

MAIL

Print catalogs still hold power to captivate consumers

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By JEN KING

As brands and retailers continue to lean toward digital-only initiatives to share merchandise with consumers, the role of direct mail catalogs has changed but is not dwindling.

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The traditional print catalog has evolved to extend to digital replicas and promote in-store experiences alongside the regular fare of lavish designer collections. Although rooted in the past, catalogs still have the ability to grab the attention of consumers on a personal and sustained level that digital still has not attained.

“One might think that the catalogs published by retailers are a thing of the past,” said Dave Rodgeron, a Toronto-based retail analyst and consultant.

“They have certainly evolved, but there is still the romance of paging through a hard copy and leaving bookmarks or dog ears where you want to have another look,” he said. “For consumers that live in rural or remote areas, a catalog still holds value.

“One change that I have seen with varying degrees of success is the magalog, a magazine that also serves as a means to highlight fashion that can be ordered online or over the phone. The key to its success has been creating a quality of editorial content that engages

the readers first and prioritizes that over the sale of merchandise or advertising space.”

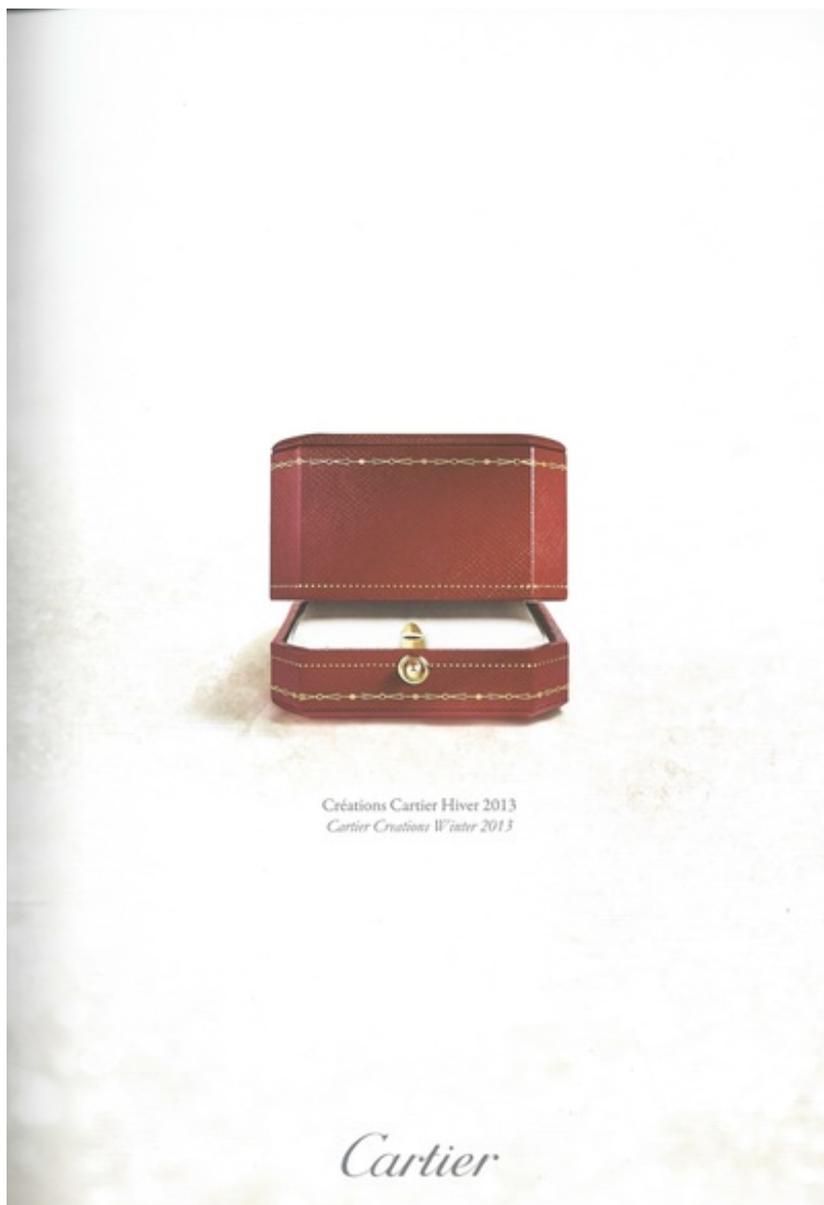
Retail mail

Holiday or season-specific catalogs allow brands, most notably jewelers, to engage consumers and pique their interest as they browse the pages. Incorporating product images into a theme is a simple tactic that resonates with a consumer's imagination and is more likely to leave an impression than a standard photo and blurb.

