

43RD ANNUAL PRINT DESIGN SURVEY

This special report is sponsored by MAN Roland, as a service to graphic design and production professionals. The 150-year-old global leader in the manufacture of printing presses and related products recently announced plans to become a fully-independent public company. The announcement comes on the heels of a number of record-setting sales in several areas. "An independent MAN Roland will be a more responsive MAN Roland for North American printers," said Yves Rogivue, CEO of MAN Roland Inc. "We've always put our customers' needs first. Our new, independent structure will allow us to further focus our dedication to the printer in terms of advanced technology and support." Among the many ways that MAN Roland distinguishes itself, it has long been a designer-friendly company that respects the power of print and the role of the creative community in shaping high-quality printing. For information about its Printing for Creatives seminar series, contact: www.manroland.com.



BULK



GRAIN



WEIGHT



WEAVE

PRINT AND TRUST

SEVERAL OVERARCHING THEMES JOSTLED FOR THE LEAD HEADLINE IN OUR ANNUAL PRINT DESIGN AND PRODUCTION SURVEY. AMONG THEM:

The continued predominance of print and collateral as the way designers earn a living.

The growing interest in recycled papers and environmentally-friendly practices writ large.

The continued rise of digital printing and digital workflow.

And the demand for greater education about efficient and effective print, prepress and paper options.

But in the end, we could not ignore the interwoven concepts of credibility and trust, which seem to light the path toward print's role and future in graphic communications.



JACKET



TRIM

THIS LINKAGE OF PRINT WITH CREDIBILITY AND TRUST ARISES FROM A COUPLE OF POINTS EXPRESSED BY RESPONDENTS.

POINT ONE. Print continues to display the classic strengths that have made it a powerful communicator over the ages: permanence, tangibility, sensuality, physicality, convenience, portability. These qualities and characteristics are more important than ever in the ephemeral world of digital communications, say many readers, because they offer an impact, a physical experience and a human connection that is disappearing from our daily lives.

POINT TWO. Taking this a step beyond where it has gone before, a quality printed piece provides credibility to the message and trust by, for and about the messenger. Credibility? Why should that be, since the content of message is the same whether it is printed, posted, broadcast, streamed, podcast or whatever? Trust? Aren't computers and digital transmissions and email as trustworthy as print in the execution of communications? As it turns out, GDUSA readers say, not exactly. Rather, it seems that, once again, the medium is the message.

Here is the essence of an argument that keeps bubbling to the surface. The very tangibility, physicality and sensuality of print suffuses the content with a sense of authenticity. The message feels real, it looks real, it springs from an identifiable source, a real person, a real location, an act of craftsmanship, an intelligence to which one can relate, a human connectedness. And the result is something visible, permanent, touchable, an archive, a reference, a resource that does not arrive via thin air and will not disappear into thin air. Taken together, this gives the printed message and the printed piece a simple but ultimately profound weight. Does this hold up to logic? Not in the strictest sense. But it holds up to designers' real life professional and personal experience. Print and paper give content — and the content creator — a certain extra degree of credibility and accountability that an electronic transmission often does not.

This positive or aspirational view of print is buttressed, as well, by lingering doubts about online communications. One such concern is knowing how to evaluate whether information — from news to history to marketing and sales messages on the web — is legitimate or not. A second deals with the fear that digital technology is not quite safe or secure, apt to lose data and documents or to compromise privacy. And a third doubt has to do with the promise of measurability, that is, whether the vaunted ROI and metrics meaningful or jumbled, valid or manipulated. This may all be as simple as saying that digital transmissions are too easy and, at the same time, too fragile to convey certain messages, and too diffuse to be the repository of a business and personal past. Time and technology will presumably alleviate many of these problems, but right now they are casting a shadow.



DOTS



LINES

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PROJECTS INVOLVE DESIGNING FOR PRINT?

76%

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR TIME IS SPENT DESIGNING FOR PRINT?

71%

Is the celebration of print a “generation gap” matter or the rant of print professionals who simply long for the old days? Partly yes, but largely no. The digital revolution is here, and most everyone surveyed for this reports embraces it for its speed, ease of use, breadth of access, its stunning growth and power. Indeed, much of the future success of GDUSA readers — and, frankly, of GDUSA itself — depends on being able to deliver an effective multichannel message

However, the 43rd annual paper survey may be seen a clarion call for everyone to relax, take a deep breath and step away from the keyboard. Step. Away. From. The. Keyboard. Print and paper have classic strengths — permanence, tangibility, sensuality, portability, convenience — that project legitimacy in an increasingly remote, disconnected, impersonal communications world. This is a fact, say our readers, ignored by creatives and marketers at their peril.

91% Work In Print

Let’s turn now to the numbers. The 2006 survey shows how vital print work is to graphic designers. The benchmark question each year is how many readers — art and design professionals at graphic design studios, advertising agencies, corporations, publishers, media companies and other institutions — design for print as part of their jobs. This year, 91% of respondents say they design for print, a huge number that is more or less consistent with every survey in memory.

This year we also asked what percentage of projects involve print design either completely or in part. Here, too, the dominant role of print stands out. GDUSA readers report that 76% of their projects are standalone print or have a substantial print component to them. Similarly, when asked what percentage of time is spent designing for print, the average is 71%.

If more than nine in ten respondents design for print, for what other media are they designing, and how does this compare? The survey finds that 70% of readers say they have been working on point-of-purchase and sign design projects, 62% in packaging, 62% in web design, 31% in environmental graphics. Last but not least, TV, film video and motion graphics logs in at 28%.

A few thoughts to take away. First, these figures demonstrate that creative firms and departments continue to be involved in varied and complementary projects in diverse media. The phenomenon

of the content creator is at the center of responsibility and control over multiple media is the basis for the graphic design community’s considerable influence on communications, as well as its buying and specifying power. Second, print projects are key to how designers actually make a living, a conclusion confirmed by our TrendWatch Graphic Arts strategic allies (www.trendwatch-graphicarts.com), who find that “print and collateral” remains the leading sales opportunity for creative firms. Third, point-of-purchase and package design remain very high in the creative business mix, which makes sense since they have some of the physical attributes and appeal of print and, if anything, are even less impacted by new electronic media than print.

