

ANALYSIS

CLIENT NEEDS

NEW SERVICES, NEW PRODUCTS, AND NEW WAYS TO
ENGAGE

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Introduction

Customers want to engage with their favorite brands in new and innovative ways. Marketers continue to search for the best and easiest techniques to gain the attention of their audience members, but all too often the connection between the customer and the brand owner falls flat. Do the products and services that you offer today serve your clients' needs as well as they did a few years ago? If not, it's time for a change.

Print service providers (PSPs) are positioned to develop and refine new solutions that help their clients connect with their audience members and enrich the customer's buying experience. The inclination to stay in your lane and avoid divergence is tempting—after all, a fresh approach will undoubtedly involve learning curves, investments of time and money, and resistance. It's a fact that new products or services will always require additional resources and a mindset for change. Leaders in our industry understand this and are quick to embrace new ideas, offer new products, and deliver new services. Their goal centers upon offering solutions that help their customers stand out in today's fiercely competitive world.

Identifying the services and products that best align with your clients' ever-changing needs can feel like throwing darts at a moving target. This article will explore strategies for accommodating customers' shifting requirements, gaining and retaining their interest, and offering services that foster excellent customer engagement.

Customers' Needs Are Changing

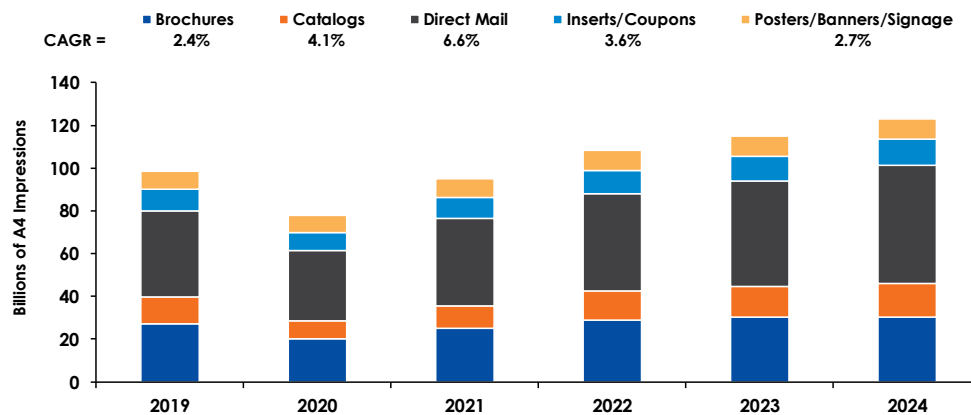
There was a time when it seemed natural to put the onus on the customer to find your business. If you don't believe me, think about the phone book—it's a mass-produced circulation that many businesses pay to be listed in alphabetically or by category so people will hopefully find them. Phone books worked very well in the past, but it was a different time. Today, it's no longer reliable to depend on the phone book for business generation.

Today's marketers must extend their efforts beyond advertising and learn how to create demand for their product and services. This means that it's more important than ever for brands to stand out in a sea of similar competitors by creating engaging experiences. Consider how the pandemic altered the way that business gets done—in many cases, customers become more self-reliant in meeting their own needs. As a result, it is now incumbent on businesses to refine their marketing efforts and meet customers when and where they want rather than expecting customers to find them. The demand for printed communications is still there, but volumes were impacted and print took a back seat to convenience and availability. This can be seen in the number of websites that are besieged with a constant stream of online advertisements.



The volume of online information has opened the door for digital fatigue, especially with so many of today's personal and business meetings also being conducted virtually. Paradoxically, the influx of online communications has improved the effectiveness of the traditional mailbox. As shown in the Figure below, data from Keypoint Intelligence's most recent application forecast projects steady growth for direct mail, catalogs, and inserts/coupons over the next three years.

Figure 1: Color Applications Overview – Promotional



Source: US Digital Production Printing Application Forecast, Keypoint Intelligence 2021

Although print remains highly influential, there is still room for improvement. Print is often static, fixed motionless on a sheet of paper, and in some cases rhetorical. Until recently, it was challenging to encourage a dialogue with print beyond a "buy our stuff" plea. As such, it's understandable why many marketers don't instinctively place print higher on their list of spending priorities.

