



Josh Gordon

## Repositioning Print for a Digital World

Print is not dead, but the way we have trained to sell it for the past 25 years is.

**T**wenty years ago, print dominated as the most targetable and graphical of all advertising media. But the advance of digital technology has passed functional leadership to others.

Today there are new ways to position print based on marketing benefits that have recently emerged. Ironically, these new benefits grow out of weaknesses in the same new digital media that print's detractors say will kill it off.

### 1. Print is the calm in the digital media storm

I returned home one evening to find my 16-year-old Laura on the computer while talking to a friend on her cell phone. On her computer ran six separate chat rooms with different friends. As I crossed the room to greet her I snapped off the TV set. She cried, "Hey, I was watching that!" Welcome to the world of multitasking media consumers, the media buyer's worst nightmare. Do you think Laura paid a lot of attention to those TV commercials? Did she notice the Web banners atop her chat rooms?

Reading, as opposed to viewing, is an active behavior. While there are magazine page flippers, research has documented that magazine reading is the least of all media diluted by multitasking. Magazines should be the medium of choice for advertisers with a message that requires contemplation, involvement, or consideration (See a great study on page 34 of the MPA's *Magazine Handbook*, free at [Magazine.org](http://Magazine.org)).

### 2. Print cuts clutter

In the online word it is not uncommon to have dozens of direct competitors, including the Web sites of the very companies you are trying to sell! If you include blogs and secondary sites the number of directly competitive sites can run into the hundreds.

One major drawback of online media is that there are millions of destinations teaming for a viewer's attention. Print can help this process by creating a periodic reminder for your destination before they enter the distracting online world.

### 3. Print is the offline "push media" for a digital world

John Milne, senior vice-president at Rogers Media, proposed this retro-sounding notion at a recent ABM conference. When you plan a Web engagement strategy you can divide your activities into ones that reside on your Web site and ones that "push" or reach out beyond it (e-newsletters, e-blasts, viral video, and others). A healthy balance of both is best for making your site a significant destination while

reaching out to new viewers. Print can be added to out-of-bound media, and can reach a distinctly different audience.

### 4. The magazine format is exploding as an influential marketing tool

Give your advertisers some perspective. While magazine advertising is under pressure, the magazine format itself as a pure marketing tool is enjoying unprecedented growth. A study on sponsored media from the Custom Publishing Council on 2006 custom media found that sponsored magazines have surpassed all other forms sponsored media to become the top choice among marketers.

Spending on custom media in 2006 increased to an all-time industry high of \$55.6 billion, with a record number of titles published (125,044) and the highest number of pages printed ever. (See the study at [custompublishingcouncil.com](http://custompublishingcouncil.com)).

### 5. Start selling your "ad friendly community"

Rich Miller, general manager of media buying giant Medi-aFirst International, proposes that the old ways of evaluating magazines are obsolete. Says Miller, "A magazine can no longer be defined by the platform through which its content is distributed; it's defined by the community of persons who share a common interest in that content. A magazine is a social network. It's a club."

But a magazine community is different from many in that ads are welcome, with about half of readers saying they enjoy them as part of their reading experience (pages 28-30 of MPA's *Magazine Handbook*). In contrast, readers consistently rate online advertising as among the least favored of all advertising forms. Despite forecasts for big increases in ad spend on social networking sites, a recent headline from *Barron's* asks, "What if Facebook can't sell ads?"

### 6. Sell complementary weaknesses

The greatest weakness of online media is the massive competition for visitors once they arrive online. Print can complement that by providing a constant reinforcement of a destination in the physical world prior to the online experience.

Print's biggest weakness is the lack of measurable feedback. Online is measurable, often to a fault. If you sell both, sell them as complementary, as they truly are.

The media world has changed and print has a vital part to play, but it is a different part. ■

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