Web design remains important, as well. Again, the result comports nicely with a recent TrendWatch survey that found that “web page design” — which had ebbed badly as a source of creative business after the dotcom bust — is on the rise. This is especially the case as the first generation of websites need makeovers and, also, as designers become more adept at website maintenance in addition to design. One logical explanation for the continuing strength of print, even while web work rebounds, is that cross-media projects — which encompass print and web components — are increasingly common. We asked explicitly about “Cross Media” for the first time in this year’s print survey; 23% of respondents said they had worked on such projects during the past year.

WHAT TYPES OF MEDIA HAVE YOU DESIGNED FOR IN THE PAST YEAR?

- 91% Print
- 70% POP/Sign/Display
- 62% Internet
- 62% Packaging
- 31% Environmental Graphics
- 28% Broadcast/Film/Video

Brochures and Collateral Lead

What kinds of print projects have creative firms been working on in the past year? The relative frequency of these projects remains fairly consistent over time. Brochures and collateral is the perennial leader and, again, ranks first in today's report. The sales promotion and direct mail categories follow closely, and cards, invitations and announcements and identity and letterhead round out the top five. That brochures, collateral and sales promotion sit on top is no surprise; the categories are broad and useful, and have long been the staples of creative firms. More interesting are the next few categories, each of which scored higher than ever. Direct mail and cards, announcements and invitations can be seen as part of a "warming" trend in a sea of cool, electronic communications, more personalized and customized forms of print that reflect the rise in one-to-one marketing and personalized communication — even handwritten notes — at the expense of mass media and mass advertising.



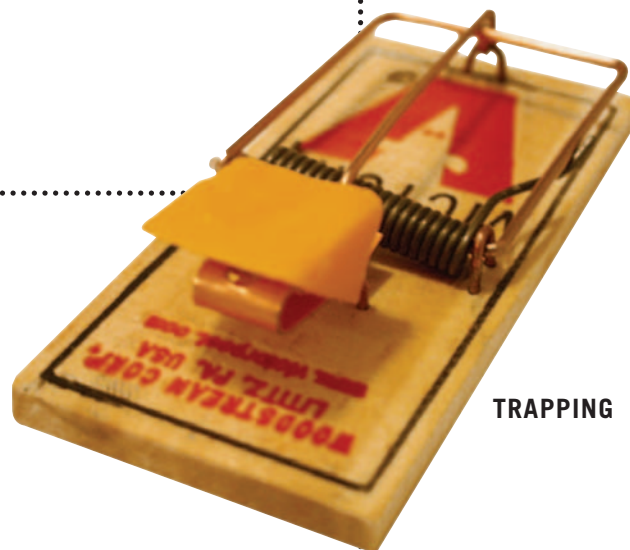
BINDING

WHAT KINDS OF PRINT PROJECTS HAVE YOU WORKED ON IN THE PAST YEAR? (IN ORDER)

1. BROCHURES AND COLLATERAL
2. SALES PROMOTION
3. DIRECT MAIL
4. CARDS/INVITATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
5. IDENTITY/LETTERHEAD
6. POSTERS
7. PACKAGING/POP/SIGNS
8. PRINT ADVERTISING
9. ANNUAL/CORPORATE REPORTS
10. PUBLICATIONS/PERIODICALS



CROP



TRAPPING

91% Buy Printing

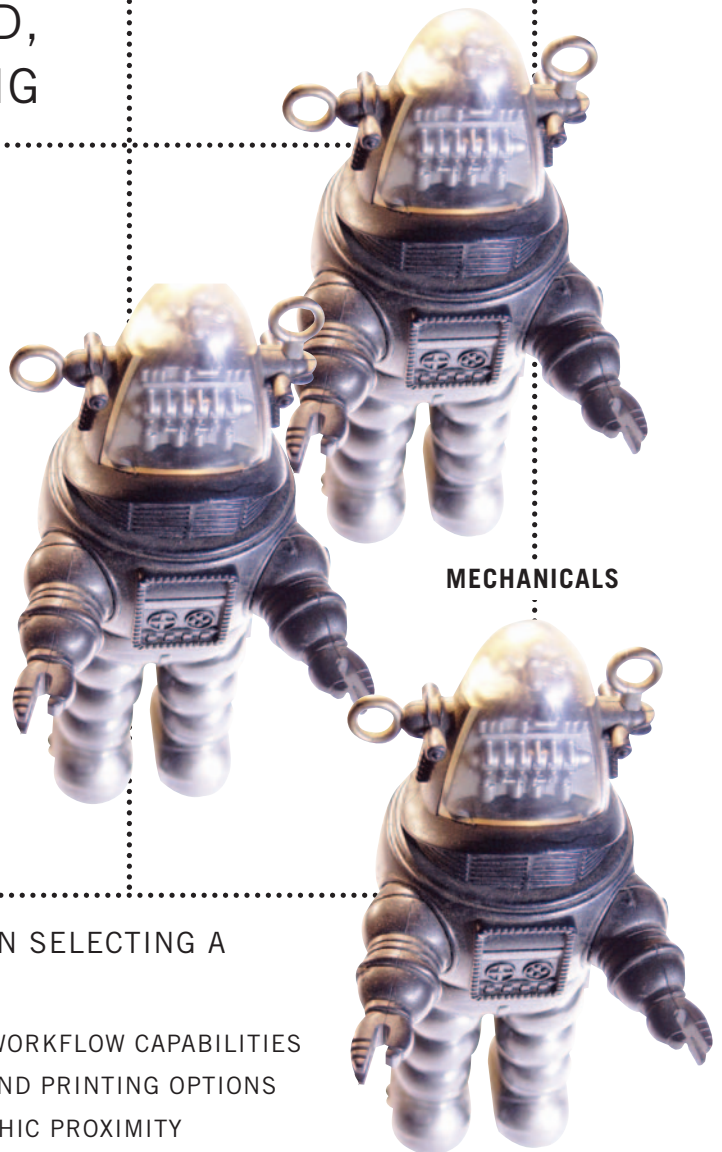
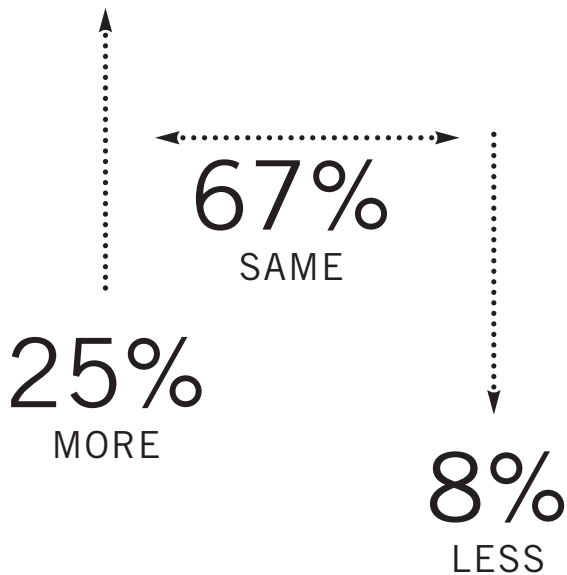
Print buying among creative professionals has been a growth activity for several years. The reasons: the traditional walls between design and production have come crashing down, and the number of firms operating in a hierarchical manner with a dedicated print buyer function have dwindled. For the second year in a row, slightly more than nine-in-ten respondents say they buy printing, at least sometimes, as part of their jobs. And as in the past couple of years, more designers say they are buying more printing than in the recent past. As for what they look for in a commercial printer? That answer, too, is similar to last year's response: Price and quality, of course, but also trust, reputation and a commitment to service.



