

Case Study: Portfolio Audit to Optimize a Collection of Print Publications

2024

Introduction

A federal health agency created, maintained, and distributed more than 60 print titles in English and Spanish, covering topics including disease-specific information, caregiver support, and general health and wellness guidance. Publications included booklets, handouts, posters, and brochures, most of which were aimed at a lay audience.

Each year, the agency distributed over 1 million free copies of these publications to the public, including nonprofit organizations and healthcare professionals, who could order multiple copies of each title via the agency's website.

The goal of this project was to ensure continued access to these high-demand publications despite resource limitations and rising costs of materials, maintaining the agency's commitment to providing critical health information in print.

Scope of Work / Approach

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, paper and other materials required for printing publications became increasingly expensive due to supply chain disruptions and shortages. At the same time, the funding available for printing was capped at the organizational level and could not be increased.

To address this challenge, a detailed cost-benefit analysis was conducted for each publication, considering factors such as:

- Number of copies distributed annually
- Cost per copy to print
- Relevance to audience information needs
- Centrality to the agency's mission
- Redundancy with information available from other agencies

Data were systematically collected and analyzed in a spreadsheet to identify cost-saving opportunities while minimizing impact on public access.

Key Insights / Findings

- Print publications remained a highly valued channel for the agency's audience to access health information.

- Rising demand could not be met under existing resource constraints without changes to the publication strategy.
- Approximately 10% of the collection could be discontinued due to low distribution, limited relevance, or redundancy with other available materials.
- All posters could be discontinued, as the information was largely available in smaller handout formats.
- Remaining publications should be prioritized for reprinting based on audience demand and alignment with agency goals.

Recommendations

Recommendations for publications retained in the collection included:

- Use lower-weight paper for larger publications to reduce printing and shipping costs.
- For smaller booklets, reduce the number of pages by minimizing white space and removing select images; adjust the physical size slightly to reduce printing costs.
- Reduce the copy limit for certain titles based on individual printing costs.
- As appropriate, lengthen intervals between updates so that each publication could remain in circulation longer before requiring a reprint.

Impact and Value

Print publications from this federal agency continue to be highly valued by the public, providing accessible, tangible health information at no cost. Popular topics, such as healthy eating and caregiving, benefit from bulk distribution at health fairs, community events, libraries, and other in-person settings. They provide reach that online materials alone cannot offer.

This project maximized public service with limited resources by implementing practical, low-impact changes rather than eliminating widely used titles. It provided a clear framework for future cost-benefit analyses of publications and established criteria for managing the content life cycle, ensuring that the agency could continue delivering timely, relevant health information despite resource limitations.