

MOBILE COMICS

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
COMICS FOR SMALL SCREEN DEVICES

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION	3
What are Mobile Comics?.....	3
Who reads Mobile Comics? And how?	3
Who is this guide for?	4
TELLING STORIES IN SMALL SPACES	5
How to use the small screen in your favor	5
1) Narrow width, infinite height	5
2) Silence areas	6
3) Frame size as narrative highlight.....	7
4) Less is more	8
5) focus on reader's attention	9
How to use scrolling in your favor	10
1) Distribution of balloons and reminders as guide.....	10
2) screen movement as descent or fall	11
3) Screen scrolling as camera movement	12
Digital enviroment in your favor	13
1) Animaton	13
2) Sound effects and background music	13
TECHNICALITIES	14
Images size and quality	14
Texts.....	15
Digital publishing	16
1) Personal website	16
2) Social Networking sites	17
3) Exclusive comics' platforms	17
Monetizing.....	18
IN CONCLUSION	19
Alas, Online!.....	19
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	20

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE MOBILE COMICS?

Comics are a form of media through which stories are told, just like movies or books. They are another way of making art and culture.

Unlike movies or books, which require an investment of time to visit the theater or read a long novel, a comic format allows the audience to consume content more quickly. In the past, comic consumption has occurred on a fixed publication schedule. Due to the rise of mobile devices in daily life, there is a growing audience for content which can be consumed in intervals, such as when waiting in a bank service queue, taking public transportation, or moving between one appointment and another. And that's where mobile content comes in.

Comics designed to be read on small-screen mobile devices are not meant to replace printed comics, nor are they intended to replace digital webcomics designed to be read on tablets and other large screens. **Mobile Comics**, are, in fact, just another type of comic, as are traditional newspaper comic strips, Graphic Novels, manga, and similar variations of the comic medium. **Mobile Comics are a new genre, designed for readers on the move.**

The purpose of this guide is to educate would-be comic creators who want to make the most of the design features available to the Mobile Comic genre. This guide will allow you to tell your story using methods which appeal to readers who are in a hurry or are busy.

WHO READS MOBILE COMICS? AND HOW?

You may have heard of the expression “Mobile First.” This term is used to prioritize the development of applications and websites for small screens on mobile devices, and adaptation for larger screens is a secondary concern. Although “Mobile First” development strategies date back to 2010, some types of mobile content, including Mobile Comics, are only now coming into focus.

If you talk to traditional comic book fans about comics made to be read on your cell phone, or even about webcomics in general, most will say that they “prefer to read the magazine, on paper.” This is expected: traditional comic book fans were introduced to their favorite stories and characters through the more traditional magazine format.

Webcomics readers—specifically, Mobile Comics readers—are part of a **new audience**. They are adapted to social networks, timelines which automatically refresh, and they are comfortable watching a [Netflix](#) series on a smartphone with

headphones while waiting for their flight at the airport. They are a generation who watches little television and hardly reads magazines.

Apart from the differences in content delivery and consumption, such as the distinction between printed and digital media, this audience is also accustomed to having their preferred content come to them. A (very) few years ago, it was normal for readers to visit their favorite sites searching for content. Today, content comes to them, often via links sent by friends, family, or other trusted persons, in a sort of personalized “content curation.” Multiple social media platforms, such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Tumblr](#), facilitate this content curation. Comics publication on these platforms has always been quite popular, especially for the comic strip genre.

But this guide goes further than examining social networking sites, and also explores the advantages of **Content Platforms**. As [Netflix](#) provides access to movies and series, and [Spotify](#) provides access to music and podcasts, there are online platforms which specialize in comics. These platforms can allow traditionally printed comics to be digitized for cheaper and easier distribution, or enable publication of comics made specifically to be read with mobile devices.

Why is this guide focusing on these platforms? Longform digital comics are more likely to benefit from the format and structure of these platforms. While comic strips benefit from the immediacy of social media, longform comics with ongoing stories benefit from providing the reader with a clear, coherent reading experience on mobile devices.