DUMMY

91% SPECIFY, RECOMMEND, APPROVE OR BUY PRINTING

ARE YOU BUYING PRINTING MORE OR LESS OFTEN THAN IN THE RECENT PAST?



MECHANICALS

WHAT FACTORS ARE MOST IMPORTANT WHEN SELECTING A COMMERCIAL PRINTER?

1. QUALITY
2. PRICE
3. TRUST, REPUTATION
4. STRONG CUSTOMER SERVICE
5. TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE
6. DIGITAL WORKFLOW CAPABILITIES
7. ON-DEMAND PRINTING OPTIONS
8. GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY
9. STATE OF THE ART EQUIPMENT
10. EASY TO USE WEBSITE

Digital Printing is Mainstream

We have also seen technologies that were once unique become common. Digital short run printing — which this survey has tracked over the years through the theoretical lens of Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* — is surely one of those technologies. If we could come up with another metaphor as apt, we would, mercifully, use it. But no concept quite so perfectly describes what we have been documenting: that creative firms have embraced digital printing as image quality has improved, as designers become educated about specific advantages of the technology, and as the service has become more accessible. Last year, we were quoted widely as having declared that adoption of digital short run printing had moved from alternative to mainstream and had, indeed, "tipped."

Today, we report a new record level of use: nearly three-in-four respondents in our survey — 72%, to be exact — report having used digital short run printing in the past year.

A couple of points to note. First, the trend does not appear to be abating. More than a quarter of respondents say they are buying or spec'ing digital printing more often, and a mere 7% report turning to it less often.

Second, in the past, designers have been standoffish about one of the most theoretically compelling advantages of the technology — the ability to customize and personalize. Many print buyers have viewed these capabilities, which meld sophisticated database marketing with print design and output, as too difficult to master or unnecessary to their projects. However, this year's results suggest that the tide may be turning here, too, as customization capabilities become a major reason for choosing the technology.

72% SPECIFY,
RECOMMEND,
APPROVE OR
BUY DIGITAL
SHORT RUN
PRINTING

DO YOU SPECIFY, RECOMMEND, APPROVE OR BUY
DIGITAL SHORT RUN PRINTING?



WHY DO YOU USE DIGITAL SHORT RUN/ON DEMAND PRINTING?

- QUICK TURNAROUND
- PRICE
- MORE PRECISE PRINT RUNS
- ABILITY TO CUSTOMIZE
- EASE OF DIGITAL WORKFLOW
- COLOR ACCURACY
- PAPER CHOICES
- ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLINESS

PLATED

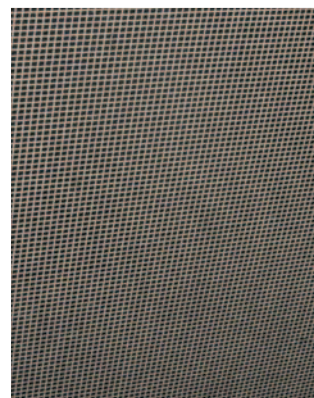


88% Specify Paper

As a companion figure to the 91% of readers who work in print and the 91% who buy printing, the 2006 survey also establishes that 88% of readers specify, recommend, approve or buy the paper used in print projects. This figure is similar to last year's survey, and within a few percentage points of the high watermark reached in the mid-1990s. In the context of history, this figure is substantially higher than two, three or four decades ago, when the commercial printer and the paper distributor were largely in control of the final paper decision, when paper choices were more limited and when graphic designers had less influence. As we have noted in the past, the growth in responsibility and control by the creative community over paper decisions foreshadowed its control over all aspects of production — hardware, software, prepress, workflow, proofing, print buying and the like.

With regard to paper specifying, the comments captured later in the special report tell much of the story: Creatives are remarkably committed to, and enthusiastic about, paper and what it represents in their personal and professional lives. They fully understand that the cacophony of our digital age is actually making the well-designed and well-specified printed piece more persuasive and valuable. And they comprehend that paper character and quality can make or break, enhance or undermine, a project or campaign.