Both Cartier and Tiffany have substantial catalog programs that use the aforementioned strategy to stay top of mind among its wealthy consumers.

For the 2013 holiday season, Cartier shared the “magic of winter” with its valued consumers in its annual direct mail catalog that is accompanied by a personalized holiday message.

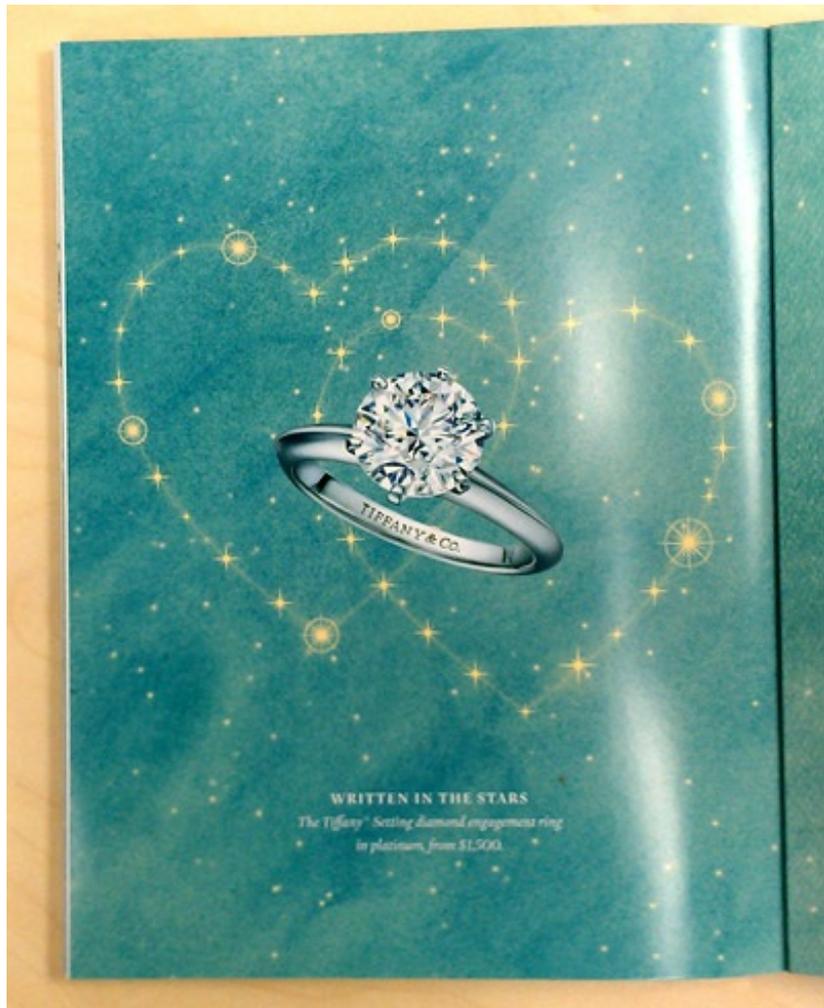
Cartier’s winter catalog featured 43 pages of high-jewelry designs set against a motif of ice crystals on high-gloss, thick paper. The ice theme began on the cover where the Cartier logo appears in red against a stark white page with an edging of embossed ivory lines meant to resemble frost on a window pane ([see story](#)).



Cartier's Creations Winter 2013 catalog

Playing off the notion that many consumers will buy jewelry for Valentine's Day, Tiffany pushed gift purchases through an astrology-themed direct mail catalog that presents its collections and pricing.

The cover of the mini-catalog states, "Above all, a Tiffany heart," and shows a group of gold stars in the shape of a heart. The astrology theme is apparent throughout the catalog in the background of the cover and product images that show constellations over a Tiffany-blue night sky ([see story](#)).



Tiffany Valentine's Day catalog page

Other direct mail catalogs have grown from seasonal look books accompanied by purchase options to well-rounded magazines. Today's catalogs often include curated collections with an editorial bent to engage the reader for a longer period of time.

For instance, department store chain Neiman Marcus celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its "Art of Fashion" campaign through a collaboration project with artist Sarah Moon.

