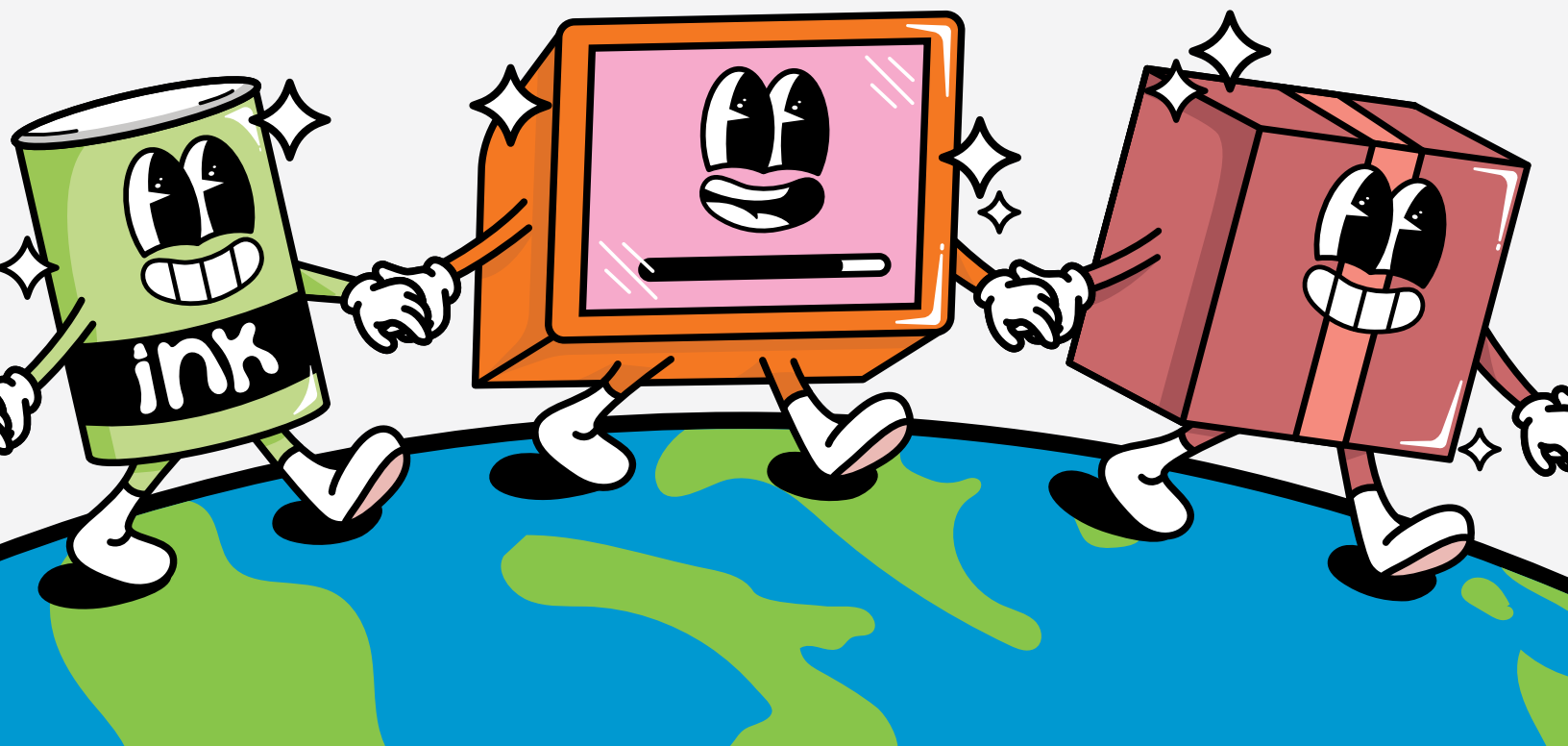




SUSTAINABLE PRINT & THE PLANET

embracing the circular economy



The Circular Economy Revolution: A Game-Changer for Printing & Design Businesses

Corefact's Sustainability Journey: Small Changes, Big Impact

Shaping Tomorrow's Graphic Arts Leaders for a Sustainable Future

Sustainability and AI: Transforming Print, Packaging & Design for a Greener Future

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A STEP AHEAD —————●

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Visual Media Alliance is non-profit trade association serving Northern California printers, packaging, label makers, design agency, and other small business owners. By providing events, education, discounts, advocacy, industry promotion and insurance programs, we help our member firms become more successful and profitable.

ON THE COVER

Cover art by Malia McCaig, Cal Poly GrC Student.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Valued Members,

Sustainability is essential for the health of our planet and the long-term success of businesses. As key contributors to the information ecosystem, the printing industry plays a vital role in advancing a healthy planet. At VMA, we believe that adopting sustainable practices is not just environmentally responsible, but also economically beneficial.

Our members are leading the way by investing in eco-friendly technologies, renewable energy sources, and sustainable materials. By embracing circular economy principles — such as minimizing waste, extending material lifecycles, and designing for recyclability — printers and designers can reduce environmental impact and create significant value for themselves and their clients. This issue of *Connected* includes a feature article on member printer Corefact, highlighting their environmentally friendly practices and how these actions also efforts benefit their business' bottom line.

The design and production of print and packaging are crucial in the circular economy, ensuring that materials can be recovered, reused, or repurposed. As Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation evolves, producers will increasingly be held accountable for the lifecycle of their products. Printers can prepare by offering recyclable and biodegradable materials, while designers can play a vital role by creating designs that reduce waste and enhance recyclability from the start.

Printers and designers can also support clients in achieving their ESG goals by providing sustainable print solutions, offering certified materials, and optimizing production to reduce waste. By educating clients on responsible printing choices, we extend sustainability beyond our industry, amplifying our collective impact. This is the power of our profession: driving change in the brands we serve and helping them meet their sustainability commitments.

At VMA, we equip our members with valuable resources to operate more sustainably, including our Sustainability Suite, which provides group discounts on services such as FSC certification and the PrintReleaf carbon offset platform. We are continuously expanding our offerings with new discounts and services. Our new Print ReConnect Exchange helps members repurpose excess materials and machinery, encouraging reuse and recycling.

We are also proud to share that the paper we use for *Connected* is carbon offset through Print Releaf, so trees will be planted to offset our paper consumption. Additionally, VMA invests in the future of our industry through the Condrott Scholarship, which funded a student design contest on circularity for this issue's cover art. Congratulations to Malia McCaig of Cal Poly GrC for her outstanding design!

We hope this issue inspires you to further integrate sustainable practices into your business. Together, we are leading the way toward a greener future.

Please feel free to reach out anytime at ian@visualmediaalliance.org.

Sincerely,

Ian Flynn
VMA President

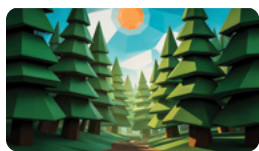


Discover Sustainable Solutions for Your Business

As Earth Day 2025 approaches and highlights the theme of "Our Power, Our Planet," VMA is here to empower members to harness renewable energy and sustainable practices to build a better future.