To clarify: comics intended for a printed medium should provide the reader with a specific narrative experience on each page. Webcomics designed for mobile devices can take advantage of the small-screen format to isolate each scene, making the scrolling process an interactive part of the comic experience for the reader.

Seem interesting? The purpose of this guide is to **help you, the comic artist, to develop your webcomic while considering the narrative potential of small screen devices**, with the goal of providing a great experience for your audience.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide assumes that you, as a comic artist, already have some knowledge about creating comics, but you may not be familiar with comics designed for mobile devices. If this assumption doesn't apply to you, but you do want to know a little more about the process of making comics, we have included a reference list at the end of this guide! Go check it out!

TELLING STORIES IN SMALL SPACES

HOW TO USE THE SMALL SCREEN IN YOUR FAVOR

The smartphone's small screen may seem restrictive at first, but it becomes potentially **infinite** as soon as you realize that it expands with a touch. Here are some ways to take advantage of the area provided by small screens to tell your story:

1) NARROW WIDTH, INFINITE HEIGHT

While the printed comic book page's size provides a larger space for framing a scene or scenario, mobile devices have some width limitation but also provide an **infinite reading height** on a small screen.

In Figure 1, a tall image with several human figures set in a room of tapestries is gradually revealed by scrolling down. It gives the reader a sensation of being in a grand place.



Figure 1: Tall scene to represent a grand place.

Source: From webcomic "[Brother's Bond](#)", accessed in 29/jan/2019.

2) SILENCE AREAS

As soon as you find yourself free from the limitations of printed pages — specifically, needing to make good use of the space on the pages to tell your story without increasing publication costs — you can begin to use **silence areas** to your advantage. By widening the gutters between one frame and another, you gain the possibility of **isolating scenes that deserve more prominence in your story**, dictating the reading pacing to your reader.

In Figure 2, the **silence areas**, which are the blank spaces before and after an important moment, isolate the scene on the mobile device's screen, highlighting and changing the rhythm of reading.

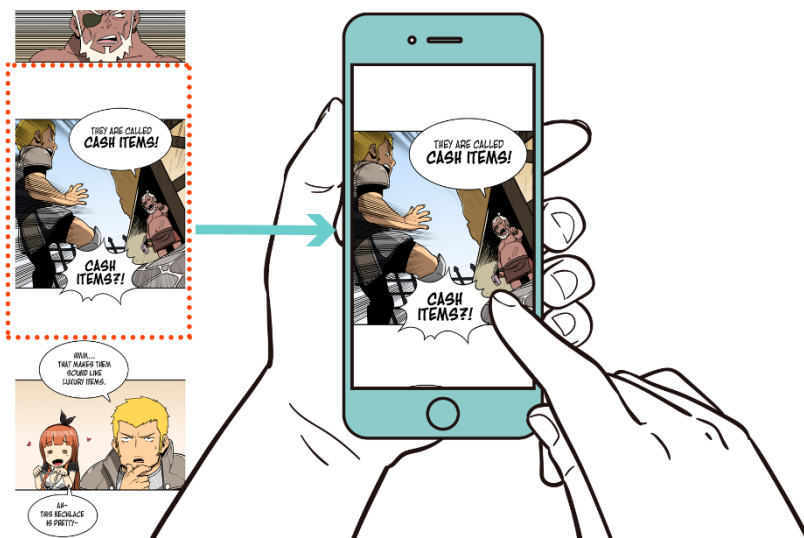


Figure 2: Silence areas to highlight narrative.

Source: From webcomic "[NPC](#)", accessed in 29/jan/2019.

3) FRAME SIZE AS NARRATIVE HIGHLIGHT

Despite mobile devices narrow screen width, there is no need to always use the entire area. **The difference in frame sizes punctuates the importance of each scene,** helping to establish pacing and provide emphasis for each narrative moment.

In Figure 3, in an important conversation between characters, the most relevant dramatic moments get bigger frames, and the complementary ones get smaller frames. In this particular sequence, the author made use of both large silence areas and different frame widths to make the conversation slower and more striking.

