

# USING MAIL MORE SUSTAINABLY

A step-by-step guide





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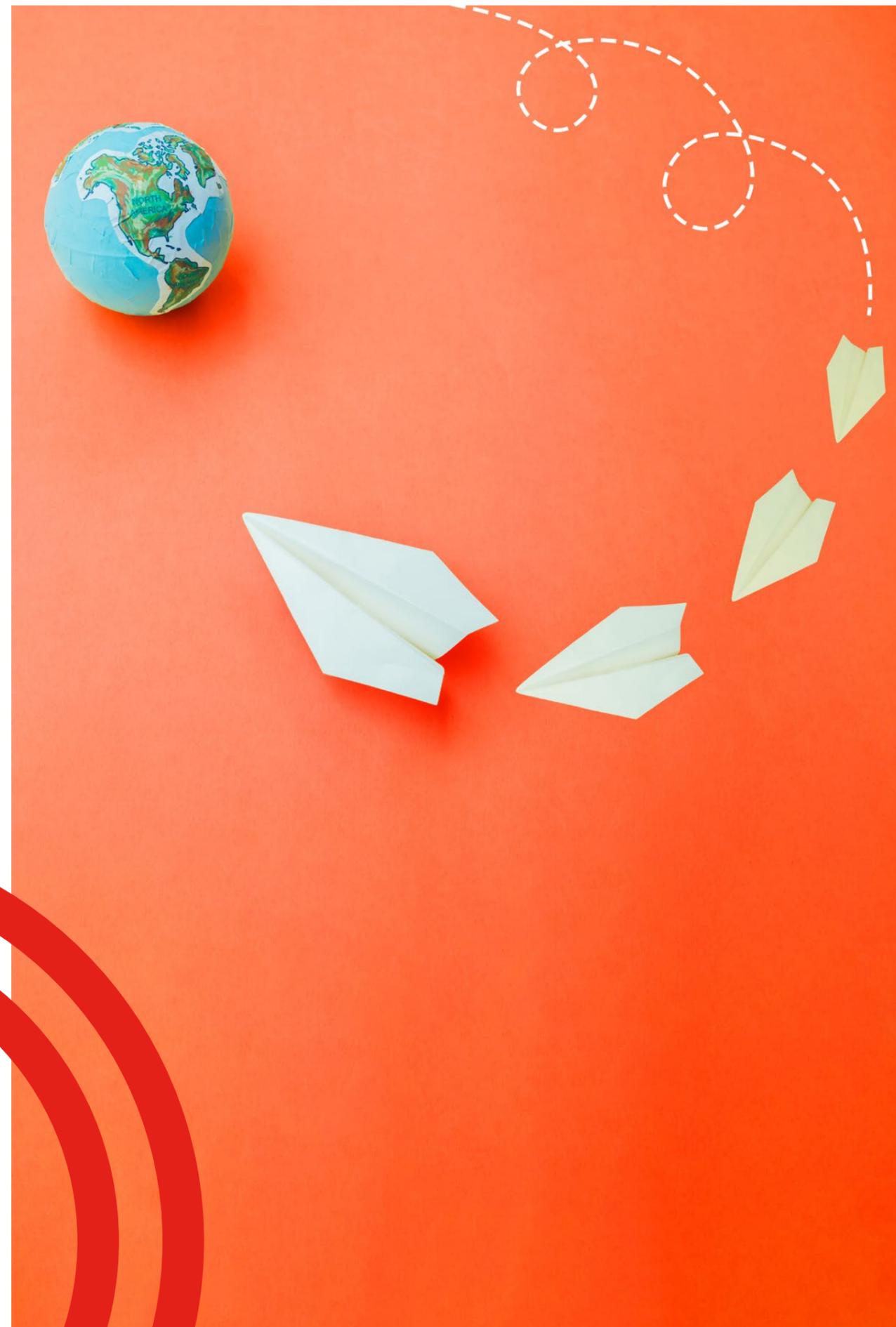
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# LOOK AFTER THE PLANET AND THE PLANET WILL LOOK AFTER US

**Sustainability. It's the word on everyone's lips, and for good reason. We all understand major changes are needed to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, our carbon footprint and impact on the environment. It means behaving differently, adopting new policies and practices, so that what we do today leads to a brighter future.**

This guide, written in partnership with the Strategic Mailing Partnership (SMP), has been designed to help you consider the various opportunities to make your mail campaigns more sustainable. We'll challenge some myths along the way and explain the various options, methods and materials available, to help reduce your business's carbon footprint.





