



RECREATION CRISIS

**WHY YOU SHOULD NOT
ELIMINATE YOUR PRINT BROCHURE**

Learning Resources Network (LERN)

Recreation Marketing Crisis

Why You Should Not Eliminate Your Print Brochure

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Why You Should Not Eliminate Your Recreation Program Print Brochure

By Julie Coates

Executive Summary

Eliminating your Recreation Program print brochure will have disastrous consequences, reducing your registrations and income by 50% (half).

We know this disastrous reduction in your income registrations will happen because it has happened to every recreation program in every community for the past five to seven years, when scores of organizations eliminated their recreation program print brochures.

We also know this will happen because not a single recreation program that has eliminated its print brochure has reported positive overall results.

Outcomes of eliminating your print brochure include:

1. You will lose community visibility and potentially community support for funding your programs
2. Saving 10% of your expenses will result in 50% loss in income. No win, big lose.
3. Your recreation program will be on the verge of financial ruin. Some have closed their doors after eliminating their print brochure.
4. Your community will suffer social and potentially economic consequences. Your programs generate revenue that contribute to an overall healthy local economy, and events bring in visitors from the outside which has an even greater impact.
5. Your community's citizens will suffer greater mental health issues, as recreation classes and activities have universally been praised as a significant way people cope with stress, grief, depression, anxiety and Death by Despair (the CDC term for the cause of the recent increase in suicides).
6. Your recreation program's competition, near or far, and especially online, will take market share and possibly whole audiences away from you.

Conclusion: All the data, documentation, experiences and results have proven you should do not eliminate your print brochure. Here is that documentation.

Message from the Chair of the Board

Dear colleague, I am pleased to introduce this special research report to you and your organization.

As Chair of the LERN Board of Directors for 2020-2021, I can report that the Board has unanimously and repeatedly endorsed that “LERN is critical to our field,” a comment first made by Marie Price of Post Falls, Idaho, when she was on the Board of Directors.

The field of recreation services has always responded to the needs of our communities. In fact, University of Chicago professor Robert E. Lucas won a Nobel prize for his work in economics, including his finding that nonformal learning is a key to economic prosperity for a nation.

We are on the frontier of another enormous opportunity for recreation services: online programs.

Thank you for your membership in the Learning Resources Network (LERN), the largest and leading association in marketing recreation services in the world.

Joseph M. Miera, M.P.A., CPP
Vice Provost
Division of Educational Outreach
University of Nevada, Las Vegas



Recreation Leaders include:

Kelly Gilfillen
Recreation Manager
City of Alexandria, Virginia

Chuck Ramm
Assistant Director of Parks
City of Temple, Texas

Jill Korsok
Orange Co. Recreation
Pepper Pike, OH

About the Learning Resources Network (LERN)

All the data, documentation, experiences and results have been thoroughly researched over the past five to seven years by the Learning Resources Network (LERN), the largest lifelong learning association in the world, serving more than 1,000 educational institutions a year.

LERN is a nonprofit tax exempt 501.c.3 educational organization founded in 1974.

An independent study conducted in early 2020 found that LERN member recreation programs had 10% higher registrations than non-member institutions. That means LERN generates an additional \$25,000 or more in annual income for LERN member recreation programs.

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About the Author

Julie Coates is Senior Vice President for Information Services at LERN. She is the foremost authority on brochures in the field of lifelong learning and recreation services. Ms. Coates has developed recreation schedules and brochures herself; and she has critiqued more than three thousand brochures over the past 30 years. She is a judge for the LERN Annual International Awards, where she reviews over 100 brochure submissions every year.

Coates is also an expert on generational characteristics, having authored the leading the book on the subject, "Generational Learning Styles." She has been interviewed by Psychology Today, BBC, The New York Times, Washington Post, PBS, Wall Street Journal, and other national media. Coates has spoken to recreation professional audiences around the world, including in Russia, Australia and Europe. She also teaches in the graduate program in adult and higher education at the University of South Dakota.



Part I.

The Evidence, Documentation and Data

Over the past five to seven years a number of recreation programs have eliminated the print brochure for their recreation programs, all with disastrous results.

