

MARK DAWSON'S

SELF PUBLISHING
FORMULA

THE KNOWLEDGE VAULT



VOLUME 1

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SELF PUBLISHING INSIGHTS

MARK DAWSON

JAMES BLATCH

MARK SELF PUBLISHING
DAWSON'S FORMULA

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INTRODUCTION

HELLO AND WELCOME to the SPF Vault of Greatness!

Every week James and I are privileged to interview some of the best and brightest in the publishing industry.

Whether they are authors forging ahead with an indie career and sharing their secrets with us, or editors and publishers from the traditional industry illuminating us about what they look for in a good book - it's all here.

We've covered what to do when Hollywood calls, how to set up and run your first author mailing list and even how to deal with criticism and keep sane!

We love doing the interviews and this book was a natural progression for us.

We hope you enjoy it and we hope you continue to listen to the weekly podcast and remain a member of our thriving community of indie authors.

Mark, April 2017

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CHAPTER 1

INTERVIEW WITH BESTSELLING INDIE AUTHOR JOANNA PENN

SEVEN YEARS OF MOMENTOUS CHANGE AND HOW TO BE PART OF THE SELF PUBLISHING REVOLUTION



SHOW NOTES

- Mark's new system of tracking his writing progress and a new sound tool he's using that has increased his word count.
- A quick reflection on the **state of the indie author nation** and the latest Author Earnings Report.
- On the **changes in the publishing industry that Joanna has witnessed since 2008** when she published her first book.
- **The importance of authors 'getting their names into people's heads'.**
- **The questions authors should ask themselves** in order to choose the publishing path that suits them best.
- Joanna's predictions about the future of indie publishing and her thoughts on **hot trends in indie publishing.**
- **What has changed for Joanna since she started writing and publishing,** and the advice she

would give herself when she was just starting out.

- **The business of non-fiction books vs. fiction.**

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH JOANNA PENN

ANNOUNCER: Hello, and welcome to Podcast Number Two, from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, hello. I'm James Blatch, and with me, as ever, is our resident author-

Mark: Mark Dawson. Hello, James.

James: Hello. I should really count myself as an author as well, shouldn't I? I've got to be positive about this, but you are the tried and tested and successful part of the duo here. Here we are, Number Two of our Podcast, and this will be the first podcast with a full interview in it, and I'm delighted to tell you that our guest today is none other than the Creative Penn herself, Joanna Penn, who's a bit of an old friend of yours, Mark, isn't she?

Mark: She is, yeah. As I told you and when I spoke to her, it was great to have her on because she's one of the first podcasters I listened to when I started learning how to do this stuff three or four years ago. She's got something like two hundred fifty or three hundred episodes, which, so you know, that's the thing to aim for, James.

James: Yeah.

Mark: No pressure.

James: We're at the bottom of that mountain at the moment, but we are climbing assiduously. **One of the**

things I think we want to do in each podcast is have a glimpse into the working lives of us as authors, as how we're progressing and the things we've learnt this week and so on. Obviously, we weren't podcasting for most of this year, so we might do a bit of catching up for both of us.

MARK, I KNOW YOU WERE TAKING A QUITE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO YOUR WORK THIS YEAR, AREN'T YOU?

Mark: I am. I've slightly in the past been guilty of, I'm very productive, but I think I could be more productive. **One of the things I am doing now is trying to introduce a bit more, bit of a systemized system, so to speak,** to try and get things moving a little bit more efficiently.

I'm staring right now at a big year planner that I've stuck on the wall of my study and one of the things that I'm doing, and this is helping loads and loads at the moment, is at the end of every day, just noting down the number of words that I've done. If I start working on any book on the first of the month, and I figure I can do 3 or 4,000 words every day, it's quite easy to extrapolate forwards and see roughly when I think I should finish that book.

If I put way markers or way points along each week, so on Friday, I might say, "I need to hit ten thousand words, twenty thousand for the next Friday," it enables me to make sure that I'm keeping in track with where I need to be and hopefully motivate myself by gamifying it a bit and demonstrating that I've actually got more words than I thought I would have at that time. That's working really, really well. It's keeping me really focused. It's making sure I get my bum in the chair, do the words every day. There it looks like I'm going to be about 10 or 15,000 words ahead of schedule tomorrow, which makes me very happy.

James: A good feeling. Everyone finds their own ways of these little tricks of the trade to motivate yourself. Some people just don't need it. They'll sit down and write and write and write. I think Joanna takes a quite, also a systematic approach. I've emailed her in the past about doing some things, and she said, "Well, I'm writing in the morning." She always says that, so she blocks off every morning, I think, and does her writing. In fact, it's quite interesting. **In talking to her from the psychological point of view of emerging from the rather dark thriller writer to the bubbly, bright and optimistic Joanna Penn in the afternoon. There's two sides to her as will come out in the interview.**

I don't have a systematic approach. I'm probably like a lot of authors who are getting going and haven't really worked out how that's going to work for me. I think your approach is very good, targets and knowing you're ahead of it or behind it, that's quite motivating.

I'm interested to know what sort of state your house is in when you write, because I often end up writing at teatime-ish for some reason because I just have a lot of work on a lot of things to do. I prefer to get them all done. Then I can feel I can write. At four o'clock, actually, my house is quite busy. Children are emerging back from school. The door gets opened quite a lot.

BECAUSE IT'S WRITING, PERHAPS IN MY MIND, I DON'T TAKE IT AS SERIOUSLY AS WORK, AS A LOT OF THE OTHER THINGS THAT I DO. HOW DO YOU APPROACH THAT, MARK? DO YOU WRITE IN A QUIET, EMPTY HOUSE, OR YOU TAKE YOURSELF OFF TO A CAFÉ? WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Mark: I need a quiet house, so I suppose the starting position is, that is my work. If I had to, I'd do lots of different things. Podcasting is a new thing I've added to the slate. There's the course that we do. **If you had to make me pick one, it would be writing. That is my work.**

I tend to start working, **I'm a morning person like Joanna. I'll start writing 8 or 8:30 most days.** If the house is empty, because my wife's gone to work and the kids are at nursery, then I'll write in the study, which is where I am now, or if Lucy is here, or especially if the kids are here, then I will go somewhere else. I'll go into a café.

I'm quite well known around the cafes in Salisbury now. I'll put some noise-cancelling headphones on. I'll listen to some white noise. **Something I'm listening to a lot at the moment is a new website, it's called "Brain.FM"** which we might talk about later, which is very interesting. All about brainwaves and productivity and that kind of stuff.

James: Really, what does it do?

Mark: Then I'll just sit down.

JAMES: DOES IT PLAY WHALE SONGS AT YOU?

Mark: **Kind of. Not whale songs. It is musical. It has beats. It's quite hypnotic.** A lot of this is marketing BS, obviously, I suspect. I think there is something in just the kind of non-lyrical music. It puts you into a fuge state, if you're that way, just very, very productive. **I tried it for a couple of days and I've managed to add twenty-five, thirty percent to my word count.**

James: Really?

Mark: It could be a placebo effect, but at the end of the day, who cares?

James: Doesn't matter, as long as it works, yeah. I'm fascinated by this, though. I want to hear some of this. We need to perhaps look at a couple of these on our future podcast.

Mark: We will. **I'm going to actually approach them and see if they'd like to come on and have a chat with us, because I think it's potentially really interesting for people who need that intense concentration, like writers do.**

James: Are you going to describe their approach as marketing BS when we have them on as a guest?

Mark: Hey, I don't pull any punches, James.

James: No, you don't. That's the lawyer in you. One thing I wanted to mention quickly before we get into it with Joanna.

A BIT OF THE STATE OF THE NATION IN TERMS OF WHERE WE ARE WITH INDIE AUTHORS AND THE INDUSTRY THAT WE ARE IN.

In February 2016, we had the latest report, the Author Earnings Report, and it was the one that caught a lot of eyes actually in the mainstream press as well, because it showed this really dramatic switch reversal of traditional publishing versus independent publishing, and indie had overtaken them, knocking on forty-five percent of all earnings now, and traditional publishing dipping below indie for the first time ever. That was such an important moment, wasn't it?

Mark: Massively important. The thing is, author earnings has been going now for two years, I think. I'd like to get Hugh Howey and Data Guy on the podcast a bit later on because I think, Hugh is amazing and Data Guy has got this fantastic grasp of the data.

What they're doing is casting light on something that indie authors have known to be true for a long time. We will talk about this ad nauseam, I should think, as we go forwards, but it would take an amazing deal now for me to consider selling the digital rights to any of my books to a traditional publisher, simply because, and I'm certainly not alone in this. I think I can sell them better than they can.

Then when you start adding to the end and things like, "Add seventy percent royalties as opposed to fifteen percent max, then another ten percent for your agent taken off," there are so many reasons now why the sensible authors are starting to make a preference towards self-publishing rather than getting someone else involved.

We've spoken about this before, and I think we mentioned it with Joanna. Vanity publishing these days is getting something on the bookshelves rather than what it used to be, which was having the arrogance if you'd like to think that you can go and print a book and sell it yourself without the seal of approval of a traditional publisher. It's just not like that these days. Things are changing so fast. **It's one of the reasons why we wanted to do this because it's just so exciting to be an author right now.**

James: **One of the interviews we've got coming up was Maria Force, who said that more has changed in the past two years than in the previous twenty in publishing,** and that is an accelerating experience of the moment. The good news is, you know what? There's money to be made. There are livings to be made out of them. Just look at those lines on the author earnings report. Just make sure that you are determined to grab a piece of that action for yourself.

Okay, let's get into this interview then. Jo Penn, delighted that she is our very first guest. It won't be the last time she appears on this podcast, but we're always going to be very happy to have her on.

Joanna Penn is a woman who probably doesn't need a lot of introduction to most of you, but I'm going to introduce her anyway because it's very impressive. A New York Times and USA Today best-selling thriller author under the pen name J.F. Penn with over half a million books sold in seventy-two countries and five languages. She's one of the leading lights in the self-publishing movement. Her podcast and blog, The Creative Penn, has served as the starting point for many authors as they embark on a self-publishing career. She's got an amazing rapport with a large and engaged audience, very active audience, The Creative Penn followers, and she's seen as one of the most trusted voices available to authors today. Joanna, welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula Podcast.

Joanna: Thanks for having me! It's great to be on the show and thanks for the lovely introduction.

James: It's all true and I guess we've really just touched on what is a multi-faceted life.

CAN YOU GIVE US A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT JOANNA PENN DOES DURING THE DAY?

Joanna: I like to describe it as I have two heads, as you mentioned. I am a thriller writer; this morning I was J.F. Penn and I was in the latest novel, and I basically don't talk to anyone. I'm plugged into rain and thunderstorms. **J.F. Penn is very dark and stormy, basically.**

Then Joanna Penn, the Creative Penn, is very much outwardly focused, trying to help people. I always wanted to be the British Tony Robbins. I like to inspire people with what's possible and I'm definitely a Pollyanna figure in self-publishing. I'm always glass overly full, but I did spend 13 years as an IT consultant in my previous life, implementing accounts payable into large corporates, which I think people will realize was a super boring job. **I left my day job in September 2011 to make a full time living with my writing.** It's certainly been a journey.

James: I bet a psychologist would have good fun with the dark and stormy Jo Penn being locked away and then the bubbly one coming out later. There's something going on there, but let's just push that to one side for the moment. Mark's with us, of course. Mark, I know when we've talked about Jo, we talk about somebody who's got a great barometer and an overview of the industry. You were asking a lot about the changes that we've seen.

Mark: I thought that would be an interesting thing to talk to Joanna about because just as a kind of supplementary introduction, when I started self-publishing four years ago, I suppose it was now, Joanna was one of the first podcaster I listened to, and I've probably listened to every episode since. It's a really fascinating and interesting podcast and a really great way to get information on things that are happening and also things that might happen. **Jo's really forward thinking and has one eye on the future, which I find very interesting.** I've got loads and loads of use out of all of her interviews. I've been on the show once and we've since become friends. Seems really weird since starting out all that time ago, now that she's on our podcast, which is really cool. I think it's going full circle.

JAMES: JO, WHY DON'T YOU GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGES THAT YOU'VE SEEN SINCE YOU BEGAN YOUR BLOGGING AND YOUR PODCASTING, WHEN YOU WERE REALLY GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF THE INDUSTRY. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES YOU'VE SEEN?

Joanna: Firstly, thank you, Mark. You are so sweet. **I think what's great about the indie industry is it's very generous and everyone's sharing everything.** I've learned a lot from you guys as well. That's one thing that hasn't changed. When I started self-publishing back in 2008, I was living in Australia. There was no international Kindle at the time. The word e-book just wasn't really used for a fiction novel. It

was a two-hundred-page PDF that the internet marketing crowd was selling on website for ninety seven dollars and whatever. That was the extent of what e-books were at that point.

2008, I did what the old-school self-publishers did back then, which was print thousands of books and try and sell them through live events, through bookstores, that type of thing. Self-publishing at the time, **I've always been very independent, so I actually looked at the publishing industry at that point and decide to self-publish because I couldn't stand how long everything would take.**

I made so many mistakes because back then. This was before Twitter or Twitter had literally just come out. Facebook was in its early days. The Kindle, then, came out later that year. The international Kindle, which I was able to buy in Australia, I was one of the first people to buy the Kindle, and to see the potential of this future. It really was amazing.

Back then, the stigma of self-publishing was still huge. It was massive. You only self-published if you were someone who couldn't get a publishing deal or you were a professional speaker who sold books at the back of the room, which I actually was at the time. That was fine.

In terms of what's changed, actually, even when I moved back to Britain in 2011, **I remember meeting some people in the publishing industry here, and being treated in a bad way because the stigma of self-publishing in Britain has stayed a lot longer.** I think, again, it has changed here pretty much in the last couple of years. We've definitely seen the opinion about self-publishing change. Even this week, **Mark's been in Forbes magazine and all that, and we've seen this week, Meredith Wild, who is a self-publishing success story, creating an imprint, being in the New York Times.**

THE RESPECT THAT IS NOW GIVEN TO SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHORS IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. I THINK THAT'S PROBABLY THE BIGGEST THING THAT'S CHANGED.

Of course, technology. There was no Kobo. There was no KDP Select. I think what people forget nowadays is how good we have it. People moan, fair enough. Everybody has a bit of a moan, but seriously. **Back in 2008, you could not have made an income doing this. A lot has changed since I first did this.**

Mark: I think that's a really good point. It has changed massively, and I don't really notice that stigma so

much anymore, and I'm serving ads to thousands of people every day now and get lots of comments on those ads, as you'd expect. I don't know whether it's just that people can't tell that the books are self-published or they just don't care anymore.

I haven't had any comments that I can think of in the last couple of weeks where someone has said, "Is this a traditionally published book or is it independently published?" I think it's getting into the stage now where it's about the story and the actual backstory behind that book was published is not so relevant as it was, maybe certainly 3 years ago, there was a lot of stigma, but I think that is going now, which is great.

Joanna: I don't know if readers have ever cared. Who goes onto Amazon or goes into a bookstore and says, "Oh, I'd like the latest Harper Collins." I don't know if anyone's ever done that. Maybe Virago, Prast, or a few of these very literary imprints, perhaps, but the vast majority of readers, I don't think have ever done that.

THE AUTHOR AS BRAND NAME IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS I DON'T THINK BIG NAME INDIES HAVE REALIZED. IF YOU CAN GET YOUR NAME INTO PEOPLE'S HEADS, THEN THEY WILL LOOK FOR THE NEXT BOOK.

You and I both like Lee Child. How many of his books, actual book titles, can people name? They can't. I probably, I think "Make Me" is his recent one or whatever, but basically people know Lee Child and they know Jack Reacher. These are the things, certainly, for fiction. And then for non-fiction, it's about, "Are you being useful?" If people type in, "I need to diet" into Amazon, do they get back the things that answer their problem?

I think it's probably authors are so sensitive about publishers because we care. Most of the stigma and nasty comments you get are from people in the industry, other authors, agents, etc.

Mark: That's right. I think the phrase that I come back to quite often is "vanity press," and that's not necessarily something the readers apply to the books. It's something that the industry applied to people who couldn't get traditional deal. It's pejorative. It's suggesting that you're publishing something because you want to puff up your ego and all that kind of stuff. That is dying out and I don't hear that very much anymore. When I started writing, again, after I had my hiatus, that was something that I heard much more often. That's great if we can get rid of that. That's fantastic.

Joanna: **I just want to come back on the vanity thing because when people talk about vanity press now, I'm like, "Well, the biggest vanity press now is traditional publishing because why else?" It's really vanity and ego that makes us want Harper Collins or Penguin on the spine.**

Let me just say, there is nothing wrong with ego. We all have it. We have to in order to actually publish books. I think that the vanity idea very much now is, "Why do you want the things that you want? Do you want to make a living? Do you want to be in a bookstore? Why do you want those things?" That should be the reason that people choose a certain publishing path.

James: It's really interesting how quickly that's happened as well. **A couple of years ago, I would see a colleague of mine who got a book deal and they're showing on Facebook their front cover, and I would think, "Well done you, fantastic!"**

NOW I LOOK AT THEM AND I THINK, "WHY HAVE YOU DONE THAT? WHY'D YOU SIGN THAT CONTRACT?"

Joanna: That is true. I would say, though, that **it's almost like a shift that is changing by country.** The US was certainly first, and I think I was very lucky that I was living in Australia in 2008. I was influenced by the American and very strong Australian blogging movement, internet business movement in Australia at the time. People like ProBlogger, Darren Rouse, Yaro Starak, Entrepreneur's Journey, and the Americans, because I had lost my English. I went to Oxford University. My mum was an English literature teacher. I lost the care about that type of thing. I stopped caring because Australians don't care. Americans don't care. Now England has shifted, but what we're seeing next is Germany, which is an incredibly literary culture. Germany is starting to shift. We're seeing some other countries slowly.

I was talking to a Nigerian author the other day. Nigeria is starting to shift. This is the wave that I see that will sweep across the world. India, the first self-publishing podcast in India, for Indians, has just started. This is the beginning in all of these other countries, and that's super exciting to me.

James: Jo, you painted a great picture at the moment. I know that you and Mark are very focused on making hay while the sun shines and teaching others how to do that.

HERE'S A QUESTION, THEN, FROM SOMEBODY WHO'S YET TO PUBLISH THEIR FIRST BOOK, I.E. ME. HOW LONG WILL THIS LAST?

Joanna: **It's crazy because I think this is only getting better all the time.** Like I said, I've sold books in

seventy-two countries. Some of those, I've sold two books. **I've sold two books in Nigeria, for example, but I'm now emailing with one of my readers in Nigeria and learning about how people are reading in Nigeria.** It's fascinating, and Kenya, and some of these Asian countries, some of the South American countries.

WHAT I WOULD SAY FOR ANYONE ENTERING THE MARKET NOW IS DON'T THINK IT'S ALL OVER. WE'VE HARDLY EVEN STARTED.

There was a podcast that Amazon India did. They said - this was January 2016 - **We are in minute one, day one, of e-commerce in India. There are two hundred million English educated English speakers in India who have money, who have smart things, who work in IT.**

I think people's idea of what the rest of the world is, people get so obsessed with their local book store, but that's not the point. The point is that you and I, all of us listening, can sell books to this global market. **As the streaming internet is rolled out, people shifting to reading on mobile, indies are so well positioned to sell in these markets because we can actually price specifically for those markets and still make a profit.** I see it as only the beginning of the most exciting time that authors have ever had. That's how I feel.

Mark: I agree. I always say when people ask, I think it's a golden age for writers, and readers too, because it's so easy to get stories out now and find new stories, new voices you wouldn't otherwise have heard. You hit the nail on the head with the global thing. That's pretty exciting for the book. **China as well, big market just waiting for books to come along. It's a fantastic time to be doing this.**

Joanna: I think it's even more important than that, like you said about new voices, talking to these Nigerian authors who basically said that they tried getting a traditional - These are British Nigerians, and we're all in England and we know we have a multi-cultural society - so these are British Nigerians, trying to get a publishing deal and being told that they already have an ethnic author on their books. I was just like, "Oh, that's so offensive."

Some of these authors, and in India as well, are starting to self-publish because their voices cannot be heard in the traditional sense. I heard about Wattpad, they're really good for YA books. They have a sub-genre of romances featuring Muslim women in hijab who just don't have stories told about the way that romance happens in those cultures. This is what I'm excited about too.

The publishers, for so long, have said, "This is what you're allowed to read. This is what you're allowed to enjoy, and we will only publish books that we think you should read." If the audience has shown that they love 50 Shades of Grey, they love all these different books, and that's why I'm excited.

Also, you can find your target market anywhere in the world. Again, people listening, the human condition is the same. It pretty much is. Everyone loves people and has a family and all that type of thing. Stories cross these borders. I do think it's super exciting, and the tools that we're getting just get better every day.

James: We hear quite a lot of negativity about the internet and if you watch the news, it's often the dark side of it comes to the fore, but it can be an incredibly empowering and liberating force. It is an empowering and liberating force in the world, and it's changing the way cultures interact and the way we live our lives, which is great.

Joanna: I talk about social karma as well, which I think is something that's been massive for me. The energy you put out in the world is the energy you get back.

If you're reading terrible news, and it doesn't change anything, and if you're trying to be generous and you're helping people and you're being positive, the internet is a wonderful place. Sure, I get a couple of nasty emails occasionally and tweets and whatever, but generally, my internet, the place I live, is amazing. My readers are amazing, and you guys are amazing, and that's, I think, just because when I'm feeling negative, I don't share it. I try and keep the energy positive out there, and this doesn't mean it's all happy days, but we also have to work hard. I think trying to make the best of things is better than moaning all the time.

Mark: Yeah, definitely. I agree with that completely.

JAMES: IN TERMS OF HOW HAVE THINGS CHANGED FOR YOU, WHEN YOU WERE, 7, 8 YEARS YOU'VE BEEN PUBLISHING NOW, MUST BE, SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

Joanna: Yeah. 2008, yeah, so pretty much 7 years. As I said, when I started, I wrote a non-fiction book first and my intention really was to become a non-fiction author, professional speaker, which I did, but I also started a blog, The Creative Penn, about what I was learning along the way, because I fell for some of the biggest ripoff merchants around back then in terms of print thousands and thousands of books and

have them all end up in the landfill and a number of other things like paid compilation books. A lot of the things that are still around today, and which is why I'm so passionate about teaching this stuff.

Another thing, and you'll like this. I spent about six months learning how to do press releases. I got really good at press releases. I got onto national TV. I got in the national press. I got on national radio, and I ended up selling about a hundred books. That's when I started learning about internet marketing.

What's changed is as I've blogged, and this is something, if people want to write fiction and they don't feel that creative, by blogging, I was able to release my voice. I was able to get used to putting things out there in the world, and if I hadn't had a blog and a podcast, I don't think I would have written my first novel, which is the thing that's really different. **Of my book income, sixty percent is fiction, forty percent is non-fiction.** I'm just writing the twelfth novel and I still have seven non-fiction books, but I want to write more and more fiction and I think the non-fiction, I won't do so much of that going forward.

That's what's really changed. I guess also excitingly, I was able to hire my husband out of his day job.

James: Yay.

Joanna: Yay, last year. Now we've got a family business and that's really exciting because when I left my job in 2011, he was still doing the corporate grind. It was great to be able to do that, and that is a result of all of these things. I do say to people when they ask about that. That's not with one book. That's with seventeen books and a blog that's been running for seven years and a podcast and all the income streams that I've been building up for years have made a mature business. Most businesses at seven years should be making a decent income. That's the way I look at it.

Mark: Just the same for me. It took me quite a long time to get to a position where I was able to leave my job, too. In case you get authors asking you how many books would it take for me to be able to do that, it's unlikely to be one or two books. Some people manage that. People like Andy Weir, although he had been writing on his blog. He was reasonably quick out of the blocks. Other people look at people like Hugh Howey. Hugh had ten books behind him before he wrote 'Wool' and that was the one that broke out.

I THINK IT IS REALLY GOOD ADVICE IS TO BE PREPARED TO BE PATIENT, AND WRITE THE NEXT BOOK. THAT'S THE BEST ADVICE THAT I AM ABLE TO GIVE NEW AUTHORS

WHEN THEY ASK WHAT THEY SHOULD BE DOING ONCE THEY'VE WRITTEN THE FIRST BOOK, IS JUST KEEP WRITING.

Joanna: **You can't build a business based on a lightning strike.** Andy Weir is a great example. You can't attempt to do an Andy Weir. You just can't. Also, sometimes it's a zeitgeist. Look at *Gone Girl*, was a zeitgeist. Hugh Howey, love the guy, but he didn't build a business like say Bella Andre or Bob Rafisi or Liliana Hart have crafted at building a business. One of those books took off massively and things happen.

When that happens, what's so brilliant if you have lots of books as Hugh did, as you say, is if you have other books, you will sell a lot more. If you only have that one book and you haven't even done something like put a sign-up to your email list at the back, you can get very upset. **You hit number one on Amazon and you only had one book. That spike is going to be pretty short-lived, basically.**

Also, the other thing I say to people is how valuable is anyone in the first year of a new job? Whether you're a teacher, whatever you are, a lawyer? How valuable are you? You're just not. In year three, still not really. Year five, you start becoming more valuable, and by year ten, you should be one of the top in your industry if you've stuck it out, because many, as you and I know, in the writing industry, most people don't even make it to one book, let alone make it to ten years honing their craft and writing more and more books. That's what I think.

I also love to learn from people like Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, who have been 40 years in this business, now are hybrid authors, obviously, that have been writing as a living for that long and have seen all the ups and downs and I just read everything that they put out because I want to learn it from people who have that kind of longevity.

James: Can I just take you back a fraction, Jo, talk about the non-fiction books?

IT IS A FAIRLY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION WHEN I TALK TO OTHER SELF-PUBLISHERS, IS SOMEBODY WHO WRITES NON-FICTION, THEY LOOK ENVIOUSLY AT PEOPLE TURNING OUT THRILLERS AND ROMANCE NOVELS, AND THEY ASK THE QUESTION, "CAN I DO THIS? CAN YOU MAKE MONEY? CAN YOU MAKE A BUSINESS OUT OF IT?"

Joanna: **It is much easier to make a business with non-fiction. Fiction is super hard.** The thing is with non-fiction, most non-fiction authors have other products, so someone will put out a book and they will have a course off the back-end that is much more pricey, or they're a public speaker.

You're going to find that most of the best-selling business books, best-selling non-fiction books on Amazon, those people don't have many books. They will have a consulting business, a speaking business. Some of those guys getting twenty grand, a hundred grand for speaking or running a consulting thing with a company. I would say with non-fiction, most business models around non-fiction rest on having higher priced products around them.

If you want to make money from non-fiction alone, you have to follow the same model as someone like Steve Scott, S.J. Scott, who made, I think he put out publicly that he made half a million dollars last year with purely non-fiction, but Steve has 45 books. If you actually do the sums on that, he's still making about the same as I am per book. He's just got a lot more. That's the thing, and Steve focuses on volume and co-writing and that type of thing.

Yes, you can, and that's the same model as most fiction authors are doing. It's volume and putting out a series and that type of thing. With non-fiction, and then, I span both. **I would say to people, "If you can avoid doing both, then do, because you do end up splitting your time and your personality into these two things."** I'm really happy with my non-fiction income.

What's amazing is every December, I make a massive stack of money on print books of non-fiction. **Print sells in non-fiction so much more than fiction for indie authors.** That's interesting. It also has got me every single speaking gig I've ever had. I've never pitched for speaking. This year I'm speaking at the Digital Commerce Summit in Colorado, which is for CopyBlogger, which is one of the goals of my life. It's so amazing, and that has purely come from the blog, the podcast, the non-fiction side of things. Yeah. Absolutely, much easier to make money with non-fiction.

MARK: WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE, IF SOMEONE SAID TO YOU, "YOU CAN ONLY DO ONE?" WHAT WOULD YOU GO FOR?

Joanna: I really couldn't choose, Mark, because I've been through this. Especially when I met you and I saw what you were doing, before you did the course, how well you were doing with your fiction. I knew, and you basically said, "I just focused." If I could just focus, if I canceled my podcast, if I canceled The Creative Penn, if I put all of this energy, if I stopped speaking, if I put all this energy into fiction, I would do so much better with my fiction. That's got to be true because you get what you focus on. By splitting my time, I split my focus, but I wrote a blog post about it. It's "Plato's Chariot," which visually was a Roman chariot or a Greek chariot with a black horse and a white horse. The dark horse is that darker side and the white horse being the light. You have to have the two of them running in parallel in order to be happy. That's kind of how I feel. **I need to teach people and help people, and I feel that when I write fiction, I**

almost feel it's selfish. Fiction is so what I want to do, whereas non-fiction to me is helping other people.

You're now, you're not writing non-fiction, but you're producing non-fiction content, so you're starting to split yourself. You've made this choice too, haven't you?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. I think the motivation is similar. It's very nice to be able to show people things that work that I've been able to develop to work very well. It is nice to be able to do that. Honestly speaking, it's pretty good in terms of the income as well and it is something that you can charge a little bit more for than a book, obviously.

If I had to choose, I would certainly choose the fiction. I think it is a bit selfish. It's something that I love doing. I think I'd do it even if someone said to me, "There's no prospect of ever being able to publish a word again," I would still write just for myself because I enjoy creating those worlds and creating characters and conversations and that kind of stuff. We're very fortunate that it's something that can run in parallel.

James: From an outsider's point of view, let me just say that I think both of your worlds, the reason your non-fiction is valuable to people and works so well is because of your fiction, because you have that proven ability to do that. That then gives you something to talk about that's a value on the other side. They do work in synergy. You both have this idealistic dream of being on the beach, just knocking out novels, but from my point of view, please don't do that. Just keep putting out the non-fiction because that's where the rest of us learn.

Joanna: Thank you, and I hate beaches.

James: Oh, okay.

Joanna: I'm a workaholic, actually.

James: And you lived in Australia?

Joanna: Yes, I know, it's crazy. I lived in Brisbane, Australia with Queensland Beaches, but no. You spend a lot of time inside in Australia, or you just die from skin cancer.

The next non-fiction book I'm working on is going to be around the author mindset. It's funny because I also do write my non-fiction books based on what I need to learn myself. When I wrote the first edition of "How to Market a Book," it was because I had just spent eighteen months, two years, learning about what marketing was, because my degree is in theology and I have a second degree in psychology. **I needed to learn marketing, so often the easiest way to learn something is to teach it.** That's how I write my books.

When I wrote "Business for Authors," it was because I needed to structure my own business in such a way that it was running well, so I thought I would just write a book about it. I think that's a good, and I think a lot of people could do that, and non-fiction can be a palate cleanser in between novels, especially if you're finishing a series or finishing one book in a series, and you want to do something a bit different.

James: Before we lose you, Joanna, can we just drill down and get a little bit of detail from you? The world changes a little bit and the marketing and you've been a trailblazer over the years.

I WONDER, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS HOT AT THE MOMENT? WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE WORKING? WHERE SHOULD WE BE FOCUSING?

Joanna: **For non-fiction, because I presume there's non-fiction people listening, I still find content marketing to be amazing.** When people say, "Is blogging worth it?" Blogging, podcasting, is still speaking, etc. Putting out free information in exchange for people, either to come to your website or to click something and give them your email, is amazing.

The number one traffic source for me is Google SEO, which I don't pay for, and I don't mean I pay for SEO. It's Google organic search. That's huge. For non-fiction for me, I continue to do everything I do and the income just goes up all the time because I keep putting out content. It's free in terms of money, but it's not free in terms of time.

I would say right now, podcasting is just massive. You guys obviously believe that too because you've started a podcast. In terms of me as a consumer, I read barely any blogs now, and I listen to about seven different podcasts as well as audiobooks. I've noticed my own preference shift to audio, which I think we're seeing the same shift in books as well. **I think audiobooks are only going to continue growing, and which we've seen with Amazon announcing its expansion in that area, too.**

I just wanted to give a hat tip to content marketing for fiction as well because, of course, Facebook ads are brilliant, but if people are just getting started and they want to give it a go, your own content is content marketing for fiction. If you put a book out there for Permafrees, which I have my first in series "Stone of Fire," I still get downloads on that every day. I'm not in KDP Select. It's also really good on the other platforms, so iBooks and Kobo and Nook, which do have special promotions on first in series for Permafrees.

If you have an email signup there, you can get traffic. You can do email marketing, all based on having a Permafrees book. It doesn't cost you anything except time, so I would always say to people that yes, if you have three books in a series, it's great to try a Permafrees first in series, and then you can do paid traffic to that. You can do Bookbub, you can do other things, but that will actually start people through your series.

We need to keep learning from each other, and nobody has the premium on all the information. I think this is a real importance around being an indie is things change all the time, and you have to be learning from all different sources, and don't just dismiss what some people might say because it sounds crazy. Start paying attention, and I think that it's so important to pay attention to these different things. I listen to the Sell More Book Show with Jim Kukral and Bryan Cohen, and I quite often get ideas from authors that you might never have heard of who've tried something new. It's so brilliant to keep learning and finding out about this stuff, so thanks for trying that, Mark, and I'm glad it was good for you.

Mark: It's good so far.

James: Good. Jo, Mark has a load of questions, most of which we haven't got to because the conversation has flown all the way through as I knew it would, but **there was one question I thought would be really useful for a lot of people to hear your answer to, which is:**

WHAT SINGLE PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND TALK TO YOURSELF AS YOU WERE STARTING OUT?

Joanna: I think it's going to depend what type of person you are. We mentioned ego earlier. I want the subtitle of this author mindset book to be "Massive Ego and Chronic Self-Doubt," because that chronic self-doubt, I think we still all have it. I think whatever writers say, they still feel that every time, but we become more used to how that feels. I think at the beginning, it took me years to write a novel. I probably wanted to write a novel when I was about five years old, and I didn't write one until I was 35. I still care very much what people think, and that holds me back sometimes. It holds me back from doing crazier stuff.

It was my fifth novel, "Desecration," where I finally stopped self-censoring my writing. Telling myself back then, it would be, "Stop caring so much what people think. Write this scene or write this book and don't worry about how it's going to be perceived in the world." That is very difficult. In fact, the book I'm writing right now, "Destroyer of Worlds," there is a scene in it I'm actually quite worried about in terms of some religious extremists, but then in terms of marketing, possibly if you get banned, it's a good idea. **This kind of self-doubt and there's too much that stops you from writing, can be crippling.** That's the advice I would give myself is really, "Look, just don't self-censor. Get that first draft down and edit it later, but stop caring so much what people think."

James: Great. That sounds like a really good note to conclude on. I've no doubt that we will talk again in the future, Jo, because you're a good friend of the Self-Publishing Formula.

MARK, IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WE'VE MISSED FROM YOUR ASTUTE MIND THAT WE NEED TO TALK TO JO ABOUT BEFORE WE FINALLY LET HER GO?

Mark: I think we should certainly ask to tell listeners where they can find both of the horses that are pulling her chariot.

Joanna: Yes, you can find Joanna Penn at thecreativepenn.com and you'll find the Author 2.0 Blueprint now, which is a free e-book and video series and everything on how to do everything, and then J.F. Penn at jfpenn.com, F for Francis and my books are everywhere in all formats, and I'm on Twitter @thecreativepenn.

James: What a delight talking to Joanna. She's one of the brightest voices in the industry, totally engaging. By the way, she is also a professional standard broadcaster putting us to shame. I think she's so engaging

and brilliant to talk to. An important influencer, has influenced you, has influenced quite a lot of the people who will be following and listening to our podcast, and so somebody who we always want to tap into and hear her view of what's changing and what's next.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. She's always inspirational and her podcast is one of the first ones I listen to as soon as it comes up on Mondays. I'll always be listening to her.

James: Yeah, great. Okay, well that's about it for Podcast Number Two. You can email us at any point, support@selfpublishingformula.com. You want to suggest a guest? You want to ask a question? You want us to talk about a topic? Do let us know. I'd love to hear from you. Follow us on Twitter @selfpubform and we will see you in Podcast Three when we are going to be talking to one of the biggest names in indie publishing, the magnificent Marie Force.

CHAPTER 2

TALKING WITH ONLINE INDIE ENTREPRENEUR PAT FLYNN



From redundancy to a pioneer in the online business sphere, Pat's blog, 'Smart Passive Income' that details his story has become a go-to resource for budding online entrepreneurs everywhere. Mark and James hunker down with Pat to talk, amongst other things, about his new book, relationship strategies including the power of transparency and whether podcasting is still a sound business strategy.

SHOW NOTES

- Pat's beginnings as an online entrepreneur.
- Why Pat wrote his new book Will It Fly?
- On the power of surveying one's audience.
- Relationship strategies Pat used with his followers while he was writing the book and at the launch.

- Transparency as a powerful audience relationship strategy.
- On segmenting email lists for greater response rates.
- What Pat would do to connect with his readers if he wrote fiction.
- Whether Pat thinks podcasting is still a good business-building strategy.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH PAT FLYNN

Hello and welcome to podcast number two from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello and welcome. Yes, how brilliant to have you here, we're getting really into the swing of things with the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. We hope it's turning out to be what you want it to be, what we want it to be Mark, which is something that's going to be giving them the direction that they need to get revenue in for their books, yeah?

Mark: Exactly, and I'm really excited about this episode today, we've got Pat Flynn on. Pat for those who don't know is the guy behind Smart Passive Income, which is one of the podcasts and in fact one of the media empires that I subscribe to outside of the Self Publishing space. I haven't heard Pat on a podcast like this before talking specifically to authors and imparting a lot of the good stuff, we hope to hear from the results of his latest book launch, which hit the New York Time's Best seller list. Hopefully very interesting James.

James: Absolutely. A lot of you will know who Pat Flynn is, if you don't you really do need to know who he is in terms of going into the space because he's somebody who just, through the way that he works and what he's done in the past, kind of owns it. He's a really, really good person to be close to and to hear, and to feed of, and that's how he operates as well. Look, let's not talk anymore because it's a great interview. Let's go over to Pat Flynn.

When it comes to online businesses, Pat Flynn is a name that stands above others. After being laid off from his 9 to 5 in architecture in '08, Pat built an internet business, the Smart Passive Income blog, that today brings him a six figure income every month. Yeah, you heard that right, every month. How do I know

that for sure? Well, that's one of the things that sets Pat apart from the others, his transparency and openness. He writes about, talks about and publishes about pretty much every aspect of his business, and he's always on the search for inspiration from others, one of the things I hugely admire him for. We are both big fans of yours Pat, so thank you very much indeed for coming on to our podcast today all the way from San Diego.

Pat: Thank you for having me. I'm so glad to be here, I'm excited to talk to all the authors out there and do what I can to help out.

James: A lot of people are very familiar with you but not everyone for certain, and I want to take you back to the beginning, just to set the scene a little bit, and ask you a question. Obviously, not a great experience being laid off.

WHEN YOU STARTED THIS BUSINESS, WHEN YOU HAD THE GENESIS OF THE IDEA, IS WHAT YOU'VE ENDED UP WITH WHAT YOU SET OUT TO ACHIEVE?

Pat: No. Definitely not, and I don't think that's ever the case. When I got laid off in '08, I wanted to get back into architecture, I loved my job. I wanted to do that for the rest of my life but this was back in the recession in the US, so there was nobody that was hiring anybody in the architecture field because nobody had any money to build any buildings.

I got really lucky that I found this podcast that was talking about online business. There was an episode where there was a guy talking about how he had helped people pass an exam, and he was making six figures a year doing that. His exam, that he was helping people with, was called the Project Management exam, and that was kind of my ah-ha moment, my light bulb moment.

I had passed a really difficult exam in the architecture industry, that I had some knowledge about, that I then decided to really package and turn into a website that then had study guides and practice exams that people could purchase, and it did really, really well. After a year, it made a little over \$200,000 and really saved my life really when I think about it.

Now that I look back on that dreadful day of June 17th 2008 when I got laid off, it was really the best thing that could ever happen to me. It really opened up my eyes to all these opportunities and more importantly it helped me just realize that I had nothing else to lose and take the required action to do what

I needed to do online. I know for a fact that if I hadn't been let go, I would probably still be doing architecture. I'd probably want to do something different but I just wouldn't have the guts to or I would be too scared to do it because I had this other thing that was going, so I was very fortunate that I got laid off.

Now, since building Smart Passive Income to share how I built that architecture business and several other businesses that have come out since then, I've gotten put into this place where I'm seen as the leader in this transparency, authenticity movement in the online business space which was definitely not planned.

I didn't think that would happen but now that I've come to be here, I definitely I'm trying to own that, and be a good example for people because my first thought of online business when I first got into it was red flags, snake oil salesmen, that sort of thing. Here I was getting into it, teaching stuff in a way that was helping everybody, everybody was happy and I was getting paid. I knew that there was a right way to do it, and that's why I started www.smartpassiveincome.com and it's grown since then into a podcast, a blog, a speaking career and now a best selling book, so I'm super stoked about the whole journey and that's for sure.

James: The fact that you had to be laid off to find that motivation I suppose, you said that you perhaps wouldn't have done it without it.

HOW WOULD YOU ADVISE OTHER PEOPLE THEN WHO ARE IN COMFORTABLE LIVINGS, PAYING THEIR MORTGAGE TO MAKE THAT JUMP WITHOUT PERHAPS BEING LAID OFF, WITHOUT HAVING THAT ABSOLUTE MOMENT?

Pat: You don't have to quit your job, and you don't have to really just go in the deep end necessarily. The thing that I realized is that I just didn't know it was possible. I didn't know what the options were and I got a lot of inspirations finally from other people who had become successful, which is why I'm really encouraged that you have this podcast, because you're featuring great advice and great people here, who can then inspire those who are in that situation to take that action that is required.

If you really want it bad enough, it will happen and you just would put in the required work to do that. For me, when I got let go, that was my way of saying, "Okay, I have to make this work," and there were other means of doing that and of course it's just really how bad do you want it. That's what I would advise.

Mark: When I started, I was a lawyer originally, I don't know if I've told you that before Pat, for 10 years.

When my second novel came out it was an exposé of what it's like to be a lawyer in London and it's been subsequently described as the longest resignation letter in London.

Pat: I love it.

Mark: It was a mutual parting of the ways that came out after that. I decided I wasn't ready, I didn't want to keep doing it and my employers did tell me that my heart wasn't in it. I think in my heart I knew what I was doing, I knew that I was going to get myself into trouble, and I actually wanted to be given the push because I wasn't quite ready to forgo the monthly pay cheque.

EXTERNAL EVENTS ARE THE KIND OF PUSH THAT YOU NEED SOMETIMES AND IT SOUNDS LIKE THAT WAS PRETTY MUCH WHAT HAPPENED WITH YOU.

Pat: I mean it's interesting, you hear about a lot of success stories and get into their background, there's always some, not necessarily dramatic event, but something that just triggered that thought of going in a different direction. Sometimes it's a lay off, passing of somebody in the family, sometimes it's another event, but there always seems to be a moment and I think that's really important to understand.

James: I suppose we have to find our moments, we have to find our motivation, but one of the great things about your SPI blog is it really sets out, not just some of the nuts and bolts about the business. There's incredibly useful stuff in there, but I think a lot of it is about the lifestyle approach as well.

We've talked about this on this podcast before, that what I sell to people when I'm talking to people about what I do is an evangelistic view of how you live your life and for me the 9 to 5, it just does not belong to me anymore. I don't want to be part of it anymore, I don't think I can ever work in a 9 to 5 environment.

I THINK THE WAY THAT WE LIVE OUR LIVES IS MUCH CLOSER TO PEOPLE THAN THEY THINK IT IS. IT FEELS MILES AWAY. MOST OF MY FRIENDS LOOK AT ME LIKE I'VE GOT SOME SORT OF WITCHCRAFT GOING ON, BUT IT REALLY ISN'T ACTUALLY, IS IT?

Pat: No. Again, it's just certain actions that you take that help you build the lifestyle that you want, and it doesn't happen overnight that's for sure. It's definitely not easy but it does come with a mindset shift and then the shift and the actions that you take because of that new mindset.

It is totally more possible now than ever to have that kind of lifestyle, by that I mean you're doing work still, obviously you're not just sitting back. I'm never on the beach sipping piña coladas all day, I work. I work hard but I work around the life that I want, and for me specifically that's very much in tune with being here with my family.

My wife and I drop our kids off to school every single morning, we pick them up both together everyday, that's very important to me. I go to my daughters dance class, and that's like at the top of my priority list. I have a business that allows me to have a flexible schedule that allows me to do all that and that's just one example of how I've been able to build a business in a way that is shaped around the lifestyle I want and not vice versa which is what most people are doing. Which is, they work, and then they try fit life into that or on top of that.

James: You're an author now. You're actually an author because you decided to write a book and because you're Pat Flynn, once you decided to write a book that was in the top and the best seller list fairly quickly. Let's talk about your approach to that.

FIRST OF ALL, WHY DID YOU WANT TO WRITE LET IT FLY?

Pat: I wanted to write *Will It Fly* because it was very important to me to create something that would actually help a lot of people. Any content I create I want it to be helpful of course but I knew for a fact that this would do really well; not just because it's me. I think part of that is, I do what I know is going to be helpful, and this topic of business idea validation, that is, when you come up with an idea knowing for sure if it's going to work once you do the work, that's validation. It's an important topic and I'm not the first one to write about it, I'm not the first one to talk about it, but I'm definitely the first one to really just write an entire book about it.

It was so important for me to do this, and I knew this was the right topic because in several occasions leading up to the decision to write about this topic, by far this was the number one question that my particular audience had. I confirmed that through surveys, direct one-on-one conversations with my audience and also through a way that I collect voice mail questions from my audience too, for the purposes of actually taking those voice mails and putting them into a podcast.

I have another podcast beyond the *Smart Passive Income* podcast called *Ask Pat*, where I answer voice mail questions 5 days a week. The cool byproduct of that is I get my audience asking me questions everyday, literally dozens of questions every week come in, and by far the number one question is, "How

do I know if this thing I'm working on is going to work?"

When you think of somebody who is in a 9 to 5 position for example, there's only so many hours of the day left. There's the 8 hours or 9 hours of work, plus the time that you want to spend with family, and then any time you need to take care of yourself in the gym and eat. Where is the rest of the time to do business? It might only be an hour. A lot of people want to make sure that that hour is well spent on something that's actually going to work, and because of that they actually don't do any work because they're not sure if it's going to work out or not. That was the Genesis for this idea and this book.

Mark: I find that really interesting. We get questions quite a lot of the time from non-fiction authors who are asking me, "I think I want to do something with the specialism that I have, but how do I know that there's a market out there for the particular book that I want to write?" You went through that in a very systematic fashion. I listened to one of the ... Is it Ryan? I'm going to forget the name now, is it Ryan Levesque?

Pat: Ryan Levesque. It's not spelled like it sounds but, Ryan Levesque who wrote the book Ask. That book is all about surveying your audience, whether you have an audience already, a following, or even if you don't, there's ways to go about finding information about your audience. In that way, you're not guessing anymore.

The worst thing you can do is just guess and then of course once it's out there you just hope, and then if it doesn't work you're left wondering why it didn't work. The cool thing about validation and going directly to your audience first is that you're not guessing anymore. When you know you have motivation, when you have the motivation you're going to do the work, and you're going to get that work in their hands much sooner you're going to serve more people too. With authors specifically, there's some really interesting things that you can do with validation.

Jay Abraham, who's a famous marketer. Back in the day - this is pre internet days - he would use validation strategies to determine what books he should write. I don't know if you know about this, but he would actually come up with a whole list of ideas of books to write, and the way he would test them is, he would actually buy classified ads in the newspaper, one for each of those books and collect orders for them. He would see which ones would actually collect the most orders and that's how he knew which he should write first, and everybody else he would just refund that money. That was kind of primitive ways

of determining what to write about, but it makes sense, right? Because he has some proof, he has validation. There's numbers behind the fact that people want this book, so then of course he's very motivated to go through that rather quickly from there.

I know a lot of authors who are utilizing more modern strategies to validate the ideas for their book by just writing a little bit about it and making it something that they can give away for free or something that's very cheap. One, maybe section of an entire book for example, just to see what people think about it, see what the reaction is like, to see if it's even anything you should expand on into a full size book. Michael Hyatt's book that just came out called Living Forward, was actually a free guide, that was a lead magnet. A lead magnet is something that you give away in exchange for a persons email address. Over 200,000 people I think he had said, had downloaded the free copy of Living Forward back when it was just a lead magnet.

Of course since then, he's expanded on it but back then it was just a dozen page PDF that helped people and people loved it, so then he knew that that was an idea that people wanted more on and he turned that into a book. We don't know how it's done on the best seller list. It's gone up to top 5 overall of all books on Amazon at some point, even during the pre-order process. Those are just some cool ways that you can validate a book topic.

MARK: IN PRACTICAL TERMS, BECAUSE I KNOW THAT WE'LL GET THIS QUESTION IF WE DON'T ASK IT, HOW DID YOU PRACTICALLY GO ABOUT SURVEYING YOUR AUDIENCE? WAS THEIR SOMETHING LIKE A SURVEYMONKEY SURVEY OR SOMETHING ALONG THOSE LINES?

Pat: Correct. SurveyMonkey to my entire audience and I didn't ask them, "Would you buy a book on this?" I asked them, "What are you struggling with most?" and then from there I would then break them down into, how long have you had you business? Do you even have a business? How much money are you making and if you want to share that?

You know the cool thing about SurveyMonkey is I can pull out all the people who have yet to start a business for example, and just look at their answers, and their struggles are going to be a little bit different than somebody who's had a business for 5 years for example. Then I can really pinpoint that one big audience who has the most requests for help and serve them through this book, and that's it. That's exactly what I did. That was really cool.

Because I wanted to actually practice what I preach in this book, in terms of getting people to pay for stuff

before hand, I actually set out to see if I could get 10 people to pay for the book even before I started writing it, and I did get 10 people to actually pay for it. 10 bucks. They just sent me 10 bucks via PayPal and I knew that that was confirmation that, "Yes this is okay. I at least have 10 customers now, let's move forward with it." Of course in my mind, it's super motivational to have somebody on there that believes in you, who knows that this is a topic that they want to see a book about and of course we just fired up from there.

James: Is it funny how consumer habits, where we get used to different things. A few years ago that would have sound slightly crazy, but because of crowdfunding and so on, a lot of us, we're paying for stuff we don't see for months. I mean I bought a header display for my car, I think 18 months ago in a crowdfunding thing. At some point in my life I'll get it but, we change our habits.

Pat: I still have yet to receive something that I purchased on Kickstarter actually too. Then you also think about events, you pay money upfront for an event that you obviously don't get access to until it actually happens. It's not something that's outlandish.

You're right, back in the day maybe 2, 3 years ago, it would be kind of like, "Really? You're asking me to pay for it, it doesn't exist yet?" But now it's like, "Oh yeah, I want to pay for this idea." Not everybody who you ask is going to say yes. There's just people who won't part with money until that thing exists, but there's a certain set of people, early adopters, and that's what you're kind of looking for here.

The beauty of working with early adopters is that they're going to be there during the process that you create this thing, as a resource for you to make it exactly what it needs to be, instead of just, you have customers then you build it and then you share it with them. You're actually working with them along the way, and that's how you can engage them, and of course once you come out with this thing it's perfect for them, which means it's great for everybody else out there once you go full scale. Then you'll already have testimonials, reviews and so on and so forth.

Mark: Yeah, and that's something that I do. Obviously I'm writing fiction, you're writing non-fiction, but having a launch team, and before that having beta readers. It was one of the big accelerators that I found over the last couple of years. I was going to ask you that question a bit later on, but I think since you've brought it up let's deal with it now.

IN TERMS OF PRACTICALLY HOW YOU INTERACTED WITH THAT ADVANCED TEAM OR THOSE BETA READERS, WHAT WERE YOU DOING? WHAT WERE YOU SHOWING THEM AND HOW DID YOU TAKE THEIR ADVICE INTO ACCOUNT?

Pat: Yeah, that was a lot of fun working with the launch team. The first thing is we announced to everybody that we were building this launch team. That of course creates buzz, makes people aware that this thing is coming out, and of course you want to collect applications. I could accept everybody but we did applications because it made people feel like it was more of a professional process, that this was like a serious thing. You know we also wanted to see who was actually into it. We've received some applications where it was obvious that they didn't care, they just wanted to get the manuscript for free and of course we didn't let those people in.

Once you get this group together, we then managed them on a private Facebook group. That was fun because, not only was I interacting with them, and I had actually a manager to help manage the launch team too in the mean time but, they were also able to interact with each other. The cool thing about Facebook is everybody's, most people are there already and you could share things and you'll get immediate feedback on those things.

Some of the things we shared were timeline, just to give people that expectation of when things were going to happen. Then we also shared the progress of the cover. That was a lot of fun and actually an interesting process because the interesting thing about a cover or design in any way is you're not going to be able to please everybody and so there was this definite division in the group which was great. It made it exciting and then when the book finally came out people were very interested in it of course.

I didn't have the complete manuscript done by the time the launch team was created, but I did share the intro at first and that was the first part. Then later, once the manuscript was done, I sent the early first draft, told them, "Hey guys, we haven't gone through copy editing yet but I wanted to give this early to you to make you feel like you're part of the process. Don't worry about spelling or grammar, that's all being taken care of, I just want you to read the story, and let me know what you think."

We did some other things, where we ask them for their favorite quotes, that we then used for social media purposes which was a lot of fun, and of course I shared some videos along the way too. I shared all the way through the set up process and to CreateSpace in Amazon, and just really sharing all those small things along the way, getting everybody excited.

Then on launch day, it was all about sharing, leaving feedback and reviews and just making people feel excited and loved for being a part of this. They get their manuscript early and they get to see the behind the scenes. The interesting thing was I got some sales from people in the launch group. They got the book already. I don't know the exact number, I wish I did, but I would guess 75% to 80% of that group, which was about 500 people bought the book anyway because they just loved seeing the behind the scenes and felt like they owed it to me, which was really cool. That helped obviously with numbers and rankings and whatnot, but beyond that it was just a great experience to have people and very motivating to have them in my corner when I launched.

Mark: That's something that I'd do too. I'm always completely surprised when people, after helping me with beta reading and fact checking and all that kind of stuff, then are prepared to buy the book as well. It's like, "Okay. You've already more than met your side of the deal and now you're going to buy the book too." If enough of them, as you say, enough of them buy the book, it doesn't need to go wide to give you a really good kick in terms of Amazon's algorithms and start to launch it with a high rank and then the reviews and the like kind of good stuff that starts to factor in together.

I REMEMBER I WAS WATCHING THE LAUNCH QUITE CAREFULLY AND YOU STARTED RANKING VERY HIGHLY, VERY QUICKLY EVEN BEFORE YOU WENT WIDE TO YOUR FULL LIST.

Pat: When the book finally was out and available, I shared it in two places, the launch group and just my Twitter account, and that's it. By then it was already close to, I want to say top 100 at that point, which was amazing. Then once I sent out the email, which came later than I wanted it to because actually the Kindle version, took a little bit longer to be approved than I was told it would be, even though it was within their "72 hours approval", it was a lot longer than I thought it was going to be. It was more than 24 hours, so I kept checking and refreshing because I didn't want to send an email out where it was just the paperback, and the Kindle wasn't there yet because I can't determine what a person's preference is for how they want to consume content.

Also, when the Kindle finally was available, what a relief but the two pages weren't connected yet. There were two separate Amazon pages, one for the Kindle page, one for the paperback and I'm like, "Can anything else go wrong here?" Because I'm waiting to send this email and then finally when they got connected I just had the email already written I just sent. I just hit send broadcast and then everything just exploded from there.

It climbed all the way to top 22 of all books on Amazon which was incredible and to see the grass on

KDP and the numbers. It was just awesome. Then the cool part was, a few days later, when everybody finally got their paperback that they ordered, I started seeing Instagram photos and tweets and all these things where people are like, "I got it. I got it," and people were doing unboxing videos. It was an awesome experience.

Then I had my very first experience at a recent conference, where people had the book, actually the conference owner bought 200 copies, that was another part of the marketing process was in lieu of speaking fees I actually had conference directors purchase books instead. This person gave away 200 books to the VIPs in this audience and after I spoke, all 200 people lined up to get it signed and that was a trip. That was incredible.

James: I should just reiterate again that all this stuff, that's the great thing about Pat, everything is laid there on the website. I recall Pat, I think there's a blogger from one of your of your team?

Pat: Yeah, no one knows his name.

James: He does the social media strategy I think you published last month and then it's really interesting to read the nuts and bolts of it.

THAT'S HOW YOU OPERATE THIS KIND OF NUTS AND BOLTS GUY. THIS IS HOW I DID IT, THIS IS HOW IT'S GOING TO WORK AND A FEW FAILURES IN THERE AS WELL.

Pat: Oh a lot. That's what people love hearing about the most, and I think again, you had mentioned earlier that, I do a lot of things that's stand out in this space, and I think that's one of them. I'm more than happy to share my failures because whether it's a win or fail, it's always a lesson for somebody. If I could take a failure for somebody so that they don't have to do it, I mean it just increases my brand, it makes me happy to know that I did that.

In the book I talk about this failure that cost me \$15,000 because I was rushing into developing a software that I didn't even know what I was doing, and that was a very expensive lesson, but I think I've saved a lot of people money by doing that. Of course, when you help people, they're going to want to help you back. It always comes back in returns in one way or another. Whenever those failures happen I'm more than happy to share it.

James: Yeah.

MARK: TALKING ABOUT SOFTWARE, WHEN YOU HAD ONE FAILURE BUT YOU HAD ONE GREAT SUCCESS WITH THE SMART PLAYER AND THAT'S WHAT WE'RE USING ON OUR WEBSITE FOR THIS PODCAST, WHICH IS A REALLY COOL PIECE OF SOFTWARE THAT WE'RE DOING THIS WITH.

Pat: Awesome. Thank you. Yeah, that was definitely a slower approach and I definitely validated that product before actually building it this time and it's doing really well, so I appreciate you guys using that.

James: I want to talk one or two other bits of machinery and software beneath the surface that you use, and obviously a mailing list is massively important to you, in a way a big advocate software as well for authors right from the beginning, and I've noticed that your mailing list is quite sophisticated.

JUST TALK TO US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW THE EMAIL STREAMS TO AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF YOUR LIST, STARTS TO DIVERGE AND SPECIALIZE FOR THEM.

Pat: This is really cool. I've been doing this over the last 6 months and it's had a dramatic effect on everything, from open rates; I'm now seeing open rates between 50% and 70%, and click-through rates of 15% to 20% which is huge in this space. That's an email list of over 150,000 people.

For the longest time I just had one email list, like one giant bucket with everybody in it and I would just send them all the same emails, both broadcast emails and autoresponder follow up emails. They'd all get the same set of emails, which it worked fine and it did okay. Recently I got in line with a new email service provider called ConvertKit. I love them so much that I'm now on the advisory board for the company. What's cool is, they make it really easy to do some of the stuff that, some of the more sophisticated, email service providers can't do like Infusionsoft or Ontraport, which are very sophisticated but also very confusing. There's a reason why some people call it Confusionsoft instead of Infusionsoft.

ConvertKit was made by a guy named Nathan Barry who's also an author. He's written a lot of books but he self-publishes them and he sells them directly from his own website. He has quite a large audience and he's a designer. He built ConvertKit as an email service provider to really just handle the intuitiveness of what it should be.

Here's what happens when people subscribe to my list. Depending on what they subscribe on, different

things happen. Let's say they just subscribe to the main list. When they get on the main list, one of their first emails, if they get that lead magnet or whatever it is that they subscribe to or for, after that they get a follow up email that says basically, "Hey, I want to give you emails that matter to you." I realized that there's a number of different kinds of people in the audience who have different needs. "In order for me to do that however, I need to know a little bit more about you and I want you to answer just this one single question for me." Then it has a question with three answers, and that question is; which of the following best describes your business? The first choice is, I don't have a business. Second one is, I have a business but I'm struggling to break \$500 a month. The third one is, I'm making over \$500 a month in my business.

Immediately, once they click on those, it tags them as such in ConvertKit and puts them into a whole brand new different set of follow up emails, specifically for that group of people. Because when you think about it, for example, somebody who is just starting out with building an online business, they're not going to need the advanced SEO strategies for how to rank on top of Google, because they don't even have a website yet. I don't need to send them that and confuse them and most people who see that, for beginners, they're going to feel like it's completely overwhelming, that they're in way over their head, that there's too much to think about.

I want to do them a favor and not even let them see that yet. A beginner would need, "Well, here's the first steps. Here's the mindset stuff. Here's the first tools of resources that you need." Based on the actions that they take in these emails, and later I'm actually doing this on the website too based on different things they click on, articles they read, downloads they download; I'll be able to better understand more about them so I could send them content that makes more sense.

MARK: ONE OF THE THINGS THAT'S VERY APPARENT IN YOUR INCOME REPORTS IS THAT YOUR BIGGEST AFFILIATE INCOME IS FROM BLUEHOST, IS THAT RIGHT?

Pat: Yeah. Bluehost is a hosting provider and they've definitely got to that top spot for me in terms of the affiliate income.

MARK: WOULD ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THAT BE BECAUSE RECENTLY YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO SERVE PARTICULARLY RELEVANT CONTENT TO PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING TO BUILD A WEBSITE EARLY ON SO THEY TICK THAT FIRST "I DON'T HAVE A BUSINESS YET" BOX?

Pat: Right, exactly. That's exactly it. That's one of the first steps and I know exactly where those people are, who need that first step, and I can just send them direct messages that are trying to cover a whole wide range of people. I know exactly who they are, where they're at and what they need and I can give that to them.

There're some other cool things in the emails that I'm doing. I'm using that in conjunction with Optimizely which is a cool site. Optimizely is primarily known for allowing you to create A/B tests on your website, meaning you could send half your traffic to one version of a page and half to another and if there's just one variant, you can just see which one actually works better. That's called A/B testing which is really smart and everybody should be testing.

They also have this thing is called personalization, so I can through a special cookie. If people are on a particular email list for example, they will then be served the different resources when they go to my resource page on my website.

The people who are in the advanced part of the list for example, when they go to my website and they go to the resource page, they don't see Bluehost, because they don't need Bluehost. They don't have to build the website from scratch again. They see the more advanced courses: the growth stuff, the virtual team building, and all that sort of stuff. It can get very sophisticated and it's definitely very confusing at first. For me I had to take it one step at a time and just break down that audience and then see how I could best serve them from there.

Mark: Yeah, because we still use MailChimp for the non-fiction side of the business. I think we're pretty much pushing up against the limits of what that can do. I love MailChimp, it's been great for me for 5 years and for what we do at SPF for a couple of years. When you start to get into tagging and stuff about it, it does get a little bit limited so we've been looking at Infusionsoft and I've been daunted by the complexity of it. I had been looking at ConvertKit so that's really helpful for us actually hear that.

Pat: Cool. If you need any more help with it let me know.

Mark: Thank you very much.

James: Talking about moving your streams Pat, I'm interested about the book.

IS THE BOOK A REVENUE STREAM IN ITSELF FOR YOU IN THE FUTURE OR IS IT A LEAD MAGNET TO ENCOURAGE OTHER THINGS SUCH AS THE PUBLIC SPEAKING? I KNOW IT'S QUITE A BIG THING FOR YOU NOW.

Pat: It is a lead magnet primarily. However, it does come with a byproduct with a little bit of income on top of that too. So far in the month of February I calculated, that was launch month, I calculated that it had generated about \$45,000 in profit, which is great. That's not including the expenses however, to pay for my coach, my editorial team and stuff. True profit would be about \$20,000 from there, which is still great especially for a book and a self-published author.

Obviously I do come with a large audience so that does help, but this was primarily made for lead generation. I just sigh sometimes with that particular term because it doesn't treat those people like people; it's treating them like a number or a lead. I'd much rather see it as a way for me to start a long-term relationship with somebody. That's really what this book is all about for me because I'm playing the long-term game.

This book is going to lead to potentially more books. Then it'll definitely lead to courses and things that come down the road afterwards. If I wanted the topic of the book to really make money primarily for me, like right off the bat, it wouldn't have been a book. It would have been a course and it would be very easy for me to sell that and I could charge a lot higher for it. However, I knew that I wanted to create as much exposure for me as possible.

If I did it as a course, it would be sold to primarily my own audience already and anybody I reach out to via Facebook ads for example. With the book, I know that I can utilize Amazon's algorithms and reach a lot more people than I would have before and also the notoriety that can come with something like the best seller list or just getting at the top of some of the categories in Amazon. There's a lot that comes with that too. Again, like I said, this is a long-term play for me so these future books that come down the road, they're going to have the success of Will It Fly behind it. I think that's going to help push everything else forward from this point on.

Mark: One thing you were particularly clever about I thought was, and this is really relevant to anyone who's considering non-fiction right now, is that it's more than just a book, isn't it? It's like a mini course really.

THERE'S SEVERAL ELEMENTS, VIDEOS AND BONUS CONTENT THAT I THINK YOU CAN ACCESS ONLY IF YOU DO ACTUALLY SIGN TO A LIST. IS THAT RIGHT?

Pat: That's actually not true. You could for example, and this is part of the strategy, was at the beginning of the book where people can still see it in the preview in Kindle, it actually has links getting access to the

course. The course is free and so the idea there of putting it in early is that some people will probably go and try to get it for free but the course is doing its job in terms of A, collecting emails. B, allowing me to build the relationship with people and I have an affiliate link inside the course to keep track of how many people go into the course first and then actually buy the book and it's actually converting. There're actually people who are getting access to the course and then buying the book, which is kind of interesting.

This course, I got inspired to make it instead of just a random bonus book or a bonus starter guide or some give away. Like you said, there're some multimedia that I felt would have added to the book a little bit. There're some parts where I talk about how to set up spreadsheets in Google and I figured that would be best to do a video. I have that mentioned in the book and there're many moments in the book where I say, "Go to www.willitflybook.com/course." You could all go there right now actually if you wanted to. You can see how that works. I got inspiration for this through one of my favorite TV shows. It's called Walking Dead on AMC. I don't know if you've heard of that show.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Yeah.

PatIt's a great show. My wife and I are obsessed with it. Right before every episode you hear the voice over guy say, "Go to www.walkingdeadstorysync.com to get your behind the scenes about this episode." While you're watching the episode on TV, on your computer if you go to that website, you actually see some stuff related to the scenes that are being shown and stuff. It's really cool. I figured, "Whoa!" I was like, "Maybe there's a way I could do this with my book."

I actually have this course, it's completely free, and it's meant to collect email addresses and it's laid out chapter by chapter exactly like the book. Within each of those chapters there's videos if there're any videos in that particular chapter that would be helpful. There's also worksheets, bonus downloads and my favorite part, the links that are mentioned in the book. They're all clickable right there so it's very easy. That was one of my memories from when I had read books and saw a bunch of links, I felt like it was hard for me to keep track of them.

That's all there. It's a big value add but here's the thing; currently there're, I would say close to 17,000

people who've purchased the book, both Kindle and paperback. The course has 5,000 people in it now so it's converting like 30% or something like that, which is great.

Now I have 5,000 emails of people who have read or are reading or are about to read *Will It Fly* and I could directly contact them. Here's a moment where it has already paid off. My coach and I were talking the other day, his name is Azul, he was helping me with accountability with this book. He saw that I had like 170 reviews after a couple of weeks and he's like, "This is great. This is great but I think you can get the 300 by the end of the month." I had only a week left and I was like, "Well, it took 3 weeks to get to 170, one week to get to 300? This is kind of insane Azul. This is ... I don't how ..." He was like, "You have emails in your course, right?" I was like, "Yeah." He's just like, "Send an email to them and say, "Hey guys. I'm looking for reviews."

I did that. Within 24 hours I gained another 100 reviews. It blew my mind and of course, because they were all in the course and because they were all getting a lot of value out of it, most of those reviews, I would say 98% of them, were all 5 star reviews. It was mind blowing. I did actually get the 300 two days before March 1st which was awesome.

Mark: This is real outside the box thinking and it works perfectly for non-fiction, it's absolutely ideal for that. It could work also for fiction. A lot of our listeners will be fiction writers and one thing you could do if you're writing fiction is to say have ... Like that *Walking Dead* example. You could have notes from the author, say like an author note at the end which instead of being written to be read, it could be a video. You could say, "For a back story on how I wrote this book, then visit this link," at which point you collect the email address. Then you could do all those cool things that you did; getting reviews or you know that these people have bought from me which is very valuable information.

Pat: Thank you. I've always had the dream of writing a fiction book. I don't know if you knew that Mark?

Mark: No I didn't.

Pat: I want to, like really bad, one day. It would be awesome. Here's what I would do to take this example that I showed in the non-fiction world of this course, chapter by chapter.

THIS IS WHAT I WOULD DO IF I WAS DOING FICTION.

I would write this amazing book and then it wouldn't be called a course, it would be called something else. I don't know what it would be called off the top of my head. In each chapter I would have art work that shares some of the scenes that I envision. Maybe I'd work with an artist to create these worlds that I envision so other people can be in that world too. I would create areas, and I have this in my course too, where in a couple of the chapters I actually ask people to answer questions and there's a commenting system there.

Now they're all talking with each other, they're answering my questions. I would have a couple of parts in that, whatever we call it, bonus thing; where people can add, "Hey, what would you do in this situation? Would you do what Joey did or would you do ... Are you on team Joey or are you on team Sarah?" Really start to create this community within your book too. That would be really fun and of course the more you can get your audience involved and make them feel like you're allowing them to be a part of it, you're set for life in the series of books that you come out with after that.

Mark: Yeah. Not many people are doing that. I only know of one other fiction author who's done anything like this and he ... I'm going to have to put his name in the show notes because I can't remember at the top of my head. He writes sci-fi, kind of space opera, and the thing that he does is he built this website which all links into the book, which describes his ships. He's got this massive, massive ships and he's like, "Okay. This scene is set in the bridge," so there's a clickable link that will take readers to it. On their tablets for example, they will go to the bridge and see a plan diagram of what it looks like.

Pat: So cool.

Mark: He spent like 20 grand on this. It was a huge amount of money but it's so cool. I don't write that kind of fiction myself but if I did I'd be all over that. It's just really, really clever.

James: Pat, let's talk about audience engagement a bit because obviously it's important to you. I hear what you said just now, you're using terms like lead magnet and lead generation. I think it's probably a good way to think about it properly as a relationship but you do have to find each other.

Now, it's only going to work if they really like the stuff that you're doing and this works for authors who

are non-fiction or yourself with your model. If they like what you're doing and it's of value to them, then that's great, but you do have to find each other, right? We call it lead generation or whatever, at the beginning.

Pat: Yeah.

James: That relationship that you then work with people, as your list gets bigger and bigger ... What are you? 150,000 now, I think you said.

Pat: Yeah.

JAMES: HOW DO YOU DO THAT? HOW DO YOU KEEP THAT PERSON? DO YOU WORK, HOW MANY HOURS A DAY? DO YOU REPLY TO ALL THE EMAILS YOU GET FROM EVERYBODY ON YOUR LIST? CAN YOU STILL DO THAT?

Pat: No I can't. It's just impossible. I wouldn't be able to do anything else if I replied to every single email which is sad because when I first got started, I would reply to every single email, and I would reply to every single comment. When you start out and you have that capacity.

I would absolutely recommend doing that because there's no better way to really start that relationship than that small interaction. At the start that's what you have to do but later on you have to implement some strategies. For example, I do a lot of interaction on live streaming platforms like Periscope and there's ways for me to be personable and show behind the scenes and share more than just what you would get on my content, normally through these social media platforms, in a one-to-many fashion. I think that's really important, to understand that that's how you can scale this relationship building.

That's the cool thing about podcasting also. I feel podcasts are an amazing way for people to listen to you as if you were in the same room with them. As a producer, I'm just talking to a microphone but at the same time I'm speaking to 80,000 people every time I hit publish on my episode. They're feeling like I'm just right in their living room, in a car with them, on a ride or walking their dog with them or whatever. That's how you can scale these relationship building things over time.

But as far as finding each other, I'm going to take a note from Mark Zuckerberg over at Facebook. He said

that there's no better recommendation than one that comes from a trusted friend. With whatever audience you have, no matter what size it is, there's always an opportunity with the people that you have, to reach more people through them.

Starting those relationships and making them feel great is what's going to make people want to share you to everybody else. Think about it. You share stuff that's awesome, and if you're the first to find something that's awesome you share it because you want to get credit for it. That's why we share or one of the many reasons why we share. If you provided this amazing experience, if you share something that's amazing with somebody, they're likely going to share. They're more likely going to share if you actually give them permission to do it or ask them to do it. Sometimes when you have that relationship already, a lot of people don't ask and they feel afraid to, but if you provided value, you have the right to ask for them to do stuff for you.

I think a lot of people, especially in sales, are afraid to do that. People who are trying to start a business, they're afraid to ask for money. You can't be afraid to ask for money. You should be afraid to ask for money if you don't have something worthy of asking money for. If you have something that you know is going to be helpful or entertaining or obviously worth their time and money, then it's your job. It's your duty to do that because if you didn't you'd potentially be letting them down and not getting in on that experience.

Mark: I think that you're actually right when you say that in the early days you should respond to as many emails as you can.

Pat: That's your advantage.

Mark: Exactly.

Pat: That's somebody's advantage over me. I can't do that.

Mark: Yeah, and it doesn't take too many of those to build up. There's the 1,000 true fans. That's the kind of magic number most people say this days to sustain a creative business. I can't think of anyone who

comes across in podcasting as approachable and as likable as you. By being that friend who you haven't met yet, if you like, it does create the relationship with your listeners or your readers.

It makes it more likely that they're going to tell their friends, you'll start seeing those tags on Facebook posts saying, "You've got to listen to this podcast," or read this book or this blog. That to me, that's the secret this days of making money from digital products. It's kind of taking it back to almost hand selling things and being someone who is approachable and that you can ask questions and that kind of stuff.

Pat: You're absolutely right. I know that when I go to conferences for example, people come up to me, who I've never ever met before and they start talking to me like we've been friends forever. Because they've heard my voice over and over again, or they've read my book. They hear me and they know me. They know me because I'm open about a lot of those things and I'm just not afraid to be me. I think that's the number one advantage that we all have, is that we're ourselves. Nobody is like us, but a lot of us are too afraid to be us sometimes on these platforms.

I think another part of it, for me specifically, is that I'm definitely open to being vulnerable and sharing these failures, I think that makes it more human. In this online world the more human you can be, the more likely that somebody's going to be attracted to you. As my good friend Chris Tucker says, if you're you, it's going to really work because your vibe attracts your tribe. That's what he says, "Your vibe attracts your tribe," and I love that.

Mark: I haven't heard that before. That's good.

James: You can feel it working with you as well. Pat, we're hitting the 45 minute mark for the interview and I know your daughter is going to be waking up soon. I do want to get a couple of extra bits in quickly.

James: We talked about podcasting a bit and I love your enthusiasm for I come from a background of radio and television. I know from my time in radio, I have such a fondness for this, the most personal of mediums. I used to do a radio show here in the UK and I always used to do Christmas Day breakfast. On Christmas day breakfast I would speak to the same people every year and they would say, "You're the only person I'll speak to today." You were their friend, they were all elderly by themselves or whatever and it was just a beautiful medium.

Podcasting is such a liberation for me that's come along because particularly, it sounds weird but with so many people listening on headphones, it becomes an even more intimate experience that you're speaking to people. That's why people feel they know you and I feel I know you almost just from this chat here, but people listen to you every week as we do. Your enthusiasm for that, that's good, but I do want to ask you a question about podcasting as well and I'm afraid I'm going to use the old tacky term "lead generation" going back a little bit as well.

We've covered it, why we say that. We're just getting into podcasting and it was really hot 2, 3 years ago and you've been a master of it.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE TO US AND DO YOU THINK IT'S STILL IN THE SAME POSITION THAT IT WAS A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO?

Pat: I think it's even hotter now to be honest, because now it's going mainstream. Now podcasting applications are on your phone and you can't delete it because Apple put it there because they know how popular podcasts are. Now podcast applications are being built into cars dashboards, so people are going to be listening to podcasts just with a click of a couple of buttons while they're driving already.

In terms of lead generation and building an audience in that way, because more and more people are listening now, you definitely have a great opportunity. More new listeners are coming every day and you want to be the show that they find and really get connected with and listen to on a regular basis.

At the same time of course, there's more podcasters who are coming into the game and actually trying to get involved too, trying to build their list and trying to get in front of an audience. Because of that there's more competition but like with anything, the cream will rise to the top. I think it's really important for you to be smart with your approach with your podcast and really target the right people, and also proactively go out there and promote your show.

The way it has changed a little bit from back when I first started, was that you could back in the day just put out a show and because there was fewer podcasts it would get exposure in New and Noteworthy, which you can still do but it hasn't had the same effects. The New and Noteworthy part of iTunes is a part that you automatically get on if you have good art work and the sound quality is good, and that gives you some free exposure to everybody really; especially in the categories that you put yourself into.

Now, there's a lot of more podcasts coming so you get lost in there really quickly. You're going to have to use tactics and strategies to really get in front of the people that you want to get in front of. There's a number of different ways to do that, it's through connecting with other podcasters and doing a share for share type thing. Here's a great tip, you can interview forum or group owners and when you do that, they feel special because they were on the show but what are they going to do after that show is over? They're going to share it with their entire forum, because it makes them look good and then you have this whole new set of listeners.

There're some strategies if you just start smart about it you can think of how to grow your podcast and continue to do that even today with so many podcasters out there. There're many more podcast listeners than ever and because of that I definitely still think it's hot and still think it's a Wild Wild West and it's a great opportunity for people.

James: Good. Well, that sounds encouraging. Mark, take all that onboard. My final question really for me, thinking about the way that you operate and the stuff that I like about the way that you operate, is the content that you produce is really good quality. Funny enough, that's not always the case even with some really great people in the same space as you and us, who are doing really well, but the kind of sound quality in the podcast is not good, the video quality is really rough.

YOU'VE SET QUITE HIGH STANDARDS. WHERE DOES THAT COME FROM? WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND AND WHERE'S THE DRIVE FOR THAT OR HOW HAVE YOU MADE IT HAPPEN?

Pat: That's an interesting question. I think there's a couple of reasons why that's my approach. I always want to be at the top of whatever I do and I do that. I know that some of these things will give me the advantage and that's really important.

Part of it is also because of the way I grew up. I was the kid who would come home with a 95% on a test and I'd be asked where the next 5% was. Also part of it is because I was just in architecture. In architecture, you can't just put half energy into a building because peoples' lives are at stake. You have to really do it right. That's how I approach my business because if you don't do it right, a building could crumble and fall on somebody or it could just not behave the way it's supposed to, all those sorts of things. My architecture background, and plus that's obviously design. Design is important to me too. I think that all plays a role in why I do what I do now.

That's not to say that you have to be perfect though. It's definitely not perfect and it's definitely progress over time. If you go to some of my earlier podcast episodes, yes the sound quality was okay, but the way that I spoke lacked confidence. I didn't even know what I was doing. Looking at my earlier YouTube videos, it's very apparent that I didn't know what I was doing, and that the visuals and the design wasn't there. You just learn over time as you do and that's been my number one educator, is execution. I execute as much as I can because I know I'll learn the most that way.

Mark: Just to tie that back, as we let you go Pat, to the book. The launch videos that you shot with I think, is it Caleb?

Pat: Yeah. Caleb my videographer.

Mark: They are extraordinary. I don't know if you've seen those James?

James: Yeah.

Mark: If you haven't we'll put them in the show next week.

James: We will, yeah.

Pat: They were a lot of fun.

Mark: With your son it was just beautiful, really, really clever and personal which is kind of ... I think that probably sums up SPI and what you've been doing pretty well on a Tuesday night.

Pat: Thank you Mark.

Mark: It's pretty obvious where people can find you, but is there any particular links you would

recommend people visit to get to know you?

Pat: I had to think about that because I'm in the West Coast so I'm like, trying to do the conversion or something. Anyway, thank you so much for having me on guys and I appreciate it. To all the other authors out there, best of luck. I hope this has been helpful to you. You can find the book at www.willitflybook.com and that's really where to go, or you could find me at www.smartpassiveincome.com and @patflynn on most social media platforms.

James: That's great Pat. Thank you very much. We're really looking forward to the sequel Let It Fly when that comes out.

Pat: Yeah, right? I have to give you credit for that.

James: We'll speak again on the show. Thank you so much for joining us Pat.

Pat: Thanks for having me guys. Bye

James: Well, there's no doubt, is there Mark, that he is an accomplished broadcaster as well as an internet entrepreneur for want of a better word.

Mark: That's a phrase coming from you James. Yeah, he is completely a super professional and one of the nicest guys I've spoken to that I have met online. He's just such a nice guy, so easy to like, and that's one of the reasons why he's doing so well with everything that he touches right now.

James: What I really liked about him, we picked up on it a few times in the interview, is this idea that you're not a snake oil salesman. There're lots and lots of people in the organizations on the internet that are more or less, they're shallow. He advocates having something of value that's going to work for the person that has joined you and that's the only way that you can operate.

That's absolutely something I know that you've been really strong about right from the beginning of this SPF project. A lot of the stuff that we've done has been of value and is completely free for people, is because you want to help them and of course there's a business behind it as well, but it's got to be substantial.

Mark: Exactly. That's what it's all about for me. When it comes to some of the things, the transparency with the income reports, that is, I'm not ashamed to say, that's inspired directly by what Pat's been doing for several years now. Transparency is important, integrity and helping people, and that really shone through with the interview with Pat.

James: Okay. Great. Don't forget, as Mark mentioned the income reports are available, they're alongside the podcast. You should get it in the part of your subscription. There will be another one coming along shortly. We also have coming up shortly an interview with Marie Force, who's a fantastic author and somebody else who kind of owns our space more than anything else. She's really shown a way, particularly a way of engaging with readers and how using ... When you get that relationship right with your readers, that's such a great benefit to everyone involved. That's a good interview as well, isn't it Mark?

Mark: Yeah, really, really worth waiting for that one coming soon.

James: Okay. We look forward to catching up with you soon. Thank you so much for joining us on the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. We'll see you next time.

Mark: Bye, bye.

CHAPTER 3

INTERVIEW WITH HYBRID AUTHOR MARIE FORCE



In podcast number 3, Mark and James are joined by the sensational Marie Force. Marie has developed a seven figure publishing operation with a mix of both self publishing and traditional publishing deals. They discuss her marketing tips as well as Marie's advice to authors setting out to build a platform for better sales. They also discuss her unique approach to reader relationships, which involve annual gatherings in her native Rhode Island.

SHOW NOTES

- In the introduction Mark talks about the ways he uses Scrivener writing software, and about his latest book launch.
- Marie Force shares the strategy she had from the beginning of her writing career of connecting with her readers and staying in touch with them.

- On the genesis of Marie's Reader Weekends and the events that take place at this annual gathering.
- Also the ROI that Marie gets from the event.
- Marie's beginnings as a writer and her early struggles with frustration, and her progress from there to running a multi-million dollar author business with several employees.
- On Marie's writing process and production, her monthly word count and the tools she uses.
- Marie's thoughts on working with a traditional publisher.
- The marketing strategies that are most successful for Marie, including TV advertising.
- The one piece of advice Marie would give new authors.
- On genre specific covers, and learning new lessons all the time.
- Why a long-term outlook matters to indie authors who want to build careers.

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH MARIE FORCE

James: Hello, and welcome to podcast #3 from the Self Publishing Formula. My name is James Blatch. With me, as ever, is ...

Mark: Mark Dawson.

James: I'm always going to make you say your name. You have to be prepared for that.

Mark: Just in case I forget.

James: Yeah, or you could call yourself "Dave Clifton" for fans of Alan Partridge who was in reference constantly, and there will be lots of Americans scratching their heads saying, "Why do they keep mentioning this man Alan Partridge?"

Go onto YouTube now, I would say, if you're not familiar with Alan Partridge because you need to be. Let's talk about our podcast today. We have a fantastic guest today. We have Marie Force who has become stratospheric in the world of indie publishing. She is going to pull back the sheets and tell us exactly how she did that and what she thinks is going to happen in the future. It's a really great interview, so stay tuned. Keep listening it's just in a few moment's time. We also just have a quick chat at the beginning of where we are ourselves.

Just to remind you, if you've listened to the introduction and the first couple of podcasts and Mark obviously is a very experienced and successful indie author who's getting a really good income and got a really good system going, and that's really the heart of why we're doing this because it's a great time to talk about all the methodologies that are going to work and help each other out.

I'm a first-time author currently writing a fiction book, a thriller set on a royal air force station in the mid 1960s, and so the other half I guess is going to be my journey as a bumbling amateur trying to hang on the coattails of the giants ahead of me.

Mark, I've got some questions for you as a newb in this business. I'm using Scrivener on your recommendation. A lot of people use Scrivener, and I'm starting to work out that there is a lot more to Scrivener than meets the eye. You kind of open it up and start writing. Then you look on the left-hand side and see the binder.

HOW MUCH DO YOU USE IT FOR ORGANIZATION, OR DO YOU DO THAT ON POST-IT NOTES ON A BIT OF PAPER AND THEN JUST WRITE IN SCRIVENER? DO YOU USE THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE SOFTWARE?

Mark: I think I probably use about 50% of it. There are bits that I don't use and don't understand, but that's not to say that I couldn't teach myself how to use those if I needed to. The tips with something like this, and I've made the journey across from Word, which I've used in the first four or five of my books and got into Scrivener on the back of basically everyone recommends it. I was like, "There must be something to this." I checked it out and it's as good as advertised.

I think the trick with using it properly is just to use what you need to make your process as efficient as possible. We'll talk maybe a bit later in terms of crafting and other episode about pantsing and plotting, but I am a mixture between a plotter and a pantsier, so I will use the binder in Scrivener, and I'll break it down into parts, and then chapters, and then scenes. I will, as I'm going along writing I kind of think, "I need a scene somewhere in the future where this happens," and I'll add that in just as a kind of a headline. Then I'll think, "In order to get to where I am now this needs to happen," and I'll go backwards and I'll slot that in.

What that enables me to do, usually on a Fridays I'll go through the scenes that I've got laid out and I'll highlight the ones that either need to be edited, I'll put that in one color, or written if they haven't been written yet, put that in red, for example. Then when I start working again on Monday and say I fancy

writing some dialogue, I'll find one of those red scenes that hasn't been started yet and one that needs dialogue. It was always a good place to start with is to start with a conversation. Then I'll start writing.

I'll do the conversation. I'll go back and add some tags in. I'll go back and describe it. Scrivener makes it so easy to do that. It's just not possible with the same level of ease on a Word document. It just isn't built for those hundred-thousand-word documents. Scrivener lets you kind of chop things down into bite-size segments and then attack them like that. It makes it less daunting and much more flexible.

James: That's really good to hear. I am using it structurally as much as I can, but I think I'm learning. As you rightly point out, even you're not using the full weight of the software; it's a lot to it. The word count, which for me I can only see an individual what I call "chapters." I'm not sure quite what Scrivener calls them. Click on the plus and it's going to tell me ... Oh no, it just immediately just added one, a new folder. They're called "folders" or "new text" on this here folder, which I've called "parts" because I've renamed them, and then text.

YOU GET THE WORD COUNT WITHIN THE TEXT, BUT YOU DON'T GET AN OVERALL WORD COUNT FOR YOUR BOOK. YOU DO THEN HAVE TO GO THROUGH EACH TEXT AND ADD UP THE WORDS?

Mark: No. You can do that. If you go to project and project targets it will tell you what your word count, and it's for the whole document.

James: You see, that is a brilliant little tip. Let me do that. Oh my goodness, there you are. Okay, I've done 18,000 since I've started rewriting this. That's quite good.

Mark: It's good?

James: Yeah, I've got the best of it. It's those little tips that make the difference to newbs like me. I knew you'd know the answer to that.

WHERE ARE YOU AT THE MOMENT, MARK, SO WE KNOW IN TERMS OF YOUR BOOK-WRITING? YOU'VE HAD A LAUNCH THIS YEAR WHICH WENT PRETTY WELL, I THINK.

Mark: Yeah, it was amazing. I launched just outside the top 100 on Amazon.com, which was fantastic. It's a book called "The Ninth Step." It's still at #1 in its categories, starting really strongly both in the U.S. and

U.K. and doing really, really strongly on Apple because I've made a big play this year on developing sales in Apple. We can talk in another episode about how best strategies for making those other platforms work hard for you.

Apple is my second best market behind Amazon.com, and in front of Amazon.co.uk this month. A good chunk of that is because The Ninth Step is selling like hotcakes over there.

James: Congratulations on the launch. There are future episodes definitely on platforms, but there's also a future episode specifically on launches. We'll get a good guess for that because it's such an important part of it, although we do touch on those subjects with our guest today, Marie Force. I think we've gone on enough, and we've got a big guest waiting in the wings, so lets here it from Marie.

We're delighted to welcome Marie Force to the SPF podcast. Most of you I know are going to be very familiar with Marie who is indeed a force in publishing. A hybrid: She straddles both the traditional publishers, people like HarperCollins or Harlequin, part of HarperCollins now. Is it Barkley or Berkeley, Marie, because we say Bark-

Marie: Berkley.

James: It's Berkley.

Marie: Yeah, Berkley.

James: I thought it would be because that's part of Penguin, of course, isn't it?

Marie: It is, Random House Penguin, Penguin Random House. I always mix that up, yes.

James: And they are traditional sides but I think what's going to catch ... most people will know from our area of influence if you like, is the indie publishing aspect to your work.

LET ME GET THIS RIGHT, YOU'VE SOLD OVER TWO MILLION IN THE GANSETT ISLAND SERIES ALONE IN WHAT, THE LAST FIVE OR SIX YEARS?

Marie: 2.5 million.

James: That's well over two million.

Marie: Sorry, but that .5, you know, got to get that in there, since 2011.

James: That's incredible, and you live in Rhode Island. Obviously you're American but you've previously lived in Europe. You traveled a little bit with your husband who is in the navy, so you're familiar with our part of the world over here as well.

Marie: I am but I have yet to spend any real time in the U.K., which is going to be rectified very soon.

James: You're going to have to tell us when you're coming over to the U.K. because we're going to show you where the best ale houses are.

Marie: That's the whole idea. You've got to have friends there before you go.

James: That's great. Marie, welcome to the SPF podcast. Thank you so much indeed for joining us. I know you are a relatively modest person reading some of the things that you write and you tweet, but you are a huge influence, I think, and an inspiration to a lot of people in indie publishing because you've just got it right.

You've got it right with the writing. You've got it right with the marketing, and over the next sort of 30 or 40 minutes we really want to pick your brains on that if that's okay?

Marie: Of course. I'm happy to.

James: A lot of people have asked about the buildup to the amount of books that you've sold, Marie, and one of the questions onboard was about mailing lists and contact with your readers. I know that's a huge part of how you operate.

CAN YOU PERHAPS TAKE US BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF HOW YOU BEGAN THAT PROCESS OF BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR READERS AND MARKETING TO THEM?

Marie: Sure. One of the things that I've done right from the very beginning is every single time a reader gets in touch with me in any way I try to capture them. And by capture I mean get them to like me on Facebook or follow me on Twitter, or in the beginning, before social media was as big as it is now, I would ask if I could put their email address on my mailing list, which at that time was an Excel spreadsheet. But I've tried to like, from the beginning, not let anyone get away.

I also feel like just having them feel like I want them in my circle has helped with a little bit of a person touch, where I'm going back to them and say, "Hey, thanks so much for getting in touch with me. Have you joined my mailing list? It's the best way to stay in touch long term." It's really been very beneficial to having that built-in audience available any time I need to tell them something. Really, I recommend to anyone from the very beginning, any time a reader writes to you, obviously with good news versus some of the things they love to say, then ask them if they're willing to join you for the long haul, if you will.

I FIND THAT USUALLY AFTER SOMEBODY COMMITS TO THREE OR FOUR BOOKS, THEY'RE PRETTY MUCH POTENTIALLY A READER FOR LIFE IF THEY LIKE WHAT YOU'RE DOING, AND SO GETTING THEM ON THAT MAILING LIST CAN BE REALLY CRITICAL.

Mark: I completely agree with that, and I was quite a little slow to the party in even setting up the mailing, so I probably wasted about six months spinning my wheels when books were being sold but I wasn't collecting that data, which was stupid on my part. I think that's only half the battle, and you said that really nicely.

It's not just getting into the mindset of collecting the email address or getting them onto the Facebook page; it is actually, like it's really critically important that you kind of come across in your communications as friendly and open.

Marie: Welcoming, yes. "Welcome to my party. Come to my party."

Mark: Yeah, and I still get in emails today and comments on Facebook from people who can't believe that an author is actually responding.

Marie: I know. I do too, and I find that to be amazing because really where would we be without them? I always say that to them. It's like customer service 101 to me, and a lot of it goes back, especially on Facebook, it goes back to the hand-selling that the booksellers used to do for us in the stores where they would have an author they loved, and they would recommend their books on the floor. We're kind of doing that for ourselves now. I try to answer every question that's asked to me on Facebook, which is quite a daunting task some days, but I try. I'm right in there, right on the front lines, and I do have some people that help me with that but most of it is me.

I just feel there's no substitute for that personal touch, and they really appreciate it. When my new book comes out they feel like their "friend's" book is coming out because we have that little bond or we've joked around about our kids or whatever. Teenagers make for really good Facebook fodder. It's just that personal touch right from the very beginning every time that they reach out to you or contact you in any way to make sure that you're bringing that to them, and I really feel that that has paid off for me tremendously.

Mark: Just before we came online, actually, I had a quick look at the YouTube video for one of your Reader Weekends which just looks amazing.

Marie: It's so much fun.

MARK: IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HEAR WHAT THAT'S ABOUT AND WHERE THE IDEA CAME FROM AND HOW THAT HAS PANNED OUT FOR YOU.

Marie: We do have a weekend every ... Now it's our third annual. We started out doing it once, and my team had so much fun. They were like, "Oh my God, we have to do this again next year," so suddenly we're doing it every year now.

Basically it's all part of my overall strategy to try not to travel as much as I was. I still have a child ... He's not a child; he's 17 and he's taller than me, but I still have a kid at home. I have one in college too but I want to be where he is until he's out of school because I know now how fast the high school years go by, and I was invited to go to the big romance conference in Hawaii. I would have loved to have gone, but I

want to be where he is.

He couldn't have gone with me, so the reader weekend is about bringing them to me, and this year we have people coming from Australia. Last year we had people that are from Ireland. It's been a tremendously cool thing, and what I'm finding too is people are coming year after year because they're meeting friends there and they want to see them again next year. It's becoming like a family reunion in some ways. Last year we had 200 readers. This year we expect to have 300. We're going to max out actually at 300.

What we do is we have a party Friday night centered on the Gansett Island series, Tiki Bar party, and then I take them to the real-life Gansett Island, Block Island, Rhode Island on Saturday on a ferry. Then we spend the day out there. Then we come back, and Sunday I do a Q&A, and a breakfast, and a book-signing. They love it. They just can't get enough, and we have so much fun. I actually have a professional meeting planner who's my full-time assistant, and so having her on board made it possible for me to do something like this. She knows how to negotiate with hotels and all that and make sure we're getting the best deal and not paying for rooms we're not using and thinks like that.

If I didn't have her I wouldn't be able to do it. That's Julie, who's my majordomo. She runs my whole business, actually, and this is just one small part of what she does for me, but that, having that skill set on board allowed me to be able to do these kind of things, and we really enjoy it. It's a lot of fun.

Mark: I guess there are two other really useful, amazing benefits out of that. I guess at the end of that you've got a massive spring in your step.

Marie: Step comes after I sleep for eight hours. On for three straight days is really exhausting, believe it or not.

MARK: AND THE OTHER THING IS THESE AREN'T JUST READERS; THEY'RE KIND OF FRIENDS AND AMBASSADORS.

Marie : They are. My husband asked me too. One time he said, "Where is the return on the investment?" Because obviously it cost me more than I make on it. We charge a small amount for them to come. We've just found that if people don't have some skin in the game they tend to cancel. It has cost me money but the return on investment is when people go home and tell everyone they know what they just did for the

weekend, and next thing you know everyone and their wives are reading the books. Then they're coming next year, and that's how it keeps getting bigger, so it's been really fun. It's really exciting. I live in Newport, Rhode Island, so it's a resort community, a destination, and bringing them here at that time of year, it couldn't be better.

James: I think the tone you have with your readers is really important. You make it sound like it's a very natural and obvious way to interact with your readers, but I think some people are a bit confused. We see Hollywood stars being quite aloof and playing the big characters, and I think some authors maybe feel that they've got to be like that. They've got to be this important person.

Actually, what I love about your relationship, Marie, it's a very unpretentious relationship with your readers. You're writing books. It sounds to me like you love writing them because the readers like reading them, and there's a sort of equal partnership there, not you as the great one-on-one side, and people worshiping on the other. That seems to really pay off. Although I'm sure we all have an ego and every writer has an ego, probably spurs you to write a bit.

BUT ACTUALLY YOU COME ACROSS VERY MUCH ON A LEVEL WITH YOUR READERS, AND I THINK THAT IS PROBABLY HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT IT.

Marie: Thank you. I appreciate that. I try. One of the things I like to hear, because obviously my life has changed a lot in the last five years, I like to hear from the people who knew me before that I'm exactly the same person I was before.

I like to think that the books are me; I'm the books. If I become somebody different then so too do the books. The books seem to be working the way they are, so I'm trying not to let it go to my head. I'm surrounded by a lot of people that keep me humble, believe me.

JAMES: THAT'S WHAT CHILDREN ARE GOOD FOR, RIGHT?

Marie: Yes. Oh my God, teenagers and young adults, there's nobody better. They'll bring you right down to size, let me tell you.

Mark: That's a good segue.

Marie: I have a great group around me. All the important people who were important to me before are still here, and a lot of them work for me now. I have my niece working for me. I have my ex-sister-in-law, who is really just one of my best friends, my brother's ex-wife. I got custody of her in their divorce. It's all the same people who were with me before are with me now, and my very good friend is my CFO. She keeps all the business ... the accounting straight for us, and just having that team around me, it keeps me very grounded because it's all the people that were in my life before.

MARK: IF YOU COULD MAYBE JUST TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE YOU FOUND THIS AMAZING SUCCESS OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS. WHAT WAS IT LIKE? WHAT WOULD WE HAVE FOUND IF WE WERE TALKING TO YOU SIX YEARS AGO?

Marie: You would have found a very frustrated author. I had a lot of books written already. It's funny to me too that my greatest frustration led to success beyond my wildest dreams because I love the quote that, "Luck is the convergence of preparation and opportunity."

When KDP opened its doors to authors, allowing us to self-publish on the Kindles, I was so ready because I had been rejected everywhere. I was published with a small indie publisher early on that didn't really do too much for me to grow my career. I didn't make any money. I made \$2,500 in 2010. All of 2010 I made \$2,500 on my books.

I had a full-time job working for a company that I loved. I worked remotely for a company in D.C. as a communications director, and I absolutely loved it. I worked for them for 16 years. I loved my day job. It was a great job, so it wasn't like I was jonesing to get out of there, but I also wanted to be writing books. I was writing books at night with kids underfoot, sitting right next to me on the sofa. Some of the stuff I wrote while they were right next to me. It's a good thing Child Services doesn't know, but I was just kind of doing both at the same time.

Then in 2011 when KDP really took off for me and I published the first of the Gansett Island series three months in a row, and my life has literally never been the same since then. I made well into six figures in 2011, and I left my job at the end of 2011, which really I hadn't planned to do for like another 10 years because I had kids going to college. There's no way I would have been able to afford not to keep that job, so to have it happen the way it did, just from zero to 90 literally overnight my head was spinning. My whole family's head was spinning for years after it.

Then literally one year on my own and then I hired Julie, and then one year after that I hired Lisa. Next

thing I know I've got four full-time employees working with me, and we're busy all the time. They are the reason I can get audiobooks out on release day and things like that. We have a very well-oiled machine in place now, but it just happened really fast, and one of the things I learned very quickly is just how important it is to manage the business in addition to writing the books.

There's a lot of mistakes you can make that can cost you a lot of money, especially in the U.S. with the way the tax system is here. If you're not minding the store and running the business too, you can end up losing your shirt in taxes. So there was a lot to learn very quickly, but it's been the most fun I've ever had in my life too, so that's certainly not complaining.

Mark: Before you took on the staffing, because I think I'm probably at that level now, and I'm at that kind of level of six figures to maybe seven figures this year, so all pretty amazing, but I'm still working by myself. I don't have anyone to help me, and I know that I should get into that kind of mindset and start thinking about getting someone on board.

Marie: I waited really until I knew I was going to be able to sustain it. 2012, '13, '14, '15 have all been multiple seven-figure years, so I wanted to make sure that I had enough to take care of myself, my family, and cover what we needed, kids in college, blah, blah, blah, before I took on a staff.

I'm really glad that I waited because I didn't want to ever be worried that I wasn't going to be able to pay them or whatever. They were leaving jobs to come and work for me, and I told them, "You're coming to work for a startup. I hope that I'm going to be able to give you a job for as long as you want one, but I'm not making anybody any guarantees." They all know that.

Mark: Yeah, it's amazing.

James: That's a critical part of any business is knowing when to expand, and obviously expanding too early can be as bad as expanding late.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT MARK WAS ASKING ABOUT THAT, AND I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE SAME THING: HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT TIME WAS RIGHT?

Marie: It was mostly about that fact that I was working ... I was writing full-time, and so my output was

changing exponentially as well. I couldn't keep up with all the demands of making sure the e-books ... They call it "self-publishing," which is a total misnomer. I have a lot of people that help me, and having especially Julie working with me on that part of it, she takes care of all the audiobook details, for example, and my audiobooks are extremely profitable.

We found that getting them out on release day is exponentially better than even one week later as far as recovering the cost in the first month, so just having that ability to turn things around like that, I give her all the credit for that. Then of course having Lisa on the other side running the accounting and the business side of it and making sure ... She comes to me, "Oh, we've got to pay this. We've got to pay ..." I am so happy to have my forward key when I get some crazy tax form for my foreign agent and I'm like, "Oh my God." Forward it right to Lisa and it's out of my life.

James: I know you get asked a lot about your writing, but I'm going to ask you as well because you're a prolific author and it's something that we're all interested in, all of us. I'm starting out. Mark is a lot more experience.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW YOU WRITE, HOW YOU EDIT, HOW QUICKLY YOU WRITE AND YOUR PROCESS.

Marie: I have journalism training, and the first thing that we're taught is fast and efficient. I try not to waste any words that I don't need to use. I write fast. I've always written fast. I used to write my best when I was on deadline. I used to drive my editors crazy when I worked for a newspaper. They'd be hanging over me. I'm like, "I got this. Don't worry." I seem to do better when there's that kind of pressure.

I don't like having deadlines. I actually actively hate them, but I somehow seem to be able to write a full-length book, and for me that's 90,000 to 100,000 words in two months. Really, I can't tell you how. I just do it. I literally start at the beginning with a blank page and go straight through, and I'm editing the whole time, going back, re-reading. I just did a re-read today of the first 10,000 of the book I'm working on now, and I clean it up when I re-read. By the time I finish I've got a solid, it's not even a first draft; it's finished. I turn that over to editors and proofreaders on the indie side and audio and all of that. It just takes off and goes from there.

JAMES: AND THE STRUCTURE IS IN YOUR HEAD, MARIE, FROM THE BEGINNING?

Marie: No, not always. A lot of it, I literally make up as I go along. Sometimes I write romantic suspense too, and I have a little bit more committed to what I plan to do with it beforehand, but one of the other

things to keep in mind when you look at this pace, I'm also writing four series. Two of them I have been writing for seven years, Gansett and Fatal. Green Mountain I've now been writing for three years and Quantum for two, so none of it's new to me. It's like literally switching from one group of people to another, one setting to another.

It's all very familiar to me, so if I was doing standalone title where I had to start from scratch and create the world and the characters and everything from the beginning, I would not be able to do that in two months.

IT'S THE SERIES-WRITING THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO PRODUCE AT THIS LEVEL.

Mark: What are you working on?

Marie: I'm working on Gansett 15, if you can believe it.

MARK: WOW, AND IN TERMS OF PRACTICALLY, ARE YOU IN SCRIVENER OR WORD?

Marie: Word, yep, straight up Word.

Mark: Wow, that's interesting.

Marie: Yep, I have series bibles in Excel that I refer to frequently, and other than that, no. I see Scrivener came along long after I was already doing this in Word, and I just didn't really see the point just taking the time to stop and learn something new when what I was doing was working, that there's probably a lot of benefit to it that I would really appreciate, but I don't have the time to do a lot of things like that that I really wish I could.

I'd love to take a forensic science class. I've even looked into it, but I don't have time. Just today I was by the medical examiner's office in my state, and I was like, "Oh, I'd love to go knock on their door and ask them if they'd give me a tour." I don't have time.

James: That's because you haven't drawn breath in five years.

Marie: I know. It's my head is spinning. I was just talking to my team today about, "I don't know how much longer I can keep up this pace. It's killing me." I wrote a 97,000 word Fatal book, and 70,000 words of that were written in January because I had the audacity to take some time off for the holidays. That's no fun, to be honest with you.

JAMES: HOW MANY HOURS A DAY DO YOU WRITE? THAT MAY HAVE BEEN AN EXCEPTION IN JANUARY, IN A NORMAL KIND OF MONTH.

Marie: January was ugly, and I don't expect it the rest of the year. I don't expect to have another month like that, although March is now shaping up because February got screwed up on a number of different levels, but no, it's just probably the actual writing, four or five maybe, everything else, another four or five. I don't know. I just do what needs to be done until my eyes give out and I just can't deal anymore. I find that when I'm clicking around on Facebook a lot the writing is done.

MARK: DO YOU HAVE KIND OF A WORD COUNT TARGET THAT YOU HIT EVERY DAY?

Marie: I did in January. I was writing 3,000 a day. I normally do not, no. I've never had word count goals because when I was first doing this I had a full-time job and two little kids, and I just didn't want to set myself up to feel like a failure if I couldn't meet them. I just never wrote like that. I just wrote as much as I could every chance I got, and that's kind of what I'm still doing, although it's more often now because I don't have the other job.

Maid for Love, which is the first one, is the shortest of all the books because we were trying so hard to sell it to a traditional publisher before self-publishing really became a viable option. We actually trimmed it down. I can't even believe this now when I look back at it what a lucky break it was that they all said no, but we trimmed it down for one of the Harlequin lines.

Oh my God, thank God they said no because literally Gansett was my life-changing series obviously. Everything is credited to get back to Gansett. The fact that I was able to leave my job, and when my husband was laid off he was able to stay laid off, and my kid's in college in New York City, and that's not cheap. All of that was made possible by Gansett Island. Every single publisher in the romance business said no to Maid for Love.

MARK: I SUPPOSE THESE DAYS YOU WOULDN'T SELL THOSE BOOKS TO A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER FOR ... MAYBE YOU WOULD BUT IT WOULD BE AN ENORMOUS DEAL THAT WOULD TURN YOUR HEAD.

Marie: My new philosophy with dealing with traditional publishers is to get all the money up front. All of it, because now, you know what? Then whatever royalty rate they're going to pay me after the fact or

whatever, 25% of net or whatever bologna it is, I don't care. That's my philosophy now.

JAMES: HOW QUICKLY IN A FEW YEARS IT HAS GONE FROM BEING KIND OF THE GLAMOROUS SIDE OF THE BUSINESS AND PEOPLE USING EXPRESSIONS LIKE "VANITY PUBLISHING" FOR SELF-PUBLISHING, BUT ANYBODY IN THE KNOW NOW LOOKS AT SOMEONE WHO SIGNS A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING DEAL AND MANY CASES SCRATCHES THEIR HEAD, THINKING, "WHAT ON EARTH WOULD YOU BE DOING THAT?"

Marie: Right, and you know what? There's a lot of things still. I have good relationships with both my publishers. I have nothing bad to say about them. I've been treated very well. Obviously I came into traditional publishing at a different point in my career than a lot of other people did. I have a lot of friends who left traditional publishing to go indie, but I never had the big New York deal or the big New York publisher before. They didn't want me, and so now it's a whole different perspective because I went into it later, so the treatment is different. The marketing is different. The advances are very different. All of it is different.

Last year I signed the biggest deal of my career with Harlequin's, HQN, for the next four books in the Fatal series. That was well worth doing. I wanted to keep the series going. They owned the first eight or nine books at that point. To keep the series where it started that was a good deal for me to continue doing that, and they made it worth my while.

James: I'm not that familiar with the tradition publishing industry. Mark, you'll know more about this.

I WONDER IF 10 YEARS AGO PUBLISHING HOUSES WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO HAVE AN AUTHOR PUBLISHING WITH THEMSELVES ALONGSIDE THEIR DEAL. THEY NORMALLY SIGN ALL OF THAT UP IN ONE GO, BUT THAT DOES SHOW SOME PROGRESS.

Marie: I don't really think they love it still, to be honest with you.

James: No, but it's some progress, isn't it? Because the trad industry, they need to change.

Marie: No, it's tremendous progress, tremendous. I've been doing this for almost ... I've been actually published for eight years this year. I heard one author say at a conference that more had changed in the last two years than in the 20 that preceded it, and I believe that because it's all changed so quickly.

ONE THING THAT'S TOTALLY AWESOME NOW IS THAT THE AUTHORS ARE GETTING

THE RESPECT THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN ALL ALONG. WE'RE NOT TREATED LIKE COGS IN THE WHEEL OR THE DREADED CONTENT PROVIDERS; WE'RE MORE LIKE PARTNERS IN THIS.

I often say to one of my publishers or the other, "We should be doing fill in the blank," and they listen to me and they do it because I ask them to. That wouldn't have happened even five years ago.

Mark: I can definitely see that change. I consult for some traditional publishing interests. You've seen the kinds of things that I'm doing and other indies are doing, and want to get onto that themselves, so there are probably five or six years behind us when it comes to some of these things.

Marie: Yes. For example, my Facebook following is like 10 times the size of one of my publishers. You know what I mean? It's like the authors are doing thing so innovatively, and it's like trying to pull them along sometimes.

Mark: Yeah, I get that. You see that a lot. You see Facebook ads coming into my feed from traditional publishers in this country, and they do the basic errors, things that are really unforgivable, like the image size is wrong so Facebook has cropped it. I've seen this once before, actually, cropped it so badly that the title of the book and the author's name were both invisible, so I'm not entirely sure how that add was going to perform. Not very well was probably my guess.

Marie: They are still learning.

James: That brings us back to content marketing.

OBVIOUSLY I'VE VERY KEEN ON HEARING SOME OF YOUR TIPS, AND PARTICULARLY WITH THE GANSETT ISLAND SERIES. WHAT WERE THE MARKETING TACTICS YOU USED AND WHAT WERE THE ONES YOU THINK BROUGHT YOU THE MOST SUCCESS?

Marie: The thing that has really been the juggernaut for Gansett is having Maid for Love free, which is the first book. It was funny because before everyone knew that that was such a good thing to do I did it in 2012, in June of 2012 when the sixth book came out, and I had no idea what to expect. It was a total game changer as far as just the number of people that were engaging with the series. Two books later was the first book in the Gansett series, was the first of my books to make the New York Times, at #6 too. Like, whoa.

Everything just exploded after that for Gansett and for my other books too. The "fallout" was tremendous, just the follow-through: you hook them on Gansett and then they go on to read everything else. That has been my experience with most of my readers, I would honestly say. Some of them are hesitant about reading the Fatal series because they're afraid it's going to be scary or whatever. Whenever somebody comes of Facebook to say that I always step back and let the readers take care of that. They let them know, "No, no, no, you have to read Fatal." Then they come back a week later. They're like, "Oh my God, I just read all nine books, and I don't know what just happened to my seven days."

The readers take care of things like that for me, but having that Book 1 free, and it's still to this day, I know a lot of people say "free" isn't what it used to be, and agree it's not necessarily what it used to be because so many people are doing it, but I'm still having amazing results with freebies. I really am, and I just did Books 1 through 3, the box set, at Christmas time for Gansett, and brought in thousands of new readers to the series that have gone on to buy all the books. Then I'm seeing the uptick in the other series too.

Free is still working tremendously well for me. Maid for Love will be free solidly without interruption for four years in June, and I'm still seeing between I want to say 7,000 and 10,000 a month just on Amazon alone of downloads there.

MARK: THAT'S IMPRESSIVE, AND YOU DO THAT WITH ANY PROMOTION?

Marie: A little here and there, yeah, definitely. Also right now I've got two other series starters free, so I'm juicing all three of them together. We did that for some T.V. ads that we ran in my local area because a lot of my books were set in Rhode Island so we ran TV ads in Rhode Island, got a huge response to that from people saying, "I had no idea that we had an author in our state writing about our state and lots of downloads of free books in all three series." That's been very beneficial too.

JAMES: COST-EFFECTIVE, MARIE? BECAUSE TV ADVERTISING SOUNDS EXPENSIVE TO ME.

Marie: It is. To me it was worth it to try it once and to see how it was received. The people that I worked with got us really great coverage. We were on everything from the morning news, to Saturday night live, to the afternoon talk shows, to HGTV, the Kardashians, you name it. People were seeing them everywhere, so it really was very beneficial in the sense of raising the profile locally, which it's the smallest state in the country but we still have a million people living here.

If you hook people on the fact that you're writing about places they know I thought that that would be worth trying. I can't say for sure will I get the money back. Probably not, but it's exposure, and it was worth it to try it once. We'll see. Maybe next year winter we'll do it again when everybody is stuck at home when it's cold. Maybe we'll try it again.

JAMES: THERE ARE STILL SOME DIE HARD STUDENTS AND PEOPLE STARTING OUT WRITING BOOKS WHO DISMISS THE IDEA OF GIVING AWAY A BOOK.

Marie: A lot of people do. One of my publishers won't do it.

James: Really? If anybody takes a parting glance at your career and comes away thinking, "I'm not going to give away a book," it doesn't make any sense. I scratch my head at that.

Marie: That, and the Fatal series, not for nothing, has also sold like 1.2 million. We've also had huge success by offering Book 1 for free. We've done it I think three or four different times now, and every single time the backlist just explodes, explodes. We do have the other publisher. We've got them down to 99 cents on Book 1, and that's going to be offered next month with BookBub, so we're very excited about that, but it's interesting to me to see that my least successful series in terms of just gross sales is the one series that's never had Book 1 as a freebie.

If you offer a book for free, I'm going to give away 100,000 copies of it in a week with BookBub, and that 100,000 is going to translate into 20,000 new readers across the series, and those numbers are just going to explode from there. Then you get not only them; you get their sisters, coworkers, cousins, aunts, next door neighbors. You get the whole kit and caboodle.

James: It's the very best marketing. You've got to start it, though, and you've done that.

YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA ORGANICALLY VERY SUCCESSFULLY. YOU'VE GOT A HUGE FOLLOWING ON FACEBOOK. DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AS WELL OR DO YOU ADVERTISE ELSEWHERE?

Marie: I do. I have Facebook advertising running almost all the time. In fact, my accountant, we were talking today about expenses and she told me that I was our biggest problem with Facebook advertising. I'm usually maxing out my account at every chance I get. I find that it's really very effective. I've gotten a lot of new readers from it. It's been definitely worth doing. I have somebody working with me now who has been fully educated by Mark Dawson and who knows all the tricks. You know Melissa. She's been

very good about getting me where I need to be with the advertising and kind of taking that on for me, which has been very helpful.

It's changing so fast all the time, and to try to keep up is just ... you know. It's better for me to write the books and let somebody else do that, and she's been great.

Mark: Yeah, that's true. I spend a good amount of money too on ads right now, and the problem I've had is that it's quite difficult. I've gone to agencies and said, "Would you take this on for me?" Isn't the cost that I'd have to spend to get someone to do that, so they look at me when I'm talking about some of the tactics I'm using. They don't know what I'm talking about, so why would I-

Marie : I know. You have to take the time to educate them.

Mark: Yeah, exactly. It's very frustrating because it takes me a little bit of time, not a huge amount, but it's time I would rather be spending writing.

Marie: Exactly. Going back to promotions and all of that, when you ask me about what made the difference for Gansett, not only the freebie, that was obviously #1, but writing more books and keeping them coming. Some years in there early days of Gansett I had four Gansett books out in one year, and the readers just love that. They love that they don't have to wait a long time, but then on the same token one time I went 10 months between Gansett books while I was writing Quantum, trying to sneak that in there. One of the best first week sales I ever had was when I waited 10 months. It's kind of like two schools of thought: Make them wait; make them drool.

James: It sounds like you're describing a relationship as well.

Marie: Yes, exactly.

James: Treat them mean.

Marie: I don't like to make them wait too long. I don't ever do that on purpose but if the muse is sending you in a new direction and you're going to write three books in three months and then put them out three weeks in a row, and you got this chance to do that, then it's kind of hard to say no to the muse when she's in that kind of mood.

Mark: We're touching on a lot of kind of medium to advanced tactics and strategies here, which is wonderful. I'm just thinking we've got quite a lot of questions from Facebook.

I ASKED FOR QUESTIONS THIS MORNING AND A LOT OF THESE WRITERS ARE AT THE EARLY STAGE OF THEIR CAREER, AND ONE OF QUESTIONS THAT CAME THROUGH AGAIN AND AGAIN WAS, "IF MARIE COULD DO ONE THING OR GIVE HERSELF ONE PIECE OF ADVICE FIVE YEARS AGO, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?"

Marie: Write more books. Write more books. Inventory is king, and having the ability to do a lot of different cool things because you have a lot of different books to mess around with has made it that much more ... I don't know. It's made it easier to expand my readership because I have a lot of things that I can play with.

I have four standalone books under my control. I have 15 Gansett books, including a novella under my control. I have four Treading Water books. I have four Quantum books. That's a lot of inventory. It's almost 30 self-published books, not to mention the box sets and all the things that go along with them that give me a lot of stuff, so to speak, to work with.

Just being able to do things like, for example, the box set #1 with the first three books for Gansett free at Christmas time this year, everybody was all over me about, "I can't believe you're giving three books away." Oh my God, the sell-through was unbelievable. What did I lose there? Nothing. I got readers that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

Mark: I can certainly agree with that.

THE WHOLE TAKEAWAY FROM THIS IF ANYONE WANTS ONE PARTICULAR TAKEAWAY IS IF GIVING SOMETHING AWAY IS SENSIBLE IF YOU'VE GOT YOUR EYE ON THIS BEING A CAREER RATHER THAN A FLASH IN THE PAN.

Marie: Right. And if you have enough inventory following the freebie. You don't want to do it when you only have one more book right behind it. You want to do it when you have five or six. I like to make the analogy, if you opened a store and you had a single pair of pants, and a single shirt, and a single pair of

shoes you wouldn't be in business very long because you'd be out of inventory. It's sort of the same thing. People who put out one or two books or even three or four and go crazy marketing them, when they read those three or four books they're done with you and they move on. Write 10 or 15 books and then go crazy marketing.

James: We've got a couple more questions we'll try and get in before we finish, Marie, if that's okay.

Marie: Sure.

JAMES: SAMUEL JAMES WHITE ON FACEBOOK ASKS, "DID YOU ENTER ROMANCE BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE PROFITABLE OR BECAUSE YOU HAVE A GENUINE LOVE FOR THE GENRE?"

Marie: I don't think you can do anything, spend as many hours doing what I do unless you have a genuine love for it. It's all I want to read. I have people tell me, "You have to read this thriller," the whole Girl on the Train sensation. I managed to read Gone Girl, but I was so happy to return to romance after that was done because I wanted the happy ending. I write what I love and what I love to read.

I was a Danielle Steel fan. I think I was reading Danielle Steel at the same time I was reading Nancy Drew, not that my mother knew that, so I've always been a romance reader and I write what I love to read, but it is very profitable. If you're going to write genre fiction the romance readers are voracious and they read more books than any other audience. If you're a prolific author and you're looking to write genre fiction, romance is a good place to be.

JAMES: IT'S A GOOD ONE, ISN'T IT? ALSO EROTIC FICTION, WHICH YOU'VE ALSO MOVED INTO A LITTLE BIT.

Marie: Yep.

James: And that's certainly since the e-reader revolution has been more helpful because when you sit on the subway people can't see what's on the cover of the book.

Marie: Yeah, and I find too a lot of people don't really care anymore what people see. That's kind of going by the wayside. I think Fifty Shades changed the way a lot of people look at stuff like that. It's just been great for the genre. My erotic romances have done exceptionally well, and I'm very committed to

continuing that series. I like writing it.

JAMES: THERE'S ANOTHER QUESTION HERE FROM KELLY COLLINS, WHO ASKED, "I THINK YOU'RE IN THE NAVY BECAUSE YOUR HUSBAND WAS. DID THAT INFLUENCE YOUR WRITING CAREER OR THE STORIES THAT YOU TELL?"

Marie: Not really but I will say that some of the places we lived did, and for instance we were stationed for three years in the Washington, D.C. area. The company I worked for before I left full-time was in D.C. and I was there a lot. I don't think I would have written the Fatal series if I didn't know D.C. quite as well as I do. So some of the places that we went made it possible for me to write books about them. The Fatal series is definitely an offshoot of the time I spent in D.C.

James: One more from Facebook.

ALANA FOLEY ASKS, "HOW DO YOU GET NOTICED AND KEEP YOUR HEAD ABOVE WATER AS AN AUTHOR IN ONE OF THE MOST COMPETITIVE GENRES AROUND?" WE'VE KIND OF COVERED A LOT OF THIS, BUT IT'S STILL A GOOD QUESTION, ISN'T IT?

Marie: This is one of those things that it's the non-quantifiable ... It's the books. I hate to say it that way because you always sound like kind of a jerk but if readers didn't like my books we wouldn't be having this conversation. It's the books, the books, the books. Every single aspect of my focus all the time is on the books.

People say, "Oh, she's good at marketing and branding and all that." Yeah, I'm okay at that. I did a lot of that in my old job. I understand how websites work and yadda, yadda, yadda, but readers either like your books or they don't. If they do then you're golden, and they're going to tell people. That's the publicity and the promotion you cannot pay for is when somebody is up all night reading one of your books and they go to work looking like hell, and then they tell all their coworkers, "Oh my God, you got to read this book, blah, blah, blah."

It's the books. I can't tell you where the pixie dust is there. I feel very, very, very, very, very fortunate that whatever I'm doing the readers seem to like, but I can't tell you the why or the how of that.

James: There are a lot of readers out there if you look at Facebook alone and it's billion-odd users, so I think we also say to people that there will be a market for your books. Not everybody writes in huge popular genres.

Marie: Right, and that's why you have to manage your expectations too. If you write in a genre that has a very small readership then you're not going to be talking about selling three million books in five years or whatever because there's just not that kind of audience out there. A lot of times too I say to people, "If you give away 100,000 copies of Book 1 and nobody buys Book 2, take a look at what's wrong with Book 1." Nobody ever wants to hear that. Of course we don't want to hear that.

Mark: It's tough love sometimes.

Marie: It is. It's awful to have to say that to someone: "Well, have you taken another look at Book 1?"

Mark: Really it's free market research in a way, isn't it?

Marie: It is.

Mark: You make it free so that you make it easy for people to buy it and then read.

AMAZON AND ALL OF THE COMPANIES HAVE DATA ON WHERE PEOPLE STOP READING AND THEY DON'T MAKE THAT AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE, BUT THAT WOULD BE INTERESTING, WOULDN'T IT, IF WE COULD SEE WHERE ON OUR FREEBIES WHERE PEOPLE STOPPED READING?

Marie: Kobo told me I had one of the best 100% read-throughs on KWL of any of the authors that they do business with, and I was like, "Shut up!" They showed me the little spreadsheet and everything. I was like, "Oh, well." I had never really given much thought to like when do people quit, because really all I'm looking at is what the sell-through looks like. So that was very nice to see that they're having good experience, the Kobo readers are.

James: That's certainly one of the explanations for your ongoing successes, isn't it?

PEOPLE OBVIOUSLY ADORE THE BOOKS. THEY'RE PAGE-TURNERS. THEY GET TO THE END AND THEY WANT THE NEXT ONE.

Marie: That's the #1 reason. It's the #1 reason. It's above everything else, all other things, and that's why

when people ask me, "Where is all your focus?" and I have this great team working with me. They make it so all I do is write the books, really. My husband got laid off a couple years ago, and now he's home. He does everything around here, so literally all I do is write books, and I'm perfectly happy that way. That makes me happy.

James: Sounds like the dream.

Marie: It is. It totally is.

James: I just want to give a shout-out to Joan Barbara Simon and Sally Clements because they provided some of the questions that we asked earlier but I didn't name check them. We should do because there's a lot of people on Facebook who are very excited to hear this interview.

Mark: One of the things that stands out looking at your author page is the branding is top class, and by that I mean it's not just the cover, although that's the most visible and obvious of the branding elements, but the blurbs are all very tight. The pages are accurate. There are absolutely no errors. The reviews are great. All of that is absolutely perfect.

I JUST WONDERED IF FROM THOSE ELEMENTS, WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?

Marie: Probably the cover. The covers are critical, and actually we're in the process right now, it's been a very interesting experience, we're re-branding the Fatal series again. Last year, I guess it was last, I can't believe it's already more than a year ago, we debuted the thriller covers that are on them now. I have to be honest. I was not thrilled with that because they took my brand off, and that's romance. I said from the very beginning I wasn't sold on it but they wanted to try it to kind of expand the audience a little bit.

The Fatal series is about a D.C. homicide detective and a politician who are romantically involved. They're going to be in every book, kind of like the ...in Death series, the J. D. Robb ...in Death series, but mine is much more romance, whereas that one is much more on the mystery/thriller side.

They're going to be on the cover of every book, and the covers are spectacular, and it's what I've wanted all along, so I'm thrilled. I'm just hoping that they sell because I was like really begging and pleading for this, but I feel like my brand is romance, and so can we please bring the romance back? How better to do

that than to find two people who really in my mind look like them and really kind of embody them.

It's really exciting. We had an awesome photo shoot, so I'm really looking forward to seeing how they do because wanted my brand of romance brought back to those covers, and when I signed the new deal with HQN I asked them, "Could we please do something about the covers?" They were all for it, and it's been a really amazing collaborative process that I've enjoyed very much, and I can't wait to show them to people.

Mark: The other question I thought would be very interesting, you kind of touched on this earlier and I kind of took a note because it was a bit unusual. You said something along the lines of back when you started out you put email addresses onto the spreadsheet. I've done too, long before I got into MailChimp and all that kind of good stuff.

THEN YOU SAID THESE DAYS IT'S ALMOST MORE IMPORTANT TO GET THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA. IS THAT SOMETHING THAT YOU FEEL - THAT SOCIAL MEDIA IS MORE IMPORTANT?

Marie: I don't know that I would say it's more important. I would say it's equally important. I wish that all of the 62,000 people that liked my page on Facebook were on my mailing list too. That would be awesome, and I'm going to be actually doing a lot more to try to get them to join the mailing list because Facebook is making it harder and harder for them to see my posts. We all have that same issue that we're dealing with.

I've actually done some things, like, for instance, started a blog that has a subscriber element to it, trying to get more people, direct access to more people on a regular basis without having a third party between us. I feel like I'm really, really insanely dependent upon Facebook, and that kind of scares me sometimes.

Mark: Yeah, and they've demonstrated in the past ... If we were talking about this three years ago, that you could put a post up and you would organically reach over 50% of your fans, these days you're looking at about 3% unless you start spending money which is ...

Marie: The goal.

Mark: Exactly. Of course they've made their decision for a number of reasons, and their advertising platform is stupendously powerful.

Marie: Yes, yes, it is. It's crazy.

Mark: It's pay to play, though. It isn't something that you're going to get for free anymore.

Marie: I have Facebook stock too so I'm okay with that.

James: A foot in both camps.

Marie: I'm just kidding. I'm just joking. I'm really joking about that.

James: We bought that yacht you've got. We paid for that.

Marie: Yeah, exactly. Between that and my Apple stock. No, I'm just kidding.

It's harder and harder and harder to get anything done on Facebook. I took a picture after a snow storm. We had this incredibly spectacular sunset. The sky was on fire, and I took a picture of it and I posted it to Instagram, and it automatically feeds to my Facebook page. The reach was something like 350,000. I'm like, "Why couldn't I get that in one of my books?" It's still possible to organically explode on Facebook. It's just you got to have the right situation, I supposed.

James: You'll have to get something in the sky.

Marie: Yeah, it's never about the books, God forbid. All their crazy rules about 20% text and ... Ah God. I also just learned a really valuable lesson, which I will be happy to share with you guys and your listeners.

I had on the new Quantum book, Rapturous that came out in January, I had bare shoulders. Facebook hated those shoulders. They hated them. The lesson that I learned was, "Okay, here is the thing: I knew six weeks before that book came out that I was going to have trouble promoting it on Facebook. I should have changed the cover and I didn't."

You know what, it was the first book in 22 books that didn't make the New York Times, and it was because I had such trouble advertising it. I think too Amazon didn't give it as much play as they normally give my books because of the cover. We are the in the process right now of re-branding the Quantum series, which is only a year old, and a custom photo shoot was done for the first three books that I love, but I can't put people on the books because it's just I can't get the right combination of the erotic content, you know what I mean, and be able to advertise it too.

MARK: THE GENRE HAS CONVENTIONS THAT PEOPLE EXPECT TO SEE ON THE COVERS THAT MARKS IT AS, "THIS IS EROTIC FICTION."

Marie: Yeah, so we're going with objects over people. If you look at the Fifty Shades covers and you look at the Crossfire and Meredith Wild, they're all in that same vein. There's no people.

Mark: I would just like to say, the Calendar Girl books, the reason the covers of those they're quite not bland; they're very striking but they're not particularly what I would say erotic. They're not selling too shabbily at all at the moment.

Marie: I know, so I'm taking the people off, and I'm going with the objects that signify what the books are about. We're going to try that. It's not like the books aren't doing great. The books sold phenomenally well, but it was a lesson learned, that, "Okay, if you can't promote this book in pre-order you're not going to be able to promote it release week either." I don't know what I thought was going to happen but it was a real wake-up call, like, "Okay, do an early test. If the book is questionable, if the cover is questionable test it early, and if it doesn't go through change the cover."

To me Facebook advertising makes the difference between a New York Times bestseller and one that did very well in USA Today but did not make the New York Times, not that that really matters. It's like winning a gold medal or an Academy award: You're always a New York Times bestseller after the first time, but when you got 21 in a row you're going for the title.

James: I think it's also about being agile and reacting. It seems like it's an exception that proves they're all the way that you operate your business, Marie, but it's a good lesson for authors perhaps are naturally quite good at sitting down and structuring their books and not naturally necessarily business people.

THAT AGILITY, THAT ABILITY NOT TO BE PROUD ABOUT THINGS BUT TO REACT AND CHANGE THAT'S WHAT MAKES BUSINESSES SUCCESSFUL.

Marie: And you know, that's exactly right because I was proud of that photo shoot. Those first three covers were rocking. You know what I mean? They were awesome, and the way it all came together, I found the guy, and then his girlfriends, pictures on Instagram, she looks just like the girl. She's a medical student not even a model, and I talked her into doing it. It was perfect, and it really launched the series, but this was a realization that that strategy is not going to work long-term, and it's time right now to change it up, so we're doing it. The new covers are going to be ... They're baller. I love them.

James: Sometimes you have to kill your babies.

Marie: Yeah, you have to kill your darlings even on the covers, exactly, yep, but it was a lesson learned.

Also having a book at \$6.99 in January might not have been the best thing I ever did. People are broke after Christmas, and I've seen the sales are very steady well into February, but I think a lot of people that would have bought it in January are buying it in February because of the timing after the holidays. I think there's lessons, always lessons to be learned, always.

James: That's never going to stop.

Marie: No. Just when you think you've got this something changes and you're like, "Okay, now what?" Then you got to recalibrate.

James: I love it.

Marie: Me too. I love it too, and my team calls it, I get one of my brilliant beyond brilliant ideas, and they know that it's going to take over their life for a week or two.

James: It's also important because for the people who are going to work hard, and put the effort in, and learn, and have the right attitude, they're going to thrive in that environment. You want it to be a bit like that. You want to be the person who's going to put the extra effort in and rise above the rest. If it was too easy it would be a saturated market and we wouldn't have an opportunity to thrive in it.

Marie: That's very true, and I do think that the way that the market is right now it is separating, and I hate to say, the men from the boys, but the people who are in it for the long haul career-wise. The people who are looking to get rich quick are finding that it's not going to happen. There is no easy path. If there was an easy path we'd all be on it.

I think it's awesome when books like Calendar Girl and Fifty Shades and some of the others that have broken out, like my friend Lauren Blakely just had a huge hit with her book Big Rock and Vi Keeland with The Baller. You just never know what's going to be a huge hit. Vi spent three weeks on the New York Times. I love to see that for an indie author. That's awesome.

Mark: It's good for everyone.

Marie: It is. It's good for all us, especially like in her case too with the sports romance, that supposedly sports romances are like ... I have one and it was so hard to sell, and blah, blah, blah. Back in the day when I was trying to get into publishing sports romances were like taboo, but there she is three weeks in a row with an indie romance based in the sports world. Good for her.

James: I was just going to say, we've interviewed one of our students who's had what appears to be an overnight success. He's had a fantastic success with a book that he wrote, specifically sort of reverse engineered the book to match the success of Facebook ads, but it's his ninth book. It looks like an overnight success to everyone else. "You've suddenly made it." He had crafted his trade over nine books to get to where he is.

Marie: Exactly.

James: So exactly what you were just saying.

Marie: The first of my books to hit the New York Times was my 25th published book, so it certainly didn't happen overnight. It certainly did not, and it doesn't for most people, I don't think. I think most of us, there's obviously a few exceptions, but I think for most of us it's a long, tedious, often frustrating, slog. I used to go two years before anything good would happen, like, oh, I get a request for 30 pages from an agent, like, oh, celebration.

I was just thinking today, I was at the post office, and I hardly ever have to go there anymore because I have someone who does that, but my entire career could be summed up with my relationship with the post office. Sending query letters back in the day before everything was digital, getting stuff back from them, self-addressed stamped envelopes, sending pages, sending full manuscripts and then waiting for nothing often. Then it goes to, "Oh, I finally sell a book and I got to send some copies to readers." Now I have somebody full time doing shipping and sending merchandise for my books. It's kind of like that evolution from completely Looserville to having merchandise for my series that's going out that readers are actually buying.

JAMES: DO YOU THINK YOU'LL SLOW DOWN AT SOME POINT, GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK?

Marie: I don't know. I'm going to be 50 in a couple of months, which I can't believe, so probably going to hit the old folks home shortly after. I don't know. It's still fun. There's still nothing else I'd rather do with my time during the day. I would like to take weekends off on a regular basis. That would be kind of nice. I don't know.

I was just thinking today too I've got one series at 15 books. I got one at 10, one at seven, and then another at five. At some point I'm probably going to have to come up with some new ideas too although I really want to say this because my readers will go freak out if they hear me say it. No end in sight in any of them right now. No end in sight.

Then I have a fifth series that I thought was done until the readers told me otherwise. My most frequently asked question, and I love this because it's about the very first books I ever wrote back in 2005 and 2006, Book 4, they asked me to write a Book 4, which I did in 2012, and my most frequently asked question is if there's going to be a Book 5 in my Treading Water series. I'm thinking about it more now than I ever have before.

James: Pushed by your readers.

Marie: Yes.

James: This is very much like ... This is Arthur Conan Doyle, isn't he? He tried to kill off Sherlock Holmes.

Marie: There are some darlings you cannot kill.

James: Yeah, exactly. Marie, we are delighted for you. It's been brilliant talking to you. I think particularly the reader engagement stuff, I think you're a bit of an innovator and leader in that field, and I suspect if you don't mind at some point in the future we might quiz you in a bit more detail about that aspect of it.

Marie: Anytime. I love listening to you guys talk. That British accent is very hot.

James: Hopefully we'll do that in a dark pub in East London at some point.

Marie: I would love that. You know, we just had to hire a narrator for a British accent in my upcoming book. I wish I would have known that you guys were British when we were first talking about this. I might have had a job of work for you.

James: We may get some work out of this, Mark.

Marie: Absolutely.

James: Marie, thank you so much indeed. We will watch your career with future success, I'm sure, and we look forward to speaking to you again. Thank you for joining us.

Marie: Thank you so much for having me. It was fun.

James: A couple of things that I loved about that interview, great to talk to Marie. She's brilliant, by the way, but one of her quotes, "More has changed in the past two years than in the previous 20," which for somebody who's in the thick of it and seeing that change unfolding in front of her, and taking advantage of it is quite something.

Also something that stuck in my mind was when she was talking about a key tip for authors: "Write more books. Inventory is king." This idea that your living is going to be set on one book, it does happen but it happens rarely, but the systems that she uses to market, the systems that you use to market Mark, and we talk about the work best when you've got inventory on the shelf so that when you've got a reader and they like your book they've got somewhere to go.

Mark: Yeah, that's really crucial. As I mentioned I think to you I made that mistake. I didn't have anywhere for readers to go, didn't have a mailing list, didn't have another book for them to buy. So whenever I'm asked at conferences, or when I'm speaking, or in emails from writers, what my best tip is for developing the career, it's a bit of a cliché these days but it's just write the next book.

KEEP WRITING THE NEXT BOOK AND THINGS WILL BECOME EASIER WHEN YOU'VE GOT MORE STOCK.

James: I haven't finished my first book yet. I do need to pull my finger out.

You can email us support@selfpublishingformula.com any questions, suggestions, guest suggestions. We're all ears. Please follow us on Twitter [@selfpubform](https://twitter.com/selfpubform). We have been delighted to bring you Marie Force today. We have another amazing guest in Podcast 4, but I'm not going to tease anymore about that now. We will see you in the next edition. Good bye.

Mark: Good bye.



If you're thinking of kicking off a career as an indie author, or have already started down that road, reading this might save you a lot of time, money and effort as you move forward. Mark and James focus on key elements that are worth getting right at the start of your adventure. Mailing lists, websites, social media presence, company set-up, copyright and using pro services are just some of the topics covered.

SHOW NOTES

- Action #1: Build your mailing list. What services to use to do this, Advanced Reader Teams.
- Action #2: Have a website. Your space on the internet, affiliate income, tracking the effectiveness of marketing strategies.
- Action #3: Social media presence. Focusing on one or two platforms, the ease of setting up a Facebook profile and page and why they matter.

- Action #4: Setting up a limited company for your author income. Assume you're going to be successful, the life of your copyrighted books.
- Action #5: Be professional. Hiring editors, proofreaders, cover designers. The pace of change and not getting caught up in fads.

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST EPISODE

James: We're having a ball aren't we in this podcast?

Mark: Yeah it's been great. Some of the people that we've spoken to have been really inspirational, and I hope that listeners have first of all enjoyed the first three episodes and the income report, and they're going to stick around for some really great content coming down the track.

James: The whole podcast world is brilliant for people. It's such an empowering thing for entrepreneurs, for people in specialized industries like ours. A few years ago this would have been quite expensive consultancy. You'd have gone to a big guy who's busy and picked their brains about what they were doing and gleaned what you could from them and these sessions, perhaps go into a seminar and travel to do that, and now it's all in our back pocket on our phones, and we're really delighted to be able to embrace this technology, and impart a lot of information, and that's what we're doing today.

Mark: Exactly, and what we hopefully will be able to do today is just mirror the giving spirit that has always been a part of the self-publishing community. Ever since I started writing, 4 or 5 years ago, I started to learn how to do things. From podcasts, from bulletin boards or forums, and other writers, it's always been a case of helping hands extended. No one pulls a ladder up after them, and that's not something that we're going to do. We're going to be providing as much useful and actionable information as we can through interviews and through the kinds of master class to have episode that we're going to look at today.

James: Yeah, so we've called today's episode The 5 Must-Do Actions for New Authors. These are going to be 5 very actionable important steps that you're going to take. This is beyond obviously writing a book although we're going to talk a little bit about the book, and what sort of product you should have on the shelf. This is going to be more to do with your practical set up, your approach to marketing and your mindset as you move forward from being a writer to a marketer.

Mark: Yeah, and as well the target here would be typically for people who are at the start of their career, but it's always helpful I think and I do this all the time, just looking back at the systems that I've got up and running and the kind of practices that I am engaged in just to make sure that everything is optimal. There may be some tips in here that established authors can implement that will make things more efficient, make their processes more professional and in the long run sell more books.

JAMES: WHAT IS THE NUMBER ONE TIP?

Mark: Number 1, the obvious thing which we're not going to touch on, we'll talk about craft and the book itself further down the line. We'll just assume that listeners have a book that's ready and ready to be sold.

The first thing that people need to do is set up their mailing list. I get asked this an awful lot, what's the first thing that I should do as a new author? It is that, set up a mailing list. I can illustrate that with reference to an example from real life.

When I started publishing successfully I had a book out. My first self-published book called *The Black Mile*.

I did a promotion with Amazon on KDP. It was one of the free promotional periods that you could and you still can use with KDP when you're exclusive to Amazon. I had a five day period I think, and I put the book up, boosted it with an ad from ... I think it was from Freebooksy, and I remember really vividly, it was in August I think. I went for a bike ride and I just took out my phone well I was having a rest to see how many copies had been downloaded, and it was something ridiculous like 40 or 50,000 had been downloaded in a few days.

I had an initial blast of euphoria which probably lasted about 30 minutes, and then I was kind of, all right, that's great. Good. I haven't got any other books for people to buy and more importantly, I've got no way for me to getting contact with the people who have enjoyed the book and wanted to hear more news from me. I didn't have a mailing list; I had no call to action on the front and back of the books. I probably lost about six months worth of head start by just going into that unprepared, which was frankly unforgivable. It won't be a mistake that I'll make again.

James: Let's touch on a couple of those subjects there. First of all let's talk about this and there's no way of sugarcoating this. We've heard it from several different sources and this has been your experience as

well. In an ideal world you do not go to the market with one book. You can do it, and you can start your main list building, but in an ideal world when you're writing your first book, you think about either breaking it down to a short novella, then followed by another novella, or you think about the first 2 or 3.

We've heard this repeatedly from quite big authors who've been successful in this field, and obviously you felt it back then when you had all these names in one book and nowhere to go at that stage.

Mark: It's optimal to have more books. I don't think it's essential. I think it is reasonable to put one book up provided that everything else is switched on. You've got a mailing list. You may not have a lead magnet at that stage, so that's an incentive for someone to join the list, but if I had a book finished, I personally wouldn't wait to buy the other one, or another couple, although some people will do it that way. I think it's reasonable to put the book out, but just make sure that everything is aligned and you're ready to exploit traffic that's generated and people buying that book, enjoying it and wanting to know more about you and your other books.

James: I've taken this from some of the people we've spoken to and from seeing how the system works, and I think I'm veering towards trying to break my initial novel into at least two. I'm quite inspired actually reading more than a few John Milton novels. I think it's a permafrost at the beginning of your book set. It's the North Korea one. It's short, it's pithy, it gets you into the guy. In fact I call out the fact that you don't give too much away, nobody even knows who this guy is apart from what he's doing. That for me was a really good hook to get into your series, and not too much writing on your part really.

Mark: It's about 20,000 words and that wasn't the first book that I wrote. The Cleaner was the first book and then I think I'd written Saint Death and The Driver, so the first 3 novels were written and available, and it was only when I decided that I wanted to give something away as an incentive for people to join my mailing list. This is when I started to get real serious about building my list. Then I went back and as you've read that book, I was on holiday in Spain, so over the course of a week. My daughter at the time was kind of having a two hour nap at lunch time, so I wrote that in about 10 hours over the course of that week, at least most of it.

I got it edited, got it professionally prepared, and then I got it up online and I started to use that as my reader magnet. I didn't do it at first. Certainly you can do after the fact. If you're able to drop 3 at once, then wonderful, you're going to go pretty well provided everything else is correct, but it's not essential,

you can do the other way round.

James: Okay, let's get onto the nitty-gritties of the mailing list. MailChimp, Aweber, there are various email handling programs around, but we would definitely recommend using one of them.

Mark: Out of those two, and there's about 5 or 6 I could recommend. From really complicated, feature-rich applications like Infusionsoft, Entrepot, Active Campaign, things like that. Slightly beyond what new authors would need.

I think it's completely fine to use MailChimp or Aweber. Mailchimp is free up to 2,000 subscribers. Once you hit 2,001 you're going to have to start paying, but I would recommend paying for it slightly earlier, because you want to use some paid features and in particular you want to use automation, which is probably something we'll cover in a bit more depth later on, autoresponder sequences and funnels and things like that.

James: There's a way, isn't there of having an auto response. You use the welcome email, and that's a cheeky way of getting a little bit of automation in for free on your list. That's good for your initial book giveaway, but it's not good for nurturing the campaign, nurturing your readers afterwards.

Mark: That's right. You can use that. That is a good hack, but MailChimp is not a particularly expensive piece of software. I think it's like 10 or 15 bucks a month at the lowest level, something like that. It's pretty reasonable. You can use it for free until you get established, but I wouldn't wait too long to jump to the paid version because it's more powerful. You get more bang for your buck. The same goes for Aweber. It's exactly the same kind of principle with the same kind of considerations you'll need to think about.

James: I use MailChimp. I've liked it a lot actually. It's not massively intuitive the very first few sessions you have with it, but don't be disappointed. There's some really good training. They do lots of good video training tutorials themselves on MailChimp. We've got a little bit of training on that coming up as well, but there are ways of finding out what you are doing. Quite quickly it will become second nature to you.

A Weber I'm not so familiar with, but I understand from the people that use it that is not too dissimilar and again you can get into it. All of these things it's part and parcel of that journey of that switching either whether it's morning to afternoon that Jo Penn and Mark and other people we've spoken do or your own routine.

You do need to be a writer at one point and then move into your marketing and this is part and parcel of that.

YOU MENTIONED SIGN UP. AT THE FRONT AND BACK OF THE BOOK, JUST TO EXPLAIN TO US. THIS IS SOMETHING I HAVEN'T DONE, I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DO IT. HOW WOULD YOU DO THAT?

Mark: Okay, so when the book is finished and you've got your MOBI file or well EPUB or maybe whatever format you are exporting into and probably both. You want to have a sign up at the front and the back of the book. Most people will tell you just put a sign up at the back.

What a sign up is it will be a quick message to the reader, and will say something along the lines of I hope you enjoyed the book. If you would like to get X free items, it can be a novel or novella or something else, and we'll get into magnets and reader magnets a little bit later on probably on a different podcast I guess. You need to advertise that, and give them a URL to go to, to sign up for the item that they are interested in.

Definitely put it at the back of the book. I would also recommend putting something at the front, so it doesn't need to be the full message. What I do is I have a quick line that says something like if you'd like a free whatever, a free novella, just go to the sign up at the back of the book. The reason I don't have the actual URL there is because people can see that link when they just look inside on the Amazon product page, and you might start to lose sales by people just seeing that link and signing up. Think about that.

On the other if you can't do the other way around and I'll say this many times as we go through these episode shows, but since five is always going to be worth more to me than a single sale. Because I can sell books probably to a subscriber which is going to be worth more to me than just one sale, so always focus on getting subscribers, that's going to be the bedrock of your business.

JAMES: I REMEMBER YOU SAYING IN THE PAST THAT ONE OF YOUR GREATEST REGRETS IS THAT YOU DIDN'T HAVE A MAILING LIST AT AN EARLIER STAGE IN YOUR ENTRY CAREER?

Mark: Yeah it was a stupid error; it was one of those situations where I was running perhaps a bit too fast before I could walk, and I possibly even didn't know at that stage that it was important. I certainly lost a few readers by not getting going earlier on. I have made up for that, I'm looking about 40,000 to 45,000 subscribers now. It's something that you can recover from if you haven't done that originally, but best practice is definitely to get that down as a process you run at the start.

JAMES: LET'S TALK ABOUT THE READERS THEN AND HOW YOU EMPLOY THEM. YOU'VE TALKED HERE ABOUT A LAUNCH TEAM, AND WHAT'S AN ARC OR LLC?

Mark: Advance reader copy, this is definitely a subject we'll go into a much great detail how to launch books, but it's probably half a dozen podcasts in that subject alone. What you can do when we you start to build up your list as subscriber is you can graduate some of them, the really keen ones into positions whereby they can have a really direct effect on your career.

You can send LLCs or advance copies when you've got a book that's ready to launch, it's been proofed, edited. You can send it to your advance team, and I use them for reiterating, so they'll pick up everything that slipped through the editorial process.

Also you can use them to lay down early reviews once the book goes live, and that certainly helps to convert traffic coming to your Amazon page or your Apple page. That's a good social proof to get reviews up early, and the more reviews you can get stands to reason that the greater number of sales you are going to have, all other things being equal. That's something that you can definitely start to influence with a launch team.

Over the last couple years when I started doing this, it was so difficult to get reviews, and it was a bit of chicken and egg. You need the sales to get reviews, but you couldn't get sales without them. It's what comes first, it was really complicated, I struggled for ages to get that fixed, and building that advance team has been the way that I have done that and it's been amazing. Those two have become have become my friends as well which is a lovely side benefit.

James: The social proof you talk about and the way that your books appear on Amazon to people who are browsing, obviously having those stars and having those reviews is incredibly important, we will use those a lot for almost all sorts of products. It's also behind under the bonnet to the Amazon algorithms are running in terms of how they place your listing in search results and so on, and those reviews are important there as well.

Mark: I have to say I suspect reviews play have affected the play in that, but no one knows how the Amazon algorithm works precisely. I have spoken to people of Amazon, and I suspect what I finally know they don't know either, there is probably one guy in a smoky basement in Seattle who understands exactly how it works. I think it's fair to say that they probably play a small part in the algorithm, but what they definitely do play a role in is if people can search genre pages and use review number of stars, average stars as a filter. You are going to be filtered out if you don't get reviews up for the book.

Also once when you are launching you can get onto hot new lists, and the best reviewed lists, all that kind of additional useful way to state, just another place to put your book cover. It will definitely be a situation where the more times it's visible, obviously the more sales you are going to make.

James: Okay, so that is number one of our 5 essential things to do, have a mailing list. Start to build it, consider the mindsets of giving something away to build it. If you got this idea that this first novel you put so much time and effort into, so the last thing you will do is going to give it away. You do need to move on from that, because actually giving it away, getting those names and getting those readers is going to set you up for the next few years.

Mark: Yeah it's absolutely essential, so yeah, definitely focus on that.

JAMES: LET'S MOVE ON NUMBER 2 OF THE 5 ACTIONS FOR NEW AUTHORS, WEBSITES. 

Mark: Yes, you need a website, it's not absolutely essential, it's not something that you have to have before you just start selling books. You do need eventually a bit of the internet web that you can stake out your ground. It's your own little home on the internet where people will be able to find you if they start searching for your name, and they just send out oodles of a very big source of traffic to my website, for people searching for the Joe Milton pictures plus or me. I find that quite a lot once you've got books obviously you can start to link directly from books to development platforms.

You can start to generate affiliate income, because you'll have affiliate links linking out from your website and you'll get commissions when sales are made which can become quite useful source of additional income.

JAMES: CAN YOU JUST EXPLAIN THE AFFILIATE PROCESS FOR THOSE ONES WHO

ARE UNINITIATED IN THIS?

Mark: Affiliate links are really useful. Apart from being a useful source of income, they also enable you to track the effect of your various marketing techniques.

The income side of things first, if you go with Amazon and you use their affiliate system, what happens is you'll get a link which is typical similar to a normal link. We will have a little bit of extra code at the end and what that code does is leave a browser, leave a cookie on the browser of the person who has clicked the link and gone through to Amazon. If that potential customer then goes through and actually makes a purchase on Amazon, and it doesn't have to be the eBook, you'll get 7% to 8% usually off the cover price of the price of the item.

It's great when it's a 3.99 eBook that's going to be an additional 8%, so you bringing your royalties up to nearer 80% rather than 70% which is a very useful bonus. It really pays off around Christmas time when people start buying \$2000, \$3000 televisions. I found last year I had a real boost of income from the affiliate source, it was significantly more, than I was actually making from book sales right back at the start of the first 18 months of my career.

We'll get into affiliates linking and how to use all that in another podcast, it's quite a big subject. You should only be using those links on your website, and you'll start to earn a little bit of extra money which will grow over time.

James: The top line here is that the website is your presence, it's the foundation for a lot of your traffic that's trying to find you, and without that you are restricted to then finding your sales link on Amazon or someone's. It's definitely something that's going to be a part of your marketing strategy.

Mark: It's a fundamental probably; the alternative is what I call digital share cropping. You don't necessarily want to grow your crop on someone else's land, which is exactly the case if you are relying on Amazon or Google. Things can change and they do change all the time. The one constant thing is the website that you control.

Another really important part of that website and that presence is you are going to have an option to sign up for your mailing list. We're tying back to that first item.

If you look at my website markjdawson.com, the first thing you will see is a sign up opportunity to join my list and you'll see a graphic of the books that I give away. Very, very simple subscription process all linked in with MailChimp, very easy to set up. I'm adding about 75 readers a day at the moment, just through that link. Even if 70 of them don't actually turn out to be long-term readers, if 5 of them do and their typical value to me is \$20, \$25, it's not difficult to work out how much money that could generate over time.

JAMES: LET'S MOVE ON TO NUMBER 3 OF THE 5 MUST-DO THINGS FOR NEW AUTHORS. WHAT IS THAT MARK?

Mark: That would be social media presence. Obviously there are plenty of social media platforms out there. Facebook, probably the biggest one right now, certainly the one that I focus on the most, but Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, you could cut your niche with social media for this purpose. Lots and lots ... I could have even mention Google plus, but we won't spend too much breath on that.

Lots and lots of different opportunities to kind of develop your presence across those broadcast mediums. My advice would be to pick one or maybe pick two. Facebook for me would be the first one. That might be because I know it best, and I'm known now as being kind of an authority on advertising on Facebook. Even if you're not ready to advertise, you should definitely have a Facebook profile, I think, and a Facebook page.

Just a quick explanation of what that is. A Facebook profile is the first thing you'll set up. You go into Facebook the first time, you set up a profile, it's where your friends and your family will link to you. It's where you'll browse through funny pictures of cats, all that kind of stuff. It's kind of the social part of things, but the business part is the actual Facebook page. You should definitely set both up. Set the profile up, it takes 5 minutes, setting a page up takes about 30 seconds. You just go in, set up a page ... You would call it whatever you want. I think mine is called Mark Dawson Author because that was the best that I could get. I couldn't get Mark Dawson, but it's very simple. It takes no time at all to do that, but because you have that, you'll then have people being able to sign up, to become fans of your page. You'll need a page. If you start to advertise you can't advertise through your profile. It has to be through the page.

It's kind of low hanging fruit. You're going to be getting people coming, finding you on Facebook, finding you on Twitter. You want to be ready for them. Make it as easy as possible for them to sign up to your list. Facebook is a great place to gather readers together. You can have groups. Facebook groups are really great. It's just another place for people to find you, learn about you, interact with you ... That's very

important. It's the place where you can demonstrate that you're a real person. You answer questions. Your personality shines through. It's a really, really simple way to do that. Of course you can run that and monitor that through your phone now, which is what I do most of the time. Just take 5 minutes whilst you're in the queue and just answer questions from readers. Makes queues go a lot faster I find.

James: Okay, so we've got our mailing list, we've got our website; we now have some social media presence, numbers 4 and 5 to come.

NUMBER 4, MARK.

Mark: This is something I was again; it is definitely the theme for this episode. I was late to get this sorted. You have to treat it like a business. I think it's important that that is done very early on. One kind of expression of that would be for me anyway, I was running it as what we'd call in the UK sole trader. I was just basically running it as Mark Dawson. That was tax entity. I was the tax entity for the first few books that I wrote. It's not a very tax-efficient way to get the money. I was in business. You could be paying full tax or not, which was ... I had a full-time job at the time, so I was paying full rate of tax in the UK. It just wasn't a very effective way to get that money out.

What I did about two years ago was to set up Unputdownable Limited; it's the business, my writing business. The copyrights for those initial books were transferred into the business, and everything that I wrote from that stage onwards was run through the business.

All of my royalties now go into the business, commissions go into the business, any income comes in to Unputdownable, and then I have an accountant that we speak monthly, talking about money that's coming in. I'm at the level now where I like to have a kind of monthly bird's eye view of how healthy the business is, and which channels are working better than others. He produced me a monthly report, and then at the end of the year we'll look at the most tax-efficient way to get the money, to pay the tax obviously, but to get the money out again. I'm not like Jimmy Carr. Non UK people wouldn't maybe not have heard of that person.

James: He's that comedian who was creative with his tax affairs. Let's put it that way.

Mark: There've been a few of those, yeah. You certainly pay the tax that's due, but you don't pay more than you're supposed to pay, and be efficient about this. You're certainly more likely to be tax efficient to

run income through companies, solely in the UK, but probably the case in the US as well. I would certainly say look in to that early on, it doesn't have to be expensive to set a company up, and it just makes things easier than a situation whereby you might suddenly be quite successful, and then you have to start trying to retro-fit things. It doesn't work quite as simply if you have to try and do that.

James: You talk about the incorporation, the tax status. In terms of having a business overview, having an accountant I think is totally very important, because having an accountant will say to you, do you know what, you're leaking money here. They'll spot something that you don't spot, like an old subscription or something, so you know what's this for? They challenge you a little bit, just to clarify where your money is going. That's always healthy to have an extra person have a view on that.

Some people might do that within their marriage if they have that sort of marriage where the wife might be a partner in the business, and they can do some of the books as well. Seeing it as an independent entity and having that business mind, and we would advise that, right from the outset, so that you treat this as a business with an income that needs to grow.

Mark: The way I look at it is that you assume that you're going to be successful. It's easy to think as you're sitting down with no people on your mailing list, just writing the first book. It's easy to assume, and let's be honest; the odds are against you making a lot of money from this. It's still a difficult thing to crack. People are managing through that, and more and more people are making good livings out of independently publishing these days.

I think it's healthy to assume that you're going to be successful, and with that assumption just think about what you would do to maximize the benefit that that would bring to you. A really easy way and a really straightforward way is to just set up your affairs in a tax-efficient manner right from the start. It's easier to do at the start than later on.

James: I'm really enjoying this checklist, particularly as a new author. It's gotten me ship shape I think. We are coming onto our final point, our fifth point Mark.

Mark: Let's just finish off the fourth one first. We've skipped one for understandable reasons. No one likes talking about this kind of stuff, but we're not going to be around forever, but our copyrights will. A

copyright is going to last for the lifetime of the author plus 70 years on top, so when I shuffle off this mortal coil, I'm going to have at least 23 books, if I'm hit by a bus tomorrow, but hopefully 50 books by the time I stop writing. Those copyrights will extend for another 70 years in the UK. I can't remember what the state is in the US, but I think it's similar. I've got 2 kids, and I want them to benefit from those copyrights for as long as possible. A really sensible thing to do early on ... And this isn't just writers advice, it's something that everyone should do anyway, but we all put it off, and I'm a lawyer and I haven't done this, which makes me an idiot, but ...

James: You sound like a lawyer when you're talking about this subject there.

Mark: I know. It's just that I'm about to offer a free will writing service. It's very sensible. Everyone should do this. It doesn't take very long and it's not expensive, but you should set up a will. Again, none of this is legal advice and I haven't been a lawyer for an awfully long time, so I'm rusty to say the least.

In this country at least, if you don't have a will, then if you die intestate, then certain provisions kick in, and that might mean that your assets don't go to the beneficiaries that you want them to go to. It just makes a lot more sense, and also it's more tax-efficient as well to get that sorted out right away. I would say, if you go and see an accountant to incorporate your company, then maybe pop into a lawyer as well and just say you just want to have a simple will so that everything is understood straightforward, and the provisions are in place should something unpleasant happen.

James: I think your children are definitely making their sounds known on the subject of what's going to be left to them. They are shouting loudly in the background. We can hear them.

Mark: Yes, they have just came back from nursery, and they'll probably be in the office in a minute.

James: That's what it's all about though isn't it, and your family is important and it's the easiest thing to, I know, I'm going to sound like a lawyer now, it's the easiest thing just to put off and put off and put off, but it's important to get done.

Mark: Come to Blatch and Dawson.

James: Blatch, Dawson and Dawson. Okay, excellent, and number 5. I like number 5.

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING TO NUMBER 5, NUMBER 5 IS ...

Mark: It's just be super professional. It is connected to treating things like a business, but be super professional. I'll say as a general position what I look at now, and I wasn't always like this. In fact I was very far from this in the early days.

I want my books to be indistinguishable from the traditionally published books that I'm competing with. Lee Child sells a lot more books than I do, but we occasionally share space on the Amazon bestseller list. I may have a John Milton book with a Jack Reacher book next door to me, and I want readers to first of all look at those covers and not be able to tell which one is traditionally published and which one is independently published, and should they buy my book and they start to read it, I want them to be impressed with the formatting.

I certainly don't want them to find any typos or errors or anything like that. It's just everything needs to be absolutely tip top and sorted out, so that it's an identical experience. Let's be honest. There are all kinds of areas these days with traditional books as well. I certainly don't want to be any worse than a traditionally published book. I have high standards and I want to be the best. That means I'm certainly paying a cover designer, I am absolutely awful when it comes to that kind of artistic endeavor, and I know I am so I certainly won't be trying to put a cover together on paint. Believe me I've always seen plenty of authors try to do that, and they always look absolutely awful.

Not cheap. Certainly not cheap to get that done, but you can use companies like 99 Design, you get a cover for \$300 from them, but if it means saving up a bit, you should do it, because you're spending a lot of time on getting the book out there, it would be awful to send out in clothes that have holes in them, to tease them with a terrible analogy. Certainly spend a bit to get the cover right.

The same goes for editorial. I would say at the very least at least it needs to be proof read by someone not connected to you. When I started writing independently with The Black Mile, I'm a lawyer and so I have an eye for detail, or so I thought. I thought I could do the proofreading myself. I discovered to my horror as the reviews started rolling in, points gathered, it was full of errors. A few readers would contact me with PDFs and the details of the errors that they found, and they were right. They were all there and it was just a case of being completely word blind. You'll discover this when you finish James, after you've got

to 60,000 words and 70,000 and you've read that 3 or 4 times during the writing process, you will miss errors. It's absolutely guaranteed.

JAMES: YOU CAN'T PROOF YOUR OWN WRITING.

Mark: No. It's impossible, you are accusing me of something there John.

James: You can't proof your own writing.

Mark: I can't proof my own writing. No one can.

James: One cannot proof their own writing.

Mark: One cannot. I was taught this, and I actually went back and paid someone to edit all of my Milton books. They've been edited about 3 times each. Generally speaking, I still occasionally get people saying there's errors, which is very annoying given that I've gone through that process. You definitely have to have that mindset. It's not good enough to just try and do it yourself, because it's just not going to work. The problem with that is, if you go look at *The Black Mile*, or *The Cleaner* the first Milton book and you scroll back to the first reviews, you'll see reviews that say, 2 stars, full of errors, and Amazon is not going to talk those reviews down. I'm not even going to try on Amazon, because it's just not going to happen. Those are always going to be there.

Fortunately I've been able to kind of cover them with reviews saying that they like the book, and that there aren't errors, all that kind of thing, but those reviews will always be there, and it's a really good reminder for me personally to never cut corners like that because it's a false economy.

James: On the subject of covers which you mentioned there briefly, and perhaps not going down the DIY route if you're not comfortable with it. We are going to have on a future podcast Stuart Bache as a guest. He does your covers Mark and does a few others in the industry. He's done some Jonah Carey covers; he's worked in the industry, the traditional industry as well as independently. He is brilliant to talk to just in terms of the approach of the atmosphere of what you are trying to create and say with the cover, his personal approach and also some tips on those people who are more comfortable with using perhaps Photoshop or InDesign or whatever to create their own cover, so that's coming up in a future podcast.

Mark: Stuart is a genius, and still will do your cover, there are plenty of other people who are getting into that space now, as there are more and more writers who see the light and start to publish themselves. The industry grows around them, so it's reasonably easy now to get a really good pro cover without getting a second mortgage to pay for it, but it's definitely something that needs to be done.

James: Keeping yourself focused as when you are in the super professional mode and everything is going to be well polished and going to look good, and as you said the indistinguishable from the old traditional industry stuff.

HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES IN TERMS OF WHAT YOU DO WITH THE BOOK AND WHERE YOU PUT IT ETCETERA?

Mark: I think the key thing to always bear in mind is just your mantra should be you want it to reach new readers, you want to entertain them, and then you want to keep them. That should always be your focus, so ignore fads. If you go into forums right now, go to KBoards or any of the other forums where writers hang out, you'll see quite a lot of people complaining about Kindle Unlimited. They complained about Kindle Unlimited when the first iteration came along. It was KU apocalypse, they then started to complain when KU2 came a long and they started to pay for pages read rather than the borrows.

There are always going to be things like that, Amazon is always innovating, they are always going to be introducing new things, things will change. New players will come on board, some will fall away. As we are recording this today, Nook announced that they are not selling in the UK anymore. Things are always going to be changing.

THE ONE THING THAT IS GOING TO BE CONSTANT IS YOU ARE PROVIDING CONTENT, YOU ARE TELLING STORIES, AND YOU WANT TO FIND THE BEST WAY TO GET YOUR STORIES INTO THE HANDS OF READERS WHO ARE GOING TO BE PREPARED TO PAY FOR THOSE STORIES.

They will be sticking around with you for the long haul, so as you produce different stories, you get new books out, there are always going to be around to support your career, so that's going to be your focus.

I see too many people writing books, trying to take advantage of things like KU, and it's just stupid as it is, because things will change. All of those people who wrote dozens of short books to take advantage of KU number one version one, is you are paid by the borrow. They don't request, they're clever now that KU two is coming around, and then it's pages read and not books borrowed. Yeah I would say just focus on

the main thing, and that's telling stories and getting them into the hands of readers.

James: Being super professional really good way to round of these 5 essential tips of people starting out. Mark, thank you very much. As ever your experience and your wisdom in this area is valuable to us who are starting out today. We have got a great guest in our next podcast, and I'm just going to tease you with that we have Sean Platt who is engaging, compelling, energetic, a poly math of our age, and a man of many podcasts. It really is not an interview to miss, so we are looking forward to Sean, I'm looking forward to just talking to you again. Thank you very much indeed for joining us on the self publishing formula podcast; we'll see you next time.

Mark: Bye, bye.

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEW WITH SEAN PLATT



This week's guest, Sean Platt, has turned a love of writing into an indie publishing phenomenon in the shape of story studio Sterling & Stone. But that's only half his story. In Podcast 5, Sean talks with the guys about what's next for Sterling & Stone, author productivity, dreaming big, making the right choices and what's currently working on the marketing front for indie authors.

SHOW NOTES

- On Sean's background and how he structures his day for maximum productivity, including naps and walking meetings.
- The pleasure of working hard on things we love to do.
- How Sean dreams big and sets challenging goals for each year.
- The choice Sean would make between being a storyteller and his other projects.

- The marketing for authors that Sean thinks is working now. And what's not working.
- Where Sterling and Stone see themselves in five years.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH SEAN PLATT

Two writers, one just starting out, the other, a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, hello. We're feeling refreshed. You're feeling particularly invigorated and refreshed, Mark, because you've just stepped off an airplane, haven't you?

Mark: I've been flying overnight from New York back to London after a weekend with my wife, celebrating her birthday in New York, which is wonderful. I'm operating on about four hours of sleep, so if I drop off, you have to give me a kick.

James: Yes, I'll do that. Well, happy birthday to Lucy. You need your energy now because we've got a busy few weeks ahead of us, not least with the podcast. We're not going to dilly-dally at this moment, because we've got a really good inspirational interview coming up don' we Mark?

Mark: Yes, it's Sean Platt, who most people in the indie space all know very well. He is typically full of beans, and inspirational, and just talking about a pretty wonderful life he's managed to build for himself.

James: We're delighted Sean Platt is joining us. If you don't know, Sean is the founder of [Sterling and Stone](#), an indie publishing phenomenon. It also houses the imprint realm in 'Sands,' 'Collective Inkwell,' 'The Smarter Artist,' and others. He writes with Johnny B. Truant, David W. Wright, and Garrett Robinson. He's enjoyed great successes with a series including 'Invasion', 'Yesterday's Gone,' and 'The Beam.'

He's built a wide ranging podcast network including the very well known Self Publishing Podcast. He's lead the groundbreaking [Fiction Unboxed](#) project, and he's currently designing a [story building app](#) that met lofty funding goals on Kickstarter. He is ridiculously prolific, somehow seems to have extended the hours available to him on any given day. He's also one of the more, should we say unashamedly ambitious

people in the indie space, with a series of goals that seem like they might be too ambitious until he goes ahead and does them anyway.

We've got a whole host of questions for you. I think we do want to start off with that whole thing about your work ethic and your approach. There's a lot going on in your life.

YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS, I'VE JUST LISTED A FEW OF THEM THERE. HOW DO YOU DO THIS? HOW DO YOU SET ABOUT EVERY DAY WHEN YOU WAKE UP? HOW DO YOU ORDER YOUR LIFE AND THESE TARGETS?

Sean: Well, I've been working since forever. I actually don't think there's a single person on either side on my family that has an actual job, where they go in and punch in. I think we're just allergic to it. My grandpa owned basically what was a junk store, but it was an awesome junk shop, on Olvera Street, which is the oldest street in California. He was Mexican. It was Ramos Imports. He just got a bunch of stuff from Tijuana and would mark it up, and it was a junk shop. He had it for 54 years and it was his business.

My parents owned a flower shop for 30 years in Long Beach, California. That was just awesome. From the time I was very, very small, I used to work there. I mean, I was ripped off, I was paid like a dollar an hour or something ridiculous. It still was money that I got to make from a very small age. I'd go in on the weekends and have to clean up the dried flowers and things like that. It was punching a clock at a very early time.

By the time I was in fifth grade, I wanted more than the \$1.25. I think that's what I made back in, what would that have been? Like, 1985. A \$1.25 an hour, and I wanted more than that. I knew I could make more than that, so I opened up a little business selling stuff on the playground. I would repurpose GI Joes; and take five of them and deconstruct them and put them back together, sell mutant GI Joes for a markup.

Garbage Pail Kids were really big at the time, so I had my mom drive me 30 miles to this Altadena liquor store that would sell them to me by the box. I would go through all of them and take out the most rare ones, and sell them individually. Then, make big giant bundles for a bargain price; and both would sell because people are different. Some people wanted the premium individual cards, and some people would want the bulk packs; but I would triple what I spent on each box, so that was cool. I just learned, and I learned to sell. It just seemed like a lot of fun. That kind of went away for a while, but I was always working in the flower shop.

I actually didn't have a lot of ambition from the time I was 15, 17. I just wanted to play, because I was in high school. That's what you do in high school, you play.

When I got a car, that was the deal. I went straight from getting my driver's license, I drove immediately to the flower shop and loaded it up with flowers for that afternoon's deliveries. That was the deal. Like, "Hey, you want to have a car, then okay, but you're going to do the deliveries and wash buckets every day after school." I did, and I enjoyed being around the shop a lot.

When I was 18, I dropped out of school early, actually, because I just was a terrible student. Once I had the car, I wasn't going to school very often. It was just a bad recipe. I just started really throwing myself into the store. Then when I was around eighteen years old, these two girls who worked for my family, really through a lot of my childhood ... One of them I saw as an older sister. They just stole from my family, and opened up a shop one mile, three-quarters of a mile away. They took a lot of our clients, and all of our standing orders while my dad was in the hospital. They just kind of snuck away in the middle of the night and opened up a shop. I was just furious. I had all the anger an eighteen year old can have. That's when I think a lot of my ambition was born. It was just really misdirected because I opened up five flower shops in the next two years.

James: On either side of the two girls' shops.

Sean: Yes, yeah. The mandate was, "We have to break even." I didn't care about making money. I cared about putting them out of business. I had to juggle a lot of employees. I was 20 years old at the time. I was juggling 20-odd employees.

This is the nicest part of Long Beach. It was a tiny little shop, I mean tiny. The rent was \$5,000 a month. I just had to break even, just break even. I could do it, I could do it. It was ridiculous. It was so stupid. I seriously wasted a couple years of my life, but I learned a lot. I got to be really scrappy, and the ambition was born there.

There was a big divide between my father and I, and the way we wanted to run the business. I was making deals because I had to have such bottom line prices, and such great quality, I was making deals directly

with the farms and buying from pretty much the best farms in the world; but I was buying direct and importing direct so that I could pay way less than I would downtown at the flower market. There were just ways that I wanted to keep doing that with the business and scaling it. My father was a little bit afraid of some of those directions.

Eventually, after working there for one, two years, I opened a preschool with my wife. Our children were very young. I was working like 70 hours a week, so I wasn't really seeing them. My son was one, and my daughter was two and a half. I just thought, "Oh man, this is ... This is rough. You know, they're growing really fast." We opened the preschool, I did that for a few years. That's when I finally started writing, so that was like eight years ago at this point, seven years ago. That was the first time I ever wrote.

Again, like I said, I dropped out of high school so I didn't really fancy myself a writer at all, but I'm verbal, clearly. I can tell a story. So I just had to slow down enough to get it on the page. There were a lot of false starts, but it was a little bit like the flower shop thing. Trial by fire, I learned really fast. I started out writing \$5 keyword articles.

Again, this is where the work ethic is there. I was used to getting up early. The flower shop business is hard. You got to go downtown and buy flowers at about two, three in the morning. You'd work seven days a week, and holidays, when everybody else is kicking back, are your hardest times. It's a little like owning a restaurant, or maybe having a farm as a family, where you just do what needs to be done and you don't bitch about it. I've always been able to just work. In fact, next week I'm taking a vacation. It's the first legitimate vacation I've ever had in my life.

JAMES: DEFINE LEGITIMATE. I MEAN, HOW MUCH WORK ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

Sean: I'm actually not. I'm going to be on a boat in the middle of the sea, and I'm actually unplugging. Even when I got married, what 15 years ago when I got married, it was a three day weekend. Every vacation that I've taken since has been either business-related in some way, or a lot of family obligations. I went to California to visit my family this last summer, and we were just scheduled down to the minute. It wasn't really unplugging at all. We're taking a vacation to the Caribbean. I'll be gone for a period of time and actually unplugging. Yay for me.

Sean: That's the first time. It's always been kind of just relentless. When I realized, "Okay, I want to write. We're going to close our preschool," which was ballsy. It was really ballsy. I had a Southern California mortgage to carry, and I thought, "You know what? I'm smart. I'm driven. I can make this work." My wife

has this almost unreasonable, unflinching faith in me.

She championed me and said, "Go, go, go." Even though it was probably the wrong thing to do. I was writing keyword articles for crappy SEO companies. It was the worst job ever, and I would get paid \$5 an article. They had to be 500 to 750 words, but I would write 20 of them in a day. That still wasn't nearly enough to cover our mortgage. I learned to copy-write, and that's when the money came in. I made really great money as a copywriter. I lost my house, but got out of debt, at least a little.

JAMES: WHO DID YOU COPYWRITE FOR?

Sean: I was a ghostwriter, so a lot of people. I wrote a lot of info-products. I wrote a ton of sales letters. If you're a good copywriter for a sales page, you'll never go hungry, ever. You can double your rates from one job to the next; and people will pay them anyway because a sales letter that converts, it's an ATM machine. I got really good at that.

Then, I started working with someone named Laurie Taylor. She paid me an absurd amount of money to work with her. She hired me as a copywriter, and then pretty much after three months working with her, I became her right-hand person and consultant. I basically became her idea person. She lived in Cincinnati. I was living in Long Beach at the time; but it was real convenient timing because I had just lost the house. She set me up in a house in Cincinnati and just compensated me really well, and treated me really nicely.

It was the first time I had ever been paid for my brain, which was very attractive to me, because someone was saying to me, "Hey, you're smart. I'll pay you just to talk to you." I liked that a lot, so I did that for a few years. During that time, I did a lot of underground copy. I did a lot of her sales letters. I did a lot of stuff, a lot of consulting.

I worked for a health insurance company and got onto SEO keywords. I was pretty ninja at SEO, and I ended up getting the number three results for "health insurance," on page one.

JAMES: WOW, AND THAT'S COMPETITIVE IN THE STATES.

Sean: Yeah, it's the most competitive. I think cigarettes and sex are both really high, but health insurance is right up there. That was pretty cool, but then Kindle dropped in 2010. I pretty much thought, 'I am never going to have client work ever again.' I left that really stupid lucrative job, stupidly lucrative, it wasn't stupid. It was stupidly lucrative. Just decided, "You know what? It's going to take a while, but long term,

this is what's best for me, and for my family, and for my soul, and kind of for the things I want to do with my time."

I left that job, and I started publishing on Kindle with Dave. I had been working with Dave for a while already. In fact, when I first got my job with Laurie we shared money and he helped me whenever he needed to. Then, I squirreled away a little bit, and was to bankroll our early days of 'Yesterday's Gone' when we were writing that. Then, I moved to Austin, because I didn't really need to be in Cincinnati anymore. Even though at that point, Laurie had become one of my best friends. I'm godfather to her twin boys, actually. I still didn't need to live in the city, and Austin is just so creatively vibrant. It seemed like a really good place to reboot my career and the things I wanted to do; so I moved out here.

Actually, the very first iteration of Sterling and Stone, I started with Laurie. I had Laurie, and I had one other partner, and we were writing non-fiction books. We were producing three books a week at the time. The first version of Sterling and Stone had three full time writers, three full time editors, a marketing director, which Laurie was, a guy named Matt, was our production manager, and then there was me. We would do really simple keyword books. Let me think of one ... 'How to do X,' right? How an author can set up a Pinterest profile, like very simple ... We were answering one question in about 10,000 words.

JAMES: IS THIS IS GOING STRAIGHT ONTO KINDLE?

Sean: These would go straight onto Kindle. We did, I want to say, just over 50 books. Then, I folded, because the two main partners weren't really getting along; that was Matt and Laurie. I got along with each of them individually really well, but they didn't really get along with each other and it just felt like ... my spidey sense was tingling, basically.

Also, it was getting away from what I really wanted to do, which was to produce fiction. I wanted to make fiction, and we were doing a lot of non-fiction books. The best thing that came from that early iteration is, I don't know if a lot of people know this, but there's a fully existing season one of 'The Beam,' that Johnny and I did not write together. That I wrote as part of this production model, which was kind of born with the first iteration of Sterling and Stone. I had mapped out the season, and I was acting like a show runner. Then, I would have a writer come in and write the show.

When it was all done, I didn't think it was good enough, so I shelved it. Then, I took it back off the shelf when I started working with Johnny because I thought he would be better able to articulate the story. That was all really cool, and then we started a podcast right about this time. Johnny nagged us into it. I'm really

glad he did, because it's been one of the best things in my life. Just the working relationship I have with Johnny and Dave, and it's been really, really amazing. That was a lot of talking.

James: Yeah, well I don't know about Mark, but I've got follow-up questions, straight away. I want to take you back, because I think everyone is fascinated with what makes an entrepreneur tick, and you gave us quite a bit of insight into that.

MY TWO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS TO THAT, ONE IS WHAT THE TWO GIRLS DID TO YOU, THE TWO WOMEN, TO YOUR FAMILY BUSINESS. I WONDERED NOW WHEN YOU'VE BEEN IN THE CUT AND THRUST OF BUSINESS FOR A LONG TIME, WHETHER YOU HAVE ANY SYMPATHY AT ALL FOR THEM, JUST THINKING FROM A BUSINESS POINT OF VIEW, WHERE YOU STILL THINK THAT'S JUST NOT THE WAY TO BEHAVE ETHICALLY, AND YOU STILL FEEL THE SAME.

Sean: I absolutely feel the same way. I would never, ever treat anyone like that. Honor is really important to me. Now, I would never behave in the way that I behaved, because I think my behavior was equally wrong. It was really easy to justify at the time, but no, that was stupid. It was really, really dumb. I should have let karma take care of it.

James: It's not ethically wrong. I think I completely understand you, and I would probably have done something similar. It may not be, perhaps the most sensible thing, to have done.

Sean: Yeah, sensible. That's exactly right. It wasn't sensible. It really ended up just wasting a lot of my time, and that was silly. What did I benefit from that? I mean, some good, in-the-trenches knowledge, for sure.

James: Yeah, you learn some stuff.

Sean: But no, I would never be friends with somebody, and then turn around and do that. They literally stole. They stole, and I don't think there's any circumstances ever where that's okay. On the other hand, I don't think that I needed to open up five shops in a circle around them just try to squeeze them. That's a little bit silly.

James: It's who you were then, and it's partly made who you are now. I find that really interesting, because

there are industries, the advertising industry, over the years, where everyone steals their clients and sets up their own agency the moment they can; where this type of behavior has long been part and parcel of it. I really love the fact that hopefully, and I think Mark and I consider ourselves in this space as well, where we operate in a different way.

I HATE TO USE THE '2.0 EXPRESSION', BUT IT'S A NEW WAY OF DOING THINGS WHERE YOU DO IT BECAUSE YOU ENJOY IT, AND BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BE WITH THESE PEOPLE, AND YOU WANT TO MAKE PROGRESS TOGETHER. YOU DON'T DO IT AT EACH OTHER'S EXPENSES, CERTAINLY NOT TO THAT DEGREE, ANYWAY.

Sean: I remember at the time I was complaining to my hair dresser about this. I really liked this guy. His salon was right next door to our flower shop, and I had gone to him since I was a kid. I just expected him to share in my outrage, and he just absolutely did not, because that happens in the salon business all the time. Yeah, I mean I can understand it, but I know I would never do that. If somebody did that to me now, I wouldn't sue anybody if they stole from me, which is maybe a silly thing to say out loud.

I feel like I'm a smart person and I'm great to work with. You lose the ability to ever work with me again because you wronged me. I can't trust you, and if I can't trust you, I'm not going to work with you. I feel like that's a big loss. The relationship is much more valuable than anything you're going to steal from me.

James: I'm going to let Mark speak in a minute. I've still got more questions. Sorry, Mark. I'm hogging Sean. My other question is about work life balance, because obviously by your own admission, you've been this workaholic. You get up in the morning, you beef up the hours every week; you're taking your first holiday soon. There's a lot of talk in this space ... People like Pat Flynn and 'the passive income,' and Tim Ferriss and "The 4-Hour Work Week."

A lot of people saying that the idea of doing all this, of getting these income streams from various sources, and podcasts, and all the rest of it, is that you don't have to work. I always think that's a little bit contradictory, because the people who are able to do this, who are so motivated that they can forge these new areas, are exactly the opposite of the people who don't want to work and only want to work four hours a week.

CAN YOU FIND A WAY WHERE YOU CAN JUST SIT BACK AND START ENJOYING THE REVENUE STREAMS COMING IN WITHOUT BEING AT IT ALL DAY?

Sean: I think that's a great question. I think that there's two sides to that. First, I do think that you're absolutely right. I think that the person who is going to enjoy those revenue streams is a person who, that's

part of the art for them, is creating those revenue streams. They're not just creating them so that they can sit back and enjoy them, they're creating them because that's part of what they want to do. I come back to this all the time. If I all of a sudden had 30 million dollars in the bank, I wouldn't be doing things much differently than I'm doing right now.

The company has grown a lot in the last year, so a lot of our infrastructure is taken care of. There has been a lot of stuff that's taken off of my plate for the first time in seven years since I started out on all of this crazy adventure. To my credit, I haven't filled that with more work, which is what I would typically have done. If I've just cleared ten hours a week off of my plate, I would add ten hours of new stuff. Lately, I've not. I'm exercising every day. I've never done that in my life. I'm exercising every day, every Wednesday I have date day with my wife. I started that in September when the children went back to school, and I haven't missed it one time, except when I had to travel. It's these other things that I'm putting into my life, which I think makes me a more complete, more balanced person, and therefore I'm refueling my tank, which I think makes me able to do even more.

I don't think it's about doing less. I don't get joy out of doing less. I find that I have work life balance because my work is, in a lot of ways, my life. I enjoy everything that I do. I think you find, for me personally, I find work life balance by not doing anything I don't want to do. I can work 70 hours a week because I get to see my children whenever I want, and I love all of the projects. As long as I put my love for what I'm doing ahead of other things like money. Because it's not that I don't like money, of course I like money; but I also am a very long term thinker. I tend to believe if I just keep doing what I do, I'm going to make more money than I can spend over my lifetime, so what's the point of hustling in ways that are incongruent with my passion?

Mark: I agree. I think I share that way thinking, too. I don't think I told you this before, Sean, but I was a lawyer when I came out of university in the city of London. Those would be 70 hour weeks, typically. The kind of place where people would leave their jackets on the backs of their chairs when they left at night so that the partners thought that they were still in the office. Those are horrible places. Certainly not for me, but I've probably worked those same kind of hours now.

If on my Sunday night, I can go to bed excited about the next five days, I know I'm doing the right thing. For too long, for 15 years, probably, I would go to bed on Sunday and was regretful because I had another five days before I got to the weekend again where I could do my own thing. Yeah, it is hard. I definitely work hard. You work extremely hard. When you're enjoying something, it's not really work, it is a blend

of work and life.

Sean: Yeah, it's life. I sit down on Sunday morning, and I'm pretty religious about this. I don't go to church, but every Sunday morning, I do sit down and I plan my week. I've done this for ever, really. When I was writing a lot of copy, or when I was juggling things with Laurie, it's other times in my life, or even the very early days of Sterling and Stone, I would have these big, long lists of to-dos when I'm planning out on Sunday. My week, it would give me kind of a sinking feeling in my stomach, like, "Ugh. So much to do. There's just so many Ts to cross and Is to dot, but I'll get to it."

Now when I'm planning my week, it's like "Aw, I can't wait to do that! Oh, I can't wait to do that! I can't wait." It's not like there's never anything that I'm not looking forward to, because of course there is; but by and large, almost everything that I'm doing at any point in the week, I'm excited about it. I'm looking forward to it.

MARK: IN PRACTICAL TERMS, WHAT DOES YOUR DAY LOOK LIKE? WHAT TIME DO YOU GET UP? WHAT TIME DO YOU FOLD THE LAPTOP UP AND FINISH?

Sean: I get up at 5:30, and that's pretty religiously. Sometimes a little before 5, but I cannot remember the last time I set an alarm at all.

Mark: Wow.

Sean: I don't need to. I wake up, and that's the time I wake up. I go out and I make coffee, and I get right to work. It's very easy for me. I do creative, so it's very easy to get lost in email. It's very easy to get slacking and just stupid, stupid stuff that all of a sudden, your day is gone and you're like, "What did I do today?" It's so, so easy, and I know that about myself.

I also know that, I think the best way to be productive is to know who you are, and trick yourself into being good, you know? If you like to eat cookies, don't put them in the house, right? That's basically my deal. I really try to kill distractions.

I want to get four to six hours of creative stuff done before I do anything else. That means beats and outlines for new stories. That means editing stuff. That means writing, anything that is just actually

producing work has to be done in the first part of the day. Right now, it's actually 9:30 for me, a.m., and I never, ever do anything at this time like this. I never do interviews at this time. I'm always creative. The reason we're doing this is because I messed up our last time. I got to own that. I wasn't going to make you guys do a later one, because I messed up the time.

James: We're very grateful. We do feel a little bit honored.

Sean: No, no. It's because I messed up, you know? That's the right thing to do. When we first made the appointment, I was "No, this is when I can do that." I think protecting your schedule is important. I think it's really easy when you're us, right? You're entrepreneurs, you work for yourself. We're creative, and we kind of are a little flopsy-mopsy with our day. Just say, "Oh, I can do it then, because I'm not doing anything else. I can do this other thing later." I think the more that you build routines into your life, and you're consistent with those routines, I think the more you're training yourself to be successful.

Mark: That's the morning, I'm with you on that.

I DEFINITELY DO MY CREATIVE WORK IN THE MORNING. DO YOU STOP FOR LUNCH?

Sean: I do stop for lunch. I stop for lunch at the same time every day, which is noon-ish, when my wife comes home from hot yoga every. She goes every single day, and that's when she comes home. I step away, and we bond. We have lunch. Then, I take a nap, most days, because I used to not ever take a nap and I would just power through stuff. Now I find that if I take a nap, it's pretty great. I wake up really refreshed and I have a little bit more energy for that last part of the day. It's not a long nap, it's 30 minutes; but it's enough to just reset me. It's nice. I'm laying down with my wife, it's a very sweet time of the day.

After that, I get another little bit of whatever done, usually admin-type stuff, email, checking in on Slack, that kind of thing. Then, at 2:00, straight up, I have a meeting every day. It's either Johnny, Dave, Garrett, except for Wednesday. Monday is Garrett, Tuesday is Johnny, Wednesday is date day, Thursday is Dave, and then Friday is podcast mania.

MARK: I'M REALLY INTERESTED IN THE NAP, BECAUSE I THINK THAT'S A BIG OF A GROWING THING NOW, BUT IT'S STILL CERTAINLY IN THE UK, IT FEELS MASSIVELY UNACCEPTABLE. I THINK EVEN YOU HESITATED SLIGHTLY AS YOU WERE SAYING IT, SLIGHTLY SELF CONSCIOUS.

Sean: I totally did, yeah.

Mark: I would really struggle to do it, not because I'm not completely convinced. I think it's a really good health benefit. I think it would make me more productive.

I WOULD STRUGGLE TO DO IT BECAUSE OF THE SELF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THAT NAGGING FEELING THAT YOU'RE SLEEPING IN THE MIDDLE OF A WORK DAY; AND THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING, WHICH IS RIDICULOUS, RIGHT?

Sean: It took me a long time to do it. What was funny is, I would encourage Cindy every day to take a nap. She's like, "I don't want to nap. You're not napping with me. I don't want to do it." I started doing it just because I wanted her to nap. I knew that she would if I did. It was kind of funny because I'll lay down, and I will literally be out in under a minute. Then, I will wake up 29 minutes later. It's amazing how like clockwork it is. I do set an alarm for my naps, where I don't for nighttime. I'll set a timer for 30 minutes, but I'm always up right before it goes off.

I think the brain is pretty amazing, if you allow it to be. If you give yourself the circumstances to allow yourself to thrive in those ways, I think we do, we surprise ourselves. I found that a 30 minute nap almost always is awesome. There are a couple of times when I wake up, and I'm more tired. I really wish that, "Oh, well I don't have a meeting now." I still wake up in the 30 minutes, but I wake up feeling really serene. I kind of feel quiet, and I'd really rather just do something quietly creative, or even just answer emails, rather than getting up and having my meeting.

Now, I started doing this midway last year. I'm not exactly sure when, but all of my meetings are walking meetings now, which is a way that I can be healthy. I know that between two and four each day, I'm walking for those two hours. We're writers, we sit a lot. It's not healthy, so I'm trying to build a lot of that movement into my day, too. Since I have a meeting every day, why not walk during that meeting?

JAMES: THIS IS A HEADSET OR IN A BLUETOOTH OR SOMETHING, SO YOU'RE ON THE PHONE, I ASSUME?

Sean: Yeah, correct.

Mark: Okay, so let's say you've had your nap, you're in the meeting until 4.

WHAT COMES AFTER THAT? HOW DO KIDS FIT INTO THIS?

Sean: Well, I walk them to the bus stop every morning. That's when I take my first little walk. It's not long,

but it's enough to get me out because I've been working for two hours by that time. It's a nice little refresh, come back, and work. They don't come home from the bus until 5:00, and by that time, hopefully I'm done.

Usually I'm done with my meeting by 4:00. Then I come in, close up a few loose ends, and then I have dinner. We always have dinner as a family, every night, 95% of the time. We have a little bit of family time after dinner. Then usually, when they are going to do their homework, I either tidy up a few loose ends. If I don't have a few loose ends, then I take that time to read.

Mark: This is very helpful. I've got two kids, four and a half and two, and I've been kind of fogged down about this for a year now. It's a constant ... not a struggle, but it's kind of a constant re-calibration to try and get the work life balance in the traditional sense of what that means into a state where everyone is happy. If I don't stop myself, I would just keep working. I wouldn't stop, and of course, that's not something that is sustainable with kids, and a family, and happy family life. It's really interesting to hear how you've broken this down. Come back to me in six months time and there might be a nap in my schedule, perhaps.

Sean: I will say that with younger children like that, it's hard. The things that I'm doing now, I could not have done when they were younger. They're really independent now. My children are 14 and almost just ready to turn 12. It's different. They want a little bit of independence, and they have to do their homework, and stuff like that. It's a little bit easier to step away, but at the same time, I know that I need to absolutely make sure that I'm plugged in with them.

I wake them up every morning, because my office right now, is actually in my bedroom. It really sucks for me to be up at 5:30, tip-tapping on the computer while Cindy's sleeping. I actually go out into the front room and my first hour and a half, I'm just out there by myself on the laptop, standing, though. I am standing out there, because I'm trying to stand as much as I possibly can. Then, I wake them up, and half an hour later we go to the bus stop. There's all these little breaks in the day, but they're very short. I do believe in the pomodoro, where they say "you work for 25 minutes, and then you take a break."

I actually think I don't do 25 minutes, I do 30 minutes; but that really works for me. 30 minutes, 30 minutes, 30 minutes; but you do that one, two times in a day, you can have a very productive six hours if you're very efficient about it. I know that I need to stay plugged in to my children because they're growing, and they're growing fast. They have to know that I want to talk to them, and I want to see them, and I want

to say good morning to them, and I want to say good night to them. I tuck them in every single night. I don't think they're too old for that. It is balance, but it's about really being cognizant of who you are and what you want to do, and what you want to model for your children because you can tell them anything, but they don't care about that. They care about what you do. Children, they do as you do, not as you say.

James: I'm like Mark, I'm fascinated by this. It's brilliant tips, so that those of us who work from home and work for ourselves. I think going back a little bit to what it is that we are advocating and when we talk to people, why we're enthusiastic about this. You're absolutely right when you say the earlier part about the money. The money's there, okay; but actually, do you know what I sell to people when I talk to people is the sorts of decisions you're making about how much time I'm going to spend with my family. How to divide up the day? How to make sure you're still healthy and stuff; because when you do a nine to five job, which in reality is getting up at 6:30 a.m. and getting in at 7:30, quarter to eight in the evening for a lot of the people who live around where I do, 60 miles from London. They would love to have the kind of problems that you're juggling with, "When do I work? When I do meet my wife coming back from hot yoga? When do I have my nap?"

You don't become complacent. This is the dream. It doesn't actually matter though if you can pay your bills, that's brilliant.

THE DREAM IS THIS LIFESTYLE, AND IT'S ADDICTIVE. ONCE YOU START, AND I THINK ANY OF THE THREE OF US TALKING NOW COULD EVER WORK FOR SOMEBODY IN A TRADITIONAL SENSE AGAIN.

Mark: Probably.

Sean: That's exactly why I think that when people say, "How do you achieve work life balance?" I'm like, "Well, I feel like it's achieved. It's just a matter of like anything else, it's optimizing." Certainly I want to create more, and I want to make more money. There are things that I want to do, but I love the harmony that I have in my life. I love not just the amount of time I spend working versus living, but the emotional gratification I have on every single thing I put my hands on right now.

Yes, I do have to sacrifice some money because there are some very easy, easy ways that I could make money that I don't. I choose not to because it's just a longer term game. If I really cared about money, I would actually still be making more money as a copywriter as I would as an entrepreneur at this point. What I'm doing now will greatly eclipse my potential as a copywriter, for sure. It's just a matter of being

patient.

Patience is a harder one for me, but the funny thing is it's actually easier now for me than it's ever been. When I was first writing those keyword articles, and then when I was copywriting, and then when I was starting Sterling and Stone. I was just working, working, working. I worked until past ten every night, sometimes past midnight, and it was just grueling. It was exhausting. I just needed everything to happen yesterday, because I just felt like I was Indiana Jones and that boulder was right behind me. I had to run as fast as I possibly could or I was going to get trampled.

I was just always running, and now I don't.

I have not met all of my goals, not even close, but I'm not hurting. I'm not struggling. I have what I need to live where I want to live, to send my children to the school they want to go to, or that I want them to go to, because let's face it: they don't want to go. Although, they do love their school. To have the time with Cindy that I have, and basically have the life I want, and work with the people I want. Yeah, I want to continue to optimize that, but I think that's a natural thing. Now that I'm at the cusp of some many things, I'm actually more patient than I've ever been.

Mark: Let's just tie this back in ambition again, because you set out what your week looks like. I wasn't taking notes, but we've all got the same amount of hours in the week. You're building in some things that I probably should build in, that would mean I wasn't working during those hours. You probably work less hours than I do, but the thing is, you produce more than I do, which is irritating the hell out of me at the moment. If you just look at that week, you are already busy.

Let's turn it back six months ago. You're already really busy with your fiction, with the podcast, all that kind of stuff. Then around about that time, you don't just have a podcast, now you've got a network. When I heard about what you were planning, I thought, "How the hell is that possible?" James and I are just setting this podcast up now and that's enough work. You've got like 8, which is ridiculous. Then it's Story Shop on top of that, the Kickstarter things that you've done, scripts. You're so ambitious.

I don't know what the question is there.

I SUPPOSE IT'S WHEN YOU LOOKED AT WHAT THIS YEAR WAS GOING TO BE LIKE FOR YOU, DID YOU EVER STEP BACK AND GO "HOLY SHIT. THIS IS ACTUALLY TOO MUCH FOR ME TO TAKE," EVEN WITH THE TEAM THAT YOU'VE GOT?

Sean: Yeah, of course. I think that for me, it's not ambitious. It's in like, "I have to do all these things, or I'm not happy with myself," right? It's more like I just love aiming big and seeing how much I can do. I've been making those end of year lists ever since I had the flower shop.

I don't make resolutions as in most people make resolutions and then they, you know, "I'm going to lose 35 pounds this year." It's not really like that. It's just more things that I want to see that I want to accomplish. Who I want to be a year from now.

The end of the year is a very reflective time for me, and I really do like to evaluate everything I've done. Then, look forward to the things that I want to do. The magic of that is that year, after year, after year, after year, the things that I say I'm going to do, I do them. Even if it doesn't all get handled that year, some of that stuff carries over, but it becomes part of my story.

For example, I have a lot of credibility with Cindy at this point, because she's seen me make these lists for 20 years almost, that we've been together. She knows that even if I put something crazy on the list, it ends up not being so crazy two, three years later. Yeah, I think that those lists are stupid obnoxious, but I don't mind aiming big, because even if I come 70% of where I aim for, that's still awesome. I think it's okay to aim really big as long as you're okay with falling short a little bit.

I'm never ever uncomfortable with failing, or falling short, or making a mistake. I just think it's all part of living a good life. We're storytellers. There's got to be conflict. There's got to be things that the hero wants that he just can't get. It's fine for me to want something, work for it, not get it, have to figure it out, work harder. With things like the podcast, it's just really looking at the whole picture and then taking it apart.

For example, blogging was very hard for me. Actually, that's not true. Blogging was actually relatively straightforward for me, and I was good at it, but I didn't really see a return. I'd been wanting to do that kind of thing. We've wanted to have SterlingandStone.net be a pretty cool place. Right now, it's not. It's actually just a mess, it's terrible. It's our biggest pain point right now is converting that site into something amazing, and we're a couple months away from where we need to be. I hate our site. I hate everything about it. It's so not what it needs to be, and especially considering we have this network.

There's two big problems with the network. One is, we don't have any place to send all of our traffic,

which is ridiculous. We also hinged the network on a podcast that we've been working on for a year, and it's still not out. That's kind of a problem, too. We've been paying our producer, and we've been creating all this content, but it's really just running in place right now. It's not doing any of the things it was designed to do; but that's okay. At least, as far as creating the content, we're pretty smart about how we do it.

For example, 'Smarter Artist' runs every single day. That seems like stupid ambitious on paper. Like, "Oh my god, that's a daily. How do you do that?" That's actually only one day a month on my end.

I have all my prompts. I write them all out, and then I just record them all in one batch, and send them to Audra, our producer. Then, she takes care of them from there. From my end, I've created a month's worth of content in one afternoon, which would be great if I actually had a call to action and follow-through on that series. As far as creating the content, we're pretty efficient about that part.

Mark: You've positioned yourself very nicely in two spaces. You're aiming on the one hand at fiction, and at readers. On the other hand, you've built up you, and Johnny, and Dave, have built yourselves up as go-to guys when it comes for other writers.

I've told you this before, SPP was the first podcast I listened to when I started to get into this three years ago. It was amazingly helpful then and is responsible for a lot of the stuff I've done since.

IF I HAD TO SAY TO YOU RIGHT NOW, WHAT IS YOUR PASSION? IF I SAID YOU COULD ONLY HAVE ONE OF THOSE THINGS, SO IT'S HELPING OTHER WRITERS, OR WRITING FICTION, OR CREATION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Sean: It would definitely be being a story teller. I do love helping people, and that's why we do it. It's always been very important to me that we're a fiction first company. I've said this a bunch of times, the easy button for us right now would be to create some sort of course for writers. I don't want to do that.

In fact just recently, we turned down a very, very generous offer to put our faces on something. I didn't want to do it. The reason is because I'm a little bit uncomfortable at this point giving advice or charging for advice. I don't mind giving advice, but a lot of what we do is so maverick. Like genre hopping is something we do. It's clearly the wrong for almost every author out there to do, right?

I don't want to be responsible for other people's failures. That makes me very nervous. It makes me very uncomfortable to think that they would be buying a product that they might not ROI on. I don't want to be responsible for that, and part of that is just my own baggage. I was a marketing ghostwriter, and I know what conversion rates were. I know how many people actually ROI'd on the stuff that they bought. I know that I had people who are very candid about how many people actually even opened the products they bought, because there is this thing in the information business where people ... they buy products because it makes them feel that much closer to their dream, not because they're actually going to do anything with the information. I just don't want to be in the business of selling help.

I think that being able to give information for free. I like that. I do feel like I'm a natural teacher, and I like helping. I spend a lot of my week answering emails, and helping people. I like the things like the Smarter Artist Summit that we're doing. I think that's awesome. I would do one of those every year forever. I think that's going to be great. The 'Stone Table,' which is our mastermind. I love that, because you're getting really, really ridiculously smart people in a room where they are sharing their best information. I feel like some of my best knowledge has come from those same types of masterminds. I really, really like that.

Ultimately, what I really want to do with life is to tell stories. I want to make movies. I want to make TV shows. I want to do all of that stuff, and I can't skip my steps. I have to pay my dues and get better and better at the craft. I do want to own the copyright, so I do want to build a studio very slowly where we can start making stuff ourselves. That's just a really incremental process. It is what I would want to do, so it's been more important to me to put fiction first and make sure that the lion's share of the money that we're making as a company is for fiction and not non-fiction.

James: I want to hear you about the industry now, because obviously a lot of our thoughts are occupied with how the industry has performed over the last couple of years, and where it's likely to go in the next couple of years. A lot of the authors who listen to your podcast, listen to this podcast, will be at the beginning of their career. It's relevant to them where you think things are going. Obviously you're so prolific, and the amount of books that you guys are putting out, you probably see the trends developing.

CAN YOU GIVE ME A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT'S WORKING IN TERMS OF MARKETING AT THE MOMENT, AND IN TERMS OF WRITING, AND PERHAPS WHAT'S NOT WORKING? WHAT IS IT YOU SEE?

Sean: That's a great question, let's see if I can stay on point here. What's working is the fact that people can publish. It's hard to get your books noticed. You can get out there, you can publish. Anybody can do that, but it's crowded, right? We had a much easier time a few years ago, because well, it was easy. There

was so much less competition. Now, a lot of people are doing indie, and a lot of people who would otherwise do traditional are really second guessing their decision and are maybe going indie where they would have otherwise gone traditional.

I think that there's maybe better quality than there was a few years ago, that's continuing to improve, and the authors are getting savvier. Things like covers are getting better. There's a lot of shows, a lot of podcasts, a lot of advice, a lot of information products out there, that are teaching you better ways to do this. Not only is there more competition, the competition is better. I think that it's not enough just to write a book, and pray. I don't think hope marketing works at all.

James: No.

Sean: I think you need to identify with your audience. I think you need to do things like Facebook ads that tell people where they are going. Mark knows this inside and out. You have to communicate with your readers.

You also have to understand the way readers read. What I mean by that, and this is another one of those things where I don't think we're especially well-equipped for all kinds of advice. Writing to market is one of those things. We very much always written the kinds of things we want to write, but writing to market can be a very effective way to find your audience, and to actually make money as a writer. We've done it-ish.

For example, our 'Invasion' series, which did very well last year, I'm really happy with it; but there's two things about the 'Invasion' series. It's not the best thing we've written. I think 'The Beam' is a much, much better series than 'Invasion,' but 'Invasion' is much more commercial. It sells much better. It's not selling out totally because I still enjoy writing the 'Invasion' series, but if I could write anything, it would definitely be 'The Beam' over the 'Invasion' series. Whatever, my family has to eat, right? That's important to balance those different things.

Even within the 'Invasion' series, we don't exactly write to market. We write to market with an overall concept that we know is really commercial, and we definitely have the product descriptions, and the covers that are very commercial, and they've made it easy for that book to be merchandised. Even within

that, we do tell the story our way. There's a lot of stuff about that series that doesn't follow the tropes, and is definitely us telling the kind of story we want to tell even if on the surface, we're writing to market.

Mark: Without giving too many spoilers away, I love the 'Invasion.'

I'VE READ THEM, SEAN, AND IN THE FIRST BOOK, THERE ARE NO ALIENS.

Sean: Yeah, right. We definitely take our knocks in the reviews for that, but I'm okay with that. I'm comfortable with that because again, it's that whole thing we were talking about with life balance. I want to love everything I do. I don't necessarily like a lot of the stuff that's written to market. I want to write something that I'll be happy with 20 years from now as much as I am now. 'The Beam,' I couldn't be more proud of 'The Beam.' I think that 'The Beam' is a really good example of sci-fi with a lot of layers, and a lot of depth, but it's a little more challenging. Certainly as a reader, it's more challenging. As an author, it takes Johnny and I substantially more time to create a 'Beam' than it does 'Invasion,' and yet 'Invasion' far outsells it. What are you going to do with your hours?

I think that knowing your market and really pleasing that market is an efficient way to make money as an author, for sure.

Mark: Yes. It's a compromise. We spoke to Russell Blake about this, a very similar point. I agree with everything he said, too. It's basically if you think of it like a Venn diagram, on the one hand you've got what readers want; on the other hand, you've got what you want to write. That'd be where it intersects. That's where you should probably be aiming if you want to satisfy yourself creatively and pay the rent. I would probably prefer to write something a bit more literary than the books that I write, but I love writing the books that I write, and they do sell well; so what am I going to do? I'm going to keep writing them.

Sean: It's absolutely true. I think it's just about balance. We just finished, about a month ago, a book called 'Devil May Care.' Johnny and I finished it, and Our mandate for that book was it has to please us, not readers. It has to please us more than 'Axis of Aaron,' which was our most literary title to date. I do not care how many copies that sells. Of course I would love it if it blew up, I would love it to be slobbered on, and everyone just think it was awesome. That would make me very, very happy; but it's about knowing your why for things.

If that book had to sell a lot of copies for me to feel successful about it, that's setting me up for failure. If I

have to love that book, and that's my criteria, then I've already succeeded. Where 'Invasion,' my criteria isn't "I have to love it more than 'The Beam.'" My criteria is, "It has to sell really well." We were successful with that book.

I think it's easy to be successful with each of your books if you set out knowing what you want. It's not what's hard about indie publishing right now, or easy about indie publishing. It's just a point that a lot of authors miss. They don't necessarily know what they want before they start a project, and knowing that books are different.

I think that there's this mentality where I think it's hard for authors to be patient. We touched on that a little bit earlier, but I think that's really true. I think that probably the number one question we get other than "How long should my episodes on my serial be?" Which, I'm so burnt out on that question.

"However long they need to be!"

The number one question we get is, "What would you do if you were just starting out and you didn't have any books?"

I would say, "I would write three books before I ever went to market with the first one," because I think that the worst thing you can do is have a reader fall in love with you and you have no where to go. Also, that gives you a funnel. It means that you have at least a hope of building a list, because you could do the perma-free, and then your second book to join the list, and then a third book for them to buy, or get excited about. I think that's very painful for an author to hear.

"You mean you would write three books and give two of them away?"

"Well, yes, because it's a long-term thing." If you want to stand out among the competition, you want to get noticed. You have to find ways to get noticed. It's not just about writing a better book, because there's a lot of people who are writing better books.

James: It's a recurring theme, and I'm the author who's writing his first book at the moment, so it's most discouraging for me. Thank you, Sean.

Sean: I'm sorry.

James: In actual fact, you're in good company because Marie Force answered that question in the same way, and look at her success. She said, "Think of it as inventory on the shelf. Don't go to market with one stuck item, because where do people go after that?" Yes, that was her. You've chimed very well with a great, successful author in the market, and you've made me slightly more depressed than I was two minutes ago. That's okay.

Sean: Now, well just look at it long term and think that when you go to market, you're just really amping your odds. I think it's certainly hard to do. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but just the results are so worth it.

As far as what's coming, I think that the biggest thing that needs to happen for indies is some sort of great discoverability engine. Right now, it's all algorithm-based, I mean on Amazon, at least. We've got merchandising on the other stores, but something that is really recommendation-based on who you are as a reader, and nothing like that out there exists. The best recommendation in the world, right now, is on Amazon. It's kind of balls. It's based on a lot of stuff that we have no control over, a lot of stuff that's really in Amazon's favor and not in the reader's favor, because they're not necessarily giving you the best book that you would enjoy. All things considered, it's their things considered.

I love Amazon, they've totally changed my life. I think they're just a great company, but I also think that authors need to realize that Amazon is not on the author's side, they're on their side. Their job is to sell merchandise, not books. Books for them, in many ways, are a loss leader. They're going to continue to change the rules in their favor as it suits them, as they should, that's their business.

I have no ill will towards them doing that, but I do wish that the indie community at large was a little more aware of that. I think that Amazon has a little too much power versus the other vendors. KDP Select is just a juggernaut, and it's very difficult to say no to.

We just launched a series, and of course we put it in Select, but I hate myself for it, you know? I really wish that I didn't, because we do preach going wide. For most titles, we want to go wide, but then there's also the reality that going wide can be a very expensive decision for authors, especially brand new authors who have no other way to promote themselves.

James: Okay, couple of quick ones just before we do let you go, Sean, for your busy day. I mean, funny enough, you're just talking about there being a big gap in the market for this kind of reader index thing; but I don't know if that's a plan you're hatching in the back of your mind for Sterling and Stone in the future maybe to do that, provide that.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF, AND MAYBE STERLING AND STONE, IN FIVE YEARS? IT SOUNDS LIKE AN INTERVIEW QUESTION, THIS ONE ISN'T IT?

Sean: The discoverability engine, I think that's just a billion dollar idea; but I wouldn't even know where to start with that. No, my fingers are definitely out of that pie. It also doesn't sound fun to me. My ambition is firmly rooted with things that are fun.

Story Shop, for example, and this just to answer another earlier question, too, on how so much gets done. It's partnering with awesome people, and the right people. All of my partners at Sterling and Stone are amazing, and help me do a lot more in less time.

Same with Story Shop. It was on our 2015 list. Our big ambitious, 'What are we going to do in 2015?' We had 'build an app' on that list, but that had no shape. I didn't really know what that would take until I started talking to Seth, and I realized what Story Shop is, and what it could be. It went from this brain fart in my mind to something much more tangible as he gave it shape. Without Seth, that wouldn't exist.

Now, I'm super, super excited about Story Shop because it's basically an app built for us, and the way we outline our stories. I love that we can build that and then share it. To me, that's not an information product. That's the perfect kind of product. I'm building something I want to use and then I'm going to sell it. That makes me really, really happy. That's the great equation.

It never would have existed without Seth. Seth has to carry that ball. I can tell him the things that I like, and would want in that app, but he has to build it. I can never do that with a discoverability engine. I wouldn't even know where to start or get my head around it, but I think Story Shop will be a pretty amazing thing. I'm really, really excited about seeing where that goes.

We will sell our first screen play this year. I'm very confident in that. I wrote four ... No, I'm on my fifth. I wrote four last year, threw two in the trash, and two are being shopped right now. Even if nothing happens

with those, I'm okay with that. I'm in the process of writing and getting better at them, and we will sell one. Eventually, we'll be a solid enough company to start making our own stuff. We'll add other authors into the stable at some point, I'm sure, years from now. We have to be much more efficient than we are. I think that the podcast network will be really outstanding. I think it's still in its infancy, and it's still missing its flagship show. We'll get there.

Basically, I just want to continue to do what I'm doing, and get better at it. I want to become a better story teller. I think that I'm still at the very beginning of my story telling career. I think I get better with each book, but I still think I'm kind of a baby. I want to continue to grow there, and I want to make a difference. I love the work that we've done at 'The Self Publishing' podcast. I love the emails that we get. That's very gratifying, and I want to continue to make a big difference in the community. I love that we inspire people, and I love that. I want to make a difference.

James: I'm going to wrap things up now. It's been an absolutely absorbing chat with you. There's a joyful nature to your success, Sean. I think it's because you're so good at articulating it. We can, in a way, it just means we kind of share in your successes and failures as well. That's quite a special thing, it's a very modern thing. I like it. There's a whole area, by the way, of writing and collaboration, I think we could do another hour with you on, because I think your approach to writing has a lot to talk to us about. Your approach to collaboration is absolutely key to your success.

Sean: I love that subject. I could talk on it for years.

James: That's me tuning you up to try and get you back at some point. I know you're a busy man, but we'd love to have you back. I think on those two areas, alone, would be very beneficial. I'm just talking personally. This is just for my life, I need to hear more of you, but I'm sure everyone does.

Sean: I'd be happy to.

James: All right Sean, thank you so much for joining us.

Sean: My absolute pleasure. You guys have a great day.

James: Different interviews have different purposes with our podcast, and there will be interviews in the future where people will be making ... and we've had them already with Marie and so on. People making notes, and little actions that they're going to take. With Sean, really, it was about that energy, that approach, that's going to be your foundation for being successful. I actually find it really quite inspirational. I don't say that about every interview, but I did with him.

Mark: Yeah, Sean has built something pretty special with Johnny, and Dave, and Garrett now, as well. Just listening to how he structures his day, and how he's been able to work it around so he can spend more time with his wife, and just going to build the life that he's always wanted. It is inspirational. He's done lots of different things. He's got a lot of experience, and I certainly learned some things about Sean that I didn't know before he spoke to us. I hope everyone found that as interesting and inspirational as I did.

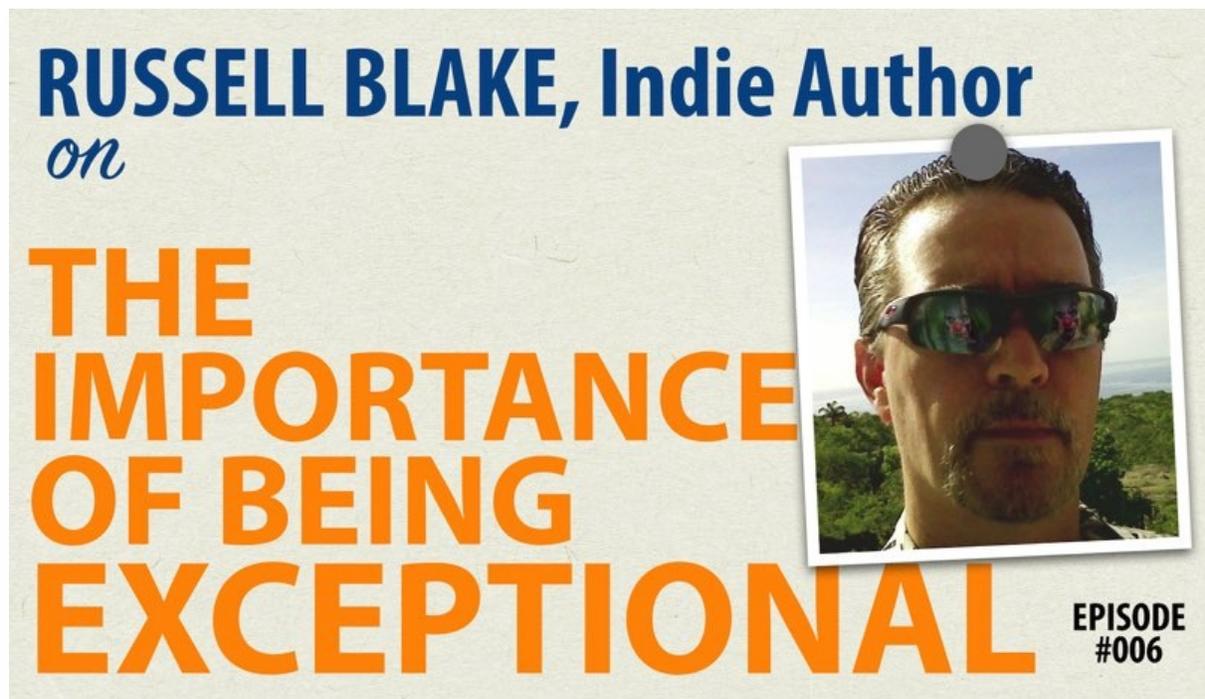
James: Yeah, I mean I haven't gone all the way in terms of having the nap, and doing the hot yoga and stuff, that he talked about; but I did, as a result of us recording that interview, I changed the way I order my day.

I've changed my whiteboard, which I have basically a board where I just have the long list of everything that needed to be done at some point. I now have it divided in two, and on the right hand side is what needs to be accomplished today. It really makes a difference to the way that I approach each day. I know that I can tick things off, and I know I've done that. I feel a lot more settled than before where it was just this vague feeling there was a load of stuff to do. I think that organization approach, which includes organizing aspects of your life that are just there to make you feel healthy, and mentally healthy, I think that's a really good thing we got from Sean.

Mark: I agree. I work on a similar basis. I think it's fairly usual that you get a bit of a blast of achievement when you can cross something off a list. It's interesting that Sean's been doing that, and it definitely works for me, too.

James: Okay, we're going to the wild borderlands for the next podcast. We've got a fantastic interview with Russell Blake, who's hugely entertaining, writes brilliant books, and he is a guy who is going to give you a lot of things that you will want to pick up on and do in your own marketing and writing experience. That's next time. Thank you so much indeed for joining us, and we'll see you then.

Mark: Bye bye.



RUSSELL BLAKE, Indie Author
on
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EXCEPTIONAL

EPISODE #006

Russell Blake is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of some 30 - count 'em! - much loved books and has been featured in the likes of the Wall Street Journal and The Chicago Tribune. He's become a hugely respected figure in indie publishing circles and together with Mark and James, happily discusses, amongst other things, why marketing a book is quite a different process to writing one, the whole Kindle Unlimited thing and how to be an exceptional author (i.e. one that makes a living from writing).

SHOW NOTES

- What a new author should focus on.
- On marketing books and how that skill set is very different from writing them.
- What being the exception to the rule in self-publishing means.

- The perma-free strategy and whether Russell is a believer.
- Russell's thoughts on Kindle Unlimited.
- On selling in online retail stores other than Amazon.
- Kindle Worlds fan fiction and what it's like to read stories by other writers set in Russell's world.
- Marketing a book that's in a different genre than your readers / newsletter subscribers are used to, including pricing strategies.
- Questions from listeners, including what Russell's experience working with Clive Cussler was like.
- Comparisons between the music business and the traditional publishing business.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL BLAKE

James: We're into April, Mark. It's becoming Spring; well, at least, it's becoming Spring at 52 degrees North, where we are. Of course, you might be in Australia, in which case you're looking ahead to Autumn, but nonetheless, it's a changing time of year. It feels kind of optimistic now; I think things are happening while the podcast is getting going, which is exciting.

Mark: Yeah, we're really pleased with the response we've had from listeners; more downloads than we expected at this stage, which is really gratifying. I've had some lovely emails and messages on the selfpublishingformula.com page, so thanks for that. Keep listening.

James: We've had some great feedback. We often pick authors off and talk about, "You should write for yourself." In a way, we're sort of doing a podcast for ourselves, aren't we, because the interviews ... We are really enjoying doing them and gleaning a lot and today is no exception.

Before we move on to today's podcast, just want to ask you a little bit about [London Book Fair](#). I know you went last year and you're planning to go again this year. What's in store for you at LBF, which is ... would you say, Olympia around 12th to 14th of April.

Mark: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. I'm going to be there again this year. I'm speaking on the Amazon panel on the Tuesday and Wednesday at 10:45, I think it is, in the Author HQ, and then taking questions afterwards. I'll be around to speak to people individually if they want to, for as long as there are people to ask me questions afterwards.

You are going to be there with John, the 3rd of the 3 Stooges, to talk to people who might be interested in

talking to us, and I think you're going to be taking a recorder down as well.

James: We're going to do a bit of podcast recording whilst we're there and a little bit of video stuff as well. We might drop some of that into our Facebook page. We'd love to say hello; we'd love you to come and say hello to us, so if you are planning to go to the London Book Fair, drop us a note.

Drop us an email at support@selfpublishingformula.com or drop a note into Facebook or, simply, walk up, tap us on the shoulder, and use the secret password, which is what? I've forgotten what the secret password is, Mark.

Mark: Umm.

James: That's it: 'umm.' Look slightly hesitant and say, "Umm." That's how most people approach me anyway.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Seriously, we would love people to come and say hello; that would be really good. Also, we're going to get as much as we can that's useful out of LBF, the London Book Fair, as possible for the podcast and we'll do some stuff from the London Book Fair itself and then we'll put some stuff in the can as well, because obviously not everyone can get there. I know most of our listeners are in the States, but there is a lot of useful stuff that will come out of that and this podcast will be a good place to glean some of that in the weeks to come.

Mark: Absolutely.

James: Good, cool. Let's move on to today's interview: quite author-based, quite writing-based, but a little bit, also, about marketing. It's a great character; his name is [Russell Blake](#). Many of you will have heard of him. Mark and Russell actually did a joint promotion a few months back, so they've done a little bit of business together.

THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE TWO OF YOU ACTUALLY SPOKE, WASN'T IT?

Mark: It was, yes. Russell is fairly infamous within the community. He'll probably hate me for saying that, but he really knows what he's talking about. We got on the phone with him. He's down in Mexico, so it's partially tequila-fueled, possibly-

James: Yeah.

Mark: ... Maybe even on his side, as well. It was a really good chat, so I hope everyone gets as much out of this as we did when we spoke to him.

James: Russell Blake is the USA Today best-selling author of 30 books, no less. In fact, I bet it's going to be more ... We'll speak to him in a second ... Including the Jet series. He's featured in the Wall Street Journal, the Times, the Chicago Tribune and, notably, Russell is co-author of "The Eye of Heaven" and at least one other book that I've noticed with the legendary Clive Cussler. Russell writes under the moniker R.E. Blake in the Young Adult Contemporary Romance genres. He's also, from our point of view, a well-respected voice on the indie publishing circuit, with a blog that's always forthright and to the point. His opinions are always worth listening to.

Hey, we're delighted to have you along, Russell, all the way from Mexico.

Russell: Lovely to be here. Hello, gentlemen.

James: Lovely to be there in the sun, I would say.

Russell: Yes. If you hear mariachis and screaming in the background, that's just par for the course.

James: Russell, thanks so much indeed for joining us. You know the basic thing that's going on here: I'm setting out on the journey; Mark's advanced. I'm going to get in first with my question because you've been incredibly successful. You're a very good writer, very well-respected. I'm not just saying this because you're on my podcast. I'm also a bit blown away by the amount you've written; you're prolific.

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT MY FOCUS SHOULD BE SO THAT I CAN GET SOMEWHERE WITHIN THE REALM OF YOU WITHIN, PERHAPS, 10 YEARS, 5, 10 YEAR. WHAT SHOULD I BE FOCUSING ON AT THIS STAGE IN MY CAREER?

Russell: I think you should plan on marrying rich. That's my first tip.

James: That ship's sailed.

Russell: Actually, if you do that, you don't really need to do anything else.

James: Yeah.

Russell: You can write your memoirs, hopefully.

Truthfully, I think the thing you need to focus on as a first-time content-creator, as a first-time author, is really to master storytelling. You notice I don't really say 'craft,' which really involves structuring sentences and pacing things and word choice and vocabulary, but mainly just storytelling, because that's, at its essence, is what a book is. It's a story, so it sounds obvious, but if you can deconstruct other people's work and become familiar with what works and what doesn't within your genre, you're going to be way ahead of the game because you'll understand how to tell a story in as well-paced and as compelling a manner as possible.

I'd say focus on the storytelling and on deconstructing other people's work, the work of other people who you think do a particularly good job within your genre.

James: That's great advice and I think already, since I started thinking about writing and started writing, it's impossible to purely enjoy a book anymore. You read a book and-

Russell: No, and that's part of the occupational hazard. I imagine movie guys are the same way. If you're Quentin Tarantino, you probably can't sit down and watch a movie and just enjoy it, because you're constantly going, "What's he doing with his POV, what techniques are they using," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. How is he pacing the story, telling what's happening off-screen, what's happening on-screen? You

get involved in all the technical aspects, but I think it's important to master the technical aspects so you understand what you're doing and then, basically, forget about all of them.

In other words, once you understand the foundation and the bones, the dynamics that go into telling a story in a good versus a clumsy way, forget all the technique and just tell a good story.

James: Okay, that sounds good.

MARK, I KNOW YOU'RE A FAN OF RUSSELL. IN FACT, THE TWO OF YOU HAVE COLLABORATED, HAVEN'T YOU, ON SOME MARKETING VENTURES. I HAVEN'T MADE THAT UP, HAVE I? YOU'VE DONE THAT.

Mark: We did. Russell and I both, for about 2 or 3 months last year, we put together a Facebook ad that gave away the first book in the Jet series and the first book in my Milton series. I can't remember what the numbers were now, Russell. We added a few thousand to our list, didn't we?

Russell: It was very successful, thank you. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to work with you on that.

Mark: It was good for me too; it's just introducing our books to different audiences, so that was really great. One thing that James said, I thought was interesting, is looking at your creative process. I think we are probably quite similar in the way that we look at things. When I started out, I had all these grand ambitions; I tried to write books that would win prizes and they were shit because I'm not that kind of writer.

Russell: Sure.

Mark: At the end of the day, the kind of decision I came down to was, I've got a mortgage to pay and I wanted to look after my family. I wanted to write books. Beyond that, actually ... I wanted to write books that people read and enjoyed, page-turners. That's something you are an absolute master at writing: page-turning fiction. None of us is going to win the Pulitzer, but we're probably going to sell quite a lot of books.

Russell: Speak for yourself. I'm hoping that ... I'm waiting for the call.

Thank you; that's very generous praise, kind words. I've read some of your stuff and you are a masterful storyteller yourself.

By the way, there's no charge for the lotion job, guys. That's perfectly acceptable within the context.

James: Let's move on. Storytelling is fantastic and I think that the sales that you've made and the friends that you've made, frankly, people like Clive Cussler, kind of speak for the fact. Every writer's full of insecurities, right? Nobody's sits there thinking, "I've got it cracked," and I'm not going to say you've got it cracked, but you are somebody who understands a story and is working on that and turning it into something profitable, which moves me on to the marketing side of things.

CAN WE TAP YOUR EXPERIENCE ON THE MARKETING SIDE? WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE FOR SOMEBODY STARTING OUT AND WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE FOR SOMEBODY WHO'S ALREADY DOWN THE ROAD IN THE WAY THAT YOU AND MARK ARE?

Russell: As a beginning author ... It took me a while to figure this out. I think you have to really view the business of publishing your work as a completely separate endeavor than creating content, which is the writing of the book, because, frankly, the skill set that makes you a good writer doesn't have, really, anything to do with operating a successful publishing company, which is where you're marketing the books, you're packaging them, you're editing them, you're making decisions on what product is the best fit for a genre.

And this is an interactive process that's taken probably a few years to be able to synthesize and articulate clearly, assuming I am articulating it clearly. I view it as content creation, which is writing books and telling good stories, and publishing, which is packaging those stories and marketing them and communicating to an audience that you have a product that is both worth paying for and that they will be interested in if they knew it existed.

I think, as a beginning author certainly, understanding that those are two separate disciplines and the skill sets don't necessarily translate across, and that you're signing up to be good at both of them, means that you have to split your time. You have to commit to the discipline of putting in x amount of time on the publishing/ marketing side and x amount of time on the content creation side.

I hear a lot of beginning authors, certainly, saying, "You know, I'm not comfortable with the self-promotion. I'm not comfortable with the marketing side; I'm not good at that." It's like, "Well, sweetie, that's what you signed up for." You're trying to operate a publishing company, so if you just want to be a purely content creator, and not be in the publishing business, which is essentially a retail game, then go ahead and just write good books, shop for an agent, hope lightning strikes and best of luck to you. If you're going to try to do both and self-publish, just recognize that you are signing up to, not only the content creation side of it, but the retail marketing side of it.

I think that's where a lot of authors stumble, because they're uncomfortable with that idea. They view it as sort of crass and commercial and it's like, "But it's a retail marketing business; of course it's crass and commercial."

Mark: I've seen that hundreds of times with new authors. I remember once, I was on a panel and someone asked me from the floor how much time I spent on marketing and how much time I spent on writing. It's probably about 50/50 for me. You can probably suggest what your split is like in a minute. When I said that it was 50/50, the answer was, "Well, then you're not a real author; you're not a full-time author?" Yeah, I could have banged my head against a wall when you get that kind of answer. That's fine; they can think that if they want, but I was tempted to say that if you have that mindset, the odds of you making a career out of writing are very, very slim, you know.

