



A NEW NARRATIVE FOR PRINT

Print anchors memory, shaping perception beyond fleeting digital impressions

In modern marketing, efficiency has become the dominant language. Dashboards glow with real-time data, campaigns are optimised by the hour, and success is increasingly measured by immediate response.

Yet this relentless focus on speed and short-term return is creating a growing imbalance. Brands are becoming easier to optimise, but harder to remember. In a landscape defined by message saturation and ever-fracturing channels, audiences are exposed to more content than ever before – and trusting less of it.

This presents a more fundamental challenge for marketers. Effectiveness is not simply a function of reach or response, but of how a brand is perceived over time. Before a message can persuade, it must first be accepted – and before a brand can grow, it must be regarded as credible. At its core, one of the cornerstones of marketing effectiveness is thus trust.

It is this principle – and the role that different channels play in establishing it – that sits at the heart of this research. In particular, the contribution of print within a multi-channel strategy, where its physicality, permanence and perceived authenticity offer a counterbalance to the ephemerality of digital media.

To explore this further, the Independent Print Industries Association (IPIA) engaged international marketing and research agency Madano to undertake a national study. The research analysed millions of digital conversations over a twelve-month period across the UK, focusing on how print is perceived within modern marketing strategies and its role in building trust with consumers.

The findings present a consistent and compelling picture. Among those involved in planning and executing multi-channel marketing campaigns that utilise print, 75 percentⁱ expressed a highly positive sentiment towards its effectiveness. This aligns with earlier findings in this series, where printed communications achieved a 73 percentⁱⁱ positive net sentiment on trust compared to digital-only channels. Most strikingly, 99.1 percentⁱⁱⁱ of consumers demonstrated strong positive sentiment towards the trustworthiness and authenticity of printed content.

In an era defined by short attention spans, message saturation, and declining confidence in the content we consume, the research demonstrates a clear conclusion. Print is not simply another channel within the mix. It is a medium that can help brands cut through noise, establish credibility, and build more meaningful, lasting connections with their audiences.

A long-term strategy

Taken together, these findings align closely with established marketing effectiveness theory, where a fundamental tension exists between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency promises control, attribution and certainty. Effectiveness, by contrast, is slower, harder to measure and far more dependent on human factors such as trust, attention and memory. These are not instant wins, they accumulate over time, forming the foundations on which long-term brand growth is built.

As internationally acclaimed marketing effectiveness expert Les Binet^{iv} consistently argues, the marketing industry's fixation on short-term gains and efficiency has come at the expense of scale, reach and genuine long-term brand building.

In an interview with the World Advertising Research Centre (WARC), he articulated this argument: "If you want long-term growth, what you've got to do is change people's minds in some way.

"You've got to build up memory structures that will bias their behaviour into the future, and that's a much more difficult and long-term job, because it involves training people's responses in such a way that you not only influence behaviour now, but you also influence behaviour tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and on into the future."

Digital-only campaigns are increasingly engineered to perform now, but not necessarily to endure. When brands prioritise short-term optimisation over long-term effectiveness, they risk eroding the very equity that makes future performance possible.

Print provides a powerful corrective to this imbalance. Not because it rejects efficiency, but because it restores perspective, bridging digital insight with real-world experience. From personalised packaging created for individual customers and impactful point-of-sale displays, to thoughtfully designed direct mail that lands in people's homes; print translates data and messaging into tangible, memorable moments – delivering emotional resonance, trust and physical presence.



Print commands attention, transforming moments into meaningful, lasting brand impact



Tangible print builds trust through presence, permanence, and human connection

As Binet emphasises in his conversation with WARC: “Brand building is about building up these mental structures but, crucially, it’s still about behaviour. It’s about getting people to change their behaviour over the longer term.

“To put it in financial language, activation is about getting an immediate response and, ideally, an immediate sale, but maybe nothing more. Brand building is about getting a long-term flow of sales, revenue and profit, now and into the future.”

Targeted and personalised print marketing, which feeds responses to it back into a digital marketing ecosystem, is well placed to achieve that very goal articulated by Binet. As Madano’s analysts identified, it creates experiences that resonate across different senses and span a kaleidoscope of life’s moments – delivering longer term memories and engagement from consumers.

