

Project LIFE

A new program from TLMI gives its members the capability of certifying that their plants, practices and products meet or exceed environmental standards.



By Jack Kenny

Two years ago I accepted an invitation to join a group of TLMI members who wanted to create a roadmap, perhaps to establish some guidelines, that could help label converting companies become more environmentally friendly. It was a privilege to become a member, ex officio, of what came to be known as the Environmental Best Practices Task Force, a subset of TLMI's Environmental Committee. Composed mostly of converters, the group met monthly via teleconference, sometimes more often, to figure out how to accomplish this daunting task.

Task force members knew from experience that converters' customers were asking questions and making demands of them about the green qualities of their labels and the components of which they are composed. And not only that: Some customers want assurances that the vendors they engage have taken steps to reduce their impact on the environment. These, then, were the questions facing the task force: What are the steps we must take to reduce our environmental footprint? What are the standards toward which we should strive? Should TLMI grant its imprimatur to the creation of standards?

After months of discussion and debate – and after watching several other industry organizations form the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership, another certification process – the task force retained Five Winds International, an environmental management consulting firm, to help with the footwork required for such a project. The result, approved now by the TLMI board of directors, is Project LIFE, which stands for Label Initiative For the Environment.

From my position as an observer in the group, I can say that the effort and the energy donated by the task force

members has been monumental. The work by Five Winds has been equally noteworthy, resulting in a clearly understandable program of guidelines toward environmental best practices for the label converter.

Below is a condensed look at the tools that TLMI converter members will have at their disposal to pursue environmental improvements under Project LIFE. If implemented successfully, the converter can receive certification from the Tag & Label Manufacturers Institute that it has met the standards. Such certification can be displayed by the company and promoted to its customers.

The following are members of the task force: Chairman John McDermott, Label World; Calvin Frost, Channeled Resources Group (Environmental Committee Chairman); Nick Van Alstine, Macaran Printed Products; Doug Kopp, Kopco Graphics; Terie Syme, Prestige Label; Will Muir, Grand Rapids Label; Thomas Dabhura, Hub Labels; Jeff Salisbury, Label Impressions; Tim Goodwin, Resource Label Group; Mark Miles, G3 Enterprises; John Kassal; Continental Datalabel; Tom Spina, Luminer Converting Group; Jack Kenny, L&NW. TLMI President Frank Sablone was an active participant, as was Cecily Randall of Channeled Resources. Five Winds' Laura Flanigan was the prime mover on the project, under the direction of John Heckman.

Reducing the footprint

The introduction to Project LIFE, which is available only to TLMI members, reads as follows: "Project LIFE was developed to enable TLMI members to find cost effective ways to help reduce their environmental footprint. As such, the emphasis is on identifying priorities that suit your business and your level of commitment to environmental protec-

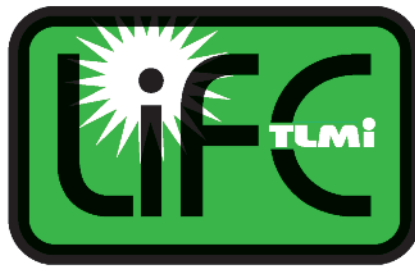
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A journey of commitment, persistence and improvement

By John McDermott, Chairman, Project LIFE Task Force

Project LIFE became a reality because label converting members of TLMI, like my own company, started growing concerned about how to respond to an increasing number of sustainability initiatives taking place around us in the marketplace. Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of their consumption on the environment. Label converters have felt the result of this growing interest through inquiries about the sustainable features of label stocks and adhesives, customer based sustainability scorecards, and rising costs for energy and disposal of label related waste streams. Many label converters want to do the right thing by their customers and their local communities, but don't know how to get started or how to focus their efforts in a way that they can communicate to their key stakeholders. Or they are afraid that it will cost them too much money or make them less competitive.

Project LIFE was developed as a way to help label converters produce a sustainability roadmap for their business, whether it is large or small. The program allows companies to move at their own pace, develop their own priorities and communicate their wins to their key audiences. And a key premise is that doing the right thing by the environment is also good for business. Good because it focuses on the elimination of waste, which usually reduces costs. And good also because it provides label converters



with an effective way to market their gains to customers and others who will reward them for their efforts.

