

'fantastic credentials'

PAPER LABELS ARE THE WAY FORWARD IN RETAIL PACKAGING

by Paul Johnston-Knight, director, Papico



Johnston-Knight: 'The report shows that paper labels afford a viable choice for brand owners and retailers'

This fact is also confirmed in the findings of a new study commissioned by leading label and flexible packaging papers producer Brigl & Bergmeister.

I'll describe the details of this study, and explain the benefits of paper labels too.

At European paper agency Papico, we've long been aware of the fantastic environmental credentials of paper labels because of their unique sustainability properties, and the fact that they can be recycled very simply.

However, the new report from Brigl & Bergmeister – in conjunction with Papico as its UK agent – has revealed just how environmentally-friendly and sustainable the paper label is compared with other materials.

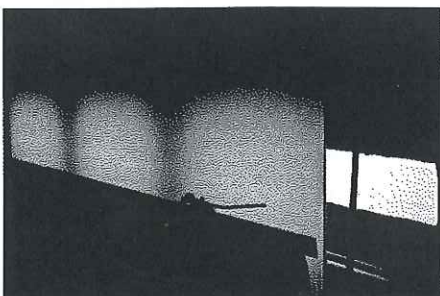
Further to its own findings, and to provide retailers with an understanding of the carbon footprint of paper and plastic labels, my company also commissioned Intertek Expert Services, a division of Pira International, to conduct a streamlined comparison scrutinising the production, transportation, disposal, and recycling of both label types.

Its study showed a 'cradle to grave' assessment of paper and plastic, and includes the production and delivery of materials, polymerisation, extrusion and thermoforming, transportation, and waste processing.

Both Papico and Brigl & Bergmeister have long been aware of the excellent ecological footing offered by paper labels; but the report results show that paper labels are a viable choice for brand owners and retailers when choosing the substrates for their products.

With more emphasis continually being put on whether the packaging can deliver when it comes to 'green' credibility, the package labelling used is an important make-up of this requirement; and it can be an essential way for brand owners to show they are taking the environment seriously by reducing their carbon footprints and employing labels that come from a sustainable background.

Combined with the new report is a study from the research institute CE Delft (Holland), which came to the conclusion that the carbon footprint of synthetic plastics is about five times higher than that of paper.



Study concluded that the carbon footprint of synthetic plastics is around five times higher than that of paper



Paper labels can be printed and applied at the same rapid speeds as orientated polypropylene substrates

Moreover, a paper label allows retailers and brand owners to literally show their green credentials on their sleeves, and the report reinforces Brigl & Bergmeister and Papico's view that there are enormous benefits in switching from orientated polypropylene (OPP) labels to paper.

These advantages are even more attractive to packers and fillers as they come without any disadvantage in terms of performance: Brigl & Bergmeister (B & B) has proved with its label substrate for PET bottles that reel-fed paper labels can be printed and applied at the same high speeds as OPP materials.

PAPER REMOVAL IS EASIER

It's long been the mindset that reel-fed labels on plastic bottles 'should' be plastic too. However, the common belief that plastic labels can be recycled on plastic bottles is a misconception as OPP film can't be processed with PET containers.

In fact, the removal of paper labels is easier and occurs more regularly than that of plastic film.

The environment has been B & B's number one priority for some considerable time. This label papers producer has worked tirelessly to further improve its company's environmental status, and has spent millions in recent years diversifying energy usage from fossil fuels to hydroelectric – from the rivers on which the mills are situated to investment in thermal capture systems.

This means that B & B is now an exceptionally low-carbon manufacturer of paper, and as such makes a very good contrast with the carbon cost of plastic label-material producers.

Using the Niklasdorf production data instead of WRAP's manufacturing data (which is based on typical mills rather than 'best in class' ones), the carbon footprint of paper is reduced by more than 20 per cent to 0.873 grams CO₂ eq. per gramme of paper; that's nearly 70 per cent lower than a plastic label of the same weight.

Further, paper's environmental performance becomes even better if 'best in class' production is considered.

The results also show, according to Intertek/Pira, that even if it was possible to make a plastic label from 100 per cent recycled polypropylene, gramme for gramme it would still have a larger carbon footprint than paper.

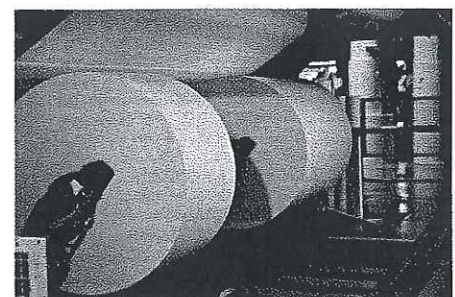
WRAP data is being developed from Ecoinvent and other sources to reflect UK conditions and the association's specific requirements. The data will form the basis of the Courtauld 11 commitment, which is how British retailers will be measuring their carbon footprint.

Of course, there are benefits from using all different types of substrates within the packaging industry but, when looking at the recyclability of paper labels against those made from synthetic materials, the difference is stark; as a percentage, far more paper than plastic is recycled.

Additionally, polypropylene's low degradability not only affects the world's oceans but its half-life period in rubbish dumps is at least 500 years. Even in landfill, paper labels degrade within a month or two, and the natural resource depletion of paper is 84 per cent lower than plastic according to the Intertek/Pira study.

The trend for brand owners to use lightweight OPP film and labels is one that paper manufacturers should fight against.

As there's no drop in speed or efficiency when moving from reel-fed plastic to paper but a huge gain in environmental sustainability, it could be an essential transition for brand owners to make in the future.



The environmental performance of paper becomes even better if 'best in class' manufacturing is considered