Russell: It's a failure to grasp the duality, the fundamentals of the business. Content creation is writing books, thinking up great stories, mastering the storytelling, the pacing all of that stuff, all the good stuff, all the craft, all the artistic and the fun part.

Operating a publishing business, which is what happens when you ask people to buy your content that you just created, that's a different business. That's why I say, if people were clear on that up front, they wouldn't make statements like, "Oh, well then you're not really an author," or "Okay, you failed to" ... What he should have said, if he wanted to be accurate, was, "Well, then you're not a full-time content creator."

Mark: Mm-hmm.

Russell: That would be true; you aren't.

Mark: No, exactly.

Russell: You are an author who also operates a publishing company to sell the content you created.

Mark: It's a bit of an extreme example, but ... I write in the morning, so when I'm writing in the morning, I'm creating stories and telling stories and tales and things. When I change hats and start going into marketing mode, those stories become, effectively, story keeping units. They're widgets to sell.

Russell: Yeah.

Mark: That sounds terribly unromantic, but that's the truth of it.

Russell: Business is, by definition, terribly unromantic. I mean, it really is; it's packaging and selling of a product.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Let me bust in for somebody who's sold on the idea, they're not pretentious about it; they're sold on the idea that they can spend 3 or 4 hours in the morning writing and then operate themselves as a business in the afternoon, but they're under-confident about that.

THEY DREAM THIS DREAM ABOUT BEING A GOOD WRITER, THEY'RE WORKING HARD AT THEIR CRAFT AND STORYTELLING, ET CETERA, AND THEN THEY LOOK SLIGHTLY AGHAST AT A WORLD THEY DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THEM ABOUT THAT?

Russell: I'd say that part of what you're signing up to is educating yourself about the business aspects of running a retail marketing company, so you have to be very clear that you signed up for both jobs. In other words, just doing one job, that's fine; then, you're a content creator, but don't have any expectation that you're going to be able to market and sell your work. Why would you be able to? Did you pick that up by

osmosis? A divine right?

Nobody would say, "I should be running Microsoft," just by proclaiming themselves to be breathing. They would grasp that that has a skill set involved and that you would have to take it upon yourself to educate yourself about that skill set so that you're effective at it.

You know, I always use the example of Yo Yo Ma: nobody sits down, picks up a cello and says, "I should be playing in Carnegie Hall as a cellist." They recognize it's going to take 10, 20 years of very hard work and committed practice and, even then, they probably won't play at Carnegie Hall.

That's why I go back to: you have to be very clear that self-publishing is not just content creation; it is the business aspect of operating a publishing company in a retail marketing environment.

Mark: The clue is kind of in the name isn't it? The publishing bit of the self-publishing.

James: Yeah, the self bit.

Russell: Authors don't hear that. They love the Cinderella story where, "Yeah, no, I just wrote the book and then I put it up and it sold 6 million copies and now the Olsen twins are coming over and I've got big book that's great," you know? It's like, yes, we all enjoy that fairy tale, but reality is ... I know a lot of authors; I'm sure you do too, Mark ... They all work very, very hard at both the content creation art and the business aspect.

Mark: Yeah, and those lightning strikes ... Hugh Howey is often put forward as a lightning strike, which conveniently forgets the fact that he had about 10 books behind him before "Wool" got big.

Russell: Of course. He's a very, very good storyteller and author; I've read his stuff. I have tremendous respect for the man, so, yeah, it wasn't, "Whoops, how did that happen?" There was definitely some craft and being in the right place at the right time and having the right story at the right time and all that confluence of events.

I've said in many other podcasts, every success story I know of is an exception. This is a business of exceptions. I would say, if authors recognize that it is the exception rather than the rule to succeed in earning any kind of a living at generating content and then selling it, that would naturally lead them into the question, "Well, what's going to make me exceptional? How am I going to be another exception?"

You can either wait for it to happen, for the universe to recognize your brilliance, or you can take steps that will make you an exception. For me, I looked at this very clinically when I looked at the business; I kind of went, "The thing that I can do is write fairly well and I can generate a lot of content in a short period of time."

My edge, if you will, my exception, was that I could create a tremendous back list of competently crafted ... And some would argue that ... Competently crafted thrillers and action thrillers and mysteries and get them out there so I'd have a back list of somebody who's been writing 20 years and have it within 18 months.

I recognized that; I was very calculated. I was like, "This is one of those exceptional things that I can do." It's not because I'm particularly fortunate or unfortunate any more than someone who's double-jointed and can do that odd thing with their thumbs where it sort of bends backwards. Some people just can do that, in which case, they could probably be good card sharks or whatever, pick pockets, and others aren't. If you can't churn out a lot of product quickly and do so at a relatively high degree of quality, that's not going to be how you're the exception.

Mark: I remember when I first started getting into this, probably 4 or 5 years ago, when you were still more active on KBoards. I remember reading some of your posts, reading some of your books, looking at your back list, and being kind of struck dumb by how fast you wrote. At that stage, I was still writing maybe a couple of books a year-

Russell: Sure.

Mark: Which is .. It's fast for most people, but I knew it wasn't fast enough. Then, in 2014, I found something that enabled me to write, maybe 4 or 5 novels in 2014 and that was the tipping point.

I just wonder: do you have any idea what that is? For me, it would be, like, the confluence of starting to get readers, starting to make money and finding a series that I loved to write. Those combined so that I could write nearly 1 million words in 2014.

WHAT DO YOU SEE, FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE?

Russell: I think it's all about self-motivation. You can either have your motivation external or internal and, don't get me wrong, greed and desperation are wonderful drivers; cornered rats tend to fight a lot harder than those with options. By the same token, also, I'm a big believer in the questions that you ask yourself tend to get different answers.

If the question you're asking yourself is, "How can I write 6 novels this year and have a blast doing it?," you're going to get a completely different answer than, "How in the name of God am I ever going to write 6 novels?"

I'm aware of the power that questions have, and my motivation levels and my beliefs about what's possible and isn't, so I try to structure, I try to craft questions that get a better outcome. I talk to people that have writers' block all the time, "Oh, I'm just not motivated," and it's like, "Again, sweetie, if you were working for Pixar or Lucasfilms or something, nobody would really, particularly, be that interested in whether life got in the way, or how you feel today; your job is to create content to a certain quality level in a certain period of time."

That's the job; if you don't want it, somebody else will be more than happy to take it. That's the job.

James: They're very easy persuade that they want to get better at storytelling; they're all ears when it comes to how you use Scrivener or whatever, and divide the chapters up. Those same people may be the ones saying, "I don't really have time to understand Facebook".

LIKE YOU SAY, RUSSELL, AND YOU SAY IT VERY WELL, IT'S YOUR JOB, SO PUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING OR MAILING LISTS OR WHATEVER, THAT YOU DO STRUCTURING YOUR CHAPTERS.

Russell: I think the old adage is that there's only one right way to write a novel, but nobody can agree on what it is. There's some truth to that, and people work in different ways and, I think different genres.

Different approaches work better in different genres. I've synthesized my approach to one where I outline now; I don't pants. I outline in a fairly brief manner and then I write to the outline; I leave myself enough wiggle room to change the story around and add or subtract things that I find interesting or uninteresting.

I try to write the outline and not because I fancy myself to be an automaton, it's just because it cuts down on the content creation time by a factor of 3.

JAMES: DIFFERENTLY FROM ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE THAT WE'VE SPOKEN TO SO FAR, I DON'T THINK YOU USE SCRIVENER DO YOU?

Russell: No, I don't use it. I just have an Excel spreadsheet that I have up on my website to show people how I organize my thoughts and I write in Microsoft Word.

Scrivener, all of these things are just ways, constructs to, basically, frame your perspective. They're just ways of organizing your thinking, but you don't require a program to organize your thinking. You can do the same thing long hand with some index cards.

James: Strangely, people managed to write books even before computers were around, didn't they?

Russell: I've heard that.

James: Yeah, with chapters and everything.

Russell: The power of perception. A lot of people are like, "Oh, ever since I found x, y, x software, I've really improved my productivity and blah, blah, blah, blah," and it's kind of like, "Okay, well again, that makes my point." It's the power of perception. Your perception is that this tool is focusing your thinking and organizing you, so you, now, are more productive, great. You could do that with anything.

Mark: Yeah, it's the placebo effect, isn't it? At the moment - I don't know if you've heard about this - there's a piece of software, or a website, called Brain FM that's supposed to produce structured white noise, I suppose I'd call it. It's quite musical; it's supposed to stimulate your brain waves. For me, that's almost certainly marketing BS, but-

Russell: It sure sounds like it.

Mark: Saying that, I've actually tried it and my productivity went up by a significant amount.

James: He's now a Scientologist.

Russell: Okay, sure.

James: I'm auditing you both right now.

Mark: I've joined a cult.

Russell: You know, you've only got so many hours on the planet, so you might as well enjoy yourself.

Mark: Give it a go.

Russell: Unless you're a Scientologist, in which case-

Mark: You've got a spaceship to get to.

Russell: Don't get me started.

James: The point, to be fair to Mark, you're making, is it is quite possibly just the placebo effect; someone tells you that's going to help you and that's sometimes what you need, isn't it, to think you're being helped and it helps you. I'm sure doctors do this from time to time, with the placebos, not just a made up thing, is it, in health.

You talk about doing the best you can to put yourself in a position to have an exceptional success, Russell. I know that you've got a few tricks of the trade; some of them are what we would now consider quite traditional tricks, a bit of a trailblazer in its day, but I can see you still use the perma free. I'm just looking at your Amazon page now and I see that "The Night of the Assassin," which seems to be the prequel to the Assassin series, a free "Ops Files Jet," I guess is towards the beginning of your Jet series, is free at the moment on Kindle.

IS THAT A PERMANENT THING FOR YOU AND IS THAT SOMETHING YOU STILL STAND BY AS BEING A STOCK IN TRADE FOR SELF-PUBLISHING AUTHORS?

Russell: I'm a huge fan of perma free on the first book in your series. Obviously, there's some nuance to that, but I like perma free; I think it gives readers an opportunity to evaluate their work and see whether you're worth their time or not.

I view it exactly the same as handing out brownies at Costco. It's like, first time's for free; go ahead and taste it, see if you like it, but the idea is that, if the content that you're creating is worth paying for, you'll attract a certain number of readers that say, "I would like more of that brownie, and I'm willing to pay for another bite of the brownie." That's the idea; it's just retail marketing.

Mark: I've just re-watched some early episodes of "The Wire" again and I think what we do with perma free is quite similar to handing out free baggies of whatever it is that's stimulating the customers. It's get them hooked and then you sell them the hard stuff.

Russell: Sure.

Mark: That's always been what I've done.

Russell: I think that it's actually one of the things that indies, really, have leveraged and that's been rather smart. One of their advantages over traditional, published authors is that they were able to use that first time's for free approach and get discovery in an increasingly difficult to gain discovery world.

It's all about visibility. Assuming you have 10 guys, all of whom can write at the same level, meaning that,

it's like that line at the fair: you have to be this tall to get onto the ride. Assuming everyone's that tall and can master their craft to the point where they're qualified to get on the ride, one of those, or two of those is going to excel while the other eight don't. Generally speaking, it's because more people have heard of that one person than the other eight or nine and that's where the retail marketing comes in. It's about gaining visibility and a time-honored tradition in retail marketing is placement, obviously, but also first time's for free. Give away free samples.

MARK: YOU CAN FILL IN THE AUDIENCE HERE A BIT, BUT YOU DIDN'T COME TO TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING; IT WASN'T YOUR FIRST GIG, WAS IT? YOU'VE GOT QUITE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE BEFORE YOU'VE MADE A SUCCESS WITH THIS BUSINESS.

Russell: I've owned businesses, I've worked for companies, I've done a few things. The disciplines never change; really, you're trying to communicate to people that you have a solution to their problem. If their problem is, for instance, they're bored and they want entertainment or stimulation, a possible solution to that is, "I have the book you want to read." You're trying to solve the same problem, whether you're selling construction equipment or building homes or import/ export, the fundamentals never change.

I think, probably, the best thing most beginning authors could do is just go get a Marketing 101 textbook. Any old Marketing 101 textbook; go spend 10 cents on it at the used bookstore and just read it, cover to cover.

JAMES: HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE THE CUSTOMER IN MIND WHEN YOU COME UP WITH YOUR BOOKS?

Russell: A reasonable amount, but I am the customer for my books, so I basically find it very easy to imagine my audience because I'm the audience for the types of books I write.

I've learned that I have to censor myself somewhat, because what I enjoy reading might be a little grittier than an 80-year-old cat lady in a trailer in Alabama, so I have to be sensitive to the idea that dismemberment and graphic violence, et cetera, et cetera, may turn off some people.

On the flip side of it, I love Tom Harris, I love "Silence of the Lambs," that sort of thing. A lot of people don't. They're like, "Ew, I don't know about that; it's a little too 'ooh' it's cringe-worthy."

I just write to my personal taste and soften it just a little bit; that's what I do.

JAMES: YOU COULD WRITE SOME HARDER STUFF AND YOU DON'T DO THAT BECAUSE YOU DON'T THINK THE MARKET'S AS BIG FOR THAT?

Russell: I could go full-blown "American Psycho" with no problem whatsoever, but I think the audience for it is smaller.

James: Okay.

Mark: Yeah.

Russell: It might be even more interesting if I did that, but the problem is, I put on my marketer hat and I go, "That product is going to be much harder to sell."

Mark: It's a case of marketer Russell speaking to writer Russell and pulling rank.

Russell: No, I have an agent; Clive's agent Peter is my agent now and he's a very thoughtful, erudite man who's been in the business forever. One of the nice things about having a good agent is that they don't bullshit you. They tell you, "Nah, that'll never fly," or "Bad idea," so if you just pretend that you're an agent evaluating someone else's work when you look at a concept, that makes it a lot easier. It takes all the personal sting out of it. It's just like, "Nah, I'm not going to spend the next 3 months trying to sell that; it'll never work."

James: Everyone needs an Ari Gold, don't they? The agent in "Entourage" who says, "That's bullshit; it's not going to work," and walks out of the office.

Russell: It saves you a lot of time.

James: Yeah, it does. Yeah, very valuable. Let's move into a little bit more of the marketing side.

I NOTICED YOU ARE PART OF THE KINDLE UNLIMITED PROGRAM. IS THAT SOMETHING YOU THOUGHT ABOUT DOING; HAS IT WORKED OUT FOR YOU?

Russell: I've got, I want to say, 25% of my books, 20% of my books are in Kindle Unlimited. I'm conflicted on that one. I see the value and the reason that I've got a certain number of my books is in there is simply so that I don't miss a potential audience. But on the flip side of it, not a big fan of exclusivity to any one channel and, frankly, if I had 5 books out instead of approaching 50, I probably wouldn't be in the program, depending on which genre I was in.

Different genres perform completely differently in Kindle Unlimited. Sci-Fi does magnificently in Kindle Unlimited; Post-Ap does very, very well. Certain types of Romance; it really seems like that's a 9 to 1 ratio of borrowers to buyers. It depends on the genre.

Mark: I've got a couple of books in K.U., but I agree with you. I'm uncomfortable with the idea of exclusivity over my entire catalog.

Russell: No, and I don't see the financial benefit. I see 35, 38% of my total income coming from non-Amazon sales. It would have to be a hell of a program to compensate me enough to want to be exclusive.

MARK: TALKING ABOUT GOING WIDE, HOW HAVE YOU APPROACHED THE OTHER PLATFORMS, BECAUSE THEY'RE VERY DIFFERENT FROM HOW TO DO THINGS ON AMAZON?

Russell: Actually, permafrees work way better on Barnes and Noble and on Apple than it does on Amazon, nowadays. I'm very guilty of completely ignoring Apple and Barnes and Noble in terms of anything channel specific and yet, my sales have been very, very good. It's in spite of anything that I've done rather than because of it that I'm seeing sales there.

In fact, I don't know ... Maybe you do, Mark; you're the marketing guy.

REALLY, YOU'RE KIND OF MARKETING GURU GUY, DO YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY TO HOOK APPLE CLIENTS OR CUSTOMERS?

Mark: You're right on perma free; it's much more powerful on Apple right now. I just did my numbers for February, and the numbers on the giveaway that I have, the Milton starter book, 7 or 8 times better on Apple than they are on Amazon. There's that, which is obviously a big thing.

In terms of getting noticed on those platforms, in my experience, it's more about relationship-building than

algorithm-tickling, if you like.

Russell: Yeah.

Mark: Meeting people at trade fairs and being tenacious but not irritating, so asking to be put in to promotions and things like that. Once you've done that and it's been successful, then they'll come back again.

Russell: It's interesting; I've never done a book fair, I've never done a trade show, I've never done any of that. I've never met anyone. I'm busy writing, so I never thought of doing it. There's a lot of different ways you can achieve the same result.

Mark: You're spending enough advertising, even if most of my Facebook ads are directed towards Amazon, people I think are on Amazon. If you spend enough, there's a big spillover. I have noticed big spikes in the other platforms on boxed sets and things that can only really be attributed to the ads that I'm running. A question of general visibility.

Russell: One of the things I've noticed, though, on Apple, which is odd. It's probably a demographic, a sort of, "Hm, that's interesting," is that Apple customers tend are less price-sensitive.

Mark: Yep. Absolutely.

Russell: Tend to be willing to pay more; they don't have a problem paying \$7 for an eBook.

Mark: Yeah, a really good example of that is, Kobo is even better than that. The difference with Kobo and Apple, actually; there's no \$9.99 limit, where there 70% royalty stops applying, so I've put together all of the books in my Milton series, so, at the moment, 8 novels and 2 novellas, and sell them for 25 bucks on Kobo and Apple. That's doing really, really well. The return on investment for ads there is ridiculous.

Russell: I really need to focus on doing stuff like that, because I really don't and I'm probably could increase my sales by 10-20% by just doing that. The problem is, there's only so many hours in the day.

Mark: Yeah, tell me about it.

Russell: I know; I wish I could clone myself or, better yet, clone you.

Mark: One thing I really wanted to ask you about: is Kindle Worlds. For the listeners who don't know what Kindle Worlds is; it's a program that Amazon introduced that allowed other writers to write within established fictional worlds.

With you, obviously, Russell, it was the Jet series, became available. There are lots of books that have been published in that series.

I JUST WONDERED IF YOU'D TALK ABOUT THAT FOR A LITTLE BIT, BECAUSE IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT IS AVAILABLE TO WRITERS OUTSIDE OF THE US, SO I DON'T HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE OF IT AT ALL.

Russell: It's fan fiction, that's what it is. It's fan fiction; it's where other authors, whether amateur or professional, can create stories, usually novellas, in a world like the Jet world, using my character Jet and any of the other characters I've created and creating their own characters and coming up with novel takes on the character. It can be anything; it can be Jet the romance, you know, Jet the steam-punk version. There's no limitations. The idea is that it's a fun way to get readers to try their hand at writing and to allow other authors, who perhaps don't have as much exposure and aren't as established, to be able to hone their chops and develop an audience using your world as the backdrop.

I can think of two immediate examples that have done pretty well out of it. One is Jason Gurley, who is a friend of mine who got a massive deal, I believe with Crown, for his book "Eleanor." He did covers for me for a while. He's also a great guy. He started writing in Hugh's world, in his Kindle World.

Another one is Tom Abrams, who has had a remarkable run in the last 4 months in the post-apocalyptic genre and who started really writing in that genre because he wrote in Steven Konkoly's "Perseid Collapse" world, which I also wrote one in.

In both cases, that worked well for them. It's possible to use Kindle Worlds as a platform to jump off and jump-start your own literary career.

Mark: From the perspective of the creator ... you, in this case ... I tried to do something similar to that. I reached out to a couple of writers whose books I really enjoyed and said, "Would you like" ... They're not as well-known yet, although I think they'll do very well for themselves ... I said, "Would you like to write a book in my Milton world?" They both started to write it and they sent me the first couple of chapters for my thoughts and I just could not go through with it. I think you'll probably tell me to get over myself, which is completely reasonable.

Russell: No, my solution is that I just don't read ... I don't have any editorial say in any of the books that are generated in the Jet world.

Mark: Have you read any of them?

Russell: I've read, I want to say, 3 or 4 of them.

Mark: Yeah.

Russell: There's something like 30 of them so-

MARK: WERE YOU ABLE TO DISENGAGE YOURSELF AS THE CREATOR OF THAT CHARACTER AND THAT WORLD AND APPROACH IT IN A NON-EMOTIONAL READING WAY?

Russell: No, I'm terrible at that. It's also the reason why I can't listen to my own audio books. I just can't do it. I can't; I should be able to say, "Oh, yes I can." Nah. It'd be a lie. Actually, the only audio book I've been able to listen to, the only take on mine, is the Black series, because the narrator just nailed it. On the other ones, they do brilliant jobs; Dick Hill, who does the Assassin series, is a marvelous narrator, very, very much in demand. He's a masterful actor, et cetera, et cetera, but the problem, for me, is just the cadence. Craft pros ... There's a certain musicality that you hear and your head and I don't think that ... It's an intensely personal cadence that you shoot for and that's your voice, in a way.

To disengage to the point where you aren't being judgmental with your voice, you know, "How true is this?" You're used to reading about that character with your voice. Now, you've got somebody ... Jet rescues baby seals in the Arctic. Well, okay, sure. Then, somebody else whose approach, whose voice is completely different, it's hard as a content creator, to stomach it. On the same point, you're also capable of being surprised. I won't mention, because I don't like playing favorites, but I read one take on it that I was kind of like, "Wow, that's ... I would have never gone that direction." It was a positive surprise.

James: You're not worried about the ... Some people might get a bit of pressure about the brand. You talked, just now, about not being too gritty with some of the series, and yet somebody could take the Jet character and inject all sorts of very gritty, who knows, sexual, violent, whatever things into the book.

Russell: Yeah, I'd read that. You're singing my song.

James: I'm going to have a go; that's what I'm going to do, a Jet series.

Russell: There we go; I think we just inked a deal.

James: What she does with the baby seals you don't want to know.

Let's get on to a couple of questions, because believe it or not, we had a lot of questions in from students and followers in the Facebook group who want to ping some things at you. One of them and I wasn't aware, I have to say, that you had one of these before I saw the question.

A LISTENER WANTS TO KNOW HOW YOU'RE GETTING ON WITH YOUR TREADMILL DESK.

Russell: It's been a lifesaver. I'm 25 pounds lighter than I was when I started writing. I write probably a couple hours a day walking on the treadmill desk and I stand at it probably 6 hours a day. I would absolutely, unconditionally recommend it to anyone that's thinking about being a writer.

The blood flows, you know, you're oxygenated. The biggest killer is really that your body wasn't meant to

be sedentary for 10, 12 hours a day; it just wasn't, so things don't work well. Nothing works; your brain doesn't work, nothing works well, if you're sedentary. Plus, you don't live as long. If you can walk at a moderate pace, and I walk at around 2 miles per hour, so I'm not really a race horse, but the point is, if I walked for 2 hours, I just clocked 4 miles and I've probably written 2,000 words, so hey, win-win.

Mark: That's pretty good.

Russell: I would absolutely recommend it. It took me maybe a day and a half to get used to it and now it's second nature.

James: This question is a follow-up.

ZARIANA ASKS, "HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WRITING A BEST SELLER ENTITLED 'HOW TO KEEP FIT, BECOME AN ICON AND MAKE A MILLION?'" IT'S JUST A THOUGHT OF HERS.

Russell: I would ... Perhaps how to abuse yourself, become notorious and .. I've already told you how to wind up with a million: marry well. That's it.

James: That was the opening gambit, okay.

We've asked a couple of the questions that Karen O'Connor wanted to ask about writing to Mark, et al, writing what you love, and I think you've answered that by saying you basically write what you love but you temper it.

PERHAPS 25% OF THE PROCESS IS TEMPERING FOR THE MARKET.

Russell: I would agree with that. Look, if you don't have a passion for what you're doing, why are you doing it? I'd just start there. It's like, look, the chances of you making a living writing are very, very slim. People hate it when I say it, "Oh, you're not ... You're such a drag; it's not inspiring." It's like, "Well, my job isn't to be inspiring; my job is to tell you the truth." It is the exception, not the rule, that makes more than beer money being a writer. That's just the way it is and if you need some false reality where that's not the case, I'm the wrong guy to talk to about it. There's lots of people who will sell you seminars and books about how wonderful it is and how you're going to ... "You can do it if you can dream it," but reality tends to be a little harsher and even a cursory understanding of the figures tells you that the odds are stacked

against you.

Just accept that, understand it. You can't change it. That's just how it is. If you're going to do it, it better be because you have some real passion for what you're going to do. It's likely that you're going to be about the only person that ever reads it. I mean, so might as well write something that you think is the best book you ever read. You see the logic to it?

If it is the best book that you've ever read of its type, there's a chance that other people might think the same thing.

Mark: I agree with that. Between my traditional deals and then writing self-published stuff, I tried to write books that I thought the market wanted and they weren't the books that I wanted to write and I've never had a situation where I've had to force myself to open the laptop to start writing. Normally, these days, I get itchy if I don't write at least a little a day. Back then, it was like pulling teeth; I hated it. I'll never do that again.

Russell: Yeah, no, trust me; I've been in that situation. I think, certainly, a few of the books that I've written over the last 4 years ... 4 1/2 now ...4 1/2 years, you know, a few came very hard to the page and others just flowed beautifully. The point being that the ones that didn't flow beautifully onto the page came after this became a money making endeavor.

Mark: Yeah.

Russell: Whether that's good or bad, I don't know, but I think every author hits that point in their professional life if they're making a living doing it where they feel the pressure of, "Can I write something again that people want to buy?," and that encounters their creative side. Their content creator is kind of like, "But I want to write x, not more of that," so I don't know. This post-apocalyptic thing that I'm doing, I can't tell you how excited I am about it and I'm cranking 7500 words a day right now.

Mark: I love post-apocalyptic as well. It's another thing I'd love to do.

Russell: Yeah, it kind of opens up the joy of creating, the series of cascading likelihood scenarios and the road warrior future and all of that. You know, it's a lot of fun, so I'm waking up early just to get to it.

Mark: That's the best sign. When you're in that kind of flow.

Russell: Yeah. There's been more than a few that I've just been, "Oh, God," you know, anything I can find to not have to get to this right now, I'll do it. "I have to balance my checkbook."

Mark: When that book is finished, or when the series is finished, how will you approach the marketing? You've got a mailing list now ... We've partly built ... We've had some together and you've been building for ages yourself.

HOW WILL YOU MARKET A POST-APOCALYPTIC SERIES TO READERS OF JET, FOR EXAMPLE?

Russell: First of all, I think that people that like Jet are going to love the post-apocalyptic. There's a lot of Jet in it. There's just a lot of that sort of pacing and action, but there's also a lot of ... There's a lot more texture to it. To go to the, "How do I intend to market it?," my mailing list is now over 20,000 people, so fine, I'll send out a mailing to them.

I plan to release the books April, May and June, so I'm going to release, bam, bam, bam; 1, 2 and 3, 30 days apart, presuming my editor doesn't quit and my proofreader ... And I write them. I also am going to enlist some of my friends that are in the same genre to read the books and, if they like them, you know, give me blurbs and announce to their readership, said, "Hey, this may be something that you like because I liked it and you may like it." I think it's just, kind of, word of mouth and I'm confident enough in the content that, between 20,000 or 22 or whatever it is I've got and my friends putting out the word and Facebook and Twitter, although I don't do very much Twitter anymore, and my blog, you know. I should be able to communicate effectively to the world that this is available and you may want to give it a try.

I'm probably going to price it just insanely cheap. The first book, I'm probably going to go out \$2.99 or \$3.99, which, for me, my Rameses series ... Yeah, I'm going out at \$6.99 and selling briskly; I have no complaints about it. Jet ... I think when I do a new release of pretty much anything, it's going to be \$5.95 or \$5.99, so to go out at \$2.99 or \$3.99 is a marked change in my strategy, but again, post-apocalyptic is a different audience. I'll probably go exclusive; I'll probably go into Kindle Unlimited on that, because

when I look at where the buying patterns are for that audience, it's Amazon.

Mark: I think I would, at least for the first 3 months, establish a base on Amazon, use K.U. and then see how it is in 3 months time, maybe go wide, maybe 6 months go wide.

Russell: Yeah, but I mean, I reserve the right to do that at all times.

I think go cheap and go narrow on the first one and see how that works. Then, I've got 30 days for the second one; I can either take that one wide and take my lumps for 60 days while I'm not seeing any sales on the other platforms, or I can wait for ... Go specific with that to Kindle as well, to K.U.

I don't know; it's interesting, because it'll be an interesting experiment for me to go into a completely different genre and see how well it translates.

Mark: I think you'll be fantastic. I read your Facebook updates and they're always really interesting and provocative, so perhaps I can see a political angle that might be coming into this series.

Russell: Oh yeah. There's definitely some room for getting up on the soapbox, but I think you also have to temper your natural enthusiasm to do that or you lose the audience, because at the end of the day, they want the story.

Although one of the things that's fun about it is it does give you a little more room to play with the philosophy of the entire thing. If the world's come crashing down around you, there's some deeply philosophical questions that people are going to be asking themselves in terms of, "What does this all mean? How do we progress from here? What have we learned, if anything? Are the atrocities that we're seeing every day just ingrained in human nature? Are we really such dark beasts that this is the best we can do?," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

There's plentiful data to mine there and I find it more substantive and more interesting to me than, maybe, something like Rameses that's more, "There's the treasure; let's go find it."

James: I'll tell you what's interesting about it. Obviously, we're sitting here in Europe and we're a few hundred miles away from people who are, effectively, living in a post-apocalyptic landscape and trying to escape from it.

Russell: Yeah, and it's interesting you say that, because I was thinking about that. I actually wrote some pages yesterday where I address that and sort of went ... You know, for Americans, this is ... America has this reality that it's carefully crafted that the world is a relatively safe place and yet, if you live in Syria or Iraq or a lot of other places in the world, it's not. I would maintain the world's never been a safe place. When the Mongol hordes were sweeping across Asia, or the Byzantine empire or the barbarians were taking over Europe, it's never been a safe place.

It's just fascinating to me that, when you've got a culture whose thesis is that we're morally superior and superior, just in terms of this form of government we have, et cetera, et cetera and a by-product of that will be we're safe. When all that collapses, it becomes very obvious, in this world that I've created, that this world's always been a dangerous place. This is artificial. The reality is, it is dangerous.

Yes, you're in the UK and if you're in the South of France in Provence right now, sipping wine, it probably doesn't seem that dangerous, but if you're breathing depleted uranium dust that's blown by the Sirocco winds north, yeah, it is more dangerous; you just don't realize it.

James: I think that's a really interesting areas, probably one of the reasons why post-apocalyptic is ... In the same way that it dominated Japanese culture for 20 years, 30 years, even into the 70s.

IT'S STARTING TO FEATURE, ISN'T IT, IN CERTAINLY VIDEO GAMES, A LOT OF FALLOUT, THINGS LIKE THAT, A LOT OF POST-APOCALYPTIC SCENES.

Russell: I think that's a reliable indicator that things are breaking down, or that the anxiety level is increasing over reality. In other words, when you have this cognitive dissonance that maybe reality isn't what the mainstream media or what the educational system is telling me it is and maybe it's something far more ominous and dangerous. I think that a release valve for that is reading fiction that explores that darker possibility, if that makes any sort of sense.

It's more cathartic. You're more interested in it because your thoughts are more naturally gravitating in that

direction.

James: Yeah, really interesting.

I really want to get a couple more of the questions in before we go. I'm acutely aware that we're taking a lot of your time so far this evening.

DOUG HAS POSTED A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS. ONE OF THOSE, HE SAYS, "NDAS APART, ARE THERE ANY LESSONS YOU CAN SHARE FROM WORKING SO CLOSELY WITH CLIVE CUSSLER?"

Russell: I think one of the things I learned and became acutely aware of and much better at is pacing. In other words, cut the bullshit. In other words, don't overwrite and cut the parts of the book that aren't essential to the story. I've become much more laser-focused since working with Clive; I've done 2 books with him. I did "The Eye of Heaven" and I did "The Solomon Curse." I have to say that, in terms of my personal approach to my books, I've seen an evolution in terms of pacing and in terms of my approach to story.

Now, when I outline, I am ruthless. I wrote a blog about it; I don't remember, maybe 2 weeks ago, maybe a month ago, that talks about the secret to writing a page-turner. That's one of the takeaways that I got from working with Clive was every chapter has to do its work. It's got to do heavy lifting. It's got to have a surprise, it's got to have a twist, it's got to have reversals, it's got to have, if possible, an action beat. It's got to create a series of burning questions that the reader absolutely must know the answer to and compels them to turn the page.

All of that, I got out of having to think through story better from working with Clive. I would have paid to do that.

James: Yeah, and you got paid.

Russell: Right, so ... win-win.

James: Obviously, I'm at the beginning end, but this is something that occupies me a lot and I'm sure people who are setting out in writing: it's not quite as crude as saying how much do I write, but I did a little experiment with one of my chapters. There's a very specific thing I know the guy, my character, needs to do and I wrote it as frugally as possible and it came out at about 4,000 words. This chapter really, really was short: he went in, got the thing done. I'm now thinking about it, it's a couple of days later, and I actually thought today why I needed to take more time to get him in there. It wasn't the story pushing that along, the narrative; it was people understanding his experience of what happened. Although I am now going to go back and make it longer and fluff it out, I think it still fits in with what you're saying. The reason I'm writing that is because people need to understand how he was feeling and how he got to where he was in his mind before the thing happened. It's still being focused.

I wrestle with this quite a lot: how much you write, basically. I enjoy reading the description, you know? I read Mark's books and yours. There's little bits of detail that tell you the bigger story. That might feel a bit like fluff at the time, but I guess that's when you are writing purposefully, even if it doesn't necessarily drive the story in that sentence.

DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?

Russell: I think it's a balancing act, though. I think that, certainly, for the type of writers I read, that I admire ... James Lee Burke is a perfect example.

James: Great writer.

Russell: His knowledge of craft is amazing. His descriptive capability, his word choice, the man is a master. I aspire to that, but I recognize I don't have the level of talent of the 60 years of writing experience he has. I think that, just because you are trying to structure your story so that it requires the reader to turn the page to find out what happens next, doesn't mean that it has to be 6-word sentences and, "The cat saw the rat." It doesn't have to be "The Hardy Boys"; you can introduce lyricism in there and there's a place for it, to put the reader into a sense of place, what it smells like, what the protagonist is feeling. All of that sensory nuance, you can also include, but, man oh man, it better move the story forward.

Mark: I think less is more. My favorite part of the edit is when I cut things out, because I know that every word I'm taking away is tightening the novel. Making it quicker flow, and also, you just have to trust the reader. If you look at a film like, "Reservoir Dogs," the ear-slicing scene. Everyone remembers that as being particularly graphic and gory, but the truth is, you don't see it. You don't see anything; it's all in your mind.

Russell: Yeah, Hitchcock was great at that.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely.

Russell: He really was and, yeah, there's some of that. You know, it's difficult; again, it comes down to voice and it also comes down to the story you're trying to tell, personal style. I tend to, as a reader, I tend to try to write like the people I admire and I don't necessarily admire commercial success as much as I do grasp of craft. In other words, if I had a choice between selling a million books or 250,000 books and one could be written in a more lyrical way that would have my peers going, "This is amazing," versus something that would be, perhaps, more commercially successful but more pedestrian and sophomoric, I think I would err to the side of the 250,000 seller. I just would; that's just my nature.

I don't know, maybe that's why I'll never be James Patterson. That's fine; I don't need to be. I'm very happy that the world's been receptive to the stuff I've written. I mean, really, I can't complain.

James: You're doing okay.

Mark: You can buy a hell of a lot of tequila with 250,000 books sold.

Russell: I can. You know, the Post-Ap thing could go that direction. I mean, really, it's probably one of the few things that I've written that really has the possibility of doing that, although the Jets sold more than that. I remember, I had this feeling when I was writing Jet, I was like, "Man, this is either going to bomb or it's great. It's going to be one or the other. It's not going to be in between."

I have that feeling right now as I right this one. It's called "The Day After Never," and the first book is called "Blood Honor," and I've just got that feeling. It's got that tingly feeling when you're like, "Shit, this might actually be good."

Mark: I look forward to reading it, really.

James: I am as well.

RUSSELL, I'VE GOT ONE FINAL QUESTION FOR YOU. I THINK THE CLIVE CUSSLER BOOKS WERE EBOOKS, WERE THEY NOT? HAVE YOU BEEN TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED SO FAR, OR WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TRAD PUBLISHING DEAL?

Russell: I'm a whore, so sure. Throw enough money at me, I'll do anything. Trust me, I would do anything.

You know, some of them have been traditionally published ... I don't know how many ... 1, 2, 3, maybe 5 or 6, no probably 8 or 9 of the books now have been bought by a company in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and traditionally published. I'm negotiating a deal right now for audio books, so I have nothing against the traditional publishing system. I had a wonderful time working with Neil over at Putnam when I was working on the Clive stuff, so I recognize it has a time and a place and I think that it's very good at getting your product in front of readers in a retail scenario, assuming the publisher puts its back into it.

I'm not sure how you guarantee that the traditional publisher is actually going to do anything besides shotgun it out with another 300,000 titles that are going to hit the shelves this year, and just see which ones start trending and then back those. That seems to be how that industry works.

James: That was your experience, Mark, wasn't it?

Mark: Don't get me started on that.

James: Yeah.

Russell: No, no. Look, the record business ... Years ago, I played music and produced people and did a bunch of stuff and it was the same.

You know, a hundred acts signed, they were all good, they were all tall enough to get on the ride, but the record company would put the same hundred grand behind every single one of them, give each one of them a video and it didn't really know which one was going to break big. It really didn't. The one, when it started trending, that's where they put their back into, and the other 99 just were forgotten.

Mark: Yeah, that's always been the way.

Russell: It's a shotgun effect, so ... I'm not sure I'm the right personality type to entrust my future and my career to a bunch of other, perhaps more disinterested parties.

Mark: Yeah, especially when, you know, you've demonstrated that you can almost certainly do it better than they can anyway, so why would you do it?

Russell: I wouldn't say that. That's very kind of you; it's very flattering. Let me put it this way: I think that I can reach a sufficient number of readers and communicate to them that I have a product that they would be interested in and then deliver a product that's good enough so they feel like coming back for more and that they got good value for their money. I feel like I can do that enough to where I don't really need traditional publishing. If there was a good fit, I'd be more than happy to take the right deal, but it's not like I will go to my grave with regret if I never got a traditional publishing deal.

James: Russell ... We've ticked well past the hour, Mark.

It's been truly great talking to you; it really has. I've thoroughly enjoyed it. One of our taglines in the podcast is 'it's a great time to be a writer.' When I scroll down your list on Amazon, I think what a great time it is to be a reader. You've got all these books for free to start you off and then the books that follow up.

Not that long ago, before this whole revolution happened, we were paying 7, 8, 9 pounds a paperback; 10, 11, 12 bucks a paperback and here, your books are, in the UK at least, sort of between 3 and 4, 5 pounds. You've got the book series coming out in the summer, which is going to be discount. What a great time to be a reader when you've got great authors like yourself churning them out.

Russell: I think, yeah, and I'm a reader, so I win on both sides.

James: It's been great, hasn't it, Mark?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely, always a pleasure. It's the first time we've actually spoken, I think, Russell, isn't it?

Russell: Yeah, certainly, other than emails. That doesn't really count.

Mark: It's been really great fun; thanks for coming on.

Russell: It was my pleasure; anytime you want me back, I'll be more than happy to.

James: There we go. Russell Blake, what a great guy to talk to, really fun chap to talk to and somebody who's a little bit like you, Mark, in the sense that he gets nitty about it. He understands how it works and he kind of, very quickly adapts to different techniques and makes them work for him.

Mark: Gets nitty about it. I've never been described as nitty before.

James: Nitty. It's a poker term, isn't it?

Mark: Yeah. You know more about poker than I do.

Yeah, he is. He's very, very smart and he works really, really hard. That's one thing, I think, that comes out from the interview with him, is this is not easy. No one said that self-publishing was going to be an easy way to make a lot of money. It's easier than traditional publishing, but it still requires a lot of hard work. It requires the ability to switch hats, change your mindset and go from being creative to being a business person, and being prepared to market and promote yourself. That's essential.

Tenaciousness and doggedness: I think that came through really powerfully. Russell has both of those

attributes in spades.

James: The two of you talked about the motivation of writing and enjoying your writing and getting on with this. As a newb in this area, I just wanted to chip in and say that I think before you've had any success at all, before you've written your book, before the first person's bought it, you've had any reviews, that's a different type of motivation that's needed. It's something we might go into with other authors in the future as well. That motivation and sitting down and knuckling down and writing when, actually, in the back of your mind, there's no strong sense of confidence that you're going to sell stuff.

You and Russell are in a different place there; you've got proven success behind you. Your motivation is slightly different. I'm just putting that in there, putting that out there for us newbies. It's not necessarily the same way of looking at things when you think about, "How do I motivate myself to write?"

Mark: I think that's ... We should probably change the schedule around, James. Next week will be Mark kicks James' ass.

James: To get on with it.

Mark: Exactly: get on with it. Much too lazy, you're not writing fast enough; get on with it.

James: Yeah, that is exactly what I need.

Thank you very much indeed for listening. We can't wait to be back with you on the next time out. Visit us on our Facebook group.

Mark: Bye-bye.

CHAPTER 7

SELF PUBLISHING SUCCESS THROUGH BOOK PROMOTIONS THAT WORK - WITH RICCI WOLMAN



THE BOOK PROMOTION piece is one of the most vital but neglected aspects of being a self published author. Today's guest, Ricci Wolman, is not an author herself but IS a marketing specialist who has made a career (and a business) out of helping authors successfully promote their books. She is founder and CEO of Written Word Media the parent company of www.FreeBooksy.com - a site that authors can use to promote their own work across vast lists of interested readers. Today Mark and James chat with Ricci about promotional best practices for new and experienced authors alike. The insights and tips she shares could be the keys to increasing your sales and success as an indie author. Be sure you take the time to listen

10 YEARS OF ONLINE AUDIENCE BUILDING HAS PLACED RICCI WOLMAN IN A UNIQUE PLACE TO HELP AUTHORS.

Book promotions don't come easy for most authors because they aren't marketers - they are writers. So when somebody comes along who has the skill and expertise to help an author get outside their own

“writer’s head” and see how the bells and whistles of marketing their books can increase sales, it’s a winning proposition. Ricci Wolman is exactly that person. She began her venture into helping self published authors by endeavoring to help her own mother gain traction with her first self published book and the efforts have led to her very successful business. You can hear Ricci’s story and learn how she might be able to help you in this episode of the Self Publishing Formula Podcast.

“FREE” BOOK PROMOTIONS ON AMAZON IS NOT A SURE FIRE WAY TO GET MORE DOWNLOADS.

Free giveaways on Amazon are still very powerful, but there are so many free books on Amazon any given day, it’s hard for your book to surface. What should you do? Learn how to do great promotions alongside those free offers to increase your visibility, gain more downloads, and start the Amazon sales engine working on your behalf. If you listen to this episode you’ll come away with some very tangible things you can do to make your next book promotion a greater success than your last.

WHY INDIE AUTHORS MUST BUILD A MAILING LIST NOW.

One of the most important aspects of your book sales is the ability to put your writing in front of audiences that are not only engaged with your genre but also interested in YOUR work in particular. That’s where building an email list comes in. As you publish your work you have the opportunity to build a list of people who express interest in your work, and once they are on your email list they are the first people you should tell about what’s going on in your writing process and publication schedules. Why? Because they’ve already expressed interest and are your first likely buyers once your next book publishes. Ricci walks new indie authors through the first steps of building an email subscription list for their followers.

IF YOU PROMOTE YOUR BOOKS, YOU WILL MAKE MORE MONEY.

That’s the blunt fact of the matter. On this episode, Ricci shares her advice regarding the step by step process indie authors should use to build an email list, set up promotions for their self published books, and improve the success of their writing.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark and James’ overview of the fun had at the LBF (London Book Fair).
- Interview with Ricci Wolman begins.
- How Mark came to be a “fan” of Ricci’s methods of promotion.
- How Ricci began her own publishing in the first place.
- Why “free” on Amazon is not necessarily the answer to book downloads.
- The growth of self published books on Amazon.
- Why authors need to develop their own marketing skills.

- Entry level tips for building and engaging a mailing list.
- Promotional tools self published authors can use today.
- Tips for making promotions as successful as possible.
- How much should new authors invest in promoting their books?
- How full time authors can take their business to the next level.
- Next things for Ricci and Written Word Media.
- Upcoming episodes to look forward to.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Free Booksy](#)
- [Written Word Media](#)
- [BookBub](#)
- [MailChimp](#)
- [Infusionsoft](#)
- [Active Campaign](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE WITH RICCI WOLMAN

James Blatch: Hello. Mark and I are back. We had a blast at the London book fair and I hope that you enjoy those two episodes that we filmed in around and about. To give you kind of author eye view of the LBF, it was fun, wasn't it Mark?

Mark Dawson: It was great fun. A quick pop quiz, when was the [inaudible 00:00:41] built?

James Blatch: We should actually set ... This is good question, when it was 1886.

Mark Dawson: Correct.

James Blatch: What have I won?

Mark Dawson: You've won, I don't know, dinner with me. Second place is two beers with me.

James Blatch: Yeah, exactly. The opportunity to sell slightly less unprepared and we did started talking about the history of the building. It was my fault. Okay. We're sort of back to normal for this podcast. We're going to be a hearing from a very important person in the self publishing sphere. This is Ricci Wolman. I'm going to introduce her properly in a moment. We get talking to her. It's suffice to say Ricci is all about visibilities, all about you being noticed and getting your books noticed, getting your head above the frame. This is something that's going to be very much on your plate. Mark is next because you're got a launch coming up.

Mark Dawson: Yes. I'm just coming through the end of the last kind of edit that I'll do on the new John Milton book which is called The Jungle and the launch they face is going to be the 20th of May. What I will do as we run up to that is I'll record some snippets that go into everything on my launch sequence, so sending out to editorial getting comments back. Then it's the pre-team getting comments back. Then the precise sequence that I use to launch and I'll talk about how well it does. I'm going to have a go again onto one of the best seller list this time. That would be a really interesting episode that I suspect will be out around about the end of May. Yeah, it's all about visibility and that's something that Ricci knows lots and lots about.

James Blatch: It is but that sounds like a great thing. I'm looking forward to that as well from my own point of view when that comes up. Let's get into this interview with our friend in a moment.

Okay. We're delighted to welcome Ricci Wolman to the SPF podcast. You're well known amongst the community but let me just introduce her anyway. Founder and CEO of Written Word Media. Of course she held an MBA from Harvard no less and Ricci incubated FreeBooksy, Written Word Media's first web property within their online marketing agency. Ricci has over 10 years experience built in audiences online using data driven customer acquisition techniques.

Just a quick word on Written Word Media because it's an impressive set of status served with 18,000 office, many of whom are self published but also works with 3 of the big 5 major publishers as well as a long list of smaller publishers and publicist on book promotions. Written Word Media has a combined audience of over 700,000 readers of which over 400,000 receive email, book recommendations based on their genre and device preferences. It's a powerful platform and she's a powerful woman. Hello, Ricci.

Ricci Wolman: Hi, James, Thanks for having me.

James Blatch: We're delighted to have you along, Ricci. Now, I'm going to let Mark kick off because I know you are a bit of a fan, Mark, aren't you?

Mark Dawson: I am, yeah. There's a good story. I told this Ricci this before. When I started self publishing 3 or 4 years ago, the first major indication that I might be on something was when I did a KDB Select kind of free weekend using those 5 days there Amazon gives you. I don't know where I found out about Freebooksy. I guess I lucked into it a bit but I booked a promotion for the book I was promoting at the time. It was that August, I think kind of harvest time. I got to actually ride on my bike. I live in the country side and out in the farmer's fields and he was harvesting the crop. I just decided to sit down and check the status.

I got my phone out. Miraculously, I had a signal and pulled it out, and found out that I had about 40 or 50 thousand give aways just in 2 or 3 days. The main reason for that was because I booked that Freebooksy promotion. That was a real lightbulb moment for me that I could leverage the combination of Amazon's promotion and backing up with an email blast from a company like Freebooksy and to get my book into the hands of people that never heard of me before. I think that was the kind of the tipping point for me to actually start taking things seriously. I've always had a really, really soft spot for Freebooksy. It's one of my favorite promotional venues.

Ricci Wolman: I love that story, Mark. It makes us really happy on this end to be have been able to help in some small way in you launching this amazing career that you now have as with a writer and as somebody who's helping so many other authors out there who want to do the same thing.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, thanks.

James Blatch: Ricci, how did this start for you? How did the publishing aspect of your work start?

Ricci Wolman: As you mentioned briefly, James, in the intro, my background is really in online marketing and audience building, not really in publishing per se. I had a consulting agency where I'd work with a lot of clients. I'd also worked with some major brands like The Body Shop which is actually a UK-based company that's international and done a lot of work for them. While I was consulting to my clients, I've

been doing this for a little while. My mom was in the midst of publishing a book. She's self publishing it herself, very niche of kind of religious fiction genre. She had found out about Amazon's 3 days with KDP Select and had decided to give that a shot.

In so doing, she set her book free as many authors do. I think she set it free for 3 days and she barely got any downloads and she was really disappointed by this and we were having a chat by phone and she was telling me about her experience and I was pretty surprised that her book being free had not gotten more attraction. I started doing some research for her and realized that although 3 days on KDP can be very powerful, the issue of discovery is almost the same as having your book priced. If you go to Amazon at the time where when I checked it for her, over 5,000 books that were free. Her book was just having a really hard time surfacing itself to readers.

In trying to correct this problem for her, I decided, well, what if I started a blog. I called it Freebooksy. Really back then I called it that because of search engine optimization. I wanted to show up for terms like free books. What if I put her book and selected a few other books from Amazon network free on this blog, and with that help her move more copies next time she did a KDP 3 day. Lo and behold, it did the next time she ran a promotion, she was able to download hundreds of books again, niche genres. She wasn't really looking at the thousands of downloads like somebody like Mark or someone who's writing one of the head genre's what we'd see back then, and Freebooksy was born.

It was really a side project for me for quite a while for the first two years. I was still focusing mainly on the consulting. What I was doing is I was using Freebooksy as a test bed for my clients. If Facebook came out with a new ad product, I would test that on Freebooksy. When [inaudible 00:08:05] rolls out, I would set up an account for Freebooksy. It enable me to be really smart with my clients because I was able to test all of these on my own home grown site. The side effect was that I started growing a really large audience because I was spending time, resources and investing marketing dollars on the site.

Authors started approaching me and asking me if they could pay to be featured on Freebooksy and it started to take off as a business in its own right. For the past two years now, almost that has been my sole focus. I have shut down my consulting business and Written Word Media is ready to pair on company of Freebooksy and the 3 other sites that we have. My story like a story of many self published authors was that of kind of figuring it out in the beginning and I still had a full time job that wasn't my focus. Today, I'm really living the dream of being able to work for myself and do this full time. It's been an incredible ride.

Mark Dawson: Do you think that it's something to be ... You say 5,000 free books at the time that your mom's book came out. That's 3 or 4 years ago. Then, I wonder what the number is now. I don't actually know what it is but it must be at least 4 or 5 times that.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah. I would think so. I haven't checked it in a little while but I know the last time I did check where in which was last year or sometime, it was over 12,000 free books when I was searching for something. The number is growing exponentially. This issue of discovery is becoming more and more important.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. As I remember really vividly, the first time I did the 3 days, this was before I wised up and used Freebooksy to give me a hand. It was really disappointing because I've been led to believe that kind of a free option was this golden bullet that everyone would see the book and download it and that would be the start of a wonderful career. Of course, that isn't what happens because there are so many free books. It's so difficult to get any visibility. That's the main question. It's still the main question today is how do you come through the noise? How do you go through the noise and find your readers. Yeah, it even reminded me that it was one of the main things that bothers me when I started doing this. It still just is what have been right now.

Ricci Wolman: Absolutely, yeah. Free is a very powerful tool because it does help you with that initial adoption and conversion rates on free are a whole lot higher than conversion rates on paid. At the end of the day, whether it's free or priced, whatever product it is, you still have to market it. It's the same across industry really if you look at apps as an example. iPhone apps or android apps, there are hundreds of thousands that are free and they're also trying to market and get people to download them. We're living in a very interesting time where consumers want things for free and there are so many free things out there but it's how do you actually find the consumers to "purchase" your product.

Mark Dawson: My point of view, Ricci, if somebody is starting up in this area, it can sometimes sound a little bit despondent when you hear the figures of how many people are giving away their books. I still suspect and I'm sure I have view on this that the percentage of all those who are prepared to take that extra step, to understand the marketing, to understand the push, to understand the coordination effort that needs to go around marketing their book is still quite small.

Ricci Wolman: The numbers may sound discouraging but if you take a step back and you look at the

picture as a whole and how in the authors are doing and how many authors are making money from their craft of writing for the first time ever, that is growing as well. To your point, James, if you take the time to understand some of the simple things that you can do in the beginning, it's not overwhelming and the chance of success I think is actually very high. Indies are accounting for almost, what, 45% of the ebook market share on Amazon. Okay. That's almost half. It's pretty incredible. When you look at the trend 2 years ago, I think indies were sitting around 27%. In the space of the last 2 years, maybe next year, indies will have doubled their market share.

Yes, there are a lot of free books out there. Yes, there are a lot of people who are self publishing but consumers are actually starting to trade their purchasing power in and instead of buying only traditionally published books, they're buying a lot of indie published books as well. I think that's really cool.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, me too. Of course clever indies are making it more and more difficult to tell the difference between a traditionally published book and an indie published book. You know, James' point that there aren't that many authors that are prepared to switch on to the marketing side. I think that is true. That's an opportunity for the ones that are. People listening to a podcast like this and learning how to use services like Freebooksy and immediately elevating themselves above most of the competition which I just think there are so many opportunities to make a positive impact instead.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah, absolutely. I think the vast majority of authors out there think that the work comes in writing the book which is not untrue. It is very, very difficult to write a book. It is something that I cannot do and the fact that somebody can do it is great. When it comes to self publishing, writing a book is maybe 30% or 40% of the work. Once you finish the book, there's a whole lot to do from the editing, proofing, getting the right cover design, publishing it and then all the way through the marketing. A lot of the books that are sitting out there when you do your searches and you look at this up, publishing stats, a lot of that are authors who are saying, "Hey, I've written my book. They put it out there," and then they haven't taken the next step to do the last, run the rest of the race.

If you take the time to do some of those things, that's where you really start joining this community of indie authors who are thriving and who are making money from their craft and who are doing very well.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. That's where we want to be. Ricci, let's stroll down a little bit in some of the detail and talk specifically about mailing list. Can you give us some entry level tips, sort of with on building and

keeping a main list engaged?

Ricci Wolman: For authors who are just getting started, the very first thing I would say is start building your own personal mailing list right away. You can start doing this even before you have published your book. There are lots of great services and tools out there. My recommendation would be MailChimp. That's what we use and we've been really happy with the service. It's also free up through 2,000 subscribers. You simply go to MailChimp. You would set up an account and you create an email list called whatever your name is. Sam the Author or Ricci Wolman's mailing list. I would say Ricci Wolman's mailing list. You slowly start adding readers to that list. The easy, the low hanging fruit is obviously friends and family.

You would send out an email to your friends and family and say, hey, I'm in the process of writing a book. Would you like me to keep you updated on how it's going and let you know when it's published? If so, please click this link and join my mailing list. That way, you can probably get your first 50 to 1000 sign ups depending on how popular you are. Co-workers, right, if you still have a day job, email your co-workers. Let them what you're doing.

James Blatch: I can still remember receiving Mark's first emails. I'm still getting the emails.

Ricci Wolman: Right, and you're still buying his books.

James Blatch: Exactly, yeah.

Ricci Wolman: You got to start somewhere. I would say start there because it's a very thrilling feeling the first time that if somebody signs up for your mailing list and then when you start logging into your list or you get an email from MailChimp everyday that says you have a new subscriber to your list. This is a marathon. It's not a race. You're not looking to build a mailing list like we have over the course of a few months. It's going to take a long time but the secret to success here is just to be doing it all the time because it adds up. If you're adding a couple people everyday over the course of a year, all of a sudden, you actually have a mailing list that could be close to a thousand people.

Take the first step. Set up your mailing list and start asking people to join in. Then if you have a website, you would have a little sign up link on your website so the people who are coming to your website can sign up for your mailing list as well. Once your book is published, at the very end of the book in the back matter portion when somebody has finished reading the book, you would say, "Did you enjoy this book? Sign up for my mailing list and I'll let you know when I have additional titles that are being published."

All those things working together will allow you to slowly start building your list. Those are just organic ways to go about doing it. Once you start getting a little more sophisticated and you have some marketing dollars, there are other ways to build your list like through Facebook ads, markers and incredible course that will walk you through exactly how to do this. I would recommend that as well. Then, it's all about engaging the people on your list. I would say rule number one, don't spam people. Nobody likes that. You don't like it, so don't do it to anybody else. I would say set up a schedule and say, hey, I'm going to email my list once a month. I think that's enough if you're an author and it's enough to keep people engaged but not so much the people are going to start unsubscribing.

Then every month, just think about what you want to tell people about. If you're got a book that you say your book is about to be published, then you would email that list and you would say to them, "Hey, my book's coming out on Tuesday. I would love your support. Would you please go and purchase the book on Amazon," and include a link for them. If you're still in the process of writing the book, you could just send an email once a month and say, "Hey, this is my status update. I'm half way through the book or I'm stuck on chapter 3, or I've had a lot of writer's block, or I'm almost done but I'm struggling with this issue." People are really interested in the writing process, especially those of us who cannot write. We have to read about authors and how you're creating this book and how you're writing it and the challenges and triumphs along the way.

I don't think it has to be complex. It just has to be genuine and people will find that interesting. They might even forward it onto other people who will then join your mailing lists. All of these things kind of feed into each other, to slowly grow and build your own audience.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I remember really vividly of getting the first email from MailChimp that wasn't from someone that I knew. It's saying that, hey, another I've got a ... Someone who's just subscribed to your mailing list. That was an amazing feeling actually. It's good to remember that because it's not like that these days. I get a lot, actually a lot more than a couple coming in these days, many more than that now. It's good to remember that every time you get their email from MailChimp, that's another reader who has

decided that they like your stuff enough to just give you something that's quite personal to them in their email address. Yeah, it's good to hear that because I sometimes get a blase about that and went for months without being able to make this work.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah, absolutely. I mean we all started from zero. Freebooksy had a mailing list of zero 5 years ago. Mark had a mailing list of zero. James, I don't know what your mailing list is today but at one point [crosstalk 00:19:16].

James Blatch: Guess. Your prediction [crosstalk 00:19:18].

Ricci Wolman: Maybe you do have a mailing list of zero right now but we all started there and it's really ... I would just say have fun with it. It's a really fun process and it is thrilling to start getting those emails and see people signing up who are not friends and family, who are just interested in you and your work. It's pretty awesome.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's great. I think the engagement is something of an art form for you, Ricci, and it's great to hear you talking about particularly like the line about it doesn't have to be complex. It just does have to be genuine. I think getting that voice right is very important. I think Mark does that very well actually. I'll even say that begrudgingly about his emails. I think getting that voice, that friendly informative but not over bearing works well.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah, exactly. I mean just you know, you write the emails if you were talking to a friend or somebody from high school you haven't seen for a while. You're just really filling them in on what you're doing on the author or writing side of your life. People will find that interesting. I think sometimes author's discounts, how incredible their skill and their craft is and especially when you hang out with a lot of other authors, you kind of assume, oh, this is something anybody can do and there's maybe not as much kind of bragging rights around writing as I feel like there should be.

James Blatch: That's because we're all massively insecure.

Ricci Wolman: With authors, I hear a lot, they say, "Well, I've got nothing to email people about. What am

I going to email them?" There are plenty of things. Just talk to people about what's it's like to be a writer, what is your day look like? How are you juggling writing and having a full time job? How are you picking the title for your book? How are you naming your characters? How do you choose your setting? All of these things are really, really interesting and people much enjoy hearing about it through your email newsletter.

James Blatch: Great. Okay. Well, should we move onto some tricks and tools of the trade. I mean there's quite a range of promotional tools available today. Some is free advice. Some are quite expensive to sign into. That particular promotional tools, Ricci, that you see is effective.

Ricci Wolman: Well, you know, we spoken a lot about email marketing. I don't want to be the dead horse here. I will say I believe the email marketing is still the most effective marketing tool that is out there. You're going to be building your own list. You continue to do that and then the other way that people use email marketing is that they basically rent lists which is what our service does. It's what services like BookBub does. BookBub, as we build really huge audiences and readers and you basically pay to get in front of that reader audience. It's the quickest most effective way to get your book in front of readers and boost your downloads and boost your sales. We can talk about that a little bit more later on.

The other effective tools I've seen out there are ... I don't want to gloss over promotional days. I'm kind of assuming here that everyone knows what I mean when I say if you're going to rent a list. The very first step there is actually to have a calendar and set up a promotional day. You're going to set your book to free for a couple of days or maybe you're going to discount your book to 99 cents or even to 2.99 depending on what you're strategy is. Taking a very planned approach to these promotional days is going to set you up for success. You kind of look out at the next 6 months. I'm not sure, Mark, if you do it in 6 months increments or you look at a whole year down the road.

Look at the title or titles that you have and then pick days on the calendar of where you're going to discounts the book or around a promotional day. The reason that promotional days are so effective is two fold. One is that you're discounting or you're making your book free so it really is a discount and your readers and people out there are going to respond to that. The second is that when you actually mark that day on the calendar and you say I'm going to do a promotional day, it forces you to really focus all of your attention on marketing for those 48 to 72 hours.

You say you're going to send out an email and you know you're going to tweet and you're going to ask people for support and maybe you're going to buy slots in lists like ours. As an author, it makes you 100% focused on marketing for a couple days every month. The result is that you will see sales and you will see success. When you focus on marketing, it will work. The challenge is how do you get yourself to focus on marketing. Setting up those promotional days is kind of the first step in all of these.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's important to [inaudible 00:23:55] and to answer the question, I'm very lazy on promotion just because I know this is one of the things, my objectives for this year is stop being so bloody lazy about. I've got so many books now that just kind of looking at the calendar and forcing myself to stop writing and to stop planning promotion is something that gets from the background of it too much. That is just lazy on my part because I know that if say I had a deal with the 99 cents on one of my books then I get a bargain Booksy placement, get in with BookBub, put them in as well, layer in with some other promotion and send an email out to your list. Provide you time that right, you can propel the book higher up, up the Amazon rankings which means more visibility which means more sales, which means more visibility, all that kind of stuff.

I know that works and that was something I did really diligently when I was starting to push this a bit in 2013 and 2014. I've got lazy now. I think one thing I want to take away from this conversation is stop being so lazy. Get it sorted out.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah. I mean I think it's Jackie Weeger. I think she runs eNovel Authors and I read a quote on her blog recently that said, "When I promote my book, I sell more copies." It's the most simple statement.

James Blatch: It's not rocket science, is it.

Ricci Wolman: It's 100% true. If you take the time to sit and promote your book, you will sell more copies. That's what I like promo days because it really forces you to sit down and focus only on promoting your book.

Mark Dawson: Say, I have 3 books for bargain, books information coming out, what would you recommend as the things I should do to make that promotion as successful as possible?

Ricci Wolman: Sure. You did mention BookBub. BookBub is a great service. They have the largest list by far out there out of all these sites. If you can get a BookBub, I would do that too. Many of our authors, if they get a BookBub, they will purchase a bargain books in Freebooksy as well because kind of the ones you punch off having visibility on both our site and their site guarantees that you're going to shoot up to probably somewhere within the top 20 or top 50 on the Amazon charts depending on your genre. Definitely try for a BookBub, schedule a feature with us. We do not have the same strip editorial criteria as BookBub does mainly because we were born out of my mom's book which was it's really hard to get their first promotion. It's really hard to get those first reviews. We don't feel that we should be only picking the authors who've already made it.

If you can't get in BookBub, don't worry. You can still get a feature with us. Schedule your features with your paid services, your rental lists. Then, make sure to send out an email to your list as well. If you're active on Twitter or Facebook, now is the time to, on the days of the promotion, to tweet and make sure that you're going to post to Facebook about your book being discounted or free. If you've started dabbling with ads, I would even recommend boosting those posts which is basically putting some pay dollars behind Facebook and Twitter to get some further amplification so your book gets in front of even more people.

Then, asking through your email list and through your Twitter followers, asking people to retweet you and to forward on the email. That's going to help you as well. The tipping point comes when you start climbing those Amazon charts and you start becoming visible in the top 100. What happens then is that people who are not on our list or BookBub lists or on Twitter or on Facebook but who just happens to be on Amazon that day surfing and looking for their next book to read, they will find your book because most consumers browse by searching the top charts. They're going to go the top 100 free Kindle books and they're going to page through and they're going to see your book, or they're going to go to the top 100 books in mystery and if you're sitting somewhere in the top 100 charts, chances are they're going to find you.

That leads to as halo effect of even more downloads and more sales. Then, Amazon's algorithm sees all these activity around your book and it's now looking at who's purchasing your book and all their other activity and then they start recommending your book in that little section on the bottom that says people who purchase this also viewed this. All of these kind of feeds into this wave that keeps building and that's where you see your sales and downloads continue to generate days and weeks after the promotional days have ended.

Mark Dawson: That's when you start big screen caps, when you're sitting next to Stephen King for about 2 hours.

Ricci Wolman: Exactly. Another one of those thrilling things the first time it happens and now, Mark, you probably take it for granted.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. No, I'm joking. I'm joking.

James Blatch: Ricci, let me just ask you again. From a rookie point of view about ... I think most people ... Probably most people listening to this podcast will accept the idea that starting out as an author, starting this, it's starting a business and you need to invest at the beginning and most businesses don't make money to start off with. You get a point where it's investment, a point where it's a break even and a point where it's profit if you're doing it right. Although lots of authors I don't think do accept that. They think they're going to start selling their first book, but let's put them to one side. I mean can you put figures on this for a rookie? Can you say to me how much you think I should be investing in that first book with the next one coming out soon with a view to being profitable in the future?

Ricci Wolman: Before I answer the question about the actual number, what I will say is the more books you have, the more money you will make. Being a first time author, you have multiple challenges. You have the challenge of getting your first book out there, getting reviews and getting sales and then you have the challenge of you're at a disadvantage because you only have one book. When somebody finishes your book, there is nothing else for them to go and purchase. Then if they haven't signed up for your email list, they kind of put the book down and then they forget about you and how are you going to get that person to come back and purchase your book the next time that you publish it.

I know for many authors, I think Russel Blake talks about this a lot. You don't really start making significant money until you have 2 or 3 or 4 titles that are out there because when you promote one title and people start reading that title, it leads to people purchasing the other titles in your portfolio per se. What I would probably recommend is when you publish that first book, you do a lot of the things we've talked about like starting to build your list and running a promotional day once every quarter. I would actually focus a lot of your attention on writing the next book which may sound a little counter intuitive. I think that is really the key to success, that you're going to be investing in the first book but you're investing

in writing additional titles, so as you're building this list and as you're building a following, you actually have other things to settle to your readers.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. That other story I told of going and sitting down, taking my phone out when I had the Freebooksy promotion, you mailed two things I hadn't got lined up is that I didn't have another book. All those 50,000 people maybe 10,000 would read the book, but there nowhere else then to go afterwards. Even more unforgiveably, I didn't have an email list. They couldn't even subscribe somewhere where I could tell them that I was working on the followup. When I look at that now, I was very naïve about that. I've done okay but I still kind of kick myself that I could perhaps have accelerated things by 6 months if I had taken things in a more professional fashion right from the start. That's great advice. Everyone should at the very, very least should have a mailing list and that doesn't cost anything. You can get a free one with MailChimp box for 2,000 people.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah. To circle back to your original question was can I put some figures on this? I wouldn't be spending a whole ton of marketing dollars when you only have one title out there. I think you could away with budgeting maybe 100 or 200 dollars a quarter for your promotional days so that you're buying slots in rental lists. If you get a BookBub, that's a very different story. Getting a BookBub on the first book when you have no other titles is almost a little bit of a waste because you're not going to get any of the halo that you would normally see from that. I would say get your first title out. I think that should be a goal. Once it's out, start promoting it every quarter so that you can grow your views and you can grow your following and it will slowly grow your reader list but spend the rest of your time writing the next title.

Then, once you have two titles out, then you can start investing a little bit more because you also got to think about the return on your dollars. If you're spending a 100 dollars a quarter and you only have one book to sell, there's only X amount of revenue you can make. You can now spend that same 100 dollars but now there are two titles to sell, so your return on that investment is going to be higher and so it goes as you have more and more titles. Then once you're starting to be [inaudible 00:33:07] positive then you up your marketing spend so that you're actually creating a business that is profitable as you're investing in it.

Mark Dawson: Another question that I've been thinking about for a little while is your in a really excellent position to answer this because with Freebooksy and bargain books you can even straddle both sides of the argument. You go on to forms these and people would be talking about the best way to promote and in particular the best price point and one of the arguments I see quite a lot is that free is over. Free is not as

popular as it was say 5 years ago which might be true. People are starting to say that 99 cents is the new free. Instead of giving away books, you should put them to 99 cents because there's some kind of advantage there. Now, I'm not sure that I agree with that but you're in a particularly good place to comment on whether you see any treats in that.

Ricci Wolman: We're constantly looking at the click through rate and the number of downloads that are coming through from Freebooksy and the free books email only has free books in it. We're seeing growth in the number of free downloads. We're not seeing any kind of shrinkage there in terms of what readers want and then at the 99 cent, 99 cent price point is compelling to readers. The challenge there is that if you're not doing a Kindle countdown deal, you're only getting a 30% royalty share. The amount of money you're making up at 99 cent price point is so little that I think it's more impactful to do free because you're going to get a lot more downloads and then you're going to see sell through on your other titles that you can then price at other price points.

If you only have one book, it's a slightly different story. If you have multiple titles, especially if you have a series, setting the first book in the series to free or doing free promotional days, I think it's still very highly, highly effective marketing technique.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Maybe the whole idea is make an impulse purchase completely frictionless and at zero, there is no price friction, so no one's going to think that I'd have to spend something. Even the 99 cents is a very small amount of money. It is still a spend. You are going to be losing people who aren't prepared to spend anything just kind of almost on an instinctive level. Whereas something that's free is much more likely just to be kind of clicked on and downloaded. Yeah, I'm [inaudible 00:35:20] and I'm not surprised that you see that from your data.

Ricci Wolman: Yeah. The click through rates on free versus paid, free is 45 times higher. There is to your point, free is free and free is very powerful and people will click through and download a free book without really thinking about it twice and 99 cents, you have to click that, pay with credit card and check your credit card, choose the credit card button. You know, it gives people pause even though you would think it's less than a dollar, what's the difference but there is a big difference.

James Blatch: Okay, Ricci. Before we let you go, I've been hogging you a bit on the rookie side of things. Can we move things on, for this last couple of questions, to authors with more experience, with more

books who are making money. Perhaps they've got a full time job and it's good money but not enough for them to change their life. What's your advice to them? How do they take it to the next level?

Ricci Wolman: I think we've touched on a while a bit but I'm going to distill it for us here. Make sure that you continue to do your promotional days, Mark.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Busted.

Ricci Wolman: For all those, and again, we run into this a lot, once you become somewhat successful, your income is kind of more stable and more consistent on a daily basis. We do see that authors tend to take their foot off the gas when it comes to setting up their promotional days and really putting their focus on marketing once a month or once every quarter. I would say try and get that discipline back and make sure that you are still doing that if nothing else to make sure that you're spending some time on marketing which can fall by the way sides. Set your promotional days, focus on your marketing.

I would also say if you have a portfolio of titles and none of them are free, I would set one to be permanently free because free is very powerful and we know ... Kobo shared the stat that if somebody reads your first book that's free, the sell through rate on your other titles are 45 to 55 percent. The lifetime value there to an author of giving away one book for free, if you have 5, 6, 7 other titles that are then going to be purchased is pretty high and I think it's absolutely worth doing once you get to that point.

The other thing I would say is get your book in all formats. Another take away from the author and news report was that indies are starting to take some share in print and audio book as well. Right now, it's not as marked as in the ebook sales. I do think that as more and more readers are purchasing their physical books online, indies are going to continue to take share. That's really exciting. If you really have a portfolio of titles, it's a fairly cheap way to amplify your revenue and see some growth without have to write a new book, just make sure your book is available in print. Then for your best sellers, get an audio book edition out.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I completely agree with that. I mean the way I look at it is if I've written a book, that's a piece of intellectual property and I want to exploit every single iteration of that IP. The obvious one is selling it as an eBook then definitely get it in print through CreateSpace or Lightning Source or

something like that. Audio is a big thing for me, I put all my books up in Audible last year. Then even things like looking at film rights, foreign translation is quite a big one for me this year. Trying to push on a bit and get some more rights sold around the world. I don't like leaving them on the table and I don't like leaving things left unexploited. All of those are really, really great suggestions for more experienced authors.

James Blatch: Great. Ricci, it's been fabulous listening to you. Value pack as I would say. What's next for you in Written Word Media?

Ricci Wolman: Well, you know. We're just going to continue doing what we do best which is building our audience. We have a really active reader audience that can help in these to sell more books. We're always experimenting with new products for if there is anything figuring out what's the most effective. That's my passion. I love marketing. I'm just going to continue to spend my time there and I would love to catch up with you guys down the road and we let you know if we come up with anything new and exciting.

James Blatch: Well, absolutely. You can guarantee it that we will remain firm friends. Ricci, it's been a great pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us.

Ricci Wolman: No, thanks for having me on.

James Blatch: Yeah. That was Ricci. It was really good talking to her. Ricci's a tenacious person and unusually perhaps for the type of person we interview, not an author herself, all about how to help authors and how to gain that visibility. I've met her and like a lot of people in the digital space, she does what she teaches if you like and she gets her own visibility in her own mailing list up and under people's noses. Then she teaches us how to do that. Yeah, as you said right at the beginning and your little anecdote there, Mark, that this was an important moment for you when you used the services of Freebooksy. An important part of it.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Freebooksy is great. It's certainly in the top tier of services that authors can go to to increase visibility and chances of being discovered. One thing we can try later and I was quite assertive that we're going to have BookBub on as well in the next 4 or 5 weeks. Freebooksy on the one hand, BookBub on the other. BookBub is well known now and the space is being a massive juggernaut when it

comes to driving sales and downloads. We're going to have a chat with them coming up. If anyone has any questions that they'd like as to put to BookBub, then they can leave them in the comments for this show and we'll pick those up and we'll filter some and get a list of interesting questions so we can hopefully put to them that perhaps they haven't been asked before and you haven't heard the answers before. That can be cool.

James Blatch: Yeah. Exciting to have BookBub on. That's a really big beast to land which is sort of fishing and hunting metaphor all in one. You can tell I'm a writer. I should say just before we go that Mark and I have had some fun this week. We've been putting together our list of podcast episodes going up until ... Well beyond the middle part of ... one into July. We've got a list in front of us. Suffice to say there's going to be a continuation of really interesting guests. I think a couple of the standpoints authors at various stages of their career including quite early on. We've got one guy has had a real breakthrough this year. Another guy who had a bit of a breakthrough in terms of getting his mailing list working last year. We got and see some of the nitty gritty. Some of that will be just inspirational hearing from other authors who've cracked that aspect of it or get some tips and a lot of it will be the detail of how they've done that in some instructional stuff.

The other thing We're going to do, and this is really looking at the stats because we can now start to look at what podcast episodes are more popular than others that people have downloaded and something that became clear to us, Mark is that in he black and white stats is that people like the episode where you basically talked through the top tips, the 5 must do actions for new authors. We didn't actually have an interviewee on for that I could say, but its made it clear that people do want value. They want to learn and they want to be able to growth their careers by listening to this podcast and others. We're going to do a couple of those, aren't we?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. We are and the first one we'll do is, or the answer to the question I get to asked the most of all these days is what should I do as a starting author? My first, the main response to that is just get a mailing list set up straight away. We'll talk about mailing lists, about what you should do, what you shouldn't do, what services you can look at, whether you should go for something simple like AWebber or MailChimp or something more complicated like InfusionSoft or Active Campaigns, something like that. Just the kind of the pros and cons, the dos and don'ts that people should be bearing in mind when they're setting up what will probably be their most valuable asset as an independent author.

James Blatch: That in fact will be the next podcast. We're going to call it something like, "It's the mailing

list stupid," because it's a real one on one, isn't it for authors. Don't worry, we are going to start at the beginning. I'm going to be asking some basic questions of what is a mailing list, how do you actually go about setting it up, how do you actually go about growing it as well as some of those sort of if you like methods and approaches in general terms to why you should have it as an author. That would be our next one and we'll have a few more of those episodes that we'll start to fill up in the bank. Now, you can go back of course in iTunes or you're preferred provider and get all our episodes and listen to them. Some great quality stuff we've had already and a lot more to come.

Mark Dawson: Cool. I look forward to be back next week.

James Blatch: Indeed. Thank you very much to our guest Ricci Wolman and we will see you next time out.

CHAPTER 8

FROM INDIE AUTHOR TO 7 FIGURE BOOK DEAL - WITH BELLA ANDRE



FROM INDIE PUBLISHING to 7 FIGURE BOOK DEAL.

with **BELLA ANDRE**
Bestselling Author



EPISODE #010

TODAY'S GUEST is one of the most prolific and hardworking Indie authors out there. All it takes is a glance at Bella Andre's catalogue to realize that this woman knows how to do what it takes to get books written! Success has come with over 50 bestsellers to her credit, and, during this chat, you're going to hear Bella's thoughts about how self-publishing has changed over the years of her career, how and when Indie authors need to put on the blinders, learning to work in your own cycles, and the details of how she got her seven figure print-only publishing deal.

AS AN INDIE AUTHOR YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN WHEN IT'S TIME TO PUT ON THE BLINDERS.

If you know you're supposed to be a writer and are doing the work, you're going to have plenty of feedback and pushback regarding all kinds of things. People will criticize your work, tell you that you're a bad author - the list goes on. It's during those times that you can't let yourself get focused on the negative things coming your way. Bella calls it "putting on the blinders" to keep yourself on track in your writing

career. During this conversation she shares some of the things she's had to overcome and how she did it by employing her own set of blinders. It's encouraging and helpful stuff for any indie author.

DON'T GET STUCK BELIEVING THAT YOU HAVE TO WRITE IN THE SAME PATTERN AS SOMEONE ELSE.

Bella has learned over the years of being a self published author that she has to be true to the way that SHE works and not try to follow some predefined or suggested writing formula. Even within the way she works she's found that the routine changes from time to time. For her it's a case of knowing herself and doing what best facilitates success for herself from day to day. James and Mark quiz Bella on how she goes about determining those cycles for herself and ask what she'd recommend to authors who are struggling to get into their own routine. You'll love her responses.

THE MOST CONSISTENTLY BENEFICIAL PRACTICE IN BELLA'S CAREER.

From an author as successful and prolific as Bella you might think that the most beneficial things in her career are things you typically hear: writing a set number of words every day, doing the work, focusing on technique and skill development, killing her darlings. But she's got a very different answer to the question that she shares on this episode - and it doesn't have to do with the act of writing at all.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Today's introduction to the guest, Bella Andre.
- Busy recording videos for Youtube advertising.
- Things that have changed in self publishing over the course of Bella's career.
- Why you've got to put on the blinders as an Indie author.
- Bella's "normal" daily routine and learning to work in her own cycles.
- Is it common for Bella to work on more than one book at once?
- Bella's writing is all done in MS Word - for a reason.
- One thing that's been the most consistently beneficial to Bella.
- Looking forward to a publishing deal and how it came about.
- The disadvantage Indie authors are at in print publishing negotiations.
- Advice for newer authors.
- Why Bella does most of her stuff herself, with the help of contractors.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

[Bella's website](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE WITH BELLA ANDRE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to ... it's double figures for us, so it's a mini birthday ... podcast number 10 and we have got a great interview. We should say straight up, should we, Mark, that we did promise that we were going to do the mailing list episode, but you know what? We had a great chat with Bella Andre and she's hot at the moment with a fantastic deal that she's just done and a real transitional ... it shows the power of self-publishing and what it's worth to the publishing industry and we really wanted to get that interview out, so we're going to go with the Bella Andre interview for this episode and we will visit the mailing list episode shortly.

Mark Dawson: Yes, absolutely. We had a great chat with Bella and we couldn't wait to bring it to you; she's been one of the most requested podcasts guests that we've had and we thought it would be wrong of us, remiss of us, to wait any longer to bring it to you, so we look forward to letting this one play out.

James Blatch: Yeah, we're going to get to it in just a moment. She's great, Bella, but before we do that I think we should just talk about where we've been today. We've been in a dark basement in Soho, in a recording studio in the heart of media land, in the UK, and we've been busy behind the cameras recording quite a number of videos as part of our extensive test and exploration of YouTube advertising.

Mark Dawson: We have, yes. We've, obviously, we've nailed Facebook. That's kind of something we're pretty good at now. And we've done Twitter as well. So the thing that we wanted to look at in the first half of this year is YouTube ads. Video is quite hot on Facebook right now, so we've got a lot of video both for the course that we run and also I've got lots for the video ads that I run to drive subscriptions to my mailing list. It just seems like a bit of a waste in not trying to exploit that content in another ... to, you know, re-purpose it and put it out into another platform. YouTube is the obvious place to try that so that's ... You've been in the lab, locked up in the lab for a couple of months, so trying to test that and see how if we can get that to work properly.

James Blatch: Yeah, we're in the early stages of finding our way and that's ... it uses the Google AdWords platform, which will have you tearing your hair out from time to time. It's not the most intuitive of platforms, but, you know, none of these come very naturally. They are systems that you need to learn, but the prize on offer is highly targeted, very effective advertising, so we're determined to crack that for you and report our results.

We should also say that we've done a few, sort of longer YouTube-style videos which have been a bit like

the podcast. So, if, for whatever reason, you want to see what we look like actually talking rather than just listening to us, you will be able to very shortly on our YouTube channel see us doing exactly this sort of thing in this Soho studio. It felt like we should've been recording a Kinks track or something in there, didn't it?

Mark Dawson: It was ... it was atmospheric, and just down the road from a sexual health clinic.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: And very, very close to where we used to work, so literally well two and half, three, minutes away from Soho square which is where both you and me and a third amigo ... John ... worked for, you know, years and years, so it was quite nice to go back and kind of go back to those streets again.

James Blatch: Definitely our old haunt and the Star Café and some famous places just around there. In fact, the sexual health clinic was one end of the passageway and the sex shop was at the other end, wasn't it?

Mark Dawson: Exactly, yeah.

James Blatch: So that sums Soho up! Okay, well, let's get onto this interview with Bella. A lot of you will know who Bella Andre is. She is an innovator and an earlier doctor in our sphere of digital marketing. She's sold more than 5 million books. She's had bestsellers around the world. She's been the number one ranked author on Amazon alongside names such as J.K. Rowling, James Patterson, and Stephen King. She's got her own publishing company. She's done a lot of things first and a lot of things very well and she's recently signed a 7 figure print only deal with Harlequin, just ... and we will talk about that. The power of going to a traditional publisher after you've had success as an indie author and perhaps a pathfinder for the future for lots of authors. So this is Bella.

WE GOT GOING BY ASKING HER WHAT SHE THOUGHT HAD CHANGED IN THE TIME THAT SHE'S BEEN AN INDIE PUBLISHER.

Bella Andre: Well, you know, there's ... I would say it's all been good. I think that people freak out a lot over things, and one thing that you learn, like 5 - 6 years in, is stop freaking out and just keep writing your

book. You know that's really what it comes down to.

I'll tell you what's the same. It's the same that your next book is always going to be the best thing you can do. Always, always, always. Even with all the opportunities and education that we have with advertising, of which, you know, I'm taking advantage of all of them. We just launched my first Twitter ads yesterday, so we're watching those. We're going to do a Tweet and all of that and, of course, advertising on FB and everywhere else, and YouTube and Google, everything. Doing all of it, right? Which is super exciting!

I'm super excited to have more tools, but nonetheless, make the most important thing is the book. For instance, today I started by doing 1500 words on my next Sullivan and then when those 1500 words were done I opened the file for my next Maverick Billionaire and I did 3000 words on that. Then when that was done I pulled out the printout I had done of my Sullivan that's coming out in a month and I started proof reading that.

When I'm done with that that's when I'm going to go and I'm going to check on my emails, and I'm going to go looking at my ads I'm running. I'm going to look at my to-do list and I've got a format some stuff for Germany. There's always ... everything's layered on top of everything else, but the most important things that I have to do today, and every day, are get those words in on those next books. Because that's ultimately what the readers want and that's what I want to do too. I got into this to be a writer, not to be an ad specialist, not to be a publisher.

Some people will come out of this and realize, you know what, I like writing the least and I want to do all these things more. Then they'll start businesses and they'll do all that, and that's awesome. After six years, I'm like no, no, I still like writing the best. I'm good at everything else, but I really like writing the books. That's where my ultimate passion is, so that's where I'm going to put my hours.

The biggest changes are, I think, there's more and more opportunities all the time for writers. Being nimble, just be ready to roll. Be ready to be flexible and just don't freak out. Just stop freaking out.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, there's been a few bumps on the road.

Bella Andre: Yes, I mean, that's reality. We're like creative artistes, we weep over our keyboards and anytime someone comes in says like "Oh that's the worst book I've ever read", right, like look I have those reviews, one star, this is literally the worst book I've read. Then people will agree with that. It's hard, it can be hard to go you know what there's thousands or millions of people out there who think these are the best books they've ever read. When that one person says no, no it's the worst. No one's ever going to win that one, you know, it's like you got to just like keep going and do the best that you can.

I talk a lot about putting on the blinders. You've got to put them on for a lot of things. You've got to put them on when someone comes in and says they hate your book. You've got to put them on when a retailer launches some new program that looks like it's turning everything topsy-turvy. You've got to put them on when you're seeing other authors do things around you that you feel like you should jump on that bandwagon, you know, and oh my God if I don't drop what I'm doing and start writing that it's all over! You've got to put the blinders on.

There's like that weird balance, you're walking that balance beam between keeping your eyes open and paying attention and being nimble so that when the waves come you can surf them, and blocking it out so that you can do what you've got to do, which is write your book.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's always going to come back to the book because everything else is transitory. Things might change: Bezos might get out of bed tomorrow and say, you know what, 40% top royalty ... You just kind of roll with that punch, but at the end of the day the most important thing is just, as you say, is getting down and writing the next book.

So these scripts fall back to the actual, yeah you already made me feel inadequate with your workload and I had a shit day today and I only got a few words in the bank so I feel dreadful and you've made me feel worse, so thanks for that!

HOW DOES YOUR DAY KIND OF LOOK IN TERMS OF WHEN DO YOU GET UP AND START WRITING AND ALL OF THAT GOOD STUFF?

Bella Andre: Well my days don't look a lot different, and you know, let's rewind and don't feel bad because, wait ... The other thing is we all have our own natural pace and speed and I write better when I write more. That's just how I am. Yeah, you know the first 4.5 - 5 years of this for me I worked almost 24 hours a day. It was a lot and I made statements like balance is over rated. You know, like it was all this stuff, and I think in a way it was very empowering for me, I think, hearing me, especially for people with

kids who are home taking care of them, it can be very empowering to be told "You know what you don't have to have balance, just go do what you want to do" so I think that was great for all of us.

Then I got to the point where I was just like, all right if I want to keep doing this long term I've got to back off some. I actually took a few months off and went to Europe and toured around with my family, and pulled the kids out of school and it was great because when you have workaholic tendencies like I do, something like that can be the only way that you can break the cycle, so to speak.

It took me, out of the 4.5 months that we traveled, the first 2.5 months I sort of was panicked the whole time. I just like to lay it out as honestly as possible, you know, I'm not magician. I'm no more special than anybody else. It's like this stuff's hard and I had to break the cycle of working really hard because I would have burned myself out. Fortunately I knew to stop before that happened.

So for 2-2.5 months I panicked because I was like "Oh my God! I'm not working on this 24 hours a day. What if it all falls away? If it all goes away?" And you're just, you're so convinced once you've done that that you have to keep doing it at that pace or you'll never be able to keep it going. What happened instead is the universe must have said you know what cut her some slack. I had the best 4.5 months so far of my career.

When a friend said to me "you know what I think this is your sign to take more vacations." Yeah, so I made a promise to myself when I came back that I would not go back into that and I haven't. I try to keep it to, I call it cultivating laziness and my friends say that my definition of laziness is like way off. For me working 8 hours a day, trying to keep it down to 8 hours a day, feels like a vacation. It feels like a pretty light load to me. So that's where I am, so I'm not working the 20 hours a day anymore, I'm working like probably about 8, sometimes it spills over a little trying to steal back my weekends as much as I can.

But of course, right now I have three projects overlapping, not including all the foreign translations and blah-blah-blah, so you know there's always a lot of stuff going on and sometimes you're busier than others. Right now it's a little bit of a busy month, but ... Yeah, so I get up and actually I go for a ... I check my emails really, really quick, make sure there's no fires, and I try to keep that to about five minutes and then I head out for a walk through the vineyards with my husband and our dog. We walk for like 2-3 hours, because I love walking, so I could walk and pick forever. I love it.

Then I come back and eat something and that's when the headphones go in. I put the same song on repeat, whatever song it is that I'm listening to, and I get my words started. That's it. Then when I am done with that, if I have time, I'll deal with the business stuff as much as I can and then I try not to work in the evenings anymore. That's my day. It's pretty simple now. It was a little less simple before, but you know what, like I was out conquering the walls, and now I'm like okay I've conquered a lot, so now I'm conquering it, continuing to conquer it just at a more measured pace.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, all the writers I know, are walkers. I love walking and running too. I get the best ideas when I'm doing that, but it sounds like you've nailed your day. Perfect. Great.

But I'm hogging you. James any questions?

James Blatch: Yeah, you've mentioned a couple of times how you will be writing more than one book at once. Is that common for you, or does it just happen to be today and the other time that you mentioned it?

Bella Andre: No, it happens sometimes. Right now, the calendar, the carefully plotted out calendar, did not end up remaining as carefully plotted out as it should have. Things shift and change. I do, I have a couple of overlapping projects right now, but fortunately, I'm really enjoying both of them, so I need to keep them both going. But you know, I was ... I wrote a whole bunch of books at 5000 words a day. A whole bunch of them. After doing so many of them I finally said, you know what, if I want to do that again in the future that's great, but I don't want to have to do that again in the future so I'm really careful now about making a schedule where, you know, if there is an overlap like this it's just over the course of a few weeks. I'm in those few weeks right now.

James Blatch: Okay, so it's not a normal thing you plan to do and one that you're particular creative approach responds to, it's just something that's happened at the moment.

Bella Andre: Yeah, it's just happened at the moment. I mean every book is different, like some books I write completely out of order and some books I write from start to finish. Some books I know what I'm going to talk about. In some books I don't really know until I finished the first draft and I figure it out when I'm re-writing.

I've just realized I can't pin down a process for myself, you know, sometimes I'll do 25 page outline and sometimes I'm like "Huh, I don't know, maybe ..." right, so it just kind of following it, wherever the book takes me I just go with it.

Mark Dawson: Are you writing in Scrivener or Word?

Bella Andre: I write in Word and I do some, I've done some audio lately, not through Dragon ... I hate Dragon, it makes me want to throw my computer through a window ... but yeah, where I'll, like in the car a lot, or if I'm on a walk by myself I'll just sort of speak some stuff and then send it off to a transcription company or my assistant with transcribe it for me and send it back. I find audio a little hard though, there's just so much editing, partly because I'm like "Um," and then "He," you know I just can't quite get it out with my voice.

Mark Dawson: It's a different place, isn't it? Writing with a keyboard is a visual process, for me anyway.

Bella Andre: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: It's tapping into a different part of the brain when you speak it. It's a completely different way of expressing yourself and I can't get my head around that as well. It doesn't work for me at all. I'd end up getting repetitive strain injury!

Bella Andre: Oh I hope not!

Mark Dawson: Okay, so in terms of marketing, I'm very interested in. Looking back over the course of say the last 6 years, if you could pick one tactic that has been indispensable for you, the thing that, or one of the things that been most consistently good for the [inaudible 00:16:41] book sales, what would it be?

Bella Andre: I think it's the relationship I have with my readers is the biggest thing of me. I think they trust me and one of my biggest things, you know, my soapboxes is the promise to the reader. I will never break my promise to the reader. So, that's why, for many, many years, really up until the past year, I did not link

Lucy Kevin, and Ball Andre, because despite the fact that I knew the Ball Andre brand sticking that onto Lucy Kevin would make the Lucy Kevin brand more successful.

I wasn't willing to sell a few more Lucy Kevin books at the expense of the Belle Andre brand. So when I decided to bring the Lucy Kevin books into the Belle Andre brand I actually did it as a test first. I took one series and I co-branded it and I watched it. I watched it like crazy. If there had been a sign that I had pissed any Belle Andre readers off that name and that connection would have come off so fast. It would have been gone instantly. Instead what I found out was people kept saying to me, "Oh my gosh, it all makes sense now. You're two of my favorite authors." That was a huge surprise to me, right, because I thought the promise I was making as Belle Andre and Lucy Kevin were different, at least in the sensuality because Lucy Kevin books don't have any sex in them and Belle Andre books do.

It turns out that because the voice is the same, and the sensibility of how I approach romance is the same, that ultimately that line in the sand for how much sex there is or isn't in the book really didn't matter. That's everything to me, is the promise to the reader. And, of course, like I said earlier, my newsletter list is gold and I'm very, very careful with that list, try to be very respectful for my fans for how I contact them. We're very interactive on Facebook and Twitter and Goodreads.

You know, I just love them, they're why I'm doing this. They're the reason why I can do this. Without them, I'd just be writing books and they'd just be sitting on my computer or whatever, so I owe it all to my fans.

James Blatch: I'm going to ask you about the print deal, which I've trailed ahead a couple of times. So you're ... You've really found self-publishing, you've excelled at it, and it found you in a way as well. Here you are now, I think this is going to be of interest to some of the guys we have, guys and girls in our Facebook group, who are doing good trade at the moment, starting to make some fairly serious sales. Then the print people come calling, and sometimes they're faced with this decision to make about whether they're going to sign over one of their books to print. You've managed to do this but keep hold of the self-publishing side of things.

JUST TELL US ABOUT HOW THAT CAME ABOUT AND WHAT THE DEAL CONSISTS OF.

Bella Andre: Well it was very exciting. I had been publishing my Sullivan series since the summer of 2011 and initially, well still, almost, I was doing four books a year in that series. It took off beyond my wildest dreams. So I put out the first four, first five, in July of like 2012, I ended up with three of those five on the New York Times and three of those five on the USA Today list simultaneously.

It kind of exploded. You know we talk a lot about, you know I'm on K-boards, I'm on all, I'm everywhere. I'm like watching everything all the time. I'm always seeing people say "When will it take off?" It's like Oh man just keep going, because book five, book six, there's magic there. So I knew I was going to write at least eight books in this series because, gosh darn it, I was going to hold on for the magic and the magic really hit at book five.

That happened and I, obviously, had severed my ties with New York by then. Things were going super well. A friend of mine had said, because I had been worried when I severed those ties in 2010, I said "Oh what if I ever want to go back to New York?" And I'm the bad girl and they don't want me back, and she goes "Auck, you know what? Enough with that." The only thing that matters is your numbers. They will not care that you severed ties if your numbers look good enough later." Well she was right.

Even the publishers I had left, everybody, came and said "we would like to work with you." "My God, your Sullivan!" "It's a phenomenon" and so I was very clear, and I think this is really what helped me, and I have seen a lot of writers be approached by publishers, you know like 100, 200, 300 in the last few years and it could be devastating in a lot of ways and people sign really bad deals. It's because one - they don't feel confident enough to just sort of say this is what I want. This is what I want and I'm going to walk if I don't get it. Then they're not sort of confident enough to stand behind that.

So as soon as the publishers came I was like I'd be crazy to sell anybody these digital rights. If you want to give me 30 million dollars for them, fine. But barring that, I'm not giving them to you. You can't have them. So I knew I wasn't going to sell any digital, I knew I wasn't going to sell any foreign, I knew I wasn't going to sell any audio. The only thing I was going to do was print. So I ended up connecting with an agent who had been an agent for a friend of mine, a previous agent, but she says you know what he's great, he's great at what he does. I just went to him and I said "here's the situation, I think I'm going to be getting these offers, so if I get them, will you negotiate them?"

He was like, "I don't know if you'll be getting these offers, because nobody gets print only offers, but if you do, yeah, call me, let's do it." By that afternoon I called him and said well we have the first offer, so, it was exciting. What ended up happening was I had actually met an inquiring editor who inquired me from Harlequin at a presenters cocktail party for a conference we were at. We were just both on a panel. I think the conference organizers wanted us to duke it out on the panel, you know, she was supposed to represent traditional and I was supposed to represent independent and we were supposed to get into a

fight, but we really liked each other. I was like "you're cool," and she was like "you're great" so we hung out that night and she just said, "just tell me everything. I'm fascinated by what you're doing. It seems amazing" so we just talked.

Honestly I was like we are never going to work together in a million years so there was no pressure. It was like I'm not trying to sell you anything. We just got on like crazy, it was great. When all this happened a few months later she called me and just said however you want to work together we're onboard. That was really it. So out of everybody who was interested, I chose them. I was very happy with their dedication and devotion to it. We ended up from signing contracts for I don't know, like 15, 16 books across the themes, including special hardcover editions, and they've printed gazillions of them, I mean everywhere. People would write me from a little island in the middle of nowhere and say there's three paperbacks here and here's one of yours.

Yeah, it was just really, really great and my hat's off to them for trying something really innovative and breaking new ground, but I just think a lot of it was that I knew what I would and would not do going into it. I think that if ... My number one piece of advice to everybody who's in that position is that it's going to be a lot of white noise and it's going to distract you from what it is you need to do. If you can't just ... You cannot wait for someone to make you an offer. If they come to you and say they're interested you have to know exactly what your position is. You need to tell them what you want.

James Blatch: It's the old thing, I suppose, you're up against people who make deals, two or three deals every day of the week and you make this one deal for 10 years. It's like me as a tennis player going out to play, I'm going to say Pete Sampris or Andre Agassi because I'm so out of date with tennis, but someone who's not in a doubt, suddenly playing in this one match. I mean because he does it every day of the week and ... But there you go, you put your lines in the sand drawn. Mark's pretty good at this because he used to be a lawyer, so I think he goes into these negotiations well armed, better, probably than the rest of us. This is really impressive, you had your line in the sand, you knew what you wanted to do and this was not a small deal. This was a seven figure deal, it's been reported anyway.

Bella Andre: Yes.

James Blatch: This is a seven figure deal.

Bella Andre: It was a big, big deal and we signed, you know we didn't just sign one of them and I do want to add, I think it's important for people to kind of realize that with all the tools that you have out there, you can still do this kind of, as I would almost say, like the old fashion way. I never did any advertising at all, you know, apart from a BookBub here or there and not even every month, because I wouldn't even like go in and submit every month to them. It was probably like four or five times a year without any advertising. I mean just going in there. I never discounted my books, either, up until probably a year and a half ago. Nothing. I did no discounts. No advertising. Honestly, it was like going off there, writing the books, connecting with fans. That was it.

So I think that, you know, when I look at the world now, I recently came back from a conference where they brought in Instagram specialists and Google ad specialists and Facebook specialists, and it was amazing. It was like the most exciting week ever. I came out of that I just felt like My God! To be able to take what we can do organically and add all of this to it. I feel like winning the lottery right now. We can do so much, but what I caution people, and I'm sure, Mark, that you say the same thing, I mean you've got your courses but I'm sure you tell people the same thing, it can be very overwhelming.

It can feel like if I don't do all of that I'm never going to get anywhere. So I always say to people is no-no start from the beginning, write your books, go out there and try to put the best cover on it, the best title on it, really think about your brand. Start to communicate with your readers and add things on slowly as you feel that you can handle them. If it gets to be too much, back off, it'll wait. It'll still be there. Facebook's still going to be there. YouTube's still going to be there. You can get on that but get the foundation.

I firmly believe that having the foundation of the catalog that I have now, now that I'm able to play with this advertising is a great, great leg up.

Mark Dawson: Oh I'm just looking at your book space and it's unbelievable the amount of content you've got, it's unbelievable. I don't know... trying to count them, but there must be 50 books.

Bella Andre: Yeah, it's a lot. It's a lot. Then there's all the languages I'm translating into. There's a lot going on.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

Bella Andre: But I say that because even I ... You know someone said to me the other day, we were at a conference, and I was sort of lamenting, like I just said "oh my God I hate formatting translations. I just feel like I don't even know what's on the page in front of me, what if I'm screwing it up?" She said "oh you don't know how good it makes me feel to know that some things are hard for you too." I was like "Are you kidding? It's all hard." Sitting down and opening my file and writing that book every day, it's hard every day.

You know, getting in there and going and being like okay you know what ad set are we coming up with now, and how are we targeting it, how do we optimize it? What kind of landing page? It's all hard! It's not like any of it becomes the easiest thing you've ever done and some paths are easier than others, and hopefully you can find good people to help you and work with you. But we are all putting in the hours, and we're all putting the time, and some parts of it we like more than others. I just think that's the most honest helpful thing I feel like I can tell anybody is like it's hard for all of us. Anybody who tells you otherwise or acts otherwise is totally full of it.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely, I mean it is hard. It's also an amazing time for opportunities as you've made abundantly clear. Yeah, there's no easy [bun 00:29:23], Facebook ads aren't going to be the thing that makes the difference. As you said, I think it's one of two things it's loving writing and writing the book concentrating on the story, and cultivating relationships with fans and readers. That for me is that's what it breaks down to. Also, we spoke Marie Force not too long ago and Marie and you are kind of duking it out towards the top of the charts in your genre, and Marie's got a pretty big team of five or six people I think, and it's actually quite nice to know that you don't. You're doing a lot of this stuff yourself. Which is kind of what I still do. So it's two different ways of doing things, it's interesting to see how they're both working.

Bella Andre: Yeah, I mean I do, I obviously have a team, but she's got a real full time team. Which is great and my hat's off to her. I don't love having full time employees. I learned kind of early on, because I'm just a little more seat of my pants. I just don't want to manage anyone. I have a lot of contractors who work project by project basis for me and they're great and I adore them, and you know I couldn't do it without them. Since I was their first client for a lot of them, they'll drop everything for me. Which is great, so I can be a little bit more behind on things with them and they'll still go okay I can do it for you, I can do it for you. But yeah, again, I like to do my covers. I like to be really, really involved in the process of everything.

The one thing I don't do at all anymore, I don't do my own formatting because I hate it and there's a lot of amazing formatters out there. But you know I like to be involved with everything else. I like to be a part of the process, because, again, I think that my success in large part has been because I am piloting the ship myself. I like to keep my hands on the wheel and really kind of keep steering course. I've found over the past few years that when I take my hands off, when I'm not in the trenches getting dirty, things don't go as well. I like to make sure that I have some mud on myself all the time. That's what it is.

You may not make the covers yourself, but I'll tell you what, it never hurts to learn how to use Photoshop or Gimp or whatever you use. You may not know, ultimately be the one who sets up your Facebook ads but you should really be in there mucking around in ads manager. Just so that you can even have coherent conversations about it with people who are helping you with it. That's really important.

James Blatch: That's really good advice.

Mark Dawson: I was going to say that's been fantastic to have you on Bella. I remember reading a post that you had on cable, tonight we're starting out, four or five years ago now, I think it was about the print deal, as I recall, and it was really inspiring. I've kept a very close eye on what you're doing because you do everything very well. That's why you're selling so many books. It's really generous of you to be on with us this evening as we record this, and if people have learned as much as me and James have.

Bella Andre: Well thanks, this has been fun.

James Blatch: Bella, it's been a real pleasure, as Mark says, thank you so much indeed for coming on and we're jealous of your life style there in northern California, but it's been really illuminating talking to you. Thank you so much.

Bella Andre: Thanks you guys.

Announcer: (exit music playing)

James Blatch: Bella Andre she's full of energy. I really got a great vibe from her, quite also a good approach I think to writing and to life. Obviously enjoys nature and enjoys her own environment and orders things quite specifically. I mean like a lot of the people we've talked to, Mark, a bit of a workaholic but somebody who's able also to switch off and go and do her walks and so on.

Mark Dawson: That's right, I think that's something that comes through talking to hyper-successful authors like Bella and Marie and Russel Blake - people like that. It is a fairly relentless work ethic. I think if you want to crack those really, the seven figure deals, those kinds of deals I think that kind of drive and determination is something that you probably need. But that's not to say that we can't have amazing careers when we're not prepared to put in those 12 hour days. It is something that I've noticed that those very successful authors are relentlessly hard working.

James Blatch: Yeah, and the other things that came to this, we are moving ourselves into a business that's almost wholly digital and it doesn't really matter where we are and we keep talking to people who live in amazing parts of the world. I don't necessarily want to move into Russell Blake's neighborhood in Mexico, but I'd love to visit him there. Amongst the vineyards in northern California, I mean that sounds pretty special.

Mark Dawson: It does, as we mentioned in the interview, it reminds me and you of that film Sideways.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: It's my favorite quote, which I won't repeat.

James Blatch: Well you can't.

Mark Dawson: We'd have the explicit tag slapped on us by iTunes but basically don't drink Merlot!

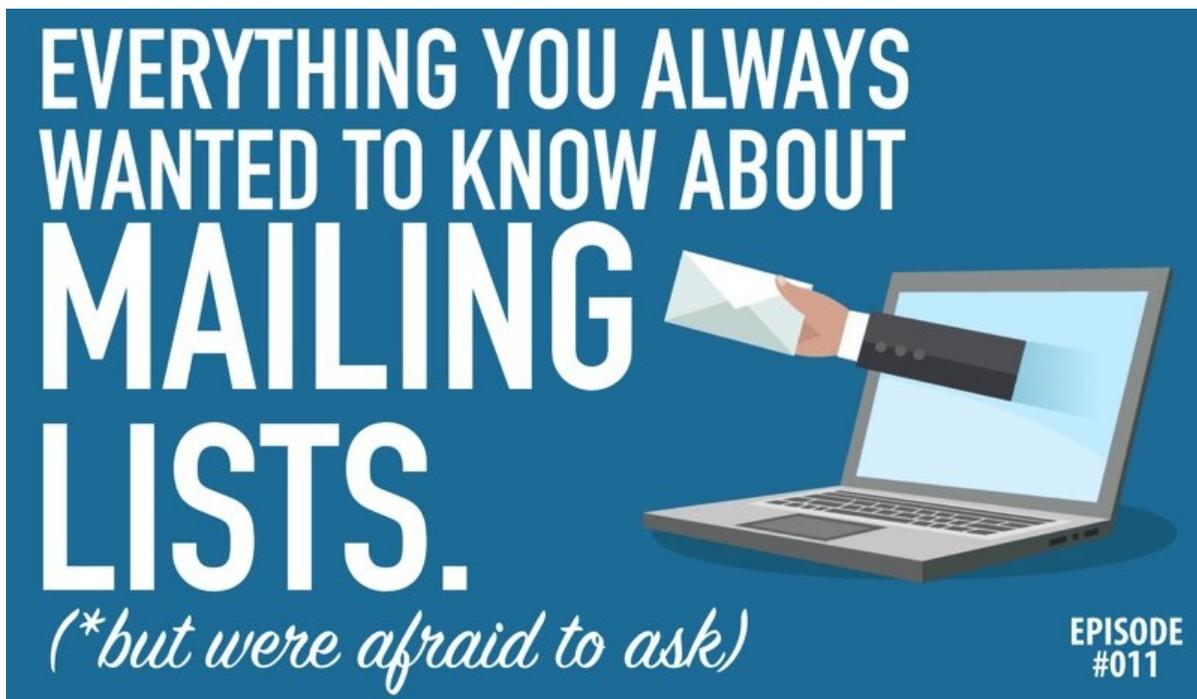
James Blatch: Parental guidance. We need that tag at some point. Okay, thank you so much indeed for listening to our podcast number 10. We will be back with number 11. We promise you that episode on

mailing lists, that detail, and we're going to talk about YouTube advertising in more detail, of course, when we've got some results for you. Have a great week, self-publishers. We'll talk to you next Friday.

Announcer: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. Visit us at SelfPublishingFormula.com for more information, show notes and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.

CHAPTER 9

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAILING LISTS (BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK)



WHEN MARK DAWSON first started seeing success as a self published author he was a bit late to the game when it came to interacting with those who were showing interest in his books. The best they could do was to buy his book, read it, then search Amazon for any other books he might have written. It wasn't a very reader centric approach and not what Mark wanted. That's when he started investigating the various ways he could interact with his readers via email lists. In this episode you'll get to hear the story of how Mark first approached the issue, the mistakes he made, and the many helpful things he's learned about truly engaging with readers that make them happy to hear from you and even eager to help you promote your writing to others.

HOW NOT TO CREATE AN EMAIL LIST.

At first Mark knew that he had to have some kind of email list but didn't really know how to start. His first step was to include his private email address in the back of each of his books. It was better than nothing, but became very cumbersome since he was adding each person to a spreadsheet and then bulk

emailing everyone from his private email account each time he had something to communicate. He quickly learned that the time it took him to do all of that work could be mitigated through using a free service like MailChimp. Mark talks through how he made the switch and the huge benefits he's seen from using an email provider of this type.

BUT ISN'T EMAIL BEING USED LESS AND LESS THESE DAYS?

James asks Mark whether he thinks email is still useful in the modern day. Studies and articles frequently report that people are turning to text and instant messaging platforms rather than email. But Mark's convinced that email is still the very best way to communicate with fans and makes his case for why that's so in this conversation. You'll learn a lot about why email is powerfully important to your brand and future book sales as well as how to go about reaching out to your audience in a way that is natural and effective.

WHAT SORT OF TONE SHOULD YOU WRITE WITH IN YOUR EMAILS?

Mark believes that everyone can effectively write email sequences and truly connect with their readers. They know how to be themselves. If you keep in mind the fact that anyone who signs up for your email list is doing so because they are interested in you and your writing, you'll realize that the thing they are wanting to get to know is you. So be you. Take the time to put some of yourself into your emails in a natural, unapologetic way. You'll be giving your readers what they want from their interaction with you and also provide a way for them to feel like they are on the "inside track" when it comes to your books and your brand.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF EMAIL SOFTWARE AND SERVICES.

What you're probably the most interested in learning is how to set up an email service to begin creating your email list. James and Mark walk through the basics of how Mark did it, what services he considered and the one he finally went with, why he made that choice, how he uses his email list on a regular basis to drive interaction and book sales, and the benefits he's derived from having an active, engaged readership that communicates with him via his email list.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- The introduction today's topic: Mailing lists for Authors.
- A special announcement (it's exciting!).
- The importance of a mailing list cannot be underestimated.
- The difference a mailing list has made to Mark's career.
- Why Mark is convinced email is still the best way to communicate with fans.
- The different types of emails that you can send out and how they work.

- Using your email list to solicit help from readers to launch your books.
- The importance of “tone” in your emails.
- How Mark started his first email list.
- James’ tips for MailChimp beginners.
- What is a double opt-in?
- How do you create different lists and why?
- How to use the information from your emails to refine the process.
- Great ideas for getting more subscribers from your readership.
- The personal touch you can have through your email list.
- Tips and tricks about mailing list strategies.
- Using advanced email service providers.
- Get Mark’s April income report.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [MailChimp](#)
- [AWebber](#)
- [Convert Kit](#)
- [InfusionSoft](#)
- [Chris Fox](#) - Author
- [FreeBooksy](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Yes, we're here in we can say for once sunny United Kingdom, can't we, Mark?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's gorgeous. It's like 20 degrees outside so I'm going to go for a walk after this. Beautiful.

James Blatch: 20 whole degrees. That's something to celebrate in the UK. Yes, we are going to talk specifically and with authority and detail about the subject of mailing lists. Mailing lists are so fundamental, not just to modern authors in the self-publishing zone, but actually to pretty much every digital business, any business online will very much revolve around a mailing list in this day and age and understanding the fundamentals of it, the role it plays in your business, and what I'm really hoping to get out of this Mark, is some real actionable points about how to set one up, how to go about building it up because, as you know, I haven't established mine yet, so that is something that's looming for me shortly.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. We could definitely focus on that and it's very important for newbie writers, but equally as important for kind of older hands, and hopefully we can put some slightly higher level of advanced strategies in place, as well, to cover all of the listenership.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. We're going to talk about the meat in our subjects, so no interview this week. This is going to be a detailed discussion on an area of value and actionable insights for self-publishing authors. As I said, it's the mailing list. We've given a bit of an introduction to the mailing list, but let's get into a little bit more detail about the role they play in the life, the marketing life of an author. Mark, and I think we've said this before, we mention it quite a lot because it's quite an important part of your process, you regretted not having a mailing list set up earlier for the very obvious reason that you are selling books to people, and that was it, that was the end of your relationship with them.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I was a bit late to the party. We've gone through this story a few times so I won't go into full detail again, but I had a few free ones back in the day when I was getting tens of thousands of free downloads off the back of ads with people like Freebooksy, and I only had one or maybe two books out then and once people had bought the books and read them all, downloaded them and read them, they didn't have anywhere else to go. There was no second book to buy if they liked the first one, and there was no way for them to get in contact with me to give me their e-mail address, so I could then communicate with them down the line and tell them when I had something else to put out. It was definitely a bit of a false start and I probably retarded my career by six months or so by just not doing it properly.

James Blatch: Okay, so you do have one now. You got one set up in those early days, and what difference has it made to your selling career?

Mark Dawson: Fundamental, absolutely fundamental. It's the most important thing, my most valuable asset in my business is my mailing list. Actually, we should probably open it out a little bit and say that we've got a mailing list for self-publishing formula, as well, so it's, as you said earlier, it's essential for any kind of digital business these days, be that selling books or selling courses. Yeah, when I started for the books, when I tracked when I was doing some slides for some webinars that I was doing last year, and you could track fairly accurately, you could see the growth in my mailing list corresponding with growth of sales and income. It's not coincidental that they're definitely linked. Lots of different ways that we'll get into as we dig in.

James Blatch: There are a few experts who are very eloquent about talking about mailing list and the power of them, Pat Flynn we've had on this podcast in the past and he's certainly a good place to go to. As always, with SPF, ours is very focused on self-publishing authors, and so we're going to really get to how you should be operating a mailing list or list our advice on that area ourselves.

You talked about owning your audience, you talked about the difference and impact that it's made on the way that you've operated. Let me just ask you a question about e-mailing because there are so many different forms of communication now and I've noticed, I'm involved a few organizations where I live, and I've noticed that the younger people seem to like things like WhatsApp and text, and I'm hearing the e-mail is not as preferred as it used to be, but do you think it is still something that is a good way of communicating?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I think all of that kind of talk is overblown, to be honest. I think it's still the most ... I'm absolutely sure it's the most effective way to connect with potential customers and still, and e-mail address is something that's still fairly jealously guarded. It's not something that people give out willy nilly these days. There's a reason for that. It's imbued with a particular kind of weightiness rather than the transience of what's a WhatsApp message, something along those lines.

People do not give away those e-mail addresses easily because it is very personal, it's something that's coming to, say, onto their phone directly onto their PC. It's something that tends to attract attention. All the data that I've seen and all the data in the test that I've run indicates that e-mail is still much more effective than, say, Facebook, Twitter, all of the social media communication channels that are available to us now. E-mail still beats all of them.

James Blatch: They can be quite rich in content, so you can have a very nicely laid out e-mail, and we're talking in more detail shortly about the various platforms you can use to do that. A well laid out e-mail and you do good ones, I think. I think we do as SPF, as well. They do look good and they give a sense of strengthening who you are, your brand, I suppose.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. You can certainly brand e-mails. I don't go too big on using all the bells and whistles. It's something that MailChimp enables you to do, and partly that's because I'm not the best designer in the world and, of course, I could hire someone to do that for me. Mostly because I want them to look professional but the most important thing for me is that they're written in a way that enables my

readers to feel a connection with me. I'll write them very conversationally, I'll talk to them as if, this is a pretty good tip. When you're writing these kinds of e-mails, just imagine that you're having a conversation with someone that you've known for years.

I will drop in information or news about new books, perhaps books I'm writing. I might, this is a nice day today, you could start an e-mail by saying I've just been for a walk, I've been for a run, it's beautiful weather, puts me in a good mood. Here's some more good news, I've got a new book out next week, something along those lines, but that kind of conversational tone is really important. It shouldn't be dressed up in business language, it shouldn't be cold. It needs to open and friendly.

James Blatch: Okay, and in terms of workload, if people haven't gotten this yet and aren't quite sure how this system. I can imagine people thinking that there's huge amounts of work goes into sitting down and writing an e-mail every month and so on. Actually, quite a lot of the system can be automated. I mean, the creation of the e-mail is a very personal thing, needs to be done, but only needs to be done once, and you can have that same initial sequence of e-mails going out to each person who joins your list for the first time.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. We need to break down what the kinds of communications that come out into two kind of main categories. On the one hand, there's automated e-mails, which is what you just described, and you're absolutely right. There's a bit of work up at the front to write those e-mails, get them loaded into your e-mail service provider, and to check that they're serving properly, but that doesn't necessarily need to take up a huge amount of time. The other kind of e-mail is what you call a broadcast or a campaign e-mail. For me for example, I've got a book out on the 20th of May, so in two or three weeks' time from the time when we're recording this, and I'll draft a couple of e-mails, maybe three e-mails that will go out in the week to 10 days of that book's launch. Those will be original e-mails that would only be used once, but they're probably more important than the automated e-mails because they're launching a book or they're asking for reviews or that kind of thing, and I get the most bang for my buck when it's writing those kinds of e-mails.

James Blatch: As you say, another powerful aspect of the mailing list is recruiting people to help you launch your book. Recruiting advanced reader teams and so on. It's your audience and they are surprisingly, perhaps not surprisingly, but pleasantly surprisingly happy to please you and happy to work alongside you in getting your books noticed.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I'm right in the middle of that process at the moment. I'm going to do or we're going to do a podcast on launching probably for the next two or three weeks. We will go into in a lot of detail with audio diaries with me explaining each step along the process of actually launching this book. Right now, the process I'm in is I've got the manuscript's been proofread, so not copyedited yet, it's been proofread to make sure most of the irritating errors have gone. I then send that out to my launch team and my advance team and they're in the process of reading it now. I've had probably 20 e-mails back in the last two days. They've only had it for three days. 20 people coming back and saying generally, they've enjoyed, a couple saying they didn't like it as much as previous ones, which is totally fine, of course, and making this suggestions.

One, this is quite fun, one question that I needed to get answered before this book goes out is there's a scene at the end of the book where my hero, Milton, needs to create a really big explosion, and it's kind of a slightly MacGyver-ish so he's locked in there and he's kind of in a room and he needs to create an explosion with the ingredient that he's got with him.

James Blatch: Our past as BBFC film examiners will come into play here because we spent a lot of time looking at MacGyver and people making explosions and trying to work out whether that was a real world risk if we released the video.

Mark Dawson: Exactly, so a lot of that has informed me, and I've come up with an idea and I think it works, but I'm not beyond what I can find on the Internet. I'm not particularly skilled in that kind of thing, so what I've done is an e-mail that went out to the advanced team, I've asked them specifically to focus on that one chapter, and I've had four or five responses from people who work in that kind of industry, gas safety, that kind of thing, which is amazing, and they've said, "Generally, yes, this would work but your fuse method would be too dangerous. This is how I would create a fuse for this kind of explosion," which is fantastic. I could probably find that out on the Internet but it's quite hard to know what you're searching for sometimes when you don't know what the answer is. They've come back with some really golden tips that will make the book much, much stronger when it's finally released.

James Blatch: It also gives you a very dodgy Internet search history if you spend a lot of time.

Mark Dawson: Oh, I've finished on that square. When I went to America a couple of weeks ago, a couple of months ago, I was legitimately concerned that I wouldn't get through immigration on the other side

because the NSA must know that I've given the books I write, I do searches on quite, well, worrying things, so I was quite concerned that I'd be taken aside, but it didn't happen, thankfully.

James Blatch: Good, okay. Before we move on to some of the nitty gritty, I'm going to start by asking how you initially set up your mailing list and how that's evolved for you personally, and then we'll talk about some of the options available now. I just want to talk about tone of writing a little bit and the reason for that is that it's very, very important and one of our previous guests, Marie Force talked all about how she talks to her audience. I've joined a few authors' mailing lists since we've been in this venture in the self-publishing formula venture and they do vary. I've noticed one in particular and another one to an extent, as well.

The authors have quite an underconfident tone and they talk about, I'm sorry to be an imposition on you today, but maybe you probably won't like this. I think they need to be more confident. I think they need to understand the reason I've joined their list is I really like their books and I want them to be confident about it. Look, I'm real excited about my next book and this is what it's going to be like, rather than, and I think it's natural. I think as writers, lots of writers are underconfident and I put myself there, as well, but I think your tone is confident and I think that's how you need to be.

Mark Dawson: I wasn't always confident and I understand where this lack of confidence comes from. I think it's because even though people have, as you said, they've subscribed, they've wanted to be on the list, people do still get a bit nervous about sending something that seems as if it's a little bit unsolicited, especially if you have an e-mail for two or three months and then you're sending this e-mail out. The reason people are worried about that is because they're very concerned that they're going to get unsubscribes and abuse reports. If you get enough of those on something like MailChimp, and the threshold is reasonably low. If you get enough of those, then you can have your account suspended, which would be, that's a bad thing.

I think there is that kind of slightly, slight nervousness in tone, but kind of perversely, the fact that you're writing e-mails that way, I think makes it more likely that you're going to turn people off, and they're going to unsubscribe anyway, or they'd be more likely to do it. It's important to diagnose that as a problem, and then it's important to get around it, be confident, remember that they're on the list because they like your books, they want to hear about your writing process or when you've got a new book out.

There's a reason why if you look on MailChimp, the kind of the final moment before you press send, first we have to press it twice to kind of double confirm you want to send it. There's that kind of sweaty monkey that ...

James Blatch: High five monkey.

Mark Dawson: The sweaty high five monkey.

James Blatch: Oh, yeah. The monkey's sweating, isn't he? Yeah, it's a big thing.

Mark Dawson: There's a reason why that monkey is sweating because MailChimp is acknowledging that it can be a thing, a big thing to send an e-mail out to 20,000 people and to be concerned that they're all going to hate it. There you go. That's a good indication that this isn't something that's specific to, to writers, it's something that is general. You can get over it. It's not something that bothers me too much these days, and it's just a little bit of confidence. Once you send a few e-mails, then you're not being deluged with unsubscribes. It's something that you can get over.

James Blatch: Yeah, be confident, sell yourself, and make it feel like what it is, which is part of a community based around your books, which is an amazing thing.

Mark Dawson: Okay, let's move on to some of the detail then, and let me take you back all those years ago, months ago, really, when you started your first list. How did you go about it?

James Blatch: Well, okay, so I'll be completely honest about how awful I did this, to start with. I realized reasonably soon after that mistake that I needed to correct that, so I'd probably been listening to a few podcasts, reading threads on cable, and kind of the penny drops. I needed to get a mailing list. What I did, because also because I'm cheap, was to put my e-mail address in the back of the book. My normal e-mail address that everyone, people can get to me on, I put that into the back of the book, and then encourage people, if they wanted to, to be on our list or get news from me. I say, "Just e-mail me and I'll take care of it."

People would e-mail into my normal inbox. I would then cut and paste that e-mail address and put them onto an Excel spreadsheet, and then when I had something to sell or to tell them about, I open up my normal e-mail program and cut and paste all those e-mails, put them into the BCC field, and then send them out that way, which is wrong on about 100 million different levels apart from the fact that it's a miracle that my e-mail account hasn't been shut down for suspicious spam behavior by the provider.

It's a stupid idea. It takes ages and ages and ages, it's massively time intensive, just generally a bad idea all around. I did for about six months and then I thought, okay, let's look at doing this a bit more professionally. I looked at the options, so there are plenty of beginner options out there. MailChimp is the big player, so very, very well-known. They sponsor lots of big podcasts. They sponsor Serial, for example. They're all over the place. I think they must have millions of subscribers now, so that's certainly the biggest, most reliable platform.

The other option is AWeber, pretty similar to MailChimp in terms of its feature suite, and they both offer that free level, up to 2,000 subscribers, you don't have to pay anything. You don't get full automation for that price, but you can get around that with a couple of clever hacks. I looked at them both, I went for MailChimp.

Mark Dawson: Is there a reason for that?

James Blatch: I felt it's a little bit more user-friendly, at least its interface is a bit cleaner, it looked a bit easier to me. I think AWeber is fine. I know people of people who use AWeber and swear by it, but for me, MailChimp was the easier of the two choices.

Mark Dawson: Okay.

James Blatch: I set that up and replaced the e-mail address in the back of my books with the MailChimp landing page that is presented to you when you open a new MailChimp list, and I started to get people in that way and immediately made it a lot more straightforward for me, a lot less cutting and pasting for one thing. That was another thing. When I was getting e-mail addresses in exchange for a free book to sign up, I was e-mailing them individually, cutting and pasting a kind of a pro forma e-mail, sticking it into my e-mail system, and then pasting the books on. It's just ridiculous.

Mark Dawson: That was your automation system. Physically take e-mail addresses. I was wondering how you did it because, obviously, once you've added them to your list in a totally manual environment, everyone gets every e-mail but you're filling up a block of the send column.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Okay. Wow, that was laborious.

James Blatch: Really, and stupid, so yeah. I got out of that as soon as I could. MailChimp takes a load off your plate, so it will maintain the list for you, it will present it in a fashion that's easy for you to interrogate. You can get all kinds of different information, you can see how active the subscribers are. Are they opening the e-mails? Are they clicking on links? Plenty of useful information that you're able to dig into.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and a couple of things I'll just add from a beginner, total beginner point of view on MailChimp because I've come to much later than you have. The first thing I say to people, I've recently got my local cricket club using MailChimp because they were doing what you were doing and it was silly, and actually, we did get e-mails blocked by the service provider who quite rightly thought it looked like spam. I've got them using MailChimp and I had people who weren't very technical looking at it and they couldn't get started until I said to them, "Lists and campaigns are separate in MailChimp. You get your lists on one side and you can have different lists full of e-mail addresses, and then you set up campaign and then you link the two. You tell the campaign we want to send it to that list."

Actually, although it sounds very intuitive when you start using it, that's not intuitive at the beginning, and people were going into the campaign and they wouldn't even start creating their e-mail because they couldn't see who they were sending it to and they didn't understand it. Once I explained that, so that's a good little beginner tip, MailChimp lists are one thing, campaigns are another, and you link them together at the end of the campaign creation.

The second thing about MailChimp is there's a good little hack in there, which is to keep it free without automation. You do get the option and it's a sort of tick box when you set up the list, is to send a welcome

e-mail, which at the beginning of the process, when people opt in, there's automatically a system, which forces them to confirm that they want to join the list, which is quite right as part of the data protection and the etiquette of e-mail lists. You have an option within MailChimp to send a welcome e-mail, which you can construct.

Now actually, if you're a new author, that could be the e-mail that delivers the book. If you've got a landing page and you're giving away your book and people join your mailing list, that part of it at least could be automated. This welcome e-mail will go out and that is still free of charge within MailChimp, so that's a really useful aspect of it. I'm not sure whether AWeber has the same hack in it, it may well do, I don't know, but MailChimp certainly does.

James Blatch: Yeah, I don't know that one, either, but yeah, and that's something that I do, so the first e-mail people get is the confirmation e-mail and that has the first of the books that I give away. It's quite useful to do that. To get your e-mails whitelisted, so in other words, I'm going into the right inbox and not going into spam or promotions, if you're on Gmail. Getting the recipient to actually do something on the e-mail indicates to Google, for example, that it's something that they wanted to receive. Having something early on that they click on, so the free book, will make it more likely that your future e-mails get through to them. Let's flesh out the opt-in side of it. There's opt-in something called a double opt-in. Can you explain that to me?

Mark Dawson: Yep. Some e-mail services will allow you to recruit or get new subscribers who just basically only have to click once. It might be that they see a landing page on your site. They click, they've got their e-mail address in, they click, and they're opted in. In other words, they're included on your relevant list from that stage. The alternative is double opt-in. They'll go through that landing page process, they'll enter the e-mail address, click they want to join, and then they'll receive an e-mail from MailChimp saying, "If you want to be on this list, just click this link and you will be opted in."

As you say, it's kind of more slight, I wouldn't say single opt-in is frowned upon because that wouldn't be right, but it's certainly more convenient to have single opt-in and you'll find that you'll get more people subscribing because it does happen quite a lot. Those double opt-in e-mails don't get opened or they lost, they're not delivered properly, and so people who wanted to join don't get the chance to join. On the other hand, double opt-in means that they're more qualified, so you know that they're less likely to be spammy, there certainly won't be spam bots. It will be someone who has indicated twice that they want to join, which suggests is good evidence, certainly better evidence that they're going to be engaged subscribers

than people who just click the once.

James Blatch: MailChimp for instance, is a double opt-in system, yeah?

Mark Dawson: Generally, yeah. It is at the kind of the level that we'll be looking at, so signups in the backs of books, that will require double opt-in. If you import people into your lists, that can effectively be single opt-in because you just, if you got a list of e-mails and you put them individually, you don't need to double opt-in those.

James Blatch: I think that technically, that stage is you ticking a box saying that they are happy to on your list, so you've done it for them.

Mark Dawson: Correct.

James Blatch: Okay. We're going to come back, I think, just briefly to Infusionsoft and ConvertKit and more advanced in a moment, but let's just press on at the beginner level or the sort of early level for authors and stick with MailChimp and AWeber. In terms of how you would then operate the platform and in terms of lists, for instance, would you have just one list with everybody on it?

Mark Dawson: No, I don't. I've got about 10 different lists, but perhaps even more than 10 now, and each of those is linked to one signup, which goes into one book. For example, the first Milton book is called The Cleaner, there will be a list called The Cleaner in MailChimp, and the only people on that list are people who've seen the link at the back of that book and have clicked on it to join. There are ways around that. You can do what's called segmentation and creating groups, but I don't think MailChimp does that very well, and I prefer just to be a little bit more basic on this.

The benefit of doing it that way is if people come into The Cleaner list, I know that that's the book that they've read, so the first automated e-mail they'll get is one advertising the second book in the series, the St. Death, and conversely, if they join the St. Death list, they'll know that that's probably the first book they've read and I might offer them the first book to get them up to speed on the book, the one before it. It does enable you to know the information of when they joined or what they did before they joined. Enables

you to be slightly more bespoke when it comes to your e-mail marketing going forwards.

James Blatch: Can people not end up on more than one list that way, though?

Mark Dawson: That is possible and it does happen, but it's not a disaster. You could, if you wanted to, try and prune those down. It's a bit of a bind. You'd have to search them, find out if they appeared on more than one list, and delete them off the duplicate ones. I would say don't worry too much about that. If people are in more than one, the odds are they'll unsubscribe from one of them and do it for you. Again, don't be worried about unsubscribes, it's not disastrous, and it just helps you to keep things cleaner.

Something like ConvertKit or Infusionsoft has more powerful features that means that doesn't happen, but at the basic level, I wouldn't worry too much about that with MailChimp.

James Blatch: Okay, so separate lists, which basically are different journeys that readers have taken different ways that they've got onto your list and that enables you to manage their experience with you in the future. That's a good tip and a trick. In MailChimp and the others, you get quite a lot of information, actually, an amazing amount of information, on who's opened what and who's clicked on what, and that's obviously a very important part of how you make changes going forward.

Mark Dawson: Yes. A kind of practical example that I sent out about an hour ago. We mentioned the contest for the SPF right at the start of the podcast. We had about 700 entries for that competition and so we downloaded or I got a download of a spreadsheet of the people who had entered. I put those into a new MailChimp list, which I call something like Podcast Launch Competition, and then because they had only given us their e-mail addresses as part of the competition, I'm not going to drop those straight into a normal SPF mailing list. It's bad etiquette, it's rude, they didn't ask to be on that list. At the same time, they might be want to be on it, so I just sent out an e-mail to them saying that the competition has been drawn, the winner's been drawn.

If they wanted to stay on our list and get the free marketing stuff that we prepared the videos we've done and all that kind of stuff, all they needed to do is to click a link that then took them to the Self Publishing Formula website. All I need to do after that is to put out a report that says, "These people have clicked that link." I can then pull their addresses and then put them into the main SPF list. It's kind of another way

of doing double opt-in, just a way to, they don't need to e-mail and tell me they want to be in, just clicking is enough and that makes it very easy for me then to just put them into the main list.

James Blatch: Likewise, if you sent an e-mail out, for instance, your an author and you've got a giveaway, a PDF giveaway. I think you've done something like this in the past, Mark, you've created sort of an MI6 document or something for somebody, so this is a bit of a bonus. When you look at that a week or so after the e-mails gone out or a couple of days after the e-mails gone out, you can see how many people have clicked on it. If you're getting very low click rates, that gives you an indication that maybe the e-mail wasn't constructed very well or the idea is very good, or maybe the subject heading was misleading. I mean, this is important information, isn't it, for optimizing going forward.

Mark Dawson: That's the kind of stuff you need, especially in the early days when you're starting to fill this kind of thing out. It's important to look at those reports that are provided to you, analyze what's working, what isn't working, so the next time you've got something to send out. You can tweak it and make it more clickable or more attractive, whatever needs to be done, just you can improve the e-mail.

James Blatch: That's one example, by the way, of something you could do, so depending on what genre your book's in, you could be a romance author, and you know that people have read your first book and you're trying to get them to read more. You'd like them to be more engaged. You could create a letter from one character to another that doesn't appear in the book, it's a bit of background information, refers to something that happened maybe five years before your story, but a lovely little thing for somebody who's enjoyed the book to then have. That's just one idea and I know you're quite good at thinking about these things, a little bit of value added material.

Think of it, I suppose, like getting a DVD and looking at the extras.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that's right, and an author called Chris Fox, who will be well-known to some listeners of the podcast, he does pretty good with his new book, and he's created I think it's a very small novella, but it addresses some questions that he deliberately left unanswered in his main story, in the novel, and he said, "Look, if you want to know the background or you want to get answers to these questions, the only you'll be able to do that is by downloading this free story." He's getting a very high conversion rate percentage of people who are just finished the book and really want to know the information that he's offering. That's exactly right, he's very clever.

Just think outside the box. He came up with some really cool ideas that will get people clicking.

James Blatch: This does enable a whole new type of communication with readers, so a relationship between authors and readers. I know when I get the end of a book I really like, I read everything on it, I go on and read reviews, I read the sleeve notes, I read the bio about the author. That's pretty much it. Usually, it's despairingly little that you can read about something in that bereft feeling when you just have to put the book down and move on, but I love this new era where you might get an e-mail from the author with a bit of extra stuff about the book.

I think about it in that way, think about the opportunity of making it a more enjoyable experience for your readers and, again, going back to what I said earlier. Don't be underconfident about it. They're on your list because they want to hear from you and they want to hear more about your books.

Mark Dawson: That's the main benefit of having an e-mail list is it enables the two-way communication between author and reader. If you do it properly, the trick is to turn those people from readers who ... Or customers even, customers to readers, then make them fans, and then make them friends. There are ways to do that. I mean, just being a normal person is a pretty good way to start. I still answer all of the e-mails I get and I get quite a few now, and that's not a chore. It's a real pleasure to get those e-mails and to get the chance to interact with my readers that way.

I know that every time I do that and give someone an interaction that they appreciate and remember, it makes it much, much more likely that they'll buy another book by me or they'll buy the new book when it's ready to go and more like that they'll tell their friends and that their friends will tell their friends, and before you know it, you've created new readers just from the pretty simple steps, sensible common sense step of just replying and being pleasant. It's not rocket science.

James Blatch: Yeah, and I think that when you're starting out and you get your first two or three new readers who are genuinely new readers, not your auntie and second cousin, that's an exciting period. The way that you write to them, and you got this tiny little community who you're thrilled that are reading your books, the way that you write to them. As you grow and you get to the point where Mark, I think you're talking about 40,000 plus on your list now, but you write to people in the same way that you wrote to them when it was 50 of them, and it was just a small group, and that's a really an amazing aspect of this digital

world, that personal touch you can still have.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Very important, actually, is to just remember how it felt like. I can remember very vividly getting with the first e-mail from MailChimp saying this person has indicated that they like your stuff enough to give you their e-mail. That was really, it was one of the kind of the main steps along the journey for me. Yeah, and just remember what that felt like and remember the kind of content and the kind of tone that you put into the e-mail when you applied to that first person and keep doing it, because there was something, it was magical. When I was growing up, if Stephen King had answered one of my e-mails or Martin Amis or Bret Easton Ellis, someone like that, I would have been doing back flips.

It's easy to become a bit blasé about that but for some readers, it is something really special about to correspond directly with their favorite writer like that.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. Just before we move on to I want to give, talk a little bit about launching in a moment just to sum on that area. You get this information back from your mail service provider, MailChimp, AWeber, or whatever, shows you how many people are clicking on links and opening, and look at that information. If you're not getting the rate of open that you want, look at how you've written the e-mail, look at the subject heading, change headlines, and try and improve those open rates as time goes on, use that information.

Just before we leave, tips and tricks and actually we've been talking for quite a long time, so we do need to wrap this up in a moment. Before we leave the subject, you're doing your launch at the moment and we are going to go into more detail about that in a future episode, but there are some tips and tricks you can talk about now.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I'll just kind of throw in not so much launches, just kind of general mailing list strategy and mindset, as well. One of the first things I would say, and this is important, we've touched on it already, is don't be worried or scared or offended when people unsubscribe, because it's going to happen all the time. People will have subscribed to a list they didn't mean to join, they subscribed and they'll want to get off. MailChimp can, if you wanted to, e-mail back and tell you individually as people unsubscribe, so I probably wouldn't recommend that. Just get one at the end of the day or even don't bother. Just check when you go into MailChimp.

You mustn't be upset by that, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're annoyed with you. One thing I would say is if people want to unsubscribe, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to do that. You don't want people on your list who don't want to be there, you'll get an unhealthy list, you'll be much more likely. Eventually they'll click this is abuse or spam and that isn't a good thing to happen. What I do is I actually create a small section of the e-mail in MailChimp in slightly smaller type and I'll put it up right to the top, just one of the first things that people see, and I'll say something along the lines of if you want to unsubscribe, that's totally cool, you just need to click the unsubscribe button below.

Then what you do at that stage, because they click the unsubscribe button, then MailChimp and the other platforms will present them with a list of options that they can tick that will say why they want to unsubscribe, and at least one of them, maybe even two of them, say that it's spam or I didn't sign up. If those get ticked, that will be counted by MailChimp as abuse, and you don't want too many of those. Because if you do, you do run the risk of having your account suspended.

What I do is I just make it really explicit that the easiest way to unsubscribe is just to tick the box that says you don't want to receive the e-mail anymore. That will just count as a normal unsubscribe and you can have many, many more of those than you can abuse reports before MailChimp steps in and takes action. That would be a ... That's a pretty good tip just to help people get off if they want to get off the list.

James Blatch: Great, okay. Thank you, Mark. Final area that I want to talk about is an advanced area. This is for people with bigger lists and I think particularly with multi-genre series of books. In fact, you got a bit of that going on, as well, Mark, different types of series. The more advanced e-mail service providers like Infusionsoft and like ConvertKit have quite sophisticated elements to them where they can start to work out and segment people for you. Pat Flynn talked a bit about this with ConvertKit. He's a big fan of ConvertKit. He now knows subject areas that section of his audience are interested in, and so future campaigns can go only to them, and this doesn't need to be done in separate lists. This is more advanced but it actually can be very powerful as your business grows.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, for him, what he does is one of the first e-mails you get will give you a chance to answer click on a link. He'll say, "Do you consider yourself to be effectively beginner, medium, or advanced level?" Depending on what one you click, your e-mail address is tagged as it goes into one mailing list on ConvertKit, and it'll be tagged with that level of competence. That then enables him to put you into an automated funnel that will depend upon your level of qualification, and in the future, if he wanted to do a broadcast e-mail with a product that was for beginners, he could just send that to

beginners rather than potentially waste the time of people who've already got a website. They don't need help on website creation, they've already got one. They wouldn't see that offer, which means that he'll get less unsubscribes is more congruent for his audience, that kind of thing.

It's very powerful and it does have application. I mean, it has application for us in our course but it also has an application for me and other writers as writers. Rather than having this multiple list, which is the way I do it in MailChimp at the moment, I would be able to tag people as they came in depending on what link they've clicked, which would be specific to one book. Instead of having 10 lists, I could have one list but each of those e-mail addresses would be tagged with the book that they clicked as they came in. It's a lot more elegant and less time-consuming than the way I do it at the moment.

I'm looking at that but the downside to this is that I'm so entrenched now with MailChimp, with the automation sequence, with the links that are in all of my books, there would be several days worth of work to correct all of that and migrate myself over to a more powerful platform. It's probably not something that I will be looking to do in the near future. It might be something that we do with the course, but.

James Blatch: Yeah, I mean, that's a real possibility that we'll move to ConvertKit and we'll certainly detail our story as we go along with that. I know Pat Flynn's obviously a big guy in this area and he does, he likes ConvertKit. Infusionsoft does a lot of the same things. Pat and others have said they find it Confusionsoft I think is how he called it, can be a little bit confusing. My view on software is it's often the case that the one that takes a little bit longer to get into at the beginning can give you more benefit in the long run, but our minds are open on it. If we move to ConvertKit with the course, we'll give the benefit of our experience, certainly.

Mark Dawson: Yep, definitely.

James Blatch: Mark, we've got to approach three quarters of an hour, which is a long time for somebody to listen to you and me talking, but I think it's been useful. I can tell you from my point of view, probably the most important stuff I've picked up has been about how to write and how to approach writing, and that motivational stuff. The second most important stuff has been about the e-mail list and how a mailing list works and why it works, and I think having that crystal clear in your mind.

Even if you've been doing a mailing list for a couple of years, I hope listening the benefit of Mark's experience, who's become very strong in this area, has been useful to you. Maybe we'll prompt a few changes. Be confident, right?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, be confident. That's a good takeaway from this is you don't need to be worried about this. It's not technically demanding and you're just sending e-mail, so don't be nervous about it. Don't be apologetic because that doesn't sell and it won't be the experience that your readers who want to be on your list, remember. It won't be the experience that they want to get from you.

CHAPTER 10

WRITING SYSTEMS, CREATIVE APPROACHES, AND HOW TO REALLY START SELLING BOOKS - WITH AUTHOR JOHN P. LOGSDON



**WRITING SYSTEMS,
CREATIVE APPROACHES and how to
REALLY START SELLING BOOKS**

with
JOHN P. LOGSDON
SCI-FI & FANTASY AUTHOR



**EPISODE
#012**

IT'S ALWAYS beneficial and encouraging to hear from someone who started from nothing and built a successful writing career from the ground up. Even more so, it's encouraging to hear the story from a person who is following the exact same procedures and school of thought that you've adopted. That's what you'll hear in this episode with John P. Logsdon. John is a student in Mark Dawson's Self Publishing Formula course and he's followed Mark's systems and approaches to achieve stunning success with his playful series of science fiction books. You'll get the full story on not only his unusual genre and style but also how he's leveraged Mark's approach to great success on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula podcast.

SUCCESS IN SELF PUBLISHING DISCOVERED THROUGH A SPITEFUL RESPONSE.

John had already written his first novel and was having a terrible time getting it noticed and promoted. Everything he'd tried by way of building a mailing list had failed (he had only 7 subscribers). When his wife pointed out the Self Publishing Formula course that Mark had created, John was very cynical. When

he finally got tired of hearing his wife talk about the course he decided that he would follow it step by step just to prove to his wife that it wouldn't work. That was his golden mistake! You can hear John's hilarious story of spite turned to success in this episode.

5000 WORDS PER DAY USING A SCRIPT WRITING TOOL.

When John followed the advice of many of the traditional writing manuals out there he found himself stymied at every turn. It took him far too long to create character sketches and outlines of every scene and he was getting discouraged. He finally decided to approach his writing in a way that he felt was a better fit for his personality and way of thinking. In the end John wound up using a scriptwriting tool (in the links for this episode) to create rough scenes and situations, writing the dialogue first, and filling in the gaps as he went. The result is a blazing word count of over 5000 words a day on most days. John goes into detail about how he works this approach to his advantage, on this episode.

WORKING WITH A CO-AUTHOR IN A WAY THAT MAXIMIZES EACH OF THEIR GIFTS.

John wrote his first novel without his co-author, [Christopher P. Young](#), who had said that it wasn't his thing. But Christopher came around - and John's so glad he did. The two of them have unique gifts when it comes to the book publishing process, and though Christopher does not fancy himself a writer, John is happy to have his name on the books because of the great things he brings to the process. You can hear how this atypical partnership works and how it might spark your own creativity.

WHY FACEBOOK ADVERTISING, AIMED AT BUILDING A MAILING LIST, IS THE WAY TO GO.

Many self published authors have tried Facebook advertising with little effect. They ignore the possibilities offered to build solid, long-lasting relationships with readers through mailing list opt-ins. That's what John finally did with his Facebook campaigns and the result was an amazing email list over 10,000 strong. John has come to realize that the relationship and interaction he has with his readers is what enables him to be a successful self published author and he believes that you can do the same thing.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark's process of recording every step of his new book launch.
- A quick preview of Mark's newest John Milton book.
- Why connection with people in the self publishing community is helpful.
- The new SPF Youtube channel.
- Who is John P. Logsdon?
- How Mark's course got John rolling in his self publishing career.
- How John writes at least 5000 words a day using processes.

- The secret tool in Scrivener that helps you know how fast you're writing.
- John's back catalogue of books.
- How John works with a co-writer.
- The marketing approach John takes to his self publishing career.
- What is a launch team and why is it such a powerful thing?
- John's journey from 2013 until today.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [John Logsdon's Author page](#) on Amazon
- www.Facebook.com/selfpublishing formula
- [Trelby scriptwriting program](#)
- [Scrivener](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to episode twelve from the Self-Publishing Formula podcast.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, hello. Welcome to the SPF podcast. Here we are again, Mark and James Blatch. Have you had a good week, Mark Dawson?

Mark: I have. I've been very, very busy James. We're recording this slightly ahead of broadcast date. I've been very, very busy with the final edits and working with my launch team for the launch of the new Milton book, which will be going out the day that this podcast goes live.

James: Yeah. We should say we are recording this about six days, if my math works, ahead of Friday, which is the day that you are launching your latest book, which is exciting. The real exciting thing, and I know this because we share a DropBox file where we put together our audio for the podcast and I can see it filling up hour by hour, day by day, with you recording exactly what you're doing in your launch sequence, exactly the process you're going through. I'm quite excited, as a new author, to listen to the nitty-gritty of how you launch a book.

Mark: Yeah, it's been good fun. Every step along the way I've kind of opened the file up and recorded a few thoughts, which it's been useful for me as well just to kind of put that down and think about it a bit. Yeah, it's going very well and I'm reasonably confident that it will be a good launch. I'm not going to kind of hang my colors to the mast and say where I think it will end up. I'm hoping for kind of within the top hundred and fifty on the Amazon.com store. Yeah, we'll see. It's been good fun. I think the episode will be very interesting for people who want to know how I launch books.

James: Yeah. What number John Milton book is this?

Mark: This is the ninth novel, so the eleventh book in total.

James: Okay. You had to think about that, didn't you? You've written so many of them. For those of us who read Milton, can you give us a quick top nine? Is there something exciting that happens? You're not killing him off or anything like that? That would be a spoiler.

Mark: I have to tell you I'm not going to be dropping any spoilers, but it's fun. It's called "The Jungle" so people can probably guess where ... Certainly Europeans will know where that's most likely set. He travels around France and Italy. He goes to Libya so there's a lot set in Tripoli which was quite fun to write about. There's a really good fight scene it that you'll remember James from when we were working at the BBFC ... If I said a famous David Cronenberg film with Viggo Mortensen ...?

James: Yes, I'm aware.

Mark: "Eastern Promises", a fight scene in a Turkish bath where Viggo is completely naked and takes out two folks who have knives. Really, really good film and a great scene so that was the inspiration for one of the scenes in the Milton book.

James: Naked fighting. A lot of women in love. I think there's a lot of your ... What's normally locked inside your head coming out here. You should be careful how much comes out.

Mark: Yes.

James: Okay, well you're launching a book and it's such a key part of marketing. It's its own art form I think in the way that you launch a book. That's an episode definitely to look forward to in the future. Last week we did a sort master class episode on mailing lists. We've got another one coming up in a couple of weeks. What we're doing now is going to talk ... Actually, we're going to be a little bit, unashamedly, a little bit about SPF now because today's guest is somebody who Mark and I got to know through Mark's course on Facebook Advertising for Authors. He's turned out to be somebody who very quickly has become a help guru within the self-publishing community, SPF in particular but wider than that as well. He's somebody who understands how systems work and makes them work and he's very interesting about the way he applies this. We wanted to talk to him because A, to find out how he got stuff working and B, how he approaches writing ... It turned out he's very interesting on the way that he actually writes as well.

I keep saying "he". I should say it's John Logsdon is the name of the guest who's coming up in just a moment. I just wanted to mention a moment the community, the SPF community, but also the wider self-publishing community. We've mentioned this before, but it's such a joyous thing to be in contact with other people going through the same things as you, having the same anxieties, but also finding the same solutions. I know you did your Facebook Q&A on Friday and I see that went really well, didn't it.

Mark: It did, yes. In a bit of context I did some Q&As on Periscope last year, which is Twitter's live video streaming service. That was great fun. The people who, some regulars came along last night watched as I drink gin and tonic and answered questions about self-publishing. Facebook's rolled out its live video more widely now so we decided, given that our presence is biggest on Facebook, that we'd do it on Facebook this year. I was on between 10 PM UK and ten past eleven and had loads and loads of people either along for the whole hour and a bit or popping in and popping out. People left ... I think over a hundred of questions were left. We got through a good number of those. It was really, really fun. I love doing that kind of stuff. There were some really interesting questions that had me thinking as well.

We're going to be doing that again ... We'll probably do it all the way through May and into June I think. Friday nights if people are around and they want to ask me a question about anything to do with self-publishing really ... Marketing especially, but I'll answer other bits and bobs as well. The place to find us is on the Self-Publishing Formula Facebook page. Not the two groups that we've got, the actual public page, which I think you can find at [Facebook.com/selfpublishingformula](https://www.facebook.com/selfpublishingformula) I think. If you're a fan of that page you will be notified when I go live, but it'll be around about 10 PM UK time which I think is 5PM eastern.

James will correct me if I'm wrong on that one.

James: Yeah, that's correct.

Mark: I'm pretty sure.

James: I know you get confused with time. Yeah, you had loads of people watching and loads of questions and that's a good thing. It is because we know that we need to assimilate knowledge to get things right in this field, but I really love the way that people help each other and you, Mark, in particular, I think you put a lot of stuff out there. We should say that we've created a YouTube channel as well over the last few months, which is a part of us getting to grips with YouTube advertising. We're starting to upload some quite useful material to the YouTube channel. If you just search The Self-Publishing Formula, you will probably find it on YouTube. Again, there's a couple of help videos there now and there's going to be more in the future.

Let's move on to John Logsdon and let me trail ahead a little bit because in a couple of weeks we're going to be speaking to Adam Croft, who's another student of the Self-Publishing Formula. This has been a huge year for Adam. He's a student who came on board with SPF in autumn of last year and has had just incredible success since that point. In fact, this week he has been posting on social media that he has been in the top twenty overall rankings on paperback for Amazon, Amazon using I think they're own imprint. Yes, I've got a copy of his book here so I should look, but I'm sure it's the Amazon imprints that's published his book.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Yeah, the overall top twenty. I think he's close to the top ten now. I think he's a couple behind the latest Harry Potter book and that's absolutely fantastic, isn't it?

Mark: Yeah, he's done fantastically well. He basically leveraged a deal with ... I think it's at Thomas & Mercer, which is the imprint that I'm on with Amazon just because he got so much amazing visibility from the Facebook campaigns he was running to push one of his books right to the top of the charts. Amazon

noticed, reached out to him, and the rest is history. This is a good demonstration of what happens when you have Amazon's marketing muscle, Facebook's marketing muscle, everything pointed in the same direction. The results can be really impressive.

James: Yeah, so we're going to hear from Adam in a couple of weeks. Let's move on to tonight's interview. John P. Logsdon. He writes science fiction. They're all humorous. He has fantasy series as well. He's a super interesting guy to talk to and I think you're going to enjoy the interview.

Okay, so we are joined by John Logsdon. John, you're over there on the east coast of the United States?

John: That's correct. I'm in the Raleigh, North Carolina area. It's about six hours, I should say, south of Washington, DC.

James: Okay, six hours south of DC on the east coast in North Carolina. Your book world takes us beyond the lake and sea straightaway. In fact, I must confess ... Full confession at the beginning. I haven't read any of your books yet, John, but you are on my list because Douglas Adams was an idol of mine, my favorite writer of all time, and I can see lots of Adams' influence in your book, particularly the "Platoon F", which I am itching to get my teeth into. If you scan your mailing list, you will find a recent addition which is my name.

I'm going to get into your books in the next few weeks, but what we want to talk to you about and one of the main reasons we've got you on here is because ... Again, full confession, the reason that we know each other and you've come into our sphere is because you actually bought into Mark's course that was launched last year. You were somebody who we noticed adopted things very quickly, got to grips with things quickly, and not just in our area on our course, but in other areas of self-publishing as well. You're a bit of a Mr. Help guy. Everyone sort of comes to you to get things sorted and you're very helpful at doing that.

Your own journey as a writer is an interesting one and I think you're at a stage where ... Probably a bit ahead of quite a lot of people and then a little bit further back from people like Mark and so on, but an interesting phase. You've got almost one foot into kind of full-time writing. You're not too far away. We're going to talk to you on the podcast about how you got there, about your approach to writing in particular

because you're quite prolific, and little bits and pieces about how you approach the marketing side of things if that's okay.

John: Sounds great.

James: Great, okay. Shall we start with your background? I know you've worked in IT and video games. You've got quite a history in video games. We haven't got time to go into all the details of that.

John: That's where my background comes for writing is really television, movie and games. It's not necessarily reading other authors. A lot of people think that what I write comes from Terry Pratchett and such. Actually the truth behind that one is I released "Ononokin", the first book called "A Quest of Undoing" and the second book, "The Full Moon Event" and I also released "Starliner" before I'd ever heard of Terry Pratchett.

A friend of mine in Scotland actually had been reading "A Quest of Undoing" and he said that the wizard reminded him of "Rincewind" and he said I should check out Terry Pratchett. I said, "I don't know what "Rincewind" is but okay." I picked up the book "Thud" and then of course I'm hooked. At that point I read everything by Terry Pratchett. My books actually aren't influenced by Terry Pratchett. They are somewhat by Douglas Adams. I won't say that they're heavily influenced. Honestly my real influences come from things like Monty Python, Benny Hill, Naked Gun, Airplane, movies like that. Just the crazy over-the-top stuff from television and movies. That's really where it comes from. Of course now there's getting a little bit more when it comes to other authors, but primarily it's TV and movies.

James: Comedy bigger than science fiction in your motivation, I think you quoted "Austin Powers" as well and "Red Dwarf" and "Futurama". These are all very comedic.

John: Completely what has influenced all of my writing. Actually it's also what influenced my ability to write fast, which we'll talk about I guess in a little bit, but yeah. It all comes from that.

James: Let's get on to that because I think that's one of the areas that people like to talk to you about and we certainly do as well. You can be a prolific writer. I think you consider five thousand words a day as

kind of the lower end of what you want to do. How do you do that, John? You're still working, right?

John: Yes, I'm still working full-time. It's tough. One of the things that I've learned to be very good at, and this all came from working in California at a startup, was you have to learn how to be very efficient. You need to learn processes that work for you. Everybody else has tons and tons of processes ... One of the points, for example, why I adopted Mark's course so easily was because his process worked for me. I tried many others but his was the only one that really clicked with me. That's just my personality type. Whenever I see something that can be done faster, more efficient, while still allowing me to retain quality because that's a big deal ... If it makes my stuff terrible, I'm not going to do it. It has to retain that quality. That's what I gravitate towards.

What I did was basically I'd started out writing the traditional way. I sat down and I tried to write this big outline. I had created character profiles. I went through all of that because every single book out there said this is what you're supposed to do so I did. It took me forever to do that. Then I wrote out the book and when I was done the book was horrible. I then tried it again with the book "Starliner" and after about a year and a half I finally got the guts to say, "Okay, I'm going to turn this over to the editorial department." They got it back to me in about ... I guess it was around three months later and essentially said, "Don't quit your day job." I was like, "Oh, great." Honestly I kind of put it aside for a couple of years. The ego was a bit crushed on that.

Then I said, "You know, I think the biggest problem is I'm spending too much time trying not to be me. I need to be who I am with what I'm writing." I was trying to write literature and I don't write literature. I write stories. Anyway, I said, "I'm going to go back to what I did in the games industry." Here's what I do now. There's a program out there that's free. It's called Trelby, that's T-R-E-L-B-Y. It is a scripting program, so for writing movie scripts or TV scripts and such. What I do is I start there. I basically just start scripting up some stuff where I put in character names and dialogue. You don't have to worry about description, you don't have to worry about setting up your scenes too much. It's just a quick one-line. "They're in a spaceship." That's it. There's your scene.

Then you just sit there and kind of go back and forth with the characters discussing things to each other. What that does for me is that allows me to say, "Who does this character sound like? Is it somebody famous? Is it somebody I know?" We all say in our books, "Anything is purely coincidental," but that the same time we all basically base our characters at least loosely on somebody we know or some stereotype of what we know. I'll sit there and I'll go back and forth between these two characters or three or four,

whatever, and I start learning who they are, what they're like, everything else. This is when I'm starting a series, by the way. At this point now I get the idea of who does this character look like in my head, what do they sound like. I also do character voices. I'll sit around and I'll also start reading that script to myself so I can build that voice in my head. Even if you're not great at voices, just getting the voice in your head ... For example, let's say ... Are you guys familiar with Fletch?

Mark: Yes.

James: Yeah, yeah. Chevy Chase.

John: Yes. Just imagine one of your characters and then you basically say, "You know what, he doesn't act like Fletch but he sounds like Fletch." Then you say, "Okay, now this person sounds like Gandalf, this person sounds like ..." You can just keep doing this. All of a sudden you start having this feeling of, "I know exactly who this character is." When I start writing that character, I can see the character, I can hear the character. I know what they're like. They might be Fletch's voice with Gandalf's personality, which is kind of weird, but you see what I'm saying. You've built this and it's all done through scripting as opposed to I'm building out this massive scene which you may just throw away. That alone allows me to get into the process very quickly. After I've done that then I say, "Okay, I'm ready to start the first book."

At this point I usually sit with my co-author and we just bounce ideas, but you can bounce ideas off of your friends or your spouse or whatever. Who cares? You're just bouncing ideas back and forth and you're having fun doing it. He and I will sit there and do that. What we'll do is we'll do an outline but it's very, very loose. It's basically one or two sentences per scene, that's it. Just straight through one or two sentences. We have an idea of what the characters are like, we know how they're going to interact, so that's not a big deal. We just want to make sure the story arc works, that we're not missing anything. We go through that process. That takes me probably about, I don't know, I'd say two hours to write out a script, maybe three. I'm sorry, not a script, an outline. About three hours. Then I hand it off to him, he looks at it, I look at it and a few days later we come back and we tweak it a little bit and then we say, "Okay, we're ready to go."

At this point I go back into Trelby and I have the outline to my left and I start literally just writing the script. I'm not worried about details, I'm not worried about anything else. I can get through that script for a sixty thousand word book, which probably is going to be around a hundred and fifty to two hundred pages

of script, is going to be probably about a week is all that'll take me to do. When that week is up, now I have a full script. At this point I can bring that script into Scrivener ... You can also write scripts in Scrivener, by the way, I just don't personally like their layout. You can bring that script into Scrivener and then that's when you start building your entire story around that script. Your script is not going to be final. As you're typing things away ... You've always written most of the dialogue, but you're going to have to change things based on when people come in and so on and so forth.

By doing it that way I'm able to focus on what I'm really good at and that is dialogue. I'm not fantastic at writing descriptions or scenes and everything else. That's not my strong suit. I can do it but it takes me longer to do that. It's really hard when I try to write those descriptions and then I'm just itching to get to the dialogue but I can't because I have to first write the description. This is what got me doing it scripting first. Again, I said I'm a TV/movie guy, so write scripts. Then I can make those scripts into full scenes, making a whole "movie" in the book at that point. Does that make sense?

Mark: Yeah, that's pretty good and that's not too far away from something that I do. Dialogue is always a good jumping off point for me. You just get conversation between two characters. I have a rough idea of where the story is set and I'll have a kind of a start, middle and end point so I know where I'm going, but if I wanted to actually get started, the best way is just to imagine that you're observing a conversation between character one and character two and then just seeing where it goes. Yeah, that's a really good tip. I've never heard anyone take it to that extent before, but it's working brilliantly for you so it's a really interesting system.

John: The other thing, I don't know if a lot of folks are using Scrivener out there or not, but there's a tool inside of Scrivener that allows you to gauge how fast you're writing. I believe it's in the tools. It's around the project statistics area. You can set it up to see how fast you're typing.

James: I don't look!

John: This is really key because I was doing about I guess around three hundred to five hundred words an hour or something like that when I started and then I found this tool. Then I said, Okay, I want you to start working on throwaway stuff, nothing I'm going to use, but I want you to try to write as fast as you can and then see where you're making mistakes, where's your quality issues and so on and so forth, because it was all about quality assurance also to make sure to do this. Now at this point I can do between two and three

thousand words an hour and at quality that I find almost acceptable. Not quite, but almost. I will go back and tweak and all that anyway, but I can do around two to three thousand words an hour, especially in a book where I genuinely know the characters. "Platoon F", no problem. Actually, the last book in "Platoon F" I was actually able to bear down and write on it. It was sixty-two thousand words I think it was and I wrote that in four days.

Mark: Wow.

James: That's because so much of it is already formed in your head. You're in the universe and the writing part comes as a natural flow to you. It's interesting to listen to the two of you talk about that because Mark, you've developed a system in a way of getting into the writing process. Other people will do a little bit of what you're talking about, but your approach ... Is that almost something that you could write down and hand out as the Logsdon method or something, as something so people ...? It's almost "template-able", isn't it? The way you've set it up for us?

John: Yeah. Actually it's something that we'll probably put up on our site at some point and talk to how to do it. We've talked about it on ... I run a podcast although with a friend of mine, Ben Zackheim who does books. He and I have done a book together as well so we've talked about it a few times there in the past, but we haven't talked about it recently. It's definitely different than a lot of people are used to, but once you get used to it it's actually pretty cool.

James: Okay. Talk a little bit about your back catalog there. "Ononokin", is that how to pronounce the the title?

John: It depends on where you're from. It's interesting. Everyone in the UK calls it that, which I find fascinating. Over here it's "Ononokin", but I like the way that you guys pronounce it better. Actually the gentleman who does my narration for the "Ononokin" series ... I'm trying to say it your way. He's the one who first pronounced it that way for me and I was actually kind of taken aback and said, "You know, it sounds posh when you say it. When I say it it just sounds American." I definitely prefer the way that you say it, yes.

James: There is an English thing that we pronounce the back end of words more prominently than most

European countries as well actually. I used to work in news and we had this with things like Slobodan Milosevic. We always used to say that until someone told us it's Slobodan Milosevic. What's the other one? Maria Sharapova. Sports people in the UK still say Maria Sharapova but she will always call it Sharapova because that's how you say it in Russian. Anyway, it's obviously inbuilt somewhere into us to stretch out the second half of every word. Anyway, that's one series and the "Platoon F" is a separate series as well. How many books have you got in both of those?

John: In "Ononokin" we've got four and we've got three more planned for this year. I'm not sure if we're going to hit three this year but we're going to try. For "Platoon F" I just released book number eight and we have one more planned for this year, which is going to actually take the story arc from book one all the way through book nine. That's going to be done hopefully in the next, I would guess, four or five months.

Mark: Wow.

James: That's some planning, right? That's the kind of planning that goes into "Futurama".

John: I wonder if they pulled the same thing we're doing though because to be honest with you when we wrote books one through five ... Actually I wrote book one by myself. My co-author was just like, "I think that's not for me." When you get there it's somewhat juvenile and purposefully so. It was a situation where I had written "A Quest of Undoing", "The Full Moon Event" and then "Starliner". "Starliner" was a really hard book to write because we were trying to not go over the top but at the same time have a lot of characters, a lot of depth, a lot going on in that world. Frankly, to be totally truthful here, we've been terrified to write book two because we don't think it ever is going to stand up to book one. I was exhausted and I was like, "I just want to write something that I don't have to think too much about. I just want to have fun."

I decided to write "Platoon F" and I wrote that first book which is really just ... The first five episodes is what I call them because they're not really novels. They're barely novellas. They're like a hundred to a hundred and twenty pages each. Then now of course they're longer books, the later ones. Chris was like, "Yeah, I don't think I want to be involved with this." That book, the first one that I released, sold five thousand copies in three months. Then Chris was like, "Yeah, I want to be involved in this." It really took off, which was surprising but there wasn't any plan at that point. It was literally just write what you think and who cares? Have fun with it. Then people started liking it. I was kind of surprised to be honest with

you about.

By the time I got to book five, we were thinking, "What are we going to do now? Is that it?" We said, "Well, no. I actually want to write a full novel of this to see how it does." We did. We wrote the full novel and at that point I said, "You know what, I can see an arc here that goes all the way through book nine if we step back." We stepped back and looked at it and sure enough we had something built by accident, completely by accident, but by the time it gets through book nine it's actually really neat. We just got to get there.

James: Yeah, so the idea's there. Talk to us a little bit about how you co-write them. Your co-author, Christopher P. Young, the two of you ... I think you've written every book together as far as I can tell that you sell. Obviously scoping out the universe, which you've talked to us about already, I can see how that would work together, particular the bits where you just sit next to each other and fire off where you think characters are going to go, but in terms of getting on with the writing, is it simply a chapter each or how does that work?

John: Actually Chris doesn't really write. He's actually an excellent storyteller, a very good storyteller, but when it comes to writing he'll sit there and rewrite the same paragraph for literally weeks on end. He's more of a hundred words a day kind of guy. We basically came up with a pattern that works for us. I'm very fast so I end up writing really quickly plus I do all these other things a hundred miles an hour. I guess I got ADD. That's my personality, but with Chris it's more a case of he's good at remembering details that I may miss because I'm writing so many books in so many different series and so on that I might accidentally miss "Ononokin" in with "Platoon F" here and he'll be like, "Hey, you just did ..." He can catch those things. He's good at doing the research on the history and all that kind of stuff and keeping things kind of together. He's also a fantastic sounding board because our personalities are extremely similar. Our comedy is both very irreverent.

We'll sit there ... By the way, he's in California and I'm on the ... He's on the west coast, I'm on the east coast. We do this all via Skype. Really what it is is I write it all. It's all me. I do all the outlines. He actually did the outline for one of our books, "Gappy's Gadgets" and we was like, "Yeah, I don't want to do that again." I do all the outlines, I do all the scripts, I do all the actual writing and everything else. What's great is is that Chris and I come up with the ideas together, I then outline it, we both kind of go over it, he makes sure that I'm not doing anything too stupid, then we come back. We work it out together.

Then I do the script and then this is the best part. I love this part of the process. We get on Skype, he's got the script, I've got the script. We pick voices and we just start going. Essentially it's three hours of reading the script from top to bottom and it would probably only take an hour except that we're laughing uproariously the entire time. It is so much fun. If ever you can get into a situation where one person ... By the way, I have written with folks where it's like, "You write a chapter, I write a chapter." Actually Ben Zackheim and I did that and it turned out okay, but I've tried with other folks and it does not always work out because, let's face it, we have egos. You might have a particular style of how you want to approach it, this person has a different style and so on.

With Chris it really is just a match made in heaven for us as far as that's concerned. Anyway, so we'll sit there and we'll laugh through things. Then I'll write the book and then I'll hand it over to Chris and I'll say, "Okay, you've got two weeks. Read it." He'll read it. He comes back with any suggestions, ideas and so on. By this point through really we're done. Our first draft is almost our last draft because we've done so much work ahead of time. Then I make any changes that we need to or if he says, "Hey, you know what, this whole chapter is just terrible and here's why" then I'll make any changes there. At that point he just kind of backs off and said, "All right, let me know when the next one's ready." From there I'm the guy in charge of all the marketing and newsletter and dealing with the launch team and the whole deal. He's got the better end of the deal, I have to say.

James: It's almost like a dynamic editing process, isn't it? When you're talking out loud you're going through the scripts, you're reading it and presumably ... Do you record the Skype sessions? How do you make notes? How do you transfer that into the next draft..?

John: I'd love to say eidetic memory. No, I don't actually do that. Usually what we do is real time. He's got the better end of the deal also here because it's 9:00 his time, it's midnight my time. By the time we're done it's three AM for me and midnight for him and he's like, "Oh, I got to go to bed. I've got to get up for work in the morning." I say, "I got to get up for work in like an hour." Most of it is just on real time as we're talking. I much prefer that as opposed to having to go back and record. I don't really work well that way. I'm the type of person that if you message me I'm more likely to respond to you than if you write me an email.

James: Let's move on to the marketing side of it. Really interesting, the whole writing approach. I'm sure a lot of people will glean something from that. It's one area I think people are always on the lookout for some inventiveness and perhaps a new approach. In terms of marketing we know obviously social media

advertising plays a fairly significant part I think in your mailing list building and your sales. Is that the main thing for you? What other areas are you using to sell your books now?

John: Right. That actually is my primary focus, basically using Mark's system. The Facebook ads are my primary approach but I also find a lot comes from ... My launch team helps a lot with that too, just the sharing and so on. I'll tell you, I've got to say, if anybody out there doesn't have a launch team you're missing out. You need a launch team. They're awesome.

James: Let's not assume too much knowledge. We've talked about launch teams before but let's pull this for a moment to just explain to somebody who doesn't know what a launch team is what exactly it is.

John: Yeah. Essentially as I define it ... Some people define them as beta-readers or so on or street teams maybe. For me, a launch team is essentially a group of people who are super fans of yours. They really love your stuff, they like what you're doing and it's kind of like a support system. I have a Facebook group for them, I go in there and I talk to them almost all the time. I'm in there every day just saying, "Hey, what are you guys doing this weekend?" We're friends. They're people who love my books but we're also friends. I say, "Hey, I've got this new cover. What do you guys think of it?" I get feedback from them and so on. I say, "Okay, I've got a couple of sample chapters. I just want to send them your way." Kind of give them little teasers and things that nobody else can get, stuff like that. They feel like, "Wow, I'm getting some cool stuff out of this too."

When it comes time for me to actually release the book, before I send it to my editor what I do is I hand it to my launch team and I say, "Look, this is not edited but here's a Google sheet. If you guys spot anything please go in here and say where you spotted it, what you found and what you think it should be." They're basically bug-reporting for me. I ended up getting a hundred and twenty or a hundred and fifty reports of "You misspelled this, you did that wrong," whatever. It's basically pre-edited before I hand it to my editor which means it's going to happen faster for me which is good because my wife happens to be my editor and she gives me nasty looks sometimes. Anyway, after I do that I say to them, "Okay, now you guys are reading it not only with the editing in mind ..." They don't have to do that part obviously, "But also to formulate a review."

I don't actually look for beta-readers to be honest with you. Actually as we kind of pointed out I think with Chris, Chris is the uber beta-reader. He knows the stories better than most anyone but me probably and so

he's a great beta-reader for that. The launch team does come back and say, "Hey, you know what, I noticed your character did this here and that doesn't seem right. Wouldn't he do this?" Then I, "Ah, you're right," and then I'll ... They're just fantastic that way. They really give you a lot of feedback.

Then anytime that you're going, "Wow, I just got this message from somebody and I can't believe that they actually emailed me." The one guy emailed me and said that I should never be a writer and all this kind of stuff, right? It's kind of like, "Grr." I don't share that guy's email with anybody but I just basically say, "I got this email." Next thing you know they're your support crew. They're in there saying, "No, your books are fantastic. I love these. Please don't ever stop writing." It makes you pumped up and you're ready to start writing again and just get back into it and everything else. I'll tell you, they're just the best thing that I can imagine having as a writer.

James: I completely concur with that. About a week ago one of my readers ... He wasn't actually on my team. He may not even have been on my mailing list, but he contacted me and said the kind of military history, the background for one of my main characters was a bit off. This is a special forces soldier, so I had to him, "Okay, would you like to have a stab at collecting the mistakes?" He just sent me a long email today with a really authentic background that I'll probably now incorporate. Of course we can go back and change things and correct them as we go along. He did that because he loves my books which is, apart from being incredibly generous on his part, it's massively motivational on my part and it makes my books better. That's a small example I've had. I'm completely with you on the launch team. They're just fantastic and everyone should be taking steps to put one together.

John: Absolute. It's so humbling too when you have all these people out there and you're just having maybe a bad sales day or whatever. You got two bad reviews on Amazon, whatever it is. Then you go in there and you see all of these people are making quotes and creating little stories in your universe. It's just unbelievably humbling. It's fantastic.

James: I think it's definitely worthwhile covering that because you've done so well with building a list and then building a launch team from it. It will be useful I think for us just to hear where you were and how far and how fast you've traveled to get where you are now.

John: Yeah actually I'd love to share this because I think this is such a cool story to be honest with you. I released my first book, I believe it was 2013. Then the second one it was ... I don't know. The next year I

released two more books. Then when I released the "Platoon F" first book and I get five thousand sales and I'm thinking, "Okay, I've made it." I'm literally at this point going, "Well, I guess I'll just go ahead and retire and start writing." Three months later I found out that wasn't going to work out. Anyway, I said, "I need to somehow capture these readers. I have no idea how but I'm going to try." In the backs of the books I would put links to my other books and all this kind of stuff. Then I said, "Let me try this MailChimp thing and see what I can do there."

Over the course of a year I added ... I think the actual number is twenty-seven. I usually just say twenty-five because it's easier but I think it was twenty-seven people and I would say that most of them are friends, family. Probably two or three of them were me from different email addresses for testing. Of course, thanks Mom. I'm sure she also signed up there and so on. Really over the course of a year. I'm just sitting there thinking that was normal. Then all of a sudden I tried all these different systems out there. None of them worked for me. They just didn't. I just couldn't find somebody who spoke my language I guess. I don't want to put any systems down. I'm just saying they just didn't work for me.

Anyhow, one day my wife ... Again, she's an editor. She also is an author but she's an editor. She says to me a friend of hers, Martha Hayes, said, "Hey you should check out this guy Mark Dawson. He's doing this teaching thing." This is a true story so be prepared, Mark. My wife said, "She's saying you should do this." I said, "I don't know who this guy is. Why am I going to do this?" She says, "No, come on." At this point I'm highly jaded, okay? I'm making maybe five dollars a month in sales if that. I still have the same twenty-seven subscribers. I'm going nowhere. Really, nowhere. Out of spite, out of pure spite, I said to my wife, "Fine. I will go ahead and do this system. I will do this system to the tee because I'm going to prove to you it is not going to work and then you'll leave me alone." That was truly what happened.

I sat down and I looked at your website and I copied your website. Sorry, but I did. Then I sat there and I put my books up just like you have yours. I did the whole thing. Then I watched your videos and I did the exact same thing you said. Obviously I couldn't use your book covers, I had to use my own, but I did the exact same thing you said. It took me about a week. I busted my hump to get it done, but I got it done and then I said, "Okay, I'm going to spend five bucks on Amazon and I'm going to show you that this doesn't work." I'm sorry, on Facebook.

Mark: "This English guy is an idiot."

John: Exactly.

Mark: "He doesn't know what he's talking about."

John: Right, exactly. I'm sitting here going ... I said, "It's not going to work," but I just worked for a week and I just really wanted to rub her face into this, right? Anyway I spent five bucks on a Facebook ad and there it went up and everything else. The next morning I wake up and I had two subscribers. I was just like, "All right, so I got two subscribers out of a week's worth of work. Way to go, babe. That was awesome." The next day I had five more. I was like, "Okay, so five more." The next day I think it was around fifteen and then it went up to like thirty.

I'm not talking thirty since the first day. I'm talking thirty that day. The first day was two, then five, then fifteen or whatever and then thirty the next day. All of a sudden I'm getting between thirty and fifty subscribers every single day. I gave her a hug, right? Then all of a sudden I'm like, "Mark's the man." I started working on this and working on this. One day I just said to myself, "I can't believe this is happening but I'm going to put a hundred dollars into this ad. I just want to see what happens because this is incredible." I spent a hundred dollars and I got four hundred subscribers that day.

James: Wow.

John: Yeah, four hundred. It just ... Whoa, that blew my mind. Anyway, obviously what I was selling, the advertising that I had done ... Here was the kicker. Other people who have come to me, what I find that they have done wrong is they don't do what you tell them to do. They all come and they say, "I'm going to put my spin on it." Don't put your spin on it. Do what he tells you to do. That's what I did and I did it out of spite, but it worked. It worked. Now every time I create an ad I literally go back and I look at your videos from the beginning and I basically say, "Okay, that's right. Yeah, I got to do this. Yep, I got to do this." I do it over and over again. Every time those ads are successful. When I sit there and create ads and I don't pay attention, "Oh, I'll just do this one myself," almost inevitably they are awful. They never do well at all.

That is the biggest thing that I learned, is number one, if you're going to do a system, do it with spite. Apparently that's a good thing. Number two, follow it to the tee. Now of course I've gotten to the point

where I still will follow what you're saying but I also have to make some tweaks now and then because you just have to as time goes on, but yeah. That's where I came from. I have amassed around thirteen thousand subscribers in one year.

Mark: What would you say ... I get this question quite a lot when I'm talking at conferences and things. I'm actually speaking at the London Book Fair next week and I'm fairly sure one of the questions I'll get because I always get it is, "I'm a new author. What is the first thing that I should do?" My answer to that is always ... I drop the ball on this and I didn't do this upfront like I should have done was focus on a mailing list. I worried about sales too much in the early days. It's more important to get subscribers. Occasionally ... In fact, more than occasionally. Quite often people, they just don't get it. They go, "Why would I want a mailing list? I don't understand that." What would your answer be?

John: The primary thing is it's sad but it's true that readers don't care about you until they care about you. If you can get a person in by ... Either it's the only book you have or a short story that you've written or whatever where they can come in and they can actually take a chance on you by signing up to your newsletter because yes, that is huge, you have to have that ... Then at that point they might care about you. If they read your stuff and they get what you're doing, you instantly have somebody who's going to come back and care about you.

This is why I say don't focus on sales at first to people because that's what I did for the longest time. Nobody cared about me so nobody's going to buy anything I've done. If instead I give them something and in return I say, "Give me your name, or your email address rather," at that point I'm giving you the opportunity to check out something of mine for free, which hey, if you don't like it it was free. What are you going to do? At the same time I'm getting the opportunity to hope that you're going to care about what I'm doing next.

That to me is where the relationship comes in. You don't have a relationship with a reader if all you're trying to do is sell. Building the mailing list, what you're really doing, in my mind, what you're really doing is you're building a relationship with the reader. If you build that relationship, at that point, every time you release something new ... Which is a little not true with me because "Platoon F" fans on one side and "Ononokin" on the other side. They're kind of separated there, but any time I release something with "Platoon F" fans I know I'm going to get sales from them. I know I'm going to get shares from them. I know I'm going to get all that. If all I did was focus on just selling and not focused on newsletter, all I would get is probably five dollars a month like I was getting before.

Mark: I think you've put your finger on it there. I think the reason you've done so well apart from the fact that you've hit the ads really well and they've worked really effectively for you, the reason I suspect you're doing well is because ... We've never met apart from talking on the phone a few times. You're very affable and you're very easy to talk to and I think you get that it's not about, "Buy my book, buy my book." It's more about, "Tell me about you. Would you like to know about the problems I had writing a hundred pages?" That kind of stuff. The kind of the interesting stuff that it isn't all about selling. It's building relationships. It's turning readers into friends eventually and that's what you're doing with your street team. That is probably the nub of why you've been so successful over the last eighteen months of so. Kudos. Keep going. You're really doing fantastically well.

John: Thank you. I have to say this. Whenever anybody ever gets an email back from a potential reader or a reader or somebody who signed up to your newsletter or whatever, even if it's just through your website or whatever, always respond. Always respond kindly. I got an email ... This is a great example. I got an email from a guy who said, "I signed up to your newsletter. I just want to let you know I am unsubscribing. I don't like what you're doing. The humor, I just find it very childish in 'Platoon F' and so on. It's very juvenile. I don't like it. It's toilet humor essentially. Honestly I don't think you should be writing this stuff," is pretty much what he was saying.

I replied back to him and I said, "Hey, I understand. Comedy is a very subjective thing. The problem with comedy is that no matter what you will always offend somebody. You can't avoid that." I said, "You know what, I really appreciate that you took the time to let me know how you felt about it and everything else because it's great criticism. I always learn something from everybody. I just thank you very much for taking the time to read my stuff and to check it out." He wrote me back a week later and he said, "You know, your email was so nice that I actually turned my brother and a friend of mine at work on to your stuff and they both love it." Basically turning a negative situation into something like that, that's just fantastic.

I also got another review from a guy a long time ago, terrible review. Just terrible. He said that he thought I must be on drugs. I replied to that, which is I know a big no-no, but at the time I was using a pen name which was ... I replied to that review and I basically said, "Thank for your response. I'm sorry you didn't enjoy it. I'm not on drugs." He responds to that review saying, "Sorry that I said you were on drugs. That was probably not a nice thing to say." Then he went into all this other stuff and then he says, "But I just don't understand how somebody could write this and not be on drugs." I said, "Okay, we're back to the drug thing again."

Anyway, we started having this dialogue and then I said, "You know what, why don't we take this offline and talk on email?" We did and I learned a lot about the guy. Number one, he was way out of my demographic. Way out of it. He was almost eighty years old, so reading something that was written from me as a thirteen year-old's perspective is probably not the best book for him. Also he doesn't know about things like "Futurama" and "Family Guy" and "South Park". He's not familiar with any of that stuff so for him it was completely out of left field.

The guy actually was in the military for a long time. He builds airplanes and he also turns his own pens, writing instruments. He actually ends up sending me the last pen that he ever made before he could no longer do it because he has arthritis. I was amazed by that. Here's a guy that literally hated what I wrote but we still became friends. I just think it's awesome. It's all in how you treat people. It really is.

James: Yeah, that's great tips. It resonates with some of the best, most prolific successful authors we've heard have a similar attitude. Marie Force comes to mind straightaway. Mark was saying earlier it's about a conversation with your readers. It's not about an old-fashioned business proposition. It doesn't work like that. No, it's great. Really great. You're good at it John as well. You're obviously a processes guy. We're coming towards the end of our time together and I fear we've almost just scratched the surface. There's been some really good value stuff in it as well from your approach to writing through to marketing and stuff from customer relations if you want to call it ... That sounds like a boring way of calling what I've just described as a conversation.

You're obviously a processes guy, which I like as well. The way you approached Mark's course, it reminded me of how I make recipes in the kitchen. I do not deviate. There's a recipe, someone's put some time into that, that's how it works. It drives me insane when people say, "A bit more of this, a bit more of that." I go, "No, don't do that. Do it the way the mail the says because that's how it should be made." There's something to be said I think for the way that your background has fed into the way that you approach writing. You come from a systematic world of programming. I used to be a computer programmer. It's actually quite a creative thing but also it's very procedural. I love the way that you've turned that into an approach to writing and marketing books and it's worked.

John: Yes, absolutely. It's interesting. I'm also a musician and it also all stems from ... Actually if you look it up you'll find that statistically speaking a lot of programmers are either musicians or writers, which is kind of interesting because programming is a highly creative art. What you're doing is you're solving

puzzles every single day incessantly, which is why a lot of programmers ... You might get burned out, but you rarely get bored. Every time you turn on the machine and you have a new project you have to work on, it's a puzzle you're trying to figure out. The same thing goes with music, the same things goes with writing. It's all a puzzle. One of the things that I find though is that if you're not enjoying the process of writing, you're doing something wrong. It is fun. If it's not fun, why are you doing it? I love to write. I love to program. I love doing music and everything else. If I didn't, I wouldn't be on this call with you right now.

James: It's been absolutely fabulous talking to you, John. Thank you so much indeed for coming on to the podcast. It did turn into a little bit of an advert for Mark's course in the middle so I should say that other online courses are available.

Mark: They're not as good.

James: It's clear the podcast is a valuable asset in an objective market. Clearly we are part of a revolution in that are and you're a leading light in that sense. Both of you are in your respective corners in that. It's been great, John, from North Carolina. We may even see you later this year which would be great. We're going to probably have a little trip to the US ourselves and we'd love to drop in on you at some point and see a little bit of the Logsdon operation for ourselves.

John: Awesome. That would be fantastic. I really appreciate you guys having me on. It was fun.

James: John was a delight to talk to, and like I did say in the interview, he's a procedural guy so he works out an approach. I know some people approach life in a slightly more creative, artistic, haphazard way and that works for them. Other people need absolutely procedures. He's probably somewhere in between because it's a creative industry that he's in, but I really like the way that he thought through how to construct a book, how to approach a story and make it a writing process that worked for him. He then applied that to Facebook advertising. Wow, he just got it right didn't he?

Mark: Yeah, he's done extremely well. When it comes to subscriptions and growing a mailing list, he's probably the student that I point to as being one of the most successful and certainly the one to go to. Very friendly and generous with his tips. One thing I didn't mention in the interview, James, was Terry Pratchett was a big influence on him. Terry Pratchett lived about five hours from me. He lived in a village called

Broad Chalke which is not too far from where I am in Wiltshire. I saw him a few times in Salisbury. Very nice guy. Always easily spotted with his big beard and the hat he wore all the time. Nice guy. Sadly missed.

James: Yeah. There's a great photograph of Terry Pratchett at a fan event. He's wearing a t-shirt and if you squint your eyes it says, "JK Rowling wouldn't come. JRR Tolkien is dead. Douglas Adams is dead, Hello, I'm Terry Pratchett." A very modest guy, very humble, and sadly taken from us far too early. I should also say that I said at the beginning of an interview we spoke to John that I hadn't read any of his books. I've corrected that since then. I am now racing through his "Platoon F" series which I'm absolutely loving. It is quite puerile, it's quite silly, but it's an amazing little universe he's created of this slightly incompetent planet and system and military organization. It's laugh out loud if you like that sort of thing. It's laugh out loud. I thoroughly recommend it. I certainly have benefited from the way that he's put together his books with his writing partner.

Okay, that's it. As we mentioned before, there is a Facebook Q&A on Friday night, so if you're picking this up on the day of release, that is tonight, Friday, which it is at ten PM in the UK which is five PM eastern and it sits there on Mark's timeline on his Facebook timeline. No, not your Facebook timeline. On the Self-Publishing Formula Facebook timeline. Is that right?

Mark: Correct. Yeah, that's correct.

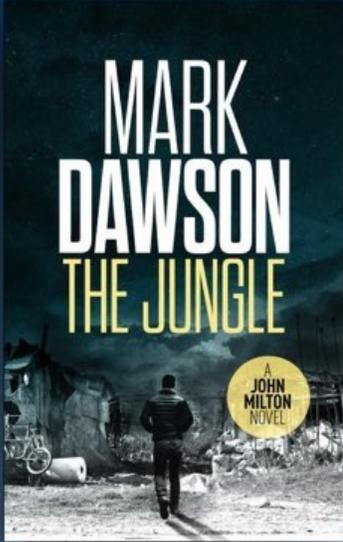
James: I had to correct myself there. Good. We've got another episode in a couple of weeks. We're going to talk to Adam Croft, a very interesting interview. Someone who has had a stellar year and he's particular brilliant to listen to in terms of mindset that you need in order to be successful and he's got the kudos now behind that to back that up. We're going to do another master class in the next couple of weeks as well. Lots of good stuff to come. Thank you so much for listening. We're going to say goodbye, you from Sleepy Hollow here in Wiltshire and me in the flat plains of Cambridgeshire.

Mark: Yes, bye bye.

James: Yeah, thanks Mark. Bye bye.

CHAPTER 11

HOW TO LAUNCH A BOOK: A DETAILED LOOK AT MARK DAWSON'S RECENT BOOK LAUNCH



HOW TO LAUNCH A BOOK.

THE INSIDE STORY OF A BESTSELLER LAUNCH EPISODE #013

THERE ARE MANY, many things that go into a successful book launch. For a self-published author it can be enough to make your head spin. That's why it's such a great thing to have an experienced and successful self published author like Mark to walk you through his own best practices and mistakes. That's exactly what you've got on this episode because Mark recently launched his most recent novel and took the time to record his own thoughts and comments each day as he progressed through his launch sequence. You're going to be the beneficiary of his hard work as he walks you step by step through the things he did.

74% OPEN RATE AND 53% CLICK RATE FROM MARK'S BETA TEAM.

One of the practices that many Indie authors have implemented is an advance or beta team of readers who serve the author in a few very important ways in exchange for a free, advanced copy of the book.

#1 - These readers help tighten up plot holes, errors, and oversights through feedback as they read the book

#2 - They provide reviews on Amazon and other retailers once the book is live on their platforms

#3 - They also can be a great source of encouragement and affirmation for the author

Mark's beta reader team was fairly large (over 700 people) and they were very active in this most recent launch. You can hear how Mark fared and the role the beta team played in this episode.

FACEBOOK ADVERTISING TO ACCOMPANY THE BOOK LAUNCH.

Once Mark had sent out his book to the beta reader team he began thinking through ways to leverage the book to his mailing list. Not everyone he mailed to opened the email, so he decided to upload that mailing list to Facebook and target ads for the book directly to those people who had not opened his initial email. That put the opportunity in front of them again in a way that many responded to by purchasing the book. But that wasn't all he did with Facebook. Once the soft launch was over Mark used Facebook to advertise the book to specific segments of people, especially those who had liked or followed his pages, and sales benefitted greatly. You can hear how Mark went about making his Facebook advertising decisions in this episode.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH TO DATE.

Within the first few days of launching his latest novel Mark's book was able to break into the top 100 books on Amazon and his U.S. sales were over 1600. That kind of success is the direct result of a well-planned, strategic launch using a variety of tools and approaches to market the book. You can hear Mark's insights and feelings about the entire process as well as hear his insider tips about what he did and why.

HOW MARK HELPED HIS LAUNCH WITH A LAUNCH PARTY.

Since his last book launched, Facebook has rolled out its live video streaming platform in full force. He's already been using Facebook live video a bit and knew that he had a significant number of people who followed him on Facebook. So, with a beer in hand, Mark sat down in his home office and interacted with thousands of fans the night of the book launch. The post was shared all across Facebook and got lots of attention all across the platform, boosting his books sales even more.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Preview of next week's episode
- Mark's audio diary for his book launch: Getting things to the proofer and editor.
- The manuscript is heading to the advance team.
- 74% open rate and 53% click rate for the manuscript sent to the beta team.
- Received the manuscript from the copy editor - 50 to 60 emails from beta readers.
- Cover reveal and prologue sent to the beta team on Facebook. Positive responses. Pre-order links sent.
- Final changes made to the copy edited manuscript, sending for formatting.
- The soft launch: over 100 reviews already.
- The final touches done for the launch emails - 50,000 emails on the way.
- The most successful launch results: 1637 copies sold in the U.S. Broke the top 100.
- Using Facebook ads in conjunction with his email list and cover art.
- Total sales figures well after the launch.
- Reviewing the cover price - \$17,000 profit so far.
- Spending more on Facebook this time.
- Things that went wrong during this launch.
- The Facebook numbers.
- The launch party and results of it

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

James: Hello, and welcome to episode 13 from the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, lucky 13. Here we are, James Blatch, Mark Dawson for the Self Publishing Formula podcast, on what is a lovely, sunny day here in the UK. It's so sunny and lovely that I can tell you somebody is mowing their lawn quite close to where I am. You might be able to hear murbling in the background, it's not my stomach. Can you hear it?

Mark: Yeah.

James: Just a little bit. Okay. Is it all nice and peaceful? You've just got birdsong in Salisbury, where you are?

Mark: We don't have people doing unsocial things like mowing their lawns, it's all very rustic and rural here. Might hear a tractor go past, possibly.

James: It is a weekday. In Germany, it's illegal to mow your lawn on a Sunday. At least it used to be, I don't know if it still is. Perhaps one of our German listeners could let us know, but I quite like that, have to say. Anyway, stop rambling James. We have a reputation, I've noticed from feedback, of being quite forthright and perfunctory in the way that we do our podcasts which a lot of people appreciate. We get straight into the good stuff, rather than lots of rambling, so we should probably stick to that. This is going to be no exception.

We are going to get onto the subject of how to launch a book with a detailed look through Mark's very recent launch. Before we get onto that, Mark, just going to mention a couple of other things.

We're going to hear from one of the Self Publishing Formula course's students next week, a guy called Adam Croft. We've mentioned Croft a few times, he's had a absolutely fantastic year. I mean, I'll just give you a headline figure. He's gone from probably an annual income of 12 to £14,000, so knocking on the door of \$20,000, not bad. With his wife working as a primary school teacher, and he's basically been paying bills.

This year he is predicted to gross a £1,000,000 and that's not an exaggeration. That's after he took the Facebook advertising course and really understood the power of Facebook ads, so a fantastic interview with him coming up. We're going to trail ahead because Mark is securing Adam's services, we hope, for a live webinar. I think, you Mark and Adam together, talking about how to use Facebook ads could be one of the most powerful and valuable webinars people are going to hear in 2016.

Mark: No pressure.

James: No.

Mark: It could be. Adam's done amazingly well, and it's quite likely he'll teach. In fact, he has taught me a few things about how he's gone about having that incredible year, some really cool things that he's done that I think we'll be able to share with listeners. We're just in the process of setting that up now, so there'll be an email that will go out with links to the webinar, but I would advise, when we do get that ready that people jump on quickly because I think that will probably be quite full.

James: Yeah, and it's going to be great. We've even noticed this week that Adam's been outselling Robert Galbraith, who is of course, you might know, J.K. Rowling. It's a pretty good thing to see, your book higher in the charts than J.K. Rowling. Very excited about that, and also just want to mention that Mark, you were live on Friday night, I was watching you. I had a beer in hand, I noticed you had a beer as well. You didn't have your gin and tonic as usual. That's a Facebook live Q & A, which people can get through the Self Publishing Formula Facebook page. It went really well, it was so busy.

Mark: Yeah, it was really busy. Again, for the second time, it was over an hour long and lots of people stuck around for the whole hour. I don't know how many questions I answered, but it was certainly three figures worth. Really fun. It's nice to be able to do that, there's no cost, anyone can kind of turn up, ask me a question, tell me I'm an idiot if they want to. No, it's been very, very entertaining and I think I've managed to give some useful information, at least I hope I have, to people who were there to listen in to what I had to say.

James: Now this week, also, we're going to be interviewing BookBub, which I know is a very hotly anticipated podcast. We haven't got a release date for it yet, but we've got a lot of your questions all ready to go on that, and that's going to be one coming up in the future.

Okay, let's, in a perfunctory manner, get straight on to our hot topic, which is how to launch a book. Now, Mark, I have to say, you've become from a student of radio, you very quickly seem to have adopted and perfected the style. I was very, very impressed with the fact that you recorded this diary, effectively, a day-by-day diary of how your launch went.

It's really, really interesting. I was editing it and I was learning loads listening to your approach and looking at the figures and how you schedule things out. I think without further ado, we're going to go into this. It's probably about twenty minutes long, something like that, perhaps a little shorter. It's really, really

useful.

WE'RE GOING TO LISTEN TO IT NOW, AND THEN MARK AND I WILL PICK UP FROM THE LAST DIARY ENTRY THAT MARK MADE AT THE END OF IT, AND GO THROUGH THE LATEST ON THE LAUNCH AND I SHALL BE QUIZZING YOU A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THAT.

Mark: It is Wednesday the 27th of April, 2016.

It's 2:50, and I've just finished the polished first draft of the new John Milton book, which is going to be called The Jungle. I've just sent it over to Canada, where my proofreader lives. She's a lady called Pauline, and she's going to be giving the manuscript a quick pass to clear up the obvious errors before I send it out to my beta team.

I'm hoping to get it back after the weekend on Monday, so that's when the books should go out to the beta team, some time probably close of play on Monday, once I've had a chance to look though Pauline's changes and make a few tweaks. I'm adding a couple of paragraphs, a couple of scenes I just want to add in subsequently sending it over to her. They'll get it on Monday, so that will be the next stage in the process, but it starts today. Day one is Wednesday the 27th of April, and I've just pressed send, so I'll be back on Monday to tell you what's next.

OKAY, SO IT'S TUESDAY, 3RD OF APRIL.

Day six in this launch campaign. I've received the manuscript back from my proof editor and I've gone through it, amended, accepted for the changes that have been suggested to me. Made a few extra tweaks, added a new opening paragraph that I'm quite pleased with.

I've just composed the MailChimp email sending to my advance team. At the time of this recording, there are 728 people on the advance team and they're going to get the formatted book in whatever format they want so, MOBI, ePub, or pdf. I'm giving it to them by way of a MailChimp hosted link, so the file hosted by MailChimp and clickable by people when they get the email.

Also with BookFunnel, the service that I recommend when it comes to allowing downloading of the three books that we give away in exchange for email addresses. That all being said, the email is ready to go, I am keen to get this off so I'm going to press send and I'll come back again tomorrow and let you know how it's gone.

IT'S DAY SEVEN, WEDNESDAY THE 4TH OF APRIL.

I sent the manuscript out to the advance team last night or last afternoon. As I said, 728 members so that it got sent that many times. The open rate was 74% and click rate was 53%.

That's largely what I'd expect given how the team has reacted to previous campaigns. What I have done this morning is just go back through MailChimp and created a new segment of people of haven't opened any of the last five campaigns, and I've assumed that they're not interested anymore, so I've deleted them from the advance team. I may or may not look to recruit some new ones. I took off about 50 I think, so we're under 700 now, about 660, 670 left, which let's be honest, is still plenty, but I may look to add a few more to bring that up to 700 again.

The numbers, the open rate and the click rate was very good. Overnight I've had the first, I think, four or five comments back or emails back. Two or three of them have actually read the book and have said very nice things which is great for my ego, of course. The others have come back with some small points that have slipped through the proofing process so far.

What I do is, I put them into their own folder and I collate them and then I go back and do everything in one blast a bit nearer the end of the process. I'm very pleased with how things have gone. I'm always nervous when I send out a book for the first time because at this point, only one other person, the proofreader, has read the book and although she said that she enjoyed it, you kind of think you're saying that because we have a commercial relationship. But these readers will tell me if they don't like what I've done with the Milton. The early feedback so far has been good, so that is, of course, a big relief. That's cool, I kind of let that run now for a few more days and I'll check back in later with an update.

IT'S DAY 13, THURSDAY THE 12TH OF MAY.

I had the copyedited manuscript come back today, a day early from my copyeditor in Canada. I've spent most of today going through those changes. Usually it's straight forward, nothing controversial. I agree almost always with the vast majority of the changes. That has been great. I've also taken the opportunity to, I've paused and kind of marinated on the manuscript until now.

I've been receiving lots and lots of comments back from my advance readers. I haven't counted it up exactly but it's something like 50 or 60 emails have come back from the team with suggestions. More than 50 or 60 have responded. Some just saying, they've really enjoyed the book, looking forward to be able to help out, but the 50 or 60 that actually have suggestions and amendments to make, so I've been storing

those up in a separate folder. I haven't touched the actual manuscript. I'm working in Word now. I haven't touched it because I wanted to make sure that the copy edit came back. I'll then work from that document alone, the copy edited document.

Now that I've got that back, I'm spending the day going through the manuscript and looking at those comments and amendments from readers. They've been really, really great. They solved a problem that was giving me practical problems towards the end of the book where Milton needing to cause a big explosion. I've had some really clever ideas for that, some things I hadn't come up with myself, so that's been fantastic.

I always love doing this, it's my favorite part of the process, going through and editing. I think the manuscript is now very tight and strong. So much so, that it's possible that I'll be slightly ahead of schedule. I might even launch the book a day or two early. I was scheduling the 20th of May, a Friday. It might be that I come forwards to the 18th or 19th, but we'll see. I'm going to spend the rest of the day going through these comments. Then I'll check back in tomorrow because I'm going to start the promotion to my list and my Facebook feed.

SATURDAY, THE 14TH OF MAY.

It's a lovely day here in sunny Wiltshire. Just taking my son for a walk down the country lane near our house. I thought I'd check in with another report. Yesterday was a really good day. I sent out emails to all of my mailing list with a cover reveal and also I chucked in the first, sneak peak to the prologue of the new book.

I amplified that by doing the same on Facebook, so I put the cover up and the prologue and put that in on my Facebook page and I had a really, really positive response. Got dozens and dozens of emails from readers, which was excellent. Most people saying that they were looking forward to buying the book when it comes out. I put pre-order links in the email for Apple, Barnes & Noble and Kobo. I made it really clear why I wasn't pre-ordering through Amazon.

People have different views on this but it doesn't help my launch strategy because of the way that Amazon tallies up pre-orders. In my opinion, it reduces the effect a launch, but even though I made that pretty clear, and in fact, the explanation of why there were no Amazon pre-orders was in bold, I got quite a lot, maybe 30 emails from readers saying they'd been onto Amazon and haven't been able to find the pre-order. On the one hand that's quite flattering because they are motivated to go and look for it. On the other hand, it's

a little frustrating.

I made it pretty clear why that was, and of course, I answered all of those emails individually, and told them just to hang around until next week when they'd be able to get it. That's a learning for me for next time, I'll be bit more explicit, I may even not put any links on when I do those kinds of teasers. Anyway, so it was great.

The Facebook post was extensively shared, 200 or 300 likes, lots and lots of comments. Everything pointing towards a positive launch next week. Quite likely now to be pushed forward a bit because I'm ahead of schedule, but we'll see. I'll close down for the weekend now, spend some time with the family. Then I'll look forward to getting ready too push this new book out next week.

IT'S MONDAY THE 16TH.

I'm in one of my cafes in Salisbury that I come to to do my writing. I've spent the last hour just going through the final amendments that I want to make to the manuscript. Just a minute ago, I saved it again as a new file, appending the word lot to it, which means for me that that book is pretty much done.

I've emailed it across together with the cover to Polgarus Studios, the formatters that I use in Australia, a guy called Jason over there, very very highly recommended. He will do the formatting magic and send that back to me, probably tomorrow. Then we can get the book loaded up to the relevant platforms, and we're good to go to start sending it out the advance team. Actually getting into the launch phase of this launch. That's it for me for today. I've got that done. I'm really looking forward to moving onto the next stage tomorrow.

IT'S WEDNESDAY THE 18TH AT 6:23PM.

I'm just running the bath for the children, you might hear the water running in the background. I just wanted to check in and tell you that the first part of the soft launch or the soft launch really has gone really, really well. In the just over 48 hours since I've had the book live on both Amazon, in fact, all Amazons, I've had over 100 reviews on .com I think about 25 reviews on .co.uk. Something like 5 and 6 or 10 or 11 on Canada and Australia, which is really excellent. I mean, a 100 reviews in the first couple of days, that's ridiculous.

They're all really good, honest reviews. Most of them or a good number of them have left the statement

that the book was in ARC, an advanced copy. I always put that on the email, so just remind them that it's best practice to put that in. They've been honest. Not everyone liked it, there's a few less enthusiastic reviews, which is completely fine, but generally speaking, it's been very, very positive. The book's page which did look a little bit bare and lonely when the book went live, now looks busy. The blurb looks good. The cover looks good. We've got all that social proof on the review, so that's mission accomplished in terms of the soft launch.

Also had about 200 buys and I think that's pushed the book up to around about 1,800 in the store, so that's a good platform that we'll be building on when we do the proper launch, which is likely to be tomorrow, I think. I've got a call with Apple this evening, the guys in Cupertino to have a chat about some promotion that they're going to be doing as the book launches. It's just looking really good. I'm very pleased with how things have gone so far. I'll check back in maybe a couple of times tomorrow if we do the launch tomorrow so I can tell you what I do when the book actually fires out to the mailing list and then the early results.

IT'S THE 19TH OF MAY, 2016 AT 12:45.

I've been busy this morning just putting the final touches to my launch emails. I've just pushed click and send on the last one. Right now, around about 50,000 emails are either queued at MailChimp HQ or on their way to the people on my mailing list. This is one of the most exciting parts of the launch. It's been soft launch for a couple of days, but now I'm telling everyone on my mailing list that the book is out there, and encouraging them to go and buy it, to share the email, get their friends and family to buy it. I will see how we do.

The price is up now to its launch price, 4.99 in the US, 3.99 in the UK. US rank is at the time of recording is 3,749 in the store, and that's off the back of 247 sales over the last three days. Most of those will be at 99 cents, a few of those are at 4.99.

I saw overnight that a few people in my Facebook group had seen that the book had gone live, it's been soft launch so far, so I haven't told anybody officially. But a few had noticed and the word spread, so today was definitely the right day to do the start of the sales sequence. By now, we've got 107 reviews on the US page, and that's all going to be from the launch being really good. I'm very pleased with that. It's 92% 5 star, 8% at 4 star. We'll get lots more coming in now at 3, 2 and 1 and I'm completely fine with that.

I like to see a nice spread of reviews on a page. I'm quite happy to get honest reviews from all the

readers, advance readers or not, depending on how they like the book and being honest, and telling other readers about it. That will give a bit more balance to the page. Right now, I'm very pleased with that as a platform for the book to go out. I will check back in a bit later to let you know how the emails have been going down, but as of right now, I'm pretty excited.

IT IS FRIDAY THE 20TH OF MAY. IT'S 3:13 IN THE AFTERNOON.

I thought I'd check back in with results of how the first day of the launch went. The quick answer is, it went really, really well. It was the most successful launch that I've ever done.

The best one I've done previously I think was up to about 102 in the .com store. But *The Jungle* yesterday sold 1,637 copies in the US, and 809 copies in the UK. That was good for an overnight rank in the US of number 80 in the store, and 49 in the UK store. I'm really pleased with that.

My unofficial aim was to crack the top 100 with this launch, and I've managed to do that. Very, very pleased with how it went. That's just on the basis of mailing list sales, so I've had a very, very good response from the mailing list. Good open rates, good click rates, and loads, and loads, and loads of emails and Facebook messages from readers getting in touch with me to tell me that they'd bought the book and that they'd either finished it and left a review or they were enjoying it or they were about to start it. Really good for the ego and obviously I've replied to all of those. That's been really gratifying.

What I've been doing today is, I'm starting to amplify the affect of that burst of sales yesterday. I'm doing that in two ways, the first way is with Facebook ads So what I've done, and this, I suppose, is about as clever as it gets from me, is I've uploaded my mailing list, so around about 50,000 people. I've pulled those out as a spreadsheet, uploaded them into Facebook and then told Facebook that I wanted to serve ads just to those people. I think the number of people on that list who had Facebook accounts was around about 29,000. I'm now serving ads, very simple ads with the graphic from or the cover from *The Jungle* with a little bit of the blurb, and just saying that it's on it's launch price of 4.99 for the next few days, and I'm sending those out.

The reason I do that is because although my open rates are typically pretty good, 30 or 40% open rate, which is well above industry average, that's still leaving 60% of people who aren't getting or aren't opening those emails. That might be because they just don't open those kinds of emails. It might be because they've gone into spam or they've gone into promotions, if they're on Gmail. What this does is, just gives me another way to reach them. Maybe they're more open to receiving that kind of notification by

way of something in their news feed on Facebook. There's that.

There's also a benefit in repeating a message. So let's say, for example, I received an email from a writer yesterday, I saw it whilst I was in a queue, and I got to the end of the queue, and by that time I was distracted, wasn't able to make the purchase of the book that perhaps I would have done. It's useful in that case to just reinforce that message, and give them a second chance to buy.

Then there's also, the advertising theory of seven touches, which suggests that you need to see something sometimes up to seven times before you're put into the mood to buy something. This is just another touch which I can amplify with Facebook live video. I've been doing a lot of that over the last two or three days. It's great for organic reach with mailing list, ShoutOut.

Then with that, Amazon gets involved. The book will start to appear in also boughts. Amazon will start to email that now to my fans, and Bookbub ads or BookBub's new launch emails. There's loads and loads of ways you can amplify that message. Facebook ads are a really, really good one. I'll be checking in to see how affective those ads have been.

I would suspect going on past experience that the return on those would be between 50 and 100%. In terms of the cost of advertising, I think I've spent about \$150 yesterday and I'll spend about the same today. I'd expect to almost double that, I would have thought, in terms of sales, perhaps a bit more than that. Of course, every one of those sales is helping to maintain that rank for a little bit longer. As I record this right now, I'm still in the top 100, at number 99 in the States. That'll start to drift down now, but it will be in the top few 100 for a while yet, for two or three days I would expect, perhaps a bit longer than that.

Anyway, just to sum up. It's been a really good launch. When you've looked back at it, it is pretty busy. There's lots of things to do. Lots of moving parts to keep an eye on, but I am very pleased with how it's worked out. It's the best launch I've had.

I will be gathering some information on sales on other platforms. It think I've had quite a few sales on Apple. A good number, like 150 or so on Kobo. I would expect a similar number plus a bit more on Barnes & Noble. It's still quite possible that I've had enough sales to hit a list, but of course, we'll see and I'll let you know.

James: There we go, radio reporter Mark Dawson. Did it feel like you're sort of a radio reporter?

Mark: I've had a good teacher, James.

James: You have. I have one bit of technical feedback for you, which I forgot to tell you.

Mark: Right.

James: I can tell you now because I know lots of people are interested in podcasts. Not everybody has spent 15 years in radio like I did before, but you recorded a couple of your bits in a very noisy environment in which case you need to speak really loudly into the microphone. You did a combination of a noisy environment in a quite quiet voice, so I had to work, and we have a technical guy who's going to work on that as well to try make sure it's listenable to. With that one small piece of negative feedback, apart from that, I think you did extremely well. You might get a job on Radio Blatch when I start the station.

Mark: It's was fun. It was good fun to do. I've been meaning to do something like that for a little while, so it was quite nice to get my thoughts down whilst they were fresh.

James: Okay, we should time stamp this. We don't normally do that because obviously this goes out a little later, but it is currently, my Apple Watch has suddenly decided to give a notification, it's the 23rd of May.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW IN TERMS OF TOTTING UP SALES?

Mark: Let's have a little look. In total sales, you know it went very, very well. My aim, unofficially, I didn't push this about too much, I didn't want to set myself up for a fall, but I wanted to hit the top 100 in Amazon US, haven't done it before. I got 102 with a previous book.

As I mentioned in, well I don't think I did actually mentioned this because this was subsequent to the last podcast or the last diary entry, but it got up to number 80 overall in the US, which was great.

It got to number 49 in the UK, so it hit the top 50, and it's still going quite strong, so it's still within the top 250 in the US. I'm not sure in the UK, but I think it'll be within the top 150.

In terms of total sales, it sold 2,507 copies in the US. 1,228 copies in the UK. 1,100 on Apple. 156 on Barnes & Noble. The Apple one was cool, it was number 2 in the whole world for a little bit a day or two after release. I had so many screen grabs with that at number 2 in the world, which was pretty amazing.

James: Yeah, that's really good. I know you have a great relationship with Apple. I'm starting to see why they like you so much, that's really good.

JUST REMIND US OF THE COVER PRICE.

Mark: I was just thinking about that, how much it's actually grossed, but it was 4.99, so 70% of that.

James: We'll get a calculator out.

Mark: I'm sure we can. 3000, 37, 48, it's about 5000ish copy sold, so \$17,000 to me in terms of the 70% royalty. That's pretty good for a week's work.

James: Well, a little more than a week's work.

Mark: More than that maybe, yes, yes, but in terms of the launch itself.

James: It was very interesting to hear how the launch went. I can see potentially, at some point, a future module maybe on one of our courses on this very specific subject because you have choices. The formula you've got to has not been something you dreamt up three weeks ago, you've plowed your way through your series. Every time you do it, every time you got through a launch, obviously you're perhaps looking to excel what you've done before.

DO YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW? DO YOU THINK ABOUT FINE TUNING IT FOR NEXT TIME?

Mark: I'm always thinking about what works and what didn't work last time. This time, one thing, I did one thing that I amplified from the last time and then I've done a new thing this time that worked well.

The thing that I did last time, for the first time, which I've spent a bit more money on in terms of this launch, was advertising on Facebook, for the actual launch itself. What I did was, I upload my mailing list, so it's around about 50,000 strong now, so I upload that into Facebook. I think around about 30,000 of them have a Facebook profile, so I build the custom audience of those 30,000 people. Then I add into that people on my Facebook page, so there's about another 20,000 on my Facebook page who've liked the page. Then I advertise to them at the same time, as I send out the mailing list emails, and the reason I do it like that is, there's a few reasons really.

Some of those emails won't get opened. It's just a fairly standard situation with email marketing in that if you're getting over 35, 40% open rate, you're doing quite well, but that means that 60% of the people who get the email, or who are sent the email don't ever see it, don't open it, it could go to spam. They might not open it for another reason, whatever. Your message isn't getting over to them. I can reach them through other means. Facebook ads directly into their news feed is a very good way of doing that. That's number one.

James: I think just to dwell on that for a second because I think some people potentially will think that that's the end of it. You know, if 7 out of 10 people haven't opened it, they'll think, well you've seen the email, they're not interested and leave them.

Actually, traditional marketing analysis will tell you, and I don't like to use this expression, but it's an expression that gets used, is that they're actually low hanging fruit. They're people who are already familiar with the product, who've made a decision to be on your list, and you should not be negative about them. Finding out that rather inventive way of using them, which is then to slip the advert into their Facebook feed, is a perfect example of how well to out leverage that.

Mark: Exactly. You can get to them in another way as well. I mean, one thing I always do, maybe a week or two weeks after launch, is to send another email out, but just send it to the unopeners and change the headline. Sometimes it's the headline that triggers spam filters. It's good to try a variation on that. I'll do that. I'll usually add another 10% who'll open that one, and then maybe 50% of them will buy the book. So you can continue to advertise to them.

The Facebook point, apart from covering those people who don't open the email, there's no bad thing in sending a repeat message to someone who would be interested in buying because when they open the email, for example, or the other way around, when they see the Facebook message, they might not be in a position physically to be able to buy something.

Perhaps they are, just at a queue, or are lying in the States waiting to pay for something, then they get to the front and they're distracted by doing what they were waiting to do, so they forget that they were going to buy the book. Maybe it was bad time, they weren't prepared to make the purchase at that time. We go back to that whole seven touches of advertising theory that it can take up to seven touches before someone is put into the place, the kind of mental space where they're ready to make a purchase. With a mailing list email, with Facebook, with Facebook normal messages, videos that I've done, I can amplify my message extensively and get it into people's consciousness that there's a new book that they'll probably like, ready for them to buy.

James: Did anything go wrong with your launch this time?

Mark: It did actually, yes. This happened to me once before and writers listening will be familiar with this. Amazon has started to crack down on reviews that it thinks are, illegitimate is the wrong word for sure, but Amazon has some kind of algorithmic process whereby they believe they can detect relationships between reviewers on the one hand and writer on the other hand.

When would I launched to my team, my soft launch, to get reviews, I mentioned in the diary that I had over a 100 reviews within the first 36 hours or so. Then I checked in just before I went to hard launch, or possibly just after, I can't remember exactly when it was, and that number had been culled down to 70, so around about 40 had been taken off.

That did happen to me before with the last launch, but they all came back again quite quickly. This time, they haven't come back, which on the one hand, well actually there's isn't a question of it being on the one hand, it is just quite annoying. Because there's no relationship between me and those reviewers, apart from the fact that they are on my advance team. I mean, I don't know them, they're not related to me. We're friends in the sense that I value them as part of my team, and brilliant. It isn't as if there's anything wrong about doing things that way, it's something that traditional publishers do all the time, sending out advance

copies.

Indies have been doing it now for two or three years. It just seems right now to me that Indies are bearing the brunt of some kind of skeezy behavior that other less reputable authors and marketers are getting into with regards to fake reviews. Annoying.

Was it a massive problem? No, because I had enough reviews to cover off that situation. It's not pleasing to me when the effort that some of my advance readers have gone into is just removed for what can only, really, I can only see is an arbitrary reason.

James: In terms of what else you did alongside the main points that you've talked about in the launch, where there parallel marketing exercises that you embarked on?

Mark: Before we move onto that, I forgot to mention the numbers for the Facebook ad campaign. I'm pretty open on what I spend and what I make. I think it would be useful for people to see how profitable that campaign was. I'm still running it, but I've got two days worth of data to share right now.

Those first two days are the day of launch, and then I think it was the Saturday, I spent \$260.09 on that campaign, and made \$562.37. That's a return on investment of a 116%, so that's absolutely not to be sniffed at. The conversion percentage on those campaigns were as high as 50% sometimes.

James: What period was that over?

Mark: That was just two days. It was the first day and the second day. I'm spending, well you can see, just over a \$100 a day at the moment on those ads.

The other thing I tried for the first time, which I hadn't done before, was to have a launch party. Facebook live video has been rolled out extensively now, so I've always had it on my page, obviously we've got it on the SPF page now, which is the facility that we use for our Friday night chats. I speak quite regularly on video to my author page, the fans on that page.

I did something in advance where I scheduled Saturday at 10:00pm UK time, 5:00pm Eastern, to do what I called a launch party. I advertised that in advance. I did plenty of other videos to get really high organic reach, just to tell people that I would be there to answer questions. Also to do a giveaway. I gave away, I don't know if you were there when this happened James, but when I was at the London Book Fair, Amazon gave me a Kindle to sign.

James: I saw the picture of you about to deface a Kindle with a pen. I assumed it was, just someone had made a mistake in terms of setting up up the photograph, but this was a real thing, was it?

Mark: Yeah, it was. It wasn't a pen, I think they would call it a Dremel machine or something like that. Basically, it was like a dentist's drill. I engraved onto the back of this Kindle my name, basically ruined it. I offered that as a giveaway, as a competition giveaway.

It was pretty simple to enter. You just had buy a book and email, I think it was the first word of the 40th chapter. Something that you would only be able to find out if you had a copy of the book, so that's encouraging sales in itself. I was there for an hour on Saturday night, with a beer and answered questions from readers. Apart from the fact that it was really enjoyable, it was kind of like bathing in good wishes, because everyone there was a reader, was a fan of my stuff. They were saying some very nice things.

That was very pleasant, but in practical, commercial terms, I think it was nearly 13,000 unique viewers turned up over the course of that hour. They were getting to know about the new book. Forging a deeper connection with me, which is great, I'm all for that. Then, because of the fact that it had really, really organic reach, lots of comments, lots of shares, lots of likes and all that kind of stuff, the organic reach on it was 206,000 people, so that's significant. If you sat down and worked out how much that would cost as a media buy, you're looking at 20 or £30,000, I would have estimated.

James: Just think about how it would have cost on a book tour to reach 200,000 of your readers.

Mark: Yeah, exactly.

James: How much of a faff that would have been?

Mark: Yeah, exactly. I did it all from my desk, so it was a resounding success. I don't know how many I sold then. Even if I sold none, I would have been quite happy to just have been around to just answer reader questions, because you know, I got some lovely comments. It's much more likely that those people will stick around for the long haul now, and buy other books that I put out.

James: That sounds really good.

YOU'RE GENERALLY HAPPY THEN WITH THE WAY THE LAUNCH WENT? YOU MUST BE PARTICULARLY GETTING SO HIGH IN THE US CHARTS ON APPLE?

Mark: I'm really thrilled about it. Today, you'll see it's not finished yet either, so Apple are tweeting out something about the book, I think at about 5:00 UK time. That's going out to an audience of about 2,500,000 so you know, that's not something that's available to everyone, but it is something I said in, I think, the Friday night session, the value of reaching out to and making personal contacts with retailers, very important.

James: I think it's also down to the fact of how hard you work and how focused you are on marketing, because if I was Apple, it's not simply somebody who writes a good book and it's going to sell well, they're also looking for individuals who've got it. Who understand that marketing is a slog, and that you work hard, and you work smart. They like you for that. They like you because they know that you're doing your bit and they're going to support you on that front.

I think that's very much something authors need to bear in mind, is to be very proactive. Is to think actively about how they're going to sell their books. What their marketing plan is. Then it's going to be easier to make those relationships, because you'll be doing the same thing, your complimenting each other then from Amazon and Apple and other sellers point of view.

Mark: Absolutely. Everyone wins when that kind of thing works well. It couldn't have gone too much better. I've taken some good information away from this launch, and I'll use that again when I launch ... I've actually got another launch next month, one that's on the Sam Mercer book, so that will be interesting because then we'll get the combined push from Amazon, which obviously is very significant. If I was to fold that into this kind of campaign again, I mean, I'm very confident we'll do better than, certainly in the

UK, I should think top 10 is a pretty reasonable target, so we'll see.

James: Okay. Onto the next book?

Mark: Yeah, which I've already started. I'm 10,000 words into the next one. There's no pausing.

James: No. Brilliant. Mark thank you so much indeed for doing that. Yes, my Padawan radio reporter's quickly becoming a master. As I said at the beginning, we are interviewing Adam Croft, definitely not one to miss for inspirational reasons and for valuable insight reasons. Adam's going to be a great interviewee for the next edition of the Self Publishing Formula podcast. There's going to be the webinar with Adam coming up. We'll give you more details about that as soon as we've firmed up those arrangements.

DON'T FORGET, MARK YOU'RE GOING TO BE LIVE AGAIN, BEER IN HAND, ON TONIGHT, FRIDAY NIGHT?

Mark: Friday night, yeah at 10:00pm UK, 5:00pm Eastern. I may change it up this time and go for a traditional G and T, just see what I feel like.

James: Just out of interest, what is your preferred gin?

Mark: My preferred gin? Probably Hendricks. My beer of choice at the moment Asahi There we are.

James: This podcast has not been brought to you by either Hendricks or Asahi but I guess we're probably open to offers in the future.

Mark: Absolutely.

James: Okay, thank you very much indeed. Thank you Mark. We will speak to you next week. Have a great week writing and selling. Bye.

Mark: Bye, bye.

CHAPTER 12

HEADING FOR \$1.5M THANKS TO FACEBOOK ADS - WITH ADAM CROFT



CAN you imagine the day that all your efforts at self publishing - the hard work writing, promoting, and planning your books - finally pays off? Today's episode is one author's story about how that has finally come about. After writing for just over 5 years and self publishing a number of books, Adam Croft finally has a best seller to his credit. His latest book, "Her Last Tomorrow" is currently the #1 self published book on Amazon and he's on track to make over \$1.5 million from it this year. You can hear the account of his journey from his own lips today as he walks through the work and strategies he's followed to get this latest book into the hands of thousands of readers.

FACEBOOK ADS FOR AUTHORS IS A VIABLE METHOD OF PROMOTING YOUR BOOK.

But you can't do it willy-nilly. There has to be a plan and a strategy in place to make the promotional efforts work. And it's also got something to do with the book that you're trying to promote. Adam tried Facebook ads before with other books but for some reason they weren't the exact right fit to garner the attention he was hoping for. But this last time things appear to have fit just perfectly. Adam chats a bit

about his success with Facebook ads and speaks highly of how it can be used to get your book into the hands of your perfect readers.

THE MONEY IS COMING IN FOR HIS SELF PUBLISHED SMASH HIT... BUT NOT YET.

As most self published authors know, once your book begins to make sales on Amazon there is up to a month lag between the actual sales of the book and the day you receive your royalty payments. The delay is understandable but it can make it difficult to finance continued promotions like Facebook ads. Adam openly shares about that difficulty and the decision he made to tap credit cards and family to finance his promotions in light of the revenue that his book sales was generating, but that he hadn't received. Hear how Adam made the decision so you can make your own game plan for financing the marketing side of your self publishing business.

AS AN INDIE AUTHOR, YOU MUST LEARN HOW TO THINK LIKE A BUSINESS OWNER.

That's because you ARE a business owner. You are the manufacturer and marketer, your books or writings are your products. There's no "home office" that will take on the distribution and promotion of your books so you have to do it. Adam has been blessed with a keen understanding of that dynamic and the will to make both sides of the self publishing process - writing AND business - work in his favor, to the tune of \$1.5 million this year alone. You can learn a lot from Adam's approach as he outlines some of how he thinks about the business side of his writing platform, so be sure you take some time to hit the play button on this one and hear what he has to say.

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO WRITING AND BUSINESS.

Adam loves his career as a fiction writer and he also loves the self publishing aspects of it as well. He approaches both with the same studied, careful approach so that he's able to ensure that his goals, in terms of writing and book sales success, are fully met. From outlining his books methodically before he begins to write, to the discipline required to stay in the chair and do the writing, all the way to the number crunching required to make wise decisions about marketing and promotions, Adam is a great case study you can learn from. It's all in this episode of The Self Publishing Formula podcast.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- The introduction to this episode and a student of James' course.
- How you can get involved in the Facebook course that changed this student's life.
- The conversation with Adam Croft, student of SPF.
- The current standing of Adam's book on Amazon.
- How Adam began to see success with his Facebook Ads campaigns.
- Dealing with the lag between selling books and receiving the cash.

- Thinking about crowdfunding for successful authors.
- The overall story of Adam's current success.
- Adam's main tips for those who want to achieve what he has.
- Why writers have to think like business owners.
- The plot of Adam's current best seller.
- Adam's other books prior to this one.
- The direction Adam believes he'll be going with his books in the future.
- How Adam structures his writing day in terms of habits.
- Software, structure, and Adam's approach to writing.
- How it feels to be the #1 self published author on Amazon.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- Adam's current best seller: *Her Last Tomorrow*
- [Scrivener](#) - writing software

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

James: Hello, and welcome to podcast number 15, from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Announcement: Two writers. One just starting out. The other, a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Number 15 in the list of Self-Publishing Formula podcasts. We hope it's going to be a very long list. It gets well into 3 maybe even 4 figures in the years to come. It's the exciting early days for us. Every single time we do a podcast, we put one together Mark, we always think, "How is this going to change a reader? How is this going to change a writer's life? How is this going to make things easier for them, better for them, give them value?"

Today, we're delighted to say we've got an interview ... It's actually not a long interview. Fifteen minutes or so, with a student of Mark's premium course. A Facebook Advertising for Authors course, who talks about the year ... Well not even a year. The three months that he's had that has changed his life.

It's very exciting, and the reason we're talking to Adam Croft today is because you will by now know, I

expect that Mark's courses, in one of its periods of enrollment, to on board new students. It happens a couple of times a year. It's only the third time we've done this Mark. We're taking on a clutch of new students, and it's exciting.

Mark: We've already had lots and lots of people sign up. There is a limit on how many people we can take on the course. It's open for ... I think it's until ... What is it James?

James: It's about the 14th, but we do reserve the right to close it early. People should understand we're a small company. There's three of us. We have a couple of helpers dotted around the world to help us, but commercially we can't take on ten people and have them there the whole time, which would allow us to take on open-ended numbers of students, so we take on a number that we can support.

In the weeks to come, there is inevitably, an upsurge in support. That works really well for us as a company, so there's a reason for that, but I would expect us to go to about the 13th, 14th, around then. That's what we're planning to at the moment anyway.

Mark: Yes. If people are interested in that, then they should go to selfpublishingformula.com for details of how they can sign up and what's included in the course, plus things like testimony, videos, and then listen to Adam's story, because he has had, as you said James, he's had a life changing year.

Going from making, I think, \$20,000 a year last year, to projecting \$1.5 million this year, and that is almost exclusively because he is completely nailing Facebook ads right now. He's doing this extremely well, and his story is an interesting one.

James: He's somebody who picked it up quickly. Really has made it work, and it's not just about the adverts and the composition of that. That would be loads of interesting bits that you'll take away from it, but it's also about the type of book you read and type of book you write, which he's been thinking about as well, in a commercial sense, as a writer. Not just as somebody who's perhaps setting out to win the Booker prize, but somebody setting out to make a business out of it.

We'll get to his interview now. I should say also that one of my jobs is SPF is to look out for students

who've posted interesting comments or their results onto Facebook, and I immediately get on to them and arrange a little Skype interview, and so far, everyone's said yes. People are obviously all around the world. People like Riley Edgewood, who I think is in DC, and recently been speaking to John Logsdon in the past down in North Carolina, and Charlotte Byrd who's in South California. A couple of them recently.

Then I contacted Adam, and I said to him slightly wearily, "What timezone are you in Adam?" Thinking what time I going to be up, and he said, "Well I'm in Flitwick," which is about 20 miles away from where I'm sitting. Where I live, so I hot footed it down there, and for once on the podcast, spoke to somebody actually living and breathing in front of me.

Mark: Yeah. It makes a difference.

James: Well I've actually stepped out of Self Publishing Formula Podcast HQ, that glittering building, and joined the real world. I guess it's a bit of a fairly typical writer's situation, which is in your front room, and I'm with Adam Croft. Hello Adam.

Adam: Hello.

James: Thank you very much indeed for allowing us into your house, and chatting to you, and what we're very excited about is you have, in a fairly short period of time, become a bit of a star in the self-publishing world.

JUST TELL US WHERE YOUR BOOK IS TODAY ON AMAZON.