At the same time, the comments also reveal a faultline in the graphic arts today between quality and commoditization, between good and good enough, between the judgement of the designer and that of the client. Paper specification, it would appear, stands astride that faultline.



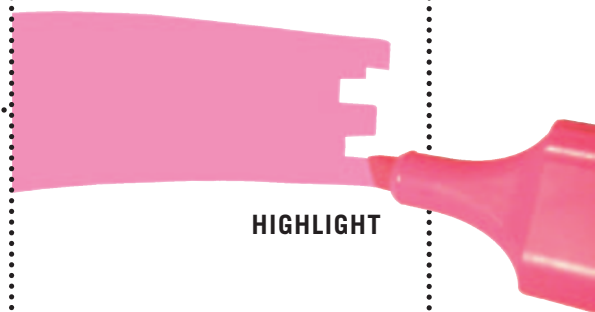
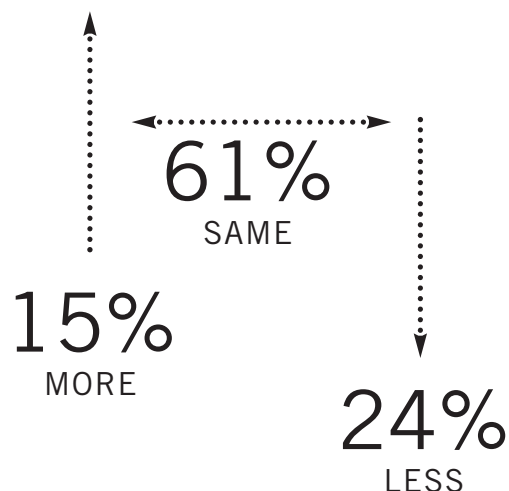
SCREEN



SHADOW

88% SPECIFY, RECOMMEND, APPROVE OR BUY PAPER

ARE YOU SPECIFYING PAPER MORE,
LESS OR THE SAME AS LAST YEAR?



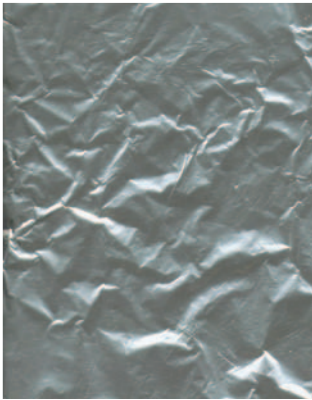
HIGHLIGHT

Types of Paper



COATED

What types of papers are graphic designers specifying or buying? In 2006, there is little change at the top. Coateds (predominantly Sheetfed) and Uncoated Text & Covers continue to sit in a virtual tie atop the leader board. Letterheads and envelopes remain stubbornly high on the list, despite the advent of email. Opaques remain popular for their straightforward value proposition, and Translucents for the look, layering and texture that many designers crave. All these categories are the staples of the business — suitable for brochures, collateral, sales promotion, annual reports, identity programs, direct mail, posters, cards and invitations and other mainstream print communication — so the results are gratifying but not terribly surprising.



FOIL

WHAT KINDS OF PAPER HAVE YOU SPECIFIED IN THE PAST YEAR? (IN ORDER)

1. UNCOATED TEXT & COVER
2. COATED SHEETFED/WEB
3. WRITING/LETTERHEADS
4. RECYCLED PAPERS
5. OPAQUES
6. TRANSLUCENTS
7. COLOR COPY/INKJET/LASER PAPERS
8. SYNTHETICS/TEAR RESISTANTS
9. DIGITAL PRINTING PAPERS
10. HOLOGRAPHICS/METALLICS



EGGSHELL



Environmental Matters Writ Large

The 2006 survey suggests an accelerating interest in environmental papers and practices. More designers say they are specifying recycled, they are doing it somewhat more often, and they see themselves as the primary driver in the decision to use a recycled paper. This reveals itself in direct questions about specifying recycled papers, as well as the heady position of “recycled papers” (4th place) in the general question regarding what kinds of papers designers specify.

Reader comments indicate both a greater interest in recycled papers and, perhaps more importantly, a greater level of sophistication and broader perspective on the whole issue writ large. That is, designers are increasingly concerned about sustainability and increasingly interested in specifying environmentally-friendly materials made by mills with environmentally-friendly policies regarding manufacturing, purchasing and stewardship. They note that select mills are responding to these concerns on a dual level: presenting quality recycled options in virtually every printing and writing paper category, and instituting and documenting certifying “green” practices as much as possible.

Several barriers continue to present themselves to the full blossoming of this segment. Price matters in virtually every job, and recycled are either more expensive or are broadly perceived as such. Aesthetics matter, and while the handmade look and feel of some recycled grades are a plus, there remain lingering concerns about the look and performance of recycled for mainstream projects. The level of client interest or commitment to the environment also matters; clients care to differing degrees about being, or appearing to be, socially responsible via environmentally-friendly purchasing. Thus, even the best intentions of creative professionals are often trumped by concerns about price, performance or aesthetics.

Finally, there is the question of education. Designers say they are in the best position to motivate greater use of recycled and environmentally-friendly papers. They also say that they need to know more in order to make informed choices and to sell those choices to the client. This is particularly important now that the issues are not solely about paper quality and recycled content per se, but have expanded to deal with broader questions of sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