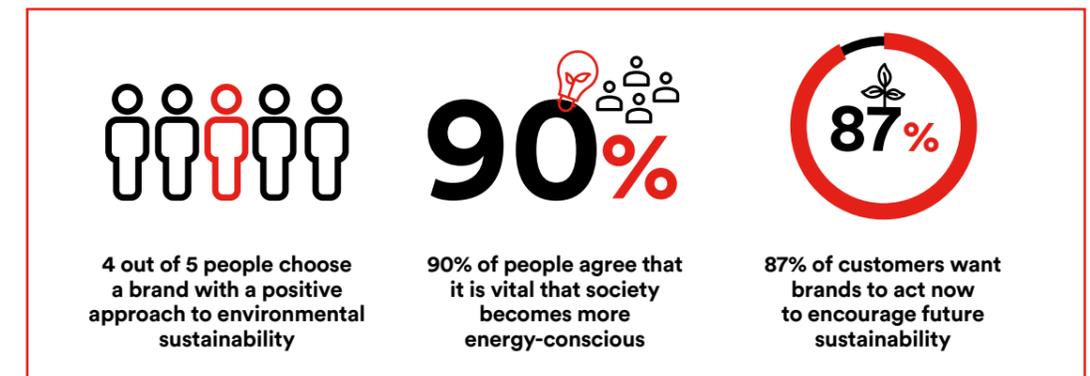
# CUSTOMERS AREN'T FOOLED



Customers increasingly care about the environment and critically, base their purchase decisions on how carbon-friendly they perceive a business to be. From a commercial perspective, it's not just about adapting to new legislation or being seen to be doing the right thing – authenticity really counts.

An independent study commissioned by SmartestEnergy revealed that people are increasingly favouring brands with a commitment to environmental sustainability\*. The study showed that 4 out of 5 people describe themselves as likely to choose a brand with a positive approach to environmental sustainability. This clearly demonstrates a development in attitudes towards companies' approach to the environment.

Whatever business you're in, the scale of the task involved may vary, but it's worth remembering that when a customer is deciding between buying your product or your competitor's, it may come down to who's operating more sustainably.



Source: \*SmartestEnergy 'Sustainability Matters' report  
[www.smartestenergy.com/en\\_gb/info-hub/sustainability-matters-report](http://www.smartestenergy.com/en_gb/info-hub/sustainability-matters-report)

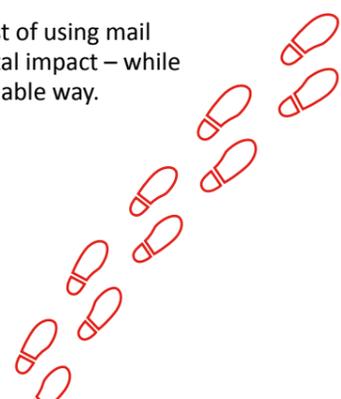
# ALL MEDIA LEAVES A CARBON FOOTPRINT

All marketing, even a basic customer email, carries a cost because the energy we use has a carbon footprint. Of course, marketing can't just stop. But you can review your plans and consciously consider the likely carbon footprint versus the commercial gain and customer benefits.

Rest assured, there are many reasons why mail should remain central to your marketing communications. From the high engagement levels to the endless creative possibilities and commercial actions it drives, mail has proven itself to be super effective when it's in the mix. If you want to know more about how mail can boost a campaign visit [marketreach.co.uk/why-mail](https://marketreach.co.uk/why-mail)

 <b>33%</b> 33% of recipients will go on to either buy, browse or want to know more Source: JICMAIL	 <b>4.6x</b> On average every mail pack is looked at 4.6 times	 Post 100 mail packs and they'll be shared with another 15 people
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The following pages will help you to reduce the carbon cost of using mail and ensure your next campaign minimises its environmental impact – while reassuring your customers that you have acted in a sustainable way.



# GUIDANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE MAIL

There's lots to consider with every piece of mail; What paper stock will be used and how will the mailing be made? What inks and finishes are involved? How far will it travel? What do you want people to do with it?

Start by asking your production manager or printer to analyse the process and provide the best solution to fit your needs.

Here's our step-by-step guide to the key aspects of using mail more sustainably.

