Environmental Costs of Using Paper in the Office —An Overview
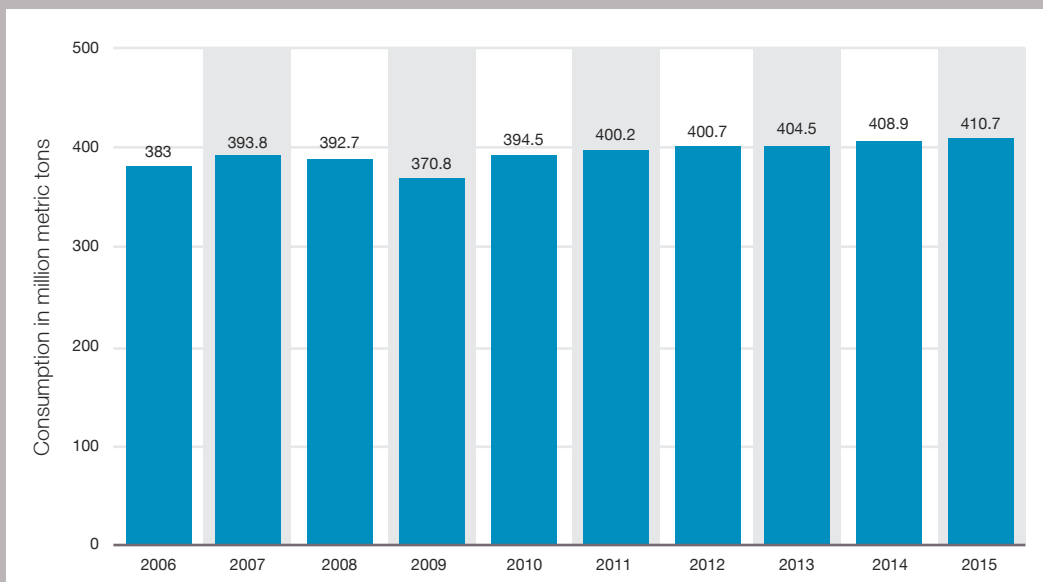
convene

Don't just meet—Convene

Introduction

'Saving the environment', 'Going green', 'Implementing environment-friendly and sustainable business practices' and so on are all topics that have been widely debated and discussed over the last many years. In fact, they have become mundane topics that are omnipresent, that everyone knows are important and yet nobody really knows what is being done about them, what is the current state and what the future really is for humankind as a whole. Amongst these topics, one of the most prominent is reducing the use of paper in any form so that more trees can be saved and our environment is able to sustain the ever-growing human population and its needs.

azeusconvene.com

Source: Statista 2017, https://www.statista.com/statistics/270319/consumption-of-paper-and-cardboard-since-2006/

Global consumption of paper and cardboard 2006 to 2015 (in million metric tons)

The above graph clearly shows that in spite of all the awareness programs that take place all around the world to save trees and reduce paper production, the global consumption of paper has increased exponentially from 392.7 million metric tons in 2008 to over 410 million metric tons in 2015.

Starting from toilet paper to study material to paper used in offices, we still use a tremendous amount of paper in our day-to-day life. Counter-intuitive as it may seem, there are enough and more facts that show how the advent of modern advanced technology has not been able to decelerate the use of paper or reduce the impact on our environment for producing paper to the extent we would have liked. Forests are still being wiped out at alarming rates, the earth's green cover is drastically reducing and all our smartphones and digital technologies are not being able to do anything to curb paper usage.

Although impact of paper consumption on the environment is a vast topic, this article attempts to talk specifically about usage of paper in office, environmental costs associated with it, and some steps that organisations across the world are taking to save the environment by reducing the use of paper.

azeusconvene.com

Why should a company reduce its paper consumption?

It is a no-brainer that if every office in this world were to reduce their paper usage even by little amounts, the cumulative effect would not only be mind-boggling but also undoubtedly a strong and effective lever that can go a long way in reducing paper consumption and saving our environment. However, the questions that any organisation can ask are – why should we reduce our paper consumption? It is after all just paper? Isn't it all recyclable and hence environment friendly? What is wrong with using paper? There are an umpteen number of reasons why an organisation should reduce paper consumption – saving the environment happens to be just one of them and probably more of an outcome rather than the means

Let us think in simple terms with some logical questions.

- Does the office need really paper? For which processes? Which group of employees?

- Is there an estimation exercise that happens to roughly calculate how much paper might be needed and hence only the required amount procured?