In the visual media industry, one of the strongest ways we can help promote a healthy planet is by implementing a circular economy. These principles—designing without waste, eliminating waste, reusing and recycling materials, regenerating nature, and using renewable energy and materials—align perfectly with our Sustainability Suite, a collection of resources designed to help printers and design professionals make meaningful strides toward environmental responsibility.

From providing discounts on sustainability certifications and innovative solutions to offset paper usage to educating on circularity and AI for efficiencies, these member benefits offer practical tools to decrease your environmental footprint. Join us in leading the way toward a sustainable future for both our planet and your business. Let's turn this Earth Day's inspiration into action every day!



Affordable FSC Certification – Build Trust with Responsible Sourcing

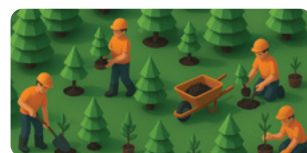
VMA members can now obtain Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification at a fraction of the cost. Through our group certification program, members can achieve Chain of Custody, Forest Management, or Controlled Wood certifications at discounted rates.

Normally costing upwards of \$5,000 annually, VMA members pay only \$1,695 per year. Recent updates expand eligibility to companies with up to \$10 million in sales or 25 employees. FSC certification not only validates your commitment to responsible sourcing but also gives you a competitive edge in attracting sustainability-conscious clients. Learn more at visualmediaalliance.org/discounts/fsc-certification.

PrintReleaf Sustainability Certification – Reforest with Every Job

Offset your paper usage and reduce your carbon footprint effortlessly with PrintReleaf. For every sheet of paper used, PrintReleaf plants trees in global forests, guaranteeing 100% net survival through their verified process.

Choose your preferred forest to support, demonstrating your business's environmental stewardship. VMA members receive a 25% discount on published rates. Start your journey at visualmediaalliance.org/discounts/printreleaf.



UPS Eco-Conscious Shipping Solutions – Save Up to 65%

Save on shipping and reduce your environmental impact with UPS's sustainability-focused services. UPS offers carbon-neutral shipping options, eco-friendly packaging solutions, and a fleet of alternative fuel vehicles to help businesses minimize their carbon footprint. VMA members can enjoy exclusive discounts of up to 65% on shipping services while leveraging UPS's sustainable practices to enhance operations and reduce costs. Start optimizing your logistics today at visualmediaalliance.org/discounts/ups.

ConnectUp Networking Event at Harris & Bruno

Thanks to our member company Harris & Bruno for hosting our December networking event. Members enjoyed this wonderful opportunity network with other industry professionals, enjoyed food and refreshments and got a behind-the-scenes preview of Harris & Bruno's latest digital technology for coating and embellishing, including a live finishing demo on their new digital embossing ZRX machine.



UPCOMING CONNECTUP EVENTS

View events at visualmediaalliance.org/upcoming-events.



- May 15 • Annual Baseball Networking Event • Sacramento
- July 17 • ConnectUp at Impact Printing • Hayward
- Sept. 25 • ConnectUp at Vintage 99 • Santa Rosa



CANON CORNER

Canon: Sustainability Stewards

By Rusty Davis, Senior Account Executive, Canon Solutions America

If I were to have a sign made about Canon's sustainability efforts, it would most likely read "Planet before Profits" in big bold CMYK+ letters! Of course it would be designed, printed directly to 100% recycled board, using water-based, non-toxic inks with the ability to de-ink, with minimal noise pollution and heat creation!

All kidding aside, the items described in my analogy ring 100% true at Canon USA. From the aqueous, non-toxic inks to the "direct to substrate" printing, all of these systems and processes are currently deployed by Canon to be the most sustainable company in the industry. For example, the newest Arizona flatbed platform eliminates the need for adhesives and additional manual or semi-automatic mounting by printing directly to the substrate and utilizes up to 10 channels and multiple passes to provide a tactile feel using PRISMAelevate.

From raw material acquisition at the start of a product's life cycle to its recycling/ disposing, Canon's focus is to ensure all three Keys of Canon Environmental Charter are at the heart of the process: Canon's philosophy: Kyosei; Environmental Assurance; and Canons' eight Fundamental Policies for Environmental Assurance. To date, Canon has one of the largest ISO 140001 certified Environmental Management Systems with over 750 certified locations.

Even prior to Canon acquiring Océ in 2010, a shared sustainability platform was the mono-component toner found in all CopyPress technologies. This process eliminated the need for additional electrical charges, eliminated the waste toner container, reduced heat, and virtually eliminated ozone from print production. Canon had been licensing the toner technology to Océ for decades, and now, the Canon varioPRINT 6000 TITAN family is the strongest, most reliable, most environmentally friendly and longest lasting platform.

Approaching 20 years since being deployed, the varioPRINT 6000 TITAN still holds the sustainability values presented at launch in 2006. With the ability to produce up to 10 million pages per month, with virtually no ozone, operating at a meek 65 decibels (about the same as normal conversation), now with 50% post-consumer toner bottles that are 100% recyclable (due to the iron-based non-toxic mono component toner!), consuming about 50% of the power when compared to competitive units, the varioPRINT 6000 TITAN is truly the sustainability steward for our industry!

Rusty Davis is the Senior Account Executive for Canon USA's Client Services Group, the division solely responsible for Canon's production inkjet systems. Rusty has more than 24 years of sales, specialist, and marketing experience with Canon USA and Océ Technologies, working on both coasts and multiple roles throughout his career, but it all started at University of San Diego driving a golf cart for the University Print Shop (an Océ customer!) and always learning! rudavis@cusa.canon.com | c: 925-949-3265

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR): What You Need to Know

California's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) law is poised to reshape packaging and waste management. Printers and designers must be ready to adapt and seize new opportunities.

Signed into law in 2022 as SB 54, this legislation aims to tackle plastic pollution and bolster recycling efforts.

By 2032, the law mandates:

25%

reduction in single-use plastic packaging and foodware.



65%

recycling rate for these materials.



Ensuring 100%

recyclability or compostability of single-use plastics.



Producers of packaging materials must fund these changes, raising \$5 billion over the next decade to support recycling infrastructure and aid disadvantaged communities disproportionately impacted by plastic waste.

Businesses using expanded polystyrene (EPS) must achieve a 25% recycling rate by January 1, 2025. This is essentially an outright ban on products containing Styrofoam. This requirement may impact printers reliant on EPS packaging, creating challenges but also opportunities for sustainable innovation.



Why printers and designers should care

While producers (brand owners and importers) bear the primary responsibility for compliance, the law impacts printers and designers, who are integral to the packaging process. Penalties for non-compliance will be as high as \$50,000 per violation.

While printers are not directly responsible unless they qualify as "producers" (e.g., manufacturers or distributors of covered materials), end producers will rely on printers to deliver compliant products and assist with the mandatory reporting of covered materials.

Designers are not explicitly accountable under the law but play a critical role in helping clients meet sustainability goals through innovative designs. Reducing or eliminating plastic components in current and future products will keep designers busy for years to come. The good news for our industry is corrugated and paperboard will be exempt if we sustain current rates of recycling.

Potential challenges for printers and designers

- **Increased costs:** Transitioning to compliant materials may strain budgets.
- **Material availability:** Finding sustainable materials could lead to supply chain delays.
- **Client expectations:** Clients will expect assistance with mandatory reporting of covered materials.

