

Hand Prints

I NEED A NEW BOX of business cards. Or, more to the point, I've run out of business cards and I feel I need a new box. I like the card I use when I'm standing on my own merits and not representing a publication. I designed it myself, guiding the graphic designer as she recreated my simple design, mocked up in Word, for printing in a small shop (now a restaurant) back in 1999. The next batch, with a new address, was printed in a cramped basement shop by a printer who appeared one night at the church I was then attending. The result was a long relationship that saw me place four or five orders over 15 years.

Now, however, the shop allegedly handles only large, commercial jobs and there's been no response to my e-mail request for another box. I've started looking for alternatives, but an affordable printer who carries the card stock I want is challenging.

Then there's the question of whether or not one needs a business cards these days. Just one was passed out at the networking breakfast I attended last week; the main use for them seemed to be as entries in the draw for a door-prize. Similarly, the last wine tasting I attended required a business card as proof of professional affiliation. Outside of work, I've frequently used mine as a calling card or to indicate a return address on mail. But then, who uses the mail nowadays?

The result has been plenty of soul-searching over whether or not to have my own, personal business card—a tangible token of myself that conveys something of who I am to the people I meet. The idea is incredibly old-fashioned when people can connect via a mobile device, either by swapping digital contacts or joining an online social network. Who needs a print when there are pixels?

The question runs through this issue of *Amphora*, both in a two-part essay by award-winning designer Robin Mitchell Cranfield and the transcript of a panel discussion University of Saskatchewan assistant professor Jon Bath moderated last fall between three British Columbia printers and book artists. The answer is a resounding yes—with one caveat. Sometimes the information we're trying to convey is best presented digitally, as Sylvana D'Angelo notes.

But very often, as both Mike Hepher and Mitchell Cranfield acknowledge, it's the connection the printed object fosters that's important. With the digital realm mediating so much of our experience of the world, there's a desire to experience content in a real and tangible way. It establishes a connection not only with the maker, as Hepher notes, but with the larger community. The hymnals Mitchell Cranfield recalls from her youth passed hand to hand among her schoolmates, providing not only a common text but a shared tactile experience that lent texture to community. "Each hymnal was solid, a member of a whole, and maybe that was its main job," she writes.

Digital texts facilitate the flow of information, but they're easily consumed in isolation. A tangible text, like the one you're holding now, differs in a simple but important regard: you can pass it along, with the prints (and perhaps stains) of the readers' hands marking its passage through the world and the connections readers made with the text and, through shared experience, one another.

~ Peter Mitham, editor