

## Quick product updates



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The Print Suppliers Group (PSG) is getting out the word on “green print” options. It is part of the growing movement in the printing industry making a demonstrable impact with earth-friendly products. This group of independent distributors — representing some \$70 million in supplies to industrial and commercial printers — has made a strong commitment to environmental responsibility.

The PSG — whose members are regional and not competitive — shares information on current environmentally friendly inks and efforts to “go green.” Partly driven by marketplace demands, the PSG is focusing on natural and low-impact flexographic print ingredients and supplies to get ahead of other industries.

PSG is advising printer-customers on ways they can take advantage. Printers are becoming more strongly committed to this movement when they learn green also encompasses cost savings in terms of faster startups, waste reduction, and efficient job operations.

Sharing approaches and experiences is helping to propel individual companies forward. Ink suppliers also can help their printer-partners tell their green impact story to customers and, ultimately, consumers.

## Green Factors

Ink suppliers are getting more involved in developing road-maps to becoming more earth friendly. For example, the PSG recommends evaluating the following factors:

- **Materials and Supplies Analysis**

Part of the A to Z review PSG members carry out for customers looks at incoming supplies and tracks records of vendors. We look at everything from formulation ingredients such as acrylic dispersion materials to emulsions, waxes, and amines such as ammonia.

For example, we determine whether water-based inks can be used. We suggest choices of inks that are low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and pollutants.

We often recommend use of concentrated colorants to enable the printer to use the thinnest amount of ink film on the substrate.

- **Good Inventory Management**

This includes often-overlooked items such as blending just enough ink for the job. Reduced waste is the result.

- **Reuse Materials Whenever Possible**

Examples from Press Color Inc. include the following recommendations:

- Totes**

- Buy material in totes and reuse the totes to ship to your customers. In the past, fiber drums were used and discarded. At one of the Press Color Inc. customers, we replaced numerous plastic pails with a pail dispenser so the operator can reuse it continually.

- Boxes**

- If you deliver to your customer in custom-made boxes with your logo on them, ask the customer if you can pick them up when you're in the area or unpack on delivery. This saves the customer disposal costs, and you save the cost of the box.

- Ink**

- Store inks to the manufacturers' specifications to ensure longevity. Recycle leftover inks when possible, and dispose of materials in an environmentally responsible manner.

- **Reduce Energy Usage and Transport Across the Supply Chain**

Regional collaborations are more important than ever. As reported in the June 13 issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, "Soaring Transportation Costs" are "forcing some manufacturers to bring production back to North America." Transport and fuel usage are important aspects of responsible ink, printing, and packaging production. Whenever ink suppliers can support their nearby customers, it's a win-win for reduction of transportation-related energy usage. Other creative ways to reduce transportation also help. At several of our customers, we offer consignment programs to reduce freight (as opposed to the old just-in-time practices).

- **Source Reduction**

The best way to handle waste is to prevent its occurrence. Lean manufacturing is a great approach. Strategies such as providing on-site automated blending machines lead to dramatic reduction of excess inventory and waste. Pre-made batches too often result in leftover and wasted ink. Waste reduction in the flexo printing process furthers the green movement and adds value to the customer-printer relationship. The latest inks have higher yields with high quality, vibrant results.

- **Biodegradability of Ink Ingredients**

This is appreciated by employees and customers alike. Mixing, in-process support, and cleanup are all simplified with today's water-based ingredients.

Taking a closer look at today's inks and systems can bring about some surprising gains. For example, ultraviolet printing inks may not be known for their material makeup, but they do result in faster press startups and high efficiency drying. This results in overall improvements in reducing substrate waste, especially on difficult surfaces like polyolefins, *and* they have zero VOCs.

"Making considered choices within the constraints of the application is the key," says Dennis Butcher, technical service manager for Lubrizol Advanced Materials Inc.

## Green Inks and Supplies Defined

When making choices — and in telling a green story about inks and printing — it makes sense to start with definitions. It's critical for business leaders to separate credible claims from "hype." The industry must steer clear from "greenwashing," which has come to mean exaggerated claims in the consumer arena.

It's always more difficult to start from a position of customer skepticism. With that in mind, explaining and defining is the best approach.

What do "sustainability," "green," "environmentally friendly," and similar words and phrases mean for your industry and your business? Look for industry definitions, turn to authorities for answers, and adapt reasonable solutions to your situation.

One of the most basic definitions of sustainability means to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations. You can add to this by looking at issues such as your carbon footprint, the environmental impact your business makes, and how you are reducing negative effects of your operations.

Draw your own "scorecard" of mileposts and measurements you can use to propel your business forward and use as a framework to tell your green story. Ultimately, any "green" solution in our industry has to be specific to our products and businesses.

**Dennis Curtin is president of the Print Suppliers Group (PSG), a nationwide group of suppliers offering the printing industry environmentally responsible inks, coatings, and total print support for the flexographic, sheet-fed, and related markets. Curtin is also VP of Press Color Inc., a supplier with operations in Appleton and Glendale, WI. Contact him at 910-687-1313; [dcurtin@presscolorinks.com](mailto:dcurtin@presscolorinks.com).**

## PSG Mission

The Print Suppliers Group recognizes there are a number of factors driving change across the industry it serves. Its members are committed to the following action plan:

- Assess their environmental impact and examine everything from products to efficiency and waste factors.
- Handle the growing numbers of requests by customers that want to know what suppliers are doing to "go green." Members can provide the facts about supplies; for example, inks with no volatile organic compound content that gain credibility and trust from the printing community.

- Further environmental awareness as an industry, proactively telling its story and showing depth of involvement.
- Track increased legislative and regulatory requirements — local, state, and national.
- Address new retail and business-to-business relationships. The Wal-Mart “scorecard” for suppliers of packaging and products is just one of the increasing demands. PSG members also are suggesting ways to make “green specifications” more measurable and meaningful.
- Suggest efficiency incentives to reduce waste and improve in-plant processing, thus catching the attention of their customers and, ultimately, retailers and end-users.

## Supplier Info

- **The Print Suppliers Group** | [www.theprintsuppliersgroup.com](http://www.theprintsuppliersgroup.com)  
PFFC-ASAP 325
- **Press Color Inc.** | [www.presscolorinks.com](http://www.presscolorinks.com)  
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