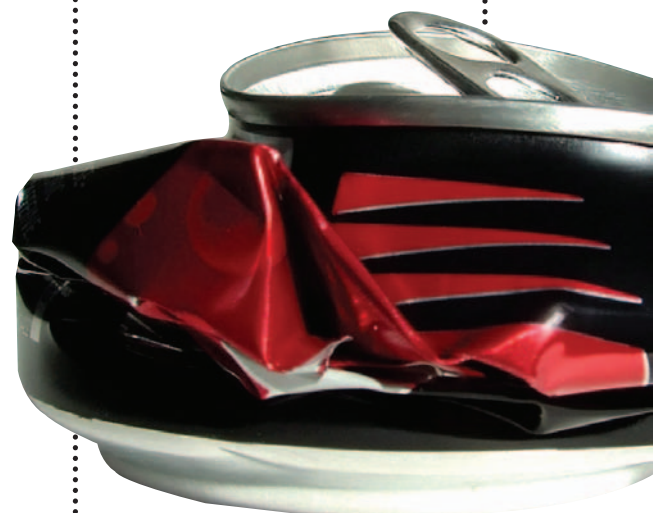
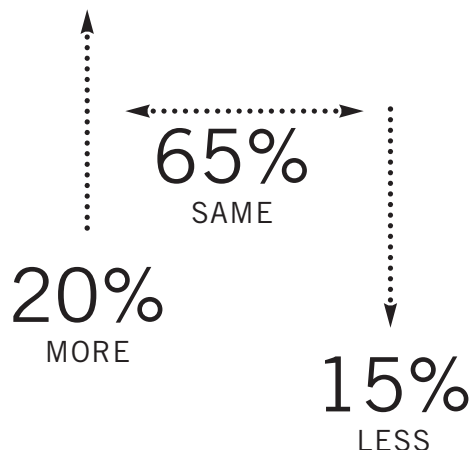
59% SPECIFY
RECYCLED
PAPER

72% DO NOT
UNDERSTAND
THE MEANING
OF MAJOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
AND
CERTIFICATION
PROGRAM
SYMBOLS

WHERE DOES THE
IMPETUS COME FOR
YOU TO USE
RECYCLED PAPERS?

60% DESIGNER
28% CLIENT
11% VENDORS
1% OTHER

ARE YOU SPECIFYING RECYCLED PAPERS MORE OR
LESS OFTEN THAN IN THE PAST?



RECYCLED

Controlling the Paper Decision

Who actually controls the paper decision? The question has long intrigued the industry, and there has been a competitive tension among creatives, clients, production people, printers and paper merchants. To address this matter, we ask readers to rank, on a scale from one to 10 — with 10 being the most important — which titles or functions most influence the final paper decision. For the seventh straight year, the figures support two basic conclusions.

One is that designers rank themselves very high — this year it is 8.4 on the scale of 1 to 10. That is slightly above the moving average of the past six years, and higher than in past decades, though modestly lower than last year. And more than half of the designers ranked themselves at 9 or 10. The statistics are further supported by heartfelt comments to the effect that designers care deeply about paper and substrates since materials are fundamental to the final output. Admittedly, it is human nature to see oneself as special, so it is not a total surprise that designers rank themselves high on the scale. Still, the strength of the perception is enlightening as well as empowering in itself.

The other conclusion, also reflected in the comments, is that “the client” is an integral part of the decision. At 6.2 out of 10, the result is up slightly from last year and way above the historical average. Why are clients increasingly assertive? As we hypothesized last year: more knowledge about graphic design and its elements than their predecessors; greater cost-consciousness than ever, in an era of making do with less; greater competition among multiple media for the marketing budget; or, in the zeitgeist of the times, more license to “partner” with creative firms when it comes to big decisions. Whatever the reason, many of the respondents’ comments evoke a conundrum — on the one hand, creatives rank themselves as highly influential as ever in the final paper decision. On the other hand, they tell us consistently that clients are putting restraints on paper choices. A perfect example of why the exact locus of a paper specification is so elusive.



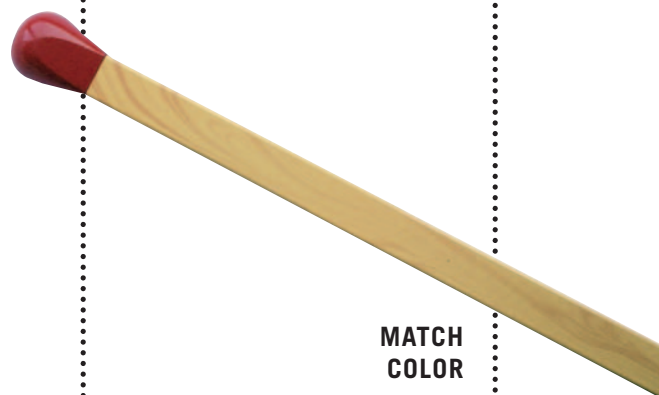
GRIND



GUTTER

WHO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT IN MAKING THE FINAL PAPER SELECTION?

1. GRAPHIC DESIGNER/ART DIRECTOR/CREATIVE (8.4)
2. CLIENT/CUSTOMER (6.2)
3. PRODUCTION MANAGER/PURCHASING AGENT (4.8)
5. PRINTER/PRINT SALES REP (4.7)
4. PAPER MERCHANT/SPEC REPRESENTATIVE (3.9)
6. PREPRESS SHOP (1.3)
7. OFFICE SUPPLY STORE (0.8)



**MATCH
COLOR**

Are print and paper still relevant to your professional life?

Yes, traditional print and paper has a very tactile and personal interactive feeling. It's still more pleasurable to relax, pick up a catalog, book, etc. at my leisure and read, enjoy, study and feel the paper. Staring through web pages for hours on end is not a personal experience for anyone other than for seeking quick research, email, etc.

— Robert Case, The Sherwin Williams Co., Cleveland OH

We will never become the fabled “paperless” society. “Paperless” is an option, not a replacement, except in the areas of research (web) and reference (I don't reach for Volumes E-G of *Encyclopedia Britannica* anymore) and entertainment (digital games). People just like paper. Inherent in paper is a certain credibility and accountability. If it's in print, it's true and someone is accountable. People like the physical characteristics of paper, especially when used correctly — the texture, the smell, the wrinkles and folds. Even the tears and stains and paper cuts.

— Craig P. Brenard, Craig Communications, Oceanside NY

Print and paper are still very relevant. Although “paperless” forms of advertising and communication are rising and are becoming just as prevalent as printed pieces, nothing can compete with a printed piece. Professionally, it is my choice, because of the sense of touch, the different textures and printing techniques available convey another level of communication. Personally, it is just that: sending someone a printed piece is much more personal than email/e-card, etc.

