

ANALYSIS

TANGIBLE AND TACTILE: IMPORTANT BENEFITS OF PRINT

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contents

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Introduction

Printed media is facing significant challenges from the digital delivery of information. Electronic media offers a clear advantage in its immediacy, yet there are limits. Statistics show that physical media is preferable in many circumstances. It may have seemed like print was on its way out in some cases, but the advantages of paper have proven to have strong continued appeal. Print also has immediate value in signage or marketing materials. The packaging industry also continues to flourish, offering more evidence that print will not be going away anytime soon. Although user preferences change over time and the pendulum has certainly swung away from paper in the past couple of decades, there are good reasons not to lose sight of the tangible and tactile advantages of print.

Production digital print techniques can make documents more compelling and valuable through personalization, targeting, just-in-time production (JIT), digital document repositories, and print on demand (POD). Even so, print service providers (PSPs) should not overlook the inherent advantages of print as well as the benefits that can be afforded based on paper choice, binding, die cuts, embossing, textures, coatings, and embellishments. This document explores how PSPs can leverage the intrinsic benefits of print.

Print's Tangible Benefits

Almost everyone has heard the statistics about readers' preference for printed matter versus electronic versions of the same material. Research studies have consistently shown that comprehension and retention are improved when materials are read in printed form. In addition, readers are less likely to get distracted when reading on paper versus an electronic device.

Paper documents, specifically those that are bound together to form books, booklets, magazines, and reports, provide landmarks—you can easily tell how far along you are in a printed book or magazine based on the feeling of the pages in your hands. According to research, this improves the ability to use “mental mapping” and can also aid in retention. On top of all that, studies have also shown that readers of all ages simply prefer paper for school assignments and pleasure reading. Here are some examples:

- **Reading comprehension is improved when reading from paper versus screens.** This conclusion comes from a European research study of more than 170,000 participants from 19 countries. Known as *The Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation (E-READ) Initiative*, this undertaking drew on the results of 54 separate studies. It was funded by The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST). For more information, see [this summary from Intergraf](#).



- **Children remembered more details from stories read on paper.** This study compared paper books to e-books that were enhanced with animations, videos, and games. A summary of this research can be found in the Scientific American article entitled *Why the Brain Prefers Paper* by Ferris Jabr.
- **Students do read digital formats faster, but this comes at the cost of comprehension.** According to an article in *The Journal of Experimental Education* entitled *Reading Across Mediums: Effects of Reading Digital and Print Texts on Comprehension and Calibration*, by Lauren Singer Trakhman and Patricia Alexander, students were able to get the main idea from digital representations of text. There is one major caveat, though—they absorbed fewer details when consuming digital content. This implies that students of all ages are much better off reading in print for in-depth study and retention.
- **Learners prefer studying in hard copy form.** A research study entitled *Redefining Reading: The Impact of Digital Communication Media* by Naomi Baron (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*) found that more than 90% of readers across five countries said that they concentrated best when reading in print. Students also said that they were more likely to reread printed material than digital alternatives.
- **Paper is the preferred medium for longer text.** An international study of over 10,000 respondents called *Academic reading format preferences and behaviors among university students worldwide: A comparative survey analysis* (by Diane Mizrahi, Alicia Salaz, Serap Kurbanoglu, and Joumana Boustany) found that a broad majority preferred print for reading longer text. These respondents believed that printed content was easier to remember and improved their focus.

The primary drawback expressed in all of these studies is that print is more expensive than electronic delivery. This means that the challenge for PSPs often lies in proving the value of print for any given application.