Adam: Today, when I looked this morning, it was number 16 on the overall chart in the UK, which is pretty amazing actually. I think the highest I've got to before then, just through purely organic means, was about 1,000, so yeah, it's pretty phenomenal.

James: This is your ninth book.

THIS HAS ALL HAPPENED WITH ONE OF YOUR BOOKS SINCE DECEMBER. IS THAT RIGHT?

Adam: It is. Yes. Yeah. I've been plodding away for five years, and had eight books out before that, and you know, they've done fine. I've been making a living from it, just about.

I had this idea for a book for quite a long time actually. I'd done parts of it, and I couldn't quite nail the ending, and I couldn't make things work, and I thought, "You know what. Is it worth it? For what I'm making out of it, is it worth just going on, or moving on to another one?"

I started doing the Facebook adverts course, and I thought, "You know what. That book idea that I very nearly binned, might just be marketable, and sellable through adverts." I finished it, and fired some ads at it, and yeah, the rest history.

James: You started seeing success early, and I know people always want to know about the detail of this because their learning themselves.

EXPLAIN HOW YOU SAW THE SUCCESS, AND HOW YOU REACTED TO THAT.

Adam: Well pretty much immediately, within the first couple of days, I started to see that whatever I was spending on adverts was doubling in sales. I thought well logically, if I'm spending ten pounds, 20 pounds on adverts, and I'm doubling it, if that principal applies at higher levels, I'd rather double a thousand pounds than double ten pounds, so I start to scale up.

Quite slowly, and I tend to recommend, and most other people recommend, no more than 50% of the existing budget. If you're spending 10 pounds a day, and you raise it up to 15. If you're spending 50, only raise it 75. That's when you do that a couple of times a week at the most. Maybe three times a week. It's a case of very gradually scaling up, and then going, "Okay this is still working." Adding in some new audiences, and essentially spending what I possible can on it.

Even now, I've scaled up to the point where I'm spending a thousand pounds a day, and I'm still doubling what I'm spending. The only reason I'm not going any higher is because I'll have run out of money by the time royalty check comes in, which isn't great.

James: Yeah. That's the thing a lot of us are familiar with.

WHEN YOU DO START SELLING BOOK, THERE'S QUITE A LAG BETWEEN SELLING THE BOOK ON AMAZON AND ACTUALLY SEEING THE CASH.

Adam: There is. It's not too much of a problem once you're rolling and going and selling the same sorts of amounts each month. It doesn't make much difference. But when you've got such an enormous jump from ... I mean, I was selling about something like 20, 30 copies a day, and I'm not at the point where I'm selling four figures a day, there is that big lag.

Like say you've got that outlay on Facebook adverts. I mean Amazon might pay a couple of months late, that's not too much of a problem, but Facebook have a nasty habit of taking the money for the adverts the same day, so that when it starts to become a bit of a cash flow thing.

Which, again, is where your business mind has to come in. You keep saying all the time, if you ought to be successful, especially with self-publishing, you need to be not just a writer, not just have that creative side, but have that business, entrepreneurial side as well. Things about managing the cash flow and having the confidence as well, and actually seeing those results coming in. Looking at the sales throughout the day, throughout the week, and going, yeah, it's doubling its money. I'm going to be getting this money in a month or two. I'm happy to put myself in quite considerable debt in the meantime.

James: We're talking 40 or 50 grand worth of debt. We're in the UK, as people can probably tell, that's pounds.

TIMES THAT BY 1.5 FOR DOLLARS, YOU MAY HAVE INVESTED \$75,000 WITHOUT SEEING ANY RETURN YET.

Adam: Well the return's there on paper, but in terms of actually being in my bank account, no. Yeah, a lot on credit cards and kind family members who've also looked at the results and gone, "Yeah. Okay. I don't mind having a piece of this." I'll have to scramble around.

When I'm at Amazon payday, if I like my first payday from this book, I want to be at the point where, as that money hits my account, my last penny went out the second before, because that means I've put everything I can towards it, and it's doubling everything I've got, essentially. Which is what I want to do. It makes sense, obviously. 100% ROI. If that's relative and it's scalable, which it has proven to be, then it just makes sense to spend as much as you can, then get as much as you can.

James: The old expression of make hay while the sun shines. Strike while the iron's hot. There's a whole load of very wise expressions that are not by accident about seizing the moment. Carpe diem. We could go on couldn't we. I was just thinking now. I just wonder if there's a market, or there's a way for crowdfunding a successful author in the early days. This is a significant issue.

YOU'VE GOT A FEW CREDIT CARDS. NOT EVERYONE HAS SPACE ON CREDIT CARDS. YOU'VE BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE SOME FAMILY WHO'VE BEEN INVESTED. IT WOULD BE FRUSTRATING IN THE EXTREME FOR YOU, WOULDN'T IT, TO HAVE RUN OUT OF MONEY EARLY ON AT THIS POINT.

Adam: Yes. In terms of actual money, I didn't really have any money really before I started. I fortunately had a good credit rating, and that's about it. A lot of writers, obviously, especially if you've been doing it for a while, you probably won't have a lot of money, and most of us don't. It is tricky.

I did look at the idea of crowd funding, and I thought, you know, that was always my kind of back up plan if I really needed more. If I couldn't get the money from family. If I couldn't get it on the credit cards. I had thought about looking at something like crowd funding or business angels, and things like that, but the idea of actually giving a portion of my business was not something I was all that keen on. Especially seeing as it's such a volatile career anyway, and it's something that's changed so massively in the last couple of months.

Three months ago, I couldn't have foreseen where I am today, and if I had, I might've thought that'd be five, ten years down the line. At least. I don't know where I'm going to be in three months time. There could be film deals, and all sorts of things. You just don't know. It's such a quick changing thing.

To have been going for five years and eight books, and all of a sudden that ninth one just to go and take off. It's not something you can predict. It's a book that I had the confidence in, once I really got my hands around the marketing side of things. I thought, you know if one book is going to go, it's going to be this one.

You've got to have that business mind, and you've got to have that confidence and be willing to take the plunge, really.

James: Just to put some of these, more flesh on the details, on this story since December. You're 17th in the overall Amazon chart today. Your sales prediction for this year ... If you look at the big growth figure.

If you don't personally realize, because of course, it doesn't take into account the investment, advertising, and it doesn't take into account Amazon's cut.

NONETHELESS, IT'S THE SALES THAT YOU HAVE GENERATED, YOU'RE PROBABLY LOOKING AT SEVEN FIGURES THIS YEAR.

Adam: Yeah. In terms of what it's done in the last two or three months, and projections for 2016, it's well on course. More than a million pounds worth of books.

James: 1.5 million dollars.

Adam: Yes. Which is just phenomenal considering in a year before that, I might have done 20 thousand pounds worth, or 30 thousand pounds worth, and that's now coming through in a fortnight, or a month, and it's insane really.

James: Well, let me say congratulations, Adam, to you. I know that's what a lot of the people listening to the podcast will be thinking. Well done you. Good on you. There's the motivation and reasons for us to continue. Let's get some top tips from a recently created master in this field.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MAIN TIP FOR SOMEBODY WHO WOULD LOVE TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS?

Adam: I think you need to be honest with yourself. I advertised on Facebook for a couple of months before launching this book, and I was advertising different books from my back catalog, and some of them worked okay. Some of them didn't work at all. It was when I actually managed to kind of get my head out of my own backside and think, "You know what. Maybe the problem isn't with advertising. Maybe the problem isn't with the market. Maybe it's the book that I'm advertising. It isn't quite right."

That's when I kind of thought, "You know what. Let's flip this on its head. Rather than saying I'm going to write a book and then market it through Facebook advertising." I thought, "What's the reason. What's the hook they want?" That's when I remember that I had this book and I thought, "You know what. That's got a really good hook on it." I won't say I wrote it for the marketing purpose, but I had it there and I thought that was one that's really going to work.

My biggest tip, really, would be you can't be pressured. At some point you might have to say, "You know

what. This isn't the right book to be advertising. It's not the right book to be marketing." You might have another book in your back catalog or an idea, or something, or you might even go the full hog and actually write one for the purposes of it being commercial.

The books now that I was trying to market beforehand on Facebook advertising, all the money I spent on advertising them, they're now selling more copies of those when I'm not advertising them, because of the sell-through from people who've read my most recent one, and then gone back and gone, "Oh look. This chaps written another eight books. Let's go and buy some of those."

I would say you've got to look at three prongs of it. Having a business approach, getting your advertising right as well, and actually looking at the product that you're selling. Even the best marketing in the world won't sell a bad product.

James: That's a really good point, and it's, I suppose, moving on to slightly advanced business and marketing theory, but it does happen all the time in switched on businesses. Rather than them sitting there thinking what is it we do and how do we market it, they look at how advertising works, how people work, and then they back design a product for that.

I know even electronics companies will do that. They'll sit there thinking, "What's going to look good on a poster in the underground? Can we now, in the subway, can we now design that product?" That's effectively what you've done to an extent. You've looked at what works well in advertising and then gone backwards. A tail wagging dog.

Adam: Yes. I went a step further for my next book. The one that I'm writing at the moment. The first thing I wrote, before I even had a title, before I really fleshed out the plot, the first thing I wrote was the Facebook advert for it. Then try and distill the plot down into a good advert, and thought, "Yeah. That's another book that will sell." Then gone back and fleshed out the book and the plot from there.

It is a case of sometimes having to think outside the box. I know as writers we're very keen on going, "I've got a great idea for a story. Let me go write it." We write it, then we go, "Right. What do we do with it now?"

You have to remember that, especially if you're self-publishing, it's a business. You've got to think of the customer that's the reader. You have to, essentially, give them what they want. Especially in genre fiction, that's what it's set up for. That's what crime, and romance, and erotica, and all of that, are set up for. We're not out there to write literary masterpieces that we're eventually proud of but no one is going to buy. We're there selling a product, and that's what the books are. Again, it's that thing of having to get my head out of my backside and realize that it's not about being a literary master. It's about actually having that product and selling it.

James: It reminds me a bit of Alan Partridge. The caricature English comedian, played by Steve Coogan, who's a failed TV presenter. Pitches a load of ideas, and one of them is a partridge among the pigeons, and the worried producer says, "Well what is that?" He goes, "I don't know. It's just a title, but I'm sure it could do something."

Adam: Youth Hostelling with Chris Eubank. I remember that one.

James: Yeah. Exactly. Cooking in prison. Yeah, so the Americans have no idea what we're talking about now.

THE POINT IS, I SUPPOSE, YOU COULD COME UP WITH A GREAT FILM POSTER, AND A GREAT TAGLINE FOR A FILM, AND THEN WRITE THE SCRIPT.

Adam: Yeah. That's what I've been trying to do more and more. Rather than writing my book and then going, "Right. Let's find the hook. Let's get the tagline out of this. Let's find out how it's going to sell." It's to do it the other way around.

At the end of the day, as much as I love writing, I'm doing it for a reason. That's because it's my job. That's because it's what I want to do. It's what I love doing. It needs to pay the mortgage. It needs to pay the bills. For that reason, you've got to sell books. Not all of us are Lord Byron. We can just keep writing things and having the money coming in from elsewhere. We've got to make a living out of it as well.

James: Yeah. Well you're going to probably pay your mortgage off this year.

Adam: Well yes. Yeah. Hadn't quite planned on it. On it going that far this quickly, but yeah. Yeah.

James: We should just talk about the books themselves.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR BOOK THAT'S GIVEN YOU THAT'S GIVEN YOU ALL THIS SUCCESS SINCE DECEMBER. JUST TELL ME MORE. GIVE ME THE ELEVATOR PITCH.

Adam: The elevator pitch is: Could you murder your wife to save your daughter? The book's called Her Last Tomorrow. It essentially focuses on Nick Conner. It's told in his first person point of view. He's getting his child ready for school. His wife's got a high-flying job in London. She leaves early. He left. He's a writer. He's left getting the kids ready in the morning, and he puts his daughter in the back of the car. Nips back into the car to grab something he's forgotten. He comes back out 30 seconds later, and she's gone. They call the police. Panic ensues. The normal sort of thing. He then gets a message from the kidnapper saying he can have his daughter back, but he has to murder his wife. It kicks off from there.

James: Intrigue. That's brilliantly intriguing, and a great hook. Obviously you have a slightly disturbed mind, like all writers.

Adam: Yes. When people ask what I do for a living, I say I invent people and then murder them.

James: Up until this point, you are a crime-thriller genre writer.

HAS THERE BEEN SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT THE FIRST EIGHT BOOKS?

Adam: Yes. There have been four in each of the two series that I write. One of them is the Knight and Culverhouse of crime thriller, which are down the kind of the Mark Billing and Ian Ranking, Peter James, kind of roots. In terms of following to British detective who investigate far too many murders happening in a small British town, to be quite honest with you.

The other one's the Kempston Hardwick Mysteries, which is a series of more traditional murder-mystery novels, which is actually a bit of a pastiche and a bit of a nod towards the kind of the golden age of detective fiction. Your Agatha Christies, your Dorothy Sayers, and actually very tongue-in-cheek approach to those. Much in a way that, kind of, Jonathan Creek did on the TV.

This was the first book, this most recent one, that wasn't actually in a series. It was a complete standalone book. For that reason I thought that's one of the reasons why I didn't actually finish it, and I didn't put too much thought into it. When I got stuck, I didn't persevere with it quite as much. I thought, well you follow the old advice everybody gives. Always write a series. Standalone books don't sell. I'm quite glad that I ignored that and got it finished. As you say, the elevator pitch side of things is what sells it. People don't care whether it's in a series or not if the tagline is that strong.

James: I know you're already onto your next book, and I've already heard the elevator pitch for that, which is also brilliantly intriguing.

DO YOU THINK NOW, THIS IS IT, THIS IS PROBABLY THE WAY YOU'RE GOING TO GO?

Adam: I think so. I still will be writing in my other series. I've got the next few books planned out in each of those series already, but the psychological thrillers are something that I love reading, and I love writing. I've wanted to do for a long time, and it's not massively different from what I do now. Essentially, it's the same crime stories, the same crime thrillers, but told from the point of view of the people that are actually living in that moment, rather than from the police, the investigation, side of things. It's not so different a genre, it's just from a different viewpoint. That's something that I always wanted to sort of do a bit more of. I'm just really glad that it's proven successful. I will be writing a lot more psychological thrillers as well.

James: Let me ask you on behalf of those of us who are still sort of starting out in writing, and I'm writing my first book at the moment. I know lots of other people listen to podcasts at the earliest stage of their careers.

HOW DO YOU DISCIPLINE YOURSELF? HOW DO YOU STRUCTURE YOUR DAY? WHAT SORT OF ADVICE AND TIPS DO YOU HAVE TO PEOPLE ABOUT HOW YOU BECOME A WRITER? HOW DO YOU GET INTO THE HABIT OF WRITING?

Adam: You just have to. There's no real secret to it. Whenever anybody says, "I've always wanted to write a book. How do I go about doing it?" I say the same six words. Bum on seat. Fingers on keyboard. There's no other secret to it.

I've given myself a minimum word count that I need to write each day. The reason I do that, again, purely commercial reasons. I know what date my next book will be finished. I can plan ahead releases. Things like that. I know how many books I'm going to write this year, because I know how many words I write each day.

James: How many is that?

Adam: Aiming for six this year.

James: Six words day?

Adam: No. Six books.

James: Six books a year. Is that how many words a day is it?

Adam: Well sometimes it is six, but two thousand words minimum a day. That's my absolute minimum. I don't often stop there. Quite often I'll ... That might take me an hour, and I might carry on and blitz through. Sometimes I can be there til ...

James: Watch countdown.

Adam: Sometimes I can be there at 11 o'clock at night still on 1,400 words. It's sometimes like getting blood out of a stone, but you have to sit down, and you still have to write. You can't go, "Oh actually. I don't think I'll be able to get any writing done today. I'm not in the right frame of mind." In any other job, if you turned up and said, if you're a bricklayer, and you said, "I'm not in the right frame of mind to mix up this cement today, or I'm not really in the right frame of mind to muck out the pigs." You'd be fired innocently.

You've got to treat it as a job. You've got to treat it as a business. You've got to get up in the morning, at whatever time. You've got to sit down. You've got to write. I know if you've got a full-time job, and you've got children, it's tricky, but even if you're getting up an hour earlier, or going to bed an hour later, or you've got to something out of the day.

You've got to cut your TV out of the day, or something like that. You've got to make sacrifices, and you've got to do it. If it's something you really want to do, and it's a career that you want, and you want to be successful at, that's what you've got to do. I wouldn't have it any other way, personally.

James: I suppose I could cut my second nap out. Start working a bit more. I joke.

Adam: Go to the pub at four, instead of three.

James: Exactly. I'm quite disciplined. That's good.

WHAT WRITING SOFTWARE DO YOU USE, AND HOW DO YOU APPROACH THE STRUCTURE AND EDITING?

Adam: I use Scrivener, which is ideal for my approach. Some people like it, and some people don't. For me, in terms of actually putting a book together, I always start off with a kind of a elevator pitch, if you like, or almost having a paragraph sometimes, which is where I've been going wrong for five years. I then, essentially, plan out the structure of the book.

I read quite heavily. The structure of stories and the theory behind stories, and books, and what have you, I'm a bit of a student of the craft as well. I tend to build out structure, so I know what my midpoint is. I know where the turns and twists are coming in. I then have that skeleton, essentially, and I build the chapters around that. Almost like a flow chart.

Within those chapters, then the beats, what happens within the chapters, and it's essentially just starting with that elevator pitch and expanding outwards, until I've got my chapters laid out in Scrivener, and what happens in each of them, and it's literally just a case of putting the words on the page.

At no point am I going, "Oh, I don't know what's going to happen next," or am I going to have to come back and change that, because I've planned it. I think if you're aiming to be quite prolific with writing, you need to plan ahead so that you don't keep writing yourself into holes, coming back and changing things, and you can get far more books out that way.

James: Yeah. Okay. That was really good, so quite a methodical approach. When you sit down to write, the framework's done. You can just enjoy writing up to those. Hitting the marks, effectively.

Adam: Yeah. All of that. Up until I actually start writing a book, it's all ... It's pure science essentially. There's no kind of staring out of the window. It's a purely scientific method ... I can't get my words out today.

James: Well luckily you're a writer.

Adam: Methodical approach is the word I wanted. Then the fun, in terms of actually the prose and getting the words down, happens after that. That's when you have a bit more fun with the science.

James: Okay. Well, Adam, thank you very much for hosting us here. We're in your house. I should say we're in Flitwick in Bedfordshire, which if you don't know the place you call it Flitwick. Twenty miles down the road or so, and it's been a great pleasure. You are the number one self-published author on Amazon today. How's that feel?

Adam: Bit bizarre hearing that, but yeah. Technically in the chart, everybody above me, at the moment, is either with a huge publishing company or with Amazon.

James: Well it's exciting to see it happen, and you're a regular contributor, I know, to the Facebook group as well. People love following your advice, and we look forward to growing with you, I think, over the next few years.

Adam: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

James: What a nice guy, Adam. When you meet somebody who's been massively successful, and they turn out to be a nice guy, it's slightly annoying. No. It's really good. We're really pleased for him, and it's exciting watching. Since I recorded that interview, the book has gone to even greater heights and greater strengths.

He has been, I think, as high as number 12 in the overall paid Amazon charts. He's been told, by at least one authority, that he is the best selling self-published book of 2016 so far. We've seen pictures of the apple charts with him at number, I think, 4, and JK Rowling's Robert Galbraith book, number 7. Everyone's going to screen grab that if it happens to them, aren't they. He's gone on and on. Let's say he's predicting 1.5 million gross sales of that book this year. Down to earth. Methodical. Thoughtful about it, and made it work.

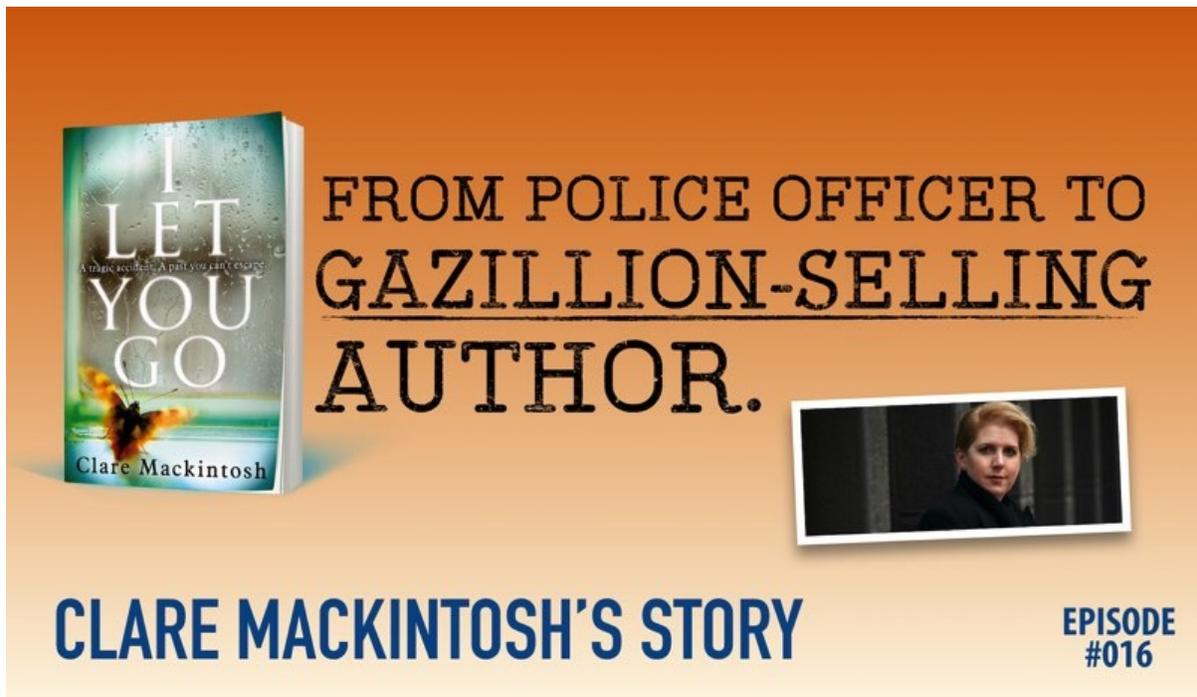
Mark: He's done fantastically well. Just to kind of round up what I said, where we're at, if you want to listen to Adam in a bit more detail and get the chance to ask him questions, you can join him and me, you can ask me questions too if you want to, although, yeah, send them to Adam. He'll do a good job answering them.

James: Yeah. That's it. A happy successful, inspiring, story. Something to think about.

Mark: Absolutely, so yeah, I hope everybody enjoyed that, and we'll be back again next week.

CHAPTER 13

FROM POLICE OFFICER TO GAZILLION-SELLING NOVELIST: CLARE MACKINTOSH'S STORY



IN THIS EPISODE we've included a great conversation with the author of smash hit crime thrillers, Clare Mackintosh. Clare is traditionally published but the lessons she's learned about rewriting, editing, and Facebook fan interaction have a lot to teach Indie and Self Published authors, so we thought it would be a valuable conversation to bring you. There's no doubt that lessons learned on both side of the publishing divide can benefit authors residing in each place, so please, make the time to listen - there's lots to learn here.

A MASSIVELY SUCCESSFUL AUTHOR TALKS ABOUT THE AGONY OF REWRITING.

Clare Mackintosh is a name that is well known in the UK and is just now coming into prominence in the fiction realm of other markets, most notably the U.S. Her success has been staggering to say the least, and she says that much of it comes from the hard work put in to rewrite her books even after she received a book deal. No less than 5 rewrites of her book between the time she accepted a book deal and it actually published, and she says that every step was one she would gladly do again because they were steps that

made the book even better and more successful. You can hear Clare's journey from Police Officer to successful author in this episode of the podcast.

AS A SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHOR, MAYBE YOU COULD USE A LITTLE MORE REWRITING.

Being self-published, you likely don't have someone holding your feet to the fire, requiring you to rewrite or reorganize large sections of your book like Clare Mackintosh did. But that doesn't mean it wouldn't be a good idea. Most of us could use some distance from our writing (taking some time off) and then come back to it with eyes that are somewhat fresh. That sort of practice could help you get the perspective you need to do some rewrites that would truly be beneficial, even if you don't have an agent or publisher breathing down your neck. What do you think? Could you apply the same lessons Clare learned through her rewriting process to your own workflow? Hear her entire story in this episode.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IS KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS IN USING THEM FOR PROMOTIONS.

Clare Mackintosh has established a very active, thriving community of fans on Facebook and has a very large following on Twitter as well. But she's quick to point out that the two platforms are very different and as a result, her goals in using each of them is very different. While the majority of people she interacts with on Facebook have read one or more of her books, the majority she chats with on Twitter have not. That alone requires a different approach. Clare has great advice for self published authors about how to approach the various platforms based on their unique characteristics, and how to share in a way that fits the platform. It's all in this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

ONCE AGAIN, THE POWER OF THE EMAIL LIST COMES TO THE FOREFRONT.

It's normal to hear self published authors talking about the significance of having an email list of raving fans to market new books and projects to. But today you get to hear the same story from the mouth of a very successful traditionally published author, Clare Mackintosh. Clare runs her own email list follow up with those who purchase her books and she uses many of the same approaches and tactics that Indie Authors use. You can hear the success Clare has experienced from doing personalized follow up with her readers and how she uses it to her advantage, in this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James and Mark welcome you to this episode.
- Today's guest: Clare Mackintosh.
- Clare's journey from her police job to writing.
- The amazing amount of work going from self publishing to traditional publishing.
- The brutal process of going through numerous re-writes.

- The personal story behind the writing and transition to being a writer.
- The differences in payments through self publishing and traditional publishing.
- Writing lessons learned about how to tell a better story.
- The themes that carried through all the edits to the end.
- The way Clare handles her own mailing list and career.
- The type of platform Clare had in place when she first began.
- The success and power of Clare's Facebook page.
- The importance of sharing native content to each platform.
- A typical day for Clare.
- Future writing plans in terms of genre.
- The odds of success are greater for self publishing.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- Clare's books: *I Let You Go* and *I See You*
- Clare on [Twitter](#)
- Clare on [Facebook](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number sixteen from The Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 9: Two writers, one just starting, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch, and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Yes, hello. Welcome to The Self Publishing Formula podcast with James Blatch and Mark Dawson. Good morning Mark, how are you are?

Mark: Good afternoon James. How are you?

James: Good afternoon. I have no idea. We've had such a busy week. I have no idea what time of day it is.

Mark: I don't know where I am. I think I'm in Salisbury but I wouldn't lay money on it.

James: It's been great. We've had a very, very busy few days. The course is open and taking on students at a great rate. We've had hundreds of students sign up for the premium course. We've been doing webinars, and that's been very exciting hasn't it Mark?

Mark: Yeah, it's always quite nervous when you open the course for the next time. You don't know quite what response you're going to get, but we've really been taken aback by how many people want to learn how to do this. It's been really flattering.

The Mastery Facebook group, which is where all the students hang out has been just buzzing with activity. Some really great messages going on in there, some good learning being exchanged right now, and I think students will be about ready to start testing their ads out quite soon. That's really, really exciting.

James: There was definitely lots of enthusiasm for the course launch beforehand. That's been realized now, and people who've got some books and got some campaigning going on now, looking at doing a new, sort of refreshed approach to it. Other people were starting out, really setting themselves up for commercial success, and digging into the detail. It is a detailed course. I spent a bit of time going through it, as you know Mark. We refreshed it a bit with some new screen flows, and a little bit of new color, and rebranding.

The detail, I have to say, I'm plugging my own course because I'm part of the SPF, but the detail is absorbing. It's quite gripping watching it. That's, I think, our advantage with this course. There are a lot of courses that you can get on social media advertising. I've done a few of them, because I've done a Twitter module, YouTube ad module is on its way. They're disappointing when they get to that point where they say, "You may want to fill this in if you think that's going to be good for your audience, or you may want to do this." Whereas what you say is, "Don't do that, do this." Very specific for selling books for authors.

Mark: That's right. The clue is in the title of the course. It's Facebook Ads for Authors. It's not Facebook ads for real estate agents, or attorneys. It's for writers. That's what I am, so when I did the course I did it with clear focus on what would be useful for where I would have been two years ago. What I would have loved to have known, which would have saved me time, and effort, and money. Yeah, it's good to hear you say that. We've had lots of comments from students who feel that way too. That's always really nice to hear.

James: Good. Everyone likes our professional approach, and I have now shut my mail down so you're not going to get another beep over your talking, because we are professionals here. Okay, right...

Let's move on to our featured interview for today. Her name is Clare Mackintosh, she lives in the United Kingdom. She is a former police detective. Not the only former police detective we've spoken to on this podcast who's now turned to thriller writing. I'm getting famous at getting book titles wrong during interviews and I think did again with her sequel, but her first book, *I Let You Go*, was her big breakthrough. It's been lauded around the world, it's been a best-seller in the United Kingdom. She's breaking it into the States at the moment. Let's listen to Clare and hear about her journey.

Clare Mackintosh, now you might remember at the London Book Fair that we bumped into a member of the SPF community called Darryl Donaghue, who is an ex-CID detective. What's CID? I suppose the FBI type equivalent in the U.K. that investigates serious crimes, and he turned his hand to writing police procedures, no surprise.

He's not the only one because one of the more famous ex-policeman now writing is Clare Mackintosh, who we're joined by today. Clare you are also CID, you also got to that point, I think, when the job became a little bit overwhelming.

I SENSE THAT THERE WAS A WRITER IN YOU ALWAYS STRUGGLING TO GET OUT, BUT YOU'VE HAD AN ABSOLUTELY PHENOMENAL LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, HAVEN'T YOU?

Clare: I have. It's that terrible cliché of talking about the roller coaster journey. It makes you feel a little bit X-Factor, but it really has been like that over the last eighteen months, couple of years. It's been incredible.

James: I'll let you tell your story in a moment, but I know the bare bones of it. I know that you did some freelance articles, and magazines, and you described, I think, in an interview once was a mediocre chick lit novel. Which we'll ask you about, but didn't see the light of day I don't think.

Clare: Well it definitely won't now.

James: What a shame. I reckon you should subtitle it, My Mediocre Chick Lit Novel, see how it goes. You then drew on your experience. You are a policeman, you've dealt with the darker side of life. I think you've said in interviews in the past that you felt that there was something darker to be written about, and you drew on some real life experiences. The book was called I Let You Go.

YOU HAD AN AGENT, I THINK, WITH THE CHICK LIT NOVEL BEFORE, SO YOU HAD SOME CONNECTION WITH A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING INDUSTRY AT THIS STAGE?

Clare: Yep.

James: Okay, I'm telling your story here, so then you picked up an agent and they realized quite early on that this was a good book. But what I was interested in, and what I think people will be interested in now, particularly on the traditional publishing path that you've been on, is that a lot of work went into the book, in redrafting, and editing.

TWELVE MONTHS WORTH OF WORK BEFORE IT SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY THEN?

Clare: Oh, at least, yeah. Let me think back. I wrote I Let You Go, I wrote the first draft in 2012, I think. That's when I signed with Curtis Brown, with my literary agent. I did another, at least one, if not two rewrites with the guidance of my agent, before it went out on submission in spring 2013. We sold it in May 2013, and it came out in November 2014. We had almost eighteen months of editing with my publisher, with my editor at Little Brown. It went through, probably, eight or nine drafts of the book before it was ready.

James: I want to talk to you about that because I think people will be interested in that process, but let's just quickly say that the book was picked up by no less than Richard and Judy's Book Club. Most of our audience in America say they don't know who Richard and Judy are, but we should say that they are a married couple who, they sort of dominate day-time television in the U.K. They're actually a lovely couple, and they're brilliant broadcasters, the pair of them.

They started slightly off beat, this little book club a few years back, and it suddenly became, very quickly became a really important thing in the publishing world. I was one of those people, a reader, who picked up a Richard and Judy Book Club recommendation book, and didn't put it down. From then on knew when that sticker was on a book in a bookshop it was a really solid recommendation.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN HUGE FOR YOU WHEN YOU GOT THAT STICKER.

Clare: Yeah it was. Like you say, they carry huge kudos that they're sort of like the Oprah, perhaps, here in the U.K. I aspired to be that sort of book. It didn't really occur to me that I might be one of their book club picks, but I certainly wanted to hit that sort of level. That sort of commercial recognition.

When I found out about five months before it was announced, which is quite a long time to keep something secret, it was a huge endorsement. In fact, even before then when I knew that my publishers were putting me forward for it, because they only put forward two or three titles from their huge, huge range of books to be considered for the book club, that gave me enormous confidence. Knowing that my publisher felt it was strong enough to be considered was a big compliment. It has, undoubtedly changed my life. It set my career on a path that might not have happened without their endorsement.

James: It was a very strong book. There's no doubt about that. I'm sure that helped, but by the sounds of it, you're going to be a very successful writer regardless.

I'm really interested in the drafting stage, because most of our audience is self publishers. Some have a foot in both camps. You've gone through that traditional publishing. It's actually becoming a rarer journey, the one that you've had, I suppose, as publishing changes and transforms over time.

THAT PERIOD THEN, WHAT WAS THAT LIKE WHEN YOU HAD YOUR BOOK, AND WE ALL KNOW WE HAVE TO KILL OUR DARLINGS, ET CETERA, AND GO THROUGH THE EDITING PROCESS, BUT THAT SOUNDS QUITE BRUTAL, WHAT HAPPENED.

Clare: It was. I suppose out of those eight drafts, four of them, maybe five, were structural. No, four of them, four big structural drafts where I literally ripped the entire book apart and wrote it again. I lost subplots, I lost characters, I brought in new themes, new threats, those were really, really big, but that still leaves another four drafts where it was really about the layers.

It was about building more depth to characters, and to settings, and to themes. It was about making the twists work, and because it's a twist in *I Let You Go*, which is sort of slightly unusual, more than the normal sort of who's the baddie? It relies heavily on language to a certain extent, and so a lot of the drafting process was about linguistically making sure that the book worked.

It was very satisfying because you have to be quite clever about the way you phrase things, and how you write them, but it was exhausting. And it was quite demoralizing to know that I sold this book, and I

should be on cloud nine, but I didn't actually have anything to show for it. It felt very often as though I was never going to be able to produce a book that was to the right standard. I had to keep coming back to what my editor and agent had said after the very first draft. They'd both been really excited about this book, so I had to keep reminding myself that all I was doing was I wasn't taking a terrible book and trying to make it good, I was taking a good book, and trying to make it even better.

Mark: Mission accomplished as far as that was going Clare.

IN TERMS OF PUTTING IT INTO CONTEXT, YOU WERE STILL WORKING FOR THE POLICE AT THAT POINT I GUESS?

Clare: No. I left the police in 2011 and wrote this book in 2012. I left predominately for personal reasons in that I wasn't being the sort of mother I really wanted to be. I was very much having the career that I wanted to have, but that was at the expense of my children.

I'd been through a rather traumatic time. I'd lost one of my children to meningitis, so I really needed to reevaluate my priorities. I left to be at home with them and writing was something that you said at the beginning that you suspected I'd always been a writer, and I certainly have been, and was probably one of the few police officers that loved doing paperwork, and putting files together.

I'd never thought it could be a career choice, but everyone says, "Don't give up the day job until you're really making a living from writing." I did it the other way around. In my case it was desperation that enabled me to make a living from it. I had to make a living from writing. It was the only thing I knew how to do that wasn't policing, and it was the only thing I could do from home. Freelance writing had to pay my mortgage. It had to cover the bills. I couldn't wait for the news. I couldn't worry about writers block, I just had to pitch, pitch, pitch until I had enough work to keep a roof over my head.

Mark: As you said, the editorial process was pretty prolonged for this. That must have been reasonably frustrating because on the one hand you wanted to put out the best book that you could, on the other hand you wanted to put the book out and hopefully to get it sold.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A FRUSTRATING YEAR AND A HALF FOR YOU.

Clare: It really was. I was very conscious of the fact that I had signed this two book deal, that it wasn't a particularly huge deal, and I certainly couldn't live on it, so I was still doing a lot of journalism. Of course

the longer the editing process took, the further away I was from any money coming in, from royalties, the further away I was from another deal after that, and just from building my career.

Looking back it all seems like actually, a relatively short period of time. Certainly it all worked very well. That kind of slow build, it was all necessary to build my career in the way that it has happened since then, but certainly at the time it was both frustrating and a worry. A financial worry.

Mark: As the audience members probably know this, the way the money is actually delivered in terms of self-publishing and traditional publishing is very different. Amazon and the other platforms will typically pay two months and a raise on a monthly basis. But you'll get an advance for a publishing deal, which as you say, might not be certainly, is not always enough to live on.

AND THEN YOU WON'T SEE ANY MORE MONEY UNTIL THE BOOK IS PUBLISHED, AND THEN YOU WON'T SEE ANY MORE MONEY POSSIBLY UNTIL THE NEXT EDITION IS PUBLISHED.

Clare: Absolutely. The first edition of I Let You Go came out in November 2014. The first royalty statement that had any sort of significance was October 2015.

Mark: Almost a year.

James: The book writing process, you've explained a bit. In terms of your writing ability, and a lot of us think about how to build up to plot twists and so, I'm going back a little bit here. But it's the bit that interests me, the plot twist, and how to actually take a reader on a journey where it's not very predictable even if you know everything in your mind that's going to work out.

But you're somebody who liked writing. You're somebody who followed real life obviously as a policeman, and again I'm going to guess you're somebody who's read a lot.

DID YOU DISCOVER A LOT IN THOSE NINE MONTHS TO A YEAR WORKING ALONGSIDE SOMEBODY ELSE OF HOW TO ACTUALLY TELL A STORY, AS OPPOSED TO HOW YOU THOUGHT A STORY WAS TOLD?

Clare: Yeah, absolutely. I have learnt so much. And I'm finding now, well having now written my second book and just starting my third, I wouldn't say I'm finding it easier, just that I'm getting better at writing.

Which you know, is unsurprising if you learn anything for long enough, you will get better at it, one hopes.

I learnt a lot about structure, and about pace, and tension. Somehow knowing something in theory, and I'd read a number of books about writing and I learned about three act structures, but it's very, very different I think reading about that on the page, and then actually tearing apart your own part with the help of an experienced editor and putting it back in such a way that the tension changes completely.

Sometimes it's a really simple thing. It's putting in a very short chapter in between two longer ones. It's varying the sentence length. It's taking a break from one narrative thread at a moment of high tension and going across to another that's working at a slightly different pace so that the reader is frustrated by the changing story and wanting to get back to the original one. There are lots of things that I'd learnt, that perhaps I'd read about, but hadn't really made sense to me until I did it myself.

James: You started off with thinking you wanted to write something a little bit darker, and I think there was a particular case back in Bristol, a hit and run that was on your mind when you first started as a policeman, policewoman I should say. Police person? I don't know what to say.

Clare: Police officer.

James: Police officer, there you go, police offer. You've referred also to your own loss in your family. You talk about grief being one of those topics that can become more consuming, was part of your ideas going into the book.

DID THOSE THEMES SURVIVE THE REWRITE? WERE THEY ENHANCED BY IT?

Clare: Yes absolutely. I probably wasn't really aware of the themes when I started writing *I Let You Go*. There were things I wanted to explore as you say, there was a hit and run that had just left me with questions. Why does someone drive off from a hit and run? What goes through their head? How does that change you as a person? How do you live with that? Lots of questions.

My own bereavement was very fresh, and I was acutely aware of how trauma and tragedy change you as a person. I was exploring those, but they definitely came out. They came to the fore in the editing process when perhaps I would look at them, almost in isolation, and look at how I was reflecting those in the

book, what metaphors I was using, how the landscape I was describing was mirroring the emotions that were being explored in a particular character.

That level of detail, I'm sure there are writers that can put that in, in a first or second draft, but for me that's very much the coloring-in that I might do after I've written the book a couple of times. Whereas now I'm probably a bit more aware of those themes earlier on. I suspect I weave them in.

Certainly my second book I had four drafts on, so I'm optimistic that perhaps my third book might just have two or three, and now I'm just about to start book three. There is a very strong theme of separation, I'm very aware of it, so I suspect again that will be stronger from the outset. We're all learning all the time aren't we?

James: Yeah, absolutely. You signed a two book deal with Little Brown, I think, when you sold *I Let You Go*. You've done your second book, *I Can See You*, I think, I haven't got it in front of me, I think is your second, right?

Mark: *I See You*.

James: *I See You*. Sorry.

DID YOU EXTEND IT, OR HAVE YOU DONE ANOTHER DEAL WITH THEM?

Clare: I have signed another two book deal with them.

James: Okay. Fantastic. It's the route we certainly recommend if it's open to you at the right price and so on.

BUT OUT OF THE CORNER OF YOUR EYE, ARE YOU LOOKING AT THE SELF-PUBLISHING WORLD AND WONDERING HOW THAT OPERATES?

Clare: Out of the corner of my eye? Only in the same way that I am looking at everything and the world around me out of the corner of my eye. It's not a route that I wanted to go down right at the start. It's not a route that at the moment, I would consider purely because I'm having a truly enjoyable and rewarding

experience being traditionally published, both from a team point of view, from a financial point of view, from a career point of view. There is nothing about my publishing journey that is not working for me. Equally it's not something I would ever rule out.

I'm hugely impressed by those who are self-published, and doing it very, very well. There are a lot of books out there that are self-published and probably shouldn't be published, just there are an awful lot of books that are traditionally and perhaps shouldn't be. I'd like to see a little bit more merging of the two camps. I think it's a little bit too them and us. I don't like that very much. I think we're published authors, and we've all got a lot to learn from each other. I think it's a shame that the two camps are rather divided.

Mark: I agree with that. The way I look at it is all we're doing is telling stories and the means of delivery, that's the only difference. You can either deliver it yourself by way of a platform like Amazon or Apple, or you can rely on a traditional publisher to take care of the distribution for you. At the end of the day it's providing interesting, and exciting, and engaging stories for readers. That's what we're aiming to do.

Clare: Yeah absolutely. For me a big part of my career, I suppose, is print. I'm a huge fan of digital and my digital sales are very important, but for the moment, where I am, is print. Being *I Let You Go* was a Sunday Times best seller last year for twelve weeks, and that obviously is purely down to print sales, not digital.

If I were to be self-published, that would be much, much harder to achieve. I'm sure you'll know far more than me about people that perhaps have achieved it, but I'm hugely grateful to my publishing team who are out there, putting me into WHSmith, putting me into super markets, into independent bookshops, into the hands of readers who are subsequently putting me in the Sunday Times top ten. I would be very reluctant to walk away from that sort of strategy at the moment.

Mark: Yeah, that's something I noticed before we met, that actually it was impossible to go past the branch of Smith's without seeing a poster in the window for the book, and then you go into the shelves, it's very prominently displayed. Obviously selling an enormous amount of copies, which was great to see.

You said about how things are coming apart, or things are still apart, but hopefully coming together, that's where we met, wasn't it? We went to Apple, you hosted an event for some authors. On the one hand we

had some traditional authors, and on the other hand we had some self-publishers like me, and Joanna Penn was there.

WE GOT TALKING ABOUT, I THINK WE HAD A CHAT ABOUT FACEBOOK ADS, DIDN'T WE, AND MAILING LISTS, AND THAT KIND OF THING?

Clare: Yeah.

Mark: You run your mailing list yourself. This isn't something that is handed off to the publisher, this is something that you engage with yourself, isn't it?

Clare: It is. I do take quite a lot of control of my career. I feel very strongly, this is my career, not somebody else's. It's not something that's being done to me. My mailing list is mine. I encourage people to sign up for my book club, I send a quarterly newsletter. I make that newsletter informative, entertaining, useful, not just as a promotional tool. My approach is very much like the extra DVD that you might get in a box set, the behind the scenes stuff, the deleted scenes.

I will send out deleted scenes from I Let You Go, scenes that I cut because for whatever reason they weren't needed, or an extra short story, or something, video interviews, that is actually worthwhile someone signing up. That's very much under my control. My social media strategy has always been very clear. I set myself goals, I look at how I'm going to achieve them, and I check how I'm doing every sort of three months. I think what I'm saying I would quite enjoy the elements of self-publishing that I do at the moment. The marketing side, I'm just not quite sure I'd want to leap into it whole heartedly.

Mark: Talk about your mailing list.

HOW DO YOU BUILD THAT? IS IT, YOU HAVE A CALL TO ACTION IN THE BACK OF THE BOOKS?

Clare: I do. That scenario where I know a lot of self-publish authors are incredibly strong, and I'm watching and learning all the time. I have a clickable link from my e-books, which goes to my book club page. It also appears in the back of my print books, it's on all my promotional bookmarks, postcards, anything like that, that's produced. That's both in the U.K. and in the States. For example I'm just looking on my desk at full page adverts that might U.S. publishers took out in the New York Times, which has my web link at the bottom.

Mark: Nice.

Clare: Those sorts of things work really well, just before a newsletter, when I know what the content is likely to be in it, I will do a Facebook advert and a call to action there. I'll do giveaways. Twitter works very, very strongly for me for signups. It's an area that I can still do, there's lots more I can do. It's on my list.

James: Your to do list. I don't want to pry.

DOES YOUR DEAL TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE FACT THAT YOU DO A LOT OF THE MARKETING. YOU'RE CERTAINLY DOING A LOT OF THE FRONT END DIGITAL MARKETING FOR THE BOOKS?

Clare: That's a hard thing to quantify, but I would say yes, I think actually it does for any deal nowadays. I remember the very first meeting I had with my acquiring editor, just at the point when she was deciding whether or not to offer on my first deal, and I remember being taken aback that I was asked as much about me, and my contacts, my plans, my social media, my online presence, my marketing savvy, as I was about my writing, and this book.

It just brought home to me that when traditional publishers are considering a deal, they're looking at you as a package. They're looking at what you can offer as a career author. They're not just looking at your book. I think that first deal certainly was about me as a person as well as me as a book.

Yes, going forward, once my publishers had worked with me for eighteen months. It was very clear. They knew how I worked, they knew what I was capable of. They knew how I worked and they liked it, and I liked working with them. It's definitely passive of the deal.

Mark: When you were at that stage, what kind of, I think I've seen it described as what's your platform like. What's your Twitter presence, Facebook, all that kind of stuff.

WHAT KIND OF LEVEL WERE YOU AT THAT THAT STAGE. DID YOU HAVE FOLLOWERS, OR WERE YOU AT THE BEGINNING STAGE?

Clare: I did. In fact, somewhere I will have some of my social media strategies for that particular period, which will tell me exactly how many followers I had, and what I was aiming to achieve over the next

quarter. I had to change slightly because earlier when we mentioned my mediocre chick lit book. I had written this excellent romantic comedy, and at the time I was doing freelance journalism, I was writing funny stuff. I was writing a very funny blog and wrote this romantic comedy. My whole strategy was around building the sort of audience that read those sorts of books. When I switched, I had to rebrand essentially.

I had to change my name. I was writing under a different name. I had to gradually slide my social media activity over from the sort of slightly tongue and cheek, self-deprecating, stay at home mom type content over to a slightly more thoughtful, more sinister content. That took time. That took about twelve months.

In a way, it was good that I had this long editing process after I got my deal, because I needed to handle all of that. I still follow a lot of rom-com authors, and readers, and there really is a strong crossover actually between the two genres. It's not quite as distinct as perhaps moving from science fiction, or fantasy, to I don't know, to crime, or to comedy, but I had to do that and focus on building the sort of audience that I wanted for this particular genre of writing.

Mark: I'm just looking at your Facebook page now actually. It's really good. A lot of really excellent content. I'm just seeing you posted a photograph of an idea for a book that you've written in the back of a spiral-bound notebook or something?

Clare: Yeah, that was the very first idea for I Let You Go.

Mark: That's great. All the kind of content, readers absolutely love that. It establishes a connection between the reader and the writer. I think that's really excellent, and so easy to do.

IT'S SO EASY TO MAKE THAT KIND OF CONTENT AVAILABLE THESE DAYS. YOU GET REALLY TANGIBLE RESULTS FROM IT.

Clare: Yeah you do. I'm a huge fan of Facebook and I actually, I don't have a huge following there. I've got about fifteen hundred, sixteen hundred followers on Facebook, but they are incredibly engaged. My reach is very high. My reach from a post might be perhaps ten thousand, maybe twenty thousand from quite a small number of people, just because there's a lot of engagement, a lot of commenting, a lot of sharing. It's very useful to me as a promotional tool, but it's also the area I enjoy most. I have some sort of genuine conversations with readers, I use them a lot for research and for ideas.

If I'm stuck with a character name, they were very helpful. I've worked out of a penthouse that I wanted, a London penthouse I wanted in my book and I had the view from the terrace, but I'm not a Londoner, I don't know where all these places are, but my Facebook followers do. Those sorts of things are genuinely useful. Of course, mixed in with that is some of the sort of sharing of more promotional activities. Books being for sale, or on special offer, but mostly I consider Facebook to be my social environment where I get to chat to readers.

Mark: Are you more of a Facebook than Twitter person?

Clare: I'm both, and really equally enthusiastic, just the different purposes. Twitter is more ... I chat more generally about it with a wider group of people. A lot of non-readers. I would say that probably everybody on my Facebook page has read my book, whereas most of the people who follow me on Twitter, perhaps haven't. It's a very different mix of people. I use them for different things. I tend to be a lot more visual with Facebook and have more protracted conversations, whereas Twitter's much more dynamic.

I share a lot of content that is related to more personal interests, a lot of news articles, those sorts of things that wouldn't be appropriate on my Facebook page. I'm deeply averse to sharing the same content across lots of social media platforms, unless it genuinely works on all those platforms.

Something that fills me with horror is when I see social media advisors or consultants recommending that people use something like Hootsuite to just throw out the same content across all your platforms because it shows no understanding of how those platforms work individually, or how the timings might work, or the audiences might be different. I think it's rather bad advice.

Mark: The content needs to be native, by which I mean it needs to fit in with people would expect to find on those platforms.

Clare: Absolutely.

Mark: Snippets of conversation on Twitter, more in-depth, and articles, and photographs, and visual things on Facebook.

Clare: Absolutely. It may be that you share the same thing, but in a different way.

James: I notice that you're giving a course in France later in the year for crime writers.

Is there a a non-fiction, non-writing income stream opening up for you? Is that something you see in your future?

Clare: You know, oddly enough, I was thinking about this this morning. It's actually something I want to wind down, or need to wind down because I just don't have the time to do it. I am doing this course, and I'm doing it because Chez Castillon is just the most beautiful, beautiful place in Southwest France. I've spent many happy retreats there where I got a phenomenal number of words written.

It's a joy to go and run a course, but my life is very, very full of writing and the promotional activity that accompanies books, as you know, is phenomenal, so at the moment I am supporting the release of *I Let You Go* in the States.

It's only been out now for two weeks. There's a lot of interviews, and blog posts, and just general stuff that needs to be done. I'm gearing up to the release of *I See You* in the U.K., so I've got dinners with print reviewers, I've got visits with sales reps, going out to bookshops, so a lot of pre-promotional activity. That's only going to build in July when the book comes out. I've got a lot of literary festivals, and signings, and other events. In between all of that, I obviously need to write my third book. I just don't have time to do the sorts of workshops and journalism that perhaps I used to.

Mark: Could I ask you, just look at how your typical day plays out, in terms of the split between writing on the one hand, and promotion and marketing on the other.

WHAT DOES YOUR DAY LOOK LIKE?

Clare: There is no typical day really. Today should be a writing day. I'm just at the start of book three, and

I should really be able to get one or two thousand words written.

I always start off the same way. I did the dog walk and the school run, then back at my desk by 10 o'clock. We have this podcast scheduled for 11, so actually what I managed to do between 10 and 11 was get a few emails done. All book related stuff saying yes to interviews, responding to U.S. publicists who are sharing information, a couple of foreign deals that have come in, I'm saying "Yes, great. Fantastic." Lots of those sorts of things.

We've got this podcast now. I've got a lunch with a TV producer who's interested in putting I Let You Go on the screen. I will get probably an hour, maybe two hours work in this afternoon. I've got to prep for an interview that I'm doing tonight. I might, if I'm lucky, get an hour's writing in, which will probably, for me, equate to about five or six hundred words. Not hugely productive in terms of words, but a proper busy working day never the less.

Mark: We feel very guilty and also very grateful for you taking the time. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us this morning. How old are your children?

Clare: Nine, eight, and eight.

Mark: Okay, so when they get back from school then I guess it's back into mom mode?

Clare: Yeah, kind of. They're very good. They're very self-sufficient. If I'm on deadline they pretty much fend for themselves, and they know to forage if they need feeding. Mostly I do try and stop at 4 o'clock when they come home, but I'm not very good at switching off. Occasionally I will push on through.

Mark: That's something I'm definitely with you on that one. It is difficult to switch off sometimes. My kids are four and two.

Clare: Oh that's hard work. They're still quite needy aren't they, at that age? Quite rightly so.

Mark: They are. My son's just getting over chickenpox so he's very cuddly at the moment.

Clare: I secretly quite like it when my children are ill. I know that sounds awful, it's not from a Munchhausen's kind of way, but that's because they become so cuddly, and quiet, and soft, and just delicious.

James: You need to train them in foraging Mark, so they can ...

Mark: They can roam free. Exactly.

James: You're over there in the Cotswolds, I believe Clare. Is that right?

Clare: I am, yeah. In Chipping Norton, not part of the Chipping Norton set.

James: Not part of the Chippy set, so Jeremy Clarkson's not your neighbor?

Clare: He is.

James: Oh, he is your neighbor? You just don't go for dinner very often?

Clare: No. Kitchen suppers are not something I get invited to.

James: You've got your two books obviously and as I say, I See You, is your second. You're working on your third.

ARE YOU NOW SET IN A PATTERN OF THE DARKER SIDE WITH CRIME AND ASPECTS OF CRIME BEING VERY MUCH A PART OF THE WAY YOU'RE GOING TO WRITE? DO YOU SEE YOURSELF PERHAPS MOVING GENRES AT ANY POINT? IS CHICK LIT EVER GOING TO COME BACK TO THE HORIZON?

Clare: No. I don't think it will actually. I'm still a big advocate of chick lit, of commercial women's fiction, it should be called, because it's fun, and enjoyable, and quite escapist. But I think for the time being darker is where I'm at. Psychological thrillers are satisfying for me to read, and they're satisfying to write, and challenging to write, so yes.

Definitely for the moment there's a book I want to write that isn't a thriller. Doesn't have a crime element. I'm not quite sure, I think it's probably, I think you would call it high concept commercial fiction. At some point I will write that, but for now I'm firmly rooted in the crime world.

James: Okay. You say you're on the Twitter [Clare Mackint0sh](#) with a zero instead of the O? @ClareMackint0sh?

Clare: Yes.

James: You've just replaced the O with a zero.

Mark: On Facebook it's ClareMackWrites.

Clare: Yes, I've broken one of the golden rules of course, of your social media platforms, which is to make sure that they're consistent across every platform. I apologize.

James: You're famous enough now that a Google of Clare Mackintosh will reveal all of these things.

Clare: You can't escape me. I'm everywhere.

James: Clare it's been really interesting talking to you. I think particularly about the initial journey that you took from writing a book to turning it into the book that got sold. I think that whether you're doing that by yourself or you've got the, I'll say the luxury, or the experience of having a very experienced literary agent and editor with you, or not. That's definitely something I'm thinking about in terms of writing, about the

drafting, and the redrafting, and then finding a way of making those themes come through, which is what the book's all about.

THE STORY IS JUST A VESSEL REALLY ISN'T IT FOR THOSE THEMES YOU LEAVE PEOPLE WITH?

Clare: Yeah. Absolutely.

James: I found that really interesting. Thank you very much indeed from your very busy life. I hope your children, I presume, are at school rather than foraging for food in the garden.

Clare: They are indeed at school, but it was a real pleasure to talk to you both. I was delighted to be invited and it's been lovely to chat.

James: Clare Mackintosh, so fantastic for her. Really pleased that she's having the success, and she talked about trying to break America, and we'll find out in due course from her how she's getting on with that. It's been a slow start she experienced in the United Kingdom, but I have no doubt she's going to be big around the world. Very happy with her traditional deal.

We didn't really push her on that. I felt a little bit like we were talking to somebody who had felt she had done everything right by getting this amazing publishing deal, and yet I sense the world is moving towards, certainly from a commercial point of view, and we can think of one or two of our own students who've probably sold fewer books but made more money, to a different way of doing things. It's not for everybody, and for Clare, this is a perfect fit for her isn't it?

Mark: Yeah, she's done amazingly well. The latest author earnings report this week and it made it very, very clear from the analysis of Amazon's data that authors who have started in the last five years are much, much more likely to make a significant living, or a living, really by self-publishing rather than traditional publishing. The odds are much more in their favor that way, but yeah, sure it's not for everyone.

Clare's done amazingly well. She's got a great agent, got a great publisher, they've knocked it out of the park as far as marketing. Why would she be interested in changing? There's no reason at all why she should.

But my advice would still typically be, I think for most writers, is to at least look carefully at self-publishing because even at the base level, seventy percent royalty, as opposed to ten or twelve percent royalty is going to look quite a bit more attractive if you start selling a good number of books.

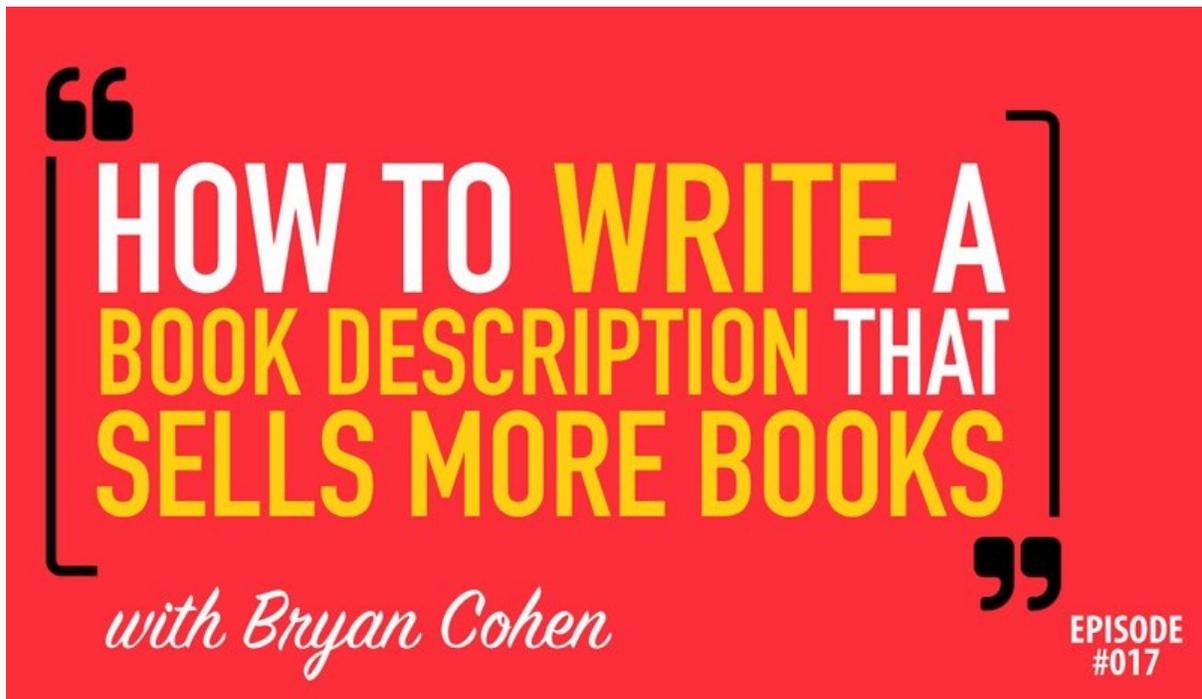
James: Okay, that's great. We've got more work to do over the next few days and then we've got hundreds of students who are going to be taking their first steps, or maybe their first advanced steps in Facebook advertising, and so on over the next few weeks. Loads of good interviews and topics still to come on the podcast. They're every Friday.

Don't hesitate, if you want to contact us, particularly if there's a subject area you would like to hear us talking about or an interview you'd like to hear. You can always email us support@selfpublishingformula.com. Well, we'll see you next time when we will be well rested.

Mark: It will be the week before we go on holiday, so yes. I will be looking forward to being well rested.

CHAPTER 14

HOW TO WRITE A BOOK DESCRIPTION THAT SELLS MORE BOOKS - WITH BRYAN COHEN



IT'S an amazing thing when you realize that you might be able to write a stellar novel, full of excellent scenes and powerful characters, but when it comes to writing a blurb to put on Amazon and other online retailers, it feels like pulling teeth to do it well. It requires a different set of mental muscles to write a compelling book summary and on this episode we receive some help from a friend of the SPF community, Bryan Cohen. Bryan's not only an accomplished author himself, he's also a copywriter who specializes in this sort of thing. You're going to be amazed at his insights and helped by the tips he has to offer. And if you apply what he teaches in this episode and see your book sales rise as a result, be sure to let us know.

DOES YOUR BOOK DESCRIPTION HAVE AN EFFECTIVE HOOK?

Just like a blog post or article title, your book description for online retailers needs to be compelling. In particular, the very first sentence needs to be the "hook" that urges the reader to keep reading. How do you make one sentence so powerful? Bryan is the man to tell us how. Listen to learn how to create a powerful hook, infuse it with emotion, and compel those checking out your book to push the "buy" button

as a result.

TRANSITIONAL STATEMENTS KEEP THE MOVEMENT AND ENERGY GOING.

Take a moment to stroll over to Amazon and read a few of the book descriptions for some of the bestselling books in your genre. What do they have in common? It's more likely than not that those book summaries use transitional statements to keep the energy and interest of the reader moving forward. They pose questions, arouse curiosity, and evoke sympathy for the characters through the description on the page. You can write a summary like that for your book and on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula, Bryan teaches you how.

ONE PLACE WHERE YOU DEFINITELY DO WANT TO LEAVE YOUR READER HANGING.

There's a good deal of discussion going on in writing communities these days about whether or not cliffhanger endings are a good thing or not. While it's debatable when it comes to the way you end your novels, there's no question about it when it comes to your book description. A cliffhanger ending is a must. Why? Because that's what leaves the person interested in your book with the desire to find out more. It's taking advantage of the natural bent we humans have toward curiosity and using it to gain a new reader and customer. You can discover Bryan's foolproof approach to writing powerful book summaries in this episode of the podcast.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark and James introduce the episode.
- The value of the Facebook for Authors course and why the launch is such work.
- Today's guest, copywriter Bryan Cohen.
- Why Bryan calls himself an adventurer.
- How writers struggle to summarize their novel into a blurb.
- A blurb hook- writing formula for authors to follow.
- Taking cues from film taglines for your book's "hook."
- How to write the first sentence of your synopsis.
- The same principle in book writing.
- Moving beyond the first part of the synopsis.
- The powerful end of your synopsis.
- How the book copy can be the difference between sales and no sales.
- What can be done for an author after the initial sales rush ends?
- What do we mean by conversions and conversion rates?
- Applying these concepts to copywriting in general.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- Bryan's [website](#)
- [Andrew Ellard](#) on Twitter
- Bryan's podcast: The [Sell More Books Show](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to Podcast #17 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living tell stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Here we are, Mark. We've got to 17 and I don't know about you, but I can barely stand now. We've had a busy couple of weeks with the launch of the paid course and that is now all done and dusted and we're back into SPF routine. A little rest maybe is needed at some point.

Mark: Yes, I've been managing to keep myself awake today on extremely strong coffee, almost injected it intravenously and slapped myself in the face quite regularly. It's been a combination of super busy with welcoming new students onto the course, then my young son decided that it would be hilarious to wake up between 4:00 and 5:30 this morning so that was great. Yeah, I'm going to jump into bed in a minute and catch a little bit of shut eye. Try to keep myself awake for the evening.

James: Yeah, that is hilarious though, isn't it? It's hilarious from somebody who has children and they're almost teenagers and you have to drag them out of bed in the mornings. I found it quite amusing.

Mark: I'm looking forward to that.

James: Yeah, yeah, it happens more quickly than you think so don't wish it away. What should we say? The launch is done. Obviously, there is a commercial aspect to what we do because people pay for the course, but we pride ourselves on being a value stop for everybody, regardless of whether you bought into the SPF or regardless of whether you ever intend to. If you listen to the podcast, if you take the free stuff that we give out, including the mini-course Facebook mailing lists, we want this to be a really useful

place to be to be part of a community, to help people turn themselves from writers and wanna-be writers, if you're not living off it, let's say, to people who are living off it and making a living from it. That's our main focus and we have a fantastic interview today. In fact, I have the advantage on you, Mark, because you haven't heard it, have you?

Mark: No, not yet. I haven't. You did this without me.

James: I did it behind your back. It's a chat with Bryan Cohen and Bryan does a lot of things and we talk about a few of those at the beginning of the interview, but his specialist area is this focus on copywriting and it's a strange old thing as we discuss in the interview that writers are not necessarily, in fact quite often, are not very good at succinct copy writing when it comes to putting adverbs together.

Bryan's a really great person who's broken down what good copy writing is. He takes us through it in this interview. You can make notes. He will take you through what sentence one in an advert should be, sentence two and three and four, etc.

This all leads towards some live training that Bryan and you, Mark, are going to be doing in the future. We do give the details in the interview. We did eventually get there in the interview, but I will confirm the details on the course that will be on the show notes page afterwards, but he's a good guy, Bryan, isn't he? He does lots. He's a very good guy to have around the community.

Mark: Yeah, he is. He's very busy. Well known from the Sell More Books Show, which is one of the podcasts I'd recommend for people who want to keep up to date on news in the publishing world, especially with the indie publishing world. He's got irons in lots of different fires. I've met him once. He came over to London about six months ago. Him, Nick Stevenson, and me went out for quite a drunken evening in a rather cool bar in SoHo that I didn't know about, but it's quite near where we used to work, James.

James: Okay.

Mark: I don't know if you know about this. It's about five minutes from where we used to work. It's the

Whiskey Shop and at the back of the Whiskey Shop, there is a bookcase that looks like it's a normal shelves of books. It's one of those fake doors that goes down to a little set up bar. Very cool. I didn't even know about it until we found it that evening. That was cool.

James: Yeah, I know about it. I've heard tell of it, but I've never been there. Then my friends went about six months ago and then didn't invite me, so I didn't get to see it then either.

Okay, let's crack on. There comes an email. Let's crack on and listen to Bryan and we'll be back at the end of the interview with the details you need to know about the live training.

Bryan Cohen is here, who is self-described, Bryan, author, entrepreneur, actor, director, producer, adventurer, I notice you also include in your description. A lot of people listen to the podcast will know that you have your own podcast with Jim Kukral, The Sell More Books Show, which has been going ... Gosh, you are into three figures, aren't you in your podcast there.

Bryan: Oh, yeah. We just did Number 114.

James: 114 is out. You've written about creative writing. Readers will know you as the Ted Saves The World series writer, fighting evil but having a laugh along the way, because let's face it. If you're going to fight evil, you got to smile occasionally, haven't you, right?

Bryan: You got to be quippy about it.

James: You got to have a quip. It's comedy writing, but it's adventure as well. Bryan, thank you so much for joining us. You're a great friend to SPF and I know we're going to get some good value out of you today. We're also going to trail ahead to a webinar which is taking place in the new future, which listeners will be invited to sign up. You and Mark are going to do some excellent teaching together, but more of that in a moment.

I WANT TO, FIRST OF ALL, FIND OUT ABOUT THE ADVENTURER TITLE. YOU'VE DESCRIBED YOURSELF AS AN ADVENTURER. CAN YOU QUALIFY THIS?

Bryan: Yeah, I think I can. I like a challenge. I like an adventure. This podcast interview is an adventure already. Probably about every year I try to do something big that is going to be a great story, that's going to be something really interesting I can talk about in the future.

I think my initial foray into self publishing was one of my first adventures and blogging and whatnot. Probably one of my best adventures, I would say, is three years ago, I had an episode that aired, the U.S. version of Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? I was on that show and tried to win as much money as possible before they could run me off the set.

James: You got onto the seat, the hot seat. I don't know if it works the same over there in the format. The fastest finger first thing.

Bryan: They got rid of that in the U.S. No fastest finger, but they have a strenuous screening process to make sure you aren't evil and you plan to use the money for good things, I suppose. I don't know. Really they just want you to be interesting.

James: You got into the hot seat. You'll have to give us a spoiler here.

IS IT ON YOUTUBE? CAN WE WATCH THIS OR CAN YOU TELL WHAT HAPPENED?

Bryan: I can send you a link. It is on YouTube, but it's one of those secret videos so that ABC doesn't get angry at me and take it down.

James: Okay. How did it go?

Bryan: I won \$20,000.

James: Wow. That's nothing to sniff at.

Bryan: Oh, not at all. I was very pleased. It was all and all, a very great adventure.

James: That is a very good adventure. That's great, Bryan. I can see you, I can hear you on Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? I think you're right for the format so I can see why they went through the screening process and came out with you. Just before we move on to more serious things that are going to be perhaps of better value to people listening to the podcast:

WHAT WAS THE QUESTION THAT YOU BAILED ON IN THE END? PRESUMABLY YOU OPTED OUT OF ANSWERING IT.

Bryan: Yeah, yeah. I walked away so that I wouldn't have to get it wrong. It was the ninth question and it was, "Which U.S. president was the first to throw out a first pitch in a professional baseball game?" It would have been very tough for your listeners in the U.K.

James: I'm going to guess Woodrow Wyatt.

Bryan: It was not. Woodrow Wyatt or Woodrow Wilson.

James: Woodrow Wilson. I just made up Woodrow Wyatt. He's like a cowboy or something.

Bryan: Woodrow Wyatt was good. It was a good answer. The answer was Howard Taft.

James: Oh, dude, you know, I've never even heard of Howard Taft. I'm sure he was a good president though. That's great.

I think a lot of people know who you are, but there will be plenty of people listening perhaps who don't, but in the Self Publishing community, you're quite a big gun. I think one of the things you do, and you're very similar to Mark in this, is you spend a lot of time trying to find out what's working, a lot of tips about putting some bits and pieces together that are going to help people go from simply wanting to be a writer to being a writer and paying their way.

THAT'S REALLY THE GOAL, ISN'T IT, OF A LOT OF THE THINGS THAT YOU TEACH AND YOU DISSEMINATE.

Bryan: Yes, I think that it's always been great working with Mark because I know we always want the same thing. We want writers to be able to earn enough to money to do this full time and cut out all the

other stuff that isn't making them happy or healthy. Yes, for sure that's one of the main goals I have in life.

I'm really looking forward to doing this with Mark. I've done this webinar a couple of times. I actually have another webinar I do more often, but Mark asked, "Can you put together a webinar that is more specifically on Facebook ads because that pertains to my audience a little better?" I did that. It's just a really great way to teach people how to write an amazing book description and then how to use that description over and over again in their other aspects of copy writing, like their Facebook ads.

Then let's carry on then with that theme and talk about copy writing. It's odd, isn't it, that you get people who can craft a novel together, but struggle to summarize it.

A LOT OF AUTHORS WILL SAY THEY REALLY STRUGGLE TO SUMMARIZE THAT NOVEL IN TWO SENTENCES.

Bryan: I've said this before, but I always see the Lord of the Rings meme with Gollum from Lord of the Rings saying, "We have to write the blurb, but we hates it." Most people hate writing the blurb. They feel like Gollum. They feel like they're in a cave and they can't figure out how to get out.

Fortunately, I'm here to give you guys some info on how to get out of that cave and to not feel like you're in a cave when you are trying to condense things. Because it can be different when you're first starting out, but with a few guidelines in mind, you will succeed a lot more readily.

James: Okay. Let's talk about one of two of those things then that are going to help us. Give is a little preview of where there webinar's going to go.

I GUESS YOU HAVE TO DISTANCE YOURSELF A LITTLE BIT FROM THE BOOK AND MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU'RE JUST SOME PERSON WHO'S BEEN GRABBED IN TO ADVERTISE AND SELL THE BOOK RATHER THAN REMEMBERING THAT IT'S YOURS AND YOU'VE GOT THIS HUGE EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO IT.

Bryan: Exactly. It's your baby. Your book is your baby. Your book is your child and you don't want to say, "Oh, this aspect of my child isn't important enough to include." Of course, you end up wanting to include so much, every character, every subplot, everything in there. That just isn't going to work.

When you try to force yourself to cut things down, you don't know what to cut so you just end up hoping

for the best, throwing something up there, and really praying that it works and maybe sometimes it will. Sometimes it won't.

It's not really about condensing so much as it is trying to convey what your book is about from a perspective of emotion. How will a reader emotionally connect with your book?

In most cases, that's not done through plot, that's not done through setting, it's done through the character. I think that's the best place to start no matter what genre you're in is to start with that character and help potential readers connect with that character in your book description.

James: The emotional impact that the book as a piece of artwork, if you like, is going to have on someone, because that's going to be the sell of the book anyway, isn't it?

Bryan: Exactly. If you think of any major book success in the last 20 years, more likely than not ... Let's just say just a Harry Potter-type book. People love Harry. They love Hermione. They love Ron. Sure, they talk about Hogwarts, but they don't go and say, "I love Hogwarts." They say, "Hermione reminds me of my daughter."

It's about that connection and so you want to tap into what it is about our character people can relate to. How can they find a connect between either that and their life or that and some kind of feeling they have had?

James: Is there a particular format to ... I mean, the description's go in different places, of course. Amazon has one format and your Facebook ad requires probably tighter copy and BookBub. There's a different way of writing up your book there.

IS THERE A FORMAT YOU APPROACH TO WHAT THE FIRST SENTENCE SHOULD DO, WHAT THE SECOND SENTENCE, AND WHAT THE THIRD SENTENCE SHOULD DO?

Bryan: Yes, more or less. A first and second sentence, I would say I have a very clear idea of what you should put in there.

The first sentence in your description, I like to think of it, not as part of the synopsis. I think most people say, "Oh, my book description. That's a synopsis of Plot Point A, B, C, D, E, all the way up to maybe half way through the novel so I don't spoil the whole thing."

You start with the hook. You start with ... I've called it a headline. You could call it a tag line, a log line. Whatever you want to call it. It is the essence of your book. Why do people want to buy it? For Mark's book, it's rogue ex-CIA agent saves the world. As simple as that. You just need what that hook is and often it's related to the main character of the book.

James: Yeah, we've talked a lot about Adam Croft in recent weeks.

HE HAD SUCH GREAT SUCCESS WITH ONE BOOK AND A LOT OF THAT COULD BE DOWN TO THE HOOK, WHICH IS, "WOULD YOU KILL YOUR WIFE TO SAVE YOUR DAUGHTER?"

Bryan: Yup. That is probably one of the best and I know I had heard Adam talk on Joanna's podcast about how he wrote the series just so he could have the strong hook and then he's had so much success with it. There's nothing wrong with writing a book just because it has a strong hook. I think that just goes to show if you write the best hook ever, you might make a million dollars. Adam is a perfect example of that.

James: He's already said that he's written the hook for his next book first. He reverse engineers the process. Actually, Adam started with the Facebook advert. He thought, "What would work well in this environment? That would work well in this environment." Then he wrote the book. He did the advert before he wrote the book. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that business approach.

I think film taglines probably great examples, aren't they, of how to start that description. The famous ones we can think of. Jaws 2, terrible film but great tagline: "Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water." That's not a description of the film. That's not anything to do with the plot. That is that emotional thing that we got when we watched Jaws. It goes into your head when you're in the sea at night, night swimming, you just can't help but hear that cello in the background. I thought that was a great tagline.

THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE CRAFTED LITTLE SENTENCES WITH MILLIONS OF DOLLARS RIDING ON THEM SO THEY'RE PROBABLY GOOD THINGS FOR YOU TO LOOK AT, AREN'T THEY?

Bryan: Oh, yeah. Looking at movie posters, looking at those one-liners. Another one that comes to mind, I

believe this is from the movie, Alien: "In space, nobody can hear you scream." Those are the things that stick with you. They have such an emotional resonance that it's so important. If you could reverse engineer and start with the hook like Adam has, that's awesome. If you've already written the book, you need to find the hook in there.

If you're not a trained marketing professional, maybe this is one of those things where you ask your audience, because your readers may be smarter than you are in some of these ways. I love pulling the ideas that readers have come up with for marketing, mostly in the form of the reviews they post.

I will find ideas for headlines in my customer reviews all the time, or in the customer reviews of book that I have written the descriptions for, because readers know how to speak in that reader language. If you use that reader language and you use that in your headlines, then you're already bridged a gap that you wouldn't have been able to do if you really come at it from that "I wrote this book" perspective.

James: Yeah, crowd sourcing your copy, clever.

Bryan: Nothing wrong with that at all.

James: No, that's good. Okay, that's your first sentence and there's ... I'm trying to think of some other good film taglines. All the good ones I can think of are just like that. In fact, the other day I looked up Star Wars. I was wondering what was the tagline for the very first Star Wars film and it was ...

Bryan: Would it be "In a galaxy far, far away ..."?

James: It wasn't, actually. It was "May The Force Be With You." It was on the posters.

Bryan: Oh, I like that okay.

James: I like that. Again, it's not an synopsis. It's intriguing and it's about the spiritual aspect of the film.

Again, people always start, who perhaps naturally want to start with "He's got ten days to save the world" type thing. It's what does this piece of work, what's the emotional message from it? May the force be with you. It's intriguing. That's a great tagline for the film and the film did pretty good over the years.

Bryan: I heard some good things about it.

James: I think they're doing the Star Wars museum up your way, aren't they? That's going to be in Chicago.

Bryan: Yeah, I'm really glad they're doing it again.

James: Yeah, we're coming over to see you when that museum's there. I mean, obviously to see you, mainly, but partly to go to the museum.

Bryan: Sure. Second thing is the museum.

James: Yeah.

Bryan: Of course.

James: After the breakfast. We should mention the breakfast. I always ask people when I'm taking mic level at the beginning of this. What did you have for breakfast? I had the most extraordinary answer from Bryan I've ever had and I've been asking that question for years doing interviews. You put a lot of stuff into a blender and then drink it.

Bryan: Yeah, I was really glad to make such an impression on you from my sound test. I was saying how my wife and I are in the midst of doing a green smoothie every day challenge. Today we had a chocolate covered cherry smoothie, which had spinach, almond milk, bananas, cherries, cocoa powder, and cinnamon in it and we blended that all together and we drank it this morning for breakfast.

James: Wow. The face I'm pulling is not necessarily one that's full of delight at the prospect of drinking that but if you say it's good. It sounds good for you, if not good.

Bryan: The cocoa powder helps make it feel chocolatey. The cherries are so sweet that they really just overtake everything.

James: Okay, right. Moving on from breakfast. We've got our first sentence which is this emotional impact which is in a neat description if necessary. Crowd source it from your reviews.

SECOND AND THIRD SENTENCES, DO YOU THEN GET INTO SYNOPSIS AT THAT STAGE? WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Bryan: Yes, in the second sentence and sometimes the headline can be a couple of short sentences. That's a cheat. We'll just say the headline is the one sentence, but it can be two or three. The ones I like to use are often three short ones, but let's get in ... Just past the headline.

First sentence of the synopsis, I love to name the character and say what the character is going through. That's about it. I do not try to throw in 90 plot points or where the character lives or anything like that. I would be much more likely to say that Ted Finley is a nerd with superpowers or ... This is from my young adult superhero book. Ted Finley is your average, dorky teen. Just something that people can latch onto.

They know that person in their life or they see what they're going through like, "This person just got divorced and has nothing left in the bank account." Something that allows them to say, "Okay, now when I see this person's name throughout the rest of the description, it matters to me."

If they don't care about who this person is or they don't have a clear picture of them in their mind, why are they going to care when this person is trying to save the world or trying to stop a criminal? I think that's one of the biggest mistakes people make in their descriptions. They don't let us get emotionally invested in that character. It's something you can do in one short sentence.

James: Does that extend to the way that you should construct the book as well for those of us who are starting out in writing, to establish the character in a descriptive way early on? Don't be mysterious about it, because otherwise people haven't got someone to latch onto.

Bryan: Yeah, it absolutely works the same way, because when you think about it, what are the things that keep people from buying your book? Well, if your cover stinks, they're probably going to click away. If you don't have many much social proof or reviews, they're going to click away. The description, if it doesn't sound good, they're going to click away.

Also, and I didn't realize this until relatively recently, a fair number of people actually download the samples of books and decide whether or not they're going to read it based on that sample, based on that Look Inside. If your character doesn't sound that interesting from the first couple of pages? Yeah, they're not really going to buy it. It's exactly the same concept.

James: Okay, let's finish up on just the copywriting 101. I know the webinar's going to be more detailed than this. Just to finish off that part of the discussion and then we'll move on to one or two other things.

YOU'VE GOT YOUR INTRIGUE. YOU'VE GOT YOUR CHARACTER DESCRIPTION. I'M DESPERATE TO KNOW WHAT'S NEXT.

Bryan: This is the point where you can start to layer in a little bit more of the plot. What happens? Nothing really subplot-y. Nothing that is going to take you into the weeds. Really at this point, you're following the main character's journey, seeing what happens next to them. If there are very important details that are needed, you can layer them in through transition sentences. When she loses her job suddenly, and then what is happening to this woman now? You can keep transitioning. I love to just transition sentences, introductory clauses, because they keep the momentum going.

I always think of a book description more like a poem than straight-up prose, because there's a rhythm to it. You're building the momentum as you go and you don't have anything that is cutting you off. You have some introductory clauses going in there taking you from one sentence to the next. You have short and long sentences to break up the rhythm a little bit. You're really getting the reader into the flow of things.

I know that sounds a little bit vague, but I don't think writing the synopsis for your book is actually terribly difficult if you just keep to the main plot and don't worry about trying to explain everything. I think the most important part from there, you've hooked the reader, you've gotten them excited about the character, now, okay, let's move them along, get them more excited as they go. I would say the next big important part comes right at the end of the synopsis.

That is ... I want to keep you waiting.

James: Yeah, I'm in suspense. To be honest, I'm still thinking about the drink as well, but I am also in the suspense about the big ...

Bryan: I'm telling you, when you come visit me in Chicago, we're all going to have smoothies.

James: This is a big finish and we're going to see how important this is in a moment.

WHAT IS THIS BIG FINISH THAT REALLY IS THE KILLER BIT?

Bryan: The most important part at the end of your synopsis, which I will note is not the end of your entire product description, the end of your synopsis is you're going to leave them wanting more. You are going to leave them with a cliffhanger.

I know there's this whole anti-cliffhanger thing going on, probably in the indie community and every writing community, but that doesn't pertain to the description. We literally need to leave the reader wanting more because they have to have a reason to click the 'buy' button.

It can be phrased in a question or in a declarative sentence. This is really the part where, "Will the two of them find love in the midst of the wilderness?" Or, "Can he stop the ticking time bomb before it ends civilization as they know it?" Doesn't have to be a question, but it's a lot easier to phrase it in the form of a question while I'm trying to come up with these off the top of my head. More or less, give the cliffhanger. Get people excited. Give them a reason to click that 'buy' button.

James: That's great. It reminds me. There's a guy on Twitter called Andrew Ellard and he's a script editor for television in the U.K. Actually scripted, I think, some Dr. Who's and stuff like that, but what he does on Twitter is brilliant. He will do script notes on something big so if there's been a big television debut of a big drama.

We had War & Peace recently and stuff like that and in films. He'll then do these script notes on them, just for public consumption. They're great to read. He talks in exactly the same tones that you've just spoken

about, about tension. He says, "If the tension's not there, this is why this scene didn't work, because there was no tension." We knew what was going to play out or we knew there was no conflict, there was no tension.

You need that as the intrigue to spur that human nature thing, which is you want to get to the resolution. The big problem script writers have, particularly in sitcoms and stuff, is keeping that tension going. Say, it might be sexual tension between Rachel and Ross or whatever. What happens when they get together? That's a great example of why it needs to be there and what you're saying is even in this synopsis, in fact, especially in this little copy here, it's got to be there.

Bryan: Oh, for sure. It's going to make a reader say, "That sounds good," or, "That sounds interesting," or, "That sounds exciting." If they don't say that, they're not going to click the 'buy' button. The tension is very key.

James: Okay, Andrew Ellard, by the way, is [@ellardent](#), E-L-L-A-R-D-E-N-T. Worth following on Twitter for those notes.

Okay, just to put this into perspective then, Bryan, I know that you and Mark worked on an ad a little while ago for one of your box sets.

THE COPY WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AD WORKING AND NOT WORKING, WHICH WE KNOW CAN HAPPEN FOR SURE, BUT YOU SAW THAT IN ACTION.

Bryan: Yes. What we were doing and this is the prime example of why you can't just copy exactly what someone else is doing and assume it's going to work. I know you guys have seen that in a big way with Self Publishing Formula. I was doing an ad and we were doing a little experiment for my podcast, the Sell More Books Show, and Mark was trying to help do a box set ad.

We were working on it together for my young adult superhero series. For some reason, it was a direct sales ad, straight to Amazon, it was not working. It was not performing well. We thought we had the targeting in pretty good shape, but was not converting. We said, "I don't have any idea why this isn't working. Let's put it out to the community."

We put it out to the Self Publishing Formula group and for the life of me, I don't remember exactly who pointed it out, but someone sent us a screenshot of their mobile device and showed that the first sentence, which was a little bit long, which was describing what was in the box set, how many reviews it has, etc., the first sentence cut off in the middle.

It didn't leave people hanging in a good way because it was in the middle of a sentence. It didn't have the hook. The hook was below that, actually talking about what was exciting about the book. We said, "All right, let's change that." We workshopped a couple of ideas for headlines and we ended up using the hook, a young adult supernatural hook, "When supernatural war strikes, a nerdy teen will rise."

We've got that it's young adult, we've got that there's a superhero in there, etc, etc. Things shot up by about 20% immediately after we put in this headline and the ad started getting a positive return on investment, all because we changed the copy. My sentence that I had written in there before, it was working perfectly well for Mark, because I basically copied, just changing in my info for his for a long sentence, but it wasn't working for mine so we had to make a slight change and it made all the difference.

James: That's a good example. We see it in the Facebook group, the SPF Facebook group, we see it quite a lot that people will post an ad that's not working. You've got to be good. People are very polite about it, but you obviously put your ad out there and you need to understand and take onboard some of the things that were said, but they can occasionally get a long list of everyone pointing out that it's far too long, it's unwieldy, I don't understand what this character is doing, what is this book about, is it romance, it is a thriller, it's not clear. All of that stuff comes out.

The biggest mistake you will frequently see, which we go back to from the beginning is overlong descriptions, overlong literal descriptions. It's a very, very common mistake. But the edge between going to your 9-to-5 and writing on the train on the way home or in the evening and sitting at home making money as a writer can be this stuff, selling the book, getting this bit right can be the edge between making money and not so.

It's great so far. Thank you very much, Bryan. I want to broaden it, if you don't mind, a little bit.

Bryan: Not at all.

James: Let's talk a little bit about generating sales. We talk a lot about launch. We talk a lot about the initial campaign for a book. I know that you've put some thought into where there's a natural drop off, what are we talking? A month, 90 days in where that can really slow down to an absolute trickle. Options look a little bit limited at that stage.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE OR YOUR THOUGHTS AT THAT POINT FOR AN AUTHOR?

Bryan: A lot of people refer to this as the 30-day cliff or the 90-day sales cliff on Amazon. This is when if you've gotten a natural boost at the start of your launch, it can start to go down. For some that's more of a precipitous drop than others.

Your options are a little more limited at that point, because you can't have this big launch boost anymore and Amazon may not give you the natural shooting out emails about your stuff. You're more on your own at that point.

When you're doing that, you really need to think about conversions. You need to think about, "Okay, I have this page out here, essentially it's a sales page, and I am getting traffic to it," and if you aren't getting traffic to it, you obviously need to send traffic to the page through Facebook ads, through promotions, if you're one of the 5% that gets accepted by BookBub, good for you, you use that, you use other email promotion sites.

No matter what methods you use to send traffic, because your options are more limited at this point, you need to improve those conversions. Getting people who visit your page, a higher percentage of those people to actually click the 'buy' button. That conversion rates becomes significantly more important and when you change your description to be a better fit your for your genre, your potential readers, that conversion percentage, goes up.

Sometimes it's only by a couple percentage points. Sometimes it can go up by 100%. All you need to necessarily change is just improving your book description. That simple change can make a world of difference when you promote your book going forward.

James: Let's just explain the concept of conversions and conversion rates to people who are not quite as advanced into this as you are.

Bryan: Of course, of course. Let's say that you have 100 people that visit your Amazon page on the day of a given promotion. If two of those people buy your book, your conversion percentage is 2%, because 2 out of those 100 have purchased it.

You don't know that 100 people have visited because Amazon obviously is not sharing that information any time soon, but let's say that instead of two people, because you have a better description, your Look Inside is fantastic, you got 20 more reviews. You now get four of those people to buy, your conversion percentage has doubled from 2% to 4%.

With a lot of promotions, you can send a significantly higher amount than 100 people. You could send 1,000. Something like BookBub will send 10,000 or more. If you can even improve your conversion percentage by a single percent or two, let alone 100% up from 2% to 4%, then you will see that difference in your bottom line in a big way, compared to the more traffic that you actually send to that page.

James: Yeah, and conversion's work in different ways, of course. It's not just sales. It can be leads for your mailing list in the first place. It can be getting people from one ad to a landing page in the first place. That in itself is a conversion even before they've put it in. You need to micro convert sometimes and work out the steps along the way to find out where people are dropping off in the chain.

Bryan: Of course.

James: This can get complicated, Bryan. I'm doing YouTube advertising at the moment and AdWords is probably one of the more complex systems and particularly with conversion stuff, because you can either do it through the Google Analytics or more traditional pixels. Even me just saying that sentence, some people will be glazing over at this point.

Bryan: Pixels? What?

James: What is a pixel? It sounds like a little elf in your garden. There are people around you you can reach out to who can look after some of that stuff for you if you're not completely familiar with it. You actually only need to do some of this complex stuff. You get your head around it in a brief period of time, at the setup at the beginning. From then on, really you're looking at a dashboard and reading data. People shouldn't be scared of it. Once you get that technical stuff set up at the beginning.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TECHNICAL YOU ARE. DO YOU INSERT CONVERSION PIXELS INTO HEADERS YOURSELF THERE, BRYAN?

Bryan: I wish they were conviction pixels. That would be amazing. Yes, I use conversion pixels on my website for my ads that go to landing pages and whatnot. I do tracking and create audiences and like you guys, I have my products that I put out there so I'm always trying to get people back referred.

I do a lot of that kind of stuff on my own, but I also do outsource some of these things because it can take some time to get it all figured. That's why I love when you can have some kind of method. When Mark and I were working on that ad, I changed one thing, I set it, I forget it, I put it up there, and that one thing made an improvement in conversion.

That's the kind of thing I love about copywriting is because you don't necessarily need to know all the technical stuff to make the improvement. You don't need to know what a pixel is. You don't need to rid the pixels from your garden. You just need to work on improving the rhythm, the focus, and the flow of what you're putting out there. That, in itself, can make a change. When you combine it with all the other stuff, I mean, it's just fantastic, but you don't need to learn that much technical know-how to get that kind of stuff going in the right direction.

James: I'm going to let you go to your lunchtime shake or your afternoon shake in a moment. Let's move back towards copywriting then, which I know is your specialist area to conclude with.

We talked about ads at the beginning or book descriptions at the beginning. Actually, there's quite a lot of writing that you do that's not just the writing of your book. It's not just a book description. Most authors will have a list and will email their readers from time to time. You'll be asked to do descriptions in different formats as we mentioned earlier, BookBub, trying to get a BookBub pitch itself in the first place is in itself a bit of copy writing, separate to the one that you then do for the ad.

WHERE DO PEOPLE START WITH THIS? WE TALKED IN DETAIL ABOUT THE BOOK

DESCRIPTION EARLIER, BUT IS IT THE SAME PRINCIPLES YOU APPLY TO ALL THESE DIFFERENT PLACES?

Bryan: Yes, more or less. You are trying to making sure that your writing elicits some kind of response. In the book description, you want people to get excited and click the 'buy' button.

For the emails, when you get people onto your email list, some of those people have come in through a free promotion of some kind or you're giving them a novella or a free novel, you want them to take a couple actions. You want them to read that free thing so that they get excited enough to buy your paid things, and then when you get ask them to buy the paid things, they do it.

You don't want to be pushy about it. It's a balance. You don't want to be pushy in the description either. You want to encourage them toward that kind of emotion where they get excited enough to buy it and maybe you want to tell them a little bit about yourself along the way. That's with the emails.

With the ads, obviously, like you had mentioned earlier, it's shorter, it's punchier, you have less time to elicit that desired response to get people to click. Same with a landing page. You don't have a lot of room. You want to make sure your button is above the fold so that people will actually click on it and get excited.

Another thing with copywriting that I think is important in the early days when you don't have that advance reader list that Mark has used to launch his books very high in the store and get 100+ reviews on the first day. If you don't have that list yet, but you need reviews, another thing you can do is send out review requests to book reviewers. That has a certain response you want to elicit from people. You want them not to delete your email. You want them to actually go and review it. Another thing, you can't be too pushy but you need to be pushy enough to make sure they take the desired action.

It really comes down to writing in a certain way to get people to take action but without them feeling like you're coercing them or pushing them too hard into that action.

James: It's when you talk to a salesman who's having a conversation with you that's valuable because it's giving you information and steering you towards a sale. Is it Gill in the Simpsons who's desperate? His wife and kids are going to starve if you don't buy the car there and then. Nobody wants to do business

with that guy. It's a tone thing.

CONVERSATION'S PROBABLY THE KEYWORD I WOULD IMAGINE WITH THAT TYPE OF EMAIL. IT IS CONVERSATION RATHER THEN THE PITCH THAT YOU DO IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.

Bryan: When it all fits together, it's perfect. When you say your email isn't just leading into what you want to get out of this person reading this email. It should be a story. It should have something that resonates with people, like your description has a character people can resonate with. It's all about that emotional resonance.

Then the story you tell when it's connected to the offer in that email, then it flows better. It makes more sense. You can take things to an even higher level when you have something at the end of that email that's trying to show that you care about them. You ask them for your their opinion. You ask them what you think about this story that you just told or what books they read.

When you have that all going together, it does feel a lot more conversational as opposed to trying to push someone into something, you are telling them a story, you're saying, "Hey, here's how you can take action on this story," and then you ask them, "Hey, what do you think of this story?" Don't direct quote say that in your email, because that is not good, but when those things combine into one email, it feels a lot more like two friends talking as opposed to a salesman like Gill.

James: I think some people will find this quite a lot to take onboard, because there is a bit of an art to it, but again I think Mark's very good at this. Any bit of communication he does, for him, is about the long term. It's not necessarily about selling a book in that email to that person. It's about knowing that that person will come around to buying a book, three, four, classically seven touches, I think that's been moved forward in the digital age, but three, four touches down the line. Maybe it coincides with a Facebook ad. You can take the pressure off a bit. It's not about that there and then. It's about the long term and have that in your mind as you're writing.

Bryan: You want people to trust you. In Internet marketing, people talking about the know, like, and trust factor. It's just the same in your author career. You want readers who believe you and trust in what you're doing and they like the books that you put out there and then they're a lot more willing, after reading your free book, to buy your second book.

James: This is all great and we don't want to go into too much detail, because the webinar's going to be the place for more details so just give us a quick pre-see of what the webinar will be about.

Bryan: The webinar is going to deep dive a little bit into what you do for those book descriptions, how you write them. Some examples as to how to help people get the feel for that with their particular genre. And then how to deconstruct what you just wrote and turn that into an ad that isn't overlong, an ad that is that short, sweet, really simple way to get more clicks, to get people to take the actions you want, and to boost your sales and your list as a result.

James: Great. Bryan, thank you so much indeed for joining us. One of the things that we try to do with this podcast is to keep it relatively tight because it's a crowded market and we know that people want to listen, of course, to the Sell More Books Show, as well as the SPF Podcast. So we give some people some time in the week and try to keep the interviews to about 45 minutes, which is where we are. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Brilliant to hear you talking in such clear terms, really bringing some clarity to the purpose of those description times when you're writing and I think that's what it needs. As you started at the beginning, people will often start that process and actually not really know what they're doing at this point, which is ironic because they're writers and they've just written a book, but it's an area that we could all do with a bit of help on. That's been brilliant. Thank you!

Bryan: Thank you very much for having me, James. I really do appreciate it.

James: I hesitate to ask what you're having for dinner so I should let you go off to Mrs. ...

Bryan: I'll consider that later. It will not be from a blender.

James: It won't involve spinach. Oh, you can have spinach for dinner. That's normal. It's spinach for breakfast that doesn't really work. Thank you very much, Bryan. We'll speak to you again soon.

Bryan: All right, sounds great.

James: It is odd, isn't it, Mark, that people who can write a novel and a short story and a novella can't put together the five sentences needed to sell the book. Why is that?

Mark: It's a completely different discipline. In the same way that writing a screenplay is very different from writing a novel, condensing 100,000 words into, say, 50 words. It's a different skill. It's quite difficult.

Getting tips from someone like Bryan is a good idea. I thought I was pretty good at writing copy, but I paid Bryan to write the copy for my last John Milton book, *The Jungle*, and he did a much better job than I would have done. It would have taken me hours sweating over commas and colons and sentence length and all that kind of stuff and Bryan came back with something that was really effective very quickly. Yeah, he knows what he's talking about.

James: Yeah, we talked in the interviews. You heard about disengagement a little bit from you, the writer of the novel, because clearly you have such an intimate knowledge of it. You've got to step back and think, "What impact does it have on somebody?" Taking that step back is the difficult thing as most people would find editing their own books is impossible for that very reason.

Mark: We're bumbling, James, aren't we? Who's more tired? Me or you?

James: Yeah, I know, but it's fun. It's an absolute blast and I have to say, we started this podcast, I don't know, you start every project slightly hesitantly, don't you? You're not entirely sure that it's going to work. I completely love this. I love every edition of the podcast we've done. I'm learning absolutely loads and it's great to get lots of good feedback from people who are listening every week and happy to be part of this community. I'm probably waffling now but I just want to say how much I'm enjoying this.

Mark: You sound emotional.

James: It's been emotional.

Mark: Don't cry, James.

James: No, no. Okay, look, that's it from us for now. We've got some super stuff coming up over the next few weeks. We've got some great interviews already in the bag and more to be done shortly. Each one we hope will add a little bit more, another nugget of value and information for you to help your writing career. I will see you next Friday on Podcast #18. Between then and now, what should we say? Get done. Get some words done.

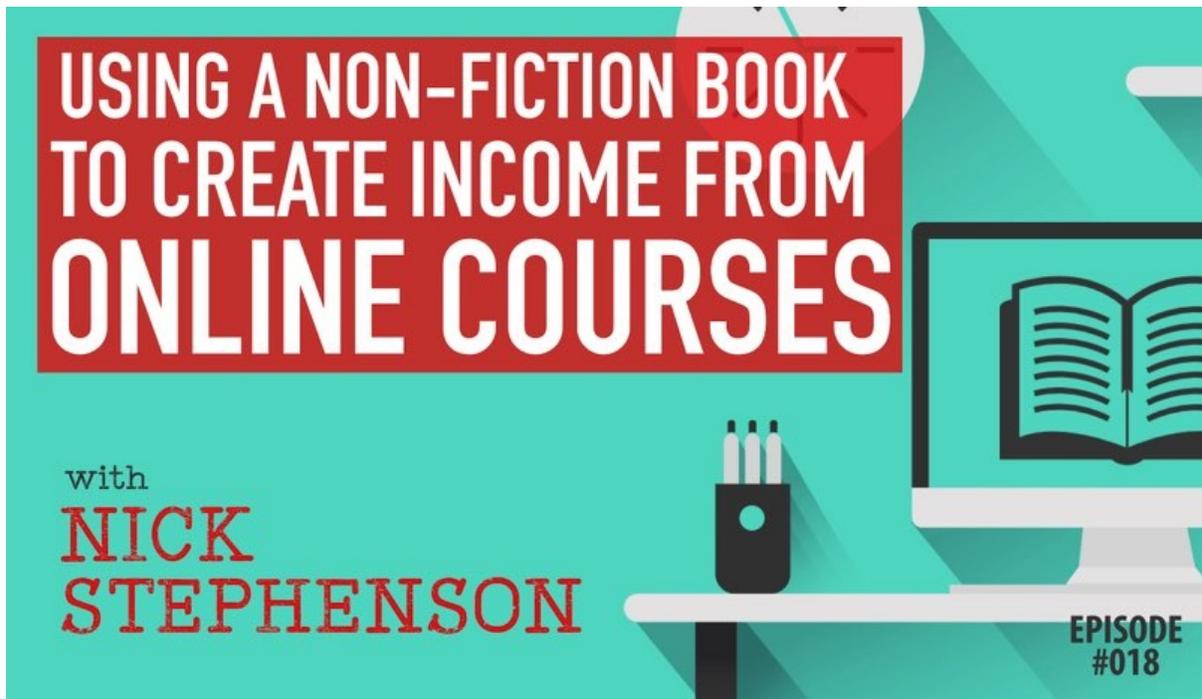
Mark: I'm going to bed.

James: And you're going to bed. Bye!

Mark: Bye!

CHAPTER 15

USING A NON-FICTION BOOK TO CREATE INCOME FROM ONLINE COURSES - WITH NICK STEPHENSON



MUCH OF THE Self Publishing Formula audience is engaged in writing fiction. But there are distinct advantages to learning how to write and distribute non-fiction works. To investigate and expose these opportunities we're starting off today with the first of a 3-part series that focuses on how to write and leverage non-fiction for the purpose of creating income streams beyond book sales. In part two, next week, you will hear David Siteman Garland tell us that EVERYONE has an online course in them, even if you think you're only a fiction writer at the moment. We start however with our good friend Nick Stephenson. Nick has a proven track record in this area and happily provides a wealth of insight on the subject with tips on how you could follow his lead.

THE ADVANTAGES OF NON-FICTION WHEN IT COMES TO PRODUCING INCOME.

When it comes to fiction vs non-fiction, it's often issues of preference, life experience, or writing skill that determines what we end up writing. But Nick points out some very compelling reasons to consider adding non-fiction to your writing skills toolbox. Besides his own success at making the switch, Nick's

also come to realize that the profit potential for non-fiction writers is much greater, simply because the topics non-fiction writers write about are more narrow, more specialized. That means there's a demand for the information you're putting out there that is unique. It's that demand that can drive the need for additional resources to help readers apply what they are learning. Nick shares his journey into non-fiction writing and the amazing income that's come from it. Be sure to listen so you can learn how to apply his techniques to your writing career.

THE FRUSTRATION THAT LED NICK TO BUILD HIS FIRST ONLINE COURSE.

Nick had become a very successful fiction writer, selling at a level higher than most authors ever reach. He wrote a very popular blog that chronicled his journey, including the steps he'd taken to make his writing accessible and produce sales. He began receiving requests to turn his blog into a book, which he did. It sold well but he continued to get the questions that he'd already answered in his book, even from people who had read the book! He wanted people to apply what he'd taught so he decided to build an online course for those who really wanted the knowledge he had to share. His income from that course has grown in leaps and bounds ever since. Hear how Nick did it, and how you can move in the same direction, in this episode.

WHY A COURSE GETS RESULTS THAT A NON-FICTION BOOK DOESN'T.

As Nick began to sell the online course version of his non-fiction books, he saw that the participants in the course were more engaged in the learning and more likely to apply it than those who purchased the book. What he discovered was that making a greater monetary investment proved to be a greater motivation for his students. They were invested in their own success at a level that those who had made a book purchase simply weren't. He suggests that all non-fiction writers consider creating a course to go more deeply into the subjects they've written about, to increase personal income but also to increase the likelihood of students actually applying what you're teaching. Hear more of Nick's journey in this episode of The Self Publishing Formula podcast.

COULD YOU MAKE THE TRANSITION INTO WRITING NON-FICTION?

Nick believes you can achieve this. It's his conviction that everyone has something in their history or background that they could leverage into a non-fiction book. It may be a skill, a way of dealing with a situation, or a philosophy or spiritual perspective. Whatever it is, every person views the areas of life from a unique perspective that might help others. And Nick not only believes you could write a non-fiction book, he also believes that from that book you could create a course to teach students on a deeper level about the concepts you've already covered. And one of the amazing benefits will be that your income opportunities increase exponentially. In this episode you can hear how Nick suggests you get started.

Much of the Self Publishing Formula audience is engaged in writing fiction. But there are distinct advantages to learning how to write and distribute nonfiction that fiction does not lend itself to. To investigate and expose those opportunities we're starting off today with a 3 episode series about how to write and leverage nonfiction for the purpose of creating streams of income that go beyond book sales. For this first part of the trilogy we've invited our good friend Nick Stephenson to join us. Nick has proven to be very successful at doing exactly what we're after and on this episode he shares a wealth of insight into how he got started and how you can do the same.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Why courses are a powerful means of income and an introduction of today's guest: Nick Stephenson.
- Nick's bio and introduction.
- How Mark was influenced by Nick's work and career.
- Nick's transition from fiction to nonfiction writing and his first courses.
- Why a course gets results that a book does not.
- The right and wrong way to use a "free" resource or book.
- How Nick follows up with the people on his mailing list.
- The lifestyle Nick and Mark get to enjoy because of their courses.
- Why writers need to understand that writing is a business venture.
- The tone of Nick's emails to his list.
- What kind of frequency does Nick publish his email to his list?
- Nick's preferences and goals in writing.
- How Nick builds his mailing list from the beginning.
- The power of testing your course topic and idea.
- Leveraging competitiveness to make your business work.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.YourFirst10KReaders.com - Nick's website
- BOOK: Supercharge Your Kindle Sales
- BOOK: Reader Magnets
- BOOK: [The 4 Hour Work Week](#) by [Tim Ferriss](#)
- BOOK: Will It Fly by [Pat Flynn](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH NICK STEPHENSON

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 18 from The Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello, here we are again with you and we have a good little mini-series embedded within our podcast for the next three episodes and we're quite excited about this Mark because we talk a lot about novels, we talk a lot about fiction, but we've decided we are going to do a mini-series on non-fiction.

Now, before we get properly into talking about non-fiction and why we're doing this, we've got to flag up something that's going to be of very great interest to, I think, novelists as well as non-fiction people, principally probably fiction writers and that is writing copy with adverbs.

People have heard the fantastic podcast with Bryan Cohen. I said fantastic, it's my podcast, our podcast but I think it was fantastic. I learned a lot from Bryan. He was brilliant.

Just to set this up a little bit before I hear why you think it's so important, I do remember very early-on we had a guest Johanna Penn - one of our very early guests on the podcast. I remember we asked her, "Is it easy to make non-fiction work in the same way it is fiction?", and she burst out laughing saying it's much easier to make non-fiction work. And partly that was because she went on to explain that the range of different things available to you, not just books.

IT'S A BIG PART OF QUITE A FEW PEOPLE WE ASSOCIATE WITH IN THIS AREA, A BIG PART OF THEIR INCOME, NON-FICTION, ISN'T IT?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it is, and it's going to be a big part of plenty of the businesses of our listeners as well. It's something that I've wanted to do for a little while. We've obviously got a lot of experience now in doing this ourselves. We've built a non-fiction business over the course of the last 12 months, so we've learned a lot of things during the course of that time that I think will help a lot of people.

What we're going to do is we're going to look at something that goes beyond just how to sell a non-fiction book. We'll talk about that a little bit too and the usual things we talk about with regards to making books physical, building a mailing list, all that kind of stuff is as relevant to non-fiction books as it is to fiction books and novels and things like that.

But, what we're going to look at in a big more detail over the course of the next three episodes is how you can take a non-fiction business or an expertise you have that would qualify you to write a book on non-fiction and how you can go beyond that and actually build something a bit more substantial and specifically build a course.

James Blatch: Okay. Courses are very hot at the moment. Obviously people will know that we have a course which is a non-fiction income for our company as you say. I suppose a bit of a spoiler ahead of our first guest is that you've got your non-fiction book, and I noticed a few people signing up for the course recently who have non-fiction books, and what they might be surprised to learn is that it's very possible the book is not the money making aspect of their non-fiction income as you say.

It's possibly even a loss-lead they give away to turn into income through other streams such as an online course. And depending on what area of non-fiction you're in, that's something that really can be leveraged. And, we've got the perfect opening guest on this, haven't we? We've got somebody who was ahead of the curve in many ways and is a great mind on these matters and has a proven track record of building a business out of non-fiction. He's somebody who's very familiar I think to lots of people in SPF and lots of people who are in our community came through him. He is a fellow Brit, just 20 miles up the road from me, and that is Nick Stephenson.

Mark Dawson: Nick's been doing courses for longer than I have. I originally came to know Nick through a non-fiction book that he had out on supercharging your Kindle sales; that was the name of the book. He found out early on he could use that as effectively a loss-lead as you say, and introduction to potential new customers who might like to learn from him.

He turned that book - which was very successful - he turned that into an entrée for Your First 10,000 Readers, which is successful flagship course. I knew when we looked at this particular subject and how people could make money from non-fiction, I knew one of the people that we had to speak to was Nick. Fortunately, as you say, he's a good friend of mine now, he's a good friend of yours, James. He was the perfect first person for us to talk to.

James Blatch: Yeah, and because online courses are turning out to be a very good way of creating an income stream for you with your non-fiction knowledge if you like, we're going to really focus on them.

The next 2 interviews - they'll make up parts 2 and 3 of this mini-series - will be with David Siteman Garland who's a man who understands how to get a course from an idea in your head to something that's going to be a profitable venture for you. Finally Ankur Negpal who's based in New York and is one of the founders of The Teachable Platform which is a platform we use and it's quite widely used in this area as well.

Lots of good, valuable information to come for the non-fiction crowd. Even if you are now currently a novelist, David's interview in particular is quite inspirational. He basically says anybody has it in them to create an online course that other people will want to buy. That's a really good interview to listen to even if you don't think necessarily it applies to you first up.

AS MARK SAYS, LET'S START WITH OUR FRIEND, NICK STEPHENSON.

Nick Stephenson straddles the twin areas of fiction writing and actual selling ... Do you see what I did there? ... He's the author of the Leopold Blake thrillers, but within our community perhaps best known for his non-fiction work which aimed to helping fellow authors turn their hobby into serious income-generating professions. To that end, he's written books such as 'Reader Magnets: Get your readers to come to you', 'Supercharge your Kindle Sales', and best known of all, perhaps, his online presence, 'Your First 10,000 Readers'.

OUR INTEREST TODAY IS NOT JUST THE ADVICE ON SELLING BOOKS, BUT HOW NICK HAS BUILT A SMALL NON-FICTION EMPIRE. SO, WELCOME, EMPEROR NICK.

Nick Stephenson: Thank you. I like the idea of being an Emperor, and also straddling stuff; I do love straddling. Thank you for having me.

James Blatch: You're very welcome. Welcome to the SPF podcast. We should say also, geographically, you and I at least are quite close because we're in the same English county of Cambridgeshire.

Nick Stephenson: I think you're basically around the corner. I should have just done this at your house.

James Blatch: Well you're further north, and obviously we don't go north from here.

Nick Stephenson: Yeah, you shouldn't. It's grim up north.

James Blatch: Yeah. And Mark's across in the west country, or heading that way, but the magic of electronics, we're all in the same place for this podcast. Nick, I know Mark and I have both followed you for some time now, and Mark when he's having his more honest moments will say that you are quite an inspiration to him to perhaps open a new avenue of income stream for himself.

IS THAT FAIR, MARK? THAT I THINK YOU WERE QUITE INSPIRED BY NICK?

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. I think Nick put the course out and I watched endlessly as he put it together and launched it really successfully. I wouldn't have been interested in doing the Facebook ads course if it wasn't for Nick's example, so that's absolutely true.

James Blatch: There's a lot of people grateful for that. Nick, let's start with that, then, because this is an area ... I mean, people look at you and they look at Mark and think, "Well, this is very special. They've got this very specific talent or knowledge in an area that they could monetize."

BUT ACTUALLY, YOU'RE TEACHING PEOPLE WHO WRITE BOOKS THAT THERE ARE WAYS OF MAKING MONEY BEYOND THE BOOK-SELLING ITSELF, AREN'T YOU?

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. I think it's a similar worry a lot of people have when they think about courses in general. They think, "Oh, I'm not an expert." Or, "I don't have a PhD or a doctorate in something, therefore I can't possibly be a teacher," but in reality, if you've got experience that other people will benefit from, then I think it's up to you to share that experience with people if that's what you want to do. Courses is a great way of doing that.

James Blatch: When did you first migrate from writing a novel to writing non-fiction?

Nick Stephenson: It was a couple years ago when, I had written 6 novels and only really recently figured out how to sell them. I think a lot of authors when you write your books and you put so much effort into them and you release them out into the world and nothing much happens, I think the common wisdom - I hesitate to call it wisdom - is that all you need to do is just constantly write more and more books all the time and then somehow magic things will happen and you'll become a success.

In reality, it's a lot more difficult than that. When I figured out that the real key was instead of building a huge backlist was focusing more on building up an audience to my existing backlist. Then things started to get a lot more successful a lot more quickly. I'd been documenting everything on this little blog that I have which I decided to set up right from the get-go and write stuff about what was happening, and I was getting more and more followers and people were asking me to put out a book that would do the same thing, so I did.

First of all I wrote a book called 'Supercharge Your Kindle Sales' which is all about key words and categories and lovely stuff like that. And then I released a book called 'Reader Magnets' which is about how to turn random traffic into e-mail addresses and then follow up with people.

It was great, people loved the books, but I still found that people would download these books and then they would e-mail me questions that were specifically answered in the books. Or they'd tell me, "Hey, I love your books. I'm just getting started as an author, how do I sell more copies?" It's just like, "Did you read the book? Did you take any of it in?"

I realized after maybe 6 months or so - bearing in mind that the books are selling well and that there were affiliate products in there that I was recommending. I'd say I used a particular e-mail program and I really liked it. I'd send people a link, and I'd earn a commission if they bought it. It was earning a decent income for me, but it was still frustrating because people weren't really investing in the information in there. They were kind of just reading it and then forgetting about it.

I was researching what other companies were doing, and I came across online courses; people selling really in-depth training - way more in-depth than you could go into in a book - and the students who were taking these courses were actually using the information and getting results and just being over the moon about it. I thought, "That's the response that I want from people following my strategies. I want them to actually go out and do it, invest in themselves, put it into practice, and then get results. That's what I want." I then decided to put together a course, and it all came from there, really.

James Blatch: Why do you think a course gets results or gets people motivated and actionable rather than a book? Because you can put a lot of detail in a book.

Nick Stephenson: You can, and I think there's a few reasons. The courses, for a start, they tend to be more expensive. That immediately disqualifies the people who aren't really serious about it. You've all the courses that are \$5 or free and they have thousands of students and very few of them actually do anything with this information. But when you have a premium training, it's more like an education.

You know, you go to university or you go to college and you're investing a lot of money and a lot of time to learn something specific, and people are happy to do that. But if it's a free evening class, people just tend not to really go or get relaxed about it. Having that course, having that kind of formal structure where students can come and learn something specific in a lot detail - often with videos to go along with it as well. I think the price barrier's helpful as well, because it means that people are physically handing over something. They've become more invested in the outcome. They tend to work harder and get better results as a result of it.

That's the main difference, really, is you can't charge more than about \$10 for a book. Even that's kind of at the high end, and even at that sort of level, people are just sort of downloading it out of curiosity, reading it, and not doing a whole lot with it in a lot of cases. The course structure was perfect.

James Blatch: There's an expression wasn't it, about free money? "Nobody plays well with free money." So, if you give somebody \$1,000 and buy them into a poker tournament, they'll play rubbish. If it's their \$1,000, all their focus and attention is there. I think that kind of backs up the theme that you've become invested in something and that in itself means you're more likely to make the most of it.

Nick Stephenson: Absolutely.

James Blatch: Well let's just dwell on giving away things for free and people not being invested in it, because conversely that is actually an important part of the strategy that both you and Mark advocate and it's a running theme on almost every interview we do on this podcast. I noticed that, is it the Kindle supercharge book is perma free now?

Nick Stephenson: 'Reader Magnets' is, yeah. That one.

James Blatch: Oh, 'Reader Magnets'. That one is perma free now.

THIS IS SOMETHING YOU USE BOTH WITH YOUR NOVELS AND WITH YOUR NON-FICTION; THAT PERMAFREE ELEMENT.

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. Free is a wonderful way of getting attention and then figuring out who are the people you want to target going forward.

Take for example the fiction side of things; I offer a free book as a sort of starter - Mark does as well - and we use that to encourage people to sign up to our mailing list. We're still not going to get 100% of people going to buy something. But it's a way of getting those people through the door and then figuring out who the buyers are.

Because something is free, you're going to get a lot of people interested in downloading it. Not all of them are going to be perspective buyers, so then your job is to follow up and figure out who your target audience is and then to also convert those people who are on the fence into buyers.

Free is a wonderful way of building an audience and getting attention, but to get people results in terms of the percentage of people that are going to do something with it, it's kind of lacking, so you have to have something else to work towards as well.

James Blatch: It also pre-qualifies people as well. Let's say if we move out of the kind of thing that we do, Nick, and let's say we were doing a book about electrical engineering; something really esoteric. If you had a free book and somebody downloaded it and then they signed up to your list after reading the book, you know at that point that they are at the very least interested enough in electrical engineering to download the book. You're getting a different quality of potential customer that would be the case if you just put up an advert to a wide spectrum of people.

Nick Stephenson: Yeah, or offer cash. Here's \$5 if you sign up to my list - the worst idea in the universe. It does give you that great way of getting attention from the right people and then further qualifying people as we go.

Mark Dawson: Can we just drill into a little bit of detail?

I'M INTERESTED IN THE POST-MAILING LIST WORK THAT YOU DO TO THEN WORK OUT WHO YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE GOING TO BE? COULD YOU GIVE US 1 OR 2 TIPS OR TRICKS AT THAT STAGE? ONCE YOU'VE GATHERED THE NAMES HOW YOU THEN DO THE DETAILED WORK AFTERWARDS?

Nick Stephenson: Sure. Everyone on your mailing list - let's say there's 100 people on your list. You're going to have maybe 10% of the people are going to be buyers already. They love what you do, maybe they've read your previous books or seen you speak or whatever. They're going to be the people who are your super fans; about 10%.

There's going to be about 5-10%, maybe more, who are never going to buy from you. They just wanted the free book or the free gift and they're not interested in anything else and they will eventually ignore you or unsubscribe.

It's that 80% of other people who are on the fence or not quite decided yet that we then have to target before we offer anything for sale.

This is a big frustration for people. They build up a mailing list and they immediately start sending out sales messages. You've all seen them where you see an advert that says "1 weird trick that can lose belly fat in 3 days," that kind of stuff, and you maybe sign up for this and then immediately you start getting sales messages through and most of the people will turn it off.

But there will be a small percentage of people who will buy it; otherwise, why are they doing it? But the vast majority - that 80% - might buy, but haven't yet decided. It's our job to then follow up with people to try and get those people who are on the fence to buy and commit.

So, what we do after someone signs up for our e-mail list is we send them more e-mails, and depending on what it is that we're going to sell, that's going to have a different focus to it. The idea is to convert those people who aren't sure yet or don't really know who you are, haven't quite built up the trust yet to build that trust, that brand recognition, and then lead people up the mountain, so-to-speak, towards the purchase.

We might do that by sending out more free content like blog posts or videos or podcasts or maybe more books, and we do it in such a way that we're telling people that this is what to expect from us, this is the

kind of quality I am, and I've got some more cool stuff coming your way soon, but it's going to be more premium-based.

Where, fiction, this would probably be a good example where you have someone sign up for a free book and then you might offer them teasers and previews of your upcoming launch and get people excited and ready to buy. And then when launch time comes you've hopefully converted some of those 80% into the buyers. That's really what the idea of getting people into the mailing list is all about, is converting people who have never heard of you into people who love you and want to buy everything you've ever put out.

James Blatch: I think it's 2-fold. The first thing, as you say, Nick, is you're introducing yourself to people so they get to trust you and feel that they have a relationship with you and you're really good in your e-mails; your personality comes through very strongly in your e-mails and that works really well. Let's go back to my horrible example of electrical engineering.

Nick Stephenson: I love that idea. I'm doing it.

James Blatch: No, I'm doing it first.

Mark Dawson: So competitive, you two.

James Blatch: We've talked about it; if it's a particular problem that these people have, you're demonstrating that you have the solution to this problem. As you say, you can give free videos which is something that we both do. You could give out books or podcasts or all that kind of stuff, but the end game is to demonstrate that you are qualified to offer advice to help them solve their problems.

Nick Stephenson: Exactly. Even if you're not a PhD in something, you're showing people that they can trust you and that you have the expertise in other ways. That's part of converting those people into buyers, definitely.

James Blatch: And we should say that there's a little Nick in the environment.

Nick Stephenson: There is. He's really noisy, isn't he? He's a much smaller and more ginger form of me.

James Blatch: Aww, that's very sweet and it's absolutely fine. People will love to hear a family environment. In fact, one of the things that people are working towards when they invest in your course, Nick, and they talk to Mark as well, is this lifestyle that you live.

Let's talk about that for a second, because obviously you're up north from Cambridgeshire, but it's still a nice place. You work from home, you spend time with your children; both of you do that. This is the end goal for a lot of people that will be listening to this podcast.

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. I think Teddy's handcuffs might be too tight. That's probably why he's screaming.

James Blatch: Is the radiator starting to come off the wall?

Nick Stephenson: Exactly. It's really kind of rattling the chains there.

The lifestyle has been amazing, and it's something that I've yearned for for so long. When I finished university, I graduated into the recession; the world's best timing. I think the day I graduated was when they had the news stories of all those guys in front of the banks with their cardboard boxes, so I was forced to find ways to find work and income through it.

I had such a great time being my own boss and doing various sorts of things. I mean, I made no money whatsoever - just enough to pay rent. But then when I eventually went into a full-time corporate job, I just found it so frustrating because you could never get anything to happen and you were always kind of constrained by what the business wanted to do, you couldn't experiment, and everything was very slow.

I realized I wanted to go back to that idea of being my own boss, but preferably one where I could afford to eat as well as get the bus on a daily basis. It eventually transitioned into fiction and then non-fiction and

then the courses. There's other experiments going on as well to see what's working, and it's been great fun. It's allowed me to pick and choose my hours and to work from home or from wherever. The key being that I don't have to be in a specific place at a specific time in order to earn revenue. Apart from recording this podcast, of course, which is awesome because it's not based on a U.S. timezone. Most of mine are at like, 9:00 at night.

Generally speaking, you have this system, this funnel, this business that's built up that can earn revenue for you without you having to physically be there to run it. People throw the word 'passive income' around a lot, and it's not really passive. You do have to do stuff, but you don't have to do it from 9-5, 5 days a week. You can pick and choose how you do it, and that's the real freedom for me is getting to see my kids grow up and not having to worry about getting into the commute and traffic every morning. It's just been amazing.

James Blatch: That's one of the key differences there between fiction and non-fiction is that with non-fiction, you're using a book as a lead generator and then sending prospective customers to a course, for example. The course still needs to be updated, you still need to do the promotion and finding new customers and all that kind of stuff. It is less intensive than continuing to write novels. The key difference is that once the course is done and the funnels are operating, you can take your foot off the gas a little bit, but with fiction, if you want to be successful, unless you have a break-out hit, you do have to keep producing content.

Nick Stephenson: Especially with publisher deadlines, Mark.

Mark Dawson: Yes, tell me about it. Very much the Tim Ferris, the 4 hour work week approach, and it's an important point to make. I'm setting out on the fiction writing things, and so I'm soaking up everything that I hear from you, Nick, and everyone else. I'll tell what is so difficult; because we all take ourselves seriously as authors and we all think we've got this novel and it's nice to be a journalist, I should be able to write, but ...

Nick Stephenson: You make stuff up, don't you?

Mark Dawson: I make stuff up, exactly, for the BBC. Now I do it for myself. The BBC was not privy to

that statement. The important thing is I'm starting to understand this is a commercial venture, this is a business venture, there's going to be a laser focus to it.

A real awakening to it for me actually was sitting down on a sofa with Adam Croft a few weeks back, listening to him who's written 7 or 8 books in a row, done a lot of the stuff that we talk about and made some income, and then he just reversed it. He started marketing Facebook ads that really started working for him, and he reverse-engineered his book. He sat down and wrote a book that would work for the ads, not the other way around, and that was his golden 'hello moment' to the Tim Ferris dream.

That's what I'm starting to get around to; this idea this is not a pretentious thing, I'm not trying to win a book prize, but I'm trying to change my life.

I NEED TO HAVE THAT RELENTLESS FOCUS ON THE COMMERCIAL ASPECT OF THE WRITING.

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. I think there's still a degree of snobbery in the literary world that we have to try and overcome and you will see this. Any indie authors listening to this, we all know that within the indie community there's snobbery about people who write 'How-To' books, for example.

If you look outside the indie industry, there's snobbery from the traditionally published people about people writing indie books and selling on Amazon. There's snobbery about snobbery about snobbery, and just like you said, the goal here is to create something, change peoples' lives, and change your own life as well and we're all kind of in the same boat. The idea that it's a commercial venture is what we've really got to get behind here and try and let go of these slightly snobby approaches I think.

James Blatch: Let's go back a little bit for more detail because it's the stuff I'm interested in and I suspect a lot of listeners as well. If we go back to the e-mails, I want to talk to you about 2 aspects of them. 1 is frequency and the other is tone.

We've spoken to a few people - Marie Force was a really interesting one on tone. She has a very friendly 'you're part of the team and this is an exciting adventure, we're all going on this adventure together' sort of atmosphere that she creates for her readers and that works tremendously well for her.

I read your e-mails, you're quite witty, you're quite personable in the way that you write; quite edgy I think as well in some of the things that you do.

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT TONE AND HOW IMPORTANT IS THAT IN TERMS OF GETTING YOU TO WHERE YOU NEED TO BE WITH THE MAILING LIST?

Nick Stephenson: For me I find the less I think about tone and the more I just write what comes naturally, the better things go. When I first started out, I was writing extremely generic e-mails. You could sign up for someone's mailing list and get a dozen e-mails just like the ones I'd written through. They were quite boring. They were still effective, but they weren't very interesting.

Then I started working on trying to let go of the idea of offending people. Not going out of my way to be offensive, but not self-censoring too much. I would write about an opinion on a certain marketing strategy I'd heard about and I will talk about it and I will tell people what they should be doing instead. I'll write it as though we're in a conversation like we're having a conversation right now, and I won't hold back.

I'm not going to be releasing f-bombs or anything, but it's just trying to figure out what your own voice is and not restrict yourself too much. That was a turning point for me because it became actually quite fun to write the e-mails and people would respond to them and they would get really excited and love them, and then some people would hate them of course, which is equally amusing. Then I would take screenshots of people sending me hate mail and I would put that in an e-mail and explain to people why you can't please everybody.

It's just this idea of having a little bit of fun, trying to be yourself, and trying not to make yourself so generic that everybody finds you boring. They'll either turn on the sleaze - usually because that's what they're used to reading - or they'll write something that's so middle of the road and so bland because they're terrified of somebody unsubscribing that then everybody else just finds it a little bit dull.

For me, having that tone and having your own unique voice makes a big difference and you can see that in the amount of interaction that I get in my e-mails now is a hell of a lot better than it was when I first started out. That's natural; you learn as you go.

My big tip is to try and let go of what you think you should be writing and just be yourself and try to get your voice to shine through. You're an author. You're a writer. You should have that ability to do that in

your books, just apply the same process to your e-mails as well and it'll make a big difference.

James Blatch: That's the thing that you said there that I sometimes struggle with is worrying about unsubscribes. At the end of the day it doesn't really matter that much. I think the thing that bothered me was when I thought I found out what MailChimp thresholds were, and I was actually catching myself getting the calculator like, "Shit. I've had 20 unsubscribes and I've sent out 10,000 e-mails. Does that mean I'm above the threshold?"

Of course I wasn't, I'm not even sure how firmly those thresholds are administered. I don't think I know anyone who's had their accounts shut down for those kinds of reasons. I think you look at unsubscribes and that's a pretty visible way to judge whether people have been offended or not by what you've written and it's very easy to let yourself be bothered by that and you have to let go and almost ignore it.

Don't be spammy, obviously, but don't be afraid to be yourself.

IF PEOPLE DON'T LIKE YOUR MESSAGE OR THE WAY THAT YOU SPEAK, THEN THEY CAN UNSUBSCRIBE. IT'S PROBABLY BEST THAT THEY DO BECAUSE YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO BE COMPATIBLE TO THEM, ANYWAY.

Nick Stephenson: Exactly. I found when I changed the tone of my e-mails to be more like I'm talking today, that my unsubscribe rate stayed exactly the same. Every e-mail I send out, it's the exact same percentage unsubscribe rate. I can't remember what it is, but it's below the danger zone.

And I found that while unsubscribes stayed the same, people clicking and opening and replying got a lot higher, so it's been that benefit of trying to let go of that fear a little bit and just be yourself definitely helps.

James Blatch: That's something that when it comes to fiction, I find that when you enjoy what you're writing, other people will enjoy it more too. I've tried to write fiction before to market without being in a genre that I particularly enjoy and that stuff was awful to write, and I imagine it was awful to read.

Nick Stephenson: No, I like the John Nelson series. What's that about f-bombs? You're about to get one. No, no, it's kind of way back when I went from traditional publishing to trashy continuing to try and get a

deal and I wrote something because I thought it would sell a lot, and it was like pulling teeth. It's similar; I've tried to write e-mails before and tried to make it sound like someone who isn't me. They're awful. It doesn't work. They're awful to write, they're probably awful to read, and no one wins. It's just better to be yourself.

James Blatch: People spot insincerity very quickly I guess, is the thing. Although, for some people I suppose their voice might not be exactly them. What is it we always used to say on radio? That you have to go away from yourself and then come back, but not all the way back.

IT'S NOT QUITE LIKE THE WAY YOU TALK IN A PUB TO SOMEBODY. IT'S SOMEWHERE BETWEEN BEING A LITTLE BIT PROTECTING AND A LITTLE BIT YOURSELF. I THINK THAT'S PROBABLY THE SAME WITH YOUR E-MAIL VOICE.

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. It's probably not exactly how I talk to my kids, for example, but we have different tones for different circumstances. As long as it's authentic and it's you, then I think that's all that matters.

James Blatch: Okay. Let's talk about frequency. You're quite prolific with your e-mails I think, Nick.

DO YOU HAVE A FORMULA YOU FOLLOW IN TERMS OF FREQUENCY, OR DO YOU JUST JUDGE IT BY RESPONSES AND WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY?

Nick Stephenson: For non-fiction, for the courses, when someone signs up for the first time - depending on where they've signed up, if they're going through kind of like a pre-launch sequence for example I'm sending them lots of free stuff and I'm excited, then they'll get an e-mail from me every single day. And then once they've gone through that, I might only e-mail them once or twice a week. It depends if I have anything interesting to say.

What I'm actually doing right now is I'm building up a backlist, for want of a better word, of e-mails that have performed well in the past - that are sort of evergreen - so that when people are finished going through a particular sequence, I can move them into what we call an engagement sequence where I have nothing to sell, I just want to give them valuable stuff and that will automatically send them an e-mail once a week or twice a week with something really cool with what I've written in the past.

This can work amazingly well because if you e-mail too often for too long ... Like, I wouldn't e-mail someone every day for a year, for example. If you e-mail too often, you're going to turn people off, and if

you don't e-mail enough, people are going to forget about you.

I found this out last year after I launched my course for the first time. It was so exhausting and there was so much work to do afterwards, I didn't e-mail anyone on my list for like 4 months, and by the time I got back to emailing again, the engagement had just dropped through the floor, so I had to work really hard to build that back up again. Now I'm trying to send at least one e-mail a week to people with something useful or inspirational or educational or entertaining or something for them to really keep up with me and the brand.

Frequency, there's not really hard and fast rules. For fiction, I think if you tried to e-mail someone twice a week, they'd probably complain. Everyone would probably unsubscribe. Fiction's a bit different; it's a lot broader.

With something very specific like electrical engineering or belly dancing for plumbers, it's a lot more specific, so people tend to have a higher threshold for how much information they get because it's useful for them. It all depends on your audience, but frequency is whatever feels right for you and you've tested on your audience. There's no kind of standard answer for that one.

James Blatch: Plus, relevancy is much easier when you know what people are interested in. For fiction, for example, I know that people like my books, but there's only so many times I can write and say, "Writing went well this week. I wrote 10,000 words yesterday. It was great."

Nick Stephenson: Exactly.

James Blatch: That's pretty much the end of the conversation for me, at least. Some authors will have a different approach to that, but not me. When you're talking about how do you get more readers, or for us, how do you use Facebook to sell books, you know the people aren't interested in selling books or building their mailing list and there will always be something new to say about that. A different approach or a different strategy that is or isn't working, so you can always say something and you know the people are interested in that particular subject.

IT'S EASIER TO CRAFT THOSE E-MAILS AND MAKE THEM INTERESTING AND RELEVANT. IT IS DIFFERENT BETWEEN THE GENRES.

Nick Stephenson: Definitely. And fiction readers as well. They might love your books, but may not care the slightest how you wrote them or how many words you've done, so it can be more tricky. Which is why for fiction if I don't have anything to say, I won't say anything or I'll e-mail out about another book I've read that isn't mine that I think people will like. But I try not to e-mail too often because like you said, it's not going to be relevant to most people unless it's specifically about a book I know they'd like, and if they get those too often, it's going to turn them off.

Mark Dawson: The way I've gotten around that problem is on the fiction side of things I only e-mail when I've got something that they might be interested in reading; like a new book or maybe a deal. Occasionally I might let them know about a deal. For their kind of lifestyle stuff, the writing process or news.

I did a Facebook live video which is very engaging because you can field questions in real time, people can have a look in your study while you're recording, all that good stuff. It's just great for them and it's great for me because I don't have to sit down and write a bloody e-mail, so it's good all around really. People work different, but that's working pretty well for me right now.

James Blatch: Let's move on a little bit in the time that we've got left, Nick, and talk about the split in your life between the 2. I'm interested to know which one you enjoy doing.

DO YOU EVER KICK BACK AND THINK, "IF I WAS JUST WRITING NOVELS OR HAD THIS ONE FOCUS, I'D BE HAPPIER, IT'D BE A CLEARER LIFE," OR VICE-VERSA? IS IT THE NON-FICTION SIDE?

Nick Stephenson: It comes and goes, really. I think my goal in life is to work on what makes me happy. I spent 3 years writing fiction and loved every minute of it, but then that story came to a close. I tried writing a new series, I tried a couple more books, got quite a long way through them, and then just decided that the passion wasn't there for that story.

So, I decided that instead of releasing something that I wasn't 100% happy with, that I would focus on something else instead, which was building up the course, building up the teaching, helping other authors build up their audience as well. It was becoming more and more fulfilling for me. Especially as we said earlier because people are investing in the education, getting results from it.

I get e-mails from people for whom it has literally change their lives. They've quit their jobs, they've hit

the top of best-seller lists, they're finally getting to where they want to be. This is very fulfilling to me and that's really what drives me to do more on this side. But, I also know that I will go back to fiction, but I'll go back when the time is right, and that's an option that is thankfully open to me, so I'm very grateful for that.

James Blatch: Okay. List building. We're to go back to the beginning part of the conversation. Your list was essential with novels. It's absolutely essential; it's the golden way that people innovate and commercialize on the internet.

TALK TO US PERHAPS ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE 2 AREAS AND HOW YOU INITIALLY BUILT YOUR LIST, WHAT TECHNIQUES YOU USED FOR THE NON-FICTION SIDE.

Nick Stephenson: The way I built my list - and still do - is a big chunk of it comes from having free books on Amazon and the other e-book platforms. As we said earlier, free is a great way of getting attention, and if you're doing something smart with that attention like converting that attention into e-mail addresses and following up with them, that is a really great way of using revenue.

I still use that model today because it just works in the background once you set it up. It just continues to work. I also did some guest posts and guest blogs have been very successful as well. Joint venture partnerships have been very successful, giveaways have been great, and Facebook ads have been good as well. There are many ways to build an e-mail list. The key is focusing on what's giving you the best bang for your buck.

James Blatch: How much paid advertising do you do?

Nick Stephenson: Not a huge amount at the moment because I'm still getting a lot of people signing up through other revenues, but this is something that I'm working on this year. At the moment, I might spend a couple of thousand dollar on Facebook advertising, but the goal is really to 10x that this year.

Now that I have the opportunity to focus on that, that's something that I'm going to be looking at very closely, because it's a great way of scaling up. Because when you've got permafrees, books are great, doing guest posts, guest blogs on popular sites is great. Joint venture partnerships are amazing as well, but if you want to literally have touch of the button control over how much traffic you're getting, Facebook ads

are definitely the way to go for that.

James Blatch: In terms of approach for this, there are going to be people listening who have the vestiges of ideas of non-fiction for building up courses and material and they've got something to work. There's lots of nuts and bolts. It's obviously very valuable listening to you on this subject and Mark, but in terms of the kind of attitude and approach that you need, is there any tips you can give people? It can be a bit discouraging working by yourself, can't it? We can all self-doubt quite a lot about this.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU CAN TALK TO PEOPLE AT THE BEGINNING STAGE OF OPENING UP A NON-FICTION ELEMENT TO THEIR INDUSTRY?

Nick Stephenson: There's a lot of things to think about when you're just starting out, and I think you mentioned that idea of getting overwhelmed and feeling a bit lonely is definitely something to work around. I think one of the ways around that is to objectively test what it is you're planning to do.

If you've got a vague idea of what you want to do in any business, if you can test it and you can prove that the market is there and the desire is there. Then that should hopefully give you the confidence to move forward which is starting to build the framework of what your business is going to look like and how you're going to get people to notice it.

A really simple way is Google keyword analysis and Google trends, looking on Amazon to see what kind of topics and areas are getting the most attention.

If you have a list already, then sending out surveys is a great way to find out what people are interested in as well. I did one at the end of last year which was really helpful for me because I basically redesigned all of my free content around the results of this survey. This was to authors, asking them what's your number 1 struggle, and their results were really quite interesting. I was expecting people to say things like their number 1 struggle was selling books or their number 1 struggle was getting reviews, and while people did say that, overwhelmingly, the number one struggle was building an audience.

My course had been, luckily, focused on audience building right from the start. But obviously, I was going to do a course specifically about selling or specifically maybe keyword optimization or something like that. But having done the survey and looked at the actual results, that would have been an absolute disaster.

If you can test your ideas, make sure that people are going to be interested enough in them to pay, then that's a really effective way of overcoming that doubt because you know that objectively the market is there and that all you need to do is have the right product and get it in front of those people. That really helps you move onto the next stage which is actually doing the work.

James Blatch: And keep believing it while you go along, because that's the problem. I think people may start out with that enthusiasm and they can do some research and they've got the idea and they think it's going to work. It's 6 weeks down the road. It was with our business, I'm sure with yours; there's quite a long period before there's any income, before there's any tangible results, and they're the moments that I think you and Mark have been successful in in keeping that focus.

Nick Stephenson: It was 4 months for me from the date that I started. Even longer actually. It was more like 6 months. But it took me 4 months to build the course and launch it, so all the time I was building this course and I was getting everything ready, there was always this nagging doubt in the back of my mind that no one's going to be interested and no one's going to want to buy this. But I knew from the e-mails I was sending out, the research that I'd done, the surveys I was doing, that people were very excited about it, so that kept me going and really pushed me to finish it.

James Blatch: I remember that quite well because we'd met each other before you started doing the course and you came over to do a session where we did a chat. That didn't work because ...

Nick Stephenson: Yeah, I forgot to to turn the microphone on.

James Blatch: ... so we met up again in London to do that again, and this was, there was nothing coming in at that point. It was basically an investment. Even things like fuel and renting a space in London where we could record and the not small matter of the time-investment that was required.

YOU WERE PUTTING ALL THAT UPFRONT WITH JUST THE FAITH THAT IT WOULD EVENTUALLY PRODUCE SOMETHING THAT OTHER PEOPLE WANTED TO BUY, AND YOU COMPLETELY KNOCKED THAT FIRST LAUNCH OUT OF THE PARK, BUT YOU HAD TO SEE THAT THROUGH.

Nick Stephenson: Exactly. It's that belief. I remember feeling the same belief when I started writing novels

as well because I had spent hours researching other people like Joe Konrath and Blake Crouch and others who had kind of started off the Kindle revolution.

I knew that theoretically it was possible, so there was no reason why I couldn't do it as well. If someone else can do it, I can do it, I just have to figure out how.

It was the same with courses. I was seeing other businesses releasing courses and doing very well with them, so I knew it was possible, and I knew my audience was interested in it because they were telling me. My research said that the market was there, and it was that belief that really pushed me through.

It wasn't an insignificant investment. It was a lot of time and it was a hell of a lot of money to put into something that may have fallen flat on its face, but that belief really did get me through it. I'm sure you felt the same, Mark, when you started off with John Milton and his Beatrix Rose series; that belief that it was going to work and it pushed you through to get them written. Otherwise it may not have happened.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, a bit of that. I'm always surprised at how well it's gone. I don't think I'd ever get over that element of surprise and I knew people would enjoy reading them. I think self-doubt is natural for creative people generally. I still get that today putting a new book out. I still kind of think, "Well, I think this is quite good, but maybe it isn't." And you'll good reviews coming in and e-mails from advance-feeds ...

Nick Stephenson: That's a great launch e-mail there, by the way, Mark. I think it's pretty good. Here's a link.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, exactly. But, I think that's normal. Sometimes it's not a bad thing, either. It keeps you on your toes.

Nick Stephenson: I still get the fear. I re-shot all my videos last month and put them out in time for my latest launch, and I was terrified. I'd taken all this research, and I'd been doing filming for a year and I kind of had this process nailed, and the video was amazing, the content was structured, it hit all the points I wanted it to hit, it followed the research. I was still terrified that people would hate it.

I was refreshing the Facebook comments every 5 minutes just to see if people hated it. Of course you get 1 or 2 people who go, "Yeah, this is absolute bollocks," but the majority of people really like it, and the fear was still there, exactly the same way it was when I would release a new fiction novel.

I knew that it was my best one, but I still thought people would hate it. That fear will always be there if you authentically invested something of yourself into a product or a book, you're always going to have that fear. I think it's a sign that you're doing the right thing.

James Blatch: If I could make an observation here; I think both of you - in fact, I include myself here - are quite competitive in life. And I think in all seriousness, I think leveraging that competitive part is the important part of driving a business as well, and that's where some of your belief comes from.

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF THAT YOU SAW OTHER PEOPLE DOING THIS AND YOU THOUGHT, "WELL, I CAN DO THAT." ACTUALLY, IT'S MORE THAN THAT. YOU THINK YOU CAN DO IT BETTER THAN THEM AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT DRIVES YOU AND MARK.

Nick Stephenson: I think it's doing it as best you can and hitting what you want it to hit. It's a bit of a subjective test as to what's better than something else, but I always put out the best quality that I can possibly do, and I think the person I'm in competition with the most is me. Having looked at what Your First 10,000 Readers looked like a year ago and what it looks like now, the difference is huge and I'm always going to be trying to beat myself like I did last time.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I think that's important. Comparison I think is a dangerous road to go down. I could compare book sales with somebody I'm writing in a similar genre to and they could be doing better than I am, and it's quite easy to get discouraged by doing that, especially when you're starting out, so I think it's absolutely right. It's just put out your best stuff, compete with yourself, make sure that what you release tomorrow is better than the stuff you release today, and you'll be on the right path.

Nick Stephenson: Yeah, and be aware of your competitors as well because it always helps you keep focus.

James Blatch: Great. Well Mark, I'm about to wrap up, so is there anything else that you think we've missed or that you'd like to inquire about with Nick?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and I'll just frame this real quick, and we haven't mentioned it in the interview with Nick yet, but the framework for this series of I think 3 podcasts is going to be how to make money with non-fiction, so this will be the first of the trilogy, using books as introductions to selling something else.

The second one will be with David Siteman Garland who we've both taken a course that he put out on building a course, and then we're going to speak with Ankor from Teachable, I think, to talk about actually how to technically structure and focus the course.

But, just sort of spinning back a little bit further, we talked about surveys earlier and I've done that too; with books actually, and non-fiction, and one of the questions I get quite a lot ... One of the answers I get when I'm asking, "What is your problem? What would you like to solve?" is how to make money with non-fiction.

I think there are 2 ways to do that. You can put out a book in the traditional sense and try to make money off the book, and that is a perfectly valid way of doing things. Obviously people do that very successfully, and we're going to be talking to Pat's friend later about his recent launch of his book, 'Will it Fly', which did really well.

The other way, which I think is the more interesting way, is what you've done, Nick; is using the book as the entrée to something else.

IF YOU WERE ANSWERING THAT QUESTION, WOULD YOU BE LOOKING MORE TOWARDS THE SORT OF TRADITIONAL SALE OR THE UPSALE OR THE BACK END?

Nick Stephenson: The mantra I like to remember is "It takes as much effort to market something that costs \$5 that it does for something that costs \$5,000." Literally.

What you've got to do is figure out what your audience size is. If you have non-fiction and you're doing something really specific and there's maybe only 50,000 people in the world interested in it, if your product is \$5, that's not going to go very far. But, if your product is a lot higher-end, the opportunity there is much higher.

This is completely different from fiction because fiction is so broad that you can get a lot of people onto a mailing list relatively easily with fiction and then sell them books and they all buy them by the bucket load.

But with non-fiction, the market is generally a lot smaller, so you have to think of other ways to bring in revenue. Because the market's smaller and more defined and more relative and specific, it is a lot easier to lead people towards a more premium product which is why in my opinion, I think it's actually a lot easier to make revenue from non-fiction; because of that.

The fact that you are much more targeted just on the basis of the fact that you're targeting a specific group of people who want a problem solved or have a very specific interest. It's a lot easier and like you mentioned Pat Flynn. Pat Flynn had a very successful book release, but he makes \$80,000 a month from affiliate hosting fees.

Does his book launch come close? I don't know; I would imagine not. I think that books are an amazing way of reaching new people, of building an audience, building authority in the non-fiction space, but in terms of the revenue potential, I think there's an opportunity to move people towards other things; things that will eventually do better for the customer and the student as well, in my opinion.

Mark Dawson: And of course, they don't need to be mutually exclusive. You could very easily build a list, have a course available for them to solve a problem, and then in the future produce a book and sell the book in the traditional fashion to the existing list that you know are interested.

Nick Stephenson: Exactly. Pat has his paid books on Amazon and other stores, he has free books available from his site. He has courses, he has other sites in different topics and niches, he has lots of stuff that he can help people with. He's got this really diversified portfolio of products, so he's got a broad spectrum of people signing in in one end and then he's figuring out what they're interested in, and then he's pointing to things that he has available.

Same with Johnny Dumas as well. He has free books out as well using those as audience builders, then he's got a variety of different products and services available as well through entrepreneur on fire. 'Digital Marketer' is another example, James Altucher ... There's hundreds of people that are using their

books as a way to grow their audience and authority but aren't necessarily making the bulk of their income from book sales. I think that's perfectly fine. I think that's a great way of running a business because the book gives people an opportunity to learn something and then if they want to take it to the next level, that opportunity's there as well but it's not going to be forced on them.

James Blatch: Nick, it's been very valuable. It's been a pleasure. I could have leant out the window and spoken to you, but we decided to do it this way. Your son has gone quiet which I'm slightly concerned about, but I'm hoping everything's okay.

Nick Stephenson: I just locked the cellar.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. Good. We should say that you can visit Nick at yourfirst10kreaders.com is the site for the non-fiction stuff, and you've got a good lead-magnet there, should we say with your free video training. Your books are available at all good book sellers; Amazon.uk ...

Nick Stephenson: Even some of the terrible ones.

James Blatch: And even some of the bad ones as well. You're a great friend to the SPF podcast. Thank you very much indeed, Nick, for coming along. We will speak to you in the future without doubt, and we will of course follow closely the meteoric rise of the Emperor.

Nick Stephenson: It's been a pleasure, thank you very much.

James Blatch: Nick Stephenson. If I was going to be polite, I'd say he's full of wisdom, and if I was going to be rude, I'd say that he never shuts up. But he's a good talker, isn't he?

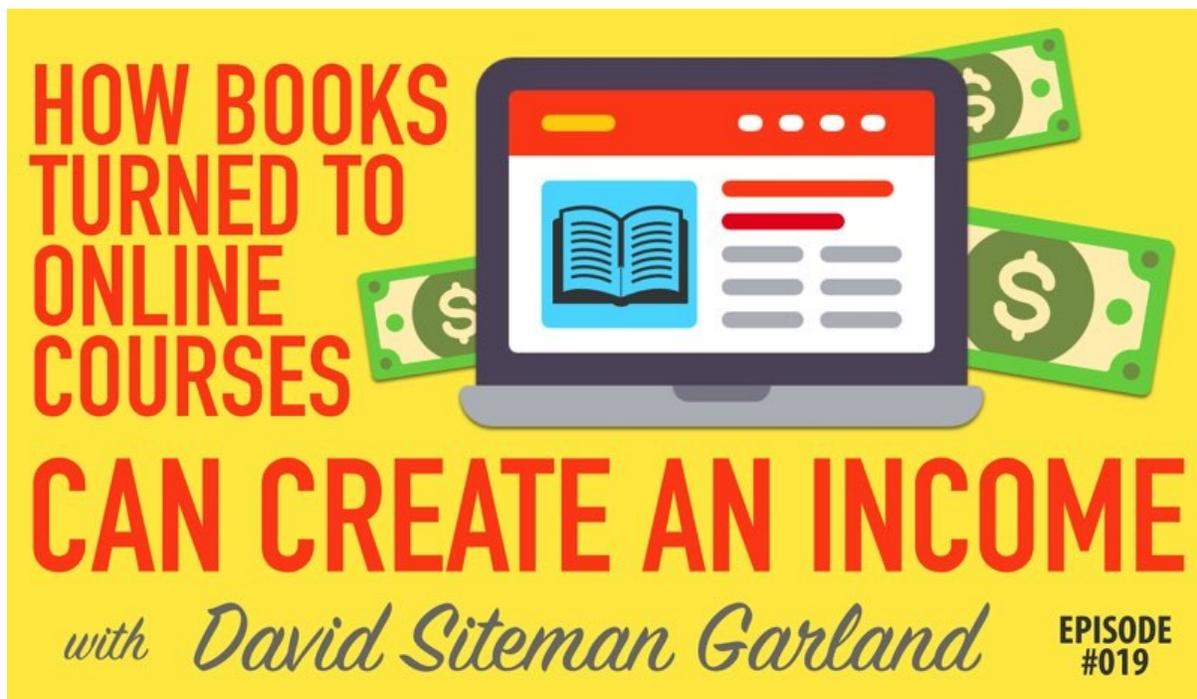
Mark Dawson: He's a great talker. He knows an awful lot about this and has taught me plenty. He was the perfect first person for us to go to. Still thinking about general principals about how you can take something that you're good at and then turn it into something other people would be interested in learning about.

James Blatch: I have to say, the closer I see Nick's business and his operation and his approach, the more impressed I am with him. He works a bit like us, I hope; quite compassionately as well. It's about the community and not just about running a profitable business, but the heart of it is a profitable business and he's very good at that.

Okay. We are going to move on. Next week's part 2 in this mini-series about making money from non-fiction sources, and that's our interview with David Siteman Garland. We hope you can join us for that, and we'll see you next time.

CHAPTER 16

HOW BOOKS TURNED TO ONLINE COURSES CAN CREATE AN INCOME - WITH DAVID SITEMAN GARLAND



THIS EPISODE of The Self Publishing Formula is part two of a three part series about using non-fiction writing to establish revenue through online courses. Give some time to this episode and you'll see the common sense and not-so-difficult way you can turn your knowledge and expertise into an online course that generates income for you.

“BUT I’M NOT AN EXPERT”

David Siteman Garland can't count the number of times people have told him that when he tries to encourage them to create an online course. But he challenges them to rethink what is meant by the word in the first place. He often says it in this way: “What have you done that has been successful? What have you gotten great results from? What do people always ask you about?” The answer to any one of those questions could be the source of a nonfiction book on the subject which, coupled with an online course, could begin to generate income for you over time. If you don't know where to begin, that's exactly why we have David on the show. He's going to give you the broad overview of how anyone can put together

an online course and get it generating income.

NONFICTION BOOK + ONLINE COURSE = CASH COW

Even if you fancy yourself as only a fiction writer, give this scenario some thought: You identify an area where you've had great success - maybe in character development, world building, CreateSpace publishing, or something entirely unrelated to writing. You put the knowledge you have on that subject into a nonfiction book designed to instruct others in how to accomplish what you've already done. Then, for those who want a deeper dive into the subject, you offer an online video course that holds their hand through the process step by step. It's a one-two punch for leveraging your experience and knowledge into a resource that can help people accomplish the things they have been dying to accomplish, and it generates an income for you at the same time.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR IDEA FOR AN ONLINE COURSE IS A GOOD IDEA?

Like anything that is developed for a consumer market, your online course needs to be on a subject that people are eager to learn about. It's the demand side of the "supply and demand" equation. It's really pretty simple: If nobody really wants to buy what you're thinking of selling, you shouldn't take the time and invest the energy to create the product in the first place. That principle holds true for online courses as much as anything else. In this episode of The Self Publishing Formula, David walks us through the steps to discover if your idea for an online course is a good one. He highlights the ways you can research the topic to discover demand and how you can begin building an email list of interested buyers before you even create the product. Interested? Listen to to this fun conversation to get the details.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction of this episode, part 2 of a 3 part series.
- Who this episode is for.
- Introduction of today's guest: David Siteman Gartman.
- The approach you can take to generate revenue from a book.
- Two different ways your online course could go.
- How to determine if there's a demand for your course idea.
- Finding your unique approach to the subject.
- Why your course could be for you a few years ago.
- Tips for building an email list.
- How to get traffic to your list building page.
- The way to track conversions on your course: create your own data.
- How to price your course (go for a premium price).
- Ongoing engagement with customers.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.CreateAwesomeOnlineCourses.com
- www.TheRiseToTheTop.com
- www.Wufoo.com
- www.SurveyMonkey.com
- www.LeadPages.net

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH DAVID SITEMAN GARLAND

James: Hello. Welcome to Podcast Number 19 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: 2 writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello. Welcome to Part 2 of 3 of our Mini Series on Non-Fiction and how to create a revenue stream from your non-fiction ideas.

WHO ARE WE AIMING THIS AT, MARK? WHAT SORT OF NON-FICTION PEOPLE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Mark: I think anybody with any kind of knowledge or expertise that they think would be useful to other people. Anyone can look at, on the one hand, writing a non-fiction book, and it's a still perfectly viable way of delivering that knowledge.

On the other hand, we're looking at a billion dollar business industry now in terms of building courses and selling those courses to people as a way for them to excel in their learning.

James: Online courses are a huge area, and for obvious reasons in a way. It's a really convenient, attractive way of self-improving basically.

In the old days, you would have had to pay a consultant for one-on-one training, which is prohibitively expensive and quite difficult to arrange, or you go to seminars, real live people in a room somewhere in a nearby city. Again, that's expensive all around.

Online learning where you get incredibly detailed training, many hours of it. You can watch it, and absorb it in your own time. You can watch it several times. You can really become an expert in an area, and an expert in an area that's ultimately going to ... depending on what you're trying to do it for, but could easily turn into something that's going to make you money, and possibly change your life, change your career.

It doesn't suit absolutely everything. I was thinking the other day about the big self improving areas like becoming a doctor and a pilot. I guess you still have to go to a hospital and get in a plane at some point. There's lots of other areas. I suppose if you, for instance, you're a day trader, I think that would really be a good area. If you've got an expertise in day trading, I think doing an online course and telling people how to set themselves up into that area or maybe financial advising. There is a myriad of ideas.

Our guest today is somebody who understands the mechanics, and also the marketing process necessary to turn that idea into a revenue reality for you. He was an inspiration for us. He was one of the go to guys for the Self Publishing Formula when we started our germ of an idea with me and Mark.

Mark: He was. He originally taught Nick Stephenson when Nick did his 10K readers course. Nick then recommended David to me. I had looked at David's course, it's called "Create Awesome Online Courses," which I'm always a little bit leery of the word awesome. It suits David like a glove. You'll hear when he starts talking, he's totally awesome.

He got this course going, Nick raved about it. I'd looked in it. I thought it was interesting. We spent \$1,000 on it about a year ago. It really did provide us with a really, really useful template that I followed quite carefully when I set up the first iteration of Facebook Ads Course. It's really good for thinking about what you might be able to teach, and how to prove ideas, how to set things up, technically, how to do it, then how to advertise it, how to handle finding customers, customer care. It really covers everything.

There are other courses available in the market. I would say David's is one of the best. He's been doing it for a long time. He's extremely experienced. We're going to get loads and loads out of this interview with him.

James: Okay. David Siteman Garland is a guru for mediapreneurs, which is a term, by the way, that he

came up with. His site, The Rise To The Top, is a gold mine of instructional detail and motivational tips on how to sell digital products and programs online. Now, here at the SPF, we know that his stuff works, because David is the guy that we went to when we launched our Facebook Ads for Authors Course, which in a bit of a journey, has brought us to this point, David, where we now have you as a guest on our podcast. I'm pretty happy that you were there right at the beginning for us.

David: There we go. It goes in full circle. I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

James: Is this a Star Wars moment where the student ... No. No. We haven't got to ...

David: Exactly.

James: We haven't got there.

David: It's some kind of moment.

James: We're still the patter ones, I think. David, look, this is a part of a mini series within our podcast that we're doing about revenue generation from factual. In your area, factual is not necessarily using the book as a revenue generator, it's using the book as a lead generator, right?

David: Right.

James: Tell us a little bit about the approach, the people who, I don't know, let's say they've got a book on windsurfing.

WHAT IS THEIR APPROACH TO REVENUE GENERATION?

David: It's funny, because for me, in 2010, which was before I mastered this, I actually wrote a published book. The funny thing was I just had no clue what I was doing, like many first time authors where you're not sure where the revenue is coming from, is it the book? Is it something from the book?

Really, at the end of the day, for the most part, the most successful authors that have been students and customers of mine, really, it turns into one of 2 things. It's all about an online course. It's all about creating an online course and teaching your expertise. What I've noticed is that it goes 2 different ways. An example you just said, windsurfing.

James: I just made that up.

David: Let's say someone writes a windsurfing book. Well, a logical lead in for that is that someone can take your step-by-step windsurfing course to learn how to windsurf in the deepest and windiest of seas in less than 30 days. The thing is it just adds up a new level when you're an author. It says, "Okay. Here is my book that's an entry point." Some people will even call it a business card in some cases, even though we know it's much more than that. Then, people that really want advanced hand-held training to get a result can then purchase your course. That's a great way of looking at it.

Now, on the other hand, too, and we're talking about this actually by email, is a lot of folks who are listening to this and follow you guys are also fictional authors, is that a fair thing to say, as well?

James: Yeah, absolutely.

David: Not unlike Mr. Dawson, right?

James: Indeed.

David: What you also have to think of is you might be thinking, "Well, I'm not teaching something specific. I'm not doing a how to book, or a business book, or something like that." Is a course, an option for me?

I would say, "Yes, it's exactly what you guys did, in many cases with authors." There's a big industry of people teaching what they've done out there online. A great example with you guys. Mark's got these great books, they're thrillers. He didn't teach people necessarily how to write thrillers or something like that. He created a course on Facebook Ads for Authors.

You might have a skillset right now. Maybe your skillset is writing funny stories. You could teach people how to do that, or something that might be different than your actual audience for your books. That's okay, as well. There's 2 different ways of looking at it.

James: Mark is in exactly that position where he does have 2 different audiences. I think before we get on to some of the strategies and tips, I want to talk to you about pricing, and that sort of thing.

We should say that you do have to be able to give something here. It has to be an area of expertise. You shouldn't underestimate that most people. If you're turning out books, there are areas of expertise.

In Mark's case, he knew he had the social media advertising stuff cracked. He could see in black and white supersonic boost to his life. That, therefore, was something that he could then turn into a course and instruction.

OTHER PEOPLE, FOR THEM, LIKE YOU SAY, IT COULD BE STORY-STRUCTURE, OR THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING, ISN'T THERE?

David: Yeah. I heard one yesterday. Actually, someone brought up an idea on a training I was doing of doing a course centered around how to come up with the perfect character for a fictional book. Do you know what I mean? There's a lot of different opportunities here.

I think a good way to look at it, people are thinking to themselves, "I'm not an expert." That's a classic thing I hear all the time. "I don't know. I'm not an expert." The bottom line is the expert theory doesn't come flying in the window in the middle of the night and just one day, you wake up and you're an expert. The way I like to look at it for people is a lot of times, the topic's right under your nose.

What is something that you've gotten results from that you can help other people get results?

We've had thousands and thousands of successful students of mine with their online courses. Some folks are just starting from a point of, I'll just make up an example, of, "You know what, I taught myself how to play clarinet over the age of 40." This is an actual course that's from a customer of mine. She taught herself how to play clarinet at an adult age. Now, she has a course teaching other adults how to play

clarinet. She doesn't have 50 degrees in clarinet playing, you know, whatever those might be out there.

Bottom line is if you've gotten yourself results, and/ or results with other people in some form or fashion, then you're qualified to teach this. I think that's one of the key things to keep in mind, because it really does hold people back; they wait and wait and wait and wait. There really are lots of opportunities right now to hone in on a specific skill in something that you could teach.

James: In many cases the person who's ahead is the person who's decided to take the step.

David: Exactly.

James: Nothing magic about there. Actually, for a lot of our people listening to podcast, their area of expertise, something they can leverage in this way may not be their writing. It may be their day job, actually.

David: Sure.

James: I mean, I've often thought day trading would be ... I don't know how much day trading courses are out there, but that's got to be a fantastic area. I keep looking for the perfect day trader who's quite charismatic. We can do an online course together, because it's my secret plan to become a gazillionaire.

David: There we go.

James: Something like that. I'm coming to you, of course, David, for the tips when that happens.

David: People fall into 2 categories. Category 1 are people that know exactly what they want to create their course on. If so, that's great. There's some great ways you can hone in on that and verify that, and make sure there's a market for it. That's awesome.

Then, there's also category number 2 of people that are sitting there saying, "Well, I'm not 100% sure. It could be this or that, or maybe I don't know it all." Actually, when I was getting started, I was more in category number 2. I did a podcast for 5 years. I had all these different interviews. I just wasn't sure what I was going to create a course on.

A big tip for people is to look in your life and think about what are some things you've accomplished. If you go to a party, or on social media, or whatever it might be, and someone asks you questions, what are they asking you questions about? Are they asking for tips on how did you lose the weight, or how did you get the book published, or whatever those questions might be, a lot of times, the topics are right under your nose. You don't even know it until you start to look for it.

One of the key things that I encourage people to really think about is what is something that you can teach that you've done that's results-oriented? That's the big thing. If you close your eyes and you picture someone goes through your course, and they do everything you say, because they're just a rock star of following, what would be the result? That's one of the key things to think about is making that there's a concrete result of taking your course as you think of putting this together.

James: It's got to be a measurable thing?

David: Exactly. It might not be literally something like "They made \$10,000," or anything sketchy like that that. You would never want to promise.

Case in point, you're an author. Now, you're going to be driving leads via Facebook with Mark's Facebook Ads course. Do you know what I'm saying? Or, with my course, is of course, to create a course and launch it. You want to have a scenario that, if they follow what you're saying, this is what's going to happen, or this is going to be the result.

James: Then, an important step that I know you spoke to us quite early on is to understand what the audience wants, as well.

IT'S NOT JUST AN ASSUMPTION AT THE BEGINNING THAT WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY IS WHAT THEY WANT.

David: That's very important. There's definitely some tips on doing that. What I like to do is good old fashioned surveys, nothing fancy, nothing crazy. You can use any kind of survey software out there. I use something called Wufoo, W-U-F-O-O. SurveyMonkey, whatever it might be.

I simply ask people "What do you want to know more about blank?" Blank is the topic that you're thinking about for your online course. What do you want to know more about horseback riding? What do you want to know more about day trading with less than \$10,000, or whatever it might be.

You don't mention a course. You don't need to mention anything. You're just getting some feedback. Then, you use whatever assets that you have to get that survey out. It might be you have an email list, you might have a blog, you might have a podcast.

If you're just getting started, maybe you just have a personal Facebook page, or something like that. That is some great market research that you can do absolutely free to start to get feedback, to start to get ideas. Also, the survey is very much a confidence builder. You'll notice that if you do this, is that you'll start to realize, "Oh my god. I know a lot more than I think I do on this topic."

I remember when I sent out my first survey. This was about doing interviews. My first course was about doing online interviews, because I've done 500 of them, plus, and people are always asking me how to get guests, how I did this, how I did that. I remember I was getting the questions back, because I was in that, "Well, do I know enough phase." I was "I can't believe people are asking this. Of course I know the answers to this." It's a big confidence builder and testing of the market, as well.

James: Another thing, I think, another way of thinking about it is, A, you're absolutely right. You probably know a lot more about the subject than you think you do. B, the internet is an incredibly enabling thing. There are people whose lives could be changed because they can take your course, and make some big decisions in their lives. That's not something to be embarrassed about or be scared about. You're going to make money, hopefully from it, if you get things right.

THINK ABOUT IN TERMS OF USING INTERNET TO ITS BEST ADVANTAGE FOR PEOPLE.

David: I couldn't agree with you more. At the end of the day, what this really is about is it's a results-oriented business, when you do online courses. You have to come from the place of wanting to help people. You want to have people have results.

I mean, it sounds almost cliché, but you want to be changing people's lives one way or the another, whether it's saving them time or money, or teaching them a new skill. Those are the most successful courses out there as the people that are driven by that mission to want to help people. Of course it's going to make great money, and great freedom, and all these great things in your business, but it has to come from a place of wanting to help people.

It's not just the courses on making money, or something like that. I mean, helping people is such a wide spectrum of different things that you can do, whether it's helping people have better dates, or get more dates, or how to get your baby to sleep. I can tell you right now, that's an invaluable one that we have.

James: No doubt.

David: Right, with the little daughter that I have right now, I can understand that one for sure. There's always ways to be thinking about that. When you come from that place of wanting to help people, that's invaluable. The people that have longevity in this business, and also people that have the most passionate customers, are the ones that get results.

James: The idea then of getting started, we do have quite a few authors who have non-fiction books and stuff. I had a long conversation the other night. This, I think, goes to the people who are ... It's not so niche, their area. It's quite broad. That is quite important at an early stage to hone them what it is that they do that's different, and where their particular expertise are.

I GUESS IN BUSINESS, YOU CALL THIS THE USP; THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE THAT YOU NEED TO SORT OUT QUITE EARLY ON IN THE PROCESS.

David: My saying is that specific sells, and more specific sells even more at a higher price. A thing to keep in mind is the more specific you can go with your course, the better. This is one of the key mistakes that I see is people going way too broad. You want to solve a specific problem, or help with a specific ambition. I'll use a couple of examples and just show you how you can hone down.

You can hone down two different ways. You can do both, as well. It's either by topic, or for audience. A great example of one for audience would actually be Mark's course. Let's just use that as an example.

Facebook Ads for Authors. It's not just Facebook ads. It's not just ads. It's not just ads for everybody. It's Facebook ads for authors. Now, let's say, you're interested in Facebook ads. You've got 2 courses in front of you, one is just a general course on Facebook ads, and the other one is Facebook ads for authors. You're an author, which one are you going to go with?

One of the big ways that people can compete with big competitors in online courses and things like that, is becoming much more specific when it comes to either the audience you serve, or the topic that you do. That's an interesting way of looking at it, because you really want to be clear on who it's going to be for. I think that's one of the big mistakes that I see all the time when it comes to courses.

James: I guess, ideally both of those would be quite specific.

A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE, AND A SPECIFIC THING TO DO WITH THEM.

David: Right. Exactly. I like to look at it as kind of a laser cut situation.

Since we're on the topic of authors, let's say you're doing a course on how to write a book. Of course, there's plenty of courses on that, right? Let's say you were thinking to yourself, "Well, how do I stick out from the pack?" Well, a couple of different things, one, when there's other courses on your subject, that's a great thing. It's more of a red flag if there's not courses on your subject.

James: Yeah.

David: Because it's showing that there's a market out there. There's always ways to stand out, because no one has your personality, no one has the way that you're going to do it. What I always get more concerned about is people saying, "Well, there's no other courses on my topic. No one else is selling to my audience." Well, that's like, I'm throwing red flags all over the place if I hear something like that. You know what I'm saying? Because, there's always ways to stand out.

One of my favorite ones is to get even more specific. Let's say you're thinking about doing a course on how to write a book, which I think is a very, I don't want to say typical, but a common course idea that people have that are authors. I'm not blasting that. That actually is a great topic. You could go far more niched with that. You could just say, for example, you could do a course on just how to write a proper

proposal if you want to get a traditional publisher to say yes. Does that makes sense?

James: Yeah.

David: Make all the way down to a specific need, or just how to write the actual book, the outlines, the tips, and things like that. You don't need to bite off more than you can chew. The more specific you get, the better. That's how I see a lot of my customers compete with really, really big competitors that have been around forever, is they get more specific. There's riches in niches.

James: I guess you think to the bits that would have helped you, what would appeal to you, because if it's, as you say, that broad title "How to write a book," you're probably not going to buy that. If it's "How to write a police thriller." Very specific area.

David: That's awesome. That's a great example.

James: Yeah. We should do that one.

YOU'RE THINKING STRAIGHTWAY, "GOD I WISH I'D HAD THAT COURSE WHEN I SET OUT. IT WOULD HAVE MADE LIFE EASIER."

David: Right.

James: I can do it.

David: That makes a great point, too, is that I don't know if you've ever heard this one, this is kind of a cliché term in business sometimes where people are like "I am not my customer," or you are not your customer.

What I've actually found with courses is actually the opposite is very much true. In many cases, the customer is you, maybe even you a few years ago.

James: I think that dovetails with the way good authors think is basically they write the books that they would like to read.

David: Exactly. A lot of times, I find myself and I find my customers a lot of times, when they're writing copy for their courses, saying, "God, I wish I had this when I was getting started," just like we just said a couple of minutes ago. That's one of the key things.

It's a very powerful thing. Think back when you were getting started, what was something you wish you had, like a really specific course that was on that you would have been "Oh my god. That would have accelerated my growth, or that would have saved me time, or that would have saved me money big time." That's another great way of looking at it.

James: Great. Let's talk about mailing lists a little bit then. It's a common thread with people selling books and having a space online. I know that it's absolutely essential, as well, in your world.

David: You know, the truth of the matter is that's the life of this business, is your email list and your relationship with that email list.

James: In terms of building your email list, for somebody who is starting out with maybe they've got their books selling, their fiction books, in that instance.

THEY'VE GOT BASICALLY A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER FOR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BUSINESS THAT THEY'VE GOT THE IDEA FROM, FROM THIS INTERVIEW, HOPEFULLY. WHERE DO THEY EVEN BEGIN, DAVID?

David: Great question. Let me just also specify something that's important is that people debate this all the time: Is there a magic number that needs to be on your email list to have a successful online course? The answer is really no, because I've seen everything across the board.

When I first launched my first course, which was "Create Awesome Interviews," there were just 400 people on the email list for that course, just 400 people. It did \$19,800 in sales. Now, that course grew and grew and grew, grew, and grew and grew, because when there's one, there's more.

Don't think that you have to build an email list, necessarily of 50,000 people before you launch something. I think that's one of the key things to keep in mind before you even talk about list building, because too many people wait too long. Is the size of list important? Yes. Also, you want to move forward with it so you can get it out there and get more and more customers over time, makes sense?

James: Yeah, it does.

IS THAT TO DO WITH PRICING, AS WELL?

David: Yes, it does. Really, it starts with a list. We could talk pricing for sure. I want to give some list tips, because I think that's important that you just talked about.

One mistake that happens with email lists is that people don't have people opt in for something specific. Meaning, it just says, "Join my email list, then I'll sell you some stuff." Or, "Just the list and you'll get nothing, but at some point I'll give you something."

Instead, what you want to do, and this is all about getting your house in order before you get traffic, because traffic is actually easier than you think. This is the part that's very important, where people miss. Is that you want to have people opt in, which means enter your email address, for something free. We call these opt in pages. We call these lead pages. We call these landing pages. We call these squeeze pages. There's a million different terms for them.

I personally use something called lead pages, but you can use anything you want. Doesn't matter. The goal of this page is quite simple, it's to give away something free in return for their email address. They get something free, you get their email address. Then, later on, you're going to bring them down a path towards the sale with free content, and then doing a launch, and all that kind of good stuff.

On this page, you want to give away something free. There's plenty of examples. Let's choose a random topic that we could come up with something. I always like a random topic that I know nothing about. I'll let you choose anything you want, and we'll come up with something.

James: Snowboarding.

David: Snowboarding. You could start out with an opt in page that gives away a free video on snowboard trick tips, something like that. They enter their email, they get a free video where you're going to go through some tips. Another thing you could do is a snowboarding buyers guide, or something like that, where you go through all the cool equipment they have to look. They enter their email address, they get a pdf with something like that, like a buyer's guide, or something like that.

Another thing you could do would be like a cheat sheet. Some tips on pulling off your first trick, things like that. You get the idea there. These are called lead magnets. Lead magnets are things that people opt in for, they get them free.

Personally, I love things that are video-related, because they have a higher perceived value. One of the things that I teach, and one of the things I love is creating a free video series for people. In the snowboarding example, maybe you'd give them 3 free videos where they learn a trick in each video, right? They opt in, they get the first video. A couple of days later, they get a second video. A couple of days later, they get a third video, whatever it might be.

Best thing to start, and I want to give you the full scope there, is really with one. Just start with one, as you get started, something that your audience would find valuable as your first opt in page. What your job then becomes, I'm putting that in air quotes, "Job," is to drive as many of the proper people to that page as you possibly can. Because the reason is that you will build a targeted email list, which is much better, than just shooting a bull horn out there, shooting a shot gun out there, getting a bunch of random people, and then trying to figure out what they're really into. Now, you're really specific. You know if they opted in for the snowboarding thing, they're interested in snowboarding. That's very obvious, right?

Then it becomes, "How do you get traffic to your page?" Really, it comes down to a few different things. Number 1, it's time versus money. There's always options one or the other. Do you have a lot of money? Do you have a lot of time? Do you have both? Whatever it might be.

If you've got a little bit more money than time, Facebook Ads are a great way to get started with this, or not. You can do that in. You can scale that up very quickly, just start to build that relationship with people. Getting them clicked on ads, and getting them ready to go. It's also the most scalable.

Another great way is optimizing your website everywhere by the way. If you do blog post, podcast, anything like that, make sure that you mention your giveaway all the time. Below it, put it all over your site, make sure that it's ready to do, so people are coming in, let's say you have this great blog post you write, at the bottom, remind them that they can get their snowboarding cheat sheet, or remind them they can get their snowboarding video. That's one of the key things, as well, is your own content. Then, out there promoting that.

Another great way is interviews. Once you have a specific topic, narrow it down. Let's just use snowboarding. Let's say that you have this really cool trick that no one else can ... I'm making this up. No one else can learn that ... Well, hopefully someone can learn it. You can teach them it in 30 days or less. I don't know. They're going to be able to do a back flip in 30 days or less on a snowboard. That's going to be your big topic.

Well, that's a great topic now to go out to podcast, blogs, things like that and send emails and say, "Listen, I have this great method for teaching a black flip in snowboarding. I'd love to come on, teach your audience a little bit about it."

Then, any time you do an interview, or anything like that, you're going to get a link back to your website. That's where you use the lead page, or the opt in page. That's one of the key things. You want to make sure, when you're driving traffic, all the traffic goes there.

There's a lot more tips to that. That's kind of a 5 or 6-minute crash course in generating opt ins.

James: That's great, David. One point I want to make about this, I think that when you're thinking about what it is you're going to giveaway, our view at SPF, and we came to this quite early, I'm sure influenced by you, was that it had to be something of standalone value, something that was really good. We should be, it's going to sound a little bit perverse. We should be happy when someone does that and doesn't buy our course, but gets value out of it and improves themselves.

You've got to be doing this to make people better. If you're getting it right at that stage, don't worry about the other stuff. It will follow because of that value.

I WOULD SAY, DON'T JUST GIVE AWAY A FEW PAGES, A PDF HANDOUT, GIVE AWAY SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY GOING TO SHOW HOW AMAZING YOU ARE. THE REST WILL BE A LOT EASIER FOR YOU AFTER THAT. IT SHOULD BE OF VALUE.

David: I 1,000% agree with that, because at the end of the day, not everyone is going to buy. That's totally fine. You want to be known as the person that has great valuable stuff, so they come back again. I think that that's one of the key things, also.

Webinars are a big thing in this business. I love doing webinars. They're great. That's one of the key things. When you create very valuable free webinars for people, regardless of whether they purchase or not at the end, let's just say they come on and they soak up your valuable content, you want to be known for that. You want to be known that you're giving away great stuff as well.

This is the funny thing, some people think, "Well, I'm scared to give away so many great things because then nobody's going to buy." You've heard that one before?

James: Yeah.

David: Guess what, it is straight up not true. It is a myth, myth, myth, myth, myth, because here's what ends up happening is actually the opposite, the opposite of that.

What happens is people say, and I've done this, too, when I purchase things. Maybe you have as well. I think "Oh my god. If the free stuff was so good, that good, I can't wait to have my mind explode when I buy the paid stuff." That's where you want to be at. You don't want to be the person that gives out the crappy little thing, and they're like, "Well, I don't know. Who cares? This kind of sucks." Then not opting in for anything again. It's a very good point. I totally agree with it.

James: Let's move on to one or 2 other areas. I know you've got to dash here shortly. We mentioned price.

I WAS THINKING IMMEDIATELY WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT LIST SIZING, ABOUT THAT CONVERSION OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO BUY YOUR PAID PRODUCT, AND HOW YOU PRICE YOUR COST, AND WHAT SORT OF CONVERSION RATE YOU SHOULD EXPECT, OR SHOULD BE AIMING FOR. IS THERE SUCH A THING?

David: We'll talk about pricing and conversion rate is an interesting thing. I was actually talking about this

the other day. I was doing a cross fitness competition. What they do is they put out the workouts on a certain day of the week. Then, you do them. Then, you can then redo them. Then, you can redo them as many times as possible, or as many times you can stand between Thursday and Monday, and then you get your score. A lot of people will redo it, and do better, and redo it and do better. They don't really know what to aim for on the first workout. They don't know what's a good time. They don't know that's a bad time. They don't know until you do it.

It's the same thing when it comes to conversion rate for online courses. You really don't know what a "Good" conversion rate is until you actually launch your first time. Then, you have something to compare it against.

I'm a big believer in creating your own data, not just going by a random trend that we pull out of the industry, because everybody's different. Everybody's built their list differently. Everyone's been in this business for a different period of time. Everyone has a different reputation, different credibility.

There's so many different factors that go into conversion rate that it wouldn't be fair to say to someone, "You know what, you better have a 3% conversion rate, or that's a failure," because at the end of the day, it's not true.

I'm a big believer in creating your own data, just like you would for a workout, like that, that's measured when it comes to conversion rate. You know what's even funny? We've sold, I don't know, probably in the last few years, at least over 5 million dollars in digital products programs. I couldn't even tell you my exact conversion rate. I can tell you exact conversion rates on each campaign we do. I cannot even give you an overall one.

James: Even within your sphere, those conversion rates may vary?

David: That's right.

James: Different markets and different ...

David: Exactly. Also, list size. The bigger your list gets, the smaller your conversion rate is going to be, but you're going to get more customers. There's a lot of variants there when it comes to conversion rate.

That being said, on pricing, which is an interesting huge topic in itself that I could talk about for 100 hours. I'll just give you a couple quick things on that.

Number 1, I'm a big, big believer in premium pricing for online courses, because there's so many other crappy things out there that have lower prices. Online courses, when you position them correctly, are premium.

When you're helping people get results, a specific type of audience, I would always encourage people to be in the top 5 to 10% of their market when it comes to their price for their course. Because, here's the thing, it doesn't take a million people to make a living at this. I think that's one of the important things.

A mentor of mine named Ryan Lee pointed this out very early on when I was getting going with online courses. He said, "Listen, David." He said, "It's going to be the same amount of work for you to do a \$97 course as it is for a \$997 course. Why would you not do that and create something extremely valuable for people where you can also, obviously, generate more revenue?" What also ends up happening, and this is key, you get more serious customers. That's the key part of this.

You get more serious customers that are willing to invest in themselves and get results. There was a customer of mine, Karen Pack. She's got a course on productivity, time management. She increased her price big time and had less people sign up, but ended up with 33% more revenue, and over 50% more testimonials, because now, people are thinking to themselves, "Well, this is a significant investment. I'm actually going to follow through with this."

That's one of the key things to keep in mind with this. This is, again, the results-business. Your pricing has to be an investment for folks. You want the serious folks. That's at the end of the day. I know Mark's done that. I'm sure you guys have seen that behind the scenes, that price that you make a big difference with that, as opposed to going after two dollars and five dollars and 7% people.

James: That's great. A final area that I want to talk to you about is the ongoing engagement with your customers. They shouldn't all just be front-loaded to build your list up, make a sale and then move on.

TO DO IT RIGHT, IT'S GOT TO BE A COMMUNITY THAT GOES ON.

David: Yeah. There's a lot of different ways to do that. I'm a big believer in keeping it simple when it comes to this. You don't want to just sell people and then you ride off on a bicycle in the ... I don't know why you'd be on a bicycle. In this scenario, you're on a bicycle.

James: Or your windsurf, or your snowboard.

David: Yeah, or one or the other. You're in some kind of mode of transportation. The thing is what I like to do, number 1, and there's pros and cons of this. We have a very, very vibrant Facebook community for us. A lot of people find a lot of value in doing that with their online courses. That becomes its own. People are making connections. Some people meet up in different cities. That becomes its own little universe of community which is a key thing that can be built over time with their course. Realize, your Facebook group is going to start with just a few people that builds up over time. I remember, for my main course, my group started with just 50, 60 people. Now, it's in thousands when it comes to that. Community is a big aspect that you can have there.

The other thing is content. What people get confused here, and there's not a perfect formula for it, is how much content are you going to be sending people? The way that I like to look at it, I wouldn't send out all that much content all the time.

I invite people to webinars and different things. I send out tips. One of the greatest tips that I had on content was from a guy named Russell Brunson. His tip was that he sends out these emails frequently that he calls "Seinfeld emails." They're really emails about nothing, like the show. Really, it's just sharing stories, or quick tips, or things like that, just little stuff that keeps people engaged, a piece of advice, a case study, or things like that.

For me now, I don't necessarily send out content on necessarily a regular basis. However, I've been in this business for a long time. I know for your first several years, let's just call it 3, at least, I would recommend being pretty consistent with the day of the week. Have it where it's wacky Wednesdays and every Wednesday you're going to send something to someone. Send something to your customers.

It might be a "Hello. Here's a funny photo of my dog." It might be "Hello. Here's a great tip." It might be "Here's a great case study." Something like that. That's a great way to build some consistency. Then, as your business evolves, you can obviously get a little more loosey goosey with it. We find that we're always looking for valuable things to send to our customers, both free and paid.

James: That's great, David. I'm aware of the time. The line is just starting to drop out. I guess the broadband is just getting a little bit damp. It's an art, and a science, I think. You've mastered the science end. I love the way that you talk about the approach and the tone of the business and how that should be, because that's, for me, a very important part of it.

JUST QUICKLY, DID YOU SAY YOU THINK YOU'VE TURNED OVER 5 MILLION DOLLARS IN THIS?

David: Yes, last year was over two and a half. That was great. Now, yes, in the gambit of it, we're actually well over that now, which is great. What I'm more excited about than that, obviously it's pretty exciting, not going to lie. It's pretty exciting.

We have had hundreds and hundreds of students with just amazing stories and case studies. That's really, what keeps me going personally. I'm not talking about just people that have made 7 figures. By the way, we've had several students doing 7 figures, many, many doing multiple 6, many doing 6 and 5, and the list goes down. I get equally excited about people telling me about their very first sale.

They woke up. They checked the phone. They rolled over on the bed. They saw a receipt in their email box. They jumped up and down and did a little back flip. That's the stuff that gets me excited because where there's one, there's more.

It's the confidence building and the ability to say, "I created something from my brain that other people are now purchasing." That's what I get excited about, is hearing people that launched their first course to 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, and then several years later, we've had plenty of those people that are now doing several hundred thousand, if not into 7 figures. That's what, I think, is very exciting about this business, is the long term potential for people.

James: Well, anyone who has sold a single book will know that feeling, David.

David: Amen.

James: Brilliant. Thank you so much indeed for joining us. It's been a delight to talk to you, David. I am sure that we will talk again as time goes on. We'll keep a close eye on ... Oh yeah, we should say where you'd like people to go to learn more about yourself, risetothetop.com.

David: You could go to the risetothetop.com and createawesomeonlinecourses.com. Either way will lead you some way shape of form that way. I would love to see you over there. Let me know also if you hear from me that you heard about us on this podcast, for sure.

James: Absolutely. Great, David. We're going to let you go. Thank you so much.

David: All right. I appreciate it.

James: David Siteman Garland. I think there are quite a few David Garlands on the internet, hence his Siteman in the middle of that. Like a few of the people we've spoken to, when you hear him and you hear his enthusiasm and his attention to detail, it's easy to see why he thrives in this area, in this self-starting, self-improving area.

Very, very valuable set of information and a clear direction for people who've got a non-fiction idea and a look into ... I was going to say revenue-ize it. I'm just going to basically make that word up. Turn it into something that they can pay the wages.

Mark: Monetize.

James: Monetize. There you go. That is just a made up word that's been used more often, so it's starting to sound like a real word.

Mark: Exactly.

James: Good guy.

Mark: Very good guy. He knows his onions, as we say over here. Definitely someone that people can learn a lot from. I hope that was an interesting interview.

James: Definitely was for us. We have one final part in this mini series on non-fiction, that's with Ankur Nagpal. Anchor is the founder of Teachable, one of the founders. They've been hugely successful in this area. They provide a platform that we rate, we use it, we find it very smooth. It gives us the least amount of hassle. It presents the course in a really nice way.

They go to Tech Crunch, I think initially for the ... They're funding one of the big tech startup funding contest. They won a couple million dollars there. I think they got another couple of million dollars just a few weeks ago this year. It just goes to show, this area is a very, very hot area at the moment.

He's next week. That will be the final part of it. I don't know what we're doing the week after. If you're a novelist and have absolutely no intention ever of doing anything in the non-fiction realm, Podcast 21 will be back to fiction, we can promise you that.

CHAPTER 17

A TECHNOLOGY PARTNER TO HELP BUILD YOUR ONLINE COURSE - WITH ANKUR NAGPAL OF TEACHABLE



WHEN YOU'RE able to get your non-fiction book or area of knowledge put into an online course you'll have plenty of options when it comes to organizing that course for online consumption. And when you do, it's important that you find a platform that serves you as a partner, not just in a business relationship. Today's episode of The Self Publishing Formula podcast is a conversation James had with Ankur Nagpal, founder of the online course platform Teachable. The two of them chat about the way Teachable came to be, what makes the platform unique from other online course platforms and how their view of partnership with their instructors makes all the difference. You'll love the insights you'll hear in this week's episode.

THE TEACHABLE ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM CAME ABOUT ALMOST BY ACCIDENT.

Ankur had created his own online courses and was hosting them on Udemy but was having some issues with the way that platform worked. First off, he didn't like that he had no access at all to the students who took his course. In that way he wasn't really building an asset he could use into the future, only dealing with one-off interactions. In his desire to find a new platform that would work in a more cooperative way

with instructors he wound up creating his own app. That was the beginnings of Teachable and the start of a successful online learning platform.

THE FIRST STEP TO A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE COURSE: FIND THE AUDIENCE.

No matter the idea you have for an online course in terms of subject matter, it's not a good idea to spend a lot of time creating it only to discover that nobody wants to buy it. Instead you need to find out if there is a real audience that wants to learn the subject you want to teach. Given the reach of the internet that's no longer a difficult thing to do. In this episode you're going to hear some great advice about ways you can verify the need for a course before you begin creating it.

WHY ONLINE COURSES ARE NOT YET IN NEED OF PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTION.

In the overall lifespan of the internet Ankur believes that online courses are still relatively new. The public is yet to develop expectations of online courses that are on par with television or movie studio productions. That's a great thing for content creators who are low budget, small business owners because all kinds of simple approaches to instruction can still make the grade: screen capture software - slide decks with voice over - standing at a whiteboard drawing doodles - all of these and more are not only acceptable but very popular ways for instructors to create and disseminate the information they have to share. In this episode you'll get some ideas about how you could use your computer and smartphone to create your first online course.

CREATING A COURSE ON TEACHABLE IS NOT THE LAST STEP - THE TEACHABLE TEAM CONTINUES TO HELP YOU.

Ankur and the team at Teachable are committed to building the best technology in existence to fuel online learning. As a result, they've committed that they will not get into the business of selling information themselves. Instead they want to provide the training, ongoing tips, and useful instruction for free to those who use their platform. They see it as a primary and powerful way they are able to be true partners with those who use their platform - which only serves to make everyone involved more successful. You can get a free trial of the Teachable platform by listening to this episode, so make sure you take the time to listen and get in on this great deal.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James' introduction to this episode and the track record of the show thus far.
- The reason for today's episode emphasis on nonfiction writing.
- Introduction of today's guest, Ankur Nagpal.
- When Ankur got into online courses and how it happened.
- Ankur's experience in software engineering and how he hired developers.

- The Self Publishing Formula's team experience with Teachable.com & what Ankur sees working in the realm of online courses.
- How Teachable helps authors build an audience without worrying about the tech.
- The most common type of teaching videos and other options you can use.
- What limitations might exist when it comes to online learning?
- A free offer from Teachable and how the platform has come to be.
- How Teachable compares to Udemy.
- How anyone should start building an audience.
- How the Teachable team helps its instructors with ongoing training.
- The growth of online courses in the future and the Teachable path ahead.
- Free resources for SPF listeners from Teachable.com.
- The end of the nonfiction mini-series and Mark's experience with nonfiction.
- Preview of next week's episode on the topic of publicity.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.Teachable.com/SPF
- www.Udemy.com

Join the Facebook Community by emailing [support\(AT\)SelfPublishingFormula.com](mailto:support(AT)SelfPublishingFormula.com)

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH ANKUR NAGPAL

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number twenty from the Self Publishing Formula.

Announcer: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Here we are then number twenty. I hope you're finding these podcasts useful. We're really enjoying the guests that we're speaking to and putting together the podcasts for you. We've had some great ones recently. The Bryan Cohen podcast about copy writing went down an absolute storm. We had lots of feedback on that.

Just goes to underline really, Mark, that this is without question a golden time to be in self publishing even

though it does feel like a hard road, mountains to climb in some places, some cases, but, for instance, the social media platforms are being under used by business generally and people generally, so there's certainly space for making hay while the sun shines.

Mark: Yes, that is absolutely right. They are being used by businesses, but not really by authors all that much and not really by independent authors, so that means that there's a great opportunity for people to get involved and start to spread the word about their work which is fantastic, and it ties in quite nicely with something I did last week. I was invited by The Bookseller which is one of the, probably the biggest industry publication over here in the UK, and they had a big conference for publicity and media professionals involved in books at a really big venue in London actually.

I was invited to go and speak to it after I met them at The London Book Fair, and it was only when I stood on the stage and looked out, it must have been five hundred people, that I kind of realized that it was a slightly bigger thing than I had expected it to be, but very, very successful. It went down really well.

I gave them a really quick fifteen minute talk about what I do with social media, advertising, Facebook in particular of course, and then gambled at the end with just took my phone out and did a Facebook Live broadcast from the stage whilst I did my last slide which went down really well. It was a good demonstration of how cool that new tool is, and I don't think many of them knew that it was possible, so that was really good fun. Could have been embarrassing, but it worked no problems.

James: Facebook Live is a relatively small little niche area of social media and being used by a few people, but even that's for lots of people particularly in the bigger, the more traditional the industry, the less they seem to know about what's possible and what you can do now.

I'm currently putting together the YouTube module which we're going to be sending out to our current students very shortly, and one of the stats I found there is that eight percent of US businesses are using YouTube. Eight percent. I mean that's a pretty low figure, so ninety-one, ninety-two percent of businesses don't use it for advertising, don't use it to push their wares in any way, shape or form, and that means, and that will be different.

In twenty-five years it will be absolutely standard that these big social media platforms will be an

advertising platform for most businesses, but at the moment it's the gold rush. It's the Wild West out there, and time to make, as I said, I said earlier, make hay.

Mark: You're mixing metaphors.

James: I know.

Mark: Does that make me the sheriff?

James: Yeah. The deputy.

Mark: You could be my deputy.

James: Somebody shot the sheriff. Anyway we are talking about non-fiction at the moment. This is the third and final installment of our miniseries on non-fiction. It's a growth area within self publishing and it's an area that's more interesting and requires its own specific approach, slightly different from if you're a fiction writer.

Chiefly, as we've explored already with [Nick Stephenson in the first episode](#), it might not be your book that brings you the revenue. Your book may even be the thing that you give away, and actually it's your knowledge that you can utilize. You can create an online course which is the big area, and we really got into that last week where we [spoke to David Siteman Garland](#) who is a great evangelist for online courses and I think most people find that quite motivational.

To get a little bit more into the nitty gritty of how you can go ahead with that particular strategy, this week's guest is a founder and owner of one of the largest and certainly one of the fastest growing online course platforms out there, and that is Teachable.

We're familiar with Teachable, Mark, because we had a choice to make, didn't we, when you came up

with the idea of the Facebook advertising for authors course, and we cast around. We tried a few, and we settled on what was then called Fedora, like the hat, but they've subsequently changed their name to Teachable.

Mark: We did. I say we, it was really our third, our friend John who was in charge of tech stuff and he had a look at the various platforms that were available for us to use, and he recommended Fedora, as it was then. We were both impressed, I think, it would be fair to say, and as we got to grips with how to use it, it's got over some small teething problems to become what I would say is now a very robust, stable, and extremely professional platform that has gone quite some way to providing our students with exactly the kind of environment we wanted when we were setting up how this course would look like.

James: One of the things I really like about Teachable is their focus on revenue streams and on marketing. They don't just sit back and provide you a platform just to host your course. They are all about growing and you growing and them growing, and they've attracted a lot of funding, a couple of million dollars went in again recently. I don't know how easy it is for them to wander up to TechCrunch and these big funding organizations and just attract the money, but they do seem to regularly get a lot of interest from people who are looking to invest in growth areas in tech.

Ankur Nagpal is the name of the man who we're going to speak to today from Teachable, the owner and founder, and we'll speak to you in a few minutes.

Ankur: Yes sir. Right from downtown Manhattan.

James: From the Big Apple, the greatest city on Earth, second only to London. Ankur, you will be familiar I think to some people in the self publishing community, the wider publishing community, but to others perhaps not so familiar. We've talked, this is the third episode then, part three of our look at how to generate a revenue stream from non-fiction. People who perhaps aren't novelists but have a knowledge or a skill that they impart. At the moment as we've been discovering the really hot thing is online courses.

WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS HOW YOU GOT YOURSELF SO FAR AHEAD OF THE GAME? WHEN DID THIS START FOR YOU?

Ankur: As you mentioned I'm the founder of a company called Teachable. We help a lot of people including the great guys over at Self Publishing Formula create and sell online courses by handling this

technology. I wish I could say that that was our plan and we wanted to build this company around it, but the whole thing was so incidental. It's not even something we planned to happen as much as it organically evolved.

I was teaching a couple of courses on Udemy, and that made me realize that this online course thing is here to stay. It was brand new platform, people were enjoying taking the courses. Building courses was easy, but we felt very stifled on Udemy just because it was a marketplace where I didn't get my own students email address.

I would work so hard to get someone to my course only for them to get cross-sold into something competitive, and on top of that we were keeping anywhere from seventy to fifty percent of sales even though we drove the sales.

All of these frustrations led to building what was the first version of Teachable. At the time it was called Fedora which was honestly just an app I built in a few days that we wanted to use for our own courses, and from that point on it was like, "Okay, it worked for our courses. Let's try and get one more person using it, two more people using it."

It sort of organically over the next few months evolved into something that made me go like, "Okay. You know we might be onto something. Maybe this is just not a fun side project but this is a company." That's how we started now almost a little over two years ago.

James: That's been an amazing couple of years, and that's the right way to build a company I guess, is needed.

DID YOU COME FROM A TECHNOLOGY BACKGROUND? YOU SAID YOU BUILT THE APP IN A COUPLE OF DAYS. IS THAT SOMETHING YOU GOT SOMEBODY ELSE TO DO OR DID YOU PHYSICALLY DO THAT YOURSELF?

Ankur: Yep. I built it myself. I should preface this with I'm a terrible engineer. I'm a bad, bad programmer, but at the same time I can still get it done, which means I built the first version entirely myself, but as soon as I realized that this is a real company, I was like, "Okay. Time to get serious."

We hired a couple of developers and started actually building again from scratch. The version I built was only good enough to validate the business. It was not good enough to actually end up using after that point. It was something we built, it was useful, but ended up discarding it entirely because as I said, bad developer. Yes. I did build the first version myself.

James: The whole online course thing, I mean I think it's amazingly democratizing. It's allowing people in their own time to improve, to self improve. It's allowed people to start businesses and making money from their knowledge which is something we'll move onto in a minute. But also just from a customer point of view I've taken quite a few online courses and I've paid quite a few hundred dollars for them and I don't regret any of them. I think they've been amazing things for me.

IT TOOK A LONG WHILE TO GET TO WHERE WE ARE NOW, DIDN'T IT? I GUESS THAT WAS MAYBE THE STREAMING TECHNOLOGY, THE BANDWIDTH WASN'T THERE A FEW YEARS AGO.

Ankur: I think it's a culmination of factors really. I mean even if you look at the macro trends for a second, more people are getting the internet every single day. More people are getting comfortable spending money on the internet.

Five years ago people weren't comfortable putting in their credit card online. We're still so early, you know, bigger picture in this whole internet thing. I mean, I still see online courses where they are now, we're still very, very, very early on in the movement of what they will become. When I look at a course it's really just a way of selling, as you said, selling knowledge, selling information. Right now, what are we doing? We're basically recording videos, putting them up there, and we think that's the best version of disseminating information.

I think five years from now, ten years from now we'll look back at what we consider a course now and probably laugh. Like, "Wow. Those were the simple days." I think we're still so early into what courses can eventually become.

James: It is evolving and we spoke to David Siteman Garland on last week's podcast and he's quite an evangelist for the online course. He basically says pretty much everybody has something in them that could lend itself to a valuable course online and you can find an audience.

WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

Ankur: Absolutely. I go one step further and say that I think teaching is one of the most human things we do. You organically do it as a child to a younger sibling. It's in our nature to teach, and that's another thing that motivates us a lot at Teachable is like getting more people to self identify as teachers, like our audience is not people that are high school teachers.

It's like if you're writing a blog post, if you're creating a YouTube video you kind of are teaching people. Even a non-fiction book, a lot of non-fiction authors, you might not identify as a teacher, but I would argue that you are a teacher and that's a big part of what we want to do too is like having more people identify as teachers especially people that are, for lack of a better word, entrepreneurs, self motivated, running this entirely themselves.

James: From your bird's-eye view then at Teachable looking down, and when we selected you we looked around at quite a few platforms and we selected you and we've been very happy I have to say. It's been a great experience. In fact the best compliment I can give you is it's been fairly painless, which is kind of from our point of view how you want it to be because our focus is on all the other things that go along with it.

We've had some great success. We've had three launches now and I think we've been up there I think in your customer league which we're delighted about. We know what our business is in self publishing which is a boom area and getting it right does require some work.

There's a niche area there you need to understand and that's what we're doing, but what else is working from your point of view?

PEOPLE LISTENING TO THIS PODCAST ARE CASTING AROUND IN THEIR MIND THINKING, "WELL, WHAT COULD I DO?" WHAT ARE THE AREAS THAT YOU SEE THAT ARE WORKING?

Ankur: The first thing that kind of amazes us every month is we've never had the same person being our top revenue earner two months in a row. It was just the constant stream of different topics that we've seen be successful is amazing. What that means is it's basically getting rid of limitations.

A lot of people believe like, "Okay. I have this topic, but this topic is not profitable." That's not true at all. No matter what the topic is, there's a profitable course there. The only thing that might vary is when you

get further away from the money, and when I mean further away from the money I mean your course is not about helping people get a better job, it's not about helping them make money online.

If it doesn't link in some way to a better financial or professional outcome, you sell your courses at a lower price point per unit, but it doesn't mean you can't sell thousands of units and still make as much money as someone selling a four hundred dollar course or a five hundred dollar course that's somewhat closer to the money.

The first thing I want to talk about is how there is no such thing as an unprofitable topic. We have people making money teaching courses in digital scrap booking, water color painting, jazz guitar lessons. The only difference is people selling those kinds of topics is generally sell courses at a twenty to sixty, seventy dollar price point so they have to sell more units to be at the same kind of revenue level.

In terms of things that are working, it's really hard to find trends because every single month there's different topic areas coming. The biggest trend if I had to generalize would be build an audience. If you build an audience, like building the audience is the part that is the difficult part, and if you build an audience whatever topic you've built an audience in, you can and you have profitable courses within them. It's more about who are you and who is the audience you're going to build, and then find out what that audience wants to learn.

James: Obviously that is a key part of getting to the point of launching an online course and that's what David Garland was talking about in some detail last week.

HOW DOES THE PLATFORM HELP THAT? WHAT'S YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE PROVIDING FOR A TEACHER TO ENABLE THEM TO DO THAT SIDE OF THE BUSINESS?

Ankur: As you pointed out, and actually I think you had Joanna Penn on your podcast too, and what Joanna said was, or her exact words were, "Look, Ankur, I'm an author. I'm a creator. I want to teach people. I want to help people, and I don't want to deal with plugins. I don't want to deal with technology. The best thing you guys do is you allow me to not think about it."

I think that really summarizes what we're striving for. We want to let teachers, teacher-entrepreneurs focus on their craft, their skill, on teaching others, on helping others. We want to handle the technology; the

technology should not be what you think about. That's kind of the biggest thing we're going for.

The secondary thing we're going for is a lot of, at least in America, I mean pretty sure it's like this in most parts of the world, but especially in America teachers are, in my opinion, horribly undercompensated for the kind of work they do. Helping teachers and teacher-entrepreneurs make money and make a living from what they're doing is really, really important to us. We want to talk about what can we do to help teachers make more money, and that's a big, big thing we internally think about a lot. We're a platform for teachers; what can we build? What small feature can we do that dramatically changes the amount of income a teacher can make?

An example is when we allowed people to create multiple pricing tiers for a course. It seems like a really small thing, but it dramatically changed the amount of money a lot of teachers could make, because all of a sudden you could create an arbitrary pricing plan that's ten X more, that includes an hour or two of consulting time or something. We're always thinking what can we do to help teachers financially do a lot better.

James: I notice the installment plan is something you've added recently and that's something we were very keen on offering students, particularly as an outlay on Facebook ads to try and make it as painless as possible. In the old days we had to count the ten months or twelve months and then manually, although I think your friend Jack helped me cancel them automatically. But now there's an installment plan.

THOSE LITTLE THINGS, AS YOU SAY, MAKES IT EASIER TO FIT IN WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS, WHICH IS AT THE HEART OF ANY GOOD BUSINESS, RIGHT?

Ankur: Absolutely. That's kind of also what differentiates the product a lot from say a traditional shopping cart provider. There's just a lot of things that are really important when you're selling information online as opposed to selling physical goods. So getting that part right, because, again, when I think about what we're doing now, we're a platform to help people sell online courses. But bigger picture we're a platform for helping people transfer knowledge, and I think the way society is going, I mean the market for people selling information and selling knowledge will be if not already, will become larger than the market for physical goods.

Today it's courses. Two years from now it might be something. What we know we're doing is just focusing on teacher-entrepreneurs and helping them make money.

James: Looking around at your current crop of teachers, I mean we do a lot of ScreenFlowing. It lends itself to what we're teaching in Self Publishing Formula, and taking people through that process, and I guess that's the staple of a lot of courses. I've done a few courses. I did a YouTube ads, couple of those courses, and the teachers on both of those preferred to stand up in front of a whiteboard, I mean as simple as that actually.

When you first look at that shot, you think this is really low maintenance. It was like a simple DSLR camera and him standing there, but it's all you needed, and it was absorbing because he's just making the most of a very simply, uncomplicated environment.

IS THAT A TYPICAL MIX OF PRESENTATION STYLES?

Ankur: Yes. In general I would say the most common type of video is probably slides with a voiceover. A few people have started investing in very high quality talking head video. But, again, to kind of go back to what I was talking about earlier, I think we're in the early, early, early stages of online courses to the degree that things like production quality matter less right now. If you're someone that's looking to get in online courses, now is a good time because the barriers to entry are so low. I do think two, three years from now courses are going to look a lot better as they mature.

Think about it. Already you have people making a few million dollars from their courses. It's a matter of time before someone makes fifty million dollars from a course, and if you're making fifty million dollars from a course, what would happen if you spent five million dollars in producing that course?

I think this space will continue evolving and production qualities will keep getting better, but right now, frankly, the barriers to entry are so low. A lot of courses that do really well are just literally someone firing up ScreenFlow and talking, no script, no preparation, talking.

Very often the topic they're teaching is compelling enough, or the, for lack of a better word, the teacher-student fit. What I mean by the teacher-student fit is for whatever reason this specific person is the best person you can learn from that people are willing to overlook things like production quality because you have this ability to learn from someone that's the perfect expert for you. Either you relate to the teacher or they teach the topic that no one else teaches about. That production quality doesn't matter that much right now, and that will change, but that's also what's cool about courses.

James: I completely agree with that and I come from a video production background, and I've always thought, in fact I was a BBC reporter before then making news films, and when the news story was incredibly strong it didn't matter what the production was like. You could be filming it on your iPhone. It was gripping.

If the news story was weak you had to work really hard with your production values.

I WOULD BE SLIGHTLY WARY ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE SPENDING A LOT OF MONEY ON PRODUCTION VALUE AT THIS STAGE, BECAUSE, AS I SAY, YOU NEED A SCREENFLOW, A WHITEBOARD, AND A PEN AND YOU'RE AWAY. YEAH?

Ankur: Absolutely. That's the other thing that a lot of people discount is, again, back to the teacher student fit, is a lot of times you can be the right teacher for someone just by virtue of your path being most similar to that student.

Because traditionally in traditional education everyone learns from a professor. A professor has some kind of formal qualification. Has probably not done the thing they're teaching recently, but if you look at the most successful online teachers, they've done the thing they're teaching recently. They're probably still practicing that thing. By virtue of being practitioners of what they're teaching, they're better teachers. And very often by virtue of not being that good, and this is where it gets funny, is a lot of the best teachers are the people that are not good at actually doing the thing, but that makes them more relatable because they had the same path to self teach that a lot of their students did.

Like our most successful, before you guys came along, the first people to make over a million dollars on our platform taught iPhone app programming, but the rub is they were not very good programmers. They were people that struggled and self taught themselves how to code after years of failing, but because of that they were the teachers people wanted to learn from. You'd rather learn from someone that's faced the same struggles, that doesn't have a computer science degree, that's not a natural, and that's what's funny, right? A lot of times the most compelling teachers are people whose path looks a lot like yours versus the professor that studied something twenty years ago.

James: It's a disruptive thing. What's happening in lots of industries, turning conventional wisdom on its head a little bit.

Ankur: Yep. Absolutely.

James: Is there any limit to this, Ankur? I'm trying to think of the big educational areas that people have traditionally invested in, so learning medicine I guess is one, law, flying, pilots license and stuff like that. I mean you can't actually teach somebody, necessarily to fly.

DO YOU SEE ANY LIMITATIONS IN CONVENTIONAL INDUSTRIES MOVING MORE ONLINE IN THE FUTURE?

Ankur: No. I mean a lot of stuff will not get a hundred percent online just by virtue, as you said, there's things that cannot be taught online. But at the same time, there's still supplemental things that can be done online.

When I look at online learning right now in terms of the weaknesses, here are a couple of weaknesses I see. The first one is in traditional education. I went to college I had a great time. You're still missing out on a lot of the social experiences and the learning that happens by virtue of the people you interact with. I still think that's lacking a little bit online.

The second thing I think that's lacking a little bit online is, and, again, I'm going to make an analogy with the way gym memberships work, is you still have a lot of people that buy courses but don't end up doing the course, and it's not really the fault of the teacher in a lot of ways. The same way people buy memberships and don't go to the gym. One of the areas that I'm looking for innovation and it's not going to be us because we're focused on the technology, but I'm really curious to know what is the personal trainer equivalent of an online course, whether it's an accountability partner or something.

A lot of people end up working with personal trainers not because of the trainer's expertise, but because the trainer keeps them accountable. They have someone to show up to every day and do their workout. I'm really curious to know as to what that innovation is going to look like with online courses, because I think for a lot of courses people will be willing to pay not just for the content but for the accountability and to actually have someone to hold them responsible to consume the course.

James: I guess what we're trying to recreate is turning up every week to a class where you're being pushed and tested and trying to create that yourself at home.

FOR SOME PEOPLE IT DOESN'T COME EASILY, RIGHT?

Ankur: Absolutely. Look, we monitor this stuff pretty closely, like what makes people complete courses. It's so funny, like charging more money, for instance, is one of the best ways of getting people to complete a course. The more money you charge, the more likely they are to complete the course, but even then across our entire network and we have some amazing teachers, I'll still be honest and say I'm a little disappointed at the number of people that buy courses and don't consume as much as they should. I guess that's just human nature because that's something I've done as well. I've bought courses and very often have ... I don't know. James, you've bought courses. How good are you about completing them?

James: I don't think I have ever got to a hundred percent in any of the courses I've bought, but I've done a lot. I've done a lot of all of them.

Ankur: Also the hundred percent thing is interesting. A lot of people measure their success that way. Clicking around and watching the parts you want, I think that's how people want to consume courses. The idea of just watching every video because it leads to a hundred percent might not even be the point. For a lot of people skipping around is the experience they want.

James: I mean probably those stats are more interesting than the hundred percent stats. The bits that people have watched five times because they're following it, instructional, and making it work.

Ankur: Yep.

James: We've got a special offer. I know you're going to do a favor to our listeners to give people an opportunity to sign up to Teachable free of charge for a month and have a full explore of the platform, and I think that for some people will spark their ideas when they see how the platform works.

It's pretty intuitive and pretty easy, and then hopefully that will motivate them to move into this area. Let's talk a little bit about Teachable because it's been a great journey, a fantastic and exciting journey. We're really delighted that we were in fairly early on with you as well. As you say, you had a name change in the middle so people may remember as the Fedora days, the old hat, but it's a start-up and it's an exciting environment.

AND YOU'VE HAD A FEW BIG FUNDING MOMENTS I THINK.

Ankur: It's really interesting as to, I mean obviously we're having a blast here. We're now twenty-one people in New York, but I always tell the team this internally. We notice this every month or two it feels like we're doing something different. Running a ten percent to a fifteen percent company, to a twenty-one percent company.

At every stage it feels like we're at a particularly higher difficulty. Honestly, it's a great place to be overall. Just we've been fortunate enough that not only has the team grown, but the platform has grown. We're now at a point of on any given day we have hundreds of thousands of dollars transacting through the system.

We're now at a point of this month we'll probably have over three million dollars in course sales just happening this month. Getting close to two million students, so just being able to do things at this scale is amazing, and it's starting to give us competitive advantages. If we want to test a small tweak on the checkout page, we have so much data now that we can start doing things that are better for the entire network really, really easily.

It's taken a while to get here but what's great is now that we have something that's working it's just like we can spend time optimizing things that in the past the scale wasn't there where it made sense.

A small one or two percent change in the past wouldn't have meant much, but now because of the scale it's actually pretty significant.

James: You've made some choices about how you enable people to run their courses which is to effectively to price them, name their own price, to set up the different price points, et cetera. But that's not everybody's choice is it? Because you mentioned Udemy at the beginning, and although I haven't visited it very recently I've noticed some of the chat particularly on your Facebook page actually of people seeing with a little bit of despair about the routes and the choices Udemy have taken.

PERHAPS YOU CAN JUST UPDATE US AND TELL US WHAT THE DIFFERENCE IS AND WHAT THEY'VE DONE.

Ankur: To start at the very beginning Udemy is a marketplace, and the advantage of Udemy from an instructor's perspective is they do the marketing for you. They will bring you students, while all you have

to do is put your course up there.

It sounds like a pretty compelling value proposition, but the downside is because it's a marketplace, they regulate everything. What that means is you're not getting a single student's email address. You're not really building an asset. You're just getting a little bit of money for your courses up there. They take a fifty percent revenue share and they also have limitations on what you can and cannot do.

For instance a course must be at least forty-five minutes of video. Your course cannot cost more than fifty dollars. Your discounts need to be between this percentage and that percentage. I actually think for a lot of people that are just messing around with online courses, like you just want to do a little bit of work, put something up, and get a check in the mail every once in a while, Udemy actually could work out really well for you.

If you're serious about this, if you think this is your business, I mean, you know, you just can't run a real business like that. What you can do, if you do want to run a real business and still use Udemy, is potentially use Udemy for your cheaper smaller courses, or maybe even giving courses away for free because they will get you that distribution, but if you're not selling your own course on your own platform on the backend, you're just never going to build a real business.

James: I don't want to overlap too much with David Garland because I think your answer to this might be quite similar, but I want to address the people who have become motivated over the last couple of podcast episodes about the potential for moving into online courses and taking those first steps.

WHAT ARE YOUR KEY TIPS TO THEM?

Ankur: My key tips are when you have an idea for what you want to do, find your people, find your audience, start talking to them, start validating whether you have this course idea, whether people will buy before you actually build it.

The biggest mistake I've seen people do is spend three months recording something and then realizing that no one will buy. I'm a huge fan of the lean start-up methodology of you have an idea, you kind of workshop it, find people that would be potential customers, and ask them, "Hey, will you pay me for this?"

Work with them, build the content out, and then have your first launch. We go into more detail in all of our training material, just like more specific ways and where do you find these audiences to validate this idea with.

If you already have an audience, it's even easier. You just email your audience. If you don't, you just have to start finding an audience, talking to them. Whatever you do, validate that this is something people would pay for. If possible get them to actually put their money down. It doesn't matter how much, but even paying a dollar actually matters a lot in validating whether there's something there. Only then, only then do you actually go ahead and record your content.

James: I knew your answer would be the same as David. That's because it's the correct answer, build your audience. It's got to be the number one thing. Okay, so you just mentioned then your own training material, and I know you done quite a lot of outreach work. You got to do your own training videos. You also do webinars from time to time, and in fact you've got a very good blogger. I can't remember her name top of my head.

Ankur: Ashley.

James: Ashley. Yeah. Ashley does fantastic work in digging out articles and putting stuff together.

BUT TALK TO ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR OWN TRAINING THAT'S AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE.

Ankur: A little bit of background about the company. We're twenty-one people now of which nine people work on what is effectively a hybrid growth marketing product education team. A lot of the training stems from there. We make the best technology and we're doubling down on that, but very often we have people that still need a little bit of help in terms of how do I build an audience, how do I sell a course. We've decided to invest in creating some of this training just to make available to people to walk them through the process. I think we've done this twice now where we've created our own course on creating online courses.

There's a lot of people like David Garland that probably do as good a job, maybe even a better job, but a lot of their training is not financially accessible for a lot of people. A lot of people can't afford to spend, I don't know. I mean you guys went through David's course. How much did you guys spend on it?

James: Five hundred dollars something like that. It wasn't cheap. I can't remember exactly.

Ankur: If you got it for five hundred, you probably got a very good deal, because normally I think it sells for a thousand. What we've done is once in a while we'll do promotions where if someone commits to Teachable for a year we'll give them a course, that I think is of that level of comprehensive training, for free with the software.

We've been back and forth where in the past there was once a time when we charged for courses, but then we're like, look, for us to stay focused on the technology we made an internal rule to never make money selling information, just back that kind of changes your priorities pretty fast.

There's some people in the course software space that also sell courses, and we thought about it and decided that's not for us. Very often if people commit to the software, we decide to give them to give the training included because very often they just can't afford some of the other training out there.

The second thing we do is we also work with a lot of people giving the training to bundle in the software there, because I do think for a lot of people starting out you need both. You need the training and the software, so for us both creating our own training as well as partnering with people doing training has been a huge growth channel and a huge driver of what I think has differentiated us over the years.

James: There is a partnership feel, I think, to the relationship that you build with your students, or with your teachers I should say, and, yeah, we've definitely benefited from that and appreciated that. Ankur you're a pathfinder at Teachable which is exciting.

THE POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH IS, ALTHOUGH WE DON'T QUITE KNOW MAYBE WHAT THE FUTURE IS GOING TO LOOK LIKE, BUT IT'S JUST GOING TO GROW, RIGHT?

Ankur: Absolutely. Right now when we do nothing we probably grow by ten percent month-on-month. When we work really hard that goes up to about twenty percent month-on-month.

It's really nice because I've built, I've been in technology start-ups before. I've been in companies where you kind of kid yourself that it's working, where things are stagnant but you kid yourself into the smallest

things. Now, for us, we do feel privileged and honored that we're onto something. It's like just I feel honored that amongst the team we really, really, really get along well, enjoy working together, but more than that we go the sense that we're doing meaningful work. I say that because I made money early on in my late teens, early twenties building Facebook applications. It was a successful business, but I never had the sense of doing meaningful work.

Now we just feel lucky because great team, great investors, come in every day feel like we're doing meaningful work. We like our customers. It's literally feel like we have everything going for us. Where, if we don't build something amazing from here on, it's unforgivable because it's just like we messed up. There's literally no externality, there's no reason to mess up from here on in. It would just be poor execution on our part.

James: Staying agile and being able to adapt has got to be a key thing for you, because what you don't want to do is turn into a company that's too big to change, because you've changed quite a few times already. You've already said that.

Ankur: Absolutely. It's something we fight to do. A lot of companies, especially in Silicon Valley, you look at the number of employees as a metric of success. We are actively trying to break that thinking, like, yes, we have to grow because our business is growing, but we fight to keep our team as small as possible just because everything is better with a smaller team, at least in our opinion.

James: Okay, so, Ankur, you've got an offer for our podcast listeners if they want to dip their toe into the Teachable water.

HOW IS THAT GOING TO WORK?

Ankur: If people go to [Teachable.com/SPF](https://teachable.com/SPF), for Self Publishing Formula, we're going to give them a free month of Teachable at any plan at all, and they can mess around on the platform.

We'll also bundle in a couple of training courses. One of the courses is just is called Million Dollar Instructor which is what we created with the guys over at Bitfountain who I talked about are the iPhone app developers. They were the first people to hit the million dollar threshold on our platform. Created a training course on how they did that.

We're including that as well as recordings from our last summit, of which Mark was a part of, and a free month of Teachable if they just go to [Teachable.com/SPF](https://teachable.com/SPF).

James: The summit was great, and I'm not just saying this, but the one Mark was on was particularly, I think, good.

Ankur: Mark was very amused when he was on the panel with Andrew Warner and James Altucher and they definitely went at it a bit.

James: Yeah. They did. It was author-centric as well which was great. Good.

WE LIKE THE COMPANY SO MUCH WE'RE GOING TO COME TO NEW YORK AND SEE YOU, AREN'T WE, IN THE AUTUMN.

Ankur: Looking forward to it. I think we have a date in the calendar for September.

James: We do. We are going to have a beer together in New York and share in some of that Teachable success, and long may we be a part of it. Ankur, thank you so much indeed for coming onto the SPF podcast.

That link again, shall I say, [Teachable.com/SPF](https://teachable.com/SPF). Sierra Papa Foxtrot, or just Self Publishing Formula. Look, we'll catch up again, probably maybe next year in terms of the podcast and we'll see what Teachable are doing then because as you say probably will look a little bit different from what you're doing now, and that's the beauty, yeah?

Ankur: Yep. Likewise. It's been a blast. Thanks for having me.

James: Ankur Nagpal. Enthusiastic like a lot of these companies. One of the traits of these start-up companies is they're kind of young and they're enthusiastic, and they just want to forge forward and they want you to be a partner with them, and that's all good, isn't it, for people like us who are self publishing, running our own businesses. We are all effectively start-ups.

I don't think, you know, the older self publisher is not that old in terms of how long your business has been going, and to be a part of this community, it feels like the right place to be at the moment.

Mark: It does. Yeah. Very enthusiastic. Really smart. Whip smart I'd say, and makes me feel old. I don't know about you, James.

James: Yeah. Even older.

Mark: These young whippersnappers running around. I'm forty-two, makes me feel about eighty-four when you listen to these young guys running around telling us old fuddy-duddies what we need to be doing.

James: I'm still in my forties which I can say for a few more months, so I'll say it quite a lot this year. It's good to be a part of that, and I think that Ankur talks in a very clever way about what you should be focusing on.

As I said at the beginning before the interview, they don't just provide the platform and then sort of shrug their shoulders and say, "It's up to you." They are interested in you finding viewers and in you providing the right content for your viewers and then doing what they can, and they have a great support service as well. Ashley, we mentioned in the interview, puts out a really good, well-targeted email each week which is going to help you build your course.

That brings to an end our miniseries, a bit like Roots in the 1970s or was it the 80s, a famous miniseries, Kennedy was the other one that I liked, on non-fiction. I hope it's been of use. It's an area that you've grown into in the last twelve months, Mark, and we've grown into.

HOW DO YOU RATE NON-FICTION ALONGSIDE YOUR FICTION CAREER NOW, BECAUSE YOU'RE RUNNING BOTH OF COURSE?

Mark: I'd say they're complementary. They're both driven by the same kind of principles, finding readers or students depending on what you're looking at, and then providing them with really great content, the kind of thing that they want to consume.

I love doing both. I'd probably, if you put a gun to my head and said you could only do one, I would still consider myself to be an author. That would be what I would choose to do, but we get a lot of fun working with the students that we've had. Some of the conversations going on in the Facebook group right now with the students is just really great stuff. Very inspirational. People learning all the time, and making great strides to getting their books out to as many new readers as possible.

James: Don't forget you can join our Facebook community. If you just drop us an email at support@SelfPublishingFormula.com you can join our closed Facebook group. It's by invitation only but the fact that you're listening to this podcast means that you are invited. Just tell us that you want to join us in that, and you don't have to be a paid up member of any courses or anything like that. That is a free to use community, and it's a great place if you are into Facebook advertising in particular, but other social media platforms as well.

One of the main benefits you get from that is just to, I think, not only work out how to do things and get some best practice from what's working and what's not from other people, but the most practical use you can get is to stick your adverts in there, put your copy in there. Say, "Look, I've been listening to Bryan Cohen, and I've rewritten my copy. What do you think?" You will get a selection of comments.

You need to be able to take the criticism. It's an absolutely essential part of working in the creative industry as you know anyway from writing your book, but to take on board I think you get some really excellent, sound advice from people who aren't putting themselves out there as experts, they're putting themselves out there as people who've done that and seen the results of it, and this is what worked for them, and that's a really, really powerful little thing to have.

Mark: Absolutely. I hope that was useful for everyone. I mean it was something that we've been thinking about for a while. I get loads and loads of questions about non-fiction so it was really good to be able to pull together three extremely well qualified guests to help us consider how to make money from non-fiction, how to use your book as a calling card, effectively, and then to build a course on the back of that.

We had fun doing that, and, as I said, we have a lot of fun with the non-fiction side of the business, and I hope that was useful too, but as you said, James, we will be moving back into fiction next week, and I think we're going to be doing something on publicity.

James: We are. Publicity, which a bit like all these areas that go around the art of writing, is a bit of a black art for most people. They don't really know quite where to start on it. I don't think you and I really did. I mean my background is perhaps a bit more geared around publicity than yours, but nonetheless we have discovered quite a lot, and I've learned a lot about, because it's changing, actually, access to publicity and how you do that is changing a lot, and there's quite a lot you can do by yourself.

We're also going to explore the professional options that are available to you which aren't always cheap. Sometimes you can get quite a lot of bang for your buck depending on how you approach that. Publicity, how to get yourself out there, how to get your head above the parapet, get yourself noticed in what is a busy space. It can mean a lot in terms of your sales.

Mark: Absolutely. Just to tie it back with the non-fiction side of things, if you're trying to establish yourself as an authority, then it's great to have mentions in mainstream press. Kind of a bit of a spoiler ahead of next week, I managed to get, or we managed to get with the help of our publicists some really good coverage in places like the Sunday Times, the Daily Mail, the Telegraph, big UK newspapers that have been really useful for helping us build a bit of a reputation for ourselves when it comes to teaching and also, of course, selling my books.

James: We need to get you into the New York Times now, The Washington Post.

Mark: Yeah. Exactly.

James: We need to focus.

Mark: If anyone is listening who has an intro into The Washington Post then send an email to ... I still can't do it.

James: You were going to be very rude. I'm going to stop you there. I'm going to stop you there before you swear and use profanities, but, yes, basically you're media hungry.

Mark: Media@me.com.

James: ... attention seeking. Yeah.

Mark: Exactly.

James: Insecure. Unless you're reading about yourself every day, things go downhill for you. Please feed the beast. Okay. That's great. Thank you very much indeed for listening to podcast number twenty. As Mark says, back with something that's going to be of more general use, I think, for authors next week, specifically publicity, and plenty of good, exciting interviews coming on down the line. We'll speak to you again next Friday. Until then, I don't know, get writing. Is that what we say? I'm writing, are you writing?

Mark: #Writing.

James: Excellent.

Mark: Bye-bye.

James: Bye.

CHAPTER 18

TAPPING INTO THE TRADITIONAL PR MACHINE AS AN INDIE AUTHOR



INDIE AUTHORS HAVE LONG TAKEN pride in their ability to use the tools at their disposal to create works of fiction and nonfiction that easily rival the quality and appeal of those published through the traditional channels. But using the traditional PR (public relations) channels has been a bit of an enigma to this point as many of the existing gatekeepers appear to still be in place. Not intimidated by such things, Mark and James took it upon themselves to do a bit of an experiment in the PR world to see what reach and exposure Mark could generate for himself both as an author and as an authority in the indie publishing niche by hiring a PR firm. In this episode you're going to hear what's come of that PR experiment so far and get some lessons you can use right now.

PR IS NO LONGER ONLY FOR THE TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED AUTHOR, BUT IT'S NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART.

Most self published authors understand the hustle it takes to gain exposure for their writing in the crowded book markets of the online retailers. But stepping into the world of bookstores, media outlets, and

television stations is another world entirely. But that doesn't mean it's impossible, as Mark demonstrates on this episode. His recent foray into the world of traditional PR did cost him a pretty penny but it was worth it in both results and in learning, and he's not shy to share all of that information with you. Hear how his PR campaign took place, what came of it, and how you can take some of the principles he learned to advance your own reputation as an author and an authority.

WHY TRADITIONAL PR COULD BE AN IMPORTANT STEP FOR YOU AT SOME POINT.

While the "rebel" nature of self publishing enables us to accomplish a lot of good for ourselves by going around the traditional gatekeepers of the publishing industry, we can't allow our independent spirit to keep us from taking advantage of opportunities that may seem a bit more traditional. The typical PR route is one of those that can yield great results if we're willing to use it. The exposure that comes from features on TV shows, traditional newspapers and their online equivalents, and radio shows is still unmatched in many ways. In this episode you can hear how Mark was able to leverage those to his advantage and why he thinks it could be a great way for Indie authors to gain even more exposure as their career advances.

EVEN IN SELF PUBLISHING THE MARKET IS GETTING CROWDED. YOU'VE GOT TO SET YOURSELF APART.

We all love self publishing because it enables us to go around the gatekeepers and empowers anyone to publish a book. The bad news is... anyone can publish a book. That means your baby is one of the crowd and you've got to do something to make yourself and your writing stand out (apart from making it very, very good). In this episode Mark and James discuss how a PR campaign could help give you that boost in attention that you need to get on the radar of more and more prospective readers. It could be the added tool in your toolbox that gets you the notice your writing and your book really need.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark's mixed feelings about paying for PR.
- The need to build reputation and credibility as an author.
- Mark and James' discussion of the experience with the PR firm.
- Why Mark was impressed in his meeting with the PR firm.
- The authors the PR firm has worked alongside.
- Why PR could be an important step up for authors at some point.
- Approaching potential readers who are engaged with "old media."
- The importance of having print books for this approach.
- Measuring the price and success of this potential PR campaign.
- The potential of reaching new readers through the campaign.
- Why this is a long term investment (and how you can follow along).
- 12 weeks later and the costs involved: \$6,000 pounds.

- The option of going solo and what Mark got out of his investment.
- Additional notice that may have come from corollary sources.
- Why mark wanted to do this campaign in the first place.
- How a growing self publishing market demands you set yourself apart.
- Letting readers know that “vanity publishing” is gone now.
- Other PR options for smaller budgets.
- Moving forward with the PR company: how it could look.

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

Announcer 1: Hello, and welcome to Podcast number 21 from the Self Publishing Formula. This week we're starting "Out and About."

Announcer 2: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

Announcer 3: Please do not leave cases or parcels unattended anywhere on the station. Any unattended articles are likely to be removed without warning.

