

What Can Neuroscience Tell Us About Why Print Magazine Advertising Works?

A White Paper from MPA – The Association of Magazine Media

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KEY FINDINGS

It is certainly not new news that print magazines consistently perform well in the quantitative market mix models that advertisers commission to evaluate the effectiveness of their media spending. Numerous studies in the past few years and independent, media-neutral meta-analyses conducted by many of the leading firms in the field of market mix modeling consistently demonstrate that print magazines deliver advertiser ROI even when myriad other media are in the mix. Print magazines perform exceedingly well against important advertiser KPIs such as ad recall, persuasion, brand consideration, purchase intention and actual purchase. A recent meta-analysis of nearly 100 advertiser-commissioned ad effectiveness studies from Millward Brown Digital offers still more evidence that print advertising punches above its weight. But these studies don't give us a clue as to why print magazines continue to demonstrate such effectiveness.

The white paper *What Can Neuroscience Tell Us About Why Print Magazine Advertising Works?* explores the possibility that our brains may process paper-based information differently from information transmitted on screens. A scan was performed on published research over the last ten years in the leading peer-reviewed journals for the cognitive sciences—comprising cognitive psychology, learning and developmental psychology, linguistics and anthropology, as well as the newer field of neuroscience, whose focus on the internal workings of the brain has yielded important insights into human behavior.

The results from this review of 150 papers, books and experimental reports suggest:

- Reading on paper is slower and deeper (associated with analysis, inference and reflection), while reading on screen is faster and more in a scanning mode.
- Paper-based reading benefits from more focused attention, less distraction and less anxiety related to interruption, multitasking and cognitive load.
- Paper-based reading is widely associated with better transfer to long-term memory and clearer comprehension.
- Memory and comprehension from paper-based reading is likely enriched by the multisensory experience of holding and manipulating paper and the sense of position effected by the physicality of print.
- In the case of advertising, print advertising activates neural activity associated with desirability and reward.

While the evidence is still accumulating, the existing body of research supports a reasonable contention that the print paper platform itself is responsible for much of the consistent high performance of magazine media in advertiser-sponsored market mix models, particularly on cognitively complex dimensions such as recall, brand consideration and persuasion.