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The unique power of print.

Predicting the future is always a risky proposition. Experts in the 1960's believed that in 2012 we would be going to work in our atomic powered flying cars. While scientists can precisely predict the time of an eclipse a thousand years in advance, they can't accurately predict how long their commute to the lab will take this morning. As long as they are dealing exclusively with physics and numerical data, their predictions will be 100% correct, but when you introduce humans into the equation, all bets are off. For the last twenty years, the "experts" have been telling us that print would be "dead" within 5 years. They were absolutely convinced that consumers would get all of their news from electronic media, that 24/7 news channels and universal access to the web had made print obsolete. The fact that print advertising is still alive and well is due to that human variable in the equation. Online advertising is definitely faster; and often cheaper, but in the minds of consumers it is not necessarily better. Let's look at some of the reasons print advertising is still the way to go for most advertisers.

In the advertising industry, everyone is trying to get their message in front of as many people as possible. Radio people talk about Arbitron rankings, TV people about Neilsons, web people talk about page views, billboard people talk about traffic and we print people talk about circulation. At the risk of being exiled from the world of advertising, I must say—all of these numbers are meaningless. The sheer number of people exposed to an advertiser's message means nothing if those people do not take action and buy something from the advertiser. Engagement is far more important than exposure. I usually have the radio on in my office, but I rarely pay much attention to it. Most of what I "hear" literally "goes in one ear and out the other." The same is true of the billboards I pass while driving, I don't pay any more attention to them than I do the trees or the buildings I pass. On the other hand, even the most hurried and cursory reading of a print product forces me to be engaged. The other media formats tend to be passive; our brains can easily filter them out. Reading is inherently an active pursuit. Reading even a single word requires the reader to use numerous areas of the brain to process the information. Reading is in effect, "an inside job," the information must be processed inside our heads. This engagement is why print is the most effective way to communicate complex ideas.

Proponents of other types of media often say that they have an advantage because the consumer doesn't have to seek them out. They make a point of saying that a reader has to make a decision to pick up a paper, while the public can not avoid

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their media—no matter how hard they try! One of the key differences between print advertising and all other media is that consumers actually seek out print products for the advertising, while in virtually all other media, they try to avoid the advertising. Never forget that:

***PRINT ADVERTISING IS A DESTINATION WHILE
ADVERTISING IN ALL OTHER MEDIA IS AN INTERRUPTION!***

Just think about how people interact with media. More than 44% of American homes now own a digital video recorder (DVR). One of the primary reasons people give for purchasing a DVR is the ability to fast forward through the ads on a recorded program. The cable and satellite TV companies actively market commercial free premium channels and video on demand services. Because television viewers will go to great lengths to avoid advertising, this has led major advertisers to forsake spot advertising in favor of using “product placement” within the programming. Ford actually produced their own TV series and offered it at no charge to NBC. Ford even allowed the network to sell the spot advertising around the program. “Escape routes” is a reality program where teams of attractive young people travel around the country in their Ford Escapes competing in a variety of challenges. Every scene of the program prominently featured the Ford vehicles. Since small advertisers can not afford to produce their own programs, they should question the value of television advertising.

Consumers have been trying to avoid radio advertising since the invention of the tuning knob. Radio broadcasters know that they are essentially the background noise in people’s lives. Gone are the days when the Waltons gathered around the radio and actively listened to their programming. To grab consumer attention, the radio industry has adopted the techniques employed by a spoiled five year old who feels they are being ignored by mom and dad—they get loud and obnoxious. This is why the volume spikes when an ad is broadcast and why most radio commercials are so annoying. This is also why so many people now subscribe to commercial free satellite radio or listen to online radio stations. The prevalence of iPods and MP3 players has also taken a big bite out of radio’s market share. Research indicates that the better educated and the more affluent consumers are, the less likely they are to listen to commercial radio. These are the same highly desirable consumers who tend to be active readers of print publications.

On line advertising has the same effect on consumers. Pop-up ads are slightly less popular than recreational root canal surgery. Most people delete these before they

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can even load. Banner ads are the billboards on the “information super highway.” Media experts discuss the effect of “banner blindness.” Many people can not recall even one banner after spending time online. People see the web as a way to zero in on the specific information they are interested in at the moment. This focus creates a form of tunnel vision which makes much web advertising ineffective.

When discussing print advertising I talk about quality as well as quantity. The “Adology” studies conducted by AdMall offer proof of this. This study not only asked consumers what media they had been exposed to, but also what media led them to take action. For the purposes of the study “action” was defined as contacting a business and/or making a purchase. In virtually every category, print ranks near the top. This is even the case when the people queried spent more time with other forms of media. Print’s ability to influence behavior per dollar spent is far greater than any other media. There are several reasons for print’s excellent ROI. People see advertising in print as “news.” They use papers as a resource to help them find the products and services they need. Free and community papers in particular are seen as “news that you can use.” Consumers want the access to local businesses, sales and coupons in their communities. Marketers know that “no one likes to be sold, but everyone likes to buy.” Print allows consumers to interact with the advertising on their own terms and on their own schedule. People can choose to read the paper whenever and wherever they want. Consumers don’t feel that the advertiser’s message is being “shoved down their throat.” Ironically, the fact that the reader is in control of the interaction gives print its powerful impact.

Print super charges the response from all other media. Because print is tangible and can deliver product details, it can motivate consumers to take action on what they’ve seen in other media. For example, a local restaurant runs a TV commercial that shows consumers enjoying delicious steaks in their dining room. This spot makes the viewer hungry for a steak dinner...but then the program returns and their focus shifts back to helping the CSIs solve the crime. A few days later that same person picks up a paper and sees an ad for the restaurant. They tell their spouse, “Hey here’s an ad for that place we saw on TV and there’s a coupon for a “buy one get one” steak dinner. The number’s right here. Let’s call them and make a reservation.” The TV ad raised awareness of the business, but few consumers would remember their number or even their name. The print ad fills in the blanks and gives them the information they need to act on their desires. Print can also be used to drive traffic to a client’s website or to reinforce the message from bill boards and other media. Because print provides the impetus for consumers to follow up on the messages delivered by other media, it has

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a place in every business's marketing plan. If a business can only afford to advertise in one place, print is the obvious choice, as it is the only media which can stand alone.

I some times feel that print is the "Rodney Dangerfield" of the advertising world. We "get no respect." This view is reinforced by news stories telling the public that "print is dead," and touting the rise of "new media." The truth is, print still "delivers the goods," and the customers. Print remains an affordable and effective way to attract customers to local businesses. As we've seen, making accurate predictions is never easy, but based on the facts I'm going to stick my neck out and say: "in the future when people need a new reactor core for their flying car, they'll still look in the paper for a coupon!"

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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