

Ebooks? Websites? People still love printed documents

1st July 2013

The paperless office is a myth. The notion that we are all “going digital” and that “digital content” is the future is about as much sense as the “paperless office” was when it was suggested back [in 1975 in Business Week](#) magazine. The notion that we are all going to give up print because we no longer need it is just plain daft.

Indeed, there are services that can turn [blogs into printed books](#), digital magazines into [printed publications](#), or entire sections of Wikipedia into [printed tomes](#). Far from giving up on print, we are obsessed by it.

Yet, sales of e-readers such as the [Kindle](#) continue to soar. So what’s going on? if we love print, why are we engaging even more with digital content?



[New research from Pew Internet](#) reveals what is happening. Their study found that even though teenagers and young people love digital, they also cannot tear themselves away from print.

What is happening is that people are developing different purposes for different kinds of material. In the past, when we only had one format, print, we had to use it for all of our reading needs. Now we have print, e-readers, websites, smartphones, tablets and we appear to be developing different ways of using them to suit particular needs.

For instance, when you are studying a text book and you need to highlight things, put Post-It notes on particular sections or scribble in the margin that is so much easier with print than on a digital device. But if you just want to read a novel, then an e-reader is a dream device; it saves your place automatically and it can connect you to all the other books by your favourite author so you can download them and carry them around with you to read when you want.

A tablet device, on the other hand, can let you easily read material that is interconnected, which takes you from one document to another with ease. And it lets you store those important items together in a single collected notebook on something like [Evernote](#).

However, for material we need to interact with, it seems we find it hard to tear ourselves away from print.

So it begs the question, what kinds of material do you produce for your visitors? Do you have material they can hop about in, which might be good for a tablet? Do you have simple, straightforward, easy to read material that would be great for an e-reader? And do you have material that requires interaction which can only really work in print?

The Internet is currently in the midst of a “content” revolution with the world and its wife talking about the need to produce a never-ending stream of “digital content”. But as this new

research from Pew Internet suggests, that will only satisfy a proportion of your visitors. Gone are the days when we just needed to prepare content; now we need to produce the content in multiple ways to fulfil the different purposes people have. And that means you still need to produce material in print.

More evidence that print is preferred over digital

11th September 2013

The newspaper industry is in turmoil as it tries out online “pay-walls” because it needs to gain revenue having lost circulation in print. Everywhere you go in the newspaper world these days you hear people muttering “print is dead”. Interestingly, as far as I can tell, these are the same people who told us that we would have a “paperless office”. Their ability to predict the future is not brilliant.

