

# ANALYSIS

## INTELLIGENT PRINT MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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## Introduction

In today's multi-channel world, marketing to consumers is more complicated than ever before. Even before the onset of digital technology, the communication landscape included multiple channels (e.g., telephone calls, printed direct mail, television, radio, door-to-door sales). Now, the more traditional marketing communications like print must also contend with digital communication channels like e-mail, text messaging, mobile apps, and social media. As consumer preferences continue to evolve, print marketing must also evolve. Print remains an important component of the communications landscape, but it is jockeying for position against an ever-expanding array of channels. This document explores how print service providers (PSPs) and other printers can leverage the power of print in an increasingly digital world.

## Winds of Change

Like any other channel, printed communications are no stranger to consumers' shifting preferences. Back in the early 1990s, "junk mail" was at its height, and many consumers were opening their printed direct mail over the trash can because so much of it was irrelevant or unnecessary. The desire to reduce clutter, increase convenience, and save the trees all contributed to a steep decline in bills, statements, and other types of direct mail—particularly once digital entered the scene and made it possible to view all of these communications electronically.

Digital communications became more and more prevalent over time, and it wasn't long before they actually outnumbered printed communications. Today, e-mail spam messages are considerably more numerous than printed junk mail, and direct mail is most certainly the less cluttered channel. What's more, direct mail is a tactile form of communication that can appeal to multiple senses—touch, sight, and even smell.

Consider the following statistics:

- ◆ According to a report from Data & Marketing Association (DMA), up to 90% of direct mail gets opened, compared to only 20% to 30% of e-mails.
- ◆ Data from Canada Post suggests that direct mail requires 21% less cognitive effort to process than e-mail.
- ◆ Based on direct mail statistics from Marketing Profs, three-quarters of consumers can recall a brand after viewing a piece of direct mail. Meanwhile, only 44% can do the same after seeing a digital ad.

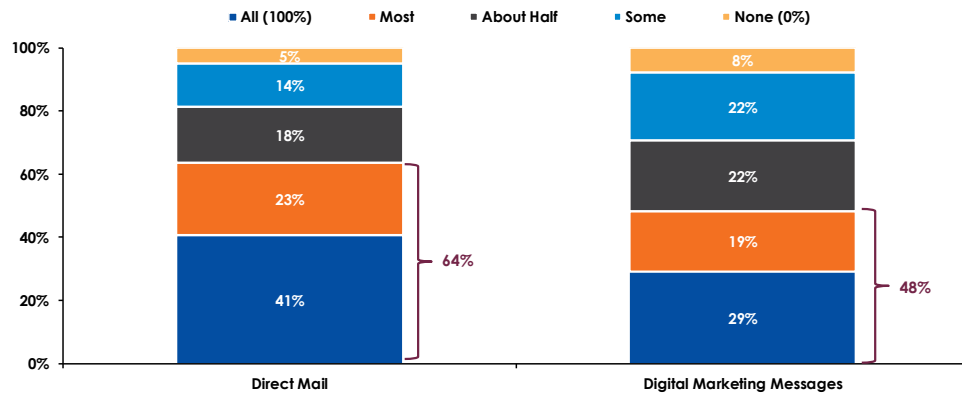
While all of this undoubtedly creates an opportunity for printed direct mail to cut through the clutter and get noticed, it is more important than ever for marketers to be smart and strategic in their use of printed communications. Research from Keypoint Intelligence confirms that highly personalized and relevant printed applications can have



an impact and prompt consumers to take action. In relation to digital marketing messages, direct mail was more likely to be reviewed before it was thrown out. Although 64% of consumer respondents read all or most of their printed direct mail before discarding it, less than half read all or most of their digital marketing messages before deleting.

**Figure 1: Share of Messages Reviewed Before Disposing/Deleting**

What percentage of the direct mail/digital messages that you receive do you read/review before disposing/deleting?



