

Bonus Chapter

Showing Off Your Work

In This Chapter

- ▶ Exploring self-publishing options
 - ▶ Promoting your work
 - ▶ Preparing for your first manga convention
-

So, you're ready to get your very first manga work out there for the public to see. Congratulations! Whether you're shopping your portfolio to major manga publishers or hoping to present your work at manga conventions, self-promotion is your number-one priority. The good news is that the cost of basic self-promoting doesn't have to be as expensive as you may think. In this chapter, I discuss some useful self-publishing and promotion tips and give you options to consider.

Getting Feedback

Before opening up your wallet and heading to the printers, get another manga artist's opinion on your work. Don't be shy or timid — think of this round of feedback as a pilot test. Assuming you've been slaving over your drawings for hours, chances are you're tired and unable to see your own work from an objective viewpoint. Getting opinions from others is crucial for objectivity, and remember that they may have some helpful suggestions that you overlooked.



One of the most productive places to get feedback is at comic book and manga conventions. Depending on the size of the convention, exhibiting artists (both amateur and professional) are generally more than happy to share their two cents about your work.

Here are some helpful hints in seeking feedback:

- ✔ **Be polite and courteous when approaching artists.** You may not realize how busy they are. A lot of artists take on commissioned sketches from fans at conventions, so they may not have the time to offer feedback.
- ✔ **Take notes.** You can store only so much (or so little, as the case may be) information in your short-term memory. When you get back to your studio, type the notes you took and keep them as part of your studio log.
- ✔ **Don't take comments personally.** Okay, so not all artists are going to be nice with their comments. Some of them may come across as rude and arrogant when they respond to your work. You can't control that. What you can control is how you decide to react. Take everything with a grain of salt.
- ✔ **Network.** If your feedback session is going well, ask the artist whether she can recommend another colleague, editor, or publisher to look at your work. See whether the artist can introduce you personally to this other person. This technique is known as *networking*, or intermingling with the industry.
- ✔ **Keep in touch.** Always get the artist's contact information. More than likely, he has a business card that has enough information for you to stay in touch. After the convention is over, keep in touch via e-mail. Even if you don't get a response, chances are he'll remember you the next time you meet.
- ✔ **Return for seconds.** After applying an artist's comments to your work, keep coming back to the same artist to get her response. Don't be shy — if she spent time with you the first time, chances are she has no problem looking at your work the second time around.

Self-Publishing

Because manga is in black and white, publishing your own manga is fairly economical. Unlike American comics, where publishers are left licking their wounds after forking out thousands of dollars to print full-color comic books, a budding *manga-ka* (or manga artist) can create his or her own nifty-looking, black-and-white, mini manga booklet (11-x-8½-inch spread) at a fraction of the cost. These mini manga booklets are also referred to as “ashcan,” “zines,” or “dojinshi.” The following sections give you what you need to decide whether to make your own copies or take your manga to a professional printer.

Making your own copies

Believe it or not, copy machines can create clean, crisp, black-and-white reproductions of your manga work. Consider visiting your local print shops with your manga pages and see how much they charge to print out your work in ashcan format size.

Call around to find the best rates. Because some places charge for resizing your artwork, you may want to bring in a reduced-size copy of your original work to save some money. Be sure to also ask your printer whether you can get a better price per copy if you print more copies.



Although most printers do charge less per copy if you order more, be careful not to overprint. An old saying says, “Fifty bucks is still fifty bucks.” Unless you have the budget or are intending to sell plenty of copies, I don’t recommend printing drastically more than you can sell just to save a buck or two (especially when you’re printing your first completed manga project).

If you’re on a tight budget, you can always photocopy your manga artwork yourself. Although getting used to adjusting the image size and contrast settings on the photocopier may take awhile, this method is definitely one of the most economical ways to copy your manga.



If you have a digital workstation available and you’re looking to print a very small number of copies of your book (10 to 20, for example), you may want to consider arranging and printing the booklet at home. Scanning in your pages at home and doing the production work using desktop publishing software, such as Adobe InDesign or Quark Xpress, gives you better quality control. Standard home printers can now print better-quality images than a photocopier can. Keep in mind that you need to staple the center of the book to secure the pages in place. You also need to make sure that your page number ordering is correct.



Even if you’re just starting, you want to make sure your final product looks as professional as you can make it. That means double-checking to make sure all pages are in order and not missing. I suggest getting a friend to read through it once to make sure everything reads clearly. Having another person go over your works helps reduce careless mistakes. If he doesn’t catch anything, you’re all set to go! Part of making the mini manga booklet look professional is including your contact information. Your studio name, your name (pen name if applicable), e-mail information, mailing address, phone number, and Web site should all be clearly listed so that readers can find out more about you and your work.

Using professional printers

Although professional printing costs a bit more than making your own copies, you can rest assured that the printing quality is consistently better at higher volumes. In addition, the fact that your manga is black and white cuts the production costs considerably. Just make sure that you follow the precautions I list here. When in doubt, always contact the printer and ask the representative to clarify any questions you have. Don't be intimidated — you're their valued customer and their job is to make sure you're fully informed!



