



IndieCreator: Insights from a Newbie Comic Creator & Other Industry Pros

This is a series of bi-weekly columns by Bob Heske @ Heske Horror, creator of [The Night Projectionist](#) and [Cold Blooded Chillers](#), featuring interviews and insights from indie comic artists, writers, creators, distributors and visionaries.

10 Questions with Chris Sheard @ YUDU Store

If you haven't heard the news, award-winning digital publishing provider [YUDU Media](#) is launching an online magazine store in the wake of the well-publicized closure of Menzies Digital's 'magazines on demand' service.

Called '[YUDU Store](#)', the service will allow publishers to host their publications online and drive secure subscription traffic to each title.

YUDU Store complements the tremendously popular [YUDU.com](#) website which is an ePublishing library and marketplace that lets visitors read, publish, buy, sell and share digital content. YUDU.com has been on the web since 2003.

With worldwide coverage, YUDU Store will offer publications from across the globe. A currency converter will subsequently let consumers know the price of each publication within their own local currency.



From a publisher's perspective, YUDU Store has two unique propositions:

- First, as a division of one of the world's biggest e-publishers, YUDU is the owner of the proprietary software; and
- Second, because there is no software license it can offer a revenue split of 75:25 which is a significant attraction for publishers.

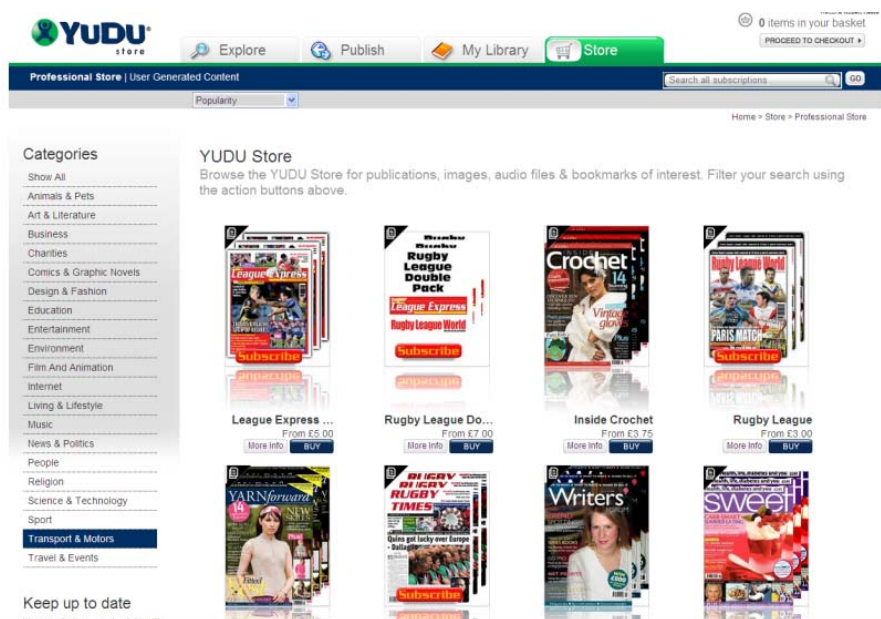
According to Chris Sheard, YUDU Store Online Subscriptions Manager, world-class customer service will also be a big benefit. “We are so confident of our ability to deliver unparalleled account service and support that we don't ask publishers for exclusivity and offer straight-forward rolling contracts,” says Chris.

To hear what else Chris had to say, and learn about the promise YUDU offers YOU as comic and graphic novel creators, read on...

1. First, tell us about Chris Sheard – what do “yudu” at YUDU, what have you done in the past, and what brought you to this exciting new digital platform.

(CHRIS:) Well, I've been involved in publishing and digital for a long time. Most recently I moved over to YUDU to launch a new digital newsstand. They had a great foundation in place, superb team, brilliant technology and they gave me the chance to mold the site in my own way. I wanted to build a professional platform that could cater for all professional publishers, from multinational companies to small niche producers. My ambition is to build [YUDU Store](#) into the number one consumer digital platform within 12- 24 months.

Before joining YUDU, I worked on digital newsstands for Menzies, ITV, Asda and WHSmith as well as working in traditional publishing for IPC Media – marketing a host of niche publications from Caravans to 4x4's!



Outside of my day-to-day I'm a serial entrepreneur; I write for a few websites as well as consulting for several smaller publishers and start-ups.

2. Give us the elevator pitch on YUDU – what makes you different and better than all the other platforms out there?

(CHRIS:) What I'm really proud of with regards to YUDU Store is that it suits all types of publishers; whether you're a smaller publisher with a few graphic novels that you're just looking to get further exposure and monetize your portfolio, or a publisher with 70 titles who wants full statistics, guidance, and marketing tools.

