



What is the value of a book? Is a brand new hardcover worth the price of a steak, while a Kindle download of that same material worth only a cheap bottle of wine? I know that the people reading this would assign it at least the value of red meat, given that you're aware of the time, the talent, the anguish and passion that go into producing quality literary work, whether it's a book realised to provoke and transport or one commissioned and packaged to amuse or instruct. A book offers great bang for your entertainment buck.

The question of value—which is much debated these days as publishers negotiate for e-book prices that surpass Amazon's now well-established \$9.99—is critical to booksellers because the value one places on a physical book is intrinsically linked to the value one places on a physical bookstore.

If books become solely downloadable material, they are, in a sense, no longer really "books" or even "e-books" but "content"—content that the online world expects to receive for next-to-nothing. Content for Internet users is cheap. Like the real community, the online community consists of dreadful people, delightful people and all us in between. But virtual reality is not real-life; it is an environment in which people imagine themselves unencumbered by accountability—sometimes in matters of legality, often in matters of civility. Few people would ever address anyone face-to-face the way they would when working themselves into a state of self-righteous anger on a message board. How many people would approach a real

flesh-and-blood author with a stack of his books before him with a furious rant about how he's a money-grubbing so-and-so trying to gouge readers with his over-priced book? In the online world, obtaining information for free is the point; it's the game; value is negligible.

For this issue we asked some publishers what they consider an independent store's greatest asset in this competitive sales climate teeming with discounters and e-tailers. They mentioned the personalized service and the unique qualities each store possesses that make every Independent a destination. Honing that distinct identity and projecting it outward are key. However, I would argue that at least of equal importance is building your community and cementing your place in it.

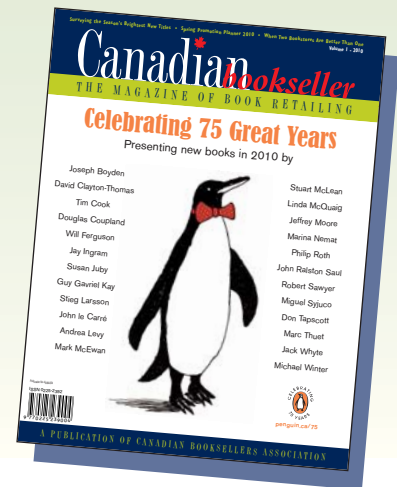
In his article on page 34, Mark Lefebvre discusses how a bookstore becomes a resource—a destination—in part by referring customers to other neighbourhood businesses or events that might interest them. It is through efforts like this that residents learn to appreciate the real value of their community, how individual businesses are bolstered by belonging to a larger network, and how the threat of one store closing becomes more meaningful.

If the survival of the bookstore depends on the survival of the book, the reverse is also true. Physical books need physical stores, and the existence of the latter depends on the survival of thriving real-life communities, of which online communities are a pale and soulless imitation. **CBA**

About the Cover

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WE'RE MOVING!



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Our phone and fax numbers will remain the same.