

Comixology cuts Apple, Google out of digital-comics kickback


Following Amazon's purchase of the digital-comics marketplace, Comixology updates its Comics apps to prevent Apple and Google from taking a cut. The move makes it harder to buy comics through the app.

by Seth Rosenblatt [@sethr](#) / April 26, 2014 3:37 PM PDT

Comics – Read Comic Books & Graphic Novels by comiXology

By comiXology

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This app is designed for both iPhone and iPad.

Free

Category: Books
Released: Apr 26, 2014
Version: 3.6
Size: 31.7 MB
Languages: English, French
Seller: comiXology
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You must be at least 17 years old to download this app.
Infrequent/Mild Sexual Content and Nudity
Infrequent/Mild Horror/Fear Themes
Infrequent/Mild Simulated Gambling
Infrequent/Mild Profanity or Crude Humor
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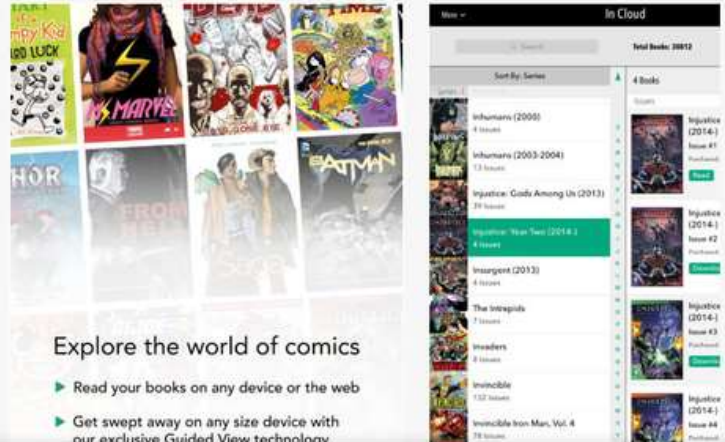
Description

Get swept away in the most immersive comic book and graphic novel reading experience available on your iPad, iPhone, and iPod touch. A free comiXology account is required to sign in and read comics in this comics reader.

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Screenshots

iPhone | iPad



Explore the world of comics

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- ▶ Get swept away on any size device with our exclusive Guided View technology

Comixology's new iPad app is a big gamble because it cuts out in-app sales from the top-grossing iPad app.

Screenshot by Seth Rosenblatt/CNET

Digital-comics marketplace and reader Comixology updated its Comics apps for Android and iOS on Saturday to **stop Apple and Google from taking a percentage** of purchases made through the apps.

The move returns to Comixology, which was just **purchased by Amazon for an undisclosed sum**, a significant portion of its sales that had been going to the tech titans. They were collecting 30 percent of the price of every comic sold. Most new comics retail for the same price digitally as in print, between \$2.99 and \$3.99, and at least one company -- DC Entertainment -- has said that digital comics now represent around 15 percent of its new comics revenue.

Along with the app update and its more difficult purchasing process, Comixology is offering all its current users a \$5 credit as a way to get people to try the purchase workflow.

"For years they've been one of the highest (if not the highest) revenue app on iOS," said Rob Salkowitz, author of "Comic-Con and the Business of Pop Culture."

"Removing that feature gets around Apple's fee and restrictive policies but creates extra steps for customers. I guess they are banking on having a loyal enough audience at this point that the reward outweighs the risk," he said. "Having Amazon behind them mitigates some of that risk while providing a pretty clear business rationale in terms of timing."

Comixology's chief marketing officer Chip Mosher told CNET that the company is incorporating Amazon's Web-based payments strategy prior to approval of the acquisition by the online mega-retailer.

"As we move to complete the acquisition with Amazon, we are shifting to the Web-based purchasing model they've successfully used with **Kindle**, which we expect will allow us to strike the best balance between prices, selection and customer experience," he said.

While the goal of Comixology's move might help its bottom line in the long term, it's also the most high-profile incident to date of a vendor balking at Apple and Google's in-app take. Google fans will suffer only a minor setback, but comics

fans who read on iOS have no recourse and must change how they buy their books.

Mosher declined to say whether Comixology had received complaints from comics publishers. **Comixology's impact on digital-comics publishing** can't be understated. Most comics publishers had been apprehensive at best about publishing comics digitally because of fears of undercutting their small-margin print business, and Comixology was the vehicle they chose to help them make the transition.

Mosher also pointed to a benefit for comics readers: Apple's content restrictions for app vendors are now rendered moot. This issue came to a head a few months ago, when Apple demanded that Comixology stop selling the **best-selling and critically-acclaimed sex-themed comedy Sex Criminals**.

