



(This study is based upon preliminary results obtained from an NPOA survey conducted in late November 2013.)

**NATIONAL PRINT OWNERS ASSOCIATION**

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**An NPOA Special Report** December 2, 2013

# Vast Majority of NPOA Survey Respondents Indicate They Check PrintOwners List Serv Daily

John C. Stewart, NPOA Executive Director

More than 72% of the subscribers to the PrintOwners list serv have been members for three or more years, with 50% having been active for at least six years or more, according to the results of a recent survey conducted by the National Print Owners Association (NPOA).

The PrintOwners list serv is the oldest and largest list of its kind in the printing

industry. We asked them “If you can remember, tell us how you first heard about the PrintOwners List Serv?”

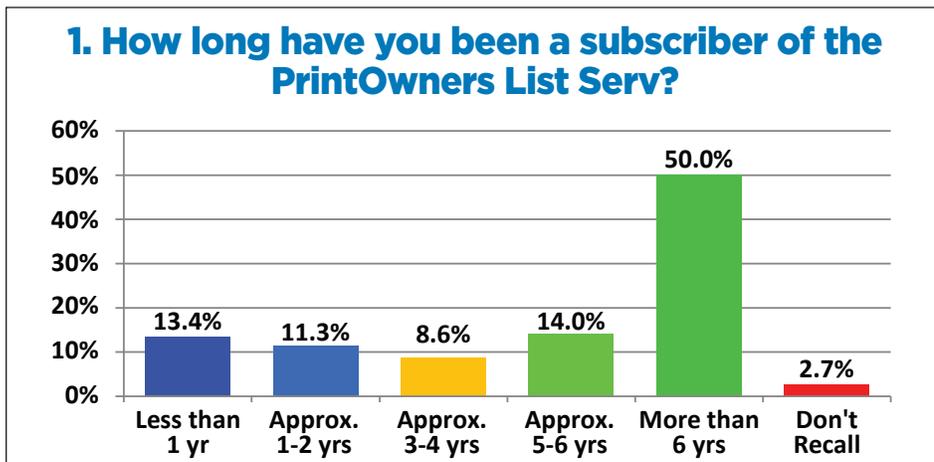
Approximately 41% of those responding told us they heard about the list serv from a fellow printer, while 16% noted they had read about the list in a magazine column. Approximately 10% of respondents said they heard about the list while attending

a printing conference, while another 8% told us they joined as the result of one or more emails.

## NPOA Survey Raises Issues for Future List Management

Based upon the results of this survey, NPOA is faced with three, somewhat conflicting issues that will eventually need to be resolved:

- (1) Should the association continue to market this free industry list serv and attempt to expand its membership (and daily traffic);
- (2) If the list serv membership is increased in size and daily email volume is increased significantly as a result, will that diminish the value of the list to current subscribers;
- (3) Would the influx of “new blood” and new participants counter the desire by some to maintain the “close knit” atmosphere that exists among current list subscribers.

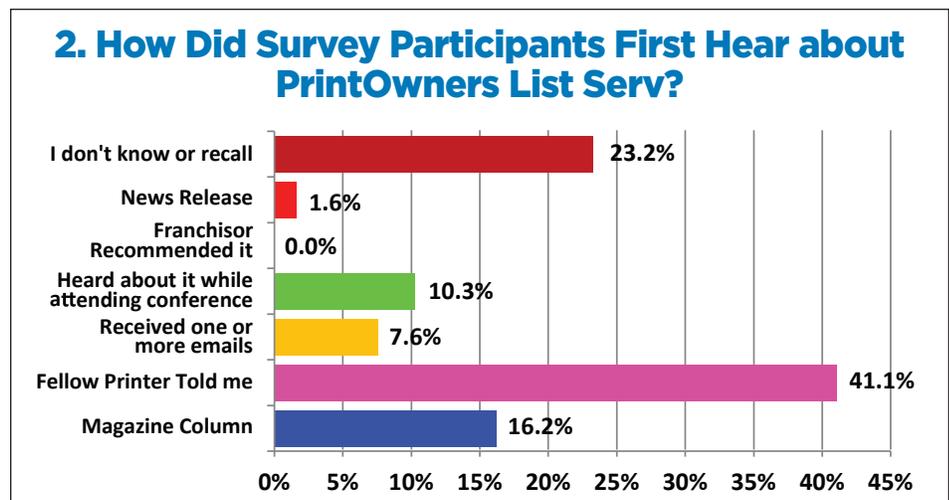


industry. With approximately 620 members at any given point, it is responsible for handling more than 11 million emails.

