

Quit Paper: Four Steps to Beating Paper Addiction

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Step One: Admitting the Problem

Addiction is a powerful thing. Addiction causes intelligent individuals to behave irrationally. It prompts people to exhibit behaviors that they know are detrimental to not only themselves, but those around them as well. Just ask any smoker.

But smokers have one thing going for them. Most people around them want them to quit.

The American business world, on the other hand, seems unreasonably tolerant of an addiction of its own — an addiction to paper.

At first glance, this addiction hardly seems as costly as the toll smoking takes on society. But when you add up the numbers, paper waste starts looking almost as ugly as an overfilled ashtray.

- In a typical year, the United States used eight million tons of office paper (3.2 billion reams). That's the equivalent of 178 million trees.
- In the United States, we use enough office paper each year to build a 10-foot-high wall that's 6,815 miles long. That's more than the distance from New York to Tokyo.
- The average U.S. office worker prints 10,000 total pages per year, which is more than a tree's worth per year

Paper is not a new addiction. When computers began to replace typewriters, people said it would result in businesses reducing paper use — no more would employees be trashing entire pages because of a few typos. They'd get to double- and triple-check each draft, and nothing would hit the printed page until it had been completely readied as the final hard copy.

That didn't really happen. As it turned out, people within production environments at companies loved looking at hard copies of each and every draft of their reports, notes, letters, invoices, even labels. And printing and duplication had become faster and more accessible than ever. Instant gratification made the print button even more addictive.

Soon enough, electronic document formats took root. It became easy to share documents without requiring the physical delivery of hard copies. Teletypes gave way to fax machines, which gave way to PDFs. Today, it's entirely possible to keep a business document electronic throughout its entire life cycle.

But organizations are still addicted to the print button.

- Global paper products consumption has tripled over the past three decades and is expected to grow by half again before 2010.
- Demand for recycled paper will exceed supply by 1.5 million tons of recycled pulp per year within 10 years.



Within a typical company, the cost of the addiction to the print button is relatively clearly defined — and it's not just the paper, but also the ink on the page, which is among the most expensive commodities purchased by the typical business.

- Average cost of a wasted page is six cents
- Average employee prints six wasted pages per day — that's 1,410 wasted pages per year!
- If you were to fill up the tank of your car with Hewlett-Packard or Lexmark ink, it would cost \$100,000

But the problems is not just what addiction is doing to your company. It's what paper addiction doing to society as a whole.

The environmental effects of paper addiction are well-documented, and it's not only about deforestation. The costs range from overflowing landfills to wasting water and energy, to adding to CO2 emissions:

Forests

- Old growth forests make up 16 percent of the virgin tree fiber used each year to make paper products and in the U.S. we have lost 95 percent of our old growth forests.
- It takes three tons of wood to produce one ton of copy paper.
- If every American business saved just one tree, the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere would be reduced by one billion lbs annually. This is almost 5 percent of the amount that human activity pumps into the atmosphere each year.

Greenhouse gas emissions

- If the United States cut office paper use by just 10 percent it would prevent the emission of 1.6 million tons of greenhouse gases — the equivalent of taking 280,000 cars off the road
- Production of one ton of copy paper produces 5,690 lbs. of greenhouse gases, which is the equivalent of six months of car exhaust.
- Dumping paper in landfill adds methane to the atmosphere as it decomposes, which brings 20 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide.

Waste

- In 2003, paper and paperboard accounted for 35 percent of the total materials discarded in the United States.
- Paper accounts for 25 percent of landfill waste (and one third of municipal landfill waste).
- Production of one ton of copy paper produces 2,278 lbs. of solid waste

Energy

- The American pulp and paper industry is the second largest industrial consumer of energy and uses more water to produce a ton of its product than any other industry.
- To produce one ton of copy paper, it takes 11,134 kWh (same amount of energy used by an average household in 10 months)

Water

- Making one single sheet of copy paper can use over 13oz. of water — more than a typical soda can.
- Production of one ton of copy paper generates 19,075 gallons of waste water



Step Two: Examining Past Errors

Okay, enough about how bad the addiction is — you probably have gotten the point by now. Now you need to examine the behaviors that are causing this problem within your organization and within the business world on the whole.

