



Outdoor ahead of the game in the green scene

As outdoor tackles environmental issues, **Jane Bainbridge** examines how media owners are adapting their products for greener working practices

There was once a time when a few tasty green credentials were a nice-to-have for any company wanting to portray itself as a responsible player. But as the environment has moved up the political and social agenda, those credentials have been elevated to must-haves.

As industries go, there are plenty of worse polluters than outdoor advertising, but as a predominantly paper-based business, with a high product turnover, outdoor has contributed its fair share to landfill.

But over the past few years, out-of-home media owners have tackled their environmental impact head on and have innovated and adapted their products to ensure greener working practices.

In many respects the outdoor companies have been ahead of the game because, as many work with local authorities, their environment and waste management policies have been under constant scrutiny. As Dave McEvoy, group marketing director for JCDecaux, puts it: "If we win the contract for bus shelters, our environmental systems will be part of the judgement."

This could include interrogation on everything from how the company disposes of broken glass to the electricity consumption of its hoardings and the fuel used in its fleet.

The most obvious issue is poster recycling. The combined problems of the inks used, and the paste to stick the papers on billboards, have rendered it almost impossible to recycle old posters. So the media owners have been developing new systems for securing their ads, as well as base materials and printing techniques for the posters.

JCDecaux's solution has been to roll out a new system of billboards that do away with glue in favour of hooks and to introduce a new form



Poster recycling: new systems are being developed by media owners for securing their ads

of vinyl, which not only ticks the environmental box but also has the added benefit of being a better printing quality and quicker to post.

"We're converting all the billboards to PE. It's not vinyl and it's thinner than PVC, but has similar qualities and we can recycle it. About 40% will go back into new posters and the rest will be used in the building trade and other things," says McEvoy. "We have to change the structure as well, so we have a patented system that stretches the PE across the board and is fixed with hooks and tensioners."

The first 200 billboards changed at the end of March and the company plans to convert 200 to 250 billboards every month. With an estate of

around 10,000 sites across the UK, it will take JCDecaux several years and millions of pounds to convert them all.

CBS Outdoor's non-paste solution came from collaboration with 3M, the Post-it manufacturer. Its alternative to paper and paste – called dryposting – involves applying a poster to a giant piece of sticky paper, all held down by a frame.

CBS Outdoor is London Underground's media supplier and its managing director Tim Bleakley acknowledges that it operates in a sector where "green issues are at the heart of the business". He says the development of dryposting came about because the company was looking for ways it could improve the quality of posting display, as

OUTDOOR GOES GREEN

well as working conditions. He says: "People's working conditions are important, how the ad looks to the consumer is important and its impact on the environment is important."

Although green credentials were not a requirement in the tender for the TfL contract, CBS Outdoor recognised that the environment was high on both the Mayor of London and TfL's agenda.

"Part of our thinking was that the environment will become a greater issue, so we have a responsibility to change that aspect of our business," says Bleakley.

The environmental impact of dryposting is far less than the old paper and paste system and reduces the waste going to landfill. CBS has set a target to recycle around 90% of its London Rail (London Underground and DLR) posters in the next two years. On buses, CBS is moving away from using vinyl and developing a recyclable product.

Green fleets

After posters, a key area where outdoor media owners are improving their environmental impact is their fleets. The nature of the business means a large number of vehicles are on the road, covering significant distances – an area Clear Channel has focused on.

Three quarters of its fleet of 535 vans and cars is LPG, hybrid or electric, which saves around 74 tonnes of carbon a year. It has also taken the simpler step of minimising wasted miles. Pip Hainsworth, Clear Channel's marketing director, says: "We looked carefully at our work schedule to save mileage. It dropped from 20,000 to 16,500 average annual mileage." In 2005, Clear Channel won the Green Fleet Award and last year it was given the Fleet Hero of the Year Award (500+ fleet) from the Energy Savings Trust.

Bleakley says CBS Outdoor is currently looking at shifting its fleet to energy efficient hybrid cars and JCDecaux has safe driving training to help reduce fuel consumption.

Hainsworth says recycling has always been high on Clear Channel's agenda, and its vinyl posters have been reprocessed for almost 10 years. But it has also looked for ways of reducing paper waste on a smaller scale. With the introduction of Nokia N70 handsets to all of its operators, it can send them electronic work



Dryposting: environmental impact is less than paper and paste system and reduces waste

schedules as well as providing a system of scanning barcodes on posters to prove posting. "It's green because it is paperless and it's an instant and infallible way of doing proof of posting," adds Hainsworth.

Some see the rise of digital as a way of claiming greener credentials. But the savings on that resource have to be balanced against the rise in power consumption.

Energy provision is another aspect that falls under environmental scrutiny for out-of-home media owners and the use of devices such as photoelectric cells ensures unnecessary lighting can be eradicated.

JCDecaux switched to a green energy provider last year, as has Clear Channel for its bus shelters. JCDecaux is also introducing a new lighting tube that uses 30% less power, as well as having a longer lifespan, and it has installed solar-powered bus shelters in several cities including Plymouth, Nottingham and Manchester.

For those operators serious about their environmental standing, they need to become ISO 14001 compliant. This is an internationally accepted environmental standard from the British Accreditation Bureau. At present, CBS Outdoor is the only outdoor media owner to have attained it, although JCDecaux is hoping to reach it and has set itself a target of reducing its carbon emissions by 10% each year for the next five years.

Landfill-free target

Manchester-based graphic display producer MediaCo was awarded ISO 14001 in September. With its own recycling facility, it has set itself a target of being 100% landfill-free this year by expanding its environmental management system to cover every area of its business where waste is created. MediaCo's waste materials, including outdoor PVC skins, are reprocessed to produce traffic cone bases and health-and-safety barriers among other things.

Managing director Mark Wardle says: "The 100% landfill-free target can be achieved by careful planning and communicating with our customers. We already offer collection and recycling of used displays to our outdoor clients and we're planning to offer the same service to our entire client base."

So far, the move by companies to be more environmentally friendly has been either internally driven, or as a result of demands from local authorities or international clients, rather than the advertisers or agencies.

"Being green is not necessarily important now to paying advertising customers, but it is becoming more important to show corporate and social responsibility to our franchise partners," says Bleakley. "I believe the outdoor industry is strong in this area. But we have not trumpeted much of what we have done to avoid being seen as currying favour with advertisers. We think actions speak louder than words." ■

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION

Last year, the Outdoor Advertising Association's Health and Safety Committee extended its remit to include the environment. The committee has been meeting for more than five years, but, as green issues moved up the agenda, the committee decided to address the environment.

Although still in the very early stages, the committee is looking at drawing up environmental industry standards.

Bill Wilson, the OAA's operations director, chairs the committee, now called Health, Safety and Environment. He says: "What we're talking about doing, and want to do, is devising a policy statement with minimum requirements."

These requirements could then be used by the OAA to ensure a standard in the industry and any

company wishing to join would have to comply with the criteria to become a member.

"If an outdoor media owner operates bad practices, then everyone is tarred with the same brush," says Wilson. "This might be seen as being protectionist, but it's for a positive output."

An initial draft has been drawn up and now needs to be discussed. Wilson says he expects the detail to be sorted out throughout this year so that a standard will be fixed and in place by 2009.

Alan James, chief executive of the OAA, adds: "We're still at the very early stages. To do this properly is quite a process. We need to look at a lot of things and it takes a great deal of manpower to investigate what we can do and the best way to go about it."