



There is a lot to love about print, ask any digital media pro

by D.B. Hebbard

The launching of print magazines by some digital media properties has some publishers and media observers scratching their heads. If print is dying why would a digital publisher want to launch a print product? The answer is simple enough: print is not dying (though it may be declining).

It is not hard to understand at all why a digital property would launch a print magazine—it is the same reasons a print magazine would launch a website or a tablet edition: brand extension, diversification of products and revenue streams, etc. But a better answer might simply be that coming from a digital media perspective, one more easily sees when print is the answer.

Occasionally those of us intimately involved in digital media find ourselves on the other side of the argument with print publishers when talking about the platform—with digital media pros pointing out that print still offers many things digital still does not (like shelf life, familiarity, authority, etc.). That is not to say that digital platforms can't have these attributes, as well—just that print really does many things well.

What brings a chuckle, though, is when the conversation turns to efforts to make print more like digital. Publishers that use augmented reality, QR codes, and other efforts to make their products more interactive seem to me to be missing the point. If one wants an interactive magazine, one might consider the platform that does this best, like tablets, rather than trying to cut corners.

I have said for many years that the reason many publishers get locked into their print editions is that they see their product as the print magazine rather than their content or brands. If the print magazine or newspaper is your product—period—then everything else is competing with you. But if it is your content and brand, then you feel free to create many products around that content, including digital ones like mobile and tablet editions, blogs and associated websites. If *The Washington Post* newspaper IS the product, funding a digital start-up, in other words, seems a foreign idea. But if the news and information generated by the staff of the *Post* is the product, then packaging that content in infinite ways becomes a logical way to do business.

Not a month goes by that I am not pitched a story about some new product that will make print *more like digital*. I usually decline. If you want your print magazine to be more like a tablet magazine, I usually ask, why not create a tablet magazine? The answer I am given varies, but the answer I believe is "because this is what I'm selling publishers today."

I think no one loves and appreciates print more than a digital media pro who has worked in print. When I read stories online from tech sites that denigrate print (or tablet editions) I immediately check out the background of the author—often they are new to the business and have only worked online. Their position, in the end, is no different than that of a print publisher who doubts the future of the web, or mobile, or tablets.

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I suppose I should be a little less dogmatic and admit that there may be a place in print for gimmicks that make print act more like digital. But they are, as far as I'm concerned, just that... gimmicks. Like the 3D magazine cover, or the QR code. They probably have their place.

But when you build a tablet magazine you immediately understand that every part of that publication can be interactive—often in ways that are simply not possible in print. But the print magazine has advantages for readers that tablets struggle with, too—like the ability to quickly thumb your way through the print magazine to see what lies within, like the ability to tear out a page, almost without thinking about it, shoving it into your back pocket for referring to later.

Maybe the problem with many print publications today is that they are run by executives who fail to see the value in print. Maybe they should talk to some digital media folks, they'll tell them why print is still a great platform.

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