

# Two Sides North America Press Release

## **Paper or Digital Communication: New Two Sides Survey Shows U.S. Consumers Want the Right to Choose**

DAYTON, OHIO – August 16, 2023 – In an attempt to reduce costs, many banks, utilities, insurers and other service providers are switching consumers from paper to electronic bills and statements, often without their consent, and some are now charging fees to receive paper statements. Others are urging their customers to switch from paper to digital communication because it's "green" or "better for the environment." But a recent survey commissioned by Two Sides North America and conducted by international research firm Toluna found that consumers want the freedom to choose how they receive important communications from the companies they do business with.

### **The Right to Choose**

The Two Sides survey showed that 81% of U.S. consumers believe they should have the right to choose how they receive important communications from their service providers, on paper or electronically, and 73% believe they should not be charged more for choosing a paper bill or statement. These percentages increased from 2021 by 78% and 67%, respectively.

While using the internet can be a quick and convenient way to transact business, companies that default customers to electronic communication put at risk many Americans who do not have broadband access, cannot afford it or have difficulty using the internet. Particularly at risk are people in rural areas, older people and those living on low incomes. According to a 2021 study by data technology company BroadbandNow, some 42 million Americans do not have broadband internet access. The Pew Research Center reports that 25% of people over age 65 never go online. A 2023 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), states that nearly a third of Americans who don't have broadband say the reason is because they can't afford it.

Companies that force consumers to go paperless also face risks of their own. Nearly 46% of consumers said they would consider switching to an alternate provider if their current one forced them to go paperless, up from 41% in 2021.

### **Digital Communication is Not Always Preferred**

The survey showed that 65% of consumers are increasingly concerned that their personal information held electronically is at risk of being hacked, stolen, lost or damaged, up from 64% in 2021. Those over age 65 are most concerned (74%), but 46% of those aged 18 to 24 have the same worry.

Internet use is practical and convenient for many, but electronic communication also comes with undeniable challenges, including issues associated with overuse. The survey revealed that American consumers believe "switching off" is more important than ever, with 59% saying they spend too much time on digital devices, up from 51% in 2021. 53% of consumers are concerned that the overuse of electronic devices could be damaging to their health, causing issues such as eye strain, headaches and sleep deprivation, up from 51% in 2021.

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## Which is better, Print on Paper or Digital Communication?

“The simple answer is that both print and digital communication have important uses and benefits that consumers value,” says Two Sides North America President Kathi Rowzie. “The question should not be which one is better, but which is best suited for each individual’s needs. It’s vitally important that all consumers have the right to choose how they receive important communications from their service providers – free of charge – to assure that those who are unwilling or unable to access the internet are not disadvantaged.”

## The Facts About Greenwashing

It has become commonplace for companies to encourage their customers to switch to from paper to electronic bills and statements with misleading claims that going paperless is “green.” These types of broad, unsubstantiated environmental claims, known as greenwashing, are not only misleading, but also fail to comply with established environmental marketing standards such as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC) Guides for Environmental Marketing Claims and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14021 standard.

“Statements like ‘Go Green, Go Paperless’ are not backed by sound science and fail to recognize the vast and growing negative environmental impacts of electronic communication,” Rowzie says. “These misleading claims damage consumers’ perceptions of paper and put at risk the livelihoods of more than 7 million people in the U.S. print, paper and mail sector.”

Two Sides continues to successfully challenge major corporations and other large organizations to eliminate misleading environmental claims about paper products from their customer communications. For more information about the Two Sides Anti-Greenwashing Campaign, visit [www.twosidesna.org/anti-greenwash-campaign/](http://www.twosidesna.org/anti-greenwash-campaign/).

*The 2023 Two Sides Trend Tracker Survey queried 1,000 respondents over age 18 across the United States. It is the second of Two Sides’ biennial trend tracker studies designed to explore and better understand consumer perceptions, behaviors and preferences related to the sustainability of paper products.*

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## About Two Sides North America

Two Sides North America ([www.twosidesna.org](http://www.twosidesna.org)) is part of the non-profit Two Sides global network which includes more than 600 member companies across North America, South America, Latin America, Europe, Australia and South Africa. Our mission is to dispel common environmental misconceptions and to inspire and inform businesses and consumers with engaging, factual information about the inherent environmental sustainability and enduring value of print, paper and paper-based packaging.

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The logo features a green rectangular background with a black oval in the center. The text "Two Sides North America" is written in green, and "Press Release" is written in white, both in a bold, sans-serif font.

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