Turning challenges into opportunities

Printers and designers can position themselves as indispensable partners by:

- **Educating clients:** Guide customers on phasing out non-compliant materials like EPS and transitioning to recyclable alternatives like corrugated and paperboard.
- **Offering sustainable solutions:** Develop packaging designs that meet regulatory standards and prioritize minimalism, reusability, or compostability.
- **Expanding services:** Provide advisory and compliance-focused services, such as material audits and sustainable packaging redesigns.

Stay informed and take action

To support members, VMA will be hosting a webinar covering EPR compliance, its impact on the printing industry, and strategies for adaptation. Don't miss this chance to turn challenges into opportunities — stay tuned for registration details!

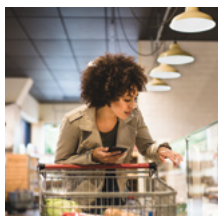
MEMBER NEWS

RRD Delivers Innovative Labeling Solution for a Major Product Launch

RRD showcased its expertise in delivering a cutting-edge, UPC-integrated labeling solution for a product's U.S. debut.

The challenge was to create a high-quality, moisture-resistant label that could endure retail environments while maintaining an appealing design. RRD worked closely with the importer to design a dual-purpose label that combined the primary label with the UPC code, streamlining packaging and reducing labor at the copacker.

Additionally, RRD created custom six-pack boxes for food shows. With over 70,000 labels produced and shipped, the importer expects to secure new contracts and boost expected sales by 5% to 25%. rrd.com



Canon Achieves Top 10 U.S. Patent Ranking for 41st Consecutive Year

Canon continues to demonstrate its innovation leadership, ranking ninth in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) listings for 2024, marking its 41st consecutive year in the world's top 10.

The company also ranked first among Japanese firms for the 20th consecutive year. Canon's dedication to patent filing is integral to its business strategy, focusing on global expansion and aligning with technological advancements. By securing patents across various fields such as AI, IoT, and the environment, Canon ensures a competitive edge, fueling its future growth while contributing to society and enhancing corporate value. canon.com



Landa Press Powers Marketing Alliance Group's Expansion with New S11 Installation

Landa Digital Printing has once again helped propel Marketing Alliance Group (MAG) forward with the installation of their second Landa S11 Nanographic Printing press.

This new press, equipped with Landa's innovative PrintAI module, will enhance MAG's ability to produce high-quality, detailed prints for their expanding health and beauty sector. The S11 press delivers unparalleled speed, sustainability, and accuracy, reinforcing Landa's reputation for cutting-edge printing technology. MAG's investment in Landa's capabilities is a testament to the exceptional solutions our members provide, helping businesses stay ahead in the competitive market.

mktalliance.com | landanano.com



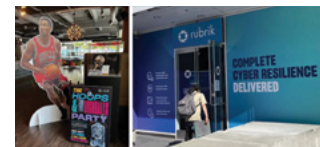
Landon Hair and Jamie Dotson with their 2nd Landa Press

BarkerBlue Partners with Impact Events to Elevate Rubrik's Presence at RSA 2024

BarkerBlue, a leading solutions provider for marketing, decor, and art reproduction, recently teamed up with Impact Events to enhance Rubrik's presence at RSA 2024.

With their expertise, BarkerBlue provided a comprehensive suite of display graphics and event marketing materials, creating a cohesive and impactful brand experience throughout the conference. As a trusted, single-source partner for display solutions, BarkerBlue continues to demonstrate its commitment to quality and efficiency, ensuring their clients stand out at every event.

This partnership exemplifies the high-level capabilities of our members in supporting successful brand activations and experiences. barkerbluecreate.com



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The Circular Economy Revolution: A Game-Changer for Printing & Design Businesses

BY SONALI SHAH

Imagine a printing industry where nothing goes to waste, resources are maximized, and businesses thrive by turning sustainability into a competitive edge. That's the promise of the circular economy — a model that's transforming industries worldwide and opening up exciting opportunities for printers and design agencies.

Gone are the days when “sustainability” was just a buzzword. Today, it's a driving force behind customer decisions, brand loyalty, and regulatory compliance. For print businesses, adopting circular economy principles isn't just an eco-conscious move — it's a smart business strategy.



What is the “circular economy”?

The circular economy is all about closing the loop on waste. Instead of the traditional “take-make-dispose” linear model, it focuses on keeping materials in use as long as possible, extracting maximum value before responsibly recycling or repurposing them.

For the printing and design industry, this means rethinking everything from design and production to how products are used and disposed of. The result? Reduced costs, a lighter environmental footprint, and stronger relationships with sustainability-minded clients.

How print & design businesses can lead the charge:

Here's how your print business can turn circular economy principles into a competitive advantage:



1. Close the loop with innovative programs

Why let printed materials end up in a landfill when they can be recycled or repurposed? Develop client programs to collect and process used printed products, such as brochures, packaging, and signage. For example, a “take-back” program could allow clients to return old materials, which you can recycle into new products or resell as raw materials. It's a win-win: reduced waste for the planet and repeat business for you.



2. Prioritize recycled and renewable materials

Switching to paper and substrates with high recycled content is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to reduce your environmental impact. Bonus points if you source materials certified by organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Not only does this approach appeal to eco-conscious clients, but it also positions your business as a leader in sustainable printing.



3. Design for durability and reuse

In the circular economy, products are designed to last. For printers, this might mean creating refillable promotional items, reusable packaging, or durable signage that clients can use again and again. For designers, high-quality, long-lasting designs don't just reduce waste — they also enhance your reputation for craftsmanship.



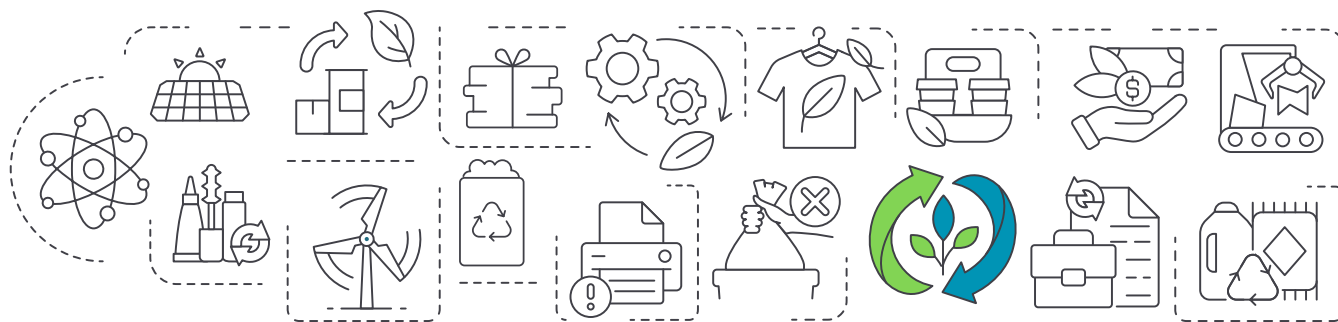
4. Offer end-of-life solutions

Partnering with recycling facilities to manage the disposal of printed products responsibly is a powerful way to close the loop. You might even collaborate on innovative solutions like compostable inks or biodegradable substrates. Clients will appreciate knowing their materials won't end up polluting the environment.



