



# PaperChain®

## LINK & LEARN

### Surviving and Thriving in Interesting Times

“May you live in interesting times!” We’ve all heard this supposed “Ancient Chinese Curse.” Why are interesting times a curse? The answer lies in what makes things interesting; our interest is peaked by variety. We take little interest in things which we see every day; this is why the marketing departments of well known brands are always coming up with ways to create new versions of their products. People will notice Tide in a new package, or with a new “miracle” ingredient. So “interesting times” are by definition times of great change. We are certainly living in very interesting times.

Most people have a love/hate relationship with change. Human beings are inherently conservative; we base our actions on what has worked for us in the past. A behavior or product that has served us well in the past is seen as the safe choice for the future. This is what creates value for a brand, “I liked my Nike shoes, so I’m sure their t-shirts are great.” While we appreciate small changes, a new flavor of a product we like, a styling change in a favorite car model, we’re frightened by major changes that force us to make significant changes in our behavior. Paul Christenson of the Harvard Business School coined the term, “Disruptive Change” to describe change that shakes up an industry and/or creates new ones. Disruptive changes, such as the rise of the internet and the prevalence of smart phones, make the times we are currently living very, very, VERY INTERESTING!

The key to surviving and thriving in changing times is a careful and logical evaluation of how to use technology and products available to us to best accomplish our goals. We must constantly ask ourselves, what best serves our needs at this particular point in time. Making a decision based on a purely logical evaluation of the facts at hand is much harder than it seems. Individuals and organizations are financially and emotionally invested in their current business model. I am a good example of this; I have sold print advertising for more than three decades. I am also a dedicated reader of newspapers and magazines. These experiences make me a believer in the power of print and I am very comfortable with recommending print advertising to my clients. The danger lies in believing that my personal experience is typical; in believing that everyone living in my market interacts with media in exactly the same way. A desire to protect one’s “turf” can also make us resistant to change. I am 100% comfortable with all aspects of the print advertising business; I understand it inside, outside,

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN

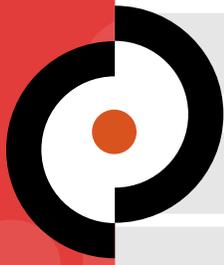
backwards and forwards. When I enter the digital realm, I am a novice and have to feel my way through an undiscovered country. Organizations often react in similar ways. Companies, that have invested large amounts of cash in their printing facilities, are very protective of their print products.

Our industry is in a transitional period. There is still a great deal of value in our print products and I believe this will continue into the foreseeable future. Digital products are growing in importance at a rapid rate and this trend shows no sign of abating. We are at the point the movie industry was in at the end of World War II. In 1945, the film studios had dominated the entertainment industry for over five decades, virtually everyone consumed their products and the industry was immensely profitable. This dominance was challenged by the “disruptive” technology of the 1950’s, television. Initially, studio executives tried to deny the impact of TV; they felt that people would never desert their neighborhood theaters for a tiny, flickering, black and white screen. Over the next several decades, the film industry lost a huge portion of their market share to television. Some studios disappeared and the entire industry had to scale back. Eventually, they learned to adapt and to seek out new business models. Today, the film industry’s profits are not limited to ticket sales; they come from product tie-ins, video sales, branded merchandise etc. Like the film studios, the advertising industry has to learn to think in different ways, if we are to survive and thrive in this period of great change.

We must ask ourselves, “Why does our business deserve to exist? What do we give our consumers in return for their support?” I believe the answer to these questions is content and connection. We provide our readers with information that makes their lives better. We tell them what is going on in their community and what their local businesses have to offer. We also provide the local business community with a way to connect to as many local consumers as possible. Every decision we make should be based on delivering the best possible content and connecting with the maximum number of readers. We do not sell print; we do not sell digital advertising; we sell content and connection. Our job is to develop a portfolio which effectively accomplishes this objective. Sometimes this is a print product, sometimes this is a digital product; during this transitional period it is often a combination of these two products.