- 
- Paper type
  - Inks & finishing
  - Suppliers
  - Data
  - Waste reduction
  - Recyclability

# 01

## WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS'S PRIORITY?

**Reducing your carbon footprint is important but it's not the only thing that matters.**

Sustainability is a complex concept as shown by the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development.\* Of course, not all of these SDGs are relevant to producing a mailing – in this guide we'll focus on the most important ones which are responsible consumption and production, and reducing energy usage to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>.

Your business's commercial objectives are fundamentally important, so the choices you make will inevitably involve some sort of compromise, balancing your strategic goals with the carbon cost of your mailer.

Most businesses have a paper-use policy or carbon offsetting strategy already in place.

In addition, ask your printer to assess the likely carbon impact of your next mailer and for any recommendations to reduce this further.

Your design team can then advise you if these recommendations can be applied without diminishing the look, feel and effectiveness of your mailer.

**Source:** \*[un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html](https://un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html)



# 02

## HOW TO CHOOSE SUPPLIERS

**Find like-minded suppliers who share your goals. What evidence is there for this? What accreditations do they have?**

Look for a Carbon Balanced Printer, a B-Corps or a Social Enterprise Mark, which demonstrate a high standard of ethical and sustainable production processes. Some may have all three. The assessments made are rigorous for all, so if you see these symbols you know they're putting their money where their mouth is.

**What do these accreditations mean?**



**Carbon Balanced Printers** measure their entire CO<sub>2</sub> output across the whole company. They continually work to minimise their footprint to help balance or offset any unavoidable emissions throughout the print process.



**B-Corps** or B Corporations are companies verified as having high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.



**Social Enterprise Mark** is externally assessed and guarantees an organisation is committed to creating positive social change.



# 03

## CLEAN DATA REDUCES WASTE

It may sound obvious, but checking your database is accurate and up-to-date not only ensures your mailing programme will be as effective as possible, it also reduces waste.

### Mailing the right people

People move house, change their name and unfortunately pass away. Knowing your data is accurate and reaches the right person is always crucial for mail. It's why data-hygiene checks should be made regularly - especially since mailing someone who's deceased is still the most common complaint to the information commissioner.

Failing to do this not only creates waste, but also puts your brand's reputation at risk.

“  
**Data analysis helps you prioritise, test and learn more about your customers.**  
”

### Checking your database is accurate and up-to-date

- **Valid Address Check.** By incorporating Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) into your systems you can ensure the addresses you hold are correct.
- **Data Suppression** is key to removing people from your database who you shouldn't contact and strengthens your business's data protection policy in line with GDPR. There are several ways to achieve this:



**The Mail Preference Service** run by the Data & Marketing Association (DMA) is the UK's official 'do not mail me' register.  
[dma.org.uk/mail-preference-service](http://dma.org.uk/mail-preference-service)



**Experian Bereavement Register (TBR)** is created in tandem with The Data Agency, who keep a record of Death Certificate folders for UK Registrars.  
[www.experian.co.uk/business/glossary/the-bereavement-register/](http://www.experian.co.uk/business/glossary/the-bereavement-register/)



**Specialist B2B Suppression** checks company addresses, any change of name, personnel and job titles.

### Focus on your warmest audience

Data analysis helps you prioritise, test and learn more about your customers. It can pinpoint your warmest prospects from previous campaigns, identify pools of customers to test at smaller print volumes and record the response to different offers and messages. It not only helps reduce waste, data analysis improves your ROI. If you're unsure where to start, ask your data partner how it applies to your business.





# 04 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (CX) COUNTS

The overall look and messaging of your mailing is key to response rates.

It almost goes without saying that your design should be clear and engaging, with messages that are easy to understand and respond to. And just as with digital, the fewer steps to respond, the better.

There should be no limits to creativity. However, if there's an inventive way to reduce the physical size or prompt a better response, then this should be considered.

Mail is a really effective springboard to encourage customers to continue their journey online (e.g. by scanning a QR code or integrating augmented reality). This can provide an amazing experience for the customer, but it's also important to remember that digital, like all media, has a

carbon footprint too from powering devices, Wi-Fi & even the web servers behind the scenes.

Following the steps in this guide will help improve your customer relationships. With clean data, simple messaging and clear instructions, you may even reduce the volume of calls your fulfilment teams have to manage – in turn reducing waste and energy use.

To learn more, read our recent report, written in collaboration with Accenture. Inside you'll find compelling insights that explain how mail can transform the customer experience, as well as different examples of successful campaigns.

