



WHY DO E-COMMERCE COMPANIES SEND PRINT CATALOGS?

Printed catalogs are decidedly old-school. Long before the advent of computers, let alone the internet, smart phones, social media and online payment systems, businesses across the country successfully used printed catalogs to sell their wares.

So why is it that over the past several years a number of well-known pure-play e-commerce companies have launched offline campaigns, sending out printed catalogs to drive sales for new and existing customers alike? And why haven't all of those well-established "mail order" companies that now have significant web presences switched over to a purely digital marketing approach? It's simple. Printed catalogs work, and today they work to drive and increase online sales.

A 2013 study shows that print catalogs directly boost online sales. They do this by increasing consumer's purchase intent – 58% of online shoppers surveyed said they like to browse catalogs for ideas, and 31% have a retailer's catalog handy when they make an online purchase. Catalogs also increase average order size by 12.5%, as compared to internet-only customer shopping¹. This is in line with what was found in a study completed in 2011, which showed that 75% of consumers use catalogs to browse and research products and services, with 79% of consumers doing so at least four times each year. Once they've made a decision, though, consumers often shift to other channels, such as the internet, to complete the purchase².

What's so magical about printed catalogs? A lot! Printed catalogs:

- **Get read** – Printed catalogs are read at the kitchen table, on the sofa and in bed. According to U.S. Postal Service data, 48% of households read catalogs, and only 24% discard them without reading them³. Compare that to things sent via email, where a 5% open rate is considered outstanding!
- **Get saved** – Consumers hold on to catalogs that interest them, often for many weeks. Plus, catalogs are frequently shared by multiple members of the household – something that rarely happens when messages are sent via email.
- **Are delightfully tactile** – People like holding a catalog in their hands. They can circle an item they want, fold back the corners of pages, put it down and pick it up again later. People who shop online are often on a comparison shopping mission. Those who browse catalogs may be more likely to relax and enjoy the shopping experience.

Printed catalogs have an interruptive value when they arrive in the mail. They grab and hold consumers' attention, make a very emotional connection and motivate them to take action. It's no wonder so many e-commerce companies are printing and mailing catalogs to drive their online sales!

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¹ Kurt Salmon, "Is the Catalog Dead? Not in the Omnichannel World," 2013

² Oracle, "Cross-Channel Commerce: A Consumer Research Study," 2011

³ U.S. Postal Service, "2011 Household Diary Study"