

Green shoots...



Amongst the many other things currently keeping the GTC Council busy, we have recently been considering how we can improve our carbon footprint and thinking about implementing an environmental policy for the organisation. As good an intention as this sounds, it can be complicated trying to do the right thing and so looking around to see what others are doing can be a great place to start. Probably the best example we have found of a company within the industry really committing to this in a thorough and thoughtful way is **GTC sponsor VMI**, which has already introduced many sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Once she has some more time on her hands post Zerf, **Alison Chapman** fully intends to get more involved in helping formulate the GTC's policy!

Along with many burning topics of the day at the moment, it seems, the issue of climate change and what we should be doing about it seems to be another of those frequent discussion points that can wildly polarise people, evoking strident opinions either way – everything from it's the biggest issue that any of us have ever faced, to it's not even a thing at all, to it's just a natural cyclical occurrence and not much influenced by the way we choose to live on the planet. Without getting too deeply into the rights and wrongs of this (as Zerf and the GTC have never been 'political' organisms), on certain things we can hopefully agree. Whatever the causes, the planet is getting warmer and so any kind of rationality tells us we should be doing whatever we can at least not to exacerbate the problem and ideally to mitigate against the effect, manmade or otherwise. And secondly, as so graphically demonstrated by GTC TICA winner, the great Sir David Attenborough in *Blue Planet II*, as a matter of huge urgency we need to do whatever we can to reduce the appalling amounts of pointless plastic that end up in our oceans, potentially wiping out whole species in a devastating and accelerating way.

What is the GTC doing so far?

So, with all this in mind, and having taken advice from a sustainability adviser, the GTC Council, led by Council members Kate Harvest and Peter Newman, has been seeing what we can do to up our game on different fronts, starting with the 4R 'Refuse, Reduce, Recycle, Recover' principle and also taking on board the important advice that ideally you should measure what you are already doing so that you can then assess improvement – so we have a bit of thinking and work to do on that before we can get started.

Firstly, this magazine and GTC In Focus. Yes, you could argue that we should stop printing physical magazines altogether and only produce the online versions – but we know that the printed forms are still hugely valued by members and colleagues, and that not nearly so many people enjoy reading our publications online (although some do – and don't forget the whole fascinating back archive of Zerfs is available, searchable and downloadable for GTC members). We also know that the shelflife for Zerf is longer than for many other publications with people reading and keeping them rather

than quickly discarding or recycling them. One thing we have been able to do relative to the magazines, though, is to review their delivery packaging. A while ago, we ensured that the plastic bags in which Zerf and GTC in Focus were distributed could be recycled and printed this information on the carrier sheets. However, the soft plastic used is not recycled by all local councils, often requiring it to be taken to a supermarket bag collection bin and we suspected that not many people would actually bother or remember to do that, so many of the bags may have ended up in landfill. We then looked into the potato starch option that many publishers are now using but again there can be issues. If these are not composted in the correct way (in a compost or food waste bin), they don't break down properly and can end up releasing into the atmosphere methane, which is 21 times more damaging than CO₂. Again, it seems likely that a percentage of people won't recycle these bags correctly, so in trying to do the right thing we might actually create a worse effect. So, after much deliberation, we have come down on the side of sending out the publications in paper envelopes, made of recycled paper and easy to recycle (hopefully literally everyone has got the hang of how to recycle paper by now!). There was a cost implication to this decision (one of the reasons we hadn't done it before as we are always looking to keep costs down to make best use of members' subscriptions) but in the end we decided the greater good should come first – and also, very importantly, GTC sponsor company VMI has generously agreed to support the initiative by sponsoring the extra cost. As with all things in this kind of debate, there are some downsides to the paper route too (it's slightly heavier, meaning marginally more fuel for transport, etc.) but overall we hope that we have made a sensible and environmentally responsible choice – which incidentally had been requested of us by several GTC members who had got in touch to question our use of poly bags.

Other points that we will be looking at soon will be good practice around reducing fuel use for attendance at GTC events (encouraging lift-sharing and train transport to GTC Council meetings and workshops, etc.), ensuring that catering at such events is as plastic-free as possible and carbon-offsetting the few flights taken on GTC business.