Although some subscribers cite the sheer volume of emails as a negative, most subscribers credit the list serv as being an invaluable source of information and “problem solving” that is unmatched anywhere else in the industry.

## How Did Subscribers First Hear About PrintOwners List Serv

Similar to the findings we often uncover when it comes to surveying our own customers, “Word of Mouth” was the dominant source cited by survey participants when we



## Vast Majority of Respondents Check List Daily

Recognizing the fact that the findings of our recent survey are most likely weighted towards owners who are generally more active on the PrintOwners list and thus more likely to participate in a survey about the list, more than 85% of our respondents told us they check the PrintOwner posts at least once a day, with almost 40% saying they checked the list “Every 2-3 hours.”

For many subscribers, the list appears to be an invaluable resource for keeping up with the industry and resolving a myriad list of challenges and problems encountered by owners on a daily basis.

## Many Read, But Few Post To PrintOwners List Serv

Despite the fact that a large percentage of subscribers told us they check the list on a daily basis, the vast majority said they post only “1-3 times per month” or post “rarely.” Some Printowners subscribers complained

privately to us that the list seems to be dominated by a small number of posters.

Others told us they would post more often, but by the time they get around to checking the list, the questions or issues have already been answered and solved.

Still others complained that a few members of the list appear to post excessively, not with necessarily constructive comments, but rather with simple “me too’s” or “I agree” comments and nothing more.

Some readers told us confidentially that they get frustrated and tired of reading comments by the same list of 10-20 posters all the time, arguing the list could be even more valuable if it attracted broader participation.

## PrintOwner List Receives High Marks from Most Participants

Despite some negative feedback received from a few survey participants, the PrintOwners list serv nonetheless received extremely high marks from most of our survey respondents. As you can see from the accompanying pie chart, approximately

## A Brief History of the PrintOwners List Serv

The PrintOwners list serv officially went “live” November 22, 1997, according to the list’s “unofficial” historian Doug Shelton, Superior Impressions, Inc., Toledo, OH.

The founders of what has since become the largest list serv of its kind in the printing industry were Bob Bergey, George Croft, Doug Shelton, Larry Nebel, Hal Wendt and Shirley Hattayer. According to Shelton, the founders spent a couple of months, prior to going “live,” discussing and developing policies and procedures to guide the list and how it was to be used. Most of those early policies and rules remain in effect today.

“The list was successful from the start,” recalls Shelton. “In December 1997, there were 452 posts to the list in the first month. By February 1998, the total number of monthly posts had grown to 1378. By November 1998, one year later, the number of monthly posts had grown to 2537.”

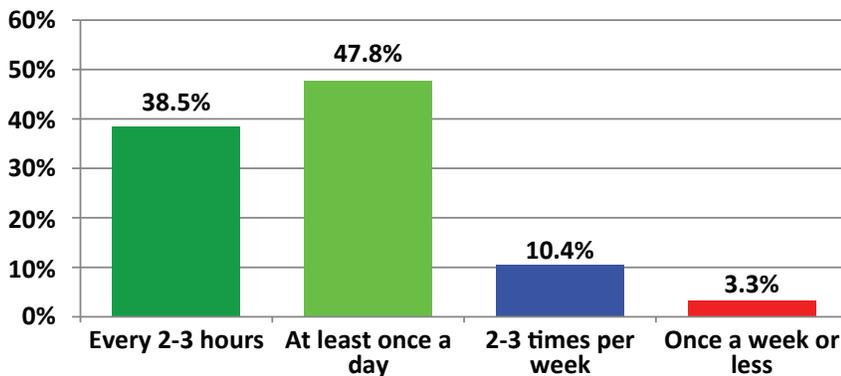
The PrintOwners list was purchased by Mike Stevens, former owner and founder of Express Press in Fargo, ND, in November 2008. Stevens is well known for a marketing services company dedicated to printers called Marketing Ideas For Printers and Websitesforprinters.com.