Today, print offers new and effective opportunities to create an emotional connection between brand owners and their audience members. Marketers understand that an emotional connection is critical to standing out in the crowd. Clever uses of engaging print marketing have become more prominent in recent years. For example:

- ◆ Motorola printed an ad in *Wired* magazine that uses a paper-thin chip and LEDs to change the phone's color on the page with the press of printed-on buttons.
- ◆ A fashion company sent out personalized magazines with ads that directly link to the customer's Facebook page, giving them a functioning "like" button right on the paper.
- ◆ A car company used a QR code that led to a video behind the ad page. Under the image of a car, the video makes the still shot come to life with lighting effects. This is an example of how simple print ads can be enhanced with tools that consumers already have in their homes.



- ♦ Another print example moves digital to analog. Print companies now offer vinyl record tracks embedded on a postcard, enabling the recipient to play a song on any turntable.

The technology behind these products is not new, but rather the result of finding innovative ways to use existing techniques and technologies. As a side note, use caution when adding interactive elements—they must be easy to use and easy to understand. Otherwise, the user may become frustrated, resulting in a negative customer experience rather than a positive connection.

Gamification as a Service

When you think about it, the technology used to create engaging print seems like a paradox. It involves incorporating an array of microchips and algorithms and putting them through extensive testing and development, all for the purpose of making a simple task even easier. Manually typing in a web address has been rendered obsolete, because a QR code can direct you to the site automatically by pointing your phone's camera at a black & white square. Omni-channel campaigns provide brands a way to reach more qualified prospects in less time. More and more, menial inconveniences are being automated with technology. Print has the potential to do the same, while also creating more compelling reasons to engage.

Incentivizing clients to engage by "gamifying" the process is another way that PSPs can bring new life to traditional print. Gamification involves applying elements of gameplay to your strategy, such as point-scoring or a traditional competition. Employing this with print, it's possible to create a marketing campaign with which customers will readily and willingly engage. One example is sending individualized QR codes that link to personal ads and implement a rewards system. Loyalty tiers can be set so users can earn redeemable points and "level up" for every code they receive and scan. Increasing incentives at each level will keep your customers' thoughts on your brand over a more extended period of time. Similar to almost every marketing effort in today's world, these programs must enable customers to engage how and when they want to. Notably, these creative techniques have the potential to deliver a "wow" factor that will foster positive brand perception and may elicit word-of-mouth marketing.

Differences in Scale and Kind

Business success depends on more than simply offering a portfolio of interesting products or services. Growing PSPs are able to look beyond their current offerings and focus on their customers' changing needs. Thanks to shrinking attention spans, the art of gaining and holding a prospect's or customer's attention must be top of mind. Marketing professionals rely on data to measure when, where, and how customers and prospects engage. In other words, they track when interest occurs as well as when it wanes.



In the entertainment industry, the interest curve measures how engaged your audience is. Movie makers and video game developers are masters at this—even in our attention deficit world, a well-made film or video game can keep an audience captivated for hours on end. The interest curve can be found in all types of media. Capturing and retaining the interest of the audience depends on two tactics—difference in scale and difference in kind. Difference in scale is exactly what it sounds like, incrementing volume. A movie may escalate the conflict, or a game might throw more enemies at you. More proves to be better. Likewise, businesses can increase the number of touchpoints they add to connect with their audience. At the same time, however, simply adding more of something is a linear engagement with diminishing returns. Even the most loyal customer will likely feel overloaded after receiving their tenth flyer with the same offer and design. To avoid this, PSPs must think proactively for their clients and provide solutions that shift how they connect with their prospects—also known as a difference in kind or shifting how and when you connect. When combined with differences in scale, this strategy creates a proprietary competitive advantage. Better yet, the customer receives an experience that is engaging, different, and memorable.

The Bottom Line

Today's customers are eager for a break in the monotony. All businesses offer products and services, so your suite of offerings must evolve and align with the changing needs of your clients. Although they were previously limited to only the most prominent and well-funded brands, creative marketing methods are now more economical to the mass market. Feature-rich digital presses, software offerings, and finishing techniques will only carry you so far. By bringing all of the pieces together cohesively and creatively, you can promote print's functionality to a higher level.



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As Director of the Business Development Strategies service at Keypoint Intelligence, Karen Kimerer has experienced the many challenges of expanding current market opportunities and securing new business. She has developed a systematic approach to these opportunities, addressing the unique requirements of becoming a leader in our changing industry.

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