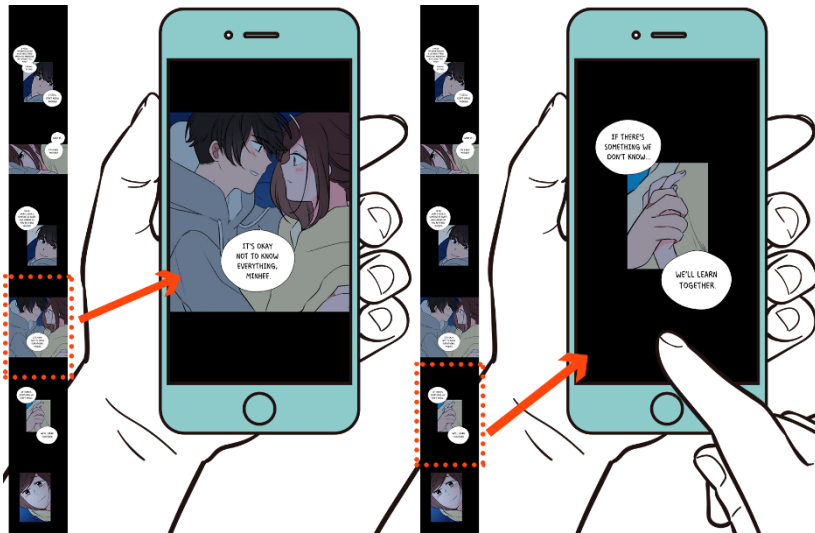


Figure 3: Emphasis on narrative by frame's width.

Source: From webcomic "[His Barcode Tattoo](#)", accessed in 29/jan/2019.

4) LESS IS MORE

The same rules proposed for Mobile First concepts for content apply to comics: it's important to worry about the amount of text that will accompany the art, as large blocks of text are more difficult to read on a small screen than on paper or large screens.

In this case, you can follow two basic rules: 1) if the text is not crucial to the narrative, consider removing it; and 2) if longer text is necessary, break it up into small segments and spread it across the frames (see example in Figure 4). Small text balloons are more enjoyable to read, and when arranged in a sequence of dialogue balloons or text boxes, they also help to guide the readers' eyes (we'll talk more about this shortly).



Figure 4: Break the long speech balloons and reminders into small segments to improve pacing.

5) FOCUS ON READER'S ATTENTION

Content displayed on small screen devices tends to hold only a small part of people's attention. The rest of their attention is divided by the line at the bank, the end of the break between classes, the timer on the microwave, and so on. You can help maintain their focus by strategically highlighting elements of your design to facilitate quick reading.

By focusing on what is really important, such as a character, an object, or a dialogue balloon, you will design your comic to call attention to prominent concepts while also decreasing reading time. In Figure 5, you can see some examples of how to highlight different design elements for this purpose.