5. Educate and empower your clients

Sustainability is a team effort, and your clients are your most important allies. Share insights about the circular economy, highlight the environmental benefits of your offerings, and guide them in making greener choices. The more informed your clients are, the more likely they'll be to embrace and champion your sustainable solutions.



Why circular economy practices make business sense

Still wondering if it's worth the effort? Here are three reasons why going circular is a smart move for your business:

- **Meet Growing Client Demands:** Sustainability isn't optional anymore — it's a requirement. With brands, governments, and consumers pushing for eco-friendly practices, offering circular economy solutions will set you apart in the market.
- **Unlock Cost Savings:** By recycling materials, reducing waste, and designing durable products, you can cut costs in the long run. Plus, you'll be less vulnerable to fluctuating raw material prices.
- **Enhance Your Brand Reputation:** In today's competitive market, businesses that lead the way in sustainability stand out. Clients and consumers alike are drawn to companies that demonstrate environmental responsibility.

Turning challenges into opportunities

Adopting circular economy principles isn't without its challenges — material costs, supply chain adjustments, and client education can all pose hurdles. But these challenges are also opportunities to innovate and grow by:

- **Building stronger client relationships:** Offering sustainability consulting services to help clients navigate complex regulations and meet their sustainability goals, positions you as a trusted partner.
- **Investing in innovation:** Circular economy practices drive creativity. Whether it's experimenting with new materials, developing closed-loop systems, utilizing AI, or finding unique ways to repurpose waste, innovation will keep your business ahead of the curve.
- **Creating new revenue streams:** By expanding into eco-friendly product lines or offering take-back programs, you can tap into growing markets while reinforcing your commitment to the planet.

The future is circular

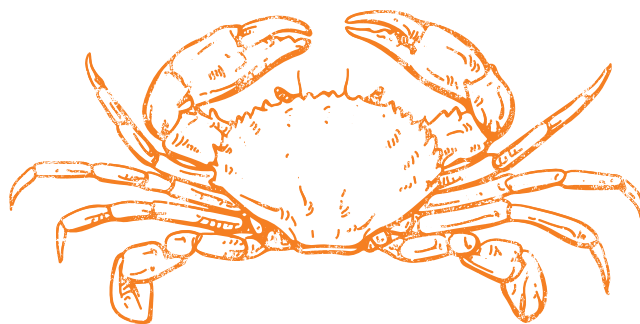
The shift to a circular economy isn't just a trend — it's the future of printing. As regulations tighten, materials become scarcer, and client expectations evolve, businesses that embrace this model will thrive.

By adopting circular economy practices, you're not just reducing waste, you are creating value, building stronger client relationships, and positioning your business as a forward-thinking leader in sustainability.



“As leaders in design and innovation, it’s our responsibility to harness the power of creativity for the greater good. Sustainability isn’t just a trend—it’s the future of our industry. We have the tools to reduce waste, minimize environmental impact, and lead by example. By embracing sustainable practices, we can redefine the way the world consumes and recycles. The power to protect our planet lies in every decision we make.”

—Unknown



Shell-ebrating Success: VMA's 2025 Member Crabfest

This January, we celebrated at our annual crabfest! VMA members enjoyed plenty of crab, camaraderie, and good vibes — it was an evening of delicious bites and valuable connections.

Congratulations to VMA member Ernest Lompa, Owner of On Line Bindery, who was awarded this year's "Most Crabtastic" award for all he does to support VMA. And thank you to all our generous sponsors who contribute everything from wine to raffle prizes.

Whether you came for the food, the networking, or both, we're glad you joined us — and we can't wait to do it again next year!







Recycling crusher compact operator

Corefact's Sustainability Journey: Small Changes, Big Impact

BY REVA HARRIS

Christopher Burnley, CEO of Corefact, has always incorporated sustainable practices, like paper recycling, in his business. But watching paper pile up in the company's recycling bins still got under his skin: "It would annoy me when I would go out there and see all this waste in these bins. I thought, 'We've got to do something about this.'"

He knew that he could push his sustainable practices further, which spurred him to think about how the company could be more environmentally conscious. Now, sustainability is woven into many aspects of the business. "For the last 20 years, we've been making continuous improvements on decreasing the amount of materials we need to produce products, looking for partners and vendors that provide more sustainable options, and reducing the amount of electricity we use."

Burnley and his team approach sustainability as a journey. In addition to traditional eco-conscious practices, they also seek out innovative partners to help them do the right thing for the planet and the business, bit by bit.

What's good for the planet is also good for business

Burnley says he initially pursued sustainability practices with costs in mind: "Ultimately, waste is both unprofitable and bad for the environment...Every single one of those sheets in the recycling bin — that's 25 cents."

When he realized that printing jobs separately resulted in a lot of scrap and excess waste, the Corefact team started ganging up all their work so that every single sheet was fully utilized. To further minimize waste, they also matched products to the various paper sizes they carry.

In addition to production efficiencies, Burnley is also investing in sustainable facility operations. He transitioned the lighting at Corefact's facility from fluorescents to LEDs, which reduce electricity consumption and are easier to maintain than fluorescent bulbs.

Finding smarter ways to handle waste

Because printing processes produce more waste than just paper, Burnley is always on the lookout for eco-friendly ways to recycle oils, inks, and the packaging they come in. "I or someone else on the team will be walking through the warehouse, and we see things like drums or pallets that are piling up. And we wonder, 'What can we do with this?'"

While vendors can offer some guidance, Burnley also seeks out people who have innovative approaches to dealing with waste. "There's an interesting community out there of people that are trying to find ways to renew resources."

He made his first connection via Craigslist. "I was reading online about people who are doing biodiesel and cleaning machinery with oil. So, I started looking around on Craigslist and there were people posting on the board saying, 'Hey, I'll come pick up your oil.'"

What started as a single connection has snowballed into a network of recycling partners who align with Corefact's commitment to the circular economy. Burnley says it all happened organically by networking through organizations like VMA and Facebook groups, as well as by doing online research. "We'll go online and find somebody doing something cool and all of a sudden you've created this little ecosystem where they're coming by and picking up pallets, drums, waste oil, and so on."

Over time, he found more partners who had unique uses for his waste, including someone who makes furniture out of the 55-gallon drums that are used to transport coatings. His next goal is to find someone who can recycle irregular-sized pallets. He's also open to exchanging excess materials, like specialty inks and paper with uncommon dimensions, with other printers in need. He thinks VMA's new exchange marketplace, Print ReConnect, will make these kinds of arrangements even easier.



"Ultimately, waste is both unprofitable and bad for the environment...Every single one of those sheets in the recycling bin – that's 25 cents."



Minimizing cutting waste



Programmable robot cart carries heavy load



Efficient print layout to reduce paper waste

Empowering employees to problem-solve

At Corefact, employees are encouraged to seek out new opportunities to improve sustainability. For example, one employee noticed that they were wasting paper in the dye sublimation area on some projects, and suggested they rotate the jobs differently in the imposition file. The suggestion was sent back to the pre-press team, and now they're using 90% of each sheet instead of 70% for those projects. The idea was originally for a mug-printing project, but the same tactic also worked for other jobs, like the four-tab dividers used in presentation kits.