We have three fixed pricing levels from £99 a year to £150 a publication.

I've also made the YUDU Store model very transparent. There are no hidden costs, you get a fixed 75% revenue share and there are no fixed contracts. I want people to be happy to publish and sell on YUDU and feel confident in it. Plus, I'm on hand to offer advice and guidance.

The technology itself is superb, which is great because otherwise my efforts would be made redundant! It has everything you could want. Publications are all search engine friendly and include data protection, sample pages, ability to add video and audio content, I could go on. Plus the name YUDU comes from the fact that 'you do' it. We offer a self publishing option that allows the publishers to regain complete control. The system is really quick and easy to use and not something you should be scared of trying. We have around 300 new publications produced every day on the main YUDU site by a whole range of people from teachers and charities to budding writers covering all genres.

3. You've won a lot of awards recently. Tell us about them.

(CHRIS:) It's been a great few years for us and it's been brilliant that our efforts have been recognized. I think the latest count is seven wins over the last 24 months. I won't relay to much cheesy commentary but the awards are...

- Most Innovative Solution for Online Customer Engagement, ECMOD Awards
- Digital Magazine Delivery Company of the Year, PPA awards
- Most Innovative Media Platform, How Do Awards
- 13th fastest Growing Digital Media Company in the UK, Media Momentum Top 50,
- Supplier of the Year Gold Award, The Revolution Awards
- Business Innovation, Be Inspired Business Awards (BIBAs)
- Most Promising Business of the Year, Be Inspired Business Awards (BIBAs)



4. Tell us how a comic creator can get his/her titles up on YUDU in 5 easy steps.

(CHRIS:) Well if a comic creator wanted to, I'd say they could be selling in about 15 minutes.

- **Step One:** Go to the main YUDU Site (www.yudu.com).
- **Step Two:** Sign up for a Plus account.

- **Step Three:** Upload your titles via our fast FTP service.
- **Step Four:** Name your selling price, then it will be live on the main YUDU site.
- **Step Five:** Just email me and I'll transfer it onto the YUDU store as well.

Any questions or probs, give me a shout at Chris.Sheard@yudu.com.

5. Explain the "non-exclusive" sales arrangement that you have with publishers.

(CHRIS:) Exclusivity in digital seems a ridiculous concept to me! Can you imagine any shop approaching you saying, "hmm... we like your title, but we want to sell it exclusively, so don't sell it in any other shop worldwide". It's so restrictive. When I'm involved in start-up magazines, I always recommend they sell through as many portals as they can. Try everything!

6. What type of promotional support do you provide for publishers? What does YuDu do as a company to get your brand out and noticed in the marketplace?

(CHRIS:) I will always look to promote titles but I'm a firm believer in giving publishers the tools they need to self promote. I provide flash banners and guidance to really push their own titles on top of what we are doing.

One of the best selling publishers on the site (and previous ones I've worked on) is KAL Media, who sell knitting and craft titles. Not what you're expecting? Well they are superb at communicating the availability of the digital version through mentioning it on their blogs, their websites, and in forums. They don't pump any extra revenue into this, they only mention it in activities they currently do, but it's the best way to promote your title. Tell your consumer it is available!

Alongside this, I'm proactive in promoting all titles and generating traffic. We are just about to launch an affiliate scheme for the store, we're recruiting for another social media expert, and we do a lot of natural and paid search, as well as the obvious email campaigns and digital title sponsorship.

7. What type of traffic does the site generate – both on the library and in the store? Tell us about some of the best sellers on the site.

(CHRIS:) Yudustore.co.uk is only a week old, so traffic-wise it is too early to tell. Yudu.com however is an already proven established site. With regards to Alexia rankings it's currently ranked 14,448 with around 250k visitors a month.

From running this and other digital sites, the best sellers are always niche. They tend to promote their titles better and they tend to have limited print distributors. That's the massive benefit of digital, it doesn't price discriminate by location. It doesn't matter if you're two minutes

from the publisher, or backpacking round China. As long as you have Internet access, you can buy and read your edition.

8. Customer service is big with YUDU which is pretty much a self-service site. How do you empower visitors and subscribers to make your platform as intuitive as an iPod while providing responsive support for the tech neophytes?

(CHRIS:) The platform has been designed to be user friendly and intuitive so anyone can use it. We've also got a free service so people can give it a go. That's half the battle with digital, getting people to try to produce and consume their titles in digital format.

But one thing I wanted to really bring to the forefront of YUDU store is providing support and guidance. At the end of the day, if we can give the publishers the confidence and tools to be successful in selling their portfolio, it's a win/win situation.



9. What is the fee to get your titles listed on the store? What perks do you provide to publishers who sign on for a "Plus" account?