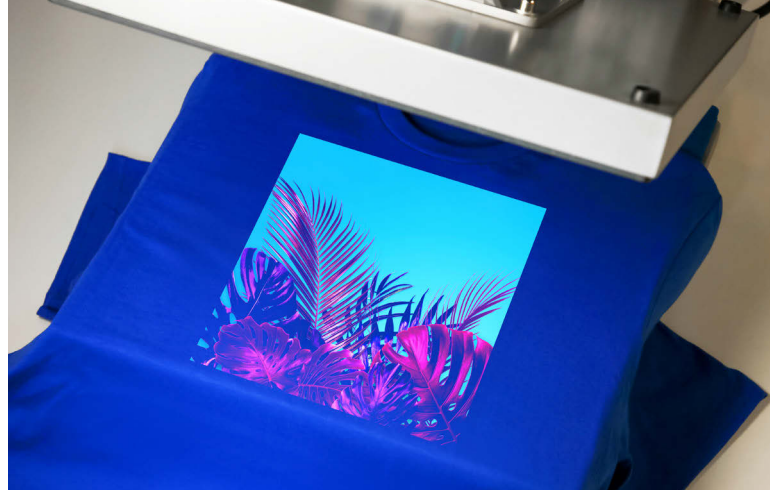
“If you want long-term growth, what you’ve got to do is change people’s minds in some way.”
– Les Binet

From pausing to take in a beautifully designed retail display, to browsing a favourite magazine, or opening a hobby catalogue – with that unmistakable scent of fresh print and the quiet anticipation of purchases to come – these are moments that naturally draw us into slower, more lasting forms of engagement.

As printed marketing and communications can also be kept, repeatedly returned to – and are often personalised to the recipient in both overt and subtle ways – it allows consumers to engage directly. Instead of competing with thousands of other brands for just three seconds of attention, this sustained, tactile engagement helps form an emotional brand anchor^{vi} – which as Madano’s research details, increases trust and a strong perception of authenticity.

Trust as a foundation for effectiveness

These trends matter, because trust is not a “soft” metric. It is a commercial driver. Brands that are trusted are more likely to be chosen, remembered and recommended. Trust



Physical media lingers, inviting deeper engagement and repeated brand interaction

reduces perceived risk, making purchase decisions easier and repeat behaviour more likely. In this sense, trust is not merely a by-product of effective marketing, it is a prerequisite for it.

Indeed, a key study from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and the Financial Times found: “Trust is now the second most powerful metric (after product or service quality) for driving key business outcomes such as profit, market share, and acquisition – up from sixth 20 years ago.”^{vii}

This finding reframes trust from a qualitative perception to a quantifiable driver of commercial performance.

Print’s strong trust advantage explains its enduring effectiveness as a brand-building medium. A printed message cannot be edited, deleted or replaced in real time. It arrives complete, deliberate and tangible. These qualities foster credibility in ways that transient digital formats are less equipped to replicate. As trust underpins marketing effectiveness, print’s ability to command it gives the channel a distinctive and valuable role within the media mix that should be actively leveraged.

This is not simply a theoretical or rhetorical position. Madano’s analysts subjected the dataset it gathered to detailed, multi-layered analysis, interrogating patterns of sentiment, behaviour and perception at scale. From this evidence-based process, four consistent perception drivers emerged that underpin the strong positive sentiment around trust and effectiveness in printed marketing and communications:

- **Increased commitment:** Print media is perceived to be more trustworthy due to the significant effort and resources required for its creation and distribution, which signals credibility and commitment to the content.
- **Deeper connections:** The physical presence of printed materials fosters a stronger connection with consumers, enhancing trust and credibility compared to “easily dismissed” digital media.
- **Younger audiences:** 73 percent of consumers – rising to 82 percent among Millennials – trust print marketing more than digital-only channels.
- **Information retention and recall:** Engagement with print materials leads to better information retention and brand recall, significantly influencing consumer behaviour and fostering loyalty over time.

Beyond short-term efficiency

Short-term activation plays an important role in delivering marketing effectiveness. Indeed, performance media is highly effective at converting existing demand and driving immediate response. But activation alone does not build brands. Brand growth depends on something fundamentally different: the gradual accumulation of meaning in the minds of consumers – this is where print excels.