Corefact uses a peer-to-peer rewards system to incentivize employees to participate. When an employee makes a suggestion, their managers or peers award them points and broadcasts them in the company Slack, so others can see that suggestions are not only welcomed, but they're also celebrated. "The more our employees can tell us how we can do things better, I think the better off we will be. They're on the front lines, seeing what's actually going on. They're the ones that are most likely to be able to impact change, and they do," says Burnley.

Sustainability starts with small steps

Burnley says getting started with sustainability doesn't have to be overwhelming. Begin with simple, impactful changes — switch to energy-efficient lighting, improve recycling habits, or find ways to reduce material waste in production. From there, explore partnerships with vendors who offer sustainable solutions and connect with other printers to exchange ideas. Creativity plays a big role too — sometimes, the best solutions come from rethinking how you handle everyday materials. The key is to start small, stay curious, and keep building on each improvement. Sustainability is a journey, and every step forward makes a difference.



Shaping Tomorrow's Graphic Arts Leaders for a Sustainable Future

BY REVA HARRIS

The future of graphic arts demands a new kind of training: one where sustainability takes center stage. According to Pew Research, two-thirds of Gen Z believe addressing climate change should be a top priority — including the future leaders of print and design. Just ask Mira Rose Shupe, a third-year student in Cal Poly's graphic communication program, who puts it plainly: "I don't see a future in the graphic communication industry that isn't sustainable."

With the help of professors like Rachel Ma, Ph.D., Shupe and her classmates are preparing to shape that future.

Equipping students to be creative problem solvers

For Ma, an associate professor with a background in print, engineering, and paper science, driving awareness of

sustainability is critical. "We're preparing students for career readiness. One thing that we really focus on is updating the curriculum to reflect industry trends, and sustainability is a top issue." Students learn about inks and substrates, papers, plastics, and other materials, as well as volatile organic compounds.

It's common for students to start recognizing sustainability practices in their daily lives. Recently, a group of Ma's students brought her the packaging for a cake from Costco. It was clearly labeled with the types of material it was made of (cardboard, plastic, and foil), and how to properly recycle each component. "The students were paying attention to details that they probably never noticed before. Now that they have that understanding, it makes an impact when they graduate and are part of a collaborative team making informed designs," says Ma.



"I don't see a future in the graphic communication industry that isn't sustainable."



Cake packaging with recycling instructions

In addition to their professors, students get insights from guest speakers. Shupe recalls one class where, “We had speakers come in and talk about recycling and composting, and how consumer packaging affects that, and how we see it in our communities.” One big takeaway? “Everything can be recycled, which I never really considered. But we only recycle things that have a market for their recycled products. That showed me that if we can find solutions for using more recycled products, we can recycle more items.”

Sustainability is a social justice issue

For Ma and Shupe, sustainability and social justice are intertwined. Ma says, “Sustainability is part of social justice. Being socially responsible in how things are manufactured or recycled — that’s something I talk about in my classroom.” She discusses misconceptions on topics like paper consumption and teaches students about the true environmental impact of various materials. “By breaking those myths and equipping students with up-to-date knowledge, we can strengthen their decision-making skills and make sure that they will succeed in their careers.”

Shupe says she often sees sustainability and social justice intersect such as when talking about accessibility. “With packaging, a lot of the time, accessibility features involve adding more material and more printing. But the sustainability

perspective says we should be reducing. It’s up to this new generation of the print industry to find the best way for those two things to intersect. A lot of my packaging courses have really focused on accessibility and the circular economy model, trying to analyze how those two things work together and how to reduce waste and keep materials in use.”

Marrying theory with practice

A global design competition gave Shupe a hands-on opportunity to merge sustainability and accessibility. Teams were charged with redesigning the iconic Pringles can. She says, “The competition’s sponsor, Kellogg North America Co., specifically asked for a more accessible design, but it was obvious that all of the students were focused on both accessibility and sustainability.” The final product was a folding carton that, unlike the current multilayered Pringles can, could be recycled so it also met standards for compostability.

Cal Poly regularly provides students with the chance to apply their classroom learning in practical settings. For example, Ma advises the student chapter of the Technical Association of the Graphic Arts (TAGA). Each year, the group participates in the annual international TAGA student publication competition. Many of the projects featured in the journal have a sustainability aspect, either as the main focus, or a point of note.

Shupe took a digital publishing systems class centered on digital file prep and workflows, where students created a card deck and its packaging. According to her, “What really stuck with me was the way we nested the designs into a press sheet together, leaving less waste on the sheet itself. It was a small detail, but it made me realize that sustainability doesn’t need to be the antithesis of reduced costs.”

Envisioning a career with impact

Looking ahead to her career prospects, Shupe is excited for any opportunity where she can have a true impact on sustainability: “I could choose a career path that focuses on water-based inks or recyclable materials, and that would be fantastic. But if I went to a company that wasn’t leading in sustainability, I could also use the knowledge I’ve gained in the program and make a real difference.”

Ma believes that with a willingness to embrace forward-thinking problem solving, employers can build a strong talent pipeline and future-proof the industry. She and her colleagues are committed to nurturing that talent: “We’re preparing students to be global citizens, to be socially responsible, and to be informed. That way they can help create products that contribute to a better world.”



Card box imposition



Pringles package redesign



The current Pringles can design poses accessibility challenges for our target audience. Our main pain points is that the existing packaging lacks user-friendly features for convenient retrieval of Pringles crisps, leading to frustration and inconvenience. Our team’s objective is to enhance accessibility for both individuals and groups, and convenience through the packaging design to allow a smoother and more positive snacking experience.

PAC Global Student Design Competition: Pringles Package Redesign

Andrea de la Vega, Sarah Cao, Claudia Maldonado, and Mira Shupe. Fall 2023

PAC Competición de Diseño Estudiantil Global: Rediseño Del Paquete Pringles

Andrea de la Vega, Sarah Cao, Claudia Maldonado, and Mira Shupe. 2023, Otoño.

VMA Student Contest Showcases Circular Creativity

For the cover of this issue—all about print, packaging, paper, and the circular economy—we asked the next generation of designers to create a compelling image on the theme of circular design in print. Thank you to all the students who participated. Here are our first, second, and third place winners.



First Place

Congratulations to Malia McCaig of Cal Poly's Graphic Communication program for the winning cover art!



From Malia about her cover art:

The design I created is meant to show how all elements of the design process work together in creating a sustainable environment. Each step is equally important, from the way it's designed to the inks and type of packaging materials we use. The ink character was added to show that different kinds of inks can be more eco-friendly than others, which is something that should be considered through the design process. A packaging character is depicted on the right, representing the fact that materials chosen impact the recyclability and reusability of a product.

