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The background of the cover is a photograph of a man and a woman in a professional setting. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark blue polo shirt with the 'LABELTRONIX' logo on the chest. He is looking down at a printed sample on a table. The woman, on the left, has short reddish hair and is wearing a red top. She is also looking at the sample. The overall scene suggests a collaborative work environment in the printing industry.

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Green Gift Cards

Paper Proves Environmentally Friendly, Economical Alternative to Plastic

By Mike Salerno

Paper or PVC? That may not be the first question that comes to mind when you think credit cards, but Minneapolis, MN-based The Meyers Printing Companies, Inc. is thinking otherwise. The long-time FTA member and award-winning Shopper Marketing Solutions provider recently announced its latest, reformed foray into a new field: paper credit cards. After years of struggling against traditional plastic cards, this innovative printed piece is finally making waves in the industry.

Introduced in 2004, Meyers' Greencard offers an environmentally-friendly and more economical alternative to PVC cards. However, like many other new products, it faced many

challenges at first. "Plastic cards have been around forever. They're widely accepted and everybody likes them," said Meyers Label and Card Group President Gregg Temple. "We're really fighting market acceptance and perception. People think, 'Plastic: good, durable. Paper: cheap, flimsy.'"

Many companies are now capitalizing on the advantages of utilizing the Greencard. They see it as a benefit to their business. As a result, Meyers has seen the operation grow into a substantial portion of the company's Label Group. In fact, it even warranted a name change.

"We've been doing this for about six or seven years now," said Temple. "It's gotten to the point where we've changed the name of our division to the Label and Card Group instead of just the Label Group. It's about 30 percent of our business in the division."

HIDDEN PERSUADER

"Durability is a challenge," claimed Temple. Retailers have a difficult time believing that this paper product can hold up and still be attractive to the consumer. "In fact, we've been very close with a number of retailers where they were excited about this from an environmental standpoint and a cost standpoint. There were multiple pluses here, but at the end of the day, they did not make the decision to change." Ever the persuader, Temple does not hesitate to pull out samples. "I've got three cards I've been carrying around in my wallet for over two years, and they've held up really well." That, he maintained, says a lot for the product.

Meyers has seemed to corner a significant portion of the market for cards designed for one-time use. The perfect storm of environmental and economic advantages, coupled with a growing penchant for one-time usage, has allowed the Greencard to flourish for prepaid phone cards and activation codes.

"Almost all of the business to date is for digital downloads and activation codes," said Temple. "We really think the gift card market could be profitable, because there are a lot of people who are using plastic cards for gift cards where they really don't need it."

The patented production process of the card provides options of unique barcode, serial number, concealed authorization code and magnetic stripe verification systems. It also offers capabilities for pre-loaded value, POS valuation or on-line activation for products such as, prepaid cellular phone credits, music downloads and store memberships.

To better reach these companies, Temple commissioned a study to examine the advantages, both environmental and economical, of using his product as opposed to PVC cards. The results have helped sway companies who may be



ADVANTAGES TO CAPITALIZE ON

- Cards are produced in 15-20 days versus 18 weeks.
- The paper product offers 42 percent energy savings over PVC.
- GHG emissions are cut 69 percent from PVC.
- Water-use savings are estimated at 89 percent.
- Enhancements to the look, feel and lifespan accommodate the pickiest retailers.

concerned with durability or other questions that come with choosing a paper card over plastic.

With the new product, Meyers has found a way to be more profitable than the competition, get to market up to 90 percent faster and offer more printed graphic flexibility not available in traditional PVC production.

ECO-FRIENDLY RESULTS

According to Temple's study, the Greencard provides 42 percent energy savings, a 69 percent savings on GHG emissions and an 89 percent water-use savings, all while being distributed to the consumer at a faster pace.

Environmental advantages continue with 42 percent energy savings measured in joules (megajoules). Production of 1,000 Meyers Greencards uses 243.6 megajoules, instead of the 422.9 megajoules used in PVC production for the same amount of cards. Creating 10 million gift cards using these systems saves the same amount of energy as recycling seven tons of aluminum cans and is equal to the average gas, electric and heating oil use of 17 average American homes.

"All these big companies have green initiatives and environmental initiatives," said Temple. "Sometimes you're dealing with people who have a portion of their compensation based on accomplishing these things. I don't see this becoming any less than what it is. There will be more and more pressure on the green side as things go forward."

Green House Gas emissions showcase the next advantage. Production of 1,000 redemption cards produces 4.7 kgCO₂e. The same card production using traditional PVC produces 15.2 kgCO₂e. This illustrates a 69 percent savings in GHG emissions. Producing 10 million gift cards creates CO₂ savings equivalent to a Toyota Prius driven around the Earth nine times, or an average semitrailer driven around the Earth twice.

Water use in production is an important element to monitor. The card uses 340 liters per 1,000 cards produced. PVC production of 1,000 cards requires 3,026 liters—an 89 percent savings. Producing 10 million gift cards creates a savings equivalent to 49 years of water use of a typical household family of four.

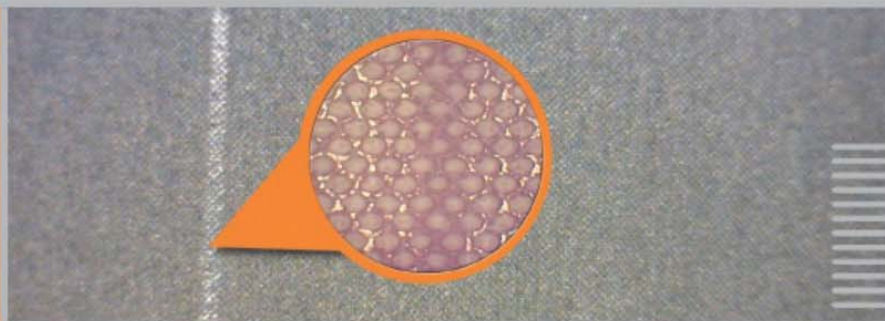
ROBUST FUTURE

In a world of green initiatives, Temple believes Meyers is poised for even greater success in the future. Enhancements to the product's look, feel and lifespan will help accommodate even the pickiest of retailers, and help save them money as well.

"In the balance over time, the green thing is going to weigh more in our favor. I really look at it as market acceptance. We continue to improve it, so it gets more and more glossy and displays better graphics. It's a more robust construction than it was when we started. We've improved the adhesives and the print quality on the variable data." ■

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