

SMART CHANGE STARTS HERE

PAPER'S POWER PLAY


Going where digital can't, paper
delivers a strong, tactile experience



BY JOANN WHITCHER

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Digital's rise as the primary communications tool has had unintended consequences in paper usage. In the world of marketing communications, paper has achieved a certain cachet.

Freed from its long-standing utilitarian status as the primary vehicle to deliver mundane information—think telephone directories—the perception among designers and their high-end brand clients is that paper should be used to convey that something special is happening, be it an event or a product catalog.

"Digital is not going anywhere, but paper delivers a very strong experience," says award-winning graphic designer Kit Hinrichs. The noted author, educator, and founder of San Francisco-based Studio Hinrichs he is an ardent fan of paper and print. "Paper plays a significant role in delivering specialty information and for things like packaging, where it can arouse strong tactile feelings and people pay attention. The messages are stronger and there is more of an impact with paper," he affirms.

Combining print and digital in a coordinated marketing effort delivers the most impact, Hinrichs adds. The different print technologies now available also help enhance the quality of the experience for the individual. When direct mail is personalized and targeted and bringing a tactile experience to the consumer, it can also deliver a dynamic web experience.

"I'm more discerning in how I use paper today," Hinrichs acknowledges. "Paper is just not the commodity it used to be."

Mohawk Fine Paper, which doesn't manufacture commodity paper, has promoted the use of fine paper through its Maker Quarterly publication as well as its own marketing campaign efforts. In the quarterly, paper samples are printed on different Mohawk grades, featuring unique finishes and using varied print techniques to build a compelling narrative around the Mohawk brand and the relevance of its paper.

For designers today, print is simply one option among many, notes Chris Harrold, Mohawk's SVP of marketing & creative. "It's a tool to solve a problem for a brand and a customer; a problem focused on awareness and marketing.

"We find that designers of all stripes, whether they are in-house and embedded in a brand, part of a startup of four people in San Francisco, or part of a large established identity in NYC or Paris, are embracing print," he adds. "It cuts through the digital clutter and engages with the individual in a much more meaningful way."

Highly visible consumer brands are rethinking how they produce catalogs, their designers crafting them so they are much more than just a functional listing of their products. These aren't lightweight, printed on 80-lb stock, with images slapped on the pages. Incorporating narrative and storytelling as much as they incorporate product, these catalogs feel like more like a photo essay or coffee table book, notes Harrold.

"One design firm is using our paper for what is becoming a series of consumer catalogs for The North Face," Harrold explains. In a recent spring catalog for women's athletic wear, the designer used gray paper and white bright paper, all uncoated, vellum or natural finished.

"Just the thing you would think you wouldn't print a catalog on," muses Harrold.

"Paper is no longer just for printing," says Christine Traulich, who co-founded Red Bliss Design with sister Dori McDonald. "It is being laser cut, die cut, formed into flowers/shapes, used as decor, and so much more.

"Laser cutting is a trend that is not going away anytime soon," she continues. "As a designer, laser cutting has transformed invitation design and even wedding decor."

Red Bliss creates "jaw-dropping" avant-garde custom stationery and invitations for weddings and other memorable occasions. The Minnesota-based design firm uses paper and other elements to turn the ordinary into expressive, authentic moments. The company's custom invitations have been featured in more than 50 different publications, including *Town & Country* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Synthetic paper is shedding its image as being purely functional, and is also chosen for distinctive, high-end end use. Bonnie Chase Designs in Miami employs synthetic paper to manufacture wine tags that fit snugly around wineglass stems, without worry that a spill will soak and ruin her efforts. Chase creates the wine tags for a variety of holiday party themes, and they are output on a digital laser printer.

Waterproof—or wine proof—paper is also being used for coasters, menus, license plates, outdoor signs, brochures, ID cards, and wristbands. A YMCA in Chesapeake, Va. created durable guides for its swim lesson program, as the instructors needed to be able to use the printed guides while in the water. The lesson guides were printed on a Canon device.

Synthetic substrates are also being integrated in high-end marketing pieces. Former Boston agency Modernista! used a synthetic in a brochure it designed for General Motors. Providing a graphically enhanced, aerial view of the Hummer car, the translucent insert revealed peek-through images of the car's undercarriage; a detailed image of the car's underbody was visible after the reader turned the page with the insert on it.

Hinrichs uses uncoated color paper stock to convey a specific feeling or achieve a certain look, noting that uncoated black stock with embossed type creates a look that is "really different." Digital inkjet's ability to print white ink technology has helped to create interest in the use of dark colors, such as blacks and browns.

Specialty paper manufacturers, such as Neenah, Mohawk, and Sappi, offer an ever expanding range of colors, both darks and brights, and in heavier stocks, giving designers the opportunity to explore and enhance paper's tactile properties. "I do end up using more coated, because of its flexibility, but ultimately it depends on the project, what you are trying to convey," Hinrichs explains.

Ironically, because runs are not typically as large as they used to be, the designer is able to use heavier stock. "I used to do a lot of annual reports, large volumes; now the runs are relatively small, so I don't have the same concern about stock," he says. "I'm not worried about the cost of 12 carloads of a piece, because the run is more like one truck."