Recently, I helped to develop a blended product for my company. The sales manager of one of our local offices asked me to provide her team with some research to help them sell our annual bridal section. She told me that her reps

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**



# PaperChain®

## LINK & LEARN

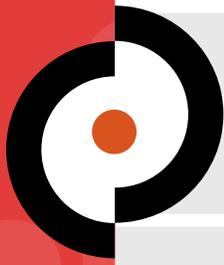
were telling her that their customers felt the bridal tab simply didn't work. The target market for the bridal tab was women in their 20's and 30's. When I looked at the demographic profile of our print readership, I found that very few of our readers matched this target. I looked into the media usage habits of young engaged women and found that they are heavy mobile web users and also found wedding magazines informative. I also looked at the history of our bridal tab, we had produced this product for decades, but it had declined in recent years. It had lost revenue in each of the last five years and had actually lost money in the previous year. This struck me as the perfect definition of insanity, doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Most of our management team attributed this poor performance to a lack of effort by our sales force. I worked with the manager to develop a blended product.

The first step we took to developing the new wedding product was to literally wipe the slate clean. We started with a blank whiteboard. In the center of the board we wrote, "Reach potential brides with the information they want and need." With this objective established, we looked at the best way we could reach our target market. Our company sells both direct mail and e-mail marketing. We contacted our list vendors and learned that they could provide us with lists of women who planned to wed in the next 18 months. We brought in one of our artists to help us design a very attractive print bridal magazine. We used this print product as the core of our marketing package for bridal advertisers. Here is what we offered our clients:

- The print magazine mailed to all of the engaged women in our core service area.
- An online "flip book" version of the print product hosted on our company website.
- Three e-mail blasts to the engaged women throughout our market featuring key advertisers and a link to "flip book" edition of Wedding Planner.
- Promotion of product and web address for "flip book" in all our print publications.

This provided a great deal of value for our bridal shops, caterers etc. Instead of publishing a product and hoping the target market would see it, we proactively delivered it directly to them. Because we targeted only the small portion of the

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**



# PaperChain<sup>®</sup>

## LINK & LEARN<sup>SM</sup>

market which was engaged in our core, and most affluent market, we were able to produce a much smaller number of printed magazines. This smaller print run allowed us to improve the quality of the publication to a glossy magazine format and off-set the mailing cost. The e-mail blast allowed us to directly contact every potential bride in our market and drive traffic to the online product and to our website. This product was very well accepted by the market, sales were 400% of the previous year's newsprint tab and we have had excellent feedback from our advertisers and from our readers.

I believe our blended wedding product was so successful because it was designed with the needs of the advertisers and the target market in mind. We looked at which products could best accomplish a clearly defined objective. Rather than trying to revive a product which had been created for an environment which no longer existed, we used current information to design a product which addressed the needs and concerns of our current advertisers. After the success of this product was apparent, a number of people in our organization suggested we use this model for our annual home and garden tab. This is "one size fits all" thinking and does not consider all of the variables considered in creating the wedding product. While the number of women planning to marry at any particular point in time is small, many people are interested in home improvements. This need is better served by a widely distributed print product and we are developing a print product supported by online promotion.

To survive in "interesting" times, we must learn to embrace change and to constantly look at the facts, as they are in the moment. Phrases like "tried and true," or "we've never done it that way" can be suicidal for any organization in these changing times. While these "interesting" times can be challenging and stressful, they can also be very exciting. I'll close with this thought from writer, Kathleen Norris, which sums up what we need to do to thrive far into the future, "Disconnecting from change does not recapture the past, it loses the future."

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

Link & Learn is brought to you every month as part of PaperChain's<sup>®</sup> mission to provide educational material to the free paper publishers. **If you have an issue you would like to see covered please email [janderson@wisad.com](mailto:janderson@wisad.com), put "Link & Learn" in subject line.** Be sure to check out [www.paperchain.org](http://www.paperchain.org) for past issues, electronic ready promotional ads and much more to help you remain competitive.

**You may download this and all issues of Link & Learn at [www.PaperChain.org](http://www.PaperChain.org)**