Source: http://di-branche.de/digital-imaging/topthemen/default.asp?rb=topthemen&top_item=52547&i_item=52547&top_step=2&top_start=1&rb=home&top_rb=home

Misuse of the Blue Angel by Ninestar and Toner-Dumping

SMART CHINESE-GERMAN “BLUE WASH” STRATEGY

The audacity here couldn’t be bigger: Since August, Ninestar has been advertising that it has received the 'Blue Angel' according to RAL DE-ZU 177 for numerous G&G toner modules. This demanding environmental seal is awarded exclusively to remanufactured toner cartridges. Now test purchases, which we have exclusive access to, have shown that six G&G cartridges bought at Tonerdumping in recent weeks are 100 percent Newbuilt! They have exactly the same manufacturer part numbers as the Blue Angel certified cartridges. This is grossly misleading to consumers and 'Blue Washing' in its purest form. The fact that the Newbuilt cartridges tested do not even bear the Blue Angel logo does not make things any better. RAL has already reacted to our research, contacted Ninestar immediately and removed the G&G cartridges from their homepage.



A prime example of or Blue Washing powered by Ninestar and toner dumping: First make sustainable Blue Angel cartridges appealing to the consumer and then supply single-use Newbuilt cartridges with the same article number... (© Fotolia)

"We are honored to receive this certification because it is sponsored by respected, independent and credible German public institutions," said Ni Ming, Director of Ninestar's Quality Management Department, visibly proud in mid-August. At the time, the Chinese company had numerous G&G toner cartridges certified with the 'Blue Angel' - China's first printer supplies brand.

Industry observers had rubbed their eyes in amazement at the time. After all, it was obvious that Ninestar had been flooding the European market for years with one type of product in particular: cheap single-use cartridges that are 100% newbuilt. These are exactly the opposite of sustainable and are completely contrary to the requirements of the Blue Angel (for details see info box) in almost all points.

How does Ninestar want to accomplish this, many had asked themselves at that time. It was clear that the world's largest hardcopy manufacturer also produces reman cartridges. But to bring such cartridges onto the European market on a large scale would require a logistical herculean feat: On the one hand, Ninestar would have to set up a nationwide empties collection system, and on the other hand it would have to ensure that reman products sold in Europe were produced exclusively based on European empties. This is provided for by the so-called 'First Sales Doctrine', which the OEMs monitor with legal scrutiny - just about two years ago HP took rigorous action in this regard and sent numerous cease-and-desist letters to German online retailers (**https://tinyurl.com/y5dwmmwq**)

It only takes a little creativity

The solution to this riddle is much easier than you think. All it takes is a little creativity and cleverness. Obviously, Ninestar first defined a series of cartridges that are in particularly high demand in the tendering business in Germany. Then they had the corresponding G&G Reman cartridges tested according to the strict specifications of

RAL DE-UZ 177 and sent the detailed test reports with an affidavit to RAL gGmbH. RAL gGmbH checked the documents, found no defects and certified the cartridges with the Blue Angel. From this point on, Ninestar was able to advertise with the prestigious seal of approval, and at the same time the certified G&G toner modules were published on the RAL website.



The Printers/MFP and Supplies area is one of the most important product categories for the Blue Angel: The eco-label is widely used in the industry. (© RAL)

So far, so good.
Now there would have been two possibilities:

1) The truly sustainable strategy
Ninestar is completely switching to Reman cartridges for G&G products certified with the Blue Angel, at least for the German market, and is advertising them accordingly.

2) The ‚this way, that way' strategy:
Ninestar decides to to adopt a two-pronged approach and offers the G&G cartridges through its German trading partners in two different forms:
A) as new build cartridges (like they already do now)
B) as reman cartridges, which are Blue Angel-certified.

Under this approach, the two product categories would have to have different article numbers in order to distinguish them reliably.

Misguided eco-passion

In fact, a third option - let's call it the 'smart Chinese green or blue washing strategy' - has been chosen. This means that G&G's main German distributor, Toner Dumping, - all the test purchases came from the Berlin company's online store - continues to sell G&G Newbuilt cartridges from Ninestar. Toner Dumping uses exactly the same article number with which the blue angel-certified G&G cartridges were advertised on the RAL homepage and by themselves.

