ABSTRACT

Despite the ubiquity of digital, print is making a rebound from its expected demise. Physical advantages of print as well as demographic and environmental trends are pushing back against the tide of digital. Marketers should be cognizant of these trends and look for opportunities to introduce print into their marketing campaigns to gain attention and increase comprehension.

IN A DIGITAL WORLD, PRINT STANDS OUT.
Print vs. Digital

Over the past decade, we have seen an explosion in the amount of digital content and the capacity to transfer this data. In fact, there are currently three zettabytes of digital content in the world. A zettabyte is a trillion gigabytes of data. The amount of information will continue to double every 18-24 months along with faster pipes to carry this information. Even more astounding is the capacity of the internet to transfer data is now approaching one zettabyte. This is a far cry from the dial-up modems of the 1990’s.

Consumers are furiously trying to keep up with all this new information. We are constantly on our laptops, tablets, phones, devices and watches – reading and digesting data 24/7/365. We are multitasking, scheduling and scanning; all in the hope to stay up on the volumes of data.

Meanwhile, marketers are very cognizant of digital opportunities as they feverishly try to get the attention of potential customers. Content strategy is all ablaze as marketers try to develop the perfect strategy to connect with their audiences. Like mini-Napoleons, they send their digital content armies out via the digital pipes to their intended targets with flying emails, advertising artillery and social media infantry in a coordinated mobilization. Once the battle is over, they quickly switch gears and start analyzing all this data to glean insights. Meanwhile, traditional marketing techniques like direct mail and print collateral are left in the dust.

Global headlines proclaim that print is now dead. A somber trumpeter plays taps to commemorate the downfall of print, some 500 years after the invention of the printing press. You had a good run, print, but now you are falling by the wayside. Digital is victorious.

Or so we thought.

Interestingly enough, print is experiencing a resurgence over the past year. Here are a few headlines that you might have seen recently:

- Survey: More Respondents Prefer Reading From Paper Than Screens
- Why Digital Natives Prefer Reading In Print. Yes, You Read That Right.
- 92 Percent Of College Students Prefer Reading Print Books To E-Readers
- A Learning Secret: Don’t Take Notes With A Laptop
- The Plot Twist: E-Book Sales Slip, And Print Is Far From Dead

Due to a perfect storm of trends and a better visual experience, printing is making advances against the digital onslaught. Some of the most compelling of these reasons includes sustainability, preference of print by the millennial generation, increased interest in sustainability and a number of health reasons.

“For marketers, these reasons are compelling and justify implementing new opportunities to connect with prospects and customers via print. For the 70% of B2B marketers who don’t do any printing at all, this should be a wake-up call.”
Andrew Piper writes in *Slate* that, “Open books can be measured by the sliding scale of pages past and future, like steps, just off to the side of the page. What lies after the digital page? An abyss. No matter what the page number says (and depending on which screen you’re reading it will say different things), we have no way to corroborate this evidence with our senses, no idea where we are while we read.” In other words, the physical structure of a book provides context and navigation for what we read on the page.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- People prefer to read paper.
- It’s easier to flip back and forth in printed materials.
- Reading on digital screens is draining.

From experience, even with improvements in digital screens, we all know that it is easier on our eyes to read printed content than digital content because of the better contrast of ink and paper. In June of 2015, a report from *Two Sides* was released showing that 81% of US respondents preferred to read print on paper over a digital screen.

This is a significant statistic that should give pause to marketers who only provide content to their audiences digitally. “The results of this survey will be particularly useful for advertisers, marketers and educators who need to understand how information is being delivered, received, processed and retained,” explained Phil Riebel, President of Two Sides.

The experience of turning pages also makes reading easier. According to *Scientific American*, “Most screens, e-readers, smart phones, and tablets interfere with intuitive navigation of a text.” Research showed that taking *reading comprehension tests on computers caused high levels of stress and exhaustion amongst users*. Meanwhile, “digital scrolling” which requires a reader to move and read text at the same time was found to be mentally draining.

“Most screens, e-readers, smart phones, and tablets interfere with intuitive navigation of a text.”

- *Feris Jabar, Scientific American.*
Context and navigation not only make it easier to read printed materials, they also make it easier to learn. The Scientific American report cites several studies that show people prefer to read printed material when they are trying to understand something substantive.

