

ANALYSIS

PRINT AND PAPER

Promoting the Advantages

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Introduction

Electronic communications have now become so ubiquitous that marketers, sales teams, content creators, advertisers, and others may simply overlook the inherent capabilities of print. Younger generations, now more likely to control promotional and other print-related budgets, have grown up on electronic communications and may prefer them. This is partly due to familiarity, in much the same way that older generations may prefer hard copy. Regardless of whether a consumer is old or young, the rationale for print spending must depend on overall effectiveness.

Highlighting the Benefits of Print

Now more than ever, those involved in selling and manufacturing print applications need a tool that enables them to highlight the advantages of print and paper in ways that appeal to the next generation of marketers and content providers. This message is largely built on the inherent benefits of print, but it also hinges on other factors—such as sustainability—that are crucially important to business leaders today and in the future. This document proposes a simple mnemonic device (PLATE) to serve as a reminder of the effectiveness of print and paper.

Figure 1: The PLATE Acronym

Physical
Lasting
Accessible
Tactile
Eco-friendly

The PLATE acronym starts at a place that is familiar to most in our industry—the printing plate. It reminds us of five key and interrelated factors that make the use of print and paper appealing as well as effective.



Physical

Print is a physical channel that touches our five senses in a visceral way. Though its biggest impact is through sight and touch, it is not entirely devoid of appealing to smell, sound, or even taste. The smell of ink on paper is familiar to anyone who opens a new book. The sound of newspaper, magazine, or book pages turning is a familiar experience to people around the world. Although we are considerably less likely to taste most print or paper, there are certainly times when printing impacts food through decorated cakes, candies, or other goodies. The impact on our five senses is an essential part of the experience of interacting with print. This is one of the ways that print stirs the reader's imagination.

Even lackluster monochrome or process color printing can catch the eye if the communication is well-designed, but adding Pantone colors or special effects (like neon and metallic inks) can take that physical experience and ramp it up a notch. (See more on this below in the "Tactile" section.)

We live in a society where almost everyone around us is literate, but that is not the case in all parts of the world. Early literacy education thrives on the use of printed materials. Even in a world dominated by cell phones and electronic devices, the physical aspect of a printed piece remains extremely important. It can be distributed, held, viewed, and absorbed without an internet connection, e-reader, or subscription to a cable service. You might keep a printed piece, toss it in the recycle bin, use it for kindling, or throw it in the garbage can, but it is there... it's physical. If you keep a printed piece, it will be there the next time you go looking for it (assuming you can remember where you put it!). This leads us to the next letter in the PLATE acronym, "L" for Lasting.

Lasting

Paper is lasting. A printed piece on paper will outlive any digital file format that humans can devise. You need to know how to read, of course, but that holds true for any way that text is distributed. Printed bills, statements, postcards, and direct mail sit on the counter as a reminder of something you might—or might not—wish to pursue. Print is not ephemeral. It sits there and bugs you. It will not evaporate when you turn off the power.

A letter that was written over 50 years ago still has the power to move us. So does a book we once read and enjoyed, or a card that lifted our spirits when we were feeling down. When you look back on your high school days decades from now, will you still have a reader for that digital yearbook? Isn't it much more likely that you'll simply pick up your printed yearbook and flip through it? What about your photos? The ones that you have printed out and placed in a frame or an album will be within reach, and will not require your hard drive, a password, or cloud storage to look at them. This brings us to the "A" in PLATE, Accessibility.



Accessible

On top of being readable without an electronic device, print on paper (or any other substrate) is accessible for other reasons too. Paper documents enable a greater level of focus. You aren't competing with the temptation to access another browser window, play an electronic game, or listen to beeps, alarms, or other alerts. Without these distractions, it is easier to focus.¹ Studies have shown that students prefer reading paper hardcopy to electronic alternatives. They absorb more and are less distracted.

Reading a book by turning its pages also provides additional mental landmarks that our brains unconsciously use to sort through information, whether we are reading a textbook or the latest murder mystery. If we want to go back to something we've recently read, we tend to remember if the text we're looking for occurred early or late in the book, on a left- or right-hand page, or in the first or last sentence of a page. Readers are also more likely to be willing to re-read paper copy over materials on screen.

It is also true that print and paper are democratic, though not in the sense of political parties. They are democratic in the sense of processes that give everyone a voice and a chance to participate. Paper is accessible to anyone, provided they can read. They don't need electricity, an internet connection, or a special device.

In a similar sense, a paper document carries some weight (not just in a physical sense, but also a metaphysical one). It is intentional. There is a basic understanding that information that has been set down in print on paper has been given extensive thought and deserves being distributed that way. There is a trust associated with printed documents because it is easier to falsify electronic communications.

