DON'T STOP THE PRESSES: PRINTED LITERATURE IS STILL AN IMPORTANT PART OF TECHNOLOGY MARKETING

It is often assumed that when targeting a highly technical audience, electronic materials are the best medium and that printed literature no longer has any value. Napier's research shows that print is still valued by a technical audience.

"Print is dead" is a common refrain amongst marketers in the B2B technology sector. Many believe that engineers, IT professionals and other technical audiences don't want literature and marketing materials on paper. Considering the low cost of digital distribution, eliminating the print budget can look like an attractive financial move; but are we compromising the effectiveness and impact of our marketing campaigns by cutting print too aggressively? Napier conducted a research project during August and September 2011 that shows many engineers would like more literature provided as hard copies.

The overall results showed that engineers generally like printed literature and marketing materials more than digital: 39% have a preference for print, 38% don't care and – perhaps surprisingly given their technical roles – only 23% have a preference for digital. Moving all your literature to digital distribution means that you could – to some extent – alienate the 38% of your audience who prefer print.

25% of the engineers we asked thought that there should be more printed literature. This is double the percentage of those who think that there is too much. This suggests that even with increasing environmental awareness, engineers feel that more paper-based literature should be produced.

The results also show that there is a very significant percentage of technology professionals who continue to want printed materials. It's possible that this might change as new devices such as online flip books, e-book readers and tablets gain a foothold in the workplace, but at the time of the study their influence on information provision in the B2B technology sector was minimal, with none used by more than 8% of the respondents.

Data sheets are the most highly valued printed items. Application notes, however, were also very popular, with 77% of the respondents saying they use them frequently. Other items of technical literature, for example reference designs and block diagrams in the electronics sector, were far less popular and only 26% of the respondents use cross reference guides frequently.

Despite the respondents' fondness for print, the company data library appears to be dying, with just 47% of respondents using a central information resource at work. It wasn't clear whether this was due to the lack of resource to maintain a library, or if there were other factors at work.

In some good news for technical publishers, magazines journals and online publications were ranked as highly as manufacturers' collateral for quality of information. Respondents to the survey were split almost fifty-fifty between manufacturers' collateral and magazines, journals and online publications in ranking the most accurate and useful information. In contrast with magazines, distributors – which also aggregate content – did not receive such a positive response: only 5% of those surveyed stated that distributors produce the best material.

The survey did highlight some opportunities for distributors to improve. Only 17% wanted distributors' literature organised by manufacturer, which is the easiest and most prevalent approach, but the one that adds the least value. In contrast, 47% wanted information organised by application and 36% preferred it to be categorised by technology. This suggests that distributors should invest some resources in providing clear indices to make their catalogues easy to use and increase their value for engineers.

The first message that is coming through from the survey loud and clear is that marketing teams must not drop printed literature entirely. With many engineers maintaining a preference for print over digital collateral, it's clearly a very effective way to reach your audience. The study also showed that there is a huge opportunity for distributors to improve the effectiveness of the materials they create; organising by application and technology rather than by manufacturer could add significant value. Distributors can learn from the model created by industry magazines - approach content from the perspective of the reader and offer a choice to your customers about the way they receive information. It is this approach which continues to pay dividends for magazine providers and highlights opportunities for distributors in the future. Print is clearly here to stay for some time yet, so it's worthwhile investing the time and money to make sure you're getting it right.

More information about this research is available from Napier – **www.napier.co.uk**

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