

The Limits of Digital: Living and Working in a Hybrid Environment

Lara Mancuso, Ph.D.

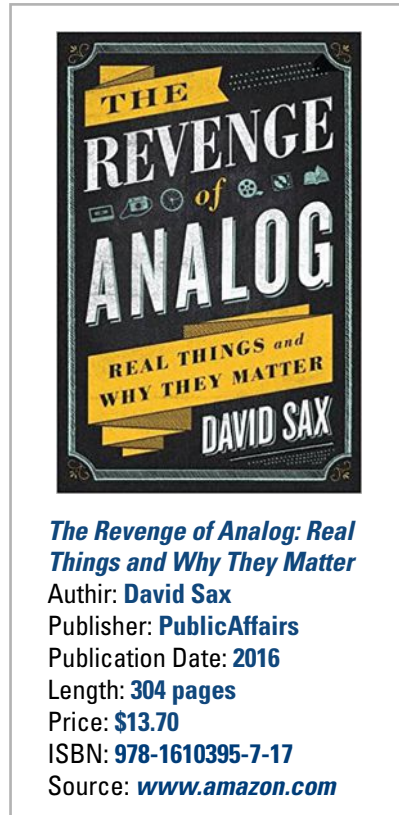
The *Revenge of Analog* is a captivating narrative about the significant revival of analog technologies, tools, experiences, and businesses in various domains. The book defines analog as what “doesn’t require a computer to function, and most often exists in the physical world (as opposed to the virtual one).”

It comprises six chapters: four are dedicated to analog “things” (vinyl records, paper notebooks, motion picture and photography films, and board games), and five are dedicated to analog “ideas” (printing industry; in-store shopping; handcrafted goods businesses; integrative and design thinking theories in education; and collaboration tools, such as whiteboards, in offices).

Reasons for the Analog Revival

Having collected data mainly through interviews and observations, the author builds his arguments using engaging stories and anecdotes. He attributes the return of analog to multiple causes:

- The pleasure associated with tactile experiences and palpable objects, such as buying and listening to vinyl or developing photos
- The appreciation of limited choices as opposed to endless possibilities, as shopping in retail stores versus online
- The relief and feeling of accomplishment associated with closing a book or newspaper after we are done with reading
- The symbol of status and credibility represented by certain goods, as the printed version of *The Economist* or a Moleskine® notebook
- The lack of anxiety, distress, or distraction caused by constant



The Revenge of Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter

Author: **David Sax**

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interruptions when online

- The support of creativity and imagination offered by the borders and constraints imposed by the analog world, as designers drawing on a blank sheet, artists using analog photographic film, or musicians recording on vinyl
- The ability to promote and intermediate social interactions offered by playing board games, window shopping, or learning in classroom environments

Relevance for RIM

Sax is a journalist, so the intended audience is not records and information management (RIM) professionals, but the general public. The narrative prioritizes breadth over depth, and many topics that are crucial to the RIM field, and would certainly

benefit from an analysis focused on the analog-digital interaction, such as privacy, are missing.

Provides Insights

However, Sax’s analysis is pertinent to RIM because it provides insights into where the superiority of the analog, when compared to the digital, lies. The book suggests that some of these virtues are connected to individual skills and expectations, as in creativity, imagination, social signifiers, and sensual experiences, whereas others are related to social relationships, human connections and interactions, and collaboration.

This approach is helpful to understand why some prefer to read from paper than from computer screens when the content requires intense reflection and concentration; why users are arguably more likely to buy in to the disposition of paper than of digital records, as the tangibility of the medium prompts decisions on storage options and limitations; and why, given the opportunity, several researchers in archives prefer to consult the original, even if a digitized version is available.

Explains Role of Analog

The book also touches upon the analog-digital interaction in organizations, bringing into light tasks that have an indirect, albeit significant, impact on the RIM field, notably, the role of paper and other analog tools in: collaborative work; employees’ engagement; notetaking and mark-up strategies; time management skills; office design to promote human interaction; and workflow management.

The book’s main value to RIM is that it’s inspiring to overcome digital vs. analog dualism – the perspective that the digital “virtual” world and the physical (analog) “real” world are

separate realities that don't interact – which, according to Sax, is propagated by the digital industry.

Encourages Hybrid Approach

Instead of deeming older technologies old-fashioned and exulting the newest innovations, it is more advantageous to take the best out of each medium and to make sure different media work together for the benefit of users. This approach can be applied, for instance, in the design and implementation of electronic document and records management systems, as recognizing user preferences and making RIM technologies align with them promote compliance.

Sax reminds us that we work and live in a hybrid environment. It is an invitation to look at the analog and the digital as complementary and to make better informed and less prejudiced judgements in order to identify the best solutions. Rather than offering evidence of the revenge of the analog, as the title indicates, the book encourages a reflection about the shortcomings of the digital.

This is a timely call for professionals and organizations that are frustrated about having to modify business requirements to suit technologies' biases, but also wish to keep up-to-date with the latest digital tools, developments, and trends. **E**



About the Author: Lara Mancuso, Ph.D., is an archives, records, and information management consultant based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and has taught information governance and security courses at the University of British Columbia. She earned a master's degree in archival studies from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. in history from El Colegio de Mexico. Mancuso can be contacted at mancuso@interchange.ubc.ca.



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