

Publishing Executive

Magazine Literacy Offers Something Bright to Weary Magazine Professionals

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For magazine industry professionals so exhausted by bad news and uproar that they forget how much they have always loved magazines, talking to John Mennel is a tonic.

John started an organization called Magazine Literacy (www.MagazineLiteracy.org), and he runs it on a shoestring basis. Its goal is to use the power of magazines to help at-risk children and families learn to read, and to love reading.

“Meeting the literacy needs of children—and adults—by sharing magazines with them, with the people around us, the people we love—that is something we can celebrate, something to be proud of as an industry.” John tells me. He speaks with the fervor of a true evangelist and his words are evocative of a simpler bygone age, an age when we all believed in our medium and expected everyone else to believe as well.

“Every individual in every corner of the industry has a role to play,” he told me. “We are a force that creates value for those around us; magazines are a force to create joy and facilitate learning.”

But John does more than evoke nostalgia. He’s opened (in conjunction with the Toronto-based e-commerce company, [ShopLocket](#)) the first online [Magazine Literacy Market](#). It’s meant to be that very industry-wide collaboration that he speaks of. The needs are posted by the organizations; local teams bundle and post the magazines, sending them on their way to the farthest points of the globe (or nearer by, depending on the source of the request), and consumers and businesses fund delivery of magazines to literacy programs.

The model originated with food distribution programs, the milieu in which Mennel had his first career. “People need food for their bodies, but they also need food for their minds,” John said. “We have people, groups out there working to feed the hungry. Those of us in magazine publishing, who love magazines, now have an opportunity to nourish minds as well.”

Magazine Literacy has a green element as well, encouraging the recycling of magazines to send to readers around the world; it has a social media aspect, encouraging crowdfunding to raise the money needed to start and continue the programs.

Now it needs the participation of the industry. “Publishers, consumers, and businesses—we can all come together for this, to use what we have, what we know and love, to help other people,” John said. “Magazines are magical, we can all feel that, from the time we’re little kids. They open new worlds for us. They’re small miracles that arrive in the mail.”