

# GREEN W

| Diane Sainato

Two Sides is a global initiative spanning twelve countries and areas working to promote the responsible production and use of paper and print. Two Sides dispel common misconceptions and myths damaging a sector that employs 258,000 Australians and 38,000 New Zealanders by providing verifiable information on the environmental credentials of the industry.

Two Sides certainly has its work cut out for it with a variety of organisations, banks, utility companies and telecommunications providers persuading their customers to 'go paperless' or 'switch to digital statements' in the name of 'saving the trees' and reducing environmental impact. It is crucial that we address these claims, as they are misleading and inaccurate, unsupported by any reliable scientific evidence or life cycle analysis.

The truth is that printed products are not environmentally destructive, they are one of the most recyclable and renewable forms of communication there is. Papermaking is an inherently sustainable process, and providing an organisation is sourcing its paper responsibly, there is no need for concern or transition to digital statements.

In fact, contrary to these companies' claims, electronic correspondence and statements do not come without consequence to our environment. Our digital devices, the internet, and the systems that support them, all have carbon footprints. This footprint accounts for almost 3.7% of global greenhouse emissions, not to mention the colossal issue of electronic waste, with 53.6 million metric tonnes of electronic devices and waste being disposed of in 2019.

Rather than genuine environmental care or initiatives, the transition to digital statements is often driven by a desire to reduce cost. Many consumers are aware of this too, with research by Toluna finding that 49% of Australian and New Zealander respondents believe



# WASHING

that organisations promoting digital as better for the environment do so to save on cost. Not only is pushing the switch to digital communication misleading, but it also removes choice and preference from consumers. 74% of Australian and New Zealander respondents of the Toluna survey believed that they should have the right to choose how they receive communications from their service providers, whether that be printed or electronically.

Two Sides works to actively confront greenwashing by monitoring the communications of companies and informing them on the basis of science and fact. We have recently commenced a top 200 company review to ensure any greenwashing across the industry is minimised. Conducting an annual review like this provides a proactive engagement approach as opposed to addressing greenwashing once it has occurred.

This is essential because many of these companies have a large reach, and any misleading claims can have a harmful impact on consumer perception of paper and the reputation and revenue of our industry. Greenwashing leads to an annual loss of more than \$500 million AUD of value to the paper, print and publishing industry worldwide, according to a 2021 study by Two Sides and Toluna.

The widespread adoption of environmental values and consumer preference for sustainable products is well known, and as companies have looked to capitalise it has led to an increase in greenwashing.

## 53.6

million metric tonnes  
electronic devices and  
waste being disposed  
of in 2019

Digital devices,  
the internet and the  
systems that support  
them, all have carbon  
footprints accounts for

## 3.7%

almost of global  
greenhouse emissions

An anonymous survey by the Harris Poll for Google Cloud investigated corporate green washing behaviour by interviewing 1,491 executives from a wide range of industries around the world. They found that despite 80% of the executives giving their companies an 'above average' rating for environmental sustainability, two-thirds questioned the genuineness of their company's sustainability efforts.

The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission has increased its focus on the issue too. They have made it quite clear in the last year that they will not tolerate any greenwashing behaviour, and are taking enforcement action against companies that deceive or mislead consumers. Their guidelines clearly state that no business or company should falsely claim that their goods or services have capabilities or effects that they do not have and any environmental benefits claimed must be substantiated.

As Two Sides continues to correct misinformation about the paper and print industry, they must ensure they do not engage in any similar behaviours of greenwashing. Abide by and refer to the ACCC guidelines and when promoting or presenting the environmental attributes of your products or initiatives, do so in a way that is clear, sincere, and verifiable. If you are unsure, double-check. By doing so we can continue to stand tall in environmental merit and record and together ensure the efforts of the industry are represented with fairness and accuracy.