— Jessica Brickman, Adrenaline Graphix, Sayreville NJ

Print and paper are very relevant. If we're using less paper, there's not much sign of it. I still read the paper daily and three magazines per month. The continuing advantage of print is its ability to be anywhere, anytime and not be restricted by size, bandwidth, coverage, color or electronic failure. It can also be digested at the user's discretion. A car dealer can give you a brochure with a CD, but you probably won't watch the CD.

— Joe Adams, Creative Alliance, Louisville KY

Working at a print publication, I see businesses moving toward television and web. The advantage I see print having over TV and the web is that you can take it with you, whereas a TV commercial comes and goes in 30 seconds and an e-card or website will never match a great-looking full-page ad.

— Samuel Drew, Suburban Communications, Middlefield OH

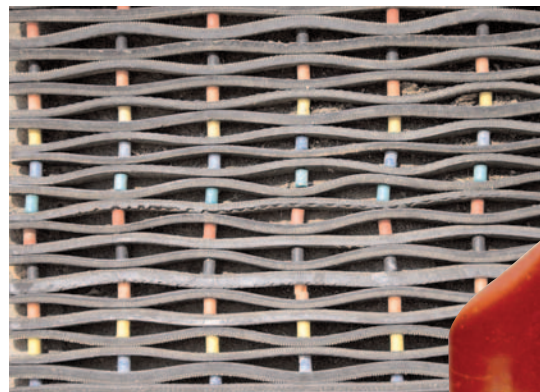
PRINT CAN NEVER BE REPLACED.

It's a tangible experience. The web is resurging, which is fragmenting the media mix. As a marketer, I use print materials to help create relationships. This relationship-building is crucial.

— Emily Grote, USA Today, New York NY

Print and paper will always play a major role in my professional life, as well as my personal life. Print provides that tangible security of feeling, seeing and maybe smelling. Visually, print allows designers like myself to fully communicate our creativity and provide a message with a lot of impact. Versus a digital medium, print is timeless. Only when a designer can successfully design in print is he or she a master of creative communication. Great design from a Paul Rand or a Wolfgang Weingart can be appreciated even to this day.

— William Sangster, Maydesign, Hanover PA



MATTE



GLOSS

Are print and paper still relevant to your professional life?

When it comes to the world of advertising, the medium of print is still “in your face,” which is pretty much what advertisers want. It causes the reader to react and respond. People who frequent the web purchase what they need, but the web in itself doesn’t seem to have the power to inspire consumerism as print and TV do. So far, driving consumers to the web without the visual stimulus of print is a tough sell. Print is in a strong partnership with other media, and that role shows no sign of weakening.

— Robert Schadler, Epoch 5 Graphic Design Group, East Norwich NY

For some purposes, people still need to feel the paper, to hold something in their hands, such as bank statements and bills. The growing importance of the web in so many areas of American life is still “scary” to some, especially of the older generations. As long as the baby boomers are still around, it will not become a reality of day-to-day life.

— Jesse Richardson, Easley SC

Product literature in print form is still a sales force requirement. However, more and more requests are being made for web literature in PDF format, Powerpoint presentations, interactive stuff on CD/DVD. Our younger salespeople are making this request more than the old guard. Print media is still shaking out, making a transition and finding its place in the digital age.

— Larry Dombrowski, Signode Packaging Systems, Glenview IL

Print and paper are still relevant. In the same way that a pencil on paper has an immediacy and instinctive feel about it, so does the experience of holding and viewing a printed item. There are tactile, visual and explorative elements to print that can never be reached with just a screen. The internet is often a great first port of call for information, but it lacks depth. I can attest to this with the great number of manuals, publications and subscriptions I have. The print world and web are like a washer and dryer — both useful and great when working together to get things done.

— Richard A. Hooper, Reinnov8, Greensburg PA

PRINT IS STILL VERY RELEVANT.

It has more credibility than web, TV and radio. I’ve been hearing about the “paperless” society, but I’m drowning in print and more makes my wastebasket every week.

— Robert Carrison, Carrison Design, Norfolk MA

Print is still strong in the graphic design industry because it is tangible and thus creates greater impact. For example, our company creates its own monthly newsletter. Most people prefer the hard copy over a digital file that may get lost in the email inbox. We also create packaging and sign designs, which cannot be replaced digitally. Of course there are advantages to digital files, for example, it can be shown to multiple people in one email.

— Debbie Tieu, Atico International, Ft. Lauderdale FL

If I could see 20 years into the future, I could give you the answer. If it is indeed a paperless society, I would be saddened. I am uncomfortable putting all my faith in a computer that could crash or forever lose important data. I am big on retaining hard copies. As a creative individual, I feel a stronger connection to a printed piece that someone can touch and feel, or can amuse or inform or persuade — than one where someone can press a key and eliminate all our effort without a chance. So I hope we achieve a middle ground where digital communications work side-by-side with a media mix that includes newspapers, magazines and direct mail. The internet is wonderful, but its also a big throwaway sometimes. I enjoy the convenience of email but it falls far below even the personal interaction of a phone call. In all things, I try to achieve a balance. I hope the world does, too.

— Stan Ogen, Ogen Creative Services, Cherry Hill NJ

Does the quality, character or brand of paper still matter to the outcome of a graphic design project? Do designers still care?



GRADE

PAPER CHARACTER AND QUALITY ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THEY HAVE EVER BEEN.

In fact, as websites have become the great equalizer in business imaging, it is even more important than in the past. People expect the print collateral to deliver the quality of image that their website projects cannot.

— Matthew Pendergraft, Pendegraphics Design Group, Bartlesville OK



SCORE

Paper is still an important part of the printing process. There is always a need for quality papers. It may not be obvious to the consumer, but it weighs heavily in a very objective way. A consumer may receive a printed piece and may not know why the piece feels more competent or trustworthy, but it does.

— J. Mark Rokfalusi, Rokfalusi Design, Atlanta GA

In more than half of our jobs, specific papers are chosen because they apply to or enhance the design. This is not budget-based but design-based.

