

Self-Publishing – From Planning to Publishing

Small Press Expo- October 2004

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- I. Having consistent work habits will help you produce a quality comic on schedule.
 - a) Find the time of day that is best for you and set aside a specific time to work.
 - b) Practice drawing to work faster. You should be working toward drawing finished pages (which you do not need to go back to for corrections or refinement). If you can draw one finished page per day, you will be on schedule for producing a full comic every month.
 - c) If you cannot produce finished pages, examine your habits, environment, and levels of perfectionism to determine why.

- II. Smaller promotional pieces can lead into larger sales.
 - a) Mini comics (smaller, cheaper comics printed with photocopies or on your home printer and stapled together) are a way to save time and money.
 - b) Mini comics give you something to show at conventions that will generate interest and drive traffic to your website or higher quality books.
 - c) Use mini comics to get reader responses and quotes that can be used in press releases or to impress distributors.
 - d) Be creative with your promotions- if they are interesting or eye catching, more potential customers will notice and remember you.

- III. Finding a Printer- there are more options than you may realize.
 - a) Find a printer that offers comic size as a standard to get a better price. If your printer does not offer comic size, consider changing your format to keep the cost down.
 - b) Full bleed does not cost more than a normal color page layout.
 - c) Ask for paper samples and try to choose a cheaper paper to keep cost down.
 - d) POD is more cost effective for printing fewer comics.
 - e) Offset is more cost effective for printing 1500 or more comics.

- IV. Trade Paperbacks- where the money is
 - a) Book trade is seeing a lot of market growth, but you need a distributor to participate.
 - b) It is easier for stores to backorder trades than floppies.
 - c) Print floppies as a loss leader: don't charge very much for them, but use them to generate interest in your trade.
 - d) You can make money by selling trades online, through bookstores, at art shows, and at conventions or trade shows.

- V. Promoting yourself and your work
 - a) Participating in anthologies is a great way to get your name out. There are some you can pay to be included in. Others simply take submissions.
 - b) Have a creative, user-friendly website to promote your comic. Word of mouth travels quickly on the Internet and can help you create a fan base.
 - c) Use floppies, your website, and mini comics to get feedback and useful quotes from readers.

- d) Message boards are a good place to meet potential readers and get feedback.
- e) Find a local writers or comics community and get involved. They can provide support, ideas, collaborators, and fans.
- f) Go to conventions and trade shows. These are the best places to network and get your comic known. Going to conventions also shows distributors that you are serious about marketing your book.
- g) Write a press release. This is a great way to have information about your comic posted on news sites or to get possible interview opportunities.
- h) Get reviews- send out promotional copies of your comic and press releases to news sites. Online reviews get more traffic than print ads or reviews.
- i) Contact local bookstores and comic shops about carrying your book. Phone calls to shops are more personal and effective than sending email inquiries.
- j) Remember: It is your responsibility to make your book sell. If you do not promote it, no one will know it exists.

Note: The panel recommended reading Cerebus Guide to Self Publishing by Dave Sim.

VI. Distribution

- a) Distributors are not bad guys trying to promote only a select few comics. They are interested in selling lots of comics, and will try to help you if they think you are serious about creating content and marketing your work.
- b) Diamond is the main distributor for comics. www.diamondcomics.com
- c) Cold Cut (www.coldcut.com) and FM International (www.fminternet.com) do about 10% of the business that Diamond does, but it never hurts to increase your market.
- d) Diamond is not a good place to send backorders, since they wait until several orders have been placed for a book before shipping out copies.
- e) Use your personal website or FM International for backorders, since they will be filled more quickly.
- f) Be sure to let your distribution rep help you! Send them copies of your finished comic before it goes on sale so they can help market and promote your work.

Diamond Mining- How to Get Your Comic Distributed by Diamond Small Press Expo- October 2004

Jim Kuhoric, Steve Leaf, Filip Sabilik, Robert Randle

Diamond Comic Distributors Inc. (www.diamondcomics.com) is the largest retail distributor of comics to direct markets. They place comics in about 3700 comic shops every month, and about 700 of those shops carry independent comic titles. Diamond also has a sister company that distributes books to major stores (like Barnes and Noble). If you have a comic distributed by Diamond, they will try to help get your trade into book channels (although this is not a guarantee).

