

# MORE EFFECTIVE ADVERTISING: PRINT COMPLEMENTS WEB

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## OVERVIEW

1. **DEBUNKING THE MYTH: PRINT LIVES**
2. **DIVIDED ATTENTION**
3. **IN PRINT WE TRUST**
4. **MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS**
5. **GETTING DEEPER WITH QR-CODES**
6. **COMPLEMENTARY ADVERTISING**

Over the past few years, businesses have understandably moved to incorporate the web into their advertising programs.<sup>1</sup> To balance advertising budgets, print and broadcasting advertising have been sacrificed. Businesses' decisions have been based partially on tougher economics; partially on perceived effectiveness; partially on changing demographics. The assumption is that younger audiences are more apt to spend time reading computer and mobile devices. And arguably, more "hits" per dollar can be generated online versus in print.

In this article, I address the relative and complementary effectiveness of online versus print media, primarily magazines. Effectiveness for a specific advertising purpose, however, is not considered.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, ads for all services cannot be addressed, although the specifics of the service, the target, and the message must always be considered.

I consider whether the shift to web from magazines is warranted. Is web advertising a *complete* replacement of print? What do print and the web do best? Does it make more sense to use *both* media — print *and* web — each according to their own best uses and purposes?

After reviewing the research, what I propose — again for most, not all services — is a cross-media strategy, taking advantage of what each medium does best. First, to *engage* with a magazine. Then to *alert* and *prompt* the potential customer, moving her to deeper consideration. And, with more complex services in particular, to *persuade* with the web, where specifications, directions, detailed comparative information and so forth might be found.

In short, despite the proliferation of web-based communication and social media, magazine readership continues to grow, print continues to be more engaging and trusted, print ads are more economical for most purposes, and the advent of QR codes<sup>3</sup> make the connection between print and web more direct,

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<sup>1</sup> "Print versus Internet Advertising," *Bradenton Times* (June 15, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.*, a vendor of geriatric products will likely do better in print than on the web, if only because many seniors have limited access to or are unaccustomed to using the web. However, a rapper would do better on the web, especially given the audio capabilities.

<sup>3</sup> A QR-code, or Quick Response code, is a computer generated matrix, square, black and white, readable by digital camera or scanner. The information encoded may be text, a URL, or other data.

effective, and reinforcing. Rather than making the simple decision of print *or* web, advertisers should consider the strategic decision to combine print *and* web.

## 1. DEBUNKING THE MYTH: PRINT STILL LIVES

First, let's be clear, research studies report that the popular impression — that print is dead — is wrong. In a desire to be “cutting edge” and create news, or perhaps because of economic interests, there has been a tendency to prematurely declare older technologies dead. TV versus radio; air conditioner versus fan; Kindle versus books. Each earlier technology survives, each for its own reason. Just as the “paperless society” vastly over-anticipated a paper-free revolution, electronic communication, and the web as the exclusive medium of advertising, is many decades away, if it happens at all.

There is a commitment to print advertising, and that commitment may be substantial. According to Media Research Inc., magazine audiences are up over the past 5 years: up more than TV, up more than radio.<sup>4</sup> Hardly a dying sector, magazines remain in their growth phase.

Moreover, research shows that the impact of advertising is greatest for magazines, as compared with internet or broadcast media. McPheters & Co. concluded that a given magazine ad makes twice as many impressions as TV, and 6 times as many as the web.<sup>5</sup> MRI-Media-Day reported the time-ad impact ratio for print magazines is more than twice that of internet and TV (and 5 times that of radio).<sup>6</sup>

According to a 2008 study by Marketing Evolution, this advantage translates into dollars. The cost per impact of magazine ads' effectiveness was substantially less than the cost of web ads: \$1.08 versus \$1.97 for brand awareness; \$1.40 versus \$2.58 for brand familiarity, and \$1.23 versus \$2.61 for purchase intent.<sup>7</sup> Dynamic Logic concluded that a dollar spent on magazine advertising influenced nearly 5 magazine readers, while TV affected less than 1, and web advertising affected less than 1/3 per dollar spent. In effect, the relative economic impact of magazine versus the web is over 15-fold.

## 2. DIVIDED ATTENTION

A major advantage of print over web advertising is reader attention. About 27% of internet users are engaged elsewhere. They are only lightly focused and often multi-tasking. Their attention is divided Nielsen reported in 2010. that 59% of people surfing the web were simultaneously watching TV.<sup>8</sup> By comparison, only 9% of magazine readers do something else while reading.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the web user *tends* to scan as an accommodation to the medium, which focuses on speed.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the user is looking for specific pieces of information: an address, a recommendation, a picture, etc. Or she is searching for an answer to her question, perhaps poorly formulated. Or perhaps the electronic text and images flashing on her screen are like low-level background noise — like Muzak — to the user.