— Tracy Fujihara, Outhouse Design, Chicago IL

The quality and character of a paper still drive me to select one brand over another. I have had great ideas fall flat because of paper issues. On the other hand, if time, availability and price are issues, I would (and have) selected a less expensive brand.

— A. Campbell, Lakewood OH

Yes, paper makes a huge difference to the outcome of the final project. There are a great many papers out there, so finding a good stock is not hard. Convincing a client to go with a better stock can sometimes be a challenge. When you show a client the difference, especially with a printed sample, they usually want to go with the better stock. Price is an important factor, but if the cost isn't much higher, most people will prefer a premium grade.

— Zac Vannot, Stealth Studios, Albuquerque NM

Yes, paper – good paper – has the same distinction as well-made clothing. That doesn't mean it has to cost a lot. We look for well-made, tactile and high-performing papers that are economical as well. Also, it's important to educate clients that the price and availability of paper, like gas, fluctuates. As designers, we should be considerate in our design to avoid paper waste and pick papers that will perform well on press. Make good friends with your print rep and their prepress department. They have saved me so many times. I love them.

— Cheryl Bogovich, CB Design, Alexandria VA

Does the quality, character or brand of paper still matter to the outcome of a graphic design project? Do designers still care?

Paper quality and character are still a huge part of design and its impact on the end-user. Designers certainly still care about and prefer to design for specific stocks. Unfortunately, clients are mainly concerned with budget and will go for a standard paper and sacrifice impact to cut costs. On demand and low quality printing has made the conflict harder on designers, since the better papers are rarely available in broken cartons. If paper manufacturers would change with the rest of us and have smaller or no minimum order requirements, paper could remain a part of the design process. Otherwise, it may well disappear as digital and low quality paper stocks win out.

— Michelle Evans, Amazing Spaces, White Haven PA

Creative people understand that it matters, but the clients are not as concerned as they once were. “Good enough” has finally made an unwanted appearance in areas that were once considered worthy of quality. It is a shame.

— Michael Dean, Brand Thirty Three, Torrance CA

I care about the quality, character and cost of paper. The paper needs to reflect the type of job in color, feel and visual representation. If the job can afford higher price and quality, it's in. If cost is too high, I look for something close. I listen to pre-press/printer recommendations. I am attracted to papers that have a feel of handmade quality or other visual characteristics when a job permits. I have always let the job/customer and my intuitive response make paper decisions. Free samples of paper and samples of printed materials often influence decisions.

— Dee Seymour, Seymour Design Associates, Battle Creek MI

Yes! The quality, character and brand of paper matters immensely. The client/production team often decide due to price/cheaper paper but in the long run they don't save, as the number of outtakes are sometimes more than the money they planned to save, and also because the company branding/image of the client suffers.

— Lolita Mitter, Lakefront Media Inc., Ramsey NJ

The brand of paper is very important. I once tried to lower the cost of a project by using cheap paper, but, in the end, the project was a disaster. You may have to spend more, but you do get quality! I enjoy your Graphic Design USA magazine. It gives me a better idea and knowledge base to expand my paper usage, and allows me to experiment with several different textures and styles.

— Tammy Nolet, Nolet Designs, Martinsburg WV

I select paper based on quality and character, as opposed to price. The paper quality and look can “make or break” a design project. I am not happy with recent developments in the paper industry. where many grades have been discontinued. This makes it very difficult; I always have to check on stocks before I spec them.

— Patricia Brady, Brady Design Service, Hudson NH

THE PAPER YOU USE CAN MAKE OR BREAK A GRAPHIC DESIGN PROJECT.

Most designers are well aware that the success of a final project depends largely on the type of paper it's printed on.

— Aimee Libby, Libby Design, Hanover MN

The quality and character still matters, but not as much as, say, five years ago. Everything is becoming commodified.

— David Russell, David Russell Design, Seattle WA

Price remains important, because certain papers are too expensive for certain clients' budgets. This puts pressure on the production manager to come up with alternate sources that achieve the same desired end-result. Paper is vitally important to all our print projects, and we treat paper selection accordingly. However, there is a paucity of choices for small-run brochures, direct mail, etc. available at reasonable cost. More mills should go direct to agencies with value/price propositions geared to high quality but lower spenders.

— ZJ Stanco, Progressive Marketing, Huntington NY

Brand name papers are no longer adequately differentiated to command a price premium. Unfortunately, this isn't a problem just affecting the paper industry; it's the natural outcome of globalization. Defining and delivering compelling brand values and promises is the antidote in nearly all industries.

— David Canaan, Laurel Group, Novato CA

Yes, designers care very much about the quality of paper and printing, and its effect on design. In my experience paper is not decided by other criteria until the quantities become high enough to raise cost control awareness. Issues regarding the availability of mill items, stockability, etc. are the major reason designers are frustrated with paper specification.

— Brian Lee Campbell, Desbrow, Pittsburgh PA

How important to you are environmentally-friendly papers and papermaking?

As a Vermont-based design firm with a local clientele, we have a lot of clients who raise the issue of using recycled papers. The two primary factors in the decision are the type of project and the client. We will often suggest environmentally-friendly papers to clients if they have not asked, but it fits the job and their brand. Recycled papers are almost always met with an enthusiastic response.

— Thomas Waters, Earthlogic, Essex Junction VT

Specification of recycled papers occurs on a project-by-project basis. Most of the print projects I work on incorporate specialty papers for which there are no recycled versions. However, if the client is involved with environmental issues, then I try to push them toward recycled paper stock. I do use printers who are “green” as environmental conservation is important to me. And, yes, I am aware of the environmental symbols, but I would like to have more information pertaining to them.

— Daniel MacLeod, Visual Braille, Arlington WA

Clients tend to listen to creative/specifiers and production people, because their general interest level is low. Get the creative/production people motivated and most of your job is done.

