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Paper Weight

In the early days of the computer I remember hearing an interview about how they were going to reduce the amount of paper typically used in offices, schools, banking institutions, etc. Now, after twenty years of watching how computers have only increased paper usage, I think we might finally be seeing how technology can truly result in reducing paper waste.

From websites to twitter and facebook, the e-marketing revolution has changed the way society communicates, seemingly overnight. Over the past few months I have had the privilege of acting as the Green Shops Coordinator, I have visited businesses that have reduced the amount of paper they use to almost nothing. Rather than printing costly brochures and buying newspaper ads, they have turned to social networking like twitter and facebook to constantly message their consumers. E-newsletters have not only proven more cost effective but also farther reaching and allow businesses to track their readership and understand more about their customers, sometimes instantaneously.

Fewer and fewer brochures and reports are being printed everyday as websites have virtually transformed the way we do business and search for information. Having gone through the growing pains, websites are now more user-friendly, easier to navigate and running faster all the time. Where once a business with limited resources could only do localized marketing, the e-marketing revolution has made it possible to reach potential audiences, customers and clients all around the world.

Additionally, within the organizational walls, employees are challenging their employers by voicing their environmental concerns and challenging business standards and operational practices. Offices are sharing more and more information online through email, pdf documents, and usb sticks, while practices such as paperless billing are becoming more widely accepted. More people are questioning the need for multiple copies of documents in meetings and businesses have modified their technology to include things like Smartboards and LCD projectors to share information in the boardroom.

I can't imagine that any industry in North America today has been unaffected by technology. Even something as sacred as reading a book has been transformed, with new e-reader gadgets such as Kindle and Kobo in high demand.

The paper industry employs thousands of people everyday, which we are well aware of in New Brunswick. And though many organizations have cut their paper usage considerably, there are some paper products that may never be replaced by technology. Nevertheless, cutting down trees isn't as taboo as it was perhaps thirty and forty years ago. I've heard many environmentalists admit that forestry is, or at least, can be a very environmentally sound industry. In realizing that buyers

are more eco-savvy than they once were, many paper companies have begun to re-incorporate more sustainable forestry practices and continue to respond to consumer demands when it comes to environmental policies and standards.

Like everything, over time an evolution of the paper products industry has taken place. Newspapers and magazines have been thrown into the e-generation and the successful ones have adapted by offering their subscribers online options in both readership and ad placements. They have had to realize that e-technology isn't necessarily a bad thing and doesn't have to mean the end of their enterprise, but rather just a new way of doing business.

Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who lives with the environment in mind and is proud of the steps many businesses are taking in our community to reduce their environmental impact. If you would like to contact the Green Matters team email greenmatters@fredericton.ca.