The TLMI Task Force was driven by a mix of large and small converters who are committed to the industry and want to find ways of addressing the major challenge of sustainability. And it was helped along by some very knowledgeable and helpful people who are specialists in environmental affairs. It is not a silver bullet that will provide instant solutions overnight. Rather, it will be a long journey marked by commitment, persistence and incremental improvements. In fact, Project LIFE is probably a key

step in organizing ourselves for dialog with our suppliers and customers regarding the key challenges specific to label converters and where we do not yet have winning solutions in place:

- Renewable sources for face stocks
- End of life for matrix waste
- Recycling of liner waste
- Recycle compatibility of adhesives

We look forward to many others joining us on this journey toward a responsible future.

John McDermott is the president of Label World, located in Rochester, NY, USA.

tion, and encouraging continuous improvement. At this time, there are no explicit targets for performance a member must achieve in order to participate. Participants are encouraged to set their own goals that are ambitious but feasible, and to demonstrate continuous improvement on priorities based on regional, market, or business issues."

The basic tool of the project is the scorecard, an Excel document that enables a participant to score his or her company's status or progress on many levels. These include clean production techniques, treatment of energy and greenhouse gases, material use and waste, and management practices. The scorecard is accompanied by a reference manual that explains the range of actions and activities that a company will undertake in its pursuit of a greener business. A company will rank its efforts in each area; for example, it is "investigating the development of a project or program at this facility," or it is formally engaged in an

activity, or that it is publicly reporting its performance, program and targets (public reporting includes printed materials or a website).

The big step in Project LIFE is certification. A company must meet certain criteria specified in the scorecard to begin this part of the process. It must be "engaged" in all of the management requirements, it must be "investigating" all of the requirements, it must "demonstrate a process for how priorities will be or were determined for creating formal programs", and it "must demonstrate that the facility has incurred no significant environmental violations."

If the scorecard meets with TLMI approval, the final step is audit from a qualified third-party auditing firm approved by TLMI. "The auditor then conducts a site visit to evaluate programs and activities, and submits a report to TLMI and the member," according to the LIFE instructions. "If the audit verifies activities, you will receive a certification letter

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with the complete verified scorecard and an aggregated score summary. You are then authorized to use the program label with the scorecard on your website or marketing materials." Scorecards must be updated every year for TLMI review, and audits are required every other year to maintain certification.

What's in the scorecard?

The first section of the scorecard addresses Clean Production Techniques, and asks for scoring on programs to (a) decrease a facility's VOCs, HAPs and UV releases to air; (b) use best management practices to avoid other releases to air; (c) decrease quantity of facility releases of water and releases into waste water; (d) minimize solid waste sent to landfill from production, and from the office and the rest of the plant; and (e) to ensure proper disposal of hazardous waste.

The Clean Production Techniques section addresses more than just the print production area. It focuses on the establishment of policies "to give purchasing preference to environmentally preferable materials such as office supplies, paper, equipment, etc.," and to the use of "environmentally

preferable packaging materials or practices for shipping." In addition, it asks whether a company uses environmentally preferable cleaning practices throughout the facility.

The section on Energy and Greenhouse Gases asks for scoring on energy efficiency of production, offices and facilities, as well as energy efficiency of the distribution fleet. The scorecard calls for comment on programs governing greenhouse gas management, renewable energy and the off-setting of greenhouse gas emissions.

Product Design asks companies to score themselves on design output and processes that minimize waste, on their work with customers to minimize processing and material and energy use, and on their use of environmentally preferable facestocks, adhesives and liners.

Finally, the scorecard addresses Management. For certification, a company must be "engaged" in all of the requirements. These include having a policy that outlines environmental commitment, creation of annual continual improvement objectives and targets, and programs to monitor performance, proper maintenance of equipment, environmental best practices awareness, and more. ●

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First Label Initiative for the Environment certification

Grand Rapids Label Becomes First TLMI Member to Gain Project L.I.F.E. Certification

At the Annual Meeting in October, a presentation was delivered to attendees that outlined TLMI's new Project L.I.F.E. (Label Initiative for the Environment) program. Project L.I.F.E. was developed by TLMI in order to assist the association's members to find cost effective ways to reduce their companies' environmental footprint. Member interest in the initiative has been extremely high, and recently the program has certified its first company, Michigan-based Grand Rapids Label. TLMI Illuminator Editor Jennifer Dochstader recently spoke to Grand Rapids Label President Bill Muir about the certification process.



Dochstader: During the recent TLMI Webinar which featured Project L.I.F.E. you mentioned some advantages your company was realizing from going through the program's certification process. Some of these advantages included real bottom line savings. Can you elaborate on this?