Most printers don't accept original artwork when going into production. Almost all printers (including the ones overseas) request that you send in your manga pages in digital file format. I list several tips to keep in mind before submitting your digital files:

- ✓ If you're working in Photoshop, convert all your digital color image files into CMYK settings.
- ✓ Before coloring, all files should be at least 300 *dpi* (dots per inch). Some printers may even require anywhere from 400 to 600 *dpi*.
- ✓ Most online printers have their own templates available for free download. Instead of creating your own from scratch, go with the specs provided by the printers — it's safer.
- ✓ Scan in and work at first on a file that's larger than the required size. Scaling a smaller image to become larger reduces the image quality.

Gearing Up for a Manga Convention

When you've printed your works and made all the necessary tweaks, your next big move is to exhibit your manga at your first manga convention. In this section, I tell you what you need to know to take this step.

Tables, hotels, and travel, oh my!

Everything takes preparation, time, and unfortunately, money. When starting out, you need to make sure you conserve as much of your financial resources, time, and effort as possible. Unlike the big publishers, who shell out big bucks to participate at major conventions, you may need to make tough resource decisions about which convention to attend depending upon your budget. The following sections show you how to do that.

Reserving an artist table

Depending upon the size and popularity of the convention you're attending, table spots for artists fill up quickly. Make sure that you register early to guarantee yourself a spot. Signing up earlier also increases your chances of getting a better spot with higher traffic. Most conventions have online registration options, while others require you to mail in an application that you can download from their Web site. (In Chapter 21, I list some of the major conventions and their Web sites, where you can either download the application or find out more about how to register.)

Regardless of how you register, conventions usually require an advance payment for the table. Depending on your financial situation, you may need to save up for a convention — some of them can be rather expensive. Consider reserving only a portion of a table or getting another exhibiting artist to split the cost with you. Although you risk not getting as much exposure, your costs are cut in half.

Booking a hotel

Depending on how far away your convention is, you may need to make hotel reservations. If you're on a budget, arrange to share a room with friends or other artists who are attending the same convention. When you're booking a hotel room, make sure you have access to the convention site from the hotel. Although most convention halls are located in or near the city's hotel arena, double-checking doesn't hurt. Don't forget — you're going to be lugging quite a bit of stuff between your hotel room and the convention hall; you don't want to be stuck miles away without a convenient way to get to your table.



If you're on a tight budget, I recommend finding a manga convention that's close to either your house or a friend's house so that you don't kill your life savings on hotel costs. Although the size of the convention you go to may not be as big as some others, you may save money — you can end up spending over \$1,000 or more at conventions located in big cities.

Making travel plans

Depending upon the distance between your house and the convention location, you may need to make travel plans. Even if you're attending a local convention, you still need to consider how to get your cargo from your doorstep to the convention.



I strongly recommend getting a friend to help you carry stuff around. Having an extra body by your side reduces the chances of any mishaps.

If you need to arrange transportation via train, plane, or car, plan in advance. Tickets can sell out quickly depending on the season and destination. You may be able to get a cheaper ticket if you book earlier.

Materials to bring

After making your table, hotel, and travel arrangements, create a checklist for the products you're taking with you. Bear in mind that this checklist constantly changes as you attend more conventions and discover what you need and what you don't need to bring. I suggest comparing your checklist with your peers' and with your exhibiting neighbors' at the convention site. Maybe someone else brings something that you think is helpful. In this section, I list three categories for you to consider when you're deciding what to take with you: promotion, selling, and presentation.



Different artists are looking for different outcomes as they sell and promote their products. Take my suggestions and modify them to meet your needs. Don't worry if you don't have all the materials on my lists. Gradually building up your items is better than spending your resources all at once.

Promotional materials (freebies)

Promotional items are “bait” for the fans. The purpose of having them on your table is to entice the fans to stop at your table and linger a bit longer.

Remember: Everyone *loves* free stuff. The longer you can hold people at your table, the more you increase your chances of drawing additional attention to your table, which means more sales. See what other exhibiting artists are giving out.



Make sure you're staying within your budget. Don't make the common beginner mistake by spending more than you can afford on freebies. Remember, they're supposed to promote you, not break you! As you read through my list of freebies, calculate which items are within your budget:

- ✔ **Postcards:** On the front, include your manga project title, the cover art, and your name as the creator and artist. In addition, if you have a studio name, include it along with your studio logo. If you have a writer working with you, list his or her name. On the back, list your Web address, e-mail address, and any other necessary contact information.
- ✔ **Business cards:** On the front, list your contact information (studio name, studio Web site, your name, your mailing address, and your e-mail address). On the back, include the cover art with the manga title at the top.
- ✔ **Flyers:** Your cover art should occupy the entire front side. The manga title appears at the top, followed by your studio name and your own name. At the bottom, put your Web site and your e-mail address. Use different sizes for each, with the title as the largest size, and everything else in descending order, with your e-mail address being the smallest.