[marketreach.co.uk/resource/customer-mail](https://marketreach.co.uk/resource/customer-mail)

# 05

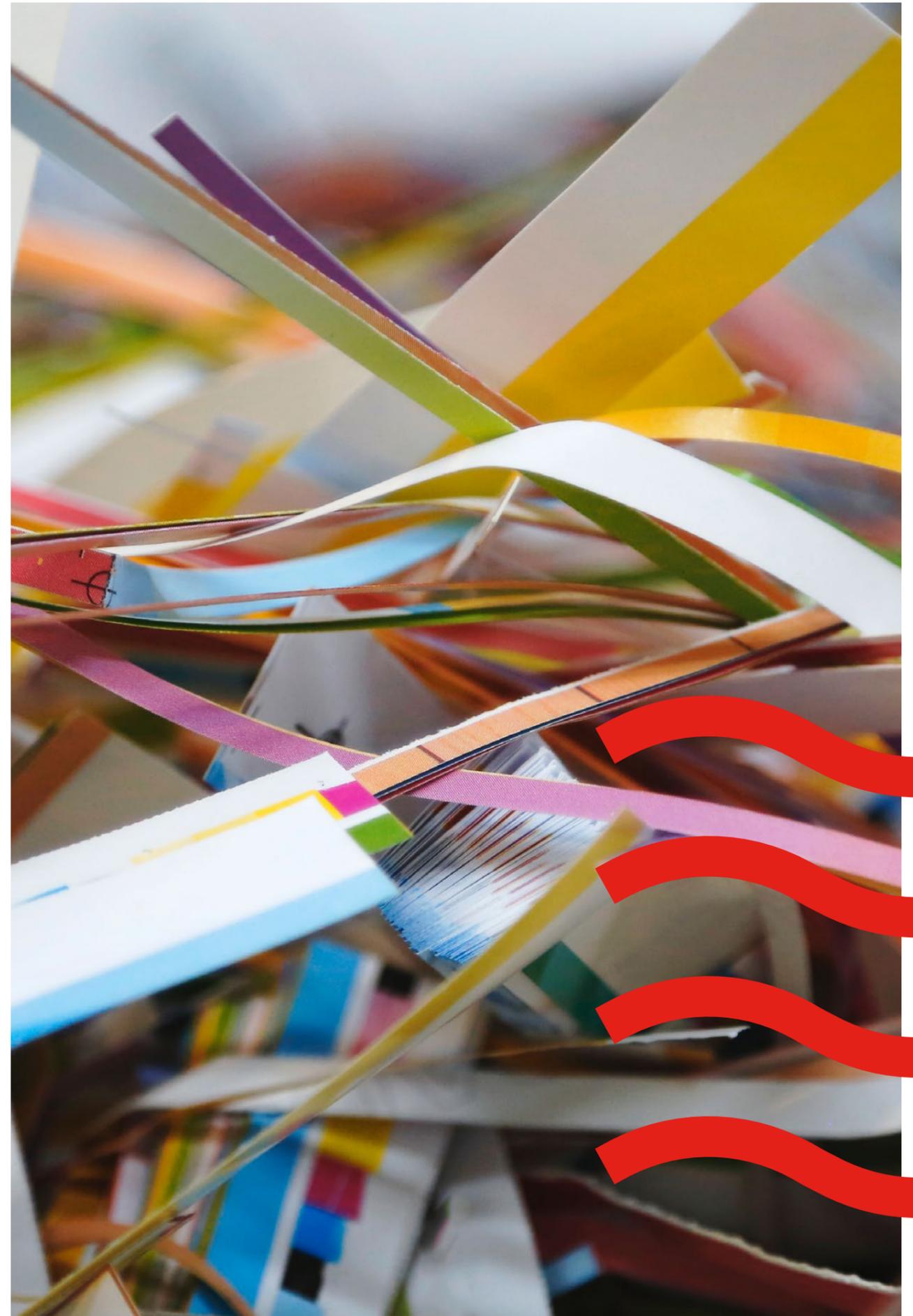
## DESIGN TO MINIMISE WASTE

**You should aim to get the most out of the materials and format you're planning to use – with as little waste as possible.**

What to check for:

- Can the amount of excess paper trimmed off be reduced?
- Is the amount of ink coverage appropriate?
- Would less dense inks be suitable, saving more energy during printing?
- Can blue colours be substituted for other colours which use less heat and require less time to dry?
- Is the overall weight and size as economical as it can be without reducing the impact of your campaign?