According to the panel, there are two main reasons that comics are rejected by Diamond:

1. The comic is not ready for print- The comic must make at least \$1200 to cover basic costs. If they do not think the comic will meet the sales requirement for any reason (poor story, weak cover, etc.), it will not be accepted.
2. The author only puts in the minimum required effort- A comic will sell better if the author is willing to work and do marketing, in addition to simply having the book listed by Diamond. The author should be willing to do press releases, go to conventions, make phone calls, etc.

Diamond is looking for professionally done comics with good story and art. A strong cover that is eye-catching is also a plus, since it will stand out on the shelves and generate more sales.

The information about submitting a comic can be found at:

http://vendor.diamondcomics.com/getting_started.asp

In your submission, be sure to include:

1. A new supplier information sheet (available for download at Diamond)
2. A fully completed sample of your comic
3. A cover sheet describing your comic and marketing plan
4. A color tiff or jpeg of your color cover on CD
5. Basic information: company name, comic title, contact information, price, names of creators, description of comic

Be sure to fill out the information on the new supplier sheet exactly. Leaving off contact numbers or other essential information is a bad way to start and does not make a good impression.

Once you have sent in your submission, it can take two or three weeks to process. A panel reviews every submission, so no one person makes a decision about which comics are selected. If your comic is not accepted, you will be sent a form rejection letter.

Note: The form rejection letter is only sent because of time constraints. If you would like to find out exactly why your submission was rejected, you are welcome to call Robert

Randle at Diamond. He will explain the reasoning and give you suggestions for improvement.

“Previews” is the monthly catalogue of comics available through Diamond for the direct market. It is sent to retailers, comic shops, and consumers. It will include a small picture of your comic’s cover and a description. Retail shops review “Previews” and place orders with Diamond for comics. Diamond then places purchase orders with the artists and vendors, who send comics to the distribution center. In the end, it takes about a month after “Previews” is sent out for books to appear on the shelves in comic shops.

If your comic is accepted, you will be assigned a Brand Manager. This is your main contact at Diamond for purchasing, sales, and marketing. The brand manager will call you to set up a vendor account, and to establish the list rate and discount for your title. You need to provide a 2x3 inch 300dpi CMYK .jpeg of your book cover for your free listing in “Previews.” If you like, you can purchase additional ad space in “Previews.”

Diamond will place a purchase order at the end of the month, which is based on the order requests they have received from retailers. Each book must make at least \$1200 to meet the purchase order costs. Diamond will be a little lenient with new titles, since it can be difficult to make that much when you are just starting out. However, books that do not make \$1200 can be dropped from Diamond’s list.

If your title is removed from Diamond, it is not the end of everything. You will remain listed as a vendor and you are welcome to submit new titles for consideration.

It is a mistake to assume that the hardest part of being an author is creating the book. The hardest and most important part of publishing is marketing. You are competing with thousands of other books each month, and you have to work to get your title noticed by the customers. Think about marketing your book before you even submit it to Diamond.

There are a lot of good ways to market your self-published comic:

1. Have a booth at conventions- This is a great grass-roots technique because it gets your face and name out. You also meet lots of other creators, publishers, and media. Networking!
2. Post your work on a personal website- The internet is very cheap and reaches a large audience. This is a great way to build buzz around your book before investing in printed copies.
3. Send press releases and review copies to industry websites.
4. Call and directly speak with local shops and retailers about carrying your book.
5. Place ads in industry magazines.
6. Plan on having a separate marketing budget in addition to printing costs.

Self-publishers must work very hard to push themselves and build a name for their comic. Your passion makes you the best person to market your book, and you should be sure to write press releases and try to get reviews. Be sure to tell Diamond what makes your book important, different, or the next big thing. They can help you with additional ads or editorials, if they think your book will be a big seller.