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<sup>4</sup> Media Research Institute, Magazine Audience Accumulation (May 11, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> McPheters & Company, (Conde Nast Publications and CBS-TV: 2009).

<sup>6</sup> MRI MediaDay, Deloitte “State of the Media Democracy” Study (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Marketing Evolution (Measuring and Managing Your Marketing ROI), as cited in Magazine Publishers of America, 2010-11 MPA Handbook.

<sup>8</sup> Nielsen, “Americans Using TV and Internet Together 35% More than a Year Ago” (March 22, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> BIGresearch *Simultaneous Media Usage Study* (2009).

<sup>10</sup> See J. Nielsen, “How Users Read the Web,” *Alertbox* (1997).

That web users scan more readily than print readers is likely an accommodation to the faster pace of society. According to Nielsen, 79% of web users scanned. He cited four reasons: (1) reading a computer screen is tiring, (2) to create a sense of productivity, (3) because each page competes with other pages for attention, and is possibly less useful, and (4) life is hectic.<sup>11</sup> The first has diminished as better screens have become available, but the others likely persist. In fact, the rapid scanning used on the web has influenced web page design to require shorter works and bulleted outlines: less on narrative style.<sup>12</sup>

The research has established that most people maintain a more peripheral relationship with online resources. Researchers found web surfing is a “rapid activity,” even for pages with substantial content, and call for page designs that allow for “cursory reading.”<sup>13</sup>

This tendency to scan may be generational. Our children, having grown up with the web, are more accustomed to electronic screens and may be more accustomed to treat the web as a reading – as opposed to a scanning – source. For now, however, the fact remains that *the web is used differently than print by most adults.*

### 3. IN PRINT WE TRUST

People say they “trust” magazines more than the internet, and there is substantial evidence that readers attach more weight to magazine ads. In 2009, according to Nielsen, 59% of users said they trusted a magazine ad either completely or somewhat.<sup>14</sup> (A newspaper was trusted slightly more.) But only 33%, 37%, and 41% trust online banner ads, online video ads, or online search-engine results to the same extent.<sup>15</sup>

In 2006, Dynamic Logic showed that magazine advertising increased advertising effectiveness more than internet in 4 of 5 categories: brand awareness, ad awareness, brand favorability, and purchase intent.<sup>16</sup> In the 5th category, message association, it was tied. In one category, purchase intent, print advertising’s impact was nearly 5 times that of the web.<sup>17</sup> *Print advertising is clearly more convincing.*

However, web access comes with speed. With speed, at some level, has come superficiality. Web space has become crowded, physically and mentally, with no one receiving loyalty. Lots of data, little information. How shall we evaluate a resource? Think of the results of a Google search, ranked by Google’s algorithm and Google ad dollars: not validity; not user needs.

In the context of wide variety, *print remains a reliable, trusted resource that motivates action.* Not all print, of course. But established print sources tend to be regarded as the premiere sources of information on the web as well.

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<sup>11</sup> See J. Nielsen, “Why Web Users Scan Instead of Read,” *Alertbox* (1997).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Web Writing Style Guide, Hampshire College, online at [www.hampshire.edu/web-writing-style-guide.htm](http://www.hampshire.edu/web-writing-style-guide.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Harold Weinreich et al, “Not Quite the Average: An Empirical Study of Web Use” (ACM Transactions on the Web: 2008)

<sup>14</sup> “Trust & Advertising Global Report,” *Nielsen AdWeekMedia* (July 2009).

<sup>15</sup> See also Experian Simmons Multi-Media Engagement Study, (Full-Year Study: 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Dynamic Logic, “Comparing TV, Magazine and Internet Advertising Shows Incremental Impact and Specific Strengths” (CrossMedia Research: January 2006).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4. MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS

With print advertising, it is impossible to tell if an ad has been seen unless the customer brings a coupon to the store or specifically mentions the ad. Proving the copy has been seen and comprehended is even more difficult. Circulation can be verified. Readership cannot. Whether the message reaches the eyeballs — let alone the brain — of a reader is an open question with print advertising.