Some of them come down to flaws in business processes in production environments. Often processes inherently create paper without good reason.

One of the most common strategic mistakes is an over-reliance on hard copy postal mail for customer communications. Increasingly, vendors and customers are willing to accept invoices and payments electronically — yet many businesses still print and mail reams of billing-related material. Paper-driven billing processes require dozens of printouts, from the invoices themselves to shipping documents, regulatory forms and payment confirmations to copies made for internal error checking and routing to relevant personnel.

Even for those companies no longer mailing invoices and instead using faxes, too often, much of the process remains as paper-intensive as ever. Many times incoming faxed documents are duplicated and redistributed internally as confirmations and in advance of manual key entry into financial systems.

In addition to process flaws, the individual worker often makes eco-unfriendly choices, such as:

1. Printing documents that could otherwise just be read on the screen
2. Printing before editing
3. Printing only on one side
4. Widow printing, where only a few lines appear on the final page
5. Paying little attention to recycled content or not reusing waste paper
6. Printing in full size / double space during draft formats
7. Making multiple copies of the same document for manual filing and distribution

Step Three: Teaching a New Code of Behavior

The best advice for reducing the use of paper within an organization is to avoid printing documents unless absolutely necessary. From a strategic point of view, those managing production environments should inspire several key changes in the way they run their departments.

Encourage staff to use e-mail where possible to send and receive business messages. Consider alternatives to traditional fax machines, including technologies that deliver faxed documents electronically and route them automatically within organizations. Esker offers a range of solutions to fit the needs of organizations of all sizes that accomplish these goals and more.

But even without implementing any new technology, there is often a myriad of previously untaken steps to pursue within business. Here are other tips for reducing paper use within your production environment:

1. Actively encourage all employees to use less paper. If it comes from the boss, it will be seen as important.
2. Purchase only the quantity of supplies needed — especially letterhead, envelopes, and business cards — to reduce the need to dispose of outdated stock.
3. Ask suppliers to reduce unnecessary packaging or packing materials.
4. Minimize the use of colored, glossy, and special-thickness papers that are difficult to recycle.

5. Maximize the use of chlorine-free paper made from recycled materials, or that made from cotton, hemp or bamboo, which grow faster than trees.
6. Use reusable or two-way envelopes to post your inter-office correspondence.
7. Use a single space format for the text of final reports.
8. Print in draft mode to conserve ink.
9. Make two-sided copies. Develop a policy to copy reports, letters, memos, etc. on two sides rather than one to conserve paper. Purchase or lease copiers designed to copy on both sides without jamming or malfunctioning.
10. Use technology to electronically distribute and archive documents.
11. Alter business process to reduce the dependence on paper and increase use/access of electronic documents.
12. Use Internet publishing and electronic forms to reduce paper copies.
13. Order office supplies online rather than via paper forms.
14. Cut down on paper for memos. Place memos that can't be e-mailed on central bulletin boards for everyone to read or use. Routing slips also provide a record of who received and acknowledged a memo.
15. Use marker boards or chalkboards instead of paper for brainstorming.
16. Keep physical mailing lists current.
17. Maintain central files (probably electric) instead of multiple files. This option saves not only paper but also reduces the time, space, and money spent for filing.
18. Shred used paper for use as packing material.
19. Do a good job maintaining copiers, computers, and other equipment to minimize scrap generation and prolong the life of these machines.
20. Ensure paper stocks aren't stored in damp or humid conditions, as this can cause jams in machines and more paper wastage.
21. Appoint a recycling coordinator to audit paper use, develop a plan of action with measurable goals and a feasible timetable, promote the program to both management and employees and gain management authorization to purchase needed equipment and supplies and for negotiating contracts with recyclers and brokers.
22. Choose vendors that support environmentally sound products and services.
23. Take a careful look at the paper stock choices you make, using <http://www.PaperCalculator.org>, which provides the economic and environmental impact of your current choice, and alternative choices.

Step Four: Helping Others Fight Paper Addiction

As the new year begins there is no better time than now to make the resolution to Quit Paper. Send along this article to your friends working within office environments so that they too can get their organizations on the road to recovery. Or have them visit <http://www.quitpaper.com> for even more tips and resources.