

Over the past two years, there have been discussions about whether comic book sales have been increasing or decreasing, and whether or not the industry is in a good place. One thing people have been overlooking, however, is the local comic book store. These local stores are primarily independently owned businesses who rely on people buying their comic books in person. The pandemic has certainly changed the comic book industry, but how has it affected these local shops?

Guy is the manager at the Faneuil Hall branch of Newbury Comics. Despite having to close for three months due to the pandemic, Newbury comics performed about as well as all other years. Guy said, "It's pretty much the same, for the company at least."

Bob Howard, co-owner of Comicazi in Davis, affirmed what Guy said. "Comics have always been solid...I think it's just adjusting itself...For all the downtime we had no comics versus now...it's on its regular rise." Comicazi saw a small bump in comic sales. Bob simply attributes this fact to the lack of comic sales the year before.

The same sentiment is true for customers. Guy hasn't noticed an increase in new customers coming in since the store reopened. To remedy this, Newbury has implemented a subscription model for buying comics. This subscription allows customers to select comics to set aside weekly and gets them a 20% discount on books.

In the current climate of comic books, this subscription model is necessary, according to Guy. Comic books are now readily available to read digitally and order online, so stores need to do more to keep customers coming in. Guy said, "It does kind of hurt the sales of actually selling [comics], but it's kind of like streaming music. It is what it is."

Bob elaborated on the 'subscription model' for comic stores. He explained that every store does a type of subscription service. Customers create a pull list, or a list of ongoing series they want the store to order for them. This system is how the store knows how many copies of a book they should order. Newbury comics then offers a discount through this system. Comicazi doesn't offer a similar discount. They aren't as concerned about digital comics as Newbury comics are. Bob said, "Digital comics? I don't think so because no one's actually figured out how to make money from digital comics...That's not a sustainable thing."

Comicazi and Newbury comics seem to be taking a very different approach when it comes to the rise of online and digital buying. Newbury comics has an online store where people can shop. Guy said, "A little less than half the people do it online." Comicazi doesn't have this, instead focusing more on their physical store. Bob said, on the recent success of their store, "We had to close two days a week because we couldn't handle how many customers were coming in." It's clear that, despite the rise of digital comics and online shopping, there is still a clear market for comic shops.

It's hard to say local comic shops are thriving, despite their apparent success. According to ICv2, a 'geek culture trade magazine', comic book sales were up 6% in 2020 from 2019. This is a huge leap for the industry, yet Newbury Comics and Comicazi have not seen the same increase in sales. The industry has shifted to reflect the new online marketplace. It's hard to tell how much longer local comic book stores

will hold out with the growth of online comic subscriptions like Comixology and Marvel Unlimited, but there's one thing that's certain: people still have a desire to go into their local comic book store, browse the new releases, attend the events, and maintain the human part of comic books. Bob said, "What the pandemic did in a big way, for as much as it brought people to online shopping...It also brought people back to shopping locally."