



How green is the media?

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How Green is the media? Not very, according to author and researcher **Toby Miller**, who was in Australia recently for an [International Institute of Communications](#) breakfast function.

65% of the print media's carbon footprint comes from paper, but if you think it is much greener to read a newspaper off the screen, think a little deeper. While the individual consumer may waste less by reading off the screen, how much power is being used at the corporate media level to run the servers that deliver web pages and apps to those consumers? Much more than you would think says Miller, who also points out that computer

components have a short life and, when discarded often become toxic landfill.

Greenpeace estimates that if the internet's latest fad, 'The Cloud' were a country it would be the fifth largest energy consuming country in the world.

The environmental impacts of making an iPad or other tablet device, including raw materials, transport, energy, and disposal, far outweighs the footprint of a book printed on recycled paper: 33 pounds of minerals are used in a tablet device, including "conflict minerals" such as tantalum. By contrast, two-thirds of a pound of minerals are used in a paper book; 79 gallons of water versus 2 gallons; 100 kilowatt hours of fossil fuels versus two hours, with proportional emissions of carbon dioxide.

Miller told the breakfast audience that 'Cloud Computing,' which sounds so benign, consumes huge amounts of energy and heat to run the thousands of servers needed to store information 'in the cloud.'

The health effects of exposure to internal toxins are estimated to be seventy times greater in tablets, and the energy required to read something on the cloud for half an hour equates to ninety minutes watching television or the printing of a newspaper.

In radio the cost of powering transmitters, especially old AM transmitters, is huge, as is the amount of energy consumed. FM is a more efficient and green method of transmission, and digital radio is even more green, with much lower energy consumption and reduced costs. In television, flat screens have created a new era of wastefulness for consumers.

There are three areas where media is wasteful said Miller:

1. Consumption: Consumers are using more high tech devices and throwing them away far more often than in the past. Sadly, even equipment recycling schemes often involve children in poor countries stripping toxic parts out of old phones and computers under poor labour conditions, where they are exposed to

danger. 'E Waste' disposal and recycling is a big issue, according to Millar.

2. Energy: The aviation industry is known to be one of the most energy consuming industries in the world, but what is not widely known is that media is close to aviation in its energy usage, once you factor in the costs and equipment required to host audio, video and text on servers.

Google's server farms use the same amount of energy as a city of 200,000 people.

3. Waste: Planned obsolescence, the habituation of consumers to want the latest devices, and the toxic poisoning that occurs in recycling electronic equipment all contribute to contamination and waste, according to Miller.

What is being done by media to improve the situation? Miller highlighted News Limited's commitment to energy neutral buildings and policies as one success story and urged all media to examine their consumption patterns in an informed way so they can realistically track their actual energy usage and then make sensible decisions about reducing it.

Toby Miller is an internationally known researcher and author in this field. He was a former radio broadcaster on the ABC and BBC, and is the author of [Greening the Media](#), published by Oxford University Press.

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