

Case Study: WI Life

Recycled paper meets new magazine's commercial criteria



WI Life is distributed as part of the membership package to over 200,000 Women's Institute members in England, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Published eight times a year by the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), the first edition appeared in February 2007.

The magazine includes a wide range of articles and news stories addressing the interests of Women's Institute members. Advertising plays a key role and the publication has to maintain high production values to ensure that advertisers' expectations are consistently met.

Each edition of WI Life comprises around 70 to 80 pages. The magazine is printed using a heat-set web offset (HSWO) process on 60gsm matt-finished paper manufactured from 100% recycled fibre.

'Paper whiteness was an absolutely critical issue'

Key Facts

- WI Life, the new magazine for members of the Women's Institute, is printed on paper with 100% recycled content.
- The paper complements and promotes the publisher's positive stance on environmental issues without compromising the quality of the magazine.
- The paper has not caused any technical problems in the printing process, or any difficulties in securing advertising revenue.
- The magazine's readership has been supportive of the decision to opt for recycled stock.

Motivation to 'go recycled'

Right from its inception, WI Life's publisher intended the magazine to reflect the NFWI's responsible attitude towards environmental issues. Every aspect of the publication, its production and its distribution has therefore been specifically designed to embody eco-friendly principles wherever practical.

For example, the magazine uses vegetable rather than chemical-based inks and is distributed in completely biodegradable plastic wrapping. A prominent information box highlighting WI Life's green credentials is included on the contents page of every edition and asks readers to recycle the magazine after use.

The decision to print the magazine on recycled paper was therefore a natural one and fully supported by the NFWI's Board of Trustees.

“Choosing 100% recycled paper was the clearest possible statement of our commitment to protecting the environment”

Neal Maidment, WI Life

Importantly, it was also consistent with the Care of our Environment campaign initiated by the NFWI in 2005. A key aim of this campaign is the prevention and reduction of waste and the conservation of natural resources.

The process involved

Because WI Life was a completely new magazine, the publisher had more freedom of choice when selecting a recycled paper than a publisher introducing recycled stock for an established title; the need to ensure that the selected paper would seamlessly maintain continuity of brand image was simply not an issue. Nevertheless, it was vital that using recycled stock would not affect the quality of colour reproduction in the publication. The whiteness of the paper was also seen as absolutely critical.

In consultation with Headley Brothers Ltd, the contractor appointed to print WI Life, the publisher identified a paper that appeared to meet all the necessary criteria. However, this had to be rejected due to the extended lead time required for ordering the stock. Another option, 60gsm Signa Coat, was therefore identified. Signa Coat is a recycled paper made from 100% recovered fibre. The final decision to use this stock was taken after a print trial tested its ability to deliver the necessary quality of printed product.

Funded by WI Enterprises, the print trial consisted of a short production run of mocked-up samples of WI Life. The publisher was satisfied with the results, particularly in terms of look and feel. In addition, the recycled nature of the paper was apparent in the samples and it was believed that this would reinforce the environmental message which the NFWI wanted the magazine to convey. The trial was judged a success and the publisher gave the go-ahead for WI Life to be printed on 60gsm Signa Coat paper.

Responsibility for sourcing the paper for each issue is delegated to Headley Brothers. There are no indications that paper availability will present any problems, so the NFWI has considered it unnecessary to identify either a fallback stock or an alternative paper supplier.

Results and perceptions

In terms of production, the 100% recycled paper has not caused any technical concerns for the print company. All feedback received from Headley Brothers about the performance of the stock has been good. No problems have arisen with ink-drying and the frequency of web breaks has been the same as normally experienced with virgin papers.

In terms of quality, the publisher is fully satisfied with the high standard of the final printed product. The matt-finished recycled paper was deliberately selected to demonstrate the NFWI's environmental commitment and, as intended, does not create exactly the same impression as a gloss-coated virgin-fibre stock. (Gloss-coated recycled-content papers are now available in the marketplace, if a publisher requires them.)

The overall reaction of readers to the use of recycled paper has been positive. A small proportion of members have commented on the fact that the paper is not gloss-coated. The publisher has explained to them that the decision to use a matt paper was driven by environmental considerations.

The use of 100% recycled-content paper has not prevented the magazine from attracting advertising that would be equally at home in high-quality gloss publications. Advertising revenues have not been compromised in any way, thus meeting one of the NFWI's key objectives.

In terms of cost, the recycled paper is a little more expensive than a typical virgin stock of the kind often used for this type of publication. This, however, was considered acceptable. Although paper costs always need to be considered carefully in any commercial publishing enterprise, the cost of the stock was not the overriding factor in deciding to go recycled in this particular case.

Conclusions

The NFWI considers the use of 100% recycled paper in its new flagship magazine to be a complete success. Using the paper not only supports the NFWI's green agenda but is also spreading environmental awareness throughout the organisation's 200,000-plus membership base.

Summary

Opting for recycled paper has helped to set WI Life on an eco-friendly foundation that is contributing to the success of this new publishing venture.

“From a commercial perspective, the paper meets all of our key requirements”

Mark Linacre,
WI Enterprises



The printer's experience of recycled papers

Equipped with three web offset presses and eight sheet-fed presses, Headley Brothers Ltd produces 160 million m² of magazines a year. Around 2% of this total output is currently printed on recycled-content paper. As well as WI Life, the company prints a 24-page four-colour quarterly and a 76-page four-colour monthly magazine on recycled stock.

In Headley Brothers' experience, recycled paper does not necessitate an increase in normal machine-cleaning or blanket-washing rates, or changes to normal ink/water balances, web tension settings or dryer and folder settings.

The firm has not put any special quality monitoring in place for recycled paper, handling it in exactly the same way as other stocks. The only area where some difficulty has been experienced is register. In Headley Brothers' view, the key issues to bear in mind when choosing recycled paper are 'runnability' and cost.

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