

## Still living the green dream?

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### Where we are now

Do you remember back in 2007 when we were all going to save the planet? Barring the latest Harry Potter book, green was the talking point of the year. Publishers and booksellers were looking to their supply chains and distribution for ways to cut emissions; firm sale was a hot-button issue; recycling and paper sourcing from sustainable sources was de rigueur; company-wide carbon reduction schemes, such as “turn it off” campaigns were launched; bags for life started appearing at every till point and were given out at every book launch; publishers began launching green lists; and *The Bookseller* had a green initiative prize at its annual Retail Awards.

Looking back, 2007 almost seems like another era. When the economy tanked, green was no longer the main talking point, with the bottom line taking precedence. Fierce retailer resistance—particularly from Waterstone’s—led Hachette and Penguin to shelve plans to go firm sale on backlist, signing up to the still effective, but less robust, Industry Returns Initiative. A few head office corporate social responsibility posts went among the deluge of redundancies—and while many of the green initiatives that may have been under their remit have remained, it is fair to say that the priority given to them has been reduced. At least one prominent publisher has scaled back its commitment to using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) paper, as lack of supply has meant a 3% to 5% surcharge—a not inconsiderable amount during tough times. And, alas, *The Bookseller* ditched its green award for 2009, partly due to the paucity of entries the previous year.

Perhaps one sign that green has fallen by the wayside is that the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP)—the trade association for scholarly and professional publishers—has cancelled its green seminar scheduled for 4th November. This despite a programme that included some of the leading green publishers, such as Earthscan chairman Edward Milford, Alastair Sawday Publishing business development director Toby Sawday and Ashley Lodge, publisher at Pearson Education and chair of the Publishers Green Network, the group that exists to help promote awareness and good environmental practice throughout the industry. Lesley Ogg, ALPSP’s organiser for the event, confirmed that the conference had been shelved due to a lack of numbers, a casualty of the recession. “We have to make a decision about these things. But I don’t necessarily think it’s that publishers are not concerned with the issue. It comes down to budgets,” she says.

### On the radar

But if budgets are altering the industry’s focus on environmental issues, that does beg the question of whether it has gone off the trade’s radar full-stop. Not at all, says Mark Gough, Reed Elsevier’s environment and health and safety coordinator who last week took over as chair of the Environment Action Group (EAG), the Booksellers Association/Publishers Association joint committee on green issues. “Actually there is more activity than ever before. Even given the difficulties of the recession, companies are under more and more pressure, as their stakeholders are increasingly concerned about these issues,” says Gough.

He adds that the trade is “on target” for its call to reduce its carbon emissions by 10% by 2015, with most companies “looking to do more”. The EAG has had a flurry of activity recently including developing a carbon calculator for books, and linking up with other creative industries to share best practice, such as with the music industry’s low carbon group, Julie’s Bicycle.

“I can see why there is the perception that green is not fully on the agenda as it once was,” Gough says. “But that is because we have set the bar high, have hit that bar, and need to set the bar even higher. Customers are still acutely aware of [green issues], but their needs have changed and, they just don’t want it rammed down their throats. We

don't have to print the exact carbon footprint of each book on its cover. It is enough that customers know a book comes from an ethical source."

Helen Fraser, the Penguin m.d. who retires at the end of the year and Gough's predecessor at the EAG, admits that there may have been "some clamping down on costs" by those in the industry during the last year, with climate change possibly slipping down the agenda. But she argues that it is still a vital issue for the trade, not least because of last year's Climate Change Act, which legally committed the UK to cutting its carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. "Because of the act, it will be impossible for any UK business not to be focused on [being] green. If anyone isn't, it is going to hit them like a train," says Fraser.

### **FSC and printing**

One of the most important areas for the industry is, of course, the sourcing and production of paper. The Publishers Database for Responsible Environmental Paper Sourcing (PREPS) is the resource for judging paper's sustainability, based on the Egmont Grading System.

PREPS has 16 publisher members, including three of the top four—Hachette, Penguin and HarperCollins—which account for 60% of the UK books market. This autumn marks PREPS' third anniversary.

Alison Kennedy, Egmont's production director and the driving force behind the grading system and PREPS, believes that publisher interest has not waned. "The really good news is that we have been growing year on year, and even given this economic climate we have had everyone sign on for another year."

As the PREPS model relies on publishers sharing information, the more publishers that are involved increases the database's effectiveness (and, a not undue consideration for publishers in these straitened times, reduces the entry price: the yearly fees have just been reduced by 7%). Kennedy still admits to some difficulties despite the widening reach. "Those mills that are getting their fibre from sustainable sources are keen to come to us, then there are some that are not so forthcoming. But ultimately the grading ensures that if you don't want illegal logging in your supply chain, you can rely on the Egmont system."

The point that Gough makes about the rising bar in the green stakes for publishing in general also works for printers in particular. As the demand for environmentally friendly publishing has ramped up, there are few printers who do not trumpet their green-friendly practices, from using FSC and PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) paper, to vegetable inks, or being ISO 14001 accredited.

