

Mail, E-mail and the Environment – a Pitney Bowes Perspective

Pitney Bowes is a company founded on the technology used to print postage on paper-based communications, such as physical mail, envelopes or labels. As the information technology sector has grown and evolved, paper and electronic communications have become increasingly intertwined. Today, Pitney Bowes business solutions deliver to customers the technology necessary to succeed in a multi-channel world.

In business sectors across the globe, integrated multi-channel marketing is used to reach customers more effectively and personally, with combinations of direct mail, telephone contacts, catalogs, traditional or new media advertising, and online interactions. In addition, despite original predictions of a paperless office or home with the advent of the personal computer, the consumption of paper and paperboard products per person worldwide has more than doubled since 1961, according to Earth Trends.

Although the role of paper-based communications—in the office, for our customers and in consumers' daily lives—has evolved to work along with electronic communications, it remains a preferred communications channel for certain specific types of information. A survey completed by International Communications Research (ICR) revealed that consumers prefer mail for receiving new product information and offerings as well as confidential business communications, such as bank statements and financial reports.

In addition to consumer preferences for paper-based communications in many situations, there are environmental considerations as well. Despite the claims of some, it is simply not true that electronic communications are environmentally superior to paper-based communications under all conditions. In fact, the amount of energy to manufacture electronic devices and the energy consumption to power them contribute to the carbon footprint of electronic communications and should be considered when comparing these two mediums.

In addition to the variables in any end-to-end communications process, determining the true environmental impact of electronic communications remains elusive, according to a 2001 study by Manfred Zurkirch and Inge Reichart. This important life-cycle study concludes that comparisons of electronic and paper communications can only be made with established parameters in an end-to-end communications process, and the conclusions for environmental superiority tip one way or the other depending on those parameters. In light of this, Pitney Bowes believes that each sector has a responsibility to make every part of the communications activity chain more beneficial to the environment.

The mailing industry is making progress in measuring the environmental impact of paper-based communications. "The Environmental Impact of Mail: A Baseline" by Pitney Bowes concludes that mail's carbon emissions are less than many everyday consumer activities. These findings are similar to a US Postal Service life-cycle analysis, which concludes that the carbon footprint of a typical household's mail is about equal to the use of a kitchen coffee maker.

For Pitney Bowes, the organization's focus on the creation of technology for both paper-based and electronic communications is a critical component of the organization's business model. In order to continue to serve a broad and diverse customer base, Pitney Bowes always aims to adopt strategies that align the interests of customers and shareholders with efforts to protect the planet.