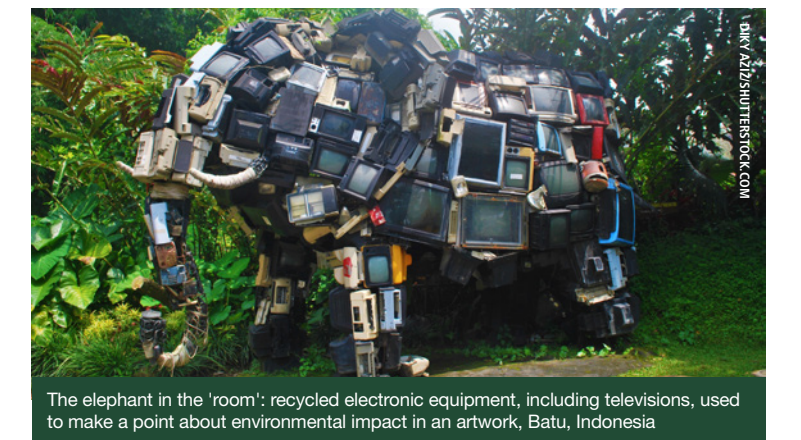
VMI – a good example to us all

The fact that VMI has stepped in with support for our publication packaging is totally in line with the company's policies overall. We have been impressed by the practices this company has been implementing for a while, something that has also been recognised by Ealing Council, which awarded the Acton-based company an environmental grant to support its energy-saving initiatives back in October 2016. VMI takes this very seriously, with the Board of Directors determining the company's environmental policy. This policy is actioned through multiple practices that are already embedded into how the company functions and is a great example of what other companies could be doing.

Just as for many of us at home, setting about improving a company's carbon footprint and environmental impact can seem daunting at first – as mentioned above, it can be complicated and seem overwhelming, which is why Barry Bassett, VMI's Managing Director, believes sharing is important and has taken the perhaps unusual step of circulating the knowledge they have accrued about best practices to other companies in the field. After all, this issue is one with implications for all of us and our children, and shouldn't

be viewed through any kind of 'competitive advantage' lens. At the heart of the VMI environmental policy it says: "The aim of the policy is not simply legislative compliance, we wish to enhance our corporate social responsibility by supporting the development of best practice and innovative solutions to deliver sustainable growth whilst continually improving environmental standards." The Board takes responsibility for the overall effectiveness of the environmental policy and also stresses the essential role that employees at all levels need to play in the development of environmental awareness and efficiency, supporting this by training.

As we have reported in Zerf, through its albert initiative, BAFTA is also doing a lot to inform and encourage productions to look at how to reduce waste and the use of plastic and non-sustainable resources, as well as energy conservation on productions, awarding those it considers to have done well on this front with certification. This certification has now been rolled out to cover suppliers as well. Some take a slightly cynical view of this, dubbing it 'box ticking', but my personal take on it is that, as with what we may try to do at home, starting somewhere is the important thing and, even if you only improve practice in one area at a time, it all helps until new ways of working and thinking about resources eventually become engrained. Just think how doubtful people were about the supermarket bag charge at first, but four years in, the use of single-use bags has been drastically reduced and everyone has just got used to taking reusable bags with them. On the very rare occasion when I forget because I've gone into a shop on the spur of the moment, I practically feel as if I am committing a crime in purchasing a 5p bag!



The elephant in the 'room': recycled electronic equipment, including televisions, used to make a point about environmental impact in an artwork, Batu, Indonesia

Ways in which VMI is implementing its environmental policy

Plastic free

Recently VMI stepped up its already impressive efforts to reduce single-use plastic to a minimum and this year has committed to stopping using plastic to seal cables, instead applying paper adhesive labels to indicate whether a cable requires testing or not. These labels are printed on recycled paper for minimum environmental impact; in fact, only recycled paper is used throughout all office operations. Barry says: "I have always been bothered by our reliance on single-use plastic, so we started looking for alternatives and we didn't have to look far."