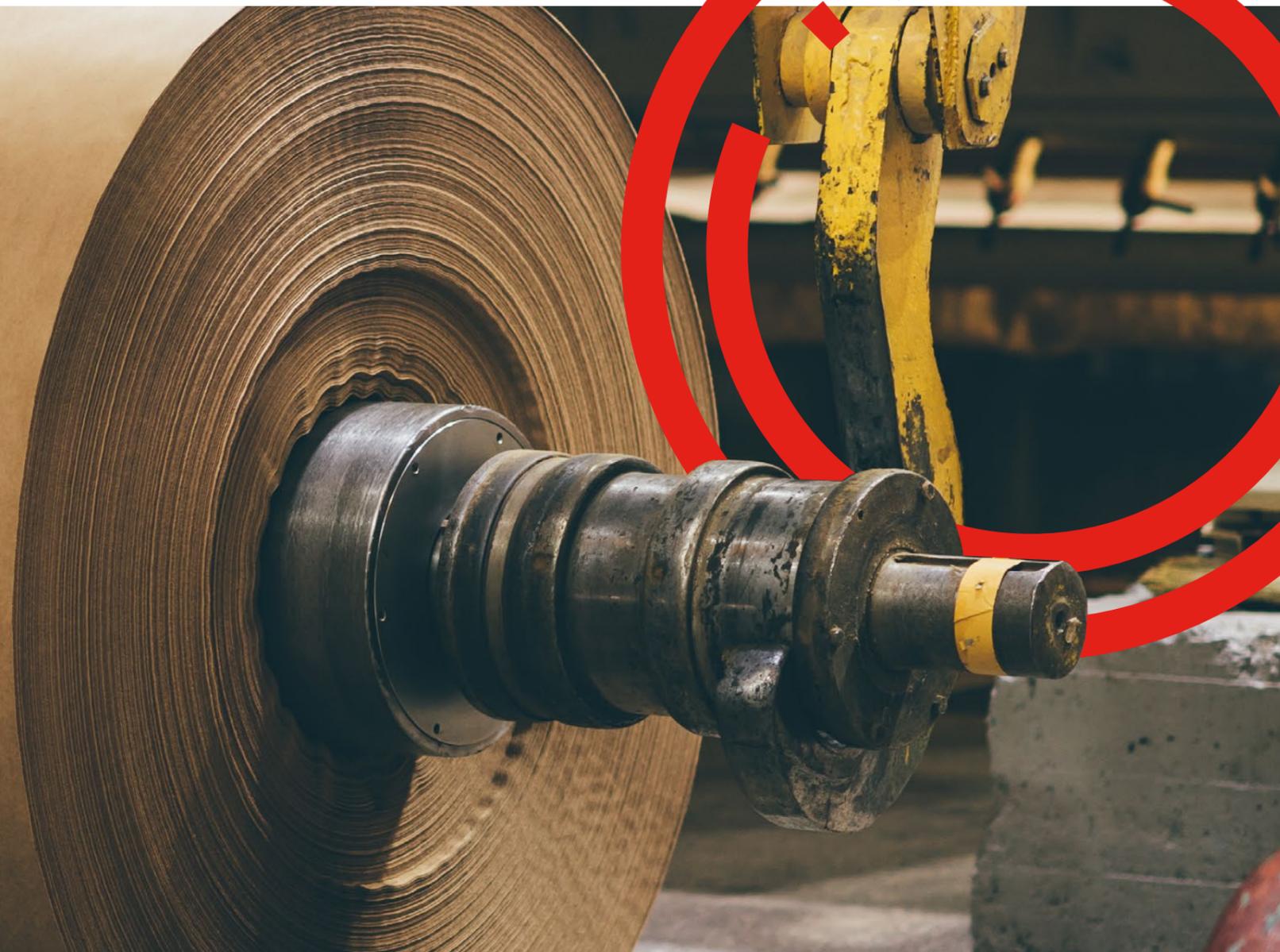
All of these elements, together with the method of delivery, consume energy and impact the sustainability of your mail campaign.



# 06

## HOW PAPER HAS EVOLVED

There are many elements that affect the environmental impact of your mail campaign including types of ink, finishes, transport, and ability to recycle. But another that needs to be considered is the paper stock you choose. As a first step, check if your company has a policy regarding paper use.