Some publishers, such as **DC Entertainment** and **Image Comics**, have since taken steps to diversify their online publishing platforms.

Comics publishers that were asked to comment have not yet responded. Apple and Google did not respond to requests for comment.

Chris Roberson, a comics author and co-publisher of Monkeybrain Comics, a digital-comics publisher, **said on Twitter** that he expects the move to result in more money per sale going to the comics' creators. That could backfire, though, if overall sales decrease because **iPad** owners buy fewer comics.

Comixology's remedy could lead to many comics fans feeling like they've been left hanging.

Comixology's Comics app for iOS is no longer able to make in-app purchases of any kind. iOS users must make all comics purchases from the **Comixology website store** and then synchronize the books to the iOS app.

The Comics app had been one of Apple's top grossing apps with in-app purchases for several years. It ranked third on the iPad top-grossing chart for 2012, and was the top-grossing iPad app of 2013, with 14 percent of all nongame in-app sales.

Just a day after the new iOS app launched, it had only a 1.5-star rating after more than 800 reviews.

The old iOS app's comic-reading functions will continue to work, **reports Bleeding Cool**, but the store won't. For people who don't want to have to download their books to their iOS device, this could be a small time-saver.

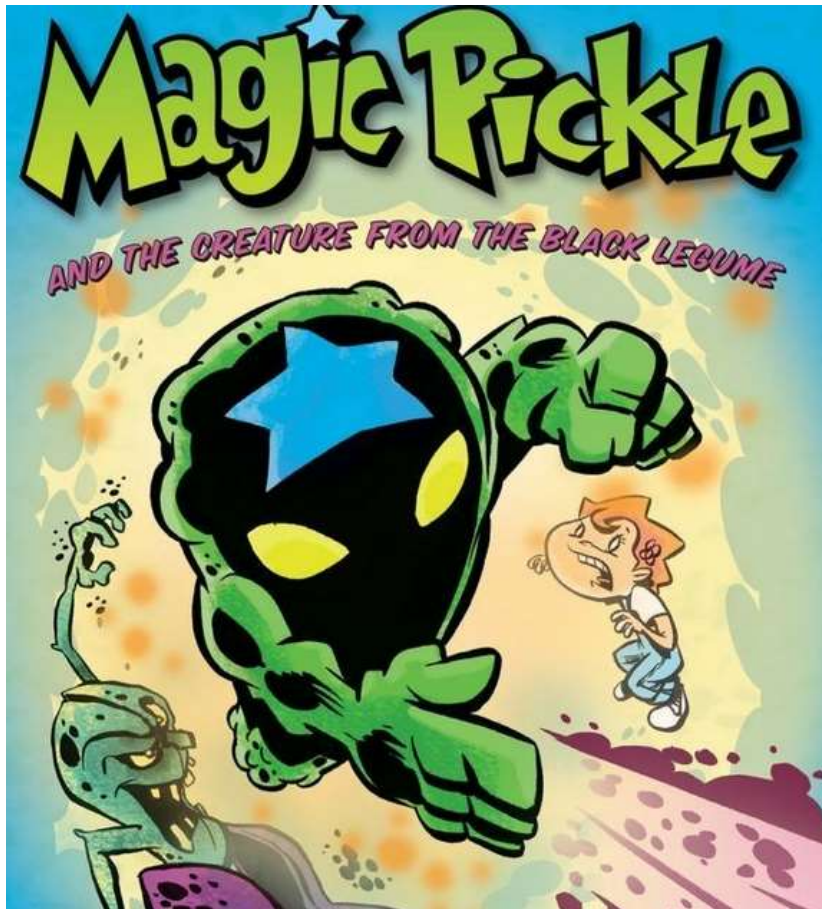
Comixology's Comics app for Android will continue to allow users to make in-app purchases, but instead of paying with your Google Play account, you must now go through Comixology's new system and pay with PayPal or a credit card.

Comixology was a hero to many comics fans for its key role in convincing publishers to sell their books digitally. But a survey of Twitter comments on the change indicates that, at least for iPad owners, today the villain is Comixology.

Digital comics successful sidekick to print, say publishers

Two years ago, digital comics rocketed to the front page when DC Entertainment rebooted and began publishing all its titles in digital as well as print. Now that most North American publishers have followed suit, they say digital has become a small but growing part of their business.

- by **Seth Rosenblatt**
- July 20, 2013 1:28 PM PDT



Comixology has added Scholastic titles like the Magic Pickle at Comic-Con 2013. Screenshot by Seth Rosenblatt/CNET

SAN DIEGO -- It's not always that the plucky kid in the cape and domino mask can save the day, but digital comics are here to stay, say American comic book publishers.

