

www.environmentalpaper.eu

Paper Use and Efficiency

Introduction

Paper is a useful commodity. It enriches our lives through education and literature and helps us to keep track of our money, our history and our personal lives. Yet paper is often undervalued and wasted, for products such as advertising that is sent to our homes without our permission and is often discarded, unread.

Making paper is highly resource intensive and causes pollution. It involves the destruction and degradation of vast areas of forest and significant quantities of water, chemicals and energy to convert it into products and to dispose of it. Each year, far more climate changing gases are emitted by the paper industry than by global aviation.

Several Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) around the world have started a paper efficiency drive in nations that use more than their fair share of paper. The European Environmental Paper Network's (EEPN) paper efficiency project, Shrink, is challenging all sectors of European society to participate by taking some simple steps, with the aim of reducing our paper use by 50%.

The Paper Utility Matrix

The Paper Utility Matrix was created by the EEPN as a tool to help governments, NGOs and companies take the first steps towards improving their paper efficiency.

How it works:

The Paper Utility Matrix highlights which consumption patterns are the most useful and which are wasteful, and so helps identify which paper uses could be most effectively prioritised for action. Low volume and socially beneficial uses of paper need not be scrutinised nor its consumption questioned. High volume papers with little social benefit should be eliminated or drastically reduced. It is the type of paper end use that really deserves the greatest attention in our efforts to be more efficient with our use of paper.