- Does anyone really look back to see how much money was really spent on paper consumption?

- How much paper is wasted? How much paper is printed? Hence, how much is spent on printers and ink (black and white as well as colour)?

- What kind of paper is purchased? Chlorine-free environment-friendly recyclable ones or something else? Is there a proper recycling process in office?

- Has any analysis ever been done to understand how paper consumption can be reduced? Can technology replace the need for paper? Has it been tried?

azeusconvene.com

The list of thoughts and questions might seem long and unending but once an organisation starts the journey, a lot can be achieved by adopting simple measures as we shall soon discuss. So, why go green? As reported by Reduce.org, out of many, there are three main reasons why – let us look at them below.

ECONOMICAL:
Reducing paper consumption reduces costs – both environmental as well as operational

A common misconception is that paper is cheap and hence is not a large overhead cost. For an office-worker to use paper, many associated activities are triggered e.g. procurement, storage, printing and copying, waste management and recycling - every one of which incurs cost – the cost of the paper becomes insignificant. As found by The Paperless Project, a coalition of companies focused on transforming the way organisations use paper and electronic content, costs of paper consumption in offices are high:

- Companies in the U.S. spend more than $120 billion a year on printed forms.

- In an average, a document is copied 9 to 11 times and for maintaining every 12 filing cabinets, an additional employee is required. Also, each of these four-drawer file cabinet holds an average of 10,000 to 12,000 documents, takes up to 9 square feet of floor space and costs $1,500 per year.

- The average cost of filing documents is about $20 per month. Each misfiled document costs $125 whereas one lost document cost $350 to $700.

- A typical employee spends 30-40% of his time looking for information locked in email and filing cabinets.

- Paper usage in an average business grows by 22% a year. This means, paper volume will double in 3.3 years and costs will increase manifold.

- In the UK, an average office worker uses 10,000 sheets of copy paper each year. That is 20 reams of paper (500 sheets per ream) or 4 boxes of paper in total with an estimated cost of £10 per box .

azeusconvene.com

ENVIRONMENTAL:
Reducing paper consumption saves the environment

Paper might be a necessity for some official tasks and processes but comes with high environmental costs. Paper production is dependent on multiple natural resources – trees, energy, and water. Here is a quick fact sheet for you:

- More than 40% of wood pulp is used for paper production

- One sheet of paper requires more than 1.5 cups of water at a minimum

- 400 reams of paper are equivalent to 1.25 acres of pine forest absorbing carbon related gases for over a year – hence reduction of paper consumption reduces greenhouse gases in our environment
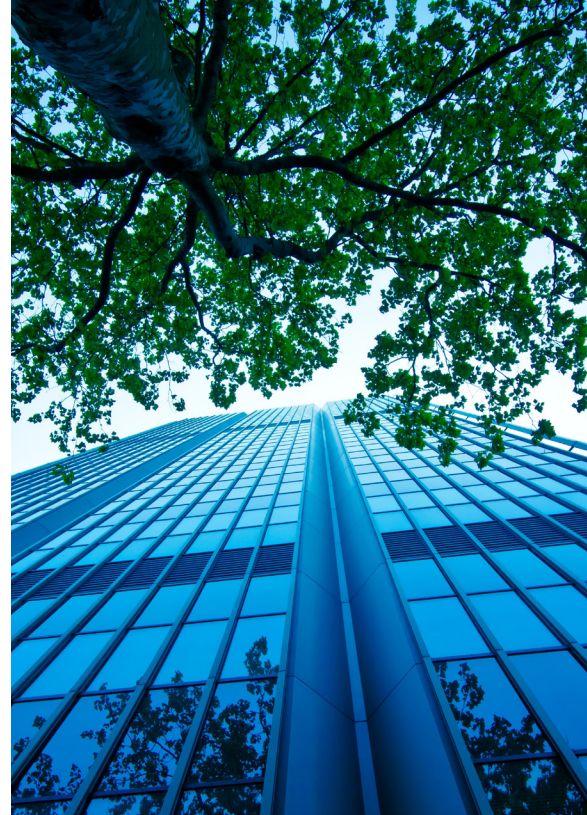
EFFICIENT:
Reducing paper consumption can increase efficiencies

Unabated and unrestricted use, or rather abuse of paper in offices induces inefficiencies in multiple processes and of many kinds. The Paperless Project reports that:

- 45% of the paper that is printed in offices ends up trashed by the end of the same day – this happens to over a trillion sheets of paper per year, worldwide.