Remember, they guys who work for Diamond are fans of comics. They want as many creators to succeed as possible, and they will work with you to make that happen. You can help by keeping in contact with them; call them and let them know the status of your projects, and send them samples of your work so they can promote it.

Working with the Media

Small Press Expo- October 2004
Heidi MacDonald and Ryan McLelland

If you bother to publish your book, you **MUST** promote it. No readers will ever find you if you sit silently and just wait for them. The most important thing you can do is promote yourself.

One of the best marketing tools is for you to create a personal website about your comic. Using the Internet is cheap and it can reach a wide audience. A user-friendly website can help you develop a fan base, it is a place for links and referrals, and it can provide in-depth information for reviewers to use for research. Be sure to include a press section with links and excerpts from any reviews or interviews you have.

Also, become a regular on industry blogs, forums, news sites, and message boards. They are a great place to make contacts. Include a link to your personal website as your signature on message boards to increase visibility.

Press releases are the key to getting reviews and interviews. Journalists are always searching press releases for interesting content. Press releases are easy to put together, free to send out, and they can help people learn about your book.

1. Make sure the headline explains what the book is about.
2. Include a good image of your company logo or book cover, since it can be an eye catching addition to articles and lead buyers back to your personal website.
3. Funny or clever press releases are sure to catch attention.
4. Send a press release any time something major happens with your book, such as a new series, trades, new publisher, or major story changes.

Don't forget the importance of attending conventions and trade shows. Journalists from industry media attend the larger conventions, and they are looking for new and interesting comics to write about. Having a booth at conventions shows that you are serious about promoting your work, and puts you in a position to make great contacts. Be sure to have:

1. An eye-catching display that will draw people to your table.
2. Books to sell or give away, or flyers that promote your book and personal website. These will help people remember you.
3. A strong tag line or selling point. For example, saying, "This is just a comic my friends made." doesn't stand out as well as saying, "This is the world first zombie-pirate car salesman."

You can even attend conventions before your book is ready for sale. Having preview copies and fliers can help generate interest and increase initial sales, when your book is complete.

Small, self-published books are not likely to be contacted directly by reviewers, but that doesn't mean getting a review is impossible. You should send review copies of books to industry media and request interviews. If they like the book, journalists will talk it up. This is much more powerful than any ad, since it is more likely to be noticed or linked to by different sites. A good interview will draw attention to your work.

Develop a submission package and press kit. It should contain:

1. Sample pages from your comic or the complete comic
2. Company and author information and contact numbers
3. Company logo (a graphic that can be included in articles)
4. Press Release about your comic (what the potential article could be about)
5. Previous articles or reviews that have been written about you.
6. A little personal information to make your story stand out and to give the press kit character.

Each journalist will have a personal preference about receiving submissions by standard mail or email. You might be able to find this information on their website, or you can always call and ask them.

Timing is also important when contacting the media. Summer is always the busy promotional season for larger titles and companies. Sending out a press release right before a big convention (like the San Diego Comic-con) is a bad idea, because your small comic will get lost in the shuffle of big names. The winter and spring are slower, and journalists will be more likely to take an interest in smaller or new titles.

Develop a list of media contacts.

1. Do a Google search for industry sites and magazines.
2. Visit prominent blogs to find contacts
3. Contact sites that you like to read or visit regularly.
4. The panel thought that The Idiots Guide to Graphic Novels may contain a list of media contacts.

Industry sites that give reviews:

Wizard

Entertainment Weekly

Publishers Weekly- reviews are automatically added to book description on Amazon
Comic Book Guide

Comic Book Galaxy- <http://www.comicbookgalaxy.com/index.html>

The Fourth Rail- <http://www.thefourthrail.com/>

Comic Book Resources- <http://www.comicbookresources.com/>

Silver Bullet- <http://www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com/>

The Pulse- <http://www.comicon.com/pulse/>

Newsarama- <http://www.newsarama.com/>

Comics Journal- <http://www.tcj.com/>

The Beat- <http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/>