This means in detail: If I, as a potential customer, am interested in the Blue Angel certified G&G toner cartridges, I will find a list of all certified cartridges with article numbers either on the RAL website or on the Toner Dumping blog (18.8.2020). Once my eco-passion is in full swing, only two clicks will take me from the blog to the Toner Dumping online store. There I enter the article number from the list of Blue Angel certified cartridges using copy & paste and can order them immediately. I can literally feel Greta Thunberg patting me on the shoulder and I feel all around eco-happiness. The trouble is that two days later I get a single-use Newbuilt cartridge made in China, which is pretty much the exact opposite of what one could call sustainable. But as a non-professional, I'm not able to judge that - that's why I trusted the Blue Angel as a reliable brand. Unfortunately, this trust has been misused...



Comparison image of a tested G&G toner cartridge (NT-PH532Y for HP Color LaserJet CP2025) with the original HP cartridge: The G&G cartridge is clearly new build.

Swift reaction from RAL

This is grossly misleading to consumers and 'blue washing' in its purest form. Ninestar advertises with this seal of approval, which is renowned in Germany, and suggests to customers that they are getting an ecologically sustainable Reman product at a bargain price. In fact, in most cases they get a product that is quite the opposite of what the Blue Angel promises - namely a cheap single-use newbuilt cartridge from China, which after a single use either ends up in the landfill or clogs up the elaborate collection systems of remanufacturers, further driving up their costs for empties.

The fact that the six Newbuilt cartridges tested do not carry the Blue Angel logo does not make things any better: this would have been an even more flagrant violation.

The brazen approach is at the same time an appeal to the awarding authorities of the various seals of approval to show how serious they are about really protecting their brands. RAL reacted immediately after we informed them about our research: They immediately examined the documents, asked Ninestar to quickly send them a statement and removed the G&G cartridges certified with the Blue Angel in August directly from the website. It seems quite obvious that our view that this is a gross misleading of consumers is shared at RAL.



The Blue Angel is one of the best established environmental seals - and one would be well advised at RAL to nip any form of abuse or green washing in the bud. (© RAL)

A chance to enhance the Blue Angel profile

Let's hope that RAL isn't fobbed off by Ninestar with a simple 'Oops, I think we made a little mistake here'. There is too much at stake: The Blue Angel is a strong brand in Germany. In order to protect it and nip such obvious attempts at cheap green washing in the bud, you cannot take such cases serious enough. Anyone that cheats so obviously must also suffer the consequences. Otherwise, all the others who also rely on the Blue Angel will wonder why they should play by the rules when others won't.

It would undoubtedly be a strong statement for the credibility of the Blue Angel if the RAL were to iniate infringement proceedings against Ninestar: This would certainly enhance the profile of the Blue Angel as a demanding environmental label - both within the printing industry and beyond. The fact that the Ninestar Group also includes Lexmark - the printer manufacturer currently has a proud 'collection' of more than 100 Blue Angel-certified laser printers - does not make things any easier. But overly simple solutions - such as one and the same article number for different products - are obviously not always effective… ho

100 percent new build

The following six G&G toner cartridges were purchased online from Tonerdumping - the main distributor of G&G cartridges in Germany - in September and October 2020 for the tests on which this article is based and were analyzed in an independent test laboratory:

- Part Number NT-PH532Y for HP Color LaserJet CP2025
- Part Number NT-PH530BK for HP Color LaserJet CP2025
- Part Number NT-PH201BK for HP Color LaserJet M252
- Part Number NT-PH411C/PH412Y/PH413M for HP Color LaserJet M452

For all these G&G cartridges, Ninestar had received the Blue Angel certification in August 2020. All six cartridges analyzed were clearly single use new build cartridges. The detailed results are available to us, a photo is shown as an example.

High standards

Brand owner of the blue angel is the German Federal Ministry for environment and nature protection. The Federal Environment Agency develops the technical criteria for the award guidelines. The “Jury Umweltzeichen” is the independent decision-making body of the Blue Angel, and RAL gGmbH, based in Bonn, is the official awarding body.

The most important goal of the Blue Angel for remanufactured toner modules according to RAL DE-ZU 177 is to achieve a substantial reduction in the amount of waste from toner modules. Strict upper limits apply for harmful ingredients in toner powder as well as in the cartridge housing, and emission tests are also mandatory. Only remanufactured Reman cartridges can be certified, which (without toner filling) consist of at least 75 percent

recycled parts. This excludes parts that are directly decisive for the print quality, such as photoconductor drums. The functionality of the toner modules must be ensured by tests according to DIN 33870-1 or DIN 33870-2.

Last but not least, the supplier must provide evidence of a suitable collection system for empty cartridges and accurately document both the origin of the collected empty cartridges and the remanufacturing process. We would have liked to see this proof for the certified G&G cartridges - but RAL withheld it from us for understandable reasons...