Red Bliss clients are looking for more texture and color choices in their paper, says Traulick. "Gmund is leading the way in this category."

Gmund, a German paper manufacturer, is known for its use of color and texture in its products. Gmund Wood is a good example of what the papermaker offers. Genuine wood grain is palpably integrated into the paper's surface. Gmund Veneer has the look and feel of wooden veneer, an impression strengthened by a slightly glossy coating.



WHAT PRINT PROVIDERS WANT

Printers are doing themselves and their clients a disservice when they always default to coated gloss paper, says Harrold. "It makes sense for them, though, because of operational efficiency, to go to their default 80-lb coated gloss. It's what most printers are set up to run.

"But it's apparent to us that their clients are hungry for the kind of printers who come in and roll up their sleeves and ask their clients: 'what do you want to do, how can we make print elegant,'" Harrold says.

Printers need to understand the role paper plays, in terms of overall impact of print project.

Hinrichs works "with some of the best printers in the country; part of the reason I choose them is that they know how to get the most out of sheet, how to enhance a sheet with a new technique or technology that I may not even know about. The printers I work with keep me informed."

Many up-and-coming designers today don't have any experience working in print, and don't know about its capabilities. "It's up to the print provider to educate their client base," says Hinrichs. "They would do themselves a great service, the industry a great service, and increase the use of printing."

At Mohawk, "we are trying to embolden and empower designers to bring the whole thing forward," says Harrold. "In this age of the PDF, designers coming out of school today have lost the touch of how to think like an architect and build a project, looking at a paper's surface properties, and using that as part of the equation."

CERTIFICATION IS A GIVEN

One issue that is no longer a major part of the equation in terms of paper choice is certification.

There was a time, 15 years ago, when it was a lot more of the topic of the moment, says Harrold, noting that Mohawk does participate in Greenseal, FSC Carbon Neutral Procedure, and has its own wind power program. "But now it feels like less of a driving issue," he says. "There is an expectation on the part of designers that they are buying from someone that is using responsibly sourced, recycled fiber.

"We personally believe in certification programs," says Harrold. "It lets a third party speak for us."

The use of a certain amount of recycled paper is considered a given, agrees Hinrichs, especially with certain clients, such as nonprofits, museums, and public institutions.

"You need to have a balanced look at this," he notes. "You need a certain amount of virgin material with recycled stock to give you material for all the recycled stuff you use. Cardboard boxes, for example, are unusable if they are recycled too many times; they need new fiber to support it."

Certified or not, dark colors or bright, the right paper elevates the printed material, and helps brands connect with consumers in a meaningful and lasting way.





This commemorative poster for AIGA's 100th anniversary, created by Studio Hinrichs, features the names of all past medalists. It is printed on Mohawk Superfine Cover.



This piece was created to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Art Center College of Design. It is a set of cards that features the work of selected students from the graduate and undergraduate programs at the college.

Art Director: Kit Hinrichs

Designer: Sarah Gardner



The Alphabet Card, Kit Hinrichs of Studio Hinrichs was inspired by this collection of Victorian Alphabet Postcards to bring the tradition into the 21st Century. The AlphaChrome postcard set is a modern interpretation of original alphabet cards from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The typeface used is an in-house revival of Stack, which was Dan X. Solo's 1970s typeface. The cards are made from 30 different prints, including William Morris patterns, Italian Marble Papers, and traditional Japanese Prints. The set consists of 39 cards: the full alphabet, 0 through 9, !, &, and ?.

AlphaChrome Postcard Set

Coated Stock



Classic Color's Brand Alchemy is a collection of 30 different finishes designed to intrigue from the first glimpse to that crucial encounter between hand and printed piece. Designed by Thirst's Rick Valicenti with branding by Studio Hinrichs, each card features a letter of the alphabet (as well as a few additional symbols).



Created for the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge in 2012, Golden Gate Girder is a proprietary typeface for San Francisco's most iconic symbol. The alphanumeric poster displays the range of the typeface, which was inspired by the bridge's construction of rivets and girders and in its Art Deco styling.



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The Sappi Standards are a series of educational brochures for Sappi Fine Papers demonstrating how some of the hundreds of printing techniques can be used to promote better communication. Studio Hinrichs has had the opportunity to work with Sappi for over 20 years for several of their product introductions and educational series.



Filled with entertaining urban legends and popular misconceptions, Sappi's new "True or False" booklet refutes the widespread belief that uncoated printing papers cost less than coated. In addition to comparing costs, performance capabilities, and environmental benefits between coated and uncoated sheets, "True or False" presents an actual side-by-side demonstration of the same image printed with the same press settings on Sappi McCoy Matte and Silk and two comparable uncoated grades, so readers can see the tactile and visual differences for themselves. The concept and design of "True or False" was created in partnership with Kit Hinrichs of Studio Hinrichs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joann Whitcher

Joann Whitcher has covered the graphic arts industry for more than 25 years, specializing in long-form feature articles and branded custom content. Topics span a broad range of subjects, including direct and targeted marketing, industry trends, digital printing, case studies, and more.

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