

THE PUSH TO DIGITAL - HOW DO CONSUMERS FEEL ABOUT IT?



THE CONSUMER'S
RIGHT TO CHOOSE
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Consumers feel strongly about having the option to access paper documents for a variety of reasons. Whether it is for security concerns due to online fraud, lack of computer or Internet access, or just preference for paper, consumers overwhelmingly want to be able to choose how they receive important financial information.

This fact sheet is a compilation of testimonials from consumers who have voiced their opinions about why paper documents are so important to them. These comments are from consumers in the U.S. and Canada and were gathered from a survey done by Consumer Action¹ as well as online or email comments sent to Keep Me Posted² and the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission website.³

Internet Security is a Growing Threat

Online fraud is a growing concern. Most consumers feel that their data is at risk of being hacked or stolen – and they are right. Research indicates that data breaches are on the rise. Mobile devices are the latest targets with the number of new malware variants for mobile having increased by 54% in 2017.⁴ According to a report that surveyed 3,000 business leaders from more than 80 countries, 53% of companies globally are sufficiently prepared for a cybersecurity attack, and the percentage is lower for small businesses.⁵

What are consumers saying? (comments selected from the Consumer Action Survey and submissions to the Keep Me Posted and CRTC websites)^{1,2,3}:

- The less information or banking that is online, the less likelihood of hackers getting my information and utilizing it.
- I do not like to be online in accounts any more than absolutely necessary due to lack of confidence in online security, regardless of measures used to protect, especially credit cards and investment accounts.
- I'm sick of relying on the computer for everything. There are viruses and phishing and errors. I don't know who knows when I open something or not behind the scenes. I don't like how it hurts my eyes after working all day on the computer - so I am not interested to look at the screen when I am off work as well. I'm just done with it. I like tangible documents; I decide what I want to do and when - systems crash, systems have errors. I like the visual of having my documents in front of me at the same time. Not out of sight, out of mind. Opening multiple screens – ugh.
- I worry about electronic security of my information and who is doing what with my information. Even if my data doesn't get hacked, who is the other party -- who owns my personal information – who are they selling my data to, and what is the buyer doing with it?
- Companies are being hacked all the time (e.g., Bank of Montreal recently) and have not proven they are able to keep my personal information safe. Accessing paper bills is a way I can protect myself when companies cannot.



A Preference for Paper

Not everyone wants to use email or their mobile phone to pay a bill. Paper documents allow for a different type of record keeping and visibility to your financial information. Many use a paper bill as a prompt for payment to avoid late fees or to avoid having data get accidentally deleted or lost in email inbox clutter.

What are consumers saying? (comments selected from the Consumer Action Survey and submissions to the Keep Me Posted and CRTC websites)^{1,2,3}:

- There are too many ways for things to go astray in the email world. Email is not always reliable, and I prefer working in paper and being able to lay things out and compare. It's really much easier and simpler. When it comes time to pay, honestly, it's much easier to deal with paper.
- Paperless is good for some things, but anything financial such as banks or brokers--paper is the only record of proof that I have and trust in case anything happens to that financial organization.
- It's too easy to miss an email; sometimes something important goes to my junk file, and I don't see it. Or there's an outage. I like PAPER that I can underline, check, or make notes on.
- I request a paper statement for all of my bills. It is my preferred method of bill reconciliation, and I do not support this electronic movement. This is my right, my choice, and in my opinion, the safest and most accurate way of conducting my personal finances.



Internet Accessibility is not an Option for Everyone

Accessibility to the internet is not the same for everyone. Many consumers do not have access to online information because of their location, income level, age, or ability. When companies charge for a service, it has the greatest impact on those who are the most vulnerable.

What are consumers saying? (comments selected from the Consumer Action Survey and submissions to the Keep Me Posted and CRTC websites)^{1,2,3}:

- US Bank and Midwest Bankcentre in St. Louis, MO are now charging \$5.00/month for paper statements. My girlfriend's father is 94 years old and has been a customer of Midwest Bankcentre for over 25 years. They will not waive the fee even for a senior citizen.
- Many people with low income don't have reliable access to the internet and therefore require paper bills. No one should be charged to receive a paper bill. The fact that many people opt for electronic bills should result in savings to the company that more than offset any costs associated with sending paper bills to those who need to have them or prefer to receive them.
- Price of computer equipment + monthly cost of internet connection + cost of utilities for electricity = unfair, absurd, and costly way to pay a bill. Add the bank's service charge, and all this takes my money!
- I'm lucky to have computer access in my home. I know a lot of folks are only able to access the Internet on their phones (or not at all). If all bills had to be accessed online, that would mean that those folks would struggle to obtain, review, and pay their bills.
- I need a paper bill, i.e., a bill by so-called 'snail mail'. I live by myself, and I have health issues. How would anyone have access to my bill if I am incapacitated or in the hospital?
- For many of us who are on limited incomes, or do not have regular internet service, it is not a practical way to pay our bills. To have to pay for internet service every month just to pay bills is too expensive for me, as well as I really do not know how to use it. Although I live in Silicon Valley, I am NOT in the least a "tech person." As I get older, it's a better reminder to have paper, and it's more difficult to see the screen and spend time in front of it.
- At LEAST 25% of Americans do NOT have reliable internet access or affordable computers. To rely on email will - as always - discriminate against the poor, the rural, the elderly.

Consumers Speak – They Want a Paper Option

Results of a 2019 Toluna consumer survey indicated that 86% of Americans and 82% of Canadians agree that they should have the right to choose how they receive communications (printed or electronic) from financial organizations and service providers.^{6,7} Consumers want the option to choose how they receive documentation, especially when companies are doing it to save money and pass along the cost to the consumer.

What are consumers saying? (comments selected from the Consumer Action Survey and submissions to the Keep Me Posted and CRTC websites)^{1,2,3}:

- It is a disadvantage to elders and people who have little or no access to the internet to have mandatory electronic bills. Honestly, it goes AGAINST the best interest of the customer, and nobody is doing anything to stop companies and institutions for imposing this unilateral choice. The consumer was pushed to accept this inconvenient practice. We are losing the power to check and compare our expenses and what we are paying for.
- I'm tired of the constant prompts on websites asking me to switch to paperless billing. They often make the choice to stay with mail notices harder to see than the other choice.
- Records can only be verified on paper. Electronic bills, notices, etc. can only be verified if printed out - which is not 'paperless'. Shifting from paper to electronic billing and record keeping is a false 'economy'.
- ALL companies should be required to continue sending paper bills if the customer prefers, it's a cost of doing business! I'm sick of the "save a tree" excuse.
- Paper bills are essential to me. They provide a method of communication should I not have internet for whatever reason. It is a "No-Brainer" that telecommunication companies MUST provide a paper bill to customers. It is a widely accepted cost of doing business.



Sources

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- 4 Symantec Internet Security Threat Report, 2018.
- 5 PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Digital Trust Insights Report, 2018.
- 6 Toluna and Two Sides North America, 2019. Busting the Myths: A study of U.S. consumer perceptions and attitudes towards print and paper.
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