The typical and predicted (based on past experience) outcome is a loss of 50% of your recreation program's registrations and income. This is what recreation programs report.

Most of the organizations eliminating their print brochure have reinstated it after the financially ruinous results. Those few who continue to operate without a print brochure continue to have registrations and income at about 50% or less of what they could have given their market size.

For organizations in the United States, LERN is able to trim your brochure and brochure distribution costs by up to 20% without losing registrations, and usually increasing them. We do this by analyzing the best carrier routes, those subunits within a zip code, to see where your customers come from, and recommending which carrier routes to which you can mail profitably, and identifying what carrier routes you lose money and to which you would restrict mailing.

No positive results by eliminating the print brochure

We also know elimination of the print brochure leads to losses because not a single recreation program that has eliminated its print brochure has reported positive overall results. None have maintained, much less increased registrations and income after eliminating their print catalog. LERN receives over 100 awards nominations a year, and not a single nomination has been submitted for achieving benefits from eliminating the print brochure, ever.

EXAMPLES

Here are a few of the reports we have received. The names of the institutions are confidential.

One program told us they would not be printing and distributing a fall brochure. We followed up. Here is what we learned.

"This is the worst fall term we have had since I have worked here (since 1992). We definitely feel that not mailing the catalog had a significant effect on registration."

More programs have given us similar feedback:

"This has been an excruciating setback for us. At a time we were asked to become self-supporting, they took away the best marketing piece we had."

"A city near us has a mayor that cut their brochure, and of course, their enrollments have dropped in a huge way. It has happened in a couple of cities in our area already, with dismal results."

One LERN member, The City of Henderson in Henderson Nevada, surveyed their participants and learned that:

- 80% of residents said they learn about the programs through the print brochure.
- 75% of the respondents said they keep the brochure until the next issue arrives.
- 60% indicated that at least two people read the brochure

Reducing Brochure Expenses

LERN can reduce your print brochure expenses. There are two ways we do this. We have guidelines for reducing the number of pages, usually reducing 4-8 pages, in your print brochure without diminishing registrations and income.

The Evidence Print Readers Register Online

People who register online for a recreation programs are more likely to register after receiving a print brochure. That is consistent with the data from the broader direct mail industry which find that more customers who purchase online do so after receiving a print catalog.

So, the presence of online registration does not affect the importance of the print brochure in a person's decision to register for a noncredit recreation professional class. As the brochure authority Julie Coates in 2020 summarized it, "Print drives decisions. Decisions are implemented online."

Even for people who register online-- even in the age of digital marketing-- direct mail still accounts for the majority of registrations and income for recreation programs.

When we survey LERN member programs, we consistently find that online registration is growing steadily as the preferred way to register online. Online registration now accounts for an average of 73% of registrations for the typical successful recreation program. And to be clear, the trend is for more people to continue to register online, so that percentage will continue to climb.

Nevertheless, even for recreation programs where 80-90% of students register online, enrollments generated from print promotions consistently account for as much as 70% of registrations and sometimes more.

The Evidence that People Respond to Print

In a study of 224 organizations promoting leisure learning online courses we found that the programs with the most registrations and income for online classes used the print brochure to generate 70% of their registrations for online classes.

In May 2020, in fact, two of those organizations became the first to publish an entire print brochure with just online courses.

In tech savvy, high tech Seattle, no fewer than organizations promote online classes with a print brochure. If any city saw a decline in the effectiveness of the print brochure, it would be Seattle, with the headquarters of Microsoft, Amazon and a slew of other online companies. And yet even in Seattle, organizations report the print brochure is the most important marketing tool for class programs.

Part II.

The Data That You Will Also Lose Taxpayer Votes

In repeated exit polls, voters who have participated in leisure and recreation classes have reported they have voted 20 points higher than the average voter for local taxpayer support of a referendum (bonding, mill levy, etc.) from the local organization (recreation department) from which they took the class.

The inescapable conclusion: when you cut your recreation program participants in half, you cut your taxpayer support. And to repeat, when you cut the print brochure and mailing for your recreation program, you cut your registrations by 30%-50%.