Mark: It is Friday morning. It's cold and it's early, about 8:00. It's misty in Salisbury and I'm just about to get onto a train to travel into London to go and see a PR professional. I've always had mixed feelings about paying for PR. My view on things is it's usually possible to pay for things, or to arrange things about yourself and I've been pretty lucky with the things I've been able to arrange over the course of the last couple of years. I had a big article in Forbes, which was a real boost for my credibility within the author community. That resourced just at London book fair last year after I did some work for Amazon, on their store. I did some QA's for them. They were looking for someone to speak to Forbes and I was the person they gave a polite kick up the backside to go and do that, and that was wonderful.

Since then, other things have come in off the back of that. Those things I've been able to arrange myself. Another good example of something that just happened serendipitously, and this was through the Forbes article, I was contacted a couple weeks ago by a producer for a Radio Four documentary. Radio Four is a big national radio station in the UK, for those not in the UK. They want me to be a mentor on a five part series that will be spread across a week, where a rookie novelist tries to self publish, or looks at publishing in general. Obviously I'm up for that. It will give me more credibility, more exposure, so I'm

definitely interested in that.

Bubbling away in the background all the while has been the thought that I could do something additional, some rocket fuel could be added to build up my standing, both within the author community for people that are writing books and need help with getting them out there, and also for sale of my books. It's certainly a big byproduct of my advertising has been a big increase in sales as you'd expect, but not just off the ads, just my brand awareness in general has led to an increase in sales. That's something that I'm interested in too.

I spoke to my agent and asked him to recommend a firm of professionals that I could go and see. I figured I'd just go by myself. I got a few quotes, eye watering quotes. In one case it was 15,000 pounds up to 20,000 pounds, for a performance that isn't guaranteed, which bugs me a bit. I'm not comfortable with paying something when there's no, what we'd call, key performance indicators. In other words, I hate that kind of language. I want to know what I'm getting. What's the bang for the buck? They weren't prepared to give me that, so it made me a little bit nervous.

We'll see how this goes this morning. I'll go to the meeting and then I'm going to meet James afterwards and we'll sit down and have a chat about how it went, what my thoughts are, what's been promised, what isn't promised, maybe even mention the cost if that's something I can mention if it's not confidential. We'll just chat about PR in general and what is and isn't possible. With that, I've got a coffee, the trains just about to pull into the station, so I'm going to get over there right now, sit down and get ready and let's see how it goes.

James: Okay, Mark promised that I would be invited along at some point. I wasn't, I noticed, invited for the important meeting with the PR people, but here we are. We're in a rather curious place Mark, aren't we? This is your old haunt, here isn't it?

Mark: Yeah. I used to write, five or six years ago, there's a place called The Jeffrey Museum in east London and it's well worth a visit if you like what houses would have been like over the last 4 or 500 years. Perhaps I'm not selling it the best. People don't hear from my advice on places to visit in London. They probably want to know more about what we've just been talking about.

James: Yeah, but it's nice to set the scene. I think my adolescent daughter and young son would probably not forgive me for bringing them here because it's quite dry. For us, our age, it's lovely and who knows, if you're a writer this is exactly the sort of place you might become inspired with ideas. Anyway, as you say, we're not here to talk about that today.

We're here to talk about PR, which is a bit of a dark art in many people's eyes. You set the scene as you left Salisbury to why you were having this meeting today.

LET ME JUST ASK YOUR IMPRESSION, HAVING HAD THE MEETING, IS THIS SOMETHING YOU THINK YOU WANT TO MOVE FORWARD WITH?

Mark: Definitely. I was really impressed. I've been thinking about it for a while, as I mentioned earlier, about PR, whether it was something I should do organically or whether we should get some professionals in to help.

It's worth mentioning up front now that we're looking at this as a two step process. Part of it will be for my books, half of it will be for my books, and half of it will be for the nonfiction business that we've built at SPF.

I was very impressed. It was in a very trendy office near King's Cross with a very low door that I walloped my head on as I went in. They are very very nice, very switched on. I had a meeting with a couple of them, including their proprietor. I was very impressed they'd done their research. They knew about me. They knew about my books. I'm definitely interested in taking it on.

James: What are they going to do?

Mark: That's a good question. That's one of the questions I had. They've already put together a very broad based approach about the kinds of places that they'll try and place stories, so that could be offline press, newspapers, it could be radio, something you know lots about and the TV, something else you know about. We talked about my story, which is, I suppose, reasonably interesting. They are more interesting than other self publishers, but the whole writing all those books on the train in 2014, making that Forbes article. That's always been a big thing to be able to find me is what Forbes said about me after the London book fair last year. We just kind of talked about that, what it might look like. The thing that PR's are not going to do is they're not going to guarantee press coverage. It's not something that's in their gift. They're half of the

equation.

What they do is they go out to media organizations and try to place the stories. They can't promise you that they will get results. I got the impression that they were very confident this morning that this is the kind of story that should be able to sell quite easily.

James: Okay, I should have added in the beginning that we're in the café section, so reasonable noises may occur, but my sandwich is about to arrive as well, which I'm looking forward to.

There's a business decision for you to make and you would have listened carefully to that. I've got a couple of questions before I ask you about where you see the worth and how you're going to measure that. Particularly, if you were going to process two areas, Self Publishing Formula also Mark Dawson the author, how they present you has got to be carefully thought out.

IT'S GOT TO BE QUITE SPECIFIC TO SELL WELL IN TERMS OF STORIES AND GENERALITIES DON'T SELL WELL.

Mark: I think what we're looking at now is my profile and it's raising my profile. I'm reasonably well known now within the author community, but it's a big community and it's growing every day. This is just talking about the SPF side of the business. We've got five figures worth of authors on our main list now, but that doesn't even touch the surface of how many people are thinking about getting into the space, thinking about doing advertising. Even in the basic, entry level stuff, there's a huge amount of people who are interested in this now. One of the things I said this morning was that it's very easy for us who are within the industry, and steep within it, to assume level of knowledge that would be common for everyone.

I had a chat with a Radio Four producer who was interested in doing a documentary about me and he knew nothing about self publishing. This was with the benefit of some research because he was talking to me, but he still knew nothing about what was possible, so that was very instructive I thought.

Getting the message out, the origin story about how I went from working with you at the BBFC and getting into a position where I've had a million downloads of my books now and earned a significant income. That's a compelling story that people would be interested in hearing.

On the other side of the business, in my book business, raising my profile as an author is something that I'm very interested in doing. They've worked with some big authors, including one other very big Indie author, whose name eludes me now, but it's an erotica author who hit the New York Times list without knowing it. He hit number one on the New York Times list without knowing it. Off the back of E. L. James' successful Fifty Shades, and they're still doing really really well. They've got a campaign that they've run for her. She's been in all the big magazines, the big newspapers. That's obviously a useful analog for what we're going to look at with what they might be able to do for me. As we would call this now, in March, the London Book Fair's coming up.

They're heavily involved with the book fair. I'm talking on the Amazon stand again. It's the perfect opportunity to get into things like the book seller over here, and to spin that story off and have interviews. That's where I had the interview for the Forbes article was after the LBF last year, so there's lots of opportunities for that now. It's a perfect time for us to be looking at what might be possible.

James: Okay, and in terms of other authors, I'm guessing somebody who's writing their first book, like me, probably doesn't need to invest in PR at this stage.

BUT DO YOU SEE THIS AS AN IMPORTANT STEP UP AT SOME POINT IN AN AUTHORS CAREER?

Mark: I think you get to a point where you can only do so much yourself. Everything that I've placed so far, I've been interviewed in The Financial Times, across BBT radio, I've had an article in Telegraph, the Forbes article, all that kind of stuff. That was either stuff that I organized myself or stuff that came to me, perhaps through Amazon's press office on a couple of occasions, or other times people who somehow Googled self publishing and have come to me, probably through the Forbes article, it's rated very very highly.

But there does come a point where you need a bit of accelerant. I'm not a PR professional. Number one, I wouldn't know how to pitch a story to newspaper. Number two, I just don't have time. It's not something I have the capacity to fit in. I'm at the point now where I think financially it's a decision I'm able to make. I think the benefits are potentially quite big for both sides of our business.

I heard examples this morning from other authors and the campaigns that they run. You can give me the the Daily Mail on a Saturday, you can sell enough books just off of that to hit the top of their best seller charts. Same goes for your TV on the sofas, on breakfast TV. That kind of thing is really powerful. It

works very well for traditional publishers.

The key thing is, no one that I'm aware of in this country, a bit different in the states, no one in this country is really making a big play out of the fact that it's possible to do all of that yourself. There's a really good story there and they could see that. I could tell that the thing that's compelling is that I'm selling more books than traditionally published authors, lots of them, with no backup, just me and my laptop and the train.

James: An important thing to remember when we're talking about this, we are talking very much about new media, which is the area that we operate in. But unlike the PR, you'll be aiming at traditional media, so it won't be surprising if this is a revelation to the things like how people buy books.

Purchasing books has changed because they're still printing newspapers and magazines and struggling a little bit to get along. You mention the Mail. That actually does have a very successful online presence, as does the Guardian, but a lot of the other newspapers are not really sure where to go on that front.

YOU'RE PITCHING TO THE OLD INDUSTRY AND STILL USING THEM FOR WHAT THEY'RE WORTH, WHICH IS TO BROADEN YOUR EXPOSURE BEYOND NEW MEDIA.

Mark: Also, I know from my own sampling of my audience, that my readers skew towards the older end of the spectrum, so say between 40 and up, with a preponderance probably between 50 and 65. They're older, not necessarily therefore the ones that you'd assume to be the most new media savvy. They might not be the ones likely to see a Facebook ad for example, although lots of them are, I know that a lot of them are.

This is potentially a very interesting way and a very powerful way to access a big slice of the population who I can be reasonably confident will like the books just the same as other readers who heard about me from ads, or from Amazon or those kinds of means. There's potentially a big broadening of my audience.

James: Your books are in print as well, which is probably quite important here.

Mark: They are. Yeah, they are in print. I don't sell, I don't know how many, 1,000, 2,000 copies a month maybe of print books. The thing with print is they're in print, but they're online, so you can't go into a book

store very easily and just ... They're not sitting next to James Patterson's books. You have to go to Amazon and order them, so yes I can cater to reader who don't like reading on e readers.

James: I'm just thinking if you're trying to capture a market who won't see a Facebook ad for it, but they probably will go onto Amazon and order a book, but they probably won't have a Kindle, they might not have a Kindle. There's certainly somebody in that category.

Mark: Yeah, that's right.

James: Other e readers are available.

Mark: Yes, absolutely they are. I know that we've spoken to Adam Craft, he's done very well with ads as a result of doing what we've been doing. I know he's seen a massive spike in his print sales, we've really seen it, much more than I sell, but that's another way people can access my stories that I haven't really exploited yet.

James: Going back to the figures, two answers before, the bottom line in your business. So there's a bottom line here.

DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THIS IS GOING TO COST YOU AND DO YOU HAVE A TIMESCALE FOR MAKING THAT BACK AND HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MEASURE THAT?

Mark: That's interesting. They've quoted a figure which I'm probably not going to mention now because I think it's confidential and I don't want to go into too much detail, but it's four figures and I was quoted ... I mentioned a couple figures from others that I spoke to. I was recommended a firm in Eastland and then they came back with 15,000 pounds, or \$22,000, something like that, which was a lot of money. I was uncomfortable with that.

The thing is, they won't give you guarantees as I mentioned earlier. I said this earlier, I hate KPI and that kind of acronym, but that is key. You need something to measure how affective it is, at least in terms of have you had an article placed this month in exchange for the big spend that I've invested and they weren't able to give me that. I wasn't happy with that, so it was significantly less than that, but I was very impressed with them. They're very professional, they've got a lot of experience with traditional and new

media.

In terms of how I measure it, it's difficult. It's not the same as with a Facebook ad. You can measure to the last cent. You can attribute sales directly to a particular ad, exactly how much you've spent, exactly how much you've made so you can calculate exactly what your return is. With this only half of the equation is visible. You know what you've spent. It's difficult, probably actually impossible to quantify the precise affect of that investment.

What you would have to do and what we will look at doing, for us, for SPF, we'd be looking at, does that accelerate the growth of our main list that we can measure. For me, for books, what I'd be looking at is benchmarking. I'd be benchmarking what I would make before the campaign starts and after. If everything else is equal, you can be reasonably confident that differences can be contributed to the campaign that you're running.

James: We can see an audience who you might not attract through your existing advertising that you can get to with your author books, your books as an author. In terms of the factual side, the nonfiction side, this is something we talk about lots in the Podcast. For many of our authors it's an area that they're actually considering getting into and it's an area we have with SPF, but the people who will respond positively to that are probably in the digital space only.

YOU'RE USING PR MONEY TO GO TO OLD MEDIA CONSUMERS TO SELL THEM SOMETHING THAT'S NEW MEDIA.

Mark: Yeah, that's true, but you're amplifying your message. It's probably fair to say that most people who are interested in self publishing are going to be at least conversant with the technology, They certainly should be or they're going to have a difficult time with it. But they also read newspapers, and they also listen to the radio and watch TV in the morning. Anything that can increase my profile and my authority in that space is going to be a good thing.

James: We're going to get you on the sofa with Susanna, who's one of the breakfast presenters here in the UK.

Mark: Is this the one you fancy?

James: I just find her intellectually stimulating.

Mark: Yes, that would be a goal. I was quite close, actually, to being on breakfast TV a long time ago when I had my second book published, when I put the boot in for the lawyers because I was a lawyer at the time. When that came out I was contacted by the BBC and said would I come onto the breakfast show to talk about how awful lawyers are. Given as I was just about to be sacked I decided I better keep a low profile. I haven't done that, but I would be completely up for that. I'm not frightened by going on TV or the radio. We've been on the radio before.

James: Yeah, indeed, and we do a Podcast every week, so we're experts. If you get onto Jimmy Kimmel I'm definitely coming along to that as well.

There's a couple of decisions to make and I think this is something people might be interested in as we progress. We will go through this together and try to work out whether it's going to be worth it. It may be like all ventures, particularly PR, it is a long term thing. I kind of work in the PR market and video production. I'm just off to another meeting in a moment to commission a video for a client in east London here, and we always say to people, "Don't blow your wad on one big all singing and dancing moment, and then do nothing for two years. You've got to commit to the long term."

I WOULD PERSONALLY SAY YOU'VE GOT TO COMMIT TO THIS FOR AT LEAST 12 MONTHS, A WHOLE YEAR OF THIS. SEE WHERE IT GOES. DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR FIGURES FOR THE FIRST 6 MONTHS, BUT THEN START TO GET INTERESTED IN HOW THINGS LOOKED 12 MONTHS AGO WHEN YOU STARTED.

Mark: That's a significant investment and that is a pretty decent chunk of change for a 12-month retainer, which is what it would be. But I think it would be interesting for other authors anyway, just to see, because you can place this kind of stuff yourself. It isn't impossible.

I've done it a few times and if I had a bit more time I would probably learn how to do it a bit better so I didn't need to bring anybody else in. But it could be interesting to see if we could get a few nice articles placed so we can try and track the affect of that.

I'll talk about the experience of being interviewed or writing the article and we'll talk about the affect that it has on book sales and signups for SPF, and whether we get more Podcasters. There's all that kind of stuff. We can be completely transparent about that, so that other authors can have a think about, if they're at

the level that I'm at, whether they want to invest in a third party to run that for them or if they'd like to invest a bit of time in doing it themselves. I think that's something that we can give them some help with.

James: At some point I imagine we're going to interview these PR people as part of our Podcast. They should be up for that. Good, okay, well I can do some media training for you on how to appear on the site for breakfast television. I have to tell you, my retainer is obligatory, it's going to put the PR people to shame.

I'm looking forward to my sandwich, and I've got a meeting to go to, but thanks and we will follow this story. It's all about the story.

It was loud in that café with Mark. I do want to first of all say, that what I normally like to do for recording conditions is have ultimate control of the room and the environment. I felt I couldn't stand up and tell everyone to shut up once we had our conversation, so we should say it was loud in the café.

Mark: If you'd done that you wouldn't have gotten your sandwiches.

James: I wouldn't have gotten my sandwiches, or if I had gotten the sandwiches I probably would have been weary of eating them. Anyway, fascinating place to go to, one of your old haunts as you said there.

WHEN DID WE RECORD THAT? HOW FAR AWAY ARE WE NOW?

Mark: Goodness. You put me on the spot there. It must be three months ago. Something like that.

James: It was about three months. That was beginning for you, and the adventure as you explained as we were talking, and something had been on your mind and there was a lot of unknowns going into it. We've got twelve weeks or so of results to look at now. We can go through those.

I think the first thing we should perhaps look at is how much this venture has cost you, and a slight warning that it is a high figure. You told me at the time, and obviously it's something we were going to do together, so I was a little taken aback by the cost of this. Most people are going to think wow, this is so out of my depth, but actually, for some people, this will be potential investment. But there's a lot you can

learn from what we did here that will be relevant even if you're not going to spend this sort of money.

SHOULD WE MAKE PEOPLE FAINT BY TELLING PEOPLE HOW MUCH YOU PAID FOR THIS PUBLICITY SERVICE?

Mark: Yes. We paid for it really. We split the cost between the two sides of the business. On one hand there's my books, on the other hand there's the nonfiction side of the business with the self publishing formula. The cost was 5,000 pounds plus tax, so it came in about 6,000 and we split that 50/50. I got an email this morning from my accountant James, and he said, "The PR was expensive at 12,000 pounds wasn't it Mark?" I was like, what? I paid them twice.

James: Oh. Oh my.

Mark: That's great. Anyway, they're paying me back the duplicate amount.

James: This is why I do the figures.

Mark: I know. I know. I tend not to get involved with that kind of stuff. It was reasonably expensive, but not as expensive as others I was quoted. I mentioned one when we had our chat that was coming in at around about 15,000, which was for the year, but was still was a bit on the expensive side I thought.

James: We've learned some things going through the process and I think we'll come to our conclusions towards the end of this discussion whether it was worth it or not, but there are other ways I guess of doing it.

I know of at least one of our students actually who's doing really well and as good income from his selling and he got a little bit at the similar quotes that he got and he decided to go solo. Basically he put out favors to his friends and family to see if he can get some help getting some publicity and he works at it that way. That's the other way of doing it, but what did we get out of this? What did your side of the business get out of it?

WHAT DID WE GET OUT OF IT AS SPF, AND WAS IT WORTH IT? WHERE DO WE START? SHOULD WE LOOK AT SOME OF THE ACTUAL TANGIBLE RESULTS?

Mark: I suppose that's what it comes down to is what actually was arranged as a result of the campaign that was run. I think we did pretty well. I think we did get very good money. We had quite a big interview on the online section of the Telegraph. That came, the Telegraph for those not in the UK is one of the big broad sheet newspapers over here, and they sent the reports down to Salisbury and was with me for a couple of hours. We had a good chat about self publishing and the industry and how I do things. That ran and that was great.

James: I thought the photography was fantastic in that article.

Mark: Yeah. I don't know, who took those photos?

James: I never got a credit. Anyway ...

Mark: No bitterness there from Mr. Blatch. The next one was the Daily Mail, so that's, unless this has changed, it certainly was the most trafficked newspaper website in the world. Daily Mail was very very big, worldwide for that, usually with a never ending stream of celebrity gossip. But they put an article in, I can't remember what the section was, but it was one of the finance sections, so they asked me some questions on bits and pieces to do with the financial side of self publishing. That was great.

When I was interviewed by Podcast network, they called themselves manacle. They have a pretty big worldwide reach, very professional offices in London. I went down there a couple of weeks ago. I think that came out this week, so two or three days before we were recording this. That was great.

This was also running over the course of the London Book Fair. The PR handler, I suppose you call her, that I was assigned, marched me to the book seller offices at London Book Fair, introduces me to the guy who owns it and runs it.

On the back of that I spoke at the media conference about two weeks ago. That was me on a stage in front of 500 PR professionals from the traditional publishing industry, which was good fun, and a good chance to show them how Indies do things around there. I think that went down quite well and if I was in the business for extra work coming off the back of that, I would've been able to probably get a new job. I had

several people asking me to come into London and talk to them about what I do with social media.

James: Hey, can't afford you.

Mark: I told them that they couldn't and I don't want the job, so I walked away.

James: I hope you didn't say I didn't get out of bed for that and just walked off and left them standing there. Okay, the Daily Mail if you're not in the UK, you may not be familiar with these, although the Mail does have a good global reach now. They are big hitter in this part of the world. I mean, I think the Daily Mail may be the most read newspaper as well as being one of the worlds biggest websites. This is definitely the equivalent to the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post level of paper, but here in the UK and a little wider than that.

We got a couple of other hits didn't we that didn't necessarily come from that, but perhaps indirectly.

AMAZON PUT YOU FORWARD FOR SOME THINGS AND BECAUSE YOUR PROFILE IS RAISED ELSEWHERE AND IT MAKES YOU A MORE ATTRACTIVE PROPOSITION TO OTHER ENTITIES DOESN'T IT?

Mark: It does, yes. Amazon willed me out now and again to do bits and pieces to talk about self publishing with an Amazonian, so I was at London Book Fair again this year on the stage for them a couple times, which was great. They had an even celebrating Shakespeare's birthday, whenever that was.

James: April 23rd.

Mark: I was going to say April 23rd, so yes.

James: He was born and died on the same day.

Mark: You're the man we need for a pop quiz. I went down to London and I did some down the line radio interviews for about ten or eleven local radio stations in the UK, some bigger than others. That was pretty

good.

Off the back of that, Amazon introduced me to some journalists at the Times and they ran a very lengthy back page piece on me in their fame and fortune section, which was quite amusing, but that was great as well.

James: I used to be on the other side of that. Of course I was a local radio presenter in the UK, and you get someone who's on their 14th interview of the day, sitting in a cubicle in London.

Mark: Yep.

James: Normally people are pretty good at keeping the energy level up through that. As I said, it's different for us to say they were a result of the publicity we have, they weren't a direct result of, but on the other hand people will say, oh yeah.

THEY'LL DO A BIT OF GOOGLING, THAT DAILY MAIL ARTICLE COMES UP AND SUDDENLY IT'S A YES RATHER THAN A NO.

Mark: That's the thing. In terms of the building authority, that was one of the purposes was to build my recognition within the author community. If people are thinking about taking one of the courses that we do then they're going to want to know a bit about the instructor.

It's all well and good going onto a sales page and reading stuff that we've put together. That's not necessarily going to be something that they're going to, that might not be enough for them to persuade them to go ahead. If they do a bit of research and they Google, they're going to see the Forbes article that came up a couple years ago, or any of these ones that we've placed since then. It's all very useful.

Of course we can do a page on our website with a credentials page. That's very helpful as well. It's a good calling card for people who want to come and check out a little bit more about my story and just to satisfy themselves that I sometimes know what I'm talking about.

James: Sometimes.

Mark: Not always.

James: On the nonfiction side, it's easier I think to see the immediate benefits of this and that credibility that you get as you say as people are about to invest in a chunk of change for a course, to see you validated by big hitters like Forbes and the Daily Mail, could just be the difference between buying and to buying.

There may well be people who listen to Podcast who did their due diligence on you, saw that you were credible, saw that you had attracted the publicity and interest elsewhere. That translates itself into commercial value for us.

Move on a little bit to why you started it. The purpose of that, and then try and bring this around to your career as a fiction author and whether it also gave you tangible results or anything that you can quantify.

Let's just start with why we did this. Obviously we talked about this before you invested the money in it. That authority was one of the things we're looking for. Authority as a figure and a thought leader. I hate using those expression but people use them.

A THOUGHT LEADER IN THE SELF PUBLISHING SPACE WAS VERY IMPORTANT FOR SELLING THE CAUSE AND I THINK THERE'S A BIG TICK IN THAT PARTICULAR BOX.

Mark: That was one of the main aims on that side of the business was to do that and I'm happy that was met. I think we got good value for money for that part of the equation. I was selling books, but the other part, so the book selling part of my business, that's a bit more difficult to quantify because the difference between this and digital marketing, so things like Facebook ads, Twitter ads, Youtube, that kind of stuff, it's much more difficult to track conversions. We can track how effective a Facebook ad is by linking it directly to sales that are made after people have viewed that ad, and you can quantify that all the way down to the last cent.

They're very very accountable in that sense. It's a bit more difficult with studying more fluffy, traditional media tactics, and this is exactly what this kind of PR is. Its very difficult to determine how many sales have been generated as a result of a media campaign.

There are ways to do it. You can benchmark and do a before and after comparison, and other anecdotal methods whereby I've had a few emails from readers who have said they've enjoyed the Milton books and they found out about me after seeing an article about me in the Times. I'm happy enough to say that it has had an effect.

Have I seen a long jump to the top of the best seller lists? No, I haven't. The agency that we went with puts out a few more campaigns that are like this. They've had another self published writer. I can't remember her name at the time, but I'm hoping to get her on the Podcast. She writes erotica, pretty much, like E.L. James territory. She had a big feature in the Mail and she did launch into the top ten on Amazon after that came out, so I think it is possible to get that kind of result.

James: You've got to think. One of the things that's happening at the moment is that self publishing is growing, exponentially every year, therefore all the more important to separate yourself from the crowd. To get some edge over your competition. Something that's going to turn that person that's browsing your book into a purchaser.

I WOULD THINK MORE IMPORTANT IS GETTING THIS TYPE OF MAINSTREAM PUBLICITY.

Mark: This has been the preserve of traditional publishing for a long time and I don't think that's right. If I wanted to get a traditional deal I probably could at this point. I choose not to, but I also want to demonstrate that it's possible for independent authors to use the same kind of tools that traditionally published authors have had at their disposal for a long time. There's something to be said for that.

I am a bit of an evangelist for independent publishing, so it's important for me to also be out there shouting as loud as I can for authors that may not be able to get a traditional deal. Just so that they know there's another way they can get their books and reach readers. You don't need to rely on gatekeepers anymore. It would be putting it too hard to say that there was an altruistic motive for that, but that is a nice side effect of this is that everything is increasing awareness of different ways to get stories out there. That's in the back of my mind all the time as well.

James: We shouldn't forget that whilst we talk to our friends like Joanna Penn and Nick Stephenson and so on, about the self publishing revolution and how it's democratizing and it's freeing you up when all the people say no to you, which doesn't happen in self publishing.

But readers can be removed from that and not necessarily realize this is happening and realize that this amazing choice in diversity is available and the old gatekeepers are gone.

THAT KIND OF EVANGELIST CAN ACTUALLY HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT THERE AS WELL, AND JUST HELPING TO RAISE THE OLD PERCEPTION OF SELF PUBLISHING, WHICH IS VANITY PUBLISHING, AND PEOPLE UNDERSTANDING THAT IT'S THE NEW SMART WAY THE SUCCESSFUL WRITER IS NOW CHOOSING SELF PUBLISHING.

Mark: It's for readers and writers, so we're increasing awareness for readers that there are new story tellers that they can go to get stories that they'd enjoy reading. Also for writers, as I said, just educating writers that they don't need to get an agent anymore. It's not really necessary. That they don't need to get a publisher, that they can just do things themselves. You're right, it is very easy in our little enclosed publishes.

Most of the people that listen to this Podcast don't need to be told that self publishing is a viable way to get their bits and pieces out to new readers. But there are plenty of other writers, who as you say, are still equating independent publishing with vanity publishing, even though the two couldn't be more different. That's a message that needs to be gotten across.

I saw that reinforced when I was talking to these journalists and they couldn't believe what was possible these days with independent publishing. These are guys working on arts desks, finance desks. They just didn't realize the kind of success that writers can have these days, you know the people like the Marie Forces, the Bella Andres, those kind of guys. The kind of success that was possible was just completely eye opening for those guys when I spoke to them.

It bares remembering from people like us, that whilst we might be in the Vanguard, we shouldn't assume that everyone has the same level of knowledge that we do.

James: No, definitely not, and you know I used to work in the media and the newsroom a few years ago. When I started it, newsrooms were leading edge. They were the place to be. You knew everything. You read the papers every day. Actually, in my lifetime to where we are now, I see a lot of those newsrooms being a little old fashioned, a little bit stuck in the past. They're in a bubble.

Funny enough, at our political hearing, we just had this big referendum vote in the UK, and one of the things that came out of that is there is a "them and us" for the people who are on social media and

discussing things at this edge all the time and the rest of the country. Well, not the rest of the country, but there is definitely, there's work to be done in people understanding how things are changing and I'm not sure the newsroom is necessarily there anymore. They're wondering. They're finding out at the same time as other people.

THERE ARE THESE LITTLE POCKETS OF INDUSTRY, SELF PUBLISHING IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THEM, WHICH IS DISRUPTIVE, IT'S CHANGING AND IT'S SLOWLY HAVING ITS IMPACT, SLOWLY GETTING KNOWN FOR WHAT'S HAPPENING.

Mark: Yes, absolutely. Kind of wrapping this up, you mentioned other ways of doing this. People spending 5 grand on something like this is a lot of money for most people. It's a lot of money for us, so we thought about it quite carefully before we pulled the trigger on this, but there are other ways.

We mentioned Amazon reached out and got me in front of some very influential journalists, so that was great. The other author, we might as well name him, Mr. Croft. It must be time for his weekly mention. He's done very well. He got really excellent coverage on The Guardian. The Guardian, another great big newspaper over here has another very well trafficked website, and I think he was in the front page of The Guardian's website for the best part of the afternoon.

He was in the comments, and he was quite punchy in the comments as well. It was very entertaining. He was basically fighting the good fight in the community, explaining to people, particularly jealousy, was involved from some of the commenters, but Adam put up a really good fight, and because of that it got loads and loads of traffic.

And then he was invited back to be interviewed by Rachel Abbott, who we spoke to at London book fair, another very big selling Indie over here in the UK. He did that and then he reached out to local television through someone else, someone on this Podcast perhaps, and was on the BBC as well. That was all through him picking up the phone, or asking, in the latter case, asking you to pick up the phone. That worked quite well too.

James: Yeah. I got him in touch with BBC local television reporter and it was up to him whether he did anything with it. As Adam's motto, there's no harm in asking, and he asked everybody, and he continues to do that and he's had some really good success. The Guardian, again, is a big hitter newspaper in the UK.

It is possible to do it, but it does require a lot of graft on your side of things. The PR company that we use, very good, and you're really happy with them. I'm going to have a meeting with them soon so I can get to know them as well, but I know that from what you've told me they're sharp people. They are thoughtful and creative in the way they're approaching things, but PR is itself a very old fashioned industry. It hasn't changed a lot in decades and it's possible these guys and the way they're thinking, the way we've talked about potential business ventures together are at the Vanguard of that industry changing a bit. It may in time become more accessible on a wider scale. I'm not quite sure how. Who knows how it's going to work out, but it might not be this type of price to access that type of market.

Mark: They are pretty switched on it, They've mentioned that they're interested in reaching out to Indie authors, not at that kind of price I suspect. Maybe putting together some learning's that Indies can use to reach out to news desks or TV stations, all that kind of stuff. They're pretty open to that kind of thing, so we will have a chat with them, and hopefully get them on the podcast as well. That could be quite interesting.

James: Yeah. Make it accessible. It is a bit of a dark art, PR. There's a way of doing it and there's some tricks to it, so some expert advice would definitely go a long way I think on that front. You and I, and our missing partner who's never on the Podcast, we'll have to get him on one day, John Dyer.

Mark: No, no, no. We don't want to do that.

James: No, let's not ruin it. We've talked this through and for us there is going to be a further relationship with this organization and we're happy with the results so far, I'm going to press forward with that, so it's been a successful venture from my point of view.

IN TERMS OF YOUR BOOK AS WELL, YOUR AUTHOR SIDE OF THINGS, ARE YOU HAPPY TO CONTINUE?

Mark: Yeah. I need to work out exactly what a continuing routine would look like from their prospective and my prospective. I'm not comfortable, I've never been comfortable with just paying someone to act on a retainer and there being no metric that I can measure success against. I'm not going to just pay someone in the off chance that something will come of it.

I need to see regular coverage, but if that's something that we feel we can agree on then I probably would

continue. I think it is useful. We had a couple of quite close calls with getting me on Breakfast Television, which would have been great.

There was a Saturday show in the UK on one of their terrestrial channels, they were quite interested too. ITV were interested to get me on their morning sofa. That could be a game changer, so that would be something that I would continue to press for. Their view is they know who I am now. They were interested enough to take a nibble last time. It didn't quite come off for a number of reasons, but maybe it just needs to be re-framed in a different way, so we'll keep that one on the back burner.

James: Yeah. One of the things that happens, and I can tell you from being in the newsroom, and occasionally you had to tank programs and deciding is that sometimes you don't choose somebody because they've been on elsewhere. You always want to be original as a program. If you look at it from that prospective, you do have to take the longer term aspect of this into account.

YOU CAN'T EXPECT ALL YOUR HITS TO HAPPEN IN THE SAME EIGHT WEEK PERIOD BECAUSE NEWSROOMS DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN AS SHEEP, EVEN THOUGH WE DO ALL FOLLOW THE NEWSPAPERS OR WHATEVER.

I think that's been of use to people. Some live blogging along the way of that particular journey, It was new territory for you. A little bit of the old business for me, but seeing it from the other side. It's been interesting.

Mark: I think so. I've learned a lot over the course of this little experiment, so we'll probably keep doing it and it's something we can check back in with a bit later if things develop further.

James: Now, we've had nonfiction for three weeks in a row. We've talked about publicity for self published authors today. Next week we're going right back to the heart of the self publishing industry and making sales and building mailing lists. We're going to talk about what's hot in terms of what's online, what's available for you in marketing, particularly with a focus on the social media advertising platforms and to compare and contrast them to see what's working and what' not.

Next week's is going to be a really useful episode. We'll probably do this at least once a year, perhaps more often than that we will just delve in because that's how quickly the industry turns over and changes. We've got some good stuff to talk about, some recent campaigns and some recent reports from some of our

authors on what's working. That's a good one to look forward to next week. That will be episode number 22, but from us, bathing in the reflective glory of your publicity, I am. You're bathing in the reflective glory of your own publicity and your hot tub.

Mark: I was just going to say I'm about to go and bathe my children.

James: That's not necessary. Okay. We'll see you next week.

Mark: Okay. Bye bye.

CHAPTER 19

USING FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND YOUTUBE ADS FOR EFFECTIVE LEAD GENERATION AND BOOK SALES



SOCIAL MEDIA ADS are a big focus of our work here at the Self Publishing Formula simply because the days when you could organically drive traffic to your website and book sales pages through normal social media interaction are gone. That's not only because social media is becoming more and more crowded but also because platforms like Facebook are adjusting their algorithms to make that kind of reach virtually impossible. Why? Because they want you to use their advertising platform instead. In this episode James and Mark give a summary of social media advertising and why they feel it's the best approach for every self published author to find and target a specific niche of readers.

FACEBOOK ADS FOR AUTHORS: WHICH CAME FIRST, THE COURSE OR THE NEED FOR IT?

You might expect that a guy who's created a course called "Facebook Ads for Authors" would tout using Facebook Ads. It's in his own interest, after all. But in Mark's case, he didn't create the course because he knew it would sell (though he did know that). He created the course because he understood the changes

to social media landscape and figured out how to leverage those changes to his own benefit. If authors are going to be successful at building a mailing list and selling books through social media, one great way is going to be through social media advertising platforms. The course is one opportunity for you to make that pivot alongside Mark, gleaning his hard learned lessons without having to make the same mistakes he did. This insightful episode will have you thinking differently about your social media strategy as an author and help you understand the need to tweak your approach and how to do it.

WHY NOT EVERY INDIE AUTHOR WILL GET THE SAME RESULTS FROM FACEBOOK ADVERTISING.

You might think that once you learn how to use Facebook advertising as an author, you're all set. But it's not that simple. Every advertising campaign targets a particular niche or genre fan base. Your appeal to your ideal reader may be effective but they may not have the means to respond as you'd like. You'll hear more insights about issues like this in this episode about social media advertising.

BUT THERE ARE OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING PLATFORMS OUT THERE.

The Facebook Ads platform is the most mature of the social media options but that doesn't mean it's the only one that works. In this episode Mark and James chat about their experience using both Twitter and Youtube ads and give you some hard numbers on the results they've seen. Depending on your market those may be very profitable platforms for you to learn and apply to drive mailing list signups and sell more books by building a larger fanbase. Hear the basics of how these platforms work in this episode.

DRIVING OPT-INS TO YOUR MAILING LIST IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS SELLING BOOKS.

One of your goals with any advertising is to sell books. But keep in mind that it's only ONE of the goals. Mark believes that even more important than getting that one time sale is starting an ongoing relationship with a fan who could not only purchase more books in the future but also become part of a community that supports your work over the long haul. That happens through fan conversations, word of mouth, online community interactions, and much more. Find out why Mark says that building your email list is the most important thing you can do as an author - and why he recommends social media advertising as the best way to do that.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode of the podcast about paid advertising.
- The Facebook Ads course was created because Facebook works.
- Why organic Facebook interaction is not enough these days.
- Is Facebook still good for paid ads geared toward sales and list building?
- How lead capture is working on Facebook these days (2016).

- How Mark also offers a purchase option during his lead capture process.
- How Facebook works best for direct sales of books.
- Why every business needs a mailing list.
- How Facebook is working for selling books in Mark's experience.
- The reality of how Twitter ads work.
- New experiments using Youtube ads.
- How to get a FREE conversion on Youtube ads.
- The different types of videos you can use on Youtube.
- The problems James had with getting Youtube videos U.S. to work.
- The up and coming social media ad platforms.
- Lead generation and remarketing on Youtube ads.
- The ongoing changes to social media ad platforms.

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

Speaker 1: Hello, and welcome to podcast #22 from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch, and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello, welcome along to our weekly podcast on the SPF with Mark, and James. We are wilting, Mark, aren't we, because it is almost 28 degrees in the UK.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's great. It was quite warm yesterday, and this week is apparently going to be very, very hot. By our standards, anything over 20 is hot. Anything over 25, you're starting to get into heat wave territory.

James Blatch: I played cricket yesterday in a wide open field with no shade, and people were wilting.

Mark Dawson: Lords, James?

James Blatch: It wasn't Lords, unfortunately. There's plenty of shade at Lords. I could stand in front of the

stands, but the kind of grounds I play on don't have stands, and people watching, but anyway, it was a very good match.

Mark Dawson: How did you do, more importantly?

James Blatch: We lost the game by nine runs, and I think I scored about nine so I didn't really help very much. We had a bit of a collapse in the middle. I stayed in for several overs, but couldn't get the ball off the square very easily, and then I was caught trying to push ahead. It's the story of my cricket life.

It's a heat wave in the UK, and when I say heatwave, it's just like normal sun for anybody else in the world, but it's enough for us. We have decided, we have a lot of interviews this year, and we are going to, from time to time, break away from that format, and talk a little bit in more detail something that's pertinent, and specific to authors, and we always want each podcast episode to be of value to authors. What we're doing today is we're going to talk specifically about paid advertising.

Paid advertising is, without question, an essential part of the armory of a modern self-published author, who is trying to get on, and is trying to build a business. You can't sit there. Unfortunately, the days of having your Facebook page, and your Twitter feed organically growing, and sharing, and getting you sales, and getting you signups to your mailing list are gone.

The platforms which we're going to talk about in more detail have made sure of that, because it's partly how they're operating now in the commercial sector. They all started off perhaps without adverts; Twitter, certainly, and Facebook, I think, introduced advertising several years into its life, but they are now very much focused on that as a business; but, don't despair, because it's something that can be used, and can be leveraged to your advantage.

This is about paid advertising, so if you're an author, you're sticking some dollars into advertising; where should those dollars go?

WHERE IS THE BEST BANG FOR YOUR BUCK? WHAT SHOULD YOU BE FOCUSING ON? WHAT'S HOT, AND WHAT IS NOT IN THIS WORLD?

Mark Dawson: That pretty much sums it up. We're going to look at some of the ones that you'd expect;

Facebook is the platform that I'm best known for. I've got a course on that. We'll be completely frank, and open about what's working, what isn't working with Facebook right now.

We'll also look at Twitter. And James will talk about Youtube, because he is in the SPF lab at the moment doing lots of experiments on getting Youtube ads to work.

I'll talk about BookBub ads. I've had quite a lot of experience with those now, and we'll touch on other bits, and pieces like Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest maybe, and anything else that comes to mind.

James Blatch: We should say this is not just the ramblings of two British men who are overheating in the sun. We have a community now of SPF authors, which runs into the thousands, and we have a lively discussion in social media, and other areas. We've had quite a few guys, and girls on over the time of the podcast. All of that is feeding into the state of play of where we are. This is, by the way something that we should do regularly, because it is a quite fast changing environment, and from time to time, we'll take some time out just to say the mechanics of where your money should be going; where is it working?

Okay, without further adieu, I think we'll press on. You mentioned, Mark, that you've created a course on Facebook ads, and some people may think, "Of course, you're going to recommend them, because you've got this course," but we should point out that is the other way around, in fact.

THE REASON YOU'VE DONE A COURSE ON FACEBOOK ADS IS BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THEY WORK, AND THAT THEY ARE REALLY THE BACKBONE OF YOUR AUTHOR CAREER, AND CERTAINLY HUNDREDS, AND HUNDREDS OF THE PEOPLE IN THE SPF COMMUNITY, I THINK, WOULD AGREE WITH THAT.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, they are now. It wasn't always the case. I suppose I've been doing Facebook ads now for a couple of years, and was doing pretty well before I started to advertise, but once I started getting into it properly, that was an accelerant for some fairly rapid growth from 2015 onwards.

It is the platform I'm most familiar with. I still spend most of my advertising budget on Facebook, although I'm spreading things around a bit now, but it is the one that's been most effective, and it still works well.

James Blatch: Let's start with a major question. When a lot of people start moving into this area of marketing, and their own business, and their own books, they get a bit confused when we talk about social

media, because everybody is familiar with their normal social media experience, which is not paid ads. It is what we would call organic social media, i.e. you have a page, you have a Twitter account, or Instagram account, whatever, and you can do your best everyday. I see authors, I follow quite a few online.

I SEE SOME OF THEM WORK REALLY HARD AT REGULAR NEWS, AND TRYING TO GET SHARES, AND LIKES, BUT WHY, MARK, IS THAT NOT ENOUGH ANYMORE?

Mark Dawson: There's a few reasons. It still works, and it is important to have that in your arsenal, but it doesn't really work; certainly not as well as it used to, because Facebook really curtailed what we'd call organic reach.

Say you've got a Facebook page with 100 people on it. Two, or three years ago, if you did a normal update post saying, I don't know, that you've got a new book out for example, it might have got out to 50, or 60 of those people. If you do it today, it will get to one, or two maximum. The reach has been severely culled.

James Blatch: They've done that deliberately, right?

Mark Dawson: They've done that deliberately, because they know that they've got a great platform with people who will react to those kinds of messages. It's quite reasonable for Facebook to say, "If you want to do that, and take advantage of the platform that we've built, you're going to have to pay us for the privilege." That's what they've done.

They've curtailed organic reach, and they've opened up reach if you're prepared to pay for it. That's the equation you need to look at now when it comes to Facebook, and also when it comes, pretty much, to all platforms, certainly the ones that we're going to be talking about today.

James Blatch: The two sides of that; they've made tweaks to the news feed, and very complicated algorithms go into this, and it's the heart of the Facebook business. But partly what they must do, and they want to do is to make sure the news feed is a lively, and entertaining place for you, otherwise you're going to stop using Facebook. Partly, they're doing that, and they're working at who you like connecting with most often.

They're going to start prioritizing, and they've already done this, of course, of prioritizing those people. You'll be friends with some people, and very rarely see any of their news posts, because you haven't interacted with them in a long time. If you go and seek them out, exchange a few likes here, and there, you'll suddenly find them popping up more commonly on your news feed.

The flip side of that is that what they have made available in terms of the targeting on the paid advertising side is, well it's frankly phenomenal, isn't it? It's allowing that complexity to sit there on your desktop, and opens up to you to use.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT NOW IS HOW TO USE IT.

Mark Dawson: It's super powerful. There's so much you can do with Facebook ads. It's raising the platform all the time.

Video is big now. Lead generation is big. Canvas ads are getting quite big. There's loads, and loads of different products that they're always testing. It's quite a lot to keep on top of, but the benefits of being on top of it are pretty significant. It's certainly worth the effort in terms of time, and also in terms of the money you'll need to spend to play on the platform.

James Blatch: Okay, let's drill down to a little bit of detail now. You mentioned lead gen ads, and I suppose this is a good time to talk about the two basic campaigns that most authors will run. One is to sell books, but the other is to build a mailing list.

IS FACEBOOK STILL GOOD FOR BOTH OF THOSE, THE PAID ADS SIDE?

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. It's more competitive these days. You've got to be a bit smarter about how you do things, but I was going to give you quite a lot of numbers. Coincidentally, the reporting platform went down this morning, so I can't get all the information that I wanted.

In terms of building a list, we'll look at lead generation, because that's the new ad product that Facebook rolled out about six months ago, maybe a bit longer than that. It's a facility that enables you to collect someone's email address whilst they remain on Facebook, or Facebook to your platform where that transaction takes place. It's all on Facebook.

It's two, or three clicks in total; very convenient, very smooth, and it's good for Facebook, because they don't lose traffic off their platform, and it's good for authors, because you don't lose people along the sign up progression.

The examples we can talk about; there's one for my own books. It's lead generation for my own mailing list. There's one for the Self-Publishing Formula mailing list, because we obviously run ads for that side of the business, too. Let's look at the books first, because it's probably slightly more relevant for most authors listening.

I've been running these ads as a video lead gen ads. It's me in a video talking about offering a couple of books to people if they sign up to my mailing list. Telling them what they can expect, what the books are like, the kind of characters, and series they're compared to; all that kind of stuff.

I'm spending around \$75 dollars a day, and that's bringing in around about 93 subscribers every day. That's what I call cost per acquisition, or cost per subscriber; 80 cents, but the wrinkle I have on that is that I send those people to what I call an up-sell page once they're subscribed. That gives them the chance to buy one of my book sets. I know they're interested in the series so it makes sense for me to offer them a book set to buy as well.

When those sales, round about \$14, \$15 a day are factored into the equation, that brings the cost per acquisition down to 63 cents. That is well within the tolerances of the campaigns that I run, getting people in at that kind of level.

James Blatch: We've mentioned this before, but one of the starting points is that you would know how much an email address is worth to your business?

Mark Dawson: You can run some math, and as you know James, math is my strong point. You can run some calculations that will work out what you think a subscriber will be worth to you when you factor in how many launches you'll have each year, the percentage of your list that will react to an email saying you've got a launch, and you multiply that out by two, or three years, and you can get some rough ideas as to what those subscribers are worth to you.

63 cents per subscriber is well underneath what I'm prepared to pay a subscriber based on the experience I have of running launch campaigns to those kinds of lists for the best part of a couple of years.

James Blatch: I want to unpack a couple of things that you mentioned going into that. First of all, you talked about a lead gen video. Not everyone's familiar with it.

As I understand the concept; you used to have an ad, and you created a landing page separately for that: a nice, clean landing page so that people clicked on your advert, which said, "Grab a couple of free books from me," they went to your landing page, which had not much else on it apart from, "Tell me where to send the books," and you got their email address.

LEAD GEN CUTS OUT THE LANDING PAGE BIT, RIGHT? YOU CLICK ON THE LEAD GEN, AND FACEBOOK AUTOMATICALLY GRABS THEIR EMAIL ADDRESS, AND GIVES THAT TO YOU WITHOUT THEM HAVING TO GO THROUGH THE LANDING PAGE STEP. IS THAT CORRECT?

Mark Dawson: Pretty much. If you imagine browsing on your phone, or your computer, or your tablet on Facebook, and you'll see in the feed a video will start playing automatically. If you tap it, you'll hear the sound as well.

If you then tap the signup button, or you engage with the ad when the video stops playing, it will open up a pop up on Facebook that will say, "If you want to signup, and get these books, we'll pass your email address on to this advertiser. If you're okay with that, click yes."

Most people do, and that just means that the email address is available to me. I automate the collection of that email address with a piece of software called Zapier. There are other ways of doing that, and then that email address, and all the other ones that sign up are automatically put into a separate list in my Mailchimp account. Then everything is automated from that step. Once the ad runs, I don't need to do anything. It's all taken care of.

James Blatch: Have you switched over completely to lead gen, or are you still using the landing page?

Mark Dawson: Not completely, because I also run another campaign on Facebook, and the objective for that is to get as many video views as possible, because Facebook loves video right now.

You can get views of your video at one, or two cents per view; usually about one cent per view. I spend maybe \$15, or \$20 a day on those videos, because there is two purposes being achieved there. Number one, it's increasing people's awareness of my books within the communities that I'm targeting; fans of certain writers will see that video quite a bit. Also, by clicking on the ads, I'll send people over to the landing page. It means I probably get another twenty subscribers a day just coming in from that campaign, too.

James Blatch: Okay, the other thing that you mentioned was the up sell-thing. Just again, to flesh that out a little bit. This is the would you like fries with that option.

THIS IS BASICALLY AT THE SAME TIME AS GRABBING THEIR EMAIL ADDRESS, THEY GET AN EMAIL, PRESUMABLY, IT'S THE FIRST EMAIL THEY GET, IS IT?

Mark Dawson: No, it's not an email. Once they sign up, if they go through the lead gen route, Facebook gives you a chance to give them a link to click on to the end of the process. I'll send them to that page where they can buy the books.

If they're going the other way, Mailchimp typically, and all good email service providers do this, too, you can, instead of the default, "Thank you for joining my list" page that they're served, you can send them to one of your own webpages. I send them to one on my site that just is quite carefully designed to make it obvious that they can get a bargain by buying either, or both of the book sets that I've got available.

James Blatch: Okay. Let me pick up again with Facebook before we move on to any other platforms. This is mailing list building at the moment.

IN TERMS OF SALES, HOW DOES THAT WORK? OBVIOUSLY, YOU DON'T USE LEAD GEN ADS FOR SALES. YOU'RE DIRECTING PEOPLE PRESUMABLY TO YOUR AMAZON PAGE?

Mark Dawson: Let's just go back before we go on to sales. There's one more thing especially for people who are doing non-fiction. We obviously run lead gen ads for Self-Publishing Formula when we've got courses to sell.

One of things we're working on at the moment is a much more entry level course, which we're calling,

Self-Publishing Formula 101. We're advertising quite extensively right now, because we're looking for beta testers for the course. People will be getting the course for free in return for providing feedback. We're advertising for that, and we're using lead gen to do that. Number one, it's getting us potential beta testers, and it's also building a list for us; for when we're ready to launch this course.

We've been running what I call a static image lead gen. It's not a video. It's a fairly bright yellow graphic that we designed that says, "Authors wanted," and there's a little bit of text that just says what the deal is. We've been running those for about a week, I think, perhaps ten days, and we've added about maybe 2,500 new subscribers to our list have come in through that ad.

The cost of adding them has been well under a dollar a time. Some days, it's been 20 cents per lead, which is ridiculously cheap. That compares with when we're doing the ads for the last Facebook ads course. I think our cost per acquisition was around about 2.50, and 3.50, something like that; very much cheaper at the moment than it was then. That's been great.

On that last campaign, I know people are interested in numbers. For the last campaign we ran for the Facebook ads course, over the course of that ads campaign, and this is going to be a big number so I don't want people to fall of their chairs, because you don't need to spend this much when you're starting, because we didn't when we started the course. We spent \$30,874, but that generated just over \$91,000. That's a return on investment of 196%. For those people who say that Facebook ads don't work, they really do work, and that's been a pretty good example of that for us.

James Blatch: Okay. That's the two sides, and people obviously know that the Facebook course sells for hundreds of dollars, and books sell for a few dollars, so you are looking at a scaled down version of that, and people don't need to, as you say, faint when they hear how much we spent on ads.

We'll talk on the other platforms as well, because we used Youtube advertising, and Twitter ads the time before. When we come on to them, we'll also talk about SPF as well, because that's usually our starting point, because that's our business that all three of us run, and to get it going, and working there is the starting point, and then we move onto books, and authors.

That is mailing list growth. We talked about the fact that each email address is worth something to you

over time, and you've got the up-sell option as well to try to minimize the cost of getting them on board, and a very important part. The list system, this is not specific to authors. As you've heard, we use it in SPF for our courses, but pretty much all digital businesses in some way, or form have a list at their heart, which is the way the business operates.

List building is essential. We would always recommend, wouldn't we, to authors that they do focus on list building, particularly in the early days.

THEY DON'T DIVE STRAIGHT IN, TRYING TO SELL BOOKS THROUGH ADVERTISING, OR AT LEAST THEY DO THE TWO IN PARALLEL. THEY DON'T JUST DO ONE.

Mark Dawson: The list is most important for new authors just starting out. You have to get a mailing list. It's absolutely critical. It's the most valuable asset you'll have as a creative professional.

It isn't just digital businesses that need mailing lists, I'd say even bricks, and mortar stores, you need mailing lists these days. It's a great way to reach your customers. It doesn't matter what you're selling. It's important to reach out to them, and tell them when you've got something that you think they might be interested in. It's especially pertinent when it comes to what we're doing.

James Blatch: So that's mailing list building, and we always talk about mailing list building as being the single most important thing that authors do when they start out. You don't simply start an advertising campaign for sales, because as we've mentioned before, whatever your business is online, it tends to revolve around a list. That's how digital businesses work, and authors are no different from that. Having your list is a really critical part of having a successful, self-published author career. We definitely talk about mailing list building as being the first step, but then ultimately that is all about selling books.

LET'S NOW TALK ABOUT ADVERTISING USING THE FACEBOOK PLATFORM FOR BOOK SALES. IS THAT WORKING FOR YOU AT THE MOMENT, MARK?

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. Something that I do every day too, I would have told you exactly how much I'm spending right, but as I said the platform isn't reporting right now. It's probably a couple of hundred dollars a day at the moment I'm spending on ads to sell books.

I suppose it's fair to say it's fluctuating a bit at the moment. Occasionally, it will return a negative investment so that means I'm not making an immediate return on the ad spend, although there is of course a benefit; just advertising in, and of itself is a benefit to you down the road. Generally speaking, most days

it's a positive return; between 20%-30% return.

The thing to say about this, for me specifically, and I'm able to compare my experiences with students in the Facebook course, is that I've spent probably a quarter of a million dollars on Facebook ads over the course of the last couple of years. It's getting more difficult for me now to find fresh audiences that haven't already seen my ads more than three, or four times.

I happen to be quite creative. I'm doing lots of retargeting at the moment. That means if you visited my websites, or you've seen some of the videos I run on Facebook, I'll then serve you with Facebook ads to try to sell you a copy of the book, or a box set, or something along those lines.

Other students in the group are getting returns of over 100% in some cases. It's still a very successful platform for sales. It's just, for me, I need to be a bit more nimble than I had to be 18 months ago. That's just, I think, because I'm chewing through the audience even a big platform like Facebook can provide.

James Blatch: Right, that's one of the questions people ask is how big is the audience?

ARE WE GOING TO RUN OUT OF AUDIENCE AT SOME POINT? YOU ADVERTISE ON QUITE A BIG SCALE THOUGH?

Mark Dawson: I do. I'm running lots, and lots of variations of ads. The spend occasionally, when I was spending the most, maybe a year ago, probably up to \$1500 a day in terms of ads. I've scaled that down now. I'm concentrating a bit more on building my list up more. I've probably got 60,000 on my mailing list now. It's very valuable for me right now, but that's going to be even more valuable down the road as I start new series, or just continue to build my back catalog.

James Blatch: We'll take a little pause on the income report whilst we launch the course, but I know you're going to do another one soon; probably for this month?

Mark Dawson: That's the plan. I'd definitely like to get back to that again.

James Blatch: Yeah, good.

In terms of overall, before we move on to other platforms, and other ways of spending your dollar advertising:

WOULD YOU SAY FROM WHERE WE ARE AT THE MOMENT THAT IF YOU ONLY CHOSE ONE PLATFORM OF EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT AVAILABLE, AND I WOULD INCLUDE OLD MEDIA HERE AS WELL - NEWSPAPERS, OR WHATEVER ARE ALWAYS AN OPTION FOR YOU - YOU WOULD STILL CHOOSE FACEBOOK?

Mark Dawson: Definitely. It's the most mature of the markets.

Google AdWords is more mature than Facebook but Google AdWords is very expensive, and not in my experience effective for this kind of thing. Facebook should be the first port of call for anyone looking to build lists, or sell books directly.

James Blatch: Okay, good. It's good to know that Facebook's still working, and it's still providing a career for you, and definitely something we want to advocate for other people. If you've got one thing you want to crack over the next twelve months, or so with your career, it's probably Facebook ads.

Let's move onto one, or two of the other platforms. Twitter took a similar journey to Facebook in that it established itself, in this rather unique way. Its USP, I suppose to use the word unique twice, is that it restrains you to 140 characters, and some people poo-pooed it when it came on. Britain's Prime Minister famously called people twats for using Twitter in a radio interview.

Actually, as a social media platform, I quite like Twitter. It's my favorite one just to browse. I can lose myself, waste time on that for quite a long time. Then, they introduced ads. The ads, at first, felt a little bit intrusive when they first started popping up on your line like they often do, but actually mixed in with the photographs, which are part of the news feed now in Twitter, or Twitter stream, I should say. I think the adverts are fitting in very nicely, and actually you can see some companies have really cracked it, and understand how it works. Others haven't so much.

We looked into it for authors, and we created a mini course that goes along with the main course that Mark uses. We've got quite a lot of experience with Twitter ads now.

I think I would say from the top, before we get into some of the specifics, that Twitter ads don't work as effectively, and as well as Facebook ads, but you can get them working for you, and you can certainly get them building your mailing list. One of the things I would say about Twitter ads; we've noticed this with both the SPF campaigns, and the author campaigns, is that the quality of leads is not as good as the quality of leads you get through Facebook.

I can't exactly explain to you why. I suspect it's because Twitter's a slightly more dynamic experience. Things flash past you very quickly. It's a very easy click on something to go through, and explore a little bit more. For instance, a lead card, which I'll come into in a moment.

With Facebook, you make more of an option to go to the advert. You're drawn into the advert, because it's specifically attracting you. You've made more of an effort to click on that, watch the video, or so on. Maybe there's a quality difference there. I'm not sure I can fully explain it except I think that is the difference.

We've had some feedback on that front as well, although people have been building their main list, they haven't found as useful, the leads as valuable to them as the ones they're getting through Facebook. But that's not to say that you can't build leads. We built 500-600 email addresses through Twitter advertising for the Self-Publishing Formula campaign for launch two back in October, November last year.

They offer a similar type of advert for you. In fact, they pioneered the lead card. I'm pretty certain the lead card was on Twitter before Facebook took it up. That works in a similar way. You design your advert. You design a little image around it. They're quite strict on the characters are very similar to Facebook on that front. The lead card is long, and thin, and once clicked on, you get another confirmation click to go through, and then that's it.

Twitter has captured your email address, and you can either have that automated through to your Mailchimp campaign. We don't even need a third party to do that. With Twitter, it seems to work pretty well, or you can export them, or you can do both, actually. You can export them directly from Twitter in CSV format, and do what you want with them.

The targeting, again, pretty similar to Facebook I would say. You've got all the usual demographics, and

then, quite a good range of interests. Certainly, now that I'm moving into the AdWords campaign, which we'll talk about in a minute, I think the interest, and the key words campaigns in Twitter actually are better in terms of selection, and I was able to really focus our Twitter ads down to a very specific audience where we were getting a good return on our rates.

I'm trying to remember now, the SPF campaigns, I think we were buying leads at about three pounds fifty to four pounds fifty, which is highish for SPF. And when we ran it for your author campaigns, I got variable. Definitely, some days were better than others, but I was buying leads for your books campaigns as low as 25 cents, and more typically around the 30-35 cents mark, and then occasionally a little bit more. Overall, probably about 30-35 cents, and that's a good price to buy leads as long as they do turn out to be in the long run, healthy leads for you.

Mark Dawson: That is a pretty competitive price. You can hit that with Facebook, too, of course, but I'd be very happy with that going forward.

James Blatch: The other thing to say about Twitter is, I think as an advertising platform, it's slightly, as Mark said, less mature than Facebook. It is evolving, and they're coming up with new ways of doing things.

Video ads were in their infancy; still really are in their infancy with Twitter. It's definitely one to watch, and if you get a chance, it's quite an intuitive platform. It doesn't take too much to get your head around it. It's definitely one, I think, to be familiar with at this stage, and start playing with, and running limited campaigns, because there will be a time in the near future when enough people are on Twitter that stretch across a wide demographic than perhaps they are at the moment. It is a bit of a younger audience, then you will start to perhaps see better returns.

Thinking about it, I'm thinking out loud here, that might be the main difference between the quality of returns is, you do have a slightly younger set on Twitter. It gets even younger when you go down to Instagram, and Snapchat, but Facebook, for one reason, or another; I'm in my forties, clinking away-

Mark Dawson: No way.

James Blatch: Yeah, a surprise, I know, but almost everyone I know is on Facebook, and it covers a very wide demographic, including the silver surface; including the old audience. If you're writing books, they're a good market for you.

IN FACT, I THINK YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC, ACTUALLY MARK, IS 45+?

Mark Dawson: 40+, yeah. Obviously, I've got readers all over the place, but the biggest slice of the pie is 40, and up.

James Blatch: That might be the difference with Twitter. It might be the fact that it's still rolling out. It's still being adopted by all; the current users are getting older, of course, but as you get an older demographic, that might be the difference between profit, and loss for us on Twitter.

That is to say, it's a nice platform, it's intuitive to use, it's pretty simple to set up, and we did get some pretty decent returns at the price we were looking for. The question mark over it is how good a quality are those returns? You may be in a different genre from us where that works better if you're looking at a younger audience. It might be Twitter gives you better results indeed than Facebook. YA has always struggled a little bit more on Facebook, because of the demographic. I would definitely view Twitter as one you should be involved with.

SHALL WE MOVE ON TO YOUTUBE, WHICH IS KIND OF THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK FOR US?

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: Even though it's been around for a while, and Youtube ads are nothing new. Youtube is a very exciting area, because the people who know a lot about digital advertising, and who work in this space, they are all raving about Youtube at the moment. They're talking about it being the wildest part of the wild west, in that not that many people are actually using it.

I think I saw a stat that 7% of US businesses have a proper presence on Youtube; i.e. that they update their presence on Youtube. They didn't simply create an account at some point. That's a very low figure, which means that there is definitely scope for getting in there, getting it right, and making hay while the sun shines.

We got involved with SPF, which we do first, of course, to examine the platform to make sure it works for our business. After an initial shaky start, as always with these things, spent a few dollars trying to get it going, it really started working.

I had a funny transition between hating the AdWords platform, because it is very complicated, and now loving it, because I realize that complexity is actually its golden goose. It's what you can use to find your profit, once you start presenting. You choose how you present the data to you in AdWords; you've got it skewed around in conversions, for instance, for this building. It all makes sense.

Where are we now? I'm just having a look, because we were running low level campaigns at the moment in between launches. If I look over the last fourteen days on the AdWords platform, I can say we've bought 134 leads of our Youtube at 2.55 pounds each. On the graph in front of me, I can see that on one of those days, I bought 17 leads at 1.21 pounds, which is pretty good.

Last Monday was very good, and then on another day, we got three at 6.54 pounds. That was Sunday. There is some variation there, but if I go back, the average over fourteen days, 2.55 pounds for 134 leads, that is an active, profitable, working campaign for us.

THE DIFFERENCE PERHAPS BETWEEN TWITTER ADS, AND YOUTUBE ADS IS THESE LEADS ARE OF VALUE TO US.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, they are. I do have some numbers on that. The last ads course launch, which was in June this year, we spent \$4,165, and that generated \$5,993. That's a return on investment of 44%. Not quite as punchy as Facebook was, but still very effective, and well worth doing.

There are some clever things with Youtube ads. If you do them properly, you can really get your costs down. And as you say, James, we're starting to look at taking videos that we've shot for Facebook ads, turning those around a bit, and starting to use those on Youtube. We're starting to get some decent results coming in for books as well. That's something that we're definitely interested in developing as we go forwards.

James Blatch: Yeah, we're in the midst of that, and I'm recording screen flows for a course that we're going to be rolling out.

It's a bit early to give you a lot of data on the books yet, but we're in the midst of that now, and starting to see the results that we want to see. The great hack that's available for Youtube ads, which some people know about, is that you can actually get a free view.

The way Youtube video advertising works is that you get charged per view. I could see, for instance, those 134 leads I talked about over the last fortnight, the advert was served 22,800 times. I got 5,032 views from that. That's a pretty good conversion rate, actually, at 22%. I was charged seven pence per view. However, what counts as a view is somebody watching at least half your video, or 30 seconds, whichever comes first. If your video is 60 seconds, or more, people have to watch 30 seconds of it before you actually get charged.

If you cleverly design your video, and that's how we teach people to do it, and you basically put all the information they need in the first twenty, twenty-five seconds with a nice big clickable banner, you will get a percentage of people who will click through. They're called click through views, and click through conversions that will give you a free conversion. You won't have paid anything for that, and that obviously lowers the cost of your overall conversions. That's a decent hack there for Youtube videos.

It's not a loophole. Youtube are quite happy with this, and they actually call them click through conversion rates, and they show you your rates, and how many click through conversions you've had. You can have that in your data displayed on your dashboard as well.

The different types of video, and this is a bit of an unknown, and I think it's one of the major hurdles that sits in front of authors when they think about Youtube advertising, and in fact, the video advertising on Facebook, is that most people could probably bring themselves to design a picture ad; a banner with the click here stuff on it; or, they could design it, and speak to somebody who can design it, and create it for them. But when it comes to video, people do have a bit of block in their minds about where they start with video.

The good news, and I come from a professional video background where we talk a lot about using graphics, and music, and very whizzy. But Youtube has shown is actually, somebody talking to screen is one of the best ways you can connect with your audience; is most likely to get people drawn in to listen to you.

You can record that on an iPhone. You can record that with a cheap microphone; a 34 pound microphone, a \$40 microphone you could plug into your iPhone, which will give you the extra bit of sound quality, which is very necessary. Apart from that, you could walk around in a park recording your piece to camera. You could do it in your garden. You can do it in your kitchen with a little bit of normal, natural lighting, and you've got a video there.

YOU'VE DONE A FEW OF THESE NOW, MARK, HAVEN'T YOU? BY YOUR OWN ADMISSION, IT'S NOT NECESSARILY YOUR COMFORT ZONE; RECORDING VIDEOS, BUT YOU'VE GOT INVOLVED, YOU'VE GOT STUCK IN, AND PRODUCED QUITE A FEW.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's one of those things where you get more comfortable the more you do it. I've done lots now, and you can get clever little auto cues that you can run from your iPad; that works very well. That gives me a bit of comfort to know that I don't need to memorize scripts, and I can riff off things a little bit, knowing that I can go back to the script if I need to.

It's one of those things; authors tend to be reasonably introspective people, and I think the idea of putting yourself in a video is something that can bother some people. It doesn't bother me anymore, it's just something that I need to get better at. It's just practice makes perfect. The more you do it, the better you get.

James Blatch: Youtube does have that slight hurdle of video advertising, but I have noticed there's been some creative ways of getting around this. One of our students used a company in the far east to produce her video. She designed it, told them what she wanted, and then there was a bit of backwards, and forwards of revising to getting it quite right, and she paid something ludicrous like \$40 for that video, which is a very low rate for a video.

If these companies, and these people are popping up, there's a service called, Peopleperhour.com in the UK, which we use. We find editors, and people will do small jobs quite cheaply for you. That does suddenly open up this area of content creation, which might be a bit of a block to you, and definitely Youtube advertising.

AdWords is not intuitive, I'll tell you right from the beginning. It's fiddly, and most of my screen flows I'm producing for this course is just getting things set up in the first place, which was a little bit painful, but once you're through that, and looking at the results, and the data, you get into it, and you can certainly use it to your advantage.

In fact, those figures you gave Mark, I'll dispute that; not dispute it, you're absolutely right in terms of that \$5,000 that we spent, but you've got to remember that I wasted several thousand dollars getting it working. Really, I would say I've spent 1,839 pounds on the campaign that produced 722 email addresses. That's about \$2,500. What did you say we made on that?

Mark Dawson: That's true. We generated 5,993.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: You could probably double the return.

James Blatch: Yeah, I think once you've got through, hopefully you do a course like ours, or somebody else's, and you can follow, and not make the mistakes that we made at the beginning of trying to get things working.

It's something I'll mention here, and I know you perhaps have a different thought on this, but I could not get the United States market working for us. I'm looking at the figures here, and some of those conversions, 28 conversions, and 18 pounds on one of the US keywords campaigns, the same keywords campaign in the UK was the 722 at 2.55 pounds. I couldn't get them working in the US.

I actually think that it was because although Britain is a good brand value in the US, I think Britain is quite a good brand value despite any politics that may have happened in recent weeks in the UK. I think it works very well. People like that, and they trust it, but I think it didn't quite have that connection with a very British environment.

When it's video, you're listening to somebody talk, and speak, and it doesn't feel like it's necessarily for you, when you're in America, and it's a British person in Britain talking. We have a plan to get some American voices in. I'm going to try that in the future, but at the moment we are running Youtube campaigns successfully in the UK, and have not got them working on the US-Canada border. You might find if you're American, it's the other way around.

Mark Dawson: A tip for British authors, don't speak with crumpet, and tea in your mouth. It doesn't go down well.

James Blatch: I don't think you should have done that. Also, you probably should have had some clothes on. It may have been the other reason.

Good, okay, we're going to mention one, or two of the others; the up, and coming new kids on the block, and the younger demographic. One of the things we hear a lot about in the chat online in the various forums of people trying to get their book sales going in the digital spaces that people who write for the YA market, and children's books have not found it as easy using the methods that other people are using if you're writing thrillers, and erotica, or romance; those other big genres. They do need to be done slightly differently.

This is where Instagram, Snapchat, for instance, may well come in. However, the early reports we're hearing from people who've been using this is that Instagram in particular is good for visibility, good for raising awareness of you as an author, and that could have a good positive effect.

Let's face it, lots of advertising is simply about raising awareness of your product, not necessarily directly selling it, and that's an important part of you being visible, and being seen; but, not necessarily good for actually getting email addresses, or actually making direct sales as a result of the advert.

IT'S DEFINITELY SOMETHING WE'RE CURIOUS ABOUT, ISN'T IT, MARK?

Mark Dawson: I'm not going to be categorical on this at all, because I don't have any data on it. It will be one of the platforms that I look at next. I'm sure it can be made to work. It's just a question of testing, finding the ads that work, working it where the audiences are, working on the copy; all that kind of stuff. I'm absolutely sure that it can work.

I think places like Snapchat, that's probably the one I'm most interested in right now, which is certainly aimed at a younger demographic. It should be good for YA, things like that. Things like Facebook ads; they do work for YA, too.

It's a bit more challenging, because you might be advertising not to the reader, but to the person who buys the reader their books, potentially. Facebook is a slightly older platform, but even with all of that being said, we've had authors like Eva Polar who has done extremely well with her YA series, which wasn't doing great until she started to advertise. Now, she left her job after getting those ads to work.

It's a bit more difficult, yes, but impossible, definitely not. The more we look into other platforms, the more we'll find different ways to reach different kinds of readers.

James Blatch: We should also say that later this week, we're going to be interviewing a man who used Facebook advertising specifically for children's book with great success. And this is somebody who has gone on to recommend, and run Facebook advertising campaigns for quite a few noticeable start ups. So we're going to hear how he did that specifically for children's books, but also a lot of valuable lessons, I think, for whatever genre you're in. I'm not sure when we're going to broadcast that, yet, but we're going to be recording that this week.

I was just going to mention before we leave the area of Youtube. More specifically, that the whole concept of lead gen - I do think this is something Youtube could do with introducing. Because you do have to use the landing page method with Youtube, and when you're already having to really optimize, and work hard to optimize to get the returns you want, you could do without those intermediate steps that may lose somebody at that point.

I don't know what AdWords plans are for Youtube advertising in the future, but I would definitely like to see some sort of instant click on your video that maybe one confirmation click then provides your email address into your list.

They do have a very, very good, and thorough re-marketing set up, and it's very important to get that set up right at the beginning of your Youtube ads life. That does allow you to specifically target anybody who has visited your website, any of the pages, or specifically target anybody who has visited your Youtube channel, as well as, of course, people who've engaged in your campaigns in the past. That re-marketing, certainly, you've got an already a quite optimized audience there, and you will get a higher hit rate from that.

BUT WE STILL DON'T HAVE THE LEAD GEN CLICK, WHICH I THINK MAYBE IS A LITTLE BIT LACKING ON YOUTUBE AT THE MOMENT.

Mark Dawson: Exactly, but it will come. They'll be keeping an eye on what's working on the other platforms, and they'll need to innovate in order to keep up with people on Facebook, and Twitter. It's just a question of when it happens.

James Blatch: Okay, well I guess we just need to summarize. We've been talking for 3/4 of an hour now, which is a long time for you and me to rabbit on, but this is really the bread, and butter of people's existence if you're an author running your business.

Classically, we talk about the afternoon, don't we? Write in the morning, and then run your business in the afternoon, or however you want to have it set up. It can be a little bit daunting, it can be dispiriting on occasions when you've put dollars in that you're not going to get back, and you've got no results for them.

BUT WHEN YOU DO GET THAT WORKING; WHEN YOU HAVE LISTENED, WATCHED RESULTS FROM OTHER PEOPLE, TAKEN STUFF ON BOARD, OPTIMIZED YOUR AUDIENCE, YOU START TO SEE RETURNS. THAT CAN BE ONE OF THE HAPPIEST MOMENTS OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER.

Mark Dawson: It's amazing, and just in terms of lead gen, I remember getting my first non-family member signing up to my mailing list, and that was through an organic sign up. Even so, the sentiment is the same, and it was a pretty amazing feeling.

I suppose it's a measure of progress now that I get emails from Mailchimp saying, "You've got 150 signups today," and it's kind of like, and next. I should probably get out of that habit, because it is useful to remember that all of those 150, you have maybe 10, or 20 of those will become die hard fans, and you don't need that many die hard fans to sustain yourself as creative professional. Being flippant about it is not the best thing in the world; remembering that each of those people can have a really important part to play in my career down the line.

James Blatch: Okay, we're looking round for a good guest to have on Youtube adverts, which we will do at some point, because we're going to re-visit that as the one that we're looking into at the moment, when we've got more data to share with you.

The other thing to remember, I think, I'll just leave you with this is, that you should remember that the platforms are changing, the demographics, the people who you've mentioned earlier, the people on these social media platforms is changing all the time. They're getting new signups every day by the tens of

thousands in your area, and by the millions globally; not every day millions, but across the weeks. And that means that what used to not work for you may be working for you in the next few weeks.

ALWAYS KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THEM, AND ALWAYS KEEP YOURSELF AS FAMILIAR AS POSSIBLE WITH THE PLATFORMS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE WHEN THEY START WORKING FOR YOUR GENRE.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, exactly. Before we wrap up, one thing, I mentioned this earlier, we are in the process of doing a new course, much more basic than the Facebook ads course, and there is a waiting list right now.

James Blatch: Do you want to quickly tell us what's going to be in the course, Mark, a little sneak preview?

Mark Dawson: Everything, really. The starting point will be, you've just finished your manuscript. Let's say it's Word, or Scrivener, and it will be what you need to do from that? It will include modules on pre-publication; things like building websites, mailing list, low level advertising, that kind of stuff. Then, it will be tactics when you've got one book to sell, tactics when you've got two books to sell, because everything changes; and, then when you've got three, or more books.

It's going to be big. It's likely to be the course that I was going to do before we did the Facebook ads course, because I've got a bit more experience now in doing courses. People are very keen to get this, and I'm actually quite keen to record it. It's been unfinished business for the last 18 months, or so. I'm looking forward to getting into that.

James Blatch: Setting yourself up for commercial success as a writer.

Mark Dawson: Yep, that's it.

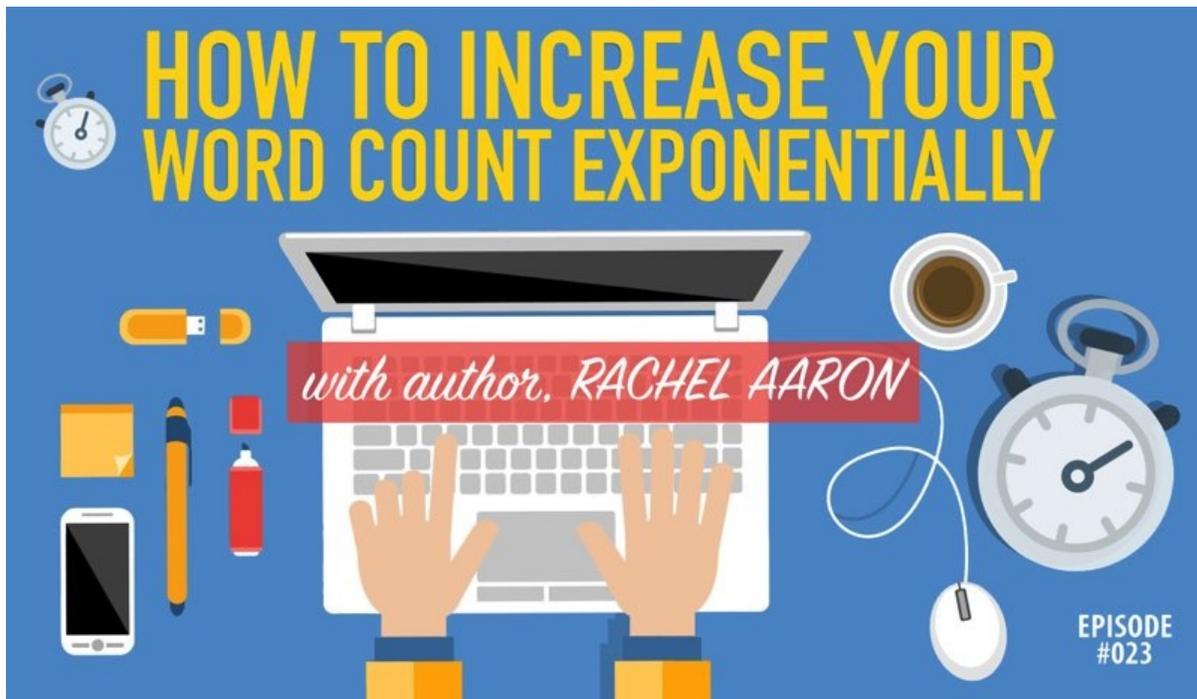
James Blatch: Brilliant. Thank you very much indeed, Mark, you can go back into the garden. You can use your hot tub about eleven o'clock tonight when things have finally cooled down.

Mark Dawson: I had a go last about ten o'clock last night, and I almost melted. I'm going to have a beer, and have a drink in the garden.

James Blatch: Excellent, see you later.

CHAPTER 20

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR DAILY WORD COUNT EXPONENTIALLY - WITH RACHEL AARON



Daily word count is one of the metrics many authors track to ensure they are moving toward completion of their projects. One of the struggles is increasing that word count to get more work done, but doing so in a way that doesn't sacrifice quality for quantity. Today's guest has discovered a way to do that. Rachel Aaron is the author of an award-winning series and has also authored a non-fiction book, "From 2K to 10K" - a 'how to' book covering the task of increasing word count through daily planning. Rachel provides insight into the writing process and is generous enough to share her insight with you in this episode of the SPF podcast.

HOW RACHEL LEARNED TO INCREASE HER DAILY WORD COUNT BEYOND HER EXPECTATIONS.

It all came about accidentally while Rachel was experiencing one of those "writer's block" moments. She

had spent days trying to slog her way through a particularly difficult part of her novel when she decided to take a different approach. She got out her notebook and forced herself to very quickly write out a brief sketch of what she wanted the scene to be about. It took about 10 minutes, and once it was on paper she went back to writing and finished the scene in record time. That experience got her thinking about why she struggled to write and how she might improve her efficiency at writing. The result was an increase in daily words written from less than 2000 per day to over 10,000.

HOW A LITTLE BIT OF PLANNING CAN SAVE YOU A LOT OF TIME WHEN WRITING YOUR BOOK.

Rachel believes that one of the main reasons authors struggle to get their writing out of their heads and onto the page is that they don't clearly know what they're writing about before they begin writing. They try to let the story unfold or the characters develop on their own - to discover it as they go. But Rachel has found that approach to be too ambiguous and subjective. She's learned that if she is able to sketch out the outline of a scene prior to sitting down to write it, her ability to write it is dramatically improved, not only in how long it takes her to write it but also in her ability to get the things she wanted written in a compelling way. Be sure you listen to Rachel's explanation. Her techniques will not only help you write faster, but enable you to increase your revenue as an author because you do.

AN OUTLINE BEFORE YOU START COULD MAKE YOUR STORY MORE POLISHED FROM THE BEGINNING.

While every author would like to increase their daily word count, they also would love to spend less time in the editing phase of their book project. Rachel discovered that as she began using outlines from which to write her scenes, not only did her word count dramatically increase, she also came out with better first drafts because the outline enabled her to have the ability to stay on track and direct the writing exactly where it needed to go. Your first draft could be of much higher quality too if you use Rachel's methods. Check out her conversation with James in this episode, and grab her book as well - it's only 99 cents.

HOW AN INCREASED WORD COUNT CAN GROW THE REVENUE OF YOUR WRITING BUSINESS.

When Rachel discovered the writing techniques she discusses in today's episode her daily word count increase from less than 2000 words per day to over 10,000. So think that through: she's able to generate more completed first drafts in less time than she ever has. That means she can get more books into her author portfolio in less time - which puts more hooks in the water to draw in potential readers. The difference to her profitability as a writer has grown exponentially as a result.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode with guest, Rachel Aaron.

- Mark's writing goals each day.
- James' introduction of Rachel Aaron.
- An award Rachel received for her latest series.
- The newness of what self publishing has brought to the industry.
- How Rachel learned to write faster.
- The way Rachel's process works for individual writers.
- How a little bit of planning can save you lots of time in writing.
- How the outline helps the text be more polished at first draft.
- The struggle of writing fiction in light of past writing habits and training.
- How Rachel moved from traditional publishing to self publishing.
- The way that niche books work better in self publishing.
- Some of the things Indie Authors miss by going independent.
- The things that are working for Rachel in marketing right now.
- How Rachel's approach could be a great approach for many authors.

Resources & Links Mentioned in this Episode

- [Rachel Aaron's Website](#)
- Book: [2K to 10K](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 23 from The Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello and welcome along, well we're in mid-summer here in the Northern Hemisphere, I guess you're mid winter in the South, but summer's coming in the opposite of Game of Thrones. Shall we say hello to anyone in the tropics, Mark in the middle bit.

Mark: You know anyone in the tropics James.

James: I think I've plenty of people in Queensland, probably, listening to this, and who knows through Central Africa. Anyway seasons greetings in the world where there's no seasons. We'll stop rambling and start focusing now. Actually we have a very focused episode today don't we, because we going to talk about writing which is common to everybody, whatever genre you're doing, whatever you're particular stick is in publishing.

The marketing may change but we all need to write and for people it comes, perhaps, more naturally than others. There's no substitute really for, as Adam Croft always said to us in his interview, "Bum on seat, hand on keyboard." We got a great interview today from a woman whose developed a fast writing system and a particular approach to it, which has really worked for her and will get you ... Well she will, in fact her book, her non fiction book is 2K to 10K in a Day, so try get to 10,000 words a day writing.

Which would obviously would make a massive difference to your writing career. Before we introduce Rachel Aaron, is her name, and people will know who she is I'm sure. Let's just talk about your writing Mark, because you've got successful books behind you.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH IT AND HOW MANY WORDS DO YOU GET DONE? DO YOU HAVE A WORD COUNT AIM EVERYDAY?

Mark: It depends really, because of what else is going on. If I'm going to do non-fiction stuff I'll tend to do that and marketing in the afternoon. Then kind of devote the mornings to writing.

At the moment if I can get a couple of thousand words a day done I consider that to be a pretty good day. It's a little less than I managed previously, in fact it's less than I managed when I was still working full time. I don't know whose law this is but there is a law that says that, "Work will expand to fill the space available." That's something that certainly that I've found, the more time I have the more things I have to do and as long as 2,000 is enough.

You look at a 70,000 word, 80,000 word novel and you're probably going to be able to do that in six weeks, so maybe even say in a couple of months you can get plenty of novels published if you can hit 2,000 a day no problem.

James: I think you're right, you and I have both had to really focus on time management since we've been running a couple of different ventures, and you're right it's like a bin in a kitchen isn't it? You just fill it up

and you get another bin next to it and that will fill up as well. You do need to be aware that you need to be proactive about what's going in the bin and how you spending your time.

That's part of it but Rachel has a particular approach to actual writing, I think it's really interesting. She's a great writer in her own right so to speak, she straddles a couple of genre's actually, science fiction and what you might call romance. She has this dragons series, where the dragons are humans, seems quite Japanese influenced to me, but, very successful in their own area.

I think another thing to take away from this interview and from Rachel Aaron's experience and success is that you don't have to panic about having a niche genre. She's very successful in an area that really is not a very wide genre. You can call it romance if you want, but she herself points out in the interview, she's not really a romance author.

Take heart if you do think that your books don't have that wide appeal, there is definitely a market and an audience for you.

WITHOUT FURTHER ADO LET'S HAVE A LISTEN TO WHAT RACHEL HAS TO SAY.

Rachel Aaron is the best selling author of separate fantasy and science fiction series, the books include the Heart Striker series, that's Nice Dragon's Finish Last, I notice the latest, The Legend of Eli Monpress, and Heaven's Queen which is the final installment in the Paradox Trilogy.

Many of you will now know her as, in the author community at least, for her non fiction books, especially 2,000 to 10,000 a book helpfully subtitled, How to Write Faster, Write Better and Write More of What You Love. Which sounds like a really good thing to talk about Rachel, welcome to the SPF Podcast.

Rachel: Thank you so much for having me.

James: It's a great pleasure to have you. Let's talk a little bit about your books to start off with and a bit about you. You're over there in the States we should say first of all.

Rachel: I am, I am native of Georgia, which as I used to tell people when I visited the UK is North of

Disneyland, North of Disney World actually, by a couple hundred miles.

James: I always say I'm near London because everyone in the UK is near London, and everyone in America is North of Disney World. Apart from, but I suppose if you're in Hawaii.

Rachel: If you're in Hawaii, you can just say Hawaii and then everyone knows.

James: There you are, you're in Georgia, and you've got a couple of series going.

I THINK YOU'VE JUST COME TO THE END OF YOUR SCIENCE FICTION TRILOGY, BUT IT'S MORE OF A ... IS IT URBAN FANTASY? IS THAT HOW YOU DESCRIBED THE DRAGON SERIES?

Rachel: Yes, well I started in epic fantasy with The Legend of Eli Monpress, which is five books and they are traditionally published by Orbit, both in the US and the UK, and in Australia and in other places.

Then I switched to Rachel Bach and wrote science fiction, which was my epic fantasy was not a romance at all. It was really a kind of a throw back to that 90's David Eddings fantasy but with a modern pacing, so it's kind of exciting and fast, it's not plodding.

It's still wizards and spirits and giant larger-than-life set pieces. My science fiction is much more of a military sci-fi romance because I love guns and kissing, so I wanted to put them together. That's written as Rachel Bach.

And my latest series I'm back to Rachel Aaron, and I tried self publishing, and there are two books out and that's the Heart Striker series. The first one's called Nice Dragon's Finish Last, and the second one is called One Good Dragon Deserves Another. The third which I actually just finished editing, and will be out in August, is called No Good Dragon Goes Unpunished.

That series, which again, self published has been doing amazingly. I actually won the RT Editors Choice Award for One Good Dragon Deserves Another, which was a giant shock to me because I'm not really a romance author. There's a love story in the book, but they're not romance, and two this is a very

prestigious romance industry award for a little self published book that's just me. I was extremely excited I was up on a stage with a whole bunch of really famous people getting an award. It's beautiful, it's on my shelf, I love it.

James: That is great.

Rachel: Super exciting.

James: With romance you choose a pretty crowded sector as well, so to stand out and pick up awards in that is truly awesome.

Rachel: Oh yes, well I was blown away. I'm actually a very big fan of Romantic Times magazine, the magazine that does it. A lot of traditional publishing has had their head in the dirt about the changes that are going through out industry. The romance sector has always been right there on the cutting edge. Romantic Times the magazine is part of that, also the romance publishers.

I went to the RT Convention which is where the awards ceremony was, and we've been talking about it a great deal on my blog. Which, by the way is, rachelaaron.net is my website, I run a blog there with my husband who actually does a lot of my marketing. We're a pair, he works for me know. We both do this publishing thing full time, we went there together and we learnt so much about what's new and marketing, and publication, and what's coming down the line, and what the trends are.

It was amazing and I absolutely recommend going to Romantic Times Convention because again, romance, they get it. It's so funny because I go back to science fiction fantasy which is my genre, that's where I am. It's like going back 20 years in the past, I'm like, "Guys, it's time to move forward and embrace the change and learn how we can all make a great deal of money from it." Apparently they don't like money, I don't know.

James: Not everyone wants to buy a ticket to the races, do they in this? That's partly what we're doing here in our podcast, there's enough people who do. I suppose, it's kind of good for those people who've made this first step of deciding to embrace the marketing side a bit.

IT'S GOOD FOR THEM, BUT NOT EVERYONE'S ONTO IT JUST YET, GIVES US A BIT OF SPACE.

Rachel: It's always kind of fun to be the first out the gate.

James: Yeah exactly, and romance, you're absolutely right. Romance, and I would say erotica's well, they're the ones that are really forging ahead. They've really enjoyed the self publishing space and it's been quite a democratic enabling system for them. Whereas maybe they had snootiness or whatever with the Trad industry before that, that doesn't exist in the self publishing world. You want to do it, you do it.

Rachel: Yeah, and also I think it has a lot to do with the romance readership. Romance readers are very particular, they know what they want, but they are a very loyal group of readers who read voraciously. They were the first group of consumers to pick up e-readers, and really move to e-books simply because, the average American for example reads 12 books a year. The average romance reader will read 100.

There are woman there who talked about reading 600 books in a year. I was like wow, no wonder you went to e-book if you didn't, your garage would be fill within a year of books.

James: Which ones do you enjoy? I get the feeling you love your science fiction, don't you?

Rachel: I love science fiction. I grew up in a very nerdy household, we watched Babylon 5, I've seen all of Doctor Who, I've watched all of Star Trek. I'm actually more of a Star Trek girl than a Star Wars girl I think. Although we're recording on May the 4th, so may the forth be with you.

James: Indeed, may the forth be with you. I'm more of Star Wars than a Star Trek, but I've got some good friends on the Star Trek side, so that's okay.

Rachel: I always loved the hopefulness of Star Trek. I always felt that Star Trek was a wonderfully, at it's core, kind of very optimistic and humanish show about the endless determination of the human spirit. I always liked it.

James: What I loved about Star Trek is they always hinted at this, they never really explained it, but they hinted at the moving on of civilization. The occasional references to, "We don't use money anymore."

Rachel: They were in Utopia pretty much.

James: Yeah, the Utopia, they never really explained it and that was the really interesting aspect of Star Trek. That was just taken for granted, a bit like The Culture Series by Ian M Banks, is the closest that I'm reading at the moment to that back story to Star Trek. Which was so fascinating, I agree there's a sophistication to Star Trek, which as a complete Star Wars nerd I will admit is not really there for most of Star Wars, so I'll give you that.

Rachel: Well actually and I might get some hate for this, but always felt that Star Wars was more fantasy than science fiction. If you remove the space ships it's really almost, the story itself is much more of a fantasy type story and a story arc. It's more of a personal journey and less the story of civilizations which is what I tend to think of as a science fiction.

I'm actually a big fan of the grittier, no I say I like Star Trek, but my favorite Star Trek was Deep Space Nine. You know, just like I love Babylon 5 which is all about the personal drama's of these two stations, Deep Space Nine and Babylon 5 accordingly.

I love, I guess like slice of life in space. I also like military sci-fi, I'm a big fan get out there and shoot anything that's got more than two legs.

James: Yeah, well you'd do well in Hollywood, because that's pretty much the plot every science fiction film that comes out of Hollywood.

Rachel: I love it.

James: Well that's a fantastic canon of books behind you, and you're a voracious writer, by the looks of things. That's very much your stick, I guess, in the author community.

YOU'VE GOT A SYSTEM. WHICH I GUESS IS THE SYSTEM YOU USE IS THE ONE YOU PREACH ABOUT, IN TERMS OF HOW TO ORGANIZE YOURSELF AND GET WRITING.

Rachel: As you mentioned in my lovely intro, thank you very much. I'm the author of what I call, 2K to 10K, which is basically the three steps I use to go from writing about 2,000 words a day, in six hours, to writing over 10,000 words a day in about the same amount of time.

That sounds really incredible and believe me at the time it was a miracle, I felt like I had cured cancer. I was so excited because I went from traditional publishing, my first two series, again where with Orbit which is a division of Hatchet.

I went from this very kind of slow six month deadline world, but the deadlines are very hard, if you missed your deadline every other part of the publication process would be thrown off. Like you had your time when you were going to get your cover design, if your book wasn't ready well then you lost your slot, you had to wait until there was another slot. Even if you were two weeks late, your stuff might be months late, and you lost your slot with your editor and so forth. You get on shuffled down the line, it was a very big deal to miss your deadline, and so I got myself into a position where I was right up against a deadline and I had to get this book done.

I was like if I didn't get this book done, it was going to be bad. It all kind of came about, I had one of those scenes where the scene and nothing is working. You're banging your head against the scene and you don't know what's going to happen, the whole things just a mess, and I had worked on it for 5 hours it had to be. Actually I think it was days, that I worked on this stupid scene, one conversation and so I finally got so frustrated I just closed my laptop, and I got out my notebook and I just wrote down what I wanted to say.

I didn't bother with the right language, I didn't bother with descriptions, I just did it like a transcript for a conversation. I sat there until I figured it out, it took me probably about maybe 20 minutes of just writing in the book. Then I figured it out, and once I figured that out I was able to go back and write that whole scene in 30 minutes.

That was the beginning, that was the a-ha moment, is that if you know what you're writing before you write it you will write it at least two times faster.

James: That's the key.

Rachel: That's the million dollar secret right there.

James: I have bought the book, I should tell you. As soon as we got you on our list I started doing my research and I couldn't, I mean for me, writing a book for the first time and I do struggle. I haven't written today for no good reason.

Rachel: Bad, very bad.

James: There's no good reason.

Rachel: I want you to know I am deeply, personally disappointed in you.

James: Yeah, thank you. That will help. I know that, funnily enough you sort of describe it, I've this scene, I've got to this point now and I don't really know what I'm going to be doing in it, and that's enough of a subconscious block for me to do other things than turn to the book.

I never talk about this seat of the pants writing, writing pens or whatever and structuralist but there's got to be, I don't ever want to be somebody who sits out, I mean some people do. They'll fill out 20 pages describing their book before they start writing it.

Particularly if people work in teams. I don't think I could do that, but I am drawn to the idea of writing down, even if it's bullet points what your scene is.

WHICH IS GOING TO MAKE IT EASIER THEN, ISN'T IT?

Rachel: I think everybody writes in their own way. Writing is very personal, I've never met two authors who have described the writing process in the same way. I really do think it's sort of a wheel everyone has to invent for themselves. That said, there are definitely some best practices you can follow especially if you find yourself getting in trouble.

For example, if you have days where you find yourself not writing, that's often the sign that something is maybe a little wrong with your book. Maybe you're not excited about your book, as you should be, because writing should be the most fun thing you do every day. I'm a firm believer of, if you don't love it you're doing it wrong, because if you think about writing. Writing is pure creativity, it's telling your story, this thing you love and sitting down to do it should be the high point of your day.

If it's not, you need to ask yourself, "Why not? Why am I not excited about what I'm supposed to write today?" That's actually another one of my points, because once I discovered that things went faster if I wrote them down. I started every day, before I would write a scene I would take five minutes and I would just write on my notebook what was going to happen in this scene.

It could be something as simple as Marcy talks to Julius. What do they say? Marcy and Julius are two characters in the series I'm writing right now, and I would just write it out like a transcript what they said. I didn't worry about details, I just wrote down what I wanted to say and if I found the conversation was going south I could just exit out and start over again.

Rather than losing 300 words I would just jump back up the page and when it was done, I would have this beautiful little, like a sketch, like I was sketching for a painting of what the scene would be.

Then when I sat down to write the scene, all the hard work, all that kind of back and forth thinking, and what am I going to say was pretty much already done. I was able to just get the scene out very very quickly and this was the number one thing that doubled my word count. From that point, I then discovered that there were days where I wrote enormously more than other days.

I was like, "Why?" "I'm doing the same process, why are some days better than other days." I'm scientifically minded. I was also keeping track of how much I was writing at this point because I was trying to figure out how can I get better.

I talk about all of this, by the way, on the blog if you go to rachelaaron.net and you click on my blog, on the side bar there's a thing called how I went from 2,000 words a day to 10,000 words a day. Which was the original blog post, and everything I'm saying is written down there so you don't have to worry about

taking notes. It's all down there, and it's all in the book, which is only 99 cents, even less in pence so it's great.

THE NEXT THING I HAD TO FIGURE OUT WAS WHY SOME DAYS ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS?

The answer to that turned out to be, I wrote more words on the days where I was excited about what I was writing. Which is again, kind of head smackingly obvious, of course you write more when you're excited. That has a dark side too, that implies the days where I'm not excited about writing, what is wrong with those scenes?

I don't want boring scenes in my book, if I'm not excited about it, no ones going to be, I mean this is my baby. That encouraged me to asking myself how can I make this cooler? Where are the rock star moments in this scene? If it's just a hum drum little scene to move the book forward, well that's no fun for anyone, why do we want that?

If the first step is know what you going to write before you write it, the next step is enthusiasm. Being excited about what you're going to write before write it.

Now what I do to make myself go even faster is when I'm doing that five minutes or I'm just sort of sketching out what I'm going to write, I ask myself what's exciting about this scene? What am I excited to write here? What is happening that is cool? Then I get myself pumped, I get myself pumped up about that so by the time I'm ready to write not only do I know what I'm going to do, I'm very excited about it. Obviously, I'm a plotter, I plot in advance, but I don't see why you couldn't do this as a pantsers.

You may get to a scene and not know what's going to happen, but you can still discover that, not in the writing. The whole point of this method, is to not discover things while you're writing because that is the most time consuming and wasteful way to do it.

If I make a mistake when I'm writing and I realize that this whole conversation been going in the wrong direction I have to lose sometimes 500, sometimes 1,000 otherwise perfectly good words just because they're going in the wrong direction.

If I know I'm going the wrong direction before I write those words, it is so much easier, just x out a paragraph I wrote on paper than to x out the five paragraphs that describes in my novel. That's really what my system does, this isn't some cheat, this isn't being a hack, I hate it when people, "Oh you write fast, you must throw away half the words you write."

Bitch please. If I did that what would be the point if I threw away half the words I wrote? I do this for a living, I don't have time to waste on that crap, ain't no one got time for that, it's ridiculous.

I get good words, and I've often found that the faster I go the better the words are because I know exactly where I'm going. It's less like writing and more like I'm actually reading the book as I produce it, and that is just the most amazing feeling in the world. It feels like you're flying, when that happens the story just picks up and takes you away. It really is kind of magical. It that magic of creation thing, it's wonderful.

James: That's great and I can certainly reflect that and the parts of the story, and the first, once I wrote 10,000 words to 30,000 words I really knew what I was doing. It just came together after 10,000 words and those next 20,000 words I did in a few days. I did them really quickly and now I need to engineer that situation again. And you're absolutely write, get excited about it.

Rachel: Even if right before you go to bed, and you haven't written today, just get out a notebook or any paper or your laptop, or whatever you use to jot things down quickly. Your phone or whatever. Just make notes about what you're going to write the next day, get yourself excited. Try to get yourself pumped about it, remind yourself why you're doing this, and not just because I want to publish a book, but why are you telling the story? When you get yourself excited about your own work, writing becomes that much easier.

James: What I find interesting about this, I think a lot of pantsers think that they are doing it quickly. They think the reason they can't be bothered to slow the process down and they just want to crack out and crack on with the book, and they can then get an edit and a redraft done.

WHAT YOU'RE REALLY SAYING IS ACTUALLY THAT'S A FALSE ECONOMY AND THAT A LITTLE BIT OF PLANNING IS GOING TO MAKE YOU GO THREE OR FOUR TIMES FASTER.

Rachel: I absolutely believe that. It's that whole a pint of sweat saves a gallon of blood kind of thing. A little bit of work now will save you enormous pain later because it's always easier to fix things before

you write them.

That said however, I fully respect people who write as pantsers, people who enjoy writing the paragraph then learning through the paragraph that that's not how they were supposed to go. They learn something about their characters through the failure, and that is definitely a valid method of writing.

It's not my method, I'm a plotter to the nth degree. I like to think of myself as a story architect. I plan everything out, all the arcs, all the change, I plan it all because I like to know where I'm going. If I don't know where I'm going I get kind of paralyzed and I can't move. But that's just me, everyone's different. If you're a pantsler please don't think I'm talking down to you. I'm really not. You do something I can't do and I respect that.

James: The other thing is the writing you end up with when you've done your scribbling in your notebook, you know what you're going to do, you're excited about and you get going.

DOES THAT HAVE AN IMPACT ON HOW FINISHED, HOW COMPLETED THE WRITING IS? ARE YOU STILL LOOKING AT THIS AS PRESSING ONE AND WRITING AS YOU WANT AND THEN WORRY ABOUT POLISHING LATER?

Rachel: I would definitely say it is more polished than it used to be when I just figured stuff out in the text. It is not yet as polished as it will be after a good edit.

My rule is that the first draft is the draft you write to learn how to write the book, and then your edit is when you actually write it. That said, planning things ahead, I think definitely skips a little step, I used to just write everything out and then it would be a giant mess and then I would go through and I'd do all the stuff and I'd fix it.

There was this giant editorial process, I just finished my 13th book, and for this novel I plotted the whole thing, I wrote it, I realized I had the plot wrong. I rearranged all the pieces, I finished it, and then I went back and I edited the big parts I knew were wrong.

Once I did all the big edits and went back to the beginning and edit the whole thing through, and now it's pretty much done. I'm very very happy with it, it's with my husband whose editing it right now and it's

going to the actual editor on the 13th.

I don't foresee any major changes at all. I mean everything's going to be very minor because the book is pretty much done. It's exactly what I want and that was only a total of about three passes. Once to write it, kind of one in the middle where I fixed all the big parts, then a final pass, so two point five, but that's really good. That's really short for a book that's 187,000 words, oh my God.

James: Oh, that's a lot of words.

Rachel: It is the second longest book I've ever written, the first longest book I've ever written actually was never published. It was my very first novel, which was 220,000, so that was quite the first novel. It was YA fantasy too, let me tell you how much that got rejected. A lot. By everyone.

James: In the self publishing area that is a couple of series there, just that one novel.

Rachel: I'm a weird self published author, maybe because I came from traditional but I like big books and I cannot lie. I like to write them long.

James: We'll just finish off on the writing, I think it's fascinating and I'm really interested in it as well. In fact one of the things I've had to do because I come from a news journalism background. I wrote for broadcasting which had two downsides, one downside was that we wrote really frugally, so my average TV news report would have about 45 seconds of speech in it.

Rachel: You must be good at Twitter then.

James: I am good at Twitter. I can condense stories, I can go to a complicated story involving politicians, and unions, and you know what and then have 45 seconds explains the story, has a middle, beginning, and end. I can do that.

THAT TURNS OUT TO BE REALLY RUBBISH SKILL FOR NOVEL WRITING, WHERE YOU WANT TO ENJOY THE JOURNEY MORE.

Rachel: I don't know, it kind of depends on the story you're telling. I'm actually a giant fan of George Orwell who was also a reporter, and I actually really love his sparse reporter style in the fiction, because it makes it feel more real. A little tip of my English major hat there.

James: I love Orwell, if I could write a book like ... I can read his books today, and do read his books today.

Rachel: They're lovely.

James: That was one thing, the other thing is that in a news room, for a decade you're beaten over the head if a small mistake gets through on air, or anywhere near on air you're in trouble. It's drummed into you through brutal episodes early on and I find it very difficult to write something that I know has got mistakes in it, is not quite right. For that reason it's actually taken me a long time to work out, do you know what I'm going to read this again and go through it at a later date and make it better.

So that's totally alien to me, where I've had to really learn that. I'm not sure how many other people who come to writing for the first time understand that there is this intermediate process, and the editing. I've loved the editing side it. You're absolutely right, that's where the story happened for me, I mean I wrote 80,000 words of this book and then started again.

Now I'm writing it, and that's the editing stage.

YOU'VE COMPLETELY DESCRIBED MY EXPERIENCE. BUT IT WAS WEIRD FOR ME TO TRY AND WRITE SOMETHING THAT I'M GOING TO GET HIT FOR.

Rachel: I think what you're describing is a very common phenomenon. I actually experienced myself, because I am a perfectionist, I hated knowing that things are wrong, it just bothers me I can't let it go.

What I finally ended up doing was that I have a rule, which is that no one has to see it. No one will see this until I give the okay. I just keep telling myself that. It's okay no one has to see it. I make myself giant notes inside the text so that I know it's not going to go out because it has this giant note in it. Therefore no one's going to see it but me, this is all just for me.

I do all these things to remind myself that this is not a final version, it is okay to make mistakes and have stuff be out. You have to get used to it, you have to ease yourself into it. It's like easing yourself into hot water, you just got to get used to the idea, that is okay to make mistakes, to not know things.

One of the ways you will murder a book, and I've murdered several, is going back and editing the first two chapters over, and over, and over again rather than finishing.

That will kill your momentum. Writing is daily practice and creativity and excitement, but it also momentum. My favorite saying is that, "Writing begets writing." The more you write, the more you want to write, and the faster you go, the faster you want to go and the better the story flows. I actually read a very good fast writing book by Chris Fox which I think is called, 5,000 Words Per Hour, which I have never hit, ever.

James: That's ambitious.

Rachel: It's crazy but the way he does it is, it blows my mind. His method is that he refused to hit backspace, he writes for a set period of, I don't remember how long he writes, like an hour or something, and he'll just write. He's not allowed to hit backspace while he's typing.

James: Even typo's?

Rachel: No nothing, he just keeps going because he's never allowed to look back.

James: I would struggle with that, I think you probably would as well.

Rachel: I can't do it, I don't know how he does it. I absolutely believe that he is going a million miles an hour, I've actually implemented a little bit of that where I've just like, I know it's wrong make a note I'll fix it later, move on. I especially had to do that with the second book in my self published series, which was the biggest bear I've ever had to write, I've never struggled with any book like I struggled with that one.

Which is weird because it's everyone's favorite book and it's the one that won all the awards, so apparently I pulled it off, but I hated that book for so long. There were times that I'm like this is so wrong, and I don't know how to fix it, but I'm just going to move on because if I keep banging my head against this wall I'm going to hate this book and never finish it.

That I think is especially true for writers like you at the very beginning, because just finish that book and a lot of the problems that seemed insurmountable in the middle, will be crystal clear to you by the time you reach the end. There's no point in investing all that energy trying to solve them, if you can at all move ahead.

It is always better to move ahead than to fix things behind you, because by the time you reach the end the things you were worried about fixing might not be even be problems anymore. You might have decided to go a totally different route.

James: That's a natural procedure, that's really really interesting, I'm lapping this up, Rachel thank you.

Rachel: I hope it's helpful.

James: I haven't read the book yet, so I'm going to get that on top of it. Just to round up the writing side, because I want to move onto marketing and a couple of other things in a moment. The book is from 2K to 10K, and it's Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com, so about a pound, about a buck, so really good.

Rachel: It's a very short, very fast book. It's about 30,000 words actually, which makes it the shortest thing I've written.

James: A novel for other people, but for you a pamphlet.

Rachel: When I was at Orbit they asked me to write a short story and I gave them a 40,000 word novella and they never asked me for a short story again.

James: Let's talk about a bit about Trad publishing and self publishing.

THE TRANSITION FOR YOU: WHAT MOTIVATED IT, AND WHERE ARE YOU NOW IN TERMS OF HOW YOU SEE YOUR FUTURE?

Rachel: The motivation was half simple, half complex. The simple part was money, plain old. Self publishing pays four times better than Trad publishing, just straight out. I make four times as much on a book that costs half as much, so you can't beat that math. I have to do a lot more work myself, but that's a one time investment, I do the work and then it's done, and then the book makes me money forever.

Versus giving up 90 to 95% of my income for my life plus 70 years, because nothing goes out of print anymore, since it's all in digital. You never get your rights back and that's definitely not worth the advance in my mind. That was a big big factor of why I jumped, because I am in this to make money. I've got a house and a kid, and a husband to support, two cars all that kind of stuff, the American dream.

The other part of it which was very very important to me, actually almost more important than the money was because the book I wanted to write. Which was the first in my Heart Striker series, it's a very weird book. It's about dragons in Detroit, and it is urban fantasy but also kind of sci-fi and kind of post apocalyptic and there definitely fantasy elements but also near future elements, and there are spirits and dragons, and majors, and the whole thing is giant political drama. It's a odd little beast.

One of the problems that I've always had is that I've kind of write these books that straddle genre's. My Paradox Trilogy, my sci-fi books, they were sci-fi and romance, my Eli novels where epic fantasy that was light hearted and moved at a very fast snappy urban fantasy pace. They actually are much more like a comic book than they are like any of the grim dark tomb's that are very popular right now.

It's this very weird fantasy, so everything I've written hasn't neatly fit on a shelf, and that has always been one of my problems. When you're traditionally published you have to fit on a shelf. They have to tell that bookstore, buyer where you belong, and I didn't really belong anywhere.

In self publishing so long as you can fit into seven categories you're good, and I've had enormous success with Nice Dragons Finish Last, in part because it's so different and people have said, "I thought I had read every urban fantasy that there was. I thought that the genre was dead and then Rachel Aaron came along and did something totally new."

That's one of the best compliments I've been paid because I love urban fantasy, and I've read a lot of it. I also got kind of bored with it and so I wanted to write something that's new, and my books are like shadow run meets dragon drama, it's bizarre.

James: We often get asked, in fact this week, we had a note on our Facebook page from somebody saying that they thought their books were too niche, and that they would struggle to find their audience. They write in I think, a lesbian erotica, two or three sub clauses to that, of what kind of genre it was. Actually she's had great success because of the targeting she's been doing on social media, and here you are saying, "Don't panic about that."

IN FACT, I THINK YOU'VE DONE A BLOG THIS WEEK ON THIS SUBJECT HAVEN'T YOU, ABOUT NICHE?

Rachel: We did, my husband Travis, who by the way has thrown himself into doing research on self publishing and has become, I would say even much more knowledgeable than I ever was. You guys should actually have him on here, he's the one that knows all this stuff, I'm just parroting what he has researched and looked up.

When we went to Romantic Times he hit, I think 15 marketing panels. It was ridiculous. The man is a machine, but he wrote this absolutely amazing - I don't say that as his wife, I say that as an author - an absolutely amazing post about branding yourself and one about how to reach a niche audience.

Which is something a lot of indie authors, I feel, struggle with because a lot of authors go indie because their books were just too niche for New York to care about. New York doesn't care if you're only going to sell 10,000 books, but in self publishing you sell 10,000 books that can be 40,000 dollars at the right price point. That's not chump change, that's definitely an audience worth having. And New York didn't even want to bother so we'll just happily take the money. Yeah, it's on the blog rachelaaron.net just click blog, it's right there, shout out.

James: How to read niche audiences, May 2nd is the date of that publication, because as I speak now I'm not sure when this is going to be broadcast, but people will be able to find it on there. In fact your blog is excellent and very focused.

Rachel: Well thank you.

James: I think it's really good. I can see Travis gets his name in there quite a lot, which is good, so you not taking all the credit.

Rachel: We've really been trying to bring him into the blog more, one because I just don't have time to write two blog posts a week, I've got to write these books, and two because he really does know an enormous amount. He keeps giving me these great blog ideas, and I'm like, "I don't have time to write this blog, why don't you write it? You're brilliant, do this."

He was a better story teller than I was when we met. This is hilarious. He was a GM, he was game master; he ran table top role playing for years. I'd never even heard of it until college, and I came in and I started dating him. We started role playing together and I loved it, but he had been doing this since middle school, so he had these amazing stories that he'd been telling. He actually helped me a lot on my early novels, he's always been my first editor and just really fantastically great. He's going to blush like crazy when he hears this, he's way too modest but he's awesome.

James: Where are his books?

Rachel: He has actually just finished his first novel. He kept having these amazing stories and he wanted to make games out of them, and I was like, "No, games don't make money, make a novel." He finally did, I'm very very hopeful, he hasn't let me read it yet, but we will see. I bet it's going to be good.

James: It's got to be a story about a GM that corrects the universe and ends up in it.

Rachel: I don't think it's quite that, but it is trapped in a video game type thing, but it's great. It's kind of like Sword.online if you've ever watched it. It's awesome.

James: When you say trapped in video game I'm just thinking Tron at this stage.

Rachel: Not that, that's awful.

James: What, we may have to disagree on that one.

Rachel: We may have just lost half the audience.

James: I love my Tron.

Rachel: I was never a really big fan of Tron.

James: Oh, where you not? Okay, I think it was an age thing, it was bad at the time but I was young so it looked great. Let's press on, we've got a couple more minutes, I don't want to go very much past 40 minutes for you. You look forward in terms of self publishing, you've really got to grips with this, is something you've thrown yourself into.

THE TRAD DEALS ARE STILL THERE WITH YOU, YOU'RE STILL TRAD PUBLISHING?

Rachel: I actually have a couple of Trad contract writing deals, where I've contracted to write books for them that are not really within my own sphere that I cannot talk about yet. We'll hopefully be talking about soon, as soon as I can sign these stupid contracts.

All of this is not to trash talk Trad, I actually love being Trad, I especially love the editorial help I got. I've had some good editors that I've hired but I am the writer I am, because of my agent and my editors at Orbit. Here's the thing: when you're indie, you are the one hiring the editor, which means if the editor says something you don't like you can fire them or you can ignore it.

When you are traditionally published your editor is your boss. They're the one doing the hiring and so if they tell you to do something you just have to figure out how to do it. You can argue your case and sometimes you win, but generally speaking if your editor says, "I hate this. Fix it." You've just got to fix it.

That kind of iron clad, just make it work moment that is a very good teacher for being a good writer. I

think one of the reasons I am as tight a writer as I am, I pride myself on being a pretty meticulous writer, is because I had so many problems that my editor was just like, "Fix it."

I'm not telling you how, you're the author fix it, and so I fixed it, I made it happen. That's not to say I rolled over or that my editor dictated, my editor actually worked with me a great deal. There were times for example in my fourth Eli novel, *The Spirit War*, that book was about 170,000 words and my editor was like, "This book is too long for mass market paperback. You can't print a book that long in this format. You have to fix it. Cut 40,000 words out and come back to me." I was like, "I can't cut 40,000." I really really tried, I think I cut maybe 12,000 of editing sentences to be smaller that kind of thing.

I finally went back to her, and I was like I've done my best, I will make you a deal, you tell me what to cut. You read this book if you tell me to cut something and I will not fight you, I will cut it with no questions asked, but you just tell me what to cut to get it down to the right size and I'll do it. She couldn't do it, she couldn't cut it, because the story was too locked together. She liked the story too much and so we ended up going to the trade paper, the bigger format just because she couldn't do it.

That was my biggest victory I every won. I was like, ha. But I don't recommend doing that. It makes your editor very mad.

James: When it's rare as well that's the dream, and I had this in the news and obviously you say to your editor, "Well look I can't do it, this is it, it can't be cut." They read it and they work out that it can't, but it doesn't happen very often because normally the editors are good.

Rachel: Normally you are wrong.

James: Normally you wrong and that's the whole process of learning that isn't it?

Rachel: That's one thing that I think a lot of authors miss by going indie. I'm not saying that you shouldn't go indie, but you do need to be cognizant of what you are giving up. And one of the things that you are giving up is that the editors working at the major publishing houses are the best in the business. They are amazing they have their jobs for a reason and they don't have to take your shit, quite frankly.

Authors think we know best, and a lot of times we don't. When you're self publishing your editor can tell you, "I think you need to fix this." You can say, "I think you need to fix your face. Goodbye." You can't do that in New York, you can't do that in Trad and I think there is a lot of merit in that and some indie authors say that's a good part.

I don't know, artistically speaking sometimes it's not good to have someone who can tell you no. That's why even now with an editor I hire I have a rule that whatever my editor says I have to try it at least once. If I try it and I hate it then I can say, "No." I've found that when I try the editors advice even if it sounds crazy, if I try it I will often find that she was actually right.

James: Everyone needs an editor and in the creative processes there's always going to be a tension, because when you create you put yourself into it. It's not just blood, sweat and tears, there's ego that goes into it.

YOU'RE QUITE RIGHT AND IT'S DIFFICULT NOT TO FEEL HURT, ISN'T IT?

Rachel: Writing a novel is the most egotistical thing you could do. You are literally sitting here and writing a giant lie and then asking people to pay money to read it. It's the huberistic act that we can do, you're like, "Here is the product of my brain, pay me money, you don't even get to own it you're just enjoying the experience." There's a lot of ego, and it's funny because writers are not as flamboyant as other artists.

We don't get the red carpet treatment, we don't get the big gallery shows, so I think a lot of writers think they're not temperamental egoistical artist that you see int he stereotypes but a lot of us are. You go to any writers' convention and there are some ego's, and that's fine, that's good. You need an ego in this business because if you don't believe in yourself no one is going to. This is the ultimate fake it till you make it kind of business.

At the same time you have to be aware of that, you have to be aware of your own short comings and be ready to check them when they start running pout of control.

James: Final question, final area.

WHAT'S WORKING FOR YOU RIGHT NOW IN SELF PUBLISHING MARKETING?

Rachel: We don't actually do a lot of direct marketing, and the reason for that being that I'm extraordinarily lucky and very very happy to have a very nice fan base that eats up my books. The way I got that fan base was I wrote good books.

I have a very high internal standard of quality. If I don't like a book it doesn't go out, I don't care if it's late, a book will be late for six months but it will be bad forever. I never put out anything I'm not 100% proud of and 100% ready to put my name on.

That sometimes means that books come out six months late, but that quality has won me an extremely loyal fan base who has followed me through some pretty weird genre's, like Nice Dragon's finish Last. The fact that I continuously keep the quality very high and really really worked to make sure that these books are not just have quality production. Meaning they not full of typos they've got nice covers and all that kind of stuff.

My goal with my self publishing works was to make them indistinguishable from my New York works. Most readers have no idea if your book is self published or not unless looks really bad.

They're not there looking at the publisher. They just want the book that looks fun. If you invest the money and the time into making your book look like a really beautiful finished product to look professional, then most readers won't even notice you're self published. They'll just notice you look like a great book for a good price and that's an instant sell right there.

For our marketing strategy, and we're doing some Facebook ads and that kind of stuff, but unlike a lot of authors who have these really complicated marketing strategies, our strategy is really to get the book as in front of many eyeballs as possible. We do that through being in Kindle Unlimited which has been very successful for us, and just say straight up get it out there, we're giant Amazon fans. Amazon have been very very good to us, Kindle Unlimited has been cutting their price, but it is still making me way more than I was making when I was in other markets.

For me and for my books, being Amazon exclusive has been very good. I don't know how long we'll stay there, but Kindle Unlimited is amazing because it removes the barrier to entry for new people trying your

books. What we've discovered especially if you work hard to product a quality product, is that once a person enters the Rachel Aaron matrix they tend to read all my books.

James: Like a web.

Rachel: Yeah, they'll start with Heart Strikers, and they'll read the next Heart Strikers book, and then they'll be, "Oh no, I'm out of Rachel Aaron books, I going to go read her other series." Then they'll go buy Eli or they buy Paradox and so once you get that customer our goal is to keep that customer for life. At the end of my book I have a little letter, which says, "Hey, thank you so much for reading please leave a review, sign up for my newsletter. Oh my God, I appreciate you so much."

That letter has gotten me so many reviews and so many news letter sign ups because when a reader reaches the end of your book, that is the moment when they are most willing to do anything for you. That is when they are happiest with you and they want to express their gratitude.

It's a nice self selection process because the people who make it to the end of the book are generally speaking the people who liked it, so you get good reviews. It all works out, and so that's the letter at the end of the book, a quality product, and the other thing we do, is of course, we do book club.

Which everyone talks about, but it really is that good, it's really amazing. There is nothing better right now than getting in front of eyeballs. There are lots of other smaller services and for us they weren't really worth the time, if you're still kind of building. But once you get over your first 1,000 or 2,000 or so sales. You start going up exponentially if your books are really good and it wasn't just a flash in the pan kind of thing.

If you actually writing books you really care about and you start getting over a 100, then 200, then 1,000, and 2,000 sales, things start going up exponentially. But those first 100 sales are really hard to get. You have to almost hand sell the thing because no one knows who you are.

So if you're still in that stage then the smaller lists like Fussy Librarian, I know is a very popular one, there's tons of them. The smaller lists can be very good. It's also good to go on a lot of these lists at the

same time. That's one of the things that we learned at this Romantic Times marketing panel that Travis went to.

They took notes for me, thank you honey. You have to touch, this is a very well known marketing phenomenon, you have to touch someone seven or eight times before your product starts feeling familiar. You don't just want to hit them with marketing once in one way. You want to hit them, you want them to see you in their email, you want them to see you on Facebook, you want them to see you anywhere you can see them. To touch them as many times as possible and the more times you touch them, the more times they see your cover or see you on a blog or see you somewhere, the more likely they are to feel familiar with you and to actually buy your book.

James: Yeah, quite a traditional goal thing, the seven steps of selling, the first touch through purchase.

Rachel: Exactly, and you know just because we're in this wild west front frontier doesn't mean the old tricks don't work. Everything old is new again, I hear.

James: Rachel that's absolutely brilliant and so much to take away, I think. Particularly for me and I know for our audience, and I really loved because it resonated very much with what Mark says, "When you talk about looking professional, setting high standards, being indistinguishable from traditional publishing." In fact, frankly, looking better than traditional publishers because when they start advertising and doing some of the things we do, they don't do it very well.

Rachel: They do not, they could take some lessons from some indies and I think a lot of the big houses are starting to do that.

James: I think they are as well. That's great, thank you so much for joining us from North of Disney. I think I'm North of Disney World as well.

Rachel: I think half the world is North of Disney World.

James: We're very happy to talk to people South of Disney World as well, we should say.

Rachel: Absolutely wherever in relation to Disney World you are, we're happy to talk to you.

James: East, West or in Orlando. Thank you so much Rachel Aaron Bach, your various author names and people will find you at rachelaaron.net?

Rachel: That is correct, rachelaaron.net, there's a link to the blog is up at the top, just click it, it takes you to my blog, everything is organized by writing, business, whatever you want. Click the tag it will take you right to it.

James: Rachel Aaron, full of energy, full of American sunshine and what a good system and a good approach and yeah, Two K to Ten K is how she pronounces the book. I think I rather clumsily said, "Two Thousand to Ten Thousand." Because I'm British.

An interesting approach. Mark, do you think you're going to take anything on board from that. You said earlier, before we started the interview, "That 2,000 words a day is going to suit you." You've got to remember that you've got a good series behind you, good box sets behind and you're adding to that.

There are lots of people out there who are just coming towards the end of the first novel and they are painfully aware that they really want to two, three, four novels to get their business up and running and for them that could be a really important step towards that.

Mark: Exactly, and the thing for me is it took me two years to write the first published book that I put out five or six years ago, *The Black Mile*. I'm obviously a lot quicker than that these days even though I may have slowed the pace a little touch. But it's just the benefit of experience and I know the time of day that I'm best suited to writing.

I've got systems in place that enable me to write reasonably quickly, so it's not really systems are great and I think most writers will get a lot of out of that interview but it's one of the things that I take away from is,

just take the things that suit you.

Then put together in a combination that suits you best. That is what I'll do and I'll look at that and I'm interested in things like eliminating distractions at the moment. I tend to find the newest shiny thing tends to interest me. You know the internet is pretty tempting especially when you have the closed seasons cricket coming on, I know you're following that James, at the moment.

There's lots of things that can distract you, so it is a question of getting a system and then devoting yourself to it, and to the exclusion of all those tempting distraction that can take our focus away.

James: Are you still using that mystic whale music in your ears?

Mark: I do, brain FM, I use it now and again. I'll do a 30 minute session.

Speaker 5: I couldn't find mystic whale in your music.

James: Oh my God, what was it called a ...

Mark: Siri

James: What did I say?

Mark: Siri doesn't know what mystic brain music is.

James: Yes, I am still using mystic brain music James, brain FM. You can set it to 30 minute or an hour and then just basically use that almost like a pomodorro technique, so you just kind of focus on that for half an hour. Then take a 10 minute break, go for a walk, stretch your legs, watch the cricket if it's you, or if it's me and then do another half hour.

James: Well I always invite you to the cricket don't I, because I have a friend with a similar email address as you and you get strange frequently get strange invites to go and watch a test match.

Mark: Well we have the same first name, I'm not sure, I think it's about as similar as it gets.

James: I only ever type Mark into my email program and then hit return and get on with it.

Before we go I wanted to point out we have a really super episode next week for Facebook advertising in particular. A man called Depesh Mandalia and he is a real guru when it comes to social media advertising, particularly Facebook advertising. He's the guy start up companies bring in to organize their campaigns, to shake focus optimize them, big campaigns he puts thousands of dollars into them.

He understands how the system works, it was a brilliant brilliant interview. We had a few technical issues, there's been a big broadband issue in Britain over the last couple of weeks but I'm sorting that out. It's going to be a really useful interview to listen too if you are into social media advertising, particularly Facebook ads. That will be episode 24 next week, but until then watch some cricket and quite possibly baseball and enjoy yourselves, and get some of that writing done.

Mark: Bye Siri, bye James.

CHAPTER 21

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN - WITH DEPESH MANDALIA



YOU CAN'T APPROACH an advertising campaign haphazardly.

That's one of the main lessons learned in this conversation with Depesh Mandalia. Depesh is a successful social media marketer and advertiser and has boosted the popularity of a children's book project through his use of Facebook Ads and other social marketing. In this episode, Depesh shares some of the things he learned when working on the "Lost My Name" book advertising campaign so that you can learn how to avoid the mistakes he made and make your advertising campaign the best it can be from the start.

YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE PATIENCE IN THE EXPLORATION PHASE OF FACEBOOK ADS.

As with any advertising campaign you've got to approach Facebook Ads cautiously and with a good deal of patience. The platform requires a good deal of time for you to troubleshoot and tweak your advertisements - including the wording and images. It's a process of honing your offer so that it strikes a

chord with those you are targeting. Depesh shares why it took 6 weeks to get the advertising campaigns for the “Lost My Name” project refined to the point it began converting - and shares his best practices with you.

ARE YOU SELLING YOUR BOOK OR THE ADVENTURE YOUR BOOK REPRESENTS?

Most authors are not adept at advertising or social media marketing. That’s fine. You’re a writer first and foremost. But if you’re going to tackle your own advertising campaigns to increase your book sales you have to be aware that you’re not really selling a book - you’re selling the adventure or experience your book provides to the reader. Depesh shares how he discovered that subtle nuance to marketing that began converting his prospects into customers - and how you can determine the same kind of appeal for your marketing and advertising campaigns.

IN 2016 THERE’S NO EXCUSE FOR NOT GETTING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CUSTOMER.

With the advent of Facebook advertising and other social media platforms there really is no excuse for not knowing who your ideal customer is. You can use the platforms to drill down into the data of who’s using and viewing the products and services your book is most closely associated with. When you do, you’ll be able to place your sales pitch or advertisement right in front of them. Once that’s done your only task is to refine your offer until they are enticed to click through and purchase. Depesh shares how to do exactly that in this episode.

YOU SHOULD AVOID MAKING GENERALIZATIONS AND LOOK AT THE FACTS.

When creating an advertising campaign you may think that you know who your ideal customer is. But Depesh says that you’re likely wrong. When he began helping with the advertising for the “Lost My Name” book project, the entire team believed that they would need to target parents. But by looking at the data they accumulated during the campaign they discovered that the people actually purchasing their books were not parents - but grandparents. The demographic data showed it very clearly. That changed the way they approached their marketing and soon their book sales began to soar as they targeted an older set of people. You can find out how Depesh recommends using the data to find your ideal purchaser by checking out this episode of the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Today’s episode: Facebook Advertising and today’s guest Depesh Mandalia.
- How Depesh got started using Facebook Ads.
- The children’s book project Depesh used Facebook Ads to promote.
- One of the reasons Depesh believed Facebook Ads would work for them.

- The hurdles the team needed to overcome to make the campaign successful.
- Why children's authors have to approach things differently.
- Do the same techniques work in various markets?
- Different ways of approaching effective marketing.
- The mechanics of discovering a NPS score.
- Lessons being learned from other social platforms.
- Key tactics recommended for your campaigns.
- Why social media will continue to grow.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.lostmy.name
- www.Delighted.com
- [Typeform](#)
- Connect with Depesh on [LinkedIn](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello, and welcome to episode number 24 from the self-publishing formula.

Automated: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best-seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello, and welcome to an episode that's going to focus on social media ads, including, especially, I should say, Facebook advertising.

Mark, you are known as a bit of a guru on Facebook ads within the self-publishing world. Where are you with them at the moment? We talked about this a couple of weeks ago, didn't we, still being sort of the prime area for you, but this guy, Depesh, he's somebody you noticed quite early on as making waves in this area.

Automated: I did, yes. I can't remember exactly how I was hooked up with him. It may have been the guys at Reedsy who I was talking to.

Depesh is behind, or was working for a company that produced a very well-received children's book called "Lost My Name." They built that business off the back of a lot of Facebook advertising. I saw those ads quite frequently because I've got two small kids, so they were targeting effectively enough to catch me, so I was in their target market. We did actually buy a couple of those for Fred and Samuel.

I thought it would be interesting to talk to him just to see what he's been doing, slightly outside of our usual space, to see if we can get any interesting information from him as to how to optimize Facebook ad campaigns.

Also, we get lots of questions from writers who are writing books for children and for slightly older children, and obviously these books are aimed at young children, so you're not aiming at the audience that are going to be either reading them or being read to; you're aiming to the people who are going to be buying those books for them.

These are a little bit more tricky to target those kinds of audiences, but it can be done. "Lost My Name" is a really good example of when it's done right, just how effective it can be.

James: The important breakthrough that Depesh talks about in the interview in more detail is understanding that people were buying the book to gift, so it was really targeting up aunts, uncles, godparents, and grandparents was their big breakthrough.

The is the guy who's brought into start-ups. His focusing, his targeting, is superb, to the point where I work from home. You do as well, Mark, and I think for both of us, coffee is quite important. I ended up subscribing to this service called Pact Coffee in the UK, a slightly new way of doing it where their thing is that they really cut down on the time between the coffee bean being picked and produced and being packaged and sent to you. It's as fresh as you could possibly get it, and it comes from very small sourced farmers.

Guess who was running their Facebook ads campaign as it turns out? Depesh. So it dropped into my timeline, and he somehow worked out through his algorithms that those who are self-employed are big target markets that. Yeah, he's good, and it was a really, really good interview.

We had a little blip in the middle due to broadband failures, but we got the bulk of this out, and very well worth listening to. Definitely as I said at the end of the interview to Depesh, this is somebody we will be talking to annually I think because he is somebody who understands the market and how it's moving and which direction it's going. Very useful stuff. Without further ado, here is Depesh Mandalia.

James: Mark is well-known for his expertise in Facebook advertising, but guess what? He's not the only one around.

Depesh Mandalia has some major success stories with the ads platform behind him. Most intriguingly for us is his success with a children's book series, "Lost My Name." Depesh now works specifically with start-ups. I'm delighted to say he joins us now. Hello. Good morning.

Depesh: Good morning. How are you doing?

James: Yeah, this is pretty early for a podcast interview, so when you work in books and media, they start later quite often, but let's try and find the energy. Depesh, let's start with your approach.

YOU'VE DISCOVERED FACEBOOK ADS AS ALMOST CERTAINLY, IS IT NOT YOUR SINGLE TOOL YOU USE FOR ADVERTISING, BUT IT'S A MAJOR ONE FOR YOU?

Depesh: Yeah, absolutely. I first started working with Facebook ads in 2013 when the platform was in its infancy. It was quite far behind Google AdWords, and predominantly, I had worked through Google AdWords over the previous period. It wasn't an instant hit. It took a while to figure out how to get Facebook working for a previous business prior to joining Lost My Name, and even at Lost My Name it took a good 6-8 weeks of hacking and testing to actually find traction. Actually, after we found traction, we just put the foot on the accelerator, and it really took off.

James: Let's talk about Lost My Name.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE PROJECT FOR US? IT WAS QUITE A UNIQUE CHILDREN'S BOOK, ISN'T IT?

Depesh: Absolutely. The founders, one of the founders actually received a personalized book for his daughter. As he read through it, he just didn't feel wowed by it. It just felt so bland.

It was a typical story of a child's name being inserted as different kind of parts of the book in the placeholders. He got together with a few friends and said, "Look, we should be able to do something better than this." Actually, the core of the book that they developed as an idea was to take each letter of a child's name and create mini stories for each letter, so rather than putting "David" in different parts of the book, the book became completely about David.

If the story was David would wake up, he's forgotten his name, and he'd go on an adventure. Each character he meets along the way would give David part of the letter of his name. He might meet a dragon, an angel, a viking, etc., etc., and at the end of it, he's got all the letters for his name. It was quite a unique way of personalizing books, which had never been done before.

James: Right. It's a way that fits right into you know what's going to get a child excited, is going around discovering their name. Brilliant, brilliant idea. As we all know, having a good idea is only the start of it.

You came in and with no real confidence behind you about Facebook ads, you pressed ahead, and as you said, went through several weeks of perhaps not getting the results you wanted.

WHY DID YOU THINK IT WAS GOING TO WORK FOR YOU IN THE END?

Depesh: I think one of the key things, and one of the aspects that's often missed around developing a new product, is this whole theory of product-market fit. It's having a product that is viable to a consumer segment.

What Lost My Name had done previously, they'd launched a book in 2012. It was shoddy. It was hacked together. Over the next 12-18 months, they developed it with feedback from friends and family, predominantly. Actually, the end of 2013, they started selling through not on the high street as a reseller, and that was their first marketing traction point. At that point, the founders actually packed up their day jobs because this was a side project and went full-time into Lost My Name in 2014.

I joined in March to support with just trying to find growth. You know, there was no where to go for a specific channel. At that time, you know, my view was they'd obviously seen traction on not the high street, so there is a demand for it. The book had really positive feedback, so if we could just find the right consumer, we should be able to shift a few more books.

At that stage, we were spinning multiple blades, so we tried paid search, display ads, Facebook, and a few others. It's really a case of pushing all of them and seeing which ones would stick.

Ultimately, they all fell away except Facebook. To give you an example, Lost My Name actually started with Facebook advertising in October 2013, so it was a good 6 months prior to me joining that they'd already been running Facebook ads unsuccessfully, so I had something to work with.

What we found was that we weren't using the platform in the way the platform should be used. There were, being a new platform, there's a whole discovery phase of trying to figure out exactly how we should do our advertising. Once we got that in play, it was working on the communication part of it and getting the proposition right for the consumer. That's the thing that really helped us to gain traction.

James: Just to take it back a step, I mean, getting that fit and you're talking about matching the audience and the environment to the product, which obviously are a very important part of it.

WERE YOU GOING FROM MAILING LISTS AT THIS STAGE? WERE YOU USING A MAILING LIST TO BUILD THE SALES AROUND IT, OR WERE YOU DIRECT ADVERTISING?

Depesh: We were direct advertising. By that point, we'd already generated some sales. One of the key aspects of Facebook, which differentiates it from many other platforms, is you can take email lists, you can upload it into Facebook and find more similar audiences. We already had some sales, so we used that as an opportunity to find more people that were similar to the ones that had already bought the book. That definitely helped us to take a step forward.

Also, we were doing a lot of work around the interests targeting, so trying to understand our demographic and trying to find them by their profiles. One of the big key differentiators between Google AdWords and Facebook advertising is that Google AdWords predominantly relies on an intent, so "I want to buy a children's gift," "I want to buy a TV," etc., whereas Facebook is a step before that.

Someone may not actually be looking for something, but if they see something of interest, they may click through. I relate Facebook advertising to TV, where it's interrupting your media consumption and trying to target you with a relevant ad. Whereas with Facebook, the approach is similar, the level of targeting and tracking is, you know, 100x what you can do on TV. That creates a key differentiator for us, but we were

able to push the book in front of consumers before they would realize that they would be interested in this. Then that gave us a big step forward.

James: An important part, and they call it remarketing in AdWords, don't they, but the look-alike lists, I guess, is the method you're using in Facebook. Presumably you also did use the traditional targeting in Facebook.

WAS THAT WHAT YOU WERE STRUGGLING WITH, OR DID YOU START TO REFINE THAT AND FIND THE WAY OF REACHING THE AUDIENCE THROUGH JUST USING FACEBOOK TARGETING?

Depesh: It's a combination of all things, I think. You know, the work that Lost My Name were doing prior to me joining, they were looking at all the right areas within Facebook. It just wasn't done in the right way.

There's a technical aspect to Facebook that you absolutely need to get right, things like pixels on the site, how you're using those pixels, how the account is structured, how your bidding is set up, your optimization, etc.

There's a whole batch of technical things, which unless you get those things right, your creative efforts are not going to be as effective as they need to be. Really, my initial work was in fixing the technical aspects of the platform and then working on the communications and trying to get the proposition across to the right people. Really, once those two things came together, then it started to kick off for us.

James: Do you mind me asking how big this campaign was?

HOW MUCH MONEY WERE THEY PUTTING INTO IT? WHAT SORT OF RETURN LEVEL IN PERCENTAGE TERMS WERE THEY LOOKING FOR, WERE YOU EXPECTING? I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU KNEW, ACTUALLY, AT THIS POINT.

Depesh: Yeah, there's no expectations. When I joined, we were spending 3-4 grand a month and making that back roughly if not slightly less. You know, as a profit, there was no profit in that because we were not making our margin back on the sales.

At that point, it was a 0% ROI, and anything better than that was seen as a success for the business. To give you an idea, by May, we had hit 450% ROI in Facebook advertising, and our budget has gone 3, 4-

fold. We've managed to grow our spend as well as massively growing our return. That kind of level of ROI continues throughout 2014, which enabled us to just grow at a phenomenal pace.

James: That's the sort of ROI figures you really only hear talked about in social media advertising, particularly Facebook advertising. Then you funnelled, you shovelled the cash in when you hit the winning formula, which of course is usually the right way to do it. Doing it cautiously, of course, making sure that you're not having a drop-off of that ROI. That worked for you. It must have been a good feeling.

Depesh: Yeah, and I've worked with lots of start-ups that have a similar vision of starting small, pumping in their profits, and growing big. What I always say to start-ups of any size is don't spend money that you can't afford to lose.

If all you can afford is £20 a day or £10 a day, then that's fine; stick to that, but be prepared to lose it.

I've seen start-up after start-up that has taken anywhere between 4 and 12 weeks to find that traction point and hit profitability. A company I worked with at the early start of the year, they were making a beauty app. They had really small budgets. It took them 3 months to find traction.

Now they have hit some really decent sales figures but because their spend levels were so level, it took them far longer to make those learnings, which Lost My Name, we already had 6 months of data. Then it took, even then, it took another kind of 4-6 weeks to really find our sweet spot, by which point then we started to plow more money into it because we knew that we were able to create a return.

James: That's a really good point, that you do need to almost divide up your growth period, your start-up period, into this period where it is going to be an investment, it is going to be finding your way, and you may not see instant results.

People come to Mark quite a lot running their campaigns, and sometimes they're in day 2 saying, "Something's failed in my ad. I haven't had a single sign-up in 2 days." I'm thinking, "Well, in 5 weeks' time, when you've continued to tweak and find and modify and change things, if you're still panicking, then come back to us." You absolutely need to see it as an investment, I think you're right.

I want to talk about children's books just for a second because it's one of those areas, certainly among the SPF community, where the children's authors have had a tougher time than the romance authors, for instance, and the thriller authors in finding their audience on Facebook and making it work.

THIS IS A REALLY PHENOMENAL SUCCESS STORY WITH A CHILDREN'S BOOK.

Depesh: It's an interesting thing, that I've worked with other children's products as well. There's a huge demand for children's products in Facebook, and I think part of it is obviously finding the right audience, but it's creating the message that's going to cut through.

If you look at any of the Facebook case studies and videos and pieces that they've put together, they talk about thumb-stopping content. It's not just that you have to find the right person; it's creating something that's going to stop them scrolling past your ad in their newsfeed, so whether it's mobile or desktop, you need to disrupt that flow.

It could be in the way you develop your creative. It could be the copy. It could be a combination of both. That's one thing which I think a lot of advertisers failed to understand.

No one's on Facebook with the intent of looking for an ad and looking to buy. Some people are open to it. They're the people that you want to target. If you imagine in any given day, someone could see 5, 10, 15 different ads coming up in their newsfeed at different times of the day.

In the morning, you're on your commute into work, you're browsing Facebook. You've only got limited time. You're not really going to buy then. Maybe at lunchtime you've got a bit more time. Then in the evening time, you're a bit more relaxed, so you've got more time to kind of scroll through. One of the key things about how Facebook works is it targets you at specific times in the day, knowing what you do on Facebook.

If at every morning, it knows generally you login between, say, 7:30 and 8:30 on your commute in, it may just drop a few ads in at that moment in time. You may not interact, but you've seen it. What Facebook will then do is target you at the time of day that it knows you're more likely to interact, so it might come back at 6:00 and serve you another ad from the same advertiser and then prompt you to take that action, so whether it's a click, sign-up, or download.

What I've found again through lots of advertisers that they don't understand is the concept of keeping ads running and what letting the algorithm identify your key users and how they interact with ads as well. You know, some people, we had big success with our children's book with the 55+ market. I was at a conference 2 months ago on behalf of Facebook, and someone said to me, "Facebook's irrelevant for me because I have a 55+ market, and they're not on Facebook."

When *Lost My Name* launched into the US, our traction came through the 55+ market. The 25-45, which was our core in the UK, were really expensive and hard to reach in the US because the level of competition, but when we launched it to the grandparents in the US, you know, they've got the expandable income, and they're actually dwelling far longer. They're using Facebook far longer than their younger counterparts because they have a bit more time. I think part of it is understanding, although it may be a children's book, it's not just the parents that are buying them.

This is one of the interesting insights we had at *Lost My Name*. After surveying the customers that we had, it's just a simple question of, "Why are you buying this book? Who's it for?" We went into advertising thinking that we're targeting parents, and we came out of it realizing it's actually the gifters that we're after because it's a personalized book. It's such a nice keepsake. It was a gifting market that we had to target.

One of the interesting stories was that one of the ads was, in particular, performing well and outperforming other ads. Actually, it was badly written. It was a very grainy picture of the book. It was written kind of with emoticons, and it just didn't feel like it was representing the product in the right way.

Coming in as a marketer, what I tried to do was to create ads that would challenge that but using kind of marketing best practice, so shorter copy, using more kind of persuasive copy, and using better, professionally-shot photography as well.

What we found over a period of 4-6 weeks, was that the ads that we would put up would continuously fail to beat the existing ad. When we went through it and we looked at it in context, one of the key things that we realized was that when you're in the Facebook newsfeed and you look at your friends' updates, they're updating photography from their phone, videos from their phone, which might be shaky, and copy which may have spelling mistakes or otherwise.

When you then present an ad in that newsfeed which is entirely professional and well-written, it stands out. It stands out like a sore thumb. That's a bad thing. If anything does look out of place when you're in your kind of browse mode, then people will ignore it. That's something that we found quite early on.

We went back to the drawing board to re-work the copy to make it a lot more natural, make it more conversational, and we actually re-worked the photography in terms of making it fit in with your kind of newsfeed updates. Rather than trying to stage professional shots, we were selecting shots which felt almost like customers had submitted them. They started to create more traction for us. That continues through 2014 of using as natural photography as we could find and copy which felt conversational and friendly. That was kind of our first cut-through.

Going into 2015, by that point, we had caught the eye of Facebook. They invited us into a creative workshop at their head office to talk about how we could take a step up in creative thinking. At that point, both myself and the creative team were quite apprehensive. We thought that, while we get this, we get this better than Facebook do, and we just went into that with no expectations. What we came out with was a whole new way of thinking about how we sell the products.

What we'd previously been doing was selling the book as a great personalized book and as a great personalized gift. In reality, we were missing out the core proponent of what the book was about, which was about the child and the personalization of the child's name.

One of the creative ideas that came out was pulling out a creative which showed the child's name, so "David," D-A-V-I-D, the characters that child would meet in the creative, so the D would have a dragon next to it, the A would have an angel, for example, and actually creating a copy around David meets a dragon, an angel, a viking, etc., etc. Who will your child meet on your adventure?

What we found was that really created a big, big cut-through beyond trying to sell a book to trying to sell the magic behind the book. The analogy I use here is of focusing on the sizzle over the sausage. The example that we used and referenced at the time was someone like M&S.

M&S sell salmon, but the quality is not that different to what Sainsbury's sell, but the way that M&S

package its up is all about the quality. The ads talk about how the salmon has been caught and how it's been processed and developed. It actually makes it feel a lot more enticing than just buying salmon, which a lot of companies would be selling.

That's where we started to focus on our sizzle, which was this wow moment of the child discovering that the book was about them. That's really what helped us to take another level up in terms of a creative message which from the photography disrupted the users' flow through their newsfeed, got them interested in the ad, and the copy which created intrigue and got people to click to the site.

That intrigue and curiosity really helps to get them off the Facebook platform and onto your website to find out more.

James: That's really interesting, Depesh. I love hearing valuable information like that, where you know there's thousands of dollars have gone into getting to that point of understanding it. That again is quite, once you say it, intuitive, but you wouldn't necessarily guess that your advertising in the timeline is essentially a user-generated content area, isn't it?

It's people with their thoughts and their sometimes ramblings and their amateur photographs. I did see an advert the other day. We're doing a YouTube ads course, which I'll come onto in a moment, and I just went online to get an example of an in-display ad. It's from Goldman Sachs. It had a very generic headline. As an in-display advert, you're expecting somebody to be drawn to your advert and click on it, make an option to see it. It's not even in-stream. It doesn't even start playing.

You know, I could look at that and just know there's nobody is going to be drawn to clicking on that advert. It spoke to nobody specifically. I don't really know what was the thinking behind it, but in the YouTube environment, again, completely user-generated, very scrappy video a lot of the time. It stood out like a sore thumb. Trying to understand your context, obviously, is an important first step.

WHAT AN IMPORTANT WAY OF LEARNING THAT THROUGH THAT CAMPAIGN, A USEFUL WAY OF LEARNING THAT THROUGH THAT CAMPAIGN.

Depesh: Absolutely. I think that's the old school of marketing. It was, we can't identify a customer too well, and we'll just send out a set of broad ads and see which one performs.

In 2016, there's no excuse for not drilling down to creating a better understanding of your customer and based on the platform they're on. YouTube, you can do your demographic targeting. You can do your interest targeting. There's no excuse now not to be using things like that. It's a combination of lazy marketing and a lack of expertise, I think.

James: You had great success with the children's book, and that's going to be heartening, certainly, to hear, and very useful to make that discovery that with children's books the gift market is probably going to be more successful for you than advertising directly to parents.

You then have moved on to quite a few other start-ups. You've become a bit of a guru in the industry in this area.

Do you find that you can apply the same techniques, or is bespoke to each place you go to, you have kind of relearn and think how the environment's going to work specifically for that product?

PERHAPS YOU COULD LET US KNOW WHAT OTHER PRODUCTS YOU'VE WORKED ON.

Depesh: That's an interesting one. I'd love to be able to blueprint this and just give it to everyone to work on, but there are two sides of it. The technical part, you can blueprint, and I've already got templates and kind of share those with start-ups.

The marketing part, the creative communications part, is so specific per sector and per company. It takes time to identify the audiences and find that traction point. Generally there are a few approaches.

If you've got existing emails, then lookalike targeting is the absolute first thing you should start on with Facebook. Then identifying those interests can help to identify your audiences and grow quicker.

Probably the last 12 months, I've worked with software companies, I've worked with a beauty start-up, I've worked kind of a few different publishing companies. Also most recently with Pact Coffee. What I found is finding the target market is the most difficult thing.

When you do then find them, it's how do you manage your costs and increase your click-through rate to make it profitable? Step one is finding the audience, and that's not always easy. Then finding profitable audiences. That's the panacea. If you can find the profitable audience, then you can scale that, and that makes all the difference.

You know, to give you a few ideas of different ways of approaching this, there's a methodology called net promoter score. Net promoter score is a way of you as a company judging how many of your customers would recommend you as a business to friends and family. You'd run a net promoter score, customers would rate your business between 0 and 10. Those rating 9 or 10 are your promoters.

Those rating between 0 and 6 are detractors. Anywhere in between that are kind of on the fence. Then you'd weigh out the score of the percentage who are your promoters minus the percentage of detractors. That gives you a real strong gauge of how well your product is performing.

For me, I've worked with maybe 10, 15 or more different start-ups, and there's a high correlation between the NPS score and how well that product is going to sell.

To give you an example, I think Amazon, their net promoter score is 40 on a scale of -100 and +100. You know, Amazon, if you look at it from the outside, they're a hugely successful company, but they're not the best in terms of kind of customer experience.

Lost My Name, we index far higher than that. I can't give the exact numbers, but it's one of the highest NPS ratings I've ever seen. I don't want to use the word "easy," but how easy it was for us to cut through in terms of marketing. We knew that we had an absolutely great product and a great experience.

Don't discount the experience in actually buying the product. That's your website, that's your emails followed up, it's your FAQs, etc. I worked with a start-up a few years ago, their NPS was I think -80, so that's the worst NPS I've seen. Actually, as much as we tried to market the product, just people weren't interested. It just wasn't a great product.

Now, leading on from that, what I've found is those start-ups that have a higher NPS score, it's far easier

to market them in Facebook. You know, it's not all about the platform. It's not all about you can take any product on there and sell anything. You can't. The product has to be really good.

That's something we try to focus on with start-ups, which is get your product and your product experiences as good as you can get it, and then we can scale the marketing, and then you will scale sales.

If you're looking at selling a book, you need to think more than just the book; it's the whole buying experience. What does the site tell you about the book, the author, the background? How much can you wrap into that sales process emotionally and build up social proof? You know, reviews of the book, independent reviews from book shops or reviewers, etc., etc. They all make a huge difference.

It's thinking beyond just selling your product on a platform but thinking about selling your product with an experience. I think that's one of the things that many start-ups fail to acknowledge early on.

James: Tell me again how you actually, the mechanics of getting the NPS score.

IS THIS SOMETHING DONE PROFESSIONALLY THROUGH A SURVEY COMPANY, OR IS THIS SOMETHING THAT SOMEBODY WITH THEIR OWN BOOKS COULD DO, COULD REPLICATE TO GET AN NPS?

Depesh: I do this myself. There are tools available. One that I often recommend to companies is a tool called delighted.com.

You take your email list, you upload it into Delighted. Delighted then fires out the emails, and it also collects the results back. It will give you everything within the platform. You don't need a tool. You can do it yourself.

You could use a Typeform survey, for example, which will allow you to create a survey for free. You can email that to your customers, and it simply needs to be one question of, "Would you recommend this product or service to friends and family?" A rating from 0-10. If you look up NPS calculations, it will show you how to calculate your NPS, so you can do it yourself. Tools like Delighted, I think they charge something like \$99 a month, and so it really depends on what your budget is.

Essentially, what you want to do is do this on a regular basis and actually continue to gather that feedback over time. For example, if you're launching new products over a period of months, that NPS score is sensitive to your products at that moment in time. That gives you an ongoing benchmark of how your customers perceive your products or service, as well.

James: That could be really useful.

DEPESH, ARE YOU USING A LOT OF OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AT THE MOMENT, OR ARE YOU THE FACEBOOK ADS MAN?

Depesh: I try not to be tied on or be too kind of dependent on a single platform. Others that I've started working on more recently; Instagram really took off for Lost My Name last year. Instagram was really, really working well for us.

I've seen other brands working really well. Really, where Instagram differentiates itself as a platform from Facebook, although the targeting, the ad setup is exactly the same as Facebook. Where I mentioned that the Facebook creative should be a bit low-fi, actually the inverse works better on Instagram. Actually, the Instagram user is used to seeing really good, crisp clean photography, and that's what works really well on Instagram.

Pact Coffee, recently, really nice enticing shots of coffee being brewed in the espresso machine or using the kind of pour-over brew method and kind of creating small videos and really making it feel like you can almost smell that coffee. That kind of creative works really well on Instagram.

For Lost My Name also we were one of the first, in fact, we may have been one of the very few UK clients to be on the Pinterest platform in the US last year. Again, we saw some real traction there. It took me a while to understand Pinterest. You know, I'm not the target market. At the time that I was doing some testing, we were actually looking to renovate part of our house, the kids room, etc. Pinterest is great for coming up with new ideas. You want ideas for children's décor or birthday parties, etc., etc., that's a key reason why people use Pinterest.

What we found, again, was that the gifting market has so much at the center on Pinterest as well, so people planning kids' parties, they want birthday parties, etc., etc. We saw that traction coming through Pinterest in the US last year, and in the UK, they launched I think in March or April. You know, I've seen companies

pick up traction there as well.

James: Are you using Twitter or YouTube?

Depesh: I've used Twitter in the past; I'm yet to see anything in terms of scalable success. I've seen small success around lead generation, so pushing Twitter ads in order to capture email addresses. That generally seems to work well.

I'm yet to see an example of an e-commerce company that are selling a product that are able to make money. Really, where Twitter and actually LinkedIn work really well is lead generation. For example, software companies, so if you're looking to get people to subscribe to your software service, you can offer free downloads, white papers, etc. in exchange for an email address. Then you start your marketing communication around that. Twitter has been quite limited in terms of direct sales.

YouTube has been really good as a supporting channel for others. For example, in Q4 last year, at Lost My Name, we started to use YouTube to broaden our marketing to attract more people to the site. They weren't directly buying from the YouTube ad, but what we were doing was filling our pot up of customers visiting the site so that we could retarget to more people through Facebook and other channels as well. YouTube, you know, we ran that alongside TV advertising at that point, and it really helped to amplify what we were doing.

James: Okay, Depesh, it's been absolutely brilliant talking to you. I feel guilty with taking the time of one of the world's busiest men. I should say I am a customer of yours inadvertently because before we'd even come across each other's radar, I was a Pact Coffee customer as a result of a Facebook advert.

Depesh: Nice.

James: I remain very happy with it. Obviously, your targeting works in that way. I think I'm going to ask you a final question, which is, I mean, for our audience, I think there's been a lot of very useful stuff, particularly at the beginning talking about having patience during the investment phase and seeing that initial money going into adverts as an investment in the future, not necessarily something that you're going

to get immediately back in terms of sales. That doesn't necessarily fall intuitively to someone who's not really done marketing before, and self-publishers are generally that person, so they're suddenly having to find themselves doing a marketing job alongside their writing job.

Going forward, what would you say, then, if you start to find your campaigns working and you need to move up to the next level? You somehow want to quit your job, start to get the kind of income in that's going to mean that this is a business that's going to grow and potentially make you wealthier than you were even working in your 9-5.

WHAT ARE THE KEY THINGS YOU'RE ADVISING YOUR START-UPS AT THAT PHASE HAVING GOT THINGS INITIALLY GOING? IS THERE A SPECIFIC TACTICAL MOVE HERE?

Depesh: I kind of relate it, again, back to Lost My Name. It's to be cautious with your growth. We were cautious right from the beginning of. We had an additional budget we could have thrown in the early stages, but we wanted to do it in a measured way. As we put more investment into the platform, we wanted to make sure that we were continuing to see returns, everything was still working as it needed to be.

Now, actually, if you fast-forward from the early success into 2015, I think at Lost My Name, we entered a period of hubris where we just thought, "You know what? We're on top of Facebook. Nothing could go wrong." We got to a phase of scaling our spend so much that actually we weren't keeping track or keeping close track of our more detailed performance metrics.

Things started to unravel. We were over-reaching to our customers. You know, there's only a finite number of people on Facebook within your selected targeting, and we started to find that we were actually spamming customers. We were hitting them far too many times with ads, and we got to a point where we were actually annoying far more people than was comfortable for business. We actually started to regress in our performance.

I think part of this is growing in a mindful way, of looking at the budget you're putting in, the kind of ROI figures that you've been used to, and knowing what your tolerances are. Having a 450% ROI forever is never going to happen. You'll soon start to saturate.

At Lost My Name, about 12-13 months, to saturate, and we had to reinvent our audience targeting, which

we did, and we started to go global, US, Europe, and further afield. You know, at that point, our confidence had reached such a peak that we just thought that nothing could go wrong.

Many things can go wrong. Facebook are constantly updating their platform. New advertisers are always coming onto the platform. You'll always find that someone's plowing in far too much money and making losses.

To give you an example, around March/April time, every year, it seems like big, big advertisers, you know, those guys that are spending anywhere between 1 and 5 million a month, are plowing budget into platforms like Facebook because it's the end of the financial year. They need to get rid of that budget. Otherwise, they're going to lose it, and they're just plowing it in. The knock-on effect for small advertisers is that your cost is then going to shoot up because the cost of bidding is therefore higher with more money flying around.

Sometimes, you have to ride the wave. I've done this with many companies where you do see these fluctuations of performance that's going really well, and then something just goes wrong; you can't explain it. Sometimes you still don't know what went wrong, but 2 or 3 weeks later, your performance has recovered again. It could be a Facebook change, it could be an external advertiser that's just knocked everyone out of the market.

Part of it is I think just being a bit measured in terms of your growth and not expecting that yesterday's or last week's success is going to continue forever because generally it doesn't.

James: We definitely noticed that. I think our Facebook forums were full of people in the spring saying that suddenly their campaigns weren't effective and weren't working. I don't know how others are feeling now.

We're sitting recording this in July. We are seeing some of the best results we've had for the last 12 months at the moment. I mean, leads for our main course that we were picking up for £3.50 we're now picking up for £1.40, and our new course for £.20 and £.30 on occasions.

I DON'T KNOW IF THE BIG ADVERTISERS HAVE ALL STEPPED BACK FOR A LITTLE BIT AND LET US PLAY, BUT PERSONALLY WE'RE SEEING FANTASTIC RESULTS.

Depesh: There's also another thing at play around the summer in particular is that e-commerce in general takes a slight dip. Lots of people go on holiday, people are home with their children, or work situations change.

Then e-commerce strategies to pick up traction again in September. Then obviously you've got Christmas picking up as well. Summer can be at times bad for some aspects in terms of e-commerce but a lot better for others in terms of kind of non-direct sales companies as well.

James: The other thing we shouldn't forget, you talk about the dynamic environment and some of the negatives for that, but one of the positives of the dynamic environment is that people are joining social media all the time.

Depesh: That's right.

James: Anybody who says my demographic like the older demographic is not there, wait a few months, because I mean, literally, that's how quickly it's happening. My father's 82. He joined Facebook 3 or 4 months ago.

HE WILL BE ONE OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN HIS AGE BRACKET WHO EVENTUALLY RELENTED AS HE'LL PROBABLY SAY.

Depesh: That's right. There's a really interesting piece I saw on this on this whole Pokemon Go phenomenon, that actually when they profiled the demographic, I think about 5% of those used in the Pokemon Go game were over 55.

You should avoid assumptions when it comes to customer marketing and look at the data, look for the facts. Quite often, you will be surprised.

James: That's fantastic. Depeche, thank you so much for joining us. Very, very valuable stuff. I can guarantee that we'll be knocking on your door again probably next year to catch up with you and find out the state of play with social media advertising because it's been I think a very valuable interview for me and for our guests. Thank you so much for joining us, Depeche.

Depesh: Thank you for having me. I appreciate that and, yeah, I look forward to chatting again soon.

James: I told you Depesh was worth listening to. A really useful guy. Interesting talking about the seasonal differences, Mark, because here we are in summer, and we have certainly noticed, you and I both running different campaigns. We're getting really good results at the moment.

I remember earlier in the year on our Facebook, on the self-publishing formula Facebook site, a lot of people weighing in about the same time a little bit dismayed that suddenly they were getting poor results, their leads were costing them quite a lot. Views and clicks were costing them quite a lot.

As Depesh points out, it's the running up to April in particular, the end of the financial year, the big corporates, the big organizations, will funnel money into advertising. Again, running up to Thanksgiving and Christmas. In the summer, they tend to do their least. I know we all want to go on holiday at this point, but really it's a time that you should be getting some good results and putting some money into advertising. We've noticed that, haven't we?

Mark: We have. I mentioned this a couple weeks ago. We've been getting leads for the self-publishing formula, the non-fiction side of the business, that were costing between 2.50 and 3.50, but after 6 months, they're now costing around about a dollar. They're ticking up a little bit as I'm churning through the audiences, but certainly between, say, \$.80 and a \$1, which is really, really good. We're spending quite heavily at the moment.

James: Depesh would say, as somebody is moving with the times, he's keeping an eye on the audiences. We talked a little bit in the interview, didn't we, about the population's changing, so when you think, "Oh, well, that particular social media platform is no good for me," you should remember that tens of thousands of people are joining it every day, and demographics are getting older on the younger platforms, and probably vice versa as well.

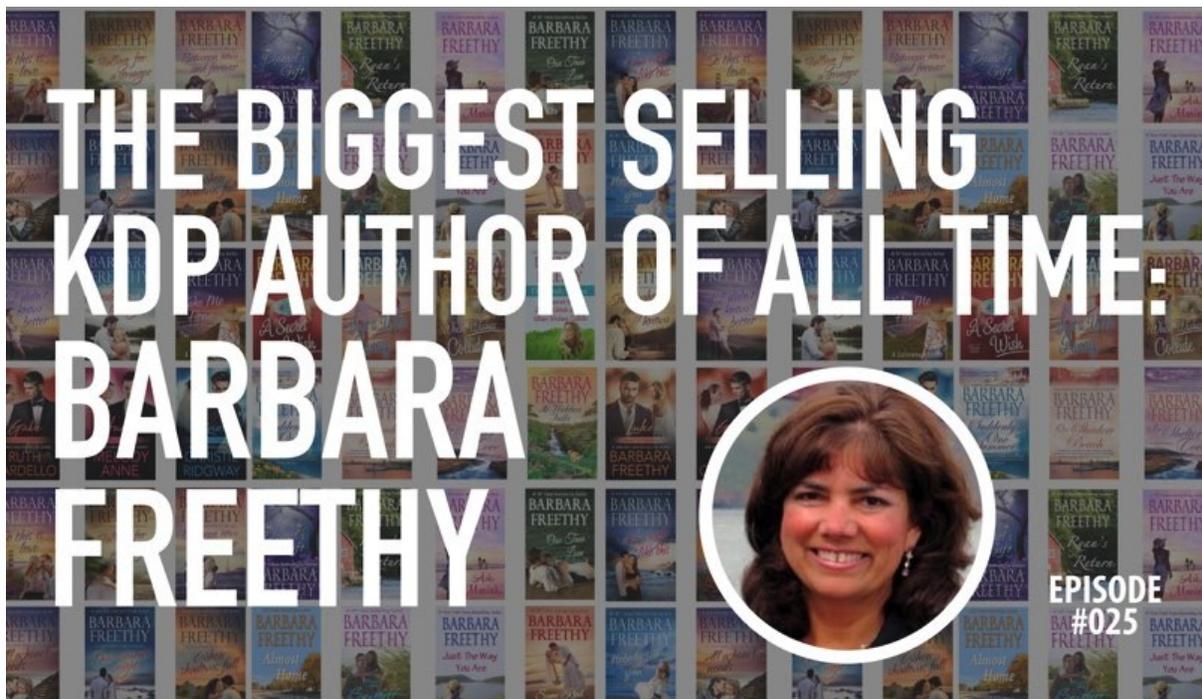
I hope that was valuable. I'm sure it was valuable if you're doing any social media advertising at all. If you want to email us, you can always email us, podcast@selfpublishingformula.com. If you're not already a member of our Facebook community, just drop us a line at that email address or support@selfpublishingformula.com, and we will send you an invite to join our Facebook group. You can

get all our podcasts going back ad infinitum at selfpublishingformula.com. Thank you very much indeed for listening. We will be back next week. Have a good week's writing.

Mark: Bye-bye.

CHAPTER 22

THE BIGGEST SELLING KDP AUTHOR OF ALL TIME - WITH BARBARA FREETHY



SELF-PUBLISHING IS what we're all about here at SPF.

And that's because it often makes more sense than traditional publishing. In fact, self-publishing is very much a response to the limitations of traditional publishing. Today's guest, Barbara Freethy, was already an established traditionally published author when she dipped her toe into the self publishing waters by independently releasing some of her backlist. The success she found motivated her to go full steam ahead as an indie. You'll hear Barbara's story and her tips for success in this episode.

THE LESS CONTROL YOU HAVE OVER SOMETHING THE LESS OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE TO FIX IT

Barbara is the highest selling self published author ever. What she's come to believe after seeing both sides of the coin is that the less control an author has over their publication process, the less opportunity

they have to fix it. For her, self-publishing provided the opportunity to avoid the problems that were out of her hands as a traditionally published author. Now she enjoys the freedom and increased income of being an indie. Find out how Barbara systematizes her publication process in this episode.

YOU NEVER REALLY KNOW WHERE YOUR READERS ARE.

Barbara doesn't assume anything about where she will find her readers or how they will want to consume her content. She's makes her work as widely available as possible and ensures that her readers can get her books however they prefer. You'll hear many more of Barbara's insights from a career that spans both traditional and self publishing.

THE MORE YOU'RE INVOLVED IN YOUR OWN E-PUBLISHING CAREER, THE BETTER YOU WILL DO.

There are many services and contractors out there who can help indies accomplish the tasks that need to be undertaken to get their books published and promoted. Barbara has come to believe that the more she is involved in the various aspects of her publishing career, the more success is going to come her way. That's because nobody cares more about her books and how well they succeed than she does. And the more she understands about every aspect of the process the better she can guide those she does bring alongside to help her with the business. Tune in to find out how Barbara suggests you go about learning the various skills needed to self publish successfully.

FEAR IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM FOR WRITERS.

Though she's been tremendously successful Barbara believes that every writer - even the Stephen Kings of the world - still have a certain amount of fear that accompanies them as they pursue writing and publication. Will the readers enjoy the book? Will it be good enough to attract an audience? Will she be able to maintain her pace to continue producing books for her fans? These fears have to be faced and dealt with repeatedly and in today's episode she chats about her approach to killing the fear and how those pursuing a career in self-publishing can do the same.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode.
- Mark's recent BookBub promotion.
- Mark's experience with BookBub Ads.
- Introduction of this episode's guest: Barbara Freethy.
- Barbara's experience with traditional publishing and the transition to Indie Publishing.
- The rocky road Barbara experience in traditional publishing.
- The difference in income between traditional publishing and Indie publishing.

- How Barbara discovered she enjoyed the entrepreneur side of Indie publishing.
- How Barbara began getting her email list established.
- The way Barbara approaches giveaways for promotional purposes.
- How learning the business side of self publishing makes you a better writer.
- The team Barbara has to help with her business.
- The reader relationships Barbara builds to foster her audience.
- How Barbara's relationship with fans has impacted her writing.
- Barbara's approach to writing productivity.
- Not a lot of advanced planning for her stories.
- Barbara's advice to new authors.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.barbarafreethy.com
- [Smashwords Guide to Self Publishing](#)
- [ConvertKit](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA FREETHY

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 25 from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best-seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Now we've reached a quarter of a century.

Mark: My goodness, that's amazing. How did that happen?

James: I don't know. It's like 50 home runs in a season. Something like that, waving your bat for a quarter of a century. Even in Cricket, which people don't understand outside England and the Commonwealth, we don't even celebrate 25, but we're going to celebrate it today. It's been a blast. We're enjoying it.

We've had some great guests on. Every single podcast has been a good learning experience. I thought

Depesh was great last week. Somebody who, obviously is a professional in the sense that we always say, "You should be professional and aim for high standards," but the truth is, we're at home running our businesses doing what we think is right.

This guy, Depesh, he goes into companies that have millions of pounds, millions of dollars invested in them. He sits there and he takes over the advertising campaign on social media and he's helped launch and make hugely successful quite a few companies.

I thought it really interesting hearing from him. That hot tip about advertising in the summer, right now, being a good piece. It does fluctuate, of course, through those weeks, but as we mentioned last week, we've definitely picked up some good bargains and bids online. Mark, talking of doing stuff online and getting some bargains, you've had a BookBub.

Mark: I did, yes. It's always interesting when you get a BookBub. I've had I don't know how many now, certainly double figures, maybe 15 or 20 over the course of the last 3 or 4 years. If you take time to look on the usual forums, they're often posts that suggests that BookBub ads are less effective now than they were. To an extent, that's probably true.

When I started doing them, they probably returned slightly more in terms of the return on investment, but even saying that, they're still easily the most powerful form of advertising outside of social media advertising that you can have.

I had a deal for the first John Milton box set that went out and sold something like 5,000 copies on Amazon at \$.99 so that's 35% royalties, so not a huge amount of money, but still with everything combined was more than enough to make it a positive return on the cost of the advert.

The effect on rankings was very impressive. It got to number 11 overall in the amazon.com store, and a similar kind of level over here at Amazon UK, and also did really, really well on all of the other platforms. Nearly 1,000 copies sold on Barnes and Noble. I think 700 on Kobo, something similar on Apple.

I'm not a big one for checking the best-seller list, but I'm almost certain that that would have hit the USA Today best-seller list somewhere within the top 100. It's not impossible that it might have hit the New York Times list as well. That's a pretty good testimony for how powerful BookBub ads still are today.

James: Powerful in that sense that although you may have only made a couple of thousand bucks on the direct ad, the visibility you gained from it was even more hugely valuable.

Mark: Yeah, and there were other benefits too, of course. I had a big spike in sign-ups to my mailing list since that deal has run. Because I've got an offering at the back of the book; it's a 3-book set so it will take people a little while to get through those books, but I've already seen a spike in sales of the second book set.

That's something that I'd expect to see continue over the next few months because at the end of the day, there's, almost certainly, new readers that they probably haven't bought a John Milton book before because why would they have bought the boxed set.

That just means that provided the writing holds up and my click through rates seem to be pretty good, that should mean once they get to the end of the third book on the boxed set, they'll be looking for the second boxed set with their next 3 books and then the next 3 books after that.

What, hopefully, will happen is that that will continue the production line of new readers who'll chew through the rest of the series, then onto my other series too.

James: BookBub's still alive and kicking. Just a quick word on the BookBub ads. Have you been using that more since we first spoke to BookBub? I know you're one of the beta testers of that.

Mark: I have, yeah. I'm kind of winding them down a bit now. The thing with BookBub ads is they're very powerful to start with when you're fresh, but you will chew through the audience a lot quicker than you would say for Facebook. Facebook is obviously a vast platform compared to BookBub. My experience so far is that you'll get a really excellent return on investment for the first couple of weeks and then it will start to tick down.

What needs to happen when that takes place, is you've just got to think, "Okay their ad is probably a little bit stale now. It's time to either change up the ad, offer something else, or wait until you've got something else to sell and then go back and advertise it again."

My experience so far has been very positive with those ads. It's a platform that clearly works. People who suggested that seeing those ads at the bottom of the daily may not want lead-to clicks. They're wrong because it certainly does and I've made a decent amount of money on those ads.

James: Good. Fresh projects works best in that environment.

Mark: Absolutely, yep.

James: Talking of best-sellers, how excited are we? We have, probably, the biggest Indie author that we've ever had on the Self-publishing Formula Podcast, an absolute giant, in fact a legend of this parish. Somebody who'd dominated with her books and we're very, very excited aren't we, to have Barbara Freethy?

Mark: Yeah, Barbara's been a really massive seller for a long time now. Very, very experienced author who's done everything really. We are thrilled that she was prepared to take time out of her schedule to talk with you, James. This is going to be an interview I think will be of a lot of interest to everybody.

James: Barbara Freethy is one of the best-selling Indie authors on the planet. She's had 18 of her books on the best-seller's list. She's sold millions of novels. In fact, Barbara is the Amazon KDP best-selling author of all time. She writes romance and after a pretty decent traditionally published career in 2011, she moved into self-publishing. I think it's fair to say, Barbara, you haven't looked back?

Barbara: I have not looked back that's for sure.

James: Tell us a little bit about that start.

JUST BEFORE 2011 THEN, YOU'RE TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED. YOU WENT THROUGH A COUPLE OF PUBLISHERS I THINK?

Barbara: Yes, I actually worked for 4 out of the big 5 traditional publishers over, across many years. Certainly had my ups and downs in my traditional publishing career. I had moments of almost greatness, and then lot of mediocrity. I definitely saw the peaks and the valleys of that path to publishing. I was working with Pocketbooks back in 2010, 2011 when the eBook revolution sort of began.

I decided I had actually gotten some rights back to some of my earlier, traditionally published books, and I decided that I would start self-publishing some of those books. It was a definitely a lot harder back then. There was just very little information about how to do anything. I was looking, scouring the internet for any kind of how-to guide.

I think I read the Smashwords Guide, which was one of the first ones that was available. Then I took some Photoshop tutorials so I could learn how to make a cover, and learned how to make an eBook, and learned what DRM meant, kind of all the little things that really weren't being talked about back in the day. It was kind of a scary, new adventure to begin, but it was also very exciting.

James: What went wrong with the traditionally published career then?

YOU SAY YOU HAD A ROCKY TIME, WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS?

Barbara: You know, in publishing there's always little things called glitches. That's kind of a popular term in traditional publishing. I was publishing right along but one of my last books had a distribution glitch, as they called it, in that it didn't get into one of the major retail chains the first 2 weeks of release.

I knew that that was going to be a huge issue because whenever you have a problem like that, when they try to sell in your next book, like 6 to 9 months later, no one remembers that there was a glitch, only they look at the sales figures and say, "Well, you know, she didn't sell very many books those first 2 weeks." I knew that that was going to be an issue going forward.

Quite frankly, I was very motivated by my own financial needs, as probably a lot of people are. I had 2 kids in college. It was very expensive and I thought things were a little bit rocky and I really needed to take charge of my career. I had some great publishers and worked with some great editors.

I know that some of these things are sometimes truly errors and glitches. Nobody's particularly responsible or maliciously trying to hurt your career or anything like that, but things happen. The less control you have over something, the less opportunity you have to fix it.

Back in the day, there was no opportunity to fix anything so if there was a glitch, I couldn't do anything about it. I was really paralyzed. I had no opportunity to speak with any of the retailers or distributors. When you work with a traditional publisher, you really can only talk to your editor, and you have to rely on everyone else in the house to do everything for you.

If your branding is off or pricing is off, or anything is off, you just don't have the control over it.

James: Frustrating. It's amazing how many authors, traditionally published authors, will just deal with that frustration that whole time. For you, you got to a point, I guess you got to the end of a deal or you at least had some commercial, some legal freedom to move into self-publishing and took your chance.

Barbara: As I said, I did start with some back-list books because I was, I guess, hybrid for a year or so back then. I had another book to write and to put out on my contract so I did that and met all my obligations with the options books but the first book that I put out as a self-published book was called Summer Secrets. It was a slow go. I think sometimes people think that everybody takes a rocket ship to the top really fast.

It wasn't that fast for me. It was a couple months. I was kind of looking at that title and I had, I think, 2 other titles up as well. Not much was happening. For me it actually started to take off first on Barnes & Noble surprisingly, not Amazon.

You never know where your readers are. That's something I really like to tell authors that you never know where you're going to kind of get your start. For me, it kind of started there. Then, for some reason, then Amazon started to pick up a little bit after that. That book ended up hitting number 1 on the New York Times. It was the first time an Indie book had ever hit the New York Times, much less get number 1 on the Times.

It was, I tell you, very shocking to my publishing house. They didn't know what to say to me. They were stunned. They were not happy. I remember asking, "Can we put this on my next traditionally published book?" I had one more to come out. They said, "We'll see." They just didn't understand it.

In fact, I think the New York Times attributed the success to my former publisher, who had originally owned the rights because they didn't know how to put a self-published author's name in that slot. It was really kind of ground-breaking and fun.

I think because I had that opportunity, I was playing around with it while I was still traditionally published. In some ways, that slowed me down because it kept me from kind of really going fast because I still had all these obligations to meet. Then once I was finally free of those, I could really concentrate on the self-publishing side.

James: What an amazing moment in history of self-publishing. Almost the moment Titanic struck the iceberg and all standing around convincing each other the boat can't sink.

Barbara: One of the publishing vice-presidents I think was talking to me and he said, "Well, why didn't you give us that book to publish?" I was like, "I tried to give you that book. I tried to sell that book." Back in the day, back-list books had absolutely no merit or value to a traditional publisher. They had nothing to do with it.

It was kind of funny and it was ironic a little bit that I had originally gotten my rights back because I thought I could sell them to someone else, but I couldn't sell them to someone else. Fortunately I was able to take advantage of that revolution as it was beginning.

James: Let's mention money because you mentioned it yourself that it was one of the motivating factors for you.

YOU WOULD HAVE NOTICED STRAIGHT AWAY, I'M GUESSING, WITH THAT BOOK THE DIFFERENCE IN REVENUE EARNED FROM A TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED BOOK TO A SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK.

Barbara: Oh, absolutely. It was very shocking. It was night and day. I'll tell you when I originally started, I

was not a full-time writer. I actually had a little side-job going to bring money in to help pay for our expenses. My first goal was just to be able to make enough to get rid of that other side job. That was ... I didn't have super high ambitions at that point. I just thought, "Oh, I can just bring in a little extra money."

I remember when I first started realizing what 70% was compared to what I was making on the traditional deal which was the 25% of the 70%. Then paying an agent because, of course I had an agent because I was working on traditional so there's just no comparison to the money. I didn't have to even sell as many books to make more than I was making. That was kind of a shocker there.

James: Today, you move in circles which would include lot of traditionally published authors. You've won fairly prestigious awards. Awards that include traditionally published authors.

DO YOU HAVE THAT CONVERSATION WITH PEOPLE WHO'VE EXCITEDLY JUST SIGNED A 3-BOOK DEAL WITH WHOEVER AND YOU QUIETLY THINK TO YOURSELF, "IS THAT THE RIGHT MOVE FOR YOU?"

Barbara: I try not to judge because I know that everyone has their own path and they have to make their own decisions. I understand that for a lot of people, the lure of traditional publishing is very powerful. They really want to see their book on a bookstore shelf and they feel that that's the way to get to that shelf. It really isn't as much anymore because the traditionally publishers can't put everybody on the shelf.

Shelf space has diminished, so it's really difficult even if you do sign an traditional deal to get what you think you're going to get. I think there's also a myth that you're going to get a lot of marketing and they're going to do a lot for you. That's not really true either unless you're really at the top of the pile.

Publishing has itself from the top down, so if you're in the top 5 authors that they have on their list that month, then you're going to get marketing, but generally speaking, those new authors are much, much further down the list. Unless you have a really big advance, which means they've invested in you, you're really not going to get that much from your publishing experience.

I do talk to a lot of people and I do understand sometimes why people make decisions they make. A lot of people want to hedge their bets. I have many traditionally published friends who have taken a long time to decide whether they even wanted to Indie publish as a hybrid. I have a popular saying that I said to them is that, "You can't swim across the pool if you don't let go of the wall."

That's what a lot of people do. They've got their hand on the wall so they stay. They're kind of hedging their bets both ways, but it's really, really hard to see how successful you can be unless you commit to it. I know a lot of traditional authors will say, "Well, I'm just going to write a novella and test the waters."

It's just never a good test because if you're somebody who writes full-length books, traditionally, just throwing a novella into the Indie waters is not going to tell you anything. I think it's definitely a hard decision for people to make, and there's a lot of reasons to do whatever path people want to do.

I totally understand sometimes financial needs are demanding. There's a lot of people who are addicted to that advance. That's how they plan their financial future and so it's really hard to give that sure money up for an unsure thing. The risk versus the reward, and you know the reward is just huge on the Indie side of publishing.

James: Huge, but hugely satisfying as well.

JUST BY THE FACT THAT YOU WERE SO FRUSTRATED OF NOT HAVING CONTROL THAT YOU MUST BE SOMEBODY WHO'S ENORMOUSLY ENJOYED TAKING CONTROL OF THAT SIDE OF THE CAREER.

Barbara: Yes. I had no idea really how much I like being an entrepreneur until I got out into my own business. I write in between the lines of romance. I write kind of a straight romance but I also add in a lot of mystery and suspense. Sometimes it was really hard for traditional publishers to know how to cover me.

My books, they would always say, "Well, you don't really fit the cover of the day" which could have been the cartoon cover or it could have been really dark suspense, or it could have been small town America. Whatever was the cover of the day, I tended not to fit that particular brand.

When I was able to get out on my own, I was able to really look at my brand and decide, well, I still believe that people like to read maybe more than just straight romance. Maybe there is this whole group of people who like a little bit of everything or a little bit of extra in their books.

I was able to try to find a way to make my books stand out as uniquely mine and they didn't necessarily fit the trend of the moment, so that was one thing that was really freeing. Also just being able to write whatever I wanted to write. To continue series. I had actually been asked to stop a series after 5 books when I was writing for Pocket.

I wish now that I had 10 more of that series because people really want them, but on a traditional side, series are much more difficult because in the print space, it's very hard for book stores to keep more than 1, 2, 3 books by an author on a shelf. It's much harder to sell series in a print space.

The customer can't go to the store and find all the books. Whereas in the e world, you can definitely. Series have become the binge-worthy kind of series that take off because you have the ability to buy all the books.

I think being able to come into the Indie space also allowed me the creative freedom to write what I really wanted to write even though it maybe went against the traditional sense of what you should publish.

James: It's funny how the constraints of the old industry and the advances of the new one actually almost diametrically opposed in places. But as you say, series is such a natural thing in the eBook world to get to the end of a book and press a button and read the next one. Of course, that's why from a marketing point of view, it works very well as well.

Let's dive into a little bit of detail if you don't mind Barbara. Those early days when you were hopelessly typing things into search engines and not really coming up with very much because you were one of the few pioneers at that time.

HOW DID YOU START? DID YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A MAILING LIST WAS AT THAT POINT AND REALIZE YOU HAVE TO DO THAT? WHEN DID YOU COME TO THE MAILING LIST IDEA?

Barbara: The mailing list idea actually came to me before Indie Publishing. I think the irony for a lot of publishers is that in the last couple of years it was my traditional publishing career, more and more social media, marketing responsibilities were being passed to the authors. I was often sent an email by someone in the marketing department of the publisher telling me to do something on my Facebook page or set up this, or set up that or think about a blog tour.

They weren't doing it for me, they just weren't going to tell me what I should do. I did have a little bit of an idea that I did need to be collecting a mailing list. I will say it was definitely smaller back then. It was very organically grown and it was mostly people who wrote to my website or sent me an email and I would add them to my mailing list.

I did have the idea back then that it was important, but certainly not to the extent that I have it today of how really important it is to have the readers and the data and to be able to reach those readers directly.

Back then, when you're with a traditional publisher you really are prevented from using those kinds of relationships, not just with the reader but the retailers and all of those kinds of partners that can help you.

I did have the mailing list idea earlier but it really took off even maybe the last 2 years. The very beginning I was so concentrated on how to really make the books and the brand and how to release them.

I think I really focused more on social media than my website which is ... I kind have gone back and forth over my career, is the website more important, is social media more important? It seems like it changes a little bit every few years, and the strategy behind it.

James: You said the last couple of years really the mailing list has been a bigger part of your time, but now people will use whatever, Aweber, MailChimp, and ConvertKit etc. In your early days, were you gathering emails in a spreadsheet and hand delivering email almost?

Barbara: In the very early days it was probably the Yahoo Group was the email newsletter. Then I did switch over and I had a couple of different systems. I think I had Vertical Response for a while, then I switched over to MailChimp. I was definitely uploading spreadsheets. I think that a lot of authors make the mistake of really using the contest to drive the side apps.

While that's really appealing, I found that a lot of those subscribers really pretty worthless in the long run, so I think in my early days I would do some big giveaways with big blog sites and then they would, "Oh we'll give you everyone for your mailing list." Then, you find out really that they're not particularly the

best subscriber because they're really just there for the prize.

I think I've learned a little bit more about the value of the subscribers on your list in terms of who's really there for your books, who's just there for the free trip to Hawaii or whatever was being given.

I still do some of those multi-author giveaways, but I don't do a lot because I don't think that that's really the best value to building your list.

James: What has been the best value for you? Do you give away a book or two?

Barbara: I do. I have done the giving away a free book in return for a sign-up or two books. I think I've done the first 2 starter books in a series. Those have been really proven to be very helpful, and also to advertise those kinds of sign-ups as you and Mark have really opened up the world to learning about that type of way in to building a newsletter list and that's been certainly a big help in growing things as well.

Also just really making sure that the sign-ups to my mailing list are everywhere. They're in every eBook, they're on my webpage, lots of places, big bold letters, lots of intriguing offers to buy into my list.

I have kind of a varied list so I have a lot of stand-alone books because I come out of traditional publishing and sometimes those are harder to sell in the Indie space. People come into my list a lot of different ways, whereas some writers they have series right from the beginning so it's very easy for them to pull people through their list.

I'll have somebody read the stand-alone book and then I don't know where they go next so I'm trying to find ways to capture them wherever they might be.

James: Mark helped you out with some campaigns probably last year was that Barbara?

Barbara: Right, last year was the beginning. We did work a little bit together and I've taken his course and

really learned a lot about the whole advertising space which was not really part of my early plans because again, it was still early days and we weren't really focusing as much on the advertising part of it as more the promotional part of it.

It's been interesting in the last, I think, year or two to see the advertising space become more important.

James: Is advertising essential to you today? You doing a lot?

Barbara: I'm really getting a little bit more involved in it, but I want to make sure that I really understand it. I think that's really easy to lose a lot of money on the sites and so I have really kind of dug into it myself in the last 6 months and trying to do a lot more testing to see what works for me and for my brand.

It reminds me of the early days of self-publishing for myself in that I really find that the more that you're involved in your own career, the better you will do. Like when you focus in on something and you really learn it, it's empowering and it also helps you make better decisions.

I do have a great person who helps me a lot with making graphics and doing some advertising. I said to her, "I just really need to also dig into this myself because I think I'll be a better partner if I can really understand how it all works."

I think that's really helped me and I really that's the success of a lot of the big Indie authors is that they haven't been afraid to sort of get their hands dirty and figure things out. The more middlemen you have, between you and your end product, the less control you have and the less you're focused on whether something's working or not.

You can let things ride and you know that \$5 a day even adds up and all of a sudden you're like, "Wow, I just spent a couple thousand dollars and I don't even really know what I got for it." I didn't know how to measure it. I didn't know how to understand it. I think these courses are really helpful for authors in that it's not just about making the ad and running the ad, but really measuring it.

Is it successful for you and maybe this works for one person but it's not going to work for you because everything is so subjective. Your audience may respond to something else. I think that's really important.

James: That's a really nice point Barbara, that it improves you as a person by challenging yourself to learn something and get to grips with it. Funny, I often think the same thing about sports. I play a bit of sports and I know a lot of people that don't but I get quite nervous in some of the sports I play. I wonder why I do it and I think afterwards because actually you grow a little bit as a person and you put yourself out there.

I think this is almost the same thing because it is a difficult thing for lots of self-published authors to do. A lot of people quite naturally are anxious about the difficulties of learning business and parts of business, but when you do it, as you say, you do grow.

THAT'S GOING TO ACTUALLY PROBABLY MAKE YOU A BETTER WRITER.

Barbara: I think it does. I think it really makes you better in a lot of ways. I think it's all a little scary.

It's funny because I've been on every retail platform. I know the back ends of every system because I've been doing it since the beginning. Then I'm faced with the Facebook advertising platform, I had that same like, "Oh, what do these words mean? What's a look-alike?"

Even when you feel like you're experienced, you still have that moment of like trepidation when you're going to push that button. There's so much in ePublishing everything is changeable and removable and easily fixed so I think that if authors can kind of get over that fear that they're going to do something irretrievably, irrevocably wrong, they'll be a little bit more daring.

It really is not that hard. It just feels like it's hard in the beginning because it feels new and strange. I've always felt like focus is super important and throughout my career there have been moments when some of the retailers, the newer retailers who've kind of come into the book space, I would think to myself, "I'm going to find a way to get on that platform and do better. I'm going to meet that rep. I'm going to research that website. I'm going to see what features they have. I'm going to put my books up for that."

Whenever I've focused in on that, I've really seen a lot more success. That's why I try to encourage authors if they're feeling stuck or plateaued and they don't know what to do next, is to really pick one thing and

focus on that whether it's advertising, or meeting retailer, or learning how to make your book look better as an ePub, whatever it is.

I think if you focus in on it, you'll just do so much better in that space and then you'll move on to the next thing.

James: Do you have a team now Barbara?

DO YOU EMPLOY PEOPLE TO HELP YOU OUT WITH THE BUSINESS SIDE?

Barbara: I have a couple of freelance specialists. I have someone who helps me with social media, and advertising on my website. I have a formatter who does strictly all the formatting. I will say it does help because I do know a lot.

As authors, sometimes we're kind of running a little last-minute and it's Sunday night and you know that book really needs to be uploaded and gee these other people have a life and don't really want to work for me at Sunday night at 9:00 so it's great when I can actually format something myself and throw it up if I have to.

I have built a team of freelance people. I don't have employees, but I have independent contractors that I work with that are great and terrific and I'm really happy that I found them. It takes time. I've had people who've moved on over the years and suddenly I'm by myself again for something. It's definitely up and down proposition.

I think if you can get some help to do the things you don't really have time or inclination to do, or to free you up to do more writing, that's great.

James: I guess in any business it's good that the boss knows how to do everything right?

Barbara: Right. I think it helps. I think you are a better partner and you're not relying and hopefully you have great people working for you, but sometimes you don't. I've had some really big problems in the translation space, especially early on. I hired a bunch of people and had horrible problems.

Found out they would farm out chapters to be translated by different translators. Again that was a world where I couldn't get that involved because I didn't speak the language. You're back to trusting someone to do it right for you. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. It helps to be kind of hands-on and know what's going on.

James: Barbara, one of the big differences I guess between traditional publishing you alluded to earlier really was the contact with readers, which becomes much more important and much easier and a part of being a writer when you're self-published.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH READERS? HOW CLOSE IS THAT? HOW ACTIVE ARE YOU WITH YOUR READERS? HOW IMPORTANT IS IT AS PART OF YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY?

Barbara: The reader relationship is really the most important to me of all the relationships and I'm definitely much more involved with my readership now. I have a private Facebook fan group. They go by lots of different names. People call them street teams, fan groups, or discussion groups, or book groups, or whatever you want to call it.

They're the super fans who really want to come and talk to you, and talk about your books and talk with each other. I think that's what's been really great watching evolve over the last couple of years is that I've got this great group of people who it's not just about promotion or doing promotional activities.

I'm not an author who's very strict about anything. Some author have rules for whether you can be in their group or not, but I'm pretty open. If you want to come in, come in. It's more of a fun place for people who really, really love to read. Then, of course, I have the public Facebook fan page that also has lots more people on it.

I try to also use my website a little bit more interactively these days. I'm starting to do a little bit more, I don't want to call it a blog because I don't really blog, but I do try to do a few more posts about behind the scenes of a book so it's where I kind of tie the reader a little bit more to my stories and understanding where I'm coming from.

I think it's easier to have a reader relationship too when you can control what books are coming out when.

I can actually respond to the readers as an Indie author so if they say, "I want another Calloway book in my popular Calloway series," I can tell them, "Yes, you're getting it and it's going to be this character and it's going to come out on this date."

I can let them know things way in advance and I can set up the pre-orders and I can really respond to what they want. If they have a question about a book, I can respond right away. It was just a little bit harder in traditional because I wasn't published frequently and sometimes there would be a year between books and it was really hard to keep the reader engagement up in between times.

Sometimes I couldn't write what they wanted. They wanted the next one. "I'm sorry but my publisher doesn't want me to write that, I'm going to write something else." Of course they'd go to that too because they're pretty loyal readers, but it's really nice when you can respond.

I have some readers who really like the suspense so I think I'll bring out another suspense title because I know I have that group of readers who likes that. I think developing that reader relationship is really, really important. I don't think you have to worry as a newer author if you're not getting a lot of fan mail. I think it's really about a very slow build and growth.

Sometimes some authors and what they write really develop a rabid kind of a fan base. I've noticed over the years that the vampire authors just have the most rabid fans. Are very vocal online and very engaged. Then I'll see super huge, best-selling authors who have very little mention online because maybe they're readership just isn't that readership.

I think it's really important not to measure your success by a vocal group on the internet. Sometimes I think that becomes an interesting thing. I'll hear authors, especially newer authors say, "My readers think I should do this." I always am asking myself in my head, "Who are your readers and how many are there? Are you listening to 5 really vocal people in your group or are you looking at your whole reader base?"

Not everyone who talks to you online is your average reader and they don't necessarily represent the thousands of people who might be buying your product. I think it's really good to engage with readers, but not to be too controlled by kind of a vocal group who may love you, and that's awesome, and it's flattering, and it's wonderful, but sometimes it's not as big as your whole group. If that makes sense.

James: It does make sense to be aware of. You mentioned there was one element that you realized that there was an appetite for more suspense so you're going to do a bit more of that.

DO YOU THINK WITHOUT TAKING THAT CAVEAT INTO ACCOUNT, THAT THEY DON'T REPRESENT EVERYONE WHO'S BUYING YOUR BOOKS, BUT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE WRITING HAS CHANGED SUBTLY OR NOT SUBTLY SINCE YOU'VE HAD A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE READERS?

Barbara: I think what's changed is that I really trust myself more. I really trust my own instincts. Because I do engage with the readers and I do know what they respond to in my books.

I think I was saying, "It's not so much about a particular character, it's more about the kind of story that you're telling." Really people are always responding to an author's voice and the way they tell the story and the things they find interesting.

I love to do family secrets and I love to do stories about identity or stories about people being reunited. I can kind of add more suspense or less suspense, or make it sweeter, make it sexier, or whatever. It's like honing in on what are the core things about your books that people are really responding to and then being able to do that.

The reason you can do that as an Indie more also is because you're not being governed by a couple of big, national book buyers who've decided what should be in the romance shelves across the country, and that's truly like four people who really influenced those trends.

A lot of authors will say to me, "Well, how come I heard the romantic suspense is dead." In fact, I was told romantic suspense was dead when I first started Indie publishing and some of my greatest success books were romantic suspense. They're only dead because in the print world, the buyers didn't want to buy them anymore.

I understand, they have a different audience and they have limited shelf space, but in the Indie world, you don't have the trends as much because there's always an audience. Some audiences are bigger and some audiences are hotter.

I always laugh because the vampires come around about every five years so I tell my friend who writes vampires, who's now sad that it seems like sales are dwindling a bit, that, "Vampires will be back, just hang on."

James: They never die.

Barbara: They never die. They're immortal and they come back in fiction all the time. Same with erotic romance. Super hot, then not, then 50 Shades comes out and the world changes again. Small town romance, hot then not. Trends do come and go, but I think you have to kind of just ride them out and keep focusing in on your core story and that's what you can do in Indie because you know you can find some readers out there.

James: Do you ever meet your readers?

Barbara: Sometimes. I don't do a lot of book signings just because they take a lot of time and I don't always find them to be that productive. I meet them more at conferences probably than anywhere else. Probably I have the biggest relationship online. That's probably true for a lot of people.

James: I'm just thinking there's 1 or 2 authors who are starting to have these weekend get-togethers which becomes a part of their experience with their readers. It seems to work well. I think Marie Force has started doing that sort of thing. That's not on your radar yet.

Barbara: No. I think it's great. I know she has a lot of success with her reader weekend and I think that's fantastic. I think sometimes too, it depends on what part of the country you're in and if you have a kind of a strong romance reader base where you are.

In the San Francisco Bay area which isn't as super romance oriented. I've seen much better results when I do big book signings in areas that are heavily concentrated with more romance readers. Sometimes there are pockets around the country that are a little bit more. Everything's very expensive out here so accomodation here is costly.

I think it all depends on a lot of different things. I really enjoy meeting the readers, but I think the relationship is with the books as well as with the author so if they love the books, and they don't need to meet me, that's fine too. Kind of whatever works.

James: Barbara, I also want to talk to you about productivity because you have produced a lot of books. I know you use some of your back-list since you turned Indie.

WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH TO WRITING? DO YOU HAVE WORD COUNTS PER DAY? DO YOU HAVE A FIXED PERIOD OF TIME OR A FIXED PERIOD OF THE DAY WHEN YOU WRITE? ARE YOU DISCIPLINED ABOUT THAT?

Barbara: I'm much more disciplined as a writer now as an Indie because I am controlling my own calendar. I generally write about 4 books a year, sometimes 5. I'm not one of those people who's writing a book a month. Good for them. Just can't do it. I generally feel like that's pretty much a good pace for me. To meet my deadlines, for the first couple of years of Indie Publishing, I probably worked harder than I've ever worked in my life.

I was really working through every vacation and every weekend so I've tried to be little bit better in the last year. I've actually put together a spread sheet and I put all my vacations down. I put my deadlines down and I try to be a little bit smarter about not putting a deadline right after a trip so that I'm not panicked trying to get something written.

I've also changed my thinking a bit more. The retailers really do need two weeks for your books to get up. In the early days we were throwing them up and they're up the next day. The weight of material of books that come into these platforms has really slowed down the process of course.

Hundreds of thousands of writers are now uploading compared to the early days. I've tried to build in a 2-week time period to have my book ready before it actually comes out. That has actually really helped a lot because then I have those two weeks to also really plan my marketing, promotional strategies instead of just being like in a panic.

Like the book's coming out tomorrow and I just finished writing it. For me, that's been a big change. I will sometimes put on my spreadsheet word counts. It does help me a little. I'm probably one of those people that like to lie to myself. "If you just go one more lap it'll be great."

Then you go one more lap and then maybe you go a lap and a half so sometimes having that word count down, psychologically I look at my word count and I go, "Well, I only need 500 more words. I can write 500 more words." That helps me keep on track. I'm definitely a little bit more a seat-of-the-pants writer. I do a lot of re-writing. Sometimes it's like get some words down and then you can go back and fix them.

James: We all have our own little psychological tricks, don't we, to get us by. Word counts work for some people. That's just to pick up on that last point before we round off.

YOU'RE NOT A GREAT PLANNER FOR BOOKS? YOU'RE A PANTSER I BELIEVE THEY CALL IT IN SELF-PUBLISHING CIRCLES?

Barbara: Yeah, right. I do do a lot of advanced planning. I know the major points of a story, but I always find my best work, really comes out of being in the moment, being in the story, being in the character's head, trying to figure out what's the worst possible thing that could happen to them at this possible moment.

For me, that just is kind of the process that works. I've tried everybody else's strategy at least once I think. Over the years you think, "Oh that would be a lot faster. I'll do a character chart or I'll do this or I'll do that.

I found a lot of pre-writing actually makes me feel like I've already written this story and I don't want to write it anymore. It becomes like a little more boring for me so I want to sort of discover the story as I go along. The map makes it harder too.

Every writer has to work out their own process. There's certainly no right or wrong way to do it.

James: It's been great, Barbara. Absolutely brilliant talking to you. Before we actually sign off, a lot listeners are at the early stage of their career and most of them including myself, usually paralyzed with self-doubt about everything. Nobody wants to read your book and not knowing really where to turn.

You're not even remotely complacent about that. I can hear from the way you're talking, but with somebody with an incredible track record now, the KDP Best-selling author of all time, I believe,

according to Amazon.

WHAT SORT OF ADVICE WOULD YOU HAND OUT TO SOMEBODY WHO LOOKS UP TO YOU AND SAYS, "WHERE DO I START AND WHAT ARE THE KEY THING I SHOULD BE DOING OR THINKING ABOUT NOW?"

Barbara: I think the main thing from the writing standpoint for the newer author is to write at least three books. You just don't know what you don't know until you get through that whole book. That's probably true of a lot of things in life. Usually the second book will be easier.

A lot of people say write what you know, but I found that I ran out things I knew pretty early on so sometimes writing what you don't know is actually a great, creative spur because you get to research something new and you get excited about it.

I think there is paralysis in writing. Fear is the biggest problem for writers in all ways. It's fear of writing the wrong thing, fear of writing something not good enough. I remember when I first got probably my first big contract in traditional publishing, I thought to myself, "Well, I have to write a better book now because they gave me more money."

That's how writers think. That's not true. You're always trying to write a better book whatever the reason you give yourself. "I have to write a better book because now it's my second book or now it's my third book.

I think, really, writing a couple of books and really getting your creative, your craft down and really concentrating on the quality of your books is super important. Then start to get into all the craziness of all the developing relationships with retailers and promoting and all of that.

I think people write one book and then they spend like the next three years trying to sell it. If they just wrote another two or three books, it's so much easier to sell the 3rd or 4th book than to sell the first book. People read one, they want to read another one, and you want to grow and you want to build.

Fear is always there. You can't tell me there's not one author who 40 books, 50 books, 100 books in, still doesn't have some fear in the writing process and also once the book is out in the world, it's very

subjective and then you have to let readers have their opinions of your work and you can't let that drive you crazy.

Trying to get past the fear and just write and trust your instincts and if your instincts are steering you wrong, then go out and talk to more people and get help. Writers are such a great network right? There's just so many places to go where you can talk to other writers and share your frustrations and get help and get support.

James: Barbara Freethy. What a pleasure talking to Barbara. I was struck with how completely down to earth Barbara is. There's no highfalutin attitude from her despite her enormous sales and her status in the industry. Very, very down to earth, very hard working, very admired in the practicalities of what to do.

It turned out to be not just an inspirational interview as we knew it would be listening to someone like Barbara, but actually a practically valuable interview I think. Particularly in terms of the attitude that you need getting on top of the detail and making things work.

Mark: Yeah, I know something that she shares with a lot of the more successful authors and especially the authors in the romance genre. They tend to do the best these days and it's not because they're writing in a genre which not only because they're writing in a genre that has a lot of voracious readers interested in it, it's because they are incredibly smart, and incredibly hard-working.

Success just doesn't fall out of a tree, it's something that has to be worked and they've demonstrated. Barbara is really key when it comes to this demonstrating the hard work does lead to success.

James: Yes, it's the whole thing isn't it? When you have hugely successful people and you're looking for what is their magic ingredient and you hang on their words trying to work out what this magic thing is that they do that you don't. It turns out they just do what you do, but they don't give up. They keep working at something until it works.

All the things we talk about day-to-day, week-to-week is just what they do better. There's no reason why you can't do it better. Can't lift yourself and elevate yourself to get on top of stuff. I'm always reminded, I

think it was Gary Player's probably just attributed to him.

Gary Player the golfer who heard somebody muttering about how lucky he was when he holed a long putt and he was walking off and he said, "It's funny, the harder I practice, the luckier I become." He's absolutely right.

Really excited to have her, Barbara, on. So kind of her to join us and it's thrills all around really to follow her career as she goes from strength to strength.

We're going to go, next week, back to sort of more practical level and something that I think is going to be of interest to people who are building up their mailing list now and looking at doing the sort of thing that Barbara does very well.

He's a guy who's founded a new mailing list service and competition to MailChimp and the others. Out of frustration because he was an author and he felt they didn't really address what he wanted from it. His name is Nathan Barry. It's called ConvertKit and it's getting huge applause.

This is an incredible story. He's very open about his figures as well. Jaw-dropping figures when he talks in an interview next week. Stay with us for that. We're going to be podcast number 26. Until then, hopefully with fresh inspiration Mark, from Barbara, we can all get writing right?

Mark: Yep. That's what I'm going to do right now.

CHAPTER 23

CONVERTKIT: A MAILING LIST SERVICE DESIGNED ESPECIALLY FOR AUTHORS - WITH NATHAN BARRY



CONVERTKIT IS an example of a niche focused business.

And the focus is authors and bloggers. Nathan Barry was (and still is) running a very successful self publishing business of his own and found that the majority of his sales came through promotions he made to his mailing list. But he began to have problems. There were not enough options in his email software to segment people according to purchase history, interest levels, and more. The frustrations became so great that he decided to create his own solution, and ConvertKit was born. On this episode you'll hear how Nathan came up with the idea, what ConvertKit can do that other email providers can't, and why it's the ideal choice for authors and bloggers.

I ALREADY PURCHASED YOUR BOOK. WHY DO YOU KEEP ASKING ME TO BUY IT?

That's an example of just one of the complaints Nathan was getting from his mailing list that forced him to

create an email solution of his own. Tremendous success selling his books enabled him to be in touch with many of his customers - but his email software at the time didn't have a way of excluding people who had already bought his books from receiving a second or third email encouraging them to buy. Nathan gives a quick walk through of the features of his software and highlights why it's the perfect solution for authors.

CONVERTKIT IS CREATED BY AUTHORS AND BLOGGERS, FOR AUTHORS AND BLOGGERS.

And that really matters. As an author you have some unique needs about interacting with the fans who have opted in to your mailing list. You want to be able to address them uniquely, according to purchase history, interests, needs, and more. Nathan and his team have created a customized solution for authors and bloggers and its growth has truly been phenomenal. You'll find out what all the fuss is about on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula podcast.

HOW DOES CONVERTKIT COMPARE TO MAILCHIMP?

Many self published authors start out building an email list with MailChimp's free plan. It enables them to get the basic features of an email list up to a certain number of subscribers. It's a great way to get started from scratch that Nathan says is the way to go for most authors. But when you have a thousand or more subscribers to your mailing list and need to begin interacting with them in specific ways, you need something more - which is why Nathan created ConvertKit. Convertkit doesn't have a free plan but offers so much more that fits your needs as an author. You can hear Nathan's description of the software and learn more about how you can see videos and more of the software in action.

THE TRANSITION FROM MAILCHIMP OR AWEBER TO CONVERTKIT COULD BE A "DONE FOR YOU" PROPOSITION.

For authors who have already built a significant following and have 500 or more subscribers on their list at present, Nathan and his team provide a concierge conversion from any other email service provider to ConvertKit. All you have to do is ask.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark and James introduce today's episode and guest.
- A new course in the works from the Self Publishing Formula team.
- James' book and process will be the demo for the course.
- How the formatting stage will work within the course.
- Chatting with Nathan Barry, owner of ConvertKit.
- Why a mailing list and the benefit good software can be.
- How and why Nathan created ConvertKit.

- How ConvertKit works.
- How Nathan's team does direct sales for ConvertKit.
- ConvertKit pricing and comparison to other services.
- The user interface and features of ConvertKit.
- How you can find out more about ConvertKit.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [ConvertKit](#)
- [Nathan Barry](#)
- [Scrivener](#)
- [Leadsy](#)
- [MailChimp](#)
- [AWebber](#)
- [The App Design Handbook](#)
- [SmartPassiveIncome](#)
- [Bluehost](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

Speaker 1: Hello and welcome to podcast #26 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller, join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hey Mark, how are you doing?

Mark: I'm good James, how are you?

James: I'm good, having a nice summer here in the UK, we've actually had some summer this year which makes a change.

Mark: Let me have a look out the window now, it's a little bit cloudy, not good. Yeah, but better than

raining.

James: Better than raining. That's a motto isn't it, better than raining.

We've got a good guest on today, we've been talking quite practical levels about mailing lists and such an important part of it and our guest today has created a new service which is specifically aimed at authors and bloggers. Quite a few people have started different mailing lists in competition to Mail Chimp and AWeber, etc. but this one has really taken off and it's got massive plaudits, it's got huge fans including Pat Flynn who's one of the biggest names in this industry behind him. It's a really interesting interview and as I mentioned last week, some jaw dropping figures when he talks about how the company is growing over the last 18 months really.

Mark: Absolutely.

James: But before then, we are creating a new course which is quite exciting for us. The Facebook ads for Author's course is quite advanced and it is aimed at people who are at that advanced level. We came together right at the beginning because you had this idea of doing an introduction to self publishing so that somebody with their first novel could get themselves set up properly for success in the future. We put it to one side in the end, because it's quite complicated and there's quite a lot to it, but excitingly, we've come back to that idea this year.

Mark: We have, yes. The thing we're aiming for this year is to put this all into to one course, which is how we're referring to it, together. I've been building the list of things I want to cover and have actually started to record stuff now which is quite exciting. We're looking to put bonuses together and all that kind of good stuff.

We've had lots of people indicating that they're interested. We've had over 5,000 writers responding to Facebook ads that we've run because they're interested in finding out what this course will entail, which is all very gratifying and quite exciting.

One of the things that I'm doing right now, is I'm going to be sharing a lot of practical examples, taking

someone right at the start of their career and doing everything that they would need to do. Setting up all of the platforms, uploading, converting books, doing covers, everything. I suppose we can announce exclusively, on this episode, that the identity of that lucky author is you James.

James: It is. How exciting for me. I basically get all this service, I get a concierge service into self publishing from you.

Mark: You do yeah, you could probably charge quite a bit for that.

James: Yeah.

Mark: We're doing everything. You're getting a cover from my cover designer. The book's being formatted by my formatter, we're building a website for you, we're doing a MailChimp and possibly even a convert kit's mailing list for you. Everything will be uploaded, the page will be, as I would recommend, it will have sign up offers, everything.

We'll take you from zero to slightly further than zero in the space of a few weeks. All of that will be documented in the course. We're pretty excited about that.

THE ONE THING THAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN JAMES, YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS, DON'T YOU?

James: Have I got to write a book?

Mark: You've got to write the book, exactly. You've been sitting on this for bloody ages.

James: I have.

Mark: It's really about time that you pulled your finger out because I'm starting to think you don't have what it takes.

James: There's fighting talk. You asked for the first few chapters this week. When you write a book for the first time, and you have no idea how terrible it is or whether it's going to fly and actually handing it over to somebody, even in the first few chapters, is quite a big thing for me, but I just did it quite quickly.

I handed it to you, so you've got that now. That from me, and we all work differently don't we, with motivation. I remember when I did NaNoWriMo if that's how you pronounce this, doing this 50,000 words in a month, and that bit in the middle which is where everybody drops away, and stops doing it, or huge numbers drop away and stop doing it, I got booked onto a BBC interview in ten days time to talk about it. It was really a four program and because of that, that's the only reason I finished it, because I realized I couldn't turn up to the BBC in London, having said, oh I stopped doing it last week. I think the same thing's happened here now with you.

Mark: Yep.

James: The novel's going to have to happen. I'm at the point with it where I've just got to, I think everyone probably does this with it, I hope it gets easier as you get along, but a little bit lost in the denouements, the act III.

What I've decided to do actually, having handed over the chapters to you, is to write the last chapter and then fit in the bit in between. I think that's going to work for me because I've got an idea, I've got a firm idea of what happens in the last day of this novel which is over seven days. I'm quite excited about the last day, but I'm not really sure how to get there. I think if I write the last day, then things will be clearer for me. I don't know if you do that sort of thing at all, just to sort of help you with the structure.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. Talking about that, Scrivener makes that pretty easy, you can jump right to the end or jump wherever you want and start writing bits. Then you might find that the preceding bits and the bits after that become easier. I often use to get around writer's block. It's not something I tend to suffer with because I use techniques like that. That's one thing to do.

Another thing, if you need a bit of encouragement, then something I would recommend, would be looking at developmental editor, something like that would be quite useful to give you an idea about the structure and that kind of thing. We'll cover all of this in the course.

James: Developmental editors; do they look at unfinished drafts?

Mark: Can do. Yes, they can do. They can take a look at how the structure is looking, pacing, plot holes, just kind of a structural examination of the book. It's ideal for something to be finished, but you could send an unfinished, provided it's relatively finished, you could send an unfinished work for kind of a once over. Especially if you're blocked, you don't know where the story needs to go.

James: Okay.

Mark: Of course, another thing you could do, which again, we'll cover in loads of detail, is look at an advance thing, or beta readers. I've occasionally got stuck on something and I've sent something that isn't finished out to perhaps a smaller subset of my team and have them come back and solve plot problems that I've had. That's something that you can do.

Obviously you don't have that right now, but we can certainly look to start building something for you, so that you've got some help early on and then you're ready to sell to a small interested audience when the book is ready to go.

James: In terms of formatting and stuff like that. I don't really know where to start, so I'm looking forward to the course on this. Can you talk to me a little bit about that at this stage?

Mark: There's lots of options, we could, I'm speaking to my formatter at Ace, Paul, who's over in Australia for all of my formatting and I have done for about three years. Jason Anderson over there is really great. Jason will probably format those three chapters to start with and then I can use those to upload.

There are plenty of other options from things like Velan, Calibre and the guys at Read See, who I've spoken to before have what they call the Read See book editor, which is a very nice web-based product which exports nice ePubs and PDFs. Scrivener can do that too, as well, so there's loads and loads of options.

It's not something that I do, it's one of the tasks that my view is, my time is better spent writing rather than fiddling around with formatting. I'm quite happy to pay 100 bucks to get Jason to format those, my books for me.

For those people who are counting their pennies a bit and trying to do things that they can do easy enough themselves, we will go into all the detailed bits necessary to help them do their own formatting. It's not that difficult, it's just a bit fiddly.

James: Okay, I'm looking forward to that bit. From where we're sitting now, I'm about to go off to have a family vacation for 10 days, so I guess I'm taking my MacBook with me and give myself a little work done every day, whilst I've got some downtime from everything else. Otherwise you're going to be on my case Dawson.

Mark: Yep. I am.

James: You can get quite aggressive, so.

We're going to get into this interview now. This is, it's such an important area, the mailing list, all our businesses really revolve around it, whether you're an author or in any other kind of area of digital online business. It's a competitive space and there's one big monkey in the middle of it. The monkey doesn't suit everybody and the monkey is quite general. This guy, as I say, his name is Nathan Barry, he's quite a laid back guy from Idaho. He had an idea and boy has he made it work.

Okay, well we are always going on on this podcast about the essential importance of a mailing list in any kind of online career, but particularly for self publishing authors and it crops up in almost every interview we do. We talk from time to time a little bit about how you actually go about with the mechanics of operating a mailing list and some of you, in your very early days, copy and pasting into a spreadsheet and then copy and pasting into the BCC column of your email program and why not? When you're starting out, it's how you do it.

As you become more advanced there's various programs available, we often mention Aweber and MailChimp. Something that's come to our attention quite a lot and is very highly recommended by one of the big industry gurus is a service called ConvertKit. Delighted to say that we're joined by the founder and CEO of ConvertKit, Nathan Barry. Nathan, hello to you.

Nathan: Hey, thanks for having me on the show.

James: I always get this romantic idea, when somebody tells me that they're in the mountain time zone, I always imagine you're in some kind of log cabin somewhere.

Nathan: Not a log cabin, but the ski resort is 20 minutes from my house, so there's that.

James: Over there in Idaho, that sounds good. Okay, Nathan, thank you for joining us on the podcast.

Let's start at the beginning because there will be people listening to this podcast who haven't started their mailing list yet and are frightened even of some of the words I've said so far.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF A MAILING LIST, WHY YOU NEED TO HAVE ONE AND IF YOU NEED A PIECE OF SOFTWARE OR A SERVICE TO HELP YOU ORGANIZE IT?

Nathan: I actually am, despite running an email marketing company, am a bit of a late comer to the email marketing world. I got started self publishing. I wrote a couple of books, App Design Handbook, Designing Web Applications, so in the technical space. Self published them, they did quite well and what surprised me was that email converted better than every other channel combined. This was back in 2012, when I launched the first one. I honestly expected that Twitter would probably drive a lot of the sales, and email just did so much better. I think the connection there is so much better.

That's when I became obsessed with mailing lists, telling people, hey, you need to have an email list for your blog, for all of your readers, your customers. You're going to get way better engagement, way better conversion rates.

Then, like you mentioned, some people are saying, well I don't need that because I have Gmail. Or people will come in and say, I have 1,000 email subscribers and then they say, oh, it's in Gmail. Well those aren't subscribers, those are just your contacts.

If someone hasn't specifically opted in to your list, you shouldn't, for an ethics perspective and then also for a marketing perspective and finally from the gallery perspective, you shouldn't be email them all of your content from Gmail. What you want to do instead, is have some great content that you're offering and then give people a reason to join your email list for continued value. You're going to send that through and email to like a MailChimp and Aweber, or, as I would prefer, ConvertKit.

James: That's a really interesting point to start with, because you still hear some people say email is dead. Kids don't use email anymore, it's all about social media, but the fact is, the bottom line in so many businesses, including ours at Self Publishing Formula, including Mark Dawson's business as an author, the facts don't back that up.

Nathan: I have about \$1,000,000 in product sales that say, no, it's not dead.

James: Exactly. It's that bottom line that shows that. Okay, so you provide this service and I'm trying to think, in the old days, we used to say like software, didn't we, or package or program. It's basically a subscription service, most of the things we use today. At the heart of it is some software that I guess.

ARE YOU A PROGRAMMER OR CODER? DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA AND GET SOMEBODY ELSE TO CODE IT? ARE YOU HANDS ON NATHAN?

Nathan: My background is in software design, so like the user experience and user interface of making software that both looks good and is easy to use. I have some programming experience, I've coded a bunch of my own iPhone apps and all that, but I always joke that no one should hire me to program for something important.

I've hired a great development team, we're still a small company, but we have 21 people working on building and supporting Convert Kit every day.

James: The time that you decided you were going to do ConvertKit, what was the driving factor? Because

there were other email services available at that point.

WHAT DID YOU THINK WAS MISSING?

Nathan: This would be about 3 1/2 years ago, I'd just come off of two self published book launches, so I'd built my initial audience, I was using MailChimp. For the first book launch I think I built a list of about 800 subscribers and then by the time I got around to launching the second book I'd increased that to around 2,500 subscribers.

Email was just doing so well at driving sales, but I kept learning all of these best practices, like, you should send up automated follow up sequences, after somebody purchases your book, because you want them to get the most out of it. Especially with technical training, they're going to buy it and download it and never implement it. That's really frustrating as an author. Then, if someone downloads a sample chapter, you should send them these automated emails to have them come back and remember to purchase, and to keep convincing them that that's a good idea.

The other thing is, where you should tag your customers so you know on your email list who has purchased and who hasn't. Then there's another idea called content upgrades. The way this works is, if you have a blog post, at the end of that post, instead of saying, hey, join my email newsletter, you might have a giveaway or some, whether it's a free chapter or resources on that particular article that are hyper relevant to what you just talked about. Since I talk about design, one example would be, I have this really long post about design and then it's, hey, if you want to get all the Photoshop files that I used in this design, put in your email address here, join my newsletter and you'll get that sent out. That's a content upgrade.

I kept running into these best practices and then I was fighting with MailChimp to get them implemented, because it just wasn't designed for this.

Conveniently, I have a background in software and so I thought, okay, I can do this better. I can build something that's built for the ground up for authors and bloggers and that's basically how Convert Kit started. It started out of frustration.

James: Well, a lot of good products do. I think that a lot of listeners who aren't familiar with Convert Kit might know the basics and the idea of MailChimp and Aweber, etc. so you can have various lists, you could create different lists for different things, but that's more or less it in terms of segmenting. You can

then manually segment and draw things out, but what you're talking about is a more intuitive platform.

A PLATFORM ALMOST THAT YOU CAN PUT SOME THINGS IN PLACE AND IT STARTS TO LEARN THE HABITS AND STARTS TO TREAT EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS MORE INDIVIDUALLY.

Nathan: Yeah, absolutely. You should not treat someone the same way on your email list, if they've purchased your product or haven't. You shouldn't be telling someone, hey go buy this book, if you know they've already purchased it.

Now all of a sudden, you don't just need one list, you need tags. You need to be able to tag someone who's purchased, so that you exclude them from your pitch emails. No one wants to be told, hey, you should really buy this thing it's great. They're like, um, I already did. Before I would do that, I would get so many emails where people would say, hey great product, I already bought it, why are you still telling me that I should buy it?

James: I was just going to ask you where you get a lot of the information from, because obviously it's as good as the information that goes into it.

THEN I REMEMBER SIGNING UP TO PAT FLYNN'S ADDRESS AND THE FIRST EMAIL BACK JUST ASKED ME A BUNCH OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT I WAS DOING, WHAT I WAS INTERESTED IN. NOW I'M THINKING, THAT'S WHAT THAT WAS.

Nathan: Yep. Exactly. For anyone who doesn't know, Pat blogs at SmartPassiveIncome.com, amazing blog, amazing podcast, and he's been a great customer of ours for almost exactly a year now. He signed up a year ago like 5 days ago.

What Pat does, is he makes a decent amount of his revenue from affiliate revenue, teaching people how to set up their first WordPress blog and that sort of thing. He has links to set up hosting on Bluehost and so if you sign up for his list, one of the first things he wants to know is what level you're at. He asks where you're at in your business, haven't started yet, I'm making between \$0 and \$500 a month or I'm making over \$500 a month. These are just three links in that automated email that you receive first and depending on what you select, it's tagging you based on the level.

If you haven't started your online business yet, he's going to tell you, well here's how to set up a WordPress blog, you should probably use Bluehost for your hosting. That's going to go through his

affiliate link.

If you're already making over \$500 a month, he doesn't need to tell you all that, he can go straight to telling you more advanced strategies.

James: That definitely has worked, because I've been on the receiving end of it from his point of view. I'm still curious about the beginning part of it. You have this idea of how this is going to work, you do some software design and then I guess you are the one who's having to put your own marketing abilities to the test.

YOU'VE GROWN QUITE SIGNIFICANTLY IN A FAIRLY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

Nathan: It was not like an instant growth story from the beginning. We launched and then had all these great results. I'm totally public with all the numbers. I don't know how much people care about wanting to get into the nitty gritty of SaS companies.

James: Everyone loves it.

Nathan: Okay, I'm public about everything. We started working on the project, January 2013, about two months later, we had an initial version that we, two or three months later that we were able to start getting some beta testers on.

By July 2013, so six months in, we'd made it to \$2,000 a month in revenue. At the same time, I had my self publishing business that was doing quite well, so it was really quite hard to get people to switch their email system, but pretty easy to get them to buy an eBook or a course.

I was balancing these two things and running Convert Kit was getting kind of hard, so we basically stayed at \$2,000 a month for the next year. I'd work on it, but we weren't really growing, but my self published business was doing great. I didn't feel any urgency around that.

Fast forward about a year to summer 2014 and I talked with a good friend of mine who's very good at software startups, his name is Heaton Shaw and he was just saying, hey I think you should shut down

Convert Kit. And the reason is, because you're working on it, it's not really growing you should move onto something else you'll be successful at.

At this point, I had a good email list, I was doing great product launches for the self publishing stuff. I kind of sat on that information for a while. He said that, which I thought kind of sucked to hear. It takes a good friend to say, hey, that thing that you're working on, you should shut it down, because it's not working. Then he continued after saying that, he said; or give it the time, money and attention it deserves and build it into a real business. Whatever you're doing is not working.

I waited like another six months or so, doing what everyone does when they hear good advice, not taking action right away. At this point, our revenue had declined slowly down to \$1,300 a month. This was October 2014. I looked at that and I really had to go, do I shut this product down, which I love it? I'm using it for my own email lists, it's driving lots of sales, but I haven't had a lot of luck getting other people to use it.

Or, do I double down on it and really invest in it and try to build it into a real company?

I decided to double down, so instead of using contract developers, I hired the best developer I've ever worked with in my career working in software. I invested all of my spare cash into the company.

James: What was your hunch that that was the right thing to do at that point?

Nathan: I asked myself two questions.

The first one was, do I still want this as much today, almost two years in, as I did the day that I started? Do I still want to run a software company? I had other options, it's not like I was in danger of being on the streets because my software company wasn't working out. I was making good money. Basically the question was, why not just continue with what's working and not do the software company? I thought, yes I still wanted it, I wanted the new challenge, I wanted to build a team and I wanted to build a much bigger company. I thought there was a lot of value that Convert Kit provided.

The next question was, have I given it every possible chance to succeed? Because if the answer is yes to that, if you've given it everything you've got and it's still not working, there's a time when you just shut it down. But if I still want it and I haven't given it every chance to succeed, there's a disconnect there.

That's when I thought, I would look back years from now and always wonder, could I have made it work if I didn't give it that shot. I did and we actually picked a niche at that time, instead of being email marketing for whoever, we went to email marketing for authors and then just started direct sales. We went from \$1,300 a month to \$1,600 a month to \$2,000 a month in revenue and by March of last year, 2015, we were at \$5,000 a month in revenue.

James: When you say direct sales, how did you do those?

Nathan: I started reaching out to authors and bloggers and I would send them an email and say, hey my name is Nathan, I notice that you're using MailChimp, is there anything frustrating you about it? People would come back and say, let me tell you and they would, all this stuff.

I would say, actually that's exactly what was frustrating me about MailChimp, so I made this other product called ConvertKit, I'd love to show it to you, can you hop on the call. Then what would happen is, we'd go through the call, they'd usually love it, they have a bunch of questions, but they'd be excited. Then we'd get to the end and I'd be like, so do you want to sign up? They're like, you know what, actually it sounds like a ton of work to sign up. I love everything about this, but I'm just not going to move my email lists, it's too much work.

I'd try to convince them that it's not that much work, we'll do it for you. Then I finally said, I'll prove it to you, I'll do it for you and I'll do it for free. That's when we came up with our concierge migrations. Then we would switch people over.

Early on, we would do it for any size of account, we've since changed that to where we do it for the \$100 a month accounts and above since we're doing so many of these. The goal is to be able to grow the team enough that we can move it back down to doing it at any size. That was the process, that's how direct sales worked and that got the initial traction.

By March of last year, it was 5 grand a month, by July we'd landed people like Pat Flynn and others and we were pushing about \$15,000 a month. In September and October of last year, Pat started promoting it along with other people and we crossed \$25,000 a month. By the end of the year, we were at \$100,000 a month in revenue and now today, six months later, we're at \$339,000 a month in revenue.

James: \$339,000 a month in revenue.

Nathan: Yeah and it's growing at least 10% every month, it's insane. We've built the team up to 21 full time people, 7,000 customers.

I think what's happened is we just got the messaging right. We're not here for all kinds of businesses. If you run that cupcake shop or something else, we're not for you. But if you're an author or blogger, we get your needs because that's where I came from, trying to sell books and courses. It's built exactly for that and we don't feel bad about turning people away and saying, it's not a good fit. That way we can have all this room and embrace with open arms all of the authors and bloggers out there who are ready for something custom built for them.

James: Wow, so now you sit back and look at your \$4 million dollar annual turnover company and think, probably good hunch that you had to put the books to one side and double down on this one.

Nathan: This one paid off, yeah.

James: Good decision I've made. Okay, well that's an amazing story Nathan and good for you for building a product that people want which is the bottom line of any successful business, right?

Nathan: Yeah.

James: How do you price it and what's the experience like compared to the sort of entry level email assistants that we mentioned earlier?

Nathan: We price it starting at \$29 a month for up to 1,000 subscribers. We don't differentiate any features based on what plan you're on, it's purely based on how many subscribers you have. You get to pay \$29 a month and get all the same features that Pat Flynn is paying many, many times that amount for, for his list.

Companies like MailChimp have a totally free plan. You can get started with MailChimp completely for free and we actually recommend that a lot of people start there. Because if you're just feeling this out and go, I don't know how important this audience building thing is to me, I'm not sure I'm ready to commit, then absolutely start with MailChimp.

We actively turn people away who say Convert Kit is too expensive or that kind of thing. We say, hey go build your list, get to 500 subscribers or something on MailChimp and then when you've proved yourself that you're serious about this, come switch to Convert Kit. We'll be ready to help you switch.

James: Do you not worry, you mentioned earlier about the difficulty of switching, it does feel, even if it's not that much work, it does feel like MailChimp's got a good handle on the entry. Once you've got people with their lists there, they feel committed, even if they're not particularly happy or they're frustrated.

YOU MUST HAVE CONSIDERED THE OPTION OF AN ENTRY LEVEL OF FREE.

Nathan: Yeah, we absolutely have. I guess two parts to that. First, on doing a free plan, we want to be able to provide really great support. Almost entirely, everyone we hire for our customer success team, is a blogger or has written a book or something like that. I don't want people who can just spit back FAQ type questions. I want people who get what you're going through and what you're trying to build and why this is important to you.

We want to be able to invest more in that and also, the response times. A while ago it was really hard for us to get past the 24 hour, like a 1 day response time to get back to and yesterday we pulled of an hour and 15 minutes. So far today, we're responding to all new emails within 30 minutes. We're trying to invest in that and the more you do a free plan, the harder that is to do. What I would hate is for the people who are just kind of feeling it out to fill up the support queue and take away from people who, they may have a small list, but they're committed to building this blog and they just have some questions.

On the other side, on the switching thing, I'm confident enough that people will hit enough frustrations with MailChimp that they'll switch. The vast majority of our customers are switching from another tool rather

than signing up with no email list.

James: Okay, the second part of that was when you get into ConvertKit, what's the experience like? Any piece of software or service gets easier with time the more you use it, but a lot of people do struggle with the concept of MailChimp when they first start. Is it going to be the same with Convert Kit?