— Alan H. Zwiebel, New York NY

Using recycled papers is very important. But sometimes cost is a factor. Most clients are willing to pay a little more for recycled paper. However, it has been difficult to justify the use of recycled paper to clients when the cost becomes too high. I would be interested in learning more about “green” papers.

— Jeffrey Hahn, Paradigm Creative Media, Omaha NE

At this time, I am more involved in digital media production for my company. On a personal level, recycled paper has a profound effect on how I design. I personally prefer recycled paper, because it will help save the trees.

— Jennifer Nez, Poco Logo, Albuquerque NM

I've always been a strong supporter of saving our forests, thus helping the environment and the animals who live in our shrinking forests. Also, I'm a strong supporter of recycled paper in general. Most of my clients go along with my decisions on paper stocks and recycled stocks.

— James Orlandi, James Orlandi & Associates, New York NY

ETHICS ARE IMPORTANT TO ME.

I won't spec or recommend certain papers based on the ethical conduct of certain major suppliers, and I always recommend companies that are not involved in clear-cutting forests... Wherever it is critical to use a paper with higher virgin paper content, I'll recommend the best, but that includes having an eye on the manufacturer's environmental policies. Choosing the ideal paper for print (I only do print design) is critical. All factors, including the environment, must be considered.

— Julia Burke, Jack Design Company, Hillsborough NC

As a brand identity/package design firm, I believe it's important to lead clients to “green” practices as much as possible. As I often explain to my clients, “Global awareness towards packaging materials that do not stay around 100 years needs to be embraced.” I encourage clients to use “responsible packaging” as a method to bond with consumers. An opportunity exists to make “greener” choices with substrates, inks and board, while also allowing the consumer to know that they are also making a smart choice. This is a win-win situation.

— Terri Goldstein, The Goldstein Group, Port Washington NY

Working within a university, we're mandated to start moving to “greener” paper choices. Currently, we're not obligated to the recycled content, but we're testing the waters at 30% to 100% recycled. Certification keeps track of the process, but if it affects the bottom line, then it may raise problems. Governmental budgets are quite rigid, so the overall cost impacts our paper buying choice, which paper we select. We still want quality and value.

— Helen Kong, UW Educational Outreach, Seattle WA

It is important to me to recycle all the paper that I possibly can, but I don't feel compelled to print on it. Clients rarely request recycled stock now.

— Jane Anderson, Jane Anderson Design, Palo Alto CA

It's important to a degree. As a citizen of the world environment, one should be aware of waste, specifically when it comes to paper consumption. However, client approval is always a factor. If there were more paper mills and commercial printers that were “green,” a lot of designers and clients would benefit. I wish there was more discussion about recycled papers and friendly environmental practices, so that decisions can be made fully informed.

— Julie Kim, Lilacor Inc., Bayside NY

Have you tried digital short run printing? What has been your experience?

I've used digital shortrun printing for the speed and price. It's been very productive for me. Unfortunately, I haven't had an opportunity to try variable data capabilities, since I have not done any direct mail projects in several years.

— Michael Wypasek, Besa Lighting, Columbus OH

The experience with digital shortrun printing varies. Sometimes you get great color, other times you do not. I like the convenience of on-demand printing. Upload digital files, proof, then print. Voila! You are done.

— Allison Duine, LogoDesignSource.com, Deerfield Beach FL

All our software documentation is print-on-demand. Our response all been positive, including reduced costs and no inventory. We have done custom publishing, but have not yet had need for variable data printing or personalization. It works like a charm; we love it!

— Peggy M. Haas, SAS, Cary NC

I use personalization and variable data printing. My primary reason is that I need small quantities and it helps to have the pieces personalized. It hasn't been easy to use, though. The offset workflow is still more streamlined, in my experience.

— Dan Clohan, Hickory Printing Group, Hickory NC

Pros: Can be more cost effective to do shortrun printing. Allows for more customization/personalization on things such as invites.

Cons: Color matching can be an issue. Difficult to find a good, quality-conscious vendor. Some jobs can actually be more expensive than offset printing.

— Claudia Failla, Medknowledge, Rocky Hill CT

Short run is good for those who do their own inhouse promotion printing and mailing.

— Lawrence F. Buckland, Long Mountain Consulting, Stark NH

Quality is very important. Short run printing is being used more frequently. It would be nice if more stocks, particularly uncoated, were made for those types of presses.

— Margery Stegman, Schenkel Stegman Communications Design, Winchester MA

I wish it didn't look so strangely shiny. It doesn't seem to look like a smooth ink coverage; certain colors shine more than others!

— Laura Shumaker, Shumaker Designs, Brownsburg IN

ON-DEMAND PRINTING HAS BEEN LESS EXPENSIVE TO BOTH THE CLIENT AS WELL AS THE COMPANY, AND ALLOWED FOR FASTER TURNAROUND.

It is efficient digitally, and the experience I have had during short run projects have all been good.

— Joel W. Davis, Musicaccord, Greencastle PA

I have worked with online digital printers. My experience with digital printing has been extremely positive: great service, turnaround time and quality of product for a very reasonable price. I will try to use these types of printing services in the future.

— Jennifer Janviere-Farrell, Notorious Ink, Milwaukee WI

My work is primarily run on sheetfed presses. Only when the quantity falls below 100 and/or I need the project the next day do I turn to digital for fast turnaround. I rarely need variable data or personalization. I find the quality to be adequate. Nothing beats the high-end quality of the sheetfed press. 99.5% of my work is sheetfed and will continue to be unless and until digital quality significantly improves.

— Janet Nicosia, Rainbow Media, Jericho NY

In my experience, digital short run printing has been more expensive, but it has also been twice as effective as traditional direct mail. Digital variable data can add a custom message to any piece, and that enhances the value and relevance of each piece we distribute.

— Scott Kilmer, Autogas Systems, Abilene TX

I have used this mostly for business cards, because my smaller clients don't always need 500-1000 cards, and digital printing is easy and looks good enough. I would be open to hearing about more capabilities.

— Justin Deister, Uppercase Design, Louisville CO