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**MELCRUM'S  
Communicators'  
Network**
**The global online community  
for professional communicators**

## The real cost of killing print

By Angela Sinickas

If your finance department is putting pressure on you to convert a printed publication to online only, they're probably focusing on an easy-to-capture number on their spreadsheets—the cost of printing in your budget. They mistakenly believe eliminating that item from your budget will help your organization's bottom line. Here are some facts to use when pushing back:

- Check your web usage statistics to see how many people are printing out copies of an internal e-newsletter. Multiply that times the number of pages being printed out in total for a single edition throughout your entire organization. Find out from your purchasing department what the cost of that actually is when you add together the expensive paper stock and color cartridges being used for the one-sided printing throughout your organization. Compare that against the relatively lower cost of mass-produced publications printed on both sides of cheaper paper. (Also printed pubs are usually published using recycled paper and environmentally sound soy-based inks, so printing at work is also less "green.")
- A study by The Poynter Institute shows that people learn better and faster when reading the same information on paper vs. online, partly because they don't click through to all the elements of an online article. ([www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)).
- If the publication includes content that could help increase your revenue or decrease your expenses, both of those outcomes will be compromised if the publication is available only online. Not only do people read less of the information available online, they are also less likely to even open an electronic document than to skim through one that appears in their mailbox in hard copy.

### Case study of lost readership

Here are some very disturbing survey results from a client who switched from print to only online for their employee magazine. The entire workforce uses computers all day long. The length,

frequency and content of the magazine did not change, but readership certainly did:

- **Only 49% of those who have seen it say it provides useful information** they either want or need for their jobs. In 2007 when this publication was still available in print, **64%** said it was useful.
- **Only 42% now read or skim** at least half of each issue of the magazine, compared to **68%** who used to when it was printed.
- **Only 15% now share their issues** of the magazine with others in their household, compared to nearly **one-fourth** who did in 2007.

Finally, you might say that you'd be happy to reconsider your point of view when all the business newspapers and magazines read avidly by Finance and IT executives eliminate their printed versions. And, by the way, the first issue of Social Media Monthly was issued in August 2010—in print!

### **Being online doesn't guarantee reading online**

Most call center employees work on a PC all day long, but most of them cannot access email or intranets while they have the customer-related software open on their screens. That means that they can't physically access what they have theoretical access to while they're at their desks. In the US, to make sure they get the legally required breaks, most companies do not allow these employees to take their breaks at their desks, which means they can't even access online information in their personal time.

Another group that has access, and is often issued company-provided PCs and phones, are field sales people. Focus group after focus group of these employees tell us that they are more likely to read printed information like newsletters in print than online because they can easily scan them while in waiting rooms to see their prospects and clients, and can quickly shove it back in their bags as soon as the customer appears. It's hard to read magazines on a phone or to actually use a laptop on top of your lap.

Just because some employees technically have access to online information does not mean that their jobs make it likely, or even possible, for them to actually read it online.