

Caught in the Web: An examination of solo webcomic production from 2015 to 2025

Daniel Merlin Goodbrey
University of Hertfordshire
Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9AB, UK
d.m.1.goodbrey@herts.ac.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

Webcomic practitioners typically work alone and are responsible for all aspects of their comic's design, creation, publication and monetisation. This paper presents the findings of an extended period of practice-based research into the nature of solo webcomic production. It uses the lens of my own experience as the creator of four webcomic series published between 2015 and 2025. These series provide case studies in solo webcomic production across a ten-year period.

2. REVENUE AND PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Solo webcomic creators rely on a shifting combination of approaches to making revenue from their work, based on a mix of crowdfunding, advertising, merchandising and commissions (Kleefeld 2020, 113). All approaches to revenue generation are significantly impacted by the size of a webcomic's readership.

A regular and consistent publication schedule is considered a key factor in growing and maintaining a webcomic's readership (Guigar and Kellett 2025). Webcomics typically consist of short instalments that are published regularly between one to five times a week. The rapid pace of this update schedule necessitates a pragmatic approach to webcomic production. Priority is placed on finding ways to work quickly and efficiently towards maintaining the publication schedule.

3. WRITING AND IDEATION

The publication schedule necessitates a fast pace to webcomic ideation. A creator typically aims to keep several weeks ahead in the writing of the series and

maintaining this lead requires a regular pace of ideation. Webcomics may operate as either ongoing serials or standalone narratives with or without a recurring cast. Standalone episodes with no recurring cast offer the creator the greatest freedom in storytelling. They work well to draw in new readers as each episode provides its own jumping on point to the series. However, this approach can also cause stresses in production due to the need for constant ideation of a new premise for every episode.

The addition of a recurring cast and an ongoing serial narrative can help to reduce this ideation pressure. These elements allow for the upfront development of a strong story engine as the basis for the webcomic's narrative. This may include a clear set of themes within which to ideate or a combination of characters and setting that naturally generate story through the cast's wants, needs, conflicts and interactions. A serial narrative may be employed as either a planned element of the series or develop organically through a gradual process of plot accumulation (Campbell 2006, 90). Serial narratives may result in episodes that work less well to draw in new readers but serve to better retain the series' existing readership.

4. ILLUSTRATION

Contemporary comic artwork operates on a spectrum between the simplified and stylised approach of the 'Cartoon Mode' and the more realistic depictions of the 'Naturalistic Mode' (Witek 2012, 28). While both approaches are found in webcomic art, the publication schedule necessitates a fast pace to illustration that favours use of the cartoon mode. The number of popular webcomic series that employ highly simplified art styles attest

to an online readership that have embraced narrative content over visual craft.

The cartoon mode is used in all my case studies, which feature an illustration approach that favours shape over line and a significant degree of simplification in characters and environments. The artwork employs a similar method to that found in digital approaches to cutout animation. Characters, props and environments are constructed from a series of smaller elements, each treated as an individual symbol contained within a library of such symbols (Figure 1). Symbols can be re-used, repositioned and swapped around to depict characters in a variety of different poses or expressions. This provides a versatile illustration approach that allows for a very fast overall production speed.

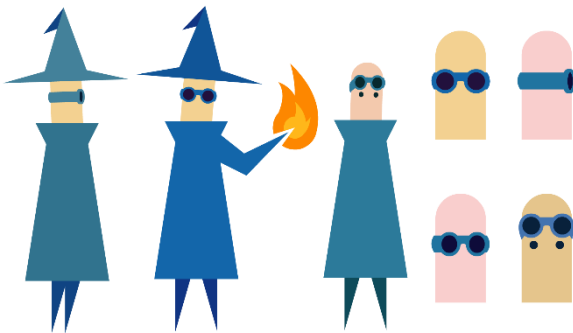


Figure 1: A character in a range of poses with a selection of elements from his constituent library.

5. LAYOUT

A key choice for a webcomic creator is whether to approach their comic in a 'Format Specific or Format Flexible' mode of production (Goodbrey 2019, 341). Different formats bring with them different conventions around layout, page size, screen dimensions and panel count. Each format also brings with it an associated audience of readers for that format. A format specific approach means producing the comic with only a single format in mind. This simplifies the design process and makes it easier to fully exploit the specific qualities of that format. But it limits the potential readership to just that of the chosen format and may result in difficulties if the creator later seeks to adapt the comic to other formats.

In a format flexible approach, the creator considers two or more different formats when creating their comic. This makes it harder to use the qualities specific to each format and can add additional design restrictions to the production process. But as a result, it is possible for the comic to reach a much wider overall audience by releasing across multiple formats simultaneously.

6. PUBLICATION AND PROMOTION

Between 2015 and 2025, significant shifts occur in webcomic publication and promotion. A major driver of change is the rise in popularity of mobile devices for web browsing from 31% in 2015 to 64% by 2025. This leads to an associated rise in the popularity of dedicated webcomic anthology services such as Webtoon and Tapas. These services offer websites and apps that provide large concentrations of readers with a mobile-friendly browsing and reading experience. While initially viewed as a positive development, the growth of these services has contributed to an increased difficulty for creators to get their webcomics noticed amongst the many series hosted by each service.

In 2025 some creators have suggested a move back towards individually hosted webcomic sites (Guigar and Kellett 2025). These sites offer creators more direct control over their intellectual property and give a clear central focus to any promotional efforts. A regular social media presence is a key element of such efforts and considered vital for growing a webcomic's readership (Guigar and Kellett 2025). In 2015, Twitter provided a single, widely used platform for webcomic promotion, but recent years have seen a fragmentation of social media platforms and usage. In 2025 there is not a single platform for promotion that covers all of the potential webcomic readership. It is also harder to get readers to move outside of their chosen platform to view webcomics hosted on the open web. As a result, it has become an increasingly common tactic for creators to publish entire webcomic episodes directly across multiple social media platforms.

7. REFERENCES

- Campbell, T. (2006) *A History of Webcomics*. Antarctic Press, San Antonio.
- Goodbrey, D. (2019) Chose the Format of Your Destructor: Design Choices for Comic Creators in Print & Digital Media. In Seelow, D. (ed) *Lessons Drawn: Essays on the Pedagogy of Comics and Graphics Novels*. McFarland, Jefferson.
- Kleefeld, S. (2020) *Webcomics*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Guigar, B. and Kellett, D. (2025) *How to start a webcomic in 2025*. Available from <https://comiclub.simplecast.com/episodes/how-to-start-a-webcomic-in-2025> (26 February 2026).
- Witek, J. (2012) Comics Modes: Caricature and Illustration in the Crumb Family's Dirty Laundry. In Smith, J. and Duncan, R. (eds) *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*. Routledge, New York.