



The Internet Newsletter is Dead: Long Live Print

By Dana Kader Robb

Okay, you can reasonably accuse me of being overly dramatic with that headline, but I get asked about e-newsletters so often that I'm considering tattooing the answer on my forehead. Since my head's not quite big enough for this endeavor, I'll start here instead.

As with any technology, the Internet brings pros and cons to the world of communication. We explored the different types of newsletters in issue #8 and took a fair look at each option. But folks are enamored with the speed and low-to-almost-non-existent cost of online newsletters. So I wanted to share a portion of an article I read recently.

In the Feb. 26 issue of *Newsweek*, Robert J. Samuelson wrote, "The paradox is that the Internet seems to deliver so much information to users at so little cost, that much of it doesn't have much value. It is read casually or not at all... We reporters constantly surf the Web and download reports and documents. Some of them we read; some of them we save but don't read; some of them, once printed, simply sit next to the printer until they're tossed. But why not? It's all free.

"When Amazon.com and BN.com offered Stephen King's novel *Riding the Bullet* free of charge, customers downloaded an estimated 500,000 copies within days. But a market study later found that only 5 percent of people read it."

History has certainly shown that people feel that Stephen King is a good writer. His books invariably make the best seller list. And, if someone were to receive one as a gift, we could certainly assume it likely that the book would be read. So when half a million people receive a gift of a Stephen King novel, why do only 5% read it? To me, it comes back to the conundrum of perceived value. I can't explain the psychology behind it, but there's something about an electronic version, as opposed to holding an actual press-printed piece, that makes the information seem more disposable and less valuable.

If your objective is to send information to thousands of people and hope that a small percentage will act on it, the Internet is exactly what you need. If your objective is to specifically target a small group of people in the hopes of developing a relationship with them it looks like you still need ink on paper.