

Carbon and all that!

Carbon and offsetting it have been green buzzwords for the last few years. But what is often forgotten is that before you even contemplate offsetting your negative carbon impacts, you should make sure that you have cut your carbon impacts to the core. Then, and only then, should you pat yourself on the back for offsetting whatever is left.

Carbon dioxide is a significant greenhouse gas, which through simply 'being' we, as humans, create. Ramp that up through manufacturing and production processes and you do have a major problem on your hands –and that is why it is important to offset, as this helps to redress the balance by compensating for your carbon impacts by putting something back into the world –offsetting schemes vary from tree planting to encouraging eco friendly forms of power generation.



What is it?

So, just what is carbon dioxide and why is it so bad? Well, it is a naturally occurring compound in the form of an odourless gas that is emitted by many natural sources and in each breath we exhale. But it can also be created by man made products, the overuse of which, and the burning of non-sustainable fuels such as coal, have led to too much CO₂ being released into the atmosphere. Not only does this contribute to global warming, but is a source of ocean acidification too.

Remember that different calculators measure different parameters and some only takes parts of your business into consideration, so it is important that when you know your carbon footprint, look at ways to minimise that even more, rather than just offsetting straightaway.

Don't forget, offsets are a complement to your wider environmental policies and should only be used once you have decreased your impacts as much as possible. This means looking at every area of your business including travel and transportation, energy, back office functions, and more, apart from your actual printing production processes.

Our top tip

First find out what your carbon footprint actually is. You can do this by working with an expert partner, or there are some useful online tools that can help. Defra also has a 'Guidance on how to measure and report your greenhouse gas emissions' document that could help too. You might also find www.ukconversionfactorscarbonsmart.co.uk useful.

There are thousands of options for offsetting, but please make sure that the company you work with is in itself responsible and that the carbon offsets you will buy are for credible projects that really will give something back to the planet.

Good carbon calculators can be found at:

www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx

www.climatecare.org/business/business-co2-calculator/

www.carbontrust.com/resources/tools/carbon-footprint-calculator/