In today's digital world, people are bombarded with spam e-mails and scam electronic offers. Although paper is not completely immune to this, it occurs on a much lower level. Trust is one reason that many users still want their bills and statements sent to them in hard copy. They want a physical, lasting, and accessible document for their records. It may be convenient to access your information electronically, but you'd be cut off from it if you forgot your password. In addition, a paper copy gives you something physical to show your bank, financial institution, or creditor if things go awry.

Tactile

There is certainly some overlap between the concepts of physical, lasting, accessible, and tactile in the PLATE acronym. Where the concept of "tactile" truly differentiates itself is in taking print into three dimensions and expanding on how the sense of touch plays a role in

¹ We touched on this topic in a May 2022 Keypoint Intelligence document entitled *Tangible and Tactile: The Important Benefits of Print*. See this article for additional statistics on how our brains categorize things we've read on paper.



print. Let's start with paper. Paper weight, texture, and finish can delight or impress the reader. Heavier papers make a profound statement in business cards, greeting cards, postcards, artwork, and other print applications. Lighter papers make it possible for high-page-count books and direct mail messages to be transported economically. A matte or gloss finish catches the eye and makes the intended message stand out. Whether done as a full-page flood or with spot use in selected areas, these finishes give designers an important tool. Dye cuts, folds, and a multitude of binding methods allow for everything from a straightforward page binding to intricate packaging to a captivating children's pop-up book. Debossing or embossing techniques add another tactile aspect to print, whether implemented through age-old or new technologies. Raised lettering on a business card or invitation can bring a level of sophistication because in addition to being able to see it, you can feel it.

Eco-Friendly

In a sense, the first four PLATE factors (Physical, Lasting, Accessible, and Tactile) are tightly related and stand in stark contrast to electronic methods of information distribution. The final factor, Eco-friendly, goes in a different direction. No one needs to be reminded about how important sustainability and eco-friendliness are to today's business leaders. Large companies frequently have Chief Sustainability Officers (CSOs) to create, track, and promote their environmental plans. Smaller companies may not have CSOs, but they often develop environmental strategies that suit their size, such as installing rooftop solar panels, participating in community projects like highway litter reduction programs, and offering financial support for environmental causes.²

In convincing younger marketing managers that print is worth pursuing, we must first acknowledge a history of solvent use and unsustainable business practices conducted by printers and paper mills alike. New methods and tighter regulations have turned this situation around, but in some minds the taint is still there. This why promoting more efficient print processes, process-less plates, digital printing methods, and recycling programs is so important for print service providers.

For paper companies, the challenge is not only to surmount history, but also to counteract intentional badmouthing of print, or what many call "greenwashing." A typical greenwashing claim might state, "Save a tree, get your statement sent to you electronically rather than in print." The implication is that using paper results in the loss of trees and forests. Greenwashing purveyors miss the point that trees are a renewable resource that can be managed effectively like farm crops. Responsible paper companies

² Keypoint Intelligence covered this topic in detail in a March 2022 document entitled *Today's Eco-Challenge: Becoming a Sustainable Printer*.



plant trees to replace those that are cut down for paper pulp, construction, furniture, or other purposes. They track the supply chain to ensure that wood products are sourced sustainably.

Greenwashing claims are particularly insidious because the firms that ask their customers to go electronic to save a tree are generally trying to save production and mailing costs rather than being truly environmentally conscious. Asking a customer to go electronic is fine, but it should be promoted as a convenience for customers who want that service rather than in disingenuous eco-friendly terms. Many customers still wish to receive hard copy bills, statements, and reminders because they rely on print and they trust it.

Figure 2: An Example of a Two Sides Anti-Greenwashing Graphic



Source: Two Sides North America

All industries have an environmental footprint that should be acknowledged. Today's consumers are coming to realize that the infrastructure associated with electronic distribution of information has its own costs and is by no means without environmental impact. It's important not to downplay print and paper because it can be recyclable, sustainable, and environmentally friendly.



The Bottom Line

The PLATE acronym highlights five essential benefits of print and paper:

- ◆ **Physical:** Print touches your senses
- ◆ **Lasting:** Print will be there when you need it
- ◆ **Accessible:** Print is focused and intentional
- ◆ **Tactile:** Print is a hands-on experience
- ◆ **Eco-friendly:** Print is recyclable and sustainable

These concepts put the spotlight on values that your sales and marketing teams can promote. And beyond the standalone value of print and paper, it is important to show how print and electronic methods can work in tandem to achieve top-level results. In a sense, print service providers are working against a tide of electronic delivery of information. To succeed, you cannot ignore this, but at the same time you cannot submit to old prejudices and nonsensical greenwashing. That is why PLATE serves as a reminder of what print and paper can and should achieve.



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