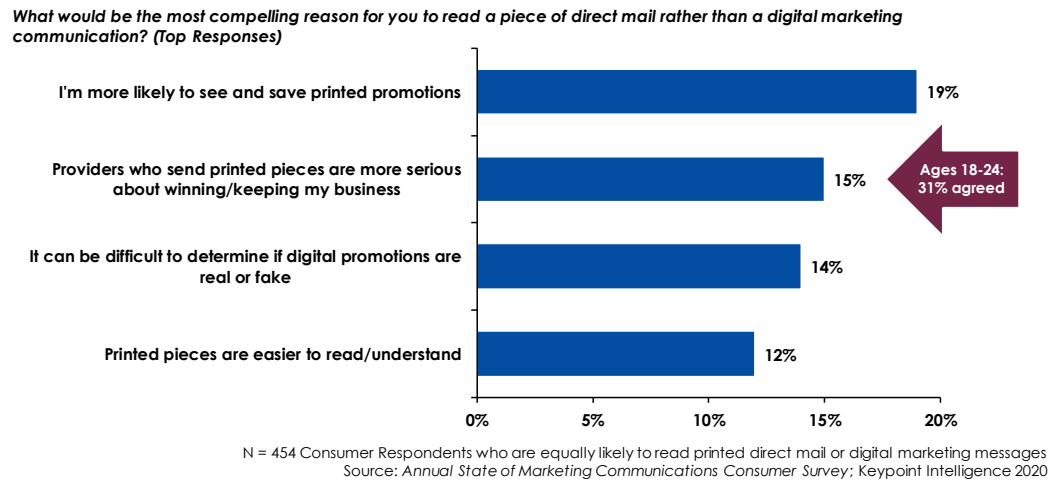
N = 1,550 Consumers in the US and Canada  
Source: Annual State of Marketing Communications Consumer Survey, Keypoint Intelligence 2020

## Giving Consumers What They Want

Because many consumers have become overwhelmed with digital communications, printed direct mail is considered a trustworthy marketing channel. In fact, when respondents to Keypoint Intelligence's marketing communications research were asked to specify their reasons for reading direct mail rather than digital marketing communications, nearly 20% stated that they were more likely to see and save printed promotions. In addition, 15% believed that providers who sent printed communications were more serious about winning and keeping their business. It is interesting to note that consumer respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 were especially likely to feel this way (31%).



Figure 2: Reasons for Reading Direct Mail



In today's omni-channel world, though, the perceived trustworthiness of a communication channel is only one part of the equation. Ultimately, savvy businesses must be prepared to communicate with businesses via their *preferred* channels. There are a lot of communication options out there, and everyone's preferences are different. According to research from Keypoint Intelligence, nearly three-quarters of consumer respondents wanted to decide which channels marketers used to communicate with them. In addition, nearly 60% of these same respondents wanted to respond to messages via the channel of their choice.

## Reaching Consumers Where They Are

There is no question that printed communications can get noticed, but today's marketers cannot focus on any single channel and expect to be successful. The business landscape is more complicated than ever, and marketers face a number of key challenges:

- ◆ Customers and prospects are busier than ever, so they won't always respond to sales calls or respond to voicemails if you contact them to share new ideas.
- ◆ In the wake of COVID-19, many professionals are spending more time working from home than they were in the past. As a result, there are no guarantees that in-person office visits will be productive.
- ◆ Customers—even loyal ones—don't always remember all of your company's capabilities. Without periodic reminders, a customer might place an order with a competitor simply because they didn't remember that you'd offered the same service to them in the past!
- ◆ Most customers don't view print service providers as innovators, so they won't necessarily ask for their input on new, important projects that might drive revenue growth.



Regardless of whether they are print or digital, all of your marketing communications must bring value to your customer. It's important to remember that your customers might be in places that you are not, so it's your job as a marketer to reach them where they are and communicate on their terms. The good news is that direct mail still works! Businesses of all types—even those that were founded during the digital age or are just now starting up—are using direct mail for their marketing efforts. This is because marketers understand that direct mail delivers higher response rates and enables its senders to stand out.