- More than 70% of today's businesses would fail within three weeks in case of a catastrophic loss of paper-based records due to fire or flood.

Thankfully, many kinds of traditional paperwork can now be easily done using digital and electronic means. Not only does it take less time to do the job, but it is easier and more efficient. Add to this the fact that electronic media can be more secure, easier to store and even backed up in case of any loss or damage. With new digital technologies in place, almost all imaginable processes that used to need paper can now be paperless. Whether it is internal communication between employees, external communication with clients and customers, organising meetings, marketing campaigns or document signatures – these can now not only be paperless but also more secure, effective, and efficient.

azeusconvene.com

How are organisations trying to go green?

So far, we have discussed how paper consumption impacts the environment and why saving paper is important especially in offices. The next logical step is to understand some of the key steps that are being taken by organisations to reduce paper consumption. Of course, thanks to an enormous amount of discussion and research on this very topic, almost everyone knows and understands the basic 'save paper' tricks – some of these are:
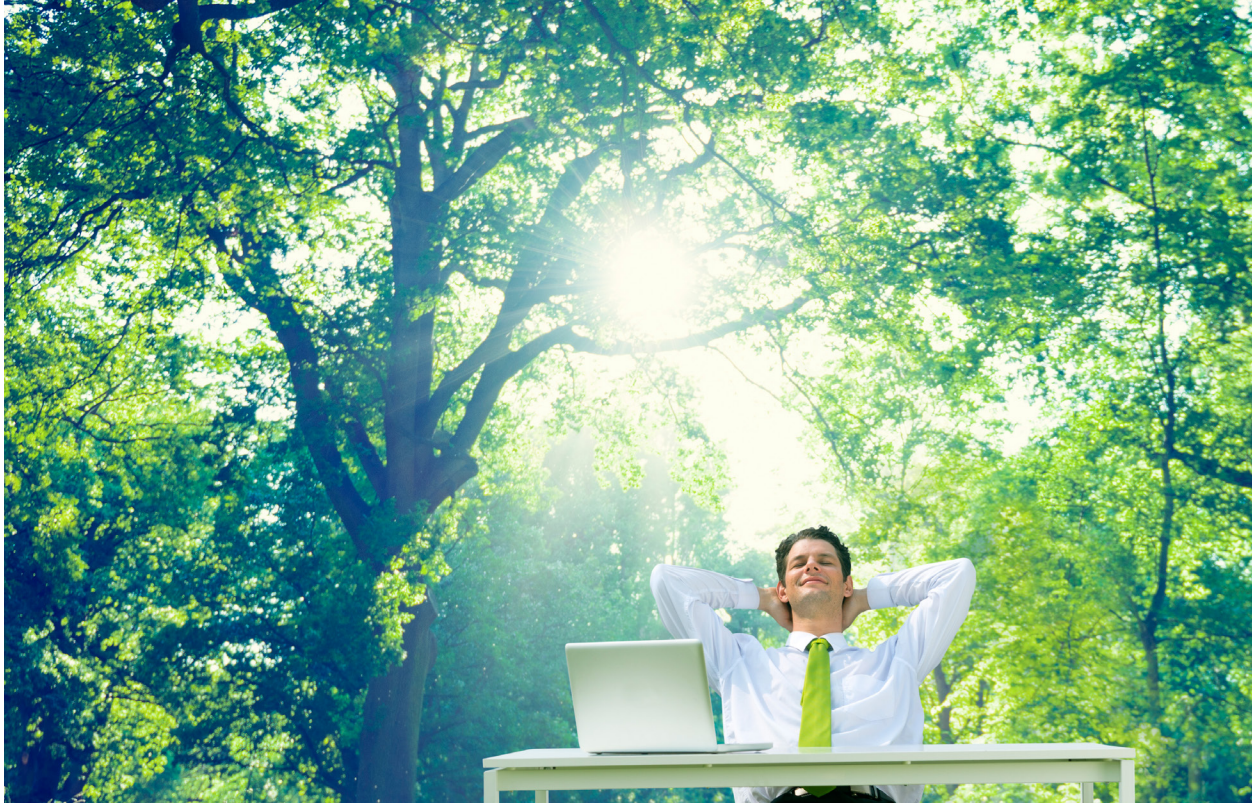
- Copy/print only when needed – don't print if you have scanned!