Part III.

Why Millennials Prefer Print

Millennials, or Gen Y, are those born between 1980 and 1999, the largest generation in history. They are your primary market for the programs you offer, and they will become increasingly important.

Set aside your notions that millennials want everything online and that baby boomers want everything in print. You have it backwards! Boomers in the US lead all other nations in computer literacy of older adults according to data provided by OECD. And millennials prefer print catalogs. Yes. The popularity of print continues to rise as more younger adults begin to participate recreation programs. The data also show that Generation Z, the generation born 2000 to 2019 (end dates vary by source) are even more attracted to print than Millennials/GenY.

Here is a summary of why Millennials prefer print:

*Print is more trusted by Millennials than purely online information (“If it’s on the Internet it must be true” is a sarcastic phrase used by this generation).

* Millennials are more risk averse than previous generations, and print reduces perceived risk

* Younger adults are more exhausted from and less tolerant of media hype than the rest of the world.

* Millennials want more authentic messages, and print with examples of real teachers and real participants and real recreation department staff, presents a more authentic message.

Increasingly, recreation professionals are noting that when they improve their print catalog, their online and digital presence is more effective. The catalog, or print brochure, drives traffic to your website.

- Integrate your print materials with digital communication
- Focus on creating well-designed, easily navigable web pages and good social media
- **Print drives decisions. Decisions are implemented online**

Be authentic

Younger adults are more exhausted from and less tolerant of media hype than the rest of the world. They are less trusting and quicker to judge a message a manipulative rather than informative.

- Use authentic photographs (avoid stock photos)
- Avoid hyperbole (don’t oversell or over-promise)
- Hit the hot buttons (keep your message on target)
- Don’t “boomerize” your messaging (there’s bad blood here, people)

Focus on your participants

The best print brochures we are seeing have lots of content that focuses on participants.

- Tell their stories
- Share their struggles and their successes
- Make them come alive in your pages
- Help your prospective participants relate to them

Highlight your Instructors

Your instructors are your most important assets. We all know that we wanted to sign up for classes taught by specific instructors because they had a reputation for being good teachers. This is true for your participants, as well.

- Turn your instructors into “real people”
- Make them relatable
- Make them accessible and helpful

Personalize your content

There are lots of ways to do this in every section of your brochure—from the table of contents to the registration pages. Some of those techniques include the tips above, but there are a lot more things you can do—and must do—if you are going to be successful in reaching younger adults.

- Create friendly, inviting contact pages.
- Make the process simple and unintimidating.
- Use photos of your staff

- Include names and job functions of the person to contact
- Include personal information about your staff, pictures of their pets, their hobbies. Make them real and friendly.
- Help young people overcome their reluctance to ask questions

Reduce Risk

Most young adults are intimidated by bureaucracy and the rigid rules that have characterized educational institutions for the past 100 years. The result is that lots of these students just won't risk rejection or failure. This is bad for them and bad for you.

- Have flexible registration options
- Eliminate penalties for most everything
- Have a generous refund policy
- Create easy access to information about your program
- Train your staff until you can't train them anymore to be friendly, helpful and supportive

Part IV.

The Direct Mail Industry Proves Catalogs Work

LERN Conference presenter and direct mail expert Paul Franklin reported a recent study by the U.S. Postal Service that shows print catalogs are the biggest factor in generating online customer orders. Customers who receive print brochures are:

- More likely to become multi-buyers on-line
- Account for 15% more transactions than those who did not get a catalog
- Will spend an average of 16% more than customers who did not get a catalog.

Additional research from the USPS shows that:

- Customers spend 30 minutes per day sorting, viewing and acting on mail.
- 98% of households bring in their mail daily.
- 77% sort through their mail daily.

