

Brief History of DC and Marvel Comics Companies

How Industry Competitors in Graphics Novels Shaped the Market

Oct 14, 2008 Stephanie Cox

DC and Marvel Comics, 2 leaders in the sequential art industry, each have a unique history and bring different strengths to the graphic novel/comic book market.

Together Marvel DC and gobble up 80% of the comic book industry market share, with Marvel taking 35-50% and DC taking 25-30% (according to Marvel Comics' WikiInvest).

Marvel, DC Squash Independents in Sales

These 2 industry giants are whom independents love to hate. Each company is largely responsible for both establishing and subsequently pigeonholing the sequential art publishing world. While many feel that the medium would have died in the 1950s were it not for these companies' strong adaptability and longevity in America's heart, their current dominance makes it difficult for smaller publishing companies to create a name for themselves.

Marvel and DC, Establish Icons During Depression-Era America

However, if Marvel and DC take the lion's share of the market today, it's certainly due to hard work and a history of creative vitality. Both companies were started in the 1930's, when a gloomy, Depression-ridden America certainly needed heroes.

DC Comics began in 1935 under the name National Allied Publications. The new company launched *Detective Comics* in 1937, creating what would become the longest *continuously* running series in comic book history. *Detective Comics* became synonymous with their company and soon National Allied Publications adopted the moniker 'DC,' a shortened version of their most successful title.

Detective Comics gave fans their first Superman adventure in 1937. The first Batman debuted in 1939. 1940 saw the release of Flash, Hawkman, Green Lantern, and 2 years later Wonder Woman was created.

During this so-called Golden Age of Comics, Marvel was also laying the groundwork for its epic catalog of more than 5,000 characters. Today's Marvel Comics was once Timely Comics, DC's largest competitor in the 1930s. In 1938 Timely Comics launched *Marvel Comics #1*. Timely later became Atlas Comics, which then officially became Marvel Comics in the 1960s, during what became known as the Silver Age of Comics.

Marvel Comics' Golden Age saw the release of Sub-Mariner and Human Torch. Super talents Joe Simon and Jack Kirby joined company and created *Captain America*. Jack Kirby then teamed with comics mogul Stan Lee to help launch the Silver Age of Comics, creating *Fantastic 4*, *X-Men*, *Spider-Man* and *Hulk* in the early 1960s, according to his biography.

Marvel and DC Differences

While these 2 companies share a long and intertwined history with many similarities, it is important to note

their differences. Marvel Comics tend to be set in real cities and have more real characters. DC Comics puts their heroes in fictional cities and takes a more mythical, iconic approach to characters.

It is also important to note that in 1969 DC comics joined with Warner Bros and remains under the mega company's watchful eye to this day. The move was controversial and some say limits DC's abilities to be flexible in a changing industry.

Marvel Comics is its own company. Most recently Marvel Comics took full creative control over their movie franchise. Marvel Entertainment Inc will oversee the production and profit of no less than 10 major motion pictures based on its characters in the coming years, after previously only receiving a fraction of control and profit from earlier blockbusters such as *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*.

Marvel and DC Comics Find Success at the Box Office

While Marvel takes slightly more than DC in the publishing market, it's difficult to see who wins the movie market. Both Marvel and DC characters have raked in billions at the box office. DC began movie-goers obsession with seeing their favorite super heroes on the silver screen with the release of *Superman: The Movie*, and the successful *Batman* franchise that followed. DC has somewhat failed at fully profiting from their treasure chest of characters when compared with Marvel's success.

Greater special effects capabilities and a resurgence in public interest in the once-ailing comic book industry led to Marvel bring forth 9 movies, each with a domestic box office haul of more than \$200 million by 2003, according to their WikiInvest page. DC has found recent success with more Superman and Batman movies in recent years, and has plans for yet another Batman movie in addition to the much-hyped *Watchmen* film. Comic book movies in general continue to rake in billions worldwide, with the releases like *Batman: Dark Knight* and *Iron Man*, making theaters a viable offshoot of comic book publishing success.

No doubt that these 2 companies continue to wow fans and dominate an industry that is based on the weekly sale of \$3 comic books.

Copyright Stephanie Cox. Contact the author to obtain permission for republication.