Backing up this claim, the Two Sides survey showed that, “88% of respondents indicated that they understood, retained or used information better when they read print on paper compared to lower percentages (64% and less) when reading on electronic devices. The same trend was found for reading complicated documents with 80% indicating a clear preference for reading print on paper.”

In one British study, students read course material either in a booklet or on a screen. While all the students did well on the subsequent test, the ones who used a computer remembered the information rather than knowing it. Psychologists believe that, “Remembering is a weaker form of memory that is likely to fade unless it is converted into more stable, long-term memory that is ‘known’ from then on.” Those who had read the printed material learned it more thoroughly – they knew it.

A Fast Company article says that “Thanks to technology, we’re reading more than ever—our brains process thousands of words via text messages, email, games, social media, and web stories. According to one report, the amount of reading people do tripled from 1980 to the late 2000s, and it’s probably safe to say that trend continues today. But as we jam more and more words into our heads, how we read those words has changed in a fundamental way: we’ve moved from paper to screens.” Do we have analog brains or brains able to keep up with the sheer amount of digital content?

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80% of respondents in a Two Sides survey indicated a clear preference for reading print on paper.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Reading on paper creates stronger memories of the information.
- Learning is better from printed pages.
They believe this plays a key role in comprehension, “but that is more difficult on screens, primarily because the time we devote to reading online is usually spent scanning and skimming, with few places (or little time) for mental markers.” Students prefer to read print when they are studying because even though it slows them down, they remember and learn more thoroughly.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Digital reading encourages scanning rather than reading, leading to incomplete learning.
- Taking notes on paper is better than recording them on a device.
- Students prefer hard-copy textbooks.

**Marketing Tip:** If you want audiences to truly understand what you’re trying to communicate, it’s best to provide printed materials they can read carefully and understand fully. At your next marketing conference, provide printed literature, pads and pens to increase the comprehension of your content by your audience.

Research has shown that people don’t take digital reading seriously. A San Jose State University survey cited by *Scientific American* concluded that, “People reading on screens take a lot of shortcuts—they spend more time browsing, scanning and hunting for keywords compared with people reading on paper.” As Piper observes, “Skimming is the new normal.” People don’t successfully learn what they read if they don’t approach it with a serious mindset and read thoroughly.

Even note-taking digitally has its drawbacks. *Scientific American* featured the results of experiments showing that students “who wrote out their notes by hand had a stronger conceptual understanding and were more successful in applying and integrating the material than those who took notes with their laptops.”

Naomi S. Baron, an American University linguist, found that students were 90% more likely to multitask when reading on screen vs. reading hard copy. So why is this true? “Researchers say readers remember the location of information simply by page and text layout — that, say, the key piece of dialogue was on that page early in the book with that smudge on the corner.”
Naomi Barton said in article in the *New Republic* that while she initially assumed the teenagers and young adults they surveyed would embrace digital reading, “They talked about things I didn’t think 18- to 26-year-olds cared about anymore.” This included such physical experiences as the feel and smell of books, the discomfort of reading on screens, and the satisfaction of seeing how far they have read.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Reading on print uses our other senses like touch, smell and even hearing the pages flip to make a more powerful cognitive memory.
- Digital reading does not have that same tactile experience as print reading.

The tactile, sensory experience of reading print on paper is significant. *Scientific American* points out that text on a screen is an “ephemeral image” – it has no reality. The feel and sound of paper matters. Two Sides survey showed that **67% of respondents said they liked the feel of print media over other mediums.**

Touch is an important aspect because there’s nothing quite like that feeling of holding paper. Digital texts “always elude our grasp in some fundamental sense,” according to Piper. “The touch of the page brings us into the world, while the screen keeps us out.” Certainly, there are many benefits to digital text, and in certain circumstances, it’s the perfect medium.

Marketers should look to develop a print-digital hybrid approach to their plan for content production. When providing complex content, offering printed materials will improve your audience’s experience, understanding, retention – and hopefully your sales.