The main problem with not having a print brochure is that your people must come to you to obtain information about your program. You are not putting it in their hands (as you do with a mailed print course/class schedule). This means that you are expecting them to remember, seek, and act on interest in your program. It's a busy world and that's a lot to expect. Here are some key things to remember:

1. **Print brochures drive enrollment.** The data are consistent over time. Print drives enrollment. Recreation programs consistently report that 70-75% of their enrollments come from their print brochures. One LERN member that shared 80% of his program's enrollment is directly attributed to the brochure.
2. **Print brochures are "push" oriented.** They arrive in the hands of the reader. The reader does not have to go to them. Even in the age of increased "pull" marketing, "push" strategies are still crucial.
3. **Print brochures are often easier to read and navigate than digital promotions.**

4. **Print brochures can be kept, shared, and re-read.**
5. **Print brochures are accessible to ALL household members.**
6. **Programs that do eliminate the print brochure see significant declines in enrollment.** Recently, a LERN member reported that a previous director had mandated the elimination of the print brochure. Enrollments dropped dramatically and dwindled to about 200 per term after the print brochure was eliminated. When a new director was hired and reinstated the print brochure, registrations rebounded to 4,000 per term.

Even though many people may now register online, the registration form in your print brochure is a marketing tool that pays for itself over and over. It tells the reader to take action and register. For proof, just look at the next direct mail catalog arriving in your mailbox- - it will have an order form. Provide all the information needed to convince someone to register, including place, time, cost, and instructor. The print brochure should contain everything someone needs to know to make a decision to attend your programs.

The lesson to be learned here is that decisions should not be made without data. Every organization should survey for data and use the data to make decisions. Use the survey data to justify and support your program's value to your decision makers. Being able to track and measure the effectiveness of direct mail is a critically important benefit. Tracking responses, refining your distribution, and targeting more carefully can significantly increase your enrollments and income. Intelligent mailing strategies are important. It is not sufficient just to mail your brochures to the community at large. Mail the brochure to existing customers and mail more often to your best customers. This increases enrollments.

LERN recommends using targeted marketing to make mailings more efficient and effective, and to test the response to alternatives to print promotions. LERN's Market Segmenting software anal-

ysis tool was developed to help you understand who your best customers are and how to target them most effectively. The analysis is available free to LERN members, and includes reports on carrier routes, repeat rate, primary market segments, and much more. For more details on this service, contact Tammy at info@lern.org.

Use Direct Mail as part of an Integrated Marketing Strategy

Electronic communication can be wiped out with a tap of the “delete” key, filtered into junk folders, cancelled by unsubscribing or sent to unmonitored email addresses, created just for receiving marketing emails. According to Data & Marketing Association, 57% of all email addresses are abandoned because the users receive too many promotional emails. Plus, it requires initiative on the part of participants to go to your web site or reply to an email for additional details. Again, you need to put something in their hands on a regular basis. According to research conducted by MailChimp, open rates for emails across all industries max out at just shy of 27%. This means that more than 2 out of every 3 marketing emails sent will go unopened, and that is the best-case scenario. By contrast up to 90% of direct mail gets opened or viewed.

Compare that with direct mail where response to house lists averages 9% and is rising according the Data and Marketing Association. And, according to USPS studies, 60% of catalog recipients visit the website of the company that mailed the catalog, a significantly higher percentage than those receiving email promotions.

Use your brochure to drive people to the web site where you can give them a lot more information about your program and activities, and by all means have an online registration option. This has become essential.

eMarketing is certainly an important component of your overall marketing mix, but it is not time to abandon the print brochure. Other marketing delivery options have come into play rapidly (social networking, mobile, etc.), but people are not ready for a drastic change like the elimination of print bro-

chures. You should never make a drastic change in your marketing plan without testing it first.

Many people like to register online because of the convenience it represents, but they do not necessarily want to read descriptions online. We recommend providing brief and interesting course descriptions in a brochure that you mail twice to your best customers and supplementing those mailings with email and mobile reminders about registration online, and if possible, with social networking posts. If your course descriptions are well written, they will motivate readers to seek additional details on your program, which they can do on your web site. Provide a copy/link to a PDF or digital version of your current brochure on the main page of the web site for your program to reflect a coordination of efforts.