(CHRIS:) As mentioned, we try and cater for everyone. We have the top end £150 an issue model, where we take the PDF's and look after the whole process. We supply in-depth monthly reports, weekly sales figures and lots more bells and whistles.

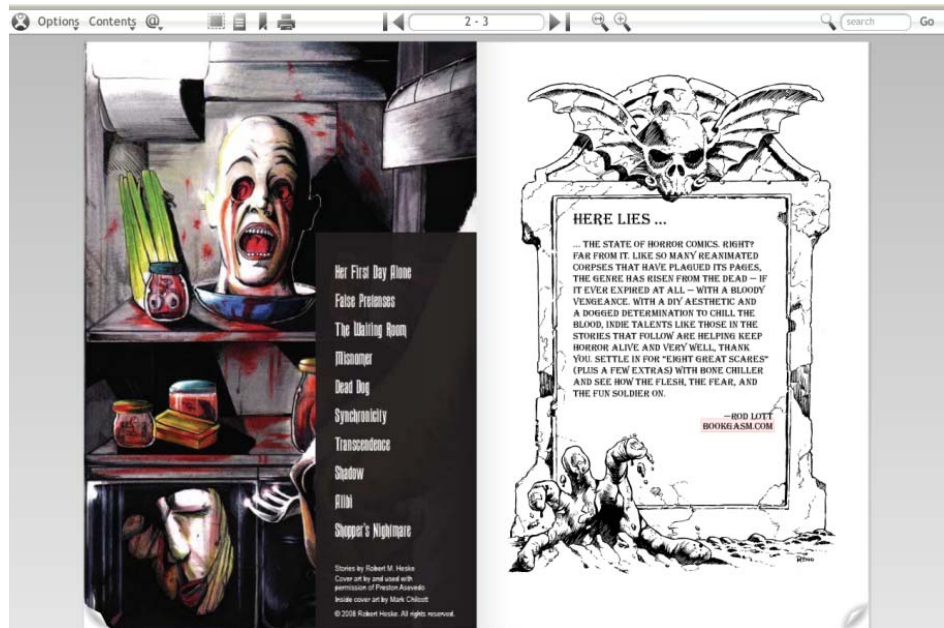
But we also provide a sufficient platform for the smaller publishers. For £99 a year you can produce and sell an unlimited amount of titles; it means you get the marketing tools, you get the space to sell your title, and the access to the technology. Every time you log in, you get your own title-specific statistics on sales. It's a self sufficient program that allows publishers to monetize their catalogue and look after all aspects themselves.

10. Tell us about the YUDU team you have assembled. How many countries do you sell to now? And what we can expect in 2010?

(CHRIS:) Considering the company is only six years old, the growth has been pretty remarkable. I've only been here four months myself, but we now have two UK offices and one in the US. People may have noticed the recent investment by US firm Quad Graphics as well which highlights our ambition.

Sales wise, there are very few countries we are not seeing sales from. Hosting mainly UK titles, but also a growing US portfolio and a solid European group, we are not reliant on any one market.

The biggest area of expansion for 2009 is title specific. On the test site we had 10 titles. A week after launch we had 18. We are expanding the store by an average of a title a day, and that rate is only increasing right now. Latest estimates are that we'll close 2009 with around 112 titles, which is very exciting.



Technology-wise, we're seeing some very impressive evolutions, but I'm going to keep that under my hat for now! And YUDU Store has a whole host of new expansions planned for 2010. I think we will surprise a lot of people by where we go with the site so quickly.

I'm expecting 2010 to be a very big year for us and I'm sure YUDU can be a very important platform for comic books and graphic novels. Hopefully we can pick up a few more awards along the way!

Thanks Chris! Any comic creators interested in contacting Chris to get more information can email him at Chris.Sheard@yudu.com or visit www.yudustore.co.uk.

Also in the news ... InvestComics was nominated in the 2009 Project Fanboy Awards in the "Best Comic Book Website" category. To cast your vote, [click here](#).

Bob Heske is creator of [The Night Projectionist](#), a vampire horror series by publisher [Studio 407](#) with film rights optioned by [Myriad Pictures](#). Through his Heske Horror shingle, Bob self-published his critically acclaimed horror series [Cold Blooded Chillers](#). Bob's trade paperback [Bone Chiller](#) (a "best of" CBC anthology) recently won a Bronze medal in the horror category at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards. His new "end times" anthology [2012: Final Prayer](#) releases on November 13, 2009. Bob's works are available online at [Zaldiva.com](#), [ComixPress](#), [IndyPlanet](#), [HeavyInk](#), [SmallZone](#) and [DriveThruComics](#). You can email him at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.