- ✓ **Buttons:** Assuming the buttons are small, just fit in your studio name and Web site. If you don't have a studio name, display a close-up of your character's face along with the title of the manga.
- ✓ **Stickers:** Depending upon the size of the stickers, place your manga cover art to fill the entire thing. The manga title should overlap the cover image at the top, and your name should overlap the cover image at the bottom. If space allows, include your studio name at the bottom. Because stickers tend to be more expensive, you may want to move this item into your "selling materials" category.



For beginners, I recommend starting off with business cards or postcards. They're cheap, easy to pass out to fans, and don't occupy much table space. Many artists need nothing more.

Selling materials (merchandise)

The items you sell should occupy most of your table space. Place them in full view, without any obstruction, of the fans who pass by. If you create a sign to place on your table, make sure that it doesn't cover or hide your selling materials.

- ✓ **Prints:** These 8½-x-11-inch or 11-x-17-inch prints should feature any artwork other than your cover.
- ✓ **T-shirts:** Have your main character and the title logo of your manga printed on T-shirts.
- ✓ **Original art:** Collectors and fans may be interested in buying original artwork.
- ✓ **Mini manga books:** This should be the most important centerpiece of your merchandise.



I suggest buying a small booklet stand from an office supply store to place your mini manga books in. The stand not only increases the chances of your book drawing attention, but also saves table space for the rest of your merchandise.

- ✓ **Protective manga and print sleeves:** These sleeves are something to place your prints and books in. They add to the professional presentation of your manga, leaving your fans more satisfied with their purchase.

Presentation and other miscellaneous items

Most beginners are timid about showing their work. Don't be bashful, even if you're at your first convention. Give your hard work the credit it deserves! In my experience, a lot of *really* bad artwork sells very well at conventions simply because it's presented very well. Of course, that doesn't apply to you!

Remember that saying “It’s not what you say, but how you say it”? Well, it applies to the way you set up your table and present your merchandise to the fans. I list some ideas you should consider when deciding what to bring with you to your next convention:

- ✓ **Tablecloth:** A black cloth that’s big enough to cover a table that’s 8 feet wide.
- ✓ **Banners and stands:** Large enough to grab the attention of the fans.
- ✓ **Book stands:** Have something to prop your mini manga against.
- ✓ **Basic drawing materials:** Be prepared to do commissioned sketches if someone likes your style.
- ✓ **Money box or safe:** Make sure you have some small bills for change, and make sure you never let the box out of your sight!
- ✓ **Tools:** Scissors, box cutters, packaging tape, markers, and so on.
- ✓ **Inventory checklist:** To record the number of sold items.
- ✓ **Food:** Enough to get through half the day.
- ✓ **Moving cart and storage boxes:** To transport your stuff to the convention hall from your hotel room.
- ✓ **Another warm body:** Somebody who can help you carry equipment and help with sales when you step away from the table.



Occasionally walk around and observe what other artists are presenting. If they have some cool-looking banners or great-quality prints, ask them where they had them done and how much they cost. Most artists are open to sharing information with others.

Protecting Your Published Work

A common myth is that protecting your work is very expensive, and therefore you’re helpless against people who want to steal your images and use them to their advantage. Technically speaking, your images are copyrighted (protected) the moment your pen touches the paper. However, in order to avoid complications when challenging another person for *infringement* (when someone uses or takes your work without your written or verbal consent), register your work with the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., for a nominal fee. Although current law says you must file a separate application for each published book, multiple filings pale in comparison to the cost and mess of hiring lawyers and the time and energy you may spend trying to prove your case in court.

Poor man's copyright

A single registration fee is currently less than \$50, but I know that for some, this amount is steep. If you're looking to save some cash, you can do what I did in my early preteen years. Put photocopies of your original works in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. For the price of a postage stamp, the post office stamps the mailing date, which becomes the date that your

copyrighted work is "recorded." When you receive the self-addressed envelope, don't open it. Save it for the day when you need to produce proof of copyright and ownership to an official or judge in court. This isn't the best way of "registering" your copyright, but if you're on a really tight budget, it's better than nothing.

I strongly recommend getting in the habit of registering for a copyright each time you self-publish an issue or as you complete a series of drawings of your original manga works. The moment you begin to expose your artwork to the public (either at conventions or online), you need to make sure your works are protected and backed up by the government.

The best way of obtaining an application for copyright is by downloading what's known as the VA (Visual Arts) Form from the U.S. Copyright Office at www.copyright.gov. Although you must file a separate application for each published book, you may file as many single, individual images as you want under one application.

You can also file an application for your manga script if you think someone may take your dialogue. In that case, use Form TX.



Because the copyright office can't accept files digitally, you need to include copies or printouts of the material you want copyrights for. Never, ever send in original artwork because it can't be returned.

Clearly stated on the application is the fact that you **can't** copyright an idea or concept. Only the exact images that are printed on paper are protected.



To avoid breaking your bank with registering each illustration or drawing as a separate filing, I strongly recommend waiting until you accumulate a number of works first. You can file everything under a single registration fee as long as the genre is the same — in this case, manga.

