

By **MONICA SHAW**, Editor

# Communicating the added value

**Pulp & Paper speaks with the founder of an independent database and search tool for commercial printing papers to find out what paper producers should communicate about their value-added efforts**

**W**hether guaranteeing fast delivery, ensuring sustainability concerns are addressed or imparting specific sheet characteristics, North American papermakers are now focused more than ever on adding value to their products as a means of staying competitive.

And perhaps no other grade segment is as concerned with adding value as that of commercial printing papers. With colorful swatch books and glitzy campaigns geared at attracting graphic designers to high end products, this segment is known for its marketing efforts.

But with all of this effort, are customers getting the right message? Sabine Lenz intends to help those customers in design and printing communities sort through the clutter. A graphic designer with 20 years experience, Lenz started PaperSpecs, a web-based interactive paper guide ([www.paperspecs.com](http://www.paperspecs.com)), in 2001 and, eventually, *PaperTalks*, a weekly e-newsletter. More recently, Lenz has provided an exclusive "Tips on Paper" series for Domtar's Designer Corner ([www.domtardesignercorner.com](http://www.domtardesignercorner.com)).

PaperSpecs members, who are printers, merchants and graphic designers, have access to a comprehensive database put together and maintained by the PaperSpecs team, most of whom have backgrounds as designers and production managers. The

data come from paper company press releases, as well as directly from sales and marketing contacts at paper companies throughout the world. In addition, there is information

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unprecedented," she says.

As PaperSpecs stays on top of such changes for its members, it is uniquely positioned as a communication channel between producers of commercial printing papers and their customers. This position gives Lenz, who often speaks on paper topics, vital information regarding how well paper companies are communicating their value-added efforts to end users.

## Giving designers useful data

For PaperSpecs, what began as a CD-based database has progressed to the current web-based version that features advanced search capabilities for thousands of papers. In addition to searching by typical paper information like finish, color range, weight and brand, members can specify other details, such as the paper manufacturer, recycled fiber percentage (total or post-consumer), brightness and application (newsletter, postcard, bags, posters, etc).

Members may also select from a list of even more details, such as SFI or FSC certified, metallics, ECF or TCF, cotton content, grade number, Indigo suitable, water/scuff resistant and more.

While the database was created for graphic designers, about 20% of its 700 members are merchants, and another 20% are printers. The majority of members are in North

on mill promotions, special offers and swatch books, as well as quick tips for users.

Lenz describes PaperSpecs as "fiercely independent and not sponsored by any mills or merchants." Since starting the company, the database has been continuously impacted by mergers in the paper industry and consolidation of paper lines, and Lenz is prepared for this to continue. "We find that the current flood of changes, cancellations of existing lines and the number of new releases is simply



America, as PaperSpecs only features papers that are available in the US and Canada. The database currently contains more than 4,200 papers from more than 70 different paper companies. According to Lenz, each paper company is contacted on a monthly basis in case a product launch is imminent.

"We are persistent in contacting them because we would like to know prior to the launch of a new line," Lenz explains. "We show paper swatches so members can see the colors and patterns in the paper or insertions, so if a company launches a new text and cover line with lots of colors and textures, it takes us a few days to create the swatches and enter the information."

PaperSpecs alerts its members of these new paper promotions and allows them to order swatch books from paper companies through the web site. In today's leaner business environment, Lenz points out that members value the ability to stay in the new product loop, as well as order swatch books and sample sheets, through PaperSpecs.

"As paper companies have cut their sales staffs, some customers have fallen by the wayside," Lenz describes. "For example, one paper company had three spec reps in our area and now there is just one, so obviously that one person can't call on all designers and printers, who are now mainly receiving direct mail promos."

To create the most representative swatches, PaperSpecs uses everything from digital photography to scans. "We do whatever it takes to give the most realistic impression of that specific paper, and we also feature the actual paper's closest PMS color so that members get an idea of the paper's hue because not everybody calibrates their monitors," says Lenz.

In addition to consistently contacting paper companies for updates, PaperSpecs delves for more information than is usually contained in swatch books. Some of this type of information is used to create

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"Printing Notes" for each product, which includes information such as the maximum line screen that should be used on the sheet and notices for printing with offset or specialty printing processes like embossing and thermography.