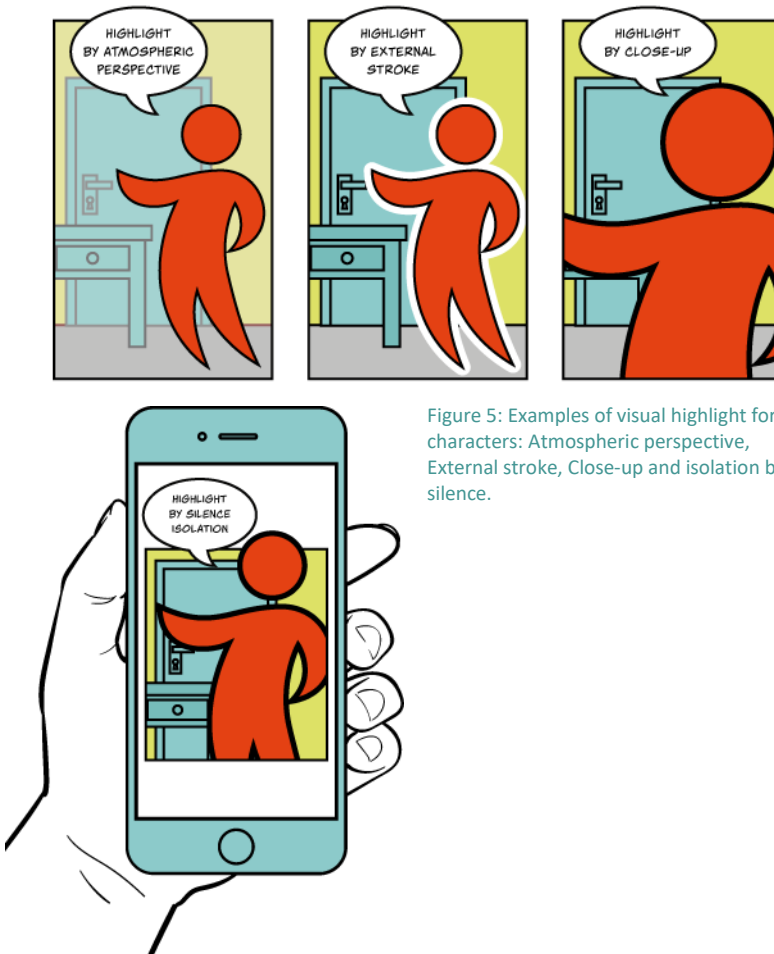


Figure 5: Examples of visual highlight for characters: Atmospheric perspective, External stroke, Close-up and isolation by silence.

HOW TO USE SCROLLING IN YOUR FAVOR

In addition to the infinite vertical space provided by small screens, you can also use **scrolling movement** to help your storytelling.

When you move the comic image on a mobile screen up or down, this generates movement between the frames. This vertical movement can be used as a narrative tool for the storytelling experience, further immersing the reader in the comic.

1) DISTRIBUTION OF BALLOONS AND REMINDERS AS GUIDE

As previously mentioned in “less is more,” dividing longer texts into small segments helps making reading more pleasant and rhythmic. Depending on where balloons and reminders are placed in frames, **you can guide the reader's eyes**. Figure 6 provides an example of this, with panels organized in a winding line.

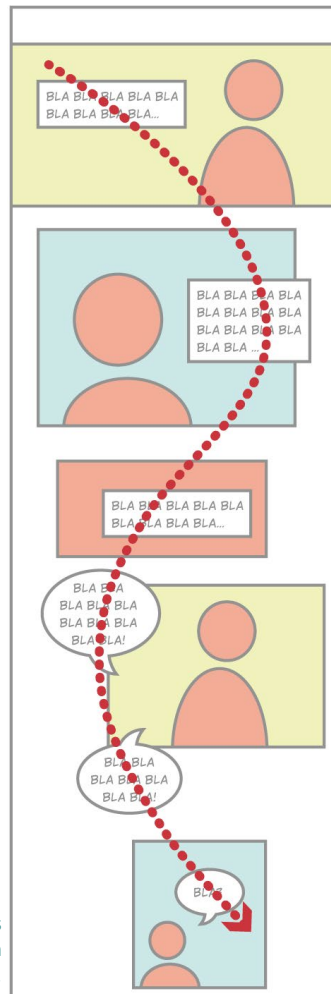


Figure 6: The position of balloons guides the reader's eyes through the narrative.

2) SCREEN MOVEMENT AS DESCENT OR FALL



This use of scrolling is self-evident: if the mobile device screen relies on vertical movement, why not use it to convey the feeling of movement in your favor?

Using scrolling as movement gives Mobile Comics traits similar to animation: the reader's sensation of **following a trajectory** becomes more noticeable and gives the impression of interactivity.

The example in Figure 7 shows the character falling towards the bottom of the ocean. As the reader sees only a fraction of this image at a time, the scrolling process gradually reveals what's below, and allows them to feel like they're following the character's fall.

The same idea can be applied to other concepts, such as nightfall / sunrise, or even a shift of scene as shown from above.

Figure 7: Sensation of fall amplified by screen scrolling movement.

Source: From webcomic "[Castle Swimmer](#)", accessed in 30/jan/2019.