Print operates outside the constant churn of digital-only environments – it lingers. Mail is passed around in homes and businesses; catalogues and magazines sit on desks and coffee tables. As JICMAIL's research proves time and again, printed assets are often seen and read by more than their original recipient, and are returned to frequently, extending reach organically and increasing cost-effectiveness. This gives brands the opportunity to deliver longer campaigns that reinforce familiarity, trust and recognition while growing their audience.^{viii}

Madano's research also reinforces this distinction. Across channels, perception sentiment consistently associates print with credibility, memorability and effectiveness when used as part of a broader communications mix. These are not abstract qualities; they are the mechanisms through which brands compound value over time.

Digital-only approaches excel at immediacy, capturing attention in the moment, but rarely holding it for long. Print, by contrast, operates through presence – its physical nature allows it to remain visible and be revisited, strengthening pattern recognition and reinforcing brand memory.

From pixel to print and back again

Crucially, print does not compete with digital media or channels such as radio and TV, it complements them. The most effective campaigns do not treat channels as isolated silos, but as interconnected systems.

Within this system, print media plays a distinctive and important role – its ability to be targeted and personalised to the recipient is derived from the same data sets that power digital-only campaigns. It then delivers on its unique strengths, before being able to drive the recipient back to digital platforms using tools such as discount vouchers, access to special interest content, or limited time offers. The behaviour of the consumer when interacting with those digital platforms can then be gathered – further enriching the original data set that fed the campaign.

“The power of a good campaign has always been in the combination of different weapons.” – Mark Ritson

As world-renowned marketing professor Mark Ritson has emphasised across multiple articles and interviews – print media enhances overall campaign effectiveness, especially when integrated alongside digital activity: “I also continue to believe that synergy beats specialism. [...] The power of a good campaign has always been in the combination of different weapons at different stages of the execution to get the job done.”^{ix}



Print and digital connect, creating seamless, responsive marketing ecosystems



Data-driven print delivers credibility, authenticity, and lasting consumer confidence

He has also specifically highlighted in a recent article published by Marketreach the value of print media, such as direct mail and door drops, within this strategy: “The quiet but reassuring truth about media is that diversity really does always win. Adding different channels into an integrated campaign always beats betting the house on a single approach. [...] When mail is done well – done as Lester Wunderman, who created the first loyalty and reward schemes, once envisaged it – it remains one of the great connections between companies and customers.”^x

This aligns closely with JICMAIL’s concept of the super-touchpoint, moments where physical media heightens attention, response and engagement, amplifying the effectiveness of surrounding channels^{xi}. Rather than acting as a standalone channel, print strengthens the entire communications ecosystem– its true value lies not in generating low-cost impressions, but in acting as a high-impact multiplier that strengthens the performance of every other channel it touches.

“You’ve got to build up memory structures that will bias their behaviour into the future... influencing behaviour tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and on into the future.” – Les Binet

Madano’s research supports this, with print media such as direct mail emerging as one of the strongest positive drivers in discussions of print effectiveness, particularly in relation to engagement and response – generating a 91 percent positive sentiment score among UK consumers. It demonstrates how physical media can deliver both effectiveness and efficiency when deployed strategically.

Consistency and brand growth

Marketing effectiveness is shaped not only by where messages appear, but by how long they endure. Ritson has long argued that brands perform better when campaigns run for longer, delivering coherent, consistent and distinctive visual assets over time^{xii}.

Print is inherently suited to this long-term approach– sustaining visibility and delivering cumulative impact. Over time, consumers begin to recognise consistent brand cues and slogans, improving pattern recognition and strengthening brand image through familiarity.

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Professor Jenni Romaniuk has also consistently emphasised the importance of distinctive brand assets in building memory structures^{xiii}. Through print, brands can deploy distinctive colours, typography, design and messaging across multiple physical assets, from tote bags and key chains to magazines and catalogues – creating visual identities that capture attention and embed memory.

Print provides an ideal environment for these assets to do their work. Its tactile nature, visual depth and physical scale provide a broader creative palette for expression, giving brands the space and time required to embed themselves in memory. When deployed consistently across print and other channels, creative assets become anchors - cues that trigger recognition long after the initial exposure.

