



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN

### The Right Tool for the Job

In my workshop, I have several sets of wrenches in my tool box. When I have to build or repair something, I need to choose the one particular wrench that perfectly fits the nut or bolt I need to tighten or remove. If I try to use the wrong tool for the job at hand, I won't be able to complete the job and may even damage the thing I'm trying to repair. Wrenches are tools mechanics use to keep machinery running smoothly. Advertising is a tool that business owners use to keep their enterprises running smoothly. Just as a mechanic must use the right wrench to accomplish his job efficiently, it is vital that an advertising professional choose the right "tool" to promote their client's business effectively. About forty years ago, the number of wrenches in a mechanics tool box doubled. They had to adapt to a changing automotive market, as import cars were built using metric nuts and bolts. In recent years, the advent of online advertising has forced many companies in our industry to "expand their toolbox." Here are some thoughts on choosing the right "tool" for the job.

#### **"To be in print or to be online, that is the question."**

Though we have a lot more ways to help our clients today, our basic mission hasn't changed—we're still in the business of providing a way for our advertisers to connect with consumers who want to buy their products. Today we can help our advertisers connect online or in print. Many customers see this as an "either/or" decision. There are many factors to consider and the decision is not as clear cut as many people would like to think. Here are some things to consider when deciding between a print, an online or a "blended" program making use of both.

#### **Print readers, "Netizens" or somewhere in between**

The internet as we know it today is less than 25 years old. In the 1990's and early 2000's the "experts" were postulating that print would soon disappear. Obviously, this prediction was way off the mark. This doesn't mean we can afford to ignore the impact of online advertising. In 1995, about 14% of Americans had access to the internet. Today, just 20 years later, 87% of Americans are online. An entire generation has grown up with web as a constant presence in their lives. These are the people who were supposed to abandon print, but research shows that young people continue to read print media. Young people, like everyone else, are less interested in how information is delivered to them than they are in content and convenience. People judge media by its relevance to their lives ("Does this matter to me?") and how easily they can access the content. This is why free and community papers outperform

You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN

daily papers with younger people; our papers provide them with coupons and offers allowing them to stretch their smaller incomes and do not require them to purchase a subscription. On the flipside, many older adults are active users of the web. One of the busiest sites on the internet is the AARP site. Even a person who is in their mid seventies was probably introduced to computers and the web during their working years. We are in the midst of a long transition from traditional to digital media. As you would expect, younger people tend to spend more time online than their parents or grandparents. Heavy web users tend to be better educated and more affluent, making them a highly desirable market. At this point, no media is completely dominant. Media usage is more of a continuum. There are a handful of consumers on either end, people that get all of their information electronically, or at the other end, those who use print exclusively. Most of us fall somewhere in between. Many people of all ages still read print publications. We are at a point where the number of people using digital media is too large to ignore. At this point in time, the great majority of people use a combination of print and electronic media.

Though exact numbers are difficult to determine, most experts agree that less than 25% of free and community papers publish an online edition. The disparity between the percentage of consumers on line, 87%, and the number of papers who publish an online edition, 25% or less, is a source of concern. A growing sector of the market is making increasing use of the web. By creating an online presence for their products, publishers not only create new revenue opportunities, but also insure the long term growth of their enterprises. Local papers tend to have strong local brands. This strong name recognition attracts users to their websites and to their online advertising. An online presence also becomes a defense from competitors which present their products as stronger, because they are web based or have a web component.

A web presence also fundamentally changes the relationship between a publication and its readers. It changes the conversation with our readers from a monologue to a dialogue. When done right, it is possible to build a community of your readers. You can ask for their input and suggestions. By engaging readers you are able to drive readership to both your print and digital products. Seth Godin's book *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* is an excellent book on building a community around your product.

You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN

### **Lots of ways to make money**

One of the reasons that publishers have been reluctant to invest time and money into web products is that they question whether online products will make them money. The answer to this question is, “yes, but it takes a lot of work.” One of the reasons that print publications were so profitable for so long was that the hurdle for getting into the business was so high. To produce a print publication, one had to collect the content, the stories and/or ads, you had to design the paper, find someone to print it and then get it into the hands of readers. To produce a website you have to download a template and publish it. You can “borrow” content from another source and you’re ready to go. This low cost entry into the industry means that the law of supply and demand keeps prices low. The advantage that local papers have over online competitors is we are experienced in providing high value local content. This, coupled with the strong branding mentioned above, gives us an edge over start up or national web providers. We also have the ability to package web advertising with our print products. Many publishers have had success by talking to an advertiser about online advertising and then selling print as a “value added” feature.

Maintaining a web presence necessitates either learning the “digital ropes” or hiring people with expertise in this field. Once you have built your company’s digital capabilities, you can leverage it to sell additional online products. We have long been a resource for our customers. They count on us for marketing and business advice. Many publishers have taken this consultative approach into the digital realm. Some have established in house “Digital Agencies.” They help their customers design and maintain their websites or manage their social media presence. There are a number of vendors who can provide these services to your paper, allowing you to broker them to your clients. Other vendors will allow you to offer e-mail marketing services to your advertisers. E-mail marketing allows you to expand your customer base to B-to-B accounts and advertisers who do business outside your normal service area. Our company has had great success launching an online radio station. This requires little more than a laptop and a microphone. We produce strong local sports content and have leveraged this to produce local sports programs sponsored by our advertisers. Our company has set up Facebook and Twitter pages for our readers. Generally, we post local news stories which drives use of these pages. For a fee we will do stories like, “Big sale this week at Main Street Sports. Check it out.” I believe that the secret to making money on the internet is creativity. The more you interact with the web, the more ways you will discover to use it to help your advertisers connect with their customers.

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN<sup>SM</sup>

### The right tool

The great American humorist, Will Rogers said, “Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you don’t keep moving!” This makes even better sense today than in Roger’s day. Our culture and our technology are changing so quickly that it is hard to keep ahead of new developments. We are at a point in time where print is still strong and digital advertising is growing rapidly. By embracing digital technology, we can help our customers in the present and position our organizations for success far into the future. When you use all of the tools in the box, the job becomes a lot easier.

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

Link & Learn is brought to you every month as part of PaperChain’s<sup>®</sup> mission to provide educational material to the free paper publishers. **If you have an issue you would like to see covered please email [janderson@wisad.com](mailto:janderson@wisad.com), put “Link & Learn” in subject line.** Be sure to check out [www.paperchain.org](http://www.paperchain.org) for past issues, electronic ready promotional ads and much more to help you remain competitive.

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**