

Social Purpose at Hemlock Printers

Hemlock Printers is Western Canada's largest commercial printer offering digital, offset, display signage, mailing, warehousing, fulfillment, and distribution services. Hemlock services the Pacific Northwest and increasingly major cities in the southern and northeastern US. It is a family company, founded in 1968 and based in Burnaby, BC, Canada. It has 220 employees. It adopted its social purpose in 2018.

HEMLOCK PRINTERS' SOCIAL PURPOSE
We exist to create connections, build community, and inspire actions that safeguard the health of the world's forests.

“I think the value of having social purpose is that a business is taking a proactive step in really addressing wider societal issues that we know we have to solve. And by making that statement and by backing it up with action, a business is saying they want to be part of the solution rather than waiting for government regulation or other things. Now that we have defined our social purpose, Hemlock can proactively become involved in solutions that will benefit society and the planet.”

Richard Kouwenhoven – President and COO, Hemlock Printers Ltd.

Why Hemlock Printers Adopted a Social Purpose

Hemlock's leadership decided to adopt a social purpose on the company's 50th anniversary. It chose to do so to focus the leadership teams on the company's future, to secure the founder's vision for the company, and to connect all of the sustainability initiatives it had underway, so that it could act cohesively and decisively in a changing market.

What its Social Purpose Means

Create Connections & Build Community

These are two foundational elements of the company, which has focused on creating connections and building community since it was founded. Hemlock seeks an active role in discussions with customers, suppliers, and communities to advance towards their purpose. The company wants to co-create solutions with stakeholders and have active discussions and collaboration for the health of forests with their growing customer base, while continuing to work on sustainability efforts with their suppliers.

Inspire Actions that Safeguard the Health of the World's Forests

Hemlock's printing business has historically relied on forests, including old growth forests, to produce the paper it uses in the printing process. With this purpose the company will double down on their efforts to promote and encourage the experimentation of creating paper made from an alternative source to trees. Hemlock intends to mobilize the printing industry, its customers, and its communities to speak up for forestry health and conservation. They want to inspire collective actions that safeguard the health of the world's forests by educating future generations on ways to be eco-friendly and active in their communities.

How Hemlock Printers Defined Their Social Purpose

Hemlock participated in the first cohort of eight social purpose companies convened by the Social Purpose Institute (SPI). They worked through a toolkit with assistance and support from the SPI experts and participated in discussions with other business leaders to share successes and lessons learned along the way. Guided by the SPI, they identified their core competencies and assets, and key societal issues they can impact, and consulted stakeholders on potential purpose options.

Core Competencies & Assets

One of the first steps to defining a company's unique social purpose is to identify the assets and competencies the company can harness for its purpose. The core competencies Hemlock chose to leverage is paper use, its supply chain, its role in the printing industry, its customer base, and its long-standing relationships with forest conservation NGOs.

In developing its core purpose Hemlock focused on paper consumption as the largest and one of the most essential components of the company's business and where it could have the biggest impact. It is also an area where they already had a track record in engaging their paper suppliers and printing customers and felt they could lean into in the years ahead.

Societal Issues

The next step in the process of defining their social purpose was to understand the societal issues their company can have a unique impact upon, given their core competencies and assets. They looked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and prioritized five to consider in the crafting of their purpose: Affordable Clean Energy, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life on Land, and Partnership for the Goals.

Stakeholder Consultation

Hemlock's third step was to consult employees and other stakeholders on the wording of their social purpose and what they wanted this statement to convey. Through this exercise, they landed upon a focus to safeguard the health of the world's forests by engaging and connecting people, businesses, and communities on their societal ambition.

How The Social Purpose Creates Value

Hemlock Printers believes their social purpose creates value for all company stakeholders. With its social purpose, Hemlock involves customers in making choices that improve forestry health, so they can join the effort and contribute to Hemlock's goals. Increasingly, customers seek to reduce their own impacts on the environment and forests and by using Hemlock as their printer, they can play a role to reduce deforestation. Hemlock employees are motivated by the purpose, as it shows them they are working for a caring company, and that their efforts are contributing to the social good.



