

Consumer Insights

Australians want their paper bills and statements



Remember the saying: “The customer is always right”? It seems Australian banks, telcos and utilities have gotten the message mixed up. The push for customers to move to ebilling and statements is being made with little, if any, regard for customer preference. An interesting position in a consumer-savvy market.

Findings of an international survey (Two Sides, 2016) indicate a majority of Australian consumers are resistant to being unwillingly moved to online communications and are unhappy that it is now their responsibility to print valuable documents. Many consumers would like to continue receiving printed bills or statements because they provide a permanent record for important documents and some consumers do not have reliable internet access so require paper communications from companies.

Australian consumers are resistant to being unwillingly moved to online communications:

- 76% are unhappy if asked to pay a premium for paper bills and statements,
- 69% want the option to continue receiving printed information as it provides a permanent record for important documents,
- 58% are unhappy that the responsibility to print valuable documents is being passed to consumers,
- 44% would consider changing service providers if asked or forced to move to paperless communication,
- 43% don't have a reliable internet connection and want paper records.

In Australia, research found consumer cynicism when presented with environmental claims being linked to an encouragement to stop receiving paper bills and statements:

- 83% receiving environmental claims like “Go Paperless – Go Green”, or “Go Paperless – Save trees”, or “Get your bills on line - it's better for the environment” believe companies are seeking to save costs,
- 56% question the validity of these claims,
- 42% feel misled by these claims.

Paper and print remains the Australians' preferred communication channel:

- 74% prefer reading print on paper than from a screen,
- 71% enjoy the tactile experience of paper and print.



Further, an international study into electronic consumer invoicing in Nordic countries, Russia and Australia, shows that, in Australia, the physical letter is the most preferred invoice reception channel. Remarkably, the main reasons why some customers begun to use digital invoices are:

- Digital invoices were offered as only alternative
- They wanted to avoid surcharge

It is important for policy makers to acknowledge that information on paper is preferred by many consumers and often receives more attention. Consumers wish to retain the flexibility of postal and electronic communications.

In reality we live in an increasingly digital world where electronic and paper based communications coexist and are often complementary. Communication strategies must recognise this and allow for citizen choice. There are many tangible benefits that paper based documentation can bring and its preference as a means of communication by many consumers must be at the forefront of any digital planning.

Sources:

1. The attractiveness and sustainability of paper and print, Two Sides, July 2016
2. Electronic consumer invoicing in Nordic countries, Russia and Australia, Itella BI, 2013