HAVE YOU AIMED IT AT A SLIGHTLY MORE ADVANCED USER?

Nathan: We're trying to do less and do it better. We definitely have work to do on the initial learning curve. We've got a lot of training videos. Just this morning, I had been working on code for a new onboarding welcome series that has videos walking you through every step of the process. We're spending a lot of time on that.

There is definitely a learning curve. We have workshops every Thursday where our team is there live to answer questions, demo features, all of that. It could always be simpler and that's something we're spending a ton of time on.

James: Was it Einstein said, "Everything should be as simple as possible, but not any simpler."

Nathan: Yes, exactly, I love that.

James: It's a good quote. Exponential growth.

YOU'RE BASED IN IDAHO, IS EVERYBODY ELSE WHO WORKS FOR YOU, ARE YOU ALL BASED THERE? OR ARE YOU SCATTERED AROUND THE WORLD?

Nathan: We do worldwide. I think there's 5 people here in Idaho, we've got 5 in Nashville, Tennessee, then we've got Seattle, Portland, Columbus, Ohio, Barcelona, Spain, Chiang Mai, Thailand, Slovenia, wherever people want to work, we'll take them.

James: Well that's the modern way, isn't it.

Nathan: We actually use Zoom all the time which is what we're using for this call.

James: We use Zoom, it's more reliable than Skype, I think that should be its motto.

You set this up and you've got it to the point where it's doing the type of intuitive breakdown of people's lists. It's not just about your relationship with the person at the other end of your list, it is, I'm guessing, by the name you've given it, ConvertKit, it is focused on maximizing the commercial benefit of your business, right?

HOW DO YOU MONITOR THE RESULTS ON THAT, APART FROM USING IT YOURSELF? CAN YOU, HAND-ON-HEART, TELL ME THAT THIS IS A MORE EFFECTIVE COMMERCIAL SYSTEM THAN THE OTHER PLATFORMS?

Nathan: We definitely believe it and I have a few thousand tweets from customers that say the same thing. Quite frankly, people wouldn't stick with us if that wasn't the case and they wouldn't tell all their friends to switch to us and they wouldn't do webinars and demos and write review posts and all of that.

There's actually this review post that I thought was really funny. Maybe I'll send you a blank email link to it and show it. It was basically a breakup letter, like a Dear John letter, but to MailChimp. He was talking about how much he loves MailChimp's brand and all that sort of stuff, but I think it's time for us to see other people. They did this whole custom illustration with the MailChimp monkey crying, looking at a Dear John letter. It was amazing. I'll send you the link to that.

James: We should say, that long before we sorted out this interview and got in touch with you directly, Nathan, we had made a conscience decision for Self Publishing Formula to move to ConvertKit. Just on the basis of recommendations and looking around and realizing that we needed a more sophisticated platform. I guess we've come to that same point, which is exactly where you want people to come to and what the product's going to be doing. We're just in the process actually, I think we're probably entitled to the concierge service ...

Nathan: Oh yeah.

James: We're just going into that with you, which will be an interesting process. I can't wait to get my

hands on it, I have to tell you. With any business, you keep an eye over your shoulder at the competition. I don't suppose the people at MailChimp are sitting there idly filing their nails at the moment. They've got to be thinking about how they're developing their product in the future.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR DEVELOPMENT IN THE FUTURE TO MAKE SURE YOU CONTINUE TO OCCUPY THIS SPACE?

Nathan: The nice thing about staying focused is that we don't have to build all the features. We just have to build the right features for bloggers and authors. There's all kinds of functionality.

When people come to us and say, hey do you have, I don't know, I'm making something up, CRM stuff for sales tracking, because I have a sales team and they're cold emailing and calling people and I need to track all of that. How does ConvertKit work for that? We would say, not well, go use something else, go use InfusionSoft, go use something that's complicated.

We don't have to build as many features, because we say no to such a large category of customers. That makes it easier for us. I also think there are so many players out there. I could sit here and name probably 25 or more email marketing companies that make over, at least a few million dollars a year. MailChimp has 8 million customers and 600 employees. I don't think we're really taking much business away from them in the grand scheme of things. I don't know how actively they're working on improving that. I don't know if they need to.

James: I guess you're proving the old adage online which is that niche works when you focus down. That's when the results come.

Nathan: It works so well. For everyone, whatever your blog is, whatever your book is, any of that, a niche is amazing. That's such easy advice to give and so hard to take yourself, because you always think, I'm excluding all of these people and you're really not you know.

People aren't going to say, well I'm not a blogger but I run a software company and we drive a lot of our sales through a blog. Maybe ConvertKit will work for me and they end up having a great result. Whereas, most people, if you tell them it's not for them, they'll often start to find ways that you're wrong and that they can use it anyway. I found that you can't go to too much of a niche. It's so powerful.

James: Having a market and having a focus on that community. Or perhaps the best way to think of it is, it's a community that you can talk to and have a relationship with.

It's certainly worked for us at SPF. We have that conversation, in fact I had it yesterday with my business partner, who understands all of that and still was trying to tell me that we should be doing something. This is not Mark, it's our other guy. We had a friendly conversation that we should be doing something, because every business can take advantage of that. I said, well, every business uses chairs, so why don't we just sell chairs.

It will be a lot easier than what you're trying to suggest, which is we get every business, every florist and every car salesman to buy our social media advertising course. Niche works. It's really good talking to you Nathan, I'm sure people have had their interest piqued.

YOU SAY YOU DON'T DO A FREE TRIAL, BUT HOW CAN PEOPLE HAVE A LITTLE POKE ABOUT, ARE THERE VIDEOS THAT THEY CAN WATCH TO GET AN IDEA OF WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?

Nathan: Well, there's plenty of that and quite frankly, what you should do is you should set up an affiliate account. Then what you could do is through our affiliate, if you wanted to do that, then people could get a first month free if you should offer that.

James: I think an affiliate account would be an ideal thing. We'll get that link into the show notes before this episode is broadcast. In part, because it's a journey that we're going on as SPF and we're going to keep people informed about that and our experience with it. It will be certainly good to have a few people along with us in our community as well with ConvertKit.

It's exciting that there's a service that is dovetailing with this community and not simply, as you say, slightly from a standoffish is MailChimp just by necessity, because it's so huge, even with 600 employees, it's not often you have a conversation with anybody.

IT'S QUITE EXCITING TO HAVE YOU HERE AND SERVICING US, SO TO SPEAK.

Nathan: I'm thrilled to be here. If anyone wants to check out our blog, we have a lot of stuff on there, just at [ConvertKit.com](https://www.convertkit.com) about product launches and all that kind of thing because we always say that ConvertKit is built by authors and bloggers for authors and bloggers. That's core to our DNA, that's who we are. We just happen to want a better tool out there and so we've put our blogging businesses on hold in

order to build ConvertKit and hopefully support tens of thousands of authors and bloggers doing the same thing.

James: I mentioned in the interview there Mark, that we're switching over to ConvertKit. We're leaving the monkey.

Mark: At least for half of the business, the Self Publishing Formula side of things will be switching over. We're going to have a look. They've offered to handle the kind of concierge export, which means we don't have to worry too much about setting everything up. Once that's been done, I'll get involved at that point.

Mailing lists is something that I'm very focused on, so it's something that I want to be involved in, but it's quite nice to have that taken off my plate so I don't need to worry about it until things have been set up, so I can see how it works in practice.

The reviews are pretty strong. Pat Flynn is a friend of mine and he speaks very highly of ConvertKit, so that's a recommendation that I'm going to listen to. The numbers speak for themselves. Nathan wouldn't have a business that's generating that kind of income if it wasn't a robust and useful product. We're very keen to see how that works. Of course, if it works well, then it might be something that I'll look to exporting my main mailing list, which is nearly 55,000 strong now, so we'll see. We'll see how we get on.

James: And depending on our experience with it, I think it's going to be very positive as you say, it's very likely. We'll be upfront about it if we end up in their affiliate program. I know Pat Flynn, that's how his business operates, he's very transparent about it with his monthly income reports. He makes tens of thousands of dollars on that. That's not because he thinks he can make money from it, it's because he primarily thinks this is a really good platform and you should be using it. I think we'll probably get to the same place with them, but we'll see. As things develop we'll keep you in touch with that.

There are other options and in fact, if you are a member of our course at the moment, you will have noticed in Facebook that one of our students has created a really low end option for people who can't afford it. ConverKit starts at \$29 a month and goes up from there. There are other options that do a lot less.

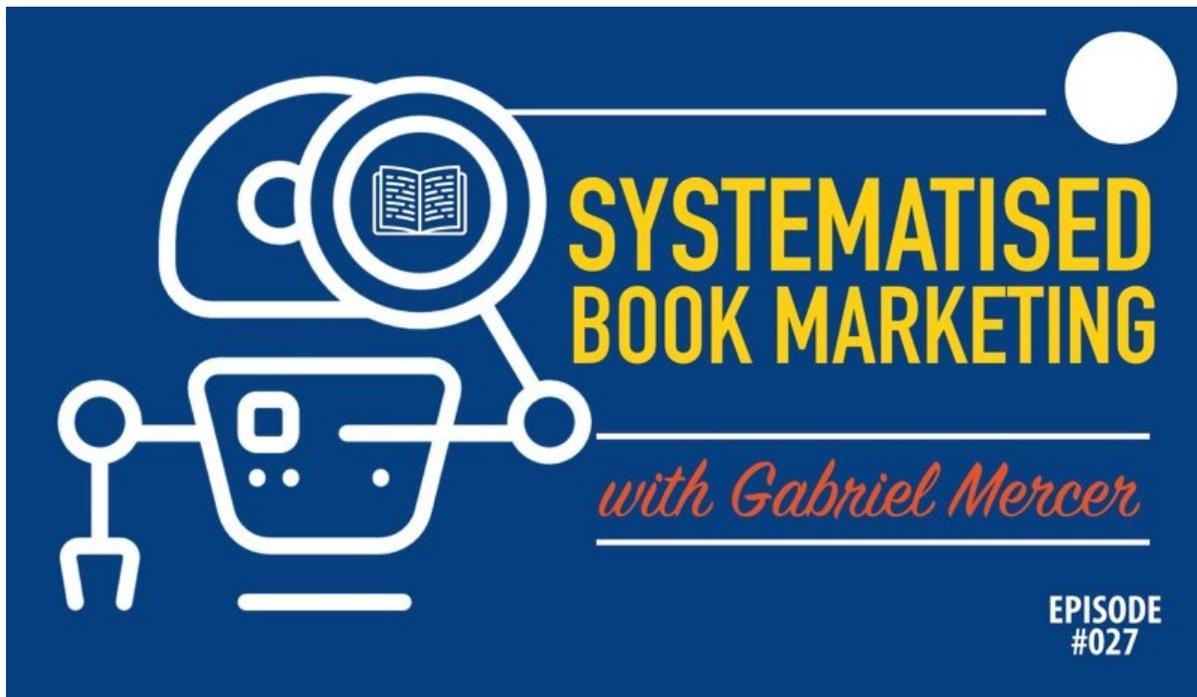
If you are getting to the point where you really need to market to your list and start making your list perform better for you, then you need something probably more sophisticated than even MailChimp and I guess that's what they've done.

James: Yeah, thank you. Right, I'm going to get writing and have a great week.

Mark: Cool. Bye bye.

CHAPTER 24

SYSTEMATISED BOOK MARKETING - WITH GABRIEL MERCER



WRITING A NOVEL IS ONE THING. Writing a novel specifically to fulfill a demand is another.

On this episode of the Self Publishing Formula podcast, James has a very intriguing conversation with Gabriel Mercer, a marketing and technical expert who was approached by a would-be author about marketing her books - before they were written. She had an idea that she wanted to be a best-selling author and made up her mind to make it happen. She figured that the best way to do it was to find out exactly how to meet the demand of a popular niche genre on purpose. It turns out she figured right. This conversation opens the door to many ideas that seem unorthodox but as the one who pulled all the strings behind the scenes Gabriel is convinced it is a repeatable strategy - and you'll get to hear all about it on this episode.

MOST NOVEL WRITERS WRITE FROM PASSION FOR THE STORY. THIS AUTHOR WROTE TO SELL.

Don't misunderstand, this author enjoys writing, but the driving force behind her efforts was not self-expression or creativity. She was interested in becoming a professional author so she did what needed to be done to ensure that happened. She found out how successful book promotion happens, what book niches were most likely to be fertile soil for a new author, and began her plan to create books that would sell well within that genre. Gabriel is the man she asked to spearhead her technical and promotional efforts - and he's our guest on this episode of the podcast.

HOW CAN YOU CREATE A MARKETING PLAN FOR A SERIES OF NOVELS WHEN THE NOVEL WRITING PROCESS HASN'T EVEN BEGUN?

Many products come to market because an entrepreneur sees a demonstrated need in a particular niche and specifically builds a product or service to meet that need. It's smart business. The product is built with a degree of certainty that it is going to be a success. Why isn't that approach taken more often when it comes to writing a novel?

THE GROUNDWORK THAT WAS LAID WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE MARKETING APPROACH THEY USED.

Gabriel provided the basic structure she'd need to follow to promote and market her books well. Then he told her that he'd serve as a paid consultant if she wanted to take further action - and didn't expect to hear back from her. But she jumped on his offer and the two were off to the races. One of the things Gabriel advised she start on immediately was building relationships with other authors in her genre and those who would soon be fans of her writing. Her efforts at establishing those relationships even before the books were written was a significant part of the sales success she experienced. You can hear how Gabriel advised her to go about it and what she did to accomplish it.

COULD THIS SAME SUCCESSFUL WRITING AND PROMOTIONAL APPROACH WORK IN DIFFERENT GENRES?

Gabriel took a fairly unorthodox approach and believes - based on the sales numbers and email opt-ins alone - that the approach he used should work in other genres as well. He's currently running tests in the science fiction and fantasy niches to see if his suspicions are correct. This conversation opens the door to all kinds of creative novel marketing ideas, so be sure you take the time to listen.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- How Gabriel Mercer came to be known by the SPF guys.
- Starting the book launch and marketing in reverse.
- Why authors need to understand that self publishing contains many roles.
- The state of the project when the author approached Gabriel.
- How Mark approached the marketing task on behalf of his author client.

- The giveaways Mark used to promote the book.
- Facebook Ads in the promotion campaign.
- Lining up the books to release in quick succession... a mistake.
- The books series sales success since launch.
- Gabriel's role in cover design and formatting.
- Current campaigns Gabriel is running.
- Testing Gabriel is doing in different genres and why he's confident it will work.
- Next week's conversation with Rachel Abbott.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Tim Grahl](#)
- [Ryan Holiday](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to Episode 27 from the self-publishing formula.

Announcer: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Here we are back again, Mark Dawson and James Blatch with you with the SPF weekly podcast. We've got a really good interview this week. Quite an interesting one, actually, and this is going to be one that's going to be of great interest for anybody who's in the stage now of launching a book, or even if you've got a couple of books but you've never quite got yourselves going to really kickstart your career. We are always interested in hearing the stories and hearing the detail about how people make themselves successful as self-publishers. This guy actually emailed me out of the blue. We had a chat over email, and very quickly I became very interested in how he had done this.

It's a very commercial approach right from the beginning. He and the person who he was marketing the book for, the author. He's not, in that sense, self-published. He's done basically the self-publishing job for somebody else, but they took, if you like, a brutalist commercial view right from the beginning, before a word was written on the first book, to work out what was going to be successful. He explains in great detail in this interview how they went through the process, and I think they're looking at a six figure income for the first year of this self-publisher's career, which is obviously fantastic. His name is Gabriel

Mercer, and I think you're going to enjoy this interview.

Get contacted from time to time by listeners from the podcast, and when Gabriel Mercer contacted us, we thought this is interesting, because Gabriel talked about a project to get a writer launched. Over a few month period, they went up to I think something like a \$50,000 revenue. We'll talk to Gabriel in a moment about that, but there were a few things that stood out that were different from the approach that they took. I'm delighted to say Gabriel joins us from the eastern side of the United States. Gabriel, are you?

Gabriel Mercer: Yes, right around Florida area.

James Blatch: Are you in Florida? Sunny Florida. Wonderful. Gabriel, just talk us through this project then, how you approached it.

FIRST, WHAT WAS THE BOOKS, THE SUBJECT, ETC., AND WHAT WAS YOUR STARTING POINT?

Gabriel Mercer: I come from a technology background, so books, to me, are completely foreign. Or they were, up until probably about a year and a half ago. A friend of mine who knew what I did in tech was talking to me about digital marketing, and said, "Look, I have an author who wants to "pick your brain," sit down with you at a coffee shop, and spend hours trying to learn everything about digital marketing in a matter of minutes," which never works, but I agreed, because it's a good friend of mine. The author and I sat down at a Starbucks local to me, and she had really good questions which I answered, and by the end I thought, okay, that was fun, I need to go back and do real work.

I used my same typical consulting offer that I make. I'm like, "Look, if you want more of my time, you just have to pay me," and that usually will exit anyone who is not serious. She took me aback and jumped all over the opportunity, and was like, "Absolutely, I would love to pay you for time." We started working together from that point on.

The thing about this project was she committed to it in a way that I think I hadn't seen from a lot of other authors. Most people decide that they want to write a book, and then they decide what the book is going to be about, and then they bring it to market, and she reversed that whole process. She looked at what the market was doing and decided where the opportunity was, and then she went ahead and wrote not just one, but three full novels before going to market. That process, for us, was what ultimately led to most of

the success.

James Blatch: The way that she approached her writing and her business.

Gabriel Mercer: Exactly. It was a commitment to quality, and she treated it like a business from the very beginning. She was disciplined, she was focused, she put a lot of hard work in. She's still continuing to be patient about results, even though I think what she's done is tremendous.

James Blatch: That's something that we do talk about all the time, and you do get some resistance. Some authors don't like the idea of being business people, but I guess that's where you come in then, Gabriel. Actually, we get asked quite a lot by authors. Mark gets emails, "Can you run my campaigns for me," and his answer, because he's a very busy man, he's got several businesses on the go, is "You wouldn't be able to afford me because of the time I would take out from the other businesses." Actually, if you make it your specialism, and I guess you do do bits and pieces for other people. This is the missing link for some people.

Gabriel Mercer: It is, and I think a lot of the key to an author's success is just acknowledging that, particularly in self-publishing, there is not just one role. There's not just the writer anymore.

This is something that actually goes back to, if you look at old Tony Robbins, his business mastery program, he talked about this exact same thing. In any company, there are three roles, and he calls them the talent, the leader, and the entrepreneur. For the writer market, it's really the artist, the director, and the producer.

You have the art side, which is this idea of creating fiction, and doing this creative activity that's a form of expression and bringing that product to life.

On the other side, you have the other two pieces, which are the ability to run and manage an outsourced team or a project, and then there's the social side. The influencer outreach, the working with readers and talking one on one to other authors, and moving the needle through networking.

Each one of those is a completely different skillset, and unfortunately for most self-published authors, you have to be really good at all three.

James Blatch: That is one of the tricks, isn't it? We'll just go back to the point.

HAD SHE FINISHED HER FIRST BOOK WHEN SHE FIRST CAME TO YOU?

Gabriel Mercer: She had not written anything when we first talked. Not at all. It was pretty surprising. She had just done enough research to know that she wanted to write.

It was an old hobby for her when she was in college, and she was like, "Look, I want to write. I don't know what I want to write. I don't know what it's going to be. I don't know what that book is going to look like, but I know that this is what I want to try to do, and I want to do it professionally."

We talked about how that would look, how long she would have to stay in a day job. I said, "Look, I think the best way for you to approach this is think about romance as a market. Obviously huge. Bigger by twice from the next nearest market down." I said, "You really need to think about what your brand is going to be, because that's really what your focus needs to be."

She started writing and wrote three full length contemporary romance novels, closer to the erotic romance side than the clean romance side, because that's, I think, still what is popular for the most part in that genre, and then she also made the decision to write New Adult, so another really popular category right now. That, I think, has been the key to her success.

James Blatch: Interesting that, from your point of view, it was ideal that somebody comes to you at that very early stage rather than having created maybe three different cross-genre books and give you a more different marketing task. You could work together, as it should be really, marketing and the product should be very closely aligned.

WHERE DID YOU START, GABRIEL? WHAT WAS YOUR KNOWLEDGE AREA OF MARKETING AND SELLING BOOKS?

Gabriel Mercer: I come from a background of tech, and so the way that I got into marketing and eventually information products, which I think books are a part of, is through the tech side. I started being a coder in

school. I ended up, through developing software and other information platforms to learning that the other challenge that a lot of businesses have is marketing.

Then I eventually developed into the paid advertising side, which is what led me to you and Mark, what you guys are doing with Facebook ads. That is definitely probably the hottest ad platform that exists right now. My path is completely different than most would take to get to this, but I really think that most coders, especially guys who love to be in the cave and just developing software, I think their artistry is pretty much the same as an author in a lot of ways. I've seen so many parallels between those two roles over the years.

James Blatch: When you say a coder, do you actually mean a programmer? Somebody who writes programming code.

Gabriel Mercer: Right, I was a developer. That's probably the proper term for it.

James Blatch: Yes. I was in a previous life as well, as a computer programmer, in the old COBOL days. I completely agree with you. There's an artistic element to computer programming that people don't appreciate. They think it's ones and zeroes, but it actually is a far more artistic endeavor.

You have this outline. You got led to us, to Self Publishing Formula and presumably one or two other areas.

WERE FACEBOOK ADS YOUR MAIN THING? I THINK THAT YOU SAID TO US WHEN YOU INITIALLY CONTACTED US THAT YOU DIDN'T USE THE PERMAFREE ROUTE, WHICH IS ALMOST CHAPTER 1 OF THE BIBLE FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE.

Gabriel Mercer: I have really strong feelings about that. Having been in the information products market for as long as I have now, and having built my whole career around that, that's how I made the bulk of my income. It's how I continue to make the income that I need to pay the bills. That's my day job, so to speak.

First of all, I think it's hard to imagine somebody spending the amount of time that they spend building a story or a fiction property of any kind, and then only selling it for what for most authors I think is going to be less than \$20 in every case. I don't think I've seen a book for more than that in a very long time.

That already is hard for me to wrap my mind around, and it's the reason I avoided books for so long, even non-fiction books. The conventional wisdom in my world is that there is no money in books. It's a business card or it's a tool to get to the things that you really want to sell.

It wasn't until I saw what Mark was doing that I realized that the possibility of making a living from fiction is even possible, and that all came together with this author being on my doorstep and saying, "Look, I'm willing to commit to this and make it a professional gig, so how can we do it?" That's when I started to dig. Permafree, it's not a philosophy that I buy into, and I can get into why if you want to talk about that.

James Blatch: What I'm more interested in is what you did instead of it, because I think you did have some form of giveaway, didn't you?

Gabriel Mercer: We did. We still gave away things, just never the core product. We gave away a Kindle Paperwhite loaded with 25 ebooks that were very market specific, so it would appeal to the same demographic.

The author spent a year and a half doing outreach to various authors in the genre that she was writing in and making connections, and doing the Tim Grahl relentlessly helpful mindset. Or maybe a better example would be the Ryan Holiday canvas strategy, where she just worked for them without taking credit to buy herself some favors later on when her books were out.

All of that led her to the point where, when she did finally release, she got a lot of forward momentum. The giveaways and in particular the way that we kicked things off with the mailing list was just about a \$500 buy in to really, really promote and push and build her list as quickly as possible, and we ended up with 1200 people. In one week, I would say that's a pretty good list building effort.

James Blatch: You got 1200 signups in a week?

Gabriel Mercer: In a week, yeah. The good news is is that in most cases, giveaways tend to attract people

who are bargain seekers. They're people who are looking for the thing you're giving away.

James Blatch: That's one of the dangers people have warned about with it, yeah.

Gabriel Mercer: For sure, and we were conscious of that, and so we did a really good job of making sure that our offer was very focused and that we took care and nurtured those people afterwards to the point where we have a 75% retention rate after, it's been 90 days now. About 900+ of those people are still sticking around.

James Blatch: You cracked this Holy Grail of a giveaway, a competition, a contest, actually, and with valuable leads, not just people who simply entered to try to win and then went off and didn't engage with you anymore.

YOU ACTUALLY HAD A VERY POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT RATE AFTERWARDS.

Gabriel Mercer: Right, and I credit the author with that entirely. The strategy was there prior to me ever coming on board. I just simply pushed her to engage and nurture and treat those readers and those early subscribers as if they hadn't entered for the giveaway and that they really did care about what she was doing as a fiction writer.

I think that turned the tide for her a little bit. She did a lot of work with those early readers. She built a launch team from that of 30 people. Again, she's retained 75% of the readers, and now, after three different books, she's, I think 31 reviews on one title, 20 on another, and 7 on another. Each one of those has been organic. She's really done a good job.

James Blatch: Remind me, did you say how much you spent on your ads in that week?

Gabriel Mercer: We went really heavy in the very beginning. We were spending probably anywhere from \$10-\$30 a day just depending on which book we were promoting, but I really went heavy on Book 1, knowing that that was going to be the introduction to the series and hopefully lead to read through later on. That turned out to pay off.

After 162 different variations, we finally hit on a combination of ads that drove clicks at anywhere from 12-19 cents. It eventually leveled off at around 14, and it continues to perform well. We're actually still running it at about \$10 a day right now.

That resulted in a break even and a little bit of positive return, but not a whole lot. It was really more the exposure in the first month that we were looking for.

James Blatch: You went very big at the beginning, had your launch giveaway.

Gabriel Mercer: Right, launch giveaway.

James Blatch: How much did you spend on advertising for that to get the 1200 leads?

Gabriel Mercer: Gosh, to get the 1200, it was probably only a week's worth of advertising.

James Blatch: A few hundred. 3 or 4 hundred, maybe fewer.

Gabriel Mercer: Yeah, it wasn't a lot. Maybe \$100, even. It wasn't a lot of money.

James Blatch: That's a very good value. That worked really well for you. If I remember this rightly from the way you wrote:

YOU DID LINE UP THE BOOKS TO LAUNCH IN QUICK SUCCESSION, AND MAKE AN IMPACT WITH THE TOP 10 LISTS, OR BESTSELLING LISTS AS QUICK AS POSSIBLE.

Gabriel Mercer: If I had to go back and do anything over again, that would be the one thing I would probably change. I would space those releases out a little bit more.

Three weeks seemed at the time to be optimal. It gave us enough time to really push things out and try and brute force the bestseller lists and push the author's books into visibility, where Amazon hopefully then

would pick it up and start marketing.

I think that everything I've seen in the data since then indicates that the shelf life of even a new release is actually much longer than I originally anticipated. While there is a drop off at 30 days, I think it's probably closer to 6 months when a new title finally starts to lose steam.

James Blatch: What you discovered is you actually have more time to not worry about momentum dropping away.

Gabriel Mercer: I think a very slow, linear, growth-like build is much better than that exponential spike that eventually drops off.

Again, everything we've seen across all of the books that we publish now to date indicates that it's much better to build slowly over time, and even release at a rate of once per quarter than it is to try and cram everything into a 30 day or a three week window as we did with her books.

James Blatch: You did your launch, and you had how many books? Was it five at this stage?

Gabriel Mercer: She took a step back and was really overworked at one point. She was juggling a full time job as a bookkeeper and, I think, a forensic accountant for a couple of companies that she was freelancing with in addition to writing full time and doing a heavy amount of outreach, again, with influencers, reviewers.

She was even querying at one point looking for a traditional deal until I talked her down from that. Actually, thank you, data guy over at Author Earnings for talking her down from that. It was a lot for her to handle, and she said, if anything has to give, knowing what we know about the space these books should be coming out, I want to dial back and focus on promoting these properties that I have and making the decision to push off books four and five until later in the year. That's slowed her growth considerably in the last, probably, two weeks to three weeks since the launch of her last book.

James Blatch: In bottom line terms, once you'd launched, you getting towards the peak of your sales, what were you hitting?

Gabriel Mercer: She is probably going to max out this year at six figures, is my guess.

James Blatch: Wow.

Gabriel Mercer: She's going to do really well. There's no doubt. Again, I think that that is an outlier. I don't necessarily think that is normal.

I would say that, had we not done literally everything right except for cramming all of these books into one small space as a release window, I think she probably would have come out closer to 20,000 in the year, but it's just something clicked.

I think, whether or not she realized it, what she wanted to write lined up really well with what the market was looking for. It all came together in the right way and just exploded.

Again, I don't think it's as much luck in my mind as it is just following a really good system, working hard, doing all the things that you and Mark talk about on your podcast.

James Blatch: I'm sure it's not luck by the sounds of the methodical approach that you've taken to it.

DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN COVER DESIGN AND FORMATTING, ALL THIS ANCILLARY STUFF, AS WELL?

Gabriel Mercer: I did a little bit, yeah. I have some background working as a partner in marketing agencies with design and art direction. I'm by no means an expert. I have an eye for what I think looks good.

I imagine many amateur art directors do, and being able to pair that with, again, a strong testing methodology where this seems like it would work very well, let's test three variations of it and figure out

what actually works. The thing that I always love saying is that I make more money every time I'm wrong. It's healthy for me to adopt this mindset of I'm going to take my best shot, but it's still just an assumption.

James Blatch: Lots of valuable lessons coming out of this, but that constant split testing, constant reevaluation, constant optimizing of your campaigns.

We talk about this on the podcast quite a lot, and I've seen today, actually, coincidentally, somebody who's been running campaigns for two or three weeks and is about to throw it all in because it's not working. And you're thinking there aren't many businesses in the world where after 21 days you get it all cracked to measure profit and you can go off and enjoy. It takes some work, but you kept that agility going all the way through the campaign, so I'm certain you're still doing that now.

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT RUNNING AT THE MOMENT AND WHERE ARE YOU IN TERMS OF CAMPAIGNS?

Gabriel Mercer: Right now, we are currently running two campaigns. We were running a campaign for a book club giveaway where we gave away, I think it was, 10 signed copies of her book to a select audience. I think two or three thousand people requested the book. It went really well, and we just mailed those out the other day.

The other thing that we're running is we're continuing to run that same \$10 a day really solid ad copy and ad imagery directly to her book, and that typically comes in at about 120% ROI. Again, it's not earth shattering, but it's enough to keep her sales at the level they need to be so that when people read through to the other books, books two and three, as a result of those ads, those are all profit for her.

James Blatch: Gabriel, you've proved that you can, I think you said in the email to me initially, you can absolutely jump start a career from zero. This is not a case of having to wait two or three years of slog. If you get the stuff right at the beginning. Obviously you had a quite good genre for this, but we talked to Rachel Aaron a couple of weeks ago. We have lots of authors who have very successful careers in niche genres as well, so I don't think we can all say that's what this is down to. Congratulations on that. It's really good.

CAN WE KNOW WHO IT IS? IS THERE ANY REASON WHY WE CAN'T KNOW WHO THE AUTHOR IS?

Gabriel Mercer: She's asked me to keep her name private. I'm not entirely sure why, to be perfectly

honest. She is just very conscious of getting the wrong kind of attention to her books, and she doesn't want to be known for the money that she's making. She wants the work to stand on her own. I don't know. It's an interesting dynamic, but I'm just respecting her wishes in this case.

James Blatch: I understand that. That's certainly not for everyone.

IS THIS SOMETHING YOU THINK YOU CAN MOVE ON TO ANOTHER AUTHOR WITH?

Gabriel Mercer: I can definitely say that it can be replicated in romance.

We are currently testing the exact same methodology across science fiction fantasy, and soon will be testing with another author in thrillers. There's lots of things lined up.

The only thing I can say for sure is that it worked in this particular case with this author writing full length contemporary romance. I don't know if the same will be true if we try mystery thriller. I don't know if the same will be true in science fiction, but I suspect that it will be because a lot of the core tenets and principles that we're applying really I think are going to be the differentiators going forward. A lot of that was assumptions on my part when we first started and what I was really pleased to see was that a lot of the data is bearing that out.

James Blatch: If you get around to doing a blog post on it, we'll probably feature you as a guest blogger on SPF, but certainly point people in the direction of anything you'd write down, because I think it's a very interesting way of looking at it.

What particularly is interesting is your lack of emotional involvement in it. We all get emotionally involved in our business, but the fact that you're not the author does make you slightly different in this community where mostly it's people themselves, and being able to slightly disassociate themselves from their author selves is an important part of approaching the business correctly. I think people would want to learn from that, learn the way that you've approached it without it being your babies that are for sale.

Gabriel Mercer: It's really hard to take off that creative hat, something that you've poured blood, sweat, and tears into over time, and look at it as purely an information product and really try to gauge how the market is reacting to that or how your audience is responding to what they're reading. A lot of people don't

want to hear it, and that's the truth.

It's one of the reasons I encourage all new authors to go out and get early feedback from any of their writing and engage on how much work they're really going to have to do. Is it going to be a couple of years and a couple of bin novels, or is it going to be 10 years of daily work that you really have to consider? That's a big choice.

James Blatch: Gabriel, thank you so much indeed for coming onto the Self Publishing Formula podcast from sunny Florida, although I have to say, the two weeks I've spent in Florida, it rained every day. I drove around looking behind cars reading The Sunshine State on everyone's registration plates.

Gabriel Mercer: They don't tell you that the summer is hurricane season and not to show up around then.

James Blatch: I think we're going to be there in September, in hurricane season. Gabriel, thank you so much indeed. It's been really interesting, and we'll keep in touch. Let me know when you put that down in writing, we'll get a link out to people.

Gabriel Mercer: Definitely. Thanks, James. I appreciate it.

James Blatch: Gabriel did things a little bit differently. I mentioned to Gabriel in the interview that you get asked a lot by people, "Can you run my campaigns for me?" You always say "You couldn't afford me," because obviously you're running quite a few businesses and your own publishing empire. But this guy is a digital marketing guy who's had his interest piqued about self publishing, and he's made a real success of this romance author's first three books.

They didn't have a permafrees giveaway, so they gave away a Kindle loaded with the free books that were of a similar genre, and that worked really well for them for an explosive list build over a couple of week period. That was the main difference, I think, between the way that we often talk to people about doing things, but it seemed to work for them, so a really interesting interview.

Mark Dawson: It's interesting on giveaways. I'm a little more sanguine about doing those because I've done plenty in the past and the danger is you get people who want the free thing and they're not so interested in your books. If Gabriel has demonstrated that it's worked for him, it's something that is worth looking fresh at. It's not something that I do, but maybe I'll take another look at it.

James Blatch: It's different circumstances. I think what you give away and how you pitch the adverts all make a difference in that front, but there's more than one way to skin a cat.

Gabriel found us because he understands Facebook advertising, the power of social media advertising, and he was a big fan of what you were doing and the way you were teaching that, so that's how he found us, and then he thought that this story would be interesting.

I have asked Gabriel, you probably heard in interview, if he'll do a blog post for us at some point in the future, because it's quite a lot of detail in the description of how he did that launch, and I think that would be interesting to hear.

Okay, we're coming back to talking directly to an author next week. We are going to talk to the wonderful Rachel Abbott, who is probably quite well known to a lot of Self Publishing Formula listeners. We actually spoke to her, didn't we, at the London Book Festival?

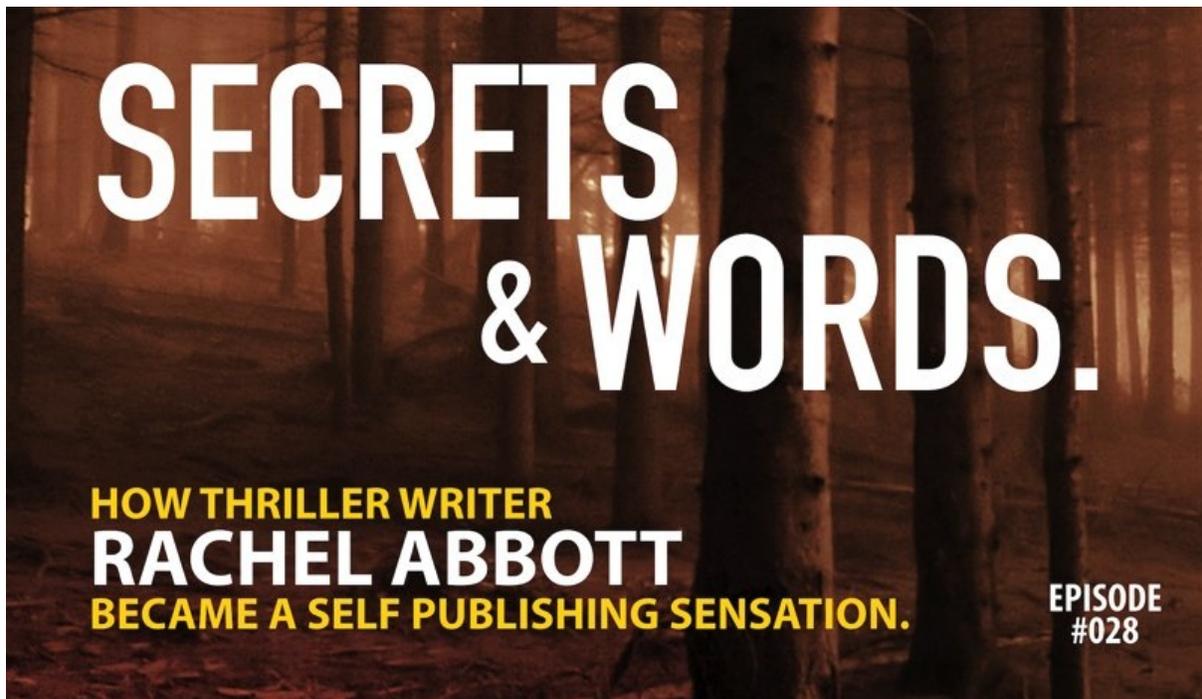
Mark Dawson: At the book fair that we did. It's great. One of the biggest selling KDB authors in the UK. Very well known, is great fun to talk to, so that's definitely going to be something that people should look forward to next week.

James Blatch: We're going to talk to Rachel about productivity and tactics and sales. She's somebody else who's a bit of a fan of yours, Mark, so there'll be a bit of mutual love there, but we'll hear a lot of original and interesting stuff from Rachel without question. That'll be SPF 28.

We're looking forward to talking to you again. Thank you so much for listening.

CHAPTER 25

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR IN THE UK, RACHEL ABBOTT, ON HER SUCCESS, MARKETING, AND WRITING HABITS



BEST-SELLING THRILLER AUTHOR, Rachel Abbott is quick to point out that her success is just as surprising to her as it is to anyone. Her skill and her savvy for marketing and sales have combined to make her the best-selling author in the UK on Amazon's KDP platform. On this episode, you'll get to hear how Rachel, after an entirely different career in business, got into writing, how she devised and regularly implements an extensive marketing plan for each new book launch, and what she believes it takes to be a successful author these days.

IF YOU WANT TO BE A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, WRITE A BOOK THAT IMPACTS THE READER

That is just one sliver of the advice Rachel has for those who take the time to listen to this episode. It's her firm belief that you can't simply write a story: you have to connect the dots between the story and the human experience being portrayed within it. It's the connection to the reader made by your story that makes the difference and propels them to read your book - and the next one after that. Rachel generously

shares her insights and experiences on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula so be sure to set aside the time to listen.

BUILDING AWARENESS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR BOOK MARKETING.

Before you even think about selling books you need to consider how people are going to get to hear about them. One of the most important parts of book marketing is building awareness that your books even exist. On this episode, Rachel explains how she first got started and how that initial set of experiences influenced her current approach to awareness building. She walks us through some of the foundational elements she puts in place to ensure that it happens across a wide variety of media and social channels.

NO BEST-SELLING AUTHOR TODAY ATTAINS THAT STATUS BY THEIR WRITING ALONE.

Many self-published authors these days seem to believe that once they write the book it will somehow magically sell itself. But that's not the case and it's something that Rachel discovered early on in her writing career. She says that she didn't become a best-selling author by writing and expecting sales to follow. She's taken a very aggressive approach to marketing and selling her books including plenty of social media interaction with fans, building an email list, paid advertising, and other tactics. You can hear how this successful author integrates skilful writing with savvy marketing on this episode of the podcast.

EVEN SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHORS CAN USE A GOOD AGENT.

It does create a little bit of confusion when you first hear that a best-selling self-published author like Rachel Abbott uses an agent. But it's not the typical approach to hiring an agent that you'll find in Rachel's toolbox. Her agent helps her keep abreast of what is going on in the market that Rachel is trying to write for, serves as a sounding board for the book's structure, plot developments, themes and much more. You can hear Rachel describe this fascinating twist on the standard author-agent relationship on this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Update on Mark's recent webinar with Nick Stephenson.
- A SPF meetup in Florida - September of 2016.
- Introduction of today's guest: Rachel Abbott.
- How Rachel got into writing.
- What got Rachel into the idea of writing.
- Rachel's thoughts on writing a book that impacts the reader.
- How Rachel began pursuing publishing.
- The road toward success for Rachel.
- The marketing plan that got her book to best-seller in 4 weeks.
- Rachel's writing schedule - 1 book per year.

- Rachel's general advice for those just starting out.
- When Rachel started collecting email addresses.
- Rachel's launch plan (it's a massive plan).
- How Rachel uses a publicist.
- The role Rachel's agent plays in her career development.
- Rachel's writing routine.
- The tools Rachel uses.
- How Rachel is using Facebook Advertising Boost Post

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Rachel Abbott Official Website](#)
- BOOK: Only The Innocent
- BOOK: Stranger Child
- NOVELLA: Nowhere Child
- BOOK: Kill Me Again
- [Scrivener](#)
- [Scapple](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number twenty-eight from the Self Publishing Formula.

Narrator: Two writers, one just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Mark, you've been a busy boy this week. You just got off a webinar with author Nick Stephenson, how did that go?

Mark: It was great, really good. Nick had a great webinar presentation planned and loads of people turned up and almost all of them stayed until the end which was great. We spent about half an hour answering questions on book marketing. That was fun and, as usual, I learned some stuff as well, so all good, really.

James: I think having you and Nick available together to answer questions covers a huge chunk of what you need to know to get on with self publishing.

Mark: Yeah, we covered pretty much everything, so I hope people got good value out of that. I think they did.

James: Good. Was it quite advanced?

Mark: No, not too much. Reasonably basic, looking at how to find your first ten thousand readers, that's Nick's thing, of course. Reasonably basic level, a good webinar for everyone.

James: Good. Because one of the things we're thinking a lot about is new authors. I think a lot about it because I'm just getting towards the end of drafting my first novel and I'm really starting to get into the next stage now. We're building our 101 course, which we're very excited about. You, me, and John all doing elements, mainly you, it has to be said, as the man who cracks the whole model.

If you're an author, you've got either your first draft and you're just moving into that next stage of marketing, or you don't know where to start on it, or possibly you've got a couple of books but you haven't really got the commercial set up right yet, this is aimed at you.

It's a really big thing for us, isn't it? Because we think this is such an amazing industry at the moment, it's an amazing opportunity and an amazing time to be a writer, but you've got to get those steps right in the first instance to get yourself set up properly for success.

Mark: Yeah, exactly. In the main course that we've done, I suppose I've become best known for is the Facebook ads course. That's reasonably advanced, not completely advanced, but you do need to be a little bit down the road really before you start to implement that.

We've definitely come to the conclusion that there's a massive demand for something below that, more of an entry level, almost nuts and bolts. Everything you need to do from the moment you finish your

manuscript to the moment you're ready to start selling it. Then beyond that with the second book and the third book. Your optimum sequences, mailing lists, social media, all of that kind of stuff that, to be honest, I kind of take that stuff for granted these days, because I've been doing it for so long now. When you actually step back and think about it and try to put yourself back into how your shoes, as you were five years ago, kind of where you are now, James, you realize quite quickly that there's a big demand for that kind of resource.

We are excited, I've cleared my calendar for September to start recording that. We're hoping to get that at least in the can by the end of September and then we'll start testing it in October and we're thinking about opening doors in November.

James: That URL is www.selfpublishingformula.com, there's a big banner at the top of the page. You cannot miss it when you're on there.

One other thing I want to mention, we're very excited we have a fantastic interview by the way in just a moment, so we're going to rattle through these parish notices, as we say in old England. The other thing I want to mention is coming up in September is Mark, I, and the third person who you don't hear from in SPF, John, we're all going to be in the United States. Most of our students are in the US, we have students around the world, Australia, Europe, here in Blighty, but the majority, the biggest percentage is the US. We're going to drop in on a few of our students, particularly the ones who started at the beginning with us and have had great success, meet them.

We're going to converge together at NINC, which is the annual conference down in Florida and we are going to host a little get together. Have a drink on us and come and say hello. We would love to hear from you. If you listen to the podcast regularly and you're anywhere in the Florida area, or within driving distance of Florida, that's going to be on Wednesday, the twenty-first of September in the evening. We'll put out some details on our Facebook page near the time, when we've sorted out actual venues. It's probably going to be about seven o'clock in the evening and will go on till late. I don't think we're going to buy the drinks all night, Mark. We should make that clear at this stage.

Mark: We'll get John to buy the drinks.

James: Get us drunk, basically, and drinks will be yours. We would love for you to come up and say hello to us. It's always, absolutely brilliant. London Book Fair was the highlight for us this year. Meeting so many people who listen to the podcast or have been in our Facebook group or even taken the course. It would be lovely to see you if you're going to NINC.

If you're in our Facebook group, you should know about this already, but if you're not in our Facebook group, do drop us an email at support@selfpublishingformula.com and we will send you an invite to come to the Facebook group and that will give you the details of where we're going to meet. It's going to be very close to the main hotel which is the, what is it called again? It's on St. Pete's beach, isn't it? In Florida.

Mark: Tradewinds?

James: Tradewinds. A resort hotel, Tradewinds. I'm not giving a venue detail yet because I'm speaking to the hotel and we're trying to work out what the best thing to do, it might be at a nearby bar, it might be somewhere in the hotel. We don't want to step on the toes of other things that are going on NINC.

I think there's a BookBub reception that night and absolutely you should be able to go to that and then come to us will be the plan. That's a bit of SPF live in September in Florida, so we're looking forward to seeing you then if you can make that.

Right, time to get on with our interview. You know that earlier this year we spoke to the biggest selling KDP author on the planet and today we have the biggest selling KDP author in the United Kingdom, Rachel Abbott. She has something very much in common with Barbara Freethy in that she is very down to earth, once you start listening to her talking in a few minutes there'll be no surprises to why she's successful, because very much like Barbara, she puts her head down, she understands how things work and if they don't work she keeps at it until they do work. It's a methodical approach, brilliant interview, very inspiring, very valuable. Without further ado, let's move on to Rachel and we're going to pick up when I asked Rachel in the beginning to talk to me about how she first got into writing.

Rachel: I didn't actually start writing until I had taken early retirement from work. I published my first book in 2011, at the end of 2011. Through a lot of marketing efforts and hard work, I managed to get to the top of the charts and since then it's been all systems go, really. I've not stopped writing since.

James: Rachel, I can't believe you're retired already, because we have met and you don't look old enough to have been retired from another career. What was your other career?

Rachel: I used to run an interactive media company. I started that company in 1982, we used to produce software and originally it was floppy disc software for schools mainly. Mainly for the education market.

James: Okay, so a little bit of crossover. I suppose you're quite ahead of its time, interactive media in the 1980s. You've got one foot in the digital space coming up to this point of writing.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO WRITE? WAS IT THE IDEA OF SELF-PUBLISHING, WAS IT THE IDEA SIMPLY OF WRITING, YOU HAD NO IDEA THAT YOU'D BE SELF PUBLISHING AT THAT POINT?

Rachel: It was really strange actually because I'd never thought about it, I've always been a voracious reader, but I'd never really thought about writing a book, until I was thinking sometime in the late 90s, probably, I was talking to the chairman of my company and saying that I would quite like to sell the business because I'd been doing it for a long time and it was very exhausting. I said I'd quite like to sell it and he said well what would you do? I said I think I'd probably write a book. Everybody looked at me and I thought, yeah, I'd really like to do that. But it was quite a long time after that before we actually did sell the business, and even longer after that before I actually gave up work, because I carried on working for the holding company for another five years after I'd sold the business. I used to drive to work plotting murders, basically.

James: You wanted to write, that was your motivation? You liked the idea of it and you enjoyed books.

THEN HOW DID YOU MAKE THAT TRANSITION? BECAUSE LOTS OF PEOPLE READ BOOKS, NOT EVERYBODY WRITES SUCCESSFUL BOOKS.

Rachel: I think it was because I had all this time driving to work and back, because I used to drive for an hour each morning, even though it was only fifteen miles. I used to think about how the murder might actually take place. Because I wanted to work on the principle of what set of circumstances could be so bad that a woman would have no choice but to murder a man.

Once I got that idea into my head, I used to plot all these murders. Then when I'd actually given up work, I found that I was bored. I was at a loose end, I didn't have enough to do. At that point, it was one winter,

the weather was pretty vile and I went to the office and sat down and thought, I'm going to start writing that story and see what happens. Once I started writing I found I couldn't actually stop.

James: The same with you couldn't stop reading a good book, you couldn't stop writing a good book.

Rachel: That's right, yeah.

James: Always a good sign. Rachel, when you think about the story and you think about the situation and that's obviously quite a compelling beginning for your books. We all know as writers you can't just prosaically tell a story, right? Because that could take five minutes to tell somebody what happened. When you write a book, you really write about something else, don't you? You write about the affect on people's lives or the character. I'm still intrigued as to how you made that transition. Having the idea of the story is one thing, isn't it?

TURNING IT INTO A BOOK THAT HAS A GREATER IMPACT ON YOU IS SOMETHING ELSE. HOW DID YOU DO THAT? WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

Rachel: You're right about that, that is quite difficult. Sometimes when I start to write a book I think, this is going to be really short. Because you actually start to think that the story's very simple. But it's the relationships around the story that I find particularly intriguing.

Most of my stories are slightly relationship based, some of them are very relationship based. It's the impact not just on the protagonist, it's the impact on the people around as well and the whole family dynamic and what's going on with the rest of the family. I try to get myself into the position where I'm thinking from the points of view of each of the individuals and telling their stories separately.

James: Okay, and the relationship of course is what as drives us as humans really, isn't it? When we go through our own lives, that makes sense. You got to the point of writing and you found that came to you.

DID YOU APPROACH PUBLISHERS AT THAT POINT? DID YOU START WRITING THE LETTERS? DID YOU FINISH YOUR BOOK FIRST?

Rachel: I finished the whole thing first. Then I wrote it again, because it just wasn't right and I gave it a few people to read. I gave it to my mother to read, she was always perfectly free with her opinions.

James: As mothers always are.

Rachel: Yeah. Sadly, she's no longer with us and she wasn't around when it was finally published, so that was a shame. But anyway, she gave me her opinion as did several other people, and I still wasn't going to do anything with it because I'd done it for my own enjoyment, really.

Then my step-children came on holiday and they said could they read it? I printed it out chapter by chapter so that they could read a chapter and pass it on to the next one. It was really fascinating because they were so intrigued by the story and we're having dinner in the evening and they'd say, I really wonder what happened to this person and I wonder why she did that and I wonder who did this and ... I thought, well it is gripping them, so maybe there is something there.

At that point I did send it out to a small number of agents and I got a reasonable response, but generally they felt it wasn't the kind of book that the market was looking for at that time. I didn't want to wait around for years and years and years, sending it and re-sending it to agents, so I didn't do anything. I put it on the virtual shelf for about a year and did nothing with it.

James: Right, it's the old gatekeeper thing. Somebody else decides that people don't want to read your book.

BUT WE'VE FOUND A WAY OF SMASHING THROUGH THE GATEKEEPER, HAVEN'T WE WITH SELF PUBLISHING. WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

Rachel: It was probably September, 2011. The book had been started sometime in 2009 and probably finished in 2010. I'd had a look before to see about self publishing, but initially if you were in the UK, it was very difficult because to start off with you needed a US bank account and a US tax code. I thought I can't do with all that, so again I put it on the back burner.

Then I noticed that you could actually start to self publish for the Kindle if you're in the UK, so I thought, well I'll just have a go at this then. That sounds all right. It was actually more complicated in those days, but because of my background I understood about HTML coding and so converting the book so that it was ready was relatively easy for me.

James: That was a useful thing to have in your back pocket, a bit of HTML coding. You were quite hands-on obviously in those days, twenty-eleven doesn't sound that long ago, but actually it was eons ago in self publishing terms, you're probably almost alone as well.

I DOUBT YOU HAD MUCH CONTACT WITH ANYBODY ELSE WHO WAS SELF PUBLISHING, DID YOU?

Rachel: Well, there was a little band of people, actually. Mark Edwards and Louise Voss had been self publishing, although at that time they'd probably just got a publishing deal because their book was so successful. Now they're kind of between, a little bit hybrid now.

There was Mel Sherratt as well and there were a few people around and we used to talk to each other and support each other. But it wasn't anywhere near as difficult, I don't think. Technically it was more difficult then, but in terms of the competition, it was less difficult than it is now.

James: Did you start to see success straight away?

Rachel: No, because I took it upon myself and I thought, all right, there we go then, that's it. That was in November, I published it November the fifteenth. Christmas we went to England, we were living in Italy at the time, we came across to England and we were staying with one of the step children again. I felt sick on Christmas day and I was delirious, I thought this was fantastic, then I realized I was being a bit pathetic really, because I used to run a company and I've done nothing to market this book at all. After Christmas I came back and I wrote a marketing plan, it took me two weeks to write the plan and after that it took four weeks to get to number one.

James: Tell us, Rachel. What was in this plan?

Rachel: It was twenty-seven pages long. I think what I was trying to do is I was trying to identify the ways in which people would become aware of my book.

Building awareness is the most important thing to start off with, when you start to market your books. I tried to look at ways of making people aware. What I'd been doing up to that point, I'd been online and I'd think, oh I'll do a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of the other. There was nothing that was a concerted

effort.

The things that I did then don't work so well now. I did a lot of chatting to people on forums. They'd only just developed the Meet Our Authors forum and people were very supportive and chatted a lot. Whereas now when you go to those forums, people just seem to cut and paste an adware for their book and then move on. But I built quite a lot of relationships that way. It was all about awareness, every single aspect of the original marketing plan was making people aware. How could I get my book cover in front of many eyes as possible.

James: You used forums and I guess some social media, organic social media as well at that point?

Rachel: Yeah, for what it's worth, when I started I had nine followers on Twitter, so that was impressive, wasn't it? That was one of my things was building up my Twitter followers. Again, it was easier to do then because there were lots of things you could do with Twitter that you can't anymore.

One of the things, I had a piece of software that allowed me to choose other authors, obviously you could do this in any industry, but I chose other authors who I thought were in a similar field to me and I automatically, using this software, followed all of their followers. A lot of them had got auto follow back switched on so they all followed me back. I was able to go from nine followers to four thousand followers in about two weeks.

James: You put your twenty-seven page marketing plan into action.

DID THAT INCLUDE ANY PAID ADVERTISING? YOU USE ONE OR TWO TRICKS HERE, IN THIS BIT OF SOFTWARE FOR TWITTER, BUT WAS THEIR PAID ADVERTISING AT THAT POINT?

Rachel: Nothing at all. I worked fourteen hours a day, seven days a week for three months, actually. Because I carried on after that, so January, February, March, I just never left my computer. And ate vast quantities of chocolate biscuits. It was not good.

James: So far as ingredients. Coffee, obviously as well.

Rachel: Coffee and chocolate biscuits, yeah.

James: And then this fantastic moment, you saw yourself on the best seller list.

Rachel: It was unbelievable. A lot of that happened because of the forums, suddenly it started to leap off the charts. I posted on one of the forums, I don't know what's happening. Somebody said, check out this forum, and it was a reader's forum but a few people had noticed my book and had started to read it and were talking about it. That really made a massive difference. I went onto the forum with hundreds of people actually talking about it.

Once you get a big leap in sales one day, then you become much more visible and you're much more likely to be picked up by the Amazon algorithms so that your book gets promoted to people. It all kind of worked from there, really.

James: Yeah, and that's true today, I think. It's difficult to get a start, but you'll be surprised when you do get some momentum rolling things become a little bit easier because of those magical algorithms, they reward success, don't they?

Rachel: Absolutely.

James: I should say, this is "Only the Innocent" I believe your first book?

Rachel: Yes, that's right.

James: Yeah, so this is your first book and you've got at least five other books, Rachel? I should get it up on my browser, now. I'm trying to do it from memory.

Rachel: I've got five full length ones and one novella.

James: Okay, so you had your success. You obviously got a bit of self confidence about your writing at that point as well, because we all like that at first, don't we? But there was some affirmation for you, that people genuinely wanted to read what you were writing.

DID YOU MAKE MONEY FROM THE FIRST BOOK BEFORE YOU MOVED ON TO THE SECOND AND THIRD BOOKS?

Rachel: Oh yeah. I originally priced "Only the Innocent" at one pound ninety-nine. Which at the time was a pretty reasonable price because of course, the vast majority that had traditional publishers were selling eBooks at pretty much the same price as a paperback. So a one ninety-nine price point at that point was quite reasonable. I sold a lot of books, when it was at number one it was selling between three and four thousand copies a day. Yes, I was doing quite well out of it.

James: Yes. You were making money from it, I can tell.

YOU'VE MOVED ON SINCE THEN, HOW FREQUENTLY HAVE YOU WRITTEN?

Rachel: I usually produce one book a year. Last year it was a bit different because I'd written "Stranger Child" in 2015, it came out in February, and I was really pleased with the ending, I thought it was absolutely the right ending for the book. But there was a character in it who my readers obviously began to care about quite a lot and they wanted to know what happened to her after the end of the story. Although I'm not a great fan of novellas myself, I don't often read novellas, I thought well, if they really want to know then I need to write what happened to her, and so I wrote a novella and it's done incredibly well.

James: Which one's the novella?

Rachel: "Nowhere Child"

James: Oh yes.

Rachel: It came after "Stranger Child."

James: Okay, well it's a good job you didn't kill this character..

Rachel: Absolutely. I have thought every now and again about killing somebody off, but I resist.

James: You'll get hate mail. Rachel, it's quite inspiring to hear from a standing start, but you've spoken quite quickly about some of the detail, the amount of work and study that went into this and you're, clearly having run your company, into the detail, you understand that you've got to get the details right to make the whole thing work.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON TO WHERE YOU ARE TODAY AND HOW YOU OPERATE YOUR MARKETING IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT, FOR PEOPLE STARTING OUT, WHAT WOULD YOUR GENERAL ADVICE BE?

Rachel: In terms of marketing, I tend to work on some basic principles. There is a basic principle in marketing that you have to get awareness, interest, desire, and action all sorted out.

When you get people, as many people as you can, aware of your book and they reckon that you have to see the cover seven times before anybody would recognize it. What you want is you want people to see your book on Amazon and think, I think I've heard about that, I think I've seen that somewhere before. Then that sort of generates the interest.

When they're interested, what are you going to do to create the desire in them to buy your book? You can do that by the way that you write your blurb, for example, that's really important that people get hooked when they read the blurb. Also, if you've got lots of good reviews from reputable reviewers, that helps enormously because they can see that other people have also enjoyed your book.

It's a whole process really from thinking the most you can do to make people aware. I wrote to every blogger that I could find that did anything to do with thrillers or crime novels and said, can I write you an article? Can I do an interview? Will you review my book? Most of them wouldn't review it because it's my first book, but they would accept an article or an interview. People said to me, everywhere I go I keep seeing your book cover. That was a really good thing, that was raising the awareness. That's the main principle.

The action one isn't quite so applicable in terms of marketing terms. That means make it easy to buy, but it was already on Amazon, it's pretty easy to buy anywhere. Sometimes people even now will send me an

email and they say you can find my book on Amazon and I think, where's the link? Some might, most just won't think to click on something, and there it is.

Those are the kinds of basic principles and the other thing that is of critical importance, and you know all about this, that is maintaining a really good database of your readers, having a mailing list and using it sensibly.

James: Okay, let's move on to the main in just a moment, just to sum up that bit in terms of attitude. You worked really hard, but in a very focused way. Obviously, when you got those refusals from people, you must have got a few of those in a row, there were no points at which you threw your hands up in the air and walked away or gave up.

WE OFTEN SAY TO PEOPLE, YOU'VE GOT TO BE UNEMOTIONAL ABOUT THE MARKETING SIDE OF THINGS, YOU'VE GOT TO TREAT IT LIKE A DAY JOB, A BUSINESS, AND THAT SEEMS TO ME ONE OF THE SECRETS OF YOUR SUCCESS IS THAT SORT OF PLODDING THROUGH, IF YOU LIKE, PLODDING METICULOUSLY THROUGH IT.

Rachel: Yes, I think that's a very good description. Sometimes, in the early days it did feel like plodding through it, you know I've got to do this, I've got to. There weren't so many things automated either, so it was much more hands on, you had to be constantly thinking of new, interesting things to say to people.

James: Okay, let's talk about the main list.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU START GATHERING THE EMAIL ADDRESSES OF YOUR READERS?

Rachel: Not soon enough.

James: Everyone says that.

Rachel: Probably by book three.

At the moment, in all my books now at the end, there is a "if you want to find out more about Rachel Abbott's books please click here" and it takes you to the website. I get quite a lot of people who sign up

everyday, people who have read the book and think, oh yeah I want to be notified when there are more books.

Now of course on Amazon there is a follow button as well, so if you look under an author's description, there's a yellow follow button and if you click that you'll also be notified when that author writes a new book. There's lots of different ways now, but building my mailing list is something that I cannot believe that it didn't think of it, it's really, really bad. But I didn't actually think about it until the third book was coming out.

James: But you have started building it since then. How important is it to you today?

Rachel: It's very important, for me the important thing is keeping in touch with my readers. That's something else I've not done as well as I should have done. Because now my marketing concept have got two strands, one is keeping the existing readers happy, and the other one is finding new readers.

My existing readers are such a great bunch, they are so supportive. You just have to go onto Facebook and post something and you get loads of responses and loads of positive feedback. It's really important that I do things with my mailing list, with my newsletters that is going to appeal to them and not just all about trying to get new readers. When I do my marketing plan I think very much about existing readers and they're the ones who I approach through my mailing list and through Facebook.

James: Rachel, you sell a lot of books, you potentially are the biggest selling UK KDP author. I don't know, is that, do you know that for sure? Have you confirmed?

Rachel: It is confirmed over the previous five years that I was the highest selling author on Amazon UK.

James: Yeah, which is amazing. Congratulations on that.

Rachel: Thank you.

James: As we're hearing in this interview, not an accident. Something that you've worked at and got to this point. What I'm getting at, I suppose, is you sell books well beyond your list and your profit points are well beyond your list, but the list is an important, particularly for a new book being launched.

AND THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS WHY YOU'RE SO CAREFUL ABOUT YOUR EXISTING READERS. THEY ARE THERE TO GET YOUR BOOK THAT INITIAL PUSH.

Rachel: Yes, it is really important that. I do a lot of things around the launch. I have a fairly large launch plan which is in a spreadsheet and there's so much stuff that goes on, as well as using the mailing list to notify all my existing readers, which is great. I also obviously use Facebook and Twitter for that, but I do quite a lot of stuff leading up to it, you know, little teasers and things and here's the cover, here's a bit of the blurb, here's a bit of the story. Just to try and get people interested so that when the book actually is available to buy, people have already shown some commitment to buying it.

A lot of people say why are you doing this? But every year when I do a launch I do a Facebook party and that's really for the people who have consistently followed me throughout the year. It's full of daft quizzes and prizes and competitions. I get really good feedback from that and it's again, it's a relatively small number in relation to the size of the database and the number of followers, but it's the people who have been most consistently on my side and have been supportive. Who've come along I'll chat to them all day, which is great.

James: That sounds like quite a lot of work, Rachel.

HAVE YOU GOT A TEAM NOW?

Rachel: Yes, I'm afraid I couldn't do it all myself, no I just would not be able to cope with that. I have a PA who works with me here in my office. She just comes in a couple of mornings a week, but she also works from home an hour or so each day just doing some of the background stuff that needs doing.

I also have a virtual assistant; Joanna Penn put me in touch with her, so we both use her. She's in Canada and she does quite a lot of work on the database and builds the newsletters and all kinds of other things along those lines.

My PA here has to organize all my travel because I'm very rarely in one place for more than two or three weeks before I have to go somewhere. I've now got a publicist and I've always, I've got an agent since I

first produced "Only the Innocent."

James: A publicist? That's quite interesting. How long have you had a publicist? Because we did an episode on that recently and Mark's recently invested in a publicity company. In fact for our company as well, for SPF and we've been quite pleased with the results and seen them as quite important to get to the next level. Not necessarily important at the first stage, but if you want to wrap things up we've found that's been very useful.

HAVE YOU FOUND THE SAME THING?

Rachel: Definitely, I think it's very difficult, I've heard a few conversations about this at various talks that I've given, the same with an agent, but we'll talk about that separately.

In terms of the publicist, the thing is it's very difficult to quantify what they do for you. My publicist now has got me some fantastic reviews in magazines, magazines like Good Housekeeping Magazine and Red Magazine. The thing is if you actually look on the publication day of the magazine, the sales promptly don't go up so people say, how's that work then?

Again, it's all about awareness. It's making more and more people aware of who Rachel Abbott is. She organizes me to speak at festivals and again, people say going to festivals doesn't sell you any books, but it's all about being out there and being seen and being taken seriously.

James: Similar I suppose to raising awareness that you did in the stage, but on a smaller scale in the forums where there were readers, some readers active in online forums, whereas now you're popping up around the world in different places. The magazines that you mentioned certainly in the UK, Red Magazine I notice it appearing in our house, so that's quite a well read magazine.

I always say to people when I used to work in PR before it is a drip-drip-drip thing, you can't ever look at a single PR event and think that's going to do things for you. What's going to do things for you is twenty-four months of popping up all over the place.

AS YOU SAY, PEOPLE THEN CONNECTING THE DOTS AND THAT LEADING THEM AT SOME POINT TO CLICK BUY AND TRY ONE OF YOUR BOOKS.

Rachel: That's absolutely right. The thing is, the people that you get through forums and Facebook and Twitter, they're only a relatively small fraction of the people who read books.

If I think about my friends who really love reading, most of them don't have a Twitter account at all, the vast majority of them don't have. Most of them do have a Facebook account, but a lot of them don't use it very often, so you have to make people aware by as many means as you can. For some people that might mean if you can get a publicist who can get you an article in the Sunday Times, as my previous publicist did, you know it makes a big difference. People know who you are, they've heard of you.

James: Okay, let's just talk about the role of an agent, Rachel. Then I want to talk to you a bit about productivity and your approach to writing.

FOR THOSE OF US AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR WRITING CAREERS, YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT AN AGENT DOES WHEN YOU'RE SELF PUBLISHING. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

Rachel: Yes. A lot of people have said to me, well, what on earth do you need an agent for because the agent's job is to sell your books to a traditional publisher. They don't understand why I've got one if I'm going to remain independently published. The fact is that my agent, and not all agents are created equally, it has to be said, but my agent gives a massive amount of editorial input.

When I come up with an idea for a book, my agent asks me to send a synopsis of the book that I want to write and she comes back with suggestions, like are you sure you've got this right? Et cetera, et cetera and then I write maybe the first twenty thousand words and she has a look at that and gives me some feedback from that and so it goes on.

She's actively involved in the process of making sure that I am writing for my audience, so she's got a very clear idea in her head. Because as a writer it's quite easy to go off on a bit of a tangent and you need somebody to be able to pull you back to where you want to be. She does all of that, but she also is constantly thinking about my future, do I want to remain independent, do I want to do a hybrid deal, how do I want to work, what about other countries? My books are now translated into over twenty languages and that's all through the agent.

James: That's really interesting, the editorial role, almost like the role of a structural editor who would

give you some consultation advice.

I WONDER HOW MANY WRITERS, PARTICULARLY SELF PUBLISHED WRITERS, HAVE THAT TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH AN AGENT?

Rachel: I think it depends on the agent. Certainly, my agent is Lizzie Kremer and she works for David Higham Associates and I'm fairly certain that all of the agents there give editorial feedback, because I do know people who work with other agents within that company and they all get editorial feedback. It's key.

One of my writing friends is now with David Higham Associates, who was previously with another, which obviously I won't mention, and never got any editorial feedback at all. Never. I think having the right agent is really important, having an agent who just sends your book out to publishers, which is fine if you want to be traditionally published, that would work great. But unless they're actually actively selling your translation rights as well, in some cases I think people don't need an agent.

For me, because she's actually helped so much in the whole development of my career, and encouraged me when I'm feeling really, oh it's not going very well, you know sometimes the stories don't come together and she helps, she puts forward ideas and it works really well.

James: When do you get a chance to write? Because you seem quite busy.

Rachel: I am busy. I do tend to work seven days a week, but that doesn't mean to say I don't take any time off. For example, this afternoon after we finish talking I'm going out for the rest of the afternoon.

James: Are you swimming?

Rachel: No, I'm not going swimming. I was going to go swimming, but some friends are having a barbecue so I'm going to that instead. I do tend to try and work at least a fair part of every day, and most days I'm in the office for about seven or eight hours.

The days that my PA is in, I do admin when she's here because I can't really write very well because obviously we've got a lot of things to discuss and I would lose my concentration.

I do set myself a word count once I start writing, because I've got deadlines in my head by when I need to finish things. I work very hard to stick to that word count.

James: Can you give us an idea of what that is?

Rachel: It depends on the state of the book/ At the moment, it's about two thousand words a day. Sometimes it's more, sometimes it's a lot more.

After I've published a book, my last book came out in February, March, and April were pretty much spent doing the marketing and tying up loose ends, doing the stuff that needed to be done and putting forward some ideas for the next book. Then I started writing in May, but I've started a completely different book, and then changed tack halfway through and went back to a different story, so I lost a month or so there.

It goes on like that, those sort of things happen all the time. I will go back to the original idea in the future. There's been a bit of dodging around from idea to another at the moment. That's why I'm on a fairly tight schedule and I might have to up the ante to three thousand words a day.

James: These are deadlines you set yourself, effectively, as opposed to your agent, who is probably in your ear a little bit, encouraging you.

Rachel: No, she never pushes me at all. The problem I have, obviously is that when I've written something and it goes to her, she's got so many other people she's got to look out for that I have to obviously make sure that it fits in with her timing as well.

There's no point me sending her something when she's about to go off on holiday, for example. I try and work around that as well and she tries very hard to accommodate me. It takes quite a bit of backwards and forwards and quite a lot of ideas. Like you said, the structural idea has to be done and then there there's the line idea, and the copy idea, and the proofreading and it all takes time.

James: When you start your book, how developed is the structure?

Rachel: When I actually start writing, the structure is quite well thought through. When I come up with the idea, first of all, I just took a kind of one page synopsis, but then I work really hard on the characters and I have very comprehensive character descriptions and location descriptions.

Also, I have a plan of the time so I know what time of year it is so I know when somebody's going out at six in the morning is it going to be light, is it going to be dark? What sort of weather they might be getting, you know if you're writing thrillers, there is a temptation for every single scene to take place on a dark, winter's night when it's raining or snowing. But that gets a bit tedious, doesn't it?

You have to think about all of those things, so I do a lot of work in advance on that. I have a pretty comprehensive structure on the story, although it does tend to divert from that structure as the story goes. But I don't like writing into a vacuum. I like to think I know where it's going, even if it does actually go a bit off piece along the way.

James: What tools do you use? Microsoft Word or Scrivener or one of the others?

Rachel: I use Scrivener a lot, actually. There's a lot of things I really like about Scrivener. For example, if I'm using Scrivener to write, which as I say, my first draft is always in Scrivener but once it goes off to the editor it goes into Word because the edits don't work in Scrivener.

When I use Scrivener, I can easily find the chapter that I want to go to because down the left hand side of the screen you've got the folders with all of the chapters and then the text sections with all of the scene names, so it's really quick and easy to find the bit that you're going to.

But it's not just that, I can also use key words so that if I'm tracing, if I'm following for example an element of the story, let's say somebody's mobile phone goes missing. I can actually tag every chapter where the mobile phone is mentioned with a key word and then I can just read those chapters to make sure that story actually is consistent and nothing gets lost along the way.

I use Scrivener a lot and I also use Scapple, which is by the same people as Scrivener, and that's a kind of mind mapping tool. I use that a lot to work out what I think might happen in various scenes.

James: The key word is functionality which is something I'm aware of but not used. I think Mark uses it, but that's something I definitely need to get into. As you say, you write something then you realize you need to check it for consistency from something five chapters previously and it can be a bit of a pain having to wade through working out where that stuff is. The key word seems to be like a good way around that.

Rachel: We can create collections and that works really well. Most of my stories have got lots of different strands, so there's always a policeman in my stories called Tom Douglas and he is not the main character, believe it or not. He's always there because there's always a crime to be solved, but the main characters, in my head at least, are the people who are either the perpetrators or the victims of the crime, and it's there story that I'm telling and then Tom Douglas comes in and does his bit.

There are normally, the one I'm working on at the moment, there are four stories that are running side by side and of course they will all converge at some point. It's really important that I can check all of those stories individually, so any scene that relates to any one of those stories, I can actually just read all of those scenes sequentially by using collections and that really helps me make sure that I haven't done anything ridiculous like somebody's already dead and I've got them in a conversation or something.

James: Yeah.

Rachel: Which I don't think I've ever done, actually. But you know ...

James: We'd all think that's clever and deliberate and you're playing with us if that happened. Rachel, "Kill Me Again" I think was your lovely, fantastic title, by the way, "Kill Me Again" I think was probably your latest?

Rachel: Yes.

James: And you've got the next one in the pipeline?

Rachel: Yes, I have.

James: Okay, just so. Because I think those that haven't come across Rachel Abbott's work yet will want to investigate it, I'm sure having heard you talk about it indeed. One final area, Rachel, before we let you go for your barbecue.

Facebook advertising I know is something you've been increasingly interested in. It's how we got talking earlier this year.

IS THAT SOMETHING THAT'S A FEATURE FOR YOU NOW?

Rachel: Yes, I don't do as much of it as I would like to, actually. And that comes down to time. I am trying to get other people in my team involved in doing it because I do think it works well.

I use the Boost post facility quite a lot so that I can actually boost a post to certain sectors. I have started to follow the course, Mark's course, and I think he works really well and there're so many brilliant tips in that actually. But it is one of those things that I would do a lot more of, but I just need to find the time, and that is to get other people up to speed so that other people could do it on my behalf, really.

James: There's some detail there to master, isn't there? Well Rachel, it's been a real pleasure talking to you. It was great fun to meet you in London earlier this year and it's fun to think back to you and Mel Sherratt earlier in 2011, around then and sort of pioneers really who led the way and here you are now with a fantastic catalog. As you say, it's just confirmed, the UK's best selling KDP author which is an inspiration to all of us.

Rachel: Thank you very much, James. That's very kind of you.

James: I loved talking to Rachel. She was over there in Jersey, I think it was Jersey or Alderney.

Mark: Alderney.

James: Alderney, that's it. One of the Channel Islands, which is a group of islands in between Britain and France, a very, very lovely, very beautiful place. She works away in her office and she talked to us a bit about that, obviously about how she does her writing, alone and then does a bit of admin with her PA. She has a nice life, does a lot of traveling as well, I should say Rachel, but I absolutely loved talking to her.

I love listening to the fact that she gets on with business. This is not, again we come back to this theme, Mark.

YOU DON'T SIT AROUND WAITING FOR MAGIC THINGS TO HAPPEN. YOU MAKE THEM HAPPEN, RIGHT?

Mark: I've tried the first approach with my first couple of books and surprisingly, that didn't work for me very well. It was only when I realized that you need to be more than just a writer these days if you're going to make it that things started to pick up steam.

You're right, Rachel is a very, very good example that takes a career by the scruff of the neck and just shakes it and shakes it until things start to go right for her. So you get completely inspirational. And for you too, James. You're getting to the stage now where we're going to be finishing your book, or you're going to be finishing your book soon. Then I'll be publicly shaming you and you'll get that book uploaded and start selling it, that's the plan.

James: Yeah, well I'm properly into the finishing stages now. I'm at that point now where I'm obsessing about it all the time. I went out and cut the cricket strip at our ground for an hour this afternoon, it's one of the things I do a couple of times a week, I just find it quite therapeutic, just thinking over and over again about the wording and how the whole book's going to finish and sell. I guess you have that all the time. You professional writers, you. Actually that reminds me ...

THAT STILL SMARTS, DOESN'T IT? THE PERSON WHO DECIDED YOU WEREN'T A REAL WRITER BECAUSE YOU DID YOUR OWN MARKETING. YOU STILL MENTION THAT IN YOUR EMAILS.

Mark: I do still mention that because it's the most ridiculous comment I've ever heard. The fact that I do fifty percent writing and fifty percent marketing and she thought that meant I wasn't a full time writer. I don't know where her books are though James.

James: Yeah.

Mark: Funny that.

James: And Rachel Abbott's not a proper writer because she does her own marketing.

Mark: Exactly.

James: Ludicrous. Okay, thank you very much indeed for listening.

CHAPTER 26

INDIE AUTHOR SUPPORT FROM THE ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS - WITH ORNA ROSS



LIKE MORE AND more traditionally published authors these days, Orna Ross took her rights back from a large traditional publisher to re-publish her books herself. Because she was the one in charge she was able to do it in the manner she'd always wanted. That was in 2011. At The London Book Fair in 2012, she launched ALLi, the Alliance of Independent Authors. Her work for ALLi has gotten her a good deal of notice. She's been named in The Bookseller's "Top 100 People in Publishing." We are honoured to have Orna on The Self Publishing Podcast and on this episode you'll hear her story, what ALLi is doing to help Independent Authors, and learn how you can be involved with the group.

LOOKING FOR SUPPORT IN YOUR SELF-PUBLISHING JOURNEY? THE ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS MAY BE THE PLACE FOR YOU.

The ALLi (pronounced "Al-eye") offers friendship and collaboration for those self-published authors who often feel alone on their publishing journey. The advice and education, advocacy, and representation offered enables authors to self-publish in a professional manner. It's quickly grown to have thousands of

members all over the world. From basic self-publishing help to issues surrounding book rights, translation rights, and sales in foreign markets, ALLi is the best friend of many indie authors. You can find out more about ALLi and learn how you can join the group, on this episode.

THERE'S AN UNCOMMON BOND OF FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AUTHORS.

The self-publishing community is an amazing group of people, each person working diligently to write great books and get them to their readers, but also willing to lend a hand to other authors who are on the road a bit further behind them. On this episode, Orna explains how the ALLi membership helps each other through events, website forums, and more - and explains the benefits of coming together in such a supportive community of like-minded authors.

TRADE PUBLISHING CAN'T STOP WHAT INDIE AUTHORS ARE BRINGING TO THE INDUSTRY.

The trade publishing industry is struggling to keep up with indies. We are finding more and better ways to write, publish, and market our work in record time - and with incredible success. Orna believes that in time there will be a greater synergy between traditional and self-publishing, but she is hesitant to say exactly what that combination might look like. She can see both sides learning from the other, but how it will happen, nobody can predict. You can get more of Orna's insights into the industry and the world of independent publishing by listening to this episode.

THE INDIE AUTHOR SPIRIT ISN'T SEEKING VALIDATION, IT'S SEEKING SOMETHING ELSE.

One of the things Orna loves about the world of self-publishing is what she calls the "indie author spirit." In her view, it's a spirit of generosity that's aimed at giving value and wonderful experiences to the readers while at the same time focusing on the business side of publishing. Indie authors seem to understand the importance of relationships with readers and the connections that make those relationships happen in genuine ways. Set aside some time to listen to this episode. You'll be inspired by what Orna and others are doing to move the indie publishing community forward.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- The Youtube Ads for Authors module is released.
- How Orna's creation of AIA came about by accident.
- The aim of AIA when it comes to ethics in independent publishing.
- The importance of community and fraternity in indie publishing.
- Orna's advice to brand new indie authors.
- How help happens within The Alliance of Independent Authors.
- The international nature of the alliance.

- The markets in India and Germany.
- How you can be a part of The Alliance of Independent Authors.
- Orna's insights into what's happening in the publishing industry these days.
- Preview of next week's episode.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Orna's website](#)
- www.SelfPublishingAdvice.org
- [The Alliance of Independent Authors](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to episode 29 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Mark, here we are. Episode 29. We're going strong. It's the summer time. A lot of people have been away, but we have been busy, busy bees haven't we, doing lots of stuff getting 101 ready.

For people who are already in your course, we should emphasize, I always emphasize this. This podcast is not about you having to be a purchaser of our course or anything. It's about the community and us helping each other regardless of that, but we should mention to the people who are in the course, we've also released the Youtube ads for authors module this week. That's going into action. We're looking forward to seeing some results. It's an exciting area, Youtube.

Mark: Yeah, I'm very excited about the Youtube course. Obviously that's something that you've been responsible for coming out of SPF labs. I'm pretty excited to dig into that myself. We've had some great responses from the beta testers so far as well. All in all, very exciting stuff.

James: We're really used it properly in England, got lots of data on it in terms of advertising our course. The results there have been very strong. We've been very pleased with it. A lot of people are talking about

Youtube as being the future now. There are lots of reasons why.

I suppose one of the main reasons is that Youtube is actually ubiquitous. People say that about lots of social media, but there are certain demographics drawn to Twitter, to Facebook, to Instagram. Youtube is the one that your 12 year old daughter through to your 85 year old father will at some point in the day probably find themselves on.

Also, you can be in London or you can be in Cardiff in Ghana or you can be in Australia or Russia and Youtube is there. It really is the one that reaches parts other social media platforms don't reach. That's important.

Lots of exciting things happening in the future. We did a really interesting interview last week with Orna Ross, which is going to be our feature interview for today. We talked a bit about new markets with here. Mark was very interested in chatting with her about people who don't take advantage of translations, don't take advantage of foreign markets because they're worried about the complexities of it. She's a real advocate for breaking down those barriers. We talked a lot about India, a huge market, and Germany. I know you're pretty much broken some of those markets already, haven't you?

Mark: No, not in India yet, but it's set soon. I'm looking at it. I've published in Germany by a major publisher over there. I've got an Italian deal, Czech Republic, Denmark, I think should be sorted now. Weirdly enough, my accountant sent back the breakdown of last month's income. There's now quite a healthy chunk every month coming from rights that I've sold, foreign language rights in those markets which is pretty encouraging. With these other markets coming online, Brazil's another big one that I'm excited about, there's so much potential for growth as we go forward in the next two or three years.

James: Yeah, that's going to be a key area for us to understand. I think it will be very much part of the podcast landscape in the future. I'd really like to do more than one episode actually on this. There are things to understand, dos and don'ts of it. Orna has already started to suggest some key people that we can talk to for specific markets.

You would think actually, it's a bit of an easy win, isn't it, if you're sitting there and you've already got good platform in the US and probably in the UK. An easier win for you rather than writing your next

couple of books and expanding what you're doing here is just to use your existing inventory. Germany and India are the two ones being mentioned by Orna, of course there are plenty of others. Half the world speaks Spanish, oh and Mandarin. Mandarin and Spanish I guess.

Mark: Absolutely. I completely agree with that. If you've got an asset you want to put to work for you, it doesn't make any sense to leave any rights on the table. I do deals for the audio, there's film writers, I've got a deal for quite an exciting deal with a producer for a couple of my series and foreign rights. There's a lot of money that can be exploited from the properties once you finish them.

James: Time to hear from Orna then. Orna's one of the founders and in charge of the Alliance of Independent Authors. This is a strong advocacy group. It's based in the UK as you'll hear, but it works across the world with membership across the planet. It's the organization is batting in your corner. Orna is a fascinating woman to listen to. She's a writer in her own rite as you'll hear. Without further ado, let's hear from Orna.

Orna: I'm an Indie author primarily and director of the Alliance of Independent Authors and it all happened by accident is all I can say. I had for various reasons, decided to become a full time writer back around 2010. I did that for a while. I was missing having a day job.

I found because I had always fitted writing into the edges of life. It was my stolen time, my magic time that actually having all the time in the world wasn't suiting me very well. I was writing less than I had ever written before which was really ironic and unexpected.

Then I had discovered self publishing. Very quickly I was looking. I'm a bit of a joiner. I like groups. I was looking for an association to join. There wasn't one doing what I thought really needed to be done. I was quite horrified what I was seeing happening in the space.

Authors were really being taken advantage of all around the track it seemed. So I thought we need an association. I need a day job. The two kind of came together. I formed ALLi as the Alliance of Independent Authors as a non profit because that was the way I wanted to go with it. Partly so that people could know it was trustworthy, but also because it seems to me that that's what the organization like this should be.

It's been fantastic. It's been absolutely wonderful, an incredible group of authors have joined and continue to join. An amazing team has serviced from that group. We work really well together. We just finished a team meeting there before I'm speaking to you. We have great bond.

We enjoy learning what we can and passing it on and looking out for the community in our way. There are lots of other organizations and all the people who are doing that too in their way, like you guys and many, many others and hooking in with them is also part of it too.

We have a reach that extends beyond our membership. Our reach is much wider than our membership and we take the information, we take it out in the community through our self publishing advice center which is full of all sorts of information. We have on an online conference for authors three times a year; fringe to Frankfurt book fair and London book fair and Book Expo America. Everything we do is free. It's no charge. Our core aim is ethics and excellence in the self publishing sector in the entire sector as much as we can influence that.

James: You talked about ethics, which is an intriguing concept. You have an industry you've made up and it's most fragmented.

WHAT'S YOUR AIM THERE IN TERMS OF WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT ETHICS?

Orna: We have a code of standards. It's something that we feel most people will be happy to align to. There are two aspects of the ethical side of things. There is the publishing side.

One of the reasons I founded ALLi was because of the horrific services that are out there and still are out there and John Doppler, our watch dog, calls them predatory. They're certainly profiteering in their motives. They have no interest in books whatsoever. They have no interest in authors.

They are simply about making money and they don't mind how they do it. Their very heavy sales tactics, constantly up-selling, picking vulnerable writers deliberately, people of a certain age. They have absolutely no interest in the quality of the writing or in anything except getting one book published and promoted and maximizing the amount of money they can make from that.

We have a partner membership whereby we take in services that are doing a good job for writers and are at the opposite end of the ethical spectrum, who are very author-centric in how they go about their business, who care about writing, who know the publishing is a really important job in this world. They care about how they do it.

They need to align with the code of standards in order to be admitted as a partner member. Then we can recommend them to our other members through our directory and our database and say these are people who are good services. They might be very small, one person freelance designer or editor working from home and everything in between. That's one side of it.

Then about a year or two ago, we had quite an interesting development for one of our members. Jane Steen became very concerned about ethics in the author community itself and the kinds of things Indie authors were prepared to do to promote their works. The whole sock puppetry thing; people writing false reviews, getting their friends to write reviews, buying followers, all the various ways you can game the system on Amazon and all of these kinds of things.

We added, then, and it was a campaign for a while. I think it served its purpose actually and we're moving onto a different campaign now, but it highlighted what was going on. There were a lot of authors wanted a badge that they were able to put on their website at that time to say "I am an ethical author." We provided that. The Book Seller ran the campaign and included us in there.

It's at that base ethical level. I think you talk about the variety within the community and you're absolutely right. It's one of the things I love about it is that everybody's not only different, but really, because they're Indie minded, and Indie spirited, really proud of their difference and really wearing it a lot of the time.

What unites us when you have a community of any kind is that kind of stuff; what you believe in, what you think is right or wrong, how you go about approaching your job and how you feel about your reader. I think that's really key to ethics or an understanding that you are actually, we all are in service to the readers and not on some kind of ego trip of our own, but of course our egos are in there as authors. We're not getting them out any time soon.

James: Nobody's without an ego completely.

Orna: No. Not possible, I don't think.

James: I couldn't agree more really with the observations you make, certainly in terms of organizations that are in the authors interests and those that aren't. I think hopefully one of the key differentiators, we place ourselves here is when the organization has as part of its makeup lots and lots of contact with other authors. It becomes a community place certainly SPF does. Our Facebook group is thriving.

That was one of the best things that happens in my daily routine is the contact with other authors. I think other organizations where that doesn't happen, and I have noticed them, where really they want a one on one relationship with you. That's not, for me, that doesn't feel like self publishing.

SELF PUBLISHING IS A BIT OF A CAMPAIGNING ORGANIZATION. IT'S GOT THE FEEL OF ALMOST A VOLUNTARY FRATERNITY. FRATERNITY IS A GOOD WORD, ISN'T IT?

Orna: Yeah, it is. It leaves the girls out, but...

James: Sorry.

Orna: It's so hard to find the word. It's such an interesting thing that you're raising. I completely agree. It's that whole unity thing.

We say self publishing and we call ourselves Indie authors, but actually we cannot do it on our own. It's not possible for a good book to be made without somebody holding it up. It's that old idea that it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a community to make a book.

The author's name goes on the book, but there are all sorts of people in there. Like yourself, the high point of my day is going onto the forum and finding out what's on people's minds and watching. It's unbelievable. I couldn't believe it when I started at first. I almost take it for granted now, but I have become more accustomed to it, but you're reminding just how extraordinarily amazing and fabulous it was to watch people coming in behind other people and helping. It's definitely one of the most generous communities bar none.

I think it was a surprise to people just how generous authors were. This always went on. If you read any of the biographies of the writers who have come down to us, you see how much they relied on each other and how much they helped each other in every way. This is just a new and easier way and the tribes are bigger, but it's the same thing that's always there in the reading and writing community. It's a fabulous community to be part of.

James: It is. It's very supportive. Frankly it needs to be. It's an isolating career. You can feel under confident and insecure about it most of the time.

We talk about ego, but most writers have a fair dose of the opposite as well which is feeling insecure about what they're doing. You don't work in a workplace, so you don't get that kind of validation and so on. You need that community, I think you're absolutely right. In both cases, my organization and yours, we play a role in that.

WHEN SOME FRESH AUTHORS ARE COMING IN, WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE FOR THEM?

Orna: We start where they are. There are so many different ways you can succeed as an Indie author.

The first thing is to see where people are in their own pathway and what they're looking for. We have people who quite simply just want to write a book. Perhaps only for themselves, their friends or family. We don't have a huge number of people fall into that category and certainly within the self publishing space there are far more authors out there who are like that than we tend to have in our organization. That's just because you focus more on people who actually want to do this and make some money at it, or even better, make their living at it. We have the other person who wants to really make a killing at it. Most of our people fall somewhere in the middle.

First of all, they need learn how to make a good book, make a book that serves the reader. That means good design so that people know what the book's about and what genre it falls into. It means good editing. We all know now, I think much more than we did three or four years ago what it takes.

We bring people through what we call the seven process of publishing. Very often an author thinks producing the book is what they think of as publishing. The production end of things, the formatting, the editing, the putting the covers on a print book, the getting it out there. That's production. That's only one of the phases. There's also marketing and promotion and running an author business.

Then the whole area of publishing rights and selling rights and all of that which is something that we go into more with our professional members. Our professional members are people who have to have sold fifty thousand copies or more in the last two years. Up at that end, they're more concerned with running a business; time and money, how to write faster, better, reach their readers more effectively and if their rights sold. At that end, we have a literary agent. We work with your license and pub matching and people like that who help people to find rights buyers and so on.

At the other end, there are people who are just coming in or preparing a book for a publishing, that's our associate membership. These are people who haven't published before either through the trade press or in any way and they are learning how to put that book together.

First of all, you've got the amazing trip of putting a book together, fiction or non fiction. That in itself is an incredible learning journey. Then you've got of writing it, putting the words together, then you've got putting the digital art back together or the printed book. Then you've got the job of reaching your readers and finally selling rights.

We're there for the long term. Each of those is a journey in itself. Each of those is a learning by doing journey. There are people who can help you and support you in different ways. You need to work out what support you need and where you're going to get it and what you're going to do yourself. It's a process. It takes time.

It's just now we're getting to the point of seeing people who came in who were looking around thinking, "I haven't got a clue. What is an Amazon KDP? What is that?" Who are now up and running and leaving the day job and selling well and really, really happy. That's amazing.

James: In terms of the practical side of that, how does that manifest itself? Is it peer to peer help within the Alliance?

Orna: There is an awful lot of informal peer to peer help. What what we do is we have a self publishing advice centers. That is run by our members for the wider community. Within that, people share their knowledge, their information and their expertise.

We have small and large forums where people get together and help each other and train. We don't have an actual one to one mentoring system in place. I think one of the things we would like to do is set up genre one to one where people we would match somebody who's actually doing well at something that somebody else wants to get into. That is something that we're thinking about a little bit further down the track. It's the forums really. It's all online because our members are everywhere.

It's the connections that are then made and people break off into their own informal groups. We also have live groups. We don't actually run them at all. We don't take any responsibility for them. Members, one member in an area saying any ALLi members in this vicinity? Let's get together once a month. We facilitate that. We don't run them. They look after them. They're not under rights. It's a very loose sort of arrangement, but we do manage them for the administration end of this just through meetup.com so that they can know what's on when and are able to attend it. There are some of the ways in which it happens.

James: You mentioned geography just then. You're in London today. We should mention you're Irish. I think some people will be able to tell that for your accent. A nation of some fine writers from history of course.

BUT THE ALLIANCE IS VERY MUCH INTERNATIONAL.

Orna: Completely. It's global and was from day one. I think actually being Irish is a big advantage there I have to say because of our history of immigration and because I myself moved away and at various stages gone back to Ireland, then lived away again. Also, just being a small nation, you have bigger windows on the world.

The average person from the UK or the US who just doesn't realize how much they are in their own world. I think it has been very useful to be Irish in this job. Also, it has been amazing to watch what can happen across those borders. That's one of the things that I think is very useful is the way in which we have somebody in US who wants to break into the UK or the Australian market or whatever the way in which members can help each other to do that. We can have cross collaboration. People putting themselves at the end of each other's books and so on in different countries.

Very often we get somebody on the forum who says, "Will you take a look at my page and see what my price is over there?" Or whatever. You've got all that going on. It's very global.

Having said that, the majority of our members are almost 50% of our members now are US. I think it's about 40% Europe, and then roughly 20% the rest of the world. That balance has kind of settled in now. When we started, we were about a third, a third, a third. Now it's there. I think that's where it will be for a while.

James: It would be interesting having a look at those figures and say a year's time, two year's time. There's no question that America is a very vibrant place for self publishing. I'm not sure whether that's cultural or just there's more of an entrepreneurial, natural spirit there or whatever. It's an exciting environment to be in.

One of the things on our list ... unfortunately you get so busy that it's not going very far further up the list, but I really want to have a serious look at India. I think that it's a huge potential. There's a billion people. You mention getting some advice on pricing in different markets. That's an area you need to look at very carefully when you move into somewhere like India. I'd be very interested.

WE'RE GETTING A LOT OF CONTACT NOW FROM INDIAN WRITERS. I THINK VICE VERSA, THERE'S A BIG POTENTIAL MARKET OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE READERS IN INDIA WHO HAVE A VORACIOUS APPETITE.

Orna: There's no doubt about that. We have a number of Indian members actually. We have an Indian ambassador and also a partner member who is very dedicated. I agree with you. It's definitely a definitely close area.

The other one I think for people to watch is the German market at the moment. I think there is really there a space now for English language in Germany in publishing, but also it's the first quarter call I think for translation.

James: Even ahead of Spanish?

Orna: Just in that it's warmer market. I know that Spanish is a huge language, the whole Californian phenomenon, the south US states makes Spanish attractive in that way, but what I feel is that the German market is really warm now. It's really warming up.

Two years ago, people were talking about it, but I can see here that's sort of a tipping point that we saw in the UK that we saw two years ago if you know what I mean. I think it's one to watch. If you're thinking getting a translation, I would say German first. It depends, it totally depends on what you're writing as well.

James: I can see a couple of future podcast episodes already going down onto my list here. I think breaking India is one.

I THINK FOREIGN LANGUAGE PUBLISHING FOR ENGLISH WRITERS IS SOMETHING A LOT OF WRITERS ARE INTERESTED IN. IT'S A HUGE POTENTIAL AREA THAT'S UNDER EXPLOITED AT THE MOMENT BECAUSE OF COMPLEXITIES, AT LEAST THE PERCEIVED COMPLEXITIES.

Orna: Exactly. It's something we're looking really closely at. Rights in publishing has always been almost treated as the Black R. Nobody knew what they did over there. It's all about contacts. It turns out that in the land of email, contacts are not actually that difficult to make while trade publishers would say to you, "It's so important to meet them and to get warm, press the flesh and so on."

Maybe, but if the book is right, it tends to sell. What's really key for that is that you understand the publisher and what they publish and what they look for in their territory. Once you get a grasp of that, it's actually relatively easy to get the sale.

We have some members who are doing some really interesting things there with just an assistant, somebody who has no experience in writing, just takes the orders. It's very admin heavy. Lots of interesting things happening there. Let me know when you're thinking of it and I can get you some interesting people.

James: For sure, Orna. We should give out some practical detail shouldn't we?

IF PEOPLE HAVE HAD THEIR INTEREST PEAKED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING A PART OF THE ALLIANCE FOR INDEPENDENT AUTHORS, HOW DO THEY GO ABOUT JOINING AND WHERE DO THEY FIND YOU?

Orna: We're at allianceindependentauthors.org. Our self publishing advice center if you just want to dip in your toe and see what we're all about is selfpublishingadvice.org.

James: I know you had a presence at the London Book Fair. We bumped into each other there.

DO YOU GO TO OTHER WORLD WIDE FAIRS AND CONVENTIONS?

Orna: There are three publishing fairs that get our attention. We could be on a constant kind of circle of fairs, and it would be lovely and interesting and we'd meet lots of the authors as well, but it's not possible. We focus on the three biggies which is London Book Fair and obviously as we're here in London, and Frankfurt because it is the largest rights fair in the world, and Book Expo America, to keep us in touch with what's going on in the American market.

What we do then, is we run our Indie author fringe event along side each of those fairs. We bring the fair as it were, to the Indie authors who can't go themselves, tell them what we've found out there, what's happening, what the trends are, what's happening in trade publishing as well because that is relevant to Indies particularly to those who are thinking of selling their rights. Also, though in recognition of the fact that a lot of the author world is not particularly clued in to self publishing. Most of our members could actually give these talks rather than go and attend them.

We thought out the information that we feel is missing from the fair online so that people can keep up with the latest in what's happening. It's a great way for us to be in touch with a lot of people all at once.

We got some good tape there from Mark when we were there. You came to our rescue on the audio, remember? Fairs are a great way for us to speak to lots of people all at once and find out what is current and what's happening because self publishing changes so very rapidly. The advice we were giving a year ago, some of it still stands, but some of it doesn't. Even the services that were here in the UK a year ago, some of them are not here now and so on.

The fair is a great keep in touch with authors and keep at the head of the information stream.

James: On that subject, I was a little surprised at London Book Fair how tucked away the Indie authors seemed. It was certainly in percentage terms a pretty small number for the footprint of the whole place. I couldn't really work out, looking at the big traditional publishing stands, whether there were people there who were very savvy as to the changing industry and positioning themselves so they can survive that or whether they were rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

DO YOU GET A SENSE OF THAT SIDE OF THINGS GOING BACK?

Orna: I think it's the latter sadly. I see more open doors in trade publishing now. One of the campaigns we run is Open Up to Indie Authors. That campaign is specifically about explaining and educating the publishing, industries, the literary festivals, the competitions people, what is actually going on and how you are missing out and how this is what we need to do to kind of meet you. This is what you need to do to meet us in the middle. We get a lot of resistance. It's really surprising how many people will cut off their nose to spite their face because they don't like self publishing.

There is a lot of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic going on there. The traditional publishers are generally going to the fairs as they always have done. That world is carrying on as it always has done in the main. They are picking up some learnings from self publishing authors connected to reaching the reader mainly.

At the London fringe fair we had a young woman from one of the trad houses who had left. She had left through sheer frustration because she just was being constantly laughed out of the place because she was thinking about readers rather than retailers. There's that whole thing of the customer base.

Trad publishing thinks of the bookstore as the purchaser whereas we as authors think of the reader. For example, they have a website where they can sell books. These kind of radical ideas. They're beginning to look at Facebook ads as an author would use them and all of that kind of thing. They're beginning to support their authors to make those warm contacts with readers and so on.

It's very, very slow. The business is not surviving as it was. It can't. It simply can't. It will have to change. How it's going to change exactly is anyone's guess. I don't think anyone's quite sure what's going to happen there.

In terms of the author presence at fairs, London's the best, James, by a mile. It's so much better than anywhere else. They make a space for authors. It's nice and roomy. There's plenty of space around their tables where you can sit and be able to sit down at one of those tables beside the author's space you would have to buy it for fifteen hundred dollars. They have a long way to go.

I think London Book Fair's motto is authors at the heart of the business. I think every author that sees that

is kind of hollow laughter because authors are not at the heart of the traditional publishing business for sure. That's one of the reasons why self publishing is so vibrant.

However, I think we will see a meeting in the middle. I think there will be a lot more blurring of lines. We are seeing people who started off at self publishing who then got a trad deal and were delighted with that and who are now coming back out either to exclusively self publish again, or else to do some kind of mixed arrangement where they sell some of their rights, or rights to some of their books, but not all of them.

I think we're going to see the two coming together much more in the future. Eventually, we probably won't be able to really tell one from the other. What will distinguish people I think is not your mode of publication, but your attitude.

To me it's all summed up in that word Indie. It's an independent spirit which isn't seeking validation. It's seeking something else which is either that connection to the readers or your own creations response to what you're producing and your own relationship with that or to make a living or to make a lot of money to commercially succeed.

It's an independence of mind that isn't saying, "Publish me, please. Somebody tell me I'm good." I know we all have those moments. We always will, but to live from that place is very unhealthy. I think it's one of the reasons why we needed something to come along like this. We've got exactly what was needed.

James: I mentioned in the interview, Mark, that we bumped into Orna at the London Book Fair. She feels that she's in my debt because I sorted out some recording in a session at the last minute. I think the guy recording their session had let them down and I ran over to the desk with my equipment to plug it in. That's a small example of how we always happy to help each other. That's the whole point of that organization. I know you're quite provisioning ALLi as well, the Alliance of Independent Authors.

Mark: Absolutely. I've had all kinds of useful information, help from them now and again. I'm really for places where authors can hang out, swap information and just talk to other authors. People are going through the same things that they're going through. ALLi is one of the best places on the internet for that.

James: We gave the web address away in the interview, but I'll just repeat it now. Allianceindependentauthors.org. You can go there, you can find out about being a member. There are various levels of membership, but as I say, it's an organization that works for you. It's good to support it back as well.

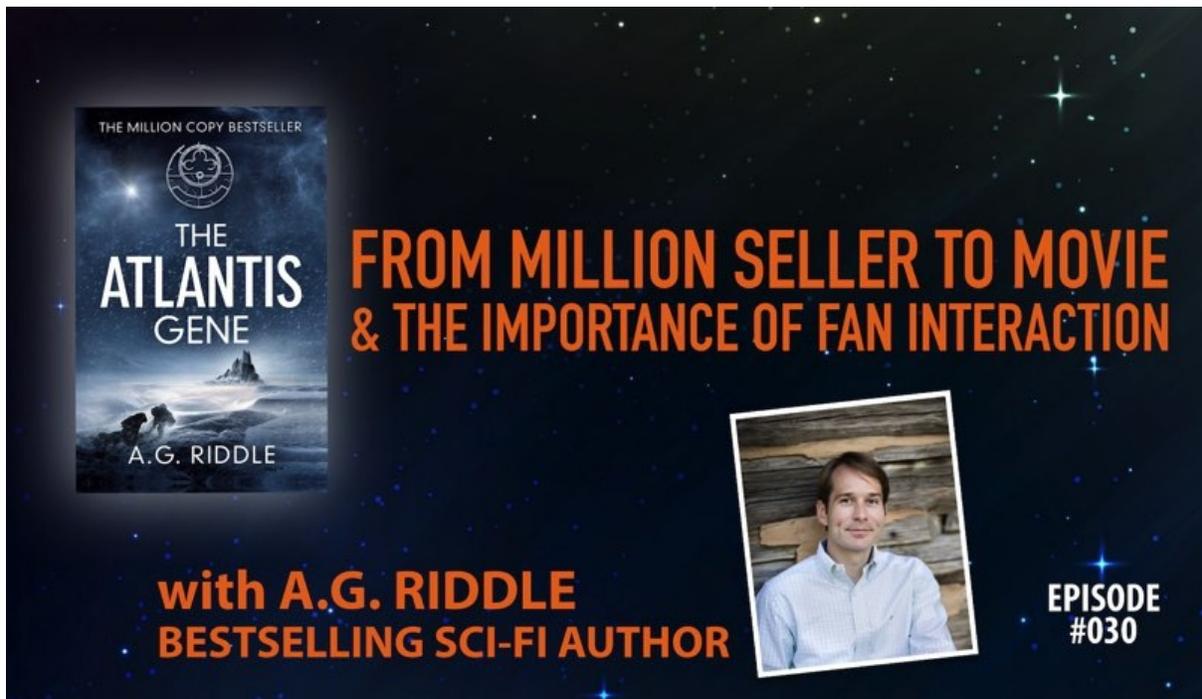
Great. We're going to go back to authorship for next week. Orna is in fact an author, but we are going to be talking to quite a famous and quite a sought after in terms of podcasts. We're going to be talking to A. G. Riddle.

Mark: Yes. A. G. Riddle, Gerry Riddle is the author of the Atlantis Gene, a million selling Indie author, film deals, foreign rights, the works. A really interesting story. Very smart guy, good writer. This will be something that I think people will be looking forward to listening to.

James: Absolutely. That's next week. That'll be number 30. Thank you so much indeed for joining us this week. It's been our pleasure as always. We'll speak to you again next Friday.

CHAPTER 27

BESTSELLING BOOKS MADE INTO MOVIES - WITH AUTHOR A.G. RIDDLE



IT'S every author's dream to have their books made into movies and today's guest, A.G. Riddle might be about to realize that dream. His best-selling series of books has already had the movie rights purchased and he waits to hear from the studio as to what the next steps will be. But Gerry is amazingly at ease with it all, taking his success and the possibility of a movie deal in his stride. On this episode we talk about the movies and a good deal more that has to do with his self publishing journey, writing routines, mental toughness, and the things he believes have brought success to his writing career.

TWO YEARS TO WRITE THE FIRST BOOK - AND VERY LITTLE PROMOTION AFTER THAT.

It's not a formula for success that A.G. Riddle recommends to other writers but it's what really happened in his case. He spent 2 years researching and writing the first book in his series - The Atlantis Gene - then published the book to Amazon, sent out a promo to his email list, and waited. It was slow going at first but over time the momentum increased and his book sales exploded. He's still astounded at the success

that the initial book had and is glad that the follow-up books, and a stand-alone book, have also done well. You can hear what Gerry says about book promotion and marketing at this point in his career and why he recommends email lists as a powerful way to get launched.

READER INTERACTION AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL WRITING CAREER.

In this new “social” digital age, interaction with readers has never been easier and A.G. Riddle says that it’s one of the things about being an author he enjoys the most. He feels that the depth and genuine nature of the relationships he’s able to establish with those reading his books is a large part of what makes a new release so successful. His loyal fan base is quick to set the initial charge and the Amazon search algorithms take over from there to expand his book sales. You can hear what Gerry does to keep up fan interaction on this episode of the podcast.

HAVING HIS BOOKS MADE INTO MOVIES IS GREAT, BUT HE’S NOT HOLDING HIS BREATH.

Gerry is quick to point out that the studio simply has the option to make the movie and that the option is a ticking clock that will expire if further steps are not taken. He knows it would be a great asset to see the movies made but isn’t counting on it. He’d rather stay busy writing and building his fan base than place all his hopes on a movie deal. You can get to know best-selling author A.G. Riddle on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

SUCCESS IN SELF PUBLISHING IS NOT DEFINED BY MOVIE DEALS.

With the recent breakout success of Andy Weir’s book “The Martian” and the Matt Damon movie that was made from it, many self published authors have come to see books turned to movies as the ultimate sign of success. But A.G. Riddle doesn’t agree. Even though he’s got a movie deal in the works, what matters to him is the impact his stories are having on people. In this conversation, he recounts a letter he received from one reader who told him how his books got him through a difficult period in his life and kept him encouraged and hopeful. That is the kind of impact that matters - to Gerry - and to you.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- A get together for SPF listeners at the [NINC conference](#)
- Today’s guest: A.G. Riddle, author of The Atlantis Gene
- How A.G. got his first book release to blow up.
- How Gerry launched the book and promoted sales.
- Why authors need to develop mental toughness.
- A.G.’s daily routine.
- How important is reader interaction and relationship for A.G.?

- The use and benefits of a mailing list.
- The idea of offering bonus content on the website.
- A.G.'s decisions regarding Indie VS traditional publishing.
- How the Atlantis Gene series became traditionally published in foreign markets.
- The films that are being made of A.G.'s books.
- Daily word counts, character development and research, the actual craft.
- Pricing strategies and how they came about.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [A.G. Riddle's website](#)
- BOOK: The Atlantis Gene
- BOOK: Departure
- BOOK: The Martian
- NeoWriter
- [Scrivener](#)

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH AG RIDDLE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 30 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Female: Two writers. One just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Woohoo, we've got to number 30, Mark, where 30 is old. What does that mean?

Mark: I wish I was. I'm not 30 years old. I wish I was. If you think about it that's half a year, we've managed to do this every week. That's pretty good, really.

James: Yeah, it is pretty good. We've got a great guest today.

Mark: Yes, Gerry Riddle. The author of The Atlantis Gene. A really smart guy, very good writer. Has written a very, very successful series of books. I think, over a million copies sold. It's pretty to do the

math to work out roughly how he has probably made from those books. Film deals, foreign rights, audio, the works. Gerry has covered everything and done a brilliant job doing it.

James: These are not the sort of film deals where it goes on and on and on and on. I need to actually get a film out of the end of it. These are films that are happening now, bought up by big studios.

We should say Gerry is a laconic character, isn't he, Mark? He's very laid back but it's worth listening to, everything that he says.

In terms of his writing, he got there, apparently, quite quickly. Although, when you listen to him in more detail, obviously, there was a little bit more work than, perhaps, he initially let on about, in terms of getting to the level of success he's had. He's had an inspirational amount of quick success.

Mark: He kind of came out of nowhere. As you rightly point out, it's something that he's, obviously, worked extremely hard at. It's like this one is you got to look graceful and serene on the surface but he's paddling like hell underneath.

James: [AG Riddle](#) is a polymath who doesn't do a lot of things okay. He does a lot of things right with a series of internet companies behind him, he turned back to fiction writing and in 2013 published *The Atlantis Gene*. Two more novels in that series followed.

To say they were well received by readers is an understatement. Over a million copies sold in the U. S. Alone and two feature films in development. One with Twentieth Century Fox and one with CBS films. Gerry straddles both traditionally published worlds and Indie publishing, a strong showing in Indie publishing world, as well. Gerry, we're delighted that you've joined us today. Thank you very much for being on the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

Gerry: Thanks for having me.

James: You're a writers writer, I think. A lot of people will be very interested in the writing side of it, so,

I'm going to let Mark kick off today. He's a bit of a fan.

Mark: You came out of nowhere and one of the questions that we've had was how did that first book, *The Atlantis Gene*, blow up? Was it luck or strategic planning or something else?

Gerry: It's a question I get a lot and I don't know if I have a good answer but I'll say what my opinion is. I think that was a book that was very different from everything else out there in terms of self publishing. It was this look that straddled a few genres.

It was a techno-thriller and a science fiction novel at its heart. It, also, was this action adventure. This mystery novel similar to Dan Brown. It, also, had this romance plot, which I think was not just something that was tangential or a feature.

It really was enough of a part of that story to satisfy a lot of romance readers. I think, science fiction readers liked it. People that liked just Clive Cussler and mystery adventure, action adventure. I think, those, the fact that it was a genre spanning novel, helped it a great deal. I, also, think, the cover and the title and the kind of curb appeal of *The Atlantis Gene*.

There's a reason that Hollywood keeps making sequels. I know we're all kind of unhappy about that but, people tend to be curious about something they already know a little something about.

I think *Atlantis* in the title certainly appealed to a lot of people who have always been curious about it. *The Atlantis Gene*, I think, as a title, implies that this book is about something. It offers some sort of intellectual journey and, hopefully, a fast paced adventure. Those are the reasons, I think, it succeeded.

I think that in the Amazon store, people would see it and think, "That's kind of interesting." And they would fire it up. The only thing I would add is that in that first book took me two and a half years to write.

I took a lot of chances and a lot of people hated the book. I think, at the end, there was a critical mass of people that got to the end of that book and they were really excited or thought it was remarkable enough to

tell a friend.

I think, if you really want to break out, it's very easy to say write a remarkable novel but I think that, as a new writer, I kind of felt like I had to roll the dice and take some chances and really hit out of the park or strike out at the plate. That's what I wanted to do. Perhaps I got lucky or whatever. I've been incredibly impressed with how well that novel has done.

That's a long way to say that I don't know exactly what it was but I think those are, somewhere in there, probably, the reason.

Mark: I remember seeing it in the rankings, right at the top. It did come out of nowhere. I remember thinking the cover was particularly brilliant. I hadn't actually thought about the title before. Now, you explain it like that, it is a genius title because it does touch on lots of different ideas, is very suggestive. It's perfect for the genre, very mysterious. I think it was very clever. Everything came together very, very nicely and it had so many reviews early, as well. Really great reviews seemed to come out of nowhere. It was top of the charts for months, as I seem to remember.

James: How much planning was involved in that, Gerry? How much of that happened organically, for you?

Gerry: In terms of the launch?

James: The the launch and the word of mouth, obviously, a lot of that's organic, but, how much did you help it along?

ANY TECHNIQUES OR TIPS?

Gerry: I put so much into writing the novel that I didn't really have a launch plan. I just, some of this was naivete, I really thought if I wrote a great novel and just put it out there that things would happen. Yes and no, it happens that way but I really am a firm believer that you've got to have an early critical mass of readers to find this thing. It has to be the right readers. If they get to the end of it and they're really excited and blown away, that's when I think the magic really starts to happen. You get noticed by the Amazon algorithms and the world opens up.

In terms of what I actually did, I wrote this novel over two and a half years. I did the cover. My mom edited it. I did the formatting, myself.

One of the things I did on Amazon is I wrote three descriptions for the novel. I will tell you that was one of the hardest things, really writing a description for that. I still hate doing it.

I put the three up there and the cool thing about self publishing is I picked the one I thought was best and I put it up there and tested it for a day. Then, I put the other one up there. I would split test. The one that was better, I would use that as my description. I would keep tweaking it.

I think that helped a lot. That was back when the conventional wisdom is you launch, you get on BookBub or some of these. Finally, eReader News Today accepted me. I spent 18 bucks or something or small amount, because it was a revenue share. You paid them 25% of whatever you made. I didn't make that much. It was nice for someone to say yes. Not much of a launch strategy.

James: I read that in night school that that was the only promotion that you bought. Which is remarkable to see the success that the book had. You're bucking the trend almost at every turn. In that your no BookBub, do the cover yourself, I didn't know that. It's an amazing cover. Congrats on that.

Then, you have minimal promo and you still caught lightning. That's really amazing. You said that you were split testing the descriptions. That's interesting and I love doing that, too.

IS THAT SOMETHING THAT'S COME FROM YOUR PREVIOUS HISTORY BEFORE YOU TOOK UP WRITING?

Gerry: Yeah, definitely. I really have approached writing the way I approached my business career. I started a company in college with a childhood friend. We started a bunch of them. We started like 12 companies. The vast majority went absolutely nowhere. We always learned something from it.

The biggest lesson out of the start up world was to iterate and to learn from your failures. Those are the companies that really succeed. The ones that take risk, learn from it and have this perspective of "Man,

you pick yourself and you go on."

I think it's a lot tougher with writing because in a start up, in a business, you're saying, "Yeah, this is a business." You're going to see a lot of consumers and it won't be for a lot of people but I think with writing you're so personally invested in it. You're emotionally invested in this work of whatever you want to call it, art. To see it get rejected, I think, is very tough. You have to develop a certain amount of mental toughness. That was a big obstacle for me to overcome.

James: Quite a few of our authors and, in fact, Mark's a bit like this himself, aren't you, Mark? Is almost split the day so you have you're writing in the morning or whenever and you do your marketing in the afternoon. That point to try and mentally split yourself away. You do break that emotional link. Otherwise, as you say, you can't really be in business.

IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE PERSONALLY WOUNDED WHEN SOMETHING DOESN'T WORK AND TAKE IT AS A REJECTION, RATHER THAN BEING CLINICAL ABOUT WHAT'S NOT GONE WRONG, WHY'S IT NOT WORKED AND LET'S TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

Gerry: I think that's right. That's exactly it. I write in the morning. In the afternoon, I try to follow up on the emails and do whatever else is going on. I think the mental toughness comes with time. It's quite a culture shock.

James: We emailed before. This was after I heard you were on Simon's podcast way back.

WHEN THINGS STARTED TO TAKE OFF FOR YOU AND YOU STARTED TO GET SALES, YOU WERE CHECKING YOUR KDP DASHBOARD EVERY SPARE MINUTE?

Gerry: Definitely. Very early, you're looking for any sort of confirmation that it's going well or some definitive validation to not give this up and do something else. I launched the book and it was not doing well. I didn't think it was.

We had run companies that had been pretty successful. A couple got pretty successful, then, a bunch went nowhere. The ones that get successful, those are the ones that you can tell when it's happening. There's this algorithmic spreading, like a virus. I was waiting and hoping that would happen.

My parents came up for dinner in North Carolina and asked, "How's it going?" I'm like, "It's not going

well." I remember I was constantly checking my stats at dinner. They were like, "What has happened to you?" I was like, "Well, you know, it's hard to explain." I think it's one of those things that unless you've been through it, it is very hard to relate but, you get pretty obsessive. I did, anyway.

James: It's compulsive. I used to get in trouble. I'd go to the toilet and check my stats. Then, come back and say, "I've sold a book." You're actually right. It's that validation. Until that point, maybe for you, you would have shown it to your girlfriend. I showed it to my wife. They can say this book is amazing but in the back of your mind you're still thinking, "You're going to say that because you're invested in saying that."

WHEN YOU GET PEOPLE YOU'VE NEVER MET BEFORE BUYING THE BOOK, AND THEN, AGAIN, ONE STEP FURTHER IN REVIEWING THE BOOK, IT'S EXACTLY WHY WE'RE ALL REASONABLY PRECIOUS FLOWERS WHEN IT COMES TO THIS KIND OF STUFF. THAT IS THE VALIDATION THAT YOU NEED TO GIVE YOU THE BELIEF THAT MAYBE YOU GOT A BIT OF TALENT AFTER ALL.

Gerry: I think that's it. I think for every human being, it's sort of like you need some daily dose of success or you need at some regular interval to maintain your motivation or you figure this is not working out. I've got to go do something else.

I do think that's one of the powerful things of self publishing is that you get data. It's a double-edged sword. You get data instantly. I do think one of the key skills here is mental toughness. I think it develops over time and then, discipline. You talked about routines and stuff like that. It's certainly helped me a lot.

James: What does your typical day look like, now, in terms of writing and marketing and production?

Gerry: I write in the morning and do everything else in the afternoon. I'm an outliner. I write pretty detailed character histories. Then, I'll write an outline of the novel. I do it for my own self-confidence. I want to know that when I'm writing something that I've got this big pay off at the end. The nightmare scenario where I wake up in a cold sweat at night is I've written two-thirds of a novel and there's not this blockbuster ending. That would terrify me.

James: It's funny how many mysteries or horror films or things you do go to see, where they've really gone ahead and made the work but they still don't have an ending for it.

Gerry: That's exactly right. I hate it and I know readers would hate it. At the same time, when I start writing, so many things change.

When I wrote my first novel, my outline was so detailed. It was over detailed. About half way through, I threw the whole thing out and rewrote it.

Now, my outlines are loose enough to allow for things to happen as the story unfolds. I still have that ending is going to be there. I find that characters that I thought were going to be great weren't that interesting or the story takes a turn. That's fun.

I think that if you are really religious to the outline and you write something that doesn't make sense or strikes readers as odd, I think you hurt the story. What I've found is, when you're writing the story, to make sure it's logical and believable because if you lose that believability, it doesn't really matter what happens after that. That's my process.

James: Did you say you start with the characters and then do the outline?

Gerry: Yes. For me, the kind of books I'm writing, I really start with a scientific or historical mystery that intrigues me or some kind of premise that I really personally am intrigued by and get excited about. That's really what gets me started. Then, I start to think about what's a fresh character that might be involved in that, somebody that I would like to learn more about. Then, I start to flush out, "Okay, what's their personal history?" The plot almost comes from that. It's like, "Why are they involved? What's happening around them?" The arc of the story starts to unfold for me.

James: Do you write in Word or Scrivener?

Gerry: I write on a NeoWriter. I don't know if you guys are familiar with that?

James: Yeah.

Gerry: The NeoWriter is basically a key board with about four or five lines in monochrome text. It's got no internet connection, no spell check or anything like that. It operates on four double A batteries. It lasts for weeks at a time.

You can get them on eBay for 40 or 50 bucks or something. I write on the Neo because I find that it's nice to not have the internet or somebody telling me I'm misspelling. I'm a terrible speller. I'm a little obsessive. If I saw that I'd misspelled a word, I would correct it.

I write all my drafts there. I, also, think that Neo helps me to write shorter sentences and tighter prose. I tend to write longer prose, which I don't like, in Word or Scrivener. I take my drafts and I put them in Scrivener. In Scrivener, I organize all my outlines and all the other stuff. Then, I work it from there.

James: The Atlantis Gene took two and a half years to write. You've picked up speed since then.

THE SECOND AND THIRD BOOKS, WERE THEY FASTER WORK BECAUSE YOU GOT YOUR LEGS UNDERNEATH YOU AND YOU KNEW WHERE YOU WERE GOING?

Gerry: Yes. The second and third were quicker to write. It took me two and a half years but I'd done a lot of the trilogy research and backstory. I had a lot for those second and third books already done.

I think the second one took me eight or nine months. When The Atlantis Gene came out, I had pretty good headstart on The Atlantis Plague. Although, I did rewrite The Atlantis Gene and it was just a ton of stuff happening, while I was writing Plague. I've gotten a little faster. My last book came out December of 2014, Departure, which was a stand alone. Since, then, I've been writing a lot but I haven't published anything.

James: I've got to say your books are clumped in what looks like a tremendously busy 18 months in your life.

Gerry: Yeah, it does look that way but I've been writing a lot now and I got a lot of stuff in terms of outlines, character bios and have a lot written that's stock piled that will come out at some point. It's just been a lot going on here. We're building a house and my wife is pregnant. There's just life stuff going on. What I'm trying to do is get a lot of my research and planning done ahead of time so when the baby comes

I can just write every day and start putting this stuff out there.

James: The readers are going to be pleased to hear that. You have a loyal following, a huge, loyal following, I should say. I know that you value your contact with readers. It's certainly something that comes across in the interviews I've heard and the bits I've read about you.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH THAT AND HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU?

Gerry: It's huge. I think it's important for me. I learn a lot from readers. They're also a source of inspiration and just daily encouragement.

When I set out to write my first book I'd always loved science fiction and I'd always loved reading it. It'd been this source of calm and escape in my life and was really one of the sources of joy. I thought, "I'm going to write this novel and if it takes off, this is going to be my second career." It's going to be something that I really am into and feel is this really valuable thing for the world. If it didn't workout or wasn't a huge success, I thought, "This might be a hobby or maybe I'll go do something else."

I remember very early I got a reader email that said, "I've been in the hospital for a few weeks. I read your book. It was just this thing that took me out of what was going on and this real source of happiness in my life." That's when it came full circle.

I had become this role for this reader that other great writers had been for me. That's when i knew I was going to keep doing it no matter what. The reader interaction is very important for me. I think it varies for each writer but I still like doing it.

James: Did you, straight out of the gate, have a mailing list set up?

Gerry: I did.

James: Do you think that's a benefit from your previous experience that you knew, immediately, that that was going to be crucially important?

Gerry: I knew right off the bat I wanted to have a mailing list. I knew I needed it. I obviously did my own website. I wanted that to be a big role. I'm going to do more with the website.

When the first book came out, I had this fact versus fiction piece. With *Departure*, we did this Easter egg hunt with all these sites. On the website we had all this bonus feature content and stuff and an epilogue, which hadn't appeared before.

I've got some other ideas that I'm going to do for the web site that I think will be pretty cool. I would encourage writers and I think the website, depending on what kind of books you write, for my genre, for techno thrillers, I hope they lead people who are intellectually curious and they want to go on the website and say, "I wonder how much of that was real?" and read more and things like that.

James: Regarding the bonus content and the Easter eggs, was that something that was driven by Harper Collins or had you said to them that you wanted to do something like that?

Gerry: It was something that I wanted to do. The book, *Departure*, came out in December '14 and they were doing this rerelease. The book had been edited. There was a new chapter.

I was not convinced that people who had read the self published version would get a lot out of reading the rerelease. It was edited and remastered. It had that new chapter but if they did want to revisit the story, I wanted to give them a little more to enhance it.

James: There is the George Lucas approach to a work of art as you, then, repackage it every 18 months for 12 years.

Gerry: It's not an approach I intend to take.

Mark: Mugs like me keep buying it. That's the thing, isn't it? If you become a fan of something, a fan of an author, you are up for that. Even if dear old Douglas Adams was still alive, one of my favorite authors, it would be joyous for him to revisit some of the early books and rewrite bits and pieces of it. I'd be

completely up for that.

I GUESS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE IN YOUR SUPER FANS AND YOUR MORE CASUAL FANS. FOR YOU, IT SEEMS TO BE YOU DO HAVE A LOYAL FOLLOWING, WHICH IS WHY I'M PROBABLY PLEASED ON THEIR BEHALF TO HEAR THAT THERE'S MORE STUFF COMING OUT.

Gerry: Yeah, there's a lot more coming.

Mark: Where are you, now, in terms of the Indie and traditionally published split. I noticed with Departure you Indie launched that but it was very quickly picked up.

Gerry: Departure came out in December of 2014. It did well, sold about a quarter of a million copies in four or five months. Fox bought the movie rights. Then, they called Harper Collins and they bought the print rights.

I don't think I would have gone the traditional publishing route, initially, but, it was a situation where I thought, "Well, my core audience, a lot of my readers, have read Departure. I'm going to be able to leave it up for another month or two months or whatever, while we sort this contract out."

I thought this might be a good way to test the water. It's a nice experiment in that you get pretty clear data. My self publishing audience had largely read it. Then, the question becomes "How many people that are reading print and reading in other retailers have this appetite for the work?" I'm still waiting on that data from Harper Collins.

I'll say that I prefer self publishing for a couple of reasons. I think it may just be an issue of work flow and personality. I ran a series of internet companies and when you're in that situation, you're very used to making all the decisions, for better or worse, and having control your own destiny. There's nobody who actually controls their own destiny. When you have that kind of delusion and you get to make the calls and you get to iterate fast. I like that. I think that's where the world's going.

The other thing I didn't really appreciate when they bought the rights, is that the book would come out and it'd be \$9.99 for an ebook. I don't know when it went up on Amazon, the other retailers, I just sort of felt like, "Man, that I think is a lot of money to pay for the average person." For the person, here in North

Carolina, who makes \$10 or \$12 an hour, works full time 40 hour week and that's \$480 a week and you want them to give two percent of their whole paycheck. After you pay taxes, it becomes I think pretty real. I don't know.

I'm pretty financially secure at this point in my life so I'm writing these books because it's an outlet for me and it's something that I get a lot out of. I certainly want them to be read. That's what I was after with traditional publishing is to find a wider audience.

With all that being said, I always encourage authors to figure out what they want from writing, what's important for them. I'm not someone who thinks there's one answer. I certainly think the criteria for traditionally publishing is getting a little more narrow by the day.

Mark: Let's just go back to the Atlantis series, you self published those and they started to sell huge amounts.

HOW DID THE TRADITIONAL WORLD HINGE ON THAT? DID YOU HAVE AN AGENT OR DID THEY COME STRAIGHT TO YOU? WHAT HAPPENED?

Gerry: Both. When the books really started to break out, the big major publishers never contacted me but some smaller ones did. Then, agents really started to inquire. I considered traditionally publishing them but I really felt like, at that point in my career, what I needed to do was to learn and to continue to get better at writing.

I didn't want to take the books out of the market because I was getting so many reviews. I was getting a lot of email, and a lot of feedback. I also didn't want to mess with what worked. The book was selling. Things were happening. There's a lot more risk in upsetting the apple cart here than staying the course. What I did was I decided I'm going to sell foreign rights and that's what we've done since then, with the exception of Departure.

Mark: You think from now on, you've got these other books in the pipeline, that you're fairly set at this stage on keeping control and doing your own thing?

Gerry: I think it's what's right for me. With that being said, I'm not an absolutist. If somebody comes to me

with some offer, I'll certainly entertain it. I'm an open minded person but, I think, that contractually, Harper Collins has 30 days to bid on my next book. I have to fulfill my obligation there. I don't have anything bad to say about them. I think they're fine hardworking people. I think for me, it gets down to what I value and what I'm trying to get out of the market.

Mark: Tell us about the films, briefly. I know we'll go back to books in a minute. That's always an exciting thing for any author to imagine a film deal. Again, I have to quote Douglas Adams. I remember he died in the 20 years between selling the film rights and the film being made. I remember him saying in the intro to one of his books, "The film is in production and will be made any decade now."

THESE ARE LIVE PROJECTS FOR YOU, AREN'T THEY?

Gerry: Yeah, they are. I'll admit I'm not intimately involved in the projects and don't have a lot to report there. I talk with them every now and then. They keep me updated. I think out of them being polite to me. I don't know. I'm very optimistic. I hope that the movies will get made. The way I look at is it may or may not happen. They've invested a lot of money into and quite a lot of time. The way it's set up is that these are all options that expire. The clock's ticking. I don't know what will happen.

Mark: Have people been attached?

Gerry: They have. I don't know that it's been announced.

Mark: I'm in a similar position. I optioned one of my series to Hollywood and producers have attached writers and directors but I can't say either. I think I agree with you. My view on that is if it comes off, fantastic but it's not something I'm going to bank on or expect. It would be a nice thing. It would be an amazing thing if it came off.

Gerry: Yeah, exactly.

Mark: It's going to need a lot of work.

Gerry: The contract negotiations. I was trying to figure that out. I was like, "Are they trying to make a

movie of the week or what is this?" The lawyer is like, "They're thinking summer blockbuster with lots of fire and explosions." I was like, "Oh, that's what I'm looking for."

Mark: A fantastic way off the success of *The Martian* of being Indie published originally by Andy Weir and it's a great trailblazing film for you to follow on. Hopefully, it certainly sets the scene for Hollywood.

Gerry: Yeah, he set the bar pretty high. That's just an amazing success story and an amazing fictional story.

Mark: Well, deserved.

Gerry: Let's don't make any of those comparisons.

James: We've got up to the morning, in terms of how you work.

HOW MANY WORDS TO YOU TEND TO SHOOT FOR EACH DAY?

Gerry: I get as many as I can. I find that I have two phases. There's this phase where I'm planning a novel and doing a ton of research and character bios. That's oftentimes when I'm first starting. Really happy in that phase.

Then, I really start to wear out because I'm not writing. I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere. Most days, I can get three or 4000 words, when I'm actively writing. After that, I find that my mental stamina, I'm just not as fresh and I don't think the writing is quite as good. I've gone past that some days. I'm sprinting to the finish but I find I do more rewrites on that stuff. At some point, I just have to bag it everyday and say, "That's as much good stuff as I'm going to get."

James: You talk about being an outliner. At some point, throwing some of those ideas away. The guys and girls who are writing a book and getting quite excited about wondering where this is going to go during a writing session.

DO YOU EVER GET TO THAT STAGE IN YOUR CHARACTERS OR PLOTS OR IS IT ALL PLANNED?

Gerry: Certainly, those moments. I won't say that it's the majority of the time or even a large part of the time but there are those moments when things happen.

I think that's part of the magic and part of the reason we all do this is you get to some point and the novel just starts writing itself and things start happening. Things that you never planned or imagined and you're like, "Oh, that's really cool." I think those are some of the most fun times. I'm writing techno thrillers and oftentimes there's a lot of dense stuff in there and you kind of worry and wonder if readers are as into it as you are and as much of a geek as I am.

Those moments when the plot really takes those twists and those turns and you know that almost universally, all the readers are going to like it because you're so blown away. Those are the things that I certainly get excited about. In fact, when I'm outlining, some scenes will come up and I think they're so good. I'll go ahead and write them. Obviously, I rewrite it when you get to that point. There are points in the story that I look forward to writing and things that I know are going to happen and readers are going to love. Yeah, I totally agree.

James: We want to get through a few of the questions that have come from our Facebook group. Karen O'Connor, I think you more or less answered both of these but she wants to know about, because the plots are full of twists and turns and loads of action, how much planning goes into the books? We've pretty much covered that.

THE OTHER QUESTION FROM HER, ALSO, YOU'VE SORT OF ALLUDED TO, IS WHETHER YOU DELIBERATELY PICKED TECHNO THRILLER AS A GENRE TO WRITE IN BECAUSE IT WAS A NICHE MARKET OR BECAUSE OF SOMETHING THAT YOU LOVE TO WRITE?

Gerry: It's something that I really love. When I started, I considered two genres. One was space adventure and the other was techno thrillers. I really felt like for space adventure, there was a lot of writers doing it. I thought that the competition would probably be more intense. Star Trek and Star Wars, those are the things I grew up, and the X-Files, that was huge. I also, felt like, because a writer starting out, for myself, I wanted to do something where, even if my writing or my characters weren't as good, the novel could stand out.

James: I think, also, because you addressed this earlier and you did talk about you loved to write in the genre, obviously, that to an extent, answered the question, which was have you chosen this commercially or have you chosen it because it's what you want to do. Obviously, most authors will say, quite rightly, it's

got to be a combination of the two, right?

YOU'VE GOT TO NOT BE SILLY AND CHOOSE SOMETHING THAT NOBODY'S GOING TO WANT TO READ. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU DON'T ENJOY IT, IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW THE STORY, HOW CAN YOU PUT YOUR HEART AND SOUL INTO IT AND MAKE OTHER PEOPLE WANT IT.

Gerry: I think that's right. The core of my feeling is that you choose something that you're passionate about because that comes through in the writing. For me, techno thrillers was a perfect genre to start in because I knew my writing and my character development and all these things would develop over time. That earlier, it wouldn't be nearly as good as what I really wanted it to be.

I felt, doing a techno thriller, something with a lot of science and history, there was a lot there for readers. I felt good about doing that. I considered doing a techno thriller or a space adventure very early in my career. Although, the third book in the series, *The Atlantis World*, is very much a space adventure, which has been hit and a miss with varying groups of readers. I eventually got there, I guess.

James: We've got a few other questions. Jeff Shelby, who asked that one, he's asked a couple, actually. I noticed there's a reasonable amount of jealousy coming out through these questions. I guess because it looks, from the outside, that things happened very quickly for you without too much effort, which is not quite the case, at all.

DEAN CRAWFORD SAYING, "CAN YOU ASK HIM TO GET OUT OF MY WAY ON THE AMAZON BESTSELLER RANKING? SEND SOME OF HIS FANS OVER WITH THEIR WALLETS." I'M SURE YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO DO THAT.

Gerry: A great guy. I love that.

James: One last question from him and you have already addressed this as well, which is about the price that Harper Collins set for *Departure*. He's pegged it at 4.99. I know it's nine pounds 99 in the U. K. which is knocking on 13.50, 14 bucks equivalent.

HE WANTED TO KNOW IF THIS IS A NEW STRATEGY AND WHETHER YOU HAD A VOICE IN THAT?

Gerry: I did. I've had a voice since the launch, encouraging them to lower the price and they've agreed. I've been very happy about that. The paperbacks coming out this summer and I hope they'll continue to keep the price at 4.99 or less in the U. S. I haven't seen the U. K. Price but that feels pretty

exorbitant.

Mark: I'm with you on that one. I think 4.99 is almost the perfect price for an ebook. The thing is it's perfect convergence of volume and price. You're going to sell more copies at that level and still getting a pretty decent at 3.60 royalty, something along those lines, certainly from self publishing. That does seem to be the sweet spot. Pushing things higher than the paper cost is just ridiculous.

James: That seems to be the case for *Departure* in the U. K. Nine pounds 99 kindle edition, 7.99 paperback, 15.19 hardcover.

WHEN YOU GO WITH A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING DEAL THERE'S DIFFERENT CONTRACTS FOR DIFFERENT TERRITORIES. IT STARTS TO BECOME MORE COMPLICATED TO HAVE CONTROL OR HAVE A SAY OVER IT.

Gerry: That's right. You get your say but you don't get the decision.

James: No, it's been really brilliant from my point of view. Talking to you is quite inspirational, as well. You seem like a really nice guy. You've been very elegant about some of your motivations, which, Mark, may have explained in the beginning at the interview. I'm writing my first book, now. I'm lapping up these stories about approach and word counts and plots and outlines and so on. I found it great. Mark, you hero worship Gerry anyway, don't you sir?

Mark: Absolutely. It's really great. Thanks for coming on Gerry. We really appreciate you giving us the time.

James: He's the most laconic person I think we've ever interviewed. I really loved his story and I like his approach. He's got a correct mix between being enthusiastic about his subject but thoughtful about what's going to work and what's not commercial. Boy, did he get that bit right.

Mark: He did. He picked a subject that is very commercial, but, he obviously has a lot of enthusiasm for and a lot of knowledge about and knocked it out of the park. Really interesting interview with Gerry.

James: Great to listen to Gerry Riddle. Thank you very much indeed for listening to episode 30 and Gerry Riddle this week. It's been great to have you onboard. We will be back in a weeks time. Enjoy the last vestiges of sunshine, if you've got that. It's still hot here, hence, the background noise you hear as these fans try to keep our computers cold. We've actually had an unseasonably warm summer in the U. K. which has been nice. We will try and cool down and we'll see you next week.

CHAPTER 28

BOOK COVER CREATOR STUART BACHE TELLS HOW TO CREATE A BESTSELLING BOOK COVER



THERE ARE many book cover creators and designers out there but none with the expertise and experience of today's guest on the podcast. Stuart Bache has not only designed books for Mark Dawson but also for many other bestselling authors such as John le Carre and Stephen King. On this episode we chat with Stuart about his own journey into book cover creation and pick his brain about the steps new and aspiring authors can take towards creating their own book covers. You won't find a person better qualified or gifted at doing what Stuart does. That's why his willingness to share his experience and thoughts on the podcast means so much to us.

THE ROAD TO BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL BOOK COVER DESIGNER.

Stuart was still in college when a mentor began pulling him into some design work for clients creating, amongst other things, book covers. It was during that time in his life that he began to meet and work with some of the best-selling authors of the day. His approach has always been to make the book not only attractive but have the cover design trigger immediate and long-lasting engagement with potential readers.

In the digital world of self-publishing, provoking this kind of response is crucial. Find out how and where Stuart begins his book cover creation process, on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

WHAT DOES A BOOK COVER DESIGNER NEED FROM AN AUTHOR TO FASHION A GREAT COVER?

When Mark began working with Stuart on the creation of book covers for his novels he was asked a short series of questions about his books. What's the story synopsis? Who are the main characters? What are the locations of where the book is set? From there Stuart set off to create a book cover to represent the entire story arc. On today's episode Stuart generously shares the types of things he does to make a cover stand out - from imagery to shading and typesetting. Tune in for plenty of cover design tips!

SIMPLE RULES TO FOLLOW FOR A GREAT BOOK COVER.

It's tempting to use all the bells and whistles in a program like Photoshop to create a visual spectacle of a book cover. But Stuart advises you to resist the urge to over complicate your book cover and instead, opt for simplicity. In this conversation, Stuart points out the kinds of things that make for a simple but effective book cover and explains why book cover creators who are successful have mastered the tricky art of keeping it simple. It's all on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO CREATE YOUR OWN BOOK COVERS, HERE'S ANOTHER GREAT OPTION.

Stuart understands that up and coming self-published authors might be on a budget, so he's come up with a way for authors to use his design skills. You'll be introduced to Stuart's new design service that offers some of his cool designs in a template style format that can be edited to create a unique cover. It's a great way to get some outstanding design work for your self-published book.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Things to expect from the podcast in the next few weeks.
- The interview topic today: book covers.
- How Stuart approaches his creative process and communicates with authors.
- Multiple concepts for a book cover to start.
- How Mark and Stuart work together to create great covers.
- The tools Stuart uses to create his work.
- How Photoshop can be used by authors.
- The resolution and sizes Stuart creates for book covers.
- Suggestions for starting out with book cover design.
- The process of the work being done on the upcoming course.
- Stuart's new venture.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- Stuart's websites: stuartbache.co.uk
- OR www.BooksCovered.co.uk
- [The NINC conference](#)
- www.arcangel.com Stock photo site
- [Photoshop](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 31 from The Self Publishing Formula.

Automated: Two writers One just starting out, the other a best-seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello Mark. Well we're in America, aren't we?

Mark: Are we?

James Blatch: We are because this is the 23rd of September and by the magic of podcasting, we're actually in America at the moment, although we're not.

Mark: Yes.

James Blatch: We're obviously in the UK because we're recording this just before we leave. I'm getting a flight tomorrow and Mark's getting a flight next week, but we are going to be at NINC at the point that this podcast is released, and yeah, we can tell you we're going to gather some material.

The last time we did out and about, our guest was London Book Fair, but we're going to get our microphones out, so to speak, at NINC. We'll always do what we always do, which is try and find, seek out, the value information, the tidbits that are making a difference to people's marketing and their book-writing and try and bring that to you in an episode. I guess that's going to be the next one, so we'll aim to

have that out on the 30th of September.

Mark: Yes. You'll be editing frantically on the plane back home.

James Blatch: Yeah, exactly. I never stop working, as you know. The other thing we're going to do, John Dyer and I are taking the opportunity to visit as many writers as we can in the States. We're just going to talk to each one of those and ask them a similar set of formatted questions, really focused on what's working for them at the moment. A bit of where they're putting their money in terms of advertising and what sort of revenues they're receiving and also just little bits about what tweaks they've made that have made things better for them.

We'll also talk to people, the questions we always like to hear, about how people write, how often they write, or whether they plan, whether they're pantsers, and all that stuff.

We're going to bring you that episode, which should be a good flavor of lots of different writers and lots of different authors recorded in the States. We'll bring you that episode, around the 7th of October, so a couple of specials from America coming up in the next few weeks.

As I say, at the moment, we're still in the UK, and we have a great interview today. We've got a really interesting area, which is not one that perhaps naturally or comes naturally to writers. It's more in the creative side in terms of artwork, and that is we're going to talk to somebody who does book covers, aren't we, Mark?

Mark: We are, yes. We're going to be talking to Stuart Bache. He's my cover designer and Stuart and I suppose we go back 3 or 4 years now.

A little story before we get into the interview. When I started doing self-publishing with the Black Mile and the Impostor, the first two books that I published myself, I got a very, very talented artistic friend of mine who actually painted covers for me based on the kind of pulp covers of the 1950s, and they're really beautiful. You can see how good they are.

The artwork appealed to me. I thought it was great, but that didn't necessarily mean that it was translating for potential readers, and of course, that is the main goal of having a great cover, is to persuade people to give your books a chance and read them.

I stepped back and I decided that I'd try and find someone to do a re-jacketing job on these books for me. I came across Stuart Bache. I don't remember exactly where it was now. I think I probably saw another cover that I liked and then kind of reverse engineered it and found my way back to him.

I asked him to do the covers, or new covers for the two traditionally-published books that I'd had published in 2000. The originals are absolutely awful. I would swear apart from the clean rating for the podcast and I'd rather avoid that. But they were really dreadful. Stuart took a look at them, agreed with me, and then produced two covers that I just thought were stunning. I think he drew those ones for me. They were very very commercial.

The books immediately started to sell and I was very happy to commission him to work on those others that I mentioned and then eventually the John Milton books. He's done all of my covers since then. Probably, I don't know, 15 covers I guess? Something like that all in all.

He's also commissioned by Amazon Thomasson Mercer to work on the books that I sold to Amazon and he's got loads of experience. He worked in the traditional industry for ages as he'll say in the interview. Then last year branched out, went solo, and has been just completely knocking it out of the park with his new business. We're delighted to be able to work with him and delighted to bring this interview as well.

James Blatch: Yeah absolutely, he's a lovely guy as well, Stuart, and couldn't happen to a nicer guy but he's very focused on commercial success. Just in case you're wondering, we've split the interview into two. Half of it is about using somebody like Stuart and how he approaches his work and how he ensures that the cover is going to do the job, as Mark was referring to, rather than just look pretty.

The second half of the interview is actually about people who haven't quite got the pockets yet to employ a professional like Stuart. Stuart brilliantly, and very charitably, talks through the process and the sort of things that you can do if you want to do a bit of design yourself.

Mark: One thing worth mentioning is that Stuart is involved in our Self-Publishing 101 course and he's delivering a module on cover design. I've looked at the bits he's put together today and it's absolutely brilliant. Almost worth whatever we would decide to charge for the course in itself.

James Blatch: Yeah we'll give you a little update on where we are with 101 if you're interested in that after the interview. Let's hear from Stuart.

Well hello Stuart and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. Thank you very much indeed for joining us.

Stuart Bache: Oh thank you James, thank you for asking me.

James Blatch: You are the... should we say the illustrator in chief to Mark Dawson?

Stuart Bache: Yes that's true. Yeah, his very own art director.

James Blatch: Yeah exactly. He's such a star now, probably has a trailer with makeup in it as well.

Stuart Bache: He does.

James Blatch: Let's talk in a little bit more detail about what you do and how you do it.

Two things I'd quite like to get out of this interview. One is the creative process, how you approach it, what sort of information you need from a client and how you create the end product. You know, how that whole system works.

Stuart Bache: Sure.

James Blatch: The other thing that we'd like to talk about, how people could do this themselves. Some advice from a professional about how they could approach this, because not everybody can afford a design service, certainly at the early stage of their careers.

Let's start first of all with you as working with and for an author.

WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU GET FROM AN AUTHOR AND THEN HOW DO YOU TRANSLATE THAT INTO SOMETHING THAT THEY'RE GOING TO BE HAPPY WITH?

Stuart Bache: It's something that I've had to learn over the years. I've worked in the industry for over 10 years now and the things I've picked up from briefs that were written when I worked at HarperCollins and places like that.

Other than the synopsis obviously, it's obviously very important to know what the book's about. But places and objects and character traits. It's very important actually to have an idea of what the landscape is going to be.

I would say most important to me is comparative and competitive titles. So other covers that are out there that fit within the genre of your book, your novel, or nonfiction even, because this gives me an idea of what I'm designing for. What I'm designing against, what I'm trying to stand out from, and also what genre I'm fitting into because the most important aspect about design, especially books design, is familiarity, especially when it comes to trade and mass market fiction.

James Blatch: You're thinking quite commercially from the beginning.

WHO'S THE COMPETITION? WHAT ARE THEY DOING AND HOW IS THIS DESIGN GOING TO STAND OUT AND CATCH THE EYE AHEAD OF ITS COMPETITION?

Stuart Bache: Absolutely. I know for the vast majority of people I'll be designing E-books so it'll be on places like Amazon, places like that.

I have learned from places like Waterstones in the UK, bookstores like that, how they actually sell their books and how they place them on shelves and on their tables and they all base it on familiarity. A book will be sitting there next to books that are similar actually aesthetically as well as what's inside the books because it makes people who may have bought that book look around at those other books and think,

"Okay. Well if I like this one then I'll like that one".

That's how it works when we shop. It's a split second emotion or thought when we see something that we like and if there's a familiarity to it. Things like Lee Child, there are many books that look very similar to Lee Child, for a good reason and that is because they have similar content. Or because someone wants someone to feel a similar emotion to it, that is, that if you like Lee Child, you will like this book as well.

James Blatch: So you start from that point of view?

Stuart Bache: Yes.

James Blatch: You also, presumably, you may also have a fixed idea of what they want. Or do they more than often come to you and look to you to generate some creative ideas from scratch?

Stuart Bache: I think it can be a mixture, I mean a lot of the time people when they're hiring any professional, you want them to be the person who comes up with the ideas and to actually puts the whole thing together. But you do occasionally get someone who has already got a very firm idea in their mind of what they want because they obviously, when you're writing one of the reasons you start writing probably is because you enjoy a certain author or a certain genre and you want to be part of that and of course you're going to have a lot of those books and a lot of those covers. So you've probably got a good idea yourself what sells and what works well and what you like.

From my perspective, I think that's great. I like to have ideas and obviously who's going to know a book better than the person who's written it? I also would always throw in my own concepts as well based on what I think is working and what's doing really well this year and what's popular.

James Blatch: Then your next step. You've had this conversation, you've done a bit of research in the market, you then will do what?

DO YOU PUT TOGETHER ONE DESIGN AND GET SOME FEEDBACK AT AN EARLY STAGE OR DO YOU PUT TOGETHER THREE OR FOUR IDEAS FOR SOMEBODY?

Stuart Bache: Always, always a minimum of three. That's how I work too. I mean sometimes it'll be more but I always do at least three concepts and they will be different as well. So they'll use different typography, different colors. A completely different concept.

I try my best to give a variety and hopefully if maybe one of the ideas isn't exactly right then maybe there's something in one of them or all of them which will spark the next stage of the process.

James Blatch: You've got a great website stuartbache.co.uk and you've got quite a selection of designs. There are some, I have to say, really stand out fabulous designs that you've worked on in the past.

THE ONE THAT REALLY CATCHES THE EYE IS THE TWIN GIRLS, THE SK TREMAYNE ICE TWINS NOVEL AND ONE OF THEM IS SLIGHTLY FADING AND IT'S A BEAUTIFULLY PUT TOGETHER COVER. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

Stuart Bache: It was quite lucky really. You never know how things are going to work. I was working at HarperCollins at the time so I was senior designer there and the brief came on my desk. And occasionally we'd all work on a few similar projects. The main crux of the novel is, it's not quite thriller, it's not actually supernatural, but there is a sense of both of those things.

I looked as I always do at what was out there and what I'd be fighting with and against and there's people like Peter May and Peter James and people like that who the typestyle is very bold and there isn't a lot of effect on it, it's just very strong bit of typography. Then the image is usually muted with a strong color. So it's very very basic stuff but that's where I started from.

The story is about these two girls, twins, who one passes away and the family move to an island up in Scotland, I believe, to a lighthouse and there's a twist. And this is on the back of the cover so I'm not spoiling anything here. There's no spoilers. But the one girl, it's a case of where which one died and why did the one twin die over the other and that kind of thing. I felt it had a bit of a TV feel to it. There was that movie, BBC drama feel to the design, that's what I tried to add anyways. An extra element and a bit of narrative which I think is important.

James Blatch: I absolutely love that design and I'm sure that SK Tremayne would have been delighted with it as well.

Stuart Bache: It was a bestseller, it was bestseller twice.

James Blatch: Well you know I'm going to say Stuart, I think your design probably contributed to that because it's difficult to take your eyes off of that and not think that you want to know more. Which I guess is a key message you want to give out in a book cover.

Stuart Bache: Yeah of course.

James Blatch: I also should mention you've got some pretty big names on this.

JOHN LE CARRÉ, WHICH I GUESS YOU WERE DOING THROUGH HARPERCOLLINS?

Stuart Bache: I was when I was a Junior actually so it was a long time ago.

James Blatch: But you did the cover for one of his most famous novels, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy?

Stuart Bache: Yes.

James Blatch: That's a big responsibility isn't it, someone hands you that?

Stuart Bache: Yeah it was massive. Like I said, I was a Junior at the time, my art director had been working on John le Carré for years but he, being the art director, had loads of other things. He'd worked with him several times so he just wanted to get a fresh approach I think. So I got a chance to work on the list, it's quite a large list as well, but it was great, it was actually fantastic. I got to meet him, David Cornwell, which is John le Carré's real name but I'm sure everyone knows that. But I got to meet him and have one of the books signed which just was fantastic, so yeah that was really good.

It's kind of different. I think it was probably the first project that I'd ever worked on that took me from being brand new in the industry to actually a couple of people talking about my project.

James Blatch: Just coming onto the radar within your field?

Stuart Bache: Yes, exactly yeah.

James Blatch: Well deserved as well and a master storyteller John le Carré. I know that Mark holds him in great esteem as I think all the authors in that genre do so, one of the grandees of it. Okay well let's move into a little bit more detail then. So you've done quite a few book covers now for Mark, in fact, not too dissimilar to the concept of the Tinker Tailor Soldier spy cover.

Stuart Bache: In a sense, yeah.

James Blatch: You use this central figure, there's a slight mystery about him, and we know that Mark's main character, certainly on his John Milton books, he becomes an increasingly conflicted and flawed character. I've noticed in some of the later covers, there's a slight dishevelment to him as well. This is not the James Bond guy this is the slightly in the shadows of humanity almost flawed guy and that even comes across.

I GUESS THOSE LITTLE BITS OF DETAIL WHERE THEY TRY AND TELL THE STORY AS WELL.

Stuart Bache: Yeah absolutely. I try to get the setting and Mark's very good at that. I think we've learned from each other in that respect. He knows very much what he wants but he's always very happy for me to create and to try something new and different and there is an evolution in his covers.

From the very beginning when we worked together many years ago to how they are now. Now they are so much more refined. And then a lot of that is because we know what our conversation is going to be. We know how to communicate what we want and what he wants and how I can do it. It's got to the point now where he pretty much tells me a brief synopsis and tells me the places and how he wants John Milton to be.

And, as you say, he was suited and booted very very early on and a lot of that's to do, it's probably a bit of a tangent I'm afraid, but that's to do with where I can source my images from. When you're working with independent authors there's a price limit unfortunately because the big stock image sites like Archangel

are fantastic, but they are expensive and there's a limited use on what you can do with the photographs. Where Shutterstock is global and it's reasonably priced and that's where I tend to go.

However, we have now got to a point where I know exactly what he wants and I know who John Milton is, I think. So he gives me a few details and there is a familiarity, there is a similarity to John le Carré. There also is a similarity to people like Joe Nesbo and other authors like Lee Child. The figure, the lone wanderer and the landscape. But I think what we try to do is maybe add a little bit more narrative than they do.

James Blatch: I notice you use the weather. In fact I was thinking there's a strong similarity between the way you approach a book cover that a good director of photography or a good film director will do in using things like landscape and weather to tell the story. So everything visually is telling a story.

THE WEATHER'S VERY EMOTIVE ISN'T IT? CAN BE VERY EMOTIVE.

Stuart Bache: Oh yeah completely. I've got folders of all sorts of different skies. Thunder, mostly cloudy, dark and ominous. That sets the mood straight away.

James Blatch: Is that because an author never comes to you and says, "I've got this great book. It's a beautiful day. Everything works out really well and everyone lives happily ever after. Can you do a cover?" That never happens, that conversation?

Stuart Bache: Never. Never, never happens. I was known for a while for doing the thrillers and crime so pretty much I am set up and ready to put any thriller or commercial crime fiction together in not very long actually. I've got folders worth of clouds and landscapes and mountains and guns-

James Blatch: Ominous.

Stuart Bache: Yeah ominous.

James Blatch: Portentous.

Stuart Bache: Exactly yeah.

James Blatch: Let's move into the practical side a little bit where you touched on using stock libraries. In terms of your assets. I mean it's also, in the old days you used to say to an artist, "What medium do you work in?", so that's watercolors or oil or photography. But of course it's done digitally now and that means that really any kind of aesthetic is available to you and some of your covers are almost cut out I noticed. Looked like sort of cut out prints. Others are quite clearly photographs, at least in the early stage.

YOU'VE SOURCED THESE ASSETS FROM ELSEWHERE OR DO YOU CREATE SOME OF THESE FROM SCRATCH?

Stuart Bache: I'm probably going to be hated for this because I love Photoshop. I absolutely adore it. I do a huge amount of my work in there and if I need to I can cut out things and I will draw things and I will paint things but I'm not a traditionalist.

I am a commercial designer so when it comes to digital I will try my best to create something that looks as realistic as possible using photography or print techniques or anything like that but it will be almost entirely digital. And I probably shouldn't, like I say, admit that.

James Blatch: When you say that, for those of us that are uninitiated in this creative process.

THE LESS COMMERCIAL MIND, THE MORE TRADITIONAL COMPETITORS. ARE THEY WORKING AT A DRAWING BOARD? MOVING BITS OF CARDBOARD AROUND?

Stuart Bache: I'd say some of them are. There are a lot of very very talented book cover designs out there and very well known ones as well who, they will paint every bit of typography. They will hand draw every illustration and that's fantastic.

You know where your limits are and I know, as a previous freelancer, when I was a freelancer a long time ago I had to learn how to be more than just a commercial designer, I had to be a bit of an illustrator as well. When I couldn't physically do those things, I taught myself how to get as close as possible to those versions of illustration, whether it's a painting technique or an illustrative technique, using Photoshop or Illustrator and other Adobe applications.

James Blatch: We use them as well if it makes you feel better. I'm a big fan as well and obviously

nowhere near as expert as you are in Photoshop but that does bring me on to the final part really of nuggets from you. It's been fascinating so far by the way Stuart, and that is how people can perhaps do this themselves. I mean Photoshop is a very accessible bit of software.

Stuart Bache: Yes.

James Blatch: Particularly the subscription option; fairly low monthly payments and have access to it all.

IS THIS SOMETHING THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO AN AUTHOR? I GUESS IT DOES DEPEND ON THEIR LEVEL OF COMPETENCY AND COMPETENCE WITH THIS SORT OF THING THAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, PHOTOSHOP.

Stuart Bache: Yeah absolutely. Confidence, as with anything, comes with time and experience so I think to start off, I would always recommend simplicity. Not to push themselves too much. Do what I mentioned earlier and have a look at what your comparative and competitive titles are and see what's out there.

Shutterstock is available to everyone and just start to pick out things that you think are relevant. I'd say don't dive in into the deep end and think that you are going to create something that's exactly the same as a professional could do but have two things in mind which is simplicity.

Know what your typeface is. Don't try and be too creative with it, it doesn't need to be that. All you're doing is trying to inform people. Familiarity again, layouts and everything, they're all out there you just go into a bookshop and you can see what works and what doesn't work. What stands out to you. And then try and emulate it.

James Blatch: That simplicity, that comes across with a lot of your covers.

THERE IS THIS BEAUTIFUL CLEAR, CLEAN AESTHETIC ISN'T THERE? THAT'S OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING YOU FAVOR.

Stuart Bache: Yeah absolutely. From when I was at university I was always into type, but I was into typing in a very traditional way which was, the whole point of it is to tell a person something.

I worked in branding for a little while as well and it's all about communication and these beautiful fancy

type fonts are lovely but, especially when they're brought down to the size that you'd see on Amazon, you can't read them. So if you want to sell your book then be clear, make it simple, and use images that work within your genre. I think that's probably the best thing to do.

James Blatch: On a more practical level Stuart, what resolution, what sizes are you working in?

Stuart Bache: I personally work in 350 DPI, which is more than enough for anyone really. Print, if you're ever going to go to print which can happen and often does, you start off and then one day you decide that you want to make it print on demand whether it's with CreateSpace or someone like that.

300 DPI is print resolution. It's the option you get when you open Photoshop and you start a new file. It depends on who you're working with with your E-book. Who you're publishing through and who's creating it and everything, but they will tell you what format they want it to be. You work it to those dimensions. They usually give you pixel dimensions because of it being an E-book, which is RGB.

However, I would always and I always work in CMYK, which is the print colors, because when you switch from RGB to CMYK you lose the vibrancy of RGB. You can have fluorescent colors in RGB but you will never get in print. If you don't want to be disappointed, work in CMYK as much as possible.

350 DPI is 50 DPI more than you need but it also means that if you ever need to make it larger then you can. It just gives you that little bit of leeway and that's just a person preference that I've been using for the last couple of years. Seems to work so far.

James Blatch: Do you work in a larger size?

IF YOUR IMAGE ON AMAZON'S GOING TO BE 400X100 LET'S SAY, DO YOU WORK IN 4000X1000 AND THEN REDUCE IT AFTERWARDS SO YOU'VE GOT THAT DETAIL? HOW DOES THAT WORK?

Stuart Bache: I work in a slightly larger size. I've found that most publishers or most online retailers require, I think the height has to be 2500. So two thousand five hundred pixels. That seems to be the average minimum.

I tend to keep everything to that size, to that height at least, or larger and then cut down, and once again like I say, 350 DPI which works. Because you can use 72 DPI but it really doesn't matter when it's based on pixels rather than dots per inch.

James Blatch: Because they are what they are aren't they? 300, 400, it is that. So and I guess working slightly larger does give you those options if you as you say, you want to become a print author at some point, you've got the size to work with. The CMYK, that's interesting.

To lots of people and we are all of us want to be authors as well and we are all of us having to learn in this day and age, having to learn lots of specialist areas. Little bits of specialist areas to try to survive and grow and flourish in this day and age. The old compartmentalized lives that perhaps our parents lived are gone aren't they?

Stuart Bache: Yeah.

James Blatch: Still a lot of people will not have heard RGB and CMYK necessarily before so it's a lot to learn. In fact I hadn't really properly clicked what CMYK was until earlier this year. In another life I do some work at a school where I had to prepare an advert to go in a newspaper and they asked for CMYK and, funnily enough, I without thinking about it created the layout in RGB and exactly what you just predicted happened. I was suddenly looking at this very washed out version of the advert I'd created and I couldn't work out why but listening to you talk about it.

I THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE I HAD STARTED IN RGB AND DONE THE CONVERSION AFTERWARDS, WHICH IT ACTUALLY MIGHT BE, BUT ACTUALLY CMYK IS A DIFFERENT SET OF COLORS THAT ARE JUST NOT AS VIBRANT AS THE ONES YOU'RE GOING TO GET IN RGB. I GUESS?

Stuart Bache: Yeah absolutely, because RGB, all it's ever going to need is your screen and your skin has, as anyone will know when they're working on the computer, when you're playing games or whatever, it's all sorts of different colors. But unfortunately CMYK is four colors. So if anyone doesn't know it's cyan, magenta, yellow, and the k stands for black. I think maybe because if it was b, people would think it was blue, I don't know, but that's what it is. And that's just been the standardized print for many years.

On a side note if you ever go into a bookshop and you see vibrant colors, that color is a separate color. They're called pantone colors. They are picked and mixed especially, it's technically a fifth color along

with CMYK. They cost more money and they're rare and most independent authors unfortunately won't get the chance to use something like that, especially if they're just printing print on demand so it will be the standard CMYK.

James Blatch: I think this stuff's important because when you know they're the tones you're going to get, working with that for design from a creative point of view right from the beginning.. Because they can look great, those slightly suppressed colors. They can work very well to create the atmosphere that you want but not necessarily if it's surprised you at the end, having designed something.

I CAN SEE, LOOKING AT A LOT OF YOUR BOOK COVERS, YOU CAN SEE THAT SLIGHTLY FLATTER VERSION OF COLORS BUT IT WORKS VERY WELL AND VERY ATMOSPHERIC.

Stuart Bache: I think obviously there is a time and place for RGB. A lot of Mark's covers, in fact, because it has to be RGB when you convert it for an E-book. You have to convert it to RGB because CMYK just wouldn't upload properly.

I hope that doesn't confuse things but I work in CMYK in the main file but when I'm actually creating the final JPEG for the E-book, I will convert it to RGB because JPEGs have to be RGB when you're uploading them to the internet. Even if it's just onto your computer or onto your Facebook page it has to be RGB, CMYK wouldn't work.

I always do it for the main reason being, one the colors but two, in case we ever have to do a print version of anything. I will boost the colors for some of Mark's. The Night Step for example is a very vibrant green that you would never get with CMYK but that's because it looks wonderful as an E-book. It won't look like that in print, I can promise you. But yeah there's times and places for it.

James Blatch: Stuart thank you so much indeed for joining us.

Stuart Bache: Oh thank you James.

James Blatch: Without question we'll be speaking with you again but yeah, we always look forward to seeing your work and your covers.

Stuart Bache: Wonderful. Well I enjoy it and I look forward to working with everyone. Everyone I've worked with so far on SPF have been fantastic, so. I hope you enjoyed me rambling for a little bit.

James Blatch: No rambling at all, it's been golden. Thanks.

James Blatch: I think it's very easy to hear now, listening to Stuart, why his covers are successful and it's not about, as you say, it's not self-indulgent. You think some people paint and use Photoshop in his case to create graphics and they're doing it out of a sort of sense of, "This is what I want", like a sculpture, "I created this lovely sculpture", but actually that's no use to us.

As you said before the interview and what Stuart does, is he thinks, "How is this book going to work? How's it going to work in a bookshop? How's it going to work on a shop front?". In fact I've got a privileged position because he's designed a cover for my as-yet unfinished book and the way he started that straight away is he said to me, "The readers that want to buy your book, what books do they read at the moment?", and we started there and we started looking at those covers. That process right from the beginning focused on sales.

Mark: He really is exactly focused on sales. He did the same thing for me with the Milton book so he actually presented me with a 10 or 15 page PDF with analysis of all of the key players in my genre. So we looked at Lee Charles, Peter James, Vince Flynn, guys like that and Stuart then pulled from those common tropes that were obviously being effective in selling those books and then put them together into something... let them become unique.

The effect of that has been fairly marked, it was one of the things that led to me having an extremely good last year, is when I had this line of books that are clearly branded as being by me and also fulfill all of the genre current conventions of books that I can beat it with. That was a really big moment for me and you know Stuart, as you said before, is just extremely good at this kind of stuff.

James Blatch: Such a huge part of your book marketing and book sales is your book cover so it's an interesting subject.

I promised earlier that we'd have a little update on 101 and we do get regular emails from people saying, "Have you selected your beta testers? Can I be a beta tester? Here are my qualifications", etc. A lot of enthusiasm for these spots.

Just to say, we have not even begun that process. We are just transitioning, literally this week, from the pre-production, I would call, for my video, "World of Planning: Working Out What's Going to Be When."

Mark is getting busy, even busier than he normally is, at turning that into actual material. Generating the content so the presentations and screenplays and stuff's coming in from third parties. It's not just, as Stuart has mentioned, we've had stuff in from website developers this week as well which is going to go into this course.

Then after that, when we've got that ready, and that's not an easy task as you can imagine, we will then be ready to move towards testing so that's the point at which we're going to start selecting people to beta test. There's still an opportunity to get your name into the hat for that.

I know it takes a while but we've been meticulous about the courses we've produced in the past. They've got to be thoroughbred. Courses that stand out on the platform of anything else that's available and that's what happens at this point. When we research, when we build the course in the first place. But we're getting there aren't we Mark? Well you're getting there.

Mark: We're getting there, yes. I've been working on the course structure for the best part of two or three months. We've secured some really fantastic, additional instructors. Mostly it will be me but Stuart is doing covers, Bryan Cohen is doing copywriting. We've got guys on website design. There'll be some other additional people coming along.

I've started to collect some really valuable bonuses that will be added as well. It is a question of me now finishing the novel that I was supposed to have submitted about two weeks ago but that should be done tomorrow. Then from that point on, I'll be focusing 100% on actually recording the course. Taking the content that I've produced and then committing it to screen. Looking forward to getting into that because it's been bubbling away in my mind for quite a while now.

James Blatch: We're giving birth to the course now. Okay good. It's the 23rd of September, the release date for this. I'm about to get on an aircraft to Los Angeles and I think you're about to go home?

Mark: I suppose I probably am. Yes that's right. I would be on my way home tomorrow.

James Blatch: Bit tanned, hopefully from the Florida sunshine. Not hurricane... They have had a hurricane already, you noticed that?

Mark: Thank you. I didn't know that. I've been avoiding looking at the weather.

James Blatch: Yeah they've had one. It was a Category 1, sort of a stiff breeze in Florida terms. Just before we go, one more thing.

Stuart has started a new venture which is to use his artwork that he's produced as examples or testers for people and hasn't ever seen the light of day and he's starting to upload that to a website. To make his artwork and his book covers a little bit more accessible, a little bit more affordable to a wider audience so that you can go and pick those off and you will obviously add your title and your author name to it but it won't be bespoke for you. It'll be something that's not been used by anybody else but it's been sat there in his folder. That's, apparently Mark, I think it's working really well for him but we should give out the URL for that shouldn't we?

Mark: We should. These are called pre-mades in the business and Stuart's pre-mades are better than most people's bespoke covers so highly recommended. The price is very very reasonable and I'm saying that with absolutely no horse in that race or no dog in the fight. It's something that's just for Stuart and you can, I think the URL is bookscovered.co.uk.

James Blatch: Yes that is it. Bookscovered.co.uk is the affordable part of Stuart Bache and as we say, thoroughly recommend Stuart. Lovely guy, fantastic covers, and very commercially orientated which is what you want from your cover designer. Okay that's it. Thank you again for listening. We'll have that special from Florida next week and we look forward to talking to you then.

CHAPTER 29

ELICIA HYDER: AN INSPIRATIONAL SELF PUBLISHING SUCCESS STORY

**FROM NEW MAILBOX
TO \$20K A MONTH.**

**ELICIA HYDER's Inspirational
Self Publishing Success Story**

EPISODE
#032

SELF PUBLISHING SUCCESS stories are becoming more and more common. The opportunity to write and benefit from your books is now very real. During their recent trip to the United States for the NINC conference, Mark and James were able to meet a number of SPF students, one of whom was Elicia Hyder. She is one of the many people who has not only replaced their normal income through self publishing, but exceeded it. This delightful conversation was recorded poolside at the hotel where the NINC conference was hosted, and will serve as a shot in the arm for anyone who's willing to work hard for their self publishing success. You can do it!

A CANCER DIAGNOSIS RIGHT AFTER BEING OFFERED A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING DEAL.

Once Elicia had her novel written she began making inquiries to a handful of agents, one of whom responded almost immediately. It was a very exciting response that told Elicia that her book truly had promise. But hot on the heels of an offer from that agent came the news that she had cancer. Putting her

publishing dream on hold she dug in to fight the cancer and beat it. Once she was ready to focus on her book again she began to see that she had the means to publish on her own more successfully than with any traditional publisher - because she was willing to work harder for her own success than they ever would. You can hear what she did and how she went about it on this episode.

BUILDING AN EMAIL LIST AND SETTING UP FACEBOOK ADS TO FUEL HER BOOK SALES.

When Elicia began to market her books in earnest she did so with the experience of her digital marketing background. One thing she knew was that an email list was her first order of business. Through self-study, she learned how to set up the systems to make it happen and began collecting email addresses of those interested in her work. The next step for her was to unpack and master the Facebook ads system. She heard about Mark's course but decided that she could do it on her own - and discovered that she was missing some key components in the process. That's when she decided to invest in the course. The results she saw were tremendous and almost immediate. You can hear her entire story on this episode of the Self Publishing Formula.

SELF PUBLISHING SUCCESS IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE, BUT NOT EASY.

As Elicia's story shows, success at self publishing is entirely possible. But if you listen to what she has to share she's also very clear about how much diligence and hard work go into the process on a consistent basis. This is a woman who works hard for the success she's experiencing. If you're curious as to what that kind of hard work looks like you can hear Elicia's version of it on this episode. You'll also hear her pep talk to anyone who's willing to do the work, and about what they might be able to achieve by self publishing.

IS YOUR SELF PUBLISHING PROMOTION AND SALES MISSING A FEW KEY COMPONENTS?

Just like Elicia discovered, there are some very important, small adjustments that make all the difference in the success or failure of marketing a self published book. When she was able to understand those things and put them into practice, all her efforts began to pay off. The most vital of those was the Facebook Ads for Authors course that Mark has created. Listen to this episode to find out why Facebook ads are one of the key pieces of the marketing puzzle, and how it can be used for authors, or anyone wanting to promote their product effectively.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark and James chat about their trip to the U.S.
- How the NINC conference works and the benefits of the guys going.
- The power of the Facebook for Authors course: first hand testimonies.

- Elicia Hyder’s story of how she pitched her books: and her diagnosis with cancer.
- How Elicia Hyder first came to know of Mark’s course and why she thought she could do it on her own.
- How Elicia Hyder’s cancer battle has progressed.
- Why she turned down a traditional publishing offer.
- The income figures for her book sales today.
- The things that make Elicia Hyder work as hard as she does.
- How you can connect with Elicia Hyder .
- Upcoming podcast episode you can look forward to.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [NINC](#)
- [Facebook LIVE](#)
- [Bookbub](#)
- [Joanna Penn](#)
- [Nick Stephenson](#)
- [WattPad](#)
- [Reedsy](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

Mark: Hello and welcome to podcast number 32 from The Self Publishing Formula.

Female: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello, Mark and I have just returned from sunny Florida. It's very sunny Florida, wasn't it Mark?

Mark: It was gorgeous, very sunny.

James: It was like mid 90s everyday, which is melting point for anyone from our part of Europe and I don't know what percentage humidity it was, but close to a 100 and you and I both went for runs at various points, and I don't know about you, but I came back as if I've been swimming.

Mark: I did actually get to go swimming as well, so that was my favorite. In some ways, it was going out for a run because I was waking up at dawn because my body clock didn't quite get around to American time and then going for a run about half 6 in the morning and then going for a swim. It was, this water was so warm, my god, it was amazing.

James: What you talking about swimming in the sea or your swimming pool?

Mark: In the sea.

James: Were you not alarmed by the various signs that said this is stingray season, that you have to walk in a certain way in the sea to avoid treading on a stingray.

Mark: The stingray shuffle. No, not really, I've been to the Maldives more than once, so there's loads and loads of stingrays, at least as long as your careful, it's not really a problem.

James: Yeah, I saw one when I was running.

Mark: Yes, I saw some as well.

James: In the shallows though, which was enough for me to think I'll have a little swim in the pool and I got back to my salubrious hotel. I say salubrious hotel. I was slumming it next door to your properly salubrious hotel, so you were at the Trade Winds. Let me just set out then how this podcast is going to work, so we met up live at St. Pete, myself and John Dyer, the three people who run Self Publishing Formula. It was the first time that we had a properly been to a live event where we invited anybody you will know from previous podcasts, if you listen to the podcast, you've taken the course, or you're part of the Facebook group, et cetera, to come and say hello.

That evening went absolutely brilliantly, it was such fun. As well as the whole event. Lots of people came and tapped us on the shoulder and introduced themselves, and that gave us a lot of opportunity to record

some interviews with some really interesting stories and people.

One particular person, called Elicia Hyder tapped you on the shoulder, Mark and you had a chat with her and she told you her story. We decided straightaway that we have to share her story because it was wonderful. Please stick around for that, you're going to hear Elicia talking, the feature interview in this podcast and it's an interview you won't to miss for lots of reasons, so that's coming up in a moment.

Before we do that, let's reflect a bit on SPF live. So first of all, NINC, which we should say Mark, is Novelist Incorporated, Novelist Inc. it's a criteria membership. For instance, I could only go to the first day, which was the Thursday, whereas the conference itself had other sessions including advanced sessions, one of which was lead by you, for members. What is the criteria? I think you got to have 2 or 3 published books, is that right?

Mark: Published books and have sold, I think 5,000 dollars, something like that.

James: Okay, so you basically are on the selling side of professional authorship, which I'm not yet and I know a few people listen to the podcast won't be there yet, others will be. A very author-centric conference, which I really like, so lots of people talk about writing, and publishing, as well as marketing and so on. It wasn't just done from like the book fairs, for instance, which really come from a publishing perspective. You led a session on Facebook advertising, of course and how did that go down?

Mark: I did three sections actually. Yeah, I was on a panel on the first day talking about, looking at 7 people submitted their marketing problems and 3 of us in the panel plus someone who moderated it, looked at the problems and made some suggestions, so did that on the Thursday. Then on the Friday, I did 2 hours on Facebook ads, which when I actually realized that I was been asked to do 2 hours. I thought that might be a little bit ambitious, but as it turned out, it was plenty of time. I had stuff in the locker that I could have brought out if necessary, but no it was great. I loved all of it.

The session on the Thursday was quite interesting because I hadn't been to NINC before and I did find it quite difficult to get an idea of the level of the attendees and as soon as I looked through the case studies, I realized that they were probably, it's easy to generalize obviously, there are plenty of people who are selling more than I am and who are better at marketing than I am.

But converse of that, there were plenty of people who didn't really know the first thing about things like mailing lists, and covers, and all that kind of stuff. It was quite difficult to pitch the advice that we were giving in the first session and then it was quite hard for me to pitch the Facebook advertising session because that obviously is reasonably advanced author strategy, but what I ended up doing was breaking it down into a basic mailing list growth session in the first hour and then I did, I think it was 13 things that are working on Facebook right now in the second hour.

Things like live video. I did a Facebook live demonstration from the stage, which thankfully worked after a bit of fiddling. That went down quite well and then looking at things like targeting, tracking, all that kind of stuff. All of the things that are working really well, the things that's Facebook's doing well right now and by the of it, it was great.

I sat down and BookBub were the next ones up. Katie Donelan from BookBub and slightly surreal to see BookBub using me as one of their case studies for their ads program, which was, it was nice. I had a good chat with them beforehand as well.

James: Well we know you've arrived and the industry, but that's certainly confirmation that. My observation from sitting there listening to the first panel, and I should say even though I'm not a member of NINC, I did sneak in on the basis of I'm going to take some snaps of you for some of the other sessions.

My observations straightaway was that we surround ourselves with people who are really at leading edge of digital marketing for their books. They're either Facebook advertising, they're thinking about it, they're into social media advertising, they want a piece of the action. They understand that this is where people are growing their lists, and growing their sales, and making their living.

Yet walking into the room at NINC, and I would say maybe 50 to maybe 75% of the room felt to me quite resistant to that kind of new way of doing, for what they consider as a new way of doing things. 25% of the room definitely all over it.

Mark: No, I don't think, resistance is the wrong word. I think curious. I mean there was an example in the first session I did, the Q and A, when I said something, there's a question about one of the authors there

had done a deal with a publisher and all they bought was the first book in her series and she said what should I do? How can I get them to promote it?

My first reaction to that was that's a bad deal because if the publisher doesn't push the first book and it's not successful, number 1, it might not be your fault, and number 2, if they don't want to publish the second book, then you're going to have a hell of a struggle promoting series where you don't control the first book.

My kind of, slightly off the curve reaction to that was that's a bad deal. I wouldn't be interested in a traditional deal like that. That was without me really thinking that the person next to me was owns and runs a small independent press, so that was kind of, I tempered my language after that, but it was, I think they were definitely interested in what we had to say.

I did have a few people afterwards, because there's a couple of the questions in that first panel, I didn't get to speak because the other two panelist were quite enthusiastic about answering those particular problems. A couple people afterwards came up to me and say, "Look, there were people in the audience who were just saying, I wish they'd let Mark speak," which was, that's quite, it's very flattering. I think it doesn't, it didn't necessarily have to be me saying that. I think it could have been anyone from our community really switched on with as you said social media advertising and the new ways of doing things. That was what they were interested in. It was about mailing lists and advertising and it wasn't necessarily, they weren't fixated upon tradition deal and what a publisher could do for them.

James: Yeah, I suppose the point I was making is that for someone like me, who's on their way towards launching themselves into this market, we are so surrounded by people who are doing it successfully or trying to do it now. There's a fear maybe that this is a saturated market and it's almost too late, you missed the bus.

Then you have a sense briefly of the wider, author world and realize it's a fraction. It's 25% of the room at most, I think are really on top of this. Resistance is absolutely the wrong word. The others want to be a part of it. Some, 1 or 2 were, I just sensed in some of the comments, 1 or 2 were kind of thought it was like witchcraft or something.

Mark: It is like witchcraft. I'm regularly sacrificing virgins in the garden.

James: Yeah, exactly I know that was what Stonehenge was all about, but that's an exciting prospect and I felt quite buoyed by that. It reminded me, reinforced the fact, that we are the leading edge. If you're listening to this podcast, you already have a significant advantage over many, many other authors, fellow authors, so that was a positive message I think.

Mark: Yeah, definitely that is something that is worth remembering and I often forget it because we associate ourselves with other successful self published authors, that those are the people that I listen to or all of the Facebook groups that we run full of people interested in doing the things that we're doing.

It is very easy to draw your focus in too closely and then not see that the majority, that we are vanguard, the majority of people don't know what a mailing list is. That's so basic, I almost can't get my head around that, but that is the truth of it. Some people don't know what a mailing list is. That's the most fundamentally important asset that any author can have. It's not just an independently published author, any author whatsoever.

James: Good and now let's talk a little bit about SPF, this is going to be a little bit course centric, so I'm not going to apologize for that, it just is the way it is that we got quite a lot of students who've taken the course and had really successful launches with it and I'm going to say it's changed their lives because that's what they said to us when they came and say hello to us at our party or the people that John Dyer and I dropped in on our way down.

We drove down from New York having met the Teachable crew in New York and we dropped in on several authors and "You've changed my life," was something we heard more than once, so that's great. It's a little bit unapologetically this bit is going to be about the course and Elicia's interview coming up in a moment, but it was very impressive to be drinking a beer at night surrounded by people who are making 50,000 dollars a month, 30,000 dollars a month, 20, 30,000 dollars a month if you go around the table, spending maybe 5,000 on the Facebook ads and who's careers have just shot off stratospherically and their making not just a living, which I think is an admirable aim, I will be aiming for is to be make a normal salary.

I'll be delighted if I can do that, but here's people who thought that was their dream 18 months ago, and now are making what you might describe as a good city salary. The kind of thing that you read about in the papers. It was incredible. Impressive people right?

Mark: Yeah, there was a real highlight. I mean we basically threw a party on the, was it the Tuesday night or Wednesday night?

James: The Wednesday night.

Mark: Wednesday night. We took over one of the bars in the resorts. I don't know exactly how many people came, but probably we must have cycled through 120 over the course of the evening.

James: I've got the bar bill if that's anything and that would back that up, yes.

Mark: It was a reasonable bar bill, but we thought that was the least we could do was to cover that. The numbers were great. We had all the Draft2Digital guys came, so Chris, Kevin, Aaron, Dan Wood. We had Mark from Kobo came. Plenty of the industry guys came.

And then beyond that, we had people who'd come not to the conference, but to come meet us, which was, we had Michelle drove 4 hours to come to see us. We had Shawn flew in from Atlanta specifically to have breakfast with us and then to leave the same day, I think. We had Clint, Nathan Vancoops came along. We had plenty of people who are in the Florida region.

In fact, Elicia came. She came specifically with her mum, just to come and meet us and that was really flattering and got to hear some really fabulous stories and some success stories, apart from the ones that the guys that you met as you made your midlife crisis road trip down the east coast. It is really wonderful to hear these people, who as you say have earned enough money to change their lives through fairly simple advertising program, really wonderful to hear that.

James: Yeah, it was really good and what was interesting, I think it was quite good for NINC as well

because people like Elicia and Michelle who you just mentioned, didn't really know about NINC, but they now know about it through us, so they're going to be quite keen I think to be a bigger part of it in the future, so quite a few authors on the doorstep their in Orlando.

John and I then picked up a final interview over on the west coast with Charlotte Byrd, who's another stellar student of the course, who obviously got the right books and she was commercially minded and orientated about it from the beginning. She chose her genre, romance, I think bordering on erotic romance for her, she chose her genre based on what was going to work commercially and she hadn't even read romance. She wasn't a romance reader before she started.

She's got 3 books and she's now doing an average 10,000 dollar month. She's had some really big months in the past and will be very, very successful in the future thanks to Facebook advertising, which we mention from time to time, Facebook advertising.

Mark: Doesn't work.

James: It doesn't work. You do hear that. It is the key to digital online marketing and that's not just in the author space, but it is still at the moment is the key. We've got our fingers in lots of social media advertising pies and we're expanding that all the time, but understanding, getting to go to Facebook ads still is what you should be thinking about if you're serious about earning money from your career.

Mark: Yep, absolutely, couldn't agree more.

James: Okay, look I promised you this interview with Elicia.

Elicia came up and spoke to Mark and then I talked to her, not only did I get to do a sit down video interview with Elicia for our own purposes really for marketing the course because she's been a really successful story for us, her story was so touching and she was such a wonderful person that we wanted to share her story with you, so that's going to be our feature in for you today.

Elicia: I had completed the first two books in the Soul Summoner series, completed writing them and went through rounds of editing and decided I'm going to pitch this book to my three top picks of agents. Did a lot of research, found out who those people were. We won't name names, but I did and within three days of sending that email, I heard back from one of them. That was like, "Hey, let's talk about this book," which, you know I'm freaking out.

James: That's an amazing response.

Elicia: Totally, yeah, absolutely. Astounding response because that just doesn't happen. It's not the norm in this business, so I called everybody that I knew and told them somebody's interested in my book and then six hours later, the same day, during dinner, I got another phone call from my doctor saying we think it's cancer. We need you to come back in in the morning for some more tests.

I had been going through different tests for some suspicious lumps and bumps where they shouldn't be and it turned out it was cancer. I had to call everybody back, this time in tears for a completely different reason, because it was certain at that point that I was getting ready to go through a really big battle.

James: An interesting day in your life that you won't forget.

Elicia: The best of times, the worst of times.

James: Good stuff for a book.

Elicia: It is, it is. I wonder if anybody's every done that.

James: You decided obviously you had to put the book publishing on hold at that point.

Elicia: Yeah, I contacted the agency and I was like, "Ha, funny story, I just got a cancer diagnosis right after I talked to you and so I'm going to have to put the book on hold for now and try not to die," and so

they did, as the industry is. They don't have time to wait and they were like, "Well be in touch when this is all over with and we wish you luck, peace out," you know.

I thought that everything was just at that point, like we're going to have to start over and however long it takes me to beat this thing, so it was really disheartening. But the best thing that I took away from it is I knew this book has potential. This book can go places.

Before I became a writer, I was in graphic and web design for 13 years, so I knew a bit about marketing, online marketing, knew nothing about book marketing, but I knew because every query, how to website tells you you need to have a platform. You need to have people to market this book to to make it appealing to a publisher, so I started googling, how to build your platform and I knew, email's keen. You need to start building an email list. I had an email list at that time and it was six people, one of them was me, one of them was my mom, the other one was my sister.

James: That's a familiar story from when people start.

Elicia: Totally, I'm sure. Absolutely, but I did some googling, how to build your email following as a writer and I found Joanna Penn. I started just tearing through her website. Reading her books like, I'm like oh my gosh, this is a goldmine of information.

In one of her interviews that she did, she talked to Nick Stevenson, and I'm like okay, well he's got this free series out there, these freebies. We'll see, it's free. Well I got his three videos and by the end of listening to them, about a week later I had gone from six subscribers to 60 and I ended up publishing a book that I never intended to publish to try to build that following based on his advice and it really just kind of snowballed. It was really unexpected.

James: Was this a giveaway you published?

Elicia: I actually published the book first on Wattpad because my niece, who's 15 loves Wattpad and she's like, "Hey, put your book on this website because I want to read it," and I literally just did it for her and then people started finding it and reading it and then it ended up winning best contemporary adult romance

in 2015 for Wattpad.

James: Thanks to your niece.

Elicia: Right, yeah, completely. That was kind of the springboard into starting to find followers and then with Nick building the mailing list and then Nick interviewed Mark and Mark started talking about Facebook advertising and I'm like ha ha, I can do this, like I have a background in this stuff, I can do this. I don't need Mark Dawson. I have 13 years experience.

James: Who needs Mark Dawson.

Elicia: Who needs Mark Dawson. Thanks for the tip, thanks for telling me it was there. I got this. I didn't sign up for Mark's course, the first go around. I'm going to figure this out and I wasted probably 2,000 dollars in failed Facebook ads and I could not figure out why they were failing. I knew that it was, there's one puzzle piece in there and I don't know what that puzzle piece is, but I'll bet Mark Dawson knows. I started emailing, I'm like please let me in the course, I'm really sorry I didn't sign up the first time, I am humbled and ashamed, please let me in. You guys didn't let me in.

James: Sorry about that, I don't know what to say really apart from we're hard, hard nosed.

Elicia: Totally, like sign up while you can because they mean it when they say it's limited.

James: We get the course ready for launch and it's in a right state in between when we're doing the update, so it wouldn't be right to sell you in incomplete, not updated course, that's my excuse.

Elicia: I agree, but whatever helps you sleep at night.

James: On that before we move into when you moved forward to Mark's instruction, just tell us where you are with your treatment at this stage?

Elicia: I am almost declared cancer free. I had Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is one of the few cancers that they use the word curable with. It's a brutal treatment. I was very, very sick. I'm at a high risk for a lot of stuff because of the treatment, but I have to have one more PET scan in December, and if that one's clear, then I don't have to have anymore. I've had 2 clear PET scans, no evidence of cancer, so that's huge.

James: Well from all of us at SPF, we wish you all the best with that. That's really good news to hear, so let's focus on the positives, well that's another positive. That's the most important positive is that you're well on the road to recovery.

YOU GOT TO THE POINT THEN WHERE YOU WASTED A BIT OF MONEY, TRIED TO MAKE FACEBOOK ADS WORK AND THAT DIDN'T REALLY WORK FOR YOU.

Elicia: Well backing up too, when it came time to publish that book that the agent was interested in, I ended up turning down going the traditional route, because the advice had worked so well. I'm like I can do this on my own and the last bit of that puzzle trying to figure out was the bit that I was missing of Facebook advertising.

Once I finally got into the course, I found that missing puzzle piece on the first day and I'm like oh my gosh, this is what I've been doing wrong, and so I was able to go and tweak those ads and fix them and set things up the right away, and using his strategies on how to monitor those ads, it made all the difference in the world. Absolutely made all the difference in the world.

I had done really well with Lead Generation Ads before I joined the course, but as far as actually selling books, I could not move books. I couldn't hardly give them away.

James: What was it?

WHAT WERE THE TECHNIQUES THAT YOU GOT FROM MARK THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Elicia: Do you want me to tell people that missing puzzle thing?

James: Let's hint at it.

Elicia: There were some really specific tools that are out there and that are hidden to mere mortals that even a person with my background, I didn't even know existed. I knew that in theory, these tools had to be out there, but I had no idea where to go find them. I had no idea how to set them up and once I was given that map, to be like okay this is where you find that pot of gold, it's right here. Then it rocking and rolling since then.

James: The treasure map.

Elicia: Yeah.

James: Can you clue us in a little bit, using an American type expression, on what sort of income and figures you're getting now?

Elicia: When I first started this, it took me about five months to sell enough books to buy a new mailbox for my front yard and I'm standing like happy dancing at Home Depot because oh my gosh I'm using 114 dollars of my book money to buy a new mailbox.

James: That felt like free money to you.

Elicia: Totally, like I was, that was better than the New York Times.

James: Now you're making that in a couple of hours.

Elicia: I am spending about 5,000 dollars a month in advertising. This month will be my biggest and spend just on Facebook advertising. I'm probably spending 120 dollars a day, which is really small compared to a lot of people's ad spend and I will have, hopefully this will be my new biggest sales month, somewhere around 20,000 dollars, so that's 15,000 dollars in profit.

James: You're making 15,000 bucks a month on your books.

Elicia: I am. I like check my reports and just on Amazon sales alone, just Amazon sales alone, not counting, I have one book in Kindle Unlimited, not counting any of the other platforms, it's over 600 dollars a day, just in that.

It's absolutely overwhelming. It's really, really overwhelming. But it's a lot of work too and a lot of people think that there's some sort of magic formula or that oh my god, she must have the best book ever, or Mark Dawson must just be the best author ever, which he's fantastic author, and my books aren't bad.

I've said this to other people, there's nothing special, really special about my work, like I'm never going to be on Oprah, never going to win any medals or anything like that.

James: You're on the SPF podcast, which is slightly better than Oprah right?

Elicia: Absolutely, oh my gosh. I didn't have pajamas or a toothbrush last night, I'm like I'm going to hang out and do the podcast.

James: I'm not sure how that comes across to people listening, but this did all start in a bar last night, but anyway, like all good stories. Let's just take you back for a second.

There's this day when you think you've got a break through. You got an offer potentially coming from an agent which would lead to a traditional publishing deal. Then things go south for you with an illness, fast forward through to today.

I WONDER HOW THINGS WOULD HAVE WORKED OUT HAD YOU NOT HAD THAT PHONE CALL FORM THE DOCTOR? YOU MAY HAVE HAD A TRADITIONAL DEAL.

Elicia: I may have and I may have gotten a 8,000 dollar advance if I was lucky, probably more like 1,000 dollars for a non-published person with no following. With a decent book and then who knows if it would have earned out and if I would have seen another penny because nobody is going to work your brand the way that you do.

No publisher is going to invest in your future as a writer. They're going to invest in that book, and they're going to try to squeeze every penny that they can and then they're going to move onto the next author. I'm promoting the first book in my series, I just released book three and I'm promoting book one that I released a year ago, harder than I ever promoted it. That wouldn't have happened in the traditional world.

James: We should just point out that we are reclined on sun lounges.

Elicia: Totally, next to a tiki bar.

James: Next to a tiki bar on the beach.

Elicia: Looking at the ocean.

James: In Florida, but the reason I'm mentioning is because they're preparing the bar for opening, there's a lot of, I don't know how much ice they're shoveling into that thing, but it's making a lot of noise. Anyway, we'll have a cold one in a minute.

Just to reiterate what you said and we had this conversation just over a coffee, we've had these super author on, we've had Marie Force, Rachel Abbott recently.

WHEN THEY START TALKING ABOUT THE SECRET TO THEIR SUCCESS, IT ALWAYS TURNS OUT TO BE THE SAME THING. WHICH IS WHAT YOU'VE EXCELLED AT, WHICH IS REALLY JUST WORKING HARD.

Elicia: It is working hard. People are really shocked and authors get really depressed when I tell them that secret. I work 17 hours a day, I'm a wife, I have five children. I have no college degree. I work really, really hard and I believe in what I'm doing. I have enough faith in my work.

I am passionate enough about it because I know I may get that phone call that the cancer's back and I might not beat it the next time. I'm investing everything that I've got because if the book fails, it's going to be because the book sucks. It's not going to be because I didn't give it its very best chance.

I listen to a lot of constructive and some very deconstructive criticism from other writers, from other professionals. I had a book designer through Nick Stevenson look at my cover and go, "It sucks, like start over." As a designer myself that was really hard to hear, but he was right.

I redid the cover, sales started picking up. Reviews started coming in and like I said, it just snowballs. It builds, and builds, and builds, but you never quit. So many people, because you have really, really sucky days as an author, you have really hard days where you're like why am I even doing this and a lot of people give up, but you have to believe in yourself. You have to believe in what you're doing and you have to be willing to put your time and your money where your heart is and work it.

James: It's a heartwarming story Elicia, and you're clearly motivated to work hard and beat things and I can't help but think that played a part in your beating the cancer and your success as an author and long may that continue. Let's have a 30,000 dollar month soon.

Elicia: Absolutely, let's please, please. I'm excited because for the first time, since the series started, 10 months ago, I'm out of Kindle Unlimited, so I'm really excited to see what happens on all of the other platforms now. Honestly, I really expected my sales and my rankings to just plummet after I pulled out, because I did really well on KU and it's gone up. It's done the exact opposite. Rather than going down, it's gone up, even my sales just on Amazon, so it's really encouraging, really, really encouraging because I know that, I'm just 10 months into this. I'm just in the beginning of my career. There's a lot of time ahead. There are a lot of books ahead. I'm very excited.

James: What a pleasure it was to talk to Elicia. As I said, we were laying on the sun decks because where else would you record a podcast interview in the middle of the afternoon, it's 95 fahrenheit. And as you heard and I mentioned in the interview, they were setting up the bar next to us and pouring ice into a large, hollow container to make it as loud as possible, but I could have spent all afternoon chatting to Elicia, listening to her story and we all send our positive thoughts to her.

What a fantastic story, her recovery from cancer coinciding with this getting to grips with Facebook advertising and as she said in the interview, had she not been diagnosed with this very serious cancer, she may have done that traditional deal and her life would not be where it is today.

Mark: Yeah and it's funny how things past sometimes. It's one of those situations where I hear stories like that, people come up to me and it's immediate. It's not like we have to share that, and there are other things that she didn't mention in the story that I won't mention now, but that just make her story even more remarkable. Some of the things that has happened to her, in her life and the things that she's done.

It's just kind of so impressive and I'm so pleased that she's really nailing it. One thing we did after, I was invited to dinner with the guys from Apple on the Thursday night and they said do you have another author who you would like to come along? My first thought was to see if she'd like to come and she stayed another night. She booked another night in the hotel and we had an amazing dinner with Apple, really, really wonderful, so I got to introduce her to those guys, and hopefully that will help her to broaden her reach, so that she can start to sell books on iBooks as well as on Amazon. Just such a lovely person, it was a real pleasure to get to know her.

James: Yeah, she's somebody who makes things happen for herself and it's no surprise at all and hear the interview, that she wasn't defeated by her illness and she's not going to be defeated by that and she's going to be successful in her career because she's got a husband who's serving with the military, who's gone I think until spring next year. They have five children between them at home and she gets on with business and she makes it work and I love the slightly ballsy element to her as well, which is that she decided she didn't need our course, she didn't need any help. Threw herself into it and very quickly after a couple thousand bucks realized that she did need some pointers and wow she has not looked back since she's unlocked the key to it.

If you want to look up Elicia, let's spell her name for you. It's E-l-c-i-a and her surname is Hyder, h-y-d-e-r-, paranormal romance, paranormal suspense and romance I should say. She's in our Facebook group as well, so you can say hello to her there. That was great.

We have gathered quite a lot of really interesting material during our time in Florida and the wider states and one of the things that I did is, as many authors as I can get to, I ask them a set of questions really about how they write, where they write, what sort of approach they have to writing, how they're marketing, who does their marketing, how they split their time. The same questions to lots of different authors.

We're going to put that together for a special podcast at some point, so you can just sit back or go on your run, put this in your ear and just listen to lots of different people doing the same thing that you're doing,

talking about their particular approach to it, just to try to spark some interest and creativity in the way that we all think about how we approach our day writing and our careers as authors, so that's coming up soon.

We should also trail ahead, but we've got a very useful interview indeed. You haven't heard this one yet Mark, but it's a very useful interview indeed with a man called Ricardo Fayet who is one of the co-founders of Reedsy, which you may have heard of. Reedsy is a one stop shop to find the professional services that you're going to need as a self published author, so we're talking about editing, proofing, book covers, et cetera. All the subjects that we deal with quite regularly and Ricardo did this brilliant interview where we just stepped through.

It was quite selfish because I'm thinking from my point of view what do I do next, then what do I do, then who do I need and Ricardo stepped us through that process, talked about how we should approach particular editors and what their roles would be, and how much they would cost.

Not only does Ricardo talk about that entire process of everything you would need to go from your draft to getting your book published and into the market, but we have a very special announcement. We're going to save this as a secret for next week, Mark.

Mark: Yeah, let's save the details, but let's say it's worth listening. We're going to run to a contest with a pretty valuable prize. In fact, several quite valuable prizes, so it's definitely worth listening to next week's podcast.

James: Yeah, that'll be Ricardo next week, so thank you to our special guest, Elicia Hyder. Mark and I, I have slept 5 hours and 27, I think from where I'm sitting at the moment having landed at Heathrow from Los Angeles this morning, so I'm ready for bed. Actually weirdly I'm not, weirdly I'm now started waking up again. What do I do now? Do I drink? I don't know.

Mark: I'd get really drunk. That's got to be the solution. That's the solution to everything.

James: Yeah, it is the Dawson approach. Great, we'll speak to you next week.

CHAPTER 30

THE ONE STOP SHOP EVERY AUTHOR NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT



MANY OF THE publishing tools indie authors need to access are hard to find - at least with the quality and trustworthiness you need in order to make your book of the highest quality. That's why Ricardo Fayet and the folks at Reedsy developed their online platform. It's a site that brings together editors, graphic artists, and many other professionals who are experienced in the book publication process so that you don't have to spend days searching the internet to find the tools and professionals you need. In this interview, we chat about the ways Reedsy interface can help you put together a first-class book.

HOW TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING EDITORS ARE TRANSITIONING INTO THE SELF-PUBLISHING SPACE.

With the changes that have come to the publishing industry in just the last 10 years, many professionals who have worked for decades in the traditional publishing world are finding themselves with much less work than they used to enjoy. Ricardo and the team at Reedsy saw an opportunity in that shift in the publishing world and created a platform for editors, artists, and others to pivot into the self-publishing

space. In this episode, you're going to learn how you can find and utilize the services of all kinds of professionals to make your book shine.

A FREE BOOK WRITING TOOL THAT TAKES THE HASSLE OUT OF BOOK CONVERSIONS.

One of the real pain points of self-publishing is the various conversions that have to be made to ensure your book is able to be read and used on all platforms. ePub, MOBI, PDF - it's a mind-boggling array of options that you have to learn. Until now. Reedsy provides a free book writing and editing tool that can help you automatically format and convert your text to fit the specific needs of each publishing platform. You no longer have to struggle, search YouTube in vain for tutorials or figure it out on your own. The Reedsy team has made it simple. Find out about this incredible publishing tool on this episode.

LOOKING FOR A PROFESSIONAL BOOK COVER DESIGNER? HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO TO TRUST?

There's nothing worse than taking a chance on a graphic artist you've never worked with before only to get back a piece of artwork that you're not happy with. The back and forth of getting it just right is part of the process, but when the design is not professional to begin with the process is much more difficult. Reedsy provides an array of professional, vetted graphic designers who are able to take your book cover concept and make it a reality for you. You'll find your experience with their cover designers a pleasure rather than a burden. Find out more how you can take advantage of the various tools the Reedsy team has to offer self-published authors on this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this week's episode and interview guest.
- The progress of the new course.
- Mark's upcoming book launch.
- How and why Ricardo started his platform.
- The key area's Ricardo's platform helps writers with.
- Formatting issues in a book.
- What Reedsy actually is and how authors benefit from it.
- The cover design and selection process.
- How the Reedsy team chooses their editors.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Reedsy](#)
- [Scrivener](#)

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 33 from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Female: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: See if we lived in the Bronx ... Isn't the Bronx where they said thirty-third? Maybe would should be saying thirty-third.

Mark: Have I wandered into an unusual podcast of which I'm not previously aware?

James: Let's start by saying how well down last week's podcast went. Wow, can't talk.

Mark: It went down very well.

James: It did. Elicia was a star guest and she got lots of comments. Very positive comments on the Facebook pages which is really good to see. We're grateful. That was the first of our interviews that we recorded at NINC in Florida and this episode is going to contain another one. You've already had a preview of what this episode contains because the contest in the beginning is very much linked to the interview today.

We have with us a little later on, Ricardo Fayet who is one of the founders of Reedsy. It's a very interesting interview. I trailed ahead last week a little bit about it. Ricardo is not only going to talk a bit about Reedsy itself, but he's going to step through the process that he believes that self publishing authors should go through. Of course, that's what Reedsy supplies access to these professionals.

We'll have a little chat about that, I think off the back of that Mark, a little update. We updated a little while ago in the 101 Facebook group to say that the course is coming along. You're going into full-on production mode now aren't you?

Mark: I am. I've pretty much fleshed out the structure of the course. I'm confident I've got the content down. We've had 15 or 20 thousand survey responses from authors telling me what they'd like to learn about, what they don't need to know. All that kind of good stuff. That's been very helpful and I've put it together. I'm shipping those off to a third amigo, John. He'll be doing the slides for me and I'll be working on those slides in the next week or two.

James: I can hear a noisy house you've got there. Children running and jingling something.

In terms of your writing Mark, because I'm aware that we haven't spoken about your books for a little while now. I want to catch up really with where you are.

I THINK YOU HAVE A BOOK LAUNCH PLANNED FOR THE NEW YEAR. IS THAT RIGHT?

Mark: I've just finished, at least I've got back from the Amazon-Thomson and Mercer editor, the developmental edit version of the third book in my Isabella Rose series. That'll be going out to my beta readers tomorrow actually and going over to Amazon for copy editing.

Slightly annoying thing about publishing, and this isn't really a ding at Amazon, because they're much quicker than traditional publishing, but in comparison to how fast I can publish stuff this doesn't come out till April. Something that I've written now normally I'd be able to sell that, get it ready for sale, within a couple of weeks from this point. Maybe three weeks, get it out for Christmas, all that kind of stuff, but that's not possible so it's going to be April.

What I've actually started doing this week is the tenth John Milton book. I've written about 8,000 words over the last two or three days.

James: I'm excited. Another John Milton book.

Mark: That's going really well. I've had an idea for that that's been fermenting in my brain for about the couple of months and I've been really itching to start writing it. It's got a really interesting opening. That's going really well so far.

James: When you're with Amazon's in house publisher ... First of all, that's quite an interesting glimpse into the difference between the control you have of a self publisher and at the mercy of the machine when you're published by somebody else. The time lag indeed in that.

PARTLY THAT MAY BE DUE TO SCHEDULING OR DO YOU THINK IT'S AS QUICKLY AS THEY CAN GET THINGS TURNED AROUND?

Mark: I think it's pretty much as quickly as they can. There is a schedule they need to take into account. They don't want to dump loads of stuff all at the same time, similar books, because they won't be able to promote that properly. They are reasonably quick. When the editorial process is a little more extended than mine. I don't usually have a developmental edit, because I'm experienced enough and that's not something that I feel I need these days. Although, it's nice to have one. I got some good feedback this time around.

I use the same copy editor as Amazon, so it's something that the time frame is right about the same. Then there's a proof-reading stage on the back of it that I sometimes don't need to do. It's just a little bit more extended, but on the plus side I get the benefit of Amazon helping me launch the book or launching it for me when we're ready to go.

James: Do Amazon insist that you go through developmental edit?

Mark: They do. They're very professional. Their editorial process is at least the equal of my experience of traditional publishing. Very, very thorough. Excellent editors on staff. Basically freelancers that they use.

Cover designers is actually the same, it's Stuart Bache does the covers for those books as well. That's great. Someone I know very well and friend of the podcast. Yeah, so it's a great process. It's very interesting to see how it's all put together.

The difference is Amazon, when they're ready to launch, they know exactly how to match data with emails and customer habits and all that kind of stuff. That's the main reason why I went with them.

James: Cool and if you don't know what developmental editors are or do, that all comes up and Ricardo talks about it very clearly in the interview in just a few moments. Finally, with you, catching up with your career mark in terms of your marketing, testing the waters with our authors in the Facebook groups and talking to people in Florida last week.

The beginning of Autumn was more challenging in terms of advertising cost and return, but that suddenly got a lot better for people. People suddenly posting some really good results.

I THINK MAYBE THE BIG COMPANIES AND THE CORPORATES SPLURGED ALL THEIR MONEY AT THE BEGINNING OF AUTUMN HAVE RUN OUT NOW. EVERYONE ELSE SEEMS TO BE MAKING MERRY. HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THAT?

Mark: Yeah, pretty much. I'm testing some top secret, new Facebook strategies that I've been working on and I'm getting fairly remarkable results at the moment in terms of subscriptions. Really, really cheap. Less than ten cents per subscriber at the moment which is great and when you add in an up-sale to that, I'm actually in the black on those subscription campaigns. Adding 200 or 300 a day and getting paid for it at the moment, so that's pretty cool.

James: That's really good. Top secret sounds intriguing. I'm sure, hopefully we will hear something about that in the future.

Mark: Yep. Definitely.

James: Okay, well let's talk to Ricardo. We did actually have a brief chat with Ricardo back in April at the London book fair, but he was also in Florida with us and came along to our various gatherings and events. I caught up with him in a quiet room off the main hall. Little bit of extraneous noise in the Trade Winds resorts, but not too much.

It was really interesting to talk through. This was an interview for me, as a new author about to go through the end of the draft to the beginning of the marketing stage with a book to talk through that process with Ricardo. I make no apology for the fact that I was picking his brain on what do I do next because it's obviously a big area for me and hopefully for lots of you as well.

Ricardo: I started the company a couple of years ago and our goal was to source all the editorial, design, marketing, publicity talent that had been leaving traditional publishing companies in the past few years and put it together in the marketplace and make it available to authors and publishers worldwide.

James: I knew what Reedsy did or do and the services they offer and we'll talk more explicitly about that in a moment. Basically you can go off and get services.

I HADN'T REALIZED THAT WAS THE MOTIVATION FOR STARTING IT, REALIZING THAT ALL THESE TALENTED SPECIALIST INDIVIDUALS OF COURSE LEAVING TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING AS IT DECLINES.

Ricardo: Yeah, so we basically identified two trends. One that's well known about self publishing, a lot of authors leaving their traditional publishing companies and self publishing.

Then the second trend was the one I mentioned of a lot of talent leaving traditional publishing companies to work freelance because it's better way to live for them and also because publishing companies are now recruiting more freelance to optimize their costs. There were two trends and we thought we can combine these two trends and build a marketplace to bring them together.

James: Okay, so Reedsy today. We know that when you self publish you write the book yourself generally. Although that's interesting. We'll mention something about that in a moment. You write the book yourself, you do a lot of the marketing yourself, but there are some key tasks that need to be carried out to make your book a professional, saleable item. Which are almost certainly you're going to go and source professional services for.

WHAT ARE THOSE KEY AREAS THAT YOU FOCUSED ON?

Ricardo: There the same as the ones that go through a traditional publishing process. What we generally recommend authors is to replicate that process for the production of the book.

It starts with developmental editing, which is a step you might be able to skip on your tenth book or eleventh book once you know well about plotting and things like that and you know what your readers want.

James: Structural edit.

Ricardo: Exactly.

James: Someone's going to look at the narrative, the way you've told the story and ... I've never been through this process, but I'm about to go through it so I'm terrified but fascinated to know what they're going to come back with. What sort of things do they say to you? Do they say to you, "You've given away too much too early?" Or "You need more character stuff here?" What do they say to you?

Ricardo: There's a usual kind of advice. They generally analyze your plot, your character arcs, your pacing and then whether all that is adapted to reader's expectations in your genre or not. It's important for them to know your target market as well and what kind of genre you want to write in and who you want to reach. It's important that person is familiar with that genre and that market.

James: The structural editor's not just about telling the story. They're thinking about audience as well at that stage.

Ricardo: Absolutely. I think that's actually when the marketing starts and when the positioning starts. It's important to have someone who knows it probably better than you.

James: Okay, so structural editor. Good first stage. This, again as you say, replicating the traditional publishing journey.

WHAT ELSE HAVE WE GOT?

Ricardo: After the structural edit, you generally have a copyedit and now publishers they outsource that a lot. We work with publishers for that as well.

James: How ironic. The traditional publishing industry now uses you.

Ricardo: Exactly, yeah. It's quite fun. They realized that we have good pool of talent and generally they have people within their network, but sometimes when they have to put six books out in the same week

they need a copy editor to do rush job on one of them.

The copyediting focuses more on consistency and style, so that's both in terms of grammar, so dashes, hyphens, all that. Punctuation and also in terms of the elements of your story. Making sure that the character that had blue eyes at the beginning of the story still has blue eyes at the end of the story.

Names are checked are spelled the same way throughout the book, there are no timeline inconsistencies and things like that. It's about consistency, grammar, punctuation, style.

James: I don't know why we haven't thought of this before, but obviously what we should do on the podcast at some point is have an entire interview with a structural editor and an entire interview with a copyeditor and really go through from their point of view. That would be such a good thing to do. I think I know someone who might be able to put us in touch with those people. That's something for another time.

What's specialist work? Reading the entire novel and keeping on track of that consistency. It's every author's obsession anyway and we all worry, thinking back to chapter 1 that things have changed. You've made a decision then forgotten about it. Interesting work.

STRUCTURAL EDITOR, COPY EDITOR, DONE. WHAT'S NEXT?

Ricardo: Proofreading.

James: Proofreading.

Ricardo: That's the final step. Within a traditional publishing company after the copy edit what they do is create the files that are ready for distribution and once these files are ready they send them to the proof reader.

The proofread is a last read on the finished file because if you proof read before the final file is created, you might introduce errors during the formatting stage. The proofreading is done before you create a new format the files, because there's less formatting, there's less type setting work especially if you're just restricted to eBooks.

The proofread's last checked through manuscript, line by line and to catch any remaining typos that the previous editors have missed.

If you start out as an indie author maybe you can cut corners on the last proofread, especially if you write some genre fiction, but as you start building your mailing list and getting more sales, it's generally a really good idea to have more than one proofreader.

I know Bella Andrea who was on your podcast, I think she mentioned to me that she hires five proof readers, different proof readers for every one of the books, to make sure that no mistakes slip through.

James: I would say probably every other book I read on my Kindle I find a typo and on the Kindle you can highlight it and send it off. I don't know if anyone ever looks at those responses. I haven't fastidiously always sent them in. This will be old hat to lots of people listening and new to quite a few people as well, including me and I haven't fully appreciated those stages.

I THINK I PROBABLY MIXED UP COPY AND PROOFREADING AS WELL, BECAUSE THEY ARE QUITE SIMILAR.

Ricardo: They are similar.

James: The copyeditor must be looking at typos and stuff.

Ricardo: Yes. The proofread is really a last check generally by a copyeditor of your manuscript.

An interesting trend we've seen on Reedsy when analyzing the cost for these different services is that copy editors were quoting for a copyedit and a proofread together were quoting only slightly higher than for just a copyedit. The reason for that is that if you hire the same person to do the copyediting and the proofreading what they're going to do is they're going to do one round of copy editing and try to catch all the typos. They're going to make changes to your manuscript using Track Changes.

Then the second round of proof reading they're going to do only on the changes they've introduced. They're going to proof read only their changes. It's not a proofread and that's why they just quote it slightly higher than a copy edit.

James: Do you suggest that it's separated out? Would you think that's a better thing to do to have two individuals doing that?

Ricardo: It's up to the author. I'd say, yes.

I'd say that it defeats the purpose of the proof read to hire the same person to do copyediting and proofreading. If you want a real proofing and you want your manuscript to be perfect, be flawless, then you need to hire two separate people.

James: We all know just from writing letters and emails and I do a fair amount of stuff for my reporting in the past, you very often don't see your own errors. You have to pass it over to someone different, so I'd imagine that's even the same for proofreader and copyeditor. We're trundling along here aren't we? We've got a lot of people involved in our manuscript now and the proof is done after the formatting or before the format? After the formatting you said.

Ricardo: In traditional publishing it's after the formatting. For indie publishing can do it before the formatting, I guess.

James: Which brings us on to formatting, right?

Ricardo: Yeah, it does. We have formatters on Reedsy obviously, but we've built pretty neat tool for simple fiction, non-fiction called the Reedsy Book Editor, which is not the best of names because it's not a book editor. It's a formatting tool.

You can import your book within Reedsy by copy and pasting it. We suggest you copy and paste it chapter by chapter. It's going to take 10, 12 minutes for a novel. Then you apply some last minute formatting

changes using our formatting bar and once your book is on Reedsy the great thing is it's only seconds away from being turned into an eBook file or a print ready PDF.

We automatize and ensure the professionalism of the formatting to both ePub and Print on Demand. That's what's really game changing about it, I'd say. If you're writing complex non-fiction or if you have a lot of illustrations, if you're writing a cookbook for example or photo book, then you need to hire proper formatter because our tool is designed for simple fiction.

James: How long has the tool been going?

Ricardo: It's been going for six months now. We've been improving it a lot, it had a few glitches in the beginning, but now I think it's probably among the best tools out there because of its simplicity.

For example, Vellum is going to have more customization possibilities for eBooks, but it's not going to do Print on Demand as the Reedsy book editor does.

James: It's quite a cheaper option presumably than Vellum isn't it?

Ricardo: It's free.

James: It's free.

Ricardo: It's the cheapest option.

James: You can't get much cheaper than that. You talked about time though, in terms of a few minutes per chapter and so on, just going back to the editing stages.

WHAT IS THE NORMAL TIME SCALE ON A STRUCTURAL EDIT AND COPY EDITING AND PROOF EDITING?

Ricardo: It depends a lot on the book and on the editor. What you have to keep in mind is that most good developmental editors and especially the ones we have on Reedsy, they're booked up months in advance.

It's important to reach out to them before you finish your book because otherwise you're going to have to wait maybe 6 months to get your edit back even though they were going to work on your book for less than a month. They're booked up often 6 months in advance.

James: So you've got to wait a few months to get them and then when they start work on your book that can take a month?

Ricardo: That can take a month I think for developmental edit. It depends on the editor, it depends how many projects are doing at the same time. How much time they spend on it, how much changes they have to make, so it depends.

Copyedits can take a few days only or it can take up to a week depending on how messy your manuscript is.

James: Before we move on to other services, whilst we're still on the editing and proofing and formatting, what are the cost options? I guess this is going to vary quite a lot as well.

We should explain if people don't fully understand that Reedsy is almost like an agency in that you have people who offer their services and you're like a one stop shop to get. You can check reviews, you can check out people who have performed in the past and people's specialism in the areas that are going to match your novel and so on.

Hugely convenient, very well rated. You've built a brilliant platform I have to say at Reedsy.

THEN YOU OFFER A PRICE TO PEOPLE. SAY HOW MUCH THEY WANT? HOW DOES THAT WORK?

Ricardo: We leave complete freedom to our editors and to all professionals to quote. We don't even send them guidelines. They quote depending on the project and what we generally recommend authors is that

they ask maybe 4-5 different professionals for quotes on one project.

James: 4 to 5. Not 45.

Ricardo: 4 to 5. We limit to 5 so that you have to do a bit of research on who you're going to reach out to and also so our editors don't get frustrated. If you contact 45 for every project, there are 44 who are not going to have the job and at some point they're going to stop answering requests.

They quote individually depending on what they believe the project needs and how much time they're going to spend on it. Then what we do as a company is we gather a lot of data and we can release some guidelines on what authors should expect when it comes to developmental editing, copyediting and proofreading by word count.

We have an info graphic on our blog. If you Google "cost of self publishing" and you look for Reedsy, we're second or third in the results.

On that info graphic, we're going to say for example that for a developmental edit, structural edit on an 80,000 word manuscript the average price we've seen in our marketplace is \$1,860.

James: About 1,300 pounds, 1,400 pounds. Something like that.

Ricardo: Exactly. Obviously, if you go on Reedsy and you ask for quotes on the developmental edit on your novel, you're going to get probably quotes for 2,000, \$3,000 and some quotes for 1,000, 1,200, 1,500. It depends on the people and on their assessment of what your project needs.

James: Is that the single most expensive cost in this process that we're outlining for getting a book published?

Ricardo: Absolutely. It's the most time intensive and the one that requires a certain level of knowledge

from the editors on all-

James: And skills. A skillful job.

Ricardo: It's a very skillful job. Contrary to copyediting and proofreading that are a bit more mechanical, it requires a good degree in literature and a lot of experience reading books and assessing them. The best developmental editors are really expensive.

James: Okay, so we've got to formatting on our journey and let's say we've used the Reedsy free tool. We've got our ePub file, our PDF ready to print.

WHAT'S NEXT? I GUESS WE NEED A COVER AT SOME POINT.

Ricardo: Indeed. That's something you get at any point during the process really. You can get a cover, but it's better after developmental edit because there can be significant changes to your story and to your characters.

You might need to kill some darlings. It's better if they're not already on your cover. I'd say once you're at the copy editing, proofreading stage you can start commissioning a cover.

Our cost info graphic has analyzed that the average cost for a cover was \$700. That's slightly expensive, it's because we have some professionals on Reedsy who charge several thousand for a cover, so that's the average. Most quotes were between \$200 and \$600 for a cover.

James: Okay, that sounds reasonable. Again, that's a fairly significant cost but we're actually recording this interview in Florida and NINC.

A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE MAKING THE POINT THAT THE COVER IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR MARKETING PROCESS, ISN'T IT, SO IT IS WORTH THE MONEY.

Ricardo: It's absolutely vital and it's very easy to get wrong.

James: We saw some examples this morning, didn't we? People who got the covers wrong.

Ricardo: We definitely did, so there's a fun thing we do at Reedsy because a lot of self published covers out there are done by the author and they're absolutely awful. Let's be honest.

One thing we do at Reedsy is a monthly cover critique using Facebook live, so something you guys do as well. We invite one of our designers on the Reedsy marketplace to do a Facebook live using our page and we invite authors to send them their covers in advance and the designer picks 10 and does a live critique of the covers.

Like the case studies we saw this morning where authors were asking for live feedback on their marketing, we get authors asking for live feedback on their covers. It's always quite informative and the designer gives tips on how to make the cover better so if you've made it yourself at least you get tips on how to make it slightly better.

James: That's great, so you can plug that again.

WHEN DOES THAT TAKE PLACE?

Ricardo: If you go to blog.reedsy.com there's a section at the top for live videos and you can check our next Facebook lives and there will be a cover critic among them.

James: Is there a recording of the ones you've done in the past?

Ricardo: Absolutely. Same page, blog.reedsy.com/live, you can watch the videos for previous Facebook lives. We edit them a little bit, make them a bit more fun and we've done 3 cover critiques in the past and they've been hugely popular.

James: Okay. That's great, so we've got a cover, we've done our editing. We've done our proof, we've done our formatting.

ARE WE THERE YET?

Ricardo: We're pretty much there in terms of the production of the book and what's interesting is that in a traditional publishing company, we would have involved all these people, but on top of them we would have involved a commissioning editor, a production manager, a production editor, and an art director.

That's all the things that an author has to take on on their own.

James: That's the self part of self publishing.

Ricardo: Exactly. That's the self part of self publishing. That's really important to understand.

You are hiring people to help you out because there's no other way to produce a professional book, but you still have to take on a lot of different jobs that are usually handled by people within a traditional publishing company.

It's a lot of responsibility and it requires quite some skills and knowledge to know how to guide your copyeditors and proofreaders and know what kind of manual style they should be using. Also to know how to brief the cover designers so that they know exactly what target market they're designing for and what you want on the cover. There's a lot of responsibility for you and it's a job on it's own I think.

James: It's important to think like that, isn't it? Think of yourself, try to detach yourself a little bit from your project and just work as an art director for instance and look at the cover. Does this tell the story? Refresh yourself about what the story is and as you say. The self part of self publishing. That's the side of it from an author's point of view and you've given us some ideas of prices as well, so we can see a few thousand pounds will go into producing your book. Getting it from zero.

DO YOU HAVE AN AVERAGE COST YOU THINK FOR BRINGING A BOOK TO MARKET?

Ricardo: Yes. We analyze if we get everything together, developmental editing, copyediting, proofreading and a cover designing, the formatting's free through Reedsy Book Editor, it's around 3,000, \$3,500. Around 2,000 pounds. It's a significant cost.

Again, there are some steps you can skip or you can make the conscious decision of skipping for the first

few books. It's a case by case thing.

James: Okay, let's talk about the people you've got then. These editors and you say you've picked them.

THERE MIGHT BE PEOPLE LISTENING TO THIS WHO ACTUALLY WOULD FANCY THEMSELVES MAYBE AS A COPYEDITOR OR PROOFREADER OR EVEN DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR. HOW DO THEY BEGIN THAT PROCESS AND HOW DO YOU RECRUIT PEOPLE?

Ricardo: They can sign up on our landing page. Anyone who wants to apply to be on our marketplace signs up on our landing page as a freelancers.

Then we ask them to complete their profile, so they choose which kind of service they want to offer and in the profile goes a short overview, the genres they specialize in, the services they want to offer, their work experience and their portfolio.

What we really look at is the work experience, the portfolio and whether the portfolio matches the genres they've indicated. Generally we only accept people who've got traditional publishing experience. That's not always the case for some designers, but as a general rule, at least for editing that's the case.

James: I guess as time goes on, that will become less the case because as time goes on you will have people who were millennials, digital natives, whatever you want to call them, who were born and raised during the self publishing era.

Ricardo: Yeah, it is, and one of the first editors we added on Reedsy didn't have traditional publishing experience. She was the number 1 editor on eLance and she had left eLance because it had become a nightmare for professional editors there because you're competing with people in the Philippines who are so-called editors, but ... they quote you \$10 for an edit, basically.

James: I could tell the disparaging tone you took there, on that idea.

THIS IS THE HEART OF YOUR BUSINESS, YOU WILL LIVE AND DIE BY THE QUALITY OF THE WORK THAT THEY DO. HOW DO YOU MONITOR THAT AS TIME GOES ON?

Ricardo: We do a lot of work on the creation of the marketplace, so what we say is if you work with some of our professionals, you're protected by Reedsy as a third party.

If there's any dispute, any problem, you can come to us and tell us, "Look, I wasn't happy with the work of this editor for this or that reason," and then we can mediate as a third party. That's the added protection you have for Reedsy and we make our money by charging a 10% fee on top of what the people quote you and these are one of the things you get in exchange for the money.

On top of access to that marketplace and then collaborative tools to make your collaboration simpler.

James: We should just spell Reedsy.

Ricardo: Yeah. Reedsy.

James: People might think it's Read.

Ricardo: I know. It's not. It's from the reeds actually. We had this idea of the papyrus and papyruses made of reeds and there you go.

James: Very good.

Ricardo: Long story short.

James: Okay, so let's move on to the exciting news which is that we're going to do a contest together and you've been very generous in this.

WE TALKED ABOUT HOW MUCH THESE VARIOUS ELEMENTS COST AND AS YOU CAME UP WITH THE FIGURE OF AROUND \$3,000 TO GET YOUR BOOK, BUT SOME LUCKY PERSON HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET THAT FOR FREE.

Ricardo: Absolutely. We're going to do a giveaway together with Self Publishing Formula and it's going to be hosted on KingSumo and if you enter the giveaway, one lucky winner will get their production costs paid for. Up to \$3,000.

James: An opportunity for somebody to have their novel taken through this professional process. Will they get a chance to choose the editors? They'll get a dollar amount available to them, I guess.

Ricardo: Absolutely. The way we handle it is they sign up to the Reedsy platform, they choose who they want to work for and we basically enter our payment details instead of them entering their payment details.

James: Okay, thanks Ricardo. Are you French or Belgian?

Ricardo: I am half French, half Italian.

James: Okay, a bit of both, but you're based in London, you live in London. That's where Reedsy is?

Ricardo: Absolutely. The Reedsy team works remotely, but most of the founding team works and lives in London.

James: Half Italian, half French. You've got the best food genes in the whole of Europe. Italy's food is absolutely glorious. France obviously is a close second.

YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO EAT ENGLISH FOOD OR YOU'RE GETTING ON OKAY?

Ricardo: Is there English food? The Indian food is pretty good in London.

James: That is the number one British meal though, isn't it?

Ricardo: I know.

James: That's Ricardo who's an international man of mystery, bit of French, bit of Italian, lives in London. Think he told me he was born in Spain as well, so it's a random.

Mark: Yeah and insulted our cooking, so the next time I see him I'll be having stern words with him about the quality of English cuisine.

James: He goes to the wrong restaurants, he doesn't go to the restaurants you and I go to, Mark.

Mark: I'm going to one tonight actually, James.

James: Oh, are you? Going to a very nice restaurant tonight?

Mark: I'm going to Rick Steins restaurant in Poole. Actually paid for by my garage after I bought out from them. It was very nice.

James: That doesn't happen when I bought my Fiat 500. How far is Poole from you then?

Mark: It's an hour and ten minutes.

James: Okay, well that'll be great. I've been to his fish and chips shop in Padstow and it was sensational.

Mark: Very nice.

James: Just fish and chips. It was absolutely sensational. He's a great cook. Good. Well, you enjoy that. Anyway, steering back to the world of publishing and books, a couple of things to talk about from that interview with Ricardo.

I know the first one is that we've talked about this \$3,000 which is a fantastic contest that Ricardo and we have gone in jointly together with; a fantastic opportunity for an individual to get a huge amount of virtually all the major professional work that you need doing to get your book into market.

Mark: Way more than enough. When you say virtually enough, you could probably get ... I don't know. I could get two maybe three books done for \$3,000, so the benefit I have is that I've got a lot of experience and I've got a team around me that I trust. They charge a reasonable amount, certainly a decent amount, but not extortionate. That works pretty well for me.

I think \$3,000 is on the high side, but I've spoken to Ricardo about that before and I think they have a view on that. It's been taken from some of the higher ends of the Reedsy marketplace.

James: I think they do an average, but of course that will include a few who spend an awful lot, so that probably does skew things.

Mark: Exactly and not everyone will want a developmental edit and if people can afford it, I think it's something that's worth doing. Especially if you're at the start of your career, but that can be a big 6 or \$700 expense. \$800 for a cover or \$700 is well high. It's much higher than I pay and I'm not going to mention what Stuart's prices are on the podcast, but he is top class.

James: That was him emailing you.

Mark: It was ...

James: Don't mention the prices.

Mark: Don't mention the prices. He's not as expensive as that and I don't think that you need to spend that much. I think that you can bring it in at \$1,000, \$1,500 maybe at the top end and you can get that kind of quality factor on Reedsy and still hit that price.

On the plus side, that's what we've got to give away, we've got \$3,000 of services to give away on Reedsy. That's more than enough.

James: It's a fantastic prize, so you should by your reckoning, squeeze a couple of books out of it because the money's going to sit there, ready for you to use on Reedsy so you can get possibly two books out of that.

Mark: Exactly. Plus of course it's not just that the second prize is generous too. It's 3 second prizes will also get \$600 towards a book cover. Again, plenty of cash there to get a really top pro cover all taken care of on Reedsy.

James: Now, I really like Reedsy, I really like the service, I really like Ricardo, but I am not convinced about this name I have to say. I think it's particularly in the book publishing world you would think it might be read, but it's Reedsy and he explained how it's back to the papyrus and so on. Anyway, there you go. It's just a name and you get to learn it after a while. Once you've found it and bookmarked it, it doesn't really matter what it's called.