### Paper is sustainable

It's common knowledge that paper can be selected from sustainably-managed sources and then recycled. As Marketreach found in 2021, 77% of people now consider paper to be one of the most recycled products, while 65% consider paper to be a renewable and sustainable material.<sup>1</sup>

And yet only 16% of Europeans believe that at least 60% of paper is recycled. The true amount is 74%.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, paper can only be recycled six or seven times before the fibre in the paper breaks down. It's generally recycled into a lesser grade stock a couple of times before being turned into newsprint, then cardboard and toilet paper.

Some virgin fibre will always need to be fed into its production, so it's essential to have sustainable sources of raw materials, something the paper industry continues to develop.

Produced from well-managed forests, the paper industry's sustainability record extends beyond their renewable production process.

The industry supports local economies and bio-diversity. As an example, European forests provide 90% of the wood fibre for the region's paper mills – and are growing in size by 1,500 football pitches every day.<sup>3</sup>



77% of people now consider paper to be one of the most recycled products



65% of people consider paper to be a renewable and sustainable material



90% of European forests provide the wood fibre for the region's paper mills

Sources: 1 Royal Mail Marketreach – Trinity McQueen, July 2021. 2 Two Sides & Toluna, Paper's Place In A Post-Pandemic World, 2021. 3 Two Sides report [www.twosides.info/european-forests](http://www.twosides.info/european-forests)

## Understanding sustainable paper

Promoting responsible forest management is supported by many internationally recognised organisations around the world.

Founded in 1994, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is the most widely respected certification system in the world. Administering over 200 million hectares of forest, FSC helps everyone select wood, paper and by-products from responsibly-managed forests.

Here's a summary of the major sustainable paper sources and carbon balancing schemes.



### The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Using FSC trademarks highlights that you've selected your materials from a responsibly-managed source. It also shows customers that your company actively cares about the world's forests. See how to use the trademark: [fsc.org/en](https://www.fsc.org/en)



### World Land Trust

The Carbon Balance programme helps organisations offset their residual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through the protection and restoration of carbon-rich tropical wildlife habitats. For more, visit [carbonbalancedpaper.com](https://www.carbonbalancedpaper.com)



### Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification™

Paper carrying the PEFC label states that "you can be assured that you are not contributing to deforestation. On the contrary: you are helping stop it."

Designed to support millions of forest owners manage their forests sustainably and protect their livelihoods. Learn more about their work here: [www.pefc.org](https://www.pefc.org)



### Arjowiggins

Arjowiggins are one of the paper producers whose Environmental Benefit Statement (EBS) highlights the eco-friendly reductions you've made by using their recycled papers.

It pinpoints the amount of water, energy, wood and waste diverted from landfill, and the CO<sub>2</sub> and greenhouse gases you've saved by not using virgin fibre paper. For more, visit [recycled-papers.co.uk](https://www.recycled-papers.co.uk)

Other UK government approved certification schemes for sustainable and legal timber include:

- Canadian Standards Association (CSA)
- Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC)
- Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)

Experienced printers will have been working with these organisations for years and will be able to advise you of the most appropriate standards for your mailer.

Including these organisations' logos in your designs will help make customers aware that your company takes its environmental responsibilities seriously. It's recommended to display them clearly, perhaps including a short statement explaining how your company is minimising its impact on the environment.

## Weight counts

Weight is a key component of delivery costs. Measured in grams per square meter (GSM), the higher the GSM the heavier the paper – and the more it will cost to deliver. This doesn't mean you should choose the lightest paper with the lowest GSM – a flimsy mailer can give customers an immediate negative impression, so choose wisely. Generally, more premium brands use heavier paper stock, often applying special finishes and inks, which enhance the feel and quality.

## RECYCLE PAPER FACTS



It takes seven days to recycle a newspaper into a new edition



Every ton of paper that's recycled saves 17 trees



Every ton of recycled paper saves 7,000 gallons of water and enough energy to heat the average home for six months.

Remember pretty much all paper can be recycled, by making it into pulp and then into new paper for someone else to use.

# 07 THE PRODUCTION PROCESS IMPACT

Production processes always come with some environmental cost. It seems obvious to say the fewer the better, but there's a balance to be struck to ensure your mailing remains engaging and successful.

