blink

By

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[Comixology](#) is the #1 way to read comic books digitally. Many competitors have come and gone, but when Marvel and DC embraced the company and started using the Comixology technology in their apps, Comixology was essentially crowned the victor. Comixology's rise over the years eventually, and perhaps inevitably, led to the purchase by Amazon.

The reason why Comixology was embraced by so many people was the user experience. While not exactly like reading a comic, it felt like a natural evolution. Moreover, Comixology made it really easy to buy the next issue, allowing users to spend money binge-reading. The UX and ease of purchase is undoubtedly why it was touted by Apple with the launch of the iPad.

With the recent purchase by Amazon, however, Comixology has made a change to its UX on the iPad. The app now requires iPad users to go to a website to make purchases, much like the Kindle experience. The reason is to avoid Apple's fees when making purchases through any apps on its ecosystem. This has led to an uproar of objection by Comixology users. People are debating whether this will help or hurt indie publishers, but the overall assessment is that people do not like having to leave the experience to make a purchase. Time will tell the long-term effects, but the transition to this new experience has not been smooth for this user.

Comixology's transition

While I knew that Amazon had bought Comixology, I was unaware of the new business practice. So when I went in to the app to catch up on a few comics, I was surprised to be greeted by what I think of as a wireframe.

Comixology looking like a wireframe

Comixology looking like a wireframe

My first thought was that something was wrong with the app. Sure, I saw the message, but maybe a beta version had been pushed out accidentally. I was within an iOS 7 environment, which is supposed to download apps automatically, so maybe something unintentional was pushed. After all, I was in the Comixology app—Why would it be telling me that there was a new app? Was Comixology branching out into a new business? Why do I care about the new app, and why did that ad break the current app experience? Feeling like something was broken and confused is not a good feeling for a user to have.

In this post-Heartbleed world, I also didn't trust following a link from a broken experience. So I exited the app, and went to the app store. Sure enough, I was able to find a new Comixology app. I downloaded that, but now was curious to find out what was going on. So I went back to the old Comixology app, to see what more I could learn.

Comixology App Screens

Comixology's new interface

The next step was filled with a lot of text with some confusing graphics. I scrolled up and down a couple of times, and then tried to follow the steps.

- **Step 1 – Log in to my account.**
  Here in this old app? In the new app? On a website?
- **Step 2 – Sync my purchases**
  Maybe Step 2 would clarify things: Sync my purchases with my account. Nope, don't know where to go.
- **Step 3 – Download the new reader app**.
  Okay, now I know something: Steps 1 and 2 are not in the new app. But then why should I be syncing my account with comics that should already be synced to my account?

Taking away the functionality that people loved about an app is not great, but is sometimes a business reality. However, creating this confusing transition experience is not helping matters. It may be why users are so worked up about the transition. Comixology has, in fact, issued $5 out to all the current users, and who doesn't like free cash? So what could Comixology have done better?

Trust and listen

As Jared Spool said, "Design is the rendering of intent." So what was the intention with this design? The wireframe was trying to show a similar experience, and then tried to give step-by-step instructions. These are good intentions. Something just went wrong with the implementation.

Users may not behave how you want them to, but they are pretty smart. Try explaining exactly what is going on, with as few words as possible and give them options. I have been known to say that while content is king, context is prime minister. Let them know the context! Trust in the users, and they will trust in you.

Rather than a wireframe, make the graphic relevant to what is being said. It is part of the same message. For a quick example, maybe create a comic book-like page and with a message.

Something like this:

- **Panel 1:** We can't support in-app purchases any longer. (sad face)
- **Panel 2:** So we've created a NEW APP to continue the great reading experience you love!
- **Panel 3:** AND we're giving you a little cash to help with the change (check your email)!
- **Panel 4:** Just go to our site for purchases!
- **Panel 5:** Learn More >

Additionally, listen to the users through user testing when making such an important transition. Even if you don't want to go for a full-on user research approach (which is worth it from Blink UX, but I won't shill. Well, not much.), try doing a little guerilla research. Comixology is in New York and Amazon is in Seattle, both big comics towns. Even if you want to avoid recruiting, two major conventions are in those towns. Just send a few folk down to the floor of a convention and ask for a little feedback. I'm sure you would get more than enough to help guide the experience.

Conclusion

Comixology is now an Amazon product and is following Amazon's business practices. This business model works extremely well for Kindle, and should work well for Comixology, However, to achieve success with this next part of its evolution, Comixology has to remember how it got to where it is: an amazing UX. They need to make sure they find ways to keep that UX going.

After all, with great power comes great responsibility… for a great UX.