In a recession-defying feat, the comics business rebounded from a catastrophic downward sales spiral when DC Entertainment, the home of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, **rebooted its superhero universe** in 2011. A key component of the reboot was to begin publishing all its titles "day-and-date" digitally, meaning that they would be sold online at the same time and for the same price as they were in retail stores.

Two years on, print comics are celebrating their best industry-wide sales in a decade, and digital comics have established themselves as a small but complementary force.

"The triple digit growth slope's not as steep as when we launched," said Jim Lee, co-publisher of DC Entertainment, "but we're having tremendous success with books like the Injustice game tie-in."

Reported sales numbers back up that assertion. Comics sales in print through June 2013 are up **13 percent over last year at this point**, according to one site that tracks the industry. Digital comics 2012 sales for the North American market were estimated at around \$70 million, nearly triple the \$25 million from the previous year. Digital comics sales are a bit trickier to track, since publishers are reluctant to discuss sales figures, but they're saying digital sales are skyrocketing.

That's small when compared with the nearly \$680 million in estimated print sales from the same period, but in 2009, digital sales were estimated at \$1 million.

Ron Richards, the marketing director at Image Comics, which publishes the Walking Dead and Saga, among other titles, confirmed that his company is seeing strong digital growth. "We've learned that digital isn't cannibalizing print," he said.

Even smaller publishers, like IDW Publishing, are seeing a big boost to their bottom lines from digital. The company's vice president of digital publishing, Jeff Webber, gave some perspective on digital's impact.

"IDW has had a 20 percent growth rate over the past four years," he said. Digital is "10 to 15 percent of our business, where four years ago it would've been 30 to 40 percent of our business."

Another metric that indicates digital is growing rapidly comes from Comixology, a cross-platform marketplace app and Web site that lets people buy and read digital comics.



Batman '66 depicts the campy show in comic book form for the first time, one of DC's many digital adaptations of its heroes from other media.[DC Entertainment](#) CEO David Steinberger said that the people have now downloaded 180 million comics since the app was released five years ago, a jump of 80 million from October 2012.

As digital comics have become widely accepted by publishers, retailers, and readers, the format has not been without its growing pains. While comics are available digitally from a wide range of marketplaces, including Apple iBooks and Amazon, Comixology undoubtedly offers the widest selection of major North American publishers. That relationship to the marketplace caused havoc when **Comixology's servers crashed in March**, following a Marvel Comics giveaway.

Another controversy erupted a few months later, when Comixology pulled a new issue of the extremely popular comic book Saga from its **iOS app without warning**.

It was an attempt to avoid a conflict with Apple, said Steinberger. "We put out a ton of books, almost 300 a week. It's tough to expect any channel to review every single one of those," he said.



Images from Saga #12 got Comixology in trouble with its readers.[Image Comics](#)

"By the time of Saga, we had had some books rejected actively, so we had been pro-actively interpreting the rules," Steinberger added.

The best intentions of digital were to bring back fans who had stopped reading comics because of storage problems or difficulty finding a physical comics shop to buy them from. But it's hard to imagine that comics are seeing this kind of growth solely from old fans embracing a new format.

Some of the growth is certainly attributable to demographics. Dan DiDio, co-publisher at DC with Jim Lee, said that the fastest growing demographic is among women between 18 and 24 years old. But a tightening of the relationship between comics and their adaptations in other media have played a big role for the company, too.

Lee said that while DC is publishing its core superhero universe digitally, the company's digital-first comics are often comics adaptations of their characters

from other media. "We're finding that elusive new fan in no better place than games and TV shows," he said.

Meanwhile, Image Comics recently took the unusual step of making its titles available for **digital purchase without DRM**. The first major comics publisher to do so, Richards explained that his company approach to digital is less about learning from the mistakes of larger media businesses like movies and music, and more about giving its customers as many ways as possible to buy its comics.

"My big talking points are choice and piracy," said Richards. "Piracy exists, and there's no way to stop it. If you look at Game of Thrones, it's the most BitTorrented show on the Internet, but it's the highest in DVD sales."

IDW's Webber, who has been involved in digital comics publishing since UClick allowed people to download Garfield comic strips to their flip phones in 2003, said that digital comics are making comics more accessible to people who don't care for collecting the books.

"We love comic collectors and that's what all this is about," he said, gesturing to the chaotic hustle of the **Comic-Con** show floor. "Digital has opened it back up to those casual readers who just want to read."

It's entirely possible that digital will eventually become a bigger business than print. But for the near future, at least, digital comics will remain a growing sidekick to the older, more experienced print superhero.