The last character I chose to include was a computer, because many of these decisions start on a screen. I chose to show the circular theme through the characters holding hands and alluding to being connected to many other characters. This project is very important to me because I would love to work as a designer in the packaging industry, and I know that valuing sustainability is how we can do our part in helping our planet.

maliaccaig@gmail.com



Second Place

Daniel Tello Baldauf of Laney College

danielgustavbaldauf@gmail.com

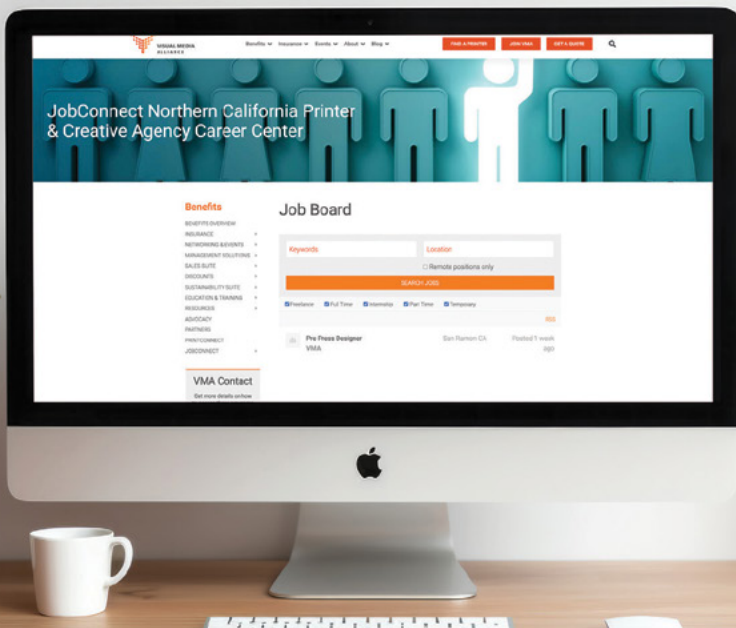


Third Place

Felicia Gonzalez of Laney College

feloved@gmail.com





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Sustainability and AI: Transforming Print, Packaging & Design for a Greener Future

BY SONALI SHAH

The print and design industries are navigating a transformative era. As sustainability becomes a critical priority for businesses and consumers alike, the pressure to adopt environmentally friendly practices has never been greater. Simultaneously, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping these sectors, offering unparalleled tools for efficiency, creativity, and innovation.

However, AI's potential comes with a caveat: Its energy demands are substantial, contributing to a notable carbon footprint. While some may argue that AI's energy intensity undermines its benefits, it remains the wave of the future. The challenge, then, is not to resist its adoption but to embrace it in a way that is smart, strategic, and sustainable. By balancing innovation with responsibility, print and design businesses can leverage AI to drive positive change while addressing its environmental impact.

AI's role in driving sustainable change

AI is revolutionizing how print and design businesses operate, streamlining workflows, optimizing resource use, and enhancing creative possibilities. Whether it's predicting demand, optimizing layouts, or automating mundane tasks, AI tools are becoming indispensable in these industries.

Yet, the energy required to train and operate advanced AI models poses a dilemma. According to some estimates, the carbon emissions from training a single large AI model can equal those of five cars over their lifetime. For sustainability-conscious businesses, the objective is clear: Integrate AI thoughtfully, using its capabilities to enhance efficiency while actively working to mitigate its environmental costs.



Here are some smart strategies for sustainable AI integration:

1 Smarter production with AI

One of AI's most significant contributions to sustainability is its ability to minimize overproduction. In the print industry, excess inventory is a major source of waste, often resulting in discarded brochures, packaging, or marketing materials.

AI-driven demand forecasting tools analyze historical data and customer behavior to predict precisely how much to produce and when, reducing paper, ink, and energy waste.

For design agencies, AI tools like automated layout optimization and color management not only save time but also reduce the need for multiple design iterations. By cutting down on revisions and material use, these tools enable more sustainable creative processes.

2 Sustainable material selection

Material choice is at the core of environmentally responsible design. AI can analyze supplier data to recommend eco-friendly options, such as recycled paper or biodegradable packaging materials.

Design agencies can further benefit from AI's ability to simulate the lifecycle impact of different materials. For instance, during the conceptual phase of a project, AI can highlight which materials have the lowest carbon footprint, helping designers make informed decisions.

AI also plays a role in optimizing ink usage, adjusting print settings in real time to minimize waste. Combining AI insights with innovations like waterless printing or soy-based inks can significantly enhance sustainability efforts.

3 Energy-efficient operations

AI-powered systems can monitor equipment performance, ensuring printers and design firms operate at peak efficiency. These tools can predict maintenance needs, reducing downtime and preventing energy waste caused by malfunctioning machinery.

For design agencies, AI can optimize digital workflows by reducing the energy demands of rendering, storage, and file sharing. Integrating these systems with renewable energy-powered cloud services further minimizes their environmental footprint.

4 Revolutionizing packaging with AI

Packaging waste is a significant environmental concern, but AI offers innovative solutions to reduce its impact. AI-driven design tools can suggest packaging configurations that use fewer materials or employ sustainable alternatives like biodegradable films.

For design agencies, AI can create data-driven, visually appealing packaging concepts that align with both branding goals and environmental considerations. By analyzing consumer preferences alongside sustainability data, these tools can identify optimal solutions that resonate with clients and reduce waste.

5 Mitigating AI's carbon footprint

While AI is transformative, its energy consumption cannot be ignored. To address this challenge, businesses can adopt several strategies:

- **Using renewable energy sources:** Powering operations, including AI systems, with renewable energy sources like solar can drastically reduce carbon emissions. Many cloud service providers now offer green hosting solutions.
- **Ensuring efficient hardware:** Investing in energy-efficient servers and upgrading equipment ensures AI operations are as sustainable as possible.
- **Incorporating carbon offsetting:** Supporting initiatives like reforestation or renewable energy projects can help neutralize the emissions associated with AI. VMA members get a special discount with PrintReleaf, a carbon offset provider.
- **Partnering with green AI providers:** Collaborating with technology companies which are prioritizing sustainability ensures alignment with environmental goals.

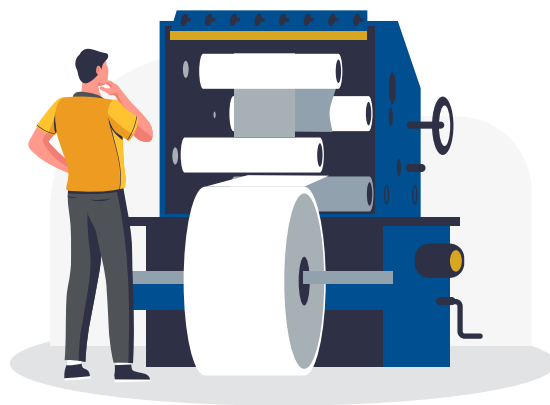
These measures allow businesses to benefit from AI and reduce their AI carbon footprint, allowing businesses to implement productivity gains in a sustainable way.

The business case for sustainable AI in print and design

Adopting AI responsibly offers a dual advantage: reducing environmental impact while enhancing operational efficiency.

Consumers increasingly favor brands that demonstrate environmental responsibility, and integrating AI into sustainable practices allows businesses to appeal to this growing demand.

Moreover, sustainability initiatives often result in cost savings. Whether through reduced energy consumption, minimized material waste, or streamlined processes, businesses that embrace AI thoughtfully can achieve both ecological and financial benefits.



Shaping a sustainable future

The integration of AI into the print and design industries represents a crossroads: a chance to redefine how businesses operate and interact with the environment. By acknowledging and addressing AI's energy demands, companies can ensure its adoption drives progress without compromising sustainability.