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Ironically, publishing people used to have heated debates about print (“It’s dead”) versus digital (“turning dollars into dimes”), but the reality is that both mediums can co-exist. Web sites that are associated with a respected print publication have a huge competitive advantage over those that don’t, especially in fields where credibility and search engines are crucial. Many publishers find that the economics of long-form journalism (what we used to call “articles”) don’t work on the web unless there’s a print publication.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Print continues to be more credible than digital.
• Merging print with digital can be more powerful than each medium alone.
Phil Rieble says that “While on-screen reading occupies an increasing amount of consumer time, people’s preferences are still for reading print on paper which they believe to be more informative, less distracting and less harmful to their health. Results also show that many people are concerned about the effects on learning and literacy due to the switch from printed books to digital media in our school system.”

**DIGITAL READING CAN BE HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH**

Reading on digital screens for long periods can lead to eye strain, back problems and difficulties with sleep.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Reading on screen can cause serious health issues.
- Younger generations are aware of these issues and are consciously looking for ways to reduce their digital consumption.
Pew Research studies show that those aged 18 to 29 have the highest print readership rates, and a report from Two Sides showed while acceptance of digital media is stronger among younger ages, a preference for print on paper still exists for all ages.

Millennials are also very nostalgic. A SXSW Panel outlined the findings of a survey that found that Millennials are the most nostalgic of any age group. The study’s authors theorize that digital experiences don’t satisfy emotional needs. “We’re hardwired for physical and emotional connection and meaning, so the more we are removed from them, the more we wish for them,” said Paul Woolmington.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
• Millennials prefer print and have the highest print readership rates.
• Digital experiences are unfulfilling.
Most paper in the US is recycled. According to Two Sides, “In 2012, over 65% of paper used in the United States was recovering for recycling.” As a marketer, you can encourage your company and your customers to recycle, and you can also work with printers to ensure that you are using recycled paper.

According to the U.S. EPA, as cited in Two Sides’ Myths and Facts, “In North America, paper is recycled more than any other commodity and the benefits include: extending wood fiber supply; reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving landfill space.” The EPA offers a list of resources that can help you be more sustainable.

While many people believe that printing is not sustainable, the truth is the opposite.

Paper is also a renewable resource. Renewable resources can be regrown or replenished in one or two human lifetimes. According to MarketingProfs in “Paper often comes from managed forests or farms, which replant about 4 million trees every day (four times more than they harvest).”

Reading on paper requires no energy except at night, unlike reading on a screen, which always requires batteries or AC power. MarketingProfs points out that, “Paper-based marketing has a smaller carbon footprint than digital marketing, since carbon emissions are only produced once, during the creation of the product. Meanwhile, carbon emissions occur every time someone uses a digital device. Even the act of producing a CD creates more CO2 emissions than printing a 100-page report in full color.”

And, if you use a cloud printer like HubCast which, thanks to our global network of printers, can print close to the final destination of your materials, you’ll save even more CO2 by avoiding the expenditure of carbon in shipping.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Marketers can be environmentally conscious by following these sustainable practices.
- Most paper is recycled.
- 4x as many trees are planted as are harvested.
- Marketers can use cloud printers to save on CO2.
Design specifically for print, don’t just repurpose your web or email designs; but also ensure that your print and web design, and more importantly your print and web programs, are integrated.

You can take advantage of every channel, using every print and digital tool available, to create integrated programs that attract attention, build your brand, and drive demand for your solutions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS
• Print is flexible and can provide personalization.
• Marketers can now grab more attention from the audience by using print.

According to MarketingProfs, “On the Internet, there is an unlimited amount of content to distract the audience from your brand; meanwhile, with direct mail marketing, there is a smaller pool of competition and thus you have a greater chance of connecting with the audience long enough to make a conversion.” Think of how little physical mail you receive, especially at the office, and how much attention you pay when you do receive something, especially if it’s designed and printed well.

Another way to stand out using print is personalization. It’s not particularly difficult or expensive to personalize print media, and a printed piece stands out more than personalized emails, which now feel like old hat. People like receiving mail that feels made for them – and they’ll assume it was expensive to do, when it actually can be done cost-effectively. There’s also an enormous range of print design options – up to 15 million variations for printing like die-cutting, embossing, stamping, and special coatings.

As MarketingProfs observes, “The most effective marketing strategy is the one that covers all your bases with both printed and digital media.”
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• We are fast and we can deliver as soon as next day to most major cities in the world.
• Your print shipments don’t get held up in customs because we can print locally.
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10 Reasons Why Print Isn’t Dead

Why Marketers Need to Print

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info@hubcast.com
http://www.hubcast.com