Muir: The example I mentioned during the webinar was that the city came out and checked our water meter thinking it was broken because our usage was down by over 30 percent. What had occurred was that over the summer months we were taking a close look at our water usage – things like how frequently we were turning on the sprinkler system for landscaping. It's interesting to drive past company lawns on a summer's day when it's raining and you notice the sprinkler systems are on because they're automated and companies don't even think about that. This is just an example of where taking a closer look at what you're doing, which Project L.I.F.E. forces a company to do, helps a company save money.

Of course this is about being environmental and being green, but so much of this is about cost, too. There are so many things a company can do they're just not thinking about, things that make sense. It makes sense for us to reduce our water consumption. It makes sense for us to go away from solvents as much as we possibly can. These are environmental decisions but they're cost savings decisions as well.

What Project L.I.F.E. urges you to do is look at everything, piece by piece. For example we recently looked at one of the latest lighting technologies that has just been introduced – new LED fluorescent bulbs. We looked at the cost savings and ran an analysis examining how often we're changing lights and the cost to do that, but at the current price of these bulbs switching over now offers about a ten year payback. There's a part of that equation for us, especially given the economic times that we're in, where this is an upfront cost we're just not prepared to make at this time. But because of the due diligence and the analysis we've done, when prices for these bulbs drop, we've set a benchmark and know exactly what that price point has to be in order for converting over to make sense for us.

Part of what Project L.I.F.E. does within the organization is to allow me to more effectively push employees to think from an environmental standpoint. That's been a huge benefit because I've utilized it internally, helping my employees understand that they're on the leading edge of environmental practices for our industry. We had some of this with ISO 14001, but because Project L.I.F.E. is tailored to our industry, it's that much more effective.

Dochstader: Was there any resistance from employees at all when you started the certification process?

Muir: When I first brought it to people, there was definitely some interest in it. One of the things our employees liked about it, having been through the ISO 14001 process, was that Project L.I.F.E. didn't seem nearly as overwhelming as ISO can be. It was much more manageable from that perspective. We've done a lot of certifications, and a lot of those are customer-driven and sometimes there is resistance from employees when you bring them another certification program. Project L.I.F.E. wasn't that way, and this was a real benefit to the program.

It's all about improvement. Many companies have already embarked on the path of becoming more environmentally aware and doing these things. Even if a company isn't that far down that path, they can still claim they're making more of a concerted effort to do more of this because they want to realize improvement – and just by showing some improvement you're meeting some of the requirements of the certification. This is important. Some of these programs seem so daunting but Project L.I.F.E. isn't one of those programs.

Dochstader: For a label converter like yourselves, what are the conversations like with your customers when it comes to sustainability?

Muir: It varies. One of the things that becoming certified in Project L.I.F.E. does is that it gives you the opportunity to talk to your customers about it. I think that's an important aspect. Now we can approach our customers and tell them we want to share something with them, and we've put some materials together about the certification that have the Project L.I.F.E. logo on it. We have some customers who are insistent upon every aspect of sustainability. Money's no object with these companies, they want something that's completely recyclable or they want something that's completely post-consumer content. They're saying to us, "I want as green a label as I can get." This certification really carries weight with these companies. With other companies that might not be so concerned with environmental issues regarding packaging, this program gives us the opportunity to talk with them and start to educate them on how being environmentally conscious can benefit them. Either way, the certification is beneficial to us.

Dochstader: Say I'm a label company and I'm uncertain as to whether I should be certified. I'm

just not sure it's going to be worth the effort. What's your advice for this company?

Muir: Everyone has to make their own decision with this. Whether you do it or not, I strongly believe the things that are outlined in the process in terms of being able to do things that are going to save costs, streamline operations, etc. are going to make your business better. In some respects, if you're going to do those anyway – you might as well be become certified and have an asset you can deliver and talk about to your customers. With the economy like it is presently, any way you can differentiate yourself in front of customers and prospects is a bonus. It makes good business sense.

Dochstader: How was it dealing with the auditing company, NSF International?

Muir: They were very helpful. The people we had that came in here were very knowledgeable and very professional. They recognized things that we were doing, and they recognized if we were trying to make an effort, which I think is important; and at the same time they were offering helpful suggestions as well. They brought flexibility into the process, which isn't always the experience with auditors. They were willing to work with the formats that we already had in place, which I think is very important.

Much more information is available at the Members Area of TLMI's website www.tlmi.com.

