



## Staples Brings Fictional 'Office' Paper to Life

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Quirky beet farmer/Dunder Mifflin paper salesman Dwight Schrute once defected to a job at rival Staples to the chagrin of his co-workers on NBC's *The Office*, and now Framingham, Mass.-based Staples Inc. and the NBC show are colliding in real life.

In December, Staples-owned office supply website Quill.com began selling Dunder Mifflin-branded paper from the hit show (Dwight Schrute and Michael Scott bobble heads not included) as part of a licensing agreement with Philadelphia-based Comcast Corp.'s NBCUniversal. NBCUniversal will receive 6% of the revenue from Dunder Mifflin paper sales, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, and the paper is priced higher than private-label copy paper.

Paper isn't exactly an exciting product to market, so the tie-in with *The Office* is a great brand differentiator for Staples, says Barbara Sullivan, managing partner of New York-based brand engagement firm Sullivan NYC. "It's brilliant. This is a marriage of a brand with a commodity that's so intractably linked in the minds of people who are buying this stuff," she says.

Anthony Bennett, partner at Effective Brands, a New York-based branding consultancy, agrees. "You can't get more commoditized than paper, so to find a way to differentiate it is really smart. It's really standardized, so most people would probably buy the cheapest brand," he says.

However, the move may not actually help Quill.com sell more paper, experts say. "The big issue for them will be, who's buying this stuff? If it's corporate purchasing people, they'll have a harder time justifying the higher price if the quality's not there. If it's smaller companies, they're less disciplined and focused on cost only, and it brings an attitude and a fun feeling and emotion to what's a very mundane task. If there is price sensitivity, that's the biggest risk," Sullivan says.

"Most paper in the market is bought by corporations," Bennett says. "I don't think those guys are going to be worried about buying Dunder Mifflin paper. It's all about, 'If I can get one cent cheaper because I'm buying a million reams a year, I'm going to take that one cent.' From an economic perspective, it's marginal at best."

Nonetheless, as a marketing and PR move, the Dunder Mifflin paper scores, he says. "I'd never heard of Quill.com [before this story]. [Even] if they break even on the paper, the millions of dollars of PR they got would pay for this exercise. This is a company that's willing to think outside of the box and do something to break out of the commoditization trap."