VMI has scrapped plastic for sealing cables, instead labelling them with recycled paper labels

VMI main environmental policy goals

VMI commits to:

- Educating and training employees on environmental issues.
- Continually improving on environmental performance, with annual reviews.
- Only using recycled paper, and recycling all paper and cardboard waste.
- Faxes are now only received and filed electronically, as is electronic mail, to avoid unnecessary printing.
- Promoting the use of sustainable transport among staff.
- Provision for home-working to reduce commuting.
- Encouraging staff to use bicycles to commute and supporting the bicycle to work scheme.
- Promoting the merits of tapeless technology to avoid stock waste.
- Minimising unnecessary journeys of delivery vehicles through efficient planning and scheduling, encouraged by reduced charges to clients for non-timed deliveries.
- Promoting a subsidised delivery service to W1 clients providing they book deliveries and collections in advance, enabling more efficient scheduling and reduced trips.
- Where possible, sub-hiring equipment from local companies to minimise delivery miles.
- Minimising wasteful packaging, such as the unnecessary bagging of cables.
- Discarding water coolers to reduce fuel use, plastic production and electricity consumption; instead, drinking water fountains are provided for staff and clients.
- Efficient use of water and energy, with water meters to monitor and regulate water usage.
- Avoiding air-conditioning in the offices.
- Using biodegradable chemicals where possible.
- Minimising use of solvents and lead-based paints.
- Timber used in building projects must be from sustainable (managed) forests.
- Minimising noise disturbance to neighbours.
- Phasing out CFCs and ozone-depleting substances; VMI uses very few chemicals but is sensitive to the environmental impact of these and restricts use as much as possible.
- Replacing canned air with a compressor to deliver pressurised air to work benches.
- Wherever possible, working with clients and suppliers to achieve the common aim.

Biodegradable plastic to seal filters

Just as with the cable initiative, after some research, VMI found a supplier that could manufacture oxo-biodegradable plastic for sheathing filters. While a logo urging you to recycle something can reassure people, what is less well-known is that, although recyclable material that is mistakenly (or lazily) put into landfill will eventually degrade, in the absence of oxygen the bi-product is methane, which is considerably worse than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas. Having sourced this biodegradable option, VMI now clearly prints on the plastic sheathing that it should be disposed of with compost waste, so that it can biodegrade with the least impact on the environment (we can only hope that as more and more of these products become prevalent it becomes second nature to people to act on instructions such as this).

Recycling

- When batteries are retired from service, they are sent back to the manufacturer (Anton Bauer, Hawk-woods, etc.) for recycling.
- Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and other harmful waste is strictly taken to Council recycling points.

Energy-efficient building

The VMI Acton HQ was purpose-built in 2012, with efficiency and environmental impact prime considerations.

- The entire building is installed with cool LED lights throughout, which offer a better quality of light, are less tiring to staff, and reduce electricity and cooling. The floors of the warehouse are installed with Ecotiles, which are made from recycled Tetra Pak containers.
- Water coolers, which increase fuel use (for deliveries), plastic production (for the bottles) and electricity consumption (for keeping the water cool) have been discarded and instead staff and clients can drink from water fountains supplying ground-cooled water straight from the water main.
- Towel waste has been eradicated with Dyson Blade hand-driers in the toilets.

Transport ideas

There have been various initiatives around transport too.

- Cheaper transit charges for clients for non-timed deliveries were introduced, allowing the number of drops per van trip to be increased, thereby reducing the number of trips and saving fuel and emissions. This has led to a measurable saving in fuel usage over the past two years.

After researching the least damaging plastics, VMI went for an oxo-biodegradable form with a clear instruction on composting



- VMI encourages staff to use public transport and sponsors them to buy bicycles; three members of staff cycle to work as does MD Barry.
- The innovative media rental arm, VMEDIA, uses an eco-friendly electric-powered BMW for deliveries. As a low-carbon service, the vehicle incurs no congestion charge and this saving is passed onto customers by offering a complementary free local and national delivery service or a subsidised fixed deliver/collection service, which is equivalent to the cost of a bike courier.

It would be interesting to hear from other GTC sponsor companies about what they are doing to improve their environmental impact. Please do get in touch with your stories as we are eager to learn from and share best practices as the GTC embarks on developing our own environmental policy.

Fact File



See more about:

VMI environment policy:

<https://vmi.tv/about/environment>

BAFTA albert: <https://wearealbert.org>