- Print on both sides

- Use recycled and recyclable paper

- Use tons of digital tools and technologies available to help you go paperless – from email to campaigns to document management to practically everything nowadays

If we focus on the technology element as mentioned above, it is interesting to note that today, due to the advent of digital and related advanced technologies, almost every office process that uses or requires paper has an alternative that is paperless! Some examples can be:

- Paper based files and folders are almost history and so is their traditional storage in cabinets and drawers. Nowadays, Enterprise Document/Content Management (EDM/ECM) systems exist that can handle all possible document related tasks in entire multinational companies starting from creation of documents, storing them securely, enabling sharing to smart backup systems.

- Sophisticated technology like email/webmail software, Customer Relationship Management systems can manage communication of a company both internally amongst employees and externally with clients and customers

- For traditional transactional process like invoicing, there are technologies available today that make paper redundant because all processes are executed though software and digital means

- Paper-based forms can be easily replaced by software applications that can create and manage electronic forms using advanced data processing systems

- Paper-based signatures are being replaced by digital signatures today which not only provide the same functionality as personal signatures but also make them more secure

- Meetings and related tasks are a big consumer of paper. Today, digital solutions like Azeus Convene can make meetings in an organisation not only paperless but also easier to manage and more efficient. Sensitive meeting documents can also be made more secure, easier to annotate, share and complete board packs prepared in very little time.

azeusconvene.com

Conclusion

The exponential increase in the earth's human population and the associated settlement and commercial needs has put unprecedented pressure on the environment over the last many years. Despite widespread debate and discussions on environmental issues across the globe, humankind has still been unable to arrest the rapid rate of destruction of available natural resources. The earth's green cover comprising of trees, grasslands and forests have been severely impacted over the last few decades. Paper is a commodity which has a high environmental cost. Consumption and corresponding production of paper, which solely depend upon wood from trees has been on the rise for several years now. Unfortunately, this is even though we have made rapid progress and advancements in science and technology. Organisations, whether commercial firms, academic institutions, or establishments of any other kind, are the heaviest users of paper. If these organisations make efforts to reduce paper consumption, the environmental cost of paper can be significantly reduced.

There are not only many benefits of doing away with paper in offices wherever possible, but going green and paperless is also easy today thanks to the advent of advanced technologies and digital. Meetings are an important official activity that can serve as a great starting point for going green and digital at the same time. Sophisticated but easy to use digital solutions can enable meetings to be completely paperless and much more efficient at the same time. By adopting such technologies, an organisation can make its processes more efficient, sustainable, and environment-friendly – it is a win-win situation. However, going green is more about adopting a mindset rather than using tools and technology. Every organisation will need to use technology along with other traditional means to reduce paper consumption in its own way and contribute to saving our environment.

Reference:

1. Paperless Office? Paper Waste Statistics For The Average UK Office, https://www.orsgroup.com/news/paperless/some-paper-waste-statistics-in-the-office accessed on June 14, 2017

2. 31 Insane Paper Consumption Statistics, May 24, 2017, http://brandongaille.com/29-insane-paper-consumption-statistics/ accessed on June 14, 2017

3. Paper comes from Trees…, May 13, 2014, The World Counts, http://www.theworldcounts.com/stories/Paper-Waste-Facts accessed on June 14, 2017

4. Pulp and Paper, WWF Global, http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/deforestation/forest_sector_transformation/pulp_and_paper/ accessed on June 14, 2017

5. Covington, Phil, Deforestation and the Role of Paper Products, Sep 24, 2013, Triple Pundit, http://www.triplepundit.com/special/sustainable-forestry-ip/deforestation-role-paper-products/ accessed on June 14, 2017

6. 11 Eye-Opening Statistics on Office Paper Wastage, Absolutely Gleaming Services, http://www.absolutely-gleaming-services.co.uk/2016/06/11-eye-opening-statistics-office-paper-wastage/ accessed on June 14, 2017

7. Paperless Office? Paper Waste Statistics For The Average UK Office, ORS Group Document Scanning Services, https://www.orsgroup.com/news/paperless/some-paper-waste-statistics-in-the-office

**Book your free
30 minute demo today at
azeusconvene.com/start-trial**

Contact Us
Email: sales@azeusconvene.com
T: +44 (0)20 8004 5936

Convene is a leading digital meeting solution that offers a secure mobile working experience for your employees. With its intuitive user experience, omni-platform compatibility and simple learning curve, this award-winning meeting app helps you transition easily from paper-based to new-age digital meetings and stay connected with your work even when you are on the go.

Visit us at azeusconvene.com today for your free trial.

convene

Don't just meet—Convene