Web technology, in theory, offers measurability.<sup>18</sup> That is, the message can be tracked one step further than print. Thus, with a magazine, we can know whether the *publication* is received. With the web, we know whether the *page* is received. In truth, neither measurement will prove if an impression has been made. But the web offers the possibility.

Advocates of the web emphasize this measurability. Yet it is *still impossible to know whether the web ad has registered with the reader*. The ad can *appear* to the reader, but might not be *absorbed*. The reader can still ignore the message. With less time spent on a page, we may guess the reader is less likely to absorb the ad. Click-through data may help, but still cannot not prove comprehension.

In addition, advertising tends to prove less effective with users of social media than other media: social media advertising placed 5<sup>th</sup> behind television, print, news & media sites, and corporate sites in recognition and trust.<sup>19</sup>

#### 5. GETTING DEEPER WITH QR-CODES

Besides measurability, a web ad is usually distinguished from a print ad by its “functionality”: the relative ease with which a user can access additional information. By clicking on a web ad, a user can immediately probe more deeply into the specifications of the service. He may be able to see related or competitive services. Or create an e-mail message to the vendor, register an opinion or comment on Facebook, Twitter, or the like.

By comparison, a print user would have to pick up a phone or go to a store or the web for more information. Information is certainly available to a print reader, even though it requires more effort than a click.

This is an important advantage of the web: the *access it provides to follow-up information*.<sup>20</sup> If magazine ads can be designed so that they lead, as seamlessly as possible, to answers to the customer’s questions, the customer will likely value the opportunity and find the experience of the print ad meaningful. The technology of QR-codes enables that.

A mobile device in combination with QR-code readers represents essentially the paradigm for a working commercial partnership between web and print. Handheld devices are rarely more than an arms-length away. With the QR-code, printed on the ad itself, the reader can scan it, and be taken directly to the relevant web site.

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., “Facebook Advertising Offers Real, Measurable Results,” Chiefmarketer.com.

<sup>19</sup> “The Effectiveness of Social Media Advertising,” *InspireMedia Blog*. InspireMedia. (April 27, 2009; Web Jun 23, 2011).

Magazines, meanwhile, have long had the effect of driving traffic to the web, even without QR-codes. About half of readers go to the internet to follow up on what they've seen or read in a magazine.<sup>21</sup> Magazines, more so than any other medium, trigger web research.<sup>22</sup> *With QR-codes, the process is that much faster and easier.*

## 6. COMPLEMENTARY ADVERTISING

The advertising environment has changed: not to *eliminate* the need for print, but to *require* it to guide to the reader to the web. Print ads and web ads serve *complementary* purposes: the magazine ad, to connect the reader to her needs and desires, letting her know that there's a commercial solution to her need; the web, to enable exploration of that solution and enable the user to satisfy the need for more information.

Regarding choice of medium, the advertiser is left, not with a simple *substitution* decision regarding print or web, but with a *strategic* decision of combining print *and* web. The magazine ad must engage and capture the reader and point her, as seamlessly as possible, toward follow-up with the web.

So, how should this blending be accomplished?

First, the *choice of magazine must be based as closely as possible on the market you are trying to target.* This requirement hasn't changed.

Second, *the design of the magazine ad must be simple, but engaging and inviting.* The ad raises questions and arouses curiosity. It captures the attention and imagination. It should draw the potential customer to the website, phone, or store. If a QR-code is available, it should tempt her to use it.

Depending on the significance and complexity of the decision, the print ad should draw the customer closer but, rarely, to the decision point. The most common mistake of a print ad is to try to give too much information. Instead, ads should give the minimum and assume the reader will follow up on the web.

Third, by including a QR-code — basically a website address, a bar-code-like symbol — the advertiser moves the reader from magazine ad to web information as seamlessly as possible. The reader can scan the code embedded in a print ad and be delivered to the relevant web page.<sup>23</sup> Most hand-held devices are now manufactured with a reader. Others can download it. It is a *brilliant marriage of print and web technology.*

What the web can do best, once the user is at the site, is provide *depth, continuity, and interaction.* The reader can get *questions answered.* She can *explore, compare and choose.* Ultimately, the web can *facilitate the sale.*

This is how print and web should work together. Optimally, print should engage and capture the reader. And, ideally, the web will tell her about the solution that will best meet her needs.

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<sup>21</sup> Chief Marketing Officer Council (2010).

<sup>22</sup> BIGresearch Simultaneous Media Usage Study (SIMM15 December 2009).

<sup>23</sup> O. Williams, "Why Isn't Everyone Using QR-Codes?" iMediaConnection (March 8, 2011).