In late 2012, the National Print Owners Association, a newly founded trade association catering to small and medium size printing companies, purchased the list serv from Stevens. Although now owned and maintained by NPOA, the list serv continues to be made available to all printers, mailers and sign-making companies regardless of their membership status.

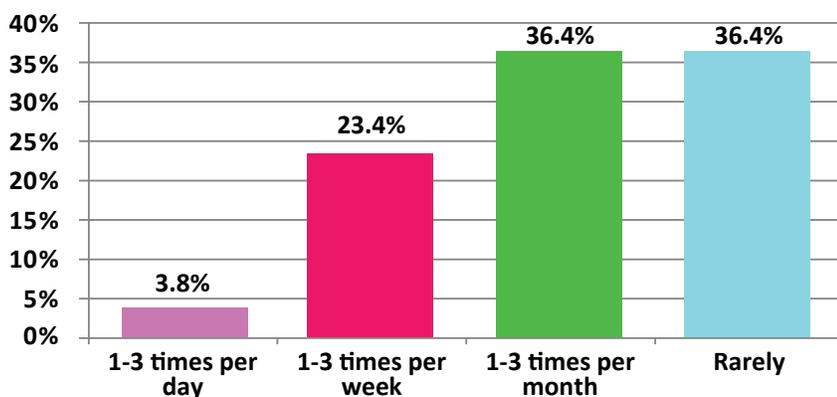
The PrintOwners list continues to be operated under most of the same general rules as it was in 1997. It is an “unmoderated” list serv dedicated specifically to owners of printing, mailing and sign-making companies. It provides a forum for owners to discuss a broad range of problems, challenges and opportunities they face each day.

As of the end of December 2013, the PrintOwners list is projected to have published more than 16,000 individual posts in the past 12-months. Since each post is individually transmitted to all subscribers (currently approximately 620), the total number of actual emails transmitted during this period is projected to exceed 10 million!

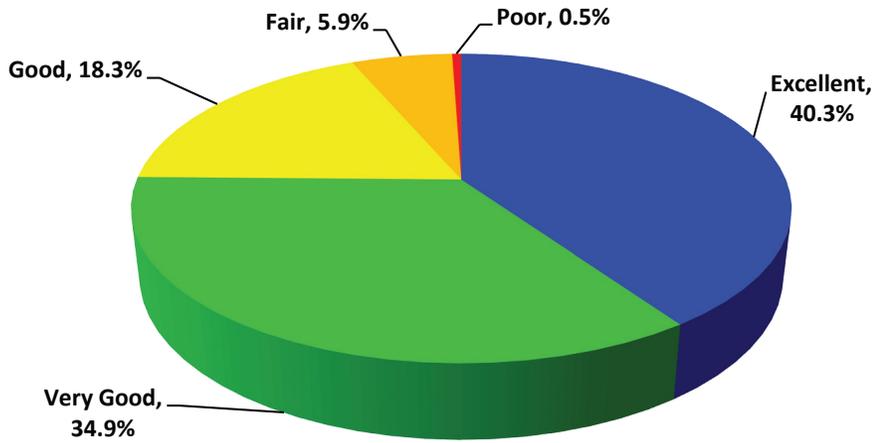
### 3. Approx how many times/week do you check Printowners list Serv?



### 4. Approx how many times/week do you respond on PrintOwners List



## 5. Assuming you regularly read posts, how would you rate the value?



75% rated the value of the list as either “Excellent” or “Very Good.” Only 6.4% rated the value of the list and the posts therein as either “Fair” or “Poor.”

### Participants Asked About Value Of List to Potential Subscribers

Curious as to how NPOA might market the PrintOwners list serv to others, we asked subscribers the following: “Assuming you are a regular or occasional visitor to the Printowners list serv, how would you recommend or evaluate its value to potential subscribers?”