"Printers and designers can check the Printing Notes to make sure the paper suits their application; for example, some metallics can't be used with laser printers while others are perfectly suitable for the application," Lenz explains. "We get this information directly from paper companies, who have tested their papers and their specific applications."

How well are paper producers doing in communicating useful information in their marketing literature? Lenz says the content varies dramatically from company to company.

"Some companies are doing a great job, and basically every promotion they send out has valid information — what we call a 'keeper' in that we keep it for reference purposes," Lenz describes. "On the flip side, some companies produce promotions to produce promotional pieces. I think companies should use the opportunity to educate customers about the paper specifics. The more educated a client is, the easier it is for everyone in the end."

**Painting a clearer picture**

PaperSpecs further delivers on Lenz's belief in thoroughly educating end users by offering "Paper and Quick Tips" that address printing, design and paper issues. Some of the tips also attempt to unravel technical specification lingo that may be clear inside the paper

industry but not necessarily for customers. "We question everything," is PaperSpecs' motto, says Lenz.

For example, the move by US papermakers to whiteness standards rather than the traditional brightness standards has required education within the design community. One tip includes the insight that whiter papers reproduce a greater color "gamut" on the press, but Lenz points out that further education on both whiteness and brightness would help dispel existing confusion.

"I think whiteness is a much more accurate measure of what the eye sees, but it is going to take a long time for designers and printers to adjust to this," comments Lenz, who is originally from Europe. "Even with brightness, many designers still think the brighter the better without considering the application. A piece with lots of text would necessitate lower brightness, for example."

PaperSpecs also tries to clarify the differences in paper grades. For example, a tip describes the difference between uncoated freesheet and mechanical papers, noting that freesheet may be more appropriate for items used long-term that must not yellow. Another tip explains the No. 1 through No. 3 rankings, noting that a "brighter sheet is more expensive to make," but extra fillers and chemicals can take a toll on press runnability. The tip also explains that paper producers may market a No. 1 sheet as a No. 2 if they have no offering in the No. 2 grade segment.

Paper customers are also confused by the fact that some sheets are specified by "lb" (weight) while others are specified by "pt" (caliper). A tip clarifies that "if a paper is called out by point, the caliper and stiffness are guaranteed, which is essential when it comes to projects with postal requirements or packaging." It also explains that an 80 lb sheet, for example, can come in a range of calipers.

Another paper designation in need of clarification is the term "high density," which

frequently occurs in swatch books, according to PaperSpecs. The web site explains the difference between a high, medium and low-density sheet as the amount of fiber per sheet, with more fiber meaning a sturdier sheet. It also points out that density does not refer to thickness, using the example that two papers with different densities could both be 12 pt in thickness.

Digital papers are another source of mystery, says Lenz. "When mills call their papers suitable for 'Digital Applications,' this does not automatically include all digital applications... but often only refers to desktop laser and ink jet printing," notes a PaperSpecs tip. This tip also describes what papers are appropriate for desktop vs production presses, and other information points to the differences in laser "compatible" vs laser "guaranteed."


In addition to explaining technical specification issues, PaperSpecs also counsels subscribers about availability issues. For example, a designer should not readily accept from a printer or merchant that a well received paper is discontinued, since many paper companies accommodate special orders of such papers, which may make sense if the paper is used at high volumes.

Also, the web site provides a distributor list and encourages designers to check around if told a paper is discontinued. It suggests contacting paper producers directly to confirm minimum order sizes and delivery times, providing a link to manufacturers' web sites. In addition, tables for basis weight equivalents between different grades are given, as well as a lb-g/m<sup>2</sup> weight conversion tool.


