



## JAMES MADDOX TEACHES SELF-PUBLISHING 101!

THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 2014

Gail here!

A couple days ago, I read a truly excellent self-published comic called CLOWN (it kind of defies description, but you want it...it will be on Comixology next month). I mentioned how much I liked it and struck up a conversation with the author, James Maddox. It turns out he is a very effective self-publisher, something I know very little about, but something a lot of aspiring creators may want to learn.

So I asked him to write a little bit about what he has learned to help those who are attempting to do what he has done. And again, his books are DAMN GOOD, and he keeps making them, so this stuff is very valuable! I would listen!

JAMES MADDOX!

SELF-PUBLISHING 101

While some of us writer-types go on to pitch our stories to editors and publishers, there's a whole other group that just get down to business and make comics happen. These people are self-publishers. Thankfully, the world of comics is a proactive community of creators, so self-publishing isn't met with much stigma, but if you're looking to get into this brand of comic creating, you might have some difficulty getting over that first hump of "But how?"

The how is actually pretty simple. In its base form, you draw a comic, take said comic to a print shop, copy the thing several times over, and fold these copies to create a booklet. Ta-da! Comic!

That's the quick & dirty method of production, and it can get much more complicated by mixing in variables like for-hire artists, printers, paper weight/gloss, and distributors. But those initial steps are what I've often returned to, especially with new comics I'm pre-hyping at conventions.

The other method of self-publishing is the Internet. I'm not embarking on that rant of how the Internet has changed the face of modern comics. Every comic-creating hopeful has been pointed to the pixelated page at least once. Just know that if used properly, the Interwebs can be a wonderful tool for distribution. If used poorly, you'll have another stagnant webcomic that gets 10 hits a month, most of them by its creator.

So before jumping into the well-trodden "How to Self-Publish!", let's briefly take this conversation in a different direction and highlight a question that every creator entering the world of self-produced comics should be asking themselves: "Why am I doing this?"

The answer usually breaks down to either **1)** I want to tell a story without any editorial changes or compromises, or **2)** I want to get professional eyes on my work so I can land a swank job making comics. Both of these goals are admirable, and both may be applicable, but knowing the answer in advance will carve out a lot of wasted time than if you'd wandered in blind, fumbling and filled with nothing but a hope and a dream. Now that you have the "why" down, it's time to rate your artistic ability. There are some creators out there who can do it all. By creating a good plot and producing the art that will bring that story to life, these people rate high on artistic ability, and creators such as myself (who can barely draw a running stick figure) generally tend to despise them. So unless you're Paul Pope, Jeff Lamire, or Royden Lepp, you're going to need to find yourself an illustrator.

There are a lot of places to create a connection with artists on the web, but for me, comic conventions are essential. And with so many cons popping up lately, finding one near you isn't a heavy task. Not only will a convention have a higher probability of hosting active artists looking to work in comics, but they also give you the added benefit of a living, breathing comics community. So strap on a cap that reads "Howdy! I'm an upcoming comic writer who's looking for an ambitious illustrator to work on my script!" and get thee to a con.

Once you've found an artist and agreed upon a mutually acceptable system of ownership/payment/bartering, the next step is comic creation. If you're prepared, you'll have all of your scripts created well in advance of approaching any artist. For the rest of us, always stay *at least* one issue ahead of your artist. If they are forced to wait on you to generate content, there's a chance they'll find other work to fill in the inactive gaps—and that other work may pull them away from your project entirely.

To combat this inactivity, set and meet self-imposed production deadlines. For all writers worth their salt, deadlines are king—especially if your goal is to work with a publisher. If you start the good habit of meeting deadlines when no one is breathing down your neck, then you won't be a nightmare to the editor who gives you an opportunity to show your skills professionally.

To reinforce this point, I'm going to say this in caps: DEADLINES ARE KING FOR ANY PROFESSIONAL WRITER. Don't forget it.

Now, after months of comic-creating wonder, your story is completed, printed and in your hand. You can finally sit back and watch as the hordes of comic readers show up at your home and fling wads of cash at you and your wonderful story. This may seem frightening at first, but just remember to smile and wave and maybe hire an assistant to sweep up the money and organize it by the various denominations.

While the above is one possible scenario, it is more likely that no one will know or care about the time, sacrifice and capital that was used to create your book. It may seem harsh, but don't think that just because you have a comic sitting on a shelf (or at a web address) that anyone will pay attention to your efforts. Unless you get out there and advertise its existence by **kindly** submitting for reviews, **kindly** requesting blurbs from professionals, **kindly** accepting and using criticism, and aggressively going to cons and hustling your ass off, the likelihood that you and your story will dissolve into the ether is very high.

Quite frankly, here's the awful truth: In self-publishing there is no finish line, there's only the track.

This causes that question of "Why am I doing this?" to become so necessary.

If you're doing it to break into the business, that's wonderful! Produce your comic and then promote it to the best of your ability while moving on to the next one. It takes a lot of work for a self-published book to find monetary success and receive critical recognition. It also takes an understanding that just because the phrase "The End" appears on your final page, it doesn't mean that your work has also come to a close.

If you're doing it to tell a story with no editorial changes or compromises, that's wonderful! Produce your comic and then promote it to the best of your ability while moving on to the next one. Or if you met your goal and told the story you wanted to tell, then hang up the writer-seeking-artist hat, Nelle Harper Lee, and go check out fly fishing. From what I hear, it's relaxing and filled with fresh air and beautiful scenery.

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James Maddox is a critically acclaimed indie writer whose most recent series THE DEAD (self-published) and The Horror Show (Broken Icon Comics) were both highlighted in Comic Bastards' "Best Indie Comics of 2013".

THE DEAD was also featured in the "Top 100 of ComiXology Submit", and The Horror Show received recognition in Decapitated Dan's yearly "Best Book You Never Heard Of".

Find more of his comics and updates

at [www.jamesmaddox.net](http://www.jamesmaddox.net), [www.thedeadcomic.net](http://www.thedeadcomic.net), [www.brokeniconcomics.com](http://www.brokeniconcomics.com), or follow him on Twitter: @jamescmaddox

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*This forum is a collection of short articles designed to help new, aspiring comics creators to navigate all aspects of the industry. The intention is to provide both practical and creative advice on a wide variety of topics, all from the minds of many of the best and most successful creators in comics.*

*It is curated by Gail Simone, writer of over 400 comics for publishers such as DC, Marvel, Bongo, Dynamite, Dark Horse, and many more. Her usual tumblr is: <http://www.tumblr.com/blog/gailsimone>*

*This forum would not be possible without the help and support of the many professionals who gave their time and expertise freely, to be used as a resource by anyone who so chooses.*

*Have fun, read some stuff, more articles on many different topics coming all the time!*

*Thank you very much to Gregory Hauenstein for the design and layout, and Courtney Meeker for her help in proofing and feedback!*

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