It's a very useful service and you can see how they started with that really bright idea of understanding that traditional publishing was winding down, there were individuals with great value and great worth to the publishing book writing community. Of course more people are writing book than ever before so there's no reason for them to think they haven't got work in the future, it's just a case of re-purposing. Reorganizing how they find their customers rather than a trad house, they're now available to you and me via organizations like Reedsy.

That's it for this week. We want to say a big thank you to Ricardo, who was a fabulous guest as always. Great to meet him in Florida. We're going away from NINC next week, we're going to be talking about social media and we're going to be talking about a tool that very specifically helps you go from somebody who dabbles or perhaps doesn't quite know how to post or when to post or how much you should post, there's a very good tool on the market that takes care of all of that for you after you put in a bit of work. Maybe once a month even, not even that often and keeps that populated for you. It's something that we use, so we're going to be talking about that in number 34 next week.

For me, I'm going to a school governors meeting tonight. For Mark, who's going to a Michelin star ... Oh my. What are you doing? Did you just fall off your chair?

Mark: I need to buy a new desk.

James: You're falling apart. Well, you need to go out for dinner to your Michelin starred restaurant wherever it is in Poole and enjoy yourself.

CHAPTER 31

HOW TO FORMAT AN EBOOK THE EASY WAY - WITH BRAD AND BRAD FROM VELLUM

HOW TO MAKE YOUR BOOK BEAUTIFUL.

Book Formatting made easy

with Brad & Brad from Vellum

EPISODE #034

IF YOU HAVEN'T GOTTEN FAR enough in your self-publishing career to worry about formatting your ebook, you've got some learning ahead. It's not easy. In fact, it's quite complicated. Instead of there being one format that all of the ebook platforms use, each of them has their own file type that they use. But before you go off and do that we've got a great solution for you. Brad and Brad are the creators of some great Mac software called Vellum and it takes all the difficulty out of the ebook formatting process to allow you to easily submit books in every format you'll need. You can hear how to get and use Vellum on this episode.

DOES YOUR EBOOK NEED TO BE IN EPUB, MOBI, OR PDF? YES.

Every book publishing platform out there - iBooks, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Kobo - has its own preferred way for you to submit your book for publication. Some of them even require their own technical format or file type (such as Amazon's MOBI files). If you want your books to be available in the broadest possible way you'll want to be able to submit them to all platforms. But you don't want to become a

software coding genius in order to do it. Enter Vellum, a powerful and beautiful piece of software that takes all of the guesswork and headache out of the formatting process so you can stay focused on your writing and be confident that once you decide on one of their pre-installed formats and make your own customized tweaks to it, your book is going to come out just as it should. Learn more about Vellum on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

THIS HAS GOT TO BE THE EASIEST WAY TO GET PICTURES THAT WORK INTO AN EBOOK.

They guys at Vellum have worked very hard to figure out the technical aspects of what it takes to place images into the content of ebooks. That's because the two of them are former software designers for Pixar who decided to create their own book formatting software to make it simple for authors to produce beautiful books every time, no matter the publishing platform they use. That includes books with images. Find out how you can test out Vellum for free, on this episode.

HERE ARE THE OPTIONS FOR FORMATTING YOUR EBOOK.

There are tons of tutorials on Youtube showing you how to use MS Word to create and format an ebook. That's fine. You can go that route. When you do, you'll wind up making a series of adjustments to your final product to dial everything in and have it come out looking how you want it to look. Alternatively, you can use a free tool (there are many of them online). That's fine too. But wouldn't it be better if you had one amazing tool to format your ebook perfectly, with great headings, drop caps, headers and footers, and images? You can do exactly that with Vellum. Find out more from the creators of Vellum on this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode of the podcast.
- The topic of formatting.
- Vellum - what is it and how does it work?
- What makes for good formatting in a book?
- How the two Brads got started in business and came up with the idea.
- The varying ways you can purchase the Vellum packages.
- How the guys came up with their pricing model and designed it for authors.
- Any future verticals for the business?
- The variety of looks Vellum can produce for your book.
- Future developments for the platform.
- Available tutorials and other ways to learn the software.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Vellum](#)
- [Scrivener](#)
- [Reedsy](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to Podcast #34 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello, here we are again and it is a delight to be with you. James Blatch and Mark Dawson on the Self Publishing Formula podcast. Thank you very much for listening week in, week out. We love hearing from you in our Facebook groups and on Twitter. We're [@selfpubform](#) on Twitter. You can join our Facebook group. We have a growing array of Facebook groups, don't we, Mark?

Mark: We do. We have four at the moment, I think, with possibly another one or two to come.

James: Yup. You can join our 101 group which is a great place to be if, like me, you are starting out on the road to being a world-class Booker prize-winning author, which is what I'm doing. Oh, if you want to make a decent career out of writing books as well and you're doing that already, you can join our self-publishing group which talks specifically about marketing because you experience guys like you Mark. You know how to format books. Interestingly, you know what things like format mean, which until about a couple of months ago I had no idea.

I'm now suddenly tonight ... This is quite a historic day. Should I tell people I just finished my novel?

Mark: I think you've already done it.

James: Yeah. I've just finished my novel.

Mark: Yes.

James: A lot of pushing from ... I love a deadline and I need a deadline and I got one from Mark. He basically booked me an editor and so that was that. I did a little mini-retreat. We had a lot of work and I locked myself away in a hotel for a couple of nights and I can suddenly see the attraction of these retreats. I think a lot of writers do them and it might be an area to explore at some point. We actually did speak to someone recently and I can't remember who it was top of my head on the podcast who was at a retreat at the time, but I can see the attraction of that.

I have more or less rewritten what was a 52,000-word novel at the time. I'd hacked it down a little bit before I started on Friday. It's now a 66,000-word completed novel. Novella, I suppose. I rewrote probably 75% of that. I've done a lot of words in a few days. Yeah, away from the house, away from the children and all that distraction and carnage was very good for me.

Mark: I've never done that before. I've never actually been away on a retreat, but it's a good idea, I think, in principle.

James: I think you and I are both thinking about potentially working away from our houses. We've both got children and quite busy houses and the best will in the world ... You don't want to be that person who's grumpy to your children all the time and says, "I can't do this and that."

The better way is actually to remove yourself for periods of the day. Mine might actually just be in the garden. I might get one of those drop-in sheds with a stove in it and so on and a skull and crossbones so the children know not to approach during the day.

Mark: Yes. I've actually told you this. I've taken my office this afternoon.

James: Oh, you have?

Mark: I have. I booked an office and spent the rest of the afternoon buying a desk and now I'm buying

duplicates of everything that I've got here so a new microphone, a new display for the monitor, all that kind of stuff. There's enough space for a little studio in there as well. Might be doing a bit more Facebook Live stuff in the next few months.

James: That's great, Mark. I'm impressed. How much time do you think you're going to spend? How often are you going to use it?

Mark: I think I'll be there almost every day. If the house is empty, I'll probably stay at home because I quite like working here and I can go for runs whenever I want. It's quite nice to break the day up, but when the house isn't empty, I do need a clear space. I think there's a good chance I'll be there three or four times a week.

James: That's great. We do have a special edition of the podcast coming up soon. I trialed a little while ago where I asked eight or nine authors in a row the same set of questions. One of the questions is where do you write? A lot of them write in bed, I was surprised to hear. I think I'd get a bad back sitting in bed writing, but people sit cross-legged on their bed.

Mark: They're young.

James: They're young. Yeah, of course. They're nimble and we're not. Anyway.

Today is novel finish today, which I'm thrilled about. Obviously it's just the beginning of the journey for the novel. It goes to a developmental editor now who's almost certainly going to write copious notes on it that I'll have to prepare myself for. That's another thing we can talk about and as we go into the mode this autumn talking a lot about new authors and starting out so I think we'll talk a bit about the editing process as I go through it.

I'm going to blog this as well, but understanding your role in the editing process, your role as an author. There's a professional, detached approach that you've got to take in terms of understanding the comments being made about your book are going to make it better. They're not personal comments about you. It doesn't mean that the book is bad in the sense that you think I'm rubbish, not good or anything you do can

be improved, right? The top golfers in the world have coaches. The top tennis players in the world have coaches.

Getting to their professional level of understanding that you can improve is where I need to be, but it's easy for me to say, Mark, I've yet to see some red pen on my novel.

Mark: Yes, I'm quite looking forward to that. I think that's going to be very amusing. We'll see how it comes back. Jenny is the editor who's going to be taking the first pass, a developmental edit for the book and she is someone I've worked with before, is very thorough, has a great eye, and has made some really excellent comments that have really improved some of my most recent books.

Then the editor we might pass it onto afterwards is a little less ... How can I say? Fairly brutal. I think he would accept that. Polite but brutal. Firm, maybe. That will be an interesting experience as we put the novel through that one as well, but no, it's really exciting.

You've done amazingly well. 66,000 words you told me you've written over the weekend which makes me look positively pedestrian at the moment so that's very impressive.

James: It's ridiculous. I've just been sitting down literally from dawn 'til dusk, probably doing 15 hours for three days of writing, because I'm at the point now with the novel where I know it inside out, although I've had those times where I've gone out. Had a swim at some point just to try and get myself to the next point. I'm just a bit stuck on the structure. At one point, I did that trick where you got to a point where you're just not really sure how to ...

You deliberately write yourself into corners sometimes. That's the whole point, isn't? Some type of a good story they get to an exciting lead and it becomes a dead end and then you move on. I was at one of those points where I literally wrote the character into a bath, lying back, thinking, "What do we do now?" It was a eureka moment. It came in the dialogue I was writing came the next steps. All these things that you writers are used to and know about is a journey for discovery for those of us who are starting out and it's fun.

Mark: Yes.

James: Love it. Absolutely love it. Anyway, I say that now. I was stressed beyond belief three days ago. Roller coaster.

A really good one for me tonight, Mark. We're going to talk about formatting, because obviously it is literally one of the steps that is coming up shortly for me after the next few stages of editing and that will be getting the book formatted and all that good stuff about getting it into people's hands. One of the formatting options, and we've talked about this before, a couple of them are free to use.

One of the formatting options that you do pay for is Vellum. It's not very expensive, actually. \$200 for lifetime use of Vellum and I think \$30 per book, if you want to do it that way. I like the look of Vellum a lot.

When I say the look of Vellum, that is the correct expression to use, because it's a beautiful bit of software. It's no surprise at all when you hear the two guys, who are confusingly both called Brad, who founded Vellum ... It'll be no surprise to you at all to find out where they worked and how they met when you see the aesthetic nature of Vellum.

Let me just ask you before we get into the interview, Mark, have you used Vellum?

Mark: I haven't, no. I've always relied on a third party to do my formatting. Ever since I started it was the studio in Australia called Polgarus Studios and I hooked up with them because Hugh Howey had used them before and I thought if it's good enough for Huge Howey, it's probably good enough for me.

I've been working with them for the last four or five years and it has its pros and cons. They're extremely professional, but if you want to make quick changes to manuscripts, it can be a little bit of a delay that's involved there. I am interested in looking at other options.

As we go towards the new course, I want to lay out all of the options available for writers from the free

ones like the Reedsy editor and Scrivener, of course, can compile into the various formats, to the other ones with things like Vellum at the top end, with producing really gorgeous books. I'm very interested in what they have to say to you.

James: I've got on my list of things to do in the next few days is record a screen flow of using Vellum. One of the things about Vellum as the Brads explain in a moment, is that you can download this software and use it for free. It's only literally when you upload, the point at which you need to have paid for it. You can practice with it.

Mark: Fiendish.

James: Yeah, it's clever. You can practice with it. You can see how good your book looks and great for us because I can do some nice screen flows to show how it works and see my novel looking at least aesthetically looking nice. Here's one more exciting thing to say about this interview just before we hand over to it. This is going to be our very first video interview.

The two Brads and I accidentally, it has to be said, at the beginning found ourselves on camera. All the podcasts go to YouTube, to our YouTube channel. If you search for Self Publishing Formula on YouTube, you'll find our channel. Every podcast that we've done is on there.

At the moment, the visual side of that on YouTube is the slide that our third amigo, John Dyer, produces, but for this one, in a moment when the interview starts, you're going to see us in all our glory and by all our glory, I mean me, unshaven.

Mark: You did have your clothes on, did you?

James: I did have my clothes on, but I haven't slept very well for three days, as you know, writing my novel and I look like Ernest Hemingway on a bad morning without the writing skill.

Mark: I think we've got to cut this out of it. We've better cut that, James. I don't think the world is ready for

horrors of that kind of description.

James: I am clothed. The only thing you need to know. The Brads look so cool on camera that we've kept that on there.

It's Brad and Brad, first of all. Let's just get this clear before this starts. We've got Brad W.

Brad W.: Yes.

James: And Brad Andalman.

Brad A.: Yeah.

James: And Brad Andalman, if you're watching this on YouTube is the one with the very cool background. You appear to have a motorbike in your kitchen?

Brad A.: Who doesn't? Yeah, it's true. I've got my motorcycle in my kitchen.

James: Exactly, good. Okay.

Brad A.: It's all one room over here so that's all we can do.

James: It looks very cool anyway. If I'd known we were going to record this, by the way, I would have shaved, but next time.

Okay, let's talk about Vellum. Do you know you're talking to the right person? Because today is the day I finished my first novel. Well, it goes to the editor today for the first time.

Brad A.: Congratulations.

James: Thank you very much.

Brad W.: Awesome.

James: Inevitably, it's actually going to be transmitted tomorrow morning because I haven't quite finished it, but you know how it is. Today is the day. I'm in the market for this and we have talked about Vellum in our 101 course and we've given an instruction for how to go through it and so on. I know it's a very, very highly regarded tool, but enough of the praise. Let's here the practical side of things.

DOES ONE OF THE BRADS WANT TO TELL ME WHAT VELLUM IS AND WE'LL GET GOING FROM THERE?

I should be more specific. I can't just say one of the Brads. That's ridiculous, okay. Let me make a choice then. Brad Andalman, because you were about to talk.

Brad A.: Yeah, Vellum is software that we wrote. It's for the Mac only. We wanted to allow authors to be able to format their books and have them easily create beautiful ebooks for a variety of online platforms so for iBooks, for Amazon, Nook, Kobo, Google Play, etc. and to really give them the control so that they don't have to go to someone else or learn a lot of complicated coding things. They can do it all and really use the principles of book design and beautiful typesetting to create ebooks that they're proud of.

James: You do use the beautiful when you're describing it, about creating beautiful ebooks and it does look like a lovely bit of software. Let's go back a little bit. For those of us who are just starting out, there's a lot of bewildering things that you need to do after you've written a book in Word or Scrivener or wherever it is.

And if you'll treat me like a complete novice here and say that I don't really know where to start with formatting. I know what it looks like in Scrivener and I know what it looks like when I've exported it as a Word document.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO IT AND WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN TO IT? PERHAPS BRAD W. COULD DO THIS ONE?

Brad W.: The answer is it depends. For authors who really want to have their book available in as many places as possible, the answer is going to be different for Amazon than it is, say, for iBooks or for Kobo or for U.S. readers for Nook. That's one thing that really makes it hard.

You need to learn not just one store's things, but each store has different requirements. That's one thing that we wanted to just make it be just a simple checkbox and that's how it exists in Vellum is, "Hey, you want this for Amazon? Great. Check." If you decide maybe you're going to start on Amazon and be exclusive, you can do that. If you decide to go wide, just check a couple of boxes and you've got those files.

Otherwise, the answer might depend. You could try uploading a Word file straight to Amazon and sometimes that'll work. It'll sometimes take a few tries to get that right. You can't do that with iBooks.

If you want to do something more sophisticated, it involves understanding formats like ePUB and ePUB 2 and ePUB 3 and which stores take which of those things.

The MOBI proprietary format that Amazon uses. We wanted to just say, "Hey, don't worry about that. Here, check a couple of boxes and you get files." We've tested the outputs so that we know it's going to work fine on Amazon and on all of their different devices that all have different characteristics. It's going to be accepted by iBooks that has really strict requirements as does Google Play.

The answer is, it can be very, very complicated. We want to make it very, very simple.

James: Okay. We're going to talk more about it obviously in just a moment, but let's talk about the Brads then and the business, because first of all, it's coincidental that you are both called Brad and slightly confusing.

Brad W.: It was not planned. Our parents didn't talk about it.

James: Was there no point when you got together in the business and you thought, "I'm going to change my name to Pete"?

Brad W.: We do sometimes have this issue when we have lunch meetings and go out and both order from the same counter and sometimes I will say that my name is Scott so that Brad Andalman gets the vegan sandwich and I get the non-vegan sandwich.

James: Good call. Good call.

HOW DID YOU GUYS GET TOGETHER AND WHERE DID THIS IDEA COME FROM?

Brad A.: We worked together for years at Pixar and we both loved Pixar.

James: Who doesn't love Pixar?

Brad A.: Yeah, exactly, but we decided we wanted to do something different and coincidentally we both ended up leaving on the same day. We had worked together on software at Pixar too and it just went really well. We wanted to do something that we felt ownership over and we wanted to do something smaller and we wanted to do it together so we quit.

I took off on my motorcycle and drove up to Seattle. We established the business and then we started the conversations about what are we going to do. We didn't really quit Pixar knowing what we wanted to do specifically, but we knew that we wanted to do something together that was interesting that involved both creating something professional for people and yet involved our creative sides, which we felt that we had. That was an experience we had at Pixar was both this combination of technical as well as creative that we both really enjoyed.

James: Yeah, Brad W., a great place to be, obviously Pixar, in terms of the aesthetics being an essential part of what you do in terms of Vellum. I'm interested in this idea of where that particular business came from.

I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WANTED TO BREAK FREE AND DO SOMETHING, BUT SOME PEOPLE WILL SPEND TWO YEARS LOOKING AT TRENDS AND MARKETS AND

RESEARCH, BUT YOU WENT INTO THIS QUITE QUICKLY.

Brad W.: Some things just worked out. We talked about a few different things that had nothing to do with books. We're not game developers, so we didn't want to go down that route. We wanted to help people work professionally.

The germ of the idea came from my wife who years ago was reading a lot of the early pioneers of self and indie publishing and just was curious about how that worked. She asked me how it worked and I had no idea.

I started talking to Brad about it and it was a thing that just stuck with us as we were going over various ideas. It was like, "You know, there's something interesting here and it's exciting from the outside perspective." Like, "Oh, this is an exciting thing that's happening."

It really felt like we can help bring our skills of software and design and create a solution that could help people. We love books and we love reading. It just felt like a natural fit and that's been good because it's been a few years since those discussions and we're still excited about it. It was a good choice for us.

James: You love books because they're behind you. Brad loves motorbikes, but I'm sure he likes books as well.

Brad A.: You can't really see that wall behind him, but his bookshelf is bigger than mine.

James: You moved up to Seattle? Are you both in that area now?

Brad W.: No, I live in Oakland, which is just a couple of minutes away from Pixar still, but Brad ... Well, you should tell your story.

Brad A.: I'm up in Seattle. I worked at Pixar both down in the Bay area of California for a few years and then moved out to Seattle. There's a small Pixar office here. I work in the Seattle office and we've continued working from our respective locations, working together on this.

James: Let's go back to the product itself.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN TO ME HOW IT WORKS FROM A BUSINESS POINT OF VIEW? FROM THE USERS' POINT OF VIEW? THERE'S SUBSCRIPTIONS MODELS? THERE'S A ONE-OFF FEE?

Brad A.: We have a couple different packages, but crucially we wanted to allow authors to download Vellum and play with it, format their book for free initially so that they could understand how it worked, to see if it would work for them.

You can go to our website, download Vellum, format your book, and then only when it comes time to generate ebooks either to upload to online stores or if you'd like to proof them on various devices or apps, then you need to purchase.

Currently, we have three different packages, but really our most popular one is the unlimited, which allows you to create as many ebooks as you want. It's a one-time fee and that's it. You purchase unlimited ebooks. That's the package name and then you're not restricted at all. You can publish all the books that you dream up.

James: That's a slightly unusual approach in a world that's dominated really with getting people to subscriptions, a one-off fee, particularly for this type of model where you are going to go back to it year after year, but obviously that's working for you.

Brad W.: We talked about different business models and there are a lot of attractive things about subscriptions in that you can continue to release updates after updates and you don't have to worry about people being stranded on older versions and buggy versions.

There are some things that we've realized probably wouldn't work for us. In particular, a lot of authors will use Vellum for a couple of weeks and then go off and spend another several months writing their next book or several years. We felt that authors may not be willing to pay a subscription if several months out of the year they're not even touching it.

We try to think about that in both pricing and design. It's like, "You know what? This is not software that people are using day in, day out. They're writing their books for most of their time and coming into Vellum when they're done so we really want to make it both easy to just like, "Okay, it's been a while since I've used this. Okay I'm going to bring this in and don't have to remember too many switches." That's what we felt made sense for pricing.

We did hear some feedback early on that some authors. We know there's authors out there that are incredibly prolific and will produce books every month, every week, but there are also authors out there that maybe just write one book and that's why we came up with these book packages.

If you've just got one book, you can buy this. Right now it's \$30 to just produce that one book. Our experience though has been those are far outnumbered by authors who, because they have a back list or because they just want to produce as many books as they can, they go for the unlimited ebooks option.

That's \$200, but a lot of people we've talked to said, "Well, you know, I would pay a formatter that for just a couple of books." That's feedback we've gotten as for why \$200 might be more expensive than some software, but a lot of authors feel that that's an investment in their business.

James: I just scrolled down to the prices and I'm not sure what I was expecting, but that is definitely lower. I thought \$200 is a very good thing for access for life and you mentioned the pay-per-titles. We'll just mention those price points as well. One book at \$29.99. One book at 30 bucks or ten books at 100 bucks or as you say, Vellum Unlimited at \$200.

Brad Andalman, let's go to you then on this one. You mentioned about the downside of not being on subscriptions potentially being caught in a previous revision. In fact, the very software I'm using to record this screen flow recently published an update for which they're charging, which annoys me having paid a reasonable amount for it the first time, like 100 bucks.

WITH VELLUM UNLIMITED, HOW DOES THAT WORK? DO PEOPLE GET THESE UPDATES FOR LIFE OR WILL THEY FACE A CHARGE IN THE FUTURE.

Brad A.: To be clear, I understand the decision probably the software engineers made to release a version and want to charge for it, because you work hard on something, you want people to pay for it. But when Brad and I got together and talking about pricing, one of the things we felt strongly was about was if

you're purchasing this thing that we're calling unlimited, we want you to feel like you own this.

You're not subscribing monthly or yearly. You've purchased this product. We've been for sale for over three years and all of our updates are free and we've introduced a bunch of different things, everything from the ability to include images, which was a significant addition. All of our updates have been free.

In the future, our intention is that people who have purchased this unlimited ebooks package will be able to publish unlimited ebooks in every future version of Vellum.

James: That's great and it's what we do with the course, as well, I should say with SPF. The one-off charge and then you get the updates as long as they keep coming out, as long as we're still alive.

Then just to remind people of something you said earlier, which I think is another great advantage of Vellum is the fact that you can download it for free and use it for free.

THERE'S NO IF I INVEST \$200 BUCKS IN THIS, BRAD W., WHAT'S IT GOING TO LOOK LIKE? YOU GET TO SEE THAT, RIGHT?

Brad W.: Yes, and there's no time limit on that either. I think that's been important for authors to understand, "Okay, what is this going to look like?" That's one of the key things that we wanted to solve, this mystery of what is this going to look like.

That's why we have this preview right in Vellum. I think that's helpful for any user to see, oh, okay that's what it's going to look like. When it's on a device and then it also gives users who are just getting their feet wet, it's a way to understand, "Okay, this is what I'm going to get should I decide to make this purchase."

We really wanted to be able to let users answer that question without any risk. Some users who early on said, "Oh, you know what? This looks incredible, but I have a lot of illustrations in my book," in our very, very, very first release, we said, "Oh, I'm glad you found that out. You didn't put money to discover that and hey, we hear you. That's important. We'll get to it." When we did add that update, then they were able to come back and say, "Okay, this works great for me." Then they were able to purchase.

James: Let me ask you then, Brad Andalman, how's it going?

HOW'S THE BUSINESS GOING?

Brad A.: It's going well, actually. You do something and you do the research on whether ebooks are the future or they're not, but you never really know, I think.

We just had this idea that there are a lot of people out there who want to self publish and we're actually really happy that our business just keeps growing. There seem to be more and more authors who are discovering us every day and downloading and using Vellum happily so that's actually been really great for us to see, because it could've been just like, "Oh, we released this thing and yeah, there's no real need for it."

We knew when we got into it that we were surprised by how difficult it was to manage all of these different requirements from all of these different stores, but even we didn't understand the extent, I think, when we first started doing this. It's great that we were able to get in there, simplify it, and then produce something that people still seem to be enjoying.

James: Brad W., there is a lot to think about when you self publish and I'm going through that now and it can be a complicated world. As we say, formatting is just one of those areas. Another thing when you think about aesthetics, the very obvious one is to think about book design, book cover.

ARE THERE ANY VERTICALS FOR YOU IN THE FUTURE, DO YOU THINK? OR ARE YOU GOING TO FOCUS ON THIS NICHE?

Brad W.: This is where we're focusing. Cover is an interesting question and some people have asked about that. I think that's the kind of thing that is still really handled best by a cover designer.

You really want that to have that personal touch. It's amazing that there's just a lot of great designers out there and pretty much any price point. We think that's still something that's best handled by designers and we're focusing on the interior still.

James: That's great. The aesthetics, which I mentioned, there's no surprise to me that there's some pedigree here from Pixar, one of the most beautiful animation studios on the planet and you focus on Mac

as well which is a company that produces technology, but does it in a very beautiful way. Clearly, that's an important part of it for you.

In terms of what's on offer for people inside the options for you, Brad Andalman ... Mine's a military thriller. Other people will be in different genres.

THERE'S CHOICE THERE FOR US TO MAKE SURE THAT THE WAY PEOPLE VIEW OUR BOOKS SOMEHOW REFLECTS THEIR CONTENT?

Brad A.: Vellum currently ships with eight different book styles and we've tried to have those eight overarching book styles represent a lot of different genres, like you said.

We have the more technological thriller perhaps one. We definitely have a more romantic one. We have a few modern ones. We have a few old school ones. We have eight of those large groupings.

We call them book styles and then within each book style, you can choose from sub styles so within, say, our Kindred book style, which is maybe targeted more at romance perhaps, you can choose from four or five headings. You can change your first paragraph style so that you can choose, oh, I want a script drop cap or a serif drop cap or no drop cap at all.

You can go through and make all of those choices for the different kinds of things you have in your books from ornamental breaks to the way that images are displayed. Within each of those eight book style groupings, you can go in and further customize the interior of your book.

Brad W.: We've seen some authors will just flip through the eight styles, pick one, say, "That's great. I love everything about it," and they're done. We've seen some authors go in and really pick and choose from those options. It's been interesting because you see maybe we designed one of these styles ... This is a more technical style, but some authors will just mix and match things and suddenly it's like, "Oh, wow, that actually looks much different than we had in mind and yet it works."

Some of the styles are actually a bit more flexible and you infer the overall style if you have a regency cover and you see a more generic style inside, the whole thing reads as regency. We've been surprised. We started with some options that at our initial intent, they've really gone beyond that.

James: Brad Andalman, in terms of developments in the future then, obviously, illustrations was a big one. On some of the ereading devices that you have, they're still quite a challenge, I have to say.

I'M READING A COUPLE BOOKS AT THE MOMENT THAT HAVE SOME DIAGRAMS THAT COME UP AND I'M THERE AT NIGHT TRYING TO GET THEM BIGGER AND SQUINT AT THEM, BUT THAT CLEARLY IS ONLY GOING TO GET STRONGER AS TIME GOES ON.

Brad A.: We have a bunch of things, like improvements we want to make to existing features and a whole slew of requests we've got from authors as well who want certain things. We get a request for more styles a lot of times. We get a request for print books as well, which is interesting. We also have a lot of things where we could improve existing features. There's definitely no shortage of things to work on.

James: In terms of helping people navigate their way through their first format experience, what supports on offer do you have? Tutorials, etc?

Brad W.: We have a pretty short tutorial that gives you the lay of the land. When you first start Vellum, you'll be prompted to use that tutorial if you want to.

What I think a lot of authors like is we'll give you a sample manuscript so you don't have to worry about is your manuscript in the right form. You can just use this sample manuscript. It's the Invisible Man by H.G. Wells. You just drag it in and just play around. I think that really helps authors see what they can do and not have to worry about their own book.

Then when they're ready to bring in their manuscript, they can think about it differently, but most of our users who go through that tutorial do get a sense of how the app works. This is the support team here too so when people do have questions that aren't answered by that tutorial or any other questions, we do try to give our best answers. We're the email support team. We answer as directly as we can and as quickly as we can. You're right. There are just a million questions out there for formatting and uploading.

James: I should also point out in our 101 Facebook group, Vellum has come up and people have discussed ideas and have helped each other which is obviously a great way to learn how to use new software and you've already got existing people who are experience users.

Brad W.: Yeah, for sure.

James: In fact, that's also brings me onto always a plus point for me when I see the example books rolling past and I see a couple of names from the Self Publishing Formula community so Lee Strauss and others are obviously keen users of Vellum and that's a good recommendation from some of our successful authors.

That's great. Thank you very much. If you Google Vellum, you do get quite a lot of information on the old type of paper material but they printed books on or wrapped books in. People should know that it's Vellum.pub, isn't it? To get to you.

Brad W.: Yes, that's right.

Brad A.: Yes.

James: Vellum.pub. Thank you, Brad and Brad, so much for joining us. We saw your cat, Brad Andalman, briefly.

Brad A.: Yeah.

James: Run through the shot. I was really hoping that he or she would sit on the motorbike.

Brad A.: She was posed attractively before we started this, but I think she got a little bit scared by all the talking.

James: Look, it's been great to talk to you. Thank you so much indeed for joining us.

Brad A.: Thank you so much.

Brad W.: Thank you.

James: So lovely to talk to them in Seattle and the Bay area, Oakland I think it was, in San Francisco. Two great guys who just, like a lot of people in this space, they saw a niche and they didn't think, "Will this work?" They made it work and they've created a little space of their own.

I would urge you to go and have a look at Vellum, have a look at them online. You'll see very, very beautiful looking bit of software and nice aesthetic as I mentioned in the interview, we saw Lee Strauss's book going up in their showoff area. Got a few other SPF names who are familiar to us on SPF in our courses and our Facebook groups. That's always a good sign, I think, because we have a high ... We have good taste.

Mark: Exquisite taste. Yeah, we have a very high bar to entry.

James: Yeah. There you go. That's Vellum for you. If you're interested in the nuts and bolts of how all this works, we'll talk a little bit more about what's going to be in the 101 course as we get towards the autumn and the launch for that, but Vellum and formatting, of course, will be a part of that. Not just Vellum, but formatting in general will be a part of that.

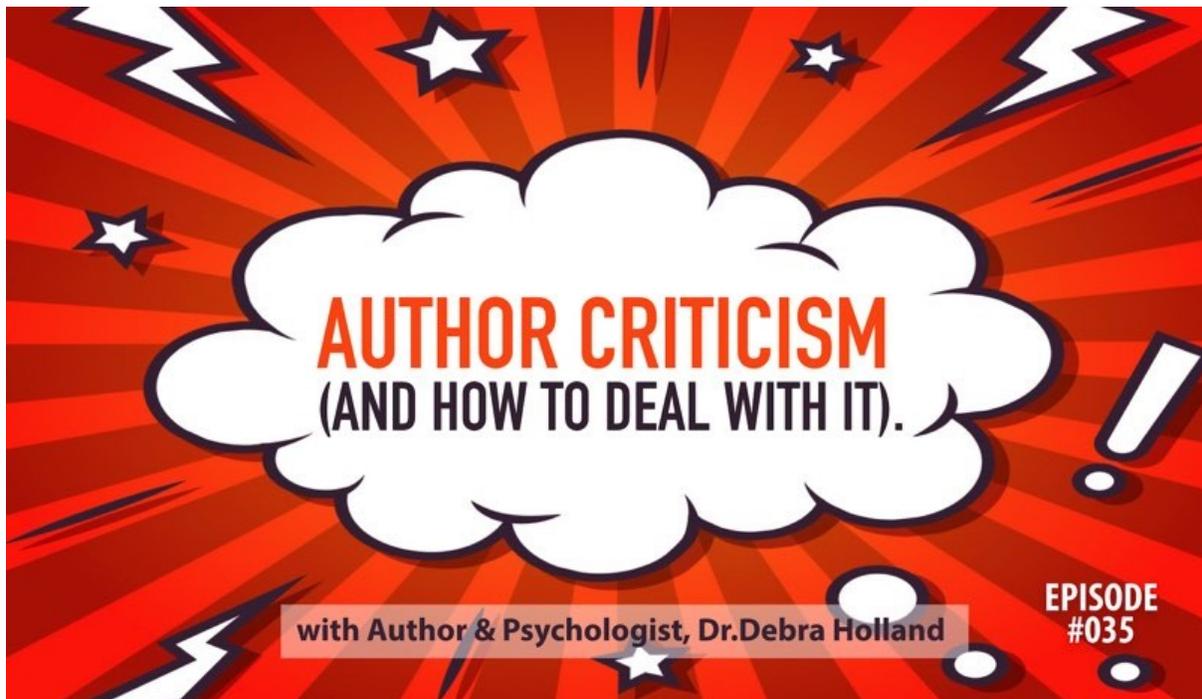
Now I've got to go and do some spell checking and work out how many sentences in my novel don't have the required number of words.

Mark: Yeah, it's always helpful to have sentences that scan properly, as a pro tip.

James: Thank you very much, indeed, Mark. Looking forward to speaking next week and thanks to the Brads from Vellum. We will be with you next Friday.

CHAPTER 32

DEALING WITH CRITICISM FROM EDITORS AND READERS - WITH DR. DEBRA HOLLAND



AS AN AUTHOR, it's a given that you're going to have get used to dealing with all kinds of feedback on your work. But don't get downhearted by the negative words. For a start, new authors should quickly get used to the fact that you simply can't please all of the people all of the time. And bear in mind what Woody Allen once said about keeping your creative talent on task: "If you're not failing every now and again, it's a sign you're not doing anything very innovative." If it takes someone else's words to make that clear to you, so be it. Take note - and don't take it to heart.

The smart author will always make the most of the constructive criticism that comes his or her way and use it to refine their written output. They also know how to identify the less useful pieces of feedback and process them without feeling the need to hide under a duvet for a day. But how to do that exactly?

In this week's episode, James and Mark discuss strategies for dealing with criticism and feedback - a very timely discussion given James' feverish wait for feedback from his editor on the manuscript of what will hopefully be his first novel (you can read more about that [here](#)).

They are joined by author and psychologist, Dr. Debra Holland, whose professional insight into the issue adds an extra dimension to the discussion. As usual, there are plenty of tips to be had for both established authors as well as those, like James, who are looking to kick start their self publishing career.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- The process James has been going through with his first book.
- Getting into your reader's shoes. It's not so easy.
- How Mark approaches the task for writing the first draft.
- Choosing the right mindset about receiving editorial feedback.
- Mark's tips to make the best use of editorial feedback.
- Is there a difference between a developmental editor and a structural editor?
- James' blogging process of his book writing process.
- How Mark responded to his very first editorial feedback.
- Dealing with negative reviews on your book once it's published.
- Dr. Debra Holland (live interview at a conference).
- The difference in dealing with reviews on fiction and nonfiction books.
- How can authors deal with isolation and introversion.
- How beginning writers can join helpful writer's groups for support.
- Dealing with the uncertainties of the financial side of writing, psychologically.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- BOOK: The Story Grid
- [Scrivener](#)
- [Debra's website](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 35 from the Self-publishing Formula.

Woman intro: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blanch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Good evening Mark, how are you?

Mark: Tired, James.

James: I should say good evening, good morning, do the old ... Good morning, good evening, good night. Good morning. Truman wasn't it.

Mark: Frost?

James: No, no, no, no. Truman show.

Mark: Partridge?

James: Yeah, very Partridge. Yes we are at the end of the day. We are colossally busy, the pair of us, or three of us with John Dyer as well at the moment and so we're squeezing in a podcast chat where we can. You've been watching the football all night, I've been busy at school meetings but here we are.

We're going to do a couple of things in this episode. If you're following what's happening with my book, which is of course one of the reasons we do this podcast is market and experienced author who's making hay and I'm a wannabe so I want to get in to get a piece of that action so I've written my first book.

Last time we spoke I'd just finished it, gone off to the editor, and Mark and I thought we'd discuss this worrying about when the notes come back, how I'm going to react to that and mindset and what you should do with notes and criticism and so on.

To time with that we have an interview with an author, quite famous author actually, called Debra Holland who writes romance herself. She's also a counselor, she's written non-fiction books on grief but

she also thinks and writes a lot about the psychology of being an author, the psychology of being a writer. But what happened Mark between us deciding to talk about how you prepare for notes coming back from your editor and now, is it an e-mail drop tonight?

Mark: Yes, notes came back from your editor.

James: Notes have arrived back from my editor so we can talk a little bit about that but if I just take myself to where I was before that e-mail drops onto my iPhone earlier, and I think probably people obviously will be at different stages. I don't know. We don't survey our audience to that degree.

I don't know how many people have sent books off to editors in the past, how many people are used to that process, but I think there's a 1 and a 0 here. There's people who've never been through this process before, never used a professional editor, and there are those who are, like yourself, where you're used to using them, and to the fact that you've scaled down just how much you use editors now, don't you?

MY BOOK'S GONE TO A DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR TO GIVE ME THE BROAD, BRUSH STROKE CHANGES THAT SHE BELIEVES ARE NECESSARY TO MAKE THE BOOK. YOU PROBABLY DON'T DO THAT STAGE ANYMORE DO YOU?

Mark: No because I'm really good. No, I don't. I'm confident enough in how the book is structured and the kind of things that a developmental editor will pick up that I usually go straight to copy editing.

Although, saying that, the books I publish through Thomas and Mercer come with a full editorial package that includes developmental, then copy, then proofing at the end. It's not that long ago. In fact, it was just last month that I had a developmental edit from the same editor that I recommended for you.

James: Okay, Jennie who's given me my notes.

Mark: That's right, yup.

James: I actually have another offer of an editor, somebody who can be quite brutal and I'm currently working out what the best process is. I think probably is to implement what Jennie's given me and then

potentially get a second hearing from him as well.

Before I talk about Jennie's feedback to me, I've done a couple of things.

One is I've tried to, for the first time I've stepped back from my draft, which I was almost unable to do whilst I was writing it, which is silly really because you need to step back from it, you need to read it from a readers point of view and be objective about it but I didn't really push myself through that process or didn't find easy to do and I think that's just naivety and inexperience on my part.

The act of sending it off, the act of sending that e-mail and the days that followed I guess I stopped worrying about it, stopped thinking about it, and in that time started to really think of the things I thought weren't working with it.

I was mulling over, I'm using the [Story Grid](#), which is Shawn Coyne's book as my main reference in terms of educating me about how to create a story. I know there are a lot of other texts out there but it's the one I'm reading and using.

One of the things he talks about is some absolute musts for the type of book that I'm writing is that your protagonist must have an external desire but also a subconscious one. The external one's the obvious one you set up, they got to stop the ticking bomb and save the world, whatever it is.

The subconscious one is what they're really trying to do and even if by nature subconscious they're not aware of it. When I sent the book off I would have a rough idea of what my hero's subconscious desire was but three days after I sent it off I had a moment of absolute clarity and realized what his subconscious desire was. And it wasn't what I thought it was. So having clarified that in my mind, that informs the way that I would rewrite the book, not completely rewrite the book but the changes I would make.

For me, even before I got the notes back, I've been able to do something that I think you probably do all the time when you write now is to think about it from a reader's perspective and take that step back and think objectively that new writers, like me, don't know how that process works and don't know to do it.

Mark: Yeah, it's something that comes with experience. I've written more than 20 novels now so some of it is just something that's reflexive. I don't know the unconscious of it so those kinds of things just kind of happen. You could look at things, those kinds of motivations, as always very important.

Other things as well, even things like how the text looks on the page. I think white space is very important and I've seen, I've read through the comments that Jennie sent you and some of those changes that she has suggested will reduce the amount of text on the page and will increase the white space.

If you look at someone like James Patterson, there's a reason why he's the best-selling author in the world, at least I think he is. If you look at how his paragraphs are structured, very often they'll be 1 sentence paragraphs, they're very quick, staccato, and it just ushers the reader through the pages very quickly and that makes those books unputdownable, which is something that I try to emulate as well.

James: Again, that's something that obviously comes with experience. One of the things that I've been doing, I'm sure lots of people listening to this podcast do, is you wonder how you're supposed to structure some basic aspects.

For instance, if you've got two scenes going on at the same time and you want to cut between them, how actually you use that white space and what that looks like or whether it's best put into a separate chapter. I keep opening other people's novels all the time and looking at the basics of how they do that. Not everyone does it the same of course, and some people deliberately set out to play with those conventions but I think from where I am, I'm not interested in subverting the conventions at this stage. I'm interested in trying to understand them and nail them.

Let me take you back a bit then, you just mentioned you think a lot of this happened sort of subconsciously to you now. When you set out on a new book and you're writing at the moment, you don't have formed in your mind this is what the hero is going to want to physically do on the surface and this is below the surface what you think he's actually trying to do.

YOU DON'T CLARIFY THAT IN YOUR MIND BEFORE YOU START THE BOOK?

Mark: No, not normally. I know with Milton for example, I'm writing a John Milton book at the moment. His subconscious is always seeking atonement for the things that he's done in the past. That is his motivation. He does realize that it's not a subconscious thing for him. He does realize that's what he needs

to do.

That drives all of the books. It has done since the first one, and then in terms of the physical process through the book I'll have a start point and an end point mapped out usually and then I'll have scenes throughout the book that I now want to include and then as I'm writing those they'll propagate other ideas and other scenes will naturally follow them or proceed them.

I don't write chronologically, I write whatever the place, and often I'll write dialogue first. I might have a conversation between the two characters and just see where that goes within the structures of the plot, which can be reasonably sometimes but they'll usually be a direction they're heading for. That's a really good way just to jump in and out, just to our conversation and to see where that takes you.

James: You have a plot when you start that's effectively your starting point?

Mark: Usually. I usually have an idea. So for this one I wanted to, I mean no spoilers here, but I wanted Milton to be in prison in a country that he's not comfortable with. So it's set in the Philippines and he finds himself in an extremely dangerous prison in the south of the island.

The book is called Black Out, that's the title at the moment, and the conceit is he's an alcoholic. He's suffered from alcoholic black outs in the past. He wakes up in a hotel with a dead body and he doesn't remember how he got there, who she is, and he's basically then he's arrested and goes to prison. The rest of the book is unraveling of what's happened and then an accounting is Milton addresses the things that have been done to him and to other people in the book.

James: Okay. You don't know what they are when you start writing. You're a classic mixture I suppose of a plotter and a pantsier.

Mark: Probably more in the plotter. I'm kind of a pantsy plotter I suppose. I know pretty much. I know how he ended up there. I know the solution to the mystery. I know who's responsible for that, why they've done it.

What I'm not sure about is how Milton will escape from the prison and then how he will free himself from suspicion and then get revenge. I'm not entirely sure how that will play out and I usually just kind of feel my way towards that as I'm writing.

James: Let's move back to mindset then for this stage that we go through to get the book improved and to the point where it might stand a chance of commercial success. We immediately are confronted by the problem of having something that you've put a lot of hours into, that you feel quite vulnerable about, being criticized and poked about and lauded over by somebody else who you're paying for their privilege of doing that. I mean I have to say, Jennie was very kind in her e-mail and in her initial notes these are the positives, these are the areas we need to work on.

I've done quite a lot of thinking about it. As I said I've been able to step back from the novel since I sent it off and actually I pretty much predicted what she was going to say. It was almost the best case scenario for me that I wanted her to be able to say to me, "Do you know what? I think you can probably write a good book. This is a start."

I wanted her to be able to see the potential for being able to get a good book out of it.

The worst case scenario is that you can read between the lines of what she's written back to you is, "Good luck with your pet project but this is not going to make it." That wasn't the tone I got from her.

In terms of the detail, I absolutely love it. I love the fact that she's tightening things up and she's got fantastic, clear description for me and I can't wait to implement it. I don't know if I've surprised myself by having that attitude or whether it's because you've been telling me, and other people on Facebook have been telling me to prepare myself and get into the correct mindset.

I think a couple years ago, I probably would have reacted differently. Now I'm thinking this is a commercial endeavor. I want this book to make money, I've got an ambition, I've got a financial ambition for maybe the end of next year to be in some kind of profit with a series of books and therefore this is a business and I follow this and I do it and that's not where I was a few years ago.

Mark: The way to look at it is Hemingway I think said this, and I won't complete the quote because we'll lose our family friendly rating but it's basically the first draft of anything is S-H, etc. etc.. That's absolutely true and I feel the same way about my stuff most of the time.

The way to look at the editorial process, and it's my favorite part by miles and miles, I love editing, is everything that you improve in the process is making your novel better. It could be something large like a character is taken out or is introduced and you tighten up the pacing. Even just small things. I certainly don't recommend people fixate on this kind of stuff but sometimes changes to punctuation can speed a sentence.

Just hitting return to have shorter paragraphs as I mentioned earlier. Every one of those changes is making your book better. The trick at this point that you have to understand, and you'll get help with this from your editor and from me if you ask me, is you've got to know when it becomes marginal gains.

If you do start fixating and moving paragraphs and punctuation around then you've probably got to the stage where you've squeezed about as much worthwhile improvement out of it as you can and although subsequent changes are making improvements, they're incremental at that stage and it's probably time to step back, accept that it's finished, and then move on to whatever's next.

James: Yeah. I think it was attributed to Francis Fort Coppola who said about the film editing process, that a film is never completed it's just an abandoned project at some point. That's probably the same about any kind of long form piece of work, is at some point you have to start working on it and release it.

I've got myself into that mindset which I think is good. I'm still under confident about my ability to implement everything that she's suggested. The thought of problems that she's talking about, like getting the characters into a 3-dimensional zone, making them more complex, stopping them being automatons to you to doing what you want them to do to make the story work.

I know that there's quite a lot in that central section of the book that I need to work on but I am really looking forward to getting stuck into it. There's a deadline, which will work perfectly for me and I'm excited about it because I'm a deadline person.

FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS TO ME ON HOW TO MAKE BEST USE OF EDITING NOTES?

Mark: I would say go through them a couple of times, read them, maybe print them out. Take them somewhere else just sit down and muddle on them and then just start to dig into them. I would say probably still work in Scrivener.

I've read all the notes but if she's suggested significant structural changes than I would still work in Scrivener and then give Jennie a chat to compare between the two documents that you send her. Scrivener's power will be very useful if you need to make structural changes. Much more useful than using Word. I'd just say get the notes up on one screen, get the Scrivener file up on the other one and then just get into it. It's fun. It depends on who much has got to be done but it's an exciting process now.

You know as I said, every change you're making is taking something which is pretty good for a starting effort and improving it all the time. Hopefully by the end of it it'll be something that you can be proud of. Well, you should be proud anyway; you've written a novel. That's something very impressive.

What you want now is to make it as good as you can and then move on to the next one. At the end of the day, the first book is probably not going to be very good. My first book's terrible. There's glimmers of promise but it's pretty much awful, but it's 90,000 published words in the bank and the next 90,000 were better and then the next 90,000 were better, to the stage now where I'm confident that I'm a pretty good writer. People seem to enjoy reading my stuff and that kind of confidence gives you a lot of freedom and flexibility as you move forward with new projects.

James: Did I hear this correct?

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR AND A STRUCTURAL EDITOR, OR ARE THEY THE SAME THING?

Mark: Very similar. Very similar. I mean you basically look at, they're not looking at sentences, they're looking at bigger flow and characterization and pacing and those kinds of more structural facets of a novel.

The copy editor will get down into sentences that can be tightened, will pick up errors, and then when we get down to the proofreading, that's when they'll go over it one final time to make sure that your grammar's correct, that you don't have typos and all that kind of stuff.

One of the things I did notice, and I think you knew this, was something that you're going to suffer from is that you're missing a lot of words out of sentences.

James: Jennie, my editor's offered me a phone conversation to go through things, which I'm definitely taking her up on.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Probably on Thursday and she's referred to us, we'll discuss this on the phone and a few places in the notes. At some point I need to apologize to her because it was, in the normal run of events it wasn't fit to be sent to an editor just because it needed a proper read through. In fact, I printed it out after I sent it, started going through it with a red pen. I think on every page I found between 2 and 6 errors that needed correcting, but we have a deadline at the moment. You pushed me a lot in the last minute and that's how it is, so it'll be a lot better next time it goes.

I also think the fact that I had been thinking about it for 3 days almost felt like should I stop Jennie where she is and do a structural, a rewrite and then give it back to her? But natural fact this is the best way for me to find my way structurally is alongside her now. She's an expert, I'm paying her, and this is a learning experience for me. Hopefully an already positive one.

OBVIOUSLY, I'VE GIVEN MYSELF ANOTHER BACK BREAKING FEW WEEKS BUT THAT'S HOW I THRIVE, RIGHT?

Mark: Yup. It's busy. I know it's hard work but it's sometimes, it's a bit cliché, but you apply pressure to coal and diamonds can appear sometimes. There you go. The moment you're in love with coal, James. I see potential.

James: I've got you on tape saying that. If you're interested in this process, if you're in the same place as me and you're interested how the editing process is going to work on a particular novel, in this case mine, I am in the process of blogging it in detail.

I've already done one which describes where the book came from, how I got to where I am now and a bit more about the writing process ramming up to the why to get it into edit. Then a bit about, number 3 will

be about preparing mindset for the notes.

What I'm going to do with this, and I haven't actually got to it yet, but it will be done in the next couple of weeks, is there will be this manuscript, which will be available, including Jennie's notes. I've got a slight problem because I need to work out how to remove her surname from it. Her surname will be released at some point she said, but at the moment she's swamped with work so she just wants to be known as Jennie. I think that is quite, I mean obviously I think a reasonably brave thing of me to do, to put out a substandard early draft but I think for people who want to read the book, forget it, leave it and you can read it next year.

However, if you're interested in learning. If you're writing a novel now and you wonder what's going to happen at the end of it and what you should be thinking about now, I think this will be a really useful exercise. I don't know how many people have done this before, to publish the early drafts with the notes to see how it progresses into the final thing.

I'm going to go ahead and do that and when it's set up I'll give you the details. If you want to read the first entry of the blog, if you go to our website, selfpublishingformula.com, you will see under blogs that James little blog is there. Can't work out exactly what we're going to call it because we're actually recording this on the day that works being done but it'll be there for you to have a look at.

DID YOU REACT BADLY THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE TOLD YOU THAT SOMETHING YOU'D WRITTEN NEEDED TO BE CHANGED?

Mark: It's hard to remember. It's so long ago now. I mean it was 2000 when my first one was published so that was traditionally published. The full editorial process was included.

I don't think I did forget but I think I was excited like you are because I know that, it's almost legitimizing when you start to work with professionals as a first time writer. The only praise you might have had is from close friends and family, which you can basically discount because in your mind you will think, "Yeah, they're bound to say that because they're my wife or they're my husband," or whatever the relationship between you and the reviewer is.

But when you start to get input from people you have a commercial relationship with, not an emotional one, that it's an exciting moment because you will naturally take their criticism, either positive or

negative, you'll take onboard more easily than you would from somebody else.

I remember at the time I was getting praise from people who had read my stuff but I think one of them was my fiancée at the time. I kind of ignored that. Friends as well said it was good but I didn't really believe it.

It was only when an agent got involved and then an editor. It was like okay so perhaps I can write a bit. That's encouraging. I remember it being very very good for motivation so I went into kind of a super manic, almost blatching, made a word up there by the way. An almost blatching, splurge of creativity. Just basically wrote another book in 3 months, which actually now come to think of it, I do that all the time now.

At the time I actually made myself sick from working too hard, but it was just driven by the fact that I was working with professional people who I took more seriously because they were professional rather than friends or acquaintances.

James: Okay. Let's move on to the thicker skin that you need to grow, even thicker than receiving notes from a paid professional, and that is the random comments of people who bought your book, for whatever reason reacted badly and then leave a review, negative review.

HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THEM AS YOU SET OUT IN YOUR CAREER AND HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THAT NOW?

Mark: It used to bother me massively. I used to refresh my author page obsessively. Almost as much as I refreshed my sales page. A review would come in and a good one would make me euphoric and a bad one would put me in a funk for hours afterwards and I'd take it very very personally.

These days I don't check very often. I'm not bothered by, I mean it's always wonderful to get good reviews and thankfully I get more good review than I do bad ones by quite a way but I still get bad reviews all the time. I still get 1 star reviews.

The ones that bother you the most are the 1 star ones but their actually taking the time to write 4 or 5 paragraphs about what was wrong with the book. It bugs me a bit but not really that much. I've had I don't

know how many reviews now, probably 10,000 over the course over all of my books and you just have to take the rough with the smooth.

Bad reviews you can learn a lot from them. A case in point. When I started writing I'd given Milton a gun that wasn't accurately described or he used it in a way that you couldn't use it, or even worse there's a safety on a gun that doesn't have a safety.

If you look back at the early reviews for the Cleaner and Saint Death, you'll see reviews from gun aficionado's in the States especially just basically laying into me for being an uneducated palm, and not knowing that the stuff that I was professing to know. It's a completely legitimate criticism because I'm selling myself as a writer of books involving guns and gun play and action and all this kind of stuff. I was getting a fairly fundamental part wrong so if they can't trust me on that, they can't trust me on anything.

That's something I don't have a problem with now because I've got people who I refer to for help when I'm not sure about something. I wouldn't necessarily have realized that I was making those kinds of errors without those 1 stars. You can find good, useful information from reviews that at first blush might make you want to stop and never write again.

James: There are two different ways of reacting.

One is to be annoyed or upset by it to the point where you would avoid reading it and the second is just to embrace it. Is there anything of value you can extract out of it and if there isn't, ignore it, and if there is.

You're very good at that I think anyway. We've had in our business lives, we get occasionally challenged by something that appears very snotty and rude and you're the one out of the 3 of us that takes, maybe the lawyer approach. The very calm kind of yeah they've got a point, we need to change, and John and I are saying let's take these people to the cleaners. I think that's a good thing. That's a very positive thing.

I'm not sure everybody has it built in and it can be distressing, I think, for authors and it can end careers for some authors.

THEY JUST NEVER REALLY GET USED TO THAT CRITICISM, THEY FEEL VULNERABLE AND ASSAULTED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE RUDE ABOUT THEIR WORK.

Mark: You don't have to go back too far to remember. I mean Steve Fry is a good example. People may or may not remember this but he was in a play called Cell Mates in the west end of London, probably 10 or maybe even 15 years ago. He got very bad reviews on his opening night and he basically did a runner and he ended up in Belgium.

Obviously there are other reasons why, I think he's bipolar, didn't help when it came to that, but I think one of the reasons he said he felt that way was because he felt personally assaulted by this litany of bad reviews. It's not unusual.

I've seen dozens of authors lose their rag over that kind of thing, but you just have to get over it. It isn't personal. Those people probably, almost certainly, 99.9% of the time don't know who you are. They wouldn't know who you were if you walked down the street. You can't take it to heart, you just have to take it on the chin, get anything useful out of it if you can and then just forget about it and move on.

James: Great. Okay.

LET'S HEAR FROM A PROFESSIONAL ON THESE MATTERS, DEBRA HOLLAND.

Debra: I'm Doctor Debra Holland and I am a psychotherapist and I'm also an author. I have some nonfiction books. One is the Essential Guide to Grief and Grieving and I also write fiction. I'm most well known for my sweet historical western romances, The Montana Sky series.

James: Debra let's start with the mixture of you being an expert in psychotherapy, a doctor of psychotherapy, and also an author.

THAT'S GIVEN YOU AN INSIGHT INTO PERHAPS THE MIND OF THE AUTHOR AND SOME OF THE STRESS AND THE STRAINS THAT GO ALONG WITH WRITING.

Debra: Right. It's often a very isolated career where in our cave, wherever that may be, writing, and we might not have a lot of contact with the public, which we might be very comfortable with. Many authors are introverts and that's fine until you have to go to a conference or be speaking or a book signing or something like that.

I think one of the big stresses is that very creative people and that creative part of us is also, can be sensitive. When we put all this time and effort into birthing our creation, our child so to speak, goes out into the world and then it is criticized and judged and that's very hard for us to have that kind of thick skin to let people go okay, you're baby has these and these and these problems or I don't like it. That's one of the unique stresses.

I think the other one is just the uncertainties of the financial situation. We don't have the regular paycheck that comes every week or every 2 weeks or every month. Royalties can be up and down. If you're traditionally published maybe you only get paid a few times a year and you don't know what that payment is going to be so how can you live this day to day life? How can you project when it's going to be a good year or when it's going to be a bad year. Financial stress is one of the biggest stresses that we have.

James: Those are really interesting areas. Let's break them down a little bit and talk first of all about the creative aspect, the courage it takes to create something, put it out there. You're going to be scared about what people think and most of us are probably under confident about ourselves and our writing and probably think is it horrible? I don't know, still waiting to hear, but it's a bit like anything. Cooking a meal for people and you sit down and you're a little bit sensitive. If somebody says oh I don't know ...

Debra: Especially if you put your heart into that.

James: Yeah, your kids make some offhand comment about it and you snap at them and that's the same thing in a way because you put yourself out there a little bit and you're sensitive.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE? HOW DO WE GROW THAT THICK SKIN OR SHOULD WE JUST ALLOW THE SENSITIVITY TO WORK?

Debra: I think it's both. It's a little different when it's your kids because it's not necessarily public. When we put a book out there, the reviews are public. Everybody can see that.

It can be public humiliation and I think that we're not going to necessarily become less sensitive. People who are sensitive, that's just who they are. What they can do is to learn not to take things personally. It's not so much as growing a thicker skin as it is in letting everybody have their own experience of your work and hopefully you'll have the positive reviews as well as the negative ones and that you focus on the positive.

We tend to focus on the negative. That one person who gave us that low review.

James: Every author seems to do that. I see people who will circulate a negative comment.

THEY'VE HAD 50 POSITIVE COMMENTS ON THAT BOOK BUT THEY'LL CIRCULATE THE ONE NEGATIVE COMMENT TO SAY LOOK WHAT SOMEONE SAID.

Debra: Right. It's either don't look at your reviews at all which a lot of people, authors will do. I personally look at my reviews. I think it does give you good feedback. I think you'll find what your readers like and maybe what some of the weaknesses are of your books. If your readers tend to sort of tell things.

For my readers they like the time and the place. It's historical Montana and so my readers say she gives me a sense of, I see the scenery, I see the details, and I get review after review so I need to make sure that I continue to do that because that's what my readers want. If I have a reader that's saying oh you've got too much of this, maybe I need to step back and say do I? Maybe they're right, maybe they're not.

James: You mustn't take every comment to heart, but it can give you some feedback.

Debra: If you have a few that are saying the same thing, then I think it's fine to step back. Again, you're not beating yourself up, you're just saying is there some truth in this that I need to look at? Is there a way, because no writers going to be absolutely perfect, and it's always a learning experience. We should, as authors, continue to grow, continue to learn our craft.

James: There's no firm advice there in terms of do read the reviews or don't read the reviews. You're saying it is up to you and what's going to work for you.

Debra: Right, and you need to see. If you read reviews and it totally throws you off your game and you're upset for days and you're maybe beating yourself up or crawling under a rock or something then you have to not read your reviews.

If you can step back, and I think that is, for me I noticed it was a process. Those first negative reviews definitely were harder for me than they are now. Now I sort of look at it and shrug and go oh whatever, but I also have so many reviews that I think a review is going to be lost. The positive ones are going to way outweigh it so I can just sort of shrug my shoulders and go whatever.

James: You write nonfiction and fiction. Is there a difference because criticism of nonfiction is potentially more serious, particularly in the scientific field whereas nonfiction everybody's got a view and you are going to get mixed views.

ARE THEY DIFFERENT FOR YOU?

Debra: For me I've been very blessed because all my nonfiction reviews are positive, which feels very good because that's why I wrote the book. I wrote the book to help people who are grieving, and whatever the loss was, whether it was bereavement or loss of a job, or lost of a marriage, that they can read my book and understand what they were going through and it could help them, so to see a positive review makes me have that feeling of I did it. I helped this person. They are saying in their review that this has changed in their life and that's so gratifying.

James: We talked also about the isolation of writing and the uncertainty that comes with a freelance career, where you're not really sure about your income.

IN TERMS OF ISOLATION, ACTUALLY THIS IS PROBABLY A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A WAY TO COMBAT ISOLATION, A CONFERENCE LIKE NINC.

Debra: Right. I've already had writers coming up to me and telling me that it's hard for them. It's hard for them to approach me perhaps because I do tend to be more well known and so they say, "I wanted to meet you but I didn't want to intrude" and I'm like this is what it's for.

Come up to authors. We're all in this together. There's nothing wrong with it. It's that oh I'm introverted and this is hard for me. There's all these people and it's sort of overwhelming because the room is full of people. It's like just go up, one person at a time, introduce yourself, ask them what they write, ask them what they like to read because we all like to read. We have that in common. We all write. We have that in common. It's not like a party where you can up to a person and not have anything in common with them.

James: With NINC you have to be published and you have to have a certain limit of sales or you have to

be traditionally published so NINC does seem to be a conference and organization that's more for people who are further along the path, their not necessarily beginners.

FOR SOMEBODY WHO WRITES FROM WHO, LIVES THAT CLASSIC, SLIGHTLY ISOLATED WORKING ENVIRONMENT, WHAT ARE GOOD TIPS FOR THEM?

Debra: Definitely go online and find writers groups. If you have some local ones, sometimes you might have to look and find local writers groups. You have to be careful because if it's a writers group that's all beginners or some of the people like poetry, or in my cases genre fiction can be very much looked down on.

If I go into a group and everyone's going it's not literary, that's going to be very hard on me because they're going to be putting down what I write, so be careful where you go and who the composition of the group is.

Try to find other writers who are writing the same kind of thing you write and that there's a level of expertise. There can be other beginners but make sure it's not the blind leading the blind and that you can form wonderful relationships online with people that you never ever meet. One of my critique partners, we've never met in all these years that we've been together.

James: That's one of the great empowering aspects of the modern digital age is being able to have those relationships. Okay, and finally the uncertainty of the financial side. This goes beyond authoring. I've had freelance careers in my media experience before and it is hard. You don't really know when the work's coming and some months are good, some months are not good.

WE KNOW THAT PRACTICAL TIPS ABOUT PUTTING SOME MONEY ASIDE AND ETC. BUT FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW, HOW DO YOU TELL PEOPLE TO COPE WITH THAT?

Debra: I think part of it is that awareness that it is going to be uncertain. I know when self-publishing first became very popular a lot of people, including myself, who had not sold books before all of a sudden have this income. And maybe it's a bigger income than they've ever had before and so what they did is they went out and bought big extravagant gifts or they bought a house that they didn't stop to think about what happens if this goes down.

Part of it is your own psychological way of looking at money and at looking at the future and that part of it

has to be yes live now as well as plan for the future. Enjoy the good royalties but also plan to live as what would happen if they dropped. It's your own thinking and your own awareness of oh a shiny thing I want to go buy because now I have money to do that.

James: That's pretty much me. Anything Apple release I have to buy.

Debra: You have to buy the toys. Part of it maybe is okay if I'm going to buy the toy I'm also going to take that same amount of money and put it into savings or making sure that the debts are paid off, making sure that you've got some investment money so that it's not all about royalties. Do you have an income someplace else that you're doing some investing as well?

James: There's an old poker expression about not playing with scared money, so you should always play poker when it doesn't matter if you lose.

IF YOU'RE WRITING BECAUSE YOU'RE DESPERATE THAT THIS HAS GOT TO PAY THE BILLS, THAT'S NOT A GOOD PLACE TO BE.

Debra: That's life. It's not just about writing and it's not just about money, it's about anything. It's like you don't make decisions out of fear because fear, most of the time, is all in our heads. It's something that we've conjured up and as writers especially we have these very vivid imaginations so we can vividly imagine this horrible thing that makes us afraid.

Then we make a decision based on this thing that might never ever come true but it feels very real in our heads and when our brain has a very vivid picture and it makes our body react. Like our heart will speed up or you're short of breath, that tells your brain that this is really real and then you have the emotions about it that makes it feel very real. Your brain has a hard time distinguishing between your fantasy in your head and reality.

James: Now that's something writers have that not many other people have.

Debra: I say this is the good side is a creative imagination is that you can put it into your books. The bad side is that creative imaginations makes you create fear fantasies in your mind. A lot of times it's the other way.

I'll be working with somebody and I start to hear what their fear fantasy is and they're not a writer perhaps. I might not know anything about them and I say that, are you a creative person? Most of the time they'll say yes and they'll say oh I like to do this or I like to make this and sometimes they'll say no and then I actually might probe a little.

Really, well what do you work on? What do you with hobbies? Then their creativity might be in motors. They are really good at putting motors and a particular part in doing something new with that motor or whatever, that they don't think of as creative but they can imagine it in their heads and make it happen. It's, again, there's the imagination. I help them see that imagination, which is so good for you with making new motors, is handicapping you here.

James: So, Debra, who's written on grief and other matters of psychology and thinks a lot about the author's life, I thought some really useful advice there, Mark, about, as we talked about earlier in terms of the criticism, either taking it on board or potentially avoiding it if it's something that's just not going to work for you.

She also talked about the financial pressures when you run your own business and you rely on income from the work that you're doing and how you deal with that. I thought very good of Debra to talk to us about that and it's an important subject for people listening.

You seem to be quite a sorted kind of guy in those terms. I think you're quite sensible with money and so on.

YOU'RE NOT SOMEBODY WHO'S EVER BEEN VERY STRESSED ABOUT THE FINANCIAL SITUATION?

Mark: No, never. I always live pretty much within my means. Even when I started doing quite well in 2014 I probably could have left the job that we were both at, at the time, in January 2014. I was certainly making the same kind of money as I was in my day job but I waited until November because I wanted to ensure that the money was consistent and I could sustain it over the course of 12 months.

At it turned out money was kind of doubling every month almost to the extent that by the end of it I was making about 10times more than I was in the day job. I couldn't really put that off anymore but I am

actually quite cautious. I've got 2 kids, I'm married, I've got a mortgage, those kinds of things need to be respected, so yeah I'm fairly careful.

James: Lots of people, 2 kids and a mortgage, aren't cautious but it is a reason perhaps to be so, but how you deal with those. I thought that was very interesting from Deborah Holland, an author herself.

I think that's it. Oh yes I will just say that the blog that I mentioned earlier that I'm writing about the book is also available at selfpublishingformula.com. You can follow along the process of getting my first novel to some kind of fit state to release, and then you can follow in the next 2 or 3 years as I overtake Mark and become the doyen of the thriller writing year. Thought I'd make a lame attempt at banter.

Mark: Aim high. Aim low.

James: I've set out my exact financial aims in one of my blogs so I am doing everything. I'm laying myself bare here, but that's part of this process.

Mark: I warned you about that.

James: Yes. I am, again, just to reiterate, fully clothed. Thank you Mark.

Mark: Thank you James.

James: We'll see you next week.

CHAPTER 33

WORKING WITH YOUR SPOUSE AS AN AUTHOR BUSINESS TEAM - WITH NATASHA BOYD AND CHARLOTTE BYRD



WORKING with your spouse may not be your idea of a perfect work environment, but many authors are discovering it's a natural next step once success comes knocking on their door. If you've listened to the Self Publishing Formula you know that Mark and James often speak of the real work it is to become self-supporting as an author. It's a reality that our guests on this episode have come to realize - and they've enlisted help in sharing the workload. In both cases, their husbands have come on board the business bus to help with marketing, launches, and more. On this episode, you'll hear from successful authors Natasha Boyd and Charlotte Byrd as well as their husbands, their new partners in business.

IF YOU'VE CONSIDERED WORKING WITH YOUR SPOUSE, THIS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGING.

Today's episode features two successful self-published authors who are not only making a living via their writing but are also clearing enough income on a monthly basis to enable their husbands to quit their 9 to 5 jobs and come on board as part of the business team. You'll hear the struggles and the triumphs involved

in making that kind of transition and why both couples feel it was the best move they could have made on a number of different levels.

THE BUSINESS SIDE OF BEING AN AUTHOR CAN EASILY SWALLOW UP THE TIME NEEDED FOR WRITING.

That is exactly why Natasha and Charlotte - successful writers and businesswomen in their own rights - have decided to bring their husbands into their writing businesses as full partners. Both discovered that they simply weren't having the time to produce the great books their fans had become accustomed to because they were too busy figuring out how to market, build email lists, interact with fans and everything else that goes into building a business as an author. You can hear their stories and get insight from their husbands about what it's been like to come alongside their wives to create an even more effective business.

IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL LIVING THROUGH WRITING.

If you've always wanted to be a writer but have wondered if it's really possible to make a living doing it, the answer is a clear and emphatic "YES!" But... you have to understand that it doesn't happen simply by writing a great book, putting it on Amazon, and watching the money come in. Charlotte can attest to that approach not working out, which is why she's taken the time to learn what it takes to build a business that promotes and supports her writing.

A SUCCESSFUL WRITING CAREER DEPENDS ON MORE THAN A TALENT WITH WORDS.

The self-publishing space is becoming more crowded by the day which means that authors with genuine talent are becoming more and more common. How do you stand out? How do you find the fan base that can support your writing full time? It's through the business side of a writing career - through marketing, sales, list building, and much more. Listen in as James chats with two successful authors who are just as committed to making the business side of things work as they are writing excellent novels.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Why Mark recommends Facebook LIVE to connect with readers.
- Who does Mark's business stuff for him?
- Natasha Boyd's self publishing journey.
- How Natasha got an agent so early on in her career.
- What Natasha has come to understand about writing faster (or not).
- Natasha's husband Stephen has joined her business through marketing.
- Why Natasha views her writing as a career and business.
- Introduction to Charlotte Byrd and the launch of her career as a writer.

- How Charlotte's husband has gotten involved in the business.
- The reality of a substantial living through a writing business.
- How the family business is a throwback to the past.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.natashaboyd.com
- www.charlotte-byrd.com

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast #36 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Announcer: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Mark, you're almost in your brand new office, your man cave that you've created for yourself in Salisbury, but not quite yet?

Mark: Not quite yet. I'm actually at home right now, because I'm waiting for a delivery from the States for a funky new camera that will allow me to do Facebook live streaming even more effectively than taking out my phone and using that. They tried to deliver it once. It wasn't accepted, so now I'm waiting again. It's one of those, "We'll be with you between 7:00 and 7:00." Something like that.

James: "We'll be with you between the 1st and the 30th of the month."

Mark: Yeah, hopeless.

James: Well, I'm interested to see this camera. It is something that we talk about in terms of author/reader engagement.

You really started your Facebook live with your readers, didn't you? You've been using them with SPF quite a lot now.

SOMETHING YOU'D RECOMMEND AS A WAY OF KEEPING YOUR READERS ENGAGED?

Mark: Yeah, definitely. It's great. It's a cheap reach. You don't need to pay. It's all free. You don't need to spend to boost it or turn it into an ad. You get really high organic reach. I do it quite a lot. I'm going to try with this new camera, if I have a little studio set up in the new office. I'll be able to hop on and do regular Q & A's and things like that, for both my readers and for SPF listeners as well.

James: I think we're all up for some hardware recommendations and solutions to stuff, so you'll have to talk to us about it in the future. We'll obviously see the results, and see if this is something that I might even play with.

Mark: Yeah, you like your gadgets. I think it'll be right up your street.

James: Good. Okay, here's a question for you, Mark.

DO YOU DO ALL YOUR BUSINESS STUFF YOURSELF? DOES YOUR WIFE HELP YOU AT ALL? DO YOU HAVE ANYBODY ELSE HELPING YOU?

Mark: Mostly me, to be honest. The writing side of things, I've got a VA. She helps me with some, quite small bits and pieces. Then, on the other side of things, what we do ... It's obviously a little bit different. For the actual writing side of things, I do it myself. Though, I can see the benefits of having help when needed.

James: How about Mrs. Dawson? It's a bit of an old-fashioned model, isn't it? I think I allude to this in a minute in our interviews, but the reason I'm asking these questions is ... The almost Victorian/Edwardian level here, in that you start a business and it's your family, you know. Dawson & Son, or Mr. & Mrs. Dawson running the shop, and so on.

The reason we're talking about this is because there seems to be quite an increasing number of authors who have just got to that breakthrough point of making money, making a decent salary, enough for them and their other half to live on, that they have suddenly employed their other half. We've got two interviews in a

row here.

Mark: Yeah, I can give you a couple more actually. Joanna Penn has retired her husband, to work on her business; and Adam Croft has retired his wife. There are few people who get in that fortunate position now. I think as you say, it does allow people to bring in very helpful, valuable assistance without needing to, effectively to bring them on payroll. They're kind of already on the payroll. If it can be done, it's a great idea.

James: These two interviews that we've put together ... They are Charlotte Byrd, who's referred to as Kate - because that's her real name - a few times in the interview. Charlotte's her author name, who we caught up with in California a few weeks ago. Before that, Natasha Boyd. Natasha actually lives in Atlanta, but she came down to Florida to see us.

We've put these interviews together for two reasons. One is that they both employ their other half, their husbands, to do the work. Natasha's husband is still in a full-time job, but it's sort of related field. Although, there's no doubt in the future that might be ... I don't think his employers would like to hear this, so I mustn't speak on his behalf. He certainly didn't say anything to me. Get myself out of trouble here. But you can imagine in the future if Natasha's income doubles or triples from where it is now, they may revisit that.

Charlotte's husband has quit his job, and is now her marketing person. He is also writing his own book.

The other reason I put these two interviews together is for someone like me, who's starting off and has financial ambitions in their mind of where they want to be in a couple of years. These two authors have both, in the last 12 - 18 months cracked it.

They've gone from a few hundreds a month, not even that sometimes, to regular 5 figures or nearly 5 figures. In their cases, to turn in a salary that means they are living off their writing, and actually accumulating some wealth through it as well. That real breakthrough. They're both at the beginning of that, which is absolutely fantastic. I thought it was really worth hearing these two interviews together. We're going to hear from Charlotte in a moment, but first Natasha.

Natasha: My name's Natasha Boyd, and I write contemporary romance mainly. I'm obviously from the UK originally, but I live in Atlanta now with my husband. I started in 2013. I was friends with some authors online, and so when I was getting ready to publish, just decided to immediately self-publish. I was contacted by an agent very soon after, about two weeks later; and was convinced that we should try and sell it traditionally, which I wasn't quite sure about.

James: What was your thinking about self-publishing at that point? A lot of people, when they start out, they don't know a lot about self-publishing. They still look at it as being a fall back if they don't get a deal.

YOU THOUGHT ABOUT SELF-PUBLISHING FROM THE BEGINNING.

Natasha: Yes, right away. I had some friends who were already self-publishing. I was in a lot of author forums, and there was a lot of talk amongst people in my genre about leaving the traditional field. They were losing control of a lot of aspects that they could see other people gaining control of: cover, and prices, and all those kinds of things.

When it came time to do it, I had a professional cover designer that I knew. I knew a professional editor. I was like, "Why don't I just do it myself? Why wouldn't it be better to put my book up in the court of public opinion, as opposed to throwing it at gatekeepers and that kind of thing?" I'd already entered some contests, and I'd finaled in one. I felt confident that that was the thing that would suit me best.

My agent decided that it really would be a great thing for a traditional publishing deal. The answer came back from one of the large big five, that they didn't think they could break my book out any more than it had been. At that point, I'd sold 25,000 copies; but I went on to sell almost 100,000 copies.

James: It just demonstrates right there how that gatekeeper system is broken.

Natasha: Yes, absolutely. My agent was fantastic actually. She said, "Look, let's just sell foreign rights." That's what she focused on, and we ended up actually in an auction in Germany that went to six figures. I feel very confident that I made the right choice for me, and that I've somehow managed to really straddle very well the indie publishing side in this country and then the foreign rights.

I would say the only massive mistake, I still think that I probably made was we did end up selling English

rights in the UK and Commonwealth. My thought process there was to maybe have more print books. I've had readers email me with a picture from the book in the airport book shop in Kuala Lumpur and those sort of places, and I'm like, "Oh, I'm really penetrating the world market."

But I don't see evidence of those sales from a traditional publishing house. Also when it comes time to doing any kind of marketing, you're basically trying to market the same product two different ways without any control in the other countries, and it became a disaster. I could say to anybody, keep your English rights. Just focus on selling foreign rights where necessary, Germany being one of the best countries to start.

James: I think Mark does a very similar thing, in terms of foreign rights, go through a trad kind of deal, but yeah, English rights he keeps. I want to take you back a little bit, the agent bit. I'm thinking, from my point of view, and other points of view of other people listening to this.

HOW DO YOU GET AN AGENT SUDDENLY, RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER? HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

Natasha: I was really lucky actually. I was actually contacted by two agents about two weeks after I published, because the book was doing quite well. I ended up signing with one of them. She was very convincing and very enthusiastic about my work. It was clear she had actually read the book from start to finish, and the other agent who contacted me had sort of dabbled in reading it.

James: Did you have a quiz ready for them?

Natasha: No.

James: On page 97 ... What does Arthur say to Sean?

Natasha: It took me so by surprise, and I felt very gratified and validated, I guess. You can't help, in this publishing world, still come up against the people who don't understand why somebody would self-publish and not traditionally publish. To have things like an agent and those ... It's really vanity, is all I can say, in some respects. Except that when they do things like sell foreign rights and really work like a partner and team with you. Then it works really well.

James: Okay. Tell me a little bit about the writing though.

2013, WAS THAT LITERALLY YOUR FIRST BOOK?

Natasha: Yes, that was literally my first book.

James: Why did you start?

Natasha: I always wanted to write. I think everybody says that, or actually, probably 90% of people say that.

We had moved, and I didn't know anyone in the new place we were living. It was a very inspirational place. It was by the coast. I just sat down and started writing. Then I actually met two authors who live on the island where we were. There's a big writer's group that's there.

James: Which island is this?

Natasha: Hilton Head Island, so near Savannah. Really, they were all very encouraging. I thought, "Gosh, if I'm going to go for it, I'm going to go for it." That's how that started.

James: Okay, so there was this seed there before, but you were in the right place at the right time. You wrote your book.

HOW DID YOU WRITE YOUR BOOK? DRAFT IT, REDRAFT IT? WRITE IT THE FIRST TIME? DID YOU PLAN IT? ARE YOU A PANTSER, AS THEY CALL IT?

Natasha: I am a pantsner, but I went through so many revisions, it's unbelievable. I think I sat on it for six months rewriting, giving it to critique partners, giving it to an editor, agonizing. I think I said to my husband at one point, "Look, when this goes live, if a hundred people buy it, we're going out for dinner." Which I thought would take forever.

James: How many sales later is that now?

Natasha: We've just crossed 100,000 sales for that book.

James: Congratulations.

Natasha: This is the deal. I really feel like there are a lot of writers who are extremely prolific, and I'm very envious of that. I've sort of agonized myself. If I could write a little faster, I could do more.

What I've really come to understand is everyone writes at their own pace, and you've got to do what works for you. What is important to me is making a living from my writing.

Some of the people you've had on your podcast, actually, who've sold millions. It's really inspiring, but it does sometimes feel a little bit out of reach for the average writer. But it is really possible to do very well and have a career without getting to that point. Not saying that I don't want to get to that point.

James: You sold 100,000. You say a career.

YOU CAN GIVE US THE FIGURES IF YOU WANT, OR YOU DON'T HAVE TO; BUT WHAT SORT OF WORK LEVEL SALARY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?

Natasha: Well, I'm fine being honest. I mean, the tax guy knows what I make. I'm severely disorganized, so I just did our taxes for 2015. For the second year in a row, I've just cleared six figures.

James: That's a decent salary.

Natasha: Yes, yes. It's not millions, and it's not six figures per month, like some people. There's highs and lows. You have amazing months and you have low months. Certainly, when you're doing foreign rights, you have the signing advance that comes in. Then you get the royalties at six month intervals. Yes, it's up and down, but if you can look at it over the long haul, it's extremely doable; very accessible to the average writer.

James: Well, I think from my point of view, and from a lot of people who are starting out, this is a more inspirational interview actually than listening to somebody who, as you say, makes millions; because you've gone through the steps. It's been, I'm sure, a hard task. We'll talk about that in a moment, but here you are, a couple of years later and you've got \$100,000 income from it.

Natasha: Right, exactly.

James: As long as you pay your taxes.

Natasha: Yes, that's before tax.

James: Schools don't pay for themselves right. Okay.

Natasha: Yeah.

James: Stephen is patiently standing next to you. Your husband, who's taking over the marketing, as we go forward. Let me talk to you then about the marketing. Obviously, you had your book, you thought about trad, but you came back and decided you were going to stick with self-publishing. Then you sit there with a blank bit of paper in front of you, thinking how do I sell the book.

HOW DID YOU START THAT?

Natasha: I was lucky in that I had some PR background. I realized that if people don't talk about your book, you're not going to sell any. My first point of entry for marketing was to try and get the book in front of influencers. Whatever those are for a particular person.

If you're writing a traditional book, I would say your local community influencers. For me, being in romance, it was online book bloggers. It really was a numbers game. They didn't know me from a hole in the wall. I just sent a lot of emails, made sure that they were personalized. I did a lot of research on what their real names were, cross referencing across social media and Twitter accounts.

James: Normal kind of stalking behavior.

Natasha: Yes, exactly, exactly, without the crazy eyes. It really did pay off, but it's work. This whole business that we're in. It was very clear, very early on, that writing the book was a very small part of it. I will say that as the market has changed, and certainly in romance, become more saturated; we've had to work a lot harder and spin our wheels a lot faster. Mark actually came into my life at a great time.

I had just published my third full-length book, and had lots of excitement from readers on my mailing list. Then the sales didn't reflect that. They were still fantastic and on a par with my first one, but it felt like you should grow your readership with each subsequent book.

I would have people email me a month later saying, "Oh, did you ever release your book?" I was realizing that I wasn't reaching these people. They couldn't see it. If they weren't on my mailing list, they were gone. The first book wasn't working, I wasn't reaching them; and Mark Dawson floated through my News Feed.

James: You were organically using social media at that point?

Natasha: Exactly.

James: Which, obviously as we now know, is quite limited. They've kind of tweaked the algorithms so that it's limited, and you have to pay.

Natasha: Exactly, and this was early days, and it was becoming very clear, very early on, that you needed to target and focus.

James: Mark turned up, dressed in white on a horse ...

Natasha: Galloping across my timeline.

James: You got into Facebook advertising, I'm guessing?

Natasha: I did, I did. I dabbled, and what I realized very quickly was there was a lot of information to learn; and I have a very, very short attention span. I quickly tried to persuade Stephen, since he's in marketing. I was like, "Please do this course for me, and I will somehow, by osmosis, take it out of your head."

In the end, he's now become more proficient at it than I have. Not everybody, obviously, has that partner, but I would say the information is unbelievable. I mean, just the dabbling that I did with some of the early modules and getting started, which was fantastic. Right away you can get started. It really made a huge difference.

James: You started with Facebook advertising, but you were selling okay before then. Just organically, at that point?

Natasha: Yes, just organically, but with a lot of just online relationships.

James: You were working hard, and with your PR background, etc.

Natasha: That takes away from writing time, a lot.

James: That is time intensive. Then you started Facebook advertising.

DID THAT MAKE AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT OR TAKE A WHILE TO GET GOING?

Natasha: It did take a while. Where it really made an impact, was when I switched to what Mark was suggesting, to start building the mailing list that way first. That's when I saw the huge difference. Right now, we're at the stage of we're boxing up a couple of my books. Our next big project is to market the box set on Facebook advertising.

James: What's your mailing list at?

Natasha: Right now, it's grown from 3 1/2 thousand, so not that many compared to some people; but for me, fantastic. It's grown to about 58, almost 6,000 thousand since March, since I've started doing all the various things.

I'll tell you what's really helped, is that I gave away the first book for free from a mailing list, before I went permafrees, which I've only just done recently. What I also did, is I offer - immediately after people get that- they get an email from me, telling them how valuable the book is. What I mean by that is, "Before you take your free book and run, it's won an award, it's sold 100,000 copies, it's my highest selling book; but I'm giving it to you for free, because I'm taking a chance that you're going to love it. You're taking a chance on me; I'm taking a chance on you."

James: You spell this out?

Natasha: I spell this out.

James: That's great.

Natasha: I say ...

James: Here's the deal, basically.

Natasha: Yeah, here's the deal. My second book is not free, but I know you're going to love book one, and I've got kids to feed.

James: It's at 400 bucks.

Natasha: It's \$4. What you can do, is if you love it, I will give you the third one for free. When they get to the end of book two ... This way I feel like ... As long as they didn't come in from the free book on the mailing list, then they can at least join the mailing list at book three. Then after book four, is my 6th. I've got a 6th chapter bonus from an alternate point of view, including the sexy scene, which is another avenue into the newsletter. I feel I've got three points of entry at this point. If people don't join and get the first book. If they just happen to buy it, and not come in on the mailing list to get it free; then there's other ways they can join.

James: Did you come up with this?

Natasha: Yeah.

James: Flow?

Natasha: Yes, and it's working great!

James: Stephen, standing there patiently. I have to raise myself up, 6'4" or something are you.

YOU'VE GOT A MARKETING BACKGROUND, I THINK?

Stephen: Marketing/advertising. My day job is actually with a marketing agency.

James: You've looked at Mark's course and so on, and also presumably the wider work load.

Stephen: Yeah.

James: How is this going to work? Are you going to be taking this over?

Stephen: I'm going to take over. I think what Natasha mentioned before, is that a lot of this stuff around launching books and the constant publicity around it takes away from her writing time.

I'm just starting out in this, over the last month and a half or so; so whatever I can do to get things off her plate that don't affect the storyline of the book. That is not my area of expertise at all. Anything from a marketing standpoint, finance, operations, the email list, that sort of stuff. Anything that I can take off her plate, and also leverage some of my background and knowledge as well.

James: That's going to be quite tough for you, because you've got a full-time job.

Stephen: Yeah, but I think helps a lot. I did take the Facebook course. It took a while for Natasha to convince me to do it, but once I started it, I really got into it.

I think it only took me probably about a week or so to get through the entire course. Once you get into it and start to understand - Mark even mentions this in the course - once you get into it, it doesn't take a whole lot of time.

It takes a while the first couple of weeks to figure out the audiences and things like that; but once you understand it, it's just going in there and checking on your numbers and maybe tweaking a few things.

Then spending a few hours on a weekend, or one night, when we come up with a new campaign; like for the boxed set. Okay, who are we going to target and that sort of stuff. Then, you're just kind of looking at it.

We've definitely tested different audiences; see what works, see what doesn't work. It's not that much of a time crunch at this point, but again, all I've been doing is the Facebook ads. I haven't really been doing much with the mailing list and stuff like that.

James: Some people would think with your professional marketing background, and that's going to give you a head start in understanding this type of material. Not just Mark's course, there's other people teaching in this area, and other social media platforms.

HOW EASY DO YOU THINK IT IS FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE, PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE

A BACKGROUND IN MARKETING, TO GET A HOLD OF THIS TYPE OF METHODOLOGY, AND MAKE IT WORK?

Stephen: I think it's easy. I have the background from a strategic standpoint, but what I've told people at this conference is, I am not the target audience for Natasha's book. I mean, I don't read a whole lot of romantic fiction or anything like that.

James: You're dead behind the eyes. Dead inside.

Stephen: Yes.

James: You're a bloke.

Stephen: That's probably more likely. Honestly, I do think it's really, really easy. I think as long as you go into it, and don't get overwhelmed. It is a lot of information, the first few modules that you go through, but he does a great job slowing it down for you.

I'm going to go back and probably do it again. Look at some of the modules to figure out some things that maybe I haven't gotten right yet. In my viewpoint, it's a marathon, not a sprint. We're going to do things wrong. You're going to have to go back and do them over and over again, but it's well worth it.

James: That's a great approach for any marketing. We have an alternate business and video production, and it's PR and marketing. We always say to people you've got to play the long game and not expect some fireworks on day one. That's a good attitude.

In terms of your ambition then, the two of you, you talk about it would be nice to have this bit bigger salary; but we were talking to somebody this morning who's a couple of books ahead of you, and she's now doing a quarter of a million dollars a year. For me, it feels like you have a platform to build on.

IS THAT SOMETHING YOU'RE AIMING FOR?

Natasha: Absolutely. I think you should never be comfortable with your status quo. You should always be trying to improve your craft, your methodology, and all of those things. Hopefully, the rewards come with

that hard work.

I do think that this is a career and it is a business. This is not really just a job. As far as that goes, when you start writing more books, there's a lot of extra things that come along with that business. You need somebody, actually, that you can call right away and get a cover done and some marketing materials pulled together. You do find yourself with employees. With that in mind, you do need to earn more money if you're going to do this properly and keep writing, I think. Absolutely.

I don't think anybody looks at any of the people here who are doing fantastically well and thinks, "Oh, well they're just lucky." It's hard work, and it should be hard work. I think it's very gratifying; very gratifying and satisfying. Also, you should never get comfortable where you are. You should just always try to keep improving.

Stephen: One other thing that I would mention too, is getting stuff off the author's plate, like what we're trying to do, just allows her to just focus on writing. Getting more work coming out the door. Hopefully, that just speeds up the revenue process quite a bit as well.

Natasha: Right, yeah. I think at the end of the day, yes, you want to make more money; but you've also got to keep your readers happy. Try not to be so focused on producing the revenue as much as ... That's the by-product of keeping your readers happy and getting more readers.

James: Are you getting a lot of feedback from your readers? When you say your bonus thing had perhaps a slightly more sexy edge than your mainstream stuff.

Natasha: It was just from a different point-of-view. People love it. I've got great readers who email me and keep in touch. One of them even sent me an entire series outline of who she wants to see in the next books and who they should marry. I suggested to her, "Well, that's great, but maybe you should write in my world, and we'll do some fan fiction." That's really like a big endgame. Yeah, it's been really satisfying. The readers are fantastic, and I think that's what you've got to keep in mind, more than anything.

James: Chance of some point quitting the day job, do you think, Stephen? I don't know if your boss is

listening to this.

Stephen: It depends on if my boss is listening.

James: Let's assume they're not.

Stephen: Let's assume they're not. Yeah, that's the end goal, and I think it is something that is absolutely attainable.

James: You've got a lifestyle then, which is worth more than money, isn't it?

Natasha: Absolutely. Time and freedom and all those things. You can work from anywhere, really. I mean, here you are, in Florida.

James: We work from anywhere. We've been working in a Chevy Traverse for the last 1,500 miles. Great. Natasha, thank you, and Stephen, for talking to us. Natasha, you've done brilliantly in keeping your English accent, taking on by osmosis, American verve and entrepreneurial spirit.

Natasha: Oh, there you go, can do attitude. Yeah.

James: A great combination. Can do attitude, exactly.

Charlotte: My name is Charlotte Byrd, and I'm a self-published author. I write mainly billionaire romances. My most famous books are "Malibu Connection: The Date", and "The Date."

James: Okay, Charlotte, let's talk about your author career over the last, shall we say, 12 months, I think, probably has been the big change in your life.

Charlotte: The big change.

James: You were trundling along.

WHEN DID YOU START WRITING AND START TRYING TO BECOME AN AUTHOR?

Charlotte: I've always wanted to be a writer. It's just been a passion of mine ever since I was little. I actually wanted to major in English in school, but ended up going with math instead.

James: Because that's a natural alternative to English, right?

Charlotte: Yes, my parents were insisting that I would have a job after graduation. It's been a passion of mine for a long time. I used to write a lot of short stories, and then I stumbled onto romance writing and found out that people were quite successful in the genre. I decided to give it a go. I thought I could just put a book together, and put it out there, and it would sell. That was very disappointing, because I did not have any sales, hardly any sales.

James: It's strange that, isn't it. You write a book, and people don't automatically come buy it in the thousands.

Charlotte: Yes, and apparently it's not 2011, whenever that was happening for romance authors. I enrolled in Mark's class, and it's been a whirlwind ever since. All the readers that I've gained, and all the money that's been coming in from my books.

James: You've been a stellar student from Mark's class, which is the reason that we're here in California, in the desert in California. Yesterday, we were sweating it in 90 degree, 90% humidity in Florida; and today, we're in this dry, beautiful landscape. Almost a moonscape.

Charlotte: Joshua Tree, California welcomes you.

James: Yeah. Well, we're delighted to be here, and we wanted to talk to you about that. Obviously, you

had the material. There was no problem with the books.

YOU WERE WAITING TO FIND THAT MAGIC KEY TO FINDING YOUR AUDIENCE.

Charlotte: Yes. When I focused on writing romance, I wrote my first book, and I put it out there. I didn't know what to do with it, and I stumbled upon Mark's course. During that, as I started making sales from the books, I continued to write. I ended up writing like six books in six months, and found my audience. Readers are just delighted. They're always writing me every day, telling me how much they love my books. It's just been amazing.

James: Billionaire romance.

Charlotte: Yes. Kind of "50 Shades" inspired; but no BDSM, just erotic. That's been my bread and butter, so to speak.

James: This choice of yours was commercially driven, this choice of genre?

Charlotte: Yes, it was. I've actually really enjoyed writing it. I'd never read romance until last summer, really. I wasn't this die-hard fan, like a lot of people are. I stumbled upon it, started reading it; I thought I could definitely write it. I've been really enjoying it.

What makes it different from other books is that it's really focused on the two characters. You just develop their emotional sides. That's been the most interesting aspect for me.

James: How did you find the transition from writer to writer/marketer, which is really what you are now?

Charlotte: Well, through Mark's course, that's been the main transition. I actually did not realize how much work the marketing aspects of all of this involve, how much work that involves. That's why, actually, my husband recently quit his job and joined the business with me. He's helping me out a lot with the Facebook ads and all the business aspect of running a romance business.

James: We've got Kevin, husband, here.

Charlotte: Yes.

James: I guess you write from reality. You've got a billionaire husband, and you live this romantic life.

Charlotte: Yes, that's why we live here in a one-bedroom, in the desert.

James: The way you're selling books, I don't think you're going to be here for much longer.

KEVIN, YOU HAD A STEADY JOB IN ONE OF THE BIG GLOBAL INDUSTRIES, A PHARMACEUTICAL, YEAH?

Kevin: Yes. It was a good job because it allowed us to finance a fairly rapid expansion for this business.

James: That's something just to dwell on for a second, because a lot of people don't realize ... When things take off in social media advertising, you really want to funnel money in. We've had this conversation before. Adam Croft, I think he had 50,000 pounds he basically just borrowed from credit cards and family.

Charlotte: When they're doing well, you want to keep putting money into it, because there are months that are slower or the cost per click is much more expensive.

May was really great for us, and then in the summer it's been slower. When it hits, like I think for Christmas, you've got to save up for that.

James: It promises good money. It makes you sound like drug dealers, but a commercial, global company pharmaceutical.

Kevin: Yeah, legalized drug dealing.

James: You've gone one step further than just providing the capital now.

Kevin: Yeah, now that we've been able to build up the savings, and the business is generating a consistent revenue; now the main need is time and labor. We don't need the capital anymore, but it's just become so much work that it was hard for Kate to keep up, to produce content and to manage the advertising.

Charlotte: Well, it's hard to write, to actually spend the time writing when you have to do so much other marketing stuff that's involved in running the business.

Kevin: The creative work can be very draining.

Charlotte: Yes.

Kevin: It's emotionally and psychologically, it takes a lot out of you. Then, if you have to go and track the performance of all of your ads and do your budgeting and all of that, it gets to be too much.

It's been very rewarding for me to see the business grow, obviously, but now to be able to contribute to its success by putting in the effort and see Kate not so overburdened with all that work.

James: You snuck out her real name there.

Kevin: I did.

James: Kate.

Charlotte: Oh!

Kevin: I'm so sorry. Honestly ...

Charlotte: I'm outed. That's okay.

James: There's more than one Kate, I think, in the US. It doesn't matter. People know. Most of the people at the office, that we speak to, have two names.

Charlotte: It's hard when you start out, you know. When I first started out, I wasn't sure that it was ... You write erotic things, and you're like, "Oh, what's going to happen?"

Kevin: Do you want your family reading it?

Charlotte: Do you want your family to read? I was also doing my regular business of writing resumes and cover letters, under my real name. I didn't want to have all of that together. Then, it kind of blows up, and you're like just Charlotte. It was a good name, yeah.

James: I think I saw you, I didn't read the post, I just had a quick flip through on Facebook groups this morning.

I THINK SOMEBODY ASKED THE QUESTION, "SHOULD I HAVE AN ALTERNATE AUTHOR NAME?" I THINK SOMEONE POSTED ON THAT.

Charlotte: I have answered that question a lot. It's more of a question I think with romance, just because some people have very religious family members or people who don't understand or they're embarrassed.

Kevin: We've met other romance authors who live in ... There's that one woman who lives in like Oklahoma, in a small town, and she's very successful and read by a lot of people. But in her real-life community ...

Charlotte: Yeah, she was married to a farmer and it was kind of like "50 Shades" kind of stuff, and she just said, "I could never tell ... My husband knows, but no one else knows." Her children didn't know, no

one. It was really just about keeping her private life and public life separate.

Kevin: It can also be an advantage in terms of your branding. If you have a nom de plume, you can have your whole social media life focused on establishing and promoting this brand of the author. Not have it diluted by your personal identity.

Charlotte: By your high school friends.

Kevin: Yes.

James: And your own behavior online, which you know all of us would probably like to separate out from our work lives.

Joining back on the husband/wife routine here. I suppose there's a couple of aspects to this. One is that, first of all, you are both going to be now living the dream. We talk about this a lot. It doesn't take a lot of money to change your life from the drudgery of the 9 to 5, to sitting in a beautiful part of the world in your own time, going for walks and making your money doing that. That's the first thing. You're making really good money, but you could do it for less; but that's such a great thing to choose. Well done on that.

I GUESS YOU MUST BE DELIGHTED WITH THAT, KEVIN.

Kevin: Absolutely. Especially with my job, I was out of town 3 to 4 days a week, travelling constantly. To be able to be at home and spend time with my wife and just be at home, that's really such a big win for this whole process.

Charlotte: When I first started, my goal was not even to make this much money. I mean, that would have been great, but it was really hard to even imagine. When I saw that Mark was spending that much on Facebook ads, I was like, "Oh my God, that's crazy!" My goal was to make like \$2,500 or \$3,000 a month; just so I didn't have to do this other job. I could just write, and that's it. It's been really great, but yeah, you definitely don't need that much money. There are lots of people who are living their great lives on much less, just pursuing their passions.

James: Well, you need to raise the equivalent of your salary. Actually, I think you need to raise a bit less. We made the move into our own business. When you work, you actually spend quite a lot of money working. Travelling around and buying lunch, so you can live on less money.

You say you were out of town a couple of days a week and now you're back, which brings me on to the other question about working together as husband and wife.

DOES HE GET UNDER YOUR FEET SUDDENLY, THIS CHANGE IN RELATIONSHIP? I'M BEING SERIOUS. IT'S A SLIGHT CHANGE, ISN'T IT?

Charlotte: It is a change. Yeah, because we were together all the time before. Then this past year when he was working at the pharmaceutical company, he was gone a lot so I could just do whatever. Not like do whatever, but I could ...

James: Ohhh.

Kevin: There's some stories I need to hear?

James: That billionaire that used to come around ...

Kevin: Yeah.

Charlotte: Yes. No, but just have my own routine, and then he just comes back with his bags and everything would be just kind of different. Then, it was the transition after you quit your job, in terms of transitioning back into the business.

I did everything. It was like, "Where do I fit in? How can I help you? How can I ...?" I'm like, "I'm the one who does the Facebook ads. You don't know. You didn't take Mark's class. You don't know anything about Facebook ads." Just transitioning and teaching him where he could fit in and what he could do.

Kevin: The hardest thing of coming on board is the transition from doing things that she tells me to do, to

being proactive and taking initiative. Knowing the business well enough that now I can get up, set my own tasks, and contribute to the business without relying on her, as essentially a manager.

Charlotte: It's been quite a relief, because thinking of things for you to do has been exhausting. It was like it would be just easier for me to do it myself.

James: It starts like that and that's a really big moment when you've got somebody pulling their weight in that sense. I can imagine the relief.

Charlotte: Yeah, it's a huge relief. I always felt like I was just providing a little motivation. Okay, this is what we have to do today. I almost wanted him to take the initiative and know the things that are in my head, to just go and do it.

James: You're getting there now.

Charlotte: Yeah.

Kevin: I'm definitely getting there now. It's been a process, but that just is what it is. Thankfully, now I am onboard and taking over some aspects of what we're doing.

Charlotte: You're even writing your own book.

Kevin: Yes.

James: Then you can start doing his ads.

Charlotte: Yes, that's true.

Kevin: There's a lot of pre-work that I have to get doing. Get the whole Facebook thing set up.

James: What can you tell us about your book?

Kevin: It's still embryonic at this stage, but it's going to be in the YA Fantasy space. Like a high fantasy book. A good comp would be the Witcher Series. It's a series of novels, yeah. They're a little bit darker. This is little bit more lighter and YA. Hopefully, I can devote enough time to it that I'll have something done by the end of the year, but we'll see.

James: A power couple.

Kevin: The thing is, it's been the inspiration of Kate really pushing herself, producing work, and building this business; really being the driving force. You know, really showing the path, and giving me the courage to go ahead and try and do something on my own, and write my own book.

James: Fantastic. Well done, Kate/Charlotte.

Charlotte: Thank you.

James: It's not an inspiration to everyone, because there'll be some authors who aren't married, are not in a relationship, sitting there by themselves and going, "I wish I had a free helping hand." Actually, in some ways it's very traditional. I mean 200 years ago, that's how businesses worked. It was the only way they could work.

Charlotte: Family business.

James: Family businesses. People mucked in together. This is kind of a new wave of business now, that's happening in this digital space. I think it's going to become common in the future.

Charlotte: We know of a lot, especially in romance, there's a bunch of husband/wife teams.

Kevin: Husband/wife teams.

Charlotte: Yeah, they even write things together, which is kind of a whole new thing. I can't imagine.

Kevin: Yeah, we're not there.

James: The billionaire needs to cross into a magic mirror in the back of his wardrobe to get into his world. Who knows.

It was quite windy out there in the desert in California, as you heard; but a really nice set up. It was so fun to be with both Natasha and Charlotte as they talked about, and you can hear the excitement in both their voices.

What we always point out, Mark, don't we, with successful authors, is you can hear the business focus in their voices as well, which is absolutely a key part in this.

NOT JUST SEEING YOURSELF AS AN AUTHOR; SEEING YOURSELF AS SOMEBODY WHO IS RUNNING A BUSINESS.

Mark: Two halves of the same coin. You'd be very lucky to break through just with being a budding writer. It's possible. It can happen. I've seen it happen a couple of times, but the odds are certainly against it. You really do need to be a good writer, and also to be a good marketer. Be prepared to roll up your sleeves with that kind of work as well.

James: About twice a year I ask Mrs. Blatch if she'll do some filing for me.

Mark: I was going to ask.

James: I am met with a fairly abrupt response.

Mark: Isn't that when I see you with a black eye?

James: Yeah, exactly, just after that. Then after six months, I've forgotten, and I make the mistake of asking her again.

It's definitely, and this is probably a bit of an elephant in the room for some people. It's not for every couple, absolutely without question. You have to have a certain relationship where you are going to be very happy to work with each other.

The real test I think is probably if you're unhappy with what your other half has done; can you confront them about that, and tell them that, and ask them to do it again? If you can't imagine that conversation taking place without there being repercussions to your relationship, then I would suggest it's probably not, necessarily, going to be for you.

Mark: Yep, I think that's good advice.

James: Okay, good, excellent. Excellent. Well, thank you indeed to Natasha and Charlotte/Kate for their interviews today. That was fantastic. We will be back in a week's time.

CHAPTER 34

WRITING AGAINST THE ODDS - WITH AUTHOR T.J. GARRETT



WHAT YOU'LL HEAR on this episode of the Self Publishing Formula is nothing short of empowering. Tony Garrett is a new and very successful author, (writing as 'T.J.Garrett'), pulling in over \$30K per month in book sales. But in order to get to that point he's had to overcome a degenerative disease that makes it almost impossible for him to see. When Tony discovered that technology could enable him to read again, new doors of possibility were opened for him. On this episode, you can hear Tony's story from his own lips, how technology and the help of friends and family made all the difference, and how resilience and determination enabled him to teach himself how to successfully market his books and generate sales.

SELF-PUBLISHING CHANGED HIS LIFE FOREVER - AND THAT'S NO OVERSTATEMENT.

Tony was entirely supported by public assistance due to his degenerative eye disease when he discovered that his electronic tablet could place white text on a black background and increase the font size - which in turn allowed him to be able to read for the first time since he finished his schooling. Halfway through

reading “The Hobbit” Tony felt inspired to write. His success has been truly amazing. He’s been able to get off public assistance, finance his kids’ education, and live a lifestyle he never thought possible. He details how he worked to improve his writing, get it published on Amazon and promote it successfully.

HOW DID A SELF-PUBLISHED, BLIND AUTHOR PROMOTE HIS BOOKS SO EFFECTIVELY (\$30K/MO IN SALES)?

After Tony overcame the odds and successfully published his first book, the real work began. He knew that the only way his books would sell and be a financial success that could support his family was if more and more people became aware of his books. That’s when he took to promotions, Facebook Ads, building an email list, and much more in an effort to get his book in front of as many sets of eyes as possible. The result is a highly successful career as a self-published author. You can hear more of Tony’s tips for successful book marketing on this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode by James and Mark.
- What’s going to be inside the Self Publishing 101 Course?
- How you can join the FB groups SPF offers.
- Who is T.J. Garrett?
- The difficulties Tony had reading, much less writing and how things changed.
- Steps Tony has taken to improve his writing.
- Tony’s first published book, summer of 2015 - 10 books since!
- How Tony built his audience and marketing channels.
- The emotional impact of Tony’s writing success.
- Tony’s recommendations for new authors.
- The kind of help Tony has found in various places.
- The role Kindle Unlimited has played in Tony’s success.
- The encouragement Tony gives to those with disabilities.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Kindle Unlimited](#)
- [BookBub](#)
- [The National Federation For The Blind](#)
- [T.J. Garrett's Amazon Author Page](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 37 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blache and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: I should say we've had a few outtakes for this podcast because we're doing something new. You can hear us in glorious stereo. God, there's a word from the 70s, but we're also going to experiment with video so if you're on YouTube, YouTube channel unfortunately you've got our mugs in shot as well, so here we are. Mark's in his brand new office in Salisbury Wiltshire in the United Kingdom and I'm in ...

Mark: Bedroom.

James: You're right. Bedroom, it's not a bedroom. It used to be garage converted to my office but I think I've outgrown it. I've got a den even put the camera around. Oh my God. Everything's falling apart. My screen went black. It's back. I won't touch my laptop again.

Anyway, yeah so if you're listening on audio, the normal way on your iPod or whatever, iPhone, this will be meaningless to you, but from YouTube a bit of a shock that we're going to be in vision. We'll try to do this from time to time. We'll see how this works.

Okay, in this episode we have an interview with a man called Tony Garrett who writes as TJ Garrett, he writes epic fantasy books, although he's just starting I think paranormal suspense and Tony has a remarkable story. I mean, seriously, it's an absolutely phenomenal story.

A year ago he was at the end of a 20 year period. While he has a degenerative disease which had taken away his eyesight almost completely, he had not read a book since he was at school, and you will not believe where he is today. We're going to hear from TJ Garrett in a moment. It is an inspiring, wonderful interview coming up.

We've had a lot of e-mails and a lot of questions on our Facebook group about the 101 course which we've been working on in the background here at Self-Publishing Formula headquarters and I've asked

Mark if I can quiz him as a new author. I'm working on it as well, obviously, but we really would like to know what's going to be in the course and rather than us keep telling people hold on you're going to find out, hold on you're going to find out, let's use this podcast just for a few minutes to have a discussion about what the 101 course material is going to be.

MARK, WHAT'S GOING TO BE IN THE COURSE? WHO'S IT FOR?

Mark: Well, James, it's for people at the start, or just beginning their careers as authors. A little bit of background will help explain what I mean.

When I started doing courses a couple years ago, I originally wanted to do something that was comprehensive, would be a start to finish checklist of everything that you need to do to give yourself the best possible chance from the moment that you finished typing the end and your book was ready to be converted into the various formats and then uploaded and sent off to the retailers.

Once I sat down and thought about that, every time I worked and I was adding more and more and more onto the course and before I knew where I was it was vast. It would have been hours and hours and hours worth of content and I'd never done a course before, I wasn't sure that I could deliver that kind of product that would successfully teach people what I wanted them to know. It was quite stressful.

In the end I decided that rather than try to do that and do a bad job, I focused on one thing that was generating a lot of interest back then and is still generating interest now and that was the Facebook and social media advertising side of things.

I put the rest of it to the side and concentrated on the smaller niche area. We've done Facebook 3 times now. I'm a little bit more experienced in delivering this kind of content and we've got more people helping us now so I thought I'd have another go at it.

The thing that I was having trouble with was working out a structure that would take a very big topic and make it logical and easily digestible for people at the start of their careers. The hook, which we stumbled upon, was the fact that you have a novel that you've been working on for a couple of years as we mentioned before, and you were effectively the perfect guinea pig.

Because you're the average guy, you're the new author just getting started, getting these kinds of things done, you've got a book that you're ready to sell. We can get a cover, we can build you a website, we can build the kind of platform stuff that you need and then we can take that book and give it its best chance to start selling and making you some money.

That was the kind of thread I was searching for. Couldn't find it previously. I guess it came to me over the course of the last 18 months as we've been working closer together.

James: Going all the way through the course this is all about setting yourself up as a commercially successful author.

Mark: Module 2 is all about pre-publication and that would be something that would be applicable for anyone at any stage of their career, even if they just want to know how to take their word document, turn it into a mov file or an epub file and then upload it to the retailers. That would be something that the course will teach and they'll be screen flows and extensive information on all that kind of stuff.

The main motivation, as you say, is to teach people how to do that and then also how to sell that book, make profit from it. We look at mailing lists and advertising and strategy about going wide or going exclusive. Everything that you need to know will be included. That's why we call it 101. It does cover everything from A to Zed. That's the plan.

James: You talk about authors at the beginning of their careers.

PEOPLE WHO'VE GOT 2 OR 3 BOOKS OUT BUT MAYBE HAVEN'T CRACKED THE COMMERCIAL SIDE OF THINGS OR AREN'T REALLY SURE WHERE TO GO ON THIS, IS IT GOING TO BE OF USE TO THEM?

Mark: Completely. In some ways they're just slightly further down the track than a newbie writer would be. Say they've got 3 books, that's a lot of ammunition and they can then pilot into building a platform, getting readers, giveaways, all that kind of stuff. They're just a year or two further down the line. It'd be absolutely perfect for those kinds of writers too.

James: Okay. Good. It's exciting and we've been incredibly busy in the background, recording screen

flows. Some of it's quick and easy and just follow. I've done some setting up of accounts today and they vary from the Amazon one where you end up banging your head against the table and almost need an accountant sitting next to you to get through the tax interview, and KOBO, which was a really easy one to do. Some of them are going to be very very useful for people just to handhold through that process.

For me, it's not just about you need an account in X, Y, and Zed, it's how to set up a website. And what the purpose of that website is, what the purpose of your Facebook group is, how you talk to your readers, how you engage them, that's the magic for me and the bit that obviously you've been through over the years. I'm not going to say perfected because it's something that I think probably even month to month you work on and develop, but you've got a system which is working.

Mark: Yeah. When you take somebody who's never had any before, a new reader, and then at the end of the process they're a dedicated fan who will be prepared to go out and buy everything that you put out. That's the goal. That's what I want to teach people how to do.

James: Good. Okay, that's exciting. The other thing that we should just say is that it's not just you and me even, we brought together some of the trusted, well-known and leading edge names in the industry to deliver some of the material and that's exciting stuff. We're going through that at the moment and it's going to be a really good package.

Anyway, enough of that. If you think maybe it's not for you just at the moment, don't forget that we do have Facebook groups which are free to join and there's some great repository of information and a great community helping each other there. We have a 101 Facebook group, purely for people who are starting out and we have a marketing Facebook group as well.

If you search for Self-Publishing Formula on Facebook and click to join either of those groups and Mark or myself or Catherine or Alexandra or Sarah or Carrie or possibly even John will click approve and let you into those groups. It's great to see you there. They're a great vibrant community and really really helpful for people like me in particular finding their way.

Okay, let's get on with our interview today. We've got Tony Garrett, TJ Garrett, he reached out to us a short while ago and said, "Oh do you think you'd be interested in having a chat with me," and we

definitely were. Both Mark and I thought straight away this is a really interesting story and I'm really glad that we spoke to Tony. He was a little bit nervous when we spoke to him. It's only about 20 minutes, the interview, it's really really worth a listen.

AT THE BEGINNING, TO GET THINGS GOING, I GOT TONY TO EXPLAIN TO ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HIS BACKGROUND AND HIS BOOKS.

Tony: At 25 years of, well almost 25 years of living on welfare which was about a progressive condition called Don-ne Bou-de Syndrome, which means at some point I'm going to go totally blind, but the moment I've got a very small amount of vision. It was 5 years ago when I got my first tablet and realized that I could change the text, I could read, even though it was huge. I got halfway through that first book and I decided I would try writing myself. The first 2 or 3 years was all learning and practicing and I actually thought I was really good and then after 3 months I sat down and read it and thought that's not right.

James: We've all been there.

Tony: Then I started full time about 6 months ago, 6, 7 months ago I think it was and actually came off benefits. At the time my income was around \$1,500 to 2 grand a monthish. That was plenty for me because I live in a small town. Obviously you just keep doing it and things got a bit better in the last few months and this last week and a half has just been unbelievable really.

James: Just to put this in perspective, you say you got a progressive condition, you've been living on state benefits or welfare. It's called different things around the world, but what's happened to you is transformational.

IT'S AMAZING THAT YOU'VE FOUND SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN DO THAT IT TURNS OUT YOU ARE GOOD AT AND THAT HAS GIVEN YOU A FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE, WHAT YOU SAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 25 YEARS.

Tony: I used to be a builder years ago when I sort of normal eyesight. I've never had perfect eyesight but normalish and I've done other things and I've tried music and I've tried this and that. But nothing that you could hang your hat on and say this is going to be a career and I'm going to be able to make a living out of it. With writing I did and it was obviously support from friends as well telling me to carry on with it.

James: Great story Tony. We're so delighted for you. Let's just talk about the writing a little bit, then we'll talk about what the breakthrough was in terms of marketing and so on.

IN TERMS OF THE WRITING, WHEN YOU REALIZED YOU COULD CHANGE THE FONT SIZE ON THE TABLET, AM I TO GATHER THAT YOU HADN'T DONE A LOT OF READING FOR A FEW YEARS AT THAT POINT?

Tony: I hadn't read a book since I left school.

James: Wow.

Tony: I can't read any size print at all unless it's the big title on a newspaper. Even the large print books weren't any good. 20 something years I'd not been able to read.

James: On a tablet you can make it such that you can?

Tony: I have to look at white letters on a black background because the other way around is just too much whiteness. Everything can get lost. Make the text big enough so there's probably 3 words on a line maybe.

James: What books were you reading?

Tony: The first book I read was The Hobbit. I got halfway through that and that's when I decided I wanted to have a go myself and then obviously I read Lord of the Rings as well. Then I went to Robert Jordan. The Wheel of Time series. That took months to get through because obviously there's 14 books in each one, so that's 300,000 words or so. Then I've gone on to all sorts of stuff. Stephen King. I've read a couple of Mark's books. I'm halfway through The Angel at the moment.

James: You said you were halfway through your first Tolkien book, your first book in 25 years and that was the point in which you thought that you might have a go at writing?

Tony: I tried writing after I left school. I tried writing a sci-fi thing but honestly I just didn't have the patience for it. It was a long job and it takes a bit of figuring stuff out. I'm not a plotter. I just write what I think has to come next and that can be confusing at times.

If you haven't got a method for building the story back in and getting your plot back in line again you can end up getting to a point where you think oh this isn't going anywhere and just stop. I figured out a way around that now so hopefully I can keep that going.

James: Tell me a little bit about that journey then. You started writing, you thought oh this is good I can do this. And then you read it back as you said and realized it wasn't as good as you perhaps thought it was.

WHAT DID YOU DO TO IMPROVE YOURSELF?

Tony: I sent an e-mail to my friend Matt who's the main force behind helping me to get the confidence to do this and I actually sat down with the tablet and read it for the first time and realized that wasn't very good. When I realized that I basically read about 30 books on how to write.

I think I managed to get some decent information out of that and just kept practicing. I did a lot of working things out. I got some very good advice from some friends of mine that I met on Wattpad, Walton A particularly, some other people as well. Just basically gave the book out to friends and told them to tell me what they thought of it and do everything that they said.

If it makes sense to me then I changed the method or put in extra bits or what you write about. A lot of it is to do with getting the flow right. I knew what was in my head but I wasn't getting it on the paper so it was getting the flow right. I think was the hardest part for me.

James: We should say in terms of genre was epic fantasy, is that right?

Tony: That's the one I've been writing up until now. I just started some paranormal investigation kind of things as well but everything is epic fantasy.

James: Really interesting that there was something in you when you left school that, I mean I'd imagine for most people who go from school to the building trade, they probably haven't tried to write a book at that point.

THERE WAS CLEARLY SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT WAS A WRITER TRYING TO GET OUT BUT I STILL THINK THIS IS A VERY VERY IMPRESSIVE PERIOD OF SELF-

IMPROVEMENT TONY.

Tony: The creative side has always been there. I've been a musician since I was 11. I've always had the creative edge. I did some art and stuff but I never imagined for a minute I'd be, I mean like I said I had a go at it, but I didn't think for a minute I'd be publishing stuff.

James: You were first published in the summer of last year, August 2015.

HOW MANY BOOKS NOW?

Tony: I think there's 10. Maybe 11. Books are actually parts of a series. The first book itself is four parts, which all the books are available now. That's, I think, depends on how you look at it, there's 8 separate things you can buy anyway and 2 of the books that I just released anyway.

James: How many words is each book?

Tony: Juganock is over half a million.

James: Oh my goodness.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO SAY THEY WERE 40,000 WORDS EACH AND YOU PUT 4 OF THEM TOGETHER TO CREATE.

Tony: No, no, no, they're all big books. There are 4 books together. Each one is about 150, 160,000 words.

James: The clue is in the word epic.

Tony: Yeah, that's it. When you say epic I think they mean over, I know it's a genre but at least 500, 600 pages over an epic. It might just be me, but that's what I expect.

James: You obviously got the writing thing done. You've built an audience and how did you do that?

HOW DID YOU GO FROM BEING ABLE TO WRITE TO BEING ABLE TO SELL?

Tony: That was the hard bit. I loved the writing but because everything takes me so long, it took me a long time getting the marketing end up. I was going to do your course but at the time I didn't have the money for it. I did but I thought did I want to spend it on that.

I wish I had now because I spent months trying to figure out how to do this and if I had done that in the first place I would have saved all that time rather than trying to figure out what to do with the marketing.

The main thing I do for marketing is I've got an e-mail list, which isn't very much. I've got about 1,200 people on there I think. I keep building that up, I keep doing Facebook ads. I do the countdowns on Amazon. I do a free thing every now and then.

I try to make sure that at least 5,000 new people a week see the products and whatnot. Other than that I just keep going. Keep Facebooking, keep blogging, keep doing what everybody does I think. I don't do enough of it, I know that because the writing takes a lot of time.

James: You've sold your first book I guess not too long after you published it.

IT TOOK YOU AWHILE TO GET THINGS GOING BUT CAN YOU GIVE ME AN IDEA OF WHAT TYPE OF SALES INCOME YOU'RE UP TO NOW.

Tony: Last month I think I sold 6,000 books but I've got most of the income from reads because the books are so long. You know the KDP, I've got over 5 million reads in September. August was building up to that.

So far this month it's not a bad, just over 1,000 sales and nearly 2 million reads and I'm sure that isn't exactly but it's a lot more than I usually end. My welfare was improving. About \$14,000 I think. September I think was 19 maybe 20.

James: That is amazing. 19 or 20 grand in a month from a pretty much standing start last year not just as a marketer but as a writer. There are lots of people who've done our course and they've found a breakthrough or whatever but they've been writing for years and it's the marketing that's come.

YOU WEREN'T EVEN A READER UNTIL LAST YEAR.

Tony: It was a bit of a learning curve doing all this. With me, like I said before, the time it takes is a problem. The marketing or the sales, I don't know if it's the marketing or not but the sales have gone really well.

James: Well, I would imagine good books. Let me ask you Tony. I don't want to pry obviously but it can be obviously a challenge for anybody emotionally to have a progressive disease and it's an understatement really and we all value our eyesight so much. I think all of us find it very difficult to conceive of a situation where that's being taken away from us, so I can only imagine the emotional impact on you of this turn around.

IT MUST BE TREMENDOUS, RIGHT?

Tony: It's absolutely incredible. I wake up everyday wanting to do something now where I used to wake up everyday feeling almost as tired as when I was when I went to bed and think oh God, not another day.

Nowadays I look forward to coming downstairs and doing stuff. I write all day, read all night, apart from a few breaks obviously. I take the dog for a walk, but other than that that's what I do and I love every minute of it.

James: Fantastic.

TECHNOLOGY IS OBVIOUSLY PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT PART IN THIS. IT'S BEEN AN ENABLING FACTOR FOR YOU.

Tony: Definitely. Without the tablets I wouldn't be able to read. I've got a lot of help from the RNIB, the Royal Institute for the Blind, bought software packages off them. I've got a very good narrator which I can't actually use for editing because it doesn't pick out sound alike words and stuff like that but it makes life actually reading some of my work that much easier. I've got large screen things, magnifiers, all sorts of bits and bobs. It just keeps getting better really.

James: Yeah a lot of technology I can imagine sitting around you.

Tony: Yeah there is.

James: You'll have to take a photograph and we'll add it to the blog post that goes along with this podcast
Tony: I think people would be interested to see that.

Tony: I think you can actually get a photo off my Facebook account. I'll give you a link to that. It's quite the studio. Nobs and buttons and lights all over the place.

James: Excellent. I'll dig that out after the interview. I imagine, the RNIB, if people aren't in the U.K. it's quite a famous historical organization that campaigns for and looks after the interests of people with vision impairment or blindness.

I IMAGINE YOU'RE A BIT OF A PINUP BOY FOR THEM NOW, TONY, BECAUSE THIS IS ABSOLUTELY WHAT THEIR ABOUT ISN'T IT? IS ABOUT USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENABLE.

Tony: Yeah. It's a bit like that. I might write to them and see if they want to speak or something.

James: Oh, I definitely think you should. We'll send this interview to them to wake them up. I used to walk past their place in London and I know that they're very keen on the technology and the use of that and, as I say, you've been helped by them.

Disability aside, what you are is obviously an accomplished and very able writer and you found that marketing thing. In terms of what we always try and do with our podcast in terms of tips for other people, is there something that you can say to me, for instance, who's just finishing their first book, is it a mindset thing.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO MAKE SURE I'M GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Tony: I think you have to separate the writing from the marketing. The writing is one job. The marketing is something completely different. You have to look at it as a totally different business and get your strategy right just for the marketing side of it.

Definitely get as many people to see your work as possible. Stick it in everybody's nose you can find. Keep plugging away at the Facebook stuff. Get your blog working, which I don't do enough of. Look at the countdown stuff. Look at the e-mailing services like BookBub and son.

Get yourself a plan that doesn't look at daily sales, because that just drives people crazy. You're looking at what you're going to do in a whole year here. Your plan should spread over the year to get you the income you need by the end of the year.

You do look up months but you can't worry about that. You got to look at the whole process, the whole year's income, as opposed to just like ... Because I used to when I just started I used to check every couple of hours and it'd be depressing, but you look at it on the long term and plan yourself for a whole year. Don't just think, "Well, this isn't working," after the first couple of weeks and give up. It doesn't work like that.

James: I think that's very good advice. We do occasionally see people, I think I've mentioned this before on the podcast, who've run their advert for 5 minutes and immediately gone to Facebook saying what am I doing wrong, I haven't had any signups.

Tony: Exactly yeah. It's getting it under people's noses that matters. If 1 person in 100 buy your book and you've got a million people looking at it, you're doing all right.

James: What sort of help did you get? You said you mentioned some help you found in the community for you. Is this people writing in a similar genre to you? Did you chose this genre because it's something you enjoyed reading or was it a commercial choice? Two different questions there.

Tony: Not commercial choice. I don't think fantasy is even in the top 5 as far as genres go. I had some writing help, which we talked through. We talked an awful lot and helped with everything but the other help, the book covers and the beta reading is all mostly family and friends.

Matt Taylor does all my covers. My ex-wife, she does a lot of the reading, so do the kids. I have a few friends that do beta reading for me and then they all contribute towards the finished product, which is another thing I'd say. In the end, that's the end. Writing is rewriting and polishing and doing all the other bits to make it into a product rather than just a story.

James: When did you know it was going to work?

Tony: When I had 4 solid months of enough money to pay the rent I thought this might work. All I thought about at the time was can I keep doing this? Can I keep benefits and can I keep paying the rent? That was my main motivation.

And of course you have to think of things differently for people who are making 10 grand a month or whatever but as long as I could pay the bills, that was my main motivation. It happened after about the first 3, maybe 4 months. The most important thing I got out of it was the ability to do things.

I've got 2 kids at University, one who's just buying his first house. I've been able to chip in and help with them. That's a huge deal for me. I've just been to Holland with my daughter. She's doing a year on the arisement thing and I never would have been able to afford to pay for her to go over there a year ago. This is what you get from writing if you work hard at it. You can actually live. You can do things.

James: That's incredible. Tony I'm so pleased for you. You're a prolific writer and I imagine that's part of your secret is that you, particularly with KU people get into it and then they're going to stick with you. They've got a lot to go to. There's always something next to go to. You think maybe 14 or 15 books. I'm just going to quick look down your Amazon page.

I IMAGINE THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS YOU'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IS THE FACT THAT PEOPLE WANT TO READ THE BOOKS.

Tony: Yeah, the KU thing, I actually got into just after they changed over from the per book to per page model. Which if it was the per book model I don't think I'd of been able to say that I'd earned all that money because the Jauganot was 2,000 something pages, Mersius is 3 books together, I think they're close to 1,500 pages. I mean I didn't intend it to be like that because obviously at the time I didn't know they were going to do a per page model but I don't know. I thought if it was going to be epic, it's got to be epic so I just kept writing.

James: It certainly is epic. The covers are definitely worth having a look at. They're very nice indeed.

YOU SAY YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER DOING THE COVERS?

Tony: That's Matt Taylor. He actually works in health and safety but he's always been an artist and he just helps me whenever I need it.

James: They're superb and there's a very cool picture of you.

Tony: Oh the one with the hat, yeah.

James: The one with the hat looking at 1960s country western.

Tony: I can tell you a story about that. We actually took 75,000 and picked that one because I'm not at all photogenic. Matt did that as well with his digital camera and it took all afternoon to get one decent photo.

James: It's a great picture Tony. It's a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you so much for contacting us. I suppose the last question we should ask you is really about in terms of what you would say to other people who have a disability or a progressive condition that you have and maybe haven't made the breakthrough yet. I would imagine you don't need to say anything.

I THINK YOUR STORY ITSELF SPEAKS FOR ITSELF BUT THAT'S GOT TO BE ENCOURAGING.

Tony: Definitely yeah. I mean anyone who is limited, we're quite lucky actually being in the U.K., the help we get. I know it's not the same in different countries and I know this podcast will go all over but regardless it's not the end just because you have a disability. You can always find a way around it.

Well not always but hopefully you can find a way around it and just keep going. All of my work has been down to the support of friends and family. I don't think I'd have done it without them. It's a big ball game and you just need to have the will to carry on and find the help and the support you can.

James: Tony Garrett, Mark what a story. Just to recap, a year ago hadn't read a book since school, worked out on a tablet and iPad or whatever that he could get the font size up to the point where with his condition he could still start to read. Halfway through J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit decided he was going to start writing and last month made 19,000 pounds. That's approaching \$30,000 on a normal exchange rate, in a

single month. Just unbelievable.

I mean that's as much as he earned in a year on his benefits and it's changed his life. It can help his daughter do her arisement course abroad, help his children through college. For people who want to contribute and want to work but struggle to, it's an inspirational story.

Mark: Yeah it is. One of the takeaways from that is not, I say don't focus on the numbers, although they are amazing and he's done incredibly well. I think there are hundreds and hundreds of authors just like Tony and you and me who are earning enough money now to maybe fill the tank up with gas or to take their wife or their husband out for a meal they might not have otherwise been able to afford, pay some bills.

It's almost those unheard people working in a way that wasn't possible 10 years ago, wasn't even possible 5 years ago. Those are the stories that are inspirational. Then you get people like Tony just crushing it. It's very difficult not to be so impressed with what he's done and grateful with the facilities that are available to us now.

I may actually send this podcast to Amazon because it's something that they should hear about because I'm speaking at a conference in Ireland late in November and I think this is exactly the kind of story that they'd be really pleased to hear about.

James: I think the RNIB in the U.K. would be as well because it's what they're all about is empowering people and giving them, if it's technology, it's technology, what they need to be independent and contribute.

Mark: For those people in America, RNIB is the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

James: Yes it is. I'm sure there's an equivalent organization in the states and Canada and elsewhere in the country so a large charity based organization, but one that looks after the interests of people with visual impairments and blindness. Yeah, so great.

Really really pleased that Tony got in touch with us and I think we'll keep in touch with him over the years. Good, look, that's it. Thank you indeed for listening and indeed watching if you persevered with the nasty astronauts here in Cambridge and the white coat wearing former lawyer in Wiltshire. We'll try to do this again, shall we? Try and do the video again.

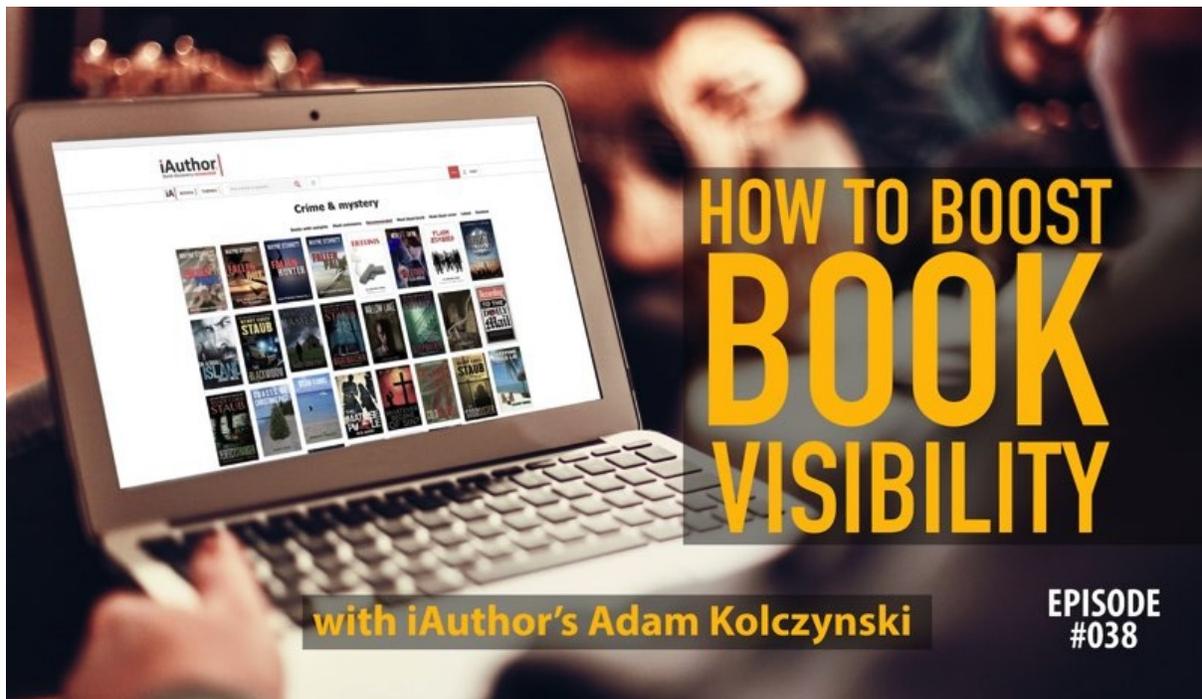
Mark: Do we have to?

James: We'll reserve judgement. We'll see what it looks like. Thanks for listening.

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CHAPTER 35

HOW IAUTOR CAN GIVE YOUR BOOKS GREATER VISIBILITY - WITH ADAM KOLCZYNSKI



ONE OF THE best things about self-publishing is that anyone can publish a book. One of the worst things about self-publishing is that anyone can publish a book. The marketplace is getting more and more crowded with new authors appearing on Amazon and other online book outlets every day. How do you stand out from the crowd? There are a handful of effective ways but Adam Kolczynski has taken a different approach with the creation of his free platform iAuthor. On today's episode, you will hear how authors and readers alike are using iAuthor to discover and promote books with very impressive results.

IAUTOR IS NOT YOUR TYPICAL BOOK LISTING SERVICE.

There are many places online where you can make your books available, but when there are already numerous books and authors vying for visibility it's hard for a new offering to become known. Adam and the team at iAuthor are making that problem much easier to deal with through their unique way of making books available to their user base. You can promote your book through typical genre listings but also through themes - a unique way of telling a bit more about your book and who may find it enjoyable.

A NEW TWIST ON THE AMAZON-TYPE BOOK DISCOVERY MODELS THAT SEEMS TO BE WORKING.

When you list your book on iAuthor you're able to categorize it like normal but also make it a part of broader thematic searches within the system. The site can work very much like a social media network where users are able to follow authors and other readers, interact about books on the platform, make comments and have discussions, and much more. Adam explains why he created the platform and how it can help you get your books discovered by people who are eagerly searching for new books.

THE IAUTHOR PLATFORM TREATS SELF-PUBLISHED AND TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED AUTHORS THE SAME.

James and Mark have long talked about a move they foresee where traditional publishers will be forced to work alongside indie published authors without forcing them to give up their publishing rights. It's a move that will gradually blur the line between traditional and self-publishing. iAuthor already works along those lines, not even asking or considering whether the book you submit is traditionally or self-published.

THE SELF PUBLISHING 101 COURSE IS COMING!

Mark, James, John, and the entire Self Publishing Formula team have been hard at work on the videos and modules that will make up the 101 course - and though they are eager for you to see it they also want to make sure that it's got every single step and resource you need in order to self-publish your own book. On this episode, James and Mark discuss the challenges of putting the course together and provide some insight as to what it's likely to contain when it launches at the end of this month.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Our introduction to the topic of visibility and today's guest.
- Mark's latest feedback from his editor.
- How feedback from an editor is typically handled.
- James' editing process as it stands presently.
- The latest progress concerning the upcoming course.
- The need for visibility done right.
- Adam's experience as an author and author service company owner.
- The problems that contribute to the visibility problems authors face.
- The ways Adam and his team are attacking the visibility problem.
- How authors can use the platform to promote their books.
- Utilizing the paid features of the platform to get even more reach.
- How the platform is laid out for beauty and exposure for authors.
- Blurring the lines between traditional publishing and self publishing.

- What you need to be able to do to make use of iAuthor.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.iauthor.uk.com
- [The IAuthor blog](#)
- BOOK: [The Lean Startup](#)
- [Kobo](#)
- [ConvertKit](#)
- [LeadPages](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 38 from the Self-publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller, join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello, Mark we are back in video, full screen when we're talking. When I stop talking and you start, you go full screen.

Mark: Very sophisticated.

James: It's like an automatic director. All those years at the BBC and the director was sitting there pressing buttons in the vision mixer, we don't need them.

Mark: It's like glimpsing behind the curtain.

James: It is. How are you and what's going on in the Dawson life?

Mark: I'm coming down with a cold. My two children had it first, then my wife had it, so it was inevitable

that I get it eventually so if I'm kind of bunged up during idle chat, that's the reason.

James: You have just got over a cough.

Mark: Yeah, I know.

James: Or something.

Mark: It's one thing after another but of course this has happened right in the middle of the busiest part of the year in terms of putting a course together so great timing, well done. Well done, my body. Excellent.

James: Well done. My daily list on my board, it's never less than going from top to bottom of stuff and I'm sure it's the same with you so yeah, we are busy at the moment. We're dressed quite similarly, aren't we?

Mark: Yeah.

James: That's worrying.

Mark: Those listening, which would be the majority, James and I are both wearing fetching-

James: Mankinis.

Mark: Mankinis. Oh God. There's an image. Sorry everybody.

James: Yeah and you will be able to see my cat in a shot if you're watching via YouTube as well. It has obviously attracted interest, a visual element to our podcast because I've noticed our number of YouTube subscribers jumped by 85 this week so people obviously want to get a look at us. We'll see if it goes

down next week.

Mark: Exactly.

James: Now that they've seen us. In this episode we are going to talk about visibility and there are various services and things available to you to try and crack that very important part of selling your book.

It's a bit of a conundrum for many people, particularly if you write in a busy, competitive genre.

We're going to look at the iAuthor platform and talk to Adam Kolczynski coming up in just a minute.

Before then, we want to do a little update really on our author careers where we are the inexperienced me and the best-selling you. Who wants to go first?

Mark: I got some notes back from my copy editor yesterday, I think it was, a couple of days late and it's always interesting to see how that plays out because it's an Amazon deal so they take care of all the editorial stuff for me.

This was a new copy editor that I haven't worked with before. Very thorough. In some ways, slightly too thorough because one of the things, this book is set all around the world but most of my readers tend to be from the States so one of the things that I have learned over the last four years is trying to get that compromise right between using the Queen's English and the American version of the same. Spellings I don't change. I use the English spelling so colour has a u and all that kind of stuff but when it comes to words like boot and car park, shopping trolley, they become things like trunk and parking lot and shopping cart.

James: But by your choice, they do.

Mark: Yeah. I choose that. It's a tricky one. You certainly wouldn't have a character who is American,

either thinking the wrong term or using it in speech. Over time it's evolved that I tend to use those words myself. The reason for that is most of my audience is in America and I've had a lot of bad reviews from people who who don't know what a boot is, the wing of a car or things like that.

This editor, doing his job properly, went through the manuscript and changed them all and it just read a bit strange. There's a scene set in Shanghai and it's an underground parking lot and he changed that to car park and I know that that will go over badly with readers who've come to expect me to use slightly different kind of language.

I'm going to have to think about how I deal with that, probably as I just change them all back again and will tell him that those are words that my readers have come to expect me to use.

James: But it is a tricky one, isn't it? I think if I'm reading a book with a British character in Britain and he uses the term trunk, I think it grates with me a little bit because you feel protective over your English and you want American English to be identifiably American and British English to be identifiably British English.

Part of me thinks quite judgmentally about people who complain to you that you've misunderstood the terms because you think, well, you're reading a book about a British agent. It's a bit like buying an old house, you buy it for its old features, you buy it for the features that make it a period house.

YOU'RE READING A BOOK ABOUT A BRITISH AGENT BECAUSE IT'S SET IN BRITAIN AND THAT'S PART AND PARCEL OF IT, ISN'T IT?

Mark: Yeah. That's fine in principle but wait until you put a book up and you start getting a flood of bad reviews, you have to find a compromise. I certainly would never have any of my British characters in speech using words like trunk, they wouldn't use that, they would use boot, for example.

But in the actual narrative, and certainly for non-native speakers, then you'd use the language that they use. It's an interesting balance. It would irritate me a lot the first time I had issues with that but you just have to figure out what your audience, where they are, what they tend to expect and then try to strike a balance between the two.

James: When you're being edited as part of a publishing deal, as you are in this case, I mean, these are the changes you've got to make?

OR HOW MUCH OF THIS IS JUST A SUGGESTION TO YOU AS AN AUTHOR?

Mark: It's mostly suggestions. Unless it's a really egregious error that I couldn't justify it, then you'd have to go with the editor but I think generally speaking, I get the final call on content issues like that.

I've gone through it once and because this has been to beta-readers about two months ago I've had lots and lots of readers back from my beta readers, some absolutely fantastic ones because there's a scene set, there's a couple of chapters set in Washington and I got my geography wrong. One of my readers lives in Washington so he's corrected everything.

He's given me the proper route that a taxi would take to get from A to B and there's even a scene set in the airport there and apparently there's been some work done there that involved the baggage reclaim area has changed from the floor I thought it was on to a basement and he's told me that that's happened. That's not something that would be very, very easy to find out online so ... you could also say that's me being ... changing those, just nickety but on the other hand, I like to be authentic.

James: Yeah.

Mark: This is the kind of thing that you can get from beta readers.

James: Absolutely.

Mark: All kinds of different, useful, changes. Anyway, that was fun.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

James: Well, before me, you don't plan trips to ever do this. Obviously it would be lovely, wouldn't it? But financially, just a visit to Dulles Airport to see where the baggage is handled now.

Mark: Yeah, I don't think I can really justify that. The internet is a pretty cool thing, you get most of it right. But then if you have a decent strategy to send it out to a decent size team of advanced readers, then all those kinds of errors that you make, you can get those corrected quite quickly. We need to find decent beta readers with actual experience in aviation.

James: Yes, yeah, definitely. I've already started putting feelers out in that regard.

Where am I with my book? I'm blogging the experience but that blog is a little bit behind because I'm not going to blog every week so I'm dribbling those out. The blog that's going out this week is the one that I wrote after submission but before getting notes back, my first set of notes so it's slightly angst-ridden.

I think I mentioned this before on the podcast that after I've submitted it to somebody, I immediately started viewing the book in a different way. It gave me the first proper step back, objective step back that I'd had in the sort of five years I've been working on drafts of the book and I immediately started seeing significant problems with it.

By the time the notes came, I was quite pleased with the fact that I was able to anticipate a lot of what Jenny said and was already thinking in my mind of how I was going to tackle it.

The problem is I'm faced with quite a daunting task of almost rewriting it again, just because I'm writing now in a different style, a different way and I'm finding this bit hard. I write quickly and I can write stories quickly, I can bash out words but I can't write in a style I'm not used to, which has a lot more to it, a bit more depth to it, more character to it.

It is less focused on moving the story forward and more focused on enjoying the time with the characters and the setting, which sounds like the wrong way to do it as a thriller but actually because I went so far the other way in driving the story, it became incredible because it forward too quickly.

I'm finding this slow. I did a session yesterday. I haven't written today but I did a session yesterday and I'm probably writing at 25% speed I was before. I feel a little bit anxious at the moment, a little bit down on the fact there's a long, it's going to be a long haul with this to get the book done. It's good. I'm really

liking what I'm reading but it's hard. It's hard, this writing lark.

Mark: No one said it was easy. No, it's hard. Every time all the words that you're writing now, are making you a better writer and all the changes that you're making to this manuscript, you're making it a better book so you've got to focus on the long term.

It might take you a couple of months to do this edit and that's how long it takes, that's how long it takes. That's just the way it is. When you're ready to start your second book, then a lot of this learning will mean that you're able to move more quickly. You won't have such a substantial edit towards the end of the process next time.

I wrote, I don't know, half a million words before I published anything. Most of that is rubbish so they say it can take a million words to find your voice. I think that's exaggerated.

James: Right.

Mark: It's all good learning experience for you.

James: Yeah, but the latest blog post was just the one I wrote before getting the notes back as I say, is all about mindset. And it's all about how I defined why I was writing, what was the purpose behind my writing so that when the notes came back, I could take them in the right spirit.

If I was writing because I loved this piece of work and it's a little piece of me that's going out there, then I react differently. I react badly to notes.

If I'm writing it because I want to be commercially successful and I've got a defined goal in say 18 months, two years of where I want to be, then I look at the notes completely differently and look at them in a much more business-like way, which is of course, exactly where I am.

That was a useful exercise to go through and blogging it was partly helpful for that. I'm now thinking about the way that I write this because I bashed out the story very quickly, bashed it out again very quickly and now rewriting it slowly.

Actually, it's not a bad work flow for me. It's not a bad work flow for me just to start off and write the sort of bare bones 60,000 words of the story and then write the novel after that. Because once I've got the story in my mind, I find it a lot easier to concentrate on describing the scenes and enjoying that. It might not be a bad work flow for me in the future but we'll see.

One thing that was really good was that my editor, when she gave me her notes, it would be a good idea if we talked it through on the phone before you start the rewrite, which I absolutely took her up on. We spoke for an hour and she very kindly allowed me to record the conversation for this podcast.

Obviously, I'm listening back to it anyway from a working point of view but we'll package that up somehow for the podcast and I think that will be interesting. Again, particularly for people who've never been through this process, people who are writing their book at the moment, maybe got towards the end of their manuscript and have not employed an editor, don't know where to start with that, to see and hear it, hear the process and what it sounds like, I think will be useful. We'll get that packaged up in the next few weeks.

Mark: Yeah, I look forward to listening to that too.

James: Good. Look, we've got so much work to do if we're going to get this 101 course up and running. It's, I have to say, looking fabulous. I edited a session, little preview here, I edited a session with Brian Cohen a few days ago, which you've introduced, Mark, and it's sensational, particularly that it's completely changed the way that I'm writing copy, just in a couple of days. That's just one of the sessions. It's a really, really good thing. We've got some top quality stuff in there. Not to mention, you. Of course you're in there.

Mark: Yeah, I tag along most of the time. It is good. I'm quite pleased with how it's coming along. We're taking our time but we're not going to rush this. I want it to be as comprehensive as I can and I can't announce anything yet but we could have a contribution from someone very, very impressive indeed.

Someone that all of us would want to hear from so we're just trying to kind of dot the i's and cross the t's on that one. We'll hopefully be able to announce that in the next couple of weeks.

James: Yeah and it's good, the way it's coming together. I think we always intended this 101 course - it can't simply be a repository of information, it's got to be a guide, a hand-holding guide of what you need to do, as well as a repository of information.

So there's places you'll go in the course just to learn how to do things, some simple tasks, some quite complicated but the course itself is, we're here with you, these are the steps and this is why you need to do it. Because that's not out there.

You can get all the bits of information but really, you don't know what information you need exactly, at the beginning. I certainly don't and for me, that's how the course is looking and we've got early betas on it now and stuff's coming back and so we're getting some pretty positive messages and helpful comments as well.

Okay, so visibility, getting recognized in this increasingly competitive area and the sort of depressing overall stat on this, I suppose is that the overall number of books is increasing at a faster rate than the number of readers, although the number of readers is going up as well, certainly when it comes to ebooks.

We know from the social media audiences that there is a market out there, a sensationally huge market and if you get that marketing right, you get that visibility right, there's hay to be made, to use an English expression.

One guy who's been in the thick of it over the years is called Adam Kolczynski. He is in the UK and despite, I think, I guess a Polish-derived name, and Adam has gone from all things really but he sets out his path to where he is today and where he is today is having founded the platform iAuthor.

I'VE GOT ADAM AT THE BEGINNING TO TALK TO US ABOUT HOW HE GOT TO WHERE HE IS TODAY.

Adam: I've been fortunate to work at both ends of the publishing spectrum. First, as an indie author, I wrote a book called *The Oxford Virus*, based loosely on time at uni and later, I founded a self-publishing

service provider. That was called Polybius Books and it ran between 2010 and 2013 and it was a specialist branding and editorial service aimed at indie authors right across the anglo-sphere. I had authors from Canada, the States, Australia ...

James: Do you mind me just interrupting?

WHAT SPECIFICALLY DID YOU DO THEN FOR AN AUTHOR THERE?

Adam: I had 6 authors on my books and they retained full rights, full copyrights. My aim was to be very much a facilitator, to help them forge their own visual brand, liaise with cover design, get them through the root and branch editing. Some of it was proofreading, other of it was much more substantive editing and once I published them, I published them under the Polybius Books imprint.

It's round about during this time that I got acquainted with the publishing world at large, particularly publishing world in the post-iPad era. I attended many trade fairs, focus groups, subscribed to literary blogs, as one does. And whenever I spoke to industry insiders, I asked them the same question, what's the biggest challenge facing the publishing industry? What's the Gordian knot of publishing? Almost unanimously the answer was book discoverability.

It's round about this time that I got together my two developers and we wanted to tackle this problem head on and got cracking in mid-2012. First, we ran a closed beta. a closed beta was effectively capped at 250 users. Really, I think this whole discoverability question needs unpacking, needs deconstructing as a concept.

The number of readers is growing arithmetically but number of books is only really increasing exponentially. When you have many more books competing for fewer reader eyeballs, it's so much harder for indie authors to stand out.

I think this discoverability problem is also exacerbated by 1) scarcity of attention. We live in a culture of instant gratification, the I want it and I want it now. I think both mobile and tablet readers are more time squeezed than ever and it's therefore harder for new authors to capture and maintain reader interest.

I think a parallel point is poor user experience when sampling books online. I think existing solutions

struggle to capture the whole serendipitous element of browsing a book in a bookshop.

You have obstacles like awkward page navigation, restrictive digital rights management settings, annoying file downloads and all of these collectively deter readers from sampling books online. And unless a reader can try before they buy, the whole impulse purchase doesn't occur and therefore millions of books are left undiscovered. A solution that tackle that problem head on seemed to be the most logical starting point.

James: You defined a problem and congratulations by the way, for getting Gordian knots into your answer because I think that may be the first time we've had that particular metaphor used. You've come hard way through this. You started a business, you've worked at the coal face trying to get authors to commercial success and you've started to really focus down on that key thing which is this visibility and the problems.

HOW THEN DID YOU TRANSFER THIS DISCOVERY OF THE PROBLEM INTO SOME SORT OF SOLUTION?

Adam: I'm a big believer in the whole lean startup methodology. Eric Reese penned a book called the Lean Startup and it's this concept that products should evolved iteratively. In this case, five iterations.

It's effectively a version of a product and you have customer validation at every milestone. In my case, I launched this closed beta in the tail end of 2012 and because it was capped at a very manageable number of users; 250 to be precise. I was able to pin down exactly what flagship features are users looking at.

Three features emerged from this. I would say probably in the minimum viable product stage that they have since evolved quite substantially. One of these was the importance of wider groupings of books. It's one thing to have books in standard genres but if you can curate them in much, much larger groupings, then you actually have the effect of transcending genre. It's this idea that genre-driven discovery is no longer enough because gaps are left and subtle layers are missed.

If you have groupings like say books written in the first person singular or books that redefine the human condition or cat memoirs written by the owner, I mean the possibilities are endless but all of these are a very interesting way of a user creating a theme. And then through the power of crowd-sourcing, dragging and dropping existing books on a platform into that theme.

Clearly, for someone who's adding a book to a theme, they're expanding their reach but in a very, very targeted and quite original way. I think that marries the whole serendipitous element of the platform and seeded sorting ensured that most liked and most followed themes remained at the top so this idea of the cream of the crop rises to the top and that kept themes' quality rich. Themes that attract say 20 readers will tend to be less visible but there is also a randomized function which ensures that you keep things absolutely active and fresh.

James: I was going to say, how do you stop the site becoming one specific genre dominated because you get a few romance readers on there. The algorithms then are almost a self-fulfilling thing, it's just going to start promoting only romance after a while.

BUT YOU'VE BUILT SOMETHING INTO THAT TO MAKE SURE THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN.

Adam: That's exactly it. There's algorithmic capping, which means that you can't create unlimited themes in a particular sub-genre and if someone's created a theme and there is no content to that theme, the system will automatically delete that theme within three months. This is made very clear.

No content is ever lost, it's always backed up but that means that as a reader, someone who's looking to discover a book and has no interest in whether that book is indie sourced or trade published sourced, they have no time for sparsely populated themes. They want to see what's new on the Rialto, what can I buy today? I think that's a really important element of themes.

James: You've thought a lot about the reader experience here and that's very important. We're going to come back to that so that people can understand what they're going to get out of this, but just from an author point of view then, going into the system and using iAuthor to get visibility. How does it appear to them?

HOW DO THEY CATEGORIZE THEIR BOOK? BECAUSE A LOT OF PEOPLE DO TALK ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO VERY EASILY CATEGORIZE THEIR BOOK.

Adam: Yes, this is it. This is the difference I suppose between seachability and discoverability. Amazon style metadata will make a book searchable in seconds if the reader already knew of its existence.

But what if they didn't? That's why it's so important to have keywords which capture the essence of a book so one level iAuthor has over 30 genres and there areas and they are indexed at the very point of creating

a book profile by the author. Then there is the option to exploit those gaps between genres and upload books to themes. That's how they're categorized.

James: Okay.

Adam: Then a secondary part, once an author has uploaded this book and created either their own theme or dragged and dropped a book into an existing theme, there is the second flag ship feature, which is the book sampling tool.

It's this idea that an author can entice readers by uploading an interactive book sample. That sample's controlled entirely from the author's use of dashboard. The sample is totally browser-centric. There's no annoying file downloads like I was referring to earlier.

It's embedable so using just one line of HTML code and there's a whole tutorial on my blog about how you can do that. That sample can travel anywhere. It can be embedded into a blog, into a site, and it's also responsive so it's built for mobile and tablet, particularly when 60% of our user base is outside the realms of desktop, that mobile responsivity is an absolute must.

James: That's a very neat feature and it's somewhere between the blurb and the permafrees book, isn't it?

Adam: That's right. That's exactly it.

James: You've got this chunk of text that goes well beyond what you'd normally have in an advert and give people a proper idea of whether this is going to be a book for them.

THAT'S A REALLY NEAT FEATURE, AND THE FACT THAT YOU CAN THEN STICK THAT ON YOUR BLOG OR OTHER PEOPLE'S BLOGS OR ANYWHERE ELSE IS GREAT.

Adam: Prominent retail links in the body of the expanded sample are also really useful in driving the impulse purchase. Because you have, for example, WattPad which is a really great place for serialized stories. What isn't there are retail links or direct download links which remunerates the author at the point of purchase.

It's great for focusing on stories in progress but not necessarily published books, whereas iAuthor really tries to attract users with genuine purchase intent. What we've noticed is that the browse, sample, buy discovery funnel, the conversion rate of purchase is really greatly increased ever since we launched the lit sampler, this proprietary book sampling tool and it's evolved quite substantially.

Two years ago, it didn't have all that many formatting features. It was a great repository of content but you couldn't, as an author, underline, italicize, you couldn't indent paragraphs to make it exactly the way the original has and imagery was a difficult one whereas now you've got all of these things as standard and it works on all devices.

I think the other thing is the analytics dashboard. That marries together all the features. What that is is that it measures book performance by total clicks, unique clicks and visitor demographics, empowers authors and publishers to plan more efficient advertising campaigns because there's no longer that reliance on guesswork.

James: Real figures that actually mean something because there's a lot of discussion recently. We've very recently had this admission from Facebook that their metrics when it came to video views weren't all that they should be.

I THINK THERE'S GOING TO BE OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, AN INCREASING FOCUS ON THE METRICS THAT SITES ARE USING BUT THIS IS AN INTERESTING ONE BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SOME GENUINE FIGURES THERE.

Adam: That's right and what's interesting is that there is also an upgraded version of the standard book profile. That's a premium ad called 7-day ads. What this is, is a native ad so it makes the reader who sees the ad both the journey and the destination. It targets readers who are already immersed in the whole iAuthor ecosystem.

It's a little bit like sponsored tweets on Twitter or promoted posts on Facebook and ever since the launch of this premium feature that we've really looked at what sort of return on investments are users seeing. Of the 800 users who've created ads so far, we launched this feature in February of this year, the average ad increases the reach, the number of impressions, four-fold. Their baseline without a promoted profile, is say 10 hits per day. They would look to have 40 hits per day with the ad and the advertising author tends to get a two-fold return on investment within 3 weeks of the advertising campaign ending.

Obviously exact results will depend on several factors like the existing sales baseline, whether subjective factors like the author's book cover, is it genuinely eye-catching and professional? Has the author created a book sample in the body of their advert?

But we can confidently say that that premium feature is hitting the mark. For example, over the last fortnight, 60% of advertisers were repeat advertisers. There's very much this idea that if you have three books, you test the water with one book and then you try another and then another still and so you're cross-promoting your content all the time within very realistic costings. You're not having to cough up 4 or 500 pounds like other premium solutions. This is 9.99 for a week and that's it.

James: Okay, so it's not a per click, per view, per impression system.

DO YOU GUARANTEE THE NUMBER OF IMPRESSIONS IT'S GOING TO GET OR DOES THAT DEPEND ON SOMETHING ELSE?

Adam: The benchmark we had in mind, we did this based on beta testing and client feedback was that that it's roughly 7 pounds 50 per 1000 impressions was a really reasonable thing to go on and so 9 pounds 99 for a week of advertising normally equates to 1400 to 1800 impressions.

That's what we're looking at. And obviously the other thing is the ads are mobile and tablet optimized so there's that certainty that users ads are being seen across all devices, not a situation where you create an ad on desktop and presume it to be self-marketing and then check on your mobile and think, where the hell is my ad? I paid for this. So it's very important that it's a seamless ad experience whatever device you're on.

James: That's a very interesting, slightly different way of doing it. I'm interested to know a couple of things about it.

I ALSO WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR GENERAL BUSINESS MODEL BECAUSE I THINK I'M RIGHT IN SAYING, UP UNTIL FEBRUARY WHEN YOU LAUNCHED THIS PREMIUM SERVICE, THIS WAS AN ENTIRELY FREE SERVICE FOR READERS AND AUTHORS.

Adam: That's right. I'm a very big believer in giving value up front. Value in that sense builds familiarity of the product. Secondly, I think it also brings trust.

A lot of companies register creative products and in two or three years, they're gone, nowhere to be seen because they never reached that critical mass of users. In iAuthor's case, I'm a bootstrap startup which means in this case, that I haven't sought out investment rounds because I find that waters down the whole idea of creative autonomy. You're no longer answerable to your clients, who in a way are the people who got you there, you've become answerable to other powers, investors, some of who may even be armchair investors. I haven't dabbled in that game at all. I'm the sole shareholder and I've got two developers and I hire them and that's it.

In terms of value added, the key thing was once we reached a critical mass of 22,000 registered users and 14,000 of whom are very active, and the combined social media reach of 125,000, it seemed that this was absolutely the time for users who were most active to have a key feature to differentiate them from other free users. That's where one of the elements of the business model became the 7-day ads, the premium feature but the secondary one, which has been running from the very beginning is affiliate links.

An affiliate link is effectively a cookie that's browser-centric and whenever there's a referral from Amazon, from iAuthor to either Amazon or Kobo, iAuthor takes a cut and it's also geo-targeted tagged. So let's say you're a reader and you discover a book in America. You'll be instantly rerouted to Amazon.com whereas if you're a UK-based reader, you'll be forwarded to Amazon.co.uk. That's very important in driving high conversion rates. Otherwise, there's the inconvenience of having to switch marketplace. A lot of people would drop off at that point.

James: There are obviously, if you've already set yourself up as an affiliate and you've got links on your own website, that's an important part of your income is getting those weird and wonderful emails from Amazon telling you that the person who bought your book then went on to buy something, occasionally unmentionable.

Adam: That's right.

James: If you're lucky, a Rolex.

Adam: That's it. I'm privy to all this. It's actually quite a laugh, looking at this on a basis and there's obviously the delay. You're obviously told things in real time as royalty, you know, Kindle direct

publishing royalty, people will know, there's a 90-day window between the transaction being made and the payment being made but what's really good is that it's both the Amazon Canada, Amazon UK and Amazon US marketplaces that are all providing their own independent data.

So I've got quite a repository of data in knowing not just how many users from each country have joined iAuthor but how many readers and purchasers in each country are there. I've almost got separate demographics for the reader element and a separate for the author element. I think that's very important from an analytics and marketing point of view.

James: Okay, so it's still free for authors to use but there is this option now for the paid advert if you like, to call it that. Just focusing on that for a second, your 9.99, it runs for a week, roughly gives you 1400 impressions.

IS THERE A WAY OF SCALING IF SOMEBODY IS GETTING A GREAT RETURN FROM THAT AND THEY WANT TO GO ALL IN ON THIS? CAN THEY BUY 2 OF THE SAME BOOK AND GET 2,800 IMPRESSIONS OR DOES IT NOT WORK LIKE THAT?

Adam: At the moment, very much it's the idea of one book, one advert. My reasoning was very much that you test the water with one ad, see how it goes and the best you can do is keep repeating the ads so within a given month, if you renew the ad four times then you're going to have it running continuously.

One of the reasons why I made it a 7-day ad is because by running for seven consecutive days, it tallies with the length of a Kindle countdown deal. It's not arbitrarily decided it should be a week. It's this idea that committing to a month in advance is probably not something many indie authors would like but across a two or three day window, you're not going to get enough traction. Seven consecutive days really tallies well with Kindle Direct deals.

James: Yeah. You've had a good take, we talked about 800-odd ads. 60% repeat use so obviously it's working for some people.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT SORT OF ROI'S PEOPLE ARE GETTING?

Adam: A two-fold return on investment within three weeks of the campaign ending, that's based on a sample of 50 of those 800 users. These are users who are happy, transparent to publishing their results and have no problem.

I'm basically looking at the number of increases in reach and that's data that I myself am privy to because I can look at each individual analytics dashboard and look at the number of hits they were getting in the non-premium version and then contrast and compare with the ones in the premium version.

James: Obviously we don't want a data breach here but you're the webmaster effectively here so you get to at least look at the data and you can talk about that. That's interesting. I think probably for authors who are starting out, and that's really where I think iAuthor excels, in getting that initial visibility.

You get to a certain point as you talked about earlier, about the sort of critical point for any business, then the certain traction you've got that can work for you but getting to that point is incredibly difficult and getting more competitive all the time.

IAUTHOR IS A VISIBILITY PLATFORM THAT NEW AUTHORS LIKE ME, WRITING MY FIRST BOOK, SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN. I GUESS THAT'S WHO YOU'RE AIMING AT.

Adam: That's right. 40% of our users are trade published. The other 60% are either indie or hybrid published. I think one of the points with iAuthor is that we made no distinction about routes to market because just as a reader doesn't go into a book shop and look at the copyright page and say, "Aha, it's a Faber and Faber book!"

That's not how people work. They look at how compelling the blurb is, the subliminal influence of how the cover has caught your eye and there is various things like have you seen a billboard, have you seen a review?

We're trying to really recreate that experience online and therefore there are no editor's picks. All content is user curated and user generated and route to market is absolutely never a barrier to entry.

James: It's a very visual site. I don't know if that's your background or just because this is what you worked out, as you talked about earlier that as one of the key components of visibility but it's visual in the sense that it's quite beautiful looking, presentation of your books.

I'M INTERESTED TO KNOW HOW YOU WORK WITH AUTHORS TO ENSURE THAT REMAINS THE CASE BECAUSE AS YOU SAY, IT'S AUTHOR-CENTRIC IN THE SENSE THAT THEY GENERATE THOSE IMAGES AND THEY GENERATE THEIR OWN COPY, ETC.

Adam: I'm a big believer in this idea of forging your own visual brand because that's something that's unique, it's authentic and it's hopefully, consistent. There's this great quote from Fauzia Burke who's a San Diego-based author branding expert. She says, "A personal brand lets you carve out your niche. After all, there is no competition for you." I couldn't agree more.

Personal branding is this process of differentiating yourself from the crowd by identifying your unique value proposition, as it were and then leveraging it across platform with a consistent message and image. It's this image-centricity, it's largely inspired by Pinterest, by Instagram and this importance of combining and condensing as much information as you can into a simple image.

One example would be, you probably noticed when browsing idle through the image slide shows and when you create a book profile, you can use the available image slots to share let's say photos of your book signings or cross promote your other book covers.

And this is really your question, how do you ensure that there is consistency in terms of file type, that it's high res, and that an author is not running into any problems across the board. What I do is I go very much for the idea of ... let's say fair policy in terms of every image that fits the aisle of a template can be accepted but if anything is let's say, low resolution or the wrong file type has been uploaded, I'll go in, I'll correct it and the author will be eternally grateful. Is that scalable across millions of authors? Well, the answer is not within current parameters.

At the moment, to ensure the integrity of the site, and to make sure it's eye-catching for both passing readers as well as active authors, I ensure that manually. I go through everything book by book, checking affiliate links, checking file types.

James: Yeah, as you say, you're a one-man show.

YOU'VE GOT 100% OF THE SHARES SO YOU HAVE TO DO ALL THE WORK, RIGHT?
OR MOST OF IT.

Adam: That's right. What's quite refreshing is that when I do get together with my other two developers, whenever we're working with an iteration, the most recent one was Lit Sample 2.0, the successor to the proprietary ereader that we launched three years ago.

Having the experience of working as a team, as a startup in Kings Cross, that was a flavor of what goes on in Silicon valley and places like that. Apart from that, it's very much a case of working one's own but also recognizing that clients are your brand advocates. They are your forgers of your social graph density.

The links that they create amongst themselves are more than the sum of their parts. To a large extent, they are almost equal partners in the company.

James: I think also what happens is that good looking images, how do you say, image-centric, good looking images inspire other good looking adverts and images. People will spend time on your site looking at some amazing, very well focused covers and what's that going to do to them? Of course it's going to make them want to be a part of that so by creating that in the first place and working hard to make sure that's how it looks, and it does look like that now, I guess there's going to be a certain organic move towards looking good for everyone else.

I've noticed actually, quite a few SPF names, people from our community are using iAuthor. I'm going to pick out one which is James P. Sumner, who's, if people want to go and have a look at his book and just have a look at how the page works and underneath you've got similar, I guess, to the Amazon type of algorithm that you talked about earlier, so you've got what you call serendipitous discovery.

Adam: That's right.

James: Which drops out there and funny enough, there's another name who's coming onto our podcast very shortly, Wayne Stinnet. We interviewed him in Florida last week, he is tied in with James Sumner. I have to say, it's very nice to see some very familiar SPF names all over your site.

THAT SAYS TO ME, BECAUSE WE HAVE A VERY SMALL CROWD, ADAM, SO THAT SAYS TO ME THAT YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT THAT'S ATTRACTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE.

Adam: I totally agree. The idea of quality attracts quality and when it comes to visuals, there could be no better context. But I agree that indie author generally if you think about how the once quick notion of an indie author sharing shelf space with a trade published New York Times best seller, that's now very real and very manifest.

This idea of being discerning, being an authorpreneur first and foremost, of all the portmanteaus of the last 10 years, authorpreneur I think is my personal favorite. It's this idea of people generally who have come through the indie route, always good to see yourself first and foremost as an entrepreneur and if by 2020, an estimated 50% of all ebooks will be self published, as Mark Coker at Smashwords predicted, I actually think it could be more than that.

One of the things is looking at all the competing communities and seeing what community suits your particular medium of delivery. It is an ultimate endorsement of a product to have so many people coming organically or from word of mouth.

It's ironic how even though I've got this premium advertising feature on my site, I've done very little advertising of my own. I've relied very much on word of mouth either through social media or through going through trade events and so and so forth. When you see Self-publishing Formula's podcast listeners already being iAuthor regulars, and for those who aren't, can't wait to welcome them on board. It's great to see.

James: The trad published authors on your site, is this typically an author who's just gone out of their way to do a bit of their own marketing of their own books or is it the trade companies themselves that are putting their books on there?

Adam: It's definitely the former. It's very much the author realizing that this is a discovery site only so rights and royalties don't enter the equation. It's not the in-house marketing team of a large player, it's the authors themselves deciding, "Ah, yes, this is a discoverability opportunity. I want to add my own book."

And this is often without bringing their publicist onboard at all but obviously through word of mouth, the publicist will then hear about it from the author and send other authors my way. This is the great thing about the carte blanche that publicists give their authors, knowing that they can't do all the promotion in-house. They do have to almost outsource promotion to the author themselves because it's often the content creator who is most committed to creating or promoting that content.

In many cases, for example, Wendy Corsi Staub, she's a Harper Collins published New York Times best seller. She sold over 4 million copies in the last five years alone. I can't take credit for that, she's already

sold them before she came to us, but she went absolutely direct. She's Harper Collins published but her publicists know nothing about this.

James: I love the fact that this is blind to trad or self-publishing. We talked a lot recently about having to get to the point soon, please, where we don't have such a thick dividing line. Because really you're talking about publishing a book and there are different ways of doing that.

When you self publish, to call it that still, you outsource quite a lot of the professional services and when you trad publish, all you're really doing is outsourcing and the way you do the deal is through rights.

For me, I'd like to see traditional publishers working with authors who want to keep their rights and I think that's an absolutely essential part of the way they need to adapt to survive the next 50 years, if not the next five years.

YOUR SITE IS ALREADY BEAUTIFULLY PLACED TO WORK IN THAT ENVIRONMENT WHERE THERE'S A MUCH MORE BLURRED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.

Adam: I think that's a really good point. It's this idea that when you do create that total blurring of boundaries between these different categories, you also open the door to authors who may be traditionally published but then decide to go it alone because they've already garnered a particular author platform.

They then harness and piggy back off the readership that they've developed over many years with their conventional publisher, having honed the skills, having become critical self editors and now are in a position where they can unleash and recreate themselves as indie authors.

There's a theme on iAuthor called books by indie authors who used to be trade published or there should also probably also be another theme, the exact reverse, books who used to be indie authors are now being snapped up by trade publishers.

Although the movement the original movement, I think it's more exciting. If you look for example at Mark Dawson's background, if you look at someone like Joanna Penn, there is always that blurring of boundaries in terms of the background.

James: How's it going? You talked earlier about 22,000. Were you talking about 22,000 readers?

Adam: 22,000 registered users, all of which are showing genuine discovery intent, not just gratuitous self promotion.

I purposely don't distinguish between blogger, author, reader. There's a danger of assigning tags. You know, calling yourself an author without calling yourself a reader is a little bit like being a life coach without having lived.

Reading is the creative lifeblood of all these professions and so it's important to see rather how our users interacting with the site and then you can call them reader-focused or author-focused. When people sign up, there is no, "Are you a reader, therefore you need to discover this."

I think that that's the other point. iAuthor provides the clay but it's users who do the molding. There are no prescriptive ways in which one has to use the site. There aren't email newsletters which are sent condensing content. I think Book Bub and so on already do that very very well.

This is serendipitous discovery, I think is when that discovery doesn't come on a daily or weekly basis into your email inbox. There's already enough email fatigue out there. It's encouraging someone to get up in the morning and say, "hmm, what's new on the Rialto? Let me check what new content is on this little site". I think that's really what I was driven by.

James: Okay. Great. Well there are some big names on there and people just starting out so it's a good place to be able to rub shoulders with some of the more established names, if you are starting out.

JUST TO WRAP THINGS UP AND GIVE PEOPLE SOME MORE PRACTICAL POINTERS, WHAT POSITION DO THEY NEED TO BE IN BEFORE THEY CAN START USING IAUTHOR?

Adam: One of the most important things is knowing that iAuthor is very much based on the post-publication end of the market. So if you have a book in progress and you want to release it as a serialized story, then iAuthor probably wouldn't be your platform for you to showcase your work.

Of course join as a reader, join as someone who's commenting and interacting with the literary world at large but if you're an author and you want to showcase your own brand, create a theme, create a book sample, that would be for a book which is already in some online retailer.

If it's on Kobo, if it's on Amazon, that's enough of a criteria, it takes enough of that criteria to join but if you're three or four chapters into a book and you're still at the stage of editing, that probably iAuthor isn't quite ready for you but it will be in six, seven month's time.

The most important thing is, once you're already on iAuthor, how do you use it? How do you harness it? There's loads and loads of brand building tips on the blog but if I could reduce it to three. One, I'd say is this idea of give and you shall receive. By being proactive about following users, you're actually attracting and initiating meaningful engagements.

Very, very often for example, you join a social network like Facebook but you just kept it as a totally dead profile, never logged in, never followed anyone else, it would completely defeat the object. The most successful authors, those whose sales baseline is the highest, are almost invariably those who followed 4, 5, 600 users.

The other thing is thinking like a reader, this idea of showing authentic interest in literature at large and that helps to engender a collective spirit of serendipitous discovery that's greater than the sum of its parts. Not gratuitously promoting content, for example, there's a special offers field within each book. Updating that with regular info about someone's book launch or when their next book is due is fantastic.

But summarizing all their reviews, which are already duplicated elsewhere, like on Amazon or Kobo, is probably a little bit too in your face. The third thing is this importance of harnessing your existing network. If you've stumbled upon compelling content on iAuthor, share it with your social media network because share buttons and bookmarking buttons are included as standard on every book profile, theme, user profile and book sample. All of those four types of profiles are also embeddable so they travel as far as your mind can take them.

James: It's an elegant looking site you've created, Adam.

YOU MENTIONED THE BLOG THERE. HOW DO PEOPLE ACCESS THE BLOG?

Adam: At the footer of the site, there are a number of social media icons. One of them is next to the Wikipedia icon, there is one which says M. that M stands for medium and that's where the blog is hosted, that's the 3rd party platform which I recommend generally to authors as a blogging platform. It's not so much geared towards creative writing and writing tips at the moment. It's at the moment, more geared toward startup culture and politics and stuff like that. But from a user interface point of view, instead of having my own proprietary blog, I've joined many startups in setting up home on Medium.

That will include brand building tips, how best to use iAuthor, why iAuthor exists, writing prompts to get you going, all that can be found at the iAuthor blog on Medium.

James: That's another elegant and good looking site. You're obviously a visual person. I hope you're sitting there in a dinner suit or something, Adam.

Adam: No, no, no. Track suit and very casual, mate.

James: You're a man with an eye for design, obviously. That's a key part, I think of iAuthor. I tell you what it's good for is just making you feel professional because it looks good and looks good to see your books looking smart alongside some very well established authors as well.

Adam: I think it's really important, this idea of the signal to noise ratio. If you have books which are instead of books taking center stage, you have loads of bloated tool bars, and pop up ads, that detracts from the, not just the number of engagements, the quality of engagements. I think the best user experience is a little bit like a joke, the best jokes don't need to be explained. It's true. The best user experience should be invisible to the user.

Scaling back and realizing that less is more was a very very big part in how we designed our user interface. It wasn't 100% like this at the beginning. As the founder of LinkedIn said, "If your first iteration doesn't make you cringe four years later, there's something wrong with it." Certainly, when I look at other screen shots of iAuthor, it's evolved visually as well as feature wise.

James: Adam Kolczynski. Really interesting talking to Adam. Good talker, he's obviously been in the industry and seen it from all sides and I think he's entrepreneurial, there's no question about that.

Before we talked about iAuthor, we talked about this period where he was doing this publishing house for self-published authors. You and I are always very cynical about the idea of that and interesting that he did move away from it ultimately although I think he was trying to make it different.

If you're going to self-publish, you really do need to do the grind yourself. With iAuthor, there's a platform there which can give you a helping hand so definitely worth checking out. I have to say it's a very good looking platform. I think certainly from a reader point of view, beautifully set out and he's an aesthetics guy.

We like aesthetics guys, right? We talked to the Vellum boys didn't we and having delved into Vellum a lot more since we spoke to them. I'm very impressed with the layout and look of that, that bit of software.

Just generally speaking, I think there's an exciting world out there of different platforms and different tools and they're well made and well constructed. Not all of them are, some of them are a little bit rough around the edges but I've been delving into Convertkit this week. I have to say, very impressed with Convertkit. It's a different from MailChimp. It's a different philosophy in the way that they do things. For a growing list, if you have more than 3 lists, then I say you need to be seriously looking at InfusionSoft or Convertkit.

When you've got as many lists as we've got, it's frankly foolish that we still are plugging away as we are. I know, it's probably my fault but we need to be porting across and yeah, very impressed with that.

IT'S A GOLDEN AGE, ACTUALLY IN TERMS OF WHAT'S AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB, RIGHT?

Mark: Yeah, loads of options out right now. iAuthor on the one hand, to Vellum; all kinds of different places and different services that can help authors get their books out there one way or another.

James: And Leadpages, which we're talking about in the 101 course as well. I think Leadpages is fantastic for people ... it's quite daunting to try and design that landing page. You will talk about it a lot in the course. This is what your landing page should do, the minimalist approach, the focus of it. And there is

this option with a 100+ templates, in fact, more than that, growing by the day that just makes that process workable.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely, no it's another great company. One of my favorites.

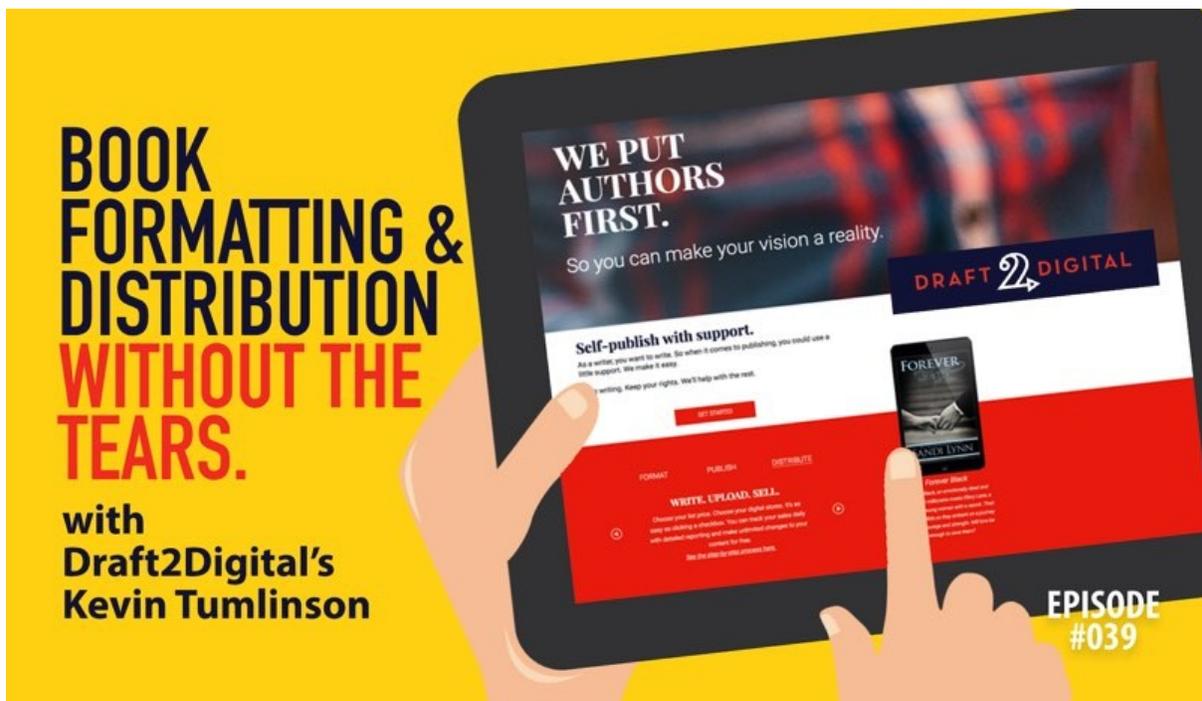
James: Good. Okay, well thank you very much indeed, Mark. I really hope that ... I don't know what to suggest really to fend off this cold, I mean it's orange juice is what you're supposed to be drinking?

Mark: Alcohol.

James: I'm not convinced but you go ahead anyway. We need you. We need you focused. Yeah, good. Keep well. Thank you very much for listening and indeed watching. Thank you to Primrose the cat for not making too much of a noise and we'll see you next week.

CHAPTER 36

THE ONE STOP SHOP FOR FORMATTING AND DISTRIBUTING BOOKS - WITH DRAFT2DIGITAL'S KEVIN TUMLINSON



THE SPF TEAM has been very impressed with the platform and service of the team at Draft2Digital. Their service has a two-pronged approach to help self-published authors with some of the most important aspects of self-publishing - and the service ensures that no financial investment is required until a book actually sells. On this episode, James chats with Kevin Tumlinson, a self-published author himself who works with the Draft2Digital team. Together they lift the lid on how D2D works, what it can do for self-published authors, and how the pricing model makes it easy for anyone to submit top quality ebooks to every digital platform.

FORMATTING YOUR BOOK CAN BE A NIGHTMARE. DRAFT2DIGITAL MAKES IT EASY FOR FREE.

In case you haven't noticed or you are a brand new author looking to self-publish, all of the online ebook vendors (Amazon, iBooks, Kobo, etc.) have differing digital requirements for books submitted for distribution on their platforms. That means you've either got to format the book yourself or you hire it out

to someone to do it for you. But not anymore. The Draft2Digital team has created an online manuscript conversion tool that will provide you with all the major ebook formats - and it's free. If you want to learn how you can use the tool, what it's capable of doing, and how it integrates with the D2D submission system, you've got to hear this episode.

GET ALL THE SELF-PUBLISHING GOODS UP FRONT WITHOUT PAYING A THING.

As writers themselves, the team at Draft2Digital understand the particular pain points authors experience. They also know that many self-published authors don't have any real marketing budget and that their time is one of their most valuable commodities. That's why they've arranged their platform in such a way that you can both format your books professionally and have them distributed to ALL the major platforms - without paying anything up front. Find out more details about how the platform works on this episode.

DIGITAL INCOME MAKES A NOMADIC LIFESTYLE POSSIBLE FOR SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHORS.

Finally, Kevin and James get to talk about Kevin's new venture which will see him and his wife travelling the US in their newly purchased RV. One of the main motivations for doing this was to stimulate his creativity and thinking for his own writing by getting out to experience more of the world. He knows that new places and new people generate new ideas and he's excited about the possibilities their travels could have for future books. You can hear how Kevin and his wife are getting on in their adventure on this episode. Who knows, maybe it will spark you to go on a nomadic adventure of your own!

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James and Mark welcome you to this episode with guest, Kevin Tumlinson.
- Update on the upcoming 101 course development.
- James' invite onto Radio 4 in the UK.
- James' introduction to Kevin Tumlinson and the Draft2Digital platform.
- The formatting issues authors face and why they are important.
- The nightmare of trying to get your book onto the online retailers, and how D2D helps you do it.
- How Draft2Digital can help you with the income and tax side of author income.
- How D2D makes their income through these services.
- Why the platform only charges authors after the book is successful.
- Kevin Tumlinson's work as an author.
- Kevin's experiment with mobile living.
- How the new living arrangements impact Kevin's workflow and podcast.
- Mark's story about working with the Draft2Digital team.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Draft2Digital](#)
- [Kevin's author website](#) (you can find his 4 podcasts there, too)
- [Teachable](#)
- [Radio 4](#)
- [Vellum](#)
- [We Are The Russos](#)
- [Gone With The Wynns](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 39 from a Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other, a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello, Mark Dawson. How are you?

Mark: Hi, James Blatch. I'm fine. How are you?

James: I caught your cold last week. Obviously, the link we use is a really powerful digital link. I've had a real proper man flu cold. I'm on the back end of it now. That type of cold that women don't really understand how much men suffer from when we get it, that kind of cold.

Mark: I'm not getting involved in that conversation, James. My life's worth more than that.

James: I can hear things being thrown at the, I can say the radio, or whatever people are listening or watching on. We finally got our video sorted out as well. Here we are in a nice glorious split screen for video so if you're enjoying that. Increasingly when we do the interviews, as long as our interviewees are happy with that, we're going to use video as well.

I've interviewed a guy called Chris Tucker this morning who lives in the Philippines. Actually, is a UK citizen coming back to the UK soon. He's a big entrepreneur in this area, really interesting guy to talk to, lots of good advice on brand building as a personal thing, of authors in particular how to build your brand, also a bit about how to build your team once you start earning a bit more money and you get busy, you need to increase your team and how you do that using virtual assistants and such. Chris Tucker's interview coming up in that short while.

Where we're sitting at the moment, Mark, what is it, 14th today, 15th? What date is it? Let's have a look

Mark: 15th.

James: 15th. We are 15 days away from launching 101. We've got everything up there and loaded on teachable platforms. We're seeing it in place for the first time. We're still making tweaks on it, a daily basis at the moment and some changes and more materials still coming in.

We've had a team of beta testers already selected and on it. One of them has already finished so that's somebody who's part of the SPF team, does some work for us and she's reporting. In fact, Carrie has put something in the groups already. She's so excited about it. We're very pleased, aren't we, with the feedback we've had so far.

Mark: Yeah, I'm very pleased with it. You never really know these things until someone else goes in and tests it. Much in the same way as when you release a new book. You've been working on it for such a long time, it's always a nervy moment when you let other people look at it for the first time. Our course is just the same and I was a little anxious before

Carrie got into it, but she's been so positive with her praise, it's very encouraging. I'm pretty pleased with how it's looking. We're still adding stuff, I can't really announce this yet, but we're looking for maybe an additional couple of sessions from someone really, really big. I mean really, really big in the indie space. It will be worth getting the course just for these two sessions. It's not confirmed yet, but I'm hoping to close that down in the next couple of days or so. Still kind of moving on, adding stuff in, working on the bonuses, and then we'll be ready to open the doors in a couple of weeks. Very exciting time.

James: There's one clear winner from this whole 101 process, which is me because I've had so much value for my author career. Including jamesblatch.com which is finally up there at as of this morning. We've created it in several places using different platforms as part of the course. If you want to go down the Wordpress route which is more involved potentially for you, there's a session on that, very good, detailed session on that. Also, if you want to do it more quickly, more easily, just create a landing page, for instance using Leadpages, there's a session on that, the result of which is that I get a three page, which is there now.

Talking about my author career, I was invited onto Radio 4 in the UK. Radio 4 is ... I don't know what the equivalent is in the States, it's not really national broadcasting, it's the BBC anyway. It's the BBC's main news channel in the UK. It's the place everyone listens to to find out whether we're going to war or not.

During the middle of the day, they have a consumer orientated program called You and Yours. Six years ago I did a small piece on my book, when I started that, and they invited me back. We talked about self-publishing, they were fascinated with your story, Mark. They're fascinated with the course that we've done, and we got to chat about self-publishing.

There was a little bit of trolling in there, one of the questions from the wonderful Peter White, he's a fantastic, one of my favorite broadcasters in the UK. He always enjoys his interviews, I enjoy speaking to him. He did say, he quoted somebody from the industry, the traditional publishing industry, saying that the vast majority of self-published books were tawdry and terrible and shouldn't be published, so it gave myself and one of our key students, Adam Cross, a chance to re-post on behalf of self publishing.

Mark: You were very diplomatic. I would not have been quite so diplomatic. I guarantee you that.

James: I tried to think what you would say, but your chance will come.

Mark: I wouldn't have been invited back on the radio again.

James: Middle of the day language. It just goes to show that attention is coming on. I've had a lot of tweets afterwards, people saying I can't believe how little people seem to know about self-publishing.

This interview with Chris Tucker is really interesting. He's a quite big digital entrepreneur. We've got a big digital business, we've got thousands of students now, we've got hundreds of them, significant businesses in their own right.

Yet, when I listen to Radio 4, for instance, when I listen to the news in the morning and they talk about the economy, they talk about Brexit and the EU and Donald Trump being elected and the steel industry and car parts and they seem to be almost oblivious to this billion dollar industry on the digital space that we're all a part of, which is starting to take over people's lives. It's an exciting place to be and they're slowly just catching on now, I think.

Mark: It's very encouraging. For anyone listening to this podcast, you're years ahead of the mainstream and that's a really exciting opportunity. You occasionally, you'll hear people say oh, self publishing is dead, e book sales are down, everything is doom and gloom, I've missed the boat, all that kind of stuff. It couldn't be further from the truth.

We're right at the start, the crest of a wave here and the fact that people are choosing to listen to you and me when talking about this it's just, it's kind of evidence that they are ahead of the curve. You get the people that we heard coming to us after the Radio 4 piece. We had lots of emails from people asking about when can I get the course and all that kind of stuff. Those people are months and months and months behind listeners to the show.

I think that just underlines what a great opportunity it is still for people to put a stake in the ground and start to develop their online books businesses.

James: Let's get on to the meat and drink of today's podcast. We've got one of our favorite contributors. We spoke to him briefly in London in April, he's Kevin Tumlinson from Draft2Digital and this will form part of the 101 course as well. Draft2Digital is one of those platforms that we explore and explain and we even had a technical know how session in there about using them.

They are, in simple terms, an aggregator in that they take your book and they upload it and they place it onto various sites that will sell your book. It's a kind of one stop shop. Once you get into this you start to

understand that it can be quite laborious getting stuff set up on each individual site, you have tax interviews and that sort of things to do.

Draft2Digital do a lot of that for you. They have a lot of value added stuff actually they provide free of charge including formatting your book. Kevin Tumlinson's a fascinating guy to talk to, not least because he's about to undergo a kind of lifestyle experiment, which we come onto in the interview and it's quite an interesting thing and it's, again, for people in our space, in the digital space, it just shows what's possible once you're no longer doing the nine to five. Without further ado, let's hear from Kevin.

Kevin Tumlinson joins us from Draft2Digital. Kevin, hello again.

Kevin: Hello. Thanks for having me on.

James: We meet around the world, don't we? London, Florida ...

Kevin: We're very international.

James: You have a fascinating side which I think we might get to at some point in this interview about your own domestic arrangements and how they're going to look in the future.

Kevin: Yeah, that's fine. It factors in somewhat with Draft2Digital. They're behind some of this.

James: Well, we'll leave that tantalizingly hanging there for the moment.

FIRST OF ALL, LET'S TALK ABOUT DRAFT2DIGITAL AND I KNOW I ASKED YOU THIS AT LONDON BOOKFAIR, BUT PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE STARTING ON OUR WRITING CAREER, CAN YOU EXPLAIN TO US WHAT YOU DO?

Kevin: Draft2Digital does numerous things for an author, but where we start is in converting your manuscript into e book format. We have a very clean, very cool format and process for that. It handles a lot of that stuff automatically.

We're able to add in, at your request, you get to select these options, but you can add in things like teasers for your next book, a notification so that readers can be notified every time you publish, a table of contents is of course in there. All of the things that you expect as far as in matter, it runs light, we'll say instead of there being a bunch of junk code. We made it very clean, so it's compatible with all of the various e readers. That's the first step thing that we offer.

In addition to that we offer, the biggest thing we're known for really, is distribution. We have several vendors worldwide, so we can get you into a worldwide audience and we go through the trouble of all the vetting, and customer service, and all the things that help us have a little more sway with these vendors.

They like dealing with us so we're able to get promos and other things that we can pass on to authors. Worldwide distribution is the thing we're most known for. Getting in at the markets, we get you into Apple iBooks, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, a whole bunch of others. That's what we're most famous for, I'll say.

James: That's the really two sides to the formatting and distribution. Let's just get the formatting bit out of the way. I have to be honest, when I first started getting involved in self-publishing I didn't really have a clue as to how this stuff worked and really what formatting was.

I think if you'd asked me, I would have assumed at some point I uploaded my word document to Amazon and they created a Kindle book out of it, and the same at Barnes and Noble. It's not like that, you actually have to create a little file, which is a little bit different for every single platform.

That technical process of turning your Word document or what you've exported from Scrivener or whatever into that file, it's actually not just a technical process, it's actually a bit of an art form as well because you want your book to be beautifully presented at that point.

There are options, you can do it yourself. There are some DIY options out there. You can employ somebody who works directly for you, more or less, and does that formatting. I guess you're somewhere in between, you're effectively employing somebody to do it, but you're an organization that does it for a lot of people.

I WAS INTERESTED IN THE FACT KEVIN THAT YOU TALKED ABOUT A LOT OF IT BEING AUTOMATED, BUT I'M GUESSING IT STILL HAS TO BE SOMEBODY LOOKING AT EACH INDIVIDUAL FILE AT SOME POINT.

Kevin: Actually, the process itself is fully automated. You upload, and here's where I believe we're being very helpful. You can upload just your Word document for example, and if you wrote it in Scrivener and export it as an RTF or a Word document, we still use that.

But we strip out all the junk code that Microsoft Word and other programs insert by default. We have everything automated so that it spits out a clean, perfect EPUB or dot MOBI, or even a PDF. There're no human eyes that really touch that except your own. You can verify how the layout looks, make sure everything looks the way you want it to, and if there are quirks or questions, then we have this phenomenal customer service who will at that point go in and make manual adjustments as needed.

James: Do you give people advice on how to prepare the file in the first place? Because your software's got to pick up chapter breaks and in some cases some novels are divided into parts.

Kevin: Yeah, it's advisable. For example, in Microsoft Word you're going to want to use the heading, the term has just blown right out of my mind and I apologize, but they have their styles, style sheets that you can choose for heading one, heading two, that sort of thing.

James: Yep, yep.

Kevin: We'll pick up on that. That's how we construct your table of contents. There's a point where you get to review that table of contents before you publish. If it doesn't look right, if it doesn't include some of your chapters, then you can contact us. We'll add those in, fix them for you.

But for the most part, we don't have to provide any real guidelines because most people do this by default. If they just put chapter one, chapter two, we'll pretty much pick up on that. It's easier if you do use headings for that stuff, but you almost do that by default.

All the major writing software that's out there does that by default. Makes it real easy, authors are very focused on making sure that they've delineated their chapters of headings and that sort of thing most of the

time. It's actually pretty easy to scan and find that stuff. Makes it easy to output a clean file.

James: That's how everyone wants to write.

THEY THINK IN CHAPTERS FROM THE BEGINNING BECAUSE THAT'S KIND OF HOW WE DO IT.

Kevin: Honestly, you're doing all the work of organizing right up front. We don't need to do that for you, but we will pick up on that system you've used and we'll spit out the appropriate chapters and the title of the book and everything gets folded in through the metadata of the book, it's handled right from the beginning, right when you're uploading your manuscript.

You'll tell us what the title is, you'll tell us if there's a subtitle, is it part of a series, what volume is it. All that stuff gets taken care of, so it can be folded in automatically. Including a copyright page, so if you didn't put a copyright page in your book we can generate one for you.

What happens is you get a whole selection of these things and you just check the box next to the ones you want and then that's it. This is all free, by the way, we don't charge a dime to do any of this stuff. We only make money on a percentage of royalty.

James: Which moves us on to the aggregating side, I think that's the right word? Is it aggregating?

Kevin: Yeah, yeah.

James: Which is really getting your book into the places where readers are going to be able to buy it. As you say, that's kind of what you're famous for. This process, people will have an idea that they want to sell their book on as many platforms as possible or they'll make conscious decisions about sticking to one or going wide or all the rest of it.

ONCE THEY'VE MADE THEIR DECISION TO DO THAT, I GUESS IT'S REASONABLY COMPLICATED TO SET OUT TO DO THIS BY YOURSELF.

Kevin: Okay, now I'm going to start talking to you as an author. From well before I started working with Draft2Digital, I initially went and tried to get into all the various e book markets. It became a nightmare

on multiple fronts.

Not only just the fact that every retailer has their own set of rules for formatting and cover size and all the various rules that impact the way you have to work. There's also the reporting side. If I made sales, now I had forty or fifty different store fronts I had to check regularly to make sure I knew what my sales were and make sure I was being paid. I actively went looking for services that would help me aggregate that. Of course, there's Smashwords which I tried and didn't particularly like, I'm talking now as an author.

James: Completely accept that, yes, as an author.

Kevin: I mean that's all there really was. Mark Coker helped create an industry here and we're very grateful to him for it, but the user experience there wasn't quite what I wanted. It was at times frustrating and that was the same feeling that Aaron Pogue had. He's one of the founders of Draft2Digital.

He created this service, which is all about making things easier and cleaner and simpler. I think we've done a fantastic job of that. Where we help the author with this stuff largely is with this centralized dashboard that's very well designed, very easy to understand. Where you can see your sales, you know exactly how many volumes you've sold this month versus last month. You can generate reports of all kinds. There no special formatting to worry about, none of that stuff applies. It's all very easy.

James: You have a relationship with these distributors, this is not simply you uploading them?

THEY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE A LIBRARY OF AUTHORS AND OF USERS AND THAT PUTS YOU PRESUMABLY IN A POSITION THEN TO DO SOME VALUE ADDED STUFF.

Kevin: Exactly right, yeah. In some cases there are advantages that we can offer that the individual author might not get as far as promotions. And for a time, Barnes and Noble has changed this now, but for a time the only way you could get a book listed for free on Barnes and Noble was through us.

Now you can do that directly, but I think most authors still prefer to do it through us. Because we handle all the customer service and all the hassles that the retailers would have to deal with, we handle all of that in house, and we're producing a huge volume of authors and books to these vendors as one client. It does give us some sway. We can't just ask for anything we want, but when we go and talk to them, they're more

prone to listen to us.

We've been able to help quite a few authors, well I don't want to say it this way because I don't want it to sound like we've got some sort of through line to best sellers lists, but we've helped with promotions. Some of these authors have hit best sellers lists. We've got quite a few New York Times and USA Today best seller in our database.

James: Let me try to work out how this works. If you set up an account, let's say Barnes and Noble and I want to distribute my book through Barnes and Noble, so I go there and I create an account, I fit in my bank details and my tax details and all the rest of it, then I start uploading my books.

IF I COME TO YOU THERE'S ONE UPLOAD AND YOU DON'T CREATE AN ACCOUNT FOR ME, YOU USE, PRESUMABLY, YOUR ACCOUNT WHERE THEN YOU THEN JUST FILTER THE MONEY BACK THROUGH ME. I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT OF THAT OTHER STUFF.

Kevin: We have a tax interview so that we can help you take care of the tax side of everything. That was a big innovation over the past year.

James: But one tax interview? Because I've done one, funny enough, I've done one today for the very big orange company owned by Jeff and it's a painful process, a tax interview.

PRESUMABLY, I WOULD HAVE TO DO ANOTHER ONE AT BARNES AND NOBLE, AND KOBO, AND IBOOKS, ETC.

Kevin: Exactly. That was one of the author pain points that we discovered and wanted to solve. It was not an easy problem to solve. It was an expensive problem to solve. But this one tax interview covers all your bases with all the different vendors we deal with.

Before I ever came to these guys, I used to promote the crap out of them everywhere. On every podcast I ever appeared on because I love this aspect. They solve these pain points. Taxes were an issue, dealing with multiple sales channels, getting paid. All this stuff, they're very big issues actually. But they're small little details that get away from you very quickly, so we went and made all of that easier. That was the point.

James: I can see the attraction of that straight away.

WE HAVEN'T MENTIONED, I DON'T THINK, THE PRICING MODEL THAT YOU HAVE. DO YOU WANT TO EXPLAIN THAT NOW?

Kevin: The only way we make any money is if you sell a book. It really is in our best interest for you to sell as many books as possible. We make a ten percent royalty off of the retail price of the book. It ends up, after all is said and done, it ends up being about a fifteen percent cut from your overall royalty. That's because ten percent goes to us, money goes to the vendor of course, that's sort of your overhead. It's a premium you pay to make your life easier. I was always fine with it. Of course, if we're helping you, increasing the volume of sales.

James: Well, that's the point, isn't it? Even a small amount of that is going to cover that.

Kevin: Right, that's the goal. That's the idea, there's never any guarantees that that's going to happen for anybody, but my personal take has always been that your odds are better.

One of the things people don't necessarily consider about marketing is it really is all about improving your odds. It's never a guarantee. If you fold this idea in of Draft2Digital as part of your marketing strategy, you are increasing your odds because we have that bit of sway with Barnes and Noble and Apple iBooks.

Apple, they kind of like dealing with us rather than dealing with the twenty-five thousand separate authors. It makes their lives easier. They're very appreciative. Apple's got a history of if you're scratching our back we'll scratch yours and we come armed with backscratchers.

James: They can afford a lot of backscratchers.

I NOTICED THEY PUBLISHED THEIR QUARTERLIES YESTERDAY AND THEY HAVE SOMETHING LIKE TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SIX BILLION DOLLARS IN CASH RESERVES.

Kevin: Yes, yeah. It seems odd to say something along the lines of Apple's becoming a major player because Apple always seems like they're a major player, but they're rivaling Amazon now in this front. We're excited to see that, of course. We have a very good relationship with Apple.

James: They own a lot of hardware that people have in their pockets.

Kevin: Exactly.

James: Depending on how people read their books.

Kevin: I've got five Apple devices within three feet of me right now.

James: Yeah. They're like rats, aren't they, in that sense? They always say you're always in ten yards of a rat, you're always within a few feet of an Apple device. Says the man who's eagerly anticipating the MacBook Pro release tomorrow. I can't tell you how I can't wait to get that.

Kevin: You're going to have to let me know. I'm waiting a bit because I been burned on early adoption in the past, but I've very excited.

James: I thrashed mine to death and it's just about hanging in there. I need to replace it. That's a fantastic description of all of that and people can obviously go to draft2digital.com and have a little poke about and see that.

But I think particularly for new authors this is an option that just makes them think, just sighs a little bit because it can be overwhelming the prospect of then distributing your book and all the things you have to do when you're self-publishing.

We're not big fans of those companies that say we'll self-publish for you and they basically charge you a lot for every service their publisher does. We don't like that.

BUT WE DO LIKE THESE LITTLE NICHE PARTS OF THE DIGITAL SPACE WHERE YOU CAN GO TO AND SAY OKAY, I'M GOING TO PAY YOU AND YOU'RE GOING TO TAKE CARE OF THAT PART OF IT. THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE DOING THERE, WHICH IS GREAT.

Kevin: Honestly, one of the driving ideas behind Draft2Digital is we really try to never charge the author

directly for anything and so far we've been successful at that. Because we're authors too, we get it. We know how hard it is to maintain a budget.

When you talk to people about marketing, there's this idea that everyone's got a marketing budget, but a lot of authors don't. A lot of authors, they're flying by the seat of their pants here. We want to be able to help all authors, we just never felt like having a base charge was going to be beneficial to the indie author just starting out, but also even when you're making a lot of money at this and you're very successful at this, that overhead starts to add up after a while and we don't want to be one more drop in the bucket that could wash over you at some point.

James: Authors come in and out of Draft2Digital?

Kevin: Absolutely.

James: If they decide, actually I'm going to upload from now on to this particular platform, they can do that?

Kevin: Yeah, not only that but you do not have to use us for distribution at all. You can still get the conversion for your manuscript. You can come convert your manuscript to dot MOBI, for example, and upload that to KDP and go exclusive with Amazon and that's fine. Of course, we prefer that you go through us, but we made that service free and it is free. That's the whole point.

James: And I'll tell you what, I'm going to have to have a look at that because I have actually today been doing a couple of screen flows on formatting for our upcoming 101 course. One of the sites I went to, which I won't mention, which offers a free formatting service it really wasn't there yet. Too many messages came up saying this bit doesn't work yet. I'm thinking I probably went to the wrong place. I should redo that.

Kevin: I should say and note on the conversion, one of the reasons we do it the way we do, you can use services or software like Vellum and you get a beautiful manuscript out of that. Ours overall is kind of simple and the reason is we test this on all the different devices.

A new device comes out and we grab it and we test this to make sure that our formatting is going to be essentially universal. We vet this, we make sure that the manuscript you produce from this is usable anywhere. By the way, if you already have an EPUB, you can still upload that to Draft2Digital.

James: If people do like the idea of spending their own time in Vellum or whatever, they can do that and then come to you with the EPUB files.

Was that a dog? Did you step on it?

Kevin: That was a dog. I am sorry, she was doing okay, I think someone came in.

James: Okay.

Kevin: I apologize.

James: Sounded like you stepped on her paw.

Kevin: No. She's a chihuahua, I'm sorry. These days it seems like every podcast gets a short introduction from my dog, Mindy.

James: That's good, that's how it should be.

Kevin: She's the unofficial mascot of Draft2Digital.

James: You know, I wanted to cover a couple of other aspects of Kevin Tumlinson.

LET'S TALK ABOUT KEVIN TURLINSON THE AUTHOR FIRST OF ALL. YOU'VE BEEN WRITING FOR A WHILE, DAN KOTLER THRILLERS?

Kevin: Yeah, that's my new series. It's a shift for me, honestly, because I started out writing science fiction back in 2008 was my first published work. I wrote sci fi and fantasy for a while, I still do technically.

Around this time last year, my friend and sometime co-author Nick Thacker, he writes thrillers. We have a show together and he just started daring me on the air to write a thriller. I did, I released it in May of this year and it just exploded. I was very, very pleased.

James: That sounds frighteningly familiar.

Kevin: Yeah. Isn't it?

James: As far as podcasters being bullied, not bullied into doing it, but I'm being gently cajoled publicly into putting my finger out and doing my thriller. That's exciting, then.

WE SPOKE, I THINK, BRIEFLY ABOUT THIS IN FLORIDA, BUT THIS IS THE CATCH IS THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORWEGIANS OR THE NORDICS HAVING GOT TO NORTH AMERICA BEFORE ANYONE ELSE DID.

Kevin: Right. The first book, called The Coelho Medallion, it's spelled so difficult that I don't even bother, but the general story is that Vikings actually made it into interior United States well before the Europeans discovered the continent and actually interacted and even lived among the Native Americans at that point.

The overall premise of the series, the Dan Kotler books is that he is an independent investigator of misplaced history. He becomes embroiled in all sorts of terrorist activities and FBI investigations and all sorts of things get kind of glommed onto this, but that's his general role.

He's investigating things that are out of place historically. That's an idea I've always enjoyed, I've always liked that notion. The second book, by the way, is on pre-order, it's the Atlantis Riddle and it's the same general idea. Same characters and I do sort of tie it back heavily to the first book although they both stand alone. They're a lot of fun. I consider them sort of Dan Brown, James Rollins type stories, in that vein of thriller.

James: That's a good sales target as well, if you can match Dan Brown.

Kevin: I think so. Funny enough, I've actually over the years I've had a few conversations with Dan Brown. I interviewed him on a radio show I did back in the late nineties when he had released Digital Fortress and no one had heard of him. Actually, I didn't interview him, the host of the show interviewed him that time around, but he actually mentioned Angels and Demons.

James: That's cool. It's really interesting, Dan Brown, it's difficult to have a conversation about publishing and writing without somebody quoting him at some point.

Kevin: Yeah, exactly.

James: It's very, very interesting also the way that he writes. You're a fool if you think that he writes down, he writes very, very clever book and quite difficult to do. Yeah, brilliant. Anyway, my editors talk to me about Dan Brown and his start recently. Well that's good, and you've got your science fiction background, I think it's quite a lot.

YOU'VE GOT QUITE A BACK CATALOG. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY BOOKS YOU'VE WRITTEN? TOP OF YOUR HEAD?

Kevin: I have around thirty books out right now.

James: Okay.

Kevin: And growing. Sometimes I mess up on my counts because I actually have four or five that are sort of in edit and ready to go or getting ready to go. But yeah, I think I have around thirty that are actually published at the moment.

James: How many books do you turn out a year? A couple a year? More than that?

Kevin: There was a transition period for me where I really started taking this seriously and in the course

of a year I put out like twelve books. I slowed that pace where it's a book every other month, instead of a book a month. I may put out between, we'll say three to six books in a year.

If I push it I could do a lot more, it's just that now I have other responsibilities like Draft2Digital, and we're getting ready to do this full time RV thing and there's a lot of stuff going on and I still manage to write everyday, I just slowed down production.

James: That is an amazing production rate though.

DO YOU WRITE ALMOST FULLY FORMED OR DO YOU DO A LOT OF WORK IN THE EDIT AFTER YOUR FIRST DRAFT?

Kevin: I'm a discovery writer, so I don't outline. When I've got a finished manuscript most of what gets done in editing is fixing typos and the occasional gaff. I don't do full rewrites anymore. I used to do that in a previous writing life.

For the most part the book comes out the way I intended it to come out. I have a street team now. I send it to them to get feedback on typos and things because no matter how I try, I can't catch them all myself. Sometimes I get some developmental editing out of that actually. Occasionally people suggest some things and I realize, yeah, that's a weak point in the story or I can improve that.

My process is just ever evolving as I discover new ideas. The street team idea was revolutionary to me because I was paying thousands to editors and still having people complain that there were typos and grammar gaffs and that sort of thing. I figure I can save that money and use it for other things to help promote the work or whatever. It's been a nice change.

James: I'm very impressed with your work right now. You mentioned, you just alluded to this RV thing as you described it. This is fascinating, because when we met you down on the west coast of Florida last month, you were I think in a hotel at the time, but you were basically doing a little trial run on your RV and doing quite a lot of traveling.

YOUR PLAN IS QUITE RADICAL WITH THAT.

Kevin: My wife and I decided almost two years ago now, we put our house up for sale. It took about a

year to sell it. We lived in an apartment while we got our lives organized.

We've purchased a thirty eight foot motor coach, so it's not a small RV. But we're planning on living in that full time for at least a couple of years. The idea is for me to travel. I am very inspired by travel. Meeting new people and discovering new places, that's always been a very big inspiration for me. We've traveled overseas quite a bit, but hadn't really traveled the continental US, so we're hopping in, we're going to travel as much as we can manage.

Now that I'm working with Draft2Digital, they knew about this beforehand and that was part of our deal from the beginning. They were very happy to have me do this. I think there's an ulterior motive there because I can be at certain conventions and events.

James: Yeah, with somewhere to stay.

Kevin: Really keep the cost down.

James: It's a long way to Frankfurt.

Kevin: Yeah, and it's a bumpy drive to Frankfurt from Houston, TX.

James: That's fascinating. What an interesting thing to do. Obviously this is something you and your wife both really want to do. I'm trying to think through the kind of pressures and changes on relationships and stuff when you suddenly go from quiet, independent lives that we lead today. In your house you go off and you do stuff, you don't see each other all the time, to suddenly being together in even a thirty-eight foot vehicle.

I'M ASSUMING, KEVIN, YOU'VE THOUGHT THIS ALL THROUGH, RIGHT?

Kevin: We have. A lot. One of the reasons we did it the way we did, we transitioned from a four bedroom fairly large home to a one bedroom apartment. That was our first step. Then since then, since getting the RV, we've traveled pretty extensively. Vacations and road trips, that sort of thing and spent time in that.

You know, my wife and I, we're very passionate people and so passionate people tend to sometimes get loud, but part of this whole thing honestly is learning how to live with each other. Learning how to you know, because you do have escape routes. When you have a house, for example, I had my office and I had a studio in my home. If I needed some closed door time it was very easy. This is a little different.

Although we did make sure we bought an RV that had three independent sections that could be sectioned off, cordoned off, so that we could escape each other every now and then. I do a lot of work from cafes and coffee shops and that sort of thing. I think we'll manage.

James: I'm sure you will. That would be great to talk to you in a few months time when you've got a few months under your belt and see how that's going.

YOU'RE A PRODIGIOUS PODCASTER AS WELL, KEVIN. HOW IS THIS ALL GOING TO WORK? I PRESUME YOU DON'T HAVE A BROADBAND CONNECTION TRAILING OUT THE BACK OF YOUR RV.

Kevin: No, I am considering running a very long cable to the Draft2Digital offices in Oklahoma. For the most part, that's the trickiest part of this. For anyone listening, by the way who is in the telecommunications industry, there is a wide open opportunity for servicing RV and mobile lifestyle folks.

There is really no good solution. Satellite and internet are both slow and has bandwidth caps. We're going to be heavily dependent on LTE mobile bandwidth for our mobile phones and hot spots, but it gets prohibitively expensive. A lot of the RV parks that we may use often have free WiFi, but it's usually very slow. It's going to be challenging, but I'm prepared ...

Doing the podcasts, I've worked out ways that this can happen. It's going to come down mostly to organizing my time more than the resource. If I can find places, there are usually a lot of cities in particular have these shared workspaces where you can go and rent a room and utilize their WiFi and that sort of thing. Businesses sometimes there are places where you can find a hotspot, or public libraries are sometimes available as a resource. I've been putting a lot of thought into this.

James: Yeah, I can see. You say planning your time, so when you get there you bash out six episodes or something like that.

Kevin: Exactly right. It'll be tricky, but not impossible.

James: It's tradition though, Kevin, isn't it? We live in our houses and we're fairly fixed and we have been I suppose for six or seven centuries, but you go back a little bit further and for millennia, people didn't have a fixed abode and they did wander and as a race we're not that far away from that.

WHO KNOWS, THIS COULD BE A TREND. WELL IT IS A TREND, ISN'T IT? YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE?

Kevin: It is a trend. We're definitely not the only people doing this. Since doing this I've actually interviewed numerous couples who are doing this full time. Most recently, the Russos from *We Are the Russos*. Shout-out!

Gone With the Winds, they're another group that does this. There's this idea, this nomad culture that's growing in the US and I think it's largely because we're tired of being tied down in one location. The way the world has evolved, we don't have to be. We can do our work anywhere. Case in point, I'm doing the marketing work for Draft2Digital and running my author career at the same time. Neither of those things requires me to be in any given location.

James: Do you think this will impact on your stories, Kevin? From your author point of view?

Kevin: Absolutely. I think in fact that's the point. I want it to impact my stories. I want to have new locations and new characters and new scenarios flowing past me so fast that I can't use all of them. That just adds a richness to your work.

There was a time in our history where if you were sophisticated, if you were an aristocrat, if you were a part of higher society, you traveled all the time. It was a given. You maybe spent a month or two at home and the rest of the time you were traveling. It was specifically because of that inspiration that comes to you. That growth that comes.

Some of our finest authors in history traveled frequently. This is definitely something top of mind. It was literally the primary motivation for doing this. My wife recognized this in me pretty early on, wanted to encourage it. She's a saint of a woman, by the way. She'll never hear this, all she ever hears is me say

mean stuff to her.

James: I've read some nice stuff about her on your website.

Kevin: Yes. I'm going to, I need to remedy that. She's wonderfully supportive in all this and she recognized pretty early on that the more I travel the more output I have. Since she's connected the idea of more output with more money, she's onboard.

James: Strange that. I think that's a really interesting point because we, although we travel more now than we've ever traveled before, there's a normalized nature to traveling which I don't particularly like. I love flying, but the truth is it's an easy thing to do, you get on this tube, you sit there, you wile away a couple of hours and you can be in Africa, in the Sahara, you can be in Florida as we were, or you can be in the middle of Europe.

Airports are in cities, so you tend to be in an urban area that looks kind of like, Nairobi doesn't look very much like London, but actually there are quite a few hotel chains you're going to recognize straightaway. When you think back to, even a couple hundred years, people like Mark Twain, you read Huckleberry Finn and that is a journey. Every detail impacted newly in his life and Mark Twain traveled two hundred miles, it was an ordeal. It was amazing and you spotted the change in the vegetation and the animals and the way people's accents change and all those things that we hardly notice anymore.

Kevin: Right. The thing about having our means of, not instantaneous of course, but our means of quickly and rapidly going from one location to another is these locations now become something consumable. When you're traveling by road or train or anything that requires you to slow down to a different pace where you're in that transition, it's during the transition that you pick up the most detail, that you pick up the most inspiration.

All the things that affect you as an author in particular, but just in your life, they don't happen generally at point A or point B. The usually happen in the space in between. That's what we're after. We want to explore that space.

James: It's not the destination, its the journey.

Kevin: Exactly, yeah. To sum it up much more succinctly.

James: Superb, Kevin. Look, we've raced through forty minutes and it's been really interesting. I knew that the RV would come up. Talking about it from a writing perspective I think was very interesting. That must be, it's one of the perennial things for writers, I'm already now thinking about my next couple of books and where the stories, the inspiration are going to come from and you know, you can sit and you can Google and you can look up things that have happened and then you can change your circumstance. Change who you're talking to, change your surroundings and you're much more likely to find inspiration from things you can't even envisage at the moment that's going to happen to you on your journey.

Cool. Thank you so much indeed, Kevin. It's been a real pleasure, we will talk to you when you can find a broadband connection in six months time.

Kevin: I'll have it all figured out, I got to, you know? Draft2Digital still has they're still people to find, authors out there who need our help.

James: They'll pioneer it and attach something to your RV.

Kevin: Exactly, exactly.

James: Do you fancy getting into an RV? A recreational vehicle, Mark? And spending the next couple of years, just you and your wife going on? The kids, obviously, you can't leave them at home. Driving around, just stopping off somewhere to do a little bit of work here and there?

Mark: I've always been interested in the crystal meth industry after watching Breaking Bad. That's exactly, I can just imagine myself kind of driving around Wiltshire, parking up in a farmer's field somewhere, cooking up.

James: Have you got an image of Kevin standing there in his underpants, because that's what Bryan Cranston's character did.

Mark: I have to correct you, you said we met him in London. We didn't, we met Dan Wood in London. But it's an easy mistake to make because they've all got huge beards, or at least they did have, Dan and Kevin and the guys at Draft2Digital. We met Kevin in Florida.

James: Yes, we did. We met Draft2Digital in London and then it was Kevin, yes and Dan and Kevin, yes sorry.

Mark: That's right. The image about Kevin in his underpants, that obviously that was a pretty hefty drinking session in Florida and I don't know what happened in the premise of your own hotel room, but if that involved you, Kevin, and his underpants, then that's fine.

James: What happens in Florida stays in Florida, you know the rules. Good, anyway. He's a great guy and he's on your side really. He's one of those industries that we like, we rate them very highly. We like them because of their attitude and the way that they organize themselves and they work with the author to make the author successful, which is what everyone working in this area should do.

Mark: I love that about it.

I'll tell you a funny story. I've been using them for a long time, almost since they started, I think. They moved to new premises a couple of years ago, or something along those, or they redecorated their old place and they emailed me and asked whether I'd mind if they printed a copy of the cover of *The Black Mile* which was my first indie book so they could frame it and put it on the wall. That was a nice touch, I don't know whether they did that or not, but it was nice. They obviously didn't have to ask me, they could just have done it, I wouldn't have minded at all, but it was nice that they reached out and said that they would like to do that which is kind of a good indication of just how ... They're really nice people and they're a pleasure to do business with. It gives me lots of pleasure to see them doing so well.

James: Right. You and I have a few more sixteen hour days to put in between now and thirtieth of

November to get this course ready and out there. Which is exciting for us. We'll be back next week with another interview and another hopefully value-packed podcast for you.

It's possible we're going to recruit a couple of more beta testers in the next week or so, I know a lot of you are hanging on, seeing if you can get that. We should also point out that we did have many thousands of applications for that. The odds are not in your favor, as the Hunger Games says, but it might be you. As they say, advertising in the UK National Nursery. Right, that's it. Thank you very much. Have a good rest of the week and we'll speak to you next Friday.

CHAPTER 37

PERSONAL BRANDING FOR AUTHORS - WITH BRANDING EXPERT CHRIS DUCKER



PERSONAL BRANDING. If you spend any time with online entrepreneurs (and you should if you're an author) you hear that phrase all the time. But what **EXACTLY** does it mean, and how can it increase book sales and advance your career as an author? There's nobody better to explain it than our guest today, Chris Ducker. He's a fellow Brit who's made quite a name for himself as an online entrepreneur, author, podcaster, and brand expert. You're going to get some very practical tips from Chris on this episode so be sure you set aside the time to listen and learn. Then take action!

WHY BEING DIFFERENT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING BETTER.

The role that personal branding plays in your marketing arsenal is not about positioning but differentiation. And that is where a focus on branding yourself as an author is worth gold to your career. Chris unpacks why being different is more important than being better on this episode of The Self Publishing Formula.

WHY YOU NEED TO BEGIN CREATING ONLINE CONTENT. NOW.

When asked how authors can get started building a personal brand Chris said that one of the most important things they need to do is to begin creating a repository of online content. Blog posts, videocasts, podcasts, ebooks - anything that might prove helpful to the people who are interested in you or your books. It'll help you to be seen as a unique resource and authority on the issues that they actively engage in. Chris says that too few authors take this seriously, and too few of the ones who do take it seriously actually do it well. It's a simple way to stand out in the crowded self-publishing space.

RELATIONSHIPS SHOULD BE TREASURED, NOT USED.

When Chris talks about building a following he makes it very clear that you should never see people as a commodity, even though it is people who pay for your living as an author. The relationships you have with your audience are important for their own sake and you need to be clear about that. People can sense if you really care about them, if they matter to you - so you want to make sure you have this issue settled in your own mind and heart. Chris says that relationships (even with fans) should be treasured, not used. Find out more about how you can build the right kind of relationship with your fans in this episode.

PEOPLE ARE HAPPY TO PAY FOR ACCESS TO EXPERTS. THAT'S WHY PERSONAL BRANDING MATTERS.

Most authors think that the only way they can make money as an author is through book sales. But that's the furthest thing from the truth. On this episode of the podcast, Chris gives a handful of examples of how he's helped authors build a significant income from their writing without it being solely through book sales. Are you curious? Chris draws from a wealth of information and experience and you'll find his approach extremely helpful, so be sure you take the time to listen.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James and Mark introduce this episode with Chris Ducker.
- A special announcement: The winners of our Reedsy giveaway!
- Mark's latest speaking opportunities.
- Update on the 101 course production.
- Who IS Chris Ducker?
- The changes Chris has seen online since he first began.
- The importance of building your brand as an author.
- Practical steps to brand building that authors should consider.
- Do you really want to give away a ton of free content?
- How would fiction authors handle this issue differently?
- What should authors look for in terms of virtual assistants?
- Chris' perspective on what's going on in the digital business world.

- The only change entrepreneurs should be focused on.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Virtual Staff Finder](#) - Chris' company
- [Reedsy](#)
- [BookBub](#)
- [Upwork](#)
- [Freelancer](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 40 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best-seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Life begins at 40, right Mark?

Mark: If you say so, and I think I've probably said that a few times myself.

James: I'm going to be saying life begins at 50, at some point, in the next few months. I know. So we've got quite a lot to get through today before our interview, and our interview is with somebody who is an encourager and an inspiration for entrepreneurs online and particularly authors.

He's a book writer as well, but also he is very big you as a brand, and spending your time doing that, and we talked about the fact that for quite a few authors this might be taking them out of their comfort zone and he's got some advice on that. Now particularly if you've got non-fiction he's got lots of ideas of how to monetize that and the areas you should be working at and the mindset you should have as non-fiction author, but not just non-fiction, anyone who is online and selling their products.

His name is Chris Ducker. He is coming up in just a few moments.

Before then we've got a few things to announce, and one is the competition. So we ran the Reedsy competition over a few weeks. We had loads of entries for this. I'm not surprised we had loads of entries, right Mark, because the prize is great.

Mark: Yeah, it is really ... I can't remember how much it was now, it was \$3,000?

James: \$3,000 worth of author services from Reedsy, and that was the first prize. And then there were specific second prizes. \$600 for cover design and so on. Okay, so I can announce the winner, with a little bit of a drum-roll, and the winner - pulled out random by our machine - was Celina.

Celina has already been in touch, we've been in touch with her via Reedsy to collect her prize and we have three runners-up who are Shaedarkspain, Andrea and Rebecca who writes under the name R.J. Theodore. So congratulations to all four of you.

You've got a fantastic prize and you've got some money there with Reedsy to really put into the professional side of your books. Commiserations to everybody else who entered. I know it's disappointing to enter and not win a competition but we had, as I say, many many entries for that, so thank you. And thank you to the guys at Reedsy who do a great job and making it very convenient and a one-stop place to find professionals who will make the difference between your book being indistinguishable from the Harper Collins and Penguin stuff next to it.

Mark: Yeah, a great competition and, as you say, we had several thousand entries, so congratulations to those four for being picked out.

James: Okay, now, talking of being professional, are you being professional, are you being professional with Amazon this week, Mark?

YOU'RE SORT OF IN BETWEEN AMAZON GIGS, AREN'T YOU IN DUBLIN A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

Mark: Well, they had an event with Writing.ie, so they basically flew out about half a dozen Amazonians, me and another author called L.J. Ross, Louise Ross, and a couple of Irish Indies. We were basically

there for the Saturday from 8 till 5 for a kind of in-person event, Q & A presentations and things.

It was also streamed live online and given some push from KDP, and I think it went quite well. It was long day. I got there; I flew out on Friday and then flew back on Saturday and the hotel we were staying in, it was a bit ominous because New Zealand were playing Ireland on Saturday night in the Rugby, and the hotel we were in was where the Irish Rugby Squad was staying.

James: All right. Okay.

Mark: So that could have been interesting. And Shaun Payne was there as well, so that was entertaining.

James: Shaun Payne and the Irish Rugby team, I mean, that is a recipe for fighting if I've every heard one.

Mark: Probably. It was very good. So that was fun, well-attended event, very professional. It had a full kind of broadcast rig there, with streaming it live on YouTube, so it was with three cameras. You would have been in heaven, and James, it was really, really pro.

And then tomorrow I'm going down to London for another full-day event in the morning. I'm being interviewed by someone from The Guardian about small business and what platforms that Amazon can do to enable you to reach customers in scale, so I'm talking about books obviously, and there is other people talking about other things.

And then in the afternoon they've invited people interested in writing, so that would be me and one other author, Tammy Roland. We're doing two presentations in the afternoon. So then it will be pretty full day tomorrow, so early start back by 8:00, and of course there's other small things on our plate as well that we're trying to do as good a job as possible with books and course launches and all that kind of good stuff.

James: That's good and good for you for your profile and so on, so obviously Amazon, you have been a bit of a pinup boy for them at the moment, which is nice to be in touch with the biggest bookseller on the

planet.

Mark: Yeah, they're great. Obviously, I've been working with them for ages now and it's lovely to be invited to those kinds of things. It's nice to give something back.

James: Good. Okay. For our people who want to rub shoulders with Amazon, if you're in the UK, they have a good presence at the London Book Fair, and there is no doubt that I think we'll be there again this year, and I know a couple of people have already told us that they're coming over from the States for that this year, so I say this year, it'll be 2017 of course in the spring.

That's a really good opportunity, isn't it, for authors to stand and talk to people from Amazon and pick their brains a little bit because they'll be on the stands all day, find out what's in their minds for the future, get some hints and advice from them and generally some encouragement. If you do fancy, pop along to the London Book Fair and come and say hello to us as well, but we'll talk more about that closer to the time.

Okay, as Mark says, we are really in that bit now in NASA parlance, they've done all that training up in Houston area, they built the stuff on the West Coast in California there. They did all the training in Houston, but now they all migrate down towards Florida for the launch.

We're at that bit now where we're starting to get into launch control for the 101 course. It's been a huge effort. We've never had more people working on a single course than we've had for this one. We've got people around the world who've been contributing to it and now are working through the testing phase. We're still putting stuff together.

I think people will be surprised when they see some of the screenflows. The dates on the screenflows are something like the 21st of November as we're going through doing stuff, thinking, "Wow, they did this quite late," and we did, we are working up to the wire on this because we want the process of launching a book and it to be very real.

And a little spoiler is that the beta testing, which we were nervous about of course because you work hard on something and it goes out to strangers, but the beta testing comments have been fabulous, and we're

quite excited now.

Mark: They have been encouraging, so it's always nervous when you something out and we've had a couple go through from start to finish and have really gotten lots out of it and we're rolling it out slowly to a couple of other beta testers as well, so it would have been tested extensively before we put it out properly, and comments will be taken into account. We'll make some changes.

Yeah, it is an interesting time now when we're just getting ready to launch. And you are very geeky for making that analogy, but you know that already.

James: Yeah, it's a good analogy.

Mark: It is a good analogy. One thing worth noting, it's not just me - we could have roped in some industry experts to also present segments for us, so Stewart, he is my cover designer, has done a really brilliant session on cover design. Bryan Cohen has done a great session on writing blurbs.

Really pleased and excited to say that BookBub are going to do a session for us as well, so we're just in the process today of having that recorded, but Book Pub themselves are going to present their session on their featured deals and their ads platform, so that's going to be tremendous value.

For those people who don't know BookBub, they are an absolutely superb company and really powerful when it comes to broadcasting your books out to millions now of interested readers. They are very well known as the best of those kinds of email list service companies, so we're delighted to have them actually telling us about how to get BookBub deals, how to use their ads platform, really excited to have them onboard.

James: Yeah, and that's a coup for us to have BookBub on. When I say, "a coup for us," what I mean, the whole community, because obviously we create courses, we host podcasts or we create Facebook group, but the SPF community, I think people are now looking at this community as being a place where a significant number of the authors who are pushing forward with their careers are now gathering, and it's a fantastic place to be at the moment, and we are honored really that BookBub immediately said to us, "We

want to be a part of this," and we've got their material in-house now and that's exciting.

That module by itself I think is the module that's going to appeal to people at every stage of their author career, even the more advanced will want to hear from BookBub personally about how they advise going about their various aspects.

Okay, let's press on because we've got this interview with Chris which is in video, so if you're watching this on the YouTube website, you'll see Chris from his home, in which the opening looks like, I think I point out, it's 17 Acacia Avenue, Portsmouth or something in England, but he's not, he's thousands of miles away, although he is very English.

So Chris, he has a background probably known to a lot of people for virtual assistant, so started a VA company. A virtual assistant is something that if you have a digital company whether you're an author or anything else, at some point you're going to start thinking that you need some help, and it's little bit of a mind throw to negotiate.

We've been very lucky with SPF and the VAs that we've had join our team so far, but more than that, he's about brand. He's about how you build your presence, and in particular as I said, if you're a non-fiction author. So let's listen to Chris and we'll be back after that.

Chris Ducker, okay look, thank you so much indeed for joining us. What looks behind you as a very normal English scene I would say, you could probably be somewhere in Sutton, England, Acacia Avenue in Southampton.

Chris: Complete with the toilet roll for cleaning the desk as well. I thought I'd leave that in there.

James: And an English phone box, but let's start by saying but you're many thousands of miles away from your home.

Chris: I'm based in the Philippines. I've been here 16 years, but I'm about as proud of Brit as you've all

come across. There's a lot more British paraphernalia behind me. I've even got a Smeg fridge over there in the corner full of beer, and no, I'm a very, very, very, very, very proud Brit. And look, even the Queen's Guard looks after me on my desk.

