

Book Business Magazine

A Primer on Selecting Alternative Book Papers

By Steven W. Frye

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Mills have traditionally heavily promoted their high-quality papers made from virgin fiber stocks. But technological changes in recent years have made available other types of stocks—in particular: recycled, synthetic and groundwood substrates. Each of these papers offer characteristics that are different from papers made from virgin fibers. Here are a few important considerations for each of these paper stock “alternatives.”

Recycled Content

Many publishers are feeling pressure from environmental groups to use recycled papers, which often are sold at a premium, while the post-consumer content still hovers at around 10 percent. However, characteristics for papers used by magazines, catalogs, newspapers and flyers have improved to a point that it is now a viable alternative. These lightweight text stocks have more post-consumer content (30 percent to 100 percent), and are brighter, whiter and, more importantly, price-competitive to virgin fiber stocks. But book stocks have not yet seen such advancements on a wide scale, except in groundwood stocks used by mass-market paperbacks.

Random House Inc. led the way this year when it announced that by 2010 at least 30 percent of the uncoated paper it uses to print the majority of its U.S. titles will be from recycled fibers.

Other environmentally conscious publishers focus on responsible forest practices and sustainability issues and put a priority on using suppliers that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

The most compelling reason for some publishers to use a recycled stock is to enhance a book’s overall message or to help convey the publisher’s ideals.

Synthetic Paper

Synthetic papers offer unique characteristics not usually related to paper: tear-, water-, chemical- and grease-resistance, as well as UV stability. However, for certain types of books, they can add a completely new dimension.

Publishers of books that are read near water (baths, pools, spas or for any water sport) benefit from water-resistance. High-usage books in messy environments (cookbooks, instruction manuals, or first aid, emergency preparedness or landscaping books, etc.) benefit from their durability and ability to be wiped clean. You can even sanitize them with disinfectants or medically sterilize them with Gamma irradiation—ideal for children’s books and hospital reference manuals.

Some of the largest producers of synthetics are Oji-Yuka Synthetic Paper Company (Yupo), Arjobex (Polyart), Hop Industries (Nanya), PPG Industries (Teslin) and Transilwrap Company Inc. (MXM, Proprint).

But synthetic papers have characteristics that are very different from those of wood-based papers, and not all printers have experience with them. Some manufacturers, such as Yupo, certify printers, indicating confidence in those printers' understanding of the stock and unique handling procedures.

It is important to remember that each manufacturer's stock is unique. Each paper's grain direction, type of coating, ink requirements and even drying times are characteristics worth considering when selecting a synthetic stock.

- **Grain.** Affects tear-resistance and folding.
- **Clay Coating.** Some synthetics have a clay coating which affects the ink lay, drying times and overall feel.
- **Special Inks.** Some stocks require special ink, whereas others use regular offset inks.

And like recycled stocks, synthetics are environmentally friendly in the fact that no trees are killed in the process of making them.

Groundwoods

A lot can be learned from some of the "big boys" in publishing. Currently, Simon & Schuster, Penguin Group USA and Warner Books all use groundwood paper in their hardcover books.

The reason for the usage is obviously to save money ... and it can save a lot. The current dollar difference between 50# freesheet trade and 45# groundwood is anywhere from \$6 to \$8/cwt, and in some cases significantly more. Add that to the 10-percent yield advantage, and you can see the attraction: about 25 percent in savings. Publishers who use a 40# can add a 20-percent yield advantage netting a 35-percent savings.

Abitibi Consolidated, Bowater Incorporated and North Pacific Paper Corporation (NORPAC) are three primary North American producers of groundwood trade book grades, and there are differences in quality—i.e., opacity, shade and formation—between their sheets.

Using groundwoods can net you cost savings, but you should also be aware of some negative attributes. Groundwoods do not meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards for permanency, and they contain lignin. In other words, groundwood papers will yellow and deteriorate.

Books with a relatively short shelf life, however, could benefit from the cost savings, while not negatively affecting readership. But other books meant to last, particularly first editions, should be aware of the possible backlash from readers. While groundwood stocks, like recycled and synthetic stocks, may not be the best choice for your next book, it may be an acceptable option that can offer significant cost savings.

Steven W. Frye is owner of Frye Publication Consulting in Hailey, Idaho. He is an expert in production processes, and has negotiated printing, paper and distribution contracts for dozens of publishers. He can be reached at Steve@SteveFrye.com.