3) SCREEN SCROLLING AS CAMERA MOVEMENT



There are two ways to use **scrolling as camera travelling motion** in Mobile Comics. The first, as in Figure 8, shows top-to-bottom movement. This vertical motion can be used to show a large area in general view, or to present a full-length character. Here, a deep cave is presented, the depth of which reveals itself more and more as the reader scrolls down the screen.

The second type is horizontal movement. This type of scrolling is a little less common, but it allows the reader to explore a scene horizontally. This technique is used to change the reading direction for specific cases where the narrow width of the screen in its vertical orientation is not sufficient to convey the scope of the scene. Horizontal movement is shown in Figure 9, which shows a chase scene of two characters on a street. To convey the sensation of movement, the author used a cylindrical perspective, which emulates the sensation of a static camera rotating on its own axis. This is enhanced by the curvature of the wall and the motion lines of the characters.



← Figure 8: Sequence emulating vertical camera motion, descending into the depths of a cave.

Source: From webcomic "[Brother's Bond](#)", accessed in 30/jan/2019.

→ Figure 9: Horizontal camera motion turning on the device's orientation to show a chase.

Source: From webcomic "[NPC](#)", accessed in 30/jan/2019.

DIGITAL ENVIROMENT IN YOUR FAVOR

Your comic will be read on a mobile device that allows you to do much more than just work with still images. Depending on the story you are telling, the use of hypermedia elements can generate a more interesting and immersive reading experience for your reader.

1) ANIMATON

This guide was developed from extensive research that included interviews with comics readers and authors. A constant theme in the results is that animation in comics is very cool, as long as it's only applied at really relevant moments.

To clarify: it is possible to add small animations (usually in the form of .gifs to ensure reproduction capacity across different devices) to enrich a narrative, but adding these should not be done simply because the author knows how to do it, or wanted to put it in the story. Animations must be crucial to make something more understandable, funny, impactful or dramatic, depending on the story being told, and can be a great point in favor of the reader's immersion.

Similarly, overuse of animations can reduce a reader's immersion in the story. As the reader expects a webcomic to be static, finding the rare animation can be a nice surprise; however, if animations are used to excess, the overuse of movement can negatively impact the reader's attention, distracting them from the story.

2) SOUND EFFECTS AND BACKGROUND MUSIC

In doing research for this guide, it was found that the use of sounds in comics is controversial. Some readers think the idea is great, and a well-executed soundtrack can improve engagement with the narrative. But others say they find it a nuisance, as they prefer to listen to their own music while reading, or consider it distracting.

The suggestion here remains the same as the use of animations: if you think that an effect or soundtrack is crucial to your narrative, do it. If you plan to add just because you think it would be fun, or because you know how, you might want to rethink that.

There are several other supplemental narrative effects that can be inserted into a mobile comic, such as augmented reality, use of a mobile device's gyroscope, parallax effects, etc. These may generate incredible experiences for your reader. However, they require greater technical knowledge for development and implementation, and the scope of this guide does not cover them.

TECHNICALITIES

IMAGES SIZE AND QUALITY

There is one important truth for Mobile Comics, and it is **there is no ideal standard image size for making Mobile Comics**. This is why:

The development of Mobile Comics consists on telling stories in images with a fixed width, which expands at the limits of the reader's device screen, and variable height, which is at the discretion of the author, and is practically limitless.

The problem here is to guess the size of the width, since the variables involved are: 1) the actual physical width of the reader's device; and 2) the screen's pixel density.

The first is quite obvious: an iPhone 7 is 6.7 cm wide and has a maximum resolution of 750 x 1334 pixels. So, images 750 pixels wide would be enough for this model, right?

Wrong, as you now need to consider the second variable. The pixel density of the iPhone 7, for example, is ~326 ppi (points per inch). The iPhone 7 Plus measures 7.7cm in width, has a maximum resolution of 1080 x 1920 pixels and a density of ~401ppi. The density is measured by identifying the size of the screen and how many pixels it can display (the higher the density, the less "pixelated" the displayed image). Table 1 provides a comparison of Smartphones models.



