

Recycled paper cuts into construction market share

Printers offer product for industry documents

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The paper wave started to roll when architects and engineers asked their printers to offer recycled paper for construction documents.

The request rippled from the printers to their paper distributors and from the distributors to their paper manufacturers. Now, that wave is rolling back. Unisource Paper, New Berlin, is ready to market its new recycled paper, and A/E Graphics, Brookfield, is making recycled paper its standard for construction document jobs.

"This is the way change happens," said Juli Kaufmann, principal at Pragmatic Construction LLC, Milwaukee. "Sometimes it's from the top down, and others come from the ground up." A/E Graphics initially offered recycled paper only to Pragmatic in response to its demands, said Tom Taubenheim, A/E's president. At first, the recycled paper was problematic. "It just didn't make good business sense," he said. "It wasn't as bright, and it was a little thinner material. So with the heat of the machines it would jam, so it was not very productive."

But demand from A/E Graphics and other printers nationwide lead Unisource, which distributes the paper for construction documents, to ask paper manufacturers like Domtar and Georgia-Pacific to improve their product, said Roger Adams, Unisource sales representative. The manufacturers responded with a stiffer product that wouldn't jam the printers that ink construction documents.

The first shipment of recycled paper for construction documents came in Nov. 1, and Unisource recently made an order for a second, Adams said.

"We are in the process of marketing this product to our customers," he said. "We are now offering it to the general public." The recycled paper is about 8 percent to 9 percent more expensive than nonrecycled, or "virgin," rolls, Adams said. He said he couldn't share specific prices. It costs more to produce because paper mills must deal with other companies to get the recycled paper fiber and because recycled fibers make the paper machines dirty. The dirty machines have to be cleaned before they can again produce virgin paper, Adams said. A/E Graphics will absorb the added cost instead of passing it along to clients, Taubenheim said. Instead of sticking with virgin paper and charging extra for recycled, the company decided to make recycled paper the standard and charge more for virgin paper. If nothing else, the company will get a competitive advantage from being the only printer around to offer recycled products, he said. "It does take away from

the margin a little bit, but it's worth the additional expense," Taubenheim said. "It will give us an edge, at least for a little while. It is very competitive. There are five of us here."

Other companies in Milwaukee and the surrounding area that print construction documents are Blueprints Inc., Milwaukee; Mid-City Blue Inc., Milwaukee; Reprographic Technologies Inc., Milwaukee; West Allis Blueprint, West Allis; and Badger Blueprint Inc., Waukesha. Les Shamens, Badger's CEO, said he didn't even know Unisource was offering the recycled product. "First, they'd have to have it available," he said. "Then we'd have to take a look at it."

Pragmatic's Kaufmann said A/E Graphic's move to offer recycled paper as the standard will ensure that she remains a customer. "They are setting a trend, and others will follow," she said. "It will certainly solidify our loyalty to them."

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