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THE DOS (AND DON'TS) OF ON-PRODUCT ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS

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In today's market, the demand for "green" products is increasingly rising and as a result, more and more companies are now making on-product environmental claims.

Logos and claims are intended to be a reliable tool for consumers to identify their "eco-friendly" options. With a little effort, making environmental claims is a good way to increase consumer awareness and knowledge, as well as a beneficial way to promote your company's dedication to environmental stewardship. However, if these claims are not made responsibly, a company can easily end up in hot water. To steer clear of some common environmental claim mistakes, follow the steps below:

MISTAKE #1: NOT SUBSTANTIATING YOUR CLAIM

Green, eco-friendly, environmental, sustainable; these are all terms heard today that are used to identify that something is a better choice for our environment. While using these kinds of words may be useful to provide a general description, they should not be the sole "descriptor words" when making an environmental claim. Instead, make sure that you are providing the most accurate, product-related information as possible.

Anyone in the printing industry is well aware that Chain-of-Custody is a prominent claim which requires third-party certification. Each forest certification standard (Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)) has its own logo-use requirements. The end result of using these logos is to instill confidence in the consumer. But sometimes a logo isn't enough, so make sure to spell it out for the consumers.

Example: "The wood fiber used in this product originated from well-managed forests and other certified sources as not to diminish natural resources and are not harmful to human life and ecosystems."

There are also smaller, local organizations that may not be as well known but seek a common environmental goal. A good starting point for identifying labeling schemes is ecolabelling.org. This website was created to provide standard data on all eco-labels in one place. It is a tool for industry professionals, as well as consumers, to learn about the logos and what they represent.

When using a logo it may be helpful to add additional information that will help the consumer clearly identify the associated environmental benefit. For instance:

- SFI uses the slogan "Good for you. Good for our forests." This helps clarify that the product's claim is specific to forest management.
- FSC references "The mark of responsible forestry" as an element of their general promotional logo and should be used whenever the space is available.
- Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization that uses science-based standards for their certified products

Conversely, do not try to give the impression that another entity is putting its 'seal of approval' on a product where no such endorsement exists. If you choose to provide your own statistics, it is best to utilize a website to display this information rather than making an on-product environmental claim. Any claim that you make needs to be substantiated and the information it cites must be readily available for verification.

MISTAKE #2: MAKING VAGUE CLAIMS

Saying that a product is “Eco-Friendly” may be factually true, but this kind of statement needs to be supported in an obvious (and rather blatant) way. Simply stating that a product is “recycled” is not sufficient. While there are multiple ways of indicating that something may be recycled, arguably the most widely recognized symbol for “recycle” is the Mobius Loop. It is also important to know the difference between “recycled” and “recyclable” when making a claim.



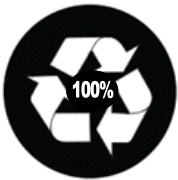
Recyclable: If a product can be collected and used again, or the materials can be used to create something new, then it is recyclable. Use caution when applying “Please Recycle Me” on the product. If a consumer has no way of properly disposing of it then the “recyclable” claim should not be used.



Recycled: This term is used when the product contains pre-consumer waste, post-consumer waste or a combination of the two. Unless the product or package contains 100 percent recycled materials, the label must tell you how much is recycled. Indicate the pre- and post-consumer recycled content whenever possible.

Example: 45% recycled fiber (10% post-consumer waste)

NOTE: Although most domestic paper mills report the percentage of post-consumer waste (PCW) in their papers, FSC now allows the inclusion of pre-consumer recycled fiber in the recycled content displayed below the chasing arrows on their *Mixed Sources* label.



If at any time the composition of a product changes to include more PCW, then it is wise to make an additional note of this. Display the new recycled content as you normally would (within the Mobius Loop or chasing arrows) since most consumers know to look for this symbol and make a separate statement regarding the change.

Example: This packaging uses 50% more recycled fiber than our previous model.

By doing this, you are advertising that this product contains even more PCW than the previous model, and it is now more “eco-friendly.”

For the final product, specify what contains the recycled fiber; the packaging, the content or both. The recycled claim is deceptive if any part of either the box or the contents (other than minor, incidental components) cannot be recycled.

Example: Packaging made with 100% post-consumer recycled fiber

Depending on the content and use of the product, there are different resources established to properly dispose of the final products. What you do with that product (i.e., applying UV coatings or varnishes) can also have an impact on the recyclability of the final piece.

My favorite example is the pizza box; its ‘recyclable’ until you put a pizza in it. The oils from the pizza saturate the cardboard materials and make not only the fibers of this box unusable, but contaminate any other recycled content that ends up in the same recycling batch. Unless there is a recycling facility in the area where the pizza boxes will be delivered, the application of the recyclable Mobius Loop cannot be applied.

TO SUM IT UP

Paper is a renewable resource and print is essential in today's business environment. By promoting substantiated claims, attributes and certifications responsibly, your services can become an integral part of increasing consumer knowledge and confidence. People look to buy products they can trust that are good for them, and even better for our environment.

RESOURCES:

Canadian Competition Bureau -
Environmental Claims: A Guide for Industry and Advertisers, June 2008
<http://www.bureaudelaconcurrence.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02701.html>

Federal Trade Commission –
Complying with the Environmental Marketing Guides
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/business/energy/bus42.shtm>



SGS-SFI-COC-037
www.sfiprogram.org



The mark of responsible forestry
SGS-COC-003630
© 1996 FSC Forest Stewardship Council
A.C.



Programme for the Endorsement of Forest
Certification (PEFC)
SGS- PEFC/29-31-17
www.pefc.org

[Erin Light](#) is the Chain-of-Custody (CoC) Manager at Unisource Worldwide, Inc. A 15-year veteran in the printing and paper industry, Light has developed extensive knowledge of FSC, SFI and PEFC CoC certification programs. Since November 2006, she has implemented processes to acquire tri-certification for all Unisource, PaperPlus, Rollsource, Paper Solutions, Websource and converting facilities. Currently, Light develops internal procedures to ensure compliance to certification standards as well as provides CoC resources, tools and information to support Unisource customers.

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