
The Value of Print Publications in a Digital-Only World



Printed materials might just be the best “new” tool for your marketing arsenal if you want to generate greater connection and impact with members.

Almost time to create or update marketing strategies around membership growth, retention, or advocacy? If you’re like most associations, your budgets are tight and your marketing calendar is stuffed with current and upcoming projects. You read blog after blog that harps on how no one reads, and that attention spans are at an all-time low. These realities can cause many of us in communication roles to feel as though our only options for upcoming campaigns are tried-and-true emails, social media, and branded landing pages.

But recent cognitive research—and my own association’s experience—suggests that life exists outside the digital world. Here’s why printed materials might just be the best “new” tool for your marketing arsenal.

Print communicates value and commitment. Here at the National Strength and Conditioning Association, we recently launched a new campaign to reach athletic directors and high school administrators to communicate the need for and value of strength and conditioning coaches. Our initial approach was to produce a branded landing page on our website, supported by promotions on social media, in emails, and at tradeshow. After working with our members and influencers within that market, we decided to make a print investment as well with customized inserts for pocket folders.



This kit has generated considerable response and enthusiasm within our high school coaching segment. Coaches now have something tangible to present to their administrators, and the kit is a physical reminder for both audiences that having qualified strength coaches supervising their weight rooms will benefit students and the school in terms of injury reduction, health improvement, and gender equity.

Receiving something in print communicates that time, effort, and financial resources were spent to produce the materials, a message that our members appreciated. Perhaps it's time for your association to audit and rank the messages it sends to existing and potential members, identifying which ones have the greatest value in terms of new initiatives, foundational principles, or connection to its core mission. Those initiatives should be given special focus, with consideration given to a print component.

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Print engages people differently than digital. A *Forbes* article noted that "neuroscience research shows paper-based content and ads offer special advantages in connecting with our brains." Messages on paper are in a context different than a person's smartphone, iPad, or desktop; this difference allows the reader an opportunity to pause, connect, and engage in a deeper way than consuming that message on a "distraction device." In addition, Temple University consumer neuroscience researchers found that print can more effectively connect emotionally with consumers than digital.

Think about it: If all our important messages to new and potential members arrive only through the same devices that constantly remind them how busy and overcommitted, they already are, how likely is it that we will capture their attention and stir them to action?

Print complements existing digital campaigns. There are excellent and valid reasons why the digital medium is often superior to print. It's cost-effective and can be instantly changed, customized, and updated. It easily facilitates actions we want members to take—registering for events and purchasing products, for example.

Print can complement these "what" and "how" elements with a "why it matters" message. For example, could a future national conference campaign be helped with a creative print piece on why attending an in-person conference matters in the first place? Or could a future advocacy campaign be strengthened by a powerful and simple message in print about why your association is passionate about the issue? Perhaps print is the needed, and sometimes missing, element that can engage the heart in a way our digital-only campaigns simply can't.

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