Ultimately, the question isn't whether AI will shape the future of these industries — it will — but how it can do so responsibly. Through innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to eco-friendly practices, print and design businesses have the opportunity to lead the way in creating a future where technology and sustainability go hand in hand.





THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PAPER: A TIMELESS RESOURCE IN A MODERN WORLD

JEFF JARVIS, VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER, KELLY SPICERS

Paper has been a cornerstone of human civilization for centuries, and as sustainability becomes a global priority, this timeless resource continues to prove its adaptability and environmental value. Contrary to misconceptions, paper is one of the most sustainable materials available, thanks to its renewable nature, recyclability, and the eco-conscious practices of the modern paper industry.

A renewable resource

Paper is primarily made from trees, a renewable resource when managed responsibly. Sustainable forestry practices ensure that for every tree harvested, several more are planted or naturally regenerated. Forest certification programs, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), promote responsible forest management. These programs not only ensure a steady supply of raw materials but also help maintain biodiversity, protect wildlife habitats, and support ecosystem health.

Today, many paper manufacturers are committed to sourcing their raw materials from sustainably managed forests. This effort helps reinforce the cycle of growth and regeneration, demonstrating that the

production of paper need not come at the expense of the environment.

Recycling: closing the loop

One of paper's most remarkable features is its recyclability. Paper can be recycled up to seven times, transforming used products into new items such as packaging, newspapers, and tissue. Recycling significantly reduces the need for virgin fibers, conserves energy, and minimizes the waste sent to landfills.

Recycling programs have made a substantial impact. In 2022, over 68% of paper consumed in the United States was recovered for recycling. This impressive rate highlights the success of community initiatives and industry commitments to creating a circular economy for paper. By recycling paper products, we extend their lifecycle and reduce the strain on natural resources.

Energy efficiency and innovation

The paper industry has embraced innovation to minimize its environmental impact. Many mills now rely on renewable energy sources, such as biomass, to power their operations. Additionally, advances in production technologies have led to significant reductions in water and energy usage, making the

paper manufacturing process more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Paper in a circular economy

As society shifts towards a circular economy, paper stands out as a versatile and sustainable material. It is not only recyclable but also biodegradable, ensuring that even when it can no longer be recycled, it decomposes naturally without leaving a lasting environmental footprint.

From its renewable origins to its ability to be recycled multiple times, paper is a model of sustainability. By supporting responsible production and recycling practices, we can continue to enjoy this invaluable resource while protecting our planet for future generations.

Jeff Jarvis is the vice president and general manager for Kelly Spicers in Northern California. He has been with Kelly Spicers for over a decade and in the paper industry since 1980. Jarvis brings a collaborative approach to finding solutions and is always looking for ways Kelly Spicers can be easier to do business with. kellyspicers.com.



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PAPER, PAPER-BASED PACKAGING, AND PAPER PRODUCTS IN A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

JULES VANSANT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TWO SIDES NORTH AMERICA

The concept of a circular economy is gaining momentum as a cornerstone of sustainable development. This innovative approach focuses on reducing waste and maximizing the reuse of resources. In the paper industry, circularity is transforming how paper, paper-based packaging, and related products are produced, consumed, and recycled.

Understanding circularity

Circularity represents a paradigm shift from the traditional "take, make, dispose" model of the linear economy. Instead, it emphasizes a closed-loop system where materials and products are reused, refurbished, or recycled continuously, minimizing waste and conserving resources. This model reduces environmental impact, curbs resource consumption, and fosters a more resilient and sustainable system.

Paper's natural fit in circularity

The paper industry exemplifies circularity due to the renewable, recyclable, and biodegradable nature of its products. From sustainable forest management to efficient production processes and robust recycling infrastructure, the industry is a leader in sustainable practices.

Sustainable sourcing and responsible production

Sustainable forest management is a cornerstone of the paper industry's circularity efforts. By employing responsible harvesting practices and reforestation initiatives, the industry supports biodiversity, protects ecosystems, and enhances carbon sequestration, contributing to climate change mitigation.

Certified forestry programs like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) play a critical role in ensuring that raw materials are sourced responsibly. These practices sustain biodiversity, maintain ecological processes, and support long-term forest health.

Recycling: A foundation of circularity

Recycling is central to the paper industry's success in creating a circular economy. Paper products can be recycled five to seven times, significantly reducing the demand for virgin materials and lowering environmental impact.

The industry collaborates with governments, waste management companies, and consumers to build an effective recycling infrastructure. This ensures that paper products are collected, sorted, and processed

back into new materials. By diverting millions of tons of waste from landfills and incinerators, the U.S. paper recycling rate — 65% to 69% — remains among the highest for recyclable materials.

A vision for the future

The future of paper in a circular economy is promising. As sustainability becomes a priority for businesses and consumers, the demand for circular, eco-friendly products will grow. The paper industry's commitment to innovation and collaboration positions it as a leader in this movement.

By embracing circularity, the paper industry not only minimizes environmental impact but sets an inspiring standard for other industries, paving the way for a sustainable and equitable future.

Two Sides North America supports the graphic communications and paper-based packaging industry, advocating for renewable, recyclable, and sustainable products to benefit generations to come. Learn more at twosidesna.org.



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Print Smarter, Design Greener:

A Sustainability Checklist for Your Business

Running a small business means making every dollar and every hour count. This checklist offers practical, impactful ways to reduce waste, conserve resources, and embrace a circular economy. Whether you're making small tweaks or big changes, these strategies will help your print and design business go greener — without sacrificing efficiency or profitability.



Conserve resources

- ☐ Improve water conservation with low-flow toilets, faucets, and waterless urinals.
- ☐ Swap plastic water bottles for a filtration system to encourage reusable bottles.
- ☐ Go paperless — reduce costs and waste by managing your business digitally.



Reduce energy use

- ☐ Use electricity meters to identify high-energy equipment and explore more efficient alternatives.
- ☐ Ask your energy providers if they offer renewable forms such as solar or wind power.
- ☐ Switch light bulbs to LED bulbs



Reuse everything possible

- ☐ Use Print ReConnect, VMA's new buy-sell marketplace, to keep print equipment, materials and supplies in circulation. Need some ink or buy some equipment — use our built-in market.
- ☐ Avoid buying new when you can reuse binders, folders, and office supplies.
- ☐ Provide real kitchenware rather than disposable cups, plates, knives, and forks.



Recycle whatever you can

- ☐ Set up clear, labeled recycling bins for paper, plastics, and electronics.
- ☐ Partner with an e-waste recycler to properly dispose of old computers, printers, and other hardware.
- ☐ Print smarter — use recycled paper and refillable ink cartridges, double-sided printing, and draft mode whenever possible.



Encourage your staff

- ☐ Gift reusable coffee cups, water bottles, or tote bags to employees.
- ☐ Reduce commuting impact — encourage walking, biking, public transport, or remote work where applicable.
- ☐ Reward employees for volunteering for an environmental cause.
- ☐ Offer employees rewards for green ideas and initiatives.



Leverage AI for sustainable impact

- ☐ Use AI-driven design tools to reduce material waste and optimize print layouts.
- ☐ Automate workflows to reduce paper use and improve energy efficiency.
- ☐ Analyze data to track and reduce your business's carbon footprint.