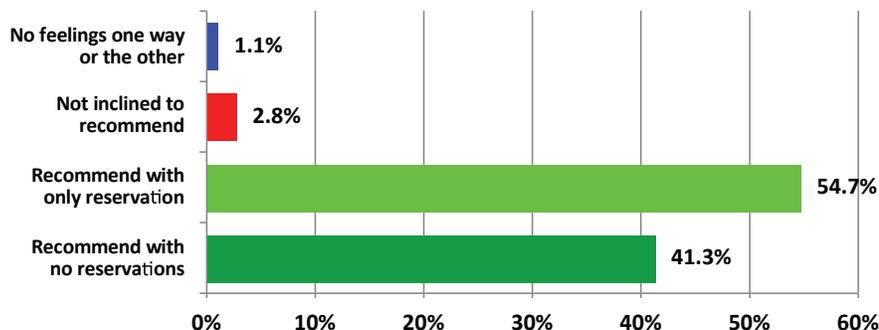
Not surprisingly, a significant percentage of respondents (approximately 55%) said they “would recommend that printers, mailers and sign-making companies subscribe to the list, with the only reservation or warning that the volume of email traffic on the list serv can overwhelm some owners.”

Approximately 41% of respondents told us they would recommend the PrintOwners list serv with no reservations whatsoever.

NPOA’s survey allowed for comments related to this question, and while only a small number chose to respond, the comments we did receive proved enlightening. Below are some of the comments we received:

- *I would strongly recommend, unless you already know everything and don't want to share.*
- *The volume of emails can be overwhelming and I would strongly urge participants to set-up a separate email folder to handle “PrintOwnerlist” emails.*
- *Too many non-business related posts*
- *I am keenly aware (sensitive) to “lurkers” and “attackers,” so I will often respond to posts with a private phone call instead of posting.*
- *Too “cliquish” – The same ten members or so seem to dominate the site, sometimes with worthless dribble.*
- *Good information, but majority of people responding seem to have sales of \$1 million and under; Not enough “mid-size” shops!*

## 6. Assuming you are a regular visitor to List Serv, how would you evaluate its value?



### Respondents Rate Recent NPOA Changes to Guidelines

As some list serv members are aware, NPOA recent made modest changes to posting guidelines for the PrintOwners list serv, to promote the list more widely and assure fair publishing access for all. We asked subscribers to rate these changes, and the results appear in the pie chart on Pg. 4.

As you can see, almost 90% of all those surveyed rated the recent changes as either “Good,” “Very Good,” or “Excellent.”

### Members of Other Associations Also Turn to NPOA List for Help

Although the PrintOwners list serv is owned and maintained by the National Print Owners Association, it is maintained for the benefit of the entire industry. Subscribers do not have to be members of NPOA to take advantage of this significant information resource, although subscribers are encouraged to increase their participation in the industry by joining NPOA. Nonetheless, membership in NPOA is not required.

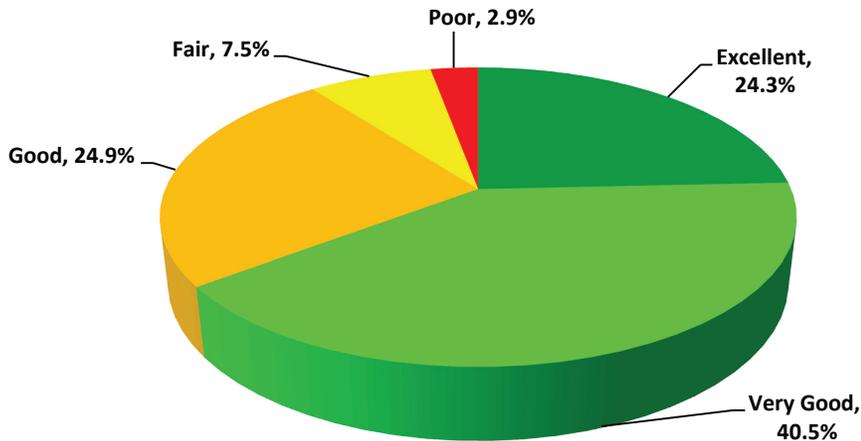
It is interesting to observe that while almost 60% of subscribers are members of NPOA, almost 27% of subscribers come from the ranks of NAQP/NAPL, and another 23.7% indicated they are members of PIA. (The percentages total greater than 100% due to multiple memberships by respondents.) Not surprisingly, approximately 26% indicated they are not members of any industry trade association.