Your web site is the perfect place to offer additional details because you are not limited to space and the cost of that space. The best approach right now is to use your brochure and web site in direct support of each other. Provide a link on your web site where site visitors can request a copy of your brochure. Send emails to drive people to your web site. Take advantage of all the benefits that each medium has to offer for your marketing efforts, and cross-promote.

QR Codes Drive Response

QR Codes can turn a print advertising campaign into a direct marketing tool with a higher response rate than direct mail alone. One reason is that mobile codes can enhance the reading experience for a targeted audience. Codes used to promote a discount, coupon or sweepstakes have a higher response rate.

According to a new report from Nellymoser, “Scan Response Rates in National Magazines,” found that readers of national magazines scan QR codes, Microsoft Tags, digital watermarks and other mobile action codes at an average rate of 6.4 percent. The report also found that mobile users are actively engaged and view an average of 18.9 mobile pages.

“The big news is that QR-style mobile codes in magazines get higher response rates than other printed direct marketing tools,” said Roger Matus, executive vice president at Nellymoser Inc., Arlington, MA.

“We never knew this before because this is the first time anyone has been able to measure the complete impact of printed mobile codes from the initial scan to the delivery of the mobile experience,” he said. Read the full article at: <http://www.mobilemarketer.com/cms/news/research/13905.html>

Catalogs drive sales for all household income groups.

Nearly 60% of online shoppers enjoy receiving catalogs. 57% of online shoppers said even though they buy online, they would still like to have a catalog on hand.

Catalogs are business builders.

Catalogs were found to discourage comparison shopping by more than 10%.

When shoppers receive catalogs, they spend more!

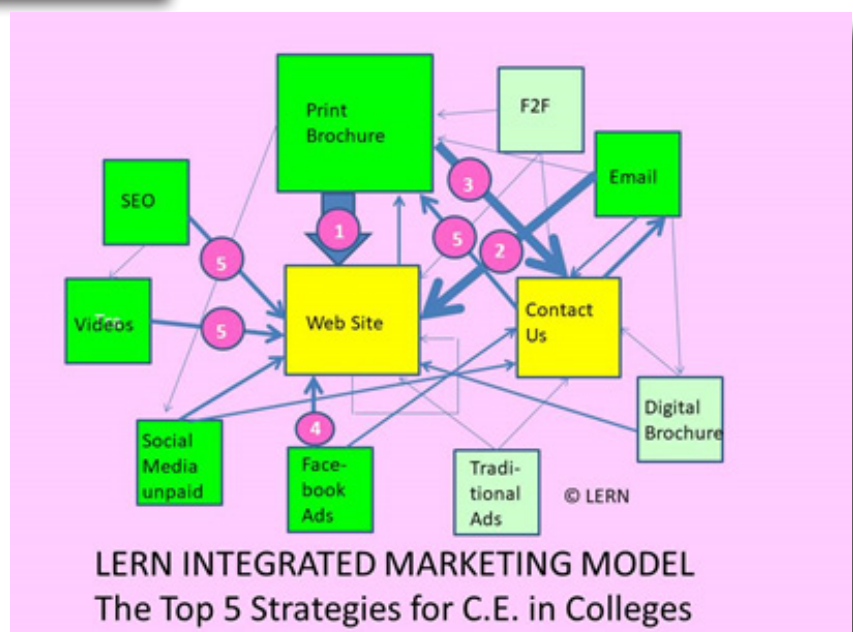
Revenue is more than two times greater from sending catalogs compared to sending only on-line communication. Average purchase is \$88 with catalog vs. \$69 without a catalog.

Integrated and Digital Marketing Starts with Print

Increasingly, recreation programmers are noting that when they improve their print catalog, their online and digital presence is more effective. The catalog, or print brochure, drives traffic to your website.

- Integrate your print materials with digital communication
- Focus on creating well-designed, easily navigable web pages and good social media
- Print drives decisions. Decisions are implemented online

Beginning in 2018, LERN has been surveying successful recreation programs about marketing success and the role of digital marketing as compared with print marketing. That model for Integrated Marketing (digital marketing is integrated with print marketing) looks like this at the present time.



Direct mail is a proven advertising tool.

