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People Prefer It. Businesses Depend On It. What's Next For Print Media?

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Two out of Three Americans Prefer Print Media In Spite of the Benefits of the Digital Revolution

NEW YORK – According to new research, digital media is no substitute for traditional printed media. A recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of Earthtone suggests that most people choose how they consume media based on personal preferences.

Research shows that the majority of U.S. adults think that printed media is easier to read than the digital equivalent. Interestingly, most adults reported that they feel more comfortable when they have something on paper than when it's on screen, suggesting that we make an instinctive association between things we can touch and feel and things that are 'real'.

At the same time, many adults also showed a preference for the immediacy that digital media offers. We value the real time information from around the world, the ability to find the music we love in seconds, and the low cost of web-based communications.

“You can exchange a dozen emails in the time it takes to find a stamp for your snail mail, but a handwritten birthday card in your mailbox somehow means more than an identically worded email in your inbox,” says Nader Alaghband, founder and CEO, Earthtone. “Simply put, we choose new, digital media where it adds value and we opt for traditional media when that's what's best for us.”

The Paperless Office

Predicting a paperless future has been de rigeur for decades, but the Earthtone survey shows that most employed adults (58 percent) think that the paperless office is unlikely to become a reality any time soon.

People's preference for print offers one explanation for this widespread skepticism. Nearly two out of three (64 percent) workers prefer ink on paper to a computer screen when it comes to reading. Interestingly, even workers in technology and telecommunications companies agreed that reading in print was easier than reading online, with 70 percent preferring paper, as compared to 57 percent of adults employed in the banking, finance, and insurance industries.¹

However, employee preference may not be the primary reason why nearly six out of ten don't envision working in a paperless office in the next five years. In fact, businesses depend on print because some compliance rules require them to retain records in hardcopy. As a result print will continue to be a mission critical business function until regulators



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While a challenging economic climate may have eroded most consumers' commitment to the environment, with two in three U.S. adults (67 percent) agreeing that they care more about saving money than "being green," companies' commitment to the environment remains strong, with only 11 percent of employed adults reporting that their company is now less likely to choose "green" products if it means spending more money. An often-overlooked opportunity for these businesses lies in changing workers' printing habits. For many small businesses, outsourced printing is a cost-efficient way to be green.

In addition to investing in print hardware that rarely operates at capacity, otherwise cost-conscious businesses regularly find themselves paying more than they have to for ink, paper, and other consumables. The cost of maintaining extensive in-house print capacity is compounded by gratuitous usage. Each printed page costs only a few pennies and employees are very unlikely to consider the aggregate cost of unnecessary printing to the business they work for.

In fact, according to the survey, nearly four out of five workers whose company outsources at least some of their printing (79 percent) said that they do so at least once a year. Because printing out-of-house bears a more obvious – albeit lower – cost, it is rare to find people using a print shop unnecessarily.

In addition to cutting costs and minimizing waste, printing through the cloud makes it easier for environmentally-responsible businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. By using Earthtone – a service that offers free carbon offsets on every print job – businesses and users can find, compare and choose one of a growing number of greener suppliers for their outsourced printing needs.

Additional findings from the survey include the following:

- 68 percent of employed adults feel more comfortable when they have something on paper than on screen.
- 64 percent of employed adults say reading in print is easier than reading on screen.
- One fourth of employed adults (26 percent) report that their company outsources its printing at least once a year, and one fifth (19 percent) say their employer orders prints online at least once yearly.
- Less than half of employed adults (42 percent) think the paperless office will become a reality at the companies they work for in the next five years.

The survey covered a range of topics, including:

- Corporate and personal attitudes toward green procurement.
- Online shopping trends amongst businesses.
- Preferred media amongst consumers.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online by Harris Interactive on behalf of Earthtone between July 14 and July 16, 2009 among 2,265 U.S. adults ages 18+. Data were weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population. Complete methodology – including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes – are available upon request.



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About Earthtone

Earthtone is the first comparison site for printing. Our vendor-neutral marketplace helps small businesses cut printing costs by making it easy to compare quotes, services, reviews and environmental credentials from hundreds of independent print shops across the US. As a gateway to a large and rapidly growing network of printing locations, we offer users choice-rich on-demand printing, wherever they are, whenever they need. For more information about Earthtone, please visit: www.earthtone.net.

1 Data based on small sample sizes (n=78 adults employed in technology or telecommunications, n=73 adults employed in banking, finance, or insurance) – results should be interpreted as directional in nature.

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