## Paper choice

Most paper can be recycled, pulped and used for something else. As well as the weight of the paper, different types of paper offer different properties;

- **Uncoated paper** allows the ink to bleed into it giving a softer, friendlier look
- **Coated papers** stop the ink soaking in to produce sharper, brighter results

Whilst both types of paper are recyclable, uncoated has a slight environmentally-friendly edge as it yields a higher percentage of fibre for recycling. Primarily the coating used is clay which does not impact recycling, but sometimes other coatings can be used such as foil which start to complicate things. So make sure you know what the coating is made of.

## Print techniques

There are two printing methods to consider, depending on the size of your print run. Both have advantages and disadvantages in terms of cost and each will suit different paper stocks and inks:

- **Large print runs** are more cost-effective using conventional printing techniques, where a printing plate or screen is created. The main energy cost involved is in drying the inks
- **Small print runs** are more suited to digital printing, where no plate is involved which arguably makes this process less wasteful

Source: [paper.domtar.com/blog/coated-vs-uncoated-paper-when-to-use-which](https://paper.domtar.com/blog/coated-vs-uncoated-paper-when-to-use-which)

[conservatree.org/paper/Choose/Paper4Project.shtml](https://conservatree.org/paper/Choose/Paper4Project.shtml)

## Ink

Inks are made in many different ways. The most eco-friendly inks are derived from soy and eco-solvents, but that's not the whole story:

- **Soy-based Inks** are made from soy beans and are available across a spectrum of colours. Another advantage is it's easier to recycle the paper it's printed on
- **Eco-solvent Inks** are non-water based and made from the ether extracts of refined mineral oils. Printers often describe them as 'soft' or 'mid' inks

- **Toner Inks** sometimes use tiny plastic particles, but these often create less waste and don't emit toxins

It's also worth considering the environmental impact of their waste and packaging:

- **Ease of recycling** is determined by how easy it is to remove the ink from the paper in the recycling process
- **Excess packaging** may not all go to waste. Some elements can often be recycled or reused

# 08

## YOUR DELIVERY FOOTPRINT

Reaching every UK letter box is obviously dependent on the access the postal system has to existing infrastructure; the available roads, the transport methods involved, for example.

Most UK mail delivery services are shifting to fewer emissions across their fleets. Royal Mail has its own set of initiatives including:

- Deploying more electric delivery vans
- Maximising their use of rail to reduce domestic flights and road freight
- Optimising their road distribution network and are exploring alternative fuels
- Increasing the efficiency of their buildings, reducing electricity consumption and heat
- Driving forward our highly impactful 'Feet on the Street' initiative, which helps keep emissions low by leveraging the unique capability of our 90,000 posties.

Source: Royal Mail ESG Report, 2021 - 2022



# 09

## ENCOURAGING RECYCLING

As you've seen, the choice of materials dictates how easily a mailer can be recycled - the less plastic involved the better. But don't forget to encourage your customers to recycle once they've finished with your mailer - and recycling is a big contributor to building a circular economy.

There are two well-known symbols that indicate an item can be recycled - you've probably seen them hundreds of times. Displaying these symbols somewhere visible will give your customers an extra nudge to recycle.



The ability to recycle some materials is less obvious.

Polywrap mailings and envelopes with windows might be perceived as unsuitable but they can currently be recycled. Alternative materials designed to be biodegradable are now being used more regularly.

Ask your printer or production team what options are available and, if they can be recycled, include a symbol or text to make it obvious for your customers.

### What sustainable choices do you have?

#### Window envelopes

Traditionally made with a plastic window\*, these days there's an array of transparent paper-based window options available.

Consumer awareness of whether a window can be recycled or not is limited, so you might want to let people know if it is by signposting it on your pack.

#### Closed face envelopes

A conventional windowless envelope or 'outer' is a popular choice. But think about how this impacts your print process. If your mailers are personalised, remember the letter and the outer will have to be printed and sorted to match every name and address.

#### Polywraps or plastic mailing bags

Polywrap made from non-biodegradable plastics and conventional plastics, whether fossil fuel or bio-derived, can currently be recycled and re-processed. There are starch-based alternatives available and although they can't be recycled, they're designed to be biodegradable or compostable.

They are light, strong and waterproof, making them ideal for lots of applications that reach millions of consumers every week.

It's important to include a 'biodegradable' symbol for starch-based 'outer wraps' so consumers know how to discard them.

#### Glues that seal envelopes

Most glues are now made from biodegradable organics and are therefore recyclable.

#### Naked mailing

Products mailed without polywrap, or envelope are known as 'naked mailings'. There are cost savings and postal discounts from using this method, however you can't include inserts. Many mail order companies use this method.