At the Somerset-based printer Butler Tanner & Dennis, marketing manger Jeremy Snell says the company is "on course" to achieve its goal of carbon neutrality by the end of the year. BTD is using a number of schemes including offsetting (owner Felix Dennis has even planted his own forest in Warwickshire), and day-to-day practical measures such as printing on both sides of its plotter proofs.

### **Green publishing**

There are a number of publishers for which ecology and ethical issues are their *raison d'être*, such as Earthscan, Sawdays, Green Books, MX Publishing the Centre Alternative Technology, and imprints like Green Profile and Transworld's link-up with the Eden Project. Three or four years ago, as public interest piqued about environmental issues, almost every publisher had a green book or list on their schedules. This is not necessarily a bad thing, of course, just canny publishers responding to a demand in the market. And to be fair, many larger non-green specialist publishers have had environmentally friendly books on their lists for years.

There was also a spate of books which were not just about green issues, but overtly trumpeted their green production, such as Provakateur's *Acme Climate Action* (Fourth Estate) John Grant's *The Green Marketing Manifesto* (Wiley), and DK's Made to Care series.

This sort of publishing has tailed off as sales in the genre have slumped. Nielsen BookScan's Environment and Ecology category has seen a tumble from a high-water mark of £1.6m in 2007, and £1.1m in 2008, to just £837,000 in 2009. This after the category had a huge spike in popularity. In 2003, sales were worth £289,000, and just £250,000 in 2004.

However, it would be unwise to say green publishing has gone away, more that it has shifted. Earthscan, for example, which publishes towards the more technical and professional end of the green market, has flourished. "The area we publish in is growing," says marketing executive Dan Harding. "In fact in 2009, we have had a year-to-year sales rise of almost 30%, and last month the highest revenue in our 20-year history. There was a moment when there was a lot of fashionable green publishing. But what we have seen with our books is that customers are looking for titles that deal with the real issues and solutions."

It should also be noted that there has been a boom in recession-fuelled self-sufficiency titles such as Jamie Oliver's *Jamie at Home* (Michael Joseph). And while not strictly green, the whole "thrift" market does have a healthy ethical/environmental strand.

Ultimately, green publishing has not gone away, just metamorphosised. Even with economic pressures, perhaps the reason green is not the hot topic is because it has become part of the industry's DNA.

### **Going green—or greenwash? By founder and publisher of Green Books, John Elford.**

Which publishers see themselves as green pioneers? Dorling Kindersley, with its *Made with Care* range, has apparently gone to considerable lengths to produce a series of titles in an environmentally sound way. On the *Made with Care* page on its website, the first line reads "DK has always been environmentally conscious at its core." Sounds good! *Made with Care* titles are printed by environmentally sound printers on FSC paper using vegetable inks, and printed "locally" (if Germany can be regarded as local), without jackets.

Any other publisher who would like to follow DK's example will be delighted to know that all you need do is to go to any self-respecting printer (preferably in the UK—no need to go to Germany), give them your print job, and ask them to print on FSC paper. There is nothing pioneering about what DK is doing with *Made with Care*, except in the amount of positive PR they have generated by doing something that we and probably many other publishers with green concerns are doing every day. Virtually every printer I've spoken to recently uses vegetable inks, and has achieved (or is on the way to) ISO 4001 status. Printers are falling over themselves to become environmentally friendly.

### **Think local**

It's far more interesting to ask what DK has not done, or is not prepared to do. Further down the page on its website, it says: "The pricing we need to achieve often dictates that we print in the Far East." So there we have it: it appears that their "greening" comes to an abrupt halt when it might hurt the bottom line. Yet printing overseas has the triple whammy of helping to reduce the printing capacity in the UK, damaging our local economy (if we want to be green, we should be supporting it), and increasing our carbon footprint.

The point of all the above is not to knock DK—who nowadays seem to be trying to green their activities in a fairly thoroughgoing way—but to show that it's easy to fall into the greenwash trap, where appearance becomes more important than substance. At Green Books we would rather be green than promote ourselves as paragons of green virtue. In recent years, all our books have been printed within 150 miles (as the crow flies) of our offices in Devon, using vegetable inks. The majority are printed on 100% post-consumer waste paper. Our retail prices are very reasonable, and we are profitable. However, it must be said that (unlike DK) we aren't a PLC with shareholders breathing down our necks, so we can make greener choices even if they reduce our profitability.

The hard fact is that we're facing a climate crisis, and we all need to reassess our values—including the primacy of profit over environmental impact. We also need to move beyond

using spin and rhetoric about environmental issues. So what's to be done? Print locally, use recycled paper, green your supply chain, office and your travel. Get your company to join the 10:10 climate change campaign (see [www.1010uk.org](http://www.1010uk.org)), whereby you commit to reducing your carbon emissions by 10% during 2010. This will encourage you to look at the carbon footprint of every aspect of your business.

On a personal level, besides joining the 10:10 campaign as an individual, you can get involved in the growing Transition movement, in which people are working to increase the resilience of their local communities in the face of peak oil and climate change. We need to work at many levels and in many ways if we are to make the radical changes that are needed.

*Source:* [www.thebookseller.com](http://www.thebookseller.com)