



## Marketing and Me

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Robin Etherington

**A**LTHOUGH I WRITE UNDER the name Robin Etherington, I am better known as one half of the comic-making team, The Etherington Brothers. Together with my younger sibling, Lorenzo, I began cutting my creative teeth on the UK's self-published scene. We were relatively clueless about the business side of this world and were unaware that so many of our early decisions would go on to define our lives and shape our working ethos.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. A little background to the world of comics. For self-published creators such as ourselves, the best way to build an audience and sell copies of your work is at a comic festival or convention. There, with enough forethought and planning, a humble trestle table can be transformed into a thriving storefront.

So it was that back in 2004, in my brother's dingy flat, we attempted to hash out a rough marketing strategy to increase our chances of success at these conventions. I mean this in the *loosest* sense. Nothing was written down, but we discussed the subject at length.

Our first decision was to make beautiful things. That sounds obvious but it carried with it a serious commitment of time, as we'd decided to make books with very detailed pages. By limiting the number of issues we would produce, we ensured that we never started anything that we couldn't finish.



We also decided to release new titles at specific shows. This was our first brush with the idea of event publishing although we were unaware of that term. Using the annual schedule of comic conventions, we tied each new release to a particular show.

That gave us a basic marketing *How*, but *Who* was our audience? The Asterix comics books had been a childhood favourite in the Etherington household. We adored everything about the series. At the time when we were contemplating what to create, no one in the UK was making all-ages books like Asterix and it felt like a missed trick. We decided to craft titles that both adults and children could enjoy.

We also had to work out the price on each cover, which is not a question most writers ever have to answer. In the end, it always came down to *Feel*. We discovered that we could only define the price of a book when we held it in our hands. I've always liked that.

Lastly, we both agreed that encountering either of us at a show should be a truly positive experience, which meant giving our time and our knowledge, widely and freely. Sharing our skills has since become a central aspect of our careers, but way back when, we just wanted to give people a reason to hang out at our table and chat.

Fifteen years distant and I am, quite frankly, amazed to discover that when it comes to our self-published titles, so many of these decisions have barely changed in their focus or spirit, even if the way we connect to our readers – thanks to platforms such as Kickstarter – has. The distance between our work and a truly global audience has shrunk. It still takes forethought and planning but it's now no wider than a virtual trestle table.