It's always worth checking with your printer if you're unsure any proposed techniques, such as adhesives, coatings, laminates and foils, will prevent your mail from being recycled.

#### Paper wrapping

Used to wrap catalogues, mail pieces and magazines, paper wrap is 100% recyclable and less harmful to our planet than plastic polywrap.

**Some types of paper can't be recycled:** For example, waxed paper, some gift wrapping paper (especially if it contains foil), paper coated with plastic (milk and juice cartons), till receipts and sticky paper.

\*The Confederation of Paper Industries suggest a maximum of 5% or less plastic content of pack weight for recycling.

# 10 OFFSETTING

While your focus should always be on reducing the carbon cost of your communications as much as possible, you may be able to offset any remaining carbon costs you can't avoid. From the first conversation, to the end of the fulfilment process, ask your partners if they can help calculate the carbon cost. If this isn't possible, you can still offset the impact of distributing your mailing.

Three areas affect the carbon cost of your mailing:

1. Direct emissions from vehicles, machinery and other sources owned or controlled by a company
2. Indirect emissions such as energy use; electricity, water, steam, heat and cooling
3. All other emissions connected to a company's activities

Once you know the carbon footprint of all three you should assess what CO<sub>2</sub> can and can't be reduced. If there are any unavoidable emissions, you can work with a partner to offset the carbon by using a recognised scheme – some giving you the option to offset more carbon than was generated.

For instance, Royal Mail recently introduced a Carbon Offsetting tool in partnership with Climate Care, who are experts in sustainability development. This tool helps you calculate and offset the carbon emissions associated with Royal Mail's role in distributing your mail. Other offsetting schemes can be used too, just ask your printer what options are available. Learn more about the Carbon Offsetting tool here: [royalmail.com/business/royal-mail-letters-carbon-calculator](https://royalmail.com/business/royal-mail-letters-carbon-calculator)

## Your Ten-Step Sustainability Checklist

- Work out what's important to your organisation
- Choose suppliers who share your goals
- Regularly check your data and target those most likely to respond
- Create a clear and engaging design
- Use a format and sustainable materials that minimise waste
- Balance the weight with your desired objectives
- Reduce the impact of the end-to-end production process
- See if the carbon cost of delivery can be reduced
- Encourage customers to recycle or compost biodegradable materials
- Offset what's left

## How the advertising industry is rising to the sustainability challenge

The industry has joined forces to create Ad Net Zero. Its ambition is to set a clear path to net zero with immediate actions to measure, track and reduce the carbon impact caused by the way the industry operates.

It is also focusing on using UK advertising's creativity to support the rapid shifts in behaviour needed to address the climate emergency.

The industry encourages advertisers to communicate the sustainable qualities of their communications and activities, encouraging their customers to recycle.

By working together to drive carbon-curbing policies throughout the advertising eco-system, Ad Net Zero aims to achieve real net zero carbon emissions from the development, production and media placement of advertising by the end of 2030.

## As Kermit said, "It's not easy being green"

As we stated at the outset – all media channels and marketing activity have an impact on the environment, particularly regarding carbon footprint. It's up to everyone involved in the industry to minimise this. And as Kermit says, it's not easy – because there's great complexity in managing the production 'ecosystem'.

Finding the right balance between the commercial goals of a mailing and its environmental impact may be challenging but minimising the impact of achieving your objectives must be the right direction of travel.

Following the steps in this guide will put you on the right path. Simply knowing what questions to ask production partners and printers to achieve the best results is a useful place to start.

After reading this guide we hope you have a better understanding of where the opportunities are to reduce your carbon footprint with more sustainable mail campaigns. After all, the sum of every small action we make today can make a big difference, and lead us towards a more sustainable and optimistic future.



### FURTHER READING

Paper communications – myths and facts  
[www.marketreach.co.uk/resource/print-and-paper-myths-and-facts](http://www.marketreach.co.uk/resource/print-and-paper-myths-and-facts)

Why sustainable marketing is a priority  
[www.marketreach.co.uk/blog/marketing-sustainability](http://www.marketreach.co.uk/blog/marketing-sustainability)

Ad Net Zero  
[adassoc.org.uk/ad-net-zero/](http://adassoc.org.uk/ad-net-zero/)

Royal Mail Environmental Guidance  
[www.royalmail.com/business/mail/environmentalmailguidance](http://www.royalmail.com/business/mail/environmentalmailguidance)

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