



FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

EVEN IN A DIGITAL WORLD, THERE'S
POWER IN THE PRINTED WORD

by Dana Guterman

It's easy to feel nostalgic for the good old days—for seemingly simpler, or perhaps more dignified, times, when air travel meant cigars and hot meals and mailboxes overflowed with carefully penned letters. Still, no one will deny that life has gotten easier since then. The digital age has brought groceries to our door at the click of a button, refreshed long-forgotten friendships in a few key strokes, and allowed us to binge-watch the latest HBO show with just a few ads from our sponsors. From a slick presentation at work to the latest addictive handheld game, there's no doubt that more and more of the information we receive is via a screen.

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At Pivot, we embrace technology and strive to use it in thought-provoking and innovative ways. After all, why struggle with teetering piles of paper and books when you can slip a single iPad into your bag? But research over the past several years shows that there's value in print, too—in reading from a sheet instead of a screen, and writing by hand instead of tapping away on a laptop. And putting such research into action might just get us—and our clients—learning faster and smarter.

You might have noticed that staring at a screen for eight-plus hours a day can cause your eyes to glaze over. You try to focus on distant objects, and you regularly, dutifully stretch. But it's not the simple act of looking at screens that impacts our learning, but how we look at them. Reading has always been a linear activity—until now. With a crisp book in hand, people read each line and savor each word; with a laptop, their eyes jump from spot to spot, scanning

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the information more quickly, but retaining far less. It makes perfect sense, if you think about it. A book, magazine, or newspaper is a tangible commitment—you buy or borrow one, and you read from start to finish, maybe skipping a section here or there, but taking it with you on your commute or while relaxing at a coffee shop.

Online, you start to read, only to see another link flashing in the right-hand corner. Sure, you could finish that meaty *New Yorker* article—or you could read that scandalous blind item with the tantalizing tagline. You dash from one window to the next, get the gist of the words, and then move on to the next thing, be it article, comic, blog post, or tweet. It's a constant battle to pay attention when this deluge of new information is just a mouse-click away. In this way, digital reading presents itself as an exercise in avoiding distractions, whereas print facilitates unadulterated focus.

In particular, reading digital materials has negatively impacted our ability to “slow read.” Slow reading is the type of reading where you relish each word, reread a key sentence, and really digest it and allow it to pour over you. Alas, this is a use-it-or-lose-it kind of situation, and with fewer books in hand, skimming is replacing deeper reading. In fact, a recent study from Norway's University of Stavanger gave credence to this correlation. seventy two participants were given short stories to read; half read the material in print, and the other half as a PDF on a computer screen. While participants scored similarly in terms of emotional reactions to the text, they scored considerably better in reading comprehension when reading the text in print.

It's not just the screen that's affecting our ability to retain information; typing away on a keyboard is significantly different than taking notes by hand. If a program participant is jotting down notes, chances are it's the key points, rephrased and broken down. With a laptop or phone, people are just regurgitating what they're hearing, transcribing the lecture instead



of processing it. In a Princeton University study, students watched a series of TED talks, took notes on laptops or in notebooks, and later were asked both factual and conceptual questions. While both groups scored similarly on the factual questions, those who took notes by hand performed far better on the conceptual questions, suggesting that writing notes by hand prevents mindless copying and enables greater involvement with the material at hand.

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So, how does this actually impact you, your clients, and your deliverables? Well, the next time a client wants another PowerPoint presentation and an emailed copy of 17 relevant articles, consider instead pushing for tangible materials. The Creative Team has been working with several local print companies to expand our print offerings, so now is the time to focus on some top-notch handheld notebooks, binders, or other materials.

A prime example: with Pivot taking on full responsibility for immersion activities, we've revamped and redesigned the immersion notebooks to be more intuitive, more attractive, and more compact. As participants travel to new cities (and often new countries!), these books offer space for notes, succinct summaries of the companies they'll be visiting, and key discussion points. When traveling to the next meeting, they can take out their book, review the

essential information, and really consider and reflect on it for maximum learning potential. During the discussion, ample notes pages allow them to document key points, thus increasing long-term retention.

This research also has implications for the most basic of programs. Ensure that laptops are closed while in a presentation, and instead give each participant a customized notebook. Not only do these encourage note-taking and full engagement, but they also serve as physical reminders of the participant experience on-program—a souvenir, if you will. By focusing on how, and not just what, participants are learning—the journey as well as the destination—we can optimize the experience and increase the long-term efficacy of our programs. After all, just because our eyes and fingers can keep up, doesn't mean our mind can.

"Take Notes by Hand for Better Long-Term Comprehension," <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/take-notes-by-hand-for-better-long-term-comprehension.html>

"The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard," <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/22/0956797614524581.abstract>

"There's Just Something About Paper," <http://www.wnyc.org/story/reading-screens-its-actually-different/>

"Is Online Skimming Hurting Reading Comprehension?" <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2014/04/09/online-reading-comprehension>

"Serious Reading Takes a Hit from Online Scanning and Skimming, Researchers Say," https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/serious-reading-takes-a-hit-from-online-scanning-and-skimming-researchers-say/2014/04/06/088028d2-b5d2-11e3-b899-20667de76985_print.html

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