<i>Model</i>	Samsung Galaxy A80	Motorola Moto G7	Apple iPhone XS
<i>Screen</i>	6,7"	6,24"	5,8"
<i>Width</i>	7,65 cm	7,53 cm	7,09 cm
<i>Imagem resolution</i>	2400 x 1080 px	2270 x 1080 px	1125 x 2436 px
<i>Screen density</i>	393 ppi	403 ppi	458 ppi

Table 1: Comparison of Smartphones models in relation to screen sizes and resolutions.

Notice that in these three smartphones, the physical screen size decreases, but the image size (resolution) and the pixel density increases!

Is the solution to make giant images of a minimum of 1500 pixels wide? Probably not. For reading on a small screen, images larger than 1000px are treated by mobile devices as too data-heavy to download with little gain in quality. However, images less than 500px can lose resolution when the user zooms in on larger screens. Any image sizing choice more or less within these measures may be adequate. Depending on where you intend to publish your webcomic, you may be able to rely on a platform's guidelines with indications of optimal sizes.

The next problem is deciding the correct size of the text.

TEXTS

The text on websites made to be read on small screens can rely on standard CSS and JavaScript programming to guarantee a proportionately good reading size, but text in image files, such as comics, isn't subject to these rules. With an unpredictable width variation, making readable text for any screen size can become a challenge. The comic creator needs to find the largest legible font size for reader comfort without making text the biggest element of the art.

In Figure 11, you can see a comparison of 4 webcomics in relation to their image widths and text sizes.

The first example, although small, still offers good legibility, especially on smartphones with larger screens over 7cm wide, but it gets more difficult to read when the width is below 6cm. The last example has a very large font size, which guarantees a great reading on any screen size, but requires a lot more area for the balloons.

It's good to remember that you don't have a height limit to tell your story, so using big balloons doesn't necessarily have to be a negative point. Your choice for text legibility can be based on your personal perception of the proportion between art and text.



704px wide
Font Size 12pt



637px wide
Font size 30pt



800px wide
Font size 28pt



680px wide
Font size 50pt

Figure 10: Webcomics' text sizes with image width and font size comparison.

Source: From webcomics "[Rei de lata](#)", "[His Barcode Tattoo](#)", "[Castle Swimmer](#)" and "[Lore Olympus](#)", accessed in 30/jan/2019.

DIGITAL PUBLISHING

After creating and developing your webcomics, the last element to consider is where it will be published. You have three basic options, which need not necessarily be exclusive. They are: 1) A personal website; 2) social networking sites; and 3) comic media platforms.

1) PERSONAL WEBSITE

A personal website is where you register your own domain (www.mywebcomic.com, for example), hire your own hosting server, or use services like [SquareSpace](#) or [WordPress](#) to provide complete and secure website platforms. This option allows you to ensure that all content is under your control, rather than taking a chance that

a platform or social network might cease to exist, thus taking all of your content and your audience with it.

The downside, on the other hand, is that the current consumer audience of digital content does not usually go to the content. Instead, they expect the content to come to them. A personal website can be a good base for your more attentive readers to find old publications, methods for contacting you, or other information, but it doesn't provide enough advantages to be the main location for your comic's audience.

2) SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites are a great way to build an audience, as you publish your comics where potential readers are already active, and they do not need to leave their comfort zones to consume your content. However, social networking sites have multiple negative attributes: they are not structured to present images in the sequences that might best benefit storytelling in Mobile Comics; the image compression might damage the quality of the art; the possibility that you may need to pay these sites to distribute your content; and the lack of control in distribution, which can interfere with monetizing.

Even with all these negative points, publishing - or at least publicizing - your webcomics on these sites is vital for increasing audience size, or reach. The best options for that, at the moment, are:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [Pinterest](#)

ATTENTION: never, EVER forget to **identify all the images** you post on social networking sites with something that can take the reader back to your website, email or main publishing platform. It can be your website's URL, your "at" username on Instagram or Twitter, or your name, in a corner of the image. Without this, your content might be lost in the immense sea of information that is the internet and your potential new reader may never find you again.