The Art of Fashion campaign debuted in September and was featured in Neiman Marcus' The Book with 23 photographs taken by Ms. Moon. Neiman Marcus's the Art of Fashion, is seen as a revolutionary step in retailer advertising, since it features high-fashion and artful

photography ([see story](#)).



Alexander McQueen fashion photographed by Ms. Moon for Neiman Marcus' The Book

The addition of Neiman Marcus' Art of Fashion within the print and digital edition of The Book gave the catalog the feel of a mainstream fashion magazine rather than serving solely to generate purchases.

Mailed catalogs are meant to evoke the allure of a brand through high-quality paper and exclusive content.

To further this catalog strategy, Neiman Marcus organized a charity initiative within the 87th edition of its for-purchase Christmas Book catalog that calls for the retailer to donate a percentage of proceeds from its Fantasy Gift assortment to its Heart of Neiman Marcus Foundation.

Lavish presents found in the book's Fantasy Gifts pages included a \$150,000 Bespoke Global Falconry Companion set, a "His & Hers" Outdoor Entertainment System for \$1.5 million, a Forevermark Diamond trip to Africa to source your own De Beers diamond for \$1.85 million and a Neiman Marcus 2014 Aston Martin Vanquish Volante, one of only ten in the world, for \$344,500 ([see story](#)).



Bespoke Global Falconry Companion seen in Neiman Marcus' Christmas Book 2013

Catalogs can also pique the interest of consumers who want to window shopping by promoting exclusive in-store experiences.

For the holidays, New York department store Bergdorf Goodman targeted affluent female consumers with a direct mail catalog intended to pique interest in the retailer's curated gift selections in time for the shopping season.

The 97-page "Holidays on Ice" print catalog featured gift items for men, women and children from brands such as Lalique, Ralph Lauren, Zegna, Fendi and Chanel. Additionally, Bergdorf sought to increase foot-traffic to its bricks-and-mortar location by including elaborate experiences for consumers that played off both the holiday season and the impeccable services the retailer can provide ([see story](#)).



Bergdorf Goodman's Holiday Window experience promotional image seen in Holidays on Ice

Catalogs have highly targeted distribution that allows the artful style and limited reserve of products to resonate with consumers.

"If the primary goal of sending printed catalogs or guides is to maintain the allure of the brand, then the brand has to be careful to limit the distribution, just as it would for a product," said Courtney Albert, management consultant for [The Parker Avery Group](#), Atlanta. "Additionally, items featured would have limited quantities, be very unique or even quirky, that speak to or are exclusive to the brand.

"I think enthusiasts of a particular brand still appreciate the catalog, whether digital or

print, because it offers an edited, usually themed selection of merchandise," she said. "For a retailer, this provides a way to communicate with the shopper outside of its everyday Web site translating into a more interactive experience and higher conversion rates.

"The first challenge for any retailer is getting a potential consumer inside the store or to its site. Granted, there are many steps leading up to that moment but once you have a consumer's attention, it is up to you if you can maintain it."

Taking a digital approach

Akin to Bergdorf Goodman's tactic of leading consumers in-stores, many brands have avoided ecommerce altogether to entice fans to shop in physical locations rather than online.

In place of ecommerce platforms, some brands have developed digital look books housed on their Web sites that keep the editorial feel found in a magalog.

For example, French fashion label Christian Dior is giving enthusiasts a guided tour of the brand's inner workings through a renovated Web site that stresses the importance of heritage rather than pushing ecommerce.

Unveiled on Oct. 31, the redesigned site allows consumers to "walk in the Dior world" by experiencing an array of images and content that tout the apparel label's history in a magazine-like format ([see story](#)).

To maintain its relevance, a print or digital catalog must shape its content in a way that engages a distinct group of consumers.

"Catalogs are still a viable way to share with consumers as long as the content is rich with information that the readers can't find anywhere else," Brittany Mills, vice president of client solutions at [Nervewire Inc.](#), New York. "Brands want to own their content and catalogs, both digital and print, are a way for them to share their brand story and own unique content.

"Typically, with luxury products, shoppers will want to try on and view the items before purchasing," she said. "Not all the time, but most of the time.

"These methods help to drive awareness and to help get that content into the hands of their customers, with the proper strategy, so that the interest is created. Brands must understand that their consumers all don't like to shop the same way. While driving foot traffic is important, you can't change the ways of some digital savvy shoppers."

Final Take

Jen King, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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