

Should You Publish in Print or Electronic Format - or Both?

By Marcia Yudkin

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Creative Ways <http://www.yudkin.com/marketing.htm>

Once you've decided to create a booklet or special report, you need to decide whether you will be offering the text in printed form or as an electronic download - or in both ways. Do not use your personal preferences or values as your sole criterion (e.g., "I like having something printed and substantial when I pay money for something" or "Anyone who doesn't understand that paper is obsolete isn't worth selling to").

Why not? It may turn out that your preferences aren't as widely shared as you think they are. And there may be important practical considerations that you haven't factored in yet. Before making your final decision on this question, consider these points:

- * Perceived value may be higher for a tangible item than for a downloaded one, particularly if the product is durably and attractively bound.

- * On the other hand, a download may offer much higher perceived value because the information is thereby immediately available.

- * Printed and bound information may be less likely to get copied and redistributed than a download that is not copy protected.

- * Your target market may not feel comfortable with the process of downloading files, or may have so many technical problems opening and reading the download that the customer service headaches quickly mount up.

- * If you want to provide another kind of item along with text, such as audio or video tapes, a print catalog or an object, such as a calculate-your-mortgage wheel or meatloaf pan, the print format makes more sense.

- * When it would be nice for people to be able to click on Web addresses right from your text, a download may seem like the optimal choice.

- * Fraud rates for downloadable products are very much higher than for products that get sent by mail.

* You can gather a valuable, valid postal mailing list when selling tangible items to be shipped or mailed, but addresses are less reliable for download sales.

Now let me say a little more about a few of the factors above.

First, fraud is indeed a very serious problem for products bought and received immediately online. Not only does the merchant almost always get stuck with a loss when a customer disputes an online charge, if the rate of "chargebacks" - sales reversed because of customer protest - gets too high, the merchant can lose his or her credit-card processing account and find it next to impossible to secure another one. On the other hand, established third-party digital download services have address checking and fraud detection procedures in place that may not be as available to individual merchants.

Second, Adobe Acrobat (PDF) files can be copy protected by the creator with several security options available. For example, you can set up a file to allow someone to read but not print, read but not copy and paste to another application, download but not create a copy of the file or not allow the file to be e-mailed to another computer. However, such restrictions sometimes do more harm than good by annoying or even enraging honest users who find themselves unable to make fair use of the material for which they've paid. For instance, they may download a file at work and then be unable to send it to their home computer, which is where they would have downloaded it to begin with if they'd had high-speed Internet access there.

Third, don't underestimate the difficulties both novice and experienced computer users may have in downloading files and accessing that information. Nancy Hendrickson, co-author of a genealogy e-book, had to stop offering her e-book as a PDF file because customers had a multitude of difficulties:

* The buyer couldn't figure out where the saved file was on their computer.

* The buyer couldn't figure out how to open the PDF file (even if they already had Adobe Reader installed on their system).

* Those without Adobe Reader couldn't figure how to download and install it.

Even after including in the "thank you for your purchase" message a detailed "here's how to download and run the file" note, Hendrickson continued to get complaints from almost 25% of her customers. She and her coauthor then converted the e-book to a self-executing .exe file and complaints fell off to almost nothing. However, her e-book is now not available at all to customers with Mac computers.

If you're tempted to dismiss her experience because your customers are technically sophisticated, more knowledgeable or adept computer users,

consider my experience: I've been online since 1994, have purchased and downloaded several e-books or special reports and have never been able to figure out why hyperlinks that are supposed to be able to transport me from a page in a PDF file to the corresponding Web page don't do anything when I click on them. I've also downloaded a few PDF files that were practically unreadable because I didn't have the font in which they were created.

I don't say this to dismiss the potential of downloaded content. On the contrary, I love getting an e-mail notifying me that someone has bought one of my digital products without any intervention on my part. Just realize: This is not a trouble-free medium, and be prepared for technical problems and complaints.

In this light, perhaps the best option is to offer both print and digital versions, so that people can select the medium that fits their needs and capabilities. When one of my colleagues offered print, PDF and both print and PDF versions, about 15 percent chose "both"!

The above is excerpted from "Profiting from Booklets and Special Reports" by Marcia Yudkin, which is available from <http://www.yudkin.com/bookletsreports.htm> . Marcia Yudkin marcia@yudkin.com is the author of 11 books, including Internet Marketing for Less than \$500/Year and Poor Richard's Web Site Marketing Makeover.

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