3) EXCLUSIVE COMICS' PLATFORMS

These is a middle ground between the two previous options. By bringing together multiple webcomics from different authors in one place, you can increase your audience just by being positioned on a platform that readers who are interested in

that particular type of media are already familiar with and access often. So far, the main platforms I've found that accept direct publication by the author are:

- Tapas – www.tapas.io
- Line WebToons – www.webtoons.com

There are other large platforms which also work with webcomics focused only on digital publishing (as opposed to digitalized versions of comics which were designed to be printed), but these require the author to go through a selection process before publication. The main ones are:

- Lezhin Comics - www.lezhin.com
- HiveWorks – www.hiveworkscomics.com
- Line WebToons – www.webtoons.com (In addition to direct publication options, they also have authors hired by the platform that gain more prominence in advertising, in addition to those who publish directly without going through pre-selection).

MONETIZING

By the end of the day, you'll need to make your webcomic financially feasible to develop and maintain. It is not the purpose of this guide to teach you how to make money from comics, but I'll leave you with some interesting suggestions as a starting point:

- **Crowdfunding** platforms, such as [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com) 🇺🇸, [Padrim](https://www.padr.im) 🇬🇧 and [Apoia-se](https://apoia.se) 🇬🇧 offer plans where readers can periodically contribute with small amounts, which together can be enough to finance your work.
- **MarketPlace** sites, such as [Society6](https://www.society6.com) 🇺🇸🇩🇪, [Redbubble](https://www.redbubble.com) 🇬🇧 and [Colab55](https://www.colab55.com) 🇬🇧 offer an easy way to sell products featuring your art, without the hassle of actually having to manufacture and ship these products. They take care of the business end and pay you a predetermined amount for each product sold.
- **Participating in events** of pop culture and design as an artist can generate revenue, either by selling your art in prints and products, or by participating in actions such as lectures and workshops.

Some webcomic platforms themselves often offer ways to make digital publishing financially viable. It is important to inform yourself of the terms of use, and positive and negative features of each, before you make your decision.

IN CONCLUSION

ALAS, ONLINE!

Congratulations! You have made a Mobile Comic and can start publishing digitally! Your focus should now be on developing a viable publication schedule, maintaining your social network presence to increase and engage your audience, and telling a good story.

This is the final version of a parameters guide for webcomics artists. It was developed during the author's doctorate degree in design, between 2016 and 2020. This version is free, and you can distribute it free of charge to anyone who wants a copy. Its publication is available on the website www.alepresser.com, in Brazillian Portuguese and English (revised and edited by [K.B.Spangler!](#)).

If you are interested in further exploring the subject of publishing Mobile Comics, you can read the complete doctoral thesis, which is also linked on the author's website and was defended in March 2020 at UFSC (Brazil).

And good webcomics for you!

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

These are just some of the books that helped in this guide's development, and that can certainly help you to improve your work as a comic artist.

- **Comics and Sequential Art:** Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist, by Will Eisner (Buy it: [PT-br](#) | [ENG](#))
- **Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative:** Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist, by Will Eisner. (Buy it: [PT-br](#) | [ENG](#))
- **How to make Webcomics**, by Brad Guigar, David Kellet, Scott Kurtz and Kris Straub. (Buy it: [ENG](#))
- **The Art of Comic Book Writing:** The definitive guide to outlining, scripting, and pitching your sequential art stories, by Mark Kneece (Buy it: [ENG](#))
- **Framed Ink:** Drawing and composition for visual storytellers, by Marcos Mateu-Mestre. (Buy it: [ENG](#))
- **Making Comics:** Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels, by Scott McCloud. (Buy it: [PT-br](#) | [ENG](#))
- **Understanding Comics:** The Invisible Art, by Scott McCloud. (Buy it: [PT-br](#) | [ENG](#))
- **Reinventing Comics:** How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form: The Evolution of an Art Form, by Scott McCloud. (Buy it: [PT-br](#) | [ENG](#))
- **A leitura dos quadrinhos**, by Paulo Ramos. (Buy it: [PT-br](#))