Madano’s research backs this up, showing that print activates deep emotional responses and experiential cues. These triggers help encode brands more strongly in memory, moving them from being noticed to being remembered.

Efficiency through quality of attention

Efficiency in marketing is often framed as doing more with less, reaching more people, more often, at lower cost. But this narrow definition overlooks a critical factor: the quality of attention a channel delivers.



Distinctive print design embeds brand identity through consistent visual expression

Print is inherently efficient because it attracts deliberate attention, not accidental exposure. Unlike digital environments, where messages compete with constant distractions and passive scrolling, print invites active engagement. It is picked up, opened, read and revisited by choice. This means brands are not simply buying impressions but earning moments of focus.

This shift from quantity to quality matters, high-quality attention increases the likelihood that messages are processed, recalled and associated positively with the brand. As Ritson has consistently argued: in practical terms, fewer, more meaningful exposures can outperform high volumes of fleeting impressions. Print reduces waste by limiting exposure to environments where attention is fragmented or fleeting, allowing brands to communicate with clarity and intent.

“Adding different channels into an integrated campaign always beats betting the house on a single approach.” – Mark Ritson

By delivering sustained engagement rather than momentary visibility, print reframes efficiency. It demonstrates that effectiveness is not achieved by maximising reach alone, but by maximising the value of each interaction. In this sense, print is efficient not because it is faster, but because it is more meaningful.

What this means for brands

For brands seeking sustainable growth, the lesson is clear: effectiveness cannot be optimised solely through short-term metrics. It must be designed into the system.

Print helps rebalance the equation. It slows attention, extends presence and reinforces meaning. When used strategically, alongside digital rather than instead of it, print enables brands to move beyond immediate response and towards lasting value.

In a world obsessed with speed, print gives brands something increasingly rare: time with their target audience. And time, used well, is what builds brands.

For more information and to access the New Narrative for Print whitepaper, visit ipia.org.uk/nn or contact info@ipia.org.uk



End Notes/Citations

ⁱ After searching and filtering millions of online conversations, posts and articles over the course of 12 months – Madano’s search algorithms identified 12,141 data points that were relevant to the IPIA’s research criteria.

With these data points curated and contextualised by Madano’s data analysts, the research focused on the perception of print’s effectiveness, aesthetic appeal, measurability, sustainability, trust and efficacy among consumers, marketing and business professionals.

Madano then investigated 608 of these data points in greater detail, which specifically discussed the perception of using print within a multi-channel marketing strategy. In doing so, its analysts identified that 455 (75%) of these data points showed a strong positive sentiment towards print being an effective part of a multi-channel communications strategy.

ⁱⁱ IPIA research study article: The aesthetic advantage: how print delivers positive experiences

ⁱⁱⁱ IPIA research study article: When authenticity matters: the trust factor of print

^{iv} Les Binet is a leading authority on marketing effectiveness. His books and articles are widely regarded as essential reading for marketing professionals, and he also bridges industry and academia through advisory roles and university collaboration.

^v Les Binet on why long-term marketing matters in the age of short-termism: bit.ly/binetwarc

^{vi} WARC Strategy – The Marketer’s Toolkit 2026: bit.ly/warctoolkit

^{vii} IPA and Financial Times - Bridging the Trust Gap: bit.ly/ipatrustgap

^{viii} JICMAIL: The time we spend with mail: bit.ly/jicmailattention

^{ix} Mark Ritson: Marketers are clueless about media effectiveness – here’s the proof: bit.ly/ritsoneffectiveness

^x Marketreach: Mark Ritson - Totally Mailed It: marketreach.co.uk/totally-mailed-it/mark-ritson

^{xi} JICMAIL – Mail Stakes its claim as a Super Touchpoint: jicmail.org.uk/resources/super-touchpoints

^{xii} Marketing Week - Ritson’s 10-step guide to ‘stand on the shoulders’ of advertising effectiveness giants: marketingweek.com/ritsons-10-step-advertising-effectiveness

^{xiii} A New Narrative for Print: An interview with Jenni Romaniuk, Professor, Ehrenberg Bass Institute: bit.ly/jenniromaniuk

Find out more about the IPIA: ipia.org.uk

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Alasdair Browne, IPIA Chair



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