

Why bother with print?

A Caffeinated Op-Ed

Today I want to question the Washington Post. Specifically, I want to know why it bothers searching for subscribers, and indeed, printing its newspaper every day. It seems to me, more and more, that the Post wants to get rid of subscribers and concentrate on giving away its content for free.

I often visit washingtonpost.com to see the weather, latest news, blogs, etc. I also get a subscription to the paper because I like to read printed material with my morning coffee. Today, as I was checking the WaPo website I saw that they have redesigned the Sunday magazine. And this is the kicker—all of it is available online for free, two days earlier than subscribers get the same material.

Subscribers PAY. Website visitors do not pay. Why on earth would you make MORE content available earlier at NO COST? How is this a smart business decision? Why would you not embargo content until paid subscribers can access it?

It seems to me that the Post is doing what it can to make sure people do not buy or subscribe to the printed newspaper. Anyone looking to save 75 cents per issue can just log on to the website and get all the content of the printed piece plus early content and not pay a cent. That translates to at least a \$6.00 per week (the Sunday paper costs \$1.50).

Should I cancel my subscription? I ask that to the Washington Post. Why on earth should I continue to pay for something I could get for free????

Print or online?

If you are a media buyer, and you are given the choice of only the online edition or the print edition of your local daily newspaper, which do you choose? Kind of a tricky question, right?

Last week, I attended a panel on business news and media, specifically tailored for public relations people. One of the panelists was the tech writer at the Washington Post. He told us how his column on personal tech runs in the paper on Sunday but is posted online on Friday. When I heard this I thought that the Post is cannibalizing itself. After all, if you can get the exact same content plus links and commentaries, online, why ever would you subscribe to the Post? (Note to self: think about whether I should cancel Post subscription).

But, apparently, the two editions (print and online) have different audiences. Most people who exclusively read online NEVER read the print edition, and those who read the print edition will only go to the online version when they want more information. This is what came out of a survey of the attendees to this panel (put on by the Washington Network Group Communications Roundtable).

What online offers that print does not is a multimedia experience, plus more (more info, links, comments, blogs). Online is also more current, updated frequently and that is what people expect.

Another panelist, the editor for the Washington Business Journal, said that they do have different content online than on the print edition, and it is more updated. However, they just started a blog, get this, TWO WEEKS ago. But WBJ may have an older base, who still wants the print edition and may not even visit the online edition.

Bottom line to answer the question is this: is the online

version better than the print version? And, what is your core target audience? If the online version is better, and has a better readership, certainly buy online only. If the online version is a skeleton version of the print, buy the print. And ultimately, look at the audience numbers. You want to buy where most of your audience is.

Your thoughts and experiences welcome!