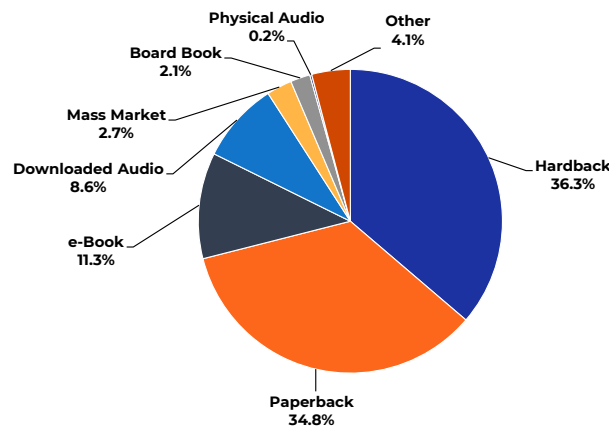
Books versus e-Books

An example of the competition between print and electronic presentations of content can be found in the latest trade sales data for consumer books. According to a report from the American Association of Publishers (a group that primarily represents mainstream consumer book publishers, meaning established trade publishers whose books you are likely to see in bookstores), e-books accounted for 11.3% of sales revenues. If you include audio books, the percent of non-print titles increases by 8.6%. Market analysts acknowledge that other sources of e-book sales such as educational and technical titles would likely increase the overall figure, as would sales of e-books through self-publishing



platforms. Some believe that this could bring the e-book figure closer to 30% of the total market.

Figure 1: Percentage of Total Consumer Book Trade Sales by Format



Source: Association of American Publishers (AAP) January 2022; Chart recreated by Keypoint Intelligence

e-Books have undoubtedly developed as an important segment of the overall book market, but printed books sales still dominate. According to the book industry tracking firm NPD, printed book sales increased 13.2% between 2020 and 2021, and 21% between 2019 and 2021. These are massive growth numbers in relation to typical market trends. The conclusion that we should take from this is that printed books remain strong despite a wide range of electronic alternatives.

The Tactile Benefits of Print and Paper

Inherent benefits like improved reading comprehension are certainly important, but that's not the end of print's ability to impress. The physical aspects of paper also come into play. Consider a printed application like a business card. The choice of paper weight, finish, color, and embellishments can bring an entirely new tactile dimension to the experience. A physical business card can send a message about accessibility and sophistication that electronic alternatives cannot approach.

Of course, it is possible to go overboard with this. All professionals have likely seen business cards printed on such a thick stock that they become unwieldy, or cards with glossy finishes that make it difficult to write on the surface with a ballpoint pen. That said, a simple yet sophisticated business card printed on a premium stock with raised type can be a sight to behold. This is one of the reasons that letterpress, the dominant printing method of the first part of the 20th Century, remains popular among a hardy group of printers who value the craft and allure of this method.

Print finishing techniques can add even more interest. We've already touched on how the sequencing of pages in a bound book has tangible benefits for tracking and comprehension, but there are tactile benefits as well. Inventive folds, bindings, and the use



of die cuts contribute an additional richness to printed pieces. Any cynics should spend some time watching the tremendous video series, [Fold of the Week](#) by Trish Witkowski on her Fold Factory website.

Figure 2: Selection of *Fold of the Week* Videos

Video Title	Episode	Budget
Surprise Waterfall Brochures	Episode: 566	Budget: Low
3 Glueless Pocket Folders	Episode: 565	Budget: Low / Moderate
Pre-Enjoyed Rolling Knot	Episode: 564	Budget: Low / Moderate
Tear-ific Open Gate	Episode: 563	Budget: Low
Hybrid Stepped Accordion Cross Brochure	Episode: 561	Budget: Moderate
Aloha! Shaped Two-Way Gate Mailer	Episode: 560	Budget: Moderate

Enhancements provided by textures and coatings are another example of the tactile benefits of print. Although these can be implemented with analog or digital techniques, some of the most exciting print output being produced today comes through the use of inkjet-based systems that create embellishments like textures, spot coatings, dimensional design components (like embossing), and even metallic foils.

