

# 81% of Gen Z report wishing it was easier to disconnect from digital devices

**New study by The Harris Poll and Quad shows that brands should blend physical and online touchpoints to drive engagement**

SUSSEX, WI, May 13, 2025 – Quad/Graphics, Inc. (NYSE: QUAD), a marketing experience company that solves complex marketing challenges for its clients, and The Harris Poll today announced the results of a cross-generational, consumer study of over 2,000 respondents detailing widespread consumer desire for more in-real-life (IRL) brand experiences. The report, titled “The Return of Touch,” shows consumer values rebalancing toward physical, tangible connections and the benefits to brands.

According to the survey, today’s consumers are seeking more sensory interactions and tactile brand experiences, opening an opportunity for brands to create greater impact through omnichannel marketing strategies that meet consumers in-store and at home, as well as online. Brands that adopt the approach can also enhance the perception of their authenticity, the study says.

## **IRL Rebalance**

The survey suggests that modern consumers seek to be more in control of their cross-channel marketing interactions as they reevaluate their relationships with digital devices. Consumers are actively seeking ways to experience and enjoy brands in person with a better blend of online and physical touchpoints.

- 78% of Americans would **choose a completely in-person social life rather than one that is digital-only**
- 81% say **digital detoxes should be routine**
- 84% of Gen Z and Millennials noted that they **value brands that seamlessly blend technology and physical experiences**
- 78% of Gen Z and Millennials appreciate brands that add digital touchpoints to **enhance physical shopping rather than replace it**

“What’s fascinating about this research isn’t simply a pandemic-driven return to physical retail,” said Libby Rodney, Chief Strategy Officer, The Harris Poll. “We’re seeing a cultural shift driven by digital natives themselves—Gen Z and Millennials are actively seeking the serendipity and human connection that online can’t deliver. They expect retailers to blend digital convenience with meaningful physical experiences, creating moments of discovery impossible to replicate on screens. Today’s consumers aren’t choosing between channels; they want brands that orchestrate both for experiences that feel both seamless and authentically human.”

## **The Tactile Renaissance is Here**

Positive tactile experiences that surprise and delight can translate into brand value for consumers. The study indicates that in-store exposure to physical products can be critical for driving purchases.

- More than three-quarters (76%) of the Americans surveyed say that **physical retail experiences help them connect more deeply with people and brands**
- 79% noted that online shopping is efficient but **lacks the magic of an in-person find**

# Quad

- 86% of Gen Z and Millennials report: **"Touching and feeling products are essential to my purchase decisions."**

## Omnichannel Drives Authenticity

The desire for offline, tactile experiences extends beyond brick-and-mortar stores, with print marketing proving impactful for brands. Consumers from every generation are expressing an appreciation — and even a preference — for print and direct mail.

- 65% of Americans **look forward to receiving catalogs** from brands
- 71% feel that print catalogs and magazines **convey a heightened sense of authenticity**
- 72% of Gen Z and Millennials say they wish more brands focused on **surprising them through mail**
- Print drives a double benefit for brands, as 78% of Gen Z and Millennials say that physical mail has **prompted them to visit a physical store**

With an integrated approach that utilizes in-store, online and at-home connection, brands can increase loyalty and drive more engagement across the board.

"We all inherently know that physically being in a store, touching merchandise, makes all the difference because of the sensory impact," said Josh Golden, Chief Marketing Officer at Quad. "That's why this research is so important — it validates and quantifies what marketers know to be true. And it helps us understand exactly how consumers hunger for the real power of tactile experiences that should be a major part of a brand's marketing mix. Connecting with consumers through IRL touchpoints, including direct mail and catalogs, fosters more engaged, loyal customers — and ultimately the best return. In a play on business ROI, we call the potential upside for brands 'Return on Touch.' The IRL dimension of marketing clearly presents tremendous opportunity for brands."

## Emergence of Retail Tourism

Surround-sound strategies that balance in-person and digital touchpoints can be especially advantageous for retail and CPG brands.

- 60% of Gen Z and Millennial consumers say **waiting in line for a hyped retailer is part of the fun**
- 62% of Gen Z and Millennials say unique, Instagrammable **store designs strongly influence where they shop**

After a wow-worthy in-person experience, Gen Z and Millennials are likely to:

- Make a **return visit** (51%)
- **Talk about a brand** with others (47%), and
- Take the time to **explore its online store** (38%)

These experiences may even spark retail tourism, in which consumers go out of their way to visit hyped retailers and pop-ups — 63% of respondents have **planned a trip around visiting a retail store or brand**.

The survey was conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Quad in early 2025 using a sample of 2,068 U.S. adults: 125 Gen Z (ages 18-28), 492 Millennials (ages 29-44), 571 Gen X (ages 45-60), 806 Boomers (ages 61-79) and 74 members of the Silent/Greatest generation (ages 80 and older). Visit [Quad.com](https://quad.com) to review the full report and see downloadable visuals [here](#).



## About Quad

Quad (NYSE: QUAD) is a marketing experience, or MX, company that helps brands make direct consumer connections, from household to in-store to online. The company does this through its MX Solutions Suite, a comprehensive range of marketing and print services that seamlessly integrate creative, production and media solutions across online and offline channels. Supported by state-of-the-art technology and data-driven intelligence, Quad simplifies the complexities of marketing by removing friction wherever it occurs along the marketing journey. The company tailors its uniquely flexible, scalable and connected solutions to each clients' objectives, driving cost efficiencies, improving speed-to-market, strengthening marketing effectiveness and delivering value on client investments.

Quad employs approximately 11,000 people in 11 countries and serves approximately 2,100 clients including industry leading blue-chip companies that serve both businesses and consumers in multiple industry verticals, with a particular focus on commerce, including retail, consumer packaged goods, and direct-to-consumer; financial services; and health. Quad is ranked among the largest agency companies in the U.S. by Ad Age, buoyed by its full-service media agency, Rise, and creative agency, Betty. Quad is also one of the largest commercial printers in North America, according to Printing Impressions.

For more information about Quad, including its commitment to operating responsibly, intentional innovation and values-driven culture, visit [quad.com](https://quad.com).

## About The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is one of the longest-running surveys in the U.S., tracking public opinion, motivations, and social sentiment since 1963. Now part of Harris Insights & Analytics, we provide market intelligence that helps businesses and policymakers make informed decisions. To learn more, visit <https://theharrispoll.com>.

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