Hemlock has strong relationships with forestry conservation stakeholders, and this focused purpose helps all parties achieve ambitious goals together. The company believes having this social purpose will help it grow due to more motivated employees, reduced turnover, increased innovation, and competitive differentiation in the marketplace.

Through the implementation of its Social Purpose, Hemlock Printers has found that business benefits are clear and evident – especially, early on, these three:

1) Customer Acquisition & Retention

This has become noticeable with the level of engagement and commitment customers now have in how and what they print on. Hemlock has found their social purpose helps attract new business.

2) Staff Acquisition & Retention

In Hemlock's experience, job seekers are striving to find companies they feel good working for. Hemlock's social purpose and global initiatives attract and motivate employees, reducing turnover at the company.

3) Strengthened Partnerships

Since adopting its social purpose, Hemlock has enhanced existing relationships with NGO partners, such as Canopy and Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC.) It is collaborating with paper suppliers Mohawk and Rolland Papers on research and development projects to protect forests. They are working with a mill in Washington State to create a sustainable and eco-friendly form of agricultural fiber, that will go to market in 2021, enabling Hemlock to accelerate progress toward its social purpose to safeguard the health of the world's forests through collaboration.

A CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

“We finally found our perfect fit in Hemlock Printers. They're high quality, they value sustainability just as we do and they are just overall great people.”

Emily Bowen, Editorial and Content Assistant, Prose

“Our initiatives are ethically based, but very strong business intentions go along with them.”

Richard Kouwenhoven, President and COO, Hemlock Printers

Purpose Goals & Targets

Hemlock's ultimate goal is to scale up forestry conservation through advocacy, purchasing negotiations and innovative product development. They actively promote and encourage the experimentation of creating paper made from an alternative source to trees. They have developed the following internal metrics to measure progress on their social purpose:

- Percentage of FSC stocks purchased
- Percentage of 100% Post-Consumer Waste stocks purchased
- Percentage of the use of other sustainable options, such as agriculture fibre substrates

Social Purpose Activation

Since adopting its social purpose, Hemlock has invested in the following measures to bring it to life:

Supply Chain Influence

The company asked its paper suppliers to provide forest of origin information. This helps Hemlock assess the risk to ancient and endangered forests in their supply chain.

Additionally, they asked mill partners to test paper made from North American sourced agricultural residue fibre to see if it was a viable new source of paper.

Customer Engagement

By collaborating with its paper suppliers, Hemlock is able to offer its customers more forest-friendly options. For example, Quebec-based Rolland's Enviro Stock provides FSC certified papers that are also Rainforest Alliance and Ancient Forest Friendly certified.

Carbon Offset Program

Hemlock has transitioned its carbon offset program to fund forestry conservation projects such as the Great Bear Rain Forest Carbon Project; annually Hemlock buys approximately \$80,000 in carbon offsets on behalf of themselves and their clients targeted at these forest conservation projects.

Government Advocacy

Hemlock Printers wrote government decision-makers encouraging them to create additional conservation laws and regulations to protect Canada's Boreal Forest.

Design Innovation

For over 15 years Hemlock has delivered an annual Holiday Wrap gift to its customers to feature different aspects of the company's brand. The program is a collaboration between design clients, paper mills and Hemlock's production team. In 2020 the gift wrap offer included hemp, FSC certified stock and a 10% donation to the forest – in which a portion of every purchase goes to Canopy in support of their forest sustainability initiatives.

Product Innovation

Hemlock is developing shipping cartons that carry FSC certification and are made from a high percentage of recycled content.

Mergers & Acquisitions

Hemlock acquired a local display signage company and plans to embed many of their sustainable practices into this organization, including plans for developing more environmentally responsible substrate and de-installation options.

Employee Engagement

New staff onboarding includes information on the company's social purpose and its sustainable practices.

“We're committed to ensuring that print continues to be an exciting, relevant, and meaningful part of how we communicate and build connected communities.”

Doug Climie, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Hemlock Printers

MORE INFORMATION

For help defining your social purpose and bringing it to life, contact us at engage@socialpurpose.ca or 604.969.8849.

This Case Study is part of the Purpose in Practice Case Study Series. Visit the “Learn” tab on socialpurpose.ca for more examples on how companies are defining their purpose and bringing it to life in their organizations and beyond.

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