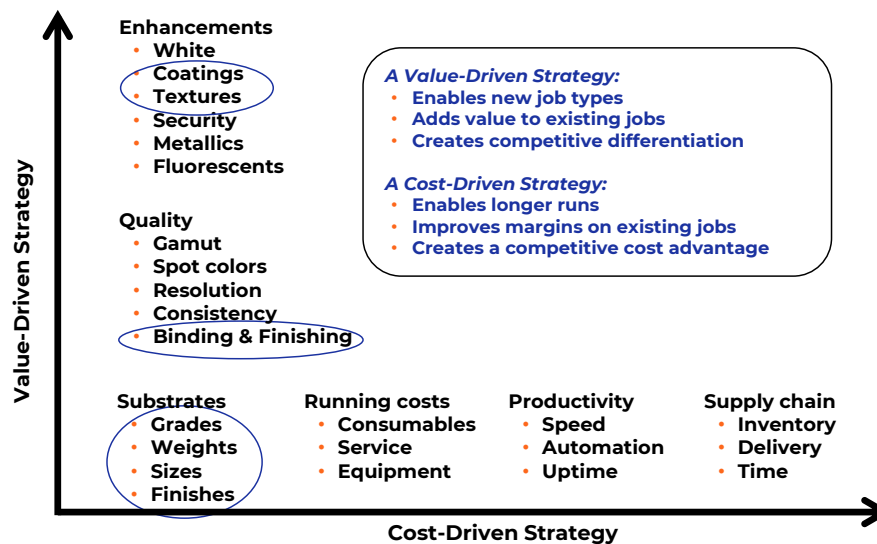
The Value of Tactile Print

Some of you might have seen variations of the Figure below, which highlights value- and cost-driven strategies used by PSPs, in the past. For the purposes of this document, we will highlight the areas where tactile benefits play a role in a value-driven strategy.

In a value-driven strategy, PSPs focus on providing customers with a wide range of products and capabilities. This starts with substrates and typically follows a quality path, ultimately leading to capabilities like print enhancements. The tactile benefits of a value-driven strategy revolve around substrates (particularly premium ones), binding and finishing methods, and print enhancement techniques (particularly those related to coatings and textures). A value-driven strategy enables PSPs to expand their product offerings, enabling new job types and improving the value of existing jobs.



Figure 3: Value-Driven and Cost-Driven Strategies



Source: North American Software Investment Strategy Report; Keypoint Intelligence 2021

In a cost-driven strategy, the starting point is in substrate selection (though likely a limited one). Running costs are tightly controlled and the focus is on worker productivity, workflow automation, and driving high levels of uptime. Anything that can be done to reduce costs in the supply chain is also key. Overall, cost-driven strategies help PSPs produce effective and economic long runs and improve their profit margins on the kinds of jobs that they do repeatedly. The competitive advantage is not in being the most innovative or creative PSP, but in being the most cost-effective one. Although the end result for either strategy is a printed piece, a cost-driven strategy places less of an emphasis on promoting the tactile benefits of print.

While there is value in each of these approaches (and most PSPs will use a combination of both), it's clear that tactile benefits fit extremely well into a value-driven strategy. What is your overall strategy as a print service provider? Is it value- or cost-driven? PSPs who intend to take advantage of the tactile benefits of print must put a dedicated focus on value in their marketing and sales efforts.



The Bottom Line

PSPs understand the value of print. Promoting both the tangible and tactile values of print is an ongoing process. Here are some tips:

- ◆ **Market the tangible benefits of print.** Some of your customers may have a bias against print as being old-fashioned or out of touch with the times, yet there are very good reasons that print has been an important media for hundreds of years. Use available statistics about the benefits of print to your advantage. (Note: The [Two Sides initiative](#) has fact sheets and infographics that are quite valuable for this purpose.)
- ◆ **Make it easy to choose among the range of tactile benefits.** Buying decisions about paper, finishing, and embellishments can be overwhelming for print customers. By having paper, binding, and print samples handy, you can help simplify the selection process.
- ◆ **Educate your sales team and customer service representatives.** If you have chosen a value-driven strategy, your personnel must understand and be able to communicate the tactile benefits that you offer. These are generally premium services and should be presented as such, and they must not be underpriced!
- ◆ **The tangible aspects of print are important for all print service providers.** PSPs that focus on a cost-driven strategy can still take advantage of the tangible benefits of print and should not overlook the opportunity to promote them.

Print faces stiff competition from today's electronic media sources, and yet it also carries significant advantages. Make sure that you promote those to the utmost!



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