

How green is your medium?

Like every other human activity, the ad process has a carbon footprint. **Patrick Dye** examines the difference between a typical TV ad and a standard press campaign

The absence of smoking chimneystacks over Soho may lull many in advertising into a false sense of security when it comes to environmental damage. Sadly, the ad process has a carbon footprint just like every other human activity.

“Advertising thinks of itself as an innovative industry, but it’s behind the curve in this area,” says Solitaire Townsend, chief executive of sustainable communications agency Futerra.




“Reducing carbon footprints is simple house-keeping for businesses in areas such as retail and finance. These firms are turning attention to their supply chain. If an agency hasn’t been asked about this already, it certainly will be this year.”

The choice of media used has an obvious bearing on the final footprint of a single campaign. But beware, even apparently greener media could have a hidden carbon price tag.



“Digital channels might appear cleaner, but anything that relies on data management such as e-mail will have an impact, since IT services use energy,” says Iain Patton, managing director of green marketing agency Satellite.

Here, we calculate the carbon footprint for a TV ad and a standard press campaign with the help of Noughtilus, which has designed a carbon calculator tool for use by the marketing industry.

Carbon footprint for a typical TV campaign

Office time	The shoot	The campaign
<p>The calculations are based on the average energy requirements of an office building per square metre. Factors taken into account include the energy consumed in heating, lighting, air conditioning, office equipment and catering.</p> <p>For the concept and creative process, the equivalent of five people is assumed to have worked full-time for 43 days, with each person using 10 square metres of office space.</p> <p>For the review/approval stage of the process (including post-production), the calculation allows for five people working full time over the equivalent of 21 days.</p> <p> Total footprint for office work: 17,706.5kg CO₂e (or equivalent carbon dioxide)</p>	<p>Travel is a major contributor to carbon emissions. For this calculation, it is assumed that 10 return flights are made - a mixture of long and short-haul - in shooting the commercial. These flights alone contribute a total of 3,573.9kg of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent).</p> <p>Once on location, the accommodation used by the crew and agency entourage must be taken into account. Assuming an average of seven people spend 13 days in a standard European hotel, this would contribute a total of 892kg of CO₂e.</p> <p>Calculations for the filming and editing stage of the process allow for the carbon generated in filming and post-production on a 30-second TV spot, which would contribute 251.8kg of CO₂e.</p> <p> Total footprint for the shoot: 4,716.7kg CO₂e</p>	<p>The final stage of the process is the viewing of the ad by the television audience, which is a major contributing factor to the total footprint for a TV campaign.</p> <p>There are many variables here, such as the size of TV used. But assuming a total audience of 15 million viewers watches a 30-second ad aired over a two-week period on a TV and set-top box combination using 0.1 kilowatts hours of energy, this would result in a total 5,861.3kg of CO₂e produced.</p> <p> Total campaign footprint: 28,284.5kg CO₂e. This is the equivalent of the carbon emissions produced by 28 people in a year (10 tonnes per person)</p>

Carbon footprint for a typical press campaign*

Office time	The campaign
<p>The energy allowances used here are the same as those used for the TV campaign. For the concept and initial meetings phase, six three-hour meetings between five people have been allowed for, with an allocation of three people each putting in 10 hours’ work for designing the creative. Typical reviewing and approval time is calculated at three people each putting in five hours’ work.</p> <p> Total footprint for office work: 390.1 kg CO₂e</p>	<p>For the actual campaign, factors that have to be taken into account include paper types used, the recycled content and the manufacturing processes that create that paper. Then there is the impact of the fulfilment, printing and distribution stages. Average figures have been used for each of these stages.</p> <p>A campaign appearing in four broadsheets with an average daily circulation of 400,000 would result in 22,863.7kg of CO₂e for a half-page ad. This figure can then be doubled to allow for one appearance a week over a two-week period to give a figure of 45,727.5kg of CO₂e.</p> <p>For a standard magazine, an ad appearing in issues of 10 different magazines with circulations of 260,000 would result in 25,918.7 kg of CO₂e. For glossy mags, an ad appearing in five titles with circulations of 100,000 would produce 4,791.8 kg of CO₂e.</p> <p> Total campaign footprint (booked in four newspapers and 15 magazines): 76,828.1 kg CO₂e. This is the equivalent of the carbon emissions produced by 77 people in a year (10 tonnes per person).</p> <p><small>*Advertising calculations are based on generic UK figures and will not accurately reflect the specific carbon footprint of any individual publication. They are intended to serve as a proxy for the industry</small></p>