

The Dingley Press

A Look at Print and Digital Waste

At Dingley, we are aware of the importance of contributing to a sustainable environment. Looking at the impact of paper and technology is one way to discover exactly what needs to be done in order to be more Environmentally friendly. We understand that both print media and electronic media are vital to the success of catalogers. The question is not whether to use print or digital, it is what impact each one has on the environment and when is an appropriate time to use each form of media for what purpose.



I. Introduction: The Environmental issue(s)



With a developing “go green” craze happening in this country, the impact of print versus that of technology on the environment is a topic that is being discussed among organizations. The Dingley Press alone printed over 400,000,000 catalogs last year. That’s millions of pounds of paper! As you can see, there is lots of paper going into the livelihood of the print industry. This has resulted in the growth of sales for tablets and e-readers. Some retailers have debated on whether they will continue to print catalogs at all.

But let’s not forget that what seems like the most obvious truth isn’t always the *whole* truth. So, let’s explore

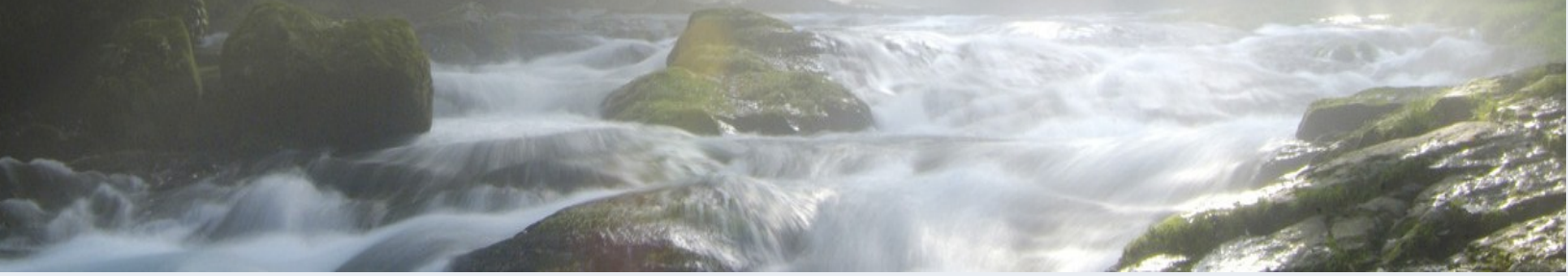
this phenomenon a little. Many organizations are re-evaluating their impacts on the environment because they are realizing that, in general, waste has become too easy to dismiss, too cumbersome to deal with, too large to regard. For most people it’s easier to not know the truth about what happens to those millions of catalogs after they are thrown into the land fill. But the reality is, in this business in this day and age, it’s imperative to know what happens to what.

Most people are aware that recycling paper is important to the sustainability of the environment. We are taught that paper affects the environment in three main ways:

- 1.) Deforestation
- 2.) Emissions of greenhouse gasses
- 3.) Municipal landfill waste

But is using your e-readers, smartphones, computers, tablets, ipods, mp3 players, email, television sets, and any other forms of technology going to cut back on the environmental impact of waste? Everyone knows we use a large amount of paper; but, does everyone know what happens to those 1,000,000,000 tons of electronic waste we have each year just in the United States alone? [Read More](#)

When studying the effects of waste, one must look at everything, from the making of the product, to the distribution, to the usage, to the waste. There are no shortcuts when it comes to our earth. Let’s look a little deeper.



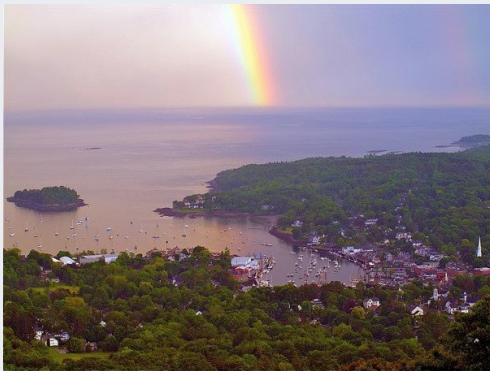
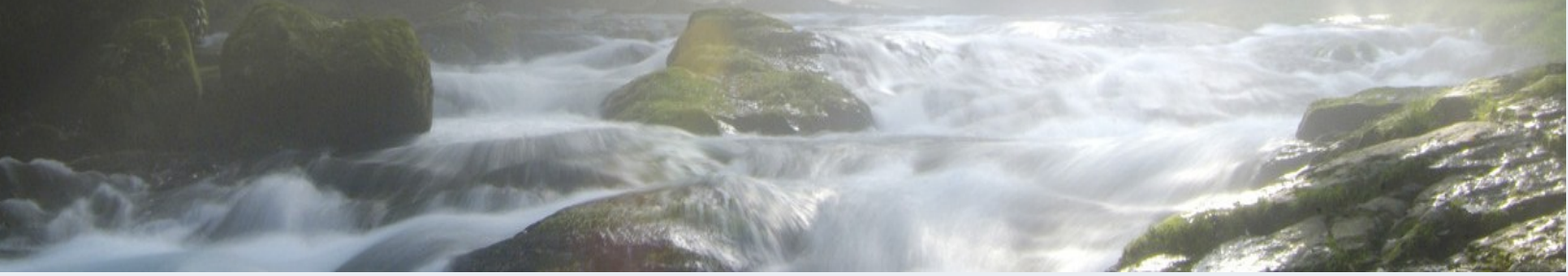
II. The Paper Story

The wonderful thing about paper waste is that it can be reused and recycled. What happens to your paper? More often than not it's made into cereal boxes and wrapping paper. We recycle paper to print catalogs and most of that catalog paper includes recycled content. Recycling is a sure way to cut back on waste both in the manufacturing of paper and the usage of it. Most paper can be recycled up to six times before it begins to break down. That's six times less paper usage. After about a century the paper waste will break down in landfills.