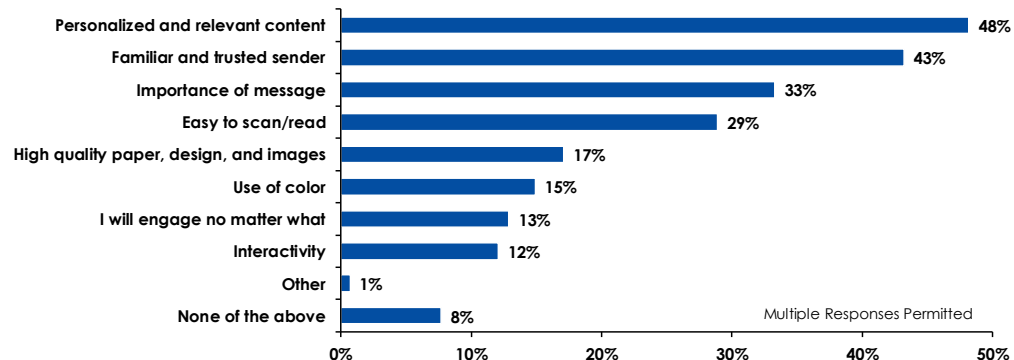
## The Value Proposition for Print

Whereas business-critical communications can get lost in the clutter of e-mail, print can stand out simply because it is a less cluttered channel. Print is still a necessary channel, and it might actually be preferable in our age of digital fatigue because it serves as an offline experience. In addition to being tactile, printed communications are memorable, emotional, shareable, and can offer a clear call to action.

Today's marketers must be strategic in their development of printed communications. It's important to get smarter about the data that is collected on customers, because this information must ultimately be used to create engagement, increase loyalty, and improve share of wallet. When respondents to Keypoint Intelligence's marketing communication research were asked to specify the factors that prompted them to read or review a direct mail piece, the top responses were personalized and relevant content and a familiar, trusted sender. This speaks to the importance of establishing a connection with customers and taking the time to get to know them on a personal level.

**Figure 3: Factors that Prompt Consumers to Read/Review Direct Mail**

*Which of the following factors make you most likely to read/review a printed direct mail piece?*



N = 1,472 Consumers in the US and Canada who read/review printed direct mail before throwing it out  
Source: Annual State of Marketing Communications Consumer Survey, Keypoint Intelligence 2020

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is thankfully becoming more contained with the widespread availability of vaccines, many consumers remain on edge as they consider the lasting effects of a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, and changes to the workforce. Consumers need empathy, and they want confirmation that the companies



they do business with are seeing them as individuals. Printed communications can be a great way to establish an emotional connection with customers, build trust, and make them feel noticed. Print certainly can't stand alone as the only means of communication, but it adds another layer of depth that can engage consumers on a personal level.

## The Bottom Line

When marketing to today's consumers, there's really only one certainty—it's not getting any easier. Establishing a relationship with your audience has never been more important because consumers want to engage with brands that they trust. Printed communications are a tangible, emotional way build a relationship with a customer, particularly if they are personalized. Although concerns about privacy and data security are very real, the good news is that consumers ultimately want and have come to expect personalization. After all, personalized and relevant content is the top factor that prompts consumers to review a piece of direct mail.

Personalization, and even hyper-personalization, is vital because it can foster a personal connection between a consumer and a brand. Today's marketers must strike a balance between collecting data and information about their individual customers while still respecting their need for privacy and security. Moving forward, there will likely be an increased reliance on first-party data that comes directly from customers and prospects. At the end of the day, consumers are more likely to engage with brands that personalize their experiences based on known data points, and printed direct mail is a great way to establish a connection and while putting your business into your customers' hands—literally!

opinion



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