- Direct mail has long been a strong component in the advertising programs of successful large businesses and Fortune 500 companies to promote their products and drive sales.
- Direct Marketing Association research finds every \$1 spent on direct mail generates an impressive \$12.57 in sales.
- Direct mail has strengths other advertising media can't claim — it's personal, tangible, portable (to re-read later and share with others), manageable, and measurable.
- At least three out of four people say they open and read direct mail. Direct mail delivers results.
- Direct mail has influenced more consumers' buying decisions than any other advertising medium — 76% of consumers have purchased a product/service after receiving a direct mail piece.
- Direct mail gets directly into the homes and hands of consumers, so mail has a powerful impact that's unbeatable.
- Direct mail cuts through the clutter and connects with age groups with disposable income.

How to maximize the effectiveness of your print brochure

LERN strongly recommends that you reinstate your print brochure if you have eliminated it. Before you make any drastic changes to your marketing plan, TEST, TEST, TEST! To be cautious, we recommend a limited print-run as a test. Print a brochure and mail it to a representative sample of your existing customer base. Compare the response rate with those of customers who did not receive a print brochure. This will limit your risk and give you data you can use to support expanding the mailing.

Make decisions based on data

The speed with which program managers have responded to marketing during the pandemic is remarkable, but LERN cautions that while many decisions had to be made very quickly, it is essential that, going forward, careful thought be given to how to best market and deliver programs. Crisis response should not become the “new normal.”

A disturbing trend that is emerging is that many program managers have decided to eliminate the print brochure in favor of email and digital marketing. This is a decision that needs to be reconsidered. There is abundant data supporting the superior response rates generated by direct mail. These data should form the basis for making a decision as critical as how to maximize the revenue potential of lifelong learning programs. Eliminating the print brochure has the potential to seriously damage future success and negatively affect registrations and slow the recovery from the initial impact of the pandemic.

Investment is better than saving

Any wealth management professional will confirm that while saving your money is a good thing to do, it does not build wealth. Wealth is built by investing in future growth. This principle holds for how lifelong learning programs market their programs. Marketing is an investment.

Too many decision-makers are assessing losses in income resulting from the decline in participation during the first phase of the pandemic and deciding that a lot of money can be saved by eliminating the print brochure. While it may appear that this is the case, these managers are not calculating the money that will be lost as a result of ineffective marketing. Investing in marketing is more essential now than it has ever been.

Conclusion

A New York Times story in April 2020 reported that businesses spend \$1 in marketing to generate \$9 in sales, which is just about the same percentage return as for recreation programming. The story continued, “Ads became an unavoidable part of modern life for a simple reason: They work.”

Your print brochure is not a cost. It is an investment, and you should expect to see enrollments increase and income increase in amounts greater than the expense of the catalog if you reinstate it. And, of course, do not eliminate your brochure if you are being asked to consider doing so.

And finally ask your customers. A joint venture between Ricoh and IBM wanted to find out a little more

about how Americans wanted to receive their important news. The resulting survey showed three out of four Americans would prefer to open important traditional mail delivered to them rather than e-mail, and 50% said they preferred traditional print material over 44% for e-mail. In our industry, specifically, we know that print is still the most powerful weapon in your marketing arsenal. The LERN member survey shows this year after year. In addition, we have seen members eliminate their recreation program print catalogs with disastrous results.

Part V.

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The Evidence Print Readers Register Online

Greg Marsello, Senior Vice President for Organizational Development at LERN, has visited and analyzed the data from more recreation and community service programs than any other person.

Julie Coates, Senior Vice President for Information Services has conducted research with LERN members on the impact of eliminating print brochures as well as data on online registrations driven by the print brochure. She has also done extensive research using marketing studies and has compiled data relevant for marketing by colleges and universities.

The Evidence Online Students Respond to Print

Print brochures from organizations in the Top 25 Partners for UGotClass, the leading online certificate provider for recreation programs.

Advertising Works

“Each dollar that companies spent on advertising in the United States last year led to \$9 in sales, the research firm HIS Markit estimated,” reports The New York Times (April 4, 2020). “Ads became an unavoidable part of modern life for a simple reason: They work.”



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