While there is no denying that paper is made out of trees, there are multiple regulations (that are monitored by multiple organizations) for the use of trees for papermaking. An article put out by New Page titled *The Environmental Impact of Print and Digital Media* explains:

In the world of print communication, the entire supply chain – from forest companies to recycling collection and solid waste management – has been focused for at least two decades on continuous improvement where environmental performance is considered. During the 1970s and 80s, concern about deforestation, dioxin in papermaking, toxic metals in printing, acid rain and other environmentally harmful practices led to heightened regulation of papermaking and printing, among other industrial concerns, in a bid to curb pollution and reverse environmental degradation. In the world of paper and print, legal compliance moved environmental best practices in the 1990s and early 2000s. [Read More](#)

So, papermaking has been studied, evaluated, changed, and supervised to ensure it is as ecologically friendly as possible. As a result the paper industry is being mindful. This is not to say that we should use *only* print media. Just that it's time to be aware of how both forms of media impact our Earth.



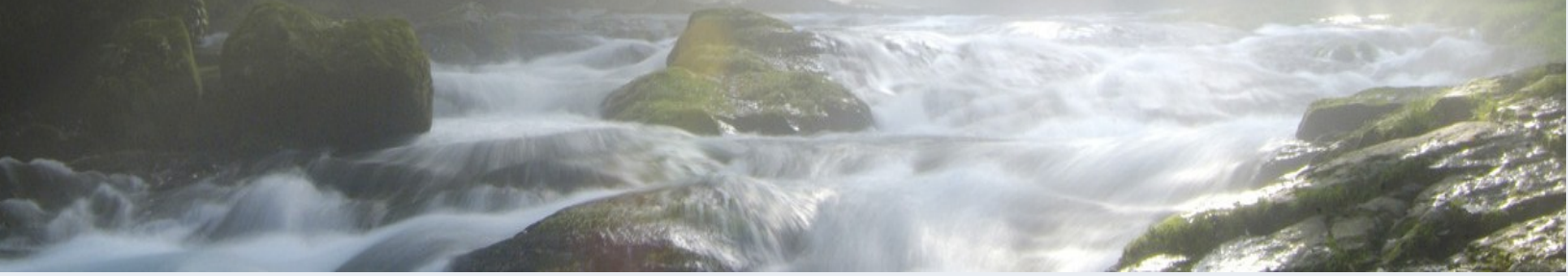
III. The Unwritten Story

“On the one hand, we're constantly told about recycling and cutting back, and on the other hand we have to buy the next gadget that comes along three weeks after the last one you bought. It's absolutely insane. We've been suckered into buying and buying and upgrading and upgrading. We're being given two very different mantras...”

~Martin Freeman

According to Don Carli in his PBS article [*Is Digital Media Worse for the Environment Than Print?*](#) “...increased use of digital media is having a profoundly negative impact on our forests and the health of our rivers. Computers, cellular networks and data centers are connected to [*the destruction of over 600 square miles of forest in the U.S.*](#)” He continues: “one of the more significant direct causes of deforestation in the United States is mountaintop-removal coal mining in the states of West Virginia, Kentucky and North Carolina.” But what does coal mining have to do with electronic waste? That piece of digital technology in your back pocket is using energy from coal fired power plants, wiping out masses of forests, and polluting rivers and streams along the way as well. The manufacturing of paper, however, typically uses renewable resources like biomass or hydropower.

The next question is what happens to your electronics after they are discarded? The cost of recycling electronics is so high, that more often than not electronic waste is exported out of country. According to [*greenlivinganswers.com*](#), “vast amounts of used electronics have been sent to countries such as China, Kenya and India. Lower environmental standards and working conditions make processing e-waste more profitable yet dangerously hazardous in those countries.” Electronic waste should be carefully handled. The PCBs, cadmium, mercury and lead are toxic to the air, the earth, and the health of people. They make people sick in ways we don’t even know about yet. Now just think about the amount of electronics you have in your home that will be disposed of over the next ten years.



IV. Conclusion

There is no doubt that both industries impact the environment. Which is more environmentally friendly could be argued endlessly with no real conclusion. The truth is that consumer and digital electronics is a fairly new sensation. Where we understand the reality of paper usage and how to recycle it, we are still learning about technology. That said there is one thing to be certain of. In the long run, whether it is electronic waste or paper waste, both impacts the environment, both should be considered greatly.

Going digital may not save the environment as this craze would lead us to believe; but it is necessary at times, just as print is. The good news for our industry? Catalogs are one of the most efficient recyclable forms of media. Most transfer stations will accept them after you have finished reading them and next week you'll pour your cereal out of them. Now, if you're trying to find a place to recycle that oversized computer monitor from 1992 that's another story altogether.

[For more information about our environmental practices, click here!](#)