I was going to say, the very large majority of the stuff you see behind me though, it's actually being sent to me by my online community which is great, I mean, I love getting all that sort of stuff, so there's a lot of Union Jacks in this house but we probably need to start paring back to be honest with you.

James: Can you first of all give me an introduction to who Chris Ducker is?

Chris: I'm a sales and marketing guy. That's what I am. That's what I do and that's what I've always done. I dropped out of uni and decided to go into the publishing world, not book publishing, but periodicals, so the company I was working for in London, big, big firm, and Pimlico and I was with them for almost eight years.

We did everything from, you know, the British Medical Journal down to Laundry monthly, you name it, and it was a very, very big firm and I did very well as a sales guy. I was running sales teams for them. That's kind of what brought me to the Philippines initially in the year 2000.

I was basically hired by one of the international banks here to come in and kind of help them with their local efforts on their personal loans, their credit cards and that type of stuff. And within a few years of being here I created my own network, my own contact list, so to speak, and I started consulting for the majority of it was American firms setting up call centers and things like that here, and eventually I said, "Well hell, if I can do it for other people I might as well do it for myself."

So that's exactly what we did and then I got active online in 2010. I still own the outsourcing business. I still own the call center and virtual staff, the VA Hub and although I'm not day-to-day involved with those businesses anymore, what I focus on now is blogging and podcasting and coaching.

And that's ultimately content creation, one-on-one stuff, and helping personal brand entrepreneurs, such as authors to build their brand further online through creating high-quality, consistent content online, and then

not only to be able to sell more books, but also to be to market themselves as an expert in their niche, as well as obviously monetize that expertise as well.

James: Chris, 2010, from modern digital entrepreneur, that makes you a veteran.

Chris: I'm a dinosaur.

James: You are. I don't mean to be rude about it but a lot of the guys who are very big, well-known names in this space started two and a half years ago, but you obviously saw it early on.

SO FROM YOUR EARLY ADOPTING STANDS, TELL US HOW IT'S CHANGED AND WERE THINGS EASIER AT THE BEGINNING THAN THEY ARE NOW FOR PEOPLE GETTING INTO THIS?

Chris: That's a really good question, and I think overall, things ... I don't know ... easy? It's kind of 50/50 because it was easier to stand out because there wasn't as much competition, right? I mean I'm coming up on almost seven years now, so yes it was easier to kind of grab the market a little bit more and become know a little faster, because there wasn't as many people in your niche, in your industry and market whatever doing, what you are now doing.

But that being said, the game has changed so much with social media. Yes, Twitter and Facebook and everything was around back seven years ago as we all know, but it wasn't the way it is now. And particularly with something like Facebook advertising, you know I'm not a big fan of Facebook, but I love those adverts. I love the hell out of those adverts, so you can get traffic a lot faster than you could back seven years ago.

You can get traffic to your landing pages. You can build your email lists a lot easier, because of the paid advertising, but particularly Facebook has been able to open that door. They've made it easier to build your lists faster, although I don't necessarily think building your brand is as easy as what it was back seven, eight, nine, ten years ago, if that makes sense.

James: Yeah, it does. Let's talk about building your brand because this is something we talk a lot about how authors are not necessarily going to feel comfortable being business people anyway. I mean, it's not

the same thing as the creative talent of writing and some will always struggle with it.

And even within the business, even when they've got their head around Facebook advertising, and doing the blurb and setting themselves up technically, the bit you were talking about, this kind of almost a Haiti's, the expression X-Factor because it's been used to death elsewhere.

THIS BRAND BUILDING, THAT IS AN AREA THAT'S TAKING SOME PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE, BUT IT'S SO IMPORTANT, ALL RIGHT?

Chris: It is, it's very important. I call it the business of you, which was the keynote that I did for the first time about three years ago at a very, very large conference in Vegas. It ruffled up a few feathers at the time, because I was saying even if you don't want to do it, even if you don't want to stand out, you must as much as you possibly can, because being different is better than being better. It's not just about being better than your competitor or having more experience than your competitor. You gotta be different different. You gotta stand out. You gotta be you. You gotta do you.

And so it's very, very important to build your personal brand, particularly as an author. I mean, probably two of the easiest ways to be able to monetize your brand as an author is through coaching and through speaking, and really they're one and the same if you think about it. Almost everything I do in my coaching sessions with my clients, I'm doing it on the stage and on keynotes and vice versa. And so, I think it's very important to build your brand.

I think, really the main reason why people should be focused on this is because what I call my 'P2P' philosophy to relationship building, and that means people to people. Business to business, business to consumer, but 'P2P'. People nowadays, more so than ever, particularly with the social web being the way it is, we are more likely to know, love, and trust somebody that somebody we know already knows, loves, and trusts, right?

We're more likely to go ahead and start following somebody based on the recommendation of somebody that we already know and trust ourselves, but even more importantly we are more likely to do business, we are more likely to spend with somebody that we know, love, and trust.

And that right there is exactly what every author, what every personal brand entrepreneur should be doing, is focusing ultimately at the end of the day in becoming somebody's favorite. We want to be somebody's

favorite productivity, or favorite business coach, or favorite whatever it is. That's what we need to do. We want to become somebody's favorite.

James: The familiarity thing, and this goes back actually all the way to the seven touches of selling, those familiarity steps along the way to somebody feeling comfortable enough to make a purchase from you, I guess. The big question is, Chris, we always try to provide some value to our podcast listeners.

HOW DO THEY DO THAT THEN? WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL STEPS AN AUTHOR, FOR INSTANCE, SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT?

Chris: The first thing they need to do if they're not doing it already is they gotta get their social media platforms built out properly. It never ceases to amaze me how lazy people are when it comes to their social media.

They have different profile photos on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. They have different cover images. They use different rhetoric on different platforms, different links, and all these things. The consistency in the same profile pic, the same cover pic, and it's fine to change it if you want to promote something at a certain time, go ahead and do that. That's absolutely fine, but the bottom line, is that idea of having that consistency from one platform to another, no matter when anyone finds me, they know who they're finding and it's very, very, very clear. So that's the first thing they need to do. Get your social media in check. ASAP.

The second thing is that, particularly when it comes to authors, you need to start creating online content on a very consistent, regular basis. Just because you're written a book that's got 60,000 words in it doesn't mean that you should not be blogging once a week at 600 or 700 words.

You must be creating content for two reasons: number one, to serve your audience because we must serve before we have the ability, or quite frankly the right, to be able to sell in the twenty-first century, right, you gotta serve first, then sell later.

The second reason why is because it's that consistent, high-value, original based, focused content on solving people's problems that would ultimately have them getting onto your email lists, coming to your live events, buying your coaching product, pitching in when it comes to your next book launch, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on.

Get your social media in line, start creating good quality, high-impact, original, online content on regular basis, and it doesn't need to be blog-posts. It can be a podcast. It can be a YouTube video once a week. It doesn't matter what it is, just consistency is key. You want to be front of minds all the time.

James: It's a great time to be a consumer on the other end of this because the way that you talk, that's the way certainly SPF runs and other organizations like and work with run, is that they put out lots and lots of stuff for free, lots of value-added stuff, and there will be thousands of people who have contact with you who will never buy anything from you, and yet will grow and learn and become better business people as a result of that.

I UNDERSTAND THIS, SO I'M CONVERTED BY THIS, BUT SOME PEOPLE WILL SAY, "WELL THAT'S A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT YOU'RE GIVING AWAY FOR FREE."

Chris: It is, but you shouldn't think of it as giving away time and effort away for free. You gotta hit the pause button right there. If you're the kind of entrepreneur that I want to work with, then you don't think like that.

You think long game. Everything we do, as you well know James, it's a long game. You must have that long game approach to creating content, marketing your brand, coming out with helpful courses and products and services, spending time on the speaker circuit. It's a long game approach. Relationships should be treasured - not used.

If all you're looking to try and do is get that quick buck all the time, and by the way, people can smell that level of BS from a mile away nowadays. We are way, way smarter today than we were ten years ago as a global consumer base, right, so it's that long game approach.

It's not about giving stuff away free. Should you ultimately stop doing that and then start charging for certain things, yes, absolutely, don't be shy, you should absolutely want to make money doing what you're doing. But you also have to appreciate and understand that to be able to get to the point where can put a price tag on something, you gotta understand what your customers want. And creating content and getting blog comments, and tweets, and Facebook messages, and Periscope conversations back from them in real time, that's gold. They'll give you everything you need to be able to produce a product that you can put a price tag on because you're providing a solution to someone's problem.

James: Now for non-fiction authors, I think this is going to work very well.

HOW DO YOU ADJUST THIS FOR FICTION AUTHORS, FOR THE VAST MAJORITY PROBABLY OF OUR LISTENERS WRITE NOVELS. I MEAN THE SPEAKER CIRCUIT AND SO ON IS PERHAPS NOT THE SAME TO THEM, BUT THERE ARE OTHER THINGS THEY CAN DO, RIGHT?

Chris: Yes, certainly. I've worked with a fiction author before actually as a client, and her big issue was that she is not a salesperson, she is not a businessperson, yet she obviously needs to make a living. And so, we went from her really just making royalties - she was doing very well from a royalty perspective. She was doing audio books as well where she was reading the books herself and doing quite well selling her own audio book versions of her books, but that was kind of it.

We produced a number of coaching slots for her on a monthly basis. I think we started with three, and then she doubled it relatively fast because she she had such a huge interest from her readership in wanting to learn how to write great fiction, and so she started doing coaching sessions.

I think she charged like \$400 an hour to begin with and I think she is now up to almost \$600 an hour. Then she put together her first little 'From zero to fiction' type course where she talks people through developing characters and worlds and all that kind of stuff to be able to come up with all these great ideas from a fiction-based author perspective, and she is actually now just about to run her first, in-person, two-day, fiction authorship mastermind event, workshop kind of thing.

There are still certainly plenty of ways to be able to monetize your work as a fiction author above and beyond your writing. And here's the thing, and you probably know this already, that a lot of your viewers and your listeners probably might think that this is the case but they don't have unequivocal proof.

I'm going to give it to you right now: people are happy to pay for access to other people more so today than ever before because as a society we value experience and success for the right people obviously. We value that experience and that success more so than we have done before, because we can see clearly on the internet who is doing things right and who is doing things wrong.

It's clear to see in a way that you put yourself across, the things that people say about you, and so on, and so on. So to give your time up for things like coaching and live events, it becomes a bit of a no-brainer for any type of author, quite frankly it's the lowest of the low-hanging fruit out there, you know what I mean?

James: Okay, let's move on to one or two practical things. So you're out there in the Philippines, I'm here in the UK, and we talk to people who work in this sort of digital space who are wherever they want to be. And that's actually for me one of the glorious things about this, more than anything else, more than actually using money as a metric, is working from home and living a much more flexible life than I've ever done before.

To get this working and set up properly, one of the things I know you've become a bit of an expert at in the past is virtual assistants and finding a team that's going to help this work, and I know a lot of our authors are getting to the point now where they need help.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE TO THEM? WHAT SHOULD THEY BE LOOKING FOR?

Chris: You gotta be looking at building a team rather than just getting help. I think that's the important thing. If you need help then you hire a freelancer and that's what you get. You get someone to come and help you do this task or that task.

But if you have the mindset of wanting to build a team, you're going to be looking to hire for the role rather than the task itself. And that's really the biggest thing, now understand that hiring people to help you virtually is no different in any way whatsoever than hiring people to come and work in your office.

People are people, employees are employees, and actually you got an open planned office with no walls nowadays, any office space in the planet nowadays. The very large majority of communication internally, even if they're all in the same building, is via things like Slack and Gmail and instant messaging. They're not even really talking to each other all that much, so you don't really need to be in each other's presence now.

I think the big thing is to understand that one person cannot do the job of five people. Yet the problem is that particularly online, a lot of people claim that the person that can help manage your website, help design your graphics for social media, help upload your YouTube videos, help edit your podcast, etc. And it's not the case, not if you want it done properly.

You wouldn't hire a plumber to come and fix your roof and vice versa. And so you've gotta look at it like

that. Be very, very pragmatic in the way that you break down the roles that you need to be able to grow your business, but ultimately, start with that mindset of hire for the role, not for the task, unless all you've got to delegate is a one-off task and then it's a different ball game obviously.

James: And where do people find the best VAs?

Chris: There's really three ways to hire people. The first way is task-based, so let's say, for example, you wanted to get a transcription done of this conversation, it's a one-time job, it's a task is what it is. You would then go to one of the job posting websites out there like Odesk or Upwork I think it's called now, or Freelancer, or something along those lines, or maybe even just a good old-fashion transcription service, and you give them the audio file, they type it all out, you pay with your money, thank you very much for playing, one-time task.

The second way to delegate and outsource is to do project-based outsourcing. Perfect example would be, say, a website redesign. It needs more than one person, right, so you might have a graphic designer to help you with the layout. Then you need to get an actual developer to do the coding for you. Maybe you bring onboard copywriter to help you with sales copy if you got products or landing pages on the site as well.

You'll have two or three people maybe work in one project, it is still a onetime things, but it's not going to take a week. It might take three or four months until you're happy to hit the go button. So with that case, you know, you might have to pay people on a monthly or a retainer basis. Possibly if you can, you pay them just for the project, and that way you know they're not going to be stringing things out on you.

And then the third way is my favorite way, and that is to hire team members. Actual individuals to come on-board in your business either part-time 20 hours a week, full-time 40 hours a week, and ultimately build that team of people around you. Graphic designer, web developer, copy writer / transcriptionist, audio video editor, and so on, and so on.

You get this team of people around you to help you do all the things that you want to do. And I mean, look, I'm not going to turn it into a pitch-fest but virtualstafffinder.com, one of my businesses, was clearly set up to bridge that gap between stressed-out entrepreneur and high experienced virtual assistant in the Philippines, and that's exactly what we do. It's a recruitment service, that's it. Honestly, there are plenty of

other VA companies out there, but I wouldn't be the type of entrepreneur that I am if I just talked about mine only.

James: Quite happy for you to do that, Chris. In the brand work you do with people, what's your gauge on how big and growing this industry is? I mean, it's funny we work in this space, but all the stuff I hear, I listen to Radio 4 every morning here in the UK, and they talk about business, and it's almost as if they have no idea this is going on.

THEY TALK ABOUT BREXIT, AND STEEL PRODUCTION, AND CAR PARTS BEING EXPORTED, AND STUFF, AND THERE IS THIS BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY THAT NEVER GETS ANY AIRTIME ON MAINSTREAM RADIO, AND MY FRIENDS DON'T EVEN SEEM TO UNDERSTAND IT, BUT YOU MUST SEE IT ALL THE TIME, MORE THAN I DO, HOW BIG IT'S GROWING AND FAST IT IS.

Chris: Yeah, because of the majority of the speaking that I do is in the United States, it's kind of where I'm known as a speaker within the personal branding business space. In the UK - I'm moving back to the UK as I mentioned to you next year - so I'm hoping is or try and start bringing it home, quite frankly. It's a huge market.

The UK is ripe for it and I don't know what level of percentage your audience is in the UK or anything, but you know Brexit for example, should not be concerning entrepreneurs in any way, shape, or form. You want to know why? Because you don't need anyone but you to make your business a success. That's my thought process on it entirely.

I'm not concerned about Brexit and I don't think anybody else should be, quite frankly, if you're an entrepreneur. Now, if you're in the steel business, maybe, but I'm pretty sure the majority of your viewers and listeners and fans are not in the steel business. They are authors writing either fiction or non-fiction books.

So, the grand scheme of things really honestly is I think the UK is approximately three to five years behind the United States when it comes to pretty much everything digital entrepreneurship, not just personal branding, but I think also content marketing, I think live streaming, I think YouTube video marketing.

Do you know how much potential there is on YouTube for entrepreneurs in the UK right now? It is wide bloody open. Because there is hardly anybody doing anything in the business space on a very, very,

regular, consistent basis.

Yeah, you got these bloody teenagers and these twenty-something bloggers that are doing great and everything, but creating no real content, they're just showing lives and people fall in love with them. But the fact of the matter is that there is a lot of opportunity in markets like the UK and we are behind. We're just behind. That's honestly what it is, and I feel like the UK is very, very ready for this. The problem, like you say, Radio 4 and the other mainstream media, they ain't talking about it.

They're just not bringing it to the people. It's down to you and I, and people like us, to go ahead and people like us to go ahead and do that in our own way, in the way that we feel like that we can deliver and serve the best.

James: I completely agree and you know, people join our Facebook group from wherever they are in the world and some people buy our online courses, and it's completely transparent, it's whether they're in Austria, Washington DC, or the United Kingdom. And then when people say to me, "How is Brexit going to affect your company?", and I'm thinking, "I have no clue how the EU affected it before, how is it going to affect it afterwards?" You know, it's meaningless.

WE LIVE IN A GLOBAL BUSINESS NOT RESTRICTED TO ANYWHERE.

Chris: It really truly is a global economy nowadays. You know the stock markets freak out, but other than that I don't think anybody should be overly worried about Brexit any more than they are a Trump administration or any other big political slash governmental change.

Change is a constant. It's always death, taxes and change. They're the only three things that you can really be a hundred percent assured of in life. And if you don't learn how to roll with the punches, if you can't learn how to pivot and change when the need arises, then you're going to have problems, and I feel like particularly with things like Brexit for example, a lot of this stuff is blown very much out of proportion by the mainstream media. They need to report it. They're sometimes maybe a little weak on content and they try and string things out a little bit I think.

James: Yeah. Well, think what happened and talk about change and how disruptive it is and uncertain the world is today, and I think, "Well, look back to the 20th century, look what happened in the first 16 years of the 20th century." A million and a half were dead in global conflicts and boundaries of countries had

changed. By the middle of the century, by 1950, 45 million people were dead. I mean, what our grandparents went through, they'll talk to you about change. And yeah, I agree. Changing the trading relationship with our neighbors or who is president who is slightly eccentric for four years is really ... we should get our feet back on the ground. I completely agree with that. And I think we're in exactly the right space to exploit perhaps other people's perception of uncertainty.

IF YOU OFFER SOLID PRODUCTS THAT THEY'RE GOING TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S LIVES THEM FROM THAT WORLD, RELEASE THEM FROM THAT NINE TO FIVE.

Chris: Agreed. I believe the only change we should be focused on as entrepreneurs is the change that we can bring the people that we come into contact with, and obviously, we're looking for positive changes, not negative changes in that regards.

James: Yeah, absolutely, and there is nothing better in the world for us to see than somebody who's been writing, and writing, and writing for a few years and finally makes that breakthrough and suddenly has their partner working for them ...

Chris: I love it.

James: ... and they're at home. It's the best thing in the world.

Chris: I love it. You know, just as a quick aside, a very quick tale here. I was working with a dental practice owner, of all places Jamaica, as a client a couple of years ago, and she had been a dentist her whole life. She was in her probably mid-forties or so, and she to me and said, like, you know, "We're doing really well." She had five different places based out around Jamaica and neighboring islands and all the rest of it. She came to me and she said, "I want to build my business, but I don't want any more locations. I don't want to hire more dentists. I want to help other dentists build their businesses, and we're doing really well with Facebook ads, I think we could teach other people how to do this."

So we sat down and we derived a strategy for her on how she could teach other dental practice owners how to grow their businesses and their practices via Facebook ads. To begin with she launched a little four video course at like \$297 or something, and out of the gate she sold like 300, like that. Didn't even think about it.

And now she's just put the finishing touches on a course, which I believe she's priced up at I think \$800 or something, and in her first week she made \$33,000, serving people in her industry based on nothing but sheer, plain experience.

And that's what I'm saying. People will pay for that access, and if you're doing a great job they'll be happy to pay for it. So, there's definitely that positive change that we can affect then. When you see people move their own needles like that, it is very, very rewarding. You are absolutely right.

James: Yeah, fantastic. Okay, look, we're going to finish up, Chris. I think it's worth just reiterating quality needs to be there. There is a lot of things need to be in place but it's absolutely essential that what your product is offering, when you do ask for that money, this is stuff that is going to have an impact on people and them, right, because there are without question ... this space is also open to people who don't have the quality behind them ...

Chris: Oh yeah.

James: ... and that can be exploitative and we need to be weary of that.

Chris: You know, it's a good and a bad thing. That entry barrier online is at an all-time low. I don't think it's ever been any lower, and because of that, like you very clearly point out, there's a lot of shall we say slightly more unscrupulous people out there. They want to try and pull the wool over people's eyes. They want to try and make a quick buck, and these are the people as we all know will come and go in the night, and very few people will really even notice it.

Unfortunately however, sometimes they'll leave that dent in one person's life that you and I know we could help, and they're very trigger-shy. They're gun-shy. They don't want to go ahead and pull the trigger because of the bad experience they've had before in the past, and it's unfortunate but you're absolutely right.

It's down to us good guys; it's down to us to set that bar higher and even, actually if we have to physically move the bar ourselves by doing live events, by speaking, you know physically actually help move that

bar higher, that's what I focus on. I genuinely want the bar to be as high as it can be in any industry that I want to touch, because I know if I bring value, and consistency, and originality to that, then I'll win every single time based on these other jokers that are out there trying to make a quick buck.

James: Chris Ducker is coming back to the UK, Mark, and I live in Cambridgeshire and you live in Salisbury, and he said to me the two areas they're looking at are Cambridgeshire and Salisbury.

Mark: Coincidence? I don't think so.

James: Well, he told me first, so one of us is going to have him on our doorstep, but yeah, there are a few people who have this sort of unending amount of energy and laser-like focus on the digital area and how it works, and where it's going, and how to make the most of it. And Chris is one of those people that you could listen to him for hours really, and it's important to listen to him and hear his tips and the areas he thinks you should be working at.

And we talked a bit in the interview about the fact that this is a burgeoning industry, it's a blooming industry. It's worth billions. It's largely ignored by mainstream press, largely ignored by mainstream industry, and that will probably be the case for another decade, at least another decade yet.

There is huge scope for people who've got their eyes open, their head switched on to make merry in this area. And for authors in particular, well just look at the difference some of the authors in our community are making to their careers once they start to understand: unlock the secrets of the digital space.

Mark: Absolutely. I've been listening to Chris for a while, and one of the things that I did or I still do, I've got to broaden my education now so I listen to podcasts and I read blog posts and get involved with communities outside of the traditional book publishing space. Because even though this is digital marketing that we're doing, we can learn plenty of things from other experts in other areas of the market.

I'm excited about going to this thing tomorrow with Amazon because there's going to be people there from all kinds of digital industries, and you know, we can talk about things like customer acquisition and that's as relevant for an author as it is for someone selling widgets, or Uber, or people delivering food with

apps, and all that kind of stuff. It's all relevant.

Lead generation is all the same kind of thing. So, yeah, I listen to people like Chris and go beyond what we would normally say would be a way you should be getting your education from as an author because you can learn things from just about anywhere these days.

James: Great. Okay. Excellent. Thank you so much for listening. It's an exciting couple of weeks ahead for us. We're not going to focus too much on one-on-one. That'll be done really online through our Facebook groups, but we will keep you in touch with how things go.

If you are interested in the 101 course, now is the time to make sure that you're on our list if you're in the Facebook community. So just go to selfpublishingformula.com and you'll get all the latest information when that stuff is all ready to launch. That's it from Cambridgeshire and Salisbury here in the United Kingdom. Have a great week writing and marketing. We'll see you next Friday.

CHAPTER 38

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS AS AN AUTHOR? - WITH AUTHOR AND SELF PUBLISHING COACH ELIZABETH LYONS



HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS? Is it in the number of books you sell? Is it in the money you make or the raving feedback you receive from fans of your books? Or is it simply that you got your book written? As you can tell there are a number of ways different people might define success as a self-published author and none of them are wrong. But asking and answering the question is crucial if you are going to have a sustained and personally fulfilling career as an author. Today's guest is Elizabeth Lyons. The mindset issues that fuel her writing have led her to write about and coach authors extensively on the importance of developing a clear sense of WHY behind their writing. You'll learn a lot about the serious and confident mindset that fuels Elizabeth and many other successful authors from this conversation.

WHY YOU NEED TO DEFINE YOUR OWN BRAND OF SUCCESS AS AN AUTHOR.

If you don't know what you're looking to achieve as an author you'll never know if you've hit it. You'll also not be able to weather the storms of negative response, missed deadlines, editorial feedback, and a host of other things that make it difficult to persevere as an author. This conversation could provide that

missing sense of clarity you need to push you forward over the edge.

WHAT TO DO IF THE CREATIVE SIDE OF WRITING MAKES IT HARD TO TREAT IT AS A BUSINESS.

Writing is inherently creative. There's no doubt about that fact. It's for that reason that many authors find it difficult to make the mindset shift that is required to effectively approach the business side of their writing. But it's absolutely necessary if your books are going to make any kind of financial difference in your life. Elizabeth has some great advice for those authors who find it hard to make the switch between creative and business person. Her advice could help you get over the hump and finally start seeing yourself and the work you are producing as things worthy of other people's money. Curious yet? Find out more on this episode.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS IF YOU NEVER GET STARTED?

Unspoken behind the concept of self-publishing is the fact that the author himself or herself is the one doing the work of getting the book published. That can take on a variety of forms but the fact remains that the end result is due in large measure to the author's work and nobody else's. Because the "getting started" phase of self-publishing can be intimidating for those who have no experience at publishing the team The Self Publishing Formula have put together their "Self Publishing 101" course. It's packed full of step by step instructions to help you get off the ground and walk your book project all the way through the final draft, publication, and promotion. Find out more about how you can get the course on this episode.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- The Self-Publishing 101 course is LIVE!
- The feedback being received from Beta users of the course.
- Today's guest, Elizabeth Lyons and the issue of mindset behind your writing.
- Introduction of Liz and the importance of having meaning behind your author career.
- Why it is OK to say, "I'm writing to make money."
- The mindset approach self-publishing authors need to develop.
- Advice for those who feel uncomfortable running a business.
- What it looks like to build relationship with customers in the digital world.
- How Liz has learned to be herself from writing non-fiction.
- The challenge of living with negative responses.
- The tools Elizabeth has created to help authors.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.PublishAProfitableBook.com - Liz's site

- [Joanna Penn](#)
- [Marie Forleo](#)
- [Self Publishing 101 Course](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 41 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Mark it's been a long haul for us getting Self Publishing 101, our second course going, but it is live and ready and people are signing up.

Mark: It's been good fun. We're already pleased with how it's turned out and the early response has been really encouraging.

James: Yeah it has. We've had our beta team out there, they're the ones who've had a look at it. Obviously we're recording this just before the actual launch moment so we can't tell you how many people have signed up yet but we know from the interest that we've had that there's a bit of queue of people waiting to get in.

We should say that in the same way that we do with Facebook Ads for Authors, there's only three of us in SPF full time. We have some fantastic helpers around but we can't take on 10,000 students. We can take on a few hundred. A couple hundred we did with the Facebook Ads course so when we get to a certain point we'll just close the door but there'll be another chance perhaps next year for people to sign up to 101.

I've done two interviews this morning with Kerry Gardner and Andrew Turpin who are both on our beta team. Just spoke to them in a very honest way about what they thought of the course, who they thought it was pitched for, what worked, what didn't. I have to say because I'm like you I've had head down in the course, it's quite difficult to really take a proper step back and look at it but it's been incredibly positive hearing from them, very detailed feedback.

Andrew is at the beginning of his career, the course is perfectly suited for him. Kerry's quite advanced now, she really made a breakthrough with your Facebook Ads course Mark, but what she said was, "I really wish this course had been available to me when I started. It would have saved me thousands." She wasted a bit of money on other courses which didn't work. That's all been very positive anyway.

If you're interested in 101 you can go to selfpublishingformula.com. You'll see straight away where to go to sign up for this limited period while it's open and taking students on.

Now what are we going to talk about today? What we are going to talk about, mindset. It's a very, very important part of being a writer. We've got a fantastic interviewee coming up in a moment called Liz Lyons who is very good, very eloquent and very targeted on asking you the question on why are you writing? What are you writing for?

She says when you get those questions right, there's a great bit in the interview where she talks about the fact that it's not just that it's going to help you business-wise, it's going to help your soul to understand what it is you do and why you're doing something.

We perhaps don't talk about mindset enough Mark because it's not just about technical details, about a website and stuff, is it?

Mark: No, no, there's accoutrements James the main, a bit of French there for today, yeah, the main reason is because for me anyway I can't stop writing. I said this actually to my wife when I was struggling to sell any books, is I'd continue to write even if there was no prospect ever selling another copy of my book to anybody, just because that's, if you asked me what I am I would say, "I'm a writer." That's what I love to do.

I think that's really important and that is often something that comes through in the writing as well. If you've got an enthusiasm for writing it's usually fairly obvious when you read the writing. The contrary is if you're forcing yourself to write, as I did once with a book that I was writing for what I thought was the zeitgeist, or write into the market. If the enthusiasm isn't there then the book tends to be soulless. That's something I think is very important to bear in mind, that this should be a passion. Unfortunately we can get

paid for it too but it's important to keep things in the right perspective.

James: Okay, look let's hear from Liz. It's a really fascinating and absorbing interview, and then we'll be back afterwards.

Elizabeth: My name is Elizabeth Lyons. I am an author and I'm also a writing and publishing coach. I've been writing my whole life really, but I have been publishing since 2003. I'm presently working on my fourth and fifth books.

James: Okay. You've got a site called Publish a Profitable Book. You've got a great presence on Facebook, you're very active, you're very dynamic, very lively.

Elizabeth: Thank you.

James: I learned loads as somebody who's writing a book. It's a great community to be a part of.

I WANT TO REALLY GET YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR FOCUS ON THE AREA THAT I KNOW IS A HOT TOPIC FOR YOU, WHICH IS PEOPLE HAVING A FOCUS AND A MEANING TO WHAT THEY'RE DOING WHEN THEY WRITE, BECAUSE IT'S KIND OF IMPORTANT, RIGHT?

Elizabeth: It's very important, in my opinion anyway. I call it the, "what is your why," component of writing a book. What I found, and I know this because I made a mistake here, so much of what we know in whatever area that we work in is because we really messed it up somewhere along the line ourselves and then had this ah-ah moment where we thought, "Oh my gosh, if only I had known this." This was definitely one of those areas for me.

When I talk to other authors, they come to me and they say, "Elizabeth how do I write a book? How do I publish a book? How do I find my readers? How do I make a million dollars? How do I hit the best-seller list?" All these sorts of things, and my first question is always, "Why do you want to write a book?" Then inevitably there's a fear on their end that there's going to be a right or a wrong answer.

What I try to really instill in writers is that there is no right or wrong answer, other than an answer that is

not authentic to who you are and your purpose in this space. Authors do better, and that can mean financially but it means peace in their soul, when they know why they are writing the book that they're writing when they're honest with themselves about that first and foremost.

James: There's a good correlation here, also Jo Penn, I think she comes up with that same question for people. She said to me when I started writing, she said, "What is your idea of success?"

Elizabeth: Bingo. That is a critical question. When I do the, "what is your why," workshop with people that's what we talk about, is, "What is your definition of success?"

Because what people have to realize is that when you put out a book, when you launch anything entrepreneurial, you start a business, you do anything, people will ask you, "Was it successful?" What they mean inherently is, "Did you make money?"

But the challenge there is that that is not everyone's definition of success. For many people just getting their words on paper and holding their book in their hands in published form is all they need, and that's okay.

James: We should also say, because we're in Britain and we tend to be over here slightly more not embarrassed but we're not as entrepreneurial, as overtly entrepreneurial often as Americans so we should also say for the British audience, it's also okay to say, "Do you know why I'm writing? I'm writing to make money."

Elizabeth: Oh my goodness, I'm so glad you said that because actually that is a huge challenge, at least with the writers I speak with. I know that culturally perhaps there's more of an entrepreneurial bent here in the States but more often than not writers feel embarrassed or uncomfortable saying, "I want to make money sharing my message and inspiring others and doing what I love and loving what I do."

I don't know if it's society as a whole, I don't know what it is but we feel like we're not supposed to make money doing what we love. Our job is supposed to be something that is painful. I tell people, "Look, if you want to make money being a writer you need to own that within yourself first and foremost because

that is going to change the direction in which you go when you publish." It's going to change your marketing strategy, all of it.

James: It might even change your genre.

Elizabeth: Absolutely.

James: In fact last week I was with Charlotte Bird, who's an author based in California. When she set out to write she looked around and found the genre that sold. Now she didn't read romance novels before that point, she's now turning in five figures a month having written three romance books.

SHE UNASHAMEDLY CHOSE THAT GENRE BECAUSE IT WAS GOING TO BE MORE LIKELY TO BE COMMERCIALY SUCCESSFUL IN HER VIEW.

Elizabeth: Absolutely. I see that a lot too, which is that writers have two sides of them. They have the creative side and they have the business side.

On the creative side perhaps they like writing, I don't know, westerns or who knows what, but they need to make a living and they want to make a living writing.

Therefore on the professional side perhaps they are journalists or they write for a magazine in a journalistic fashion, or they start writing romance or thrillers or whatever it is. Where those niches are clamoring for new and exciting material.

James: Okay, so you've got this philosophy, this mindset you believe that you need to start off with, which is to define your success goals, your criteria and why you're writing. As you've said it's okay for whatever it is. It might be the tradition ... That answer questions that you're struggling with like, "Should I be traditionally published?" Again, what's your idea of success and does that fit in?

If we focus down a little bit for self published authors, which obviously is our particular area, in terms of people who are going to write because they want to quit their nine to five. They want to live at home and want to be in a writer's life.

CAN YOU TAKE THIS ON THEN IN TERMS OF MINDSET, THE CORRECT PROCESS AND MINDSET THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE FOLLOWING?

Elizabeth: Sure. First I want to say that I am not opposed to any publishing approach. I've learned over the last year, year and half, since launching Publish a Profitable Book, that it's important for me to make it clear that I'm not opposed to traditional publishing, it's just a completely different paradigm. I think that when writers go into the writing industry they are in many cases mistaken about that process works.

Once they become clear about how the different components of that process works, if that is a good fit for them then please by all means go down that road. In terms of self-publishing you really have to, in my experience, become very entrepreneurial about it.

You have to be willing and able to look at it as a project where your book is a component of the project but that's not all of it. Once your book is out and in your hands, you have got to have a plan to get that book out not to the world at large but to the people who are going to be interested in it and going to become your readers and your followers longer term, because what you're looking to build is a group of people who anticipate everything you do after that book.

I personally am very big on building genuine relationships with customers. I'm not just out selling. Most of the people with whom I associate in the entrepreneurial space are the same way. We're not just out, "Here buy this book, have a great day, see you later." We're building something with people and it takes time, it takes patience, there's a lot of pivoting, there's a lot of regrouping. It's important to know that going into it so as not to get discouraged.

James: You're not just talking about, "Be prepared to do some marketing in the afternoon," you're talking about, "Be prepared for what your life's going to look like when this business is running successfully."

IT'S NOT GOING TO LOOK LIKE SOMEBODY WHO GETS UP, WRITES AND THEN GOES FOR A WALK AND THEN WRITES THE NEXT DAY. YOU'RE BUYING INTO THE WHOLE THING.

Elizabeth: I think so. One of the benefits to being entrepreneurial in a way, in any way, is that you sort of do get to dictate your own lifestyle. You can say, "I'm going to get up, I'm going to write, I'm going to go for a walk, I'm going to go shopping, I'm going to go have coffee. Maybe I'll come back and write, maybe I won't." Maybe that will work and maybe it won't.

Again it all depends on what you're going for. Are you looking to make an extra \$100 a month or are you looking to make six figures a year, and what does that require?

Yes, there are these overnight success stories that you share about where someone wrote a book and had no idea that it would go to the moon and back several times as quickly as it did, but more often than not in the beginning it does require that you make it a very significant of your daily and weekly schedule.

James: Yeah, more than just writing.

Elizabeth: Much more than just writing.

James: You talked a little bit about not being opposed to traditional publishing at the beginning. I think it's about time we stop talking very direct terms about self-publishing and traditional publishing because basically you are going to publish a book. You're going to publish a book, how are you going to choose to publish a book? Now you can employ a firm.

Elizabeth: That's correct.

James: Employ a firm who are going to take a cut and they are going to do load of stuff for you. They might not do everything for you or all the things you want but it might be the right thing for you. You're going to get some stuff that way or you're going to employ just a few services like editor and book covers and stuff and you can do some other stuff yourself. You're still publishing the book, right? It's not one or the other until I suppose you get the hint of a legal contract that may make it one or the other.

IT'S TIME THE TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING INDUSTRY STARTED TO MOVE AWAY FROM THAT AND STARTED TO OPEN THEMSELVES UP TO THE IDEA OF AUTHORS CHOOSING THEM AS AN OPTION ALONGSIDE SELF-PUBLISHING.

Elizabeth: I love that you said that James because it's so true. The paradigms are starting to move closer and closer to one another. I think, I love Elizabeth West says this brilliantly, she says, "I'm a single author publishing house." That's how she describes herself, because still the term self-published has a stigma associated with it that you're just running to the copy shop and binding with spiral coils.

But it still has that stigma and on the flip side people think, "Well if you are traditionally published with a big house then that means that you are good, successful, making a lot of money, touring."

What they don't necessarily realize is that in many cases there are so many things that go with both of those paradigms that people are unaware of. It's about educating yourself and knowing how these processes really work, but I completely agree, you're running a business, you're a publishing house.

James: It can be quite a scary prospect for people, particularly authors. There's a range of personality types obviously who write books but there are some personality types you see more often. People can be a little bit insular and under-confident and not necessarily feel they are entrepreneurial.

WHAT'S YOUR HELP AND SUGGESTION FOR PEOPLE WHO FEEL UNDER-CONFIDENT ABOUT RUNNING A BUSINESS?

Elizabeth: I'm one of them. I feel completely comfortable addressing that. Writers are artists, right? No matter how you slice it, if you are writing in a business manner and you are one of the people who says, "I see this niche".

Let's say I'm choosing a particular niche because I know it is lucrative and therefore I'm going to write and it's purely business, in all likelihood if that's your approach you don't have an emotional connection to what you're writing. It's purely business.

If we remove that, if you're writing a memoir, if you're writing non-fiction, which is predominantly what I coach writers on, is memoir and non-fiction, you are writing about a story or a message that is very personal to you.

We have two issues. One is what I just said, you have an emotional connection and you have the potential to put your work out there and have someone say it's awful, and that can take people down for hours or days or weeks. The other side of it is that many of us are ... I'm a complete introvert to be honest. I love to be social for a period of time but I'm the girl who's standing around the perimeter of a room full of people. I'm not the person who's in the middle, that takes a lot of effort for me.

There's a bridge between thinking entrepreneurially and acting entrepreneurially, which is putting yourself

out into the public and saying, "I have this product. It's basically about me," or in some way, shape or form, "that I wrote contributed to me," whatever it is. "I'm asking you to give me money in exchange for it." That is wildly uncomfortable for so many of us.

One of the biggest people I follow in this area, her name is Marie Forleo. She teaches business building, predominantly for women but I know there are a lot of men who follow her as well. She does a lot of great speaking about how you're actually doing people a disservice by not getting yourself into a mindset where you believe that you have something to offer. There's a difference between selling and building a relationship. The relationship sells your product without you having to put it in people's face.

James: I want to talk about non-fiction in a minute because that's obviously a big area for you Liz, but you're talking about the relationship, you mentioned it earlier as well, we're operating chiefly in the digital space and ideally you're going to be talking about thousands of potential customers.

CAN YOU DEFINE A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU MEAN BY BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP THAT WILL SELL YOUR PRODUCT?

Elizabeth: You can think about the 2:00am infomercials which are completely impersonal, for some reason they seem to work a lot of the time because they're still doing them, but we've also all experienced the situation where someone clearly just wants to sell us something and walk away. It doesn't feel good, right?

In this digital space where many times if I had my way as a coach, as a writer, as a whatever, I would go out and have coffee with everyone of my customers or readers or people or tribe or whatever, because I love that, but that's not feasible. We have to use what's available to us.

What's available to us are things like Facebook Live and the 60 second snippets on Instagram. I don't really understand where Periscope is going or is, I haven't personally used that to a great degree, but whether it's YouTube, we have to use what we can to build a connection with potential readers and current readers. It has to be genuine.

Even through emails putting your own personality, whatever that is, into your emails is critical. I hear from writers all the time who say, "I can't do a book about X because it's been done a thousand times." My response to that is, "If it's been done a thousand times there's a huge market for it first of all. Second of

all, what is unique about you?"

When you're the 1001st person to do it, what is unique about your approach? Are you kind of, "I'm very sarcastic and I don't take anything super seriously and I'm pretty transparent about my journey and things," that's my approach. Even if you sit down and you think right now about authors where every time they have a book come out you are ordering it, why is that?

More often than not it's not just because they're a great writer, sometimes it is, sometimes it is, but sometimes, many times, it's because you feel like that writer has made themselves vulnerable to you and you identify with them and you think, "This is one of my people. He or she gets me." Because he or she was where I am, I know that with their guidance I can get to where they are. It's just about being authentic. When you meet someone who you've been following online for 10 minutes or 10 years, in my opinion there should be no surprises. They should be in person exactly what you've come to expect.

James: That's great. We know this works because I see fellow authors and Mark's a great advocate of this and he's a great proponent of it actually in the way that he talks to his audience and follow his social media to see how that works, and it does work.

I'm really interested also in, because nothing's new, there's nothing new under the sun, right, the old expression. This is not a brand new idea, in fact in business terms I'm trying to relate it to how businesses operated for eons and I'm not sure if it's the same as brand loyalty, that feeling that I choose British Airways to fly because it flies the British flag and I feel brand loyal to it.

I probably overlook some of its misgivings and I probably give it a chance when things sink a little bit and don't work as well. I wonder if it's partly that, you're building that loyalty with people, that relationship and it's probably in some ways, everyone thinks, "It's so difficult to do everything." You know what? I think it's probably easier when you're a person and you're selling something to somebody sitting there behind a corporation trying to make people feel soft and warm about a corporation.

YOU'VE GOT AN OPPORTUNITY AS YOU SAY, AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY NOW WITH SOCIAL MEDIA TO BUILD A CONNECTION WITH PEOPLE.

Elizabeth: There's nothing more difficult than trying to be what you think everybody wants you to be in order to connect, because you're not going to connect with everybody. There's the saying, "Not everyone's

going to like you, you're not pizza, you're not Nutella, you're not ice cream," whatever the analogy is.

The best thing that we can all do is just be who we are and then make room for the people who are supposed to be part of our tribe to show up, instead of going, "What do they want? Let me try to turn myself into that."

Purchasing is an emotional decision so even if it's brand loyalty, I often say to people, "When you need to order shoes online where do you go?" They'll say, "I go to Zappos." Or, "When you want to order a book online where do you go?" "I go to Amazon."

There's a strategy that's on the part of the business and that sounds as though it's a sterile kind of yuck thing but it's not, everything's so fleeting, there's always a new author coming in right behind you. There's always a new something coming in. Staying in touch with in a genuine way your people is how you build genuine relations, the same way you build genuine relationships with your friends and your family.

James: We want to build relationships.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

James: You're tuning into human nature, we want to build, we want to operate in an area that feels familiar and comfortable with us. I guess getting over that initial bit, which we can talk about in a moment when you come onto how you've marketed your non-fiction but the initial bit might be the most difficult bit and then nurturing as long as you work at it is something that will reap rewards.

You're very good at that, you have a very warm relationship and quite active relationship with your followers I've noticed. How much of that have you learned from marketing hard products such as your non-fiction books? What I'm talking about is you're coaching techniques that you use. I guess all of that has come from your own experience. Non-fiction's been more your choice, you've been open about it, that you're more comfortable writing non-fiction, you enjoy writing non-fiction rather than fiction.

Elizabeth: I do.

James: Okay, let's start with that.

LET'S TALK ABOUT WHY NON-FICTION FOR YOU.

Elizabeth: Oh gosh, I don't know. I think I write the way I talk. I have a certain perspective about my life, which is just that it's crazy and chaotic and beautiful and all of this, so I love writing about it.

Fiction is challenging for me because I think that's where I go into a different part of myself. I've been working on a novel for 15 years. I don't know what's happening there. I think maybe I need some coaching myself on that one. I just enjoy the non-fiction.

I think to answer your previous question about the connection and building relationships with people, when I did my first book, which was called Ready Or Not Here We Come and it was a guide to the first year with twins, it was because I had just had twins. I'd been writing my whole life, I just had twins and I went, as an expectant mother of twins I went to the bookstore because this was pre-Amazon. I literally purchased every book there was. I think there were nine. I bought them all because I thought, "Oh my gosh."

Every one of them left me feeling like my life was over. They were not funny, it left me in tears. The business side of me, the creative side of me came together and I thought, "There's a place for a book that has strategies but also is lighthearted and funny and inspiring and empowering and motivating," so that's what I wrote.

Now when I did that I had some real fears that by being honest about some of the challenges that went on in my home, that people would be critical, and sometimes they were but more often than not they would write me and say, "It's like you're in my living room." There's this sense of identifying with your readers and your readers identifying with you, and you letting them know that, "Look, I'm just like a normal person."

That's one of the things I've come to absolutely love about Mark, is that when you watch his Facebook Lives where he's going through the income reports and the stuff for Facebook Ads, he's just sitting there at his computer in his house and sometimes he has to move to a different room because the WiFi's down.

There's not this façade of, "Okay, I can't be where you are because you're in a penthouse in Fiji." Does that make sense? It's like, just be a real ... We're all just real people.

James: Yeah. Yeah and it's funny because I straddle two industries really, we have a video production company that works largely for large corporations. On the one hand, I suppose they would never do most of the things that we do, that they wouldn't appear unshaven at home in their office.

On the other hand they're desperate to get a piece of this action, which they don't really understand, which is kind of 2.0 way of operating which is filling out with entrepreneurs and successful people who are driving digital business. They look and sound very different and they want some of that but struggle to get there.

I think you're right and I think it goes back to what we talked about before. It's friendly, it's sincere and it's accessible and that makes people like you and I want to do business with you and I want to buy your products ultimately. If they don't want to that's all right as well.

Elizabeth: You have to be okay with that.

James: You have to be and that's probably what the corporates can't get, they want to win every time and be cutthroat about it but actually you're going to be successful when you relax about that and think, "My book is clearly not going to suit everyone."

WE PUT OURSELVES OUT THERE AND EVERY AUTHOR WILL BE TOLD FROM TIME TO TIME BY SOMEBODY WHO THEY DIDN'T ASK TO TELL THEM THAT THEIR BOOKS AREN'T WHAT THEY WANT, AND THEY'RE USUALLY RUDE ABOUT IT. YOU'VE GOT TO LIVE WITH THAT, RIGHT?

Elizabeth: You have to be able to live with it. For first time authors specifically that is a real, real challenge because you get all this together and you get so excited and you get people following you.

Especially writers who in this day and age of digital stuff we have blog posts that go viral, we have Facebook Live videos that go viral and all the sudden it thrusts the person into this world that they thought they always wanted but now that they're in it and one out of every 10 people is saying, "You stink at what you do," they're not prepared.

Very rarely does anyone have the opportunity to gradually step up a plateau with their business and with their self confidence and then step up in both way, and on and on. One comes before the other in most cases. In most cases the business will pick up maybe before the writer is really comfortable with criticism.

Here's the thing, not everyone's going to like your book, not everyone's going to like your cover, not everyone's going to like your title and not everyone's going to like you. In some cases I find it interesting that when we have nine people who say, "Oh my gosh, I love, love, love your work," and then we have one who says, "I think you're an idiot," we inevitably focus on the one person who said something unkind, rather than the nine who love you.

James: Why is that? That's such a human thing.

Elizabeth: I don't know.

James: I want to scream. My author friends who post a negative comment and I think, "What about the 500 positive comments on there?" Why is that?

Elizabeth: I know. I don't know that. We need to bring in a psychologist or something.

James: Yeah.

Elizabeth: I do it, we all do it. It's definitely a very human thing. I think that the solution to it has to do with retraining.

When it happens you have to consciously go, "First of all, who cares?" I don't even know that I need to know why I'm doing it. The point is stop doing it. Put your efforts toward the nine people, if the one person has a, I don't know, a viable, valuable constructive piece of criticism, that's cool. I may do something with it, I may not. I may respond, I may not.

But what I find interesting is when you look at the Facebook pages, whether they're writers or a celebrity, anything where they have a large following and they'll post something and they'll get a thousand comments. 997 of those comments are extremely kind and supportive, and then you get the three who just want to take the person down.

The person whose page it is will actually respond in a defensive manner to the three people but not respond to any of the 997. I think, "What are you doing? What is going on?" I think it's because we feel that need to defend ourselves. We feel personally attacked. We feel criticized. We want to be able to say, "No, no, no, no. I didn't mean that." But what we have to remember is that most of those people wake up in the morning ... Hurt people hurt people.

James: I wonder also there's a human instinct in quite a lot of us which is to not really believe praise but to believe criticism as well.

Elizabeth: You just said it. We all need therapy or something.

James: Yeah, accepting praise is quite difficult.

Elizabeth: It sure is. These are the same people who feel uncomfortable selling their stuff because we're introverted, we are humble, there's a sense of humility. You want to be proud of what you've done but you don't ever want to be arrogant about it.

There really is, that's a huge, huge, huge struggle for writers, regardless of the publishing paradigm under which they go out into the world because if you're doing it yourself then all of that marketing, et cetera, is on you. If you're doing it with someone else, then the expectation is on you to get out there.

James: We should say that this is a tougher environment probably for authors. It's an unparalleled opportunity but it's also a tougher environment than when I was a kid, I'm trying to think of what I was reading. People like Douglas Adams and Stephen King and James Herbert and so on, some people have

taken the effort to write to them but I'm going to guess that people who really didn't like their books wouldn't really make that much of an effort to write to them about. Whereas today it's very easy just to drop a comment in on social media.

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE EXPOSURE TO STUFF THAT THE PREVIOUS GENERATION OF AUTHORS MAYBE ONLY HAD IT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL CRITICS.

Elizabeth: That's a brilliant point. It was also harder to send praise back then. The only way that those authors got praise is because they hit the best seller list or they were asked to speak at an event and were paid a large sum of money to do so.

Now everything is a bit of a double-edged sword. Whereas the social media allows us to connect with our readers and to get out there and to speak our mind and to get a message out quickly to everybody, it also allows other people to get to us quickly.

It's important to have boundaries. It's important to have a strong sense of self. As I tell people it's very important to have a strong inner circle.

I have people in my world where if I've written something or I posted something that's a little bit off and they came to me, if they came to me and said, "Liz, I'm not sure that that's really ... I know you real well, that's not really in line with who you are." I would really think about it.

If you're not in that circle it's not that I don't hear you, I'm not trying to ignore you, but if all you have to bring to my world is to say, "I don't like you and your books are terrible," by all means go find another ... I've got nothing for you.

James: You're quite right. In fact, as I get older I'm more like that. I think when I was younger I gave people time to criticize me, or friendships that weren't really friendship. Whereas, as I get older I'm frankly a lot less patient, and every now and again just cull negative influences in my life that come through social media and so on.

Got that too from Jo Penn as well, she does that. She thinks, "You know I don't really want to hear it." You can take positive actions to make sure that you're hearing more positive thoughts around you. The same

way that people can get you through social media, there are also ways of blocking that, which you didn't use to be able to do in the real world.

Elizabeth: Correct. It's not even a fine line, it's a pretty thick line to when you just say, "You're ... No."

James: Okay, in our last few minutes Liz I want to talk a little bit about you and your sites then. I know that you've got quite a few very author-centric offerings.

YOU'VE RECENTLY DONE SOME STUFF ON WRITING A BOOK. WAS IT THE 75 DAYS? HAVE I GOT THAT RIGHT?

Elizabeth: Yes, *Write Your Book In 75 Days*.

James: Talk to me a little bit about the type of practical tips and practical advice that you've been giving out and what's working for people at the moment.

Elizabeth: The two biggest parts of *Write Your Book In 75 Days* that are really being well received are the, "what is your why," section and helping people really clarify first and foremost what their why is, why they're doing it, their definition of success, et cetera.

Then also, secondarily understanding their reader's why, because when you're writing non-fiction or a memoir more often than not you're providing a solution to a problem. You're letting people know that you've been there as well, et cetera. You need to, at least depending upon what your why is, you maybe need to think differently about your readers' why when you're writing.

Then the second component is actually outlining, getting their book outlined. We have this tendency to think, "I want to write a book," and we start thinking about, "How am I going to sell it to all these people?" We haven't even written the first word. It's so important, it feels unmanageable and it feels very overwhelming to people.

When we can take it a step at a time and ask some probing questions to help people identify their high level topics, without having to worry about, "Is this going to be an actual chapter title? Is this even going

to make it into the final manuscript?"

But just, "Right now today when you think about writing this book," and when I've been thinking about writing this book for the last five, 10 years because in many cases that's what's been going on, "these are the things about which I want to write." Helping to unearth some of the stories and the tips and the pieces of wisdom that people have wanted to share with other but over the years have either gotten buried or the Post-it notes have blown away.

Now when they can focus, really focus and get those down, the writing of it comes so much more easily. Suddenly you realize that the whole concept is so much more bark than bite.

James: I suppose you're talking about starting with three things. Which is, what you want to get out of the whole project, what your definition of success is. An understanding of what people want out of it, and then with the content.

All three of those have got to match together, you've got to look at your content even if it's sketchy at this point, even if you're just putting stuff in the bucket to start off with.

YOU'VE GOT TO LOOK AT WHAT'S GOING TO WORK WITH THOSE OTHER TWO AIMS.

Elizabeth: Absolutely. When you don't do that what happens is you get to the end and you have a book in your hand and that's great, but then you have a disconnect because the book you've written isn't in line with your goals and the purpose of the book. That's when people start to feel schizophrenic because they feel like they're wearing two different hats and they're just running on a treadmill.

James: That's a good little triangle then, isn't it? To think about at the beginning of each project that you do and how you approach it. It's been brilliant Liz. Let's get a little plug for your Facebook site, which is Publish A Profitable Book. I think you're on Twitter @PublishAProfitableBook. Is that right?

Elizabeth: Twitter I'm actually @elizabethlyons, but everything else is Publish A Profitable Book.

James: Okay. There's loads of resources there. It's a bit like us, you can get loads of stuff just being a part of the community. You're part of our community and we're in yours. That's really good.

We've got some good takeaways from this today but I think the number one we started and finished with is defining your idea of success, what you call the why with a question mark, before you do anything. That's our takeaway, right? It's one bit of paper takeaway. If you can't answer it go back and start that bit again.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Take some time, you will be very glad in the end that you did. It's well, well worth it.

James: Liz, she's a bit of a fan of yours Mark, which is always pleasing for you to hear I guess. I thought that was absolutely fantastic. To be honest, when I started the interview I wasn't 100% what exactly sure what it was that we were going to talk about but it turned out to be 40 minutes of golden stuff really.

Mark: Yeah, fantastic. It's always nice to hear nice things but to hear some more nice things as people start to dig into the bits and bobs we've got coming up down the track in the next few months.

James: We're fascinated to hear how people are going to get on with the 101 course. You can always email us at any time of day or night. You can email us at podcast@selfpublishingformula.com. If you need to know anything about the courses or the free materials or the Facebook groups, just go to selfpublishingformula.com and you should find all the answers there.

Look, thank you so much indeed, particularly for bearing with us while we were really heads down and busy putting a course together. We have a little bit of respite now and can really focus. We've got some really good guests coming.

We just lined up somebody, in fact I think we're going to have our first musical guest I've been lining up this morning. I've been trying to persuade him to bring his guitar along for the interview, which should be a good one. I think particularly for people who don't write romance novels or any of those big genres, who are writing non-fiction, that's going to be a very, very interesting interview and maybe a guitar lesson. That's it. Good. I would say you can go off and rest but we're still at that point, 48 hours from where we are now.

Mark: In 10 minutes time I'm doing a live Facebook Live session. I'm going to do some whiteboard teaching about sales funnels. That will be interesting. Then there's emails to write, web copy to check, sales pages to check, and then finally team SPF heading down to London, or up to London, tomorrow for a swanky meal out with our respective better halves. I'm looking forward to that. It will be quite nice to finally lay our hair down, what hair I've got left.

James: It's been a very busy 12 months. It's been a very successful 12 months for us as well so we're going to go into London and celebrate that with our, as you say with our wives in tow, but we're working as well because I'm packing my car this afternoon with cameras and lighting and sound. We're going to work into Dorchester Hotel tomorrow and hopefully not raise any suspicions about what we're going to filming in the hotel bedrooms.

Mark: I'm not filming that James, it's not happening.

James: We're not filming that. Okay. On that note, thank you so much indeed for listening, we will speak to you again next week. Thanks to our guest Liz Lyons I should say. Bye.

CHAPTER 39

SELF PUBLISHING 101 IS HERE! THE COMPLETE LOWDOWN ON THE COURSE THAT'S ROCKING THE INDIE AUTHOR WORLD



IT'S BEEN on the slate ever since The Self Publishing Formula came to be: to create an easy to access course that indie authors could use to have the myriad of options and processes involved in launching or sustaining a successful author careers explained to them in plain English and easy-to-follow tutorials by someone who's been there and done it. After months of painstaking research, writing, recording, editing and multiple revisions, that course - Mark Dawson's Self Publishing 101 - is now available for a limited period. Pre-launch beta testers and early adopters are buzzing with excitement about it and you'll hear - and see if you watch our podcast on YouTube - their enthusiastic feedback for yourself on this episode of the podcast.

WHO IS THIS PUBLISHING 101 COURSE IDEAL FOR?

With a name like "Self Publishing 101," you might think that the most basic steps about writing, formatting and publishing a book yourself are what's covered. And you'd be right. But this particular course doesn't stop there. Mark and the team have included steps for helping you establish yourself as an author brand,

how to find your audience, how to use social media effectively to promote yourself and your books, how to gather emails and build a list of rabid fans. And the list goes on and on. Tune in to learn more about the exciting, jam-packed course curriculum.

THEY TOLD ME I DIDN'T NEED THE COURSE BECAUSE OF MY EXPERIENCE. THEY WERE WRONG.

One of our beta testers for the Self Publishing 101 course is a woman who's been writing and publishing her own books for many years. Her writer friends decried her use of the course telling her she'd be wasting her time. But what she discovered was the same thing that is true of many experienced authors: the platform on which she had built her career was shaky. Through the course, she's now been able to make some major refinements and tweaks to the way she operates as an indie author. You can hear more about her reaction - and why she thinks the course is woefully underpriced - in this episode.

WHEN A SELF-PUBLISHING COURSE IS NOT JUST A SELF-PUBLISHING COURSE.

It's one thing to include the basics of how to write, format, and publish a book on your own in a self publishing 101 course. It's an additional step to take you into the brand building and fan attraction machines that every successful author needs to master. It's even more valuable when the course provides tangible examples of the resources and tools you can use to make your life as an author and entrepreneur easier. But with access to a large supportive community of fellow authors coming as part of the package, the team at SPF are convinced that they're close to achieving their main aim with Self-Publishing 101: to make it the gold standard course in its sector. But they're not alone in thinking that as you'll hear from the guests on this week's show.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James' introduction to the group today, Mark, John, and James.
- The overview of this episode: The 101 Course unpacked.
- Mark's thoughts about the way the course has turned out.
- The response from the online course community.
- Who this course is ideal for.
- Beta tester testimonials and feedback for the course.
- "I didn't expect it to be as comprehensive as it is" ~ a beta tester.
- "a very compact DIY kit for self publishing." ~ beta tester
- How this publishing 101 course cuts your learning curve down.
- The pricing of the course - and why it's at its lowest price ever right now.
- The interactive groups and support associated with the course.
- "It really does guide you through the steps you need to take..." ~ beta tester.
- "It's not just the individual areas that are helpful, it's the depth in which they are addressed." ~

beta tester.

- “Mark is teaching me how to swim through the shark-infested waters of self publishing.” ~ beta tester.
- “I had quite a few people tell me that I didn’t need the course, but that’s proven not to be true... I had built the house but my foundation was shaky.” ~ beta tester.
- “This course covers it all.” ~ beta tester.
- “For \$400 it’s an absolute steal!” ~ beta tester
- “If you don’t know it and you can’t find it in this course, it doesn’t exist.” ~ beta tester
- The refund on the Self Publishing 101 course is always available - and once you buy it, it’s yours for life and will be updated as things change.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [MailChimp](#)
- [ConvertKit](#)
- [Infusionsoft](#)
- [Self Publishing 101 Course](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast #42 from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers: one just starting out, the other a best-seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Well, this is exciting because we are, all three of us, the triumvirate that is the self-publishing formula is together, and I like also, if you're watching this on YouTube, we've set up a couple of cameras hopefully to capture this, but what we've done is we've done a hierarchy of height.

Mark Dawson: I'm sitting in the throne.

James Blatch: I don't need to do that. They can hear the microphone.

Mark Dawson: Oh, yes.

James Blatch: Yes, you're sitting in the throne. I'm slightly below you, and then cleaning up the floor below us is John Dyer.

John Dyer: I'm on a much smaller throne.

James Blatch: John Dyer, you've not been on the podcast before, I don't think, but you are one of the three of us who runs SPF. Just introduce yourself. Who are you?

John Dyer: I'm John. I don't quite know what I do at SPF, but I understand it's invaluable.

Mark Dawson: I don't know what John does.

James Blatch: I don't know what John does, but anyway. Well look, the reason we're here today, we should just explain to get things going, and we're going to say right from the off that this episode is going to be about our 101 course which is live and open at the moment.

We're going to talk a bit about what it's like from the end of the manuscripts and what you do next and how you get there, and we're going to talk about how our course works, but also other things. If you're not going to get the course who may be a bit further on of what people have found.

The reason we're here in London is because we've had a handful of our early students stuck their hands up very quickly and said not only would they happily do a testimonial about the course, which we're very grateful for, but they've got on trains, they've got on planes, and they've flown into London to be filmed by us in this lovely little studio in Bloomsbury.

Mark Dawson: I think the real reason they did that was because they knew John would be here.

James Blatch: You are a celebrity.

Mark Dawson: He's a very handsome man.

John Dyer: Ah, yes. You don't even need to say it really, but I'm the reason they're here.

James Blatch: It's great. Dan's flown in from Belfast. We've still got Claire to arrive shortly. We've had people come from the south coast. In fact, the person who's come the furthest came from Mexico, but he was already in the UK.

We sat them in the seat that you're sitting in there, Mark, in the studio, and we just asked them why they bought the course, what they thought of it, how they think it's going to change their career, and whether they thought it was priced correctly, which is something we have to think about as well.

I have to say we're going to hear from them in this podcast, but we've had some very flattering and very nice answers from people.

LET ME ASK YOU, MAN IN THE CHAIR NOW: ARE YOU PLEASED WITH THE WAY THE LAUNCH HAS GONE AND THE WAY THE COURSE HAS TURNED OUT?

Mark Dawson: Yes. I'm delighted with how it's gone. We've enrolled over 600 students I think now; probably by the time this goes out it will be near 700. We've had some absolutely amazing feedback, and the fact that people have been prepared ... Not just to travel, so in Dan's case to fly from Belfast to come over here and spend the time with us. It is the fact that they have taken time out of their busy lives, writing schedules, they've got workouts to hit, and they just wanted to come down to London and hang out with us. That's really, really flattering. Whilst you guys have been busy doing whatever it is that you do-

James Blatch: Important work forming.

Mark Dawson: Whatever. I'm doing similarly important work, drinking beer and coffee in the virtual green room, which has turned out to be the pub down the road. We've had some really great conversations. All kinds of different genres represented, from action, adventure, non-fiction, to cowboys and Indians, and

really the full spectrum of John as a representative.

People at different stages of their careers, so we've had some who were reasonably advanced but had the cause to be valuable in that it maybe corrected some bad habits, and then we've had others, like my friend Steve who I went to school with who's just starting out. Very excited. He's got three books he's working right now, and is basically standing with his mouth in front of a great big force that that's just going to ... Pump is a terrible analogy. I'm going to have fire. Knowledge bombs.

James Blatch: You are a writer, just to clarify.

Mark Dawson: I know, but it's really, really great, and it's massively flattering. It isn't just these guys as well. People on the mailing list would've seen an e-mail I sent out on Monday as this podcast goes live, where I just asked for some Facebook testimonials. At the time I posted, it was about 35.

John designed a nice page and we sent those out. At the time of recording it now it's over 40, and I'd expect it to be more, and some of those have just been so flattering. It's great. We've had such a great launch, and, you know, of course that means we've made a little bit of money, which is good for us, but better for me is the fact that people are really, really engaging with this course. They're getting tremendous value out of the Facebook community that we've set up, and they want to be a part of some of the exciting things we've got planned for 2017 and onwards.

James Blatch: Let's talk about the money a little bit, because we are being noticed in the online courses community as well. People are sort of turning heads, and I think for the Teachable platform, which is one of the major players, probably the major player for people who want to make a good living out of online courses, I think I worked out we account for 5% of their total income.

We are their biggest customer; one of their biggest success stories, but I want to give a figure out there. Just because I know that everyone will say, "Oh, 600 times 397. These people are rolling in it. They'll be driving their Porsches tomorrow." One of them is. Actually, do you know what our outgoings are? Neither of you will know the answer to this figure, because neither of you take any notice at all at our other figures that I do, but the outgoings for SPF are about \$200,000 a year.

Mark Dawson: I didn't know that.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Good grief.

John Dyer: Are you sure?

James Blatch: Yeah. We're spending our current spend at the moment, and that's mainly you wasting money on Facebook advertising.

Mark Dawson: I was going to say, John, what are you spending money on. I'm not spending our money on anything.

John Dyer: Well, there's my drinks bill, and food bill, and yeah. No. I would imagine advertising is the key.

James Blatch: We'll do a really good course launch and that will pay hopefully our costs for a year, because the amount we invest in Facebook advertising, we must be a big client of Facebook's for the size of company we are. It's important for me because I think it's important that we run this company well. That we teach people to sell their books, but actually it doesn't matter because a lot of the principles are the same, and we can do.

We've really cracked that. I mean, I think we're doing a good job, and so yes, it's a big company now. We've got four people working for us around the world. There will be more after this course without doubt. Now, what I'm on selling, it's open at the moment.

IF YOU'RE WRITING A BOOK; IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT WATCHING IT IN 2017, VERY MUCH WHERE I AM, THEN THAT'S THE PERSON WE HAD IN MIND, ISN'T IT, FOR 101?

Mark Dawson: That would be one of the people. I think it's certainly that person who's just got a book ready to go, but it could also be, for example, Steve, who has, to date, has got three books.

There are some authors who have come down today who've got multiple books, and they were tossing and turning a bit about whether they should take the course, and decided that they would. I'm very glad that they did because it underlined that their foundations weren't as solid as they thought that they were.

With making some fairly simple changes and working on their mailing lists and their landing pages and their website and their offers and all of that kind of stuff, they're able to put a little bit more solidity in those foundations, which will enable them to build more substantially as they go on.

If somebody is doing really, really, really well, I'd say don't look at this course. You might be more interested in our advertising course, which we'll have again next year, but for those starting out and for those who feel they could do a little bit better, then this is one to have a look at.

As we've been saying, when people ask us whether the course is right for them, we often don't know what they don't know, so it's not always easy for us to answer that. The best answer is: we are very happy for people to sign up for the course on the \$39 payment plan. They have a 30-day guarantee, and if after looking through the course, and that's the chance to look at everything; all of the content is immediately available. If they decide that it's not something that they think that they'd benefit from then they can just get their money back, and we're very happy to process that immediately without asking questions.

James Blatch: We certainly had one person who said, even though she had a website set up, and landing page, mailing list, a convert kit account, the rest of it, it wasn't working for her. The first thing that she noticed, she walked through the course, and she said literally, "I found out what I was doing wrong quite quickly."

There are people who certainly have the basics of a setup but are not there yet, and I think that's what I, from my point of view as a new author when I look at your teaching, is the focus you bring. It's not about, "You need a landing page. You need a website."

IT'S WHAT'S THAT WEBSITE GOING TO BE DOING? WHY DO YOU NEED IT? THIS IS HOW YOU SET IT UP FOR IT TO WORK FOR YOU.

Mark Dawson: One of the things we did that we're quite pleased with, or I'm very pleased with how it's turned out, is we put all of the work, all of the walkthroughs and the technical stuff, we cut it out and stuck it into what we call the tech library at the end of the course. It's effectively a standalone modules.

All of the other modules are therefore unencumbered by that kind of technical detail. They enable me to talk on a macro level and to talk about the philosophy behind a certain tactic or strategy that I'm recommending. Then to tell people if they want to decide ... Say we're looking at mailing lists. We'll talk about why you need one and how best to optimize one, find readers and all of that kind of stuff.

Then I'm able to say at the end of it, "We recommend two e-mail services providers at the moment. We recommend MailChimp for beginners and Convert Kit for more advanced writers." If people want to set that up, James here recorded a five-part screenplay for Convert Kit. It's very, very thorough. I did one for MailChimp. You can then go to the tech library and then, at your leisure, sit down, go through it step-by-step, pause it, takes notes, whatever you need to do, without that having to distract your attention by being in kind of the main body of the course itself.

Some of the guys I've been speaking to today felt that was a very effective way to deliver what can otherwise be quite complex information.

James Blatch: Since everybody started, these 600 students have dived into the course. We've had one typo, which didn't get through all the beta stages and all the testing that we did. There was one typo, which is pretty good from 20 hours of video, and numerous PDFs. That was your fault?

Mark Dawson: That was John's job. You had one job.

John Dyer: I get the blame for everything. All I can say is it's been corrected.

James Blatch: It has been corrected. I spotted something that I felt I could have done better in the Vellum, and also Vellum released a little update this week, so that got re-recorded, and we always do that anyway.

We're about to go through Facebook ads with a fine-tooth comb. Make sure that's up to date. Let's hear from a couple of our beta testers, first of all, before we hear from the enthusiastic young students who've been taken on. I wanted to hear from our beta testers. They got a first look at the course. Some of it has changed since they first did it thanks to their feedback. I've got two who I've interviewed for the podcast.

One is Carrie Gardner. Now Carrie, we know she doesn't work for us. She's one of our Facebook moderators, and she goes through some of the courses for us, but she's very thorough. I've got a brilliant story behind her which we'll use at some point as well. "We'll use." That sounded very rude. We'll use at some point. We will talk to Carrie about her story, because it's amazing, at some point. The other person is Andrew Turpin who we didn't know at all, simply one of the beta testers.

Mark Dawson: And Stewart.

James Blatch: No, I think we're going to save Stewart. We're going to save Stewart. I know what I'm doing. I do the production. Andrew Turpin, who we don't know from Adam ... Or we didn't know from Adam at the beginning. He was selected as a beta tester. He applied through the adverts, same as everyone else did. I just interviewed them both about what they liked, what they didn't like about the course, and I thought we'd hear from them first.

Carrie Gardner: Oh, it's fantastic. I mean, I did not expect it to be as comprehensive as it is, because it's billed as the 101, not the Facebook ads for authors course.

In my mind, it was going to be somehow less of a course. Much more basic, an introduction, and it's not. It really is not that. IF all you've got is your manuscript on your hard drive. You can sit down with this course and it will step-by-step take you through everything until you're published on all platforms, you're published in paperback. It'll hold your hand all the way through. It's so comprehensive that you actually don't need another course.

James Blatch: In terms of the instruction did you find it easy to follow?

WHERE WAS IT PITCHED? DID IT REQUIRE SOME TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW TO FOLLOW?

Carrie Gardner: No, because where there has been technical know-how, it's explained. It's assumed that you don't know it. It's not assuming you're going in there with a certain level of expertise and when people are talking about KDP Select and all this, so you're going to know what you're talking about. Mark explains it, and you do, James. You explain it.

You go through it, and you make it clear, but you also then move on quickly so it's not pitched at ... How can I explain? Even if you're an intermediate person. It's basic and there's a ton of content in there for you as well. It's pitched perfectly in my view.

James Blatch: What about teaching mindset as well as the technical aspect of it? You referred earlier it took you a while to understand that you needed to treat it as a business. Do you think this course achieves that?

Carrie Gardner: Definitely. It's very easy to say, "Well, I want to be a writer. I don't want to be a business person." Honestly, if I had a choice, I don't want to be a business person, but you have to do both hand-in-hand, and it comes across very, very clearly. Not just in the modules in what's being said, but how the whole course is put together.

How you've got other people on board, but you've got all these other people, and you realize you can't just sit in and hope that things are going to work. There is a business, and it comes across very much that is how Mark has treated it from when he started, and that's why he is where he is today.

James Blatch: From what you've seen, Carrie, who do you think this course is suited for?

Carrie Gardner: I've been publishing for two-and-a-half years, and I've gone through the whole thing, and I've learned things. Honestly, there's not a lot that I didn't think I knew already, but I have learned things. If I was coming into it brand new, I could cope with it, I could keep up with it, and it would get me to where I am now in the time it takes to do the course, which is very frustrating.

I WISH I'D HAD IT WHEN I STARTED, BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE SAVED ME THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS SPENT ON OTHERS COURSES THAT DIDN'T WORK, AND, WELL, MONTHS AND MONTHS OF SPINNING MY WHEELS.

Ideally, I think it's pitched at the brand-new beginner, but also somebody that's got some experience as well.

Andrew Turpin: I started writing about a year ago. Always wanted to write a novel but never got around to it, what with work, family commitments and so on. Life was just too hectic. In fact, I started trying to put pen to paper about ten years ago, and schooled a bit, then put it down again; didn't quite get any further.

Just over a year ago I was majored under for my role as a corporate communications media relations guy with a large energy company. With the oil price having halved over the last few years, roles were not very plentiful, so I decided, "Right, I've got more time on my hands. I'll just sit down and give it a go."

James Blatch: Andrew, you put yourself forward to be a beta tester and you were selected by us randomly. We don't know each other, do we? Just say that. I think some people are thinking, have we just chosen our friends? We made some selections, really, based on experience and so on, and I think you're probably an ideal candidate just at the beginning of your career to have a look at the course.

LET ME ASK YOU THEN: WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION?

Andrew Turpin: It's very useful. Having gone through quite a steep learning curve on the writing front, then, you know, to try and get to grips with the whole marketing strategy that's required as well ... To actually get the thing out to market and to readers, and try and capture readers' via MailChimp or whatever. Very steep learning curve.

I've really found this course is a very compact, DIY kit that's been fantastically useful. It's saved me a huge amount of time that I'd have otherwise had to sort of ... You know, I spent a lot of time going through various ad hoc routes to piece together the various components of what's required, and no doubt I'd have gone down a lot of blind alleys while I was trying to do that. Yeah, it's been really helpful. Very good.

James Blatch: Did you find it technically easy to follow?

Andrew Turpin: Yes, it is technically easy to follow. I mean, what you've done is lay out the step-by-step process for everything, really. From Amazon through to MailChimp and the other e-mail operators. Yeah,

through to using think like BookFunnel, which I probably wouldn't have sort of clocked onto otherwise. Yeah, very comprehensive, and I think it's easy to dip into if you need to go back and sort of recheck something. Yeah, quite very user-friendly.

James Blatch: In terms of the impact on your career, you say that you would have gone online. You probably would have found out the ways to do things.

DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE YOU WOULD HAVE GOT THERE WITHOUT THE COURSE?

Andrew Turpin: Well, I might have got there without the course but it would have certainly taken a lot longer. I mean, I've heard Mark talking about his early days in self-publishing and going down endless blind alleys, and talking about the nightmare of trying to do things manually rather than use MailChimp or whatever.

Probably got there, but it would have certainly swallowed up a lot of time. Which, you know, I could be very valuably using trying to get stuck into the second or third books. I think the most valuable use of a writer's time is to write, and if you're sort of spending a lot of time trying to work out the technical side, that time's all gone. I think it's certainly going to be a big time-saver for sure.

James Blatch: That's Carrie and Andrew, and obviously they were both very pleased with what they found. We started to get a hint. I'll tell you what's an interesting ... Let's be honest and transparent about this. We are transparent about as much as possible in terms of how much we price the course at.

When you price a book you have to think very carefully about this, and there's a point at which supply and demand curves, and all the rest of it, and my hunch, and I'll be honest about it, is I think we've under-priced it a little bit. I think the course in terms of value is worth more, and I think we've perhaps had a few fewer students, but I think we still would have been better off with a higher price. I don't know whether you agree with that or not.

Mark Dawson: I think it's immaterial now because people have got a bargain for this course.

James Blatch: Well, I'll tell you what, that's a very clear message.

I'LL TELL YOU AS THE PERSON WHO DOES DO THE FIGURES FOR SPF, THIS COURSE WILL NEVER BE SOLD AT THIS PRICE AGAIN.

Mark Dawson: No. We have under-priced it, but we looked at it for an awful long time. We did a survey as people joined the mailing list and one of the questions was, "What would a course that solved your self-publishing problems be worth?" Or something along those lines, and kind of the median was, unsurprisingly, you had all options and most people went for \$99. Fair enough, but about 25% said more than \$399.

We thought about it and, in the end, because this is the first time we launched the course we weren't entirely sure what the right price point was. My wife was telling me that we've under-priced it because I said that we're going to go for \$397, and it turns out I think she was right. There's loads of value in the course. The bonuses themselves are worth more than the course fees.

These aren't kind of throwaway bonuses that we could just chuck together. They're valuable bonuses. Things like formatting, website design, images, all that kind of stuff that people will actually need. It isn't kind of a periphery.

This is something that people will need in order to successfully launch their books, and they're worth more than the course is worth itself. Yes, we definitely did under-price it. We definitely won't price it at this point again. I think probably next time it will be \$597 or something along those lines. It's going to be higher. Yeah, that's not a bad takeaway. If people are on the fence and they'd like to look at it now-

James Blatch: They won't get a chance to buy it for \$397 again.

Mark Dawson: Go for it now because that's not bad advice.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay, so we should give a shout-out. Stewart Grant is going to be in our next little montage coming up in a moment because he came down here today to give us some testimonial interview, but Stewart was also one of our beta testers and he did a great job and we got some great feedback, thorough feedback from our beta testers that enabled us to shape the course to the way it is today.

That's the other thing that I just want to talk about before we go into this montage of the people who've come down to see us today. I look around at the self-publishing world; the thing I'm proudest about this company is the way we have little spark here for a community, which I'm thrilled to be a part of, let alone a leader within. You know, somebody who should help shape it, but a part of this community feels, to me, an energizing thing for my book-writing career.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's an amazing community that we've built. The Facebook group itself, we've got several now. We've got kind of two, three Facebook groups based on beginner level and then advanced marketing. We've got our mastery group, which is the advertising group with over 2,000 people in it now, which is as vibrant today as it was the day we opened it, and then we've got this new genius group, which is the secret private group for people who've taken the 101 course.

That already is buzzing all the time, and I'm in there quite a lot at the moment because people are tagging me and asking me for my opinion. Which, I'm completely happy to be able to at least try and provide answers to those people. It's a really exciting place to be.

We've got some exciting new plans with people at InstaFreebie. We're going to be rolling those out next year. There's an InstaFreebie Facebook group that we've set up as part of the course. That's working. We've got Ashley from InstaFreebie in that group who talks directly with authors, helping them to run their promos and add potentially hundreds of thousands of new subscribers. From top to bottom, the community that we've built up is exciting. It's, as you say, it's energizing. It's cooperative. People are collaborating. It's a really fun place to be.

James Blatch: Yeah, and it's amazing to meet people, isn't it?

John Dyer: Well, I think one of the takeaways from today from all the people that we've met has been it's this amazing support network that you get with the course. That is an enormous amount of reassurance for people who are spending the money on the course to know they can dip into these groups.

We've heard several stories today where people have gone there and found the answer to a question that they didn't know they needed to ask in the first place. They found the answer to it. I think that's fantastic. That is worth something in itself.

James Blatch: Yeah, and as friendship, we know that you can have virtual friendships today which can be as meaningful as real-world friendships, and that was an example of that today. In fact, Carrie, one of our beta testers from our last little montage, is a virtual friend of one of the women who's going to speak in our next montage, and they have a very supportive relationship for writing and so on. That's something that's come about through our little community as well. It's an isolated career, writing.

John Dyer: I was going to say, it's a lonely existence, right, Mark?

Mark Dawson: It's a bit of a cliché, the writers sit in their ivory towers all day.

James Blatch: I've got one of those with holes in the ground.

Mark Dawson: We'd keep John in the tower.

James Blatch: I thought of a job for you. You can go and see if the red light is flashing in the back of that camera.

John Dyer: I've got a job.

James Blatch: Go and see if the red light is flashing on the back of that camera.

John Dyer: What do I do if the red light is flashing?

James Blatch: Is it flashing? If it's flashing it's good.

John Dyer: It's flashing.

Mark Dawson: Excellent.

James Blatch: You can sit down. You're going to need to check every couple of minutes.

John Dyer: I want a drink.

James Blatch: Because it did click off in the first segment, and so it would have gone black for some people, so we'll keep an eye on that. Okay, look, shall we hear from our testimonial people? These are people who Mark posted in the group and said, "Look, what do you think of the course? Who wants to say something nice about it?" Oh, we would have been open for people.

Mark Dawson: Who wants to say anything honest is what I said. I'm very, very clear that we accept good and bad feedback. Just feedback is good, because if people have issues with it then, of course, we're able to very, very quickly go into the course, make amendments. We've already done that a couple of times.

It's something we continue to do as we add new stuff. Yeah, we wanted feedback and we got some really fantastic stories in the group. As I've said before, these people have been so generous to take time out of their busy schedules to come down and hang out with us today.

James Blatch: It's like a unit. It's like a lock-up in extenders.

Mark Dawson: It's a converted sweatshop.

James Blatch: Don't say that.

John Dyer: There will be bodies in the walls.

James Blatch: I tell you, it's a lovely little studio, and they sat in the seat you're in, so let's hear from them.

Stewart Grant: Hello, I'm Stewart Grant and I'm a starting author. Just taken Mark's course. I was overwhelmed by how much information and content there is in it. The way it's laid out step-by-step, it really does guide you through the steps that Mark takes you through. There's so much value in each module and I'm just really pleased and honored to be part of the course because it's going to change my writing life.

Jack: Hi, my name is Jack and I'm a writer. There's one section that I find particularly useful, and that's where Mark keeps a whole timetable for two different scenarios, and all of the steps and what to do at different weeks and that kind of thing, and I found that really useful because I'm looking for something that's more like turning my writing into a business, sort of like a business plan, so that I can know exactly what I need to do when so that I can focus on my writing.

Stewart Grant: I think it's the step-by-step guides to things like Amazon. How to set up your page. How to get that meta data optimized. How to get that audience. How to get up your mailing list. All those kind of things are things that I probably had an idea that I wanted to do but had no idea how to do, and the course has really taken me through each of those stages and enabled me to start those steps which have kind of put me off from doing anything.

Nick Warren: My name is Nick Warren. I write thrillers that mix action, business and psychology. My first impression was it's so comprehensive. What I was looking for really was something which would take me all the way through that first publishing adventure, really. You don't have to look very far online before you start seeing Mark's name come up in terms of teaching if you're looking for a teacher for that kind of thing. I think it's not just the individual areas he's covered, but it's the little asides all the time. There's just so much depth in the content. It's really good.

Claire: My name is Claire and I've been writing for a very long time and I've come down here from Nottingham today. Before I even bought the course, when I was looking at the list of the criteria and curriculum, and as soon as I read through that I was like, "I need to get this." Because it contained exactly what I knew I was going to need.

I've done the writing, I carry on with that, and I've got the mindset, stuff that's helping me be much more productive, but then what do I do? The course is exactly fulfilling that for me. Okay, well, what do I do

with this stuff I've written now? Rather than chucking something on Amazon, I'm actually going to be able to put a book out there and get people to read it and pay to read it, and send me e-mails saying they love my stuff, and that's what I want.

Dan Fowl: My name is Dan Fowl. I live in Northern Ireland and I've been writing for the last, I don't know, ten, 12 years, maybe even more. I don't even know what year it is. He's teaching me how to swim through these shark-infested waters. His instructions, his teaching, is so detailed and relaxed. I'm confident that I'm going to be able to get this cracked.

Rachel: Hi, I'm Rachel. I've written ten books to date. I write in two genres: World War II fiction would be the genre I want to write in all the time, and I write in another genre that pays the bills. Despite the fact that I have a website and I have a Facebook page and I have a Twitter account and I have a mailing list, which are all covered in the course, I realize now that just having them isn't enough.

I haven't been utilizing them to the maximum, and I think my sales could radically improve if I just put the basics that I have in place. If I use them properly like the course suggests. When I said I was going to take the course I had quite a few people say to me that I didn't need it, and I think that's a misconception that's out there, because possibly because the name of the course is 101 Publishing.

People automatically assume that it's basic and it's for people who don't know anything about self-publishing, and I strongly disagree with that. It is a basic course in that it covers the basics, but if you don't have the basics right, there's no point in moving on to the more advanced stuff because you need the basics as a foundation. I think without this course I've built the house but the foundation it's on are rather shaky, so now I'm going back to make sure that's more stable and my long-term career will benefit.

Shena Conde: I'm Shena Conde. I live in a small village in Essex by the sea and I write stories and songs. For the last year I've been fumbling around in the dark. I've needed a plan and this is step-by-step comprehensive. He's a natural teacher, and so I think that it's going to give me loads of confidence and will give other people confidence as well. Definitely.

Steven Marriott: My name is Steven Marriott, a new author. I would say to people who know how to write but who have got no idea what to do next? Forget about everything else. This course covers it all.

Steven Moore: It covers every single thing from the smallest details that you thought you knew and you realize you didn't, to the wider picture, the long-term goal. My name is Steven Moore. I hail from Mark's neck of the woods in Suffolk.

What it's done for me more than anything else, apart from all the amazing information, which I'm excited to start to put into practice, it's the confidence that it's given me. Where are you with your career? Are you at the point where you have one book out, zero books out or three books out? I think that anybody can find value in this course. There's so much for everybody at any stage of your writing career.

Speaker 17: I think we all face the fear, the fear of not knowing what to do, and the course enables you to take that fear away and say, "Right, I'm going to do this in bite-size pieces, step-by-step at my own pace, and it's going to teach me how to do those so that I actually get some success." It's made me feel that there may not be a huge audience for my books, but there will be an audience, and actually Mark has shown me how to go out and find those people via Facebook, via mailing lists, and just kind of generate some interest around what I'm doing.

Speaker 18: Outside of the videos and the PDFs that you get inside the course, there's also the closed Facebook group that you can only get in as being a member of the course, and I've found that tremendously useful because that's live interaction.

I had a problem about some editing and I put a quick search into that Facebook group. I got the answer that I needed from that group within five minutes. If I'd had to go and research that on the Internet, it would have taken me half an hour to an hour, so just that saving. If I extrapolate that over the whole course, it's going to save me days, weeks of time.

Speaker 19: You don't even need to ask a question. You just read it and then you think, "My God. I didn't know that was a question I needed to ask."

Speaker 20: Even just the Facebook groups that you get entered into by once you sign up, the information that I've gleaned from those groups alone has been priceless.

Speaker 21: For what Mark is giving you, \$400 is an absolute steal.

Speaker 22: I think it's too cheap.

Speaker 23: How many courses do you get and actually say, "Okay, what you need to do is you need to get a website. Here's WordPress," and that's it. That should be a separate call, but you've actually got someone working through how to set up a WordPress site. This is above and beyond what you might expect. Because again, you've got people that are teaching you how to actually, point-by-point, go through that. The value in the course ... It's hard to place a value on it, to be honest.

Speaker 24: Never has there been a better value for money. I've learned so much. People in the Facebook groups that come along with it all say the groups alone are worth the money, and I couldn't agree more.

Speaker 25: To be honest, when I received the e-mail as to how much the course was, I was blown away at how inexpensive it was. I felt that was a really, very reasonable price. I think what impresses me is that Mark isn't a gatekeeper of that information. He doesn't hold it to himself and say, "I'm going to do this on my own." He shares it with us, and it is a huge amount of information.

There's years of experience in that course which you just couldn't go on anywhere else, as far I'm aware. I really felt that, in terms of value for money, the course itself is amazing, but then there are a list as long as your arm of extras. InstaFreebie, website design, discounts, all kinds of other things that are involved in it, and the ongoing support. The community. The Facebook pages. It does feel at the moment like it's never-ending.

Speaker 26: If you don't know it and you can't find it in this course, it doesn't exist.

James Blatch: There they are. They're our lovely testimonial students. We offered to pay expenses and take people out to lunch, so we had a nice lunch in Carluccio's. You can see our photograph on our Facebook groups of us in there today. We paid their train fares and we paid their air fares if necessary, and we got several offers of people in California and Australia, because we offered to pay travel expenses.

John Dyer: I offered to collect.

James Blatch: Because people need collecting. Anyway, it was lovely that they came and spoke to us today, and thrilling for us to meet them, and I think they were pleased to meet each other; people in the course. I tell you what, Mark: SPF Live is something we've talked about a little bit, and you floated some ideas in the Facebook groups, but I am pumped for this type of event.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, we're very early on in thinking about ... A few people have suggested we could host something next year, and I think that is a possibility. Maybe one in the US and one in the UK. I think that could be quite fun. We could probably get some quite good speakers to come along now. I have a feeling we could get some quite interesting corporate sponsorship, which would enable us to put on at a cheaper price. Certainly something we will look at as the new year turns around.

James Blatch: Andrea Demanski had already said as long as we're in three hours of Georgia, we must go and all stay with the Demanskis.

John Dyer: I'm there already.

James Blatch: That was the Miami Vice boats trip.

Mark Dawson: Yes, for those who haven't seen that video, John's previous appearance on SPF TV was in the back of Andrea's boat looking windswept and handsome and kind of a slightly Indian Don Johnson.

James Blatch: Okay, so the course is open for a few more days. If you're listening to this on Friday then we are late in the week putting everything together, so this podcast may actually end up on slight delay, but we've got until ... When are we going to close it? Probably the middle of the next week?

Mark Dawson: Wednesday, I think, isn't it? Yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah, Wednesday, so you've got a few days left to have a look at the course. We mean what we say. We say it to people all the time. That refund is there because we know that the course might not be for everyone, and a good way ... We can talk to you about the course, as we have done in this podcast, until we're blue in the face. Actually, if you go in, have a look at it, watch the modules, then make a decision whether it's right for you or not. We're not offended if you ask for a refund.

Mark Dawson: No. Absolutely not. When we say it closes on Wednesday, we do really mean that we, for lots of different reasons, we don't accept students outside of the open periods.

We haven't completely scheduled it yet, but I think the next time we would be looking to open this would be summer 2017. I'd say take it now. One other quick question. We do get some people who say, "should I take it now? Just at any stage," and, again, you've got the refund, but I would say just in terms of starting out, building solid foundations, and then working on your novel and getting it out there ... Or your non-fiction book; whatever it is that you're writing, you can't start learning this kind of stuff too early.

It's always going to be useful to think about how to find your readers. There are things you can do even in those early stages that will improve your chances of having a good launch. Yeah, I would say have a look at it. Once you buy it, it's yours for life, and we will update it as new things change.

James Blatch: Yeah. To somebody who is writing their first book, I think it's a nice way of having a break from your writing as you get towards the end of your book, and also to bring a focus to your writing. You start setting up your landing page and your early and your MailChimp accounts, all the rest of it.

Mark Dawson: Get the cover. Yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah, the cover done. It's motivating, but also brings a focus this is not just about an abstract thing, me writing a book. This is an asset of a business I'm creating.

Mark Dawson: Yup.

James Blatch: Good. Excellent. Well, have you enjoyed your first appearance on the SPF podcast?

John Dyer: I feel it's been stellar.

Mark Dawson: I want to see what the ratings are like afterwards. If they're down, this will not be repeated.

James Blatch: The slight problem is that John is the one who reports the ratings.

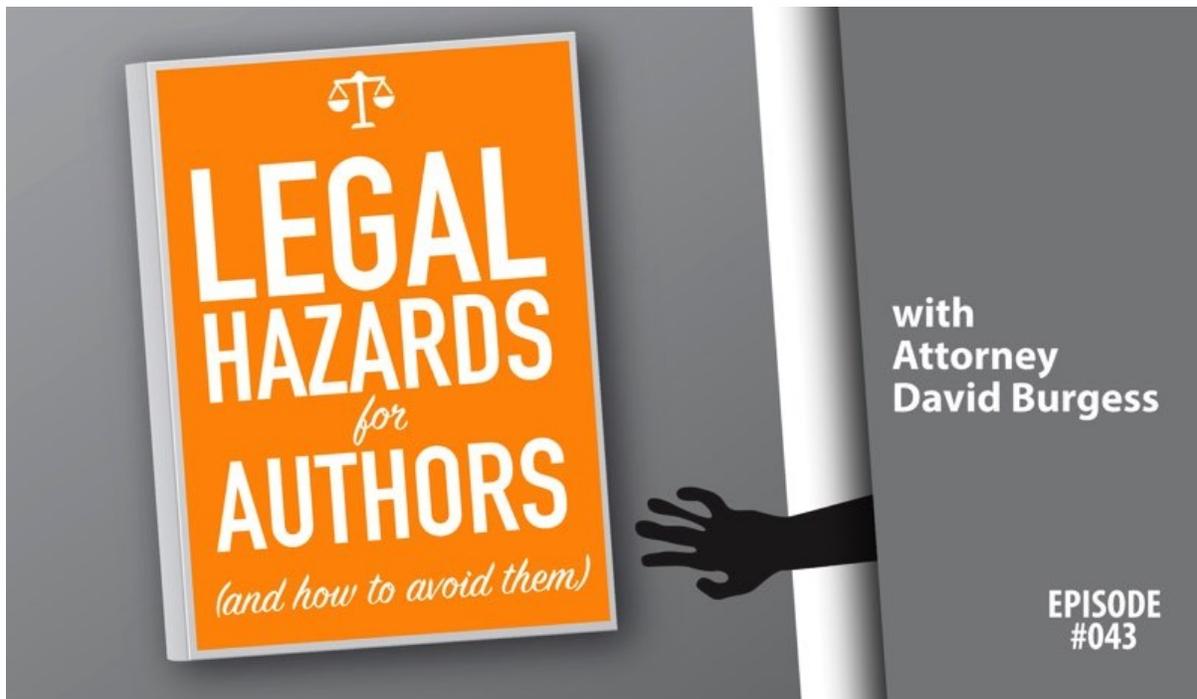
Mark Dawson: That's true.

John Dyer: Yes, so you'll never know.

James Blatch: Just massage the figures. That's it. We're going to say goodbye. We won't be talking about 101. It will all be done and dusted, but we will have a fabulous interview for you.

CHAPTER 40

LEGAL HAZARDS FOR SELF PUBLISHING AUTHORS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM - WITH ATTORNEY DAVID BURGESS



DEFAMATION OF CHARACTER is not something an author wants - or expects - to be sued for. But as you'll hear from this week's guest, attorney David Burgess - a specialist in publishing law - it's more common than you might think. Most self-published authors write without thinking about the possible legal implications of their published work. Given that a legal action could end up costing you thousands of dollars and threaten your livelihood, it might be worth giving David a few minutes of your time. Expert legal advice rarely comes as cheap as this!

CHARACTER DEFAMATION AND OTHER LEGAL PITFALLS

James and David chat at length about the issues of character defamation - both in fiction and nonfiction works - and how careful research and mindfulness during the writing process will help limit potential legal threats. Privacy is another hot potato of an issue. How do you know when your work has stretched beyond the limits of what's deemed acceptable by law? David provides a useful outline of how privacy laws are viewed in both the US and the UK with tips on how to sidestep problems from the off.

THE PROBLEM WITH HAVING A HIGH PROFILE

With writing success comes an increased profile. And that might make you more of a target for unscrupulous lawyers and fortune-seekers who want to cash in on your success. David explains how his work as an attorney helps authors safeguard themselves against such attacks.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Summary of last week's recording experience and gathering.
- The importance of the "legal" side of self publishing and introduction to today's guest.
- Why the legal side of publishing can become a big problem if you're not careful.
- What steps should authors take to prevent legal troubles?
- The issue of privacy: How authors need to protect themselves from lawsuits.
- How legal counsel can be accessible to the everyday author.
- A situation in James' book he's probably going to change for legal reasons.
- What happens when authors reject legal counsel they might receive?
- Do you need a disclaimer passage in your books?

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

ReviewedAndCleared.com

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 43 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Well Mark this time last we were in our nice little cubby hole that we found in Bloomsbury. It was a great little studio but what was fun was to be in person and record a program like it was a proper radio program sitting around a table.

Having said that, nearly everything I listen to on the radio I can tell you now. The BBC often in Manchester and the guests in London and so on. Everyone records like this but we live remote digital lives. This is normally how we connect but I thought it was fun last week and we got some feedback,

didn't we on that?

Mark Dawson: We did, it was fun. It was good to do it all together and most of the feedback was kind of divided into two camps. Some people wanted more John, other people wanted less John so we'll have to sit down and work out how that breaks down, whether it's going to be more John or less John.

James Blatch: Well Mrs. Dyer wanted more John and everybody else wanted less.

Mark Dawson: That's pretty much how it broke down.

James Blatch: Actually she was only being polite she told me afterwards. No, it was fun, in fact John and I will do, I think we'll do a podcast interview soon on some of the technical aspects of putting together your website.

We've learned quite a lot as we put together the 101 course and ask people feedback on what they're struggling with and the bits they don't understand, it's given some ideas for a really good detailed podcast for people who are struggling on what your author page should look like and the best ways to approach putting it together. We'll do that, John and I will sit down and do that shortly and that will be out in the next few weeks.

In fact we've got loads of good interviews in the can. We plotted them out. In fact I've got, in a very matter way, I got my white board and I got photograph of your white board underneath my white board with stuff but you've plotted out the podcast and how it's going to run probably until about March 2017 so we've got lots in the bag.

Mark Dawson: End of March. Yeah, and I've got a couple I'm kind of waiting to hear back from, which we might slot in there as well in terms of new year stuff so some quite good, some very good interviews to be heard later as we press on into the new year.

James Blatch: Today's interview is legal and it's an area that, there's so much you've got to understand and

learn about and we often say when you're an independent publisher, you've got to think about yourself as being a mini-publishing company so you think about the marketing, you think about the sales, you think about the packaging and everything else as well as writing the book, which isn't a big deal for somebody but what else does a company do?

It does its account so you've got to do that, and it also does legal. Publishing houses will have a legal department that have in-house lawyers, or if they're small they might use an external service. We also need to think about that now.

We don't want to alarm anybody and I think I talked to Mark who's obviously a trained lawyer after this about how this relates to us realistically, but it is something to think about. I think the best value we get out of this interview with David in a moment is partly there's somewhere and someone you can go to with fixed prices to make it a bit similar for you to approach if you want to get your books cleared.

It's a really good interview just to listen to the way that he talks, the type of issues that come up with libel and privacy and so on, defamation, almost certainly accidental, things you may not have thought of, and try to take those on board in a gentle way so you put your book together.

An interesting thing is, I have changed an aspect of my book as a result of this conversation with David and we'll talk about that a bit more so let's crack on. I'm just going to warn you that the sound quality is not brilliant on this interview but it's really worthwhile interview and worth listening to so let's hear from David.

David: I essentially started out doing a lot of work for celebrities doing newspapers and magazines and radio shows and television companies and that sort of thing. That's when I knew Mark Dawson. I saw the error of my ways and left that horrible world and then moved into the in-house side of things, so I moved over to MTV.

I was clearing all their TV content for a couple of years and then I went to work for a magazine company called the Hearst Corporation and I was the lawyer there, one of the in-house team there, clearing all their content for them. Then moved on to the Evening Standard and the Independent as I became their Deputy Head of Legal for editorial, clearing all the content for the newspapers, for the standards, for the MD, and

decided I need to make a change and set up my own firm, Reviewed and Cleared.

I wanted to bring the in-house legal skills or in-house legal advice to people who couldn't necessarily afford big lawyers so I decided to set up Reviewed and Cleared with lawyers who've been doing it for years and lawyers who love clearing content for people and love working with journalists and creatives and that sort of thing but provide it at a rate that people could afford. Trying to create a law firm where people weren't afraid to go to law firms. I know that big law firms can be terrifying so I thought what I'll try and do is create this small firm that will enable people to get legally cleared, not worry about the legal side of thing and do it on fixed base so they can just get their budget sorted and then go off and do what they need to do without worrying about it.

James Blatch: Obviously it's a great idea because I suppose two things occur to people when we think of the legal side of things and one is complexity and the other one is expense.

David: It's always expense for me. I always appreciated how expensive lawyers are.

James Blatch: I guess it's not top of most people's list when they're setting out on their author career, or probably any other career in the media, is to prioritize that moment that they're going to feed into the legal side of it.

WE SHOULD PROBABLY START BY EXPLAINING WHY IT'S IMPORTANT AND WHAT THAT AREA IS AND HOW IT CAN UNHINGE YOU IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL.

David: Yes. If everybody's honest, the lawyers always follow the money. It's when you start to have a little bit of success that you start to find that not necessarily the lawyers will be there but people will be there and start saying, "Well I created that. You've stolen that from me. I can't believe you said this about me. I can't believe you said this about my family."

It's only when you starting out, you just don't think about these things because you're readership or your viewership aren't big enough to really cause ruckus outside your small circle of friends or colleagues. It's when the success starts to come that people crawl out of the woodwork and they start to think that they want, a lot of it may be money, a lot of it may be things that they genuinely think that their reputations damaged or their things have been stolen.

What we try to do is head that off. I haven't met anybody who's writing about you who doesn't believe in it and doesn't think this is going to be amazing. Some are, some aren't, but it's better that you're at the beginning dealing with it and dealing with it for relatively inexpensive compared to when it blows up and blows up financially and legally. That's where I tend to see more of the problems. Where people, and I totally understand it, where people say, "Oh I'll be fine. It's fine. I'm sure it's fine," and then it turns out it's not fine and that's where the problems start to arise.

James Blatch: Can you be specific about the types of things that are going to get people into trouble?

David: The things I see that tend to come up more often; defamation where you're talking about somebody who is a real person or you're creating a character that's sufficiently close to a real person. It's a little bit more difficult in the U.K.

The defamation laws are a lot more strict in the U.K. than in the U.S. I'm U.S. qualified as well and frankly you can get away with a lot more in the U.S., especially if you're talking about public figures, but defamation tends to be when you're lowering someone's reputation by making statements about them. It can be in the most invasive ways, in ways that you would never imagine.

I remember dealing with one man who made rope mats and he decided he'd sue one of the magazines I was working on because we suggested he used a different type of glue than he did. To us it didn't seem like important but to him and his sphere it was important. These little things that you say about people or places or companies or family members or anything like that can come up to bite you if you can't prove it's true and if they feel it's defamatory and you've got the privacy angle of things where everybody takes inspiration from all around them.

If your Auntie Mable's got cancer, that's her business. Sometimes people will think well Auntie Mable's got cancer, so I'll use Auntie Mable as a character or as a starting point or as a description point. Then Auntie Mable realizes she doesn't want the entire world knowing about her cancer struggle. Auntie Mable suddenly has a privacy claim against you and your publisher and anybody along the publication train.

James Blatch: Just on the U.S., U.K. point of view, so for a U.S. author, of course their book may well be being retail or they may well be selling it on amazon.co.uk for instance if they're self-publishing, so does

that bring them within the remit of the U.K. defamation laws?

David: The U.K. is traditional known as sort of where everybody came for libel tourism. They view it being the same anywhere in the world. You come to the U.K. courts and so there because the burden of proof in the U.K. is different to the U.S. in that if I, as a publisher, make a statement, it's got to be proved that it's true, whereas in the U.S. I don't need to prove it's true, I just need to show that I had a reasonable belief that it was true.

Yes, people come to the U.K. and use the U.K. as a libel tourism hotspot. The courts have tried to change that but we live in a very international community.

It's very easy to show. If you have a reputation in the U.K. that reputation can be damaged. It doesn't take very much. There are a couple of trials going through at the moment where a man is trying to prove that he had a reputation in the U.K., shows a few hundred people knew him and he's doing quite well to show that that damage is there.

James Blatch: Okay, in terms of preventative measures, before we get to the legal services side of things, so when people are just sitting there writing their book at this stage, I mean every book is inspired by something. Some people are writing obviously epic fantasies and stuff that might be quite far removed but even that will have some inspiration from the real world and my book certainly is inspired by my father's career in the 1960s.

WHAT STEPS SHOULD PEOPLE BE TAKING?

David: What I'd be thinking about is, whether it's you or a friend, I'd take a look and read it with a new eye. I mean this is how I clear, you take it with a new eye and you read it and you think about how the person sitting on the bus next to you would be reading it. How they would think, what they would think of your father, your father's colleagues, are they identifiable.

Say for example, your father worked for a famous shop, I don't know a Marks and Spencer's, and he was on the board during set time and you said, "My father always told me that everyone on that board was corrupt down to their very being." Now you don't name any of those people but it wouldn't take me very long to find out who those board members were within a certain space of years and those board members could also argue, we were all identifiable.

Things are quite eccentric so they would all say, "Everybody knew I was in the board between 1966 and 1971. Now everybody thinks I'm corrupt because of this book." You need to start to look at these things and think who's lives am I touching here?

What facts am I stating here? Can I back up these facts? Are they family mix or are they something I can show? Are they rumors? If they're rumors, is it something I can prove? Is it something that will turn out? Will those people be affected? Will their circle of friends and their wider circle of friends understand who they are and believe the things I'm saying? That's from the defamation point of view.

Then you need to think about privacy. Again, identification is a real key point. You think would the man on the bus next to be able to figure out who I'm talking about? If he can figure out who I'm talking about, is this information intrinsically private? Does the person I'm talking about have a reasonable expectation that this information should remain private? My health scares, my sex life, my hobbies, whether their Max Mosley style hobbies or whether their train spotting.

James Blatch: Which of course because of his family history, he's an interesting character, but his father was a notorious black shirt leader, pro-Nazi campaigner in the 1930s. And there's his son who had a rather embarrassing episode spread across the British tabloids where he enjoyed the company of young woman who may or may not have been dressed up in military wear. We just explain that because it's an interesting legal case and Max Mosley to this day has moved on from the legalities through to campaigning for press restrictions in the U.K.

David: Max Mosley is the ideal case with looking at how privacy can touch us really. When I started at Shilling, I got another fact, the human rights act in the U.K. gives everybody an article eight right which is a right to private life, family life, home and correspondence.

And then there's the article 10 right which is the freedom of expression, which all those newspapers, publishers rely on to say we have a corresponding right to tell this story. When it all began, there was footballers claiming their article eight rights that basically they can sleep with as many women behind their wife's back as they like and the women were saying I want rights to tell how good this footballer was in bed. When it first began the women's article 10 rights always seemed to trump the article eight rights of the footballers.

Over time, close to 15 years, it's gone completely the other way to Mosley now. Whereas thanks to Mosley, if you're having ...

James Blatch: Sado masochistic.

David: Thanks, where sex workers behind your wife back for many many years, dress up, non-dress up, we can leave it there. That's all private information. You are entitled to private life, as long as there, there's only two ways in which the press can sort of delve into people's private life and this is what I deal with on a daily basis with the magazines I work for.

You have to show that somebody's either a hypocrite or that there is a public interest that we all should know about their private life. Lord Coke is a quite interesting one. That's his nickname. He was the Lord who was in charge of the house of Lords Standards Committee. He liked to use his house of Lords money to go off and sleep with prostitutes and take coke. Hence the name.

He was interesting because, and he was a hypocrite because he was in charge of the standards committee but it was also public interest because a man in charge of parliaments standards committee, we should know whether he's having sex with prostitutes and snorting cokes in their bras. He was the perfect embodiment of those two things.

Now that's what the whole Mosley case was about with people arguing whether the public had a right to know he was doing this and whether he was a hypocrite. The public had a right to know argument, the newspaper ran was that he was the head of an international organization, is it the FIA, that promotes racing.

They said as he's the head of an international organization, all the public should have a right to know what he's doing in his private life. The judge dismissed that and I think quite rightly. Every company around the world has public money running through it at some point. I have no right to know what the had of Marks and Spencer's is doing.

The interesting argument was whether he was a hypocrite or not. As you mentioned his father was a black shirt and a fascist so Max Mosley had always said, "I have no truck with my father's political beliefs. I have no care for fascism, I certainly want to disassociate myself from it in any way."

The newspaper alleged he was having the S&M sessions, that's the element to them, they said he was in what appeared to be a concentration camp, that he was wearing prisoner uniform, that the women they were speaking German and that the women were wearing Nazi uniforms. In the few days of hearings, this was all cross-examined, his evidence was, which was accepted by the judge, was that concentration camps are something not an invention, they're invention of the British, pre World War II. The prison uniform he was wearing had arrows on, not stripes as in concentration camps in Nazi, Germany. Germany has a very good language for S & M because it's harsh nature and the women brought their own uniforms and they had no Nazi insignia on them.

James Blatch: It's a well thought through as a defense is.

David: You sit down and think about it, quite logical as well. All these little things that can, I've never been involved in that world but I can imagine they're all reasonable things.

James Blatch: Sadly he's right about the concentration camps because I know from history that they were started by the British in the South African campaigns. Yeah, they've done their history.

I'll tell you what's striking me already is, we talked about the complexity and my days as a journalist, there wasn't a lot of talk about privacy. We have the libel laws drummed into us and probably 50% of all the journalistic training I ever had was just legal.

I can probably still dredge up the five main defenses of libel, but what you've got here, so you name in your book have identified somebody even by implication because they were in that position on the board or whatever at that time, but you then think, "Well, okay I've said nothing libelous about them. They're a character here, they act quite honorable. In fact, they come out to be the hero."

WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THERE'S ANOTHER ELEMENT HERE WHICH IS ACTUALLY PEOPLE MIGHT THINK THAT'S HOW THEY BEHAVED AND THAT'S A PRIVACY ISSUE, WHICH I'M NOT AS FAMILIAR WITH BUT THIS IS OBVIOUSLY QUITE AN IMPORTANT

AREA.

David: You can also, with the defamation, going back to that, you can write something and imagine, "Why would they be upset about it?" But that upset can appear from nowhere, like that chat with the roadmap.

I cleared a book about a guy, and the book was about something completely different. It was about a Warcraft game, but he tells in a chapter how he came to the game. He had a bit of a lonely childhood because he moved around and the reason he moved around was his father and his father's business partner had a falling out. Obviously, it became a family myth that the family had been screwed over by the business partner. I had to go back to him and say, "Okay, this is such a throwaway line but can you prove any of this? Can you prove that this man did these things to your dad that made him move?" He went, "Well no not really it's just what my dad told me."

The business partner was absolutely identifiable, it was just throwaway line but could have led to a lot of problems. That line had to be removed from the book and it's not necessarily your main protagonist or not necessarily your mainstream, it can be things that sort of flow off it that accepted myth or accepted, just accepted fact without really thinking about it.

They're the things that tend to crop up in books more than straightforward I'm writing about this because that tends to be the area of focus that if you're smart enough to write your book, you're smart enough to get the simple facts right.

James Blatch: Obviously everyone wants to be authentic in books. Some people it's more important than others. In my book, and Mark's books, we're really big on authenticity and Mark will get comments from people who used to be in the shadowy side of government business who say to him, "That's actually not quite how it works," and they correct him on things.

On the other hand, I'm now thinking maybe I shouldn't, because in my quest in being authentic, I've used a genuine REF station as the base and I've dated it as well. Obviously, I then created a unit that didn't exist within it and my characters are members of that.

However, the station commander was above all of those units and would be identifiable and for that reason I've kept him out of it. I've mentioned the person not by name, just the rank at one point, but I'm

now thinking actually he would probably have a case to say, "You've defamed me because these things were happening on my station, even if it's a made up unit."

I MIGHT BE SAFER JUST TO COME UP WITH REF AUSTIN GREEN AND JUST MAKE SOMETHING UP.

David: He could say, "I know you don't mean to do this." A claim could come and say, "I know you didn't mean to defame me, it's quite clear you didn't, but people believe what you're saying, people believing that you based this on actual facts."

This one story, it reminded me there, we were doing a magazine piece about a Virgin air hostess who travels around the world, sleeps with pilots, has a whale of a time. We had her in a red uniform, a nondescript red uniform. You couldn't see a face and we changed her name but forgot to put a star, an asterisk in the article saying "Name changed." The name they changed just randomly happened to be a Virgin air hostess. She quite rightly came and sued. She had every right to sue us because we basically just defamed her without any proof whatsoever.

These things can crop up in the strange places. If that man's circle of friends or colleagues or ex-colleagues say, "Oh, is this guy writing this book for a reason?" It's a difficult thing, he has to show serious harm to his reputation and with the new defamation act it's changed.

It's a little bit more difficult to sue. You would have to show serious harm to his reputation. You and I know, your background as a journalist, the serious harm can appear from the strangest places. The way I wanted to come on is actually just say be aware as you're writing every line. What are you saying? Who are you saying it to? What are you communicating?

The privacy angle, privacy's getting really really tough. It's ruining a lot of stories. There's also, to complicate matters further, people have claimed for false privacy saying it's not true, but even if it was true it's an invasion of my privacy and succeeded.

James Blatch: Okay, so that is complicated. You don't want to be sued because that's one thing, if anyone's had any legal entanglements in the past, this idea that you can sit there thinking it's fine because it's factual or it's fine because I don't think this is a case of privacy, you just do not want to go down that route.

David: No, I mean it's assault. I tried to set up a cost-effective way of dealing but even my rates, I couldn't afford me. I'd never want to get a libel battle or a privacy battle or pay to protect battle or even a copyright battle. It's just not worth the time and the hassle and I've seen firsthand how much litigation can affect journalists who aren't going to lose money but their job's in peril. And I've also seen firsthand independent publishers getting in the middle and it can be devastating.

James Blatch: Legal advice, obviously as you say, tends to be out of reach. I mean we're lucky when I worked with the BBC, we had a team of very good lawyers, there was always somebody on hand and at any time of night or day you'd make the phone call, in those days hold the phone next to a speaker so they could listen to the script and the clips, you get a bit of advice and some of them we knew were quite gung-ho about it. They'd talk to you a bit about your source and so on and then say, go with it. The only important thing that mattered from my point of view, the journalist, is that I took their advice. The big no no for me was to go ahead with something that said do not do because then I'd be in a lot of trouble.

Even if the BBC did get sued afterwards if he had said or she had said that's okay, that legal advice is a very important step but as you say, it's out of reach. These guys are probably some of the highest paid, I imagine, at the BBC and that's saying something because there are some high salaries there.

HOW IS YOUR SERVICE ACCESSIBLE TO ME?

David: For books what I do is I agree a fixed fee and I'm quite open to negotiation. What I'll often do is have a discussion with the author about the book and I will be able to give an idea after a 20 minute description which isn't charged, nothing's charged until we agree on a fee, if it is quite clear, and I do this with TV programs as well.

If it's quite clear that there's not going to be any problems they get a nice reduced rate. If it's quite clear there's going to be problems, the author knows that anyway, so we come up with an increased fixed fee rate but I always agree fixed fee.

Sometimes I'll take a hit. If a book I thought was going to easy, suddenly turns into a nightmare, and it's happened. Sometimes I'll make a bit of money when the book isn't as bad as the author and I thought it was. That's how I've tried to change the legal landscape there is to give independent publishers the opportunity. It's still a reasonably big line on that budget, I can't deny that.

James Blatch: Can you give us an indication? I mean I know it's going to vary.

David: My books tend to be anything between 1200 Quid and 2000 Quid. Through speaking to you and I said to Mark, I'm happy anybody comes to this I'm happy to offer a discount. I guess that it's still a reasonable chunk of money and I wouldn't say everybody should do it. What I'd say is that if you've got concerns, this might be a good idea to do it.

James Blatch: I think that's probably where most people will be and if they think their books are benign and they've published three before they're not going to come to you but the book where they think there might be an issue. Although I have to say we're getting value of this podcast because it's already given me some steers and I am serious about that.

I THINK I AM GOING TO RENAME THE REF STATION TO SOMETHING FICTITIOUS. IT'S JUST TOO RISKY TO GO AHEAD, AND THE STORY ULTIMATELY IS ABOUT CORRUPTION.

David: All it takes is one guy. They meet up once a year at their club and they say to him, "Well I read this book about your base and I'll tell you what it's pretty close." That's all it takes for a claimant who probably has deep pockets to get a bee in his bonnet, to eat lobster and shillings or whatever and writing very scary letters.

James Blatch: The other defense of libel I always remember is that the person's dead.

THAT'S THE OTHER THING TO LOOK INTO BECAUSE YOU CAN'T LIBEL THE DEAD. THAT'S NOT CHANGED, RIGHT?

David: No. It's the one time I see completely disgusting human beings when I ask are they alive? No. Great.

James Blatch: You've got no problem.

David: Yeah.

James Blatch: It's a fragmented media world. It's changed so dramatically in 10 or 15 years. I think you're

probably positioning yourself very nicely because in the old days you made a TV program and you started at 45,000 pounds for half an hour to put a TV program together. Today people are making TV for substantially less than that and they can't afford, as you say, the old expense regime, so I hope it's working out for you.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN GOING?

David: It's three and a half years now and I do the same thing as the TV companies. Where I'm different to a lot of, pretty much all the law firms, is I put my prices on my website and I stick to them. There's a production company booklet, there's a publishers booklet, I do the same thing.

I give production companies a clean bill of health. Some stop me from the beginning and we work right away through to broadcast. Some just send me the final edit and say, "Can you tell us if there's any problems?" What I'm trying to do, and you're absolutely right, there's no central media anymore. Some of my best clients are kids who have gone off and started a website and it's blown up. They're huge and they're doing incredibly well. The media world is so brilliant, so easy.

Another area I'm looking into is YouTube. The amount of power these kids have and I don't think they realize, the same thing I said at the beginning, once they have the power, the money, that's when the complaints start to arrive.

James Blatch: I know a great YouTube example is the woman who unboxes Disney toys and she makes 12 million dollars a year I think just from videos of unboxing. You're right, when money comes in. There was another example I remember of that which is the Borat film, which I used to be able to remember the whole title of it which I think is called Borats cultural learnings of America for make benefit glorious nation Kazakhstan. For all the times we had it drummed into us about release forms and getting the legals right, they throw everything out the window. I think they had a fake release form.

David: This is three guys in the van.

James Blatch: Yeah, the three guys in the van and the southern priest as well so there were two scenes in the film. We classified when I was working with BBC the bit about the background. Basically, as far as I know, they either didn't do release forms or the release forms were also kind of satirical, they matched what it looked like they were doing so they're signing a release form thinking this is a TV presented from

Kazakhstan and actually fact it was kind of semi-reality. He was a comedy character but he used real people, and of course had the film died a death and no one knew anything about it they probably wouldn't have been any legal problems, but it was a phenomenal success. I mean it made millions of dollars.

Inevitably people who came out thinking that they were doing one thing and it turned out they were having the mickey taken out of them came to them. Now of course they had a solution which I believe was to turn up with a checkbook and those cases got settled pretty quickly but not everyone's going to make that much money that suddenly they can write a big enough check to keep the people happy about it and I'm sure there's probably a new church somewhere in southern America where the priest worked.

David: The check they want is always five times more than it's actually worth.

James Blatch: Yeah, of course.

THE OTHER THING I WAS GOING TO SAY IS A LITTLE BIT OF MONEY SPEND IN THE FIRST PLACE IS GOING TO SAVE YOU.

David: Oh, yeah. You've got to remember I might sound like a money grabbing lawyer but I'm an in house lawyer by trade. I consider myself like those BBC lawyers, I consider myself an in house lawyer. There's a line on my website that's like having an in house lawyer. I find I've not changed my mindset maybe over a couple of years.

I find my mindset, all I'm bothered about is getting the editorial out, getting the editorial out, being involved from the beginning because when I'm involved from the beginning, I'm not the lawyer that ruins everything. I love working with journalists. I probably am a restrained journalist myself. I hate being the guy in the room going, "That seems great but you've got to get rid of it," or, "Oh that lines great," or, "Oh that chapters fantastic but God you've got to ..." I hate being that guy.

James Blatch: Yeah.

David: More on film, less on books, but if I get in the beginning and say this is how you approach this, than I'm not the guy at the end saying you're done.

James Blatch: The BBC lawyers were good like that and I always felt they were enablers. They wanted the story to go out, they wanted the documentary to be made. If they knew there was a risk there they found it in acceptable risk because you'd done your due diligence, because you'd put the work in beforehand and they could see it in their legal mind how it would stack up as a defense.

They weren't hugely thrilled the time I had to phone them to tell them that I'd got some names live, their live TV report when I was describing a notorious pedophile who had done despicable things and was being put away for a very long time and in the middle of a report, I hadn't even realized I'd done it, instead of saying his name I said the name of the two superintendent from Cambridge Police who'd arrested him and heroically put this guy behind bars.

I had no idea I'd done it. I think a lot of people didn't notice and I got a phone call from the gallery after saying we're pretty certain, we just checked the tape. You described his name. Sometimes that sounds like a training example of the worst possible thing you can do but actually it was so ridiculous and it was the policeman who arrested him. It made no impact at all and the policeman laughed it off and I think the lawyers I phoned, obviously I had to phone them just to say this has happened and they had the same opinion, said, "It's too obvious and too bonkers that that policeman is not ever going to say I'm obviously not a pedophile." Obviously he's not. Anyway it was just one of those things as a journalist. That was a relief.

David: I clear everyday the rights. I do the live.

James Blatch: Oh do you? Was that live?

David: Yeah.

James Blatch: How does that work?

David: I just call the gallery and apologize but yes there's often times I'm imaging myself throwing coffee all over myself.

James Blatch: Yeah, it's Matthew Wright the tabloid journalist and he has a few guests and okay I'm with you.

David: The Daily News I'd say.

James Blatch: Yeah, yeah, sorry, I didn't mean to.

David: An ex-colleague of mine from MTV who's now head of legal at the ITV, loves doing the live stuff.

James Blatch: I can only imagine it's quite exciting.

David: Yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah of course and there's a topical news quiz in the U.K., called Have I Got News For You. It's been long running and they often refer to the lawyer who I think sits in the front row in the studio even and has to make those big bucks decisions because they can potentially be very expensive if you get them wrong. I don't have to remind you of that.

David: You just have to really put yourself in, you're a good journalist, I mean Matthew Wright is tabloid journalist but he's a good gem, he knows his stuff.

James Blatch: They're the best journalists, the tabloid journalists. You may not like reading the writing but I can tell you from having worked in the industry, writing up stories in a tabloid sense is much more challenging and difficult and skillful than being able to ramble on for ages in the Guardian or the Times.

David: When I was clearing the Independent and the Evening Standard on Sunday I've got to say the Evening Standard was the one I enjoyed working on. I mean I guess I'm more of the, I do a lot of celebrities, I clear around 90 magazines, celebrity magazines and lovely cooking magazines and the fun ones of the celebs and the fast moving tabloid news type.

James Blatch: David, let me ask you a couple more questions that will bring us back onto useful advice I think for people in our position. First of all, what happens when, and I guess it could happen to any of your clients, they stick their feet in the ground and say, "We've heard your advice, we're going to go this way anyway."

AN AUTHOR MIGHT SAY, "WELL I DON'T TAKE IT AS SERIOUSLY AS YOU DO, I'M STICKING WITH THIS." WHERE DO THEY STAND DOWN THE ROAD?

David: All I am and all I can ever be is an advisor. Even to my clients. Even when I was in house and just lawyers to sort themselves out. All I ever am is saying this is the legal positions as I see it and these are the risks as I see it.

If somebody says, "Thank you for your advice, I don't want to follow it, what's the risks?" I'm more than happy to put that to one side and say, "Okay, if you want to keep it why don't we think about ways of minimizing the risk? Why don't we think about ways of either not letting that person know it's them or thinking about obscuring facts or changing things just to minimize the risk. Rather than getting rid of it completely let's think about ways around it."

This is what I was saying, I'd rather be a lawyer. Every lawyer could be a blank page lawyer. There's no legal risk in a blank page. I always want to get stuff out but everybody's free to ignore their lawyer's advice.

Often I will say, "It's a legal risk but I just can't see that person complaining," or, "I just can't see that this is a problem," and what you were talking about before with jurisdictions, especially with your American listeners is I could say, "Well here's Bob Smith, if anybody in the U.K. knows him, you're done for. I could have a talk with the author and the author says, "I'm pretty confident that nobody in the U.K. would know Bob Smith. I'm pretty confident his reputation in the U.K. is not at risk."

I've been in many positions where I have a clear American website where I say you find something, it might be a problem for the U.K. but I don't think anybody will sue you in the U.K. because I don't think you'll have the means to do it.

James Blatch: What about this passage that we see at the beginning of books and towards the end of the

credits and films that go on about any resemblance to any person living or dead is purely coincidental.

IS THAT SOMETHING WE SHOULD BE STICKING IN OUR BOOKS? DOES THAT HELP?

David: I think definitely. It's a great line for me to start any letter and it's a hard obstacle for the claimant to overcome.

James Blatch: There's a specific form of words we need to be using.

David: I use maybe two or three versions of it, but as long as the reader understands what you're trying to put across, you won't be called out by missing certain words or anything like that. What you convey to the reader is don't believe any of this is true.

James Blatch: Okay, so David you do this work in clearing text and pieces and so on.

DO YOU ALSO WORK IN THE COPYRIGHT SIDE OF THINGS? IS THAT YOUR AREA AT ALL?

David: I've never been a private practice copyright lawyer but I do advise on copyright. I advise what would be untrademarked, what would be a risk, and what I'm very good at is spotting where complaints will come and advising on the overarching defenses you would have if you want to use it.

The new quotation defense is great. This is in the U.K. There's been no case law on it but it looks like if you want the quote, a poem or a passage, you properly credit it than you can start to get away with taking a little bit more.

James Blatch: For instance if you want to use some song lyrics to set the tone or move in your novel, in the past you might have had to reach out to Chrysalis Records or somebody for permission.

YOU THINK NOW THERE'S SOME SCOPE FOR QUOTING IT?

David: Yeah. The prospects are looking good. There's been, like I said, there's been no case law for me to say definitively but I think a lot of people, I know I have written back to quite a few people and said, "All right this is clearly a quotation," and not heard anything.

James Blatch: I think for most authors when it comes to copyright it's probably the other way around where they're concerned particularly in this electronic e-book world, they're concerned about their books appearing and most successful authors, even moderately successful authors are finding their books for sale on sites which were not owned by them.

David: Yes. It's not a service I actually provide, which maybe I should if you think about it. There are organizations that will, in fact the law firm that passed on me, they also passed on a company called Incopro that sweeps the web looking for copyright material.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's good and I think somebody's brought that up in our Facebook group recently. It sounds like the same service so we'll check that for our discussion with Mark after this interview and try and make sure people have got that link and there's also, there's a fairly straightforward takedown notice which you can send.

David: I've got one that I can give them. I've got a blank. It invariably works, the notice and takedown actually works quite a lot.

James Blatch: Once people know you've spotted it and you're on to it.

David: Having worked with brands like Cosmopolitan, you're like this just filling another glass up every time you put your finger in it. It's the wild west unfortunately and I'm talking to you about loving working with journalists.

What I'm seeing is young kids coming into journalism where there's no scope to train them anymore, there's no money to train them anymore and they're concept of rights and select copyright rights is so far skewed to what you and I would imagine is the norm. They just have no concept of copyright, of ownership. Somebody called Google images a free geti last week to me.

James Blatch: Right.

David: That really sums up exactly where they're coming from.

James Blatch: That is a worry and I think it's more important now than ever before for people to respect and understand IP. You're right, it used to be something that had nothing to do with us. Companies dealt with it and it was very unlikely. But this day and age where everybody's doing a blog, everybody's making videos, everyone's doing podcasts, having respect for somebody else's IP which is their living, should be something that's worked on I think.

I can see that you're going to be doing that. David it's been fantastic talking to you. It's been, obviously it's a really interesting area. I think you and I could probably talk about this for hours.

David: Yeah. Once you get started.

James Blatch: I certainly as an author, I have certainly had the cogs turning in my head and I'm thinking about my text with a quasi legal brain now and so that's been incredibly useful for me and I hope it has for other listeners as well.

David: What I'll tell you is, don't necessarily go off and spend money on a lawyer, just take a moment to sit down and not be you, not be the writer, just try and be a quasi lawyer and say, "Am I affecting anyone's life with this?"

It's quite interesting. What I quite often do is write down the allegations that are being made and think about them and them standing alone. The problem when you're writing is you go, "I may not mention it and that's fine because I'm thinking about this and that's fine because I did that." Sometimes it's a good idea just to take yourself out of that and write down what you're actually saying.

James Blatch: Context.

David: Yeah.

James Blatch: David just give us a recap of the website where people can find you.

David: www.reviewedandcleared.com.

James Blatch: Reviewed and Cleared, that's what you want to hear.

David: Yes. You know what, I took that from an old client's clearing system so it was either Reviewed and Cleared or Reviewed and Commented and I thought maybe Reviewed and Commented didn't give the right message.

James Blatch: Better than Reviewed and Rejected.

David: Yeah.

James Blatch: That was David Burgess and as you mentioned at the end, reviewedandcleared.com is his place, his home on the internet if you want to go and have a look at that and he's got a very good brochure actually.

And unlike most law firms he sets out his prices because they're fixed prices so you can see in his PDF brochure what it is you're likely to pay for how many pages that he looks at and so on. That fits into exactly what he's trying to do which is to make legal services accessible to independent set of authors which is noble and it's a great thing isn't it, Mark?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. David's great. I've known him for years and years. We obviously worked together when I was practicing as a lawyer. One thing I would say though as people come out and sit with David is I don't want authors to think that they must now, as a matter of course, go to a lawyer and get their book, and it could be non-fiction or it could be fiction, need to get that checked for legal.

I would say, the best way to approach that interview is to listen to the practical advice that David gave an

in particular to think about how other people might see themselves if they could identify themselves as a result of either being named in your book or being referred to in a way that made identification possible.

If that kind of identification is possible than think about how they would feel about the things that are being said about them and if you then feel that it's something that's negative, they might be upset, then I would say it's worth just having a thought about whether you might want to get that checked out or whether simple changes might be the most sensible way to proceed. That's something you've done with regards to your book isn't it James?

James Blatch: Yeah. My book I wanted it to be authentic and it's based in a real world so I set it in a real REF station, not too far away from where you are Mark, which is where they did the test flying in the U.K. so the equivalent to Edwards Air force Base in the U.S. Then I created a fictitious unit within it because of its corruption and so on within the story line so it's not the actual REF test flying unit, it's called REF test flying unit actually is what I called it I think so that's not real the the boss of that unit's not real and the pilots there can't be identified.

However, in that interview with David, as you heard, it occurred to me of course that it had a station commander, had people on the front gate who come into play at various points and it is possible that someone could identify themselves. I think taking aboard what you've just said, Mark, I think in my case, "Okay, it's a minimal risk" and it probably falls short of a risk of defamation but actually there's a kind of moral thing as well.

I don't want to necessarily identify somebody. It might cause them problems and it's almost worse for me that I haven't defamed them enough for them to sue me but I've just made their lives a bit unhappy because they, perhaps, there might be some sensitivity about their time there, particularly as I involve aircraft crashes in my book. I've changed it. It's now REF West Portan, which is almost real if you know the landscape where you are. It sounds like it could be an actual place there.

Mark Dawson: It definitely does, yeah, I think you've been cautious and there's nothing wrong with being cautious. As you say there is a legal and a moral situation. I think you're being quite sensitive, which is fine.

James Blatch: I am sensitive.

Mark Dawson: You are very sensitive. That wouldn't have bothered me particularly because I think the risk of causing offense is also probably on the slim side but authors are different. So if you feel that that's something you can change without causing damage to your plot, your narrative, and obviously just changing the name to West Portan is not going to have any effect whatsoever on your plot and most readers might think that there is such a place as West Portan, Portan West absolutely is a good substitute.

Sensible perhaps in your case but I would just reiterate again, authors need to think about it carefully but don't too alarmed by the prospect of getting sued. What you don't want to do is name someone and then libel them. That would obviously be a very bad idea. Just think about that test that David laid out. How would people react if they could be identified as a result of reading your book, fiction or non-fiction and if it is something that you're concerned about after making that assessment than it might be worth dropping someone like David a line just to see what they think.

James Blatch: Yeah, I mean the station commander in 1966 will be looking on 90 now if he's still alive so that's the other thing I could go and check.

Mark Dawson: Yes and of course the dead can't sue so there's that as well.

James Blatch: That is one of the defenses of libel. Okay, good, well I thought it was really interesting and I love the whole legal side of things. As a journalist you get a lot of legal stuff drummed into you and some of the most memorable times I had was sitting in a court, listen to legal debates, particularly the moment of a verdict and inevitably if I was there it obviously was fairly big, high profile court case and people's lives change on the whim of a jury. I could tell you some stories about jury's but that would be illegal. Good, thank you very much indeed.

I really think this was a very valuable podcast because it's a mindset thing and somewhere that we don't normally go, the legal side of things, but just to get you thinking about it. We don't want to over-complicate people's lives, but it is something to be aware of and have in the back of your mind.

We are going to be back with a fabulous interview next week. I'm actually coming down to your part of the world. I might even drop in on REF West Portan. We're going to have an SPF meetup and start planning advertising for authors next course launch which will be next year so only a brief respite for us. We may even get to record the podcast together again. We'll see if we've got time to do that.

Mark Dawson: Good. It's nice sometimes.

James Blatch: They are. What a time to be alive. Literally you say nothing to that. There's no repost.

Mark Dawson: I'm falling asleep.

James Blatch: You are, you're barely alive. Thank you for listening, we'll speak to you next week.

CHAPTER 41

MAKE MONEY TEACHING THROUGH SELF PUBLISHED BOOKS -
WITH \$1 MILLION AUTHOR, JOSEPH ALEXANDER



THE MILLION DOLLAR guitar tutor

It's still quite rare to hear of an author earning \$1 million in book sales. But it's extraordinary to hear of an author earning that amount from sales of his instructional books on guitar techniques. James chats with guitar tutor and author Joseph Alexander this week to unpack the way he's been able to leverage his teaching to make money in a way that wouldn't be an obvious option for most music teachers. Joseph's self-publishing journey is nothing short of remarkable and you will be inspired with new ideas from listening to what he's achieved.

WHO IS THE GUITAR TEACHER BEHIND THIS \$1 MILLION AUTHOR CAREER?

Joseph has been a guitarist and expert music tutor for over 20 years. His guitar instruction books are published in four languages and have sold over 200,000 copies. He's authored over 30 guitar guides and

is very generous in sharing how he's exploited his niche, including his marketing approach and more. It's all on this episode.

YOU COULD VERY WELL MAKE MONEY TEACHING A SUBJECT YOU LOVE, JUST LIKE JOSEPH ALEXANDER.

If you are a teacher of any kind - languages, music, yoga, cooking - you have the possibility to create a self-published book empire just like Joseph. His terrific teaching ability lies at the heart of his business but it's self-publishing and self-taught marketing processes that have triggered his high income. Get outside the box of what you thought was possible by listening to how Joseph has creatively leveraged his teaching skill to build a sizeable income for himself and other instructors.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Welcome and introduction to this episode.
- Introduction to today's guest, Joseph Alexander: \$1 million author.
- How Joseph started putting his guitar teaching into written form to publish.
- Why guitar teaching has become a very lucrative career for Joseph.
- How Joseph has marketed his instructional books.
- The systems Joseph uses to manage his email list and deliver his content.
- Exploring the possibilities of online courses.
- An example of how Joseph does his instruction.
- The practical side of teaching guitar.
- The history of Joseph's book publishing journey.
- Using Amazon marketing to distribute his books more widely.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- www.Fundamental-Changes.com
- [Infusionsoft](#)
- [Mailchimp](#)
- [ConvertKit](#)
- [Active Campaign](#)
- [Dropbox](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 44 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hey. It's Christmastime. It's Christmastime.

Mark Dawson: Stop singing.

James Blatch: We actually don't have the rights to sing that song. We have come to Salisbury, which if you know the UK, even if you don't know the UK, Salisbury's a really beautiful medieval town actually. Lots of old Tudor buildings and very, very lovely at Christmas. This is your hometown, Mark.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it is. I've lived here for a few years. Great place to live.

James Blatch: Yeah, really nice. This is sort of going to be SPF HQ. We're going to come here more often hopefully and record quite a lot of the podcasts in shiny video like this. This is just a little practice to get us going. We'll get a proper setup here in the future, but a good opportunity for us to meet up in person. We do a lot digitally online, but a good time to review the year as well.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it is. Yes. We came down ... Well, James and John came down to Salisbury yesterday and we had a chat to talk about what we're going to be doing next year, and also today we've hired an Infusionsoft expert to take us through converting our MailChimp lists and putting them into Infusionsoft, which is something that we've been thinking about for a little while now. It's been a bit annoying. People on the list will have got duplicate emails for the podcast every Friday, for example, which is very irritating, especially for coming from someone who preaches about how important mailing lists are. To get that kind of basic stuff wrong is very irritating, so that won't be happening in the future.

Everyone will be pleased to hear we're going to be transitioning across to Infusionsoft, and probably we'll be able to help people, give them some learnings as to tips that we can give them to improve their own mailing lists, whether they're on MailChimp or in ConvertKit, another one that we recommend. Or for some who are at the more advanced level and running Infusionsoft lists, so lots of potential useful stuff

for people hopefully coming out today.

James Blatch: Lots of you will be familiar with MailChimp. We all went through the MailChimp bit and Mark is still using it, I think, your author campaigns at the moment.

Mark Dawson: Yep, yep. Definitely.

James Blatch: I'm quite a big fan of ConvertKit, so I like it a lot, and really like everything we've seen so far. We've got Garreth from Infusionsoft here. They've gone out to get us a sandwich now, but what's really nice about it is when you put your automations together in Infusionsoft you get this visualization. It's like plotting on a whiteboard of how you want the flow to go with arrows going between them. It gives you a lot more option, as ConvertKit does as well, but a lot more option to really target your email, so particularly if you write in more than one genre, this is the sort of thing that's going to work very well for your point of view and from our point of view as SPF we can start to target emails of people who are just starting out as authors or people who are more advanced in that branching process. Obviously we know you make your emails as relevant as possible to people, then all those things that you want to happen, that they buy your books, all those things start going up.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that's the principle of it. I'm excited about the possibilities that we have for people coming onto our Self Publishing Formula lists. We'll be tagging people as they come in dependent on answers they give us to their level of expertise. If someone tells us that they're a beginner and they're interested in beginner content, we can teach them about mailing lists, we can teach them about the kinds of content that are covered in the 101 course, but people go on the list and they're telling us that they're advanced or intermediate, then we can start to focus more on giving them useful information on advertising or marketing and that kind of useful stuff. It just allows us to be a bit more granular and specific and relevant to the needs of people who want to learn from us. I'm excited about getting that ready, so I've got a busy day tomorrow drafting I don't know how many emails, probably quite a few emails that we will then put into our campaigns and go on from there.

James Blatch: Okay. Look, we've got a really good interview for you today and it's a little bit musical, because it's the holidays time of year and we thought, "We've never had any proper music beyond the cheesy bits of music we use in between our interview links," which we are looking at reviewing by the way, but this is a man called Joseph Alexander, and he's worked pretty much by himself toiling away. He

is a guitarist and he's a guitar tutor, and he started to work out that he was quite good at teaching people, so he started to write books and he has worked with Amazon and he's worked with campaigns.

This is a guy who took his one millionth dollar in sales very recently and he started two or three years ago. I think it was two or three years ago, we'll find out in the interview. He's just beavered away. He looks up occasionally and notices that there's a whole world of us and lots of other people doing similar things and he's really excited to start being a part of that community, but he was a real discovery. Introduced himself to you, Mark, didn't he I think?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I did a day, an Amazon event about six weeks ago, and Joseph was one of the other authors on the panel. I hadn't spoken to him before, I didn't know who he was. He explained during the panel that he'd sold that much worth of content. I think his books are 9.99, so they're slightly more expensive than most fiction authors would be pricing, but I was very keen to get him on the podcast for two reasons. He's very, very good on intermediate to advanced mailing list strategies, so he's doing all of those things that we just mentioned with tagging people and then serving them content dependent on what they've said that they want to get, and he's also a nonfiction author.

I get lots of emails come in and survey responses come back to us from nonfiction authors asking for tips to how they can ... Whether it's possible to make the kind of money that fiction writers can make, and Joseph is a very good example of just how possible it is. In some ways, I don't know exactly where Joseph is with his career, but you can do fiction and then ... So you can do nonfiction for his guitar lessons, but then you could do things like courses, which is like the course that we do, and in many ways there are more opportunities for nonfiction authors to make a significant living than there are for fiction authors. I really wanted to get him on the podcast and for you to tease out of him some of the tips and strategies that he's used to have such an amazingly successful business.

James Blatch: Yeah, we do that. We also have some fun with the actual guitar stuff as well because he's an expert at what he does, and it's fascinating always to listen to experts. You're going to get all the stuff about mailing lists. You're also going to find out how he approaches teaching people how to play the guitar. We're doing this on video as well as audio, so you've got a chance to head over to our YouTube channel. You can see some of the chord positions that he's using. Okay, let's hear from Joseph Alexander and then we'll be back with a little look back at the end, a little look ahead to what's going to be happening in 2017.

Joseph A.: I've been teaching guitar pretty much all my life, and about four years ago I started writing down the stuff that I was teaching in lessons. Somebody, one of my students in fact, introduced me to self publishing after I'd approached a traditional publisher with it and they liked the book, but they thought the fact that it was three DVDs with audio with it, it made it not a commercial product. My friend's student, he introduced me to KDP, and that was it. I put my first book up, it started to sell, raised about eight books in my first year and now four years later I've written 25 and I've started publishing as an office.

James Blatch: Wow. All the books are on learning guitar or guitar technique?

Joseph A.: Everything really. We've got books from blues, jazz, heavy metal, country. We've also got dedicated books on guitar technique and theory, that sort of thing. It's quite wide-ranging what we've done.

James Blatch: Okay. We're going to talk too about the guitar itself because I think we all like to learn a little bit during every podcast. It doesn't necessarily have to be about our chosen area, but I suppose our chosen area is self publishing, so let's start with that and then talk a bit about the actual instruction stuff. Guitar books are ... People often come to us say, "My area's very niche and I don't think it's going to work," and then I look at somebody like you and you don't get much more niche than selling to a very specific type of person who wants to know something about the guitar. You've been successful with this. Just give us a little background too how well it's gone.

Joseph A.: I'm just picking up on that a little bit. It's like seven billion people on the planet, and whatever your niche is there's always going to be people interested. I think I'm quite lucky in a sense that guitar is one of the cooler instruments and not writing books about flugelhorn or whatever, so very niche. There always does seem to be a market for that, and because you're combining the interest of the guitar with the different genres of music, then you can be quite targeted and there's always an interest with that. I think it's quite comforting really the way that people are still buying guitar books when we have YouTube and things like that.

In terms of success, yeah, it's great. We've sold about 150,000 books now. I keep saying we. I wrote about 25 and I realized that there was limits to my skills, so I got friends, people that I knew and I asked them if they wanted to write books for me. I can't really play death metal, for example, so reached out to a guy that could and he's written three books. Things are profit share. It's been extremely successful to be honest with you. It's going very well.

James Blatch: That's fantastic. 150,000 books. Congratulations. You've obviously got a lot right. How have you marketed the books?

Joseph A.: I get asked this a lot. In the beginning really, I don't know if I have an advantage because the niche on Amazon isn't particularly competitive, but I just let Amazon do what they do really well, or I certainly did in the beginning. I hate marketing. It's not my strength, and I'd first be playing the guitar or I'd sing about it, and Amazon they've got this amazing machine. I'm happy to give them whatever percentage to reach the kind of audience that I wouldn't be able to reach on my own really.

But now, I think one thing that was really important to me was to let people hear what they were reading in the books. Each book's got about 150 notated examples, and so if you see something written down that sounds a bit weird and it was like, "What? is that supposed to sound like that?" Well yeah, we can give them the audio and the way we market now is we've built a massive email list of people that have come to the site, so there's a link in each book. They come to the site, they download the audio, they tell us which book that they've bought, give us their email address, and then they get access to whatever audio they want. From that we've built quite a big automated machine of marketing. Now the ...

James Blatch: Just on a technical question, what email program are you using for that?

Joseph A.: We were using MailChimp, and I think we got about 18,000 people and we left MailChimp. We've just moved to ActiveCampaign and I think this week we're finalizing a lot of the automation and things and I've got a company out in New Zealand doing that stuff for me now.

James Blatch: Okay, so you outsource quite a lot of the work. If I asked you to go into ActiveCampaign and make some automated changes, would you know what to do?

Joseph A.: Yeah, I would because I think it's important that you understand what the people that you're working with do. Also, my girlfriend, she's just joined the company as well and she's taking care of that as well. If I can't do it, at the very least I can ask her to do it for me and she knows her way around quite well.

James Blatch: It's always a good sign of the financial success of the company when the wives, partners, and girlfriends get brought in, because there comes a point often in a household where it's not really worth the other half going off to their nine to five anymore when there's a business which really needs hands on.

Joseph A.: Yeah. I think that's true. The way we've got the company structured now, I started off as self-employed writing books, and I think after my second year we made quite a lot of money and got my tax bill and that was the point where I went, "Right, this needs to change." We've got a UK limited company now. We're both on the payroll, got a normal company set up, and she's paid monthly as a normal salary, but yeah, it's lovely to have something that getting to the point now where I think well, maybe we could walk away from this a little bit. It would be completely passive. That's the idea, isn't it? Get royalty, it's all passive, but you still end up working like 14 hour days every day to keep it passive. It's one of those. It's going well, can't deny that. We, in terms of royalties, made millionth dollar, however you want to put that, last month, and sales are still continuing to grow very quickly. It's been good, yeah.

James Blatch: Congratulations, Joseph. That's really good. Obviously at the heart of all these successful stories is a good product, and I can tell straightaway that you know your stuff, and the fact also that I think you knew your limitations as well, so you realized that to keep that ... You probably could've done death metal, because everyone can do a bit of this, but I think you realized that to keep the same ... There you go. Look at that. To keep that quality level, you needed to go outside. Now, it's a good business decision as well, so that's brilliant. Did you know you were a businessman?

Joseph A.: I don't know. Maybe. I think going to music college, met a lot of great guys, and a lot of passion there for music. Hopefully I've retained that and that comes across in the stuff that I write, but I think there's a ... In any genre, whether that's fiction writing or nonfiction like I do or music, there tends to be this separation almost, like a line in the sand between the guys that are businessing, and that's your publishing companies and the marketing guys, and the artists.

That's certainly ... There's this strong history and affinity to that in music. There's always been that self image of the struggling artist that's trying to put out music but everything's commercialized by the record companies. At some point you have to make a compromise between playing what you want to play and playing what your audience or the record company is willing to listen to. Taking that back to music, there are guys that you need ... I mean this with as much respect as possible, that they think they're going to make really, really good living being a jazz trumpeter, and they were great players, but there's probably like three or four people on the planet making a living doing jazz trumpeting on a gig level. That's all love and

they're probably working gig to gig, I don't know.

If you take the analogy whereas there are other guys, okay, right, I've got to put some bread on the table and I'm going to teach. I love gigging and I love writing and I love all that side of things, but for me the most important thing was to look after myself financially, and a lot of people take that over teaching. It's not good enough. I love teaching and I love sharing what I've learned and what I can do and hopefully inspiring more people to pick up music, and actually to have anybody come to me with nothing and sit there with them for six months a year, whatever, and see them start to do their first gigs and things like that, that's an amazing feeling that you've helped them get there. Of course they've done all the work and all the practice and stuff, but you've shown them the way a little bit, and that's what I'm trying to keep in my books, if you like, that there is a path.

James Blatch: That's great. Your list, people join this and they get added in. In the old days I guess with MailChimp into a particular list, and now you've got a slightly more sophisticated system or campaign, whatever.

Joseph A.: Yeah. There's been a lot going backwards and forwards. God.

James Blatch: You basically know what areas they're interested in. Then what's made available to them is presumably hosted somewhere on a website, so download the MP3s.

Joseph A.: Yeah. I just use Dropbox to be honest with you. What we do is we've got a download page on fundamental-changes.com, you can go check that out and see the downloads, and you come to a wall basically that says, "Which book did you buy?" By doing that, people select the book, they go through the email portal, and they just get given that download. Now, what that means is that when they come into ActiveCampaign, we tag them with their genre and their book. What we've been setting up is the marketing machine, here's an introductory video of me, here's our best content, because we've got like 250 pretty good guitar lessons on the website, so here's our content line, start adding value immediately. Give, just give. If I can stress one thing, it's just give as much as you can and get people on board.

James Blatch: This is all free, if you like. I haven't bought the book, and then all this content's available to them free of charge.

Joseph A.: Yeah. The free lessons just came as organic, get people to the website to find lessons. Then we repurposed that a little bit. You sign up, you'll get the welcome email, which is a bit of a talking head video of me looking a bit awkward and saying welcome, and then you've got a couple of follow-up emails that show our best content, and then after that there's just an email asking people to review if they've liked the book. Then from that point, everybody's had those, I think the original three or four emails, but then they're separated by genre.

I think we've got five genre chains now, like little machines, like blues, rock, jazz, beginners, and general musicianship like technique and theory, that sort of thing. Then after that they will get some content, or two pieces of content, two content emails that are totally related to what they're interested in. Blues people will get blues stuff or technique or something that is applicable to all genres. Then the third email will be a promotion for a book that's related to that content. For example, we've got five or six blues books, so we know they're interested in blues, let's sell them more blues books, but things that are useful to them. Keep it useful. Keep that ...

James Blatch: Sorry, I was going to say ...

Joseph A.: No, it's just that at the moment the blues campaign and that's about 26 weeks worth of automation and it's also personally written by us all. They're in that and once they're out of that they go back into the big pool of people and we promote new books to those kinds of ...

James Blatch: That's amazing. We should say there's a slight delay on the line, so we're doing our best, aren't we, not to talk over each other very much.

Joseph A.: Okay, sorry about that.

James Blatch: That's great. I can see that you will have very, probably in marketing terms they're called a warm audience. They're a relationship with you, and that's absolutely is as it should be and that's certainly how we operate as well at SPF and we have a community and we enjoy being with the people who want to be with us. At the same time we're very transparent about what we then sell, which is occasionally an online course, of which a small percentage buy. I'm thinking from your point of view, the moment you sell

the books, but you've potentially got opportunities there, and an obvious thing obviously is online courses when you have a big list like your own in nonfiction, another one might be affiliates marketing to do some deals. Are you starting to explore those routes or do they not appeal to you?

Joseph A.: We're not so much about the affiliates at the moment. We've got Amazon associate links and we use Genius to make sure anybody goes to Amazon gets tagged with an associate's ID and taken to the right geographic location. I think for \$10 a month that's the best investment we had at genie.as is great. Highly recommend that because it's totally automated. We are building some video courses, and we are building those around the books. If you buy my blues rhythm guitar book, what we want to have is a video tutorial of that book, so you've got the book, let's upsell that to a \$30, \$50 video course. We're not sure of the details yet, but that's getting built at the moment.

As you say, they're warm and they're interested in this kind of stuff anyway, so we're trying to provide it as a service, I guess. Yeah, of course we're going to make money from it, but it's stuff people are interested in. It's walking that fine balance between yeah, we've got this, we could start shoving things down people's throats, but we're not going to do that because at the end of the day having the integrity of the brand and just providing value and giving good things to people's life, that's got to be the MO for everything you do. Certainly people come into this just with the idea of making money, and that's secondary. You've got to provide value or else people won't buy into it.

James Blatch: Got it. Let's talk about the instruction a little bit then. Who buys the books? Is this complete beginners or is this people who are already playing guitar and want to move things on?

Joseph A.: Everyone. We've got some beginners books, we've got some intermediate stuff. I wrote one book, I was like, "I don't know if I should be writing this." It was like advanced for me kind of thing. I got some help on that. Rob, who's one my authors, he's writing the heavy metal stuff, he's the most incredible guitarist. Actually I talked to him when he was about 14. We stayed in touch, and even then I was just like, "What did you want me to teach you?" He's just always been like this. He worked really hard. Great player, great guy as well. That stuff, yeah, it's difficult. I was sitting there going, "Oh god. Right." The full spectrum, and every genre as well. I've got easier blues books and more difficult blues books. Ideally, people can find a progression through that.

James Blatch: There is something about the guitar, and I don't play and I'm not an expert, but I enjoy it

hugely. What I'm fascinated about is if you get somebody who likes music to write down the top 10 guitarists in the world, you'll get a list of quite well-known names there, but what is interesting to me is the moment you hear David Gilmour or Mark Knopfler or Jimi Hendrix, you can identify them even though they may all be playing the same instrument. There's something, despite that being a fairly standard technical layout, there's something about the guitar that immediately becomes a personalized thing. Is that the case with other instruments? I don't know.

Joseph A.: I think so. I think so. I'm probably going to agree with this sort of thing, but yeah. That's the point, isn't it? We've all got the same 12 notes, it's how you play them that makes the difference with how you connect with your audience. Guitarists are the worst for this, or that I've discovered. "This guy's better than this guy, no, this guy's got better technique," and all this bullshit. Really, Frank Zappa said it the best. He goes, "If you like it, it's good. If you don't like it, it's shitty."

There's no good or bad. It's just preference. If somebody's playing something that moves you, then run with it. That's the thing. There's the old problem I'd like to hear more guitars in the pop charts and things, the way the X Factor and whatever's taking music, but that's product. You just have to separate it, and hopefully there'll always be an audience for guitar. You're right, if I listen to Steve Ray Vaughan, it's very different from listening to Jimi Hendrix, and they are playing broadly similar genres of music. I'm going to get a lot of haters of guitar who see that, but for our purposes ...

James Blatch: Wow, I get the sense there's a ...

Joseph A.: We'll take your point.

James Blatch: Competitive area within guitar, the whole community there. Okay look, you've got the guitar on your lap. I must invite you to play a little bit. Can you give us an example ... I'm not going to ask you to do a [inaudible 00:27:00] set piece, but maybe an example of how you would teach and you use video instruction. Obviously I haven't got a guitar with me. In fact we've just sold my daughter's guitar. We've given it to friends because she ...

Joseph A.: Times are bad, eh?

James Blatch: Time is bad. How would you use video instruction then to teach me something?

Joseph A.: Well, in all honesty, I don't. I've got one of my authors who does a lot of videos. I did YouTube stuff on the past, but Simon who's written I think four books for us now, he's video, he's much more personable, much nicer guy than I am. He's got a great on-screen presence. I think for one thing, you've got to break things down. You can hear ... And that's quite a complicated little phrase, but you have to separate it out so you can hear both lines.

Obviously I wouldn't teach that first, but that kind of idea was in the book that I did on finger style blues guitar and really early delta stuff, and ... Now that's a thing that's keeping it going. When you show that to somebody, they're like, "Oh god, there's all this going on. Then there's all the bass stuff going on." Teaching someone to put that together for me means break it right down. The first exercise in that book, and I was apologizing. Of course I know this is really simple, but it's this. Because if you can't get that thumb going on the neck, then I bring in that, and then ... Then maybe add in simple notes. My thumb's doing that course neck thing and I've just introduced a very simple easy scale into that. Then blues is all about bends and slides and ... I'm just introducing one note on that ... It's hard to talk and do this.

James Blatch: Yeah. You're doing well.

Joseph A.: I wouldn't necessarily double time it then, but you can see how you could build that into ... Whoa. Let's put a slide in there. Suddenly it's starting to go, but actually the main crux of that is keeping your thumb down. Because most people who pick up that book can probably go ... But getting this coordination, so as I say, break it right down and then start building it up again. That's the way I've approached all these books, and then just start. Change the chord.

James Blatch: Superb. I wish there was more of us to clap.

Joseph A.: It goes like ... Nice. I think I was never the greatest guitarist, I was never going to be that guy that was world-famous for being a guitarist, but if I can big myself up a little bit, the only thing that I've ever found that set me apart was I'm good at breaking things down to very simple elements. I think that's because I really struggled. I had a terrible time at music college. They were throwing so much stuff at me and I had to really work and reverse engineer everything. Because I struggled and I had to break things

down, I think maybe that's why I can do it and then teach it.

James Blatch: The analytical approach. I've got a couple of questions just about the guitar playing. First of all, the physical side of it. Is that something ... There must be a muscle memory thing you have to build up over time, because that doesn't look ... Even though I'm not trying it, that doesn't look like it's an easy coordination just to jump into, what you're doing.

Joseph A.: No, but that's why you start with that and get that with a metronome, and then add in something simple. Yeah, there's muscle memory. If you're learning somebody else's music I'd say that's probably quite an important thing to do. If you're on the stage, I don't want to be looking at music. If I'm doing a gig, I want to be looking at the audience. I want to be interacting with them. I don't want to be worrying about my guitar or what I'm going to play. Yeah, some things are hard and I'll have a look down, of course, but that would be for me where muscle memory comes, but if I'm improvising, if you get too much muscle memory ... The worst thing you can do is ...

James Blatch: Scales.

Joseph A.: Yeah. You need to know scales, but if you just practice them really, really fast and get faster and faster, what you do is you lock your fingers into it. Actually, Joe Pass said a lot about ... Goes, "Yeah, well these guys are reaching for that one really difficult impressive chord, but they've worked so hard on that and that's all they can play." It's almost like play easier stuff but have freedom to do it.

For me personally, and people would disagree with this of course, but I don't want to be locked into playing a particular thing. Yeah, we've all got licks. There's that, but I want to be able to have that in my ears as something that I'm going to play rather than something my fingers have to play because that's what I'm locked into. Because once you've got that ... When you start seeing things before you play, then your head is starting to take control. And (singing). Terrible singing, but you get it. You start with a new idea because it's come from a creative part of your brain rather than the muscle memory part of your brain. We can go off on that. I could talk about that for hours, but ...

James Blatch: I think it's really interesting, and week in, week out we talk a lot about books, so I definitely want to talk a little bit of detail because that's something so ... We can just enjoy our broadcast

on a tangent every now and again.

Joseph A.: No, that's cool. I'll talk about this all day.

James Blatch: Well, my other question then is just on ... Perhaps finish up on the guitar areas here, is obviously this is the bluesy stuff that you're teaching here. At what point do you diverge? Do you say to somebody, "What sort of guitar do you want to play?" And they say, "Well, I really want to play blues." Do you go right from the beginning just on blues? Or do you say, "Look, let's learn the fundamentals and then make a decision."

Joseph A.: They're coming to me with nothing?

James Blatch: Yeah. If they're starting out.

Joseph A.: You've got to get ... They're out of tune, but you've got to get those basic chords down. You're talking about breaking things down. My beginners book is based on the first six lessons, 10 lessons or whatever that [inaudible 00:35:12]. It's like this is finger one, this is two, this is three, this is four. That second finger is going to go on the second fret on the first string, and the third one's going to go next to it. Then you're going to string all six strings. It's like ... Okay.

Then moving from E minor, which is that chord and I write it down, to A minor. Just going to move that down two. Those two fingers lock together, they move down a string, and I put my first finger on there. I'm going to strum that from the fifth string, right? To get the muscle memory you're talking about, because you don't want to be thinking about building chords when you play, just that. Strum if you want, take it off, put it down. Do that 10 times and then do it with the A minor.

The thing is if I gave you enough time, I know you can do that. The difficulty is changing from there to there. What we have to do is one, two, three, four. Doesn't matter what it sounds like. If it sounds like this, doesn't matter, you've got to keep moving because the most important lesson I think I can teach somebody in the first lessons that the audience's perception of time doesn't stop. If you play a bad chord you have to suck it up and get the next one in time. You can't stop time, go back, correct it, and everyone's like, "Oh,

hang on a minute, hang on." No. You got to keep going.

People will make awful noises for about two minutes, and then suddenly it starts to click and then you can go, "Okay, here's this chord. We're just going to move our third finger onto here." Start moving between them. I teach chord pairs to build the muscle memory. It's like when you learn a new word in language. You want to learn that in context, and in fact we do learn it by context because if somebody uses a word that we don't know, we can normally infer its meaning from the surrounding words.

I think there's something like that in the brain because if I teach you a new chord and I teach you that. If I teach you ... That's a little phrase, then your fingers start to learn it and it's got oral meaning as well. It just works as a coherent little sentence, if you like, and you remember it better. From there, you can, okay, here's your A chord, and this is a bit of a cliché way to play, it depends which way you want to go, but I'll probably show them this scale, which contains a lot of those bluesy notes. I can be playing ... Or ... I can get my student, just tell him to just play on two strings. Teach them to bend notes.

I'll give them that whole scale thing, but like this one ... Cheating there. All that language is there, and it is obviously it's more than just playing, but that over ... Suddenly you've gone from something that's a scale to ... What's that? Like one, two, three, four, five. Five different notes. It's a phrase. There's loads obviously to it, but that's the general principle.

James Blatch: That's so enlightening. The fact that you use words like phrase and language is ... That's what it is, isn't it? It's a language and it's being spoken just in a slightly different way. That's great. Well, it's not difficult to see why you've been successful. You have an innate enthusiasm, I think, for instruction and teaching, which has really come across. When did you start? When did you write the first book? Remind us.

Joseph A.: It was four years ... Actually it was ... I was trying to get it in there. I generally [inaudible 00:40:00] the money side of things as secondary, but we made the first million dollars about a week before the fourth anniversary of the first book.

James Blatch: From zero to a million dollars of gross income I suppose within four years. With one genre of nonfiction.

Joseph A.: Depends how you define genre, but yeah, if you want to put it as guitar, then yeah.

James Blatch: That's fantastic. I'm really pleased for you, but also interested the fact that you've been a little bit hands-off with the marketing, you've opted into the Amazon in-built marketing schemes. It's worked for you, I'm not ...

Joseph A.: It has. It is weird, and people think it's a bit strange. I was trying to find one with my old books and the covers [inaudible 00:40:49] I did them myself in Photoshop. Actually I might just talk about this because I think this might be quite useful. Terrible at Photoshop. I don't really know how to do websites and things like that, like I know the basic WordPress stuff. I had about eight books or whatever and my website was terrible and people were just going there, and I purchased an amazing web development company in Chester called Twizzlebird. You should check them out because they're really, really good to work with.

They put the website together for me, but I was still producing these books and the content was all right, but the covers were terrible. I just went, "Listen, I'm really bad at this. Can you just put together a template for me, Photoshop template? All I want to be able to do is change the colors and put new words on and stick a different guitar on it, my jazz guitar, my blues guitar or rock guitar on it." They're like, "Yeah, sure." Gave them a week, they sent it back, and because I'm terrible at Photoshop, everything's a standardized ... If you go look at my stuff, search Joseph Alexander on Amazon you'll find it. Everything looks fairly standardized.

What happened because I was writing so many books, that suddenly became branding and it wasn't this amazing marketing decisions like, "Yeah, I'm going to write 25 books." I only started doing that after I noticed things were starting to sell all right. Everything genuinely came out of that first book, which was really ... I wanted help because it was such a bad time, sorry tangent here, but I had such a bad time at college and I'd been thrown with all this information and I was quite ignorant. I didn't know that, say, Miles Davis was different jazz from, say, John Clark. All this stuff was thrown at us week after week.

I was trying to play all this stuff in one bar or 200 beats per minute, and I sounded awful and I couldn't figure out why. I was working really hard, I sounded bad. I ended up having some time away from London College of Music, ended up going to Leeds College of Music, which was an amazing place, and they just

nurtured me through this. Like, "No, you don't want to be doing those two things together. That's just not how it's done." What I clung onto because of the fact that there was so much information thrown at me, like really advanced stuff that I wasn't ready for it. I was ready for this stuff and they were showing me this stuff.

My first book was genuinely me ... It was being cathartic really. I was writing down ... The most common chord progression in jazz is this. Two, five, four. That's one, that's called two, this is called five. Learning to settle on that ... Learning to do that is really important, and you've got to learn to do that quite simply. What my first book, I think it's like 12, 15 chapters or something, of first learn this. Then this, like the arpeggios, and then this. Forget everything else. Forget the fact we can play this stuff all over the guitar, just going to focus on this one little position.

Then I took it from there and I built it step by step by step by step without all this stuff. That's the thing. There's so much stuff out there, there's so many YouTube videos, and this is the same for writing or publishing. You go out there, there's so many people trying to sell you something or tell you things that you don't necessarily need to know for where you are right now. It gets really confusing and people start looking at things, they're on lesson like 1000 and they should be on lesson three. That was it for that. Anyway, that was all going all right, and then the marketing just happened accidentally because of this Photoshop template. We've got a new one now, but I think they charged me something like 200 pounds for doing it.

James Blatch: For what turned out to be the perfect branding exercise.

Joseph A.: Exactly. Really, we were talking about the Amazon thing. Now, what Amazon's really, really good at doing is people who bought their [inaudible 00:45:20]. I'd say 10 books at a time, and you get that cross-promotion. I think you can start in mailing lists. I thank Mark for this. I didn't even start the mailing list until way too late.

James Blatch: How do you come up with the email addresses? Is there a link in the books?

Joseph A.: No, get the audio. Got to type the page after the content, get the audio, then there's a link to the website, get the audio, stick the email address in, tell me what you've got, and then they're segmented by

interest in the book. That's how we get the email address in, about 22 and a bit thousand at the moment, but we're getting about 50 a day, 60 a day, which is kind of cool, which is weird because we sell about 150 books, 200 books a day.

James Blatch: Quite a lot of people don't ...

Joseph A.: Yeah. It's weird. Any music book comes with audio, so it's a bit perplexing why people aren't. It's free. That's the thing, people, "Oh, yeah, I free download, I free gift people something," and it doesn't really add value. The stuff that we do, if you take one thing from it, add value. Don't just give some little bit of crap away, just give them something that's really important or really useful because you can't really do once you have a Kindle. You can, but file sizes. Certainly other one with CreateSpace, I don't want to get into producing CDs. There's no mechanism to do that. This is the 21st century, man, let's have this managed through a website. It's not rocket science now, is it?

We do that. Now when we launch a book, because we've got the segmentation, I'm not going to launch that death metal book to the guy that just picked a bought country book. We're more targeted. If it's a general, like it's a technique book or whatever, yeah, we're going to launch that to everyone. But again, coming back to what Amazon's really good at is once they see something selling, they promote the hell out of it because they want to make money.

Again, maybe just because we're not in a competitive niche, I think I've got about 13 of the top 20 Kindle guitar books at the moment. Because we've got this email automation side to happen as well, there's a gradual drip feed. People are at different stages through this change, so 100 people that day will get links for blues one, 100 people will get the country book or 100 ... There's this gradual trickle now of people getting promoted specific books, like everyone's getting promoted from different all times, kind of cool. In my niche, I don't know, 1500 sales or something like that, you're going to be number one. I shouldn't be telling you this, everyone's going to start doing guitar books.

James Blatch: I doubt it. But they might pick up on some of the marketing techniques. For those of us who aren't as advanced into this as you are, how does the Amazon marketing that you opt into work? Do you sacrifice some of your royalty for that?

Joseph A.: In what sense? Are you talking about AMS?

James Blatch: Yeah.

Joseph A.: Yeah. All the normal Kindle, the shares and everything. It's hard on Kindle as well because we've got so many images and notations. The file sizes are about five, six megabytes, really cuts in. AMS is something we've just started with in the last two weeks and it has been insanely good. Insanely good. Can you still see me? I'm on a different window.

James Blatch: I can see you, yep.

Joseph A.: Okay, cool. I'm looking at my top advert. We spent \$21 on that and we've made back about \$232. That's just with 211 clicks. The average cost of a click is 10 cents, and the average cost of sale is 9%. That is amazing for us in a few ways. Like I say, we're still experimenting with this, but we immediately went, "Right" and Amanda, my girlfriend, we got all the marketing, we've got the sales pages on the website, we just found the perfect sentence. It was 150 characters I think you can have on the AMS advert and promote the book, because the AMS thing, they've just started allowing you to promote books that aren't in Kindle Selects, so that's huge.

I was literally about two days before saying, "Oh, I should've put everything in Kindle Selects and Kindle Unlimited." Then I got this email saying, "Right, you can promote anything with AMS now." I was like, "Right," so we got on it. Day before yesterday, I think, we've got all our books, all the books that I'm publishing by other people as well, because we're a publishing company now. What happens? The Kindle sales are easily paying for the adverts, which is what you want. The paperback sales, because Kindle and paperback are put together, paperback sales just suddenly spikes. It was great to test it slightly because we did the AMS or the Kindle book, and suddenly we'd sell quite a few more of that paperback version of the book. I don't know if that's because it's guitar, people like to learn music from paper. I know I do. Kindle's great, but for learning music it's probably not the best thing.

James Blatch: I can see that.

Joseph A.: Immediately revenue shot up. Then the other thing is because people are getting onto the mailing list, then we're selling books for a 9 cent advert, we're getting the money back on the Kindle sale, paperbacks are going up, and then these people are ending up on the mailing list and getting tighter marketing and, as I stressed, 66% of everything that comes through their inbox is content like guitar lessons that they're interested in. For 9 cents, to get someone on your mailing list and everything else, it's astonishing. It's like it's a total game changer.

I was chatting to Mark, Amazon kindly invited me down to the Amazon Academy in London last week, which was great. I was talking to him and he said, and it didn't even strike me [inaudible 00:51:58], "How many people are seeing your books? What sort of brand awareness is there? People are searching guitar books and your stuff's coming up." I know it works the same with him, that the recognition on Amazon and combine that with the people who also bought this.

James Blatch: That's a rich vein. It's almost like you struck a little bit of an oil well there with ...

Joseph A.: I'm a little bit shocked, yeah.

James Blatch: Well look, we've reached the 45 minute point which is normally where we say for interviews.

Joseph A.: No worries.

James Blatch: We're trying not to go on too much, but it's been absorbing, I feel that we could go on. I confidently predict that it will not take another four years for your next million.

Joseph A.: No, not looking at it too much!

James Blatch: I would suspect you're probably looking at 12 months for your next million. I bet if you draw the line on the graph now you're going to get there much quicker than that, but that's fantastic, Joseph. I don't know how many guitar players we have in our audience, our podcast and our SPF community, but I

guarantee they'll be googling your name now. Congratulations again, what a brilliant story.

Joseph A.: That's great. Thanks, James.

James Blatch: There you go. Joseph Alexander and his guitar. I hope you enjoyed that. I left all the guitar stuff in there just because it's Christmastime and it was nice to hear from him. It was a neat, where you could tell straightaway listening to him what a natural teacher he is for a start, and a very impressive person who, as I say, working quite a lot of isolation has stumbled across, worked out for himself, a lot of the things it takes the rest of us courses and podcasts and everything else to work out. The fact that he's now taking on work from other people, quite big people in the music industry, and he's going to do deals with them where he basically does all their digital marketing and takes a significant cut, he's effectively becoming a very modern publisher.

Mark Dawson: He is. He's an impressive guy. I was very impressed when I met him, and we've had a couple of chats since then. He is impressive. As you say, he's stumbled on a system that works amazingly well. He's very, very good on mailing lists, which is just another confirmation if anything were needed by this stage that you need a mailing list to do well these days. He's mastered that, especially with sending tailored content and then mailings out for people who are interested in death metals and in the jazz. That doesn't make any sense at all and there's not much point in sending those out, so by tailoring the content specifically to the interests of the people depending on what they've told him makes it much more likely that he'll get sales when he's got, say, the next jazz tutorial or death metal tutorial, whatever it is that he's selling. He's a savvy guy.

James Blatch: Great. I'd love to revisit him in a year or so's time. I think we're going to start looking back at some of the interviews we did and revisit those guys, because a lot of the people we spoke to were beginning new projects and Joseph is taking on new work, and I'm always interested to hear their story as it develops over time, so we'll definitely keep an eye on that. Just another look ahead to what's coming up in the near future. As Mark just mentioned, as if it was needed, mailing lists should be absolutely central to your existence as an author and your work online. We're going to have a look at mailing lists in more detail in the next few weeks, aren't we?

Mark Dawson: We are. We're going to have a little bit of a theme whereby we might do two or three podcasts based on a challenge that I'm going to set up for everyone to go from zero to 100 mailing list

subscribers, or your next 100. I did a webinar not too long ago where we looked at that in detail, and I'm actually going to go into a bit more depth and set listeners a challenge to go out and collect their first 100 or their next 100 subscribers. That will be fun, and of course I need a guinea pig for that. Who could I ask for that? Could be you, James, I think.

James Blatch: I have to start writing my book again.

Mark Dawson: You might need to, yeah, pull your finger out.

James Blatch: Good. My book is coming along. There's been a bit of a hiatus because we've been very busy with the 101 on the blogs, but the blogs are written and ready to go out and our third guy, our third amigo John Dyer will get those blogs online hopefully this week so you'll have them to look at over Christmas. I have to get my head down and get the rewrite done.

In terms of courses, just a quick note. One of the things we're doing today, you can't see, but behind you are whiteboards and complicated layouts for the next year, so we're looking at this stage for our advanced course on advertising for authors potentially for March, and potentially middle of the year probably we'll look at the 101 course again and be on that. We'll let you know as time goes on.

What you might be interested in, if you haven't done ... Mark's done three video lessons, completely free, on really the basics of mailing lists. We're going to redo those, aren't we? We're going to bring those up to date and we're going to let you know in the podcast because as I say, completely free, fantastic, valuable information, a really good start for people, and we'll let you know when they're rebranded and ready to go. At the beginning of the new year, there are definitely going to be ones to look out for.

Meanwhile, I guess we say Happy Christmas.

Mark Dawson: Happy Christmas, absolutely.

James Blatch: Thank you for my present.

Mark Dawson: You're welcome. Thank you for mine. Oh wait a minute, I didn't get one.

James Blatch: But you are on the slightly higher seat again.

Mark Dawson: I know. For those listening, I have the swivel chair today and James is on my dining chair.

James Blatch: Yeah, exactly. From both of us and from John as well, thank you so much for being a part of the SPF community. From Alexandra, from Kerry, from Catherine, and from Susan who are in the background for SPF and often answer your emails, we all want to say a very Happy Christmas to you. Have a lovely break over Christmas. Let's make 2017 the year of us. Everyone in this community is going to move themselves forward. We're excited about that. My personal journey as well. I'm delighted that you're along for the ride with us.

CHAPTER 42

FROM US MARINE TO SELF PUBLISHING SUCCESS - WITH THRILLER WRITER WAYNE STINNETT

**FROM U.S. MARINE TO
INDIE
AUTHOR
SUCCESS**



The intriguing career path of thriller writer, Wayne Stinnett

**EPISODE
#045**

IN THE FINAL SPF podcast of 2016, James briefly looks back at a year that held much promise for indie authors trying to advance their careers. It was also the year that the long-awaited Self Publishing 101 Course was launched with over 1000 students taking a step closer to becoming full-time, successful writers. Talking of which, in our last author interview of the year, James chats to US thriller writer, Wayne Stinnett, whose career path alone could form the plot of a book! Wayne has exploited his experiences as a US Marine and used them as inspiration for a book series that is now delivering handsome returns and allowing him to live that dream as a full-time author. The interview was conducted in Florida in September 2016 when the SPF team were attending the NINC conference there. Happy Days.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

[Wayne's website](#)

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TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 45 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to this little intermission podcast in the strange inter-nicene time between 2016 and 2017, so here we are between Christmas and New Year. Hopefully we'll get this up and ready to download either later today New Year's Eve, or tomorrow New Year's Day. This is a bit of a stopgap podcast. We've had a tremendously busy and successful 2016 and we've just taken a little bit of downtime with our families between Christmas and New Year, so it's just me today. Mark is over there in Salisbury preparing to see in the new year with his family, and John Dyer's down near Stansted Airport about 40 miles north of London with his family, and I'm the one working, but there you go.

We've done a little bit of work, all of us over Christmas, so an hour or two a day for SPF, but we are bracing ourselves for what's going to be a tremendous 2017. When I say a tremendous 2017, that entirely depends really on you because we are now a community of nearly 65 thousand writers, people who are interested in writing. And so your success is our success and vice versa.

This is a community and I'm very much a part of that. I'm really hoping that 2017 is going to be the year when I become an author as well, so that's taken a bit of a back-burner for me. We did the course

obviously in November and December and it was incredibly busy and writing was barely a focus or a feature of my life then.

I have to say hallelujah, since Christmas Day I've done a couple of hours a day writing. Tried to make sure I've just done my work in the mornings and left myself free in the afternoon to be with the family, and that's felt good and I'm getting back into it.

I think I mentioned before that I'm finding this stage quite difficult now, so post editors notes, writing with her voice in my mind with my discoveries of what I need to do to make the book better and to make it work.

I'm finding it much slower progress than I did before where I could just bash out thousands of words quite easily. So yeah, writing badly is easy and writing well is more difficult. Who knew that would be the case?

Now, this is not just going to be me rambling. We do have a really good interview with you today. One of my favorite moments of 2016, you haven't heard the interview before. It's relatively short for this little intermission podcast, but it's coming up in just a moment and you won't want to miss it.

We've got another course launch planned in March, which is going to be advertising for authors, but the more advanced course really gets into the detail of Facebook and social media advertising, which as Mark will tell you and will tell you ad nauseam, and you'll hear it from lots of other people in the industry.

That is the golden ticket. If you can understand that, you understand Facebook Ads, you understand social media advertising, you can find your audience. And that raises the issue that's occurred this week, and I'm not going to name her, but there has been a fairly high profile author who's published a blog disparaging self-publishing this week, and it's been brilliant to see our community reacting in a very positive way, mostly very dismissive.

This blog was very, very elitist, and basically said that most self-published books were not worthy of

being published, and it was a terrible thing for members of the public to be exposed to this awful writing without the gatekeeping process there.

Of course, it was utter nonsense. Very, very snobby and elitist. And as I think I made the point, I think I made it quite clearly on Radio 4 here in the UK earlier this year, surely it's down to readers to be the gatekeeper. Readers are the arbiter of whether the book is going to sell or not. It can always be published, everyone can publish anything, why should anybody not be allowed to publish? How dare you. You can't publish, you can publish.

Now, if your book's no good and no one wants to read it, no one will read it. If your book's good and people want to read it, people will read it. In fact, even if your book's not good but people want to read it, people will read it, and that's surely how it should be.

You wouldn't apply this logic, this gatekeeping logic this particular author was hanging on to to any other area of life. You know, standup comedians will start their trade and they'll go to the lowest pubs that take anybody and they'll hopefully end up at the Royal Albert Hall or Carnegie Hall or somewhere where they've been booked because they're tremendously successful. But they're allowed to start at the bottom.

They're allowed just to pitch up at local pubs and there's lots of open microphone evenings, I've even done one myself on one occasion, it was terrifying in London, and that's a good thing, right. And there's again, an ultimate arbiter because you've got the crowd there, and the point about that system is that they will get it wrong the first few times they do it, and then eventually they'll start to find their voice and they will become less terrified, and if they've got the perseverance, they'll learn their craft and they'll go on. That's a really pure market driven system if you like, you know, the audience being the market that you've got to sell to.

You would never say, would you, that there's going to be a secret group of agents of people who sit there who will never allow that person even to set foot inside the first pub and the first open mic evening, because they've decided that they're not good enough. And again, this is a point I think I made on Radio 4 about authors, so you know, J.K. Rowling and everybody else always famously have these rejection letters for their works early on.

Well, how many people of their ilk never got past the rejection letters, whose names we don't know, who went back to work at the car showroom or whatever and put away their typewriter in those days or whatever it was forever, because of that gatekeeping system?

Whereas now, that doesn't have to happen, and with the technology and the know-how, and we're part of that in SPF, we can enable people to publish their works and see how it's going to go. Even if you just do it for yourself, even if you write books for yourself and you see them up there for sale and you turn over tiny little pieces of money, but you're happy that you're writing and producing books, then that's a success story, right. That's a success story and don't listen to a word spoken by somebody who thinks that you shouldn't be able to publish.

Okay, rant over. It's a bit like a rant here. It's been an odd year. We've lost lots of people in 2016 and I was trying not to get too involved in the long list of celebrities who we've lost in this unusual year. I was thinking it's probably a product of mass media and that we know lots more people these days, but it really does feel shocking.

For me personally, Star Wars was a huge part of my life. I was 10 years old when I saw Star Wars for the first time, and Princess Leia, I had a strong mother, a strong role model. My mother was a leader in our house, and then as a 10 year old boy I saw this confident leader in Princess Leia and that's informed my hopefully positively view of women and probably the reason I have a strong female lead in my book today.

Pretty certain the world would be better if we had more women in charge, which I guess makes me a feminist in a way, but I'm probably not a very traditional feminist in that sense. But that Princess Leia character who I, yes, I also did fall in love with her, that's true, but that lead that she gave that was counter to the way women were presented to me at that time as a 10 year old boy, I've never forgotten it.

Even when she was doing the victim stuff, even when she was as a princess being held captive in the original Star Wars, she was still full of aggression and self-confidence and, you know, what did she say to Grand Moff Tarkin?

"I recognized your foul stench when I was brought onboard," she said to this guy at the head of the

Empire, played brilliantly by Peter Cushing at the time.

And so it was with great sadness, like just 10 years older than me Carrie Fisher died, and I was very fortunate that I met her earlier this year for the first time in my life.

And then of course her mother died heartbroken 24 hours later. And we all feel, well some of you don't, some of us do feel sort of emotional about that, but it's part of life.

It's also the stuff of stories isn't it, this thing that gets us going and makes us think and hits us hard. That's what we try to do in our stories, and we try to take those feelings and somehow through the craft of writing make people feel that way, get in touch with those base human emotions.

Anyway, I think I probably am rambling now summing up the year that we've had. I'm going to move on to our interview, and I'm going to leave you with the interview, so I won't be back afterwards, and it's a short interview, so for this intermission podcast. And it's one of my favorite moments of 2016 was interviewing this guy called Wayne Stinnett.

Now, many of you would've heard of him, many of you may not have done. But Wayne writes a series of books. He has a character called Jesse who's a retired marine and lives in the Keys in Florida. I think he runs a fishing charter boat. And what's great about this is that Wayne himself is a retired marine.

We spoke to Wayne, we'd had a lovely meal there on the Gulf Coast of Florida in September, I think at a place called Crabby Bills, I think that was it, and we'd eaten crab and seafood obviously and had a really nice meal. A few beers had gone down and I met Wayne and I said I've got to interview you Wayne for our podcast.

So I sat down with him and what's immediately apparent about Wayne, well two things are apparent.

One is that he's a really nice guy, one of the nicest guys you'll meet, and secondly is that if you got into any kind of trouble or danger, you would want this guy next to you. He just exuded that he could handle

himself and he could probably handle other people as well, which is no bad thing when you're writing about marines, so obviously he knows about what he writes. He's been very successful, Wayne, lovely guy.

I'm going to leave you with these 15 minutes or so that I spent with Wayne back in September. Mark and I will be back for podcast number 46. We've got a fantastic lineup.

We've got three or four months of podcasts already in the book, already recorded, well the interviews recorded. We'll do contemporaneous stuff as well. We're going to do some more masterclasses in 2017. Can't wait for all that to begin.

Finally, from me, from Mark, from John, from our team here at Self Publishing Formula, I want to say have a very happy 2017, a prosperous and successful 2017. Let's make it our year and I look forward to speaking to you next week.

Wayne Stinnett: My name's Wayne Stinnett. I'm the author of the Jesse McDermitt Caribbean Adventure series and the Charity Styles Caribbean Thriller series.

The first series is about a retired marine who moves to the Keys and becomes a charter fishing boat captain and gets into a lot of trouble and trouble always seems to find him no matter where he goes. It's nine books long, I'm working on the tenth one now.

JAMES BLATCH: A RETIRED MARINE, SOUNDS FAMILIAR. MAYBE A SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL?

Wayne Stinnett: A little bit, yeah. Jesse and I have the same moral compass. He's a lot taller and he's buff and fit and he has all his hair, but we have the same moral and ethical values I think.

JAMES BLATCH: GIVE US A LITTLE BIT OF BACKGROUND, WAYNE. YOU'VE ALLUDED TO THE FACT THAT YOU STARTED IN THE ARMED FORCES HERE IN THE US.

Wayne Stinnett: I served in the Marine Corps from 1977 and 1981, then again from '82 to '83. I served in Beirut during the Beirut bombing. Came home, started working in construction, moved up to management level, then the stress got too much and I started driving a truck. I did a whole lot of other things in between, jumping around from job to job but.

James Blatch: It's slightly odd to think that you were in the US Marines for a few years, but it was the stress of being a manager that got you, not the stress of-

Wayne Stinnett: Well, yeah. That's a whole lot more stressful.

In the Marine Corps you just do what you're told, and at management level, I'm the one telling others what to do. I had employees calling me at 11 o'clock at night, homeowners, builders, everybody.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's no good, that's for sure.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU THINK WRITING MIGHT BE IN YOUR FUTURE? YOU WERE DRIVING YOUR TRUCK AT THIS STAGE NOW.

Wayne Stinnett: I first started writing back in the 80s and I wrote several short stories and they didn't go anywhere. Of course, nothing back then, your only option was going through traditional publishing.

In 2013, my wife encouraged me to take up storytelling again. I had a lot of time on my hands in the truck, so I started writing stories and I compiled some of the short stories from back in the 80s into a full-length novel with a little bit left over, and that became the start of the second novel.

And I suddenly realized that I could probably make just as much money writing as I could driving a truck, so it was a no-brainer. I said, "Here's your keys, boss."

James Blatch: And when was that?

Wayne Stinnett: That was May 14th, 2014.

James Blatch: Okay, so it's only a couple of years ago.

Wayne Stinnett: Six months after I published the first book.

James Blatch: Wow, so only two years ago from where we are now, two years and a bit.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CAREER NOW IN TERMS OF YOUR SALES AND YOUR PRODUCTION LEVELS.

Wayne Stinnett: I'm trying to slow down, but something keeps kicking me. I think it's my main character, Jesse. He drives a boat, he tells me how fast to go, how slow to go.

But next year I want to go a little bit slower and get a little bit more in depth and a little bit longer novels. But next year I'll do two.

Every year for the past three years I've done three, sometimes four. And so I just want to slow down a little bit and enjoy what's going on now. Sales are up to, my average day now is 140, 150 books, and then an equal income from Kindle Unlimited.

James Blatch: So 140, 150 bucks or books?

Wayne Stinnett: Books, sales, and then almost an identical amount in income from Kindle Unlimited, and paperback sales, five or ten a day, and ebook or audiobooks, usually about eight or ten a day. It's taken a long time to get here, three years, three and a half years.

James Blatch: Well, it's not that long really and they're awesome figures, so congratulations Wayne, and a lot of people here look up to you and what you've done and where you are now and quite inspired by it as well. So I'm fascinated in the fact that the storytelling was always a thing, you say back in the 80s, and was Jesse, is it Jesse as your character?

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, back when I was just a little kid.

James Blatch: Oh, like Stephen King, right.

AS A BOY YOU TOLD YOUR FRIENDS STORIES.

Wayne Stinnett: My cousins would come over, my friends would come over, we'd go out and camp in the back yard and I'd tell stories and just make them up as I'm telling them.

And that got to be a habit and then I started writing stories, you know, little boys do, they write a short story on a back of a napkin or something.

And in the 80s I started doing it on a computer. I didn't have a computer, but my boss did, and I wrote a computer program that allowed me to cut back on my hours, but he had me on salary, so I had to stay all day, so I spent my time right. But I've always enjoyed entertaining people with the written word or with the verbal word.

James Blatch: There's a lot of depth to you, Wayne. You just said that you wrote a computer program at work to make your life, or to make the-

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, this isn't like computer programming, this is in the 80s. This was in-

James Blatch: Even more difficult.

Wayne Stinnett: This was in Basic. It made a little square on the computer screen and asked a question and you punched in a number and that's it. But it allowed the boss to eliminate two other estimators and I was the only estimator, and I only really worked four or five hours a day, so I had a lot of free time then.

James Blatch: And you did some writing.

AND YOU'RE ENTIRELY SELF-PUBLISHED?

Wayne Stinnett: Yes. 100%.

James Blatch: And you do all your own marketing or not?

Wayne Stinnett: I do all my own marketing. I hire somebody for editing, cover creation, proofreading, formatting. I hire a narrator to record the audios, but everything else, all the marketing I do myself. I'm the author, the publisher, the publicist, the agent, the chief bottle washer, you name it.

JAMES BLATCH: AND WHAT IS WORKING FOR YOU AT THE MOMENT IN TERMS OF MARKETING? WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE YOU USING?

Wayne Stinnett: BookBub is always the fundamental go-to answer if nothing else is working well. If you get accepted to a BookBub, you're going to have a really good month. It doesn't matter how bad sales have been.

But lately I'm doing a lot of marketing strategy on the actual launch, and trying to suppress that initial huge number of sales on the first day and spread that over three or four days until the Amazon algorithms kick in, and I think that will cause my book to stay at a higher rank. Not as high as if I did a sudden release to all my subscribers, but it'll allow it to get to a high enough rank to where it will stay and continue to stay at that rank.

JAMES BLATCH: HOW OFTEN DO YOU WRITE NOW?

Wayne Stinnett: Every day. Well, every weekday. I cut out weekends about six months ago. But I write every weekday for ever how long it takes to write 1200 or 1500 words.

James Blatch: Okay, so that's your word count, your daily word count you look for.

Wayne Stinnett: Well, it was a thousand a day seven days a week, and so now I'm cutting out weekends, so I had to make up for that and spread it out over the others.

JAMES BLATCH: AND ARE YOU A PLOTTER OR A PANTSER?

Wayne Stinnett: 100% pants. Well, except for the destination. I try to pick a place that I've been to that I'm familiar with and I think my readers might want to know about, and I tell my main character hey Jesse, go to Cuba, or go to Cozumel, he ended up in Cuba.

Once I start the book, I have no idea what the next paragraph will be, no idea the way the book's going to turn, what characters are going to be in it or anything.

JAMES BLATCH: AND YOUR BOOKS ARE SET WHEN? ARE THEY CONTEMPORARY?

Wayne Stinnett: No, about 10 years ago.

James Blatch: Okay. I was going to say, because how do you keep in touch with, I guess a lot of the marines stuff is the same, but significant parts of it will be different today.

Wayne Stinnett: I live seven miles from Parris Island where marines are made and eight miles from Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, so I've got a lot of Marine Corps around me and I can immerse myself in at any time I want to.

James Blatch: So you can write in the Ospreys and all the stuff they use today. Okay. So you're a pantsner as it were, you sit there, the stories come along. You've got quite a loyal audience.

HOW BIG IS YOUR LIST NOW?

Wayne Stinnett: My mailing list's about 2800, 2900. It's not real big, but it's all organic.

James Blatch: I'm surprised, because the sales you're getting, so a huge amount of sales off list are just coming through.

Wayne Stinnett: Well, what I think is to get a really huge mailing list, you have to give stuff away for free. When you do that, you end up with a bunch of people on your mailing list that are waiting for more free stuff.

Everybody on my mailing list, not a single one of them signed up because they got anything free. They signed up because they like the stories and they want to be notified what's going to happen next. I send an email to them twice a month, and I interact with them and we have contests.

My listeners or my readers have made up the names of some of my characters, some of the main character's equipment, and they contribute a lot to the stories too. In this latest one, I had so many contributors on this one just from my mailing list, about 30 or 40 people came up with ideas about this one character, one of the lesser protagonists.

JAMES BLATCH: ARE A LOT OF YOUR READERS IN THE MILITARY?

Wayne Stinnett: Quite a few of them. Surprisingly, a lot of women. I'd say my mailing list is probably 50/50, men and women.

James Blatch: Well, you're a good-looking man, Wayne.

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, well thank you. But I think it just, the characters reach anybody, any age group. They're just plain old people. They're not anything fancy, they don't drive around in fancy cars. He's got a five hundred thousand dollar boat, but, there are a couple of them. But he's a down to earth kind of guy and people just like that.

James Blatch: You've got a very personal relationship with this guy Jesse, and it doesn't seem to me like it's a sort of friendship in that sense. There's a business relationship between you and you sense him taking you in directions that you don't necessarily always want to go.

Wayne Stinnett: Jesse's been with me for a long time. The main character in the short stories I wrote 30 years ago was Jesse McDermitt. He's been my main character, he's been my alter ego for 30 something years now.

Back then, he was like me, served four years, got out of the Marine Corps and went back in. But now he's a retired marine, he's retired as a gunnery sergeant, he's a sniper instructor and the Marine Corps was his last billet.

And all he wants to do is go to the Keys and relax and fish and go scuba diving, and then somebody picks on somebody and he sees it or hears about it, and he doesn't like bullies, so he solves the problem. It's kind of vigilante justice.

James Blatch: So there's that moral compass that you were talking about, and obviously that's one of the reasons perhaps your books are so successful as they have that theme too in them, as well as simply a story.

THERE'S SOMETHING BEHIND, THERE'S SOME DEPTH TO THEM.

Wayne Stinnett: Yeah, well, when you stretch a character out over 10 or 11 books, your readers really get to know him. Some of my readers can tell you exactly what day he was born. I've never written it in any book, but I've alluded to it here and there enough.

James Blatch: They've worked it out.

Wayne Stinnett: Yeah, yeah. There are people that know when he was born, where he was born, what his first wife's name was, his second wife, his kids' names, his grandkids. They know every detail about him, and that's because there's been little droplets of it all throughout the 10 books, and they've gotten to know him like a friend.

JAMES BLATCH: AND HOW LONG'S JESSE GOING TO GO ON?

Wayne Stinnett: As long as I do. John D. MacDonald wrote 21 books in the Travis McGee series, and there was a big turning point in my life was when I found that first book and read Deep Blue Good-bye.

When I turned 16, I had to go to Fort Lauderdale to see Travis McGee, this hero I'd been reading about all these years. Drove down there, found the Bahia Mar Marina, but there's no Slip F18, and there's no boat there called the Busted Flush, and there's nobody named Travis McGee. And I was like, oh man, a big letdown for a 16 year old. So there's a lot of Travis McGee and John D in my books and in me, because everybody's a product of what they've read and what they've experienced throughout their life.

JAMES BLATCH: DO YOU THINK THERE ARE PEOPLE GOING DOWN TO THE KEYS LOOKING FOR JESSE?

Wayne Stinnett: That'd be cool if there is. That'd be really cool. The island where he lives is a real place. It exists. I used to go camping there all the time, but the main hangout, the Rusty Anchor Saloon, it doesn't exist, it's an empty lot. But one day soon, who knows, maybe there will be a Rusty Anchor Saloon there.

JAMES BLATCH: HAS HOLLYWOOD BEEN INTERESTED?

Wayne Stinnett: I've had a couple of people send books to people that they knew, but nobody's contacted me. It'd be nice. Just to get an option, that would be pretty cool.

James Blatch: A sort of film I'd probably go and see. You've done terrifically well, Wayne.

Congratulations on your career and it's great to chat to you because it's quite inspirational to hear, and what a life you've led as well.

Wayne Stinnett: Oh, just, yeah, having fun.



AT SELF PUBLISHING FORMULA, we often bang on about the importance of building an email list. It's the most important piece of digital property you're ever likely to own as an author - perhaps even more than your books. That's because your email list is the jump start to every book launch. Up to now we've never really gone in depth to tell you exactly what comprises a list and how to build one. That all ends today. This episode of The Self Publishing Formula is the first of a series of podcast episodes that will unpack the mystery of mailing lists and teach you how, step by step, to build your own. It's the crucial component of a successful author career so listen carefully!

SO WHAT IS A MAILING LIST?

A mailing list is a collection of names and corresponding email addresses that you own and are able to send correspondence to. But there's more to it than that. The kind of email list we're talking about on this episode is one where the people who are on your list have **CHOSEN** to be on the list. They have asked to be added because they're interested in the type of things you promise to share through your list. That's a

powerful thing! It enables you to engage with readers without fear of spamming or bothering them. They want in on what you've got to offer.

LIST BUILDING IS CAREER BUILDING!

Your mailing list will allow you to start creating long-lasting relationships with readers that will pay dividends not only when it comes to book launches but also with regard to research, feedback and writing inspiration. Getting the relationship right is key. Mark offers up some clear advice on how to go about this.

BUILD YOUR FIRST EMAIL LIST.

Mark and James take a hands-on, practical approach in this episode, walking you step by step through the process of building an email list. The first thing Mark suggests you do once you've decided on the method you will use to collect your subscriber information is to reach out to 10 people you know personally - family or friends - and tell them what you're doing and ask if they would be interested in being part of your list. It's an easy but often overlooked way of getting your list started.

KEEP IT GOING.

There's never a time when you should feel that your email list is large enough, no matter how big it gets. Mark and James discuss the various ways you can build your mailing list on an ongoing basis - with more tips, tricks and advice to come in the weeks ahead.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James and Mark introduce this episode about mailing lists.
- This is the first of 3 episodes about mailing lists - how it's going to work.
- Why SHOULD you have a mailing list?
- What tools can you use to build your mailing list?
- How to begin building your list.
- The importance of growing and maintaining the relationship with your list.
- How often should you send email to your list?
- Using social media to grow your mailing list.
- Additional methods to give people opportunity to join your mailing list.
- The challenge for this week: Get 10 subscribers by the next episode.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Brain.FM](#) productivity tool

- [ConvertKit](#)
- [MailChimp](#)
- [Infusionsoft](#)
- [Ontraport](#)
- [Wisestamp](#)
- [Ads For Authors](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 46, from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Happy new year, Mark.

Mark: Happy new year James, how are you?

James: Yeah I'm really good, and rearing to go. We had a little break over Christmas, sort of a break. You basically work every day-

Mark: We did.

James: When you're running your own business.

Mark: Yep, yep, can't.

James: What did you call me? Unbelievable.

Mark: You can't stop.

James: That is going to get us the explicit tag, apologies to sensitive listeners. Yes we can't stop, but it's great. I love the work that we do, and 2017, I'm really hoping, praying is going to be the year that I become an author. I'm not saying necessarily I'll become a successful author, but I will become an author with a published book and it's really exciting. I'm getting back into my writing, which is very difficult to do during the launch period but I'm doing a bit every day, and in fact I'll just on this subject that I have got quite into Brain FM, which is something that you introduced me to. You I think still use it, so if you don't know what Brain FM it's a kind of productivity ... Well it is a productivity tool, what happens is that it plays you some music, sort of ambient music and you can choose three different types. There's focus to help you focus on work, there's meditation I think and relax might be the other one. Best with headphones, it says, so a decent pair of headphones.

For me, the focus music actually is perfect for writing a thriller because it's quite tense music, quite portentous and it just rumbles in the background and it really, really works for me. I have a very cluttered office around me at the moment, I have lots of things going on and it's kind of a mental barrier for me to suddenly switch off from everything here and go into my novel and start writing. Actually Brain FM really helps me, I stick the headphones on, start the music and suddenly distractions are nowhere to be seen and the hour or so I set myself to work flies by. I'm not sure about the psychology behind it, we have actually reached out to them. I've contacted them and asked if they'll come on the podcast and I haven't heard anything back, and I think you've done the same thing, haven't you, at some point?

Mark: Yep, they've blanked me as well.

James: They've blanked both of us, but anyway, we are fans of their product, we're not affiliates and they don't talk to us so we have nothing to gain from this. I think these little things help, the old Pomodoro timer thing which I don't know if you've used those in the past Mark, but they're useful brain tricks as well, but for me there's something about this music and I strongly associate the book with it. I think it does somehow help me keep that sense of momentum going in the book, of what's going to happen. Even feeds in perhaps to the way that I'm writing, which is useful.

Mark: Yeah no, I used it this morning. I had two and a half thousand words today, and I had about three or four sessions, which I do half an hour sessions and then go up and stretch my legs for a bit. That worked

quite well, so yeah, I've been using it for a while. It's effective, and it could just be that it's a placebo effect but it doesn't really matter at the end of the day. If you think it helps you and you're getting your words in, it doesn't matter if it works or if you just think that it works, that's the end of it really.

James: Yeah it is, and we're going to talk about podcasts. We're not going to talk about, this is a podcast. We're going to talk about mailing lists today, and we're going to introduce that in a moment, it's going to be our main topic. We are overdue a full session on productivity, so we'll find if we come up with a Brain FM people just ignore us, we'll find somebody else to talk about productivity. I'm showing off my new Apple Watch 2, which I got this morning in the Apple store in Cambridge. Over Christmas I decided to stop ignoring the stand up now, breathe now things that come up on your Apple Watch and decided for a bit I would do them religiously, and again without sounding too gimmicky it's really worked for me, particularly the breathing. If you follow that once an hour I think it really does help your physiology and certainly standing up and circulating and getting circulation moving.

We know that sitting down is very bad for bodies, and so I think you start to put all these things together, you generally start to have a fresher, more energetic approach to life and to your work and goodness knows we need it, don't we, because we have a lot going on at any one time and to get it right does require not just doing it but doing it well.

Mark: Yeah exactly, I've had a standing desk put into the other room in my office just before Christmas and that's going quite well. I'll tend to be in this room to write, it's also quite quiet in here so we can do podcasts and things, and then in the afternoon normally I'll go and stand up and do emails and admin stuff that I can't get away from. That's quite nice, that works quite well for me. I try and get out and walk around Salisbury in the daytime as well. It's important to get the blood moving, definitely.

James: Good, okay. We said we were going to move on to our main topic of the day, and that is going to be mailing lists. There's barely an episode goes by on our podcast where we don't mention a mailing list, and that's for good reason. It should be central to your marketing plan as an indie author, and in fact any kind of online business generally revolves around a list today. Mark will suss out some of the fundamentals of why that's the case in a moment, but just before we move onto that Mark, why don't you just set out, because this is the first of three episodes we're going to be doing on this very important subject. Just suss out how the three episodes are going to work.

Mark: Yeah I wanted to kind of do something for the new year, something that is important that the community can get behind and do together. Mailing lists was the obvious thing that jumped out to me, and what we've done is we've split up, as you say, the next three episodes will be effectively a one month challenge where we will look at a number of different strategies and tactics that indie writers can use to build their mailing lists. We'll start fairly simple with today's episode, and then as we go into the second and third parts we'll do some paid traffic and then we'll end up with InstaFreebie. We've got some interviews lined up, he's a bit of a ninja on Twitter. We've got him next week I think, and then I'm hoping to speak with Ashley from InstaFreebie, week, or would be week four, which would be the third part of the series. The aim is nothing too ambitious, it will be from zero to a hundred subscribers.

If you're just starting out, it will be a path that you can follow to get your first hundred subscribers, or if you are slightly further along the line it will be your next hundred subscribers. As is the case with the 101 course, the thing that we needed is a guinea pig and when I'm thinking about guinea pigs the first person that comes to mind is not your cat, James is looking behind himself for-

James: Cat's gone.

Mark: Those who are listening rather than watching on YouTube, the cat's gone. The guinea pig is you James, so we're going to be looking at your list which I think is around about 45 strong at the moment which is thanks mostly to the fact that you're in the SPF community and you've got lots of authors following you on board. What we're going to be doing now is to try and reach out beyond that and add some more people to that list so that when you're ready to launch the book you've got a ready-made audience to launch it to.

James: Okay, well I'm excited of course to do that, and the more people I tell that my book's coming out the more I have to write it and get it out, so that's always helpful. Motivational, another productivity tool, the law of unintended consequences, so good, okay, well let's get into this. This is just again to clarify the beginning, this is something that anybody can follow in terms of the fundamentals through to the more advanced stages of by the end of this, and certainly InstaFreebie, it's something that we're doing. Lots of people around us are doing, you do a lot, but for me at my stage I don't really understand the mechanics of how I would get involved in that, so I'm looking forward to learning that. That will be more of use to people who are up and running already.

Mark: Yes, that one will be, but you need something, the freebie kind of gives it away. You need something to offer to potential subscribers for free in order to get them onto your mailing list. You might not be quite ready for that but you will be ready for pretty much everything else and especially today and good bits of next week as well.

James: Okay good, so let's start at the beginning. Why should I have a mailing list?

Mark: Well there are a number of reasons for that. We could have a whole podcast on why people need a mailing list, but I'm going to assume kind of a basic level of knowledge but the general principal is simple. In an ideal world, wouldn't it be amazing if we could go to Amazon and ask them for an email address from everyone that's bought our books or downloaded our books, and that would be great for all of the other platforms as well. The problem is they're not going to give you that information. They can't give it to you legally because of data protection reasons and beyond that it's also, it's customer information, proprietary information very valuable to those platforms, so it wouldn't be something that they would be prepared to give out to people who use that platform because of course you could just circumvent them and go directly to those readers. The downside to that is you're kind of mortgaging your future on the whims of those retailers.

To kind of give a doomsday example, I'm not saying this is going to happen. I suspect it won't happen but it is possible that tomorrow Jeff Bezos rolls out of bed in his palatial Seattle mansion and decides that he's actually a bit fed up of giving greedy authors 70% of the cover price and he thinks it's more reasonable to give them 30%. If that was to happen, and we have no way of reaching our readers, we would effectively be ... There'd be nothing we could do about it. What you can do with a mailing list is you can reach out straight to your readers, into their mailing email boxes which is still the most effective form of marketing these days and tell them that they can buy the next book directly from your website, or they could go to Apple or they could go to Kobo, Barnes and Noble, whatever retailer you decide to concentrate on, you can pivot and send them there.

You can't do that if you don't have a mailing list, so that's the main reason. It's insulation to protect you from those kinds of unexpected situations that could otherwise damage your business. Beyond that there are a couple other really, really useful ... There's dozens of useful reasons why you should have one, but two other ones that are important, you can start to recruit from a mailing list and build an advanced team. Advanced teams are just the most amazing ... They offer the most amazing facility for authors. You can get things like beta testing done, so after you've had your book professionally edited and advanced him to go

through it and pick up errors that might have slipped through the net, you can get reviews when the book launches. That's very important as you offer it out to a wider audience to have lots of reviews on that page.

Social proof just makes it more likely that someone who might not otherwise have heard of you will take a chance on you and write it because people are reporting that they've enjoyed the book. There's fact checking, you can build Facebook custom audiences with a mailing list, and advertise to them. There really are almost countless reasons why you should have one, so I'm going to assume at this point that I've been convincing enough as we're talking, James, and you have decided that you can see the value in having one. Assuming that you do, we will look at some simple tactics as to how you can actually go out and start to recruit.

James: Okay, I'm convinced, well done. Let's start at the very beginning and assume that we've just set up, as you ... People who've done one of our courses, [inaudible 00:12:27] will know that I've set myself up in Convert Kit, was my choice. You need to make a decision at the beginning of how you're going to physically gather the emails. It doesn't necessarily involve an email provider, does it? You could do this manually, but what are your tips for starting out?

Mark: There are two ways you could do this. Both are fine, you don't have to have a mailing list provider, although my advice would be that you should have one. It's probably beneficial to have one right from the start, but if for some reason you don't want to go down that route right away you could collate email addresses on a piece of paper with a pencil if you wanted to. I'm not recommending that as a way forwards, but you need some way to maintain those addresses and that would be effective. Alternatively you could open up spreadsheets, Google sheets, or you could open up an XLS and record them there. When you have something to say to those people it would just be a case of opening up your email client and then dropping them in your BCC field and emailing out. The downsides to that, and this is from someone who did this when he started out because he's an idiot, it's quite time-consuming as you get more and more people joining your list.

You have to send out emails every day, you have to manually put those addresses in then you've got to cut and paste, put the email in. If you're giving them a free book you've got to cut and paste the book, the file into the email, send it out. Assuming that you haven't jumped off a bridge after doing that for two or three weeks, the other downside to that is there is a good chance that your email service provider or your ISP will suggest that you might be spamming people by sending out the same email over and over and over

and over again, and it is possible to have your account shut down. Those are kind of the downsides to that. The other way of doing things, as we say, is to actually get an account with a professional email service provider. For the purposes of this quick discussion we'll focus on two and I'll make kind of a third suggestion for those who are more advanced.

The first suggestion and this mirrors what we said in the 101 course, is that MailChimp is still a very valid way of starting out with an email list. It's cheap, in fact it's free until you have your first 2,000 subscribers. The features are fairly plentiful, they're quite easy to use. There's a very good reason why it's the big player, that they are entry level and powerful enough to satisfy most needs. That would be my kind of recommendation for most people. If you're a little bit more confident with that kind of service and with the software then it makes a bit more sense, I would say, to future-proof yourself and give yourself a little bit more power in reserve for when you're at a level that that power will become useful. As I look back on having a MailChimp list for four years, and I've got like 65,000 people on that list now, it is starting to get, in fact it is beyond starting to get, it is very complicated.

There are lots of different lists, emailing, doing a mass email out to my list requires me to copy emails, send them out 12, or 13 times. It's not efficient, people get them more than once if they were on more than one list. Generally just a pain in the neck.

James: Is it worth just explaining, again, for people like me at the beginning, and this is something I've discovered, is the slightly different way that MailChimp and the early startup ones work from the more advanced ones. You talked about having different lists there, so when you bring people in you set up a form on a landing page or somewhere, people type in their name and email address and you decide at that point what list they're going to go into within MailChimp and that's nice and organized for you, particularly at the beginning so you might just have one list or you more likely will have a campaign that you ran over December and they go into that list.

Then later down the line you'll do what you've ended up doing where you'll think, "Well I'll just combine these two lists," because they're basically the same people now. Or you may run a campaign specifically at those people and not the other people, and it gets complicated. At the beginning it's quite useful and you could talk about it being powerful in terms of marketing because you've got different lists and you can target your emails more specifically at people, which is a key part of getting marketing right. When it gets to the point where you have 20 lists it becomes silly, and it becomes very difficult and unwieldy. You go up to the next level, with ConvertKit, and at the top end Infusionsoft, and there are quite a few others. The

way they operate is fundamentally different, so they're based more on business CRMs which are these big databases of all your customers.

You have effectively one list, might be one way of thinking about it. On that list you can tag people to identify them, so you could tag them and you can create as many tags as you like. Have a thousand of them if you want, but probably 50 or 60 is more likely. For instance when you set up that form on your landing page you'll have a tag because they come in on that form, that form will say how they came into your list in the first place. If they've opened an email they get another tag, if they've bought a book of yours they get another tag. In the end you've got one big list, people only appear on there once but you've got a lot of history about each person. That is very powerful because that means you really can then write an email very specifically to people, for instance, who downloaded your free book but did nothing else, or bought one book but did nothing else.

That's a different email to somebody who's read three of your books and is waiting, is on the advanced reader team for instance. You can see, that's the fundamental difference between those. There are some other differences within that in terms of the bells and whistles available to you. Fundamentally they are the difference between the entry ones, you talk about MailChimp and the more advanced ones that we're moving on to now.

Mark: Yep, that's it. I mean, MailChimp is list-based and Infusionsoft and ConvertKit and Intraport and Active Campaign, all those kinds of alternatives are subscriber-based. The subscriber-based ones are neater and more powerful but they're also more complicated. That's kind of the split. For the purposes of people who are just starting out, MailChimp is absolutely fine. I wouldn't recommend getting into the heavier stuff, we are just converting our SPF list across into Infusionsoft, and we can see the power that it offers but there's a reason why it's called 'Confusionsoft' by some people. That's worth bearing in mind, but for the purposes of this discussion I would say if you're literally just starting out then it is fine just to have a spreadsheet for now. We can import those names into your service provider of choice later. Otherwise, get a MailChimp account.

Doesn't cost anything, and it's pretty easy to use. Either those two will be fine for the purposes of this little session.

James: Okay, so that's the starting point, making a choice about that. Let's for instance say, I mean I'm

working in ConvertKit but I think MailChimp's a more likely option for people. We haven't talked about price actually, it's just worth saying, isn't it, that MailChimp do have this really attractive offer which is they are free to use up to 2,000 people on your list. That's really enticing for new authors, so there's no commitment at that stage. 2,000's a fair size, that means you're getting well into your startup of your author career before you have to pay a penny with the others don't necessarily offer that option. Let's talk about MailChimp perhaps from now on even though I'm actually going to be working within ConvertKit. I've got MailChimp, yeah I've got MailChimp set up, what \$29 a month, set up and now I need some names on it. Obviously I've got my dad, I've got you, I've got Mrs. Dawson and John Dire.

Actually in my case I've been very lucky as you say because I host the podcast and lots of lovely friends in the SPF community, and people like Andrea and Lucia and Michelle over there in the States, and Jackson I think and John have all jumped onto my list and given me some good feedback on my emails as well. I've got a little start with 45 noses, probably above average who've literally just started. People are probably going to have maybe six or seven names from their immediate family that they can persuade to go on there. How do you go beyond that?

Mark: Well we're going to assume that actually people have got zero, so what we're going to do, the first weeks we'll break this episode down into the first two weeks. We look at kind of optimizing passive growth in the second half of this episode, and to start with we're going to look at just asking. I want people to just sit down and have a think and then reach out to 10 friends or acquaintances and just ask them whether they'd like to be on your mailing list. In fact I wouldn't even mention the words mailing and list, what I would say is something along the lines of, "I've got a new book out," and then I'd say, "It is," and then you give them the elevator pitch. It could be in your case, it's about experimental bombers in the 6, there's a crash, or whatever the very, very quick, two sentence pitch. Just finish it with, "Would you be learning more about that?" You can communicate that message by way of email.

That's obviously the most congruent and the most obvious way of doing it if you say it's people at work, I just sent them an email giving them that kind of information. It's equally valid, you could say to people that you meet at the gym for example or church or wherever you are, you can just pass that message over, see what they say. Your next step obviously is going to be dependent on what they do, so let's assume first of all that they ... You're going to get plenty of people who say yes, so your closest friends will say yes because they don't want to piss you off, right? We'll assume that you asked me and I said yes so you've got my email address, that's on your list. If you get a few people who are saying no, that doesn't necessarily have to be the end of that particular attempt to get someone on the list. What you would do next is, first of all you mustn't feel slighted or grieved that someone has said they're not interested in learning more about

that particular book.

As authors, that's something that we're going to have to develop. We're going to have to develop thick skins because you're going to get bad reviews, you're going to get people unsubscribing from your list or reporting you for spamming them even when you didn't, all of this kind of thing is going to happen quite a lot so we need to toughen up early on and make sure that doesn't bother us.

James: I think that's important because it's not so much telling people to have a thick skin when this happens but I think the fear of people saying no will actually stop some people asking in the first place. Just remember, don't be afraid if people say no, don't worry about if it's going to happen, don't let that stop you asking.

Mark: Also some people, this is something generally we are afraid of asking ... I think there's another podcast on this but you could probably have a psychologist on the show to talk about why this might be but I think there is a kind of a natural inferiority complex because we were indie publishers. Even though the stigma is pretty much gone now at least within our community, many people still see it as a less attractive way of publishing than going the traditional route. I think that does bleed through into a number of other consequences, one of which is that we can sometimes be reluctant to push our work. This is an example of doing this, is to say, "Look, I've got a book. I'm not going to be too bullish about it because it's not really that good, you know?" All that kind of stuff and I'm as guilty, I was as guilty of that as anybody. I'm not really anymore, I know my stuff is entertaining so I don't have a problem with offering it to people.

The way I'll tell you to get around that is to say that you're not asking them for a favor. You're doing them a favor, you're telling them about something that you think they will like, you've got to be confident about that. It's not an imposition to ask someone to learn more about what you're doing, look at it the other way round, that you're offering them an opportunity. Maybe it's a non-fiction book that they'd be helped by or maybe you're offering them several hours of entertainment for free because this is the kind of book that they'd like to read. That's the kind of mind shift thing I think is important, but let's go back and think about if someone has said no to you. You can still spin that into another opportunity because what I would recommend in that instance is just say, "Okay well that's completely fine, that might not be for you but do you know anybody who might be interested in my book about 196 fast jets crashing in Cambridgeshire, right?"

Then we can see what they say, it's possible that they might then broadcast that message outside of your immediate circle of friends into theirs, possibly beyond that. This isn't costing anything, it's just asking people whether they know anybody who would enjoy what you're doing. You can always parley something that could otherwise be seen as a negative into a positive.

James: Okay, so we get over that, we start to think, and again this goes back to something we talk about a lot, about mindset and getting ourselves into business brain and detaching ourselves a little bit from the emotional side of things, treat it like a business. We've reached out to our ten people, and just so I'm specific on the aim here, do we keep going until we've got ten, that's the idea, rather than reach out to ten until-

Mark: I would, yeah, so this is the first week. So if you reached out to ten, then think about it and reach out to another ten, most people have more than ten friends or family. Reach beyond that and see if you can get some more. I say just keep doing that until you feel that you've reached the limit of the kinds of people who you're comfortable with asking. When we were working in the office we could have probably found ten people in the office who might have been interested, other people will find that in their work environments, their friends and their family, all that kind of stuff. Keep going, so that's the task for the first week is to try and get some of those people to say yes. Assuming that they do say yes, some people are going to say yes, what do you do next? The most important thing is you've got to maintain that information, so it could be that you take out your pen and paper and you write that down.

It could be that you put it into your spreadsheet, or preferably you import them into your MailChimp list, you'd add them to that list. Nothing else, you don't need to do anything else at this stage. You don't have anything necessarily that you'd want to ... You have nothing to sell them, you haven't really got anything to give away at that stage. I've seen some of your emails, James, on your list and apart from the fact that they're really excellent and I've told you that before, they're building anticipation for your book when it's ready so you could start to do that. For the people who want to see James' emails we'll put that link in the show notes so we can get people to sign up. See, I've found you ten new readers already James.

James: I think it's Salesforce.com

Mark: There you go, Salesforce.com It's worth signing up just to see what James does when he doesn't have anything ready to offer right now.

James: That's my ten done, isn't it?

Mark: Yes your ten, you can rest and put your feet up now. Your task is a hundred, ten's too easy for you so we're going to get you another hundred. Once you've added them in, I think it's just a good idea just to email them back and just to say, "Thank, that's great, glad to have you on board." If you haven't got the email just because maybe you asked them verbally then just say, "Look, what's your email address, let me know. It's the most convenient way for me to reach you and tell you about this project and tell you when I've got something that you'd be interested in." Get them to give you that email address and then record it, and that is a tick in the box, you're good to go.

James: You've got your recording system, which we're assuming might be MailChimp, it might be just doing it very manually. Second you've reached out, you've got their names, without being too very basic about this at some point I know you're going to talk about other ways of reaching people in a moment. Can we just mention what you should do in terms of sending the people emails at this stage, particularly if you're doing it manually?

Mark: I think email them back and say, "Thanks for saying yes, I'm delighted that you're interested in my project," whatever that might be. Just say, "Look, I'll reach out again when I've got something that I think you'd be interested in hearing." Just to acknowledge-

James: I've done a series of three that does effectively that, tells a short story in each. You could just do that as a single email at this stage, "Thank you for being on the list." Do you worry at this stage of it going dormant or quiet for a little bit? I know people start to panic if they've managed to get, say 60 names on their list, how often should they ... I don't want to jump ahead Mark, I know you're going to move on to these things but how often should they be thinking about sending an email?

Mark: That depends on the author and the genre and the expectations that you've set. I don't email my list very often, probably not often enough actually but I'm kind of on the, if you've got a spectrum I'd be on the side that doesn't do too many emails apart from when I've got something that I think they might be interested in. It could be a free Birkenhead or a competition, or especially a launch. Other authors, I mean Wayne Stettin, who we had on the show last week, as he said in the interview he has a compact list of about two and a half thousand readers but they're very dedicated to him and he nurtures that relationship

by emailing them twice a month, and I've seen Wayne's emails. They're exactly what you'd expect, they're avuncular, they're friendly, certainly what you'd think you'd get from Wayne. That's another way of doing it, other authors will do it every week but it depends on ...

There's no point emailing if you've got nothing to say because you'll certainly get people unsubscribing if they think, "Oh God, here comes another of James' emails where his bloody cat," whatever it is. Find a natural rhythm. Don't feel that you have to communicate with them every month because if you haven't got anything to say because you're busy working on that novel then it might be better to wait until you've actually got something concrete to actually tell them about.

James: Okay, all right, so so far we've asked people.

Mark: Yes, we've kind of asked them, asked our immediate circle of friends and maybe a couple of circles beyond that. What I would say next in the first week, so before we get on to the other bits and bobs the next thing to do is to try and repeat that process on whatever social media platform that you're most prevalent on, the platform that you've chosen or the platforms perhaps. Facebook is the one for me, that's the one I'm most active on. Just put a message and definitely don't spam people about this. No-one likes authors who are always going, "Get my free book, get my free book," or whatever, just always pushing that message. It doesn't work like that, it's the same kind of principle. Put out a message in those early days, just saying that you've got a project you're working on and would you like to learn more about it so that you can communicate? Just try and reach out to people that way. You could do it by way of direct message or you could do it as a kind of a broadcast to the followers of our profile.

That would be another way to do that, but look at Facebook, Twitter is the same. Just to reach out to people who you might be connected to and then try to slowly build that list up from those other sources.

James: Social, and we're talking organic at the moment rather than anything too advanced here. There's no money going into this, this is simply where you exist. Lots of people I think, probably you're Facebook, I'm probably a mixture of Facebook and Twitter but we're that generation we're more likely to be Facebook. Others listening to this, who are dare I say it Mark, younger than us-

Mark: We don't have young listeners, James.

James: No, it might be more Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest-

Mark: Snapchat most likely.

James: Where they're hanging out. And Snapchat of course, yeah. Anywhere that you hang out effectively, you can start to use that. Again, keep it friendly, keep it personable, as if you've met a couple of friends you haven't seen that often in the pub and they ask you how you're doing and you say, "Oh yeah, I'm writing a book. If you want to hear more you can find out here," that type of approach you were talking about. Not overloading, overboarding, not making yourself sound spammy.

Mark: Yep, no, absolutely, very low-key, very friendly, conversational, that's the way to do it. The preferable way is probably to reach out to people individually, there's a better chance that those messages will get through. For goodness' sake don't spam, because that's not the relationship that you want to be setting up early doors.

James: Yeah, there's a whole are there and I hope we can get into it, not today but in one of the other two episodes we'll talk more about frequency I think. I keep quite a close eye on the authors in our community and wider, and how often people are emailing. I've noticed quite a high profile name who we've had on the podcast in the past has suddenly ramped up how often they are sending out Tweets and links to their books, and they've obviously made a conscious decision about that. Before we say, "You shouldn't go too overboard," it's worth us perhaps fishing around a little bit and finding out what sort of results people have had. There's a couple of other names that come to mind, of people I think are very active in terms of putting this stuff out about themselves and the books and that, basically all their social media account is. I'll be interested to know how that operates as opposed to you and I being slightly more-

Mark: I'll give you a clue.

James: You don't think it'll work at all?

Mark: Badly, no of course not, I know who you're talking about. No, it's not a good idea.

James: There's a couple actually, there's somebody else you probably don't know, I was talking about her, I have noticed has suddenly started ramping it up. Anyway, okay good. So we're still in basically week one here.

Mark: Yes, we are. The second part of week one, or kind of this should be done pretty much right from the start because it's a little bit of work at the start which will pay off without any further work forever. What I'd call this is optimizing passive growth, so it's looking at primarily those social channels that we just mentioned and making it as easy as possible for people who stumble across your various profiles to sign up to a mailing list. The principles are the same as we mentioned when it comes to the retailers, there's not much point in for example trusting Mark Zuckerberg with the list of people who are interested in our books because as he demonstrated five years ago Facebook went from being a platform where you could reach almost all of your followers with one broadcast out to being one where you'd reach 1 or 2% of your followers and to get the other 98% you had to pay.

Obviously that's opened up loads and loads of opportunities for authors who are prepared to learn how to do that. We want to make sure that we get them onto a platform that we control, not anybody else. We want to get them onto our mailing list. Traffic will be increasing to us through our social channels as we become more set down as authors. We want to make sure that it, as I say, it's easy for people to get onto the list. Let's start with Facebook. I did a webinar when we were promoting the 101 course, and we looked at some of these things. It was all about mailing lists, and one of the things that we did was I basically surprised you with a question in the middle of the webinar where we looked at the Facebook page for my books and I asked what the three avenues were or the three opportunities that people could take to join my mailing list. I think you got all three of them, can you remember what they were?

James: Yes, I remember that you can ... First of all there's a button which you can choose, which I think you're going to talk about in more detail in a moment. There is the banner itself which is the one I know that not everyone works out, but you can actually do something so that you can click the picture itself. From memory, I can't remember the third one. There's another learn more somewhere, isn't there? Or about.

Mark: It was an app, yeah.

James: That's app.

Mark: There are three, so the easiest one is actually the call to action button. As you set up your Facebook page which is something that takes literally ten, or I don't know, 30 seconds probably to do those, very, very straightforward. One of the things that you can do is to assign a function to the button, if you look on the top right-hand-side of a Facebook page, so you look at mine, I think it's Mark Dawson Author on Facebook. You'll see something like Subscribe or Learn More or Sign Up or something along those lines. That's something that you can assign and if people sign up and it's connected to your MailChimp account for example then people will join your list by doing that, it will take them through to a landing page where they can then sign up and they're on the list. That's really, really easy. The second most easy way to do it, and also as you say the one that people don't often realize is possible, is to provide a link when people click on the banner.

The image for my page at the moment is a grab from the New Milton Cover for Blackout, which is out next month, and available at all good bookshops by the way. I'm such a professional.

James: Spammy.

Mark: If you click on that banner ... Spammy, exactly. It provide them with a kind of a link that they can then click that you can direct them to say a shop if you're selling something or to a sign up page, to a landing page, which is what I do. The third and final way is bit more complicated and people will need to Google this because it's a bit beyond what we can tell people in this format, but you can get what Facebook refers to as apps and they slide into certain spaces in the left hand side of the page. One of those apps is a little software snippet that will connect your MailChimp account with your Facebook profile or your Facebook page and will enable people just to ... I think mine says, "Get more books," or, "Get my books." Clicking on that will then take you straight through again to MailChimp and you can sign up that way. By doing that, the reason why you need to do this is, maybe let's say that takes an hour to set that up.

It doesn't take an hour to do that but let's just say on the pessimistic side that's how long it will take. You do that work in that first week and then it will continue to pay you back ad infinitum. Every week I would suspect, I haven't tested this for a little while but I think I'm getting between 20 and 25 signups through that Facebook page, through those three ways of getting in. There's no other work involved in that, it is

completely passive. Anything that you can do that will deliver you a benefit without you needing to do too much work is a good thing, so that is something that we should definitely make sure that listeners and our guinea pig, looking at you James, making sure that you've got all those functions set up on your page.

James: Yeah, that's definitely something I need to be doing and making sure that's all there. Two things occur to me about that, first of all it's a fantastic way of when you look at your spend and people who have already started dabbling in Facebook advertising, Twitter ads to build their list and they look at how much they're paying for conversions, of course you've got to look at that holistically and these 12 or 20, whatever you're going to get a week from that should go into that total figure you got against your total spend, and that makes your per email much better, starts to make it look better so it's a really important thing where you have an opportunity of getting them for free, set that up. The second thing, a really important point to make is that the journey that somebody takes once the click one of these buttons has got to be right. It's got to be a clean, purposeful, targeted journey.

It's funny, we talk about landing pages and I talk to fellow authors, look at me, fellow authors, other authors who say, "Yeah yeah, I'm all across landing pages and it's so important," and you look at what you hit when you click on, "Learn more" off their Facebook page or even their adverts and you get this blog site that has a list of menu options at the top, it has their latest blog at the top, below it, scroll down, everything they've done for eons. Over the right hand side there might be a sign up button by which time the person who's clicked on something saying, "Sign up now for a free book" is completely lost and then having to navigate their way through this page. You want at that point, somebody clicks on that banner, clicks on a learn more button on your Facebook page you want them to hit a traditional landing page. Clean, uncluttered, if you go to Jamesblache.com you can see the one we created for me for the course.

That's about as much as you'd ever want on that landing page, a little bit about the author, a little bit about the book, nice bit of blurb, but right across the middle of it somewhere to click and put your email address in.

Mark: Yeah exactly, it's a big focus in the ads course on building clean landing pages. As soon as you start to implement those simple deletions really, removing stuff from the page, you'll see your conversion percentage will go up and up and up. Instead of converting, by which I mean if ten visitors sign the conversion percentage's for one person, so that would be 10%. You'll find that will go up by four to a 50% by just removing those distractions and enabling them to do what they wanted to do when they clicked, which was join the list. They didn't click because they wanted to read a blog post, they wanted to

join the list or learn more about the list. To make that as simple as possible, so yeah that's really good advice, definitely people should look to do that. To round off with the other bits and bobs on the [inaudible 00:42:31] and the passive growth, so we've done Facebook.

Twitter is just the same, Twitter enables you to pin a tweet to the top of your profile. As people click on your profile name they'll see a pinned tweet, which will in this context should be directing people to the mailing list, that's very, very easy to do. Again, costs nothing, five minutes' worth of work which will deliver you subscribers. Not many but some, and these all add up of course so it's worth doing. There's two more before we round off this week, this episode. People are obviously sending loads and loads of emails, so email is another really good way to just broadcast that message but it needs to be done right. There's no point in all of the emails that we send forcing a message in about why people need to sign up to your mailing list and there's no point when you write to your bank manager about the mortgage that you haven't paid, "PS, I've got a new book, I'm writing a new book. Would you like to join my mailing list," because that isn't going to work.

