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The Paper Brightness Scale: Why it Matters

Whether it's feet to meters, Fahrenheit to Celsius or euros to dollars, conversion scales are utilized by people around the world every day. We utilize each of these scales because they not only allow us to determine comparative measures of separate data but also because they help simplify our lives.

In the world of paper, the scales and numbers we most commonly hear or refer to are the brightness scales GE/TAPPI and ISO. The question is though; can we compare these two scales and come up with just one simple conversion chart?

Because consumer's decision, satisfaction and paper price are all closely related to paper brightness, the preceding question is an important one to answer. In fact, the brightness scale is often regarded as one of the most important factors when determining which paper is most appropriate for a particular consumer. For that reason alone, providing accurate numbers that represent clear and exact distinctions is good, ethical business.

While some in the industry have chosen to make assumptions or guesses at a paper brightness conversion chart, we'll examine why such a chart is impractical and further, not possible.

Different Scales: Different Numbers

The GE/TAPPI scale which United and most of North America uses is a scale that is conducted using blue light and ignores shade. Essentially, what it measures is the amount of light reflected from the paper. The machine used to distinguish the brightness was created with this exact measurement in mind.

On the other hand, the ISO scale, used by the rest of the world, tests across the entire visible spectrum. Not just blue. The measurement simply determines the relative degree of whiteness that is reflected from the paper.

Because the different scales employ instruments that measure separate data, making inferences on how they relate cannot be exact. Quite simply the variation in methods is so distinct that putting them together into a chart could create a magnitude of potential error as high as 2 brightness points.

Conclusion

Because paper brightness is a critical number that influences consumer decisions, United will not publish a conversion scale estimate between GE/TAPPI and ISO that would by default be inaccurate. It would mislead consumers and we feel they care about the difference between 92 and 94

bright or 96 and 98 bright, which is the degree to which such a conversion chart could be wrong. Instead we make every effort to provide the GE/TAPPI number in our catalogs so that consumers can shop apples-to-apples and make an informed purchase decision.

What's in a Seal?

Second of a Three Part Series on Recycling



In the last edition of the Rap Sheet, we discussed the importance of sustainability and what this shift in business focus means to the paper industry.

In this follow-up article, we'll outline a few of the paper industry's coveted product certifications that demonstrate a new commitment to sustainability. These certifications further enhance their business' reputation among buyers who value environmentally sound manufacturing processes.

But before we delve into our next topic, lets review how United Stationers uses the above icons in our catalogs.



First, the icon with the three green arrows is used whenever a product has some amount of recycled content, whether post consumer waste or other.



The second symbol denotes paper that has at least 30% post consumer recycled content. That also happens to be the current Federal Government's purchasing requirement for recycled products.

Seals of Approval



Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – Created in 1993, the FSC was developed to change the dialogue about and the practice of responsible forestry worldwide. In 1995, the American national "chapter" of FSC was developed to manage the standards throughout the different biogeographic regions of the U.S., to provide public information about FSC and certification and to work with certification organizations to promote FSC certification in America.

To earn certification, a product made of pulp or paper must pass through a complete "chain of custody" from an FSC-certified forest to an FSC-certified paper manufacturer, merchant and printer.



Green Seal – Founded in 1989, Green Seal strives to achieve a healthier and cleaner environment by identifying and promoting products and services that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats and minimized global warming and ozone depletion. Green Seal's procedures conform to international standards for ecolabeling.

Acceptance of these environmental standards is growing, especially among paper manufacturers. As consumer recognition and demand for paper meeting these standards increases, so too will their use and popularity. United Stationers is closely monitoring the use of these certifications and will introduce paper with their seals into our assortment to meet the demand expectations by environmentally conscious consumers.