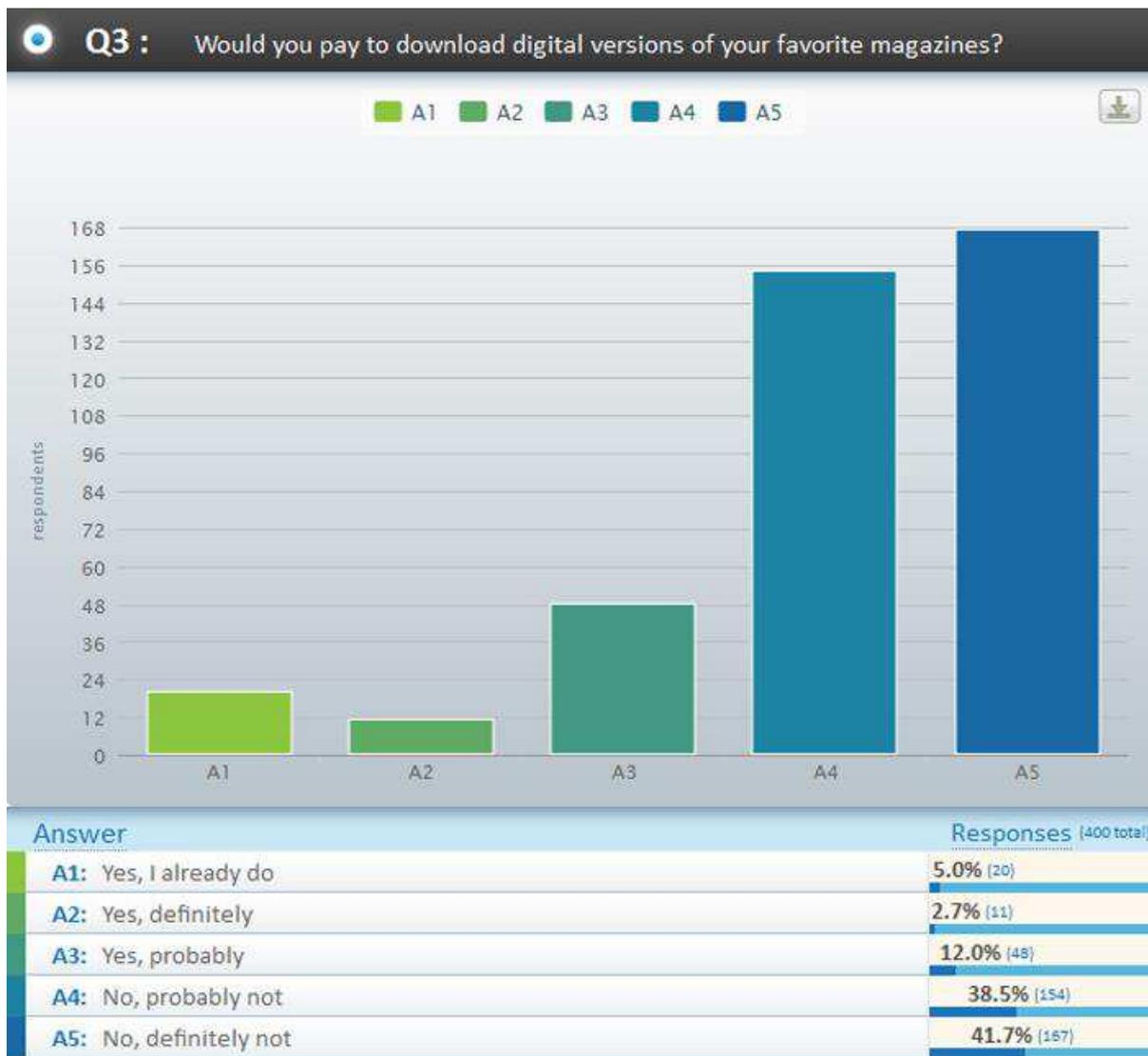
Circulations are falling for most newspapers and news executives are quick to “blame” the Internet where we have instant access to news. Of course, it is easy to blame the Internet and much more comfortable doing that, rather than look to your own failings – such as a reduction in ethical standards, poor news judgement, failing to truly understand what the readers want and so on. Those factors may well have more to do with falling newspaper circulations than the presence of the Internet.

One of the problems with the Internet is that you cannot touch it, smell it, feel it. The Internet only involves a few of our senses, whereas printed documents involve others – giving us a more “complete” experience. Indeed, for the “touchy, feely” people in the world, the Internet is a real issue because even though they have to use it, they cannot really, fully engage in the way they would like to. Some of these people even print out their emails so they can feel them, before answering. It gives them greater connection.

We live in a three-dimensional, physical world, yet the Internet is two-dimensional and not physical.

Is it any wonder, then, that time after time studies about the so-called “death of print” find the complete opposite? We love paper and printed documents.

Another [study](#), just published, shows that people are most unlikely to want digital magazines, instead preferring the printed alternative.



The research found that the only encouragement for people to want digital versions of printed magazines is if the digital version included some kind of community – something extra, over and above the printed version. Less than one in five people want a digital magazine.

Sometimes, we rush headlong in to a digital world when, in reality, our customers want something in print. Don't neglect printed documents – they are still important and valuable to your business.