

A world of engagement: magazines

 By [Graham Deneys](#)

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Huck, *Boneshaker* and the beautiful *Obscura*. Sounds confusing to the average Joe, but to the passionate and engaged individual reading the content, it's simply a release from reality, a dosage of interest and a valuable keepsake - a "my precious" of sorts...

I've worked in and around magazines for many years and have paid very close attention to this channel's particular ups and downs - I've even had the opportunity to give a lecture on magazines and the general media model that surrounds the medium. I was met with extremely weary eyes by the 25 or so students who attended the lecture. I felt as though they had already decided that the medium was not a viable option in this, our digitally-obsessed world.

Fair enough, some titles are running a fine line and just recently the demise of in the SA market is testimony to this worrying trend in the more general interest market titles.

There is however, another world out there, a thriving industry built on blood, sweat and tears.



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Initial production takes place in bedrooms and garden sheds. These "projects" take years to take shape and once launched, gain a relatively small but obsessively loyal following. Some grow exponentially and some vanish into obscurity only to be termed collectors' items', but one thing that these publications all have in common is passion - enter the world of independent magazines.

"But most of them aren't audited," I hear you cry - perhaps not, but the risk might well be worth it. These titles offer a very valuable niche segmentation that targets the top of the "pyramid" - the Influencers. If you are looking for mass reach, these titles are definitely not the way to go, but if you're trying to establish a positioning in a specific genre or particular interest point, they certainly are.

As marketers, we are constantly looking for deeper engagement with our consumers while trying to ensure that the right people are advocates for our brands. Niche magazine publishing enables just that - a trusted media channel that fuels desire and targets passionate consumers. These magazines are collected, swapped, passed on and even used as status symbols.

Mostly skewed towards the creative industry, the titles are usually visual masterpieces, sculpted by a dedicated team of creatives - a place to show and showcase particular skills.

Just a brief look at a few online resources for independent publishing including www.magpile.com and www.stackmagazines.com illustrates the size of the Indie magazine industry worldwide.

Granted, the industry is a lot smaller in South Africa, however it certainly exists and there are some great titles on offer. The recently published, *The Lake*, is a good example of this but again, a lack of audited data around reach figures and distribution will be its Achilles heel. In addition, not having the commercial resources to put forward a solid marketing plan around independent title offerings ensures that one hand is often tied when going up against established titles.

It's a bit of a catch 22, as a title that isn't ABC certified doesn't get too many ads, but without ad revenue it's difficult for a niche title to grow.

So I guess the question is: 'Is there a place for niche magazines in a world where media planners have to be accountable and justify their placement choices through robust data and experience?'

I think so. The edgy nature of the industry alone lends itself to taking a calculated risk or two.

We just have to make sure that we've done our homework and that the psychographic audience benefit outweighs the overall cost and sacrifice of reach. Independent titles themselves also have a job to do in ensuring that they are prepared and packaged in an easy-to-digest offering that clearly promotes a unique audience opportunity.

It would be great to see more independent titles being presented for consideration - perhaps it's a niche segment that we can all build together in South Africa - just don't be alarmed when *Dumbo Feather*, *Cereal* or *The Plant* (the magazine that loves the leafier side of life) land on your desk.

ABOUT GRAHAM DENEYS

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