

FLYERS POISED TO MAKE BIG COMEBACK IN POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

CHRIS TRABER

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted almost every aspect of our lives. With non-essential business shuttered or limited to curbside sales, retail flyer advertising has also fallen victim as evidenced by newspapers usually brimming with circulars now as thin as our social calendars.

While consumers fret about the future of their beloved retail ad inserts industry experts are optimistic.

Thornhill resident Renata Richardson is a flyer devotee.

"I review the grocery and pharmacy ads and sort them by need and seasonal interest," she said. "The flyers are the basis for my shopping list and for family and client meal planning."

Since the pandemic flyer content has dropped by 75 per cent. As such, she has

gone online to favoured retailers.

"Searching the Internet isn't the same as having a flyer in front of you," she said. "I like to take a physical flyer to the store, especially for price matching. It can be awkward doing that online."

"If there are fewer print flyers in the post-pandemic world I'd adjust, but I'd be very disappointed."

Aurora banker Alicia Andrus concurs.

"I like the convenience of fanning the flyers and looking for the best brands and prices. It's easier than jumping from website to site. I really hope all the flyers return. I particularly feel for seniors who can't navigate or access the internet."

Star Metroland Media retail and flyer sales vice-president Lisa Orpen is bullish on what lies ahead for flyers based on consumer



Catherine O'Hara/Torstar

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er research.

Many like the tactile experience of exploring flyers in large format free from "screen time," she said, adding that saving money on weekly shopping gives people a sense of pride.

"It's not all about the deals, it's about discovery of new products. You don't need to leave the comfort of your own home to have a window-shopping experi-

ence."

COVID-19 has changed retail habits and consumer behaviours, she said. Within the home improvement category, for example, some retailers have postponed flyers out of concern that curbside pickup can't be adequately fulfilled.

"That's a precautionary strategy to not disappoint consumers."

Consumers remain pas-

sionate about flyers and retailer analytics confirm the power of the medium, she said.

"Simply put, flyers are the strongest driver of store traffic for many retailers. They like the mass reach with the ability to target households according to location, sales data and demographics including income, age and lifestyle behaviours. It's no longer spray and pray. In the marketing world, measurement is key."

Retailers have a major stake in print and digital advertising yet print will remain vital, said Steve Acland, president of Geomedia, an analytics-driven geomarketing company focused on consumer behaviour and media planning and buying. While pandemic era flyer volume has dropped for more than 12 million Canadian households, he predicts retailers

will reevaluate post COVID-19 ad tactics.

"There will be changes for weighing print and digital," he said. "Will it be drastic? No. The majority of retailers will creep back into the new normal, some accelerating to digital for some consumer areas."

Print flyers will survive based on sophisticated data confirming their effectiveness, Acland said.

"Flyers have many positives," he said. "They come to your door. Some consumers' financial situations will change post pandemic. They will shop for sales. If retailers stop producing flyers it looks like they are abandoning the customer or that they're not open."

If Canada suffers a post-pandemic economic downturn, flyers will endure, said Fusion Retail Analytics president Joe Thacker.

"In a recession typically flyer readership goes up," he said. "Having a weekly conversation with your customer is more important than ever."



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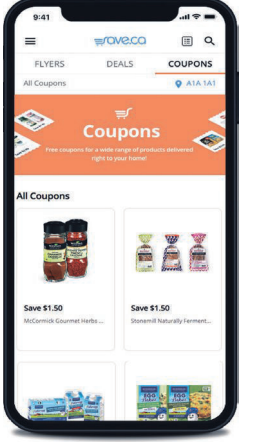
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