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Tutorial: How to Create a Successful Web Comic

HOME PAGE, INTERNET- So, you'd like to set the world on fire with a web-based comic strip but you think you haven't a chance in the world since you aren't funny and can't draw. Well, I've got great news for you because you happen to be an ideal candidate for the exciting and lucrative world of web-comicry.

After just a few postings, you'll have legions of loyal readers eating out of your cheese-powder-covered hands. Middle-aged journalists who ought to know better will turn to you as the ultimate arbiter of Internet chic. Attractive members of the opposite sex who didn't talk to you before- well, they still won't talk to you, but flushed with your sudden e-fame none of that will matter anymore. A life of untold riches and web comic stardom is yours for the taking, and all you have to do is follow these simple rules:

Rule #1 - Don't draw anything. Illustration is hard work and a time-consuming skill to acquire. Thanks to modern technology, most notably the copy & paste feature found on most modern computers, it is now completely unnecessary. Grab a random image from Google Image Search and add some speech bubbles. Don't even draw the speech bubbles- just search "speech bubble" on your pal Google Image Search.

Remember to make subtle changes to each panel to give your readers the illusion of action. That way your comics will look like people standing around talking- and people love that sort of thing. Consumer research shows that the general public really responds well to web comics that most closely resemble a Samuel Becket play.

If you can, try to add heavy lids to the eyes- because web comic characters are the most interesting when they appear to be bored with their surroundings.

Rule #2 - Don't write actual jokes. Other than the mistake of spending time drawing a comic, the second most common mistake newcomers make is writing one. Some people waste hours wracking their brains for a funny premise or clever line, but it's utterly pointless and only exposes you to the danger of your readers just not finding your jokes funny. Instead, start from a very specific audience (most often based on a fandom, fundamentalist religion, or bizarre sexual practice) and tell them what they want to hear in four-panel format.

Everybody likes to feel like a martyr, so you might try dramatizing how your audience is oppressed by others. Put together fantasy conversations where your characters tell off a generic authority figure or opposing archetype. It feels good, and your audience will grow to love you for it. Even if you've never had a funny thought in your life and are consumed with bitterness and self-pity, your readers will think of you as the king of all funny-men.

For example, gaming web comics are extremely popular at the moment because it requires no writing at all. Just take a handful of Zelda references and toss in a proper noun or two ("John Romero made me his bitch lol") and you're golden, the Molière of the Internet.

Like non-rhyming poetry, it takes a real artist to make a web comic without a joke. Religious comics are a great example of this. Images of Jesus fish swallowing Darwin fish, might seem inane or perhaps a little childish, but when it comes to generating web traffic the tactic is pure genius. It's like the old proverb about the fish versus teaching someone to fish: give a person a joke, and you've made them laugh for one day, but give a person a sense of righteous indignation and you've made a fan for life.

Rule #3 - Don't be gracious. A great way to generate buzz for your web comic is by picking a fight with another web comic, preferably someone with a more established site so that the inevitable "look at what this moron just said" links on his forum will boost your server stats. Again, you can't and probably shouldn't write jokes about them, so just barf

up a few panels about calling your target names and making them cry. Don't be afraid about sounding mean or just plain stupid. Your comic doesn't even have to make sense. It can even be something as simple as a name drop with a stolen image of dog poo- just enough to drive angry web traffic your way.

Rule #4 - Always have a fourth panel. It looks professional and gives you a nice spot for your "punchline."

Good luck- not that you'll need it. You have the best web comic system on earth behind you!

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