Choose eco-friendly vendors and partners

- ☐ Choose vendors who are committed to the environment.
- ☐ Read labels and check out alternatives for items that are resource intensive or pollute.
- ☐ Switch to eco-friendly office and cleaning products which are healthier for employees and the planet.



Deliver on demand for sustainable

- ☐ Offer recycled paper and ink options
- ☐ Offer print carbon offsetting. Check out our member discount with PrintReleaf. visualmediaalliance.org/discounts/printreleaf
- ☐ Provide sustainable paper options. See your VMA member discount with FSC. visualmediaalliance.org/discounts/fsc-certification



Spread the word and educate

- ☐ Celebrate and promote your sustainability efforts through your website, newsletters, and social media channels.
- ☐ Being sustainable is a selling point, so don't be shy about advertising your efforts. Are you using recycled paper? Label your print projects with the recycled symbol.
- ☐ Are you outfitting your building with solar panels? Show them off on your website.

By making strategic choices and leveraging the power of the circular economy, your print and design business can be both environmentally responsible and financially sustainable.

Eco-Friendly Design Trends: How Designers Can Lead the Sustainability Movement

BY SONALI SHAH

As environmental concerns continue to dominate global conversations, designers are increasingly embracing sustainability. From minimalist packaging to AI-driven design solutions, the industry is evolving to meet the demand for more eco-conscious practices. Designers have a unique opportunity to drive change, shaping a future where creativity and sustainability go hand in hand.

Here are a few key trends that are shaping the design world today:

1. Minimalist packaging: Less waste, more impact

In response to the environmental toll of single-use plastics and excessive packaging, minimalist design has emerged as a powerful solution. By stripping packaging to its essentials, designers are creating products that use fewer materials, are recyclable, and often biodegradable. This approach not only reduces waste but also enhances user experience with designs that prioritize functionality and aesthetic clarity.

For example, using recycled cardboard or plant-based plastics offers versatile options that cater to consumer demand for eco-conscious choices. Brands embracing minimalist packaging signal a commitment to sustainability while aligning with trends favoring simplicity and purpose-driven design.

2. AI-driven design for resource efficiency

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing sustainable design by optimizing resource use and reducing waste. AI tools analyze data to identify inefficiencies, suggest eco-friendly materials, and generate designs that minimize environmental impact.

For instance, generative design algorithms create efficient layouts and prototypes, reducing the need for physical samples. Predictive analytics also allow designers to anticipate supply chain needs, ensuring smarter material choices. By integrating AI,

designers enhance sustainability without sacrificing creativity, embedding resource efficiency into every stage of the process.

3. Eco-conscious materials: Sustainable innovation in design

The rise of sustainable materials is reshaping design practices across industries. Recycled plastics, organic fabrics, and innovative solutions like mycelium-based products are gaining traction. These materials reduce carbon footprints, promote renewability, and often biodegrade naturally.

Designers are also sourcing traditional materials more responsibly, such as paper using wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or plant-based inks for packaging. Sustainable finishes are revolutionizing design, proving that eco-friendly doesn't mean compromising on quality or aesthetics.

By integrating these eco-friendly materials into their work, designers help push the industry toward a more sustainable future. The growing availability of such options empowers designers to choose materials that align with both aesthetic goals and environmental values.

Reshaping the industry

Sustainability has become a movement that is reshaping the way designers work. By embracing trends like these, designers are leading the charge toward a more sustainable future. In doing so, they not only create beautiful, functional designs but also contribute to the health of our planet, proving that creativity and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand.



Revolutionizing Packaging: Sustainable Trends for 2025

BY SONALI SHAH

As environmental concerns become increasingly urgent, the packaging industry is at the forefront of transformative change. In 2025, sustainable packaging is not just a preference; it's an imperative. With consumers demanding greener solutions and regulatory bodies setting stricter guidelines, innovative approaches are shaping the future of how products are packaged, used, and disposed of.

1. Compostable materials: Nature's decomposers

The rise of compostable materials marks a pivotal shift in the packaging industry. These materials, made from renewable sources such as cornstarch, sugarcane, seaweed, and mushrooms, break down naturally without toxic residues. They offer a practical solution to the global crisis of plastic pollution, significantly reducing landfill waste and marine contamination.

Plant-based plastics and biodegradable films are at the forefront, offering brands a sustainable alternative to traditional packaging materials. As technology advances, 2025 promises the development of even more efficient compostable options that align with industrial needs and environmental values.



2. Embracing circularity through reusable packaging systems

The adoption of reusable packaging systems is gaining momentum as part of the shift toward a circular economy. These systems focus on creating products designed for repeated use, reducing reliance on single-use packaging.

Brands are introducing refillable containers for food, beauty products, and household goods, with some offering subscription models where customers return containers for reuse. Retailers

are also implementing in-store refill stations to encourage eco-friendly habits. These systems not only cut down on waste but also instill a culture of sustainability among consumers.

3. Using AI-optimized design for efficiency

Artificial intelligence is transforming packaging design by enabling resource-efficient solutions. AI-powered tools can analyze complex datasets, optimizing material usage and reducing waste at every stage of the process.

For instance, AI can help design packaging that precisely fits products, minimizing excess materials. It also identifies opportunities for more sustainable production methods, such as reducing energy consumption and streamlining logistics. Although AI can be energy-intensive, its use of renewable energy and continuous efficiency improvements make it an essential tool for sustainable innovation.

4. Smart packaging: Real-time sustainability

Smart packaging is enhancing transparency and accountability. By incorporating sensors or QR codes, brands can provide consumers with real-time data on sustainability metrics such as carbon footprints, recyclability, and energy use.

For consumers, this technology builds trust and fosters informed purchasing decisions. For brands, it offers valuable insights for improving packaging strategies, ensuring they remain at the forefront of sustainability trends.

Sustainability across the entire packaging lifecycle

The future of sustainable packaging lies in rethinking its entire lifecycle. Compostable materials, reusable systems, AI-enhanced designs, and smart packaging are not just trends — they are essential solutions. By embracing these innovations, designers and brands can lead the charge in creating a greener future where packaging serves as a tool for environmental stewardship rather than a source of harm.



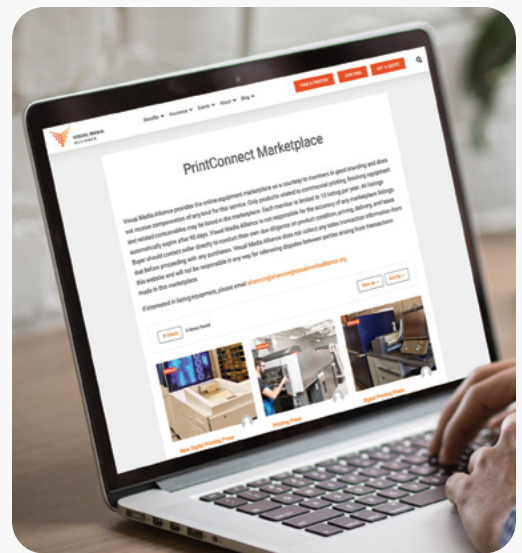
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