### Responding to green issues

With the increased public profile of issues like global warming, designers are now increasingly focused on the environmental profile of papers they use. Lenz says this interest has grown significantly in the last 12-


**Members are alerted of new paper promotions and can order swatch books through the web site.**

**Smart Papers**  
**Passport**  
Smart Paper's new Passport swatchbook features a full spectrum of fiber-added hues and accent color, and a complete range of popular weights and sizes available in both smooth and felt finishes.  
Get Sample  6/17/07


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**Domtar**  
**Domtar Solutions**  
Take a look at nature's coolest colors in Domtar's new Solutions swatchbook. The line up now includes 19 colors, 3 finishes, and FSC certified sheets.  
Get Sample  6/12/07

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**Gruppo Cordenons**  
**Chip Chart**  
There is something to be said for chip charts. The ease in which you have a quick overview of all the great papers one mill has to offer. And Gruppo Cordenons's chip chart is no exception. From the multitude of colors of the well known Stardream line, to the rubber finish of Plike. They are all here...  
Get Sample  6/7/07

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**Mohawk Fine Papers**  
**Beckett Expression**  
With fresh new shades, expanded basis weights including new extra-heavy cover weights, Beckett Expression offers a range of products that designers and printers can specify with the confidence of quality and performance.  
Get Sample  6/3/07

18 months and that it encompasses not just recycled content, but the whole sustainability issue. As such, the PaperSpecs site both educates members on and advocates sustainably produced papers.

"A great deal of pressure has been put on large corporations to be environmentally sensitive, so many of them have pushed their design teams to make environmentally friendly decisions," Lenz describes. "These teams are not simply concerned with papers having recycled content; they are also looking at everything from how the fiber is sourced to chlorine use and whether it is created with renewable energies."

To educate members, several Quick Tips



A search for blue papers brings up 214 possibilities and offers details on each.

The left screenshot shows the PaperSpecs search results page for 'blue' papers. It displays a table with 214 results, including columns for Color, Brand, Manufacturer, Color, Finish, Features, Weights, Details, and Compare. The right screenshot shows the detailed view for 'Astrobrights - Celestial Blue by Wausau Paper', including features, color, weights, and printing notes.

address environmental issues. One tip describes the differences in pre-consumer waste, post-consumer waste (PCW), virgin fiber and total recycled fiber, advocating the “more PCW the better” and noting that while many paper companies fulfill minimum EPA requirements of 10% PCW for coated and 30% for uncoated papers, others are striving to provide “more and more environmentally friendly paper, with ever increasing PCW.” As Lenz comments, “Gone are the days when recycled papers were thought to perform poorly.”

Lenz is also a proponent of FSC certification, and the PaperSpecs web site reflects this in a tip that defines FSC terms. However, the PaperGuide advanced search allows a user to designate other certifications, such as PEFC and SFI, as well as PCW and TRF content all at once so that the exact paper desired is identified. The site also provides a tip on the overall concept of carbon neutrality.

An “Environmentally Preferable Paper Purchasing Guide” is available that encourages users to be selective about virgin fiber content by looking for FSC certification and being open to alternative fibers like hemp and kenaf. The guide also defines various recycled content symbols, and offers

an “environmental hierarchy” of bleaching processes as follows, with the first being preferred:

1. Processed chlorine free (PCF) and totally chlorine free (TCF)
2. Enhanced ECF with ozone or hydrogen peroxide
3. ECF with extended or oxygen delignification (“enhanced ECF”)
4. Elemental chlorine free (“traditional ECF”)
5. Elemental chlorine

Has the paper industry responded appropriately to the demand for sustainable products? Lenz says some companies are in the forefront of adding value with environmentally sensitive products, as well as educating customers about that value with brochures describing FSC, SFI and other sustainability issues. She names Mohawk Papers and Neenah Paper as “pushing the envelope” with such efforts, as well as going above and beyond by addressing renewable energy on top of FSC certification and 100% recycled content.

Lenz notes that having the right product or the willingness to create one can bring big dividends as sustainability issues gain a stronger foothold. For example, PaperSpecs

was tasked by the City of Seattle to locate 100% recycled envelopes, and it facilitated an arrangement whereby a paper company created this product for the city.

“This wasn’t just your designer around the corner needing 500 envelopes; it was a long-term arrangement with a big customer,” says Lenz.

### Brand loyalty and global competition

As North American paper producers add value to their sheets through quality, sustainability and service, it is often in response to the threat of foreign competitors who have certain cost structure advantages. The PaperSpecs database features papers that are available in North America from paper companies around the world, including Europe and Asia. So do North American designers show a preference for domestic brands, especially when price is considered?

“Designers do not have the budgets they did even a few years ago, but most would still prefer to spec a North American brand that they have successfully used in the past,” Lenz describes. “Brand is higher on the decision making scale than you would think, given budget constraints.”

**P&P**