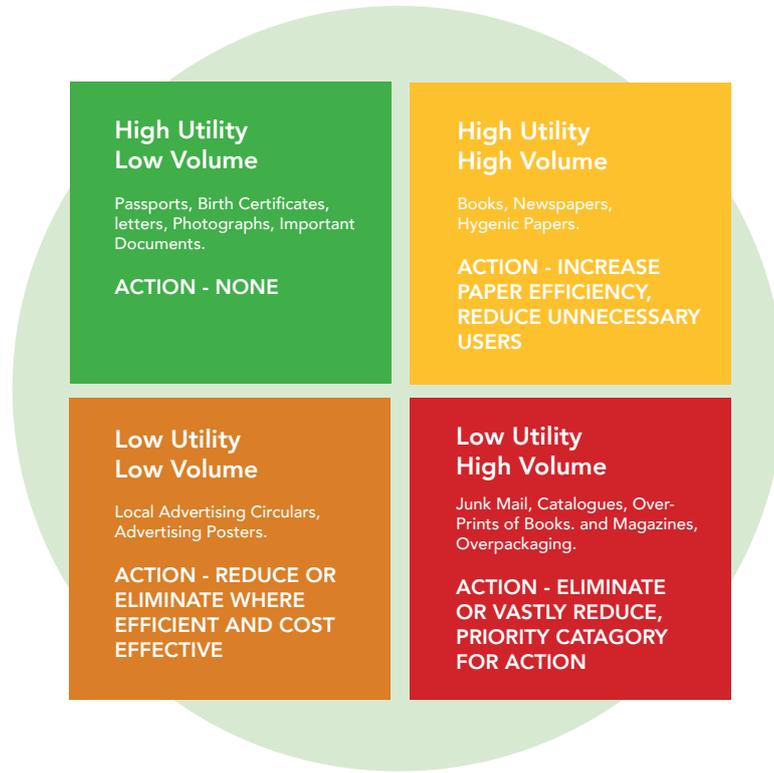


Figure 1: The Paper Utility Matrix

Proportions of paper used by certain sectors

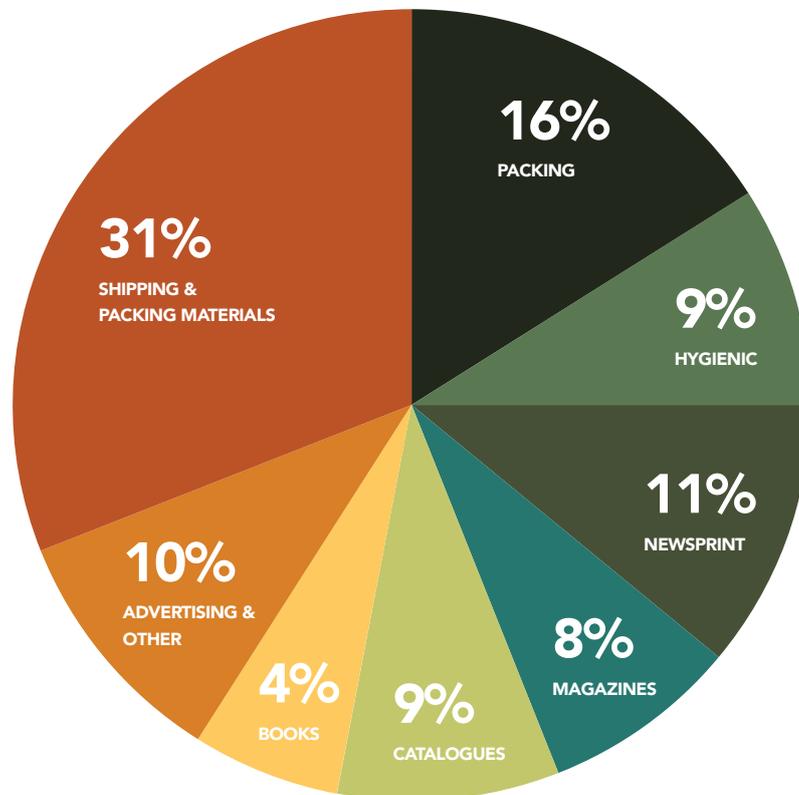


Figure 2: Paper consumption in the EU by end use Source: RISI, 2011

Within these large categories of end use we can find both high utility applications and low utility applications. Books are clearly a high utility application. However, up to a quarter of books produced are never sold, which is clearly a low-utility category for this quintessential high utility purpose. On-demand printing and moving to digital for some applications could help solve this problem.

How to determine paper utility

High utility paper end uses would exhibit one or more of the following criteria :

- Performs a critical function in organising the economy or an individual's life and cannot be replaced easily (e.g., passports, money);
- Enhances literacy and learning (e.g., books, magazines);
- Enhances social functions, such as the spread and sharing of information and news (e.g. maps, writing pads);
- Provides entertainment and the arts;
- Provides a crucial hygienic function (e.g., toilet roll).

Paper end uses with low social utility would exhibit one or more of the following characteristics :

- Is not actually used in the intended way (e.g., unread magazines, catalogues or books);
- Duplicates functions or unnecessary functions (e.g., paper plates and cups where crockery would be feasible, paperwork that could be stored in electronic formats);
- Is not requested by consumers or clients (e.g., junk mail);
- Is discarded almost as soon as it is encountered (e.g., unnecessary packaging).

The European Environmental Paper Network is conducting market research to find out more about what kinds of paper object are considered the most and least useful. If you would like to contribute your opinion by participating in this poll, please see <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TKQZCZP>.

Conduct your own research

Paper utility varies enormously across sectors and organisations, but we all make assumptions about which paper products our customers and clients find useful. Researching what they really think is a vital step towards improving paper efficiency.

- Ask your clients which end uses of paper have high and low value for them.
- Survey employees to find out how useful they consider different kinds of paper and to motivate in-house efforts to cut wasteful paper use.
- Determine the longevity of paper end uses. A study by Xerox showed that 45% of

all its office paper ends up in the bin after just one day of use.

- Determine the use rate of different products - i.e., determine which paper products are actually used by the intended audience and for the intended purpose. More than 90% of credit card mailings go straight into the bin.

Efficiency Action Steps

Step 1 - Determine the different ways paper is used in your organisation.

Step 2 - Measure and monitor the volumes of paper for different uses.

Step 3 - Assess the utility of the different uses of paper to your organisation.

Step 4 - Identify high volume, low utility paper uses.

Step 5 - Make a plan to eliminate or drastically reduce high volume, low utility paper and rationalise all other low utility paper end uses.

See www.shrinkpaper.org for ideas.

Paper Utility Case Study

Standard Life, one of the UK's biggest finance companies, is a mutual organisation with more than 1.5 million shareholders. Mailing them used to be a major part of the company's paper use, but it made substantial reductions after checking whether it was considered useful by them. A consultation revealed that only 6% actually wanted to receive mailings, such as Annual General Meeting notices, on paper and the rest wanted to 'go paperless'. The company was, therefore, able to make big shifts to online communications. Overall, along with some office paper efficiencies, it saved 320 tonnes of paper, a cut of 23%.