It should not be assumed, however, from the numbers cited above, that most printers are members of a trade association. In fact, the reverse is true. NPOA estimates that nationwide, less than 40% of all printing firms (and possibly even less) are actually members of any printing association.

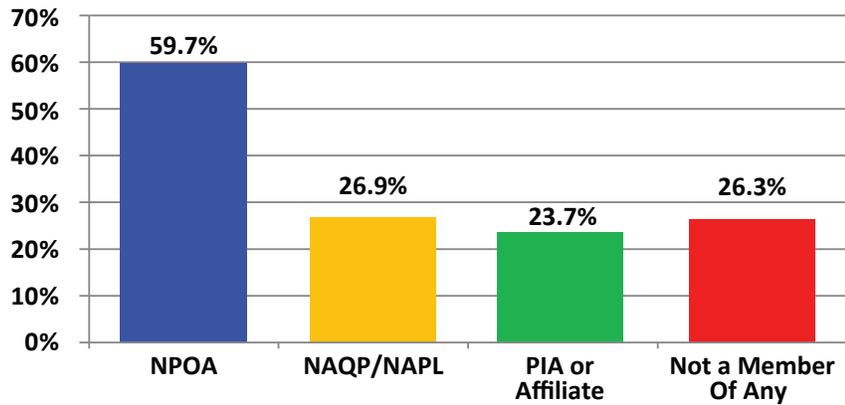
One of the major goals of NPOA in 2014 will be to reach out to members of other trade associations and encourage them to join NPOA, according to Jace Prejean, President of NPOA. “We also want to encourage many of those printers who are not members of any trade association to give NPOA a try in 2014,” notes Prejean.

“With annual dues of only \$295, and a monthly payment option of only \$30 per month, our association represents one of the best small investments a small printing, mailing or sign-making firm can make in their business.”

## 7. NPOA recently modified posting guidelines - How would you rate changes?



## 9. Are you currently a member of the following organizations:



### Should NPOA Post List of Top Posters?

Our final question of our nine-question survey asked participants, "Would you be interested in seeing a listing of the top 10 or 20 posters each month or quarter as well as a count of the number of posts by each?"

As you can see from the adjoining chart, many respondents to our survey were ambivalent. A slight majority said they just "Don't Care," while the remainder appeared to be closely divided regarding whether such a list should be published.

### Excessive Posting by a Few Presents A Challenge to List

A closer examination of PrintOwner list serv statistics reveals the list serv does face challenges. While most list subscribers acknowledge the potential benefits of attracting new members who can bring

different outlooks and levels of expertise, it is exceedingly difficult to attract new subscribers due to the overwhelming presence and dominance of a relatively small

number of posters who many say tend to post excessively.

As an example, 3.2% of PrintOwner list subscribers (20 posters) account for 34% of all posts. Equally dramatic, 84 posters, or 13.5% of all subscribers, account for 75% of all posts. The tendency of a few individuals to dominate the list traffic has a tendency to discourage others from posting, and this in turn is seen as a serious "negative" by many.

While no one is suggesting that limits be placed on subscribers as to how many posts they are allowed on a daily or weekly basis, it is reasonable to ask these posters to exercise some self-restraint.

Another frequent complaint heard by NPOA is the number of "Me too" and "I agree" responses posted by some subscribers. Posts offering these types of sentiments and nothing more contribute little to the list, and yet quickly contribute to the sheer volume of emails that subscribers most wade through to find something of greater substance.

NPOA views the PrintOwners list serv as an extremely valuable industry resource open to all. However, like most things in life and business, there is room for improvement. Consequently, we would like to encourage some of those 84 posters who account for three-fourths of all posts to exercise some restraint in their posting. On the other hand, we want to encourage many of the lurkers on the list to start contributing more and sharing some of their expertise and experiences with others on the list.

As always, your feedback and comments to membership@printowners.org is encouraged.

## 10. Would you be interested in listing of top 10 or 20 posters each month?

