



Going Paperless: 5 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Making the Leap !

November 15, 2011 by Spencer Robertson



In many discussions with recreation agencies over the last couple of years, one of the hottest topics is the trend towards going paperless. With tightened budgets, it seems logical that this topic would come up more often, as organizations search for new ways to reduce expenditures. The obvious benefits are reduced printing and mailing costs, and a lower environmental impact. However, many people have questions about the impact on registration numbers and wonder if it will work in their community. There's one simple answer to these questions – it depends.

Success among communities that have made the leap has been mixed. Don't jump the gun in a saving frenzy and cut all your paper-based marketing without asking yourself these questions:

1. Does your target audience have a high rate of Internet use?
2. Do you already use multiple online channels to promote your programs?
3. Do your online channels reach a large audience (website visitors, email subscribers)?
4. Does your community have goals aside from cost savings, such as 'going green'?
5. If your registration numbers go down temporarily, is this something your budget can handle?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, then you're more likely to be successful in your transition.

Most communities are well-connected these days, but consider your audience. This step may be common sense, but demographics can play a large part in online acceptance. Younger, well-educated groups may be more likely to see the benefits of the switch, but this is not always the case. Many recreation professionals know their communities pretty well, so you likely have a feel for your audience.

If your community doesn't already have a large online presence, it can be a difficult transition to switch directly to a digital brochure. It works best in organizations that are able to promote it heavily with a variety of online channels, such as a website, email newsletter and social media. If you've made a decision to go digital, make sure the brochure is easy to find on your website and is promoted heavily throughout all of your online channels.



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It won't be very successful if your constituents aren't aware of it and can't find it.

Aside from cost and environmental impacts, there are some less obvious benefits of online guides, such as direct online registration with links, sharing features (share via email, Facebook, Twitter), analytics and the ability to embed media. These features may be more important for some communities and provide the extra push to go digital.

Make sure you're prepared for a drop in registrations. Even if your efforts are ultimately successful, there can be an initial drop before your participants adapt. For this reason, it's a good idea to test the waters for a better gauge of success. Try running both digital and print, while putting a large emphasis on your digital brochure. Promote and share the link to your digital brochure in your print guide. You can also try printing less before making a complete transition.

Finally, in order to help your decision, do a survey or poll. Free surveys and polls can be created using SurveyMonkey, Polldaddy or a similar online survey system. This will help to understand your audience's preferences and ultimately make the decision that fits in your community.

The End

