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Riverworks Printing eschews all-or-nothing approach to green

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A common misconception about going green - particularly with respect to businesses or industries - is that doing so is an all-or-nothing proposition.

Either you're green, or you're not. Worse still, if you aren't going all-out, you must be "greenwashing" - masquerading your businesses behind a façade of sustainability.

But what about the many businesses who find themselves on the path towards green - doing everything in their power, despite a tough economy and prohibitive cost constraints - and who don't pretend to be at sustainability's finish line?

Take Riverworks Printing, a Greenland, N.H.-based company specializing in commercial advertising for clients both local and national. Founded as a spinoff to sister outfit ATA Transit Advertising - which focuses on exterior bus advertising aimed at helping raise money for nine public transit systems throughout New England, including COAST - Riverworks has forged a unique, green niche in providing their many clients with myriad sustainability-driven printing alternatives.

In so doing, they're helping reshape the green conversation within their industry, proving that, sometimes, steady improvement over the long run is better than a bank-breaking sprint.

"We like to think of ourselves as eco-driven, rather than green," said Jeff Cutter, a veteran of the restaurant industry who in 2009 decided to follow wife, Jane -owner of ATA - into the printing division of the outdoor advertising industry. "Our sustainability practices are considered in every aspect of our business, not just with our eco-friendly products. With the current options for large-format signage materials being less than sustainable, how we handle the by-products makes all the difference. Our vendors and manufacturers are feeling the pressures of today's educated consumers and we hope to see new materials often."

What does eco-driven printing entail? While there is no stone-set answer, Cutter has instituted quite the starting template: Whether it's recycling everything from printer cartridges to media waste; committing themselves to a top-to-bottom recycling program; using biodegradable and water-based materials; or putting pressures on vendors and other partners to follow their green suit - Riverworks is taking strides daily to help assure the 21st Century is a cleaner, greener one for their business and their industry.

"It's just not being honest to call ourselves green," said Cutter. "But we do our best in trying to educate people, and we're willing to take a bit of a hit on the price just to get the word out there."

More impressive still is Riverworks' unique approach to repurposing and reusing. They're currently working with Poly-Recovery, a fellow seacoast businesses housed in the Pease Tradeport which helps companies effectively recycle waste materials such as PVC, acrylics, polycarbonates, and other plastics.

They've even taken to donating left over materials to local schools, providing a way for kids to make

their own graphics, stickers, and the like.

Earlier this month, Riverworks joined Green Alliance, the Portsmouth-based organization which helps certify and promote sustainability-driven businesses throughout the region.

But if you think "green" is a mantra relegated strictly to the Riverworks shop, think again: An avid fly fisherman, photographer, and passionate supporter of water conservation efforts, Cutter travels all over the country in an effort to capture the visual essence of what he calls "the arteries of the earth."

"My love of water was part of the inspiration for the company's name, as a matter of fact," he said.

Before Riverworks, Cutter's WallShotz.com - now a division of the former - was launched in part as a way to render his and others' photography into frame-able works of art. Even today, Cutter holds photography, and nature photography in particular, close to his heart.

"It's always been a personal thing, and something I've always been passionate about," said Cutter.

"We've sort of redefined ourselves over the past few years, but that artistic aspect still very much guides us."

In shifting more and more of their operations to more eco-friendly methods and practices, the folks at Riverworks hope to do their part in bringing these still infant options to the masses - even if the profits aren't always as high.

"In this economic environment, it can be hard to stay competitive," said Danis Chamberlin, who joined Riverworks as print manager after 12 years in the print and sign-making industries. "But we're willing to take a slightly smaller profit on the eco-friendly products and services, if that helps makes them more affordable and we're helping guarantee new and long-term customers."

To that end, Riverworks has made producing effective fundraising materials for area schools and nonprofit organizations a cornerstone of their business model. In so doing, they're doing their part to assure as much money as possible stays in the local economy.

"Our goal is to help them make their fundraising more effective," said Cutter. "At the end of the day, it's a product that's locally made, being bought by local people, with the fundraising staying in the local schools. So it's a way to bring the fundraising process full circle."

What could be more green than that?

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