

Waste not, want not

Simone Mann explains how the Commercial Group reduced the amount of waste that it sends to landfill by 88% in one year



Commercial's distribution and logistics manager **Rob Paddock**; co-founder **Simone Mann**; and environmental strategy advisor **Simon Graham**



With an average, annual turnover of £25 million, The Commercial Group is the largest independently owned office services company in the UK. In 2006 it devised a strategy that would realise a 75% reduction in its carbon emissions over three years. The strategy, which covers every element of the business, includes a significant waste management programme that has focused on reducing, reusing and recycling where possible, with the overall aim of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill to just 10% per year.

Implementing this programme has required a change in mindset but the difference it has made has been significant. Processes have been streamlined and, as a result, the company is much more efficient. What was originally perceived as a basic element of our overall corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental strategy is now a fundamental one.

In only 12 months, the Commercial Group has exceeded its waste reduction target and reduced the amount of waste it sends to landfill by 88.5%. In addition, through its various schemes, 95% of cardboard and 100% of pallets are now reused. What's more, over 15 tonnes was recycled in 2007, including a tonne of bubble-wrap and shrink-wrap. Finally, outsize boxes that cannot be reused are offered to neighbouring organisations – making the most of any materials.

As a result of our endeavours, Commercial has won a Green Apple Award, and was runner up for both the Energy Saving Trust Fleet Hero Award and the BOSS Federation Environmental Award last year.

To continue and extend our approach to waste management, Commercial is working with suppliers and customers to promote the schemes within other organisations and help them undertake similar exercises. Regular reviews have been scheduled for continual assessment and improvement as part of the programme to ensure systems are honed within an ISO 14001-compliant Environmental Management System.

As with every aspect of change that has been made since we embarked on our CSR and waste management programme, it is imperative that we continue to look at ways of improving these systems. By doing so, we will remain as cost and time efficient as is practicably possible. *Simone Mann is co-founding director of the Commercial Group*

HOW COMMERCIAL DID IT

PAPER

Commercial has shifted processing orders from using paper to electronic trading. Now, 80% of transactions use e-commerce, which provides a platform to underpin the changes being implemented throughout the organisation. To stem the outflow of paper, anything which can be reused is made available internally at designated collection points and the remainder is recycled. This reduces waste and ensures staff are fully involved in the process.

CARDBOARD

To ensure no cardboard is wasted, boxes are sorted into four categories – those that can be reused internally, those that can be used for dispatching products to customers and those that can be used by neighbouring organisations, leaving contaminated boxes which are flat packed and sent for recycling.

DELIVERY PACKING

Owing to the massive amount of incoming deliveries Commercial receives, a vast amount of packing materials such as bubble-wrap and shrink-wrap are received. However, 97% of this is now being reused for the company's own dispatches. This has been so successful that Commercial has no need to buy its own packing materials.

PLASTICS AND METAL

Bins are placed in key locations where metals and plastics such as PET and polythene, can be collated and, as much as possible, can be recycled. For materials that are notoriously complicated to recycle such as PVC, Commercial has created a policy to ensure the company avoids them wherever possible in the items they use internally.

INK AND TONER CARTRIDGES

Computer consumable bins are filled, collected and sent to be reused by manufacturers. Any remaining toner is recycled, plastic is reused and metals are retained to make new products. This is complemented by a policy to refurbish as many components as possible from retired copiers and multi-function printers no longer under service contracts.

OTHER

For non-reusable material, a central recycling point has been designated. Materials are processed, palletised and delivered to an appropriate facility when a sufficient quantity warrants. The movement of recycled goods is integrated with the company's own logistics, to maximise the efficient use of vehicles.