

Love-in at the Park Hyatt

This was one newsstand schmoozefest that just might make a difference

BY SCOTT BULLOCK

In case you missed it, and many publishers did, there was a love-in at Toronto's Park Hyatt hotel recently. The A-listers of newsstand marketing were there. Air kisses filled the room. The host of this well-attended event was the Periodical & Book Association of America, a New York-based magazine marketing group that focuses on newsstand sales. It was the PBAA's first "international" gathering, and judging by the turnout of over 90 attendees, it won't be the last.

Executive director Lisa Scott played the role of emcee, wading Oprah-style into the crowd of assembled retailers, wholesalers, distributors and circulators, teasing out a variety of success stories. Scott deserves praise for lining up major sponsorship support, which in itself demonstrates a tangible "wantedness" to bring more focus to the newsstand source on behalf of all concerned. The sponsors: Gateway Newsstands, HDS Retail, Source Interlink, Transcontinental Media, Coast to Coast, Disticor, and *Masthead*.

Alexandra Cooper of *Canadian House & Home* must have been delighted when her title was singled out by Tracey Basnett of Indigo/Chapters as a shining example of how to do things right. Also enjoying the spotlight was *Dogs in Canada* director of sales Beverly Cantelon—the only small-to-medium-sized independent Canadian magazine who bothered to show up.

Every event needs a memorable lowlight moment, too, which was provided when *The Economist's* Ibrahim Mounir asked a pointed question about logistics, and was forcefully dressed down and flogged by his U.S.-based national distributor, Curtis Circulation. Competitive distributors were seen smiling, then diving for their notepads and Blackberrys.

But one of the most interesting revelations of the day was that the Periodical Marketers of Canada (PMC) has tabled a study called, "The Newsstand Channel: Opportunities and Challenges." This document, funded in part by the Department of Canadian Heritage, should be required reading for any Canadian publisher interested in moving single copies.

It's good to see that DCH has reached out to the wholesale community to seek input on strategies to increase the presence and sales of Canadian magazines through more effective use of the mass-market wholesale distribution

system. (For more on the study's specific proposals, see page 5.)

Back to the Hyatt Love-In: what it clearly demonstrates is a hunger for solutions, a spirit of inclusiveness and optimism that's in the air, and a positive momentum emerging in Canada to improve newsstand sales for Canadian magazines after years of collective moaning and bed-wetting by, well, everyone. This is cause for cautious celebration.



However, conspicuously absent from the event was André Préfontaine, who in hindsight must have been a bit busy dealing with internal political matters at Transcon. His absence was noteworthy because he was, at the time, heading a Newsstand Task Force committee struck by Magazines Canada.

Also glaringly absent from the event were representatives from small- and mid-sized Canadian magazines. Now, everyone understands that generating advertising is job No. 1, and that newsstand sales are not at the top of every publisher's priority list. With talents like Peter Willson, Tom Worsley and Yasmin Seniverente in the room, the interests of Rogers, Transcon and St. Joseph were admirably covered. And, in fairness, with the room packed with execs from Coast to Coast, Disticor and LMPI, it can be argued the interests of other publishers were covered, too.

However, high-level representatives from niche, mid-size and large U.S. publishers spent the time and money to fly in from Connecticut, New York, Washington, D.C., and Minnesota.

They clearly feel that selling more magazines in the Canadian market is important. Is it unreasonable to expect a few mid-size and small Canadian magazine folks to hop in a cab or spend a token to take the subway across town to shake a few hands, have a free drink, and cozy up to the people who can help? Even for just 10 minutes at a cocktail reception? There were a lot of really smart, fun magazine professionals in the room, and the martinis were flowing—how painful is that?

As Cal Ripkin proved in baseball, success is often determined simply by suiting up and showing up. Or, if you prefer a political analogy: if you can't be bothered to vote you really aren't entitled to complain about the new Prime Minister.

To keep things moving forward, here are a few suggestions: (i) that we continue to enlist DCH's support in testing the PMC-proposed "Best of Canada" marketing Program; (ii) identify a new high-profile leader for Mag Can's newsstand taskforce; (iii) create an annual made-in-Canada gathering of experts from all sides of the supply channel to seek collective solutions; (iv) get more Canadian publishers, not just circ experts, to get actively involved; and (v) aggressively reach out to magazine retailers; start by engaging their active participation in committee work with Magazines Canada and the Circulation Management Association of Canada, and by establishing best practices for communicating with them in seeking win-win solutions for all concerned.

The PBAA demonstrated that there's a sizable group of talented people willing and able to seek solutions to selling more magazines in Canada. The Love-in at the Park Hyatt was a good first step. Here's hoping that the next event, whomever hosts it, can build on this spirit of goodwill and creativity. **M**



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