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Print media must evolve

One of my favorite social media gurus is Gary Vaynerchuk. He really knows his stuff, and presents information in a format — video — that is universally appealing. Vaynerchuk has a personality that is larger than life and his enthusiasm for his passions — wine and social media — is downright contagious.

I've been a hard-core fan since I discovered his vlog — video blog — a little over a year ago. In my opinion, the man is brilliant. I was thrilled when he released his first book, “Crush It,” now a New York Times best seller, and had every intention of buying it. I truly wanted to buy it, but I held off because I knew I would never actually read it. Not because I didn't want to read it, but because lately I've had a difficult time reading “paper” books.

Before you shake your head in befuddlement and begin to mutter about the negative effects of technology, allow me to explain. When the Amazon Kindle was first released in November 2007, the idea of reading a book on some sort of newfangled electronic device seemed unappealing and unnatural. I dismissed the Kindle as some sort of fad that never would catch on.

Then, I bought an iPhone. My life has never been the same. I kid you not: The iPhone changed the way I look at, and interact with, the world. It's hard to remember how I functioned without my iPhone tucked snugly in my purse, within arm's reach at all times.

About six months ago, I discovered the Kindle app on my iPhone. I downloaded it, along with my first eBook. It wasn't the ideal platform for reading a book — an iPhone screen is substantially smaller than a Kindle screen — but it wasn't as horrible as I'd thought it would be. In fact, it grew on me.

After a while I preferred the format over that of a regular book. It was portable, easily navigable and the electronic books were cheaper than the paper versions.

Fast forward to two weeks ago, when I discovered Vaynerchuk's book, “Crush It,” in the iPhone app store in “vook” format. (A “vook” is a book that integrates video clips into the text, and can be viewed either on an iPhone or computer Web browser.)

I purchased and downloaded his vook and began reading. It was fabulous! As I read each chapter on my iPhone, I intermittently viewed supplemental videos. Vaynerchuk was right there with me, explaining his vision and thought processes as no one else could. A few days later I downloaded a cookbook, “The Breakaway Japanese Kitchen,” by Eric Gower, and watched the author prepare the recipes included in the vook. I was a vook con-

vert.

A week after discovering Vaynerchuk's vook, I sat down for a cup of coffee and absently reached for a magazine. As I did so, I found myself wishing it was in the vook format.

Suddenly, it all clicked.

The future for print magazines is offering readers an ad-free, subscription-based magazine in a digitally-accessible format that uses video and interactivity. In other words, provide a variation of a vook, accessible online, on mobile devices and on ebook readers such as the Kindle and Nook.

The magazine's Web site could be ad-supported with articles and video clips, but the vook version would be a seamless interface, easily navigable with supplemental videos. So, for example, a travel magazine would include videos of various locales; a beauty magazine, videos showing how to apply make up; a cooking magazine, videos of the food being prepared; and a technology magazine, videos of various devices being tested.

A few days after I conceived the concept, I learned Condé Nast had just announced it was in the process of creating a workable concept for digital magazines, and that “Wired” would be the first to appear in that format. The digital format would be for use on Apple's yet-to-be-announced, and long-awaited, Tablet and possibly mobile devices, using Adobe technology. Videos were not mentioned as part of the interactive digital format.

I think the format will become mainstream within two years if magazine publishers ensure the digital versions include video, are ad-free and are accessible on e-book platforms and mobile devices. Like books, people want to take their magazines with them in an easily portable format, rather than be tied to a computer.

Some may balk at first, but eventually will embrace the technology. Rest assured, portable digital media is the next wave in the evolution of the dissemination of information. Magazines and newspapers will evolve into a digitally-accessible format or cease to exist. There's simply no other option.

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