Obviously that's a slightly amplified example but what I would say is you can use little kind of software add-ons, especially on web-based email clients like Gmail where they will generate automatically a little signature, a stamp. The one that I would recommend is something called Wise Stamp, so W-I-S-E S-T-A-M-P. You can include a little picture, you can have a little bit of a call to action and a clickable URL that people can then go across to the landing page and sign up. I don't know how many emails a day I send but it's certainly in the three figures, and that message, it's obviously just kind of a passive inclusion, it's not something that I'm forcing down people's throats. By doing that you can be sure that people would like, "I didn't know Mark was an author, I'm going to check that out and see what he's all about." You will get signups like that, so again, no cost or minimal cost.

You can do this for free with most of these applications, and potentially adding subscribers as we go along. Then finally, again, connected to signatures, thinking about the forums where you hang out. Most forums will allow you to set a custom signature, so a forum where I hang out now and again, not as much as I used to but certainly I'll be in there every day probably is K-Boards. It used to be called Kindle Boards, it's a really good resource of authors to learn about all this kind of stuff, and you can create your own custom signature which would include, I would recommend that it would include an offer to join your mailing list. K-Boards is not the perfect environment for that because it's lots of other authors, and there's one thing, we get this a lot in our Facebook group, authors coming in and going, "Buy my book." That's not really very sensible because you're trying to persuade lots of other authors to buy your book.

That's probably not your audience, but for you, if you were in a forum about people who are interested in Vulcan bombers and I know you are, you're nodding, and I know you're a bit of a Vulcan nerd.

James: There may be somebody called Vulcan9901 in these forums, I don't know, yes. I mean they do exist, these Cold War jets, aircraft spotting forums and I have occasionally frequented them as a bit of a geek, so yeah.

Mark: That's your perfect audience, in some ways it's also your most challenging audience because these are the people you're going to have to persuade that you know what you're talking about but they're also the perfect audience, they're going to be interested in your subject matter. Again it's very, very simple just to change your signature so that it's just kind of background information that people can sign up, you definitely shouldn't be posting in the forum again and again and again that you've got this book because that's a pretty good way to get yourself thrown out of the forums. That's why signatures and forum customizations like that exist, this is a really simple, really easy, non-intrusive way to get that message across. That's definitely something that authors should be looking to do.

James: Yeah okay, and we are talking about online forums, not social media and Facebook and so on because they don't work like that. Certainly when we run our groups we don't want people posting, "Please sign up to my list," on all their links because that changes the nature of the group a little bit and we'd expect other groups to be exactly the same as that. Good, this is really exciting, I'm feeling quite energized about all of this. I've noticed also we're coming up to 50 minutes, quite a lot of talking at this stage. Are we still in week one at the moment?

Mark: Well we're done, that's week one done. You've got your homework, I want to come back next week James and I want you to have a hundred subscribers, that's your challenge. We'll shame you publicly if you haven't.

James: We mentioned quite a few resources in this podcast, you can see our show notes at Selfpublishingformula.com. We'll put the links for resources like Wise Stamp et cetera will be there. Hopefully by the end of this we'll put together some sort of giveaway, won't we Mark, and get that out to people.

Mark: Yep, absolutely.

James: Which will sum up all the key points. Great, we're not going to get into any more detail in this episode, so that is episode one of [inaudible 00:48:01], that's one of three, it's going to be a mini-series. You have your tasks, I'm aiming to get a hundred new names on my mailing list in the next seven days. You have your task of getting at least ten and you can let us know about your success, either post into our Facebook group ... If you just look at Facebook, what is it, .com, what is our Facebook group now called? Ads For Authors.

Mark: Ads For Authors, yeah.

James: Ads For. A-D-S F-O-R A-U-T-H-O-R-S, Ads For Authors.

Mark: You didn't use the four, like trendy kids do.

James: No, no, because I'm an idiot. Alternatively, people can leave comments on the show notes page on selfpublishingformula.com.

Mark: Yeah, or even email us in an old-fashioned sort of way, podcast@selfpublishingformula.com.

James: Only if your signature has been changed.

Mark: Yes, because we'll be checking that.

James: In which case, otherwise don't bother. I'll send you an angry response.

What do you think about the title for my book, what do you think about V Bomber Down? If you remember going back to this, people thought Vulcan Down wouldn't work because Vulcan reminds people of Mr.

Spock.

Mark: No, don't like it.

James: No, V Bomber Down? No, okay.

No. I thought of that one just drifting off last night, I sent my wife an email from my phone, is the only way I could make a note as I was in bed going to sleep so I scribbled, you know you can do the scribbling thing on the phone. She got this email this morning saying, "V Bone Ber Down," didn't know what it meant but I did. Okay, so that's ruled out, brilliant, thanks very much, that's useful. Good, thank you very much indeed for listening and for watching, indeed it's been a bit of a struggle. We are never going to record a podcast after 3:30 in the afternoon again in the UK because certainly my internet supplier, it goes down as all the kids come home and ramp on their YouTube videos. It's been a real struggle, you've stopped and started visually but we've hopefully got the sound absolutely perfect. If you're listening it should be perfect and if you're watching the sound should be perfect.

Mark did stop and start a few times visually. Good, can't wait till next week, can't wait till I get told off by Mark for either not doing my homework or getting it wrong in one way and another and hopefully you will do better than me, and we will see you next time for part two of Email Listing Podcast 47, until then, bye bye.



LIST BUILDING IS one of the most strategic and powerful activities you can engage in as an indie author. That's because it's the one way that you're able to build a list of people who have willingly expressed an interest in the type of books that you write. And it's YOUR list. One that you control and can sell to any time you like. That's a powerful weapon to have in your arsenal when it comes time to launching a book, running a promotion, or just reaching out to your list to build the relationships required to fuel your author career long term. This episode is part two of the list building series in which Mark and James address the use of paid advertising to capture the email addresses of prospective buyers. You won't want to miss the plethora of career-boosting tips shared within it!

LIST BUILDING THROUGH PAID ADVERTISING. DID YOU SAY 'PAID'?

The words "paid advertising" might make some of you shudder. But try and remember that your author career is a business and in order to grow any kind of business you will need to invest money in it eventually. Mark and James talk about how to get started with paid advertising without breaking the bank

and underline the rewards of getting it right and seeing that email list grow.

FACEBOOK ADS IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL LEAD GENERATION TOOLS FOR LIST BUILDING.

Mark's Advertising for Authors has become a go-to course for many indie authors looking to exploit this marketing option. Mark and James touch on some of that course's content and share some of the basics of lead generation using Facebook Ads. The tips learned here have been used by many other authors to successfully explode their mailing list. It's powerful stuff!

THE LOWDOWN ON TWITTER ADS AND YOUTUBE ADS.

Two of the less popular advertising platforms out there that you might want to consider are Twitter Ads and YouTube Ads. Both are featured as bonus modules as part of the Advertising for Authors Course. Whilst they're not as effective as the Facebook platform, James explains why they shouldn't be written off - and maybe just the thing for some authors.

DID YOU KNOW THAT AMAZON ADS CAN BE USED TO BY AUTHORS TO BUILD LISTS?

You're now able to use the power of Amazon to get your books in front of more readers by targeting people who have already demonstrated through their Amazon purchases that they are interested in the exact genre or type of book that you've written. So how does it work? Worry not! Mark and James briefly walk you through the Amazon Ads option and show you how you can use it to promote your books - and successfully build your list through opt-ins.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Mark's latest epiphany - he's been writing 2 books, not 1.
- Resuming the email list instructions, what to expect on this episode.
- James' progress in building his list since last week's episode.
- Today's focus on paid advertising to build your email list.
- How to set up a Facebook lead generation campaign (and why Mark spends most of his money on these).
- How to dial-in the targeting functionality on Facebook ads.
- Why you need to give targeting and ads time and how you can learn as you go.
- Ways you can defray the cost of your advertising.
- Twitter and YouTube ads. Possibilities and returns you can expect.
- The basics about Amazon Ads (anyone can use them, not just KDP select)
- Bookbub promotions and deals.
- Upcoming episodes in this series and on detailed additional topics.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Free Video Course List Building For Authors](#)
- [Facebook Ads](#)
- [Twitter Ads](#)
- [YouTube Ads](#)
- [Adwords](#)
- [Amazon Ads](#)
- [BookBub](#)
- [ConvertKit](#)
- [MailChimp](#)
- [Infusionsoft](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 47 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello Mark, how's your week been?

Mark Dawson: Good. Very good, James, thank you. Started doing recordings on a Tuesday and I'm kind of in the, hopefully the last sprint for the new Milton book, and I had an epiphany last night. Often happens just before I go to sleep and I had one last night.

I've been thinking this is potentially a very big book. I'm already at 91,000 words, which would be big for a Milton book and as I was drifting off to sleep last night it suddenly occurred to me that I've actually got two books, not one. So what I've been doing this morning is just looking at where a natural break would be and turns out that the natural break is around about 70,000 words in.

It's probably like another five or 10,000 words to write, which means that it'll come in at about 80,000 which is spot on for me and it will also mean I've got a 20,000 word head start on the next book. So all in all I'm pleased because I've got ... I don't normally put deadlines on myself but I've got Apple doing some

promotion for me, but I've got to get the book to them by the end of the month, and Audible are also doing some quite cool stuff that we might be able to talk about in another episode, and for that I've also got to get a recordable manuscript for them by the end of the month. So I would've been rushing a lot, I think, to get it done but now I've got a bit more time. I can concentrate on the quality and getting it up to the level I'm pleased and happy with. Generally speaking I'm in a good mood because it's been a good day so far.

James Blatch: Well that's a great thing to discover, isn't it, and there is a workload involved with books as we all know and to suddenly realize that not only have you got one book shaped in your mind, you've got a good head start on the next one. That's always a nice thing to hear.

Out of interest, I think it's a really important thing to have a notepad and pen by the side of your bed because I do the same as you. I'll often do that but I'm really bad at doing it, so that's why I said last week I ended up using my Apple Watch to scribble some kind of note, which turned out to be useless, and emailed my wife. It's the only way I could think of getting something out of my brain and into somewhere that I'd remember it in the morning.

DO YOU HAVE A NOTEPAD AND PEN BY YOUR BED?

Mark Dawson: No, I just use my phone. I'll just grab the phone and email myself or open a note app to do that. Obviously, a notepad is fine too. It's really weird. I was thinking about this morning. I often have ideas late at night as my brain is going into random mode. It flies around in all kinds of weird places and then I also have ideas when I have a shower in the morning. So I suspect that's because I've set myself a problem as I go to sleep, and then I kind of subconsciously solve that problem whilst I'm sleeping and I often have loads of great ideas first thing in the morning.

And then the other time I also find I make a lot of progress is when I'm running. I think it's just because you're not really focusing on the problem ahead of you, you're just kind of working around the sides a bit. By approaching things in that kind of capacity sometimes you can surprise yourself with what you come up with.

James Blatch: Definitely. I definitely find running is very useful as well, particularly if you go in the morning. I did this morning. It's usually the second half of the run as well. The beginning is still doing normal thinking which is quite short term, then if you run for half an hour or so, I think the last 15 minutes you've settled down a little bit and then the things start popping into your head.

Same thing that happens as you go to bed. So yes, the way the brain works, find out how yours works and try and make it work for you, I guess. I'm still keen on doing an episode on productivity, which we will definitely do at some point. The people who think about productivity think about this a lot, about how your brain works and the best way of making things work for you.

We're in the middle of our mailing list episodes, so we're doing three of these, really focusing on this core part of an author's life, which is your mailing list.

We should say, I think we can be honest about this, we had a Twitter interview during the week we thought would probably fit in here but it turned out to be really good, quite long, very detailed, and we've decided to make that its own episode. This is going to be a really good episode coming up in the near future.

It's not about paid advertising, it's about organic ... Old style. Using social media, the bit for free, that you do. About how you can really make it work for you. We've got a cracking guest, somebody who's part of the SPF community who's really understood how to leverage Twitter for free, if you'd like, the organic side of it. We're going to package a giveaway with that as well, so that's going to be really good. That's going to come up in the future.

What we need to do is really focus on the key tenets of mailing list building. We started last week with the basics that you can do, again, for free, in setting yourself up. Mark set me a task, and he set you a task, so your task was to get ten ... Was it ten we said to people, signups? By making these changes.

Mark Dawson: Yep.

James Blatch: You set me a rather lofty target of a hundred, and I'll tell you in a second how I've done on that. This week we're going to move on to paid advertising. I'll have an overview and a little bit of detail as well about the paid platforms, how they differ and where you should be looking at putting some money in.

DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU HOW I DID?

Mark Dawson: Without further ado, drum roll please, maestro, let's see if you hit this supposedly lofty

goal. I've probably gotten it whilst I was sleeping last night.

James Blatch: Yeah, you probably did. Well I did what you said. I went into Facebook and created the sign up ... To make sure they were there and I put something on Facebook. I emailed about half my contacts list. I'm going to do the other half next week, I just decided to long list, it took me a long time.

I didn't think the email was suitable for all my friends but it was for ... Because I've got quite a long, big contacts list so I did do that by hand and got bored at about K. So, I'll do the next one next week. It was great actually because I sent emails to people I don't see very often, including an RAF pilot, a guy who flew me actually in the Harrier back in the day, called Sean Bow who had become a very senior RAF officer and I met up with him for a drink about once every two years.

It was like a moment, thinking why didn't I have him on my list right from the beginning because he's the perfect person to talk about stuff. So, he gave me immediately a bit of banter back about ... He said "I hope there's a good looking RAF pilot called Sean in your book." I said "No, actually there was a good looking BBC reporter called James in the book".

Anyway, so he's on the list and it was great to get in touch with people, and all that thing ... We were talking about do you feel a bit spammy, saying to your friends "Can you join my list?" And the reality is they're delighted, most of them are delighted to hear from you. Some just joined up without a fuss, I probably didn't hear from some who didn't but that's fine as well.

Anyway, so I have 44, 45 I think names on the list this time last week and I broke through a hundred this morning. So, I'm probably about 103 I think now. So, I have fallen short of the 100 on from where I was, but getting through 100 is what I've done and that's ticking over as it goes up.

Mark Dawson: That's very good. Yeah, excellent. One thing that we should probably clear up, the episode went down really well last week, we had an awful lot of people downloading it. It's one of our most popular one's as we thought it might be.

We got a question, more than once, and we're just talking about that Facebook optimization and people

were asking how do you make the banner clickable. I don't think I explained that well enough, so I'll just tell everyone right now what you need to do.

The banner itself is not directly clickable. What you need to do is, and you can jump in here James because you've done this more recently than I have. You basically upload your picture as your banner image, then you click to edit it, it will open up a little light box for you. In that box, you have the ability to put in some text and a hyperlink.

What I would recommend is that you just draw attention to your office if people do happen to click the link. You can of course encourage people to click the link. One thing we do with SPF is we'll make that banner look like it's a button, or there's a button on the banner which, we might have a better copy that says for information on Facebook ads, for example, click this button.

Of course, the whole thing is the button. Nothing is individually separate there. As people click that banner they then go through to a little bit more space where we have more real estate to play with in terms of message and then giving them a clickable URL.

So, that's how you do that. It's not difficult at all. Most people don't know that it's possible. I definitely recommend doing that and then maybe playing with the image too if you want to encourage people to click.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: How did you find that went?

James Blatch: Yes. It is effectively the description of the photo, that's what it is. That's what you're using, so when you click on that you get a bit of description. You can put a date in there, where and when it was taken. The usual sort of Facebook thing.

You use that description so people click on the banner, that's what they see. Now other people can

comment on that and they have done in your case, I looked at yours and people have commented down there. Your thing stays at the top because it's not a comment it's a description.

Now I'm tracking through Convert Kit, I'm still getting used to Convert Kit, I do like it, I'm finding it very easy in terms of the automation, the sequences. There's a part of it I don't understand, which is the tracking.

I can see, for instance, I have 13, I think, sign ups yesterday and yet the analytics shows me one from Facebook and one from my landing page and that doesn't make any sense 'cause that doesn't add up to 13 and they're the only way people are coming into Convert Kit.

I need to dig a little bit deeper because I am keen, especially with our background in SPF, of tracking exactly where people are coming from and something I labored in the Twitter module and you labeled in Facebook module that if you don't track accurately it's very difficult then to make the decisions that are going to optimize and really get the most out of your various platforms, your space on the web. I'd like to know a little bit more about exactly where people are coming from and also it helps my tag then when they come in.

I'm still discovering that and we'll do something on mailing list platforms. We'll talk about Convert Kit and MailChimp in the future of course and certainly I'll have a bit more detail on that. I'm learning Convert Kit and Infusion Soft at the moment 'cause we're moving to Infusion Soft and SPF and that is a whole different baby. It really is. It's the closest I've come to my old days of computer programming, which I did in my 20s. It's almost coding in the campaign building in Infusion Soft.

John Dyer, our third guy, hates it. I love it, so I'll have a little bit of that.

Good, okay. Look that's what I've done this week. Would love to hear how you've done so please post into the Facebook group.

Mark Dawson: We'll leave the comments in the show notes.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Of course we've got a few people leaving comments so I feel, I keep an eye on all of those and I've replied I think to all of them so far.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: So feel free to pop in there as well.

James Blatch: I got ticked off this morning for not putting my landing page URL in my Twitter description, which is correct. I did change my Twitter description but didn't put the landing page in there so I've changed that today but I did pin the Tweet as you suggested.

We'd love to hear how you've got on. Did you do your 10? Did you make those changes? Perhaps you had them already in place but it prompted you to do a few other things. If you didn't have them in place, if you're just starting up like I am, would love to hear how you got on. It's quite exciting even if they're your friends and extended family, to have them on your list is good.

If you've joined my list I'm guinea pig here. I'm completely open to what your experience of joining my list was like. What the emails were like. I mean it's gonna take three weeks, I think, probably a few to get all the ones that are in the sequence but certainly don't hold back.

Mark Dawson: You can be nice if you like but if you got something to say-

James Blatch: Mark enjoys it when I get criticized. Okay, look we're gonna talk about-

Mark Dawson: I'm looking forward to being able to get to the end of the sequence when we'll see pictures.

James Blatch: Yeah. Yeah they're nice.

Mark Dawson: That's when the unsubscribes happen.

James Blatch: Yeah exactly, well who knows? It may be when it takes off. Right, so we're gonna talk about paid. So so far we haven't spent any money, we've just been using what's available to us and let's face it, let's remind ourselves that there's more available today for free than there ever has been from all through in the past. Incredible platforms available and when you hear this Twitter episode you're going to be amazed. This guy's got I think 100,000 followers just doing some organic optimization, so we're gonna come to that down the line but today we're gonna focus on paid advertising.

LETS START WITH FACEBOOK. WHERE WOULD YOU SAY FACEBOOK IS? IS IT STILL THE ROLLS ROYCE? THE CADILLAC? THE BIG DADDY OF PAID PLATFORMS, ADVERTISING PLATFORMS?

Mark Dawson: Yes, it definitely is. There's plenty of people who are kind of jostling beneath it trying to steal the crown away but at the moment Facebook is the biggest social media platform. It's the most mature. It has the best ad network. It has the best targeting. Everything about it is kind of top of its game so it is the one I would say that people should look at first of all.

I'm not just saying that because we have to teach a course on Facebook advertising and other bits and bobs. So you don't need to take a course to learn how to do these simple things and what we're gonna talk about today is we'll go through some of the ways that you can use Facebook Ads and then other ads, other paid ads, on the other platforms to drive traffic to your landing page or perhaps not even to your landing page when we're looking at things like lead generation ads. The goal is going to be to take those 10 people, or maybe in your case the 45 extra, and-

James Blatch: 55.

Mark Dawson: 55, sorry, 55. Okay we're gonna take them and we're gonna try and explode that a bit. Before we get into that it just reminded me one thing I think I should say is last week it all seems like it's very common sense to talk about, to go to people and ask them for something but as we mentioned it's something that people often forget to do or just don't feel comfortable doing.

So if people just take away one thing from last week it's getting into that mindset that it's okay to ask people to be on a mailing list. It's not an imposition. You shouldn't be afraid of it. It's definitely something ... I look at it as often people with opportunity. So you turn it around and make it a positive thing.

With that in mind we're now going to be reaching beyond people who might know us, either close acquaintances or distant acquaintances. We're going to be going up to people who don't know us at all, so completely cold traffic is how we describe this, and we're gonna look at three or four ways that we can do that and we'll start with Facebook.

So what we need first of all, and I suppose I should say if people ... It's quite helpful to see screen flows of how this stuff is actually done and people probably know we have a free resource for people that will demonstrate exactly how to do this. I'm not going to go into too much detail into what I's to dot and T's to cross 'cause you can get all of that with the free videos that we put together.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: I'll be posting those in the next week or so.

James Blatch: We should just say if you want to get onto that list you might want to wait a week or so for them to be refreshed but they are there at the moment. So if you go to selfpublishingformula.com/courses In fact on the main page it's the Advertising for Authors course that you should express an interest in because if you express an interest in that or an Ads for Authors that's when you're gonna get the three free videos. We don't send them out to people expressing interest in 101 because they are quite advanced but there's no harm in you going through them now. I mean the feedback we've had on that mini-course is very often people saying, "That was worth money in itself." It's just out there and it's a really brilliant middle course amongst them.

Mark Dawson: Another way to get is selfpublishingformula.com/ads. So that's another landing page that people can visit to get that. So either of those, it's not hard to find on the website.

I want to talk about the nuts and bolts of what to do but what I'll talk about is what is on offense.

There are two different kinds of ad campaigns that we can run on Facebook that will enable people to get people to sign up to their lists. The easiest and the one that requires the least back end work is what Facebook calls a 'lead generation campaign'. These were brought in I'm gonna guess about 18 months now and I knew immediately that these were coming down the track that they were gonna be real game changers 'cause they are just so cool and they convert at such a high level. It was obvious that they were gonna be really effective.

What it does is it enables you to advertise to interested potential readers, make them the offer about the free book, but the really cool thing about them is if they click on the ad, they're not taken off Facebook. All of the transaction web by you get their email address happens within the Facebook ecosystem and it should be obvious without me going into too much detail why that's good thing but the main reason is that it doesn't take them outside of that cozy Facebook environment that they are comfortable with.

It doesn't take them to another landing page, which might not look quite as nice as the Facebook platform. It probably doesn't look as nice as Facebook. It certainly would look different and all of these are good reasons why people decide that after all they don't actually want that free bit that you promised and they're not gonna give you their email address.

It makes it much easier to do that and another really good benefit of these ads is they were originally designed for mobile. They're all available on desktop now as well but it's quite, it can be a pain in the neck to fill out forms on screens. I've got the iPhone 7 Plus and even on a decent sized screen it's still difficult to be typing in your email address.

So what Facebook lead gen ads do is they'll just, you basically tap to say that you're interested and you read through the offer and you tap again. Maybe one more tap but it's two or three taps then that is done. The email address is passed to the advertiser and then the advertiser is responsible, in our case, for providing the customer or the reader with their free book. And if we use things like Book Funnel or Insta Freebie we can make that part of the process pain free as well.

These are the ads that I spend the most money on at the moment in terms of list building. I spend about \$50 a day on these ads right now and I'm getting sign ups around about between 25 and 35 cents a day, so we're looking at probably adding about 150 new subscribers a day.

Now not all of those will download the free book of course, that's fine, and all of those once you do download it not all of them will open it and read it or not all of them will open it and then not all of them who will open it will read it through to the end or like it even. But I'm comfortable and confident enough that enough people will open it and enjoy it and then will buy more of my books that these are profitable ads for me and they've enabled me ... I've built up a Facebook list audience now in MailChimp of about 30,000 Facebook lead gen subscribers and they are behaving in a way that I'd expect them to in terms of opening and clicking and interacting.

James Blatch: You say, "As you'd expect them to."

HOW DO THEY COMPARE TO HOW BEFORE LEAD GEN ADS WERE AROUND? ARE THEY AS ACTIVE? ARE THEY AS GOOD AS THAT?

Mark Dawson: I take a step back actually and say that you can kind of work a hierarchy of valuable leads, something along those lines. The best ones will be the ones who've read through your book and have seen your sign-up offer at the back and then have signed up.

Now the reason obviously they're the best is because they have just finished your book and they liked it enough that they were prepared to go and sign up for your list and get your freebie. Get something else or not get a freebie if you don't have anything to give away. That's kind of the *crème de la crème*.

Beneath that you'd get to people who are coming on on a slightly colder basis and I'd include these kinds of subscribers in that cohort because they, at the stage they sign up they probably have never heard of you before. There's no guarantee that they will download the book. There's no guarantee that they'll like the book.

What you will see is, and I segment these guys so I'm able to track their behaviors quite carefully. You will see lower open rates, lower click rates in this kind of generated audience than you would from an organic audience. But provided that it's still within parameters that you consider to be acceptable, and that kind of goes beyond what we can talk about in terms of how you ascribe a lifetime value to each individual subscriber provided that you are in the black in that transaction then you should continue to invest in this kind of activity.

James Blatch: The lead gen asks just one small point. I noticed you used the word 'tap' and you're very good at the language you use when you put the copy in, which is very important. I know you AB split test a lot of this but you do use that type of language in the copy tap here don't you?

YOU UNDERSTAND THE ENVIRONMENT PEOPLE ARE IN WHEN THEY'RE RECEIVING THESE ADS RATHER THAN CLICK, WHICH IS BIT OF A DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU'LL WANT A DESKTOP.

Mark Dawson: Yeah it depends how you serve them, yeah. You can tell Facebook to only serve to mobile. If you're only serving an ad to mobile it doesn't make any sense to use language that you associate with a keyboard because people won't be using a keyboard. So use stuff like tap.

That does sound like a really marginal game and it is but kind of the analogy I like to use for this is looking at what the cycling team, the British cycling team, has done over the last 10 years or so. They have tiny, tiny gains. Even like changing the material of the skin suits that they wear but because they have so many of these small gains, when you add everything up incrementally it becomes quite a significant gain and that's why they're better than everybody else because they pay attention to these tiny, tiny details.

James Blatch: Exactly.

Mark Dawson: The same kind of focus on detail is something we can take advantage of too.

James Blatch: I think they came up with the expression accumulation of marginal gains because they were asked so often in interviews, "What have you done?" It's a complex answer that involved 100 small changes. I get ticked off interrupting you so sorry about that.

Mark Dawson: It's okay.

James Blatch: I noticed in the YouTube comments.

Mark Dawson: Not by me.

James Blatch: No, not by you. Takiri I think but anyway, somebody stop doing that. Okay we haven't really talked about targeting.

BEFORE WE MOVE OFF OF LEAD GEN ARE YOU GONNA TALK ABOUT TARGETING?

Mark Dawson: Yeah just quickly. Not everyone will know how amazing the targeting is on Facebook so as an introductory level advertiser, what I would suggest is that you look to try and target your ad to people who you think are more likely to like what you're offering than not.

A good way to do that is to look at interest targeting. Facebook knows everything about us in terms of what we do on the platform and probably what we do off the platform too but that discussion's for another day. One of the things it does make available to advertisers is it will enable us to serve our ads to people who like something that we know that they will have in common with us.

So a good example of that for me would be, you see the covers of the books in the background. They're behind me, people who are watching on Youtube, but my books are compared often to Lee Child, Vince Flynn, David Baldashi, people like that.

What you're able to do with Facebook targeting is to send your ads to people who also like or who like those authors. Because I know that there is some kind of, there's bleed through between my readers and the readers of those guys. I can say with more confidence that I'm serving ads to people who are more likely to take the action that I want them to take.

So for you, you can look at someone like Darryl Brown or who was it that wrote Firefox? Craig whatever his name is.

James Blatch: Dean Koontz is never alone.

Mark Dawson: Craig Thomas.

James Blatch: Craig Thomas.

Mark Dawson: Craig Thomas, Dean Koontz. Yeah, all those kinds of guys who are writing those kind of military thrillers. You could look at Ian Fleming for the kind of the age that you're writing about. There are lots of different ways that you can reach those kinds of people.

You can even go slightly beyond that, beyond books, and look at TV shows and films. I'm slightly more reluctant to recommend that because there's no guarantee that somebody goes to the movies also reads books but sometimes it would be worth testing those.

Because you're able to target so precisely, you can reduce the cost of acquisition because you'll get more clicks. You'll get more conversions and all of that good stuff. Facebook makes it really, really easy to do that.

James Blatch: That was a great example of this, wasn't it? I can't remember where we used it. It might've been in an early SPF video, possibly one of your emails, where a guy worked out that he could target his flatmate. I mean literally he could leverage the Facebook targeting system to work out that his flatmate had some allergies. He had some very unusual interests in hobbies and he basically used that system to send these adverts to his one person and it worked. It freaked his flatmate out.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, yeah. That's true, Social Sherpa is the website that's on. You did a Google search on them. Maybe we'll try and find that in the show but it does demonstrate just how granually you can target really incredible stuff.

James Blatch: Good, okay. So that's lead gen ads and once you start using Facebook advertising and you've talked to, you mentioned \$50 a day but obviously we're talking here potentially people starting out.

WHAT SORT OF MONEY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT IN THE FOR ME STARTING OUT?

Mark Dawson: The minimum is \$5 a day so maybe you spend \$25 a week, something like that. That's not something to just throw away because obviously that's a lot of money for many people so the best level you'd want to be starting I would definitely recommend not to go too much higher in that when you're not experienced because Facebook will be very good at taking that money.

If you've paid for those ads you will, they quickly will be sending that money to Mr. Zuckerberg's bank

account. So you want to be cautious on that and also as you get started there will be testing you'll need to do so I'd counsel people against expecting their first ads to go like gangbusters because it's not likely to work out that way.

You need to be bit of circumspect and to build in a little bit of testing, a little bit of experimenting until we find the right combination of image, copy, and targeting. Once you do find that you can slowly start to scale it and before you know it you can be adding 150, 200 subscribers everyday if you've got the budget for that.

James Blatch: And does this require people to have a lead magnet? To have a book to give away or novella to give away at this stage or can I advertise free publication?

Mark Dawson: You could. I don't know if I've seen an ad in the last couple of years that I would've clicked on if it wasn't offering me anything at all in return. So you could say, "There's a new book coming out." It kinda depends.

If you could get a blurb from Dean Koontz saying that the new book by James Blatch is a game changer, you have to read this, you could potentially get some action to use that kind of quote and say sign up now for an exclusive launch offer. Something like that or you know you could think about it but it's possible to think about a combination that might work.

The classic formulation does include something in exchange for something else, so it is an email address that's being given over. It's not tangible in the same way that a book would be but it is intensely personal so you do typically need to give something away to persuade someone to trust you who, let's be honest, they don't know who you are. If they see your face James there's no way they're giving you-

James Blatch: The most trustworthy person. I'm fully clothed.

Mark Dawson: Yes, yes. At the moment.

James Blatch: Always a bonus.

Mark Dawson: We'll pass over that one quickly.

James Blatch: Yeah lets move on.

Mark Dawson: Typically it's a good idea. I would say yes, it's gonna be more effective but again if you don't have anything there's nothing to stop from testing to see how it gets on.

James Blatch: It's interesting to hear people's experiences. People will have tried without lead magnets or that's not how you've been getting on. One of the things that happens once you do start running these lists is that when you start you start rather cold and you don't really know quite what targeting's going to work and so it is inevitably going to be more expensive at the beginning.

We occasionally see people posting to the Facebook group who literally just started in their first week and they're despondent because they've lost their first \$25 and they've got two subscribers. Well do you know that is going to happen? Gonna tell you now because it's very difficult.

It's quite a complex series of choices you make and you need the information back to really start optimizing that but it is a virtuous circle so the more you advertise, the more you learn, the more you can optimize and one of the great things on all these platforms, we're gonna move on to the others in a moment including Facebook, is you can then start to use Facebook's own algorithms to help you currently. So when we move on to, for instance, look alike audiences.

Mark Dawson: Once you've got I'd say a few hundred subscribers, ideally I'd recommend 1,000 but you can do it with less, is you can tell Facebook to start to take your main list, you import that into Facebook, and then you tell Facebook, "Build a look alike audience based off of this list."

What Facebook will do is it will try and pick out the data points, the similarities, of all the people on your mailing list and then it will try and build you a new audience of people it thinks are quite like those

people. So the big benefit of that is then instead of your 500 strong list, something like that, you could advertise to that but you'll chew through it in a day probably.

The difference where the look alike is is gonna be at minimum two million strong in the US. A little bit smaller in the UK but we're talking about hundreds of thousands of people. And those kind of audiences have always been the best performing for me when it comes to, especially for sales ads.

I've run the same ad into the same look alike audience for six or seven months at a time sometimes. Sometimes people will be seeing those ads more than once but it doesn't matter, they still make more money from me than I spend to run the ads.

So they're really powerful and that's one of the currently unseen benefits of building a list is that you open up those kinds of new targeting options that otherwise you wouldn't have.

James Blatch: I say the more you advertise, the more data you get, the easier it is to start being successful with this but it is, like all these things, it's a reasonably tough start so do prepare yourself at the beginning.

Your first dollars that go in are an investment, right Mark? People shouldn't expect to put \$5 in and get \$25 worth of book sales straight away. It's like in editing. We say 'slow' and the whole social media world things move fast than they did 10 years before all this stuff but nonetheless. Perhaps we are a little impatient sometimes. Okay.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: You've got a, I think, in some of the next one we talked about before I didn't quite understand this. You talked about defray the cost. Is that a typo? Is that something I don't understand?

Mark Dawson: You know the word 'defray'?

James Blatch: Not really, no. I need to expand my vocabulary.

Mark Dawson: Probably, it means reduce. So if you defray the cost of something it means you basically make it cheaper. So one way you can do that with ads is, well there's two ways really.

For a list building ad one of the things I do is I'll use what I call an upsell. So as people join the list one of the first emails will say here's your free book or your free books. One of the emails that I'll send them early on in the process is offering them maybe the first four books as a box set and even though they've got say two books for free, it's still cheaper for them to get books three and four by buying the box set rather than buying them individually. So I make that obvious and make it easy for people to see that then often times you can get people, especially if they've started reading and they know they're gonna like the books, they will then go to Amazon and buy the box set.

So that is revenue that's been generated through the lead generation ads, not just getting a subscriber. I'm also getting a sale and you can use that, the royalty. So in my case a \$6.99 box set is gonna me around about \$4.17 in terms of a 77% royalty.

You can use that to reduce the cost of acquisition so instead of, say, costing me 40 cents, you get enough of them sales and maybe you can drop it down to 20 cents. Plus the other benefits of selling anything on Amazon, so increasing your rank. Increasing the chance of getting reviews. Just generally your visibility will go up so it's definitely, it's worth it to make that offer. Put it out there and see if you can get people to buy something a little earlier than you might think you should be asking them to.

James Blatch: Yeah, and we've had some really good examples of all this. You've effectively been building their list for free because they managed to almost neutralize the cost of acquisition as you say by doing the would you like fries with that option. Okay so Facebook we're 35 minutes into this, we're still on Facebook. There's a bit more isn't there?

Mark Dawson: Yeah just another thing in terms of reducing the cost. One thing you can do is to run a promotion with another author. So something I did a couple years ago with Russell Blake, who writes similar books to me, is we both put out the first books in our series. So 'The Cleaner' for me and 'Jet' for Russell.

We put them together and we had an image drawn up that made it obvious that people were getting two books from two different authors and then we shared the subscribers and we shared the cost of the campaign. So Russell and I, I think we added about two and a half thousand subscribers. It was all very obvious to people that had been added to two lists so we didn't get people complaining about that. They were getting two free books from two authors they hadn't heard before. Maybe some of them would have gone on to enjoy both of our books or maybe Russell's or maybe mine but the benefit to us chiefly was that the cost of acquisition was half of what it would've been otherwise.

If money is an issue and \$5 a day seems a bit steep then hook up with someone else and maybe you can do it for 2.50 a day. Share the subscribers. That's a really good way to get an early jumpstart at a lower cost.

James Blatch: We want to talk about some exciting areas. We're going to talk about BookBub and Amazon ads and really the new kid on the block and that is very exciting. I know people want to hear about that, so let me just deal with, or let us deal with, Twitter lead ads and Google ads.

The AdWords platform and YouTube videos. Now because the reason we'll deal with them a bit more quickly is our experience so far is I wouldn't write them off completely and I think it's absolutely essential that you understand the platforms and you dip in and out from time to time.

But in terms of the returns we've had we've struggled to really optimize and to get good returns on low value products, I.e. books. So when it comes to the course, which is a high-value item, no problem at all really. YouTube better than Twitter ads but nonetheless Twitter ads has worked as well so we've been buying leads at a good price and even during the course opening period we were registering sales through alerting people to the fact that course is open using YouTube in particular. That was great and that's something we'll invest in a lot more in the future.

When I've tried with your books and I'll try again with my books in the future, it's been harder. So we've been paying 45, 50, 60, occasionally knocking on a dollar per email address and that's gonna be not necessarily sustainable for you when you then break down how many of those people are end up gonna buy your book. So we're right on the edge of profitability with that and occasionally into loss and I know that some people have had more success than I have with that particular genres but the platforms are there so lets deal with them quickly.

Twitter actually have lead cards. In fact they had lead cards before Facebook did so you can create little Twitter adverts in slightly difference sizes depending on which advert you use. They called them cards and you go into the Twitter ads platform, you create your card and if it's a traditional card what will happen is that you'll have a clickable link in there that will then take them to wherever you want them going.

Classically we would advise you have a nice clean, crisp landing page for that. The Twitter lead card is a smaller, thinner card. Looks quite nice. Limited amount of text. They just recently increase the number of characters you can have actually because they've taken, as you might know, they've taken the image out of the counting towards your 140. So it was something like 127 characters I think they gave you once they included the card. It's a bit more now but you don't want to be too wordy on Twitter anyway but the lead card works in a similar way to the way we just described.

You would click on it and then you'd get a second click to confirm that you're happy to hand over your email address in return for whatever it is that you're offering in the advert. So a mini-course for SPF or a free book. John Milton starter book or start a series for instance and they've played about with this a little bit with the MailChimp integrations, which have been on and off over a little while and MailChimp will say they're currently still working on this. I can get it to work at the moment. I know other people can't but I went in and tested it recently. It's still working but that can be automated, should be automated.

So it's passive for you. People click, the lead cards, and bang, it pops into your MailChimp account. Whatever it is you've got set up. I suspect what's gonna happen is they're gonna move to asking people to use a third-party. I think we use Zapier, is that right, for Facebook Mark to as a go between Facebook and your mail accounts. We might end up with that on Twitter. They seem to be between and betwixt these two places but nonetheless.

So that's the Twitter ads.

NOW WHY DOESN'T IT WORK AS WELL?

Difficult for me to put my finger on it. I think I talked about this before. My feeling is first of all the ad's platform is geared around bigger enterprises rather than allowing smaller enterprises to use it profitably, and that's probably a conscious decision by Twitter.

If you look at the Twitter ads platform, they have some options for you like the promoted tweet option and they are colossally expensive. I saw one day it was \$200,000 for the promoted tweet that day and I've seen the kind of organizations that are using it are Disney and Coca Cola and the NHS in England, our hospital, so they probably got it for free. I don't know from Twitter, maybe they paid \$200,000 for it and then you come down to the level of platform, the type of ads we're using but it kinda gives you an indication of where they're looking. Where their heart is.

Now when I've spoken to my Twitter rep they dismissed this. They said, "No, no we're absolutely about small businesses" but if you're selling lawn mowers maybe that works. If you're selling books at 4.99 I think it's a bit of a struggle.

It's tested routinely. We keep an eye on it and if things change we'll let you know and I will be running more Twitter ads again soon so I'll give you more of an update on that but at the moment I would say you're gonna work hard on Twitter to get good returns.

YOUTUBE

YouTube is the social media platform of the moment because despite the fact that ... It's got two things going for it, YouTube. One is it's almost, probably as ubiquitous around the world, as Facebook. I mean you can go into, and I travel a lot for my work so I can be in Subsaharan African, eastern Europe, or Asia and everybody has YouTube. You see it around, it's on people's phones.

My dad is 85 and he watches YouTube videos. My kids are 10 and 13, they watch YouTube videos. Everybody watches YouTube videos. Facebook, you could probably say has a slightly narrower usage, maybe not I don't know. The kids are all moving on to something else aren't they from Facebook, so it's seven then they come on Facebook a little bit older.

Youtube does go across the generations. It does go across the geography and combine that with the fact that actually not that many people really understand the YouTube ads platform, which works through AdWords and they don't use it.

AdWords is very much geared up around the Google network ad so when you in there it's constantly trying to get you to use the Google network and put those adverts out that you've seen in the Google search

returns and you really gotta kinda work within it to find the YouTube area. I'm surprised they haven't sectioned it off frankly because it's an unexploited area.

So again though you have to work quite hard to get a profitable return for books and we're in early days with this so I'm not as confident in saying, "Don't try it yet," as I perhaps would with Twitter ads.

We've had great success with SPF. Moving into books I can see that as long as we can start to get the targeting and start to perhaps use some a combination of both the Google search network and YouTube, I think we're gonna see some good results with that.

Both of these, by the way, are worth joining and having a little explore around. Not just because you might want to use them as paid platforms in the future but Mark, you talked in the 101 course about joining AdWords because it gives you access to keyword generators, etc. In Twitter if you join the Twitter ad platform you can actually create one of those lead cards and you can send that out organically as the Twitter interview that's coming out in a few weeks will demonstrate to you.

So there's a lot of reason for you now to go on, upload your credit card, don't start a campaign. AdWords will beg you start a campaign, in fact it forces you but just pause it right at the beginning. They won't take any money. They're big professional organizations. They're not going to rip you off like that but it gives you access to the platform and that's partly will feed into how you can get some stuff for free from them.

So we're gonna leave that there I think with Twitter and Google. Mark, now we're in the laboratory, right? So we come back from time to time on those.

Mark Dawson: Yes, exactly. So we'll quickly touch on that. I've seen we're gonna run up to the hour I think this time but I think it's all gonna be useful information for our listeners.

I'll very quickly just touch on a couple of other things that I think are worthwhile and I'll flag them as and we'll come back to in their own episodes later. So the most exciting platform for me at the moment, and this is Facebook but I would say in this here 2017 I think Amazon ads are gonna become something that all indies need to learn how to use.

Until quite recently they were reserved for KTP Select Books, so you had to be exclusive to Amazon so take advantage of that. And because of that I didn't really get too involved in them because I'm only exclusive for a couple of books but as soon as I heard that they were available for everyone, I've been spending a lot of time and quite a lot of money testing these ads out.

We'll talk about how to make them work for sales a bit later and that really is the subject for one or maybe even two episodes of the podcast later on.

One really useful side effect at the moment is that you are only charged when you get a click. You can effectively get free impressions at the moment and thousands and thousands and thousands of free impressions. If you think about what advertising used to be about it didn't use to be about immediately generating selling. It used to be about brand awareness and teaching people about you-

James Blatch: The seven touches.

Mark Dawson: And what you have to offer. The seven touches, exactly yeah as we talk about. And one of those touches right now is effectively free on the biggest online retailer in the world so you can get free impressions of your ads right now and I've been testing these extensively for the last six weeks or so and I've had several million free impressions right now.

Hopefully I'm selling most of those ad campaigns are returning positive returns on investment every single day just in terms of the sales that are recorded. Beyond that it doesn't take into account people who see an ad but want to buy book two or the print or all kinds of things that aren't necessarily included.

So we'll get into those in much more detail later. What I just wanted to kind of flag up for listeners right now is that it's a really good way to build your reputation and generate some awareness, which can then mean that people wander over to your Amazon page and if you set up your Amazon author page correctly you'll make it very obvious.

In fact every product page as well, we'll get on to this in a minute. Every single page on Amazon should

have the ability for people to see you got an offer and then a URL they can click over to go to your landing page and take you up on that offer.

James Blatch: Sorry, just to step you back a little bit for those of us who are unfamiliar with the Amazon ads platform at all.

CAN YOU JUST GIVE US A LITTLE OVERVIEW? I MEAN WHERE DO THEY APPEAR AND WHAT TYPE OF THING DO YOU PUT IN THERE THAT YOU CAN CLICK ON?

Mark Dawson: There are two kinds of ads. There are product display ads and sponsored keyword ads. Product display ads, for me, don't work at the moment so I wouldn't concentrate too much on those. Those appear on just beneath the buybacks on a book that you target.

So for me I might go for the new Night School is a new Reacher book. I would perhaps pay, this would be expensive to get on to this page, but I might say okay. Now the problem with that, I suspect this is why those ads aren't working so well is that people have already made the decision that they want to buy book A. If they hover their mouse over the buy button it's gonna take quite an offer for them to go, "Actually, I've never get this page. I've made the decision to buy it but I'm gonna change my mind right at the last moment. I'm actually gonna buy book B." So I don't think they work very well. I am testing them a lot but I'm not getting great results from them.

The other ads are called sponsored keyword ads. So if you are searching on Amazon and you searched for Make Me or Jack Reacher or Vince Flynn or whoever, because I've targeted a campaign that takes into account all kinds of different permutations of how you might be searching for those keywords. Provided that I win the auctions between all the authors who are bidding to be shown to the potential reader, my ads can appear in the search results and they can appear also on the product page as well. Those ads are working very well.

I'm seeing returns in investment. I think overall at the moment I've ran about 100%, so basically spend one get two in case people don't understand what return on investment means but believe me, when you get 100% return you should be investing all your money into those ads because they don't bring your money effectively.

James Blatch: A money machine.

Mark Dawson: Exactly, like an ATM. So those are working really well and the benefit, apart from the fact that you can and will get direct sales from those ads, is that you can also drive traffic to your relevant Amazon pages, which can then mean if you're smart you can send traffic to your landing page and get subscribers because the underpinning logic to all of this from my perspective is a subscriber is always going to be worth more to me than one single sale.

If I had the choice of you were looking for a book and you had the choice to buy *The Cleaner*, the first Milton book, or get *The Cleaner* for free because I know my books are quite hooky and once you get into them you'll probably buy another one and then you buy another one, I know that it makes more sense for me to give you that free one. Obviously now as you hear I'm standing on the street corner offering you gateway drugs because I know that you'll come back for that stuff, which I'll make you pay for later on.

So that's what I would say for Amazon as we will get into a lot more detail on that because I know the community is basically rabid right now for Amazon ads and we are gonna do a new module on Amazon ads in the new ads course that we're getting ready for March but they're pretty good right now. I think they could be really good as we push into the rest of 2017.

James Blatch: Yeah and we'll do our best to see if we can potentially at some point get Amazon on. The London Book Fair, quite a presence so I might if we can soften them up

Mark Dawson: No, no we're gonna get them on. They've already agreed. I've spoken to Amazon. We're gonna get the head of KDP is gonna come on.

Actually we'll probably get the cameras out and go down to London for that one. We can definitely ask questions about AMS.

So the other thing, and this is kinda topical. For those who watch it on YouTube let me just hold this up there. So what I'm just describe that for our listeners, it's BookBub. I've got a BookBub deal today on 'The Sword of God', that's the 5th Milton Book. Everyone knows about BookBub I'm not gonna go into details about why their featured deals are great, just take it from me if you haven't had one, they are great and you'll sell tons and tons and tons of books even at 99 cents. I used to make your money back and then

some.

The other benefit that people don't always take advantage of with BookBub deal is that you are sending thousands of those emails. The one from my book today will go out to about a million people plus we have more than that now. So some of those people, a good number, will be curious enough to click onto my Amazon page to have a look at *The Sword of God*.

Now most of them won't buy it but maybe one or two percent will buy it but of those 98% that don't buy it, if I make it really clear that they can also have a free book, they can get *The Cleaner* for free, they might go, especially because they're bargain hunters. They're on BookBub because they like deals. They like good offers. They might well go, "Well actually he's offering me this one for free. I won't download that one but I will get that free book." Sometimes you'll get people doing both. Quite often they'll go, "Actually that's 99 cents, I'll get that. What the hell, I'll also get the free book too."

So when I do BookBub deals typically when I optimize it properly you can look to add several hundred subscribers on the day of a deal. I'll know tomorrow and maybe I'll mention it next week if I remember but I would expect 150, 200 subscribers as a result of that message being amplified across BookBub's subscribers.

My best every day I had 600 subscribers on a BookBub deal solely down to that. So that's something. I mean BookBub deals are hard to get. All the other ones that we've mentioned you can do them right now. You don't need to get anyone's approval, you can just do it.

BookBub you need to persuade them to take you but once you have been accepted and more and more people are getting accepted now I'm seeing a lot of people who haven't had them before are getting in now. You want to maximize the effect of that promotion. That's a really good way to do it.

James Blatch: Yeah. So it's another reason for keeping that Amazon author page as optimized as possible. I mean that to me, Mark, from my point of view is a lesson in itself in it's own rights. Optimizing that Amazon author page. We could perhaps do a detailed session of optimizing various places in a little bit more detail than we've done and not just for mainly the signups but for presence for part of those seven touches of looking professional, all the rest of it. So much we can do.

Okay I think we've spoken for coming up to an hour now on the paid platform and although our voices are lovely, there's probably a limit to which people are gonna get that amount of information verbally. So I think we're probably gonna draw this one to a close.

We have a final episode on mailing lists next week. We want these to be value packed but this is a stand alone mini series within it but mainly this is such an important part. It's something we're always gonna come back to and as a result of this overview series, the three episodes, we're starting to pick up these more detailed interviews.

For instance the one I just mentioned let's do an episode on optimizing pages. Let's put that in the diary because I would really benefit from that and I know others listening I'm sure would as well.

We're going to have the organic Twitter platform coming up and we will bring a interview coming up and we will also feed in all the little bits of detail like Amazon, etc. and BookBub who's been on before will come on again I'm sure for us in the future.

Good. Okay, so you haven't actually sent me a specific task for this week. I'm not going to use paid advertising, it's not right for me at this stage. I need to write. I mean obviously I tucked myself away this morning and did a couple of hours but that's my big focus at the moment is writing and I don't know if you've listened yet but we've got my editor.

My blog post is going up this week I should say, finally. So that's blog post number three, which has been a real hiatus during our course launch. I'm sorry about that but blog post number three has gone up and you can find that on selfpublishingformula.com and there's gonna be some more blog posts about the writing process that I'm going through at the moment and I'll bring you up to date on that when I finally get there and yeah, I think that's it. Is that it?

Mark Dawson: That's it, yeah. My voice is going. So I hope that was useful. There's plenty more stuff we can cover and next week we will have an interview with InstaFreebie and hopefully a bit of interesting news that will enable us to help others to maximize the effect of their InstaFreebie deals so that's all happening next week.

James Blatch: Absolutely. Okay, show notes available at selfpublishingformula.com. You can email us podcast@selfpublishingformula.com and join our Facebook group. You can find the links on our home page. Thank you so much for listening. Have a wonderful week selling, getting sign ups, and writing. We'll speak to you next Friday. Bye bye.

CHAPTER 45

GET SUBSCRIBERS FOR YOUR MAILING LIST USING INSTAFREEBIE - WITH ASHLEY DURRER



HOW CAN you get subscribers for your list? That's what we've been talking about on the last few episodes of The Self Publishing Formula and this episode features a new promotional platform - InstaFreebie - as well as Mark's ideas about how to use it in partnerships with other authors to build your list and quickly snaffle new subscribers.

NEWSLETTER SWAPS WITH OTHER AUTHORS.

On this episode of the podcast, Mark shares an idea he's implemented a few times with a good deal of success. Authors can begin to build relationships with other authors writing in the same genre. Together they can use their respective email lists to share each other's books and make them available through opt-ins. When combined with a tool like InstaFreebie - highlighted on this episode - subscriptions can sky rocket. You can hear how Mark has seen it work, in this episode.

GET TO KNOW AUTHORS IN YOUR GENRE.

Every self-published author struggles to build their subscriber list and sell books. But it can be easier if authors learn to work together - especially when those authors write in the same genre. Imagine what might happen if you are able to use your list of 500 subscribers to promote another author's free book offer - and they use a list of their own to promote yours. You have a "warm" audience that is very likely to take a look at your book after a recommendation from an author they already trust. It's a win-win situation.

GETTING MORE SUBSCRIBERS TO YOUR EMAIL LIST JUST GOT EASIER.

Our guest on this episode of the podcast is Ashley Durrer of InstaFreebie. The platform helps authors choose how many eBooks they want to give away in return for some serious list-building. Using the InstaFreebie platform, readers are given the opportunity to opt in to your mailing list at the point of book delivery. As Mark has discovered, the service has the ability to give authors some real traction with regard to boosting those all-important mailing lists.

FOR AROUND \$20 PER MONTH, YOU COULD GET THOUSANDS OF SUBSCRIBERS TO YOUR EMAIL LIST.

InstaFreebie is a new way to promote your books through giveaways - and it's a very reasonable investment when you calculate the cost-per-subscriber. For pennies, you can potentially get thousands of new subscribers to your list and be set up to promote your next book or special offers to many more subscribers than you have now. On this episode, Mark chats with Ashley Durrer of InstaFreebie about how the service has become an essential tool for many indie authors.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- James and Mark's introduction to this episode of the podcast.
- Update on Mark's latest BookBub promotion.
- Using Newsletter swaps with other others.
- How you can find good Newsletter swap buddies.
- What is InstaFreebie and how can it be used to build your list?
- The reasonable cost of InstaFreebie.
- How InstaFreebie helps authors connect with readers and other authors.
- What Ashley recommends for authors who only have one book.
- How the platform works and why it's so helpful.
- Why InstaFreebie is comparable in terms of cost.
- How authors can work together using the platform.
- The SPF efforts to build a way for authors to get more subscribers.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [InstaFreebie](#)
- [BookBub](#)
- [MailChimp](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 48 from the Self-Publishing Formula.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: What was that? You just clanged something in my ears. Are you in your posh desk?

Mark Dawson: I am yes.

James Blatch: That's not your posh desk though is it?

Mark Dawson: No my posh desk is in the other room.

James Blatch: Your posh desk.

Mark Dawson: My sit down desk.

James Blatch: Well most desks you can sit down at but your desk ...

Mark Dawson: Sit stand.

James Blatch: Sit stand. Yes it's a very posh sit stand one, a high end one of course because you're Mark

Dawson so only the very best for Mr. Dawson. It has these strange little depressions in them, which we found out putting cans of beer in when we were over there. We were wondering what they were for.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. Beer holders.

James Blatch: Beer holders. No it's a very nice desk and I'm getting closer to my garden office. I've narrowed down the company that I'm probably going to go with and I'm going to go and have a look at one or two of those that are already up to make a final decision. That I'm hoping is all going to happen in the next couple of months. I can not wait to move out of this office. Can't wait to have my own space and I think my family can't wait for me to have my own space.

Mark Dawson: By garden office, you do mean a shed don't you?

James Blatch: Well it's a posh shed. I'll show you a picture of it. In fact, if you're watching the YouTube version of this I'm going to put a picture of it up now so you can have a look at the sort of thing that I'm looking at. It looks really nice and I think, I mean I do work ... As I say, we talked out brain fm the other week and I've got a really good routine with that. It really helps me get into the zone wherever I am. It could be in a café or here in this mess that I'm in here in this room, but I think having that separate area, for me I'm quite excited about it. Having that space and just walking between the house and getting into there and getting on with it.

Anyway, so we talked about working from home quite a lot because it's an issue for most authors, probably all the authors listening to this podcast, whether you have a 9:00 to 5:00 job or you've made the break and you're doing this full-time. Where you write and how you write is something that just occupies doesn't it so we do talk about it from time to time and we will, I keep talking about this productivity episode we're going to do. It's going to change everyone's lives. It is coming. It is coming. We've got a really exciting line up, some really good ideas for podcasts in 2017, I've been working this week on video.

I get e-mails from people quite often asking me to recommend particular cameras or set-ups for doing live video, not least from Mr. Dawson who's always asking me what you should have. I've started to put together what I think is going to be a really comprehensive guide for doing live video and recorded video

that you then upload to YouTube.

What I'm not going to talk about in the podcast we're going to do with this and we'll do a proper guide giveaway with it. I'm not going to talk about the posh adverts that you might create for Facebook adverts or YouTube adverts because we dealt with those previously and we'll come back to them. But I'm talking about connecting with your readers, connecting with your audience. That could be live, you could be saying I'm going to go live.

Mark does to his Milton crowd, I'm going to go live ask me any questions you want or you could say to people, ask me any questions you want, I'm going to do a Q & A next Monday and actually what you do is you record the Q & A once you've got the questions in, it's a little bit more relaxed and you can do a little bit better quality than you upload it and that's some other peoples preferences and then we're exploring crossovers of those, so we'll do a really helpful, I think helpful guide for the basics of getting that right and making it look good and sound good, what you can do for free, what you can do for a little bit of money, what you can do for a little bit more money, so we'll have three levels. The gold, silver, and bronze options of live video. That's one that's coming up.

Before all of that we are in the midst of our three part mini series on mailing lists, which is gold dust for someone like me starting out in their career. My mailing list is approaching 130 now, so I'm quite excited about that. I've been putting into practice the things that Mark's talked about. I stopped short of paid advertising at the moment. I think I'll get the book a little bit further along before I try some of that.

This week Mark we're sort of in between, I suppose, completely free things that you can do and paid advertising because some of the things we're going to talk about today is kind of a mopping up exercise, but the cooperations between authors, some of the services that are available to you to take part in pushes and I'm interested to talk to you about this, not least because I actually don't really understand how quite a lot of them work. I know what they're called but I don't know how they work or what I'm supposed to do and I think quite a lot of authors in my position are in the same place.

Should we start, I know that newsletter swaps are something that we couldn't do just through getting to know other authors, perhaps they're our SPF community, etc, and they can be quite effective.

WHAT I'D LIKE YOU TO DO IS JUST TO EXPLAIN FOR A DUMMY LIKE ME, WHAT THAT ACTUALLY MEANS, A NEWSLETTER SWAP.

Mark Dawson: Okay, before I do that I will just round up what we had last week. We mentioned BookBub as a benefit of having a BookBub deal, apart from the fact that you'll do very well and sell loads and loads of books is that you can also leverage all of those thousands of new readers who are looking at your page to get some new mailing list signups.

I had a BookBub deal on, I think it was last Monday or last Tuesday for my Milton book, *The Sword of God*, and it was as effective as it always is. It got up to at least number 37 in the U.S. dot com stores, sold about 4,000 copies at 99 cents so work the math out fairly easily. 35% of that, you're going to be paid back the fee quite easily and of course there are lots and lots of other sales on Apple, Cobra, Barnes & Noble, Google, all those other places.

It was really effective as ever. I've never had a BookBub deal that hasn't been remarkably effective. And it was also effective in the other way that we mentioned last week. I made sure that the product page for *The Sword of God* had a fairly prominent notice that directed potential new readers to my mailing list.

They could get the first two Milton books for free and as I said last week, I'm not too worried that that's going to cannibalize actually downloads of the promotion book, *The Sword of God*. I didn't notice that it had, and even if it did it wouldn't bother me because I'd rather have those people in my mailing list than buying a 99 cent giveaway because of course by the time they get on the mailing list and then they get ready to read through the series to *The Sword of God*, it would be back up to 4.99 again so there's that, but the giveaways were great.

Obviously I monitor my Mail Chimp list. I split them out into lots of different ones so I can see how they're performing at any given time. Top of my head I think I had about 150 new subscribers after that BookBub in the two or three days after that. Really, a very nice additional bonus that authors often forget is available if they just have a little bit of planning and just sort out their product page before they go live with the deal.

James Blatch: Yeah, and I know I saw there was a comment a couple days ago in one of our Facebook groups and somebody saying BookBub are nothing but consistent with their rejections of me. I know that there are lots of people, surprisingly some really good performing authors, who just don't seem to get BookBub so I know it's frustrating. We've had them on in the past, we'll have them on again, and the advice from them always is just keep trying, your day will come, which is all we can pass on to you about

that. It's probably a bit of luck and the timing with that as well.

OKAY, SO NOW CAN WE TALK ABOUT NEWSLETTER SWAPS?

Mark Dawson: Yes, we can. A newsletter swap is pretty straight forward. If you and I both have mailing lists, one thing we can do is to promote each others books to that list.

You might say to me, "Would you do a mail out to your list about my new book when it goes live?"

Let's put it another way, let's say we're not aiming for sales but we're aiming for subscriptions, so you have a free book and you give it away in exchange for an e-mail address. What I could do is during my monthly e-mails to my list is to say "I've got a great offer for you, my friend James has written a fantastic book, it's very much in the same kind of vein as the books that I write, and if you want to get a copy of it, you just need to go to jamesblanche.com and sign up" or whatever landing page you give me. Then I will then send lots and lots of traffic, lots of potential readers, to your site.

The quid pro quo for that is that when I'm ready, or perhaps even at the same time, you then send an e-mail to your list saying that, "Mark Dawson writes these kind of espionage thrillers, if you like my book you'll definitely like his and he's also giving away, he's giving away a couple of free books, go to his site and sign up," and by doing that, you can spread out the readers between authors.

The only downside to that, and it's not even a downside, the kind of perceived downside is that it's kind of a jealousy thing isn't it? I don't want my readers to go and read your books because your books might be better than mine and they might not buy my books anymore because they want to buy your books. It's not something that detains me for too long because I think that most readers, there's more than enough readers to go around basically. Just the fact that I'm introducing you to my crowd doesn't mean that they're not going to come back and buy my stuff later and vice versa for you.

It's good to get into that cooperative mindset. Something that has, something that I've noticed in the Indie community ever since I got involved with it five or six years ago so that's something that we can all do to increase the benefit for everybody.

James Blatch: Yeah, I mean that's very much a trait of this community that separates it I think from more

traditional businesses and probably the traditional publishing market, which can be a bit dog eat dog is the people are happy to help each other.

And you've got to think ultimately that you are looking at people who enjoy reading, rather than they have a very strict quota of books they read and the moment they start reading another novelist they're going to drop you. This loyalty runs a bit deeper than that I would hope.

I mean I can remember you did one of these with Russell Blake. Actually you went a bit further with Russell didn't you?

YOU ACTUALLY PUT SOME MONEY INTO A PAID ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN WITH THE DEAL?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, we did, yeah. We have similar kind of levels. Russell's been writing a bit longer than me. He's also faster than me, so he's got about 40 books, I've got about 25 now, but we write in very very similar niches. His series is quite similar to mine.

We're often in the kind of chance together and it just made sense for the two of us to get together and cross promote. What we did wasn't a strict newsletter swap. Although it was similar, we just paid for a joint Facebook campaign so we each put in 50% of the money and we split. We each had access to the list who signed up so they got two books, one from me one from him, and then we both got to add those and we added about two and a half thousand to our mailing lists, the same people added twice.

We made it very clear that that was what we were going to be doing. It wasn't just one author, it would be two. That was really popular and that list, I e-mailed to that last week, it's still pretty active. I still get open and click rates from that so that's been a really good investment for me.

James Blatch: I mean that's a whole other area. You just mentioned that you mailed out to that list and we're talking about mailing lists, really we are focusing on building your mailing lists and different ways of doing that. But there's a whole other area which we haven't had time to explore in this mini-series really on how you then manage your list and not just technically what platform you have.

I'M INTRIGUED ALMOST JUST BY THAT COMMENT THAT YOU E-MAIL THAT LIST. YOU'VE KEPT THAT LIST SEPARATE THAT WHOLE TIME. IT'S NOT INTEGRATED WITH THE REST OF YOUR LIST AND THEN YOU GO TO THE EFFORT OF RUNNING BESPOKE

CAMPAIGNS JUST FOR THOSE PEOPLE, YEAH?

Mark Dawson: Kind of. I keep them separate because all my lists are quarantined. They're separated so I know where they've come from, so I know those two and a half people came from that promotion.

James Blatch: Two and a half thousand people.

Mark Dawson: Yes. Yeah. What did I say?

James Blatch: Two and a half people.

Mark Dawson: Oh, yes, two and a half thousand people. We keep them separate for that and that does enable me to craft bespoke messages. But the one I referred to then is that there was a message out about my annual survey, which we'll talk about in another podcast episode down the line, and so that would be a broadcast e-mail which wouldn't have been changed, it just goes out to everyone. But I can then of course track to see what the open rates for that e-mail are depending on what list I've sent it to. There's loads and loads of great stuff in that there's more than enough content for an episode of the podcast right there.

James Blatch: Yeah, yeah absolutely. Okay.

JUST ON THE NEWSLETTERS BEFORE WE LEAVE IT, WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO FIND THEIR NEWSLETTER BUDDIES?

Mark Dawson: Forums are a good place. I think the Facebook groups we have will be good. We're looking to open up a series of genre specific SPF Facebook groups, which will be happening, may even have happened as this podcast goes out. We've started with two for sci-fi and music with enough strange combination, but we'll be broadening that out to include fantasy, romance, erotica, everything really that people are interested in.

And that will be a place for all of us to get together and to do things, to collaborate with each other, make things better for everybody in that genre. We'll also be linking that in with InstaFreebie so that's something that's really the main nuts and bolts of what this episode is going to be about. We've got some interesting new developments that we'll be ready to roll out very soon.

James Blatch: Okay, yeah, so that does bring us neatly onto InstaFreebie and that's the interview that we have today because it's one platform that stands out really above the others in this area, which is sort of this cooperative pushes. We dealt with InstaFreebie quite a bit and in a moment, we're going to hear from Ashley.

BUT I HAVE TO SAY IF YOU DON'T USE INSTAFREEBIE, IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN PART OF THESE PUSHES BEFORE I DON'T REALLY FUNDAMENTALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS AND WHAT I WOULD BE SUPPOSED TO DO AS AN AUTHOR. SO JUST FOR THE DUMMIES AMONG US CAN YOU START BY EXPLAINING THAT?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, so InstaFreebie is a new service. It's been around, I say new, it's probably been around for about a year now.

What it does is enable authors to make their free offers known to potential new subscribers and it also enables the transfer of those free books to the devices of their readers in a fairly seamless fashion. When it came along I was hearing reports of how effective it was.

I'm a skeptical old git and my initial reaction was this is too good to be true because I was hearing some amazing numbers of authors adding 1,000 subscribers in a week and when something sounds too good to be true my default is it's almost certainly going to be too good to be true but the more I looked into it, the more I realized that it's not like that at all. It's very effective, it's legitimate, it's completely ethical. It's based on collaboration and cooperation and it's working really really well.

There are two ways that you can take advantage of InstaFreebie and we'll get into a bit more of that in the actual interview but the first way is for you as an author to put up your book on InstaFreebie and then to rely on them doing some pushes to their mailing list, because they've got a big mailing list of interested readers that they will advertise for you and that will mean that you'll get some subscribers, and you can also do some pushing of that yourself. You have a landing page that InstaFreebie will give you and then you can push that out across your social channels, you can put it on Twitter, Facebook, and if you tag InstaFreebie and they notice that you're pushing that deal, they may reciprocate with pushing it a bit harder to their list at the same time.

That's the kind of base level that's available to everybody. The way to supercharge that is for a number of authors to get together and this combines InstaFreebie and newsletter swaps. Let's just say we could find another eight espionage writers, so there's 10 of us all writing espionage thrillers. We would put a page together on someone's website where there'd be links to all of those free books, 10 free books.

All of the authors would then e-mail their mailing lists and utilize their social channels and send traffic to that landing page. Readers arriving at that page would have the option to download one or two or even all 10 of those books but what they would also need to do in order to get those books is to allow InstaFreebie to take their e-mail address and pass it on to the author and also to themselves. InstaFreebie builds their own lists that way too.

It's that kind of push, especially when it's amplified by InstaFreebie mailing out to its list on say a Friday, they'll have various deals going out throughout the week. You can add three figures, even four figures worth of subscribers in a really short time. It's really effective, it's very cheap, very cost effective, it's one of the most exciting new platforms that I've come across in the last 18 months or so.

James Blatch: When you say it's very cheap, what sort of costs are we talking about?

Mark Dawson: I think it's, I have to double check, it's free for the first month. SPF students get a second month for free because we're working with InstaFreebie on the launch of the last 101 course, and I think it's \$20 a month I think. Either 10 or \$20 a month going forward so it's not going to break the bank and if you're getting, say you even got 100 subscribers for that \$20, that's better than you'll get anywhere else so it's really effective in terms of price.

James Blatch: If you end up getting near four figures, or even four figures, you're talking about such a minuscule amount for potentially valuable, well yeah valuable leads.

Mark Dawson: Yeah and if you're selling a book later on to that list and the book is say \$5 and you sell 10 copies, you've already got a return of estimate of about two and a half, 250% so it's really very effective.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay. Look, shall we hear from Ashley at InstaFreebie. This is an interview that you've carried out, a rare foray into interviewing. I shall be listening with a critical ear and we'll come back after that.

Mark Dawson: I'm joined this afternoon by Ashley Durrer from InstaFreebie. InstaFreebie is a company

that I've been aware of for a good year or so I should think and I'll be completely honest up front. I think I may have mentioned this to Ashley before but when InstaFreebie came on the scene, the reports from authors about how effective it was were so positive, I almost thought it was too good to be true.

But the more I looked into it, the more I realized that it's a really great company, very author centric, enabling authors to hook up with readers and it's just worked wonders for the authors that it's worked for in the short time that it's been around, so welcome Ashley to the SPF podcast. How are you?

Ashley: Thanks so much. I'm really good. It's early here in Boston but I'm looking forward to the day. It's going to be good.

Mark Dawson: Boston is Indie author HQ with you guys and BookBub both in the same town so that's a nice place to visit. If we could get started Ashley, just perhaps if you could tell us a little bit about you and then also give us a bit of history about InstaFreebie.

Ashley: Sure. I've been at InstaFreebie for a little over two years now and I started out doing a lot of our production and operations activities but I've moved on to working on our business development and really helping to build partnerships and collaborations with authors.

In the beginning of the company when I was here, we actually started out with a different product. We had both the Mid List and the InstaFreebie but we quickly figured out that InstaFreebie had vastly more opportunity to help all authors, no matter if they were just starting out or if they were more established. So we started to run with that more and more and just realized there was much more potential to collaborate with authors and support a lot more authors too, so that's been a really exciting journey. It's been a lot of fun to work with so many authors.

Mark Dawson: For those of you who don't know, Mid List was a company kind of much like BookBub on a slightly smaller scale whereby there's a list of readers where you would then mail out on a regular basis about deals that authors might have on their books.

Ashley: Right.

Mark Dawson: Okay, so InstaFreebie has been the focus then since, pretty much since you've got on board. The thing that James said to me before, when we chatted about this yesterday was he couldn't get his head around what InstaFreebie actually does, what it offers authors.

COULD YOU SET THAT OUT FOR US?

Ashley: Yes I can. It may sound ambiguous but hopefully it does help clear things up. What we've come to find at InstaFreebie that it's not a utility, it's really about a community of authors and readers coming together to collaborate and work together in order to connect with one another.

We help authors connect directly with readers and to be able to communicate directly with readers. We love to give that to authors and to help you to do that.

Then, we have authors working together with other authors and actually supporting each other, helping to give tips so that they can be more successful and even working together on group promotions. There's really a community on both sides and then we work with everybody, continue to help to promote them and boost their work as well.

Mark Dawson: It's fairly obvious you've kind of got your foot in two camps.

YOU'VE GOT A COMMUNITY OF AUTHORS ON THE ONE HAND AND THEN A LARGER COMMUNITY OF READERS ON THE OTHER HAND AND YOU'RE JUST FACILITATING LINKS BETWEEN THOSE TWO GROUPS.

Ashley: Right, so a more simplified version of what I just said is that we help authors reach new readers and reach the right readers that are going to want to connect with them and really help authors to grow their mailing lists.

Mark Dawson: Okay, so on the readers' side, rough numbers if you're able to give them, how many readers are using InstaFreebie on a regular basis?

Ashley: We have about 450,000 readers or more. The list is always growing.

Mark Dawson: Okay, and one of the things we're going to get to is collaboration and one of the cool things about how your business model works is that you're constantly growing your list and also growing the lists of authors and the more that authors send traffic to InstaFreebie so that readers can get free books, you also grow your list at the same time which is a virtuous circle because the next time the author runs a deal the list will be bigger, is that right?

Ashley: Right. That's totally right and it benefits authors to continuously engage their readers, even if maybe they have one reader. They're just starting out and they have one reader, and they keep reengaging that one reader, we're going to reward you for that because you're trying and maybe that's all that you're able to do at the moment but you're trying so we're going to help you. Most people I would say have more than one reader but you know it's just a scenario.

Mark Dawson: Okay. Let me put myself in James' shoes. James is working on his first book. I'm obviously a bit further down the track than James is. James is ready to go and he's looking now to build his mailing list because he understands how important it is to do that.

IF I CAME TO INSTAFREEBIE AND SAID, "I'VE GOT ONE BOOK," WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT I DID WITH IT?

Ashley: I know if you've got one book I know it's kind of scary to give that away for free, so I would suggest to make it a little less daunting that you could do a preview. You could do the first chapter or a couple of chapters. It's going to depend on the length of your book and you can offer that as a sneak peek or an exclusive sneak peek to readers to introduce them to you and to the kind of work that you're writing.

That's a really great way to introduce yourself to a reader and let them try it out so they can see if they like it, rather than possibly building any negativity and they're like, "Oh I paid for this but I don't actually like it."

Whereas they're like, "Oh well maybe this wasn't for me, okay I'm going to move on," and then you have somebody else come along who reads it and they're like, "Oh I really like this, I want to read more, I'm going to go buy this book now or I'm going to go review it." Maybe you give it out as an ARC instead, an advanced reader copy.

Mark Dawson: Let's say James has set up his account, he's uploaded, he's going to give the whole book

away because James has been listening to me for long enough, he's drunk the Koolaid, he knows that mailing lists are important.

SO IF THAT BOOK IS NOW AVAILABLE, WHAT WOULD THE NEXT STEP BE? WE'VE GOT OUR ACCOUNT, WE'VE UPLOADED THE FILES TO INSTAFREEBIE SERVICE, WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

Ashley: Awesome, so the next step is to create your giveaway campaign and I want to give a note first before I describe that process a little bit more.

When you're creating a giveaway campaign it's the link that you're going to share with readers so they can become introduced to your content and then you can hopefully gain them as a subscriber or you can get reviews or feedback from them, whatever your goal is.

There's a big secret and I want authors to know about it and the thing is that with the giveaway campaigns you should make it shareable. If you make your giveaway shareable it's going to be a lot easier for readers once they've claimed your book to then share it on social media with other readers, other authors, friends, family, so it's going to help to extend your reach.

It also lets us know that you're giving us permission to share it as well. If you don't mark it as shareable we're going to be like, "Okay for whatever reason, the author doesn't want us to share it, we're going to respect that and we're going to let them do their thing."

Make your campaigns shareable. You can even go a step further and make it public so that it's also searchable on the web on a broader sense. That's just going to expand the reach.

Mark Dawson: Okay, so there's a couple of good tips. Make sure that you're increasing the chances of virility and easy sharing just with ticking the boxes on the inside of InstaFreebie. Let's assume that we've done that.

WHAT IS THEN THE NEXT STEP? HOW DO WE START TO DRIVE TRAFFIC TO OUR OFFER AND TO OUR GIVEAWAY?

Ashley: Before we go there, there are a few other things on that giveaway page. Those I would say are really important and then you're able to control how many you give away.

There's an expiration date, you can say if it's exclusive, so those are also important. Once you've got that all set up now it's time to share and I found that some of these tactics are intuitive to me but not necessarily to everybody so when you're ready to share, if you have no audience to a small audience my biggest tip in the beginning even if it's small or if it's starting out with family and friends, start engaging with the people if you have, that are your current fans, engage them first, and I say that because it's important to remember the people that are your first fans because they can be your biggest fans.

A lot of people there's so much activity going on in the media and just everywhere in the world, people like to know things first and want to be the discoverers of the next cool thing. The more that you can appreciate and reward your current fans, you're going to be able to make them your super fans and they're going to help push you out to other people.

It's really important not to forget about them in the beginning. Focusing on that. If you don't have an audience there are ways where you can include your InstaFreebie giveaway as some authors have said they've done this, putting them in the back matter of other content that you might have on a storefront or putting it on your website so it's easily accessible for readers to find.

Sharing it with bloggers, I mean like, "Hey I'm giving away this full book, it's an advanced reader copy, I want to know if you're interested in reading it." There are a lot of bloggers out there and they're always looking for content to read so take a risk and share it with them and see what happens because you never know.

If you have zero to a small audience, these are a few great ways to get your work out there. As we start to see that you're engaging people, we're also going to engage people with you so that we can continue to boost your success and maximize your campaign alongside you.

Mark Dawson: How do you notice that?

Ashley: We have internal tracking so that we're able to do that. It makes it real easy for us and it's really helpful. We do also look at our social media. A lot of authors will tag hashtag InstaFreebie or at InstaFreebie on different social media accounts and that's just another way to show us that other activity is

happening in addition to our internal tracking.

Mark Dawson: That makes a lot of sense. One of the other things that I found that's quite cool with InstaFreebie, because I've got a book up, 1000 Yards is the first, kind of my permafrees John Milton book and it's been there for a little while. If people download another book they'll be presented at the end of that transaction with, almost like Amazon also boughts, so it's like if you like this, you might like this.

Quite often my book is clearly appearing in those also boughts without doing any kind of promotion, no kind of push on my part. I'm getting two or three subscribers a day at the moment, which is over the course of a year you're looking at 500 or 600 and that's pretty significant for something that is not expensive and is minimal effort on my part. That's really good.

I SHOULD PROBABLY JUST MENTION COST. I MEAN THIS ISN'T FREE BUT IT'S NOT PARTICULARLY EXPENSIVE. THE FIRST MONTH IS FREE I THINK AND THEN IS IT \$20 A MONTH?

Ashley: Yup. It's \$20 a month to share your content, be in control of your giveaway campaigns and gain subscribers.

Mark Dawson: Okay. Not hugely expensive. When you start breaking down how much that those subscribers cost it's competitive with any other method of acquisition that I'm using at the moment. That includes things like Facebook ads so really effective in terms of cost per acquisition. A couple more things that we want to talk about before we wrap this up. The author collaboration and that kind of sense of working together is really important to the InstaFreebie ethos. I wondered if you could just tell us a little bit about how you see that working best in practice?

Ashley: Yeah. We kind of came to that conclusion. We'd always been doing it but we hadn't really realized it until I guess several months ago that wow this is a really powerful thing and we really need to keep focusing on it. It came out of really wanting to help and support authors in a new way and to reward them for engaging with readers. So if we're able to work together with authors and collaborate with them, it furthers that idea and this mentality that we're working together, we're in this together, so if we can help you to be successful than we're also going to be successful. We've continued practice with this mindset and it's come out as you share and we share.

As all authors are sharing their giveaway campaigns, whether their doing it individually themselves or they're doing it in groups or they're doing it in other innovative ways that I hadn't thought of yet, we're going to support all authors so as you're sharing and engaging with readers and you're doing it consistently we're also going to do it consistently with you. It's all about rewarding and working together so that everyone can be successful together.

Mark Dawson: Okay, so a really effective way that I've seen this happen, this is kind of what we also want to just talk about as we bring this to a close is a very effective way of making this work more efficiently is for one of the authors, or an author, to say to maybe nine other authors in their genre.

So let's say that I'm doing sci-fi and I say to nine other sci-fi authors that I know, "I've got an instaFreebie giveaway, would you like to also put a book up. I'll host a page on my website where all of those covers will be available and readers will be able to click on those images and they'll then go through to instaFreebie where they can then download their free book."

The real juice from that is when all of the authors agree that they'll share that page with their list. If I've got 1,000 people on my list, obviously that's a great start but if my other nine collaborators also have 1,000, suddenly I'm 10 timesing my reach to readers who are more likely to like the kinds of books that I'm writing. That can work really really effectively, can't it?

Ashley: Yes, totally. A lot of authors have been doing it and it's been hugely successful for a lot of them. We even have authors, several authors that consistently do these group giveaways with other authors. It's a great opportunity to work together, to get to know each other, yeah it's great.

Mark Dawson: Really effective. I've heard authors adding literally four figures worth of new subscribers over the course of a couple of weeks which is really fantastic, at a very very low price.

One of the facets of that is that someone has got to do the work of hosting the page, building it, collecting the images, all of that kind of stuff, finding the other authors who you might be interested. One of the things that we knew that we wanted to do when we started looking at the 101 course and obviously there's quite a bit on instaFreebie in that course.

One of the things that we wanted to do is take some of that effort away from authors so we are in the process, really quite soon, possibly even when this podcast goes out, to put live a website where we will host, where we will gather books together, we will put those books up and then authors will be able to send that link to their list and hopefully we'll get some reciprocal love from you guys at instaFreebie to really and try to push the people working that, getting some good subscribers for their list.

Ashley: Yeah, absolutely. I'm really excited about it. When you started talking about this idea I thought it was really great and would just further bring the Indie author community and the self-publishing community together to be more successful so I'm really excited about it.

Mark Dawson: Cool. One of the other things we're going to do is we're going to set up individual Facebook groups per genre so there will be a sci-fi, fantasy, mystery, thriller, romance, erotica, and each of those groups will have a captain. We're going to call them captains and they will enable or they will help people get together, put those primers together and we'll then take care of the slightly more irritating hosting and all that kind of stuff. We'll have details on that possibly in a week or so but we're quite close to being ready to put that live now so we're really excited to work with you guys and get that going.

Ashley: Yeah me too. That's really awesome. I'm excited and I like the idea of calling them captains for each of their different genres. That's really fun.

Mark Dawson: Cool. Okay Ashley, thanks very much. I know it's early for you in Boston right now so thanks very much for coming in early and this has been a really great useful chat for listeners today.

Ashley: Of course, yeah, I hope that all authors find some value in this.

James Blatch: There he is, the inquisitive general, Mark Dawson in a new career as an interviewer. How did that feel?

Mark Dawson: It felt fresh and invigorating.

James Blatch: Good.

Mark Dawson: I don't think we need you anymore James. This is Mark Dawson signing off, we'll forget about that.

James Blatch: Fresh and invigorating, it sounds like a shower gel but anyway.

Mark Dawson: It does.

James Blatch: You can write some copy, there's a career left for you. Look, we got to in our last 10 minutes, we're covering this area, so InstaFreebie obviously is a big platform, it's low cost, we heard all the details there. That's great and I'm already excited about the prospect of being involved in that in the future.

We've also, SPF got a bit of a head start. As you say you latched on once you started seeing the results of InstaFreebie, reached out to them. We have a really positive relationship with them so if you're inside the SPF community you will find easier and more manageable ways to be a part of InstaFreebie and we're building a platform using our community that means you'll get the very most out of your time with them so stay tuned for that and we'll reveal and send out some of the details of those genre groups and SPF InstaFreebie groups in time.

Okay, so we talked about newsletter swaps.

WHAT ELSE CAN PEOPLE DO IN TERMS OF GETTING THEIR NAME OUT THERE AND GETTING MAILING LISTS WITHOUT SPENDING TOO MUCH MONEY, WITHOUT GOING DOWN THE PAID ADVERTISING ROOTS?

Mark Dawson: It's all just going to be a question of keeping our eyes up for opportunities really because things will come along all the time. This isn't going to be something that everyone can do but I've had a few times, I mean some of it has come through from my survey results, one of the questions I ask is where did you hear about me, where did you join my list?

I've had quite a few people who heard me on the radio doing interviews, I've had people reading articles I've done in the mainstream press. Other people there's a bit of crossing the streams here. People who came across me through SPF who then decided that they'd like to read my stuff and joined the list and are enjoying my fiction as well so that's very flattering.

There's loads of ways that you can find people but the one thing that I want people to take away from this mini-series that we've done is just to be open to asking people to join and don't see it as imposing yourself on other people. See it as offering them a valuable opportunity.

You're giving them the chance to get a few hours of entertainment at no cost whatsoever so it's quite hard when you look at it that way, to see it as them doing you a favor. It's really the other way around. That's the way that you need to look at it and it will make it much easier to put those questions out there if you see it that way rather than in a negative fashion.

James Blatch: Yeah, and we talked in the first episode about some of the basic things you can do for completely free and I've been following some of those up, even after that first week, so going on to the forums that talk about vintage jets and cold war aircraft and picked up a couple of, for me, very valuable looking advanced readers. People who were there who flew the jet or maintained them in the 60s and are going to be able to pick up on the things that I got wrong in the book. That's going to be useful for me. At the same time of course hopefully recruiting some fans for my fiction in the future.

Good, okay, well look that's been our mini-course on mailing lists. We have really focused over these three episodes on the broad approaches for how you build up your mailing list. We can't underline how important it is to have a strong and healthy list, an active list.

There's lots of other aspects to this as hygiene of your list, a nice expression I know you use Mark, making sure your pruning it, you're making sure that the dead wood gets cleared out. But it's a lively and active list and not clogging up with people who aren't responding and there's a whole area of how often you should talk to your list, what sort of things you should say, how you should compartmentalize it which you can do under Mail Chimp or perhaps more easily under some of the other programs but we're going to save those for another day.

We do the odd webinar on these subjects but I hope people have enjoyed this. I certainly have from my point of view. I think it's been eye opening. We've seen the figures on our downloads have really spiked over these last couple of episodes, people have enjoyed hearing the nuts and bolts and practical advice on how to get their careers going in this area so that's a message to you and me, Mark, that people like this sort of thing.

That we need to work, it takes more effort from our point of view than just have somebody on an interview them and what's so long we put the effort in beforehand in planning the episodes but that's no bad thing. That's something you and I should be doing I think in the future. Certainly that video episode is coming up shortly so we'll do that.

Mark Dawson: Yup, absolutely. I hope people have enjoyed those. It's very nice to see people downloading in big numbers so we'll do more of this in the future.

James Blatch: Okay, now we may even be, we keep playing around with our format here. Basically the podcast comes out every week and you can hear it and if you go onto YouTube you can watch it. We are always working on how we're going to do this, what's the best workflow for us and so on and gives the best quality and what we're going to try for the next couple of months is we're going to get ourselves together in the same room and we're going to record a couple of podcasts at the same time but this will be in higher quality sound and vision so both whether you listen or you go to YouTube to watch, hopefully from next week it'll be live from Salisbury, well not live.

Mark Dawson: In this room, this very room.

James Blatch: That very room, with your books in the background. I'm going to print out my book and blue tack it to the wall.

Mark Dawson: Yeah I've got space for it somewhere.

James Blatch: Yeah. Good. Look, thanks for much indeed Mark, I'll see you at the weekend or Sunday night or Monday morning for our next session down in Salisbury. Thank you very much indeed for

listening. Hope you've enjoyed the mailing list episodes, we will be back next Friday. Have a good week of writing, have a good week of selling.

CHAPTER 46

ADVANCED TWITTER STRATEGIES FOR AUTHORS - WITH IAN SUTHERLAND



HAVING tens of thousands of Twitter followers to engage with - especially when you have a book launch coming up - is something that most indie authors only get to dream about. But this week's guest, Ian Sutherland, a crime fiction author with a background in technology, has learned how to do exactly that. In this episode, he explains how to use Twitter to find more readers, providing workarounds to use the platform organically, (i.e. for FREE!), to get real results. And he'll show how to do it without breaking the rules.

HOW TO GET FREE TWITTER FOLLOWERS WHO WILL BE INTERESTED IN YOUR BOOK

The more followers you have the bigger your reach will be whenever you tweet. Ian explains how to get free followers and communicate with them in a way that converts them into loyal subscribers. Ian's strategies will show you how to get those all-important free followers who will be most interested in your book.

WHAT TWEETS WILL HELP YOU GET MORE FREE FOLLOWERS?

Of course you want to tweet about yourself and your book. But what other content can you tweet that will help you build a loyal follower base? Blog posts? Genre-related information from around the web? Ian provides tips and resources on how to tweet out content that will add value to followers and fans - and keep them interested in your author brand.

HOW TO TURN YOUR FOLLOWERS INTO MAILING LIST SUBSCRIBERS

So how do you motivate your followers to become mailing list subscribers? Ian provides instructions on how to effectively invite your followers to join your list. It's a simpler process than you might think!

Don't be a bot - Keep it personal!

There are many automated ways you can put out content on Twitter but be wary of adopting a fully automated approach. Twitter is a social media platform, so guess what? You need to be actively social with your tribe for it work effectively!

PODCAST #49 GIVEAWAY

There's a lot to take in with this week's episode so you might be relieved to hear we have a handy takeaway for you. Ian has put together a two page PDF that sets everything out in an easy to follow format, and it is free. It's a fantastic resource for any indie author who's serious about building their social media profile and engagement opportunities. [You can grab a copy of it here.](#)

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- John and Mark introduce this episode
- Why Ian Sutherland is on this episode today.
- The importance of growing your follower base.
- How to grow your Twitter follower base.
- Who should you follow?
- What should you Tweet, and how often?
- How to turn your follower base into mailing list subscribers.
- Don't be a bot - Keep the personal touch in your tweets.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- **BOOK:** Advanced Twitter Strategies for Authors

- [Tweepy](#)
- [ManageFlitter](#)
- [MeetEdgar](#)
- [Social Oomph](#)
- [Sendible](#)
- [Ian's New Service](#)

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

James: Hello and welcome to Podcast #49 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: It's just like David Letterman. If you're watching on video ... I should say if you're listening on audio, all our podcasts hopefully sound the same. Completely formatted and then easy for you to listen to. If you watch on video, you will know that we are gradually working our way towards a very presentable, enjoyable little ... Like a TV program. We're almost where we want to be now. We've got our own little studio, which is Mark's office in Salisbury. We've got a load of cameras. I'm basically David Letterman now.

Mark: Yes. I don't know who that makes me. I'll be Will Smith today.

James: Yeah. I suppose I'm James Corden now, am I? I don't know who took over from Letterman. Whoever.

Mark: Good question.

James: Some guy richer and funnier than me. Well, richer. Anyways. The point is that we can have a nice, relaxed chat and bring you your valuable podcasts.

On that note, I mentioned it from time to time ... We are acutely aware ... We think a lot about what goes into the podcast. We are aware that there's lots of competition for your ears and your listening time and your watching time on YouTube videos so when we put together a podcast, we always want you to be able to take value away from it and for it to improve your lives in terms of your author career.

This episode, #49, is no exception. I guarantee to you that if you're an indie author, you are going to get value out of this episode. We should say probably what it's about. Really, it's a hangover from the detailed three-part series we did on mailing lists.

Mark, in the middle of that, we did an interview with a guy called Ian Sutherland and when we heard the interview, we decided that this needed its own episode, right?

Mark: We did, yeah. I listened to it after you did the intro and it's a good 50 minutes worth of value and we decided that we could edit it down a bit. It wouldn't be a good thing to do because there's so much packed into it. It's just better to put it out there and let people listen.

We're really pleased to put this together and the really cool thing that Ian's done is also put together a PDF for listeners to download, which summarizes some of the key takeaways and some additional points that will help you to really optimize your Twitter platform, especially when it comes to finding subscribers and selling books.

James: Yeah, so it's all about Twitter. I'll give you the download link now. We've got a PDF which has got a fantastic resource that Ian's very kindly put together for us. Look at all the links of everything he mentions in there and all those top tips you're going to hear about. This is organic Twitter so to give you the headline, this is Free ... What you can do for free on Twitter to increase your followers. He's got 100,000 followers now following his own techniques. He's written a book on the subject so he's an authority on it.

To get the PDF, if you go to SelfPublishingFormula.com/download49 and you can get that PDF. We'll give that URL away during the end of the podcast.

Now during the interview, I should say I think we gave out a different URL during the interview. It was my idea that we were going to put this somewhere else. We'll make sure that's live as well, whatever it is. Don't worry, but download [49 SelfPublishingFormula.com](http://49SelfPublishingFormula.com).

Mark, before we get into the interview, a quick catch up of where we are. You've been offline a little bit from SPF on and off over the last few weeks because you've been putting together another episode of In The Life of John Milton. Is this the one where we finally crossed genders?

Mark: Yes.

James: It is.

Mark: I thought it was so.

James: He looks good in skirts, doesn't he? He's a guy that can pull that off.

Mark: He's got the legs for it, yeah. I'm very, very pleased about that. I finished it in first draft on Friday, which was what I was aiming for so it's ... As we record this, it's with my proofreader in Canada. She'll be looking through it. I get it back tomorrow so Tuesday and then it will go out to my advance team and my copyeditor for two-week period and then after that we're looking to go live on the 15th of February. That's the plan at the moment.

I've done a bit of outreach to my list. They're very excited to hear this is coming. It's been a while since I've done a Milton book so really excited. Launch is always fun and obviously make a big spike in that month's earnings so quite looking forward to getting that out there the next month.

James: When did you start this book?

Mark: I started writing it probably early November. Obviously we were busy actually before that. It

would be September or October, I guess, but since we were so busy putting the 101 course together, I couldn't focus on it as much as I normally would so January has been head down, finish it off, and yes, I'm pleased with it.

It's 80,000 words. As I mentioned in previous podcasts, I also found that I kind of unintentionally written the next 20,000 words of the next book so I'll be jumping across to that. Might even start that later this week. The next book with a good 20,000 word headstart so that's always pleasing.

James: I'm full of jealousy. In terms of my book, I've had a couple of interesting, fun trips. In December, I visited an actual RAF Vulcan, a 1960's nuclear capable bomber. Four engines. I was entertained by the guys who look after the last flying version of this XH558 in Doncaster in England and they let me into the cockpit.

I did silly little things like sit in the seat and look over my shoulder to see where I could see and whether they could see each other, because I've written, in my mind, that this guy had just exchanged looks with somebody who he's friends with in the back of the jet. I needed to know that was possible and actually found out from the angles I had the originally, it wasn't possible so I made those small changes.

The sort of thing I know somebody's going to pick me up on in the book. Yesterday, I had a little drive around because funny enough and it's totally coincidentally that my book is centered geographically in this exact area where we are now, where Mark lives. As I say, a complete coincidence.

I started working on this book 10 years ago so I had a little drive around the villages of Porton and Amesbury around Boscombe Down from where the field where CND are going to be and where the camp is and so on so that was useful for me.

But as I keep saying, I'm laboring at the moment. Finding it hard going every time I sit down, I spend a lot of time going back over what I've done and slowly move forward and I'll find I've written 500 words in an hour rather than doing much more than that, but we are getting there.

I'll keep you updated. I'll do more on my book.

We have got an interview. We recorded my feedback session with my editor. We'll polish that and we'll turn that around for a future podcast episode and I'll keep the blogs coming out shortly. I want to thank you to everybody who's signed up for my list. I've got 144 so nearly a hundred more than when we started talking about it the other week, which is brilliant. I hope you enjoy my emails. I'm going to do a couple more emails. We've got some more things to talk about including that trip to the Vulcan in the UK in future emails so thank you for signing up to my list.

Okay, right. Let's get you some value, right? That's what we promised.

Ian Sutherland. Expert on Twitter. Like I say, we talked about paid advertising. We normally say about organic social media. Certainly with Facebook, that really your options are much more limited than they used to be because people like Mark Zuckerberg have worked out that they can make money through charging you access to the audience rather than you being able to do it organically. But Twitter is still open as long as you know what to do. Ian Sutherland is a man who knows what to do.

Without further ado, let's hand over to Ian.

Ian: My name's Ian Sutherland and I'm a crime fiction author. I write a series of thrillers with a single character called Brody Taylor and he is a computer hacker so there's a technology element that flows through all the stories in my thrillers and the most recent one, Taking Up Serpents, came out in October of last year.

James: Okay, and before we move on, you're a techie guy yourself?

Ian: Yeah, I have a background in technology hence the write what you know.

James: Yeah, yeah.

Ian: Although I'm not a computer hacker. Let's just be clear about that, but I have a good background in

technology that's what's led me to write the thrillers that I have in the way that I have, but it's also what's led me into taking on Twitter and social media in such a technology-driven way.

James: Okay, yeah, so just in case the NSA are listening in on this, you're definitely not a computer hacker and there's nothing to see here. Okay, good.

Let's move onto the meat of this. Social media obviously is one of the channels. It's multi-channeled within itself, the broad term 'social media' that people use as a funnel for finding their readers. It's a complex area and it's broadly divided between what we used to call organic and paid reach. And then we all know that there's been this shift toward paid because the people that own these platforms have worked out how they're going to make their money and it's being able to contact a thousand friends very easily for free is much more difficult than it used to be.

We talk a lot about putting money into very targeted advertising campaigns and doing those carefully and checking your ROI. What's exciting about what you've come to us with is potentially some workarounds which are going back to those days of being able to use these platforms organically for free, if you like, and finding positive results in terms of finding readers.

IS THAT MORE OR LESS WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM?

Ian: Very nice summary. Yeah, let's be clear. I use Twitter organically. I don't use any of the paid advertising features and we'll talk about that I'm sure this morning. But in regard to Facebook, like you, like Mark, I'm also a member of the SPF community.

I've taken the Facebook ads course and applied those principles so I do both in terms of trying to reach my readers and drive book sales, but all the way through even before I discovered Mark and advertising on Facebook, I have been using Twitter quite aggressively and really investigated it quite significantly and learnt a lot of best practice strategies from others outside of the author community. From other parts of the social media world and I've put all of those techniques together and I started to get real results.

By real results, I mean driving engagement with readers, and with networking in the community right through to getting reviews and even book sales.

MY NUMBER ONE VIEW ON TWITTER IS THAT IT'S NOWHERE NEAR AS GOOD FOR

That said, all of the other things are really important. Having a big platform to reach people, to engage with people, and to drive awareness is just as important and so I can do that through Twitter.

James: I did the Twitter module as part of our course and I would concur completely with that. We worked really hard at it. We did everything in terms of optimization and I would 80% of my module is really about trying to optimize it rather than get it going because that's the only area you can try and get Twitter working for you. And even then we have had some results, but we've found it easier to get results with higher value items like the course than we have with lower value items like the book.

My instinct is and I think I said this in the course that Twitter is geared up for bigger corporations, its paid advertising platform, than it is for small users whereas Facebook works very nicely for that. I think we found the same thing there. I wouldn't rule out paid Twitter advertising forever. Because these platforms change all the time, but where we are now, if you've got something that's going to get us results on Twitter without using the paid advertising platform, we're all ears.

Ian: Okay. I worked all this out about, let's say, 18 months ago and I was starting to get some significant results. I was talking to other authors about this. I go to author meetups and those kind of things. I'm an active member of the Alliance of Independent Authors and quite a few people said to me, "Ian, why don't you just write this down? Because what you've got here, there's definitely some secret sauce."

In the end, I did. I wrote a book called *Advanced Twitter Strategies for Authors*. That was published in April of 2015 so it's well over a year old now. Although some of the tools I recommend, they're all still active, but some of the things have changed. Some of the pricing has changed. All of the techniques are completely still valid. That I have written down in that book.

THERE'S A WHOLE PILE OF THINGS YOU CAN DO ON TWITTER, BUT THE FIRST THING TO DO IS TO GROW YOUR FOLLOWER BASE.

The more followers that you have, the bigger your reach will be whenever you tweet and whenever you retweet others. That's the big thing. It's also the most visible thing so if you're trying to build an author platform and have some kind of credibility amongst your peers or if you're trying to get a book deal and people says, "Show us how many Twitter followers you have," all of those kind of things, then a large follower count works.

I have two Twitter accounts. I have my fiction account, which is IanSuth and that's got over 100,000 followers on it and I have my nonfiction account which is IanHSuth which has just over 50,000 on it..

James: Just to put that in perspective, 100,000 followers ... I've been a BBC reporter. I've got a podcast. I'm relatively high profile in small areas and my Twitter followings not over a thousand yet, but I've done nothing in terms of trying to boost it. But if you do nothing, if you sit there and do your job, if you like, it doesn't get you very far. You do obviously need something applied that you're going to talk to us about.

Let me just drop into the conversation now. Some of this is going to be reasonably complicated, but Ian has brilliantly done us a couple of really, really good instructional detailed PDF that we're going to give away as part of this podcast absolutely for free. All you need to do is go to SelfPublishingFormula.com/TwitterIan. TwitterIan. It sounds like an insult, but it's not. T-W-I-T-T-E-R-I-A-N. TwitterIan and you can download those, but yeah, we'll give that address away a little bit later as well.

Ian, how have you done this?

Ian: Well, I knew an electrician once called Ian and he was called Electric Ian so I think you've just given me a new nickname so thank you.

James: There you go.

Ian: How have we done this? There are whole things that go in concert together so let me just walk you through some of those. In terms of the number one thing that you can do to grow your follower account, because the whole point of someone following you ... It's not something you can control. Someone has to actively choose to follow you.

Why someone will follow you will be for lots and lots of different reasons. It could be because you're tweeting something interesting. It could be because you retweeted them. It could be because you liked one of their tweets.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO HAVE SOMEONE FOLLOW YOU IS IF YOU FOLLOW THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE.

The more people that you follow, the more likely you are to get followers back. There's no reason for it, other than it's an unwritten rule of etiquette on Twitter. People generally will follow back. The rule of thumb is anywhere between 10 and 40% of the people that you follow will follow you back within a few days.

The secret to growing your follower count is to follow more people.

James: There is a hard limit, isn't it? How many people you can follow. Is it 2,000?

Ian: Yeah, so there's all sorts of limits. The official number is 1,000 but if you go anywhere near that you're in danger. If you try and follow more than a thousand people in a day, Twitter will step in and stop you and probably block your account. There's that limit.

There's a second limit which is, and this is what keeps it interesting ... Your follower count has to be within 10% of the people that you follow. If you've already followed 5,000 people, but the amount of people that follow you isn't within 10% of that, like 4,600 or whatever it might be, then Twitter will not let you follow another person, until either you unfollow a load of people and bring it back down or until you wait and a load of people follow you and you catch up.

There's a 10% rule. Up until the first 5,000 followers, that rule doesn't really apply. It only really kicks in at the 5,000 mark. It used to be 2,000, but it's now 5,000.

James: Okay.

Ian: After 5,000 you can just keep following people as long as you don't aggressively follow more than 1,000 people a day and even then I'd never recommend that. I'd recommend at most 600 or 700.

Then after 5,000, but then at that point, you need your follower account to be catching up. Following is the

number one way to attract more followers. It's really straightforward.

But then it comes down to, well, who do you follow? Because that's important. There's no point in just following everyone blindly because as authors, we want the people that follow us to have some interest in what we do.

The advice I give in the book is to find some role models. By role model, I mean someone whose an author like you ... I'm a thriller author so find another thriller author. Maybe Mark Dawson and then look at his followers and then start following them. The logic being if someone has chosen to follow Mark, then they're interested. They may be interested in Mark for other reasons, of course, because of all the things Mark does, but there's lots of thriller authors out there.

Then if they follow you back, hopefully it's because there's some relevance. You'll always get some percentage of your follower base that probably isn't relevant and so on, but overall it's generally targeted. The targeting is one way of doing it.

The other way is to search on the hashtags that people tweet. If you look at people who tweet with the hashtag #thriller, #mystery, #crime for me. It could be romance. It could be anything depending on what genres you write in. Then you can follow those people because they're more likely to be interested in you as an author.

Following other people and then targeting who it is you follow by really following followers of role models is the ideal way to do this.

James: Okay, a couple of quick questions. One is in terms of etiquette.

I'M GUESSING IT'S NOT A POLITE THING TO DO TO FOLLOW A LOAD OF PEOPLE, WAIT FOR THEM TO FOLLOW YOU BACK, AND THEN SNEAKILY UNFOLLOW THEM.

Ian: That happens a lot. I'm not recommending that at all. The minute somebody follows me, I will never unfollow them, unless they unfollow me first. It's really straightforward.

James: Okay.

Ian: Because the reverse happens to you. People will follow you and then you follow them back and then they will unfollow you so there are people who do this all the time and it's just crazy. It doesn't achieve anything.

James: No.

Ian: No, I'm not recommending that in the slightest.

James: My other question is about automation because you're talking about some big numbers here.

IF YOU WERE AT THE TOP END OF THAT FOLLOWING A DAY 600 OR 700 PEOPLE. HAVE YOU GOT ENOUGH MINUTES IN A DAY TO DO THAT?

Ian: It takes some time. Yeah, exactly. If you do this in the Twitter browser. Worse if you're on your phone, but even if you're on a browser on your computer and you try and do it through that Twitter web application, it would probably just take you a day to follow 300 or 400 people.

It's not really helpful so there are third-party applications that help you with this and they can do two things. The two I recommend in the book, one is called Tweepy and the second one is called Manage Flitter. There are other tools that do this too.

What they do is they'll allow you to search out exactly as I've described the followers of role models or people who are tweeting in certain hashtags or searching on certain bios or whatever it might be. It'll give you a big, long list and then you get your finger over your thumb and you start clicking. As you click, it moves up and your mouse moves over to the next one and so on.

There's no real automation other than doing that simply because the Terms of Service on Twitter prevent you from doing truly automated following. You have to be a human pressing the button on a computer to make a follow. All these tools have done is to make it as easy as possible to do that so that you can do many at one time.

James: Okay. I think that makes sense because I think from a Twitter user point of view, you don't want to make it too easy for people just to mass follow thousands of people. You want them at least to have done some work into working out that you are in a group that might be of use to them and vice versa.

Ian: Exactly. There were some tools about three or four years ago that did do all of this kind of stuff truly on autopilot, but they're all gone. They've all been banned by Twitter. The Twitter Terms of Service and through putting apps on their API stops all those things happening anymore so that doesn't happen anymore.

James: Okay. Ultimately, we're talking about trying to get people onto our mailing lists and we'll move onto that in a little bit.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE TECHNIQUE THAT YOU'VE USED TO GET TO A 100,000 FOLLOWERS, IAN?

Ian: That's the most effective way of attracting followers, but there are others. I recommend doing all of these things. The other things that you should do, one is tweet a lot. It's really straightforward, but tweet a lot.

I recommend some ways of doing that. Number one, obviously you want to tweet about yourself, of course, but if all you do is tweet, "Buy my book. Buy my book. Buy my book," over and over and over again, soon you'll get unfollowed.

Actually the skill is to add value to other people who might be following you. I do that through tweeting lots of interesting content that exists on the Internet. Either stuff that I've found manually and organically, like my own blog posts from the past. I have those set up in a queue that drip feeds these out on a regular basis.

Mark uses Meet Edgar and a few people use that. I don't actually recommend that in the book, not because it's a bad tool. Just it wasn't around when I wrote the book, but Meet Edgar has pre-populated queues of content that you can then sign up to and then it will drip feed those out onto your timeline.

James: Yeah.

Ian: That's quite interesting. Some of the hard work's been done.

James: I think we've got the gist of it that if you just constantly say, "Buy my book," people are going to unfollow you. I think we understood that.

DID YOU SAY THEN WHAT YOU DO USE FOR SCHEDULING TWEETS IF YOU DON'T USE MEET EDGAR?

Ian: The tool I use is a tool called SocialOomf. It's been around a while. There's a lot of tools. HootSuite. Buffer. So on. There's a lot of these tools. The reason I like SocialOomf is it takes a queue-based approach which means that you can fill a queue and you can have multiple queues in SocialOomf. I have a promotional queue so those 'buy my book' tweets do exist. They're a bit more sophisticated. I have them as a review quotes so they're more subtle. They're less pushy. I don't want to be spamming people.

Then I have a queue of my old blog posts. Evergreen-type blog posts that will drive traffic back to my website and then I have a queue of interesting genre-related stuff and then I have the best queue which is one that's automatically filled from whenever websites that I have chosen write a new article or a blog post.

The way that's done is through RSS feeds so another technical term, but RSS is an old-school Internet technique where you can use a reader, an application on your computer or your phone, tell it about the RSS feeds or websites you're interested and rather than visit all of those websites, every time they post something new it just appears in your reader like a newsfeed.

That was the original use of it, but what we do with SocialOomf is you tell SocialOomf about those RSS feeds and then every time something is posted on those websites, it pops it into my queue on SocialOomf in the format of a tweet. It has the title of the blog post or the article, has the URL link to it, and I add a hashtag and that's all done automatically. Fills up a queue and then those drip out over time onto my timeline.

Obviously, the websites I've chosen are relevant to me as a thriller author in the case of my fiction

account or about social media in my nonfiction account.

James: This is starting to explain some things. In our previous existence with our video production and I used to write a blog and a couple of posts just took off and caught people's eyes. They're a year old and to this day, I will get two or three retweets a day for those posts and I think it's because the person's retweeted it has put it onto their blog, there's an RSS feed for somebody who follows them and does exactly what you've just said. There's probably a thousand retweets of a couple of those blog posts on how much to pay for video production type blogs.

Ian: The point of doing all of that then is it makes my timeline and the people who apply the techniques from the book roughly end up being around 80% adding value, I mean, truly adding value to people because you're tweeting fresh, interesting content, which gives you a right, buys you the right to do 20% promotional tweets and even those are done in a ... Well, the way I do it certainly is in a more subtle way so that you're not just pushing and saying, "Buy my book."

Getting that 80/20 balance I think's really, really important, otherwise you just turn people off.

James: Choosing those subject areas.

FOR A THRILLER WRITER, YOU'RE CHOOSING AREAS ABOUT OTHER THRILLER WRITERS OR BOOKS OR ARE YOU CHOOSING THINGS ABOUT THE ACTUAL DETAIL OF LIKE ESPIONAGE?

Ian: Yeah. What I do is I look for websites that do book reviews, particularly if they do thriller books and there are some of those out there and blogs. Book review sites are really good. Other authors who post a lot that I find interesting. I choose their websites and so on and so on.

Basically, it's any website that you would personally go to and occasionally you see that you're reading a post and it says, "Click to tweet," and if you would do that on a regular basis on that website, it's a good candidate for an RSS feed into SocialOompf to go out automatically on your behalf.

James: Okay. Before we move on, at what point did you look at Twitter and thought, "This is an underutilized tool"? Because the thing you're talking about, the energy you're putting into it is far and away

beyond above what most people are doing.

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN FOR YOU?

Ian: What happened to me is I published my first two books back in 2014, August of 2014. I did all of the best practice that was around at the time. I had a first novel. I had a prequel novella which I made free, perma free. In those days, I wasn't doing enough to build my mailing list. I've fixed that since and we'll come onto that. Facebook posts weren't really working. It was around the time that they were starting to play with the algorithm so that if you put stuff on your page it wouldn't necessarily be seen with people.

I just looked at Twitter. The great thing about Twitter is that there is no restrictions. You can follow anyone and anyone can follow you. There is no restrictions so from that perspective it made sense to me that it's a good area to focus in on plus it is more now, but in those days it was less image intensive. Something like Instagram is all about the image. Or Pinterest, which I'm not good at graphics.

It was because of all of those things I ended up focusing in on it. I first tried to look at scheduling tweets and I looked at things like HootSuite and yes you can pre-schedule tweets in HootSuite. And it's great, but the problem is, you have to pick a date and a time and put it in there.

There is an ability on the paid version to load spreadsheets up so you can bulk upload them in advance, but if you have the same tweet in there twice, it stops you doing it so then I got into this mechanism where I was bulk uploading and then a few weeks later, I'd be bulking uploading the same ones again and it was just becoming cumbersome so I put my technical hat back on and I just started doing some research and seeing what else was out there.

That's when I discovered Buffer, which is a great step forward because it has a queue-based approach. You simply just fill a queue, but it didn't allow you to automatically recycle updates and it only had one queue.

Eventually I stumbled across SocialOomph and that's why I ended up focusing in on SocialOomph because it gave me the ability to segregate my queues, the types of content I was tweeting, drip feeding them at different times. I have some queues that drip feed, that drip once a week. No more than that. Others that drip every two hours. Overall, it just creates a nice active timeline.

For me, it was a case of having to and I was sure that Twitter could get the reach out more and then after that, I got hooked and then I started trying to figure out how to get more followers.

James: Just on frequency then, you mentioned one of your queues, every couple of hours.

HOW MANY TWEETS A DAY DO YOU DO ON AVERAGE?

Ian: It depends. On those kind of tweets, I'm probably tweeting around 40 or 50 times a day so that's quite a lot, but I haven't included retweets in there and I haven't included something we'll come to in a minute which is how I attract email subscribers to my email list.

But the value-added content plus some promotional stuff, around ... Maybe 10 promotional emails a day and 30 or 40 interesting content is going out.

James: Okay. I know it's a bit of an art rather than a science, frequency, and you have to make a judgment about it and I guess ultimately you have to look at the results you're getting and unfollows to really try and spear and work out where your sweet spot is in terms of frequency.

You talk about an 80/20% so 80% should be of interest, of value, to people and 20% should also be of interest and value to people, but it's basically selling your product or letting people know that you've got a book.

Ian: Yeah, yeah, absolutely right. If you get that right, then the volume just means ... A half life of a tweet on Twitter is getting shorter and shorter. It becomes a much busier time so it actually pays you to tweet more because you've got more chances of catching somebody on their timeline than you do in any other way.

If you only tweet once or twice a day and the odds on you ... You've got a thousand followers, the odds on all thousand of your followers seeing are pretty slim. If you want to get the word out in a nice way, then you have to increase your frequency.

The downside of that is if you're only tweeting with your family and friends, your timeline starts

overtaking their and you have to accept that they may not like it.

James: I should say it's @jamesblatch, by the way, in case anybody wants to follow me.

Ian: I'll follow you now.

James: There you go. Thank you, Ian. Get yourself a podcast and then tell people to follow you. We need to gravitate towards mailing lists, which obviously is the ultimate aim for us as authors is to try and get names onto our mailing list which is certainly a significant aim for us.

HOW DOES THIS MESH WITH THAT AND WHEN DO YOU DO THAT TRANSITION?
THAT'S PART OF THE 20% OF TWEETS, I GUESS?

Ian: No. It's special. This isn't in the book, but anyone who reads the book can subscribe to the mailing list in the back and then I send you another chapter. I will have a second edition at some point. This is a technique I discovered after writing the book in April 2015. It works really well.

The idea is fairly straightforward in principle. Let's be clear. What I'm talking about doing is using Twitter to ask somebody to join my mailing list. In the same way on Facebook ads, we have lead gen ads and the link takes you either to a landing page or you can within Facebook, the Facebook user can give you their Facebook email address and it automatically flows through to your mailing list.

It's the exact same thing on Twitter, but being done organically and not being doing through Twitter advertising, which is essentially where you explored when you put the Twitter advertising course together.

Let me do it from a reader's point of view. I'll try and describe it that way. I'm a reader and for whatever reason, I have chosen to follow Ian Sutherland, @IanSuth. Maybe it's because he followed me first. Maybe it's because he retweeted me. Maybe it's because he wrote something interesting and I thought, "You know what? I'll follow this guy." I follow IanSuth and great. End of.

About an hour alter, I'll actually receive a reply tweet or a mention tweet to me from Ian and it's in a

special format, but I notice it as a reader because it's a reply. If you're a normal user on Twitter, your notifications area, you see the number go up and so it really stands out. It's not a direct message, because there's far too much spam in direct messages, if you've looked at your direct message feed. This is an @reply. I see the @reply and it says, "Reader," whatever my Twitter handle is, "Thank for following me. Would you like a free book? Here's a free book." It's actually written more eloquently than that.

James: I think for those people who are watching this on YouTube, I might be able to bring this up because I have followed you and I'm going to scroll back through my replies because I did notice it come up, but carry on and I'll see if I can bring it into screen at some point.

Ian: On top of it just being a tweet, it's actually in a special format and it looks quite interesting. It's got a graphic in it. It's got some words around it and the technical term is it's a Twitter lead gen tweet, which I know you know about because that's what you used in the advertising side.

I see that as the reader and I think, "Oh, okay, yeah, maybe I will have a nice book for free." There's two things I can do. I can either hit subscribe and there's a button right within Twitter so I could be on my phone and press that button and it will say, "Do you want to share the email address you've registered to Twitter with with Ian?" And I say, "Yes," and that's it. Done. I've now joined Ian's mailing list and within a minute or two, I'll automatically get an email with links to the book for me to download from BookFunnel.

That's the process from a normal follower, a reader's perspective. Did you find the tweet?

James: Yes, I did. I found it and when I clicked on it, it seemed to take me to your website.

Ian: Yeah, there's two things. I learned from experience that just relying on the Twitter lead gen card, some people are hesitant to click on the subscribe button within Twitter. They look at it suspiciously. Some people are fine with it. What I've done is also include another URL within the tweet text which is a backup and that takes you to a landing page on my website where you can then sign up in the old-fashioned way.

James: Yeah, okay.

Ian: I get roughly a 50% through Twitter lead gen cards directly and 50% through the landing page, but 100% from Twitter.

James: That's automated, obviously?

Ian: Right. Let's go back to how have I set this up. The first thing to do is to create the lead gen style tweet. You actually have to go into the advertising side of Twitter.

You have to go in there. Register your account. Do that. I believe you have to register a credit card, but you don't have to spend any money so it's okay.

Once you've done that, that then opens up the ability to create Twitter cards, one of which is a lead gen card. You have to do that step first. Create a lead gen card and depending on your mailing list provider, whether you've got MailChimp or ConvertKit or whatever, then the way that you link that to your mailing list. All of the mailing list providers provide you the instructions for how to do this. You've got to provide the graphic and the text and that's that.

That's the lead gen card created and that takes care of the flow through to your mailing list.

I obviously have a landing page as a backup so I need to have a landing page to send people to and then the last thing is you have to then set up the automation so that it automatically sends the welcome tweet, I call it, to the reader within an hour or so of them following you.

There are a couple of tools on the market that will do this for you. One is called Sendible and the other one is called Audience. There're probably others as well, but there's two that I'm fully aware of, but you have to pay for these. These aren't free, but if you don't that ... They do other things, these tools, but with one of their capabilities is the ability to send this mention tweet. There are hundreds and hundreds of tools that will do auto DMs so auto direct messages, but that's pretty much pointless. You need this to be an

@reply for it to work as a Twitter lead gen card.

If you use one of those two tools or find another one, then actually what happens is within those tools, you then set up tweet variations. I then set up about 20 or so different versions, different text versions. Different ways of saying, "Hello, would you like a free book?" The reason for that is so that you're not tripping Twitter up and then it chooses them randomly each time you have a new follower and that's so you're not tweeting the same stuff.

James: Is that where you put the mix of links that go to your landing page or the Twitter lead card?

Ian: No, no, all 20 have landing page and the lead gen card in them, yeah?

James: Okay.

Ian: The Twitter lead gen card at the end of the day, all it really is is another URL. It's just that Twitter recognized a special format URL, then displays it in a different way as a lead gen card so essentially you're composing a tweet with two URLs in it.

James: Okay.

Ian: That's the way I do it.

James: Okay.

Ian: Then you do that and then every time someone follows you, it randomly chooses one of the 20 variations and then sends that in an @reply format so they see it in their notifications.

The ratio you get of followers to email subscribers varies. The range is between around 3-15%. It's not a

high conversion, but bearing in mind, other than the use of the automation tool, you're not paying for this. You're not paying for Twitter advertising here. As long as you're driving enough followers on a daily basis. If you're getting 100 followers a day, yeah? Then actually that should convert down to anywhere between 3 and 15 new email subscribers.

Unlike Facebook ads or perhaps Twitter ads, you can't scale it much more than that, simply because there's that limit of how many people you can follow in the first place and all the traffic that you put out to attract to new followers to then hit them with a welcome tweet to then get that ratio. It's a nice technique, but over a year, if you're getting 10 email subscribers a day, it builds up.

My email list is well over 5,000 and I've been doing this for a year all through Twitter.

James: Brilliant. In terms of tracking that, obviously if you're using the Twitter ads platform, you get all their analytics. I'm assuming they still work despite the fact you haven't actually paid for this campaign.

CAN YOU STILL USE IT TO TRACK HOW MANY PEOPLE CLICKED ON THE LINKS?

Ian: You can track that, yeah. You can track how many click on the link, so then you just compare that to how many actually subscribe.

James: Yeah, you can do that.

Ian: Yeah, so you can do those kind of things, but you can't do much more. They don't open up the full demographics that you see when you're doing the advertising.

James: Okay. You do need to set up a Twitter ads campaign account. In the course we recommend you create a Google AdWords account so that you can access some stuff, which you're going to use for free without running a campaign. Google AdWords is a bit naughty because it forces you to set up a campaign as part of your setup, but you don't. You can pause it immediately so it doesn't send even a single impression out.

I know some people are hesitant about this, but you know what? It's Twitter and it's Google. These are not

corporations that are going to rip you off. At least, not in that way. They're not going to force you or trick you into spending money so don't hesitate about that. You can put your credit card up, your details.

Set up your Twitter ads campaign and never run a campaign and apart from getting the odd email from them saying, "Why don't you run a campaign?" That will be the only downside of that so don't worry about that, I would say.

Ian: Agreed. Agreed. That's how it works. It's a very nice, organic way to drive traffic through to your mailing list and then from there, it's business as usual. If you've got all your other tweeting going on. You're doing your regular following every day. You'll drive new followers, which will then convert, some of those into email subscribers.

James: Yeah, obviously in your book you go into a great amount of detail about this and people can follow that. I'm very happy for you to plug that in so just give us the details of your book again.

Ian: Yeah, so the book is called *Advanced Twitter Strategies for Authors* under my name, Ian H Sutherland, on Amazon. Everywhere. On all platforms.

James: Yeah, on all good retailers. You've very kindly put together a crib sheet to go along with this interview so people can follow it and there has been quite a lot of detail in there and as I say the address for that, if you want to download that crib sheet, just pop over to SelfPublishingFormula.com/TwitterIan, which is Ian's new name. It's Ian without two 'i's. Ian with one 'i'. I-A-N.

Ian: Ian. I-A-N, yes, absolutely. There's one last thing I'd like to say because having talked through all of this, right? I'm very keen to get across. I've talked a lot about automation and how automation can help you, but if that's all you do, as far as I'm concerned, you've failed because yes, you've got the word out. You've got a bigger following. You've got some subscribers, but you absolutely still need to remember that Twitter is a social media place and you have to be social.

I still go on every day and I make time every day to interact with people personally because of all of the automation I do, my tweet stream ... I can't keep up. I couldn't possibly keep up with it. With a 100,000

followers, it just refreshes all the time. I use TweetDeck, but you can use HootSuite in its free mode and you can set up columns filtered on certain things like the mentions to you. You can filter on lists so I've set up lists of people I really am keen to know what they tweet about amongst my 100,000, I really want to know about those people and what they're saying so that I can interact in conversations.

I strongly recommend that you don't turn yourself into a bot, which is what this is entirely capable of doing. That you remember that it's very important to engage personally with people by talking and replying to people and also initiating conversations.

James: Yeah, and there's absolutely no excuse for not doing that. I can tell you from my old job that I would occasionally stand next to and interview celebrities and I'd see their phone when ... These people have hundreds of thousands of followers. Sometimes a million and their mentions are chaotic. You can't ... every time they breathe at their Twitter account, a thousand people immediately reply to them, but each one of those, at least the good ones, the kind of people who are doing ... If I was interviewing them, it's probably because they were out there doing something in the community. They'll get on there and they'll interact and the ones that catch their eye that they think are quite funny, they'll go back to them.

In the early days, Stephen Fry used to reply to every single person that tweeted him and that included me in the early days of Twitter. I've got a reply from Stephen Fry on my mentions list.

Ian: [crosstalk 00:47:01] for us to get one now. I believe he stopped using Twitter.

James: He has. You won't get one now. He stopped before he ... Once he went north of a million followers. He's now north of two million and as you say, he's come off for his own mental health reasons, I think, for his particular circumstance. Those guys can do it. You can do it as well and absolutely keep it a lively and engaging place and that's going to be the heart of why people would want to follow you in the first place.

Yeah, that's great. It's a detailed area, Ian, and I know we've skimmed across it really, but you know what? For me, where I am sitting and I'm sure for our audience, it's been gold dust, really. It's been really valuable.

Ian: One other thing though in case people are daunted by all of this. Yes, you can buy the book and read the book and try and I give you guidance in how to set all this up.

But just so you know, I am launching a service this month that I've been in beta test for the last four months with 12 authors. One of which is Mark. I've figured out a way to scale these techniques so that I can do it on behalf of other authors in a way that scales. Still leaves me time to write so I can get all this stuff set up and so on. I've proved it over the last four months for the 12 authors. We've grown their accounts by a total of 75,000 followers.

James: Wow.

Ian: Which is about 1,500 followers per author per month. It's quite significant. That's a new service that's being launched towards the end of January and if anyone's interested, it's at AuthorPlatformPsychic.com.

James: I wasn't sure how secret that was. I wasn't going to mention it, but I know you've been doing this in the background and working with these hand-selected authors to test the platform, but you're going public with that now.

Ian: I'm going public in pretty much two to three weeks it'll be live. There's a waiting list there at the moment so if anyone's interested they can sign up. It looks like it works. It looks like it'll be a valuable service.

James: This will obviously be a subscription model for you?

Ian: Yeah, absolutely. It's a monthly subscription model and there's different levels depending on how far people want to take it. They don't have to do the whole thing, but it includes the ability to drive email subscribers.

James: Okay, again we've got the stuff you've given us for the download, but if we make sure all that's included, that link and that Twitter ad, we'll make sure that's all there so if people want more details of

where to go for that, to subscribe to that, to get the book, etc. as I say, SelfPublishingFormula.com/TwitterIan.

Ian: Perfect.

James: Twitter Ian, it's been brilliant.

Ian: My new name.

James: We had a slight issue. We had to get you scrabbling from your house to your parents' in-laws' house which is where you are now. You had this really cool Jaws poster behind you and now you've got ...

Ian: I did.

James: ... what I'm sure is a fascinating 17th century scene with chickens, I think, behind you.

Ian: It's the Battle of Rorke's Drift.

James: Oh, is it? The South African campaigns, is that right?

Ian: Yeah. I don't know.

James: If you're watching on YouTube, you can see this. If you're not watching on YouTube, you don't know what we're talking about except for Ian is going out of his way to make sure this interview happened today.

Ian Sutherland. I told you you'd get value out of this episode. Some of the tricks quite intuitive and simple. Others you'd not necessarily would think about, but clearly effective, right?

Mark: Yeah, I'm a good demonstration of that. I beta tested his new service for him and as he said in the episode, I think I added double the size of the list, up to about 10,000 over the course of the experiment, but also most importantly for me, added a couple of hundred subscribers, all completely automated at no cost. Very efficient.

If you can get a few ways like that to passively build your list so Facebook being one way. Twitter being another way. Before you know it, you can find you've got 500 a month, 600 a month. Then when you add in paid advertising and organic growth through back of book links, product pages, you can very quickly find you're up to four figures a month and that's when you start to really start rolling.

Yeah, really, really useful. Definitely something that you should consider adding to your armory.

James: Yeah, definitely. If you want the detail on that, all the breakdown of what Ian was talking about and some step-by-step guidelines in how to move forward with that, you can get the PDF download we've put together for you for this episode. If you go to SelfPublishingFormula.com/download49. All one word. Download49.

Yeah, Ian mentioned he's got this service he's developing at the moment, a bespoke one-to-one service that you can subscribe to if you contact Ian. He's trialed it. You were one of the beta he used there, Mark. Obviously he's going to charge for this in the future and he's got a book as well. All of that information you'll find on the download as well.

Look, that's it for this episode. That's 49. We'll get to our half century next week, which will be ... I don't know. In cricket you just stand there very politely and wave your bat in the air for half a century. Should we have party poppers or?

Mark: Oh, we're much more reserved than that.

James: Yes, we are.

Mark: Perhaps we'll just ... We'll motor on gracefully.

James: We'll motor on. We may look very similar.

Mark: Probably will.

Okay, thank you very much indeed for listening. Don't forget the download. Visit our webpage SelfPublishingFormula.com/download49. We'll see you next week.

CHAPTER 47

HOW TO LAND A PUBLISHING DEAL - WITH ALEX CLARKE



WHAT MAKES A BOOK SELL? Alex Clarke is a traditional publisher who understands the independent market as well. In this episode, he talks about writing and pitching your book in a way that will get it noticed by both publishers and consumers. You'll want to hear every tip in this episode if you want a saleable book after all your writing efforts.

WHAT BOOKS ARE PUBLISHERS AND CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR?

What book genres sell the best? What role does the annual calendar play in how books are chosen? These questions and more are answered by Alex whose new imprint at Headline Publishing - Wildfire - has been created to try and capture those 'water-cooler' books that has everyone talking and Hollywood calling.

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PITCH YOUR BOOK

Everyone wants their book to be noticed by publishers and consumers. Which part of the book is your most immediate marketing tool? Who buys and consumes the most books? Alex explains how to set expectations for your book and draw the most likely readers in. You'll want to learn from his experience as he provides clear tips on how to pitch your book in a way that will make people want to read it!

MISTAKES AUTHORS MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

For authors, seasoned or not, it can be easy to make some rudimentary mistakes when it comes to pitching and selling. Alex talks about those mistakes and gives plenty of insight into how to avoid them. You'll feel better about the dreaded pitch-sell process after listening to what he has to say.

TRADITIONAL OR SELF-PUBLISHING?

How do you get your book to be noticed by a publisher? How are the traditional and indie markets changing? Alex talks about new dynamics in publishing and the changing roles of publishers and authors. Are people reading more ebooks than paper? Which approach should you take? Tune in and find out the answers to all of these questions.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction of Alex Clarke, a traditional publisher who also understands Indie market and the value of both industries.
- Alex Clarke talks about setting up a new imprint and describes the genres of books he will publish.
- What is the thought process that goes into setting up a new imprint?
- What will make publishers take notice of your book?
- Writing that appeals to the most frequent buyers and consumers.
- Mistakes authors make, and how to avoid them.
- The time and process involved in working with a traditional publisher.
- What is the impact of the explosion of self-publishing platforms on the traditional publishing industry?
- The key skill for getting your book noticed and increasing your sales.
- Conclusion, upcoming webinars and courses.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- BOOK: *I Am Pilgrim*
- [Ian McEwan](#)
- [David Siteman Garland Website](#)
- [David Siteman Garland podcast interview](#)

- [Faber Academy Writing Course](#)
- [Self Publishing Formula Website](#)
- [Headline Publishing](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to episode 50 from the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blache and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: We made it. Half a century, 50, I mean 50 sounds ancient doesn't it? Who would be 50?

Mark Dawson: Anyone in the room over 50? Hang on, one, we'll gloss over that.

James Blatch: We'll ignore the fact that someone might be 50 soon, but here we are episode 50 for the podcast and it started as something we thought because we think and breathe and live modern indie publishing and all the ideas that come up and we listen to other podcasts, we thought there was something we could do here. Each week to talk about an episode, talk about something that would be of use to people and here we are 50 episodes later.

We have thousands of listeners. The YouTube channel has grown, if you're watching us on YouTube, and yeah we love doing it don't we?

Mark Dawson: We do and we've got some fun things that will be coming down the line as well where we're going to be rebranding a little bit. The YouTube channel will get a bit of a lick of paint, but we'll still obviously concentrate on just providing the content and you can choose how to consume it.

If you like seeing James and I, you can watch us on video or if you'd just rather have us go directly to your ears whilst you're running or doing the dishes or whatever, obviously than the podcast is where you need to be subscribing, but yeah we're pleased to get to 50. Well done.

James Blatch: Yeah, and we'd also be delighted if you left us a review on iTunes. That's very helpful for us if you'd like to do that. We do respond to every comment. If you comment on our YouTube video I always dive in there, even if it's mildly critical, which it isn't very often but occasionally. Here we are. We're digital people in the digital space.

I'm so pleased about today's interview and today's guest because it's somebody from the heart of traditional publishing who has now moved to indie on his agenda or his horizon anyway, he's a traditional guy.

In fact he's starting a new imprint and that's why we spoke to him. But what this interview shows his how much crossover there is between traditional and indie. We are all about books, first and foremost, we're about books. About loving books, about writing them, about coming up with good ideas, about making your books something that people are going to want to read.

It doesn't matter whether you're doing this by yourself in your bedroom or you're a hoarder or penguin, you have to get all those things right, it's just a bit more pressure on this guy because he's looking after other peoples money in the big companies. He's got to make these decisions correctly, but it's a fascinating interview. He's an absolutely lovely guy. I think you know Alex, did you? How did you come across Alex?

Mark Dawson: I was in on a panel in London last year with, I can't remember what the topic was, but Alex was there, he was an agent there. Again, they were obviously from the traditional side of the spectrum and I was kind of the young turk, pushing the indie argument.

Alex is great and the way I look at it is like this, it isn't so much books, it's stories. We're in the story business, the storytelling business, and whether you distribute those stories by way of file, digital download, or with paper, it doesn't really matter, that's just the delivery mechanism. The story is the main thing.

We're just looking at different ways to get the story into the hands of readers. Alex has no axe to grind, and neither do we. I think that's important to lay out there as well. I am traditionally published in different

countries so I've got traditional deals in Germany and Italy and the Czech Republic. I have been traditionally published in the U.K. before. I've got nothing against traditional publishing.

The difference these days is that I'm able to reach out to readers directly without needing to take recourse to that kind of way of doing things but in principle if someone came and offered me money for the Milton books and I thought it was a good opportunity, I'd be up for it. But the bottom line is, and this is kind of the, I was going to say curse and the blessing, it's probably actually neither of those, it's just the fact is I have a lot of data on how much my books, how they sell, what I can expect from them.

I can extrapolate what those books therefore are worth, so it enables me to make qualified decisions on how I chose to publish them. At the moment it looks to me that self-publishing is really the only way I'm interested in going, but all options are on the table. I'm always open to ideas.

James Blatch: In terms of what's going to be of use for me as a budding author listening to this interview and the questions I asked are really focused around really tapping into Alex's masterful view of books and what makes a book sell. What he's looking for in a book that he knows is going to, in his view has the best chance of working and that's valuable for us then because if you think the way that he thinks, with a very critical eye, I think you hear Alex talk about this very openly, it's an art not a science. But that's only going to help us listening to it the way that he views the way that books come to him and what he's looking for. It's only going to help me craft my book and you craft your book.

His name is Alex Clarke, as I say he's starting a new imprint, I'll let him introduce himself in a moment and then we'll come back and have a chat afterwards.

Alex Clarke: I am setting up a new imprint here at Headline and the imprint is called Wildfire. I had been at Penguin for 15 years where I was publishing director and at the beginning of the year I was asked by the MD of Headline if I'd come here and set up a new imprint.

BROADLY SPEAKING, THE IMPRINT IS LOOKING AT QUALITY COMMERCIAL FICTION AND NON-FICTION.

In terms of the balance of the list, hopefully longterm it will be about 50/50 fiction and non-fiction. In terms of commercial fiction particularly we're looking for crime thrillers, high concept thrillers, a bit of historical, and some of the more I guess commercial end of reader group fiction.

The bottom line for the ethos of the imprint is we've called it Wildfire because that's the kind of books we want to publish. We want to publish books that people love talking about basically, that you pick up, you read and you want to tell your friends about straight away. In terms of setting that tone, our kind of touch line has been basically books with a little bit of soul, books that you do feel happy talking about with your friends and family.

James Blatch: Commercial fiction and from your description you're talking about the books that people want to sit and read on the tube, and as you say, then have a discussion about afterwords. I'm curious about the choice between combining fiction and non-fiction.

YOU TALK VERY MUCH ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL FICTION AND THEN HOW DOES THE NON-FICTION FIT INTO THAT? HOW CAN IT BE A STABLEMATE?

Alex Clarke: I've been very fortunate as a publisher that I've always published a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. I think from a personal point of view, it keeps my brain ticking over quite nicely.

But in terms of the dynamic of the non-fiction, traditionally I've published a lot of celebrity autobiography, a bit of historical non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, and so those sort of big ideas, whether it's science or whether it's issue led ideas type non-fiction.

That's very much the tone we're looking for for Wildfire is finding books, again, that are talking points. The way I publish has always been to find someone a bit different, a bit interesting, or well known to talk about such subjects so it might be gender equality, it might be environmental issues, or it might be a kind of particular historical figure or period and finding someone who can really reach out to as large an audience as possible in an interesting way as possible. That's how we're defining our hunt for non-fiction.

James Blatch: I would say that's a fair mix of non-fiction and fiction, so I don't think it's that unusual. I completely see the argument that it keeps you on your toes and keeps you interested because I think there's a lot to be said for that actually because there is a culture difference between the two and having to switch from one to the other. I suppose we'll talk about what's going to be, I suppose, more directly relevant to people like me and people who want to write and want to be published at some point in a moment.

I'm still interested in the thought process that goes into setting up a new imprint.

I GUESS THERE ARE ECONOMIES OF SCALE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION, WOULD THEY GO ACROSS FICTION AND NON-FICTION OR WERE YOU GOING TO HAVE AN INVISIBLE LINE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COMPANY?

Alex Clarke: In terms of how you structure a publishing list, I think one always has to think about how is your publishing is going to be spread out throughout the year in terms of A, the investment you're putting in, whether it's advances or production or the marketing and publicity of a book.

Whether it's repeat series fiction every month so that you're creating an engine in terms of your revenue and also your creative output and that allows you to think of the more seasonal non-fiction say, you'd love to publish a celebrity based book in the autumn, Christmas market, you might look to publish a more ideas based non-fiction book in a sort of spring market.

When I think about structuring a list, it's building a pyramid of repeat authors, brand fiction you know is going to hit the market in a certain way, and then you'll have maybe one or two books that are the big word of mouth books that you're hoping will become the next *Girl on the Train*, the next *Gone Girl*, whatever it might be.

You can only realistically as a contained publishing company, you're only going to get one or two shots at that kind of book per year so you've got to balance your structure throughout the year so that you're able to give space to that kind of big make book. It's lining up all the bits of revenue in as creative and as fruitful way for the individual books and how they might best land in the market really.

James Blatch: Okay. Well let's talk about what you look for and you talk about the talked about book and the recommended book. I can remember from my commute into London, I read *The Lovely Bones* and *The Davinci Code* and a few others just because I saw everybody else reading them. There's one book that comes up every now and again, *Girl on the Train* at the moment, and you want to find them and we want to write them.

WHAT ARE THE TOP TIPS? WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?

Alex Clarke: It's very interesting at the moment. You reference *Girl on the Train* and things like *The Davinci Code* and traditionally there's usually every year, every season, there's one book that goes crazy, possibly in a year cycle you get one, two, very rarely three books that hit that level where they sell half a million, a million copies.

Obviously as a publisher that's the holy grail. It's very hard to predict that. I guess *Before I Go To Sleep* was the first of the new generation of psychological thrillers, as we call them in the publishing industry.

You had *Before I Go To Sleep*, you had *Gone Girl*, now you've got *Girl on the Train*, and what's interesting is that they are all performing to a similarly high level. Whereas you look at something like *The Davinci Code*, that was its own unique phenomena and the same with *50 Shades of Grey*, and then everything kind of fell into the copycat, to use a sort of diminutive term, which I don't think is necessarily fair.

But everything that followed tends to have a sort of half life and eventually that trend sort of runs out of steam. What's been very interesting about the psychological thriller kind of trope within publishing, it hasn't seem to run out of steam. Actually these pillars come along, the *Gone Girl*, the *Girl on the Train*, it's just been as high as the last and each has had a wave of followup publishing afterwards.

At the moment I've just kind of, out of the back of the Frankfurt frenzy, a very significant percentage of the fiction we were receiving on submission from agents was in that psychological thriller area, category. I can't see it going away, certainly for the foreseeable 18 months of publishing.

Knowing what's been bought by publishers, including ourselves, the psychological thriller is here to stay so I think there's something in that in terms of picking what one is going to write about.

I THINK YOU DO HAVE TO WRITE WHAT'S COMING FROM WITHIN BUT ALSO I THINK IT DOES HELP TO HAVE A BIT OF A SENSE OF WHAT'S WORKING IN THE MARKET AS WELL.

James Blatch: I guess if you look at the movies, the psychological thriller going back to the 30s and the 40s and 50s and Hitchcock. Today it has been a mainstay of what draws people into seeing a story play out so there's some backing up there that it's got longevity. You say it's difficult, obviously it is difficult to spot that and you are having a lot of these pushed at you alone by agents and authors, so how do you do that?

I MEAN WHERE'S THAT MAGIC FORMULA THAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR WHEN YOU'RE READING?

Alex Clarke: I wish there was a straightforward magical formula. I think what is immediately impressive

when you read something is, the very sort of cliché that it should start with a bang.

I think as a publisher, one doesn't necessarily have the luxury of reading 250 pages of every manuscript that gets submitted. Time simply doesn't permit it so starting with that kind of explosive beginning is a good way of getting your attention. It doesn't mean every book has to start that way but it does help.

One has a visceral response to a certain kind of writing, whatever that writing might be and whatever category that writing might be, and the quality is something that really jumps out immediately.

You can tell immediately whether someone has got that magical gift with words and I think being able to structure that within a kind of immediately graspable concept or hook or story. Being able to give me that one line pitch, that one paragraph pitch at the beginning introducing the book to me, so I know what I'm expecting and then you kind of get caught by that magical prose. That's what I'm looking for.

James Blatch: That high concept that you referred to earlier. I suppose we should be thinking about the tagline and the elevator pitch and if we've got that right and that works then it builds on that. That's a good start from your point of view and you're looking for. Be careful with language, to reduce things but you're looking for fairly instantaneous gratification here. It's got to basically do what it's setting out to do from quite early on.

AS YOU SAY, YOU DON'T READ 250 PAGES. I DON'T KNOW HOW FAR INTO THE BOOKS YOU GET BUT IT'S GOT TO BE DOING IT PRETTY SWIFTLY.

Alex Clarke: Pretty swiftly, yeah. I think, as Ed says, we get very used to making our minds up pretty quickly. That doesn't mean to say that every book has to start with that James Bond-esque scene but you do get a sense very quickly of the ability of the prose.

As you say the elevator pitch is so crucial. If you as a writer are unable to pitch the book in one line to me, how am I as an editor going to be able to pitch it to my colleagues and then them to the sales retailers? That kind of immediacy of being able to say what your book is about.

James Blatch: Ultimately you can imagine the reader browsing the book store or online. They're the ultimate test of that aren't they?

Alex Clarke: People are very time poor when it comes to making judgments. The typical anecdote is that you have seven seconds of passing time as a shopper walks through the aisles of Tesco in the book section. As the publisher, I've got to convey exactly what as a reader you're going to get in that book. That's a title, that's the cover image, and it's a strap line.

If you're thinking about your own writing in those terms, I think it also helps you have enormous clarity as to what you are trying to achieve. You can visualize your end audience as it were and what you're trying to do with them and I think that actually helps the writing process as well.

James Blatch: How much do you know about the books when you start reading them?

IS THERE SPACE FOR THE SUBMISSION FROM THE AGENT OR THE AUTHOR, IS THERE A PLACE FOR THE HIGH CONCEPT ELEVATOR PITCH?

Alex Clarke: There is, yes. When I'm looking at submission I would always see how someone's positioning it. It gets my mind in the right place and it also saves me time in terms of thinking, "Okay I know I'm looking out for a crime thriller here, what kind of crime thriller is it? Is it a serial killer or is it a procedural?"

That puts me in the right mindset and I think you can capture someone with a brilliant title and a brilliant kind of strap line pitch and you're setting their expectations perfectly. I think that's very important. As a publisher you go in with a certain mindset as you start reading and you're drawn into the tension, the intrigue, the buildup, whatever it is simply by that title, that killer title. Let me think, *Girl on the Train*, that's a good title.

James Blatch: I've noticed quite a few *Girl on the Trains* being published in the last couple of weeks.

Alex Clarke: Well there's *Girl on a Train*, *The Girl on a Train*, *Girl on the Train*, so you know, having said that the title is something we all struggle with as authors and publishers. It's so important and I'd ask all aspiring writers out there to really focus on that title and test it, try it, because you can do so much work with a great title. In a way it's your most immediate marketing tool if you're being sort of strategic about it. It's hugely important and quite difficult to get right.

James Blatch: I was reading recently some of the stats on who buys and consumes books.

IT WAS LAYING OUT BARE THE FACT THAT IT IS WOMEN WHO ARE THE VORACIOUS READERS AND THE MAIN AUDIENCE WE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT. IS THAT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Alex Clarke: It's very interesting. I started off my editorial career publishing for a more male audience in fiction terms. I was publishing a lot of big epic historical series, Romans, Napoleonic era stuff, and that market has changed a bit, particularly with the advent of eBook and it's a bit harder to reach those people.

It doesn't necessarily mean they've gone away but I think for the most part statistically yeah, you are looking at women buying more books than men and whether it's they're buying the books and then passing them on, or whether they're buying them for themselves is a moot point.

But the holy grail is buying a book that both appeals to a male and a female audience and you'd be surprised at certain authors who'd you think actually might appeal to a certain gender, actually appeal to a much more broad mix of demographic. That's the holy grail.

On the male readership front I think what's been very interesting, I guess in the post I Am Pilgrim world is you've got books like Crisis, Nomads, recently Greg Hurwitz Orphan X. There seems to be a resurgence of the more kind of adrenaline, action packed, male thriller and that market has been very hard in publishing terms for the last five, 10 years. Actually this year it seems to have had a fairly significant Renaissance which I wish I could tell you why. All I can tell you is I'm keen to find some books in that area now.

James Blatch: My book starts in a 1960s nuclear REF bomber so I'm not sure I'm pitching quite to the target female audience at the moment but who knows. I'm in the edit stage now so maybe I'll introduce, it sounds very cliché and horrible doesn't it? I'll introduce romantic storylines if that's what women are interested in.

I Am Pilgrim is a good example of that.

THERE ARE SOME UNIVERSAL THINGS WE'RE ALL WORRIED ABOUT OR INTRIGUED ABOUT, INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, PROBABLY IS ONE OF THEM AT THE MOMENT AND THOSE ARE THEMES THAT ARE PROBABLY GOING TO WORK ACROSS BOTH,

AREN'T THEY?

Alex Clarke: Yeah. First of all, which bomber?

James Blatch: Vulcan.

Alex Clarke: Brilliant, I mean you sold me straightaway.

James Blatch: High concept. I'm going to have to definitely put it in front of you.

Alex Clarke: I think there are universal themes and having said that I think it's always interesting how authors manage to come at it from different angles and that's what's exciting as a publisher is when you find someone who's taking a universal theme but just has a slight tone shift in terms of perspective or handling and that's what we're always keen to find.

James Blatch: I was going to move on to the mistakes that people make, or authors make, but in a way I suppose we just reverse engineer what you've said so far.

A RAMBLING, UNFOCUSED BEGINNING TO THEIR BOOKS AND IT DOESN'T REALLY GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WHAT THE BOOKS ABOUT, IT DOESN'T MATCH THE PITCH AND SO ON. THAT'S AN OBVIOUS ONE I GUESS YOU MUST COME ACROSS FROM TIME TO TIME.

Alex Clarke: Yes. I think, being very clear with your pitch is crucial and lack of clarity is an immediate alarm bell. If a pitch letter or a pitch document doesn't have that clarity, it doesn't necessarily bode well for the novel as a whole. That's not obviously universal truth and please don't think I'm speaking universally but that is a definite no no.

What else? I think some people can take a long while to get to the meat of their story and it's a real discipline to think, "Okay what is my reader journey here? What am I expecting people to do with the process of engaging with the story?"

Certainly a tip I often give my authors is when you're thinking about formulating your narrative arc and

your structure, look at how screenplays do that process. There is such a discipline to creating, whether is a three or five act structure within screen writing, and there's some great books out there that give you really really god tips for that structuring of your narrative arc, your beats of tension and intrigue and sustaining your audience interests.

A great example of that would be Into the Woods by John York who was the director of BBC Drama for a long time and he gives a brilliant outline of how to be very disciplined with your structural planning. I think it's always a real help for an author to think about keeping that rhythm of audience engagement and that five act structure or three act structure depending on how you do it. It's a really easy way of disciplining yourself in that process.

James Blatch: It was funny how much people talk in the industry about films and books and have them very closely aligned today. I'm not sure whether that's changed from where it was 20 or 30 years ago but my editor talks to me a lot about watch this film, watch this film, see how the structure works, rather than read this book and that book.

OBVIOUSLY IT'S A LOT QUICKER TO WATCH A FILM THAN READ AN ENTIRE NOVEL BUT IT MUST BE MORE TO DO WITH THE FACT THAT FILMS HAVE REALLY NAILED HOW TO TELL A STORY.

Alex Clarke: I think there's an interesting circle there because so many films are coming from books now. In Frankfurt many of my meetings are with film scouts who are looking for books to send to film and film and TV are so dependent on the creativity that comes out of the writing but I think you're right actually.

When you're spending, whether it's five million or 100 million dollars on a film production, boy do you get it right. There's such discipline over the exposition of story and they don't always get it right but there's a real discipline to it and I think it just helps in terms of the experience filmmakers and TV makers, in the same way that writers have, of understanding their audiences' reaction is something that everyone can learn from.

James Blatch: They obviously have other tools in their armory in terms of creating this impression on the audience. I actually remember reading I Am Pilgrim thinking this has been written for the screen and it was no surprise to me after I'd finished it though, read up on the guy that wrote it was in fact a screenwriter, more than a novelist. That book read like a film to me.

Alex Clarke: I actually commissioned a novel when I was still at Penguin by a screenwriter. I had a drink with him the other day and it was really interesting hearing his experiences of coming from having been a screenwriter and what he was actually able to do more in terms of the internal voice, in terms of the kind of emotional journey writing for a novelized work. In many ways, he felt set free by that process.

James Blatch: That's interesting.

Alex Clarke: I think there are two sides to the coin. I don't think any one discipline can claim to be the more rich art, I think that's the joy of it.

James Blatch: Yeah, when you've read your book, obviously there's a few decisions you can make in the first instance and the majority of cases is obviously it's going to be this is not going to be for us. Some are going to be you'll look at them and think these are the fully formed product. But I'm imaging that most books you see them as interest to you at that early stage.

HOW MUCH WORK GOES ON BETWEEN YOU AND THE AUTHOR, AND I KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO SAY THIS VARIES A LOT, BUT TYPICALLY?

Alex Clarke: It varies a lot, James. That is the most straightforward answer. I think every case is different. At the end of the day the important part of the process is that an author feels that they are getting the best out of their writing and it's my job to help an author achieve the best they can possibly do.

I'm not the creative part of the equation, the author is, but my role is to make sure that I'm able to just tease out whatever strengths and iron out whatever wrinkles that we can, and that will vary absolutely from person to person.

I guess that's one of the great joys in working as a publisher is that you are on a different journey every time. As I say, the crucial thing from my point of view is it's the authors, it's their heart work here and it's my job to make sure that they are able to publish the best possible book.

James Blatch: We interviewed Clare Macintosh earlier this year and I was a little surprised that after she did the deal with the publisher, there was two years of rewriting and working with her book, which she seemed delighted with and delighted with the process. A huge learning process for her.

I'M WONDERING WHAT THEY SAW AT THE BEGINNING THAT MADE THEM KNOW THAT THIS WAS GOING TO BE WORTH THE INVESTMENT, CONSIDERING HOW MUCH IT CHANGED IN THOSE TWO YEARS?

Alex Clarke: Again, it's so much horses for courses and I think so often you will be captured by a certain element to the story or a certain character or there are certainly different things that capture you. Authors like to work in very different ways and sometimes these things can take a lot of time and other times you need to do relatively little work with a story. I think our job is to make sure that that process is as creatively rewarding as possible. As to what we see in the first place, that's the sort of alchemy.

James Blatch: It's got to be a hunch. Quite a lot of time, isn't it? It won't necessarily be, as we alluded to, the fully formed article but there's got to be something there for you and I guess that's what you pay for, Alex.

Alex Clarke: Well I hope so. It is a hunch but it's more often than not it's a very calculated hunch and I think our job as publishers is to ensure that we are responding to the constantly shifting trends. The readership market and trends do change all the time, and also as a publisher my role is to make sure that our publishing is sufficiently broad to cater for a number of different genres or categories or interest areas.

From a creative point of view that's very rewarding but also from a financial point of view, you're spread betting effect, you're not putting all your eggs in one basket from a kind of category or a commercial point of view.

James Blatch: How do people get to you, Alex? Obviously agents are an important part of your life but you must get a lot of unsolicited manuscripts as well.

Alex Clarke: We do get a lot of unsolicited manuscripts. The bottom line is 99% of what we do is through agents, simply because of the volume involved.

The first filter process is through a literary agent. Having said that, we're always looking at whether it's self-publishing platforms, whether it's places like Wattpad or there are any number of different areas where people are using words in very creative ways, particularly in the non-fiction.

For example, my first non-fiction title for the list next year is based on a Facebook blog and we're constantly on the lookout. My job is to try and keep eyes on as much as cultural output as possible.

How to reach us, the straightforward answer is through a literary agent but I think there are certainly ways in which, whether it's through a Faber Academy writing course, whether it's through a brilliant piece of self-publishing, or whether it's through, as I say, a Facebook blog or some other kind of blog platform.

There are certainly ways in which one can garner attention from your creative work and I think that's what's brilliant about publishing at the moment, is we're in this kind of perfect world of so many different areas of creative energy going on out there. It's brilliant. I mean we're inundated with very talented people.

James Blatch: Do you find yourself trolling around? I mean this Facebook blog for instance, is this something that you spotted and you made the approach or was somebody savvy enough to work out there was potentially a longer form project here and approach you with it?

Alex Clarke: I had spotted it but it had come to us through a literary agent. Literary agents are very canny at keeping their eyes open to these things so the agent had approached the blogger and then signed up a deal and pitched the book, pitched a proposal so agents are brilliant at that and thank God they are. It makes our publishing jobs much easier.

Having said that, I'm constantly approaching people whether it's for a non-fiction project because of their particular expertise or whether it's because I've seen a piece of creative writing on whatever platform. I do approach people and that's a great, very rewarding, part of the job is getting out there and hustling to find interesting projects.

James Blatch: Now, Alex you mentioned self-publishing. I was thinking probably most of our listeners are like me and that's probably the route that we're looking at in the immediate future. Although most successful self-publishers at some point become hybrid, whether it's the foreign books or just a different series or so and we'll start to move in trad as well.

FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON YOUR INDUSTRY FROM WHAT IS FRANKLY AN EXPLOSION AT THE MOMENT OF SELF-PUBLISHING?

Alex Clarke: I think it's a very interesting development for publishing as a whole. Several of the authors I've taken on over the last number of years have come from that background. Someone like James Oswald for example, a Scottish crime writer, had self-published his first two book crime series extremely successfully than got a literary agent.

We actually republished those two books before publishing the third in the series. I think there's an interesting kind of dynamic now as a self-published writer. Not only are you doing the sort of hard graft on the writing, you're also marketing yourself, you're thinking about your positioning, you're thinking about how to get people to notice your books.

That's a very interesting new dynamic in the publisher/author relationships and what we can learn from self-published authors and how they've managed to get themselves noticed and what we can add to that process in terms of traditional publishing and distribution and the sort of marketing and publicity we're able to bring to that.

I think there's an increasingly fruitful circle developing here. I'm always keeping my eyes very much open as to what's going on, which authors are breaking through in that arena.

James Blatch: That's good to hear because that's how it should be I think as well. The bottom line, Alex, I mean there's obviously for self-published authors who are doing well, and Mark's a good example of that, they can show you a spreadsheet which is considerably helped by the 65% that they get of the income from their books and against traditional deal which don't normally work like that, certainly haven't in the past.

IS IT AFFECTING THE WAY THAT YOU'RE DOING DEALS NOW? ARE YOU HAVING TO ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Alex Clarke: I mean the traditional publishing contracts there's lots of tweaks that happen over time to publishing contracts we all have agreed boilerplate's with various agencies, and these evolve over time, but because of the nature of print distribution and that's still a very significant portion of the publishing business.

James Blatch: That's expensive right?

Alex Clarke: It is expensive and in terms of the upfront risk a publisher takes to print and distribute a book, there's a significant financial expense there. I think those contracts that we have with authors are pretty much the same as they were say five years ago and there are little evolutions.

There will continue to be little evolutions but the business model isn't radically changing because of the nature of the print, digital balance. It still is as it is at the moment and I think as long as that's how the marketplace is keen to experience their books. Just as many people want to read the paper object as people who want to read it on Kindle. As long as there are those people I think the business model will stay fairly similar.

James Blatch: In 10 years you don't think there's going to be a significant change?

Alex Clarke: If I knew that James ...

James Blatch: Don't know what's happening next month, but you know.

Alex Clarke: Yeah, never make predictions. If you're looking statistically at the moment, it seems that there is a bit of a flattening out of the growth of eBook reading as opposed to the decline of print. They seem to be in something of a stable period at the moment. It seems that people are still split however which way in terms of reading on Kindle or reading in paper.

James Blatch: I've just ordered a vinyl turntable so if that's anything to go by, if that's a trend. Vinyl's made resurgence isn't it?

Alex Clarke: It has. I published this ridiculous Atlas last year, which was an absolutely beautiful piece of paper production and it did very well as a 25 pound Atlas. It was a crazy piece of publishing actually, probably never have gone there but it worked really well because people loved the artifact. It's almost this sort of efeticized object, isn't it? A book. You love the feel and the smell of the paper and you love the experience of engaging with that.

James Blatch: Yeah and however good the eBook platform can become, and I suppose ultimately you can view using some of the Apple software, etc., on a laptop, there are some books that are never going to be replaced from the paper versions.

Alex Clarke: No. I think what's brilliant about the evolution of digital is that it's so much easier to walk around and listen to your music, read your book when you're commuting into London, whatever. There are so many different options but at the same time we're getting evermore beautiful productions of paper books which is great. So being able to do both is like having the vinyl edition and being able to listen to it on your iPhone.

James Blatch: Exactly, which is probably where we're getting to. That's great Alex. Thank you. What's going to be of value and of use to people listening to the podcast, because time is precious.

IF PEOPLE TAKE AWAY ONE LESSON I GUESS IT'S WHAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT OF BEING ABLE TO DESCRIBE YOUR BOOK IN A SENTENCE OR TWO AND THEN YOUR BOOK MATCHING THAT DESCRIPTION.

Alex Clarke: I think so. I think as a piece of marketing or so, which is a horrible phrase, sorry, but also in terms of actually it's really helpful in terms of your creative clarity. I think it informs the process of writing as well.

If you're able to stick to that clarity, and this doesn't apply to every kind of book. There are certain kinds of books that defy that but in terms of commercial category fiction, that is very much a useful tool to have in your armory.

James Blatch: Yeah. I mean books do work like that but then authors, they often read the exceptions. I love Ian McEwan, he's my favorite author but I have no idea how his books work. I love reading them but I couldn't tear apart his books or work out why they're successful but I often think just enjoy that, read Ian McEwan but don't think about that when you're writing.

Alex Clarke: Yeah. As I said, there are always going to be books that do defy definition. I think certainly in the area I work in, which is commercial fiction, so much is about positioning, about categorizing, about being very very clear to the consumer. If you love that kind of book, you're going to love this kind of book, and just having that crisp vision and being able to communicate that instantly is a great asset to your

writing.

James Blatch: Give them what they want.

Alex Clarke: Give them what they want and yeah exactly.

James Blatch: Excellent. Alex thank you so much today for joining us.

Alex Clarke: Not at all James. Thanks so much for having me.

James Blatch: Alex Clarke, absolutely lovely guy. I loved doing that interview and obviously we do talk to people most of the time who are immersed in the digital revolution of indie publishing and there is a bit of us in them in some areas of the industry. Going into that interview I wasn't sure how it was going to fit into our flow but it fitted in absolutely perfectly because of course as it turns out we're all trying to sell books.

Mark Dawson: Exactly and I think I'd be right in saying he's asked you to send your book to him.

James Blatch: I peaked his interest so I don't need an agent, I'll go straight to Alex.

Mark Dawson: You don't need me. That's what will call it a day. No more. We'll stop at 50.

James Blatch: I'm off. No, I loved talking to Alex. Really nice guy and definitely keep in touch with him and I'll talk to him at least once a year.

He's somebody also who understands how books are changing and this whole thing about the book that everyone's reading on the tube, the Girl on the Train or The Davinci Code a few years ago, whatever it is, that trend is something of course he's keenly interested in with his new imprint.

Mark Dawson: I forgot to say at the start of the podcast today that after I met him, he offered to buy me lunch so we went out in London. He took me to a nice restaurant, we had a nice lunch for a couple of hours, it may have involved some alcohol. He's interested in Facebook ads, he's interested in mailing lists, he's very switched on, he can see what people like me and other indies are doing. He's savvy enough to know, more than savvy enough to know that there are some lessons that they can take away from that. We can teach them.

He's obviously taught us lots of things in this episode but he knows that indies tend to be pushing the boundaries quite a lot and we can teach them plenty of things that will enable them to sell more books too.

James Blatch: If you think about potentially developing other revenue streams for yourself, I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about potentially people listening to the podcast who have perhaps taken your course or are good at the Facebook advertising, really good at sorted, seeing their own income grow, there's got to be the potential there for smaller imprints or smaller publishers using the services of somebody who's cracked it, who knows, who can come in, maybe it's once or twice a week and run campaigns for digital. I know it's not something you've got time for.

Mark Dawson: I've been asked loads of times.

James Blatch: I know you have.

Mark Dawson: I did it last year for my agent. They had asked me to come in and help them set up their imprint so I did come in for about three months I think every week and they paid me a lot of money to do as well which was very flattering.

But there's only so much time that I can spend on things and it isn't really for me. But there's definitely a space there for an indie writer who would like to spread out a bit and have different income streams to offer themselves as consultant. There's a lot of opportunity for that right now.

James Blatch: Definitely. Have to think about that, so when you crack Facebook ads, it's not necessarily

just for you, you could leverage that skillset that you've developed for other people.

Before we go we've got a webinar coming up, haven't we? Do you want to talk about that?

Mark Dawson: We do. David Siteman Garland who was on the podcast way back, within the first 10 episodes I think, he is probably the best, I'd say the authority on building online courses. He's the guy that we went to when we were building the first Facebook ads for authors course, we followed his structure, it works.

What we're going to go into is David's tips on how to build a course. It's going to be perfect for non-fiction writers, especially those you can see that the book need only be their first part of the business. In fact you could do much better from positioning yourself as someone providing an online course, big booming area, obviously because we know. We're in that fairly firmly with our courses.

Also though it could also be of use to fiction writers. It's possible. I'm a fiction writer and I've obviously branched out into doing courses. Fiction writers you could do a course on writing fiction for example. You could, all kinds of things, research, you could look at, there's loads of things, using Scrivener. There's another writer that we know, Matt Morris, who's done a course on using Scrivener. There's lots of potential there. David is really switched on, he says boom a lot and he's very American, which is great.

James Blatch: Quite excitable.

Mark Dawson: He's very excitable. He's an excitable little puppy and yeah, he's a good guy and I think it will be well worth coming on board. I don't remember the time off the top of my head but we'll put that in the show notes over at episode number 50.

James Blatch: You mentioned Matt Morris. I'm currently liaising with Matt. Matt is an expert on Scrivener. Scrivener's such an important tool for many of us writing and I think most of us know that we don't really, we've scratched the surface with the software.

Matt did a fantastic set of sessions for our 101 course on using the formatting, compiling aspect of Scrivener. What I want to get Matt to do is to come in and do a webinar for everybody, a free webinar, and just give us a masterclass on using Scrivener.

Off the back of that, some of you may be interested in his course so we'll make it worth his while, he can talk about course a bit but really it's just sitting down for an hour and listening to somebody who understands Scrivener to take us through maybe the top five things that we're not doing in Scrivener that we could be doing to make our writing easier, so I haven't got a date for that yet, I'm in negotiations with Matt over it but that will certainly be available to everybody listening to the podcast when that comes along, probably in March. Okay, great.

Thank you very much indeed for joining us. Episode 50, our half century, is 50 significant in American school? 50 home runs in the season, that Sammy Sosa and Matt McGuire and those people, that was about 60 wasn't it? 62, 63 they did. I don't know what the record is now in baseball. It's probably 70.

Mark Dawson: I was going to say I know it's Superbowl 51 this year.

James Blatch: Superbowl 51, okay, so they're one ahead of us.

Mark Dawson: They're one ahead, we'll catch them on the next one.

James Blatch: But it's only the 45th president.

Mark Dawson: It'll be the 46th next week.

James Blatch: Who knows. Fast moving world of politics. Thank you for listening, thank you for watching, do leave a review on iTunes if you can. We'd love that. We will see you for episode 51 next week.

CHAPTER 48

THE VALUE OF A READER SURVEY - AN SPF MASTER CLASS



SURVEYS: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR READERS

EPISODE
#051

A reader survey is a significant tool in helping you make educated decisions about what to write, where to publish, and how to market your book. In this immensely practical episode, Mark provides details about the key information his completed 12-question 2017 Reader Survey provides and how he intends to use it (the full results are available [here](#)). He shares the questions he uses and how they benefit him as he connects with his audience and continues to write, publish, and market his books. You don't want to miss this very practical edition of the podcast!

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR READERS

What do you need to know about your readers? Mark reveals three key questions to ask about demographics, and how the answers to those can make a difference in how you write and market your books.

HOW ARE READERS ATTRACTED TO YOUR BOOKS?

A reader survey that gives you good feedback on how and why readers get interested in your books is a great tool to help you figure out how to fine-tune your writing and marketing. Mark explains how to get hold of this data and how the answers he has received have given him valuable insights into the most important elements for attracting new readers.

QUESTIONS THAT HELP YOU DETERMINE YOUR BOOK COSTS AND PRICING

Can a simple reader survey question help you determine the cost of a lead? How can reader feedback help you determine the price to charge for your book? Mark expands on how he used the survey to help him come up with a pricing strategy for his books.

WHAT TO WRITE AND WHERE TO PUBLISH

Information from a reader survey can be invaluable in shaping your writing and publishing strategy. Mark shares from his personal experience the impact that hearing from his listeners has on his writing - from boosting his confidence to helping him decide what to write next.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Why should an author do reader surveys?
- What size list do you need for a survey to be effective?
- Three important demographic questions.
- How are readers attracted to your books?
- Questions that help you determine costs and pricing.
- What to write and where to publish: Key questions to ask.
- The value of reader surveys for making future decisions and turning fans into superfans.

RESOURCES LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Survey Monkey](#)
- [Free download of Survey questions and answers](#)
- [Bookbub](#)
- [Audible](#)
- [ACX](#) (Audio Creation Exchange)
- [Kindle Unlimited](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to episode number 51 from the Self Publishing Formula

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: If you are watching on our YouTube channel, we've changed seats so you're not David Letterman.

Mark Dawson: I am. Yes, I'm the funny one.

James Blatch: I'm hey now Hank Kingsley.

Mark Dawson: I don't remember that.

James Blatch: Hey now Hank Kingsley. That was Gary Shandling's, the late Gary Shandling, what's his name. Everyone's screaming at the podcast now because they all remember. Gary Sanders. Jeffrey Tambor brilliantly played Hank Kingsley. I loved that series. It was reasonably short lived and didn't do very well in the U.K.

Mark Dawson: Very influential.

James Blatch: Very influential. Gary Shandling was all the way along wasn't he? He did the Gary Shandling show where he broke the fourth wall, and he was just a young comedian in his 20's doing a TV sitcom but he kept speaking to camera saying, "Oh, this guy's coming around now."

And what we had later was Seinfeld and the Office and today Modern Family. I did see an interview with him once. I think probably Jerry Seinfeld actually interviewed him for his Comedian's in Cars Having Coffee show and he said to him, "What did you think when everything you see on TV basically extends from what you did?"

They loved each other. When they saw each other, Gary Shandling said I love you and they just really genuinely said that and they held each other and it was months after that Gary Shandling just died very suddenly, very sad. Influential, brilliant writing.

Seinfeld for me still is the sitcom in terms of writing that you listen to. There's not a word out of place. Not a word is wasted in Seinfeld. Every sentence means something, moves the story along, moves you towards the comedy, and I know that Larry David talked about it being the most stressful period in his life and in the end he really struggled to do it but I'm so pleased that he and Jerry did get that together because it was absolutely brilliant.

Okay, enough reminiscing about comedy. We've got a master class today which is exciting. There's no interview per se, in this episode we are going to be talking about reader surveys.

I THINK PROBABLY IF YOU DO A GENERAL INTRODUCTION AS TO WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY WE DO THEM AND THEN CERTAINLY AS SOMEBODY'S STARING OUT WHO'S NOT EVEN BEGUN THAT PROCESS YET I'M GOING TO BE ASKING YOU LOTS OF QUESTIONS.

Mark Dawson: I've been doing surveys for at least two years, maybe three years now, and I always do it over Christmas. It's something that I look forward Christmas time because I know I'm going to survey my readers and as my audience site has grown, I obviously get much more data back.

The reason I do that is because I want to know about my audience. I want to know who they are, whether they're male or female, what age they are, what they like, what they don't like. Because when I know that kind of information it enables me to make educated decisions on what I'm going to be doing in the next few years.

That could be on the one hand marketing, so it could be something that I know that my audience is a certain age so I won't advertise to people below that age. That enables me to get more qualified clicks, quite useful, can mean that the cost of whatever I'm trying to do comes down, is more efficient.

It could also have an impact on the craft side of things. If my audience tells me that they want more of one character and less of another, I can redo my production schedule so they get what they want. I can test them on different ideas I might be thinking up and all that kind of good stuff.

James Blatch: That's quite wide ranging.

I IMAGINED BEFORE YOU ANSWERED THAT QUESTION IT WAS REALLY JUST GOING TO BE ABOUT MARKETING. BUT ACTUALLY IT'S EDITORIAL AS WELL, WHAT PEOPLE LIKE.

Mark Dawson: It is, yeah. There's always a question in the survey where they can tell me anything they want and some of the most useful stuff comes from that.

Also of course these are my fans so that tends to be them telling me how much they enjoy my books. That's great for the ego. Most authors tend to be quite introverted and I certainly was like this back in the early days, lack of confidence in their writing so if you want a big jump of enthusiasm as you start the new year, this is something you can really do.

We'll talk about this when we go through but I've had nearly 5,700 responses to the survey this year and loads of those comments have been fantastic for my confidence and give me the kick up the pants I need to get started with the writing this year.

James Blatch: Okay, before we get into the practicalities.

THE FIRST THING TO SAY IS THAT'S TIME CONSUMING, 5,700 RESPONSES AND YOU READ THEM ALL.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I mean there's something like Survey Monkey, which is the one that I use, the app is very good. You can just scroll through them quickly. I don't respond to them individually, that would just be impossible and also it's an anonymous survey so people don't leave their email addresses.

But it is very easy just to flick through them as you got 10 minutes in a queue or you're waiting on a train or something along those lines. It's easy to just kind of browse those. You can do it at any time. I could look through them in February if I wanted to.

James Blatch: How big is your list now?

Mark Dawson: About 65,000.

JAMES BLATCH: WHAT SIZE OF LIST DO YOU NEED TO DO A SURVEY?

Mark Dawson: I think any size. You could do it with 150 just to start getting ideas about where you are. It'd be a little artificial for you because there's not much point in asking details about your readers because you haven't got any readers yet because you haven't released anything. But you could certainly start to ask questions about what people are interested in because there are going to be plenty of people there who will be your readers.

James Blatch: For people a little bit ahead of me, you've got a book or two out but their list might still be small.

THEY MIGHT BE STARTING OUT IN THE WHOLE LIST BUILDING. MAYBE THEY'VE GOT ONE OR 200 PEOPLE ON THE LIST. IS IT STILL WORTH DOING A SURVEY?

Mark Dawson: Oh yeah, absolutely. All data is good data. You should certainly get into that as soon as you can. People quite like taking surveys and Survey Monkey's very easy. It's easy for you to create and it's also easy for people to fill out.

I find putting it out there I enjoy it. I think they enjoy it too. I also turn it into a competition so I'll randomly give some prizes out and they could be signed books, like I said the ones you've got behind you there or a good prize is to give away a Kindle so that's quite a valuable prize but you can load those Kindle's with your books so you can kind of personalize it.

I know once I was at a London book fair last year, gave me a Kindle, gave some authors, including me who were speaking for them, a Kindle, and then asked them to inscribe it with some kind of dental drill. We basically completely bugged these Kindle's up and then they gave it to me. Actually I did give that away because it was kind of a signed Kindle. It looked ridiculous.

James Blatch: I thought it was a mistake on the photograph that you were being asked to pose with a pen on a Kindle as a sort of joke but it was real.

Mark Dawson: It wasn't a pen, it was a drill.

James Blatch: Like a dentist?

Mark Dawson: Yeah it was. It was an inscription tool.

James Blatch: Yeah, so you can sign Kindle's. People who do book signings must get people coming up with their Kindle's and special pens these days.

Mark Dawson: You could probably do it with a Sharpie I guess on the back.

James Blatch: Okay, right, so can we get into some of the practicalities? You've given one thing away which is Survey Monkey is the software that you choose.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, before I forget, we'll do a PDF giveaway for this. We will have all of the questions and all of the answers.

Now, of course, it is very personal to me because these are my readers but it's useful, the data that we're going to mention is very useful for everybody. Some of it will be very specific with just talking about my books but things like what are people prepared to pay for a book, that's very useful for all authors. We'll touch on that when we get to the questions and we can talk about it but we'll also give that away, that will be at selfpublishingformula.com/download51.

James Blatch: You say you're going to give away all the questions and all the answers.

Mark Dawson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James Blatch: You're going to give away all your answers?

Mark Dawson: All the answers that I received yeah. The data.

James Blatch: Oh okay. That's really interesting. I'd love to see that.

Mark Dawson: Well there you go.

James Blatch: Okay, so we'll give that URL again towards the end of the episode. That's going to be a highly sought after one I think.

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT THIS?

Mark Dawson: Well, let's just go through the questions. We've got, let's have a look, about 12 questions and not all of them will be relevant for everybody but we'll skip over the ones that aren't and we'll concentrate on the ones that are just so that people can get an idea of what an audience might look like.

Remember I'm writing thrillers, action adventure thrillers so that needs to be taken into account. If you're writing romance, you're going to get different kind of responses on gender, which is where we'll start.

The first question I ask is are you male or female? For me, the responses come back, this would be quite surprising I think for most people, give that I write those kind of masculine books. You think that it would be quite a high proportion would be male but the actual split is 65% male, 35% female.

A very big chunk of my audience is female. That does allow me to then think about should I try running some Facebook ads just targeting women because I can start to write slightly different copy focusing on different aspects of the series, of the character perhaps more than the action or lots of variations you can draw out there.

JAMES BLATCH: I GUESS IT ALSO GIVES YOU THE IDEA THAT WITHIN THE SURVEY QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK WOMEN SPECIFICALLY, ONCE THEY'VE SAID THEY'RE A WOMAN. IT'S THAT POSSIBILITY TO BRANCH THE QUESTIONS.

Mark Dawson: You can. I don't do that, but it is possible to have a branch.

James Blatch: Find out what they like about the books. The background on that of course is that women read more books than men. I mean that is a global phenomenon. Women are the voracious consumers of books more than men.

From a commercial point of view it's always worth thinking, even if you're writing thrillers, that there should be something in there for the female audience. This is not to gender stereotype by the way. There might be lots of women who like exactly the same things in the book as men do but there are also traits.

Mark Dawson: The next question that I asked is what is your age. It's very interesting for me to know what the age of readership is that again will allow me to target my ads more effectively.

The split came back, .09% were younger than 18 so I'm not selling many books to under 18 year olds. .3% were 18-24, 5.7% were 25-40 and then we get into the huge majority are over 41. 41 to 65 is 54% and then 65 or older is 39%.

As a practical example as to how that's helped me. When I originally started doing Facebook ads you have the option to target your ads to certain ages and the cut off for Facebook is 65 and up so you can't do 65 to 75, 75 to 85. The natural cutoff is 65.

I was originally reluctant to advertise to people in that bracket on the basis that I'm going to be catching 95 year olds who probably don't read that much anymore. A bit of a generalization but it's probably true. Just that survey question has demonstrated that to me that that is probably because 40% of my audience are over 65 so that's a practical example of where I am, also makes me slightly nervous.

JAMES BLATCH: PEOPLE DO LIVE LONGER THOUGH MARK.

Mark Dawson: I know but just think 94% of my audience is over 41. I'm definitely, obviously as people are getting older they fall into that bracket again. Perhaps that means that people don't have time when they're younger to read so much or it could be slightly more worrying, they just don't read as much. It's quite hard to say but that was very useful to me.

James Blatch: There are a lot of distractions for today's younger people that weren't around when your 75 year old was 20 that's for sure. Having said that, the populations are growing around the world and particularly in some parts of the world, Africa and South Asia are growing faster than they are here. Actually I think they're declining slightly in Europe but nonetheless yeah I wouldn't worry too much about that. There's enough fish in the sea for you.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: For my point of view in the digital world we just have to think how many people enter the digital world every day who weren't there before. Particularly in your demographic I would think. That's probably the fastest growing area. My dad's, actually he's 86 next month and he joined Facebook last year. Don't worry.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I feel much better now. That was interesting.

The next one I ask is where do you live?

The split there, again this is very very useful for me in terms of marketing, also when I'm pitching books to other publishers they might want to know what my platform is in different parts of the world. I'm obviously a U.K. author but my audience is 60% in the U.S., it's 29% in the U.K. and then 4% Canada, 3% Australia and then 5% other places. That was interesting.

I remember going back a few years, it was 90%, 10% U.K., U.S. and I couldn't work out to crack the American market and I wanted to obviously because that's where most of the Kindle readers were in those days and something happened. I think it was possible the book that I released was quite international, quite Bondish in that way and that seemed to be the ticket that enabled me to get into the American market and since then, as you see there, twice as many of my readers are in the U.S. than in the U.K.

James Blatch: Yeah. That's not a dissimilar split from SPF actually. SPF is slightly more slanted towards the U.S. but slightly ahead. Most bigger populations and slightly ahead in terms of digital take up in parts of the states.

Mark Dawson: Certainly in terms of Kindle, the Kindle they're about a year ahead of us in the U.K. and then places like Australia, Germany, behind the U.K. so you can see a split. I would expect the U.K. to continue to grow. Those are the demographics.

I think that's important to get those down. They're fundamentally important for lots of different reasons. Then get into some stuff that will be very interesting I think to everybody. It doesn't really matter what you're writing.

THE NEXT QUESTION IS HOW DID THEY DISCOVER ME.

I want to know where they found out about me so I can do more of that and less of something else perhaps. We've all had an email from Amazon, by that I mean Amazon algorithm where we'll be sending out emails to people who it thinks are going to like my books because they know what they've read before.

James Blatch: I've had them.

Mark Dawson: Yup, you would have and Amazon very very good at pushing those out there. 10% of the audience found me that way so that was pretty good.

Amazon Also Boughts, so those are the stripe on the sales pages of your books that will say readers who bought this also bought this. People perhaps say they were looking for a Lee Child book or a David Baladachi book or Barry Eisler or whatever, they found on that page and linked back to one of my Milton books. 19% of the readers found me through that, so that was a pretty fruitful avenue for me. This is great.

For our friends at BookBub, 21% of my audience, so that is in fact the biggest slice, found me through a BookBub ad.

James Blatch: Wow.

Mark Dawson: I probably need to tell BookBub that. I think that would be the kind of thing that they would be quite interested in.

JAMES BLATCH: WAS THAT THE SINGLE BIGGEST?

Mark Dawson: That's the single biggest. I mean just ahead of Amazon but that was BookBub. I've probably run, I don't know exactly how many, probably about 20 BookBub's now. I was right there at the start and although they knocked me back a fair bit I still get in probably more than I'm turned down.

That's a really good indication, apart of kind of the short term benefit of immediate return on investment, two or three times what you spend on the ad. You're building audiences through that. They see the book at 99 cents or free through the ad and then you hook them and they're back for more.

That's the most important facet of a BookBub promotion is not the short term benefits, the long tail that you're trying to develop.

The other book recommendation services, like FreeBooksy, InstaFreebie, and Book Sends, those kinds of guys, 5% coming through that way.

The next source of people becoming aware of me was the thing that I'm most famous for and that's Facebook ads. 16.4% of the respondents came in through Facebook advertising so that's pretty interesting. Actually less than BookBub. BookBub has a bigger reach.

Even though those ads are expensive, probably, I haven't actually sat down and worked this out yet, I imagine those would be cheaper leads than the ones I'm getting through Facebook. On the other hand Facebook has an almost infinite reach so I'm not going to be chewing through Facebook ads anytime soon in terms of the people that I can find and I can run a Facebook ad whenever I want. BookBub is going to tell me when and when I can't but Facebook doesn't care. As long as I pay them, I can continue to run those ads.

James Blatch: Just to go back, this survey goes to your list?

YOU'RE SURVEYING PEOPLE ABOUT BEING ON YOUR LIST, HOW THEY HEARD ABOUT YOU, ETC. AT THIS STAGE IT'S POSSIBLE THAT SOME OF YOUR RESPONDENTS HAVE NEVER BOUGHT A BOOK.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it's possible.

James Blatch: It's very unlikely that they'd reply to a survey to an author they never read but it's possible.

YOU'RE REALLY TALKING ABOUT HOW YOU GOT INTO THE LIST, NOW HOW YOU

BOUGHT MY BOOK.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. This question is how did you find out about me. I can concentrate on optimizing those areas.

The next one is, and I think this was a badly phrased question on my part is, 'You saw an ad on Amazon.' By that I mean an AMS ad and that was a marketing service ad which we'll talk about on another podcast. I've only really been running those for a couple of months.

I think people here think I'm talking about sending email out from Amazon. I'm kind of going to disregard that and I'm going to push it in with the other one. That's 10% and when you put that together, Amazon does become the biggest source of referrals, which isn't that surprising. 12% of others which we won't go into because it'll take too long but the final one for 5.6% is recommendation from a family or friend so that's always going to be one of the most powerful forms of advertising, referral, personal recommendation.

James Blatch: What size was that?

Mark Dawson: 5.6%. Pretty good in terms of the chunk coming through but that's very important. Okay, again another question.

QUESTION FIVE THAT WILL BE RELEVANT FOR ALL AUTHORS IS, 'WHAT FIRST ATTRACTED THOSE READERS TO MY BOOKS?'

There are four things and then another catch up, which we won't go into here, but in terms of people, that old cliché, cover is the most important thing. I've been guilty of that too and it is fundamentally important.

I think you're not likely to get people to look at your offerings if your cover sucks. I mean it's just a fact but we might be putting a bit too much importance in that. I'm certainly not saying don't worry about the cover too much because it's not as important as the other stuff because that's not true necessarily.

I think it's very very important to do that but we shouldn't over estimate it because when I run that question and ask what was the thing that attracted people to my books, cover came back at 6.7%, so quite low down actually in terms of the hierarchy.

The most important one, or the most influential one, was blurb, so blurb came in at 35%. Several times more influential than cover.

Look inside, so that's the free sample that you can get on Amazon, that came in at 21% so that's pretty good.

Then reviewed was 26% so the second biggest factor for people joining the list because they saw the reviews that the book had and that was the social proof they needed to make that decision to purchase.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's really interesting isn't it because all those little bits and pieces that go around outside of actually writing the book, which some people are clueless about quite understandably because it's quite complex area and others really understand the nitty gritty of it.

Most of us are somewhere in between. The sort of thing we spell out in our 101 course by the way in detail but that's for another day. They are so important, all those bits, the bit at the back of your book, the bit at the front of your book.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT THIS SURVEY AND START TO LOOK AT YOUR INCOME OVER A YEAR AND PUT THOSE PERCENTAGES AGAINST THAT, YOU CAN ASK, HOW GOOD IS GOOD BLURB? YOU CAN QUANTIFY IT AND IT'S WORTH A LOT OF MONEY.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I outsource now so I get someone to make a first pass. Actually Bryan Cohen, we've spoken to before, he's very very good at writing blurbs, good formula for those, I'll pay him a couple hundred dollars to do the first part of the blurb and then I'll amend it.

I consider myself to be a pretty good copywriter but it's one of those situations where I think it doesn't hurt if you have the funds to just get someone not connected to the book to make a first go at it. Often times with Bryan I'll actually use his with minimal amendments. But even if I do cut it around a bit, it's great to have a starting point that's original that I haven't had a hand in. That's question five.

Question six, so a little bit more specific to me. I'll just kind of mention what the question was and then people can have a look at the data in more detail if they want to in the free PDF we'll give away.

QUESTION SIX IS, 'WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK BY ME?'

Not surprisingly when you think about this a little bit, the two biggest ones, I think the two biggest ones, certainly the biggest one is the first Milton book. The reason is it's way way ahead of all the others.

Let's have a look, 31% of respondents like *The Cleaner*, which is the first Milton book. The reason for that is that's part of my giveaway offer so there's a lot of those out there. It's also the first in the series.

People, even if they read through the series, they will have read that one for sure, so it's not surprising that it's had the most exposure. What is perhaps a little surprising is that that it is people's favorite because I wrote that book when I was a less practiced writer than I am today and I think the later books are technically more proficient than the early ones. But that tends to be the one that comes back as the favorite.

JAMES BLATCH: DOES IT WORRY YOU AT ALL THAT YOUR BOOKS THAT YOU'VE WRITTEN SUBSEQUENTLY AREN'T AS GOOD AS THE FIRST BIT YOU WROTE?

Mark Dawson: No because the reason, people can only tick one box so most of those people will only have read that book so they can't tick anything else.

James Blatch: Yeah. I suppose it's also if you really like a series, and it's the same with a series of films, is usually a kind of emotional romantic association with the first one. Whether it's *Back to the Future* or *Star Wars* or your first Milton book that turns you on to the rest of them.

Mark Dawson: It's interesting to look through the other answers. You see the book that I would have considered to be not in the top five in the series, is the third and this is called *The Driver*. It actually comes out as 7.6% of the audience that was their favorite, so that was probably it's like number three I think in terms of the hierarchy of favorite books which is a good reason why sometimes you're not the best judge of how good your books are.

Your audience will tell you what their favorite is and so maybe what I can do from that kind of information is look back at what that story was about. That book is a more contained story, more like the *Equalizer* episodes that *The Cleaner* was originally based on. So less globe trotting, more one location with a more kind of realistic antagonist. Perhaps that's what my readers want. Maybe this year, in fact this year I will be writing a book that's a bit more like that. That's useful.

Then just kind of funny stuff. The first book that I self-published was called The Black Mile, a long time ago now, and .8% of my audience like that. Still 45 people but we're nowhere near as popular as the Milton books are. That's question six.

Question seven, this again is going to be useful for all authors I think. It's not necessarily the data but why I ask the question and how I ask it and then what you can do with the information you get back.

THE QUESTION IS, HOW MANY MARK DAWSON BOOKS HAVE YOU READ?

Their response comes back, very very quickly tell you what it is because as I say it's more about why I ask is important about what I'm getting back. I'll break it down. One, two to five, six to 10 or 11 to 14 or more than 15. Let's just quickly run that. More than six books, so from six upwards, it's about 60% of the audience.

The reason I ask that is because I want to know how much I should spend on acquiring a new reader. To put it in internet marketing language, a new lead because if I can work out how many books they're likely to read once they start reading, I can then work out how much they're likely to spend and I can work out what the median is.

And then once I've got that information I can work out how much I should spend to acquire them. I go into this in a lot more detail in the advertising course but once you have that kind of number you can then make really educated decisions and if you're on one side of the line with your ads, than you should continue to invest. If you're spending too much, than you should cut back and try and refocus and go the other way to try and make them a bit more efficient.

JAMES BLATCH: DID YOU ASK IF ANYONE HADN'T READ A BOOK? DID IT START AT ONE TO SOMETHING?

Mark Dawson: We actually started with one.

James Blatch: My theory that some was just one to two survey with not really a book.

Mark Dawson: I know some do because in some of the comments in the free text comment, maybe three or

four said I haven't read any yet but I'm looking forward to starting.

James Blatch: I mean you talked a lot in the past about the value of a lead and although it does start to sound technical, people can start to see here exactly how you've extrapolated that figure on why you put so much effort it.

We read comments from people who are starting off in this path, people like myself, who feel a little aimless and should I be paying 50 cents what I'm paying \$1.50, do I stop my campaign because \$1.50 a lead is too much and so on. But very quickly with this data, well not very quickly but at some point with this data you've got the answers that you're looking for and as you say, informed decisions. Then everything starts to get better and better and more focused as you go on.

Mark Dawson: There are other ways to calculate, it's called read through. You can look at your relative sales numbers for books in the series and try and see trends developing there. I think that's a bit unscientific because people can come in on book three without reading book one, book two, so read through is a little bit ambiguous.

ASKING THIS KIND OF QUESTION SPECIFICALLY IS A MUCH MORE ACCURATE WAY OF FINDING OUT WHAT YOUR SUBSCRIBERS ARE WORTH TO YOU.

Then, speaking about worth, the next question.

THIS IS QUESTION EIGHT, IS WHAT DO YOU THINK A TYPICAL MARK DAWSON BOOK IS WORTH?

Now this is valuable for all Indies because we do tend to, we mentioned this before, we do tend to suggest that our books are worth less than a traditionally published book and we tend to be nervous about charging a little more than perhaps we ought to.

The answer to that, I put all the options down, 99 cents that's the first one, 2.8% of the audience responding said that that was what they thought my books were worth. \$1.99 is 6.6%. \$2.99 12%. \$3.99 16%. \$4.99 19%. \$5.99 16% and then the biggest one of all, more than \$5.99, 25%.

I would say a good starting point for an Indie author, I would say \$3.99 is about the right price. I tend to price now at \$4.99 or \$5.99. I don't go higher than that unless it's a boxset in which I'll go up to \$10. If

you think about that, \$3.99, that's 35, 45, 51, 76% of the respondents would pay more or think the book is worth more than \$3.99.

James Blatch: But the biggest single one there is more than \$4.99.

Mark Dawson: \$5.99.

JAMES BLATCH: \$5.99, BUT YOU WON'T PRICE ABOVE THAT?

Mark Dawson: No I won't. I think, you probably could and there are some authors, there's an author called Elizabeth West who is in the community. She has done really well at \$9.99 and of course even at \$9.99 were still under pricing by a considerable amount what the traditional publishers will charge for an eBook. The new Reacher book is going to cost you \$16 or \$17 in eBook, which frankly is a bit insulting.

James Blatch: Don't say that. I'm trying to get Lee Child on here.

Mark Dawson: It's not his fault. I'm sure he'd be happy to charge a little less but it's a publishing tactic to maintain print. From a reader, you have a tangible item in a book that you can put on your bookshelf or a file. It doesn't seem right that one should be much more than the other.

Anyway, that's interesting for me and what I'd like people to take away from that is just be confident about charging a little more and feeling that you don't need to be stuck in that 99 cent ghetto and being unhappy about charging more than that.

WHAT WOULD YOU CHARGE FOR YOUR BOOK?

James Blatch: Well of course it's my very first book and it's going to be effectively a lead magnet, but I have been thinking about charging 99 cents. Partly because I've had so many people saying I can't wait to buy your book and they want to buy to support me so there's going to be an initial bit of that.

Rather than give it away, I actually feel that they should be able to buy it just because they want to feel that they've contributed to my career at the beginning which is great. In longer term, my bigger audience who I don't know yet and who are purely judge me on the book, I've got to make a decision about whether

I stick with 99 cents before I've got anything else to give away or whether I give it away.

Mark Dawson: For a first time author, yeah I think you'd be looking to give it away. I think there's not much point in charging 99 cents because the actual amount you'll make, you're making 30 cents on the dollar.

James Blatch: Have a coffee in a cheap café.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, so not huge but what you can do, the subscriber is going to be worth much more to you in the long term so actually if you want to write four books by 2018, I think I read on the blog post last night, so that would be something that you need to think about.

James Blatch: I have got some questions about that but we'll come back to it. It's its own area, isn't it, pricing and so on and perhaps we'll get somebody on to talk specifically about pricing.

Mark Dawson: Definitely could.

James Blatch: Because I've got quite a few questions so I'll approach that point. Oh yeah, go on.

MARK DAWSON: QUESTION NINE, HOW DO YOU READ YOUR BOOKS?

What's the format that's most popular with my readers? Print comes in at 3.9%, that's about right. I don't push print too hard. They're all available in print, I'll probably make a grand a month in terms of print sales, perhaps a tad less than that but it's small in the grand scheme of things.

Amazon Kindle comes in at a whopping 66%, very interesting. Barnes and Noble Nook, 2.55%, Apple, 12%, Android, 6% and Kobo, 2%. Small when you think about them individually, apart from Apple which is 12% of my revenue but when you combine them you're looking at about 20% there, so that's useful for me.

We'll get on to Kindle Unlimited in a minute but if I was to go exclusively with Amazon again, and I have

been before, I would immediately be turning off 20% of my audience so I'd need to know that Kindle Unlimited could make up that short fall but there's no guarantee of that.

I've spent a lot of time on working on my relationships with those retailers, especially with Apple and you can see that is something that has born fruit now.

Then audio book comes in at 2% and then other is 4.2% but audio book that's an area that's definitely growing. I'm doing quite well with Audible. I think one of the biggest selling Indie authors on Audible, at least in the U.K. and that's accounting for a fairly small percent of the market but there's a lot of potential for growth there.

JAMES BLATCH: THERE ARE PRESUMABLY HIGHER COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH AUDIO BOOKS?

Mark Dawson: Well in the sense that there's a production involved, technically yes you'd be right in thinking that but there are ways to get around that. I sell my books to Audible studios because for me, I probably mentioned this before, it makes more sense for me to have them produce the books and then have skin in the game when it comes to ...

James Blatch: Have what?

Mark Dawson: Skin in the game. Never heard that before?

James Blatch: No. It sounds quite rude.

Mark Dawson: Skin in the game just means that you are invested as I am.

James Blatch: You've got dog in the fight.

Mark Dawson: Dog in the fight, there you go, exactly. You've got dog in the fight. So it makes sense for them to promote something that they've made too.

The other way of course is through using ACX so that's Audiobook Creation eXchange, which is another Amazon company which basically hooks up authors on the one hand with producers and their agents on the other hand. You can do that on profit share where you're not out of pocket at all. That could work really well. There's another option there but audio books definitely could be one of the growth areas as we go into the rest of the year.

JAMES BLATCH: YOU CAN QUANTIFY THIS BECAUSE YOU CAN LOOK AT EXACTLY HOW MANY YOU SOLD AND HOW MUCH YOU SPENT AND HOW MUCH YOU'RE ACTUALLY GETTING FROM IT.

Mark Dawson: Yup, exactly. Question 10, getting to the end now actually. Very simple question with a yes, no answer.

ARE YOU IN KINDLE UNLIMITED?

Kindle Unlimited, most people know what that is, it's a subscription service whereby you pay I think it's 10 pounds or \$10 a month and you can borrow books. The Netflix model.

Works very well and Amazon pays you on a pages per read basis, so something like .0045 cents per read, which sounds minuscule but when you have a million reads, a million pages read, suddenly it can be worth a lot.

Those authors that we met in Saint Petersburg, people like Lindsey Hall who were doing very significant amounts of money, most of that would be coming through KU. The answer from my service, are you in it or not? Yes was 20% and no was 79%.

The great majority are out and remember just linking that back to that question I said before, where is my audience based and there's an awful lot on other platforms, 20% of my audience is on non-Amazon platforms so that makes me think if I'm gaining perhaps 20% of the audience on KU, that's still quite a lot for me to make up in order to make that cost neutral switch.

JAMES BLATCH: YES, AND THE POINT TOO THAT IF YOU GO INTO KINDLE UNLIMITED THERE'S AN EXCLUSIVITY.

Mark Dawson: Yes, you've got to be exclusive. You couldn't be on those other platforms. The other benefit is there is effectively a new marketplace, a new very big marketplace with lots of other readers

who wouldn't buy my books. They're only interested in the subscription model so potentially you can reach thousands and thousands more.

Would I make more money by going that way? Maybe. It's possible. Would I feel more secure knowing that all my eggs are in one basket? Definitely not. That's the things you have to weight up.

JAMES BLATCH: YOU HAVE, SILLY QUESTION, SOME BOOKS IN KU AND SOME BOOKS OUT OF KU AND THAT'S COMPLETELY NORMAL AND UP TO YOU?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's not per author, it's per book so I've got I think all of my Amazon Thomas and Mercer books are available in KU, as you'd expect. They're owned by Amazon now so they're going to put them in their programs. I've got three books, the three original noir books that are all exclusive to Amazon because they did me a year long special deal to put them exclusive in return for some promotion. Now that deals expired, I'll probably put them wide again.

This is a very interesting question for authors who have mailing lists and then don't know what they should do with the subscribers they've got on the list, specifically how often should they be communicating with list members.

I ASK ANOTHER SIMPLE QUESTION, 'HOW FREQUENTLY WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR FROM ME?'

The answers come back with just when there's new book 35% of the time, 35% of the audience; once a week, thank God this one didn't win because there's no way I'd be able to mange this but 10% would like to hear from me once every week.

Once a month is the winner with 46.69% and twice a month gets 7%. I've settled on the once a month model and I have been guilty over the last year or so of not hitting that and that's because I've just been so busy with everything else but I am trying to maintain that kind of monthly contact with my readers now.

They're will usually be something to say, so I've just got the first Milton box set, has just recently been available in print so I did a mail out to the list last week just saying I had the survey responses, I emailed out about that and the next month on the 15th there will be a new book release to go out. I can maintain a monthly basis. Weekly I think I'm just going to be talking about the weather so probably not going to be that interesting.

JAMES BLATCH: DO YOU BROADCAST IN THE SENSE THAT YOU WILL ONCE A MONTH SIT DOWN, WRITE AN EMAIL AND SEND IT TO YOUR LIST? OR WOULD YOU SIT DOWN AND WRITE THE NEXT SIX MONTHS WORTH OF EMAILS AND SCHEDULE THEM?

Mark Dawson: No, they'd be broadcasting. You could put it on an autoresponder but then if you're writing something that's dependent on the time, so you might say it's summer in Salisbury but those emails could go out in the winter because you just joined your list. You're slightly ham strung by how flexible you can be.

I think auto responders and automation sequences are best as you onboard people, so talking about stuff that isn't dependent on anything other than the books that you're giving them and that kind of stuff.

GETTING TOWARDS THE END NOW. I ASK, WHAT WOULD YOU BE MOST EXCITED ABOUT IN 2017?

Again, this is helping me to work out what I should be writing more of and less of. 70% of people want more Milton. Isabella Rose, 11%, Noir 7%, so no noir, 2.35% and a new series, so one I'm thinking of writing I've actually got planned out and might start to write this year, 10% of people were interested in something new. That's interesting too.

JAMES BLATCH: DID YOU TELL THEM WHAT THE IDEA WAS OR DID YOU JUST SAY SOMETHING NEW?

Mark Dawson: Just a new series.

James Blatch: I'm a little surprised. There's such a big gap between John Milton and Isabella Rose.

Mark Dawson: Well there are 10 Milton books, two novelas, three box sets, and I've never advertised the Isabella Rose series, that's an Amazon exclusive.

There's not much point to me advertising that. The margins are much smaller because I get 30 whatever percent rather than 70%. It doesn't make much sense for me to do that. If you think about the Milton books, I have no idea, I could work it out quite easily what the impressions have been over the course of the last two years and impressions that's the number of times an ad has been served. It would be in the millions, probably 10 million now, probably something like that. It's much much better knowing that series, but 10% of 65,000 size mailing list is decent. That's not bad at all. That does quite neatly work out what I want to focus on this year.

There will be more Milton at least this one in February. There will be one directly after that, probably another one towards the end of the year. There will be another Isabella Rose.

And I might if I get time, depending on all kinds of things, write this first book in the new series that I'm thinking of but being able to validate that, get that pre-writing approval from your audience is quite a useful thing to know. I know for example, that if I wanted to do a new series, at least 10% of my audience would like me to do that. You can probably extrapolate from that another 20% will buy it for sure and so it's going to be a worthwhile exercise whatever I decide to do.

James Blatch: Yeah. Good. Any more questions?

Mark Dawson: That's it really. We kind of just mopped up with is there anything you'd like Mark to know if and you'll get, it's quite funny I just saw a couple here.

We had one guy said, it's not all praise, which is great. I want it to be honest. "Sometimes it's evident that you haven't visited a location just for research. Eg, your books set in Australia had so many errors it grated. Perhaps get a native of the country to proof it as well." I haven't been to Australia and I have had a native of the country in fact several checked it and were happy with it but obviously I didn't get everything right.

Then we had, where are we, we had one of The Sword of God, "I was very impressed with the accuracy of the upper peninsula setting," so that's in Michigan, "Which I'm very familiar with," because I haven't been there either, so it just goes to show sometimes you're going to get it right, sometimes readers will think you've got it wrong.

James Blatch: Right and you need to go to Australia.

Mark Dawson: Yes I haven't been to Australia. Strangely enough.

James Blatch: I thought that as you were walking past the main park in the square because I thought when I was there to work for the regime it was different.

There's a general point to make here as well which is an obvious thing, which is clearly you've got very valuable data, empirical evidence that you can use to make informed decisions in the future.

For those 5,700 people who already feel that they're part of your community, that's a better connection with them as well and each time you do an exercise like this, you talk a lot about turning fans into super fans and super fans into really amazing close fans, that's part of this as well isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's demonstrating that I'm listening and a number of times, I mean in the thousands of comments that I've gone through, the number of times that has come through and that people appreciate that I ask and love their connection that they have with me.

The number of times you'll hear people say I've never had a connection with an author like this before, it's amazing, and it doesn't take very long to do that. These are not difficult things to work out. They don't need to be expensive. It's just common sense really. It's reaching out and making connections. That turns them into people that are likely to, as we saw from that question, will buy an average eight of my books. My books cost say \$5, do the math.

James Blatch: 40 yeah. That's great. It's the right way to do business, to think of yourself as a business and this is exactly what you'd find big companies will be doing all the time in fact. We're slightly plagued by them in this day and age. That's the other side of being a consumer, it's very difficult to visit a website without something popping up saying have you got time to take our survey and you have to pick and choose how much time you have on those fronts.

You've been referring a lot if you're watching this on the YouTube version you'll see that Mark's been referring to his laptop a lot through this so that information, everything there, all that, the data that he's been referring to is available to you to download if you go to selfpublishingformula.com/download51 and you will be able to get all of that really really interesting stuff.

And there will be stuff in there, particularly as you mentioned at the beginning, the pricing that could be of value to you in your own books but it will certainly give you an idea of, in Mark's case, what is the ideal, not quite the ideal survey for you because you said did you get one of the questions wrong and you need to refine that in the future, but great. I've really enjoyed. That's been very interesting.

Mark Dawson: Good. Mission accomplished.

James Blatch: To make it interesting to me. Good. Excellent. Don't forget you can get all our podcasts at selfpublishingformula.com, you can subscribe to us via iTunes, leave a review if you'd like. That'd be great if you can. You can subscribe to our YouTube channel and you can watch us in glorious color as well. We're going to be back next week. I want to wish you well this week, that URL again to download the survey information, selfpublishingformula.com/download51. Have a great week Mark.

Mark Dawson: You too James.

James Blatch: And have a great week you. Good bye.

CHAPTER 49

WHEN HOLLYWOOD COMES CALLING - WITH CAL MORIARTY, SCREENWRITER AND NOVELIST



Let's dream a little: a Hollywood producer has called and wants to turn your book into a blockbuster. What exactly do you do next? In today's episode, ex-private eye, crime novelist and screenwriter, Cal Moriarty, explains how to prepare for such an eventuality and how to navigate the challenges that follow.

FROM PRIVATE EYE TO HOLLYWOOD

Cal's own career journey is inspiring. In this episode, listen to her tell the engaging story of her road to success as a novelist and screenwriter with years spent working in Hollywood now being put to very good use.

THE HOLLYWOOD RULES FOR SCREENWRITERS

Film-making is a business. Hollywood has its ways of doing things, and successful writers will learn and understand the “rules,” follow them and harness them to achieve success. Cal unravels the logic behind some of these rules and how to play by them in order to secure that life-changing deal.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A NOVEL AND A SCREENPLAY?

“They are buying the story, not the words.” Cal Moriarty talks about the differences between novels and screenplays and what the process of turning a book into a film script involves. Find out why most movie producers don’t want authors to write their own screenplays - and how you can change their minds and get yourself the job as screenwriter for the film adaptation of your book.

GETTING PAID FOR A FILM OPTION

You get the call that a producer wants the film option for your book. What should you expect in terms of being paid upfront and when the film gets made and is released? What kind of deals should you say “no” to? Cal discusses good deals, bad deals and percentages. Don’t sign anything until you’ve heard this episode!

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Introduction to this episode about thinking big - Hollywood big.
- Introduction of today’s guest, Cal Moriarty, private eye and crime mystery writer.
- Cal Moriarty’s transition from private eye to Hollywood
- Hollywood’s rules for screenwriting
- Difference in writing styles between books and screenplays.
- Some can’t do the work of cutting their novel down to a screenplay. Others can. How to get your novel out of your head and approach it as a screenwriter. It is a lot of dialog and many writers don’t like the dialog aspect.
- How screenwriting skills can enhance your novel writing.
- When to say “yes” and “no” to an option offer.
- Cal Moriarty’s plans for self-publishing her next novel, *The First Detective*.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- podcast@selfpublishingformula.com
- I Am Pilgrim
- [Self Publishing 101 Course](#)
- [Cal Moriarty on Facebook](#)

TRANSCRIPT FOR THIS EPISODE

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to episode 52 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Operator: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests and they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Welcome back to our makeshift studio here in Salisbury, Wiltshire, United Kingdom. European Union. Globe. It is the little moments. From here, we talk to you wherever you are, want to wish you a happy Friday if you listen to us on release day. Whether you're in Australia, New Zealand, United States, China, Singapore, wherever you are.

We love to hear from you! From time to time I give out our email address, I should give it out every episode really. Podcast@selfpublishingformula.com. You can just drop a line and say hello, tell us where you're listening from or tell us that you want to hear something in particular on a podcast. We'll do our very best to bring that do you.

We'd like to bring you some big name authors this year, it's one of aims. We have our feelers out. In fact, if you know a big name author, if you happen to know a world famous author and you reckon you could persuade them that there's a great little indie podcast that they should be on, please get in touch and we'll do the rest. That would be great.

Talking of thinking big, this episode is about the moment that every author dreams about as they're dropping off the sleep one night. Which is when Steven Soderbergh ...

Mark Dawson: Steven Spielberg.

James Blatch: Or Steven Spielberg rings you and says, I love your book! I'm going to make you a star! Or whatever they say in Hollywood. It's when Hollywood comes calling and we joke about it but you know what's going to happen to people who listen to this podcast, is they're going to get that call out of the blue. It's probably going to come from an agent or an agency or a small production team. They'll be, probably, thrown into panic at the prospect of suddenly being on the end of a negotiation about how much you're

going to sell your book for to be turned into a film or a TV series.

It's not as far-fetched as it sounds because it's happened to you.

Mark Dawson: It has happened to me. I got an email, I don't know when it would have been. Sometimes last year from the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles saying they're interested in one of my series and were the rights available. Then, I don't know exactly why, I think kind of a jungle drum situation that people heard that I'd been approached and I got several emails over the course of the next couple of weeks.

I handed those over to my agent and we've optioned my series to a very, very big Hollywood producer. I can't say who it is until I've got a bit more details to go but it's a very big Hollywood producer. It's perfect for this particular series.

There's an A-list Director attached to it now and a screenwriter and I think I'm supposed to be having a call with him in the next couple of weeks to talk about how their pictures are going.

It is a dream come true, really but at the same time one that I'm fairly relaxed about. There's nothing I can do to affect whether it's going to work or not work so I might as well just relax and kind of enjoy the day dream that one day I might be able to go to ... I remember at our old job, we could go back and watch the films. It's given its age certificate in the UK.

James Blatch: That's what Mark and I used to do. We used to watch films for a living when we first met.

You say you were relaxed about it but what about the in negotiation.

WHAT ABOUT YOU AGREEING TO A PRICE OR COMING UP WITH A PRICE? WHERE DID YOU START?

Mark Dawson: I'm a lawyer so I'm not worried about negotiations or contracts, that's absolutely fine. What I did was went to my agent and my view on that is I'm paying them. They're experts, they've done those kinds of deals all the time. I might, being a lawyer, I can understand kind of conjectural language but

at the same time I don't have the context of doing a film deal before. It's not something I've got experience of. I'd much rather leave that to them.

The way I deal with it is, is very hands off. I let them handle all of that. All the communication goes between Hollywood and the agency. They bring me as a when necessary.

James Blatch: That's what today's interview is about. It's with a woman called Cal Moriarty, who is remarkable figure in her own writing. She talks a bit about her own background. She's become a bit of an expert in this area. She's seen a lot, she's been through a lot and she's like the perfect aunt you want to speak to. I'm not trying to age her, she's younger than me but the perfect sort of friend of a friend who will sit down and say to you, don't be a sucker. Don't do this, do do this. Be grateful for that.

Just give you those initial steers that you might need if you suddenly find yourself in a situation where a film production company is interested in the idea, your intellection property. So, let's hear from Cal and then we'll have a little chat off the back of that.

Cal Moriarty: Cal Moriarty, former private eye, the youngest ever private eye in the UK is now a crime thriller writer. Crime mystery writer, eye with a two or an action thriller screenwise.

James Blatch: So, private eye. Just flesh that out a little bit for me. You're not talking about a detective, we're talking about somebody I would hire.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. Exactly. If you wanted to, I guess, find out things about somebody who didn't want things found out about them you would hire a private eye and they would do their very best to find out whatever it is you wanted to find out.

James Blatch: Obviously, this is the stuff of lots of books and TV series and so on but, actually, not many of us come into contact with people who've done it.

So far, I haven't needed to hire one. I'm not saying, I'm not ruling it out Cal for the future but at the moment

I haven't needed to.

IN THIS DAY AND AGE, WE LIVE IN AN INFORMATION AGE NOW, IT MUST BE A BIT EASIER, PERHAPS THAN IT WAS IN THE 19 ... IN PHILIP MARLOWE'S TIME.

Cal Moriarty: It is. Though, it's also actually a lot easier for people to hide things because you can save it online. You can use a hundred different alias' if you want to. If you had something to hide you probably wouldn't be using your real name online.

But if you're a bad person, you're putting up and using your name online since you ever went online, whether it was 10, 15 years ago, however long. Yeah, it is easier and it's actually easier for people to move around and create a kind of new life for themselves in a place where it wasn't so easy to do that before.

If you're occurring from the UK, there's many, many places that you could go and hide all around the world because you've got a British passport you can travel anywhere. If you're a really bad guy then, of course, you know where to get a fake passport and fake I.D and you'll know the kind of people to go and see when you end up in, lets say, Bermuda.

James Blatch: Okay. For example.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. For example. If you want to run away and hide. It might as well be somewhere sunny. I think the only places that don't have proper extradition treaties with the UK are, bizarrely, I think it's like a Spaniard island or something.

James Blatch: I can remember. Spain has long been a hide away for your type of East End villain. But in a rather darker episode, when I was a reporter, I was also told that it's also a place where child abusers would go and hide. It's somewhere that is, for somewhere, on our doorstep in Europe but slightly out of reach or difficult for the legal people to get ahold of them.

Cal Moriarty: I saw that the other day actually. There was a guy, I think they just caught him and he was in somewhere like Malika and that is Britain's number one wanted criminal and he is a child abuser. There was a picture of him while he was in Spain.

If I was going to hide from anyone, I wouldn't go to Spain because there's a lot of people kind of on the look out for bad guys in Spain.

You go somewhere completely different by some, I guess him and other people, they figure okay, there's lots of English ex-pats here. We can hide much easier than say if you went somewhere like Mombasa. There's not many ex-pats, young ex-pats hiding there, so you're sticking out like a sore thumb because people they to go, who is this person. This person that's just shown up.

It's not as if you go to Spain. There's so many people going there for a week, two weeks, a month. It's much easier to fit in.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Cal Moriarty: You could be kind of like Lord Lucan and maybe you end up in Africa and apparently you live out your life and then you die nice and quietly.

James Blatch: Is that what happened to him? He was in Africa?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. I do know there was a story in the paper, a few months back. It was his secretary or the PA that she had arranged for the children to go out to see him in Africa. I don't know if she was trying to sell a book or if that's actually accurate.

James Blatch: We should say to our American listeners that Lord Lucan was a notorious case in the UK of a Lord, obviously a peer, whose nanny was brutally beaten to death in the house and he mysteriously disappeared that night and was never seen again. Rumors have rebound to this day that he was hiding out South America or Africa or somewhere so who knows.

I think there was a dramatization on TV a couple of years ago, where he was killed on his crossing by his group. His honorable group of friends who said, you just don't do this sort of thing I'm afraid, chum. They

pushed him over the side of the boat, which also sounds plausible but anyway. Who knows?

But the stuff of books and films and TV series and so on, which is where we're going to come onto your story sick house. You had an extraordinary start in life. I don't really know how that begins, I don't know whether you go to the careers advice and say I want to be a private eye and school but there's obviously some spark in you that is not conventional, in that sense, if you don't mind me saying.

Story telling and stories and films has been your background, really, from there until now.

TELL ME HOW THAT TRANSITION HAPPENED FROM PRIVATE EYE TO HOLLYWOOD.

Cal Moriarty: From private eye to Hollywood. You start back a bit earlier from that. When I was at school, I was selected by the head of English to be part of this course that picked three or four of the kids out of the school to be taught for a week by people from the Royal Court Theater. Which was in London, it was pretty near where the school was. At the same times I wanted to be a private eye, she wanted to be a policewoman as well.

We had a policeman come into the school and I said I want to be a private eye. He basically burst out laughing. I just faced him and go, I'll show you. The same time as I've got these bonkers private eye fantasies, I'd hoped to be was a writer. You couldn't pick two more odd jobs that someone is probably never allow to take in a life. At the same time, I'm trying to achieve both of these things at once.

Fast forward, I left school at 16. Which is quite unusual now but wasn't unusual back then and I went to work at the Society of Genealogists in London, tracing family trees. I had two jobs in that place. One half of the time I was on a, it's called the International Genealogical Index and it's basically the Mormon database of anyone who has ever died, the Mormon church will make you a Mormon after your death. They would go around to all the church yards, the grave yards, in essentially all the world. Wherever there are Mormon people living, they will go to their graveyard and write down Rebekah Booth, born 1783, died in 1813 or whatever and write them down.

I think, in doing that, writing down in the register, you somehow become Mormon or you have service or something. I'm sure that's what it is. It's actually a great resource for Genealogists but you do have to remember that these people are lay people. They're not use to inscribing stuff off grave sites so you do get errors. Everything has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

If you're looking for your relative who was named Booth and they were born such and such you think, you have to really come about taking that information and come running with it. You have to have other means of double checking it. We used to have clients from all over the world who can access this database. I was kind of in charge of that, in charge in Genealogists.

I saw this job, private eyes wanted. Back in the day, I phoned up and I said, you don't take girls do you? Not the best idea if you're trying to go for a job. Britain was even more sexist than it is now. He said, no, we do. We do. Please come for an interview because once I told him that I was used to tracing dead people, he probably figured I could trace living people as well.

I went there and it was very, very interesting. There were lots of businesses hired them, you wouldn't even think of them. Lots of business that are getting stolen from, they think people are embezzling money from them, they want interest and information about their rivals. Whether it's the individuals running the business or who the shareholders are. All of this kind of information that is just invaluable if you're running a business and you want to know about your rivals.

That was it. I stayed there and then I ... can't remember how it went. I really wanted in the film business and I knew that the only place to be in the film business was ... England was in a recession then, I was to move to LA. That's what I did. I packed my typewriter and off I went.

James Blatch: You just up sticks and went to LA as you do.

Cal Moriarty: I didn't even know where LA was. I had to look it up on the map. I found it was by the sea, I was, great! This is going to be amazing.

James Blatch: What happens when you hit the ground in LA. Let's face it, a lot of people have, I guess over the years, landed at LAX or arrived at the train station with plans of grand career. Some of them, most of them were actors. Aren't they?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah.

James Blatch: They end up as dancers or whatever and a few make it into Hollywood.

WHERE DID YOU START?

Cal Moriarty: I started off in a B&B. In America, when they say B&B it's actually quite posh. You're staying in someone's house, it's a bit like Air B&B is now. You would often stay in a house with a host, they have like one spare room they rent out. Actually, it was a really nice elderly couple. They were both artists and beautiful art work.

Honestly, to make ends meet they were renting out one of their rooms. I thought, actually this is really good.

I got an interview with Charlie Sheen, Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez. I was doing a little bit of side journalism as well. I had got this great interview lined up and as I was flying over from London to LA the interview got canceled because Young Guns 2 was running behind schedule and Emilio Estevez wasn't going to be able to make it. The interview was about the three of them. That's what I'd got the gig on the back of, the three of them.

Emilio he was the reason it fell through. I was kind of hanging around in LA just trying to get this interview back on. I could see it was going to take ages. At which at the time, I didn't know, and that was obviously Charlie Sheen having his own problems. Probably was nothing to do with Young Guns running behind that the interview was canceled. Much more to do with Charlie Sheen.

Now that we see that, we see. He's got problems. I thought, okay. I can bloody make this work but I can't spend \$100 a night in a B&B for a month. I just got the local paper and I found a flat share in a place called Marina Del Rey with this really nice couple of girls. One was a cinematographer, one was a producer in the film business and that was it. I just decided to stay.

I stayed. I was working a job I probably shouldn't have been but I was. It was a great job in a luxury charter company and in the evening and the weekends, I go and work at the American Film Institute with the students there. Just working on the films with them and helping them.

One of the first films I worked on was *Secretary*, which back then was a 30 minute short with Jennifer Jason Leigh in the lead. That was great. To work with people like that and Steve Schaumburg, who at the time was a partner. He obviously directed *Secretary* and directed a few other films as well. But you know, that was obviously amazing she was well known then but no one had heard of him.

A few other directors and people that were coming up, it was just a fantastic opportunity. I couldn't have really gotten that experience in London because I can't imagine they let the film schools open to outsiders to come and help the students, on the film sets. But there, they do because they've got so many film sets and they need so many people to help them that the opportunities were very wide and open and I was ready to grab them.

I was learning, also, at the same time I was learning script supervision. Which is, you work alongside the director and you're keeping your eye on everything. You've got to keep your eye on the ball about what's going where, who is wearing what, who said what, where they sat when they said it. I really thought, if you want to learn about the film business, this is really the place to learn. I was just like a sponge, mopping it all up.

James Blatch: You had your writer instincts right from the beginning because you said one of your ambitions was to be a writer. I guess you were also drawn to the script in that way. When you sat there working out what was side somebody's parting was, whatever, for the next shot.

WERE YOU ALSO THINKING ABOUT THE NARRATIVE AND THE STORY? WAS THAT RUBBING OFF ON YOU?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. Of course. Before that you get sent loads of scripts because people in the states, that are so many opportunities and you get sent work from all over the place. You're reading a lot of scripts and things that are really important if you're script supervisor, is the timing of the script and how long things are going to take. If you see pages of words, if you see lots of black and white, that's a problem when you're filming. It slows everything down, essentially.

That's a really good technique that I learned, is how to time a script. If it's a comedy, how long each page should be because the page is the same size it's just the writing.

JAMES BLATCH: THE FIRST COUPLE OF PAGES IN EVERY TARANTINO FILM MUST PUT EVERYONE OFF THEM WHEN THEY SEE THAT BUT SOME PEOPLE, ALSO, YOU GET THE PEOPLE WHO BREAK THE RULES. RIGHT?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. You get the really genius people who you can break the rules because they are so brilliant. Hollywood is the afraid you've got a place outside the box. They have to commandeer to 45 seconds a page. Drama is a minute. Those constraints can actually be really useful to you as a writer.

If you know what the rules are, you can stick to them but you can turn them on their head and use them to your advantage. Once you know kind of the commandments of 45 seconds a page, as a writer, then that's a gift to you because you know what you should be putting on that page essentially to make it 45 seconds.

Instead of worrying about stuff like that, you can worry about the rhythm of the lines with comedy and the way you're setting up, how you're going to set up so you can have a fantastic drop line where it floors the audience.

You don't have to worry about, is my script 120 pages, is it 10 pages too long? It's comedy dear, it's 45 seconds a page. Just understand that and run with it. That's why when people say there are no rules, but there are. If you're working in Hollywood there are very strict rules but you just have to know how to harness them to get what you want over.

You are writing comedy, write a great comedy. If you gonna write a drama the tension has to be in the right places, same a thriller. All the set pieces for action adventure and action thriller, you have to know what you want to do, what the rules are and how you can best show off your skills. It's essentially what it is, isn't it? Showing off.

Showing off your skills as a writer so that they hire you. Somewhat like Quentin Tarantino, is absolutely committed to their style of story telling but lucky for him he does it really, really well. Whereas if you had read, you know, a jam packed first or second page that just had black ink all over it. First of all, they might not even pick it up and read because they'll say, this person doesn't know what they're doing. Why the hell am I going to read a script, this person shown me that they don't know how to do their job.

It's the same thing if you're an artist, an art critic, you like certain things a certain way and if someone does something and you think that actually shows that they're bad at your drawing, bad at writing then you're not going to waste your time. Unless you're reading scripts in their spare time, on the weekends and people go home with like 25 scripts to read over a weekend and it used to be paper.

James Blatch: Good lord. It is fascinating how Hollywood has its way of doing this. We recently were in LA doing some filming for SPF and on a day off being film gigs, we did a couple of the studio tours.

I was looking at the sitcom sets at Warner's. The guy was saying, I think it was Big Bang Theory so you know we were looking at the set. He was saying, what they do is they come in, they rehearse Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday for the episode, they shoot the exteriors on Thursday and then with the audience on Friday and then they shoot the episode.

I said oh, that's what they do on Big Bang Theory. How did they do Friends? They did Friends exactly the same way and they did the Mary Tyler Moore Show in that way and they did Rhoda in that way.

As long as you can go back because that's how we shoot sitcoms. No one was going to come in and say we've got a sitcom, by the way we're going to shoot it slightly differently they go, oh no. It doesn't work. That's amazing.

Cal Moriarty: I use to work for Warner Brothers and Friends was one of our shows at the time. I know Matt from back in the day when my boss was working on another show that Matt was on, they were the two co-stars of the show. It was a spin off from Married with Friends, it's called Top of the Heap. It was top of the crap heap. I probably shouldn't be saying that, it was not good.

One, it's essentially a business. Obviously, it's an entertainment business but it is a factory and everything has to work and be the same when you are distributing it. There's not point in you having a 45 minutes comedy that's somehow supposed to be in the sitcom slot because the sitcom slot is 30 minutes, 22 pages, you know who you're with. 20 minutes.

You can't really do anything different. That's why if you see something like Big Bang Theory that is so different but it's still the same.

James Blatch: Yeah. It's filmed and set up and produced it exactly the same way as the previous 100 sitcoms. That's really interesting and you've got a foot in both camps in terms of writing because you're a

novelist and we'll come onto that in a moment. I'm interested because we do have, in fact, Mark is in this position at the moment where film companies come to novelists. We want to talk about optioning it and people don't know where to start in that conversation.

ONE OF THE THINGS MIGHT BE AS A WRITER THAT YOU WILL THINK RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING CAN I WRITE THE FILM SCRIPT. BUT AS YOU ARE EXPLAINING HERE, QUITE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WRITING STYLES.

Cal Moriarty: They are completely different. Novels allow you, in a way, to be exceptionally self-indulgent with your words. You can put down, let's just say 85,000 words to tell us a story in a novel or one character's story within a novel but in a film script, if you've got 20,000 words that's probably 3,000-4,000 too many.

James Blatch: Of the whole film.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. You have to condense everything down. You have to boil it down to its absolute necessity. Also, what you have to do is that, most of the audience understand this, a film isn't a novel or a book. Say, you've written a nonfiction book that gets picked up. They're buying it for the story and most likely because it's been a massive success.

Firstly, most producers, let's go for 98%-99% producers are not going to want the novelist adapting their own work because they figure, you don't know what you're doing and because they have somebody who is maybe Oscar nominated, Emmy nominated, had a great short film or whatever as a writer or writer-director.

Because they work in a particular way, they'd rather use that person. That specialist to do the work. It's a bit like if you have your colon taking out or something, you'd rather the guy who's a colon expert do it than the heart guy.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Cal Moriarty: Or even the GP, the General Practitioner of Medicine, having a go for the sake of it. Hey, it's my colon, back off.

I think that that's what they prefer to work in that very particular way but as a writer if you feel that you could write a great screenplay I think it's to get prepared before the question comes up. Actually, I teach very, very successful novelists, way more successful novelists than me, how to adapt their own work into a screenplay. That's one of my specializations doing that for work and for teaching.

It's good to get pre-prepared. If you're writing a novel, think about that day when the production company is going to call. First of all, you're going to be outwardly delighted, you won't even be able to think straight, probably, that somebody has actually read your book and wants to pay good money to option it.

There's much more money to be earned as well, another 5% of the budget in the movie, as much as between 3%-5% of the budget in the movie for you to be employed as the screenwriter.

Also, talking about this is to another friend of mine who is hugely successful novelist in America and here. We were saying, you want to do your best work as a novelist but when ... you have no idea when your novelist career is going to end. It could be this book, it could be the next book, it could be three books time. In a way, what's your kind of plan for when that runs out, your time runs out essentially.

You may go on to write 60 novels but that's pretty not that likely these days, for various reasons. There's a lot more competition in the market place would be a main one. You've got to think, I have a chance here maybe to have two careers and one of them could send me in me on a whole completely different path.

First of all, it takes heck of a lot less time to write a screenplay than it does to write a novel and it's much more lucrative if you can get it right and get yourself finagled into a career in Hollywood.

You are doing that, essentially, off of the back of successful novels. You're basically using those novels to shoe horn yourself into a career as a screenwriter.

Screenwriting is a completely different art but if you've done novel writing and you can do it properly, then you understand the basic tenants of what a dramatic screenplay needs. Whether it's a comedy screenplay, or an action thriller or a cop TV show, that kind of thing.

Those same elements that are in a scene for a screenplay are exactly the same elements that are in a novel. As a novelist, you should have the confidence, that's what I say to people, it's a confidence trick, writing. You have to fool yourself into the fact that, yes I can do this every single day. People still do that when they've written 10 novels. Still everyday going, I can do this, I can do this because I've had good comments about my previous 9 novels so hopefully I can do in a 10 one.

Once you get that, once you understand that and if you can understand how a screenplay works, adaptation works, then you can hopefully get that other 5% essentially out of the production company.

Then, if that film is a success or even the screenplay goes and goes up, it gets option, it gets green lit, then you're much more likely to get hired again maybe as a stand in and screenwriter for a project that's not yours that somebody else is at, they're looking for a screenwriter for. Unless you've got that novel to start that conversation off with, the first novel or second novel you've written or even if it's the 10 novel you've written. Then you use that to get your screenwriter career going.

If you wait until the production company phones you, it's much trickier because then you're already behind the curve. If you've gone on a screenwriting course prior, even if it's a short one, one of the ones I run, you've read maybe five screenplay books, you are the biggest fan of certain authors or brilliant, you've kind of studied there even if it's just in your own head.

If you understand how screenwriting works, then you're already ahead of the curve when these people call but if you wait, they'll just try and get rid of you as soon as possible because most producers don't want the headache of bringing the novelist to write the screenplay because it slows everything down.

James Blatch: I imagine that for some writers, they'll find that process difficult if not impossible to condense down and simplify because some writers find it very difficult to edit and chop their books down when they should be chopped down as a novel, let alone, pairing it down to 20,000 words the bare minimum.

KILLING YOUR BABIES, CLASSICALLY, SOME PEOPLE FIND IT EASY. THEY CAN DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM IT EMOTIONALLY, SOME PEOPLE CAN'T DO THAT.

Cal Moriarty: No. Some people can't. Really is that child. Some people take 10 years slogging on a novel

and if you have to turn around your screenplay in four to six weeks, the same work. If you've got the same approach that it's taken you forever and you want to get everything right and every single word right, it's going to be really difficult for you to take what you need to do, which is you've got to step back, get out of the room and come back into the room and when you come back into the room, you are a screenwriter and you're adapting material.

You may have written it, you may have not but you've got to get that out of your head. You just looking at an exceptionally forensic way and which way, especially if it's for TV or film, is it going to be fairly in a massive, can you make this a very cinematic experience for people. Is there going to be not much talking because that's what a film is, not much talking, mostly.

One of kind of cinematic thrillers on TV or cinematic cop shows, it's still lots of talking probably much more so than most films. Then, I know you know in a novel, most novelist that I meet are absolutely terrified of writing dialog. If you're writing a screenplay, you have to write dialog. It can't all be picture even if it's for beautiful landscape, something *The Revenant*. There's still dialog in it.

James Blatch: I wonder how many people now write books. I read the book everyone read last summer, *I Am Pilgrim* by Terry Hayes and I was reading it thinking this guy has written this book to be a film. It didn't feel like a normal novel.

It felt like a series of scenes that were going to be filmed and it was no surprise when I looked him up, Hayes, afterwards and he's a screenwriter who's written a novel.

He's coming the other way around but I wonder if that's not a bad little thing for novelist to do in this day and age. Lots of people go to the cinema. My editor quotes lots of films that makes us think about how the story works in this film seems to be how people think more than they think about books.

RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING, PLAN YOUR BOOK AS A POSSIBLE FILM.

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Be aware that you're writing a novel, which is completely different but do you have in mind, what's going to happen when they call me from Hollywood or TV and they say, we want to buy your book, take a literal option out on it, which obviously you get paid for separately to being a screenwriter.

Once you think about where you want to go with your career and if you're really gung ho about being a writer then why not try and be two kinds of writer rather than just one. Because if you still want to do writing in five years time, first of all, there's not guarantee of that. Even if you have New York Times best sellers or the Sunday Times best sellers or any of that. There's no guarantee you will be doing that job in five years time because you're only as good as your last gig.

Maybe there's a different part you can take it on and the next 18 months for two years, you can set yourself up with your own new career but then two careers can run alongside one another. Don't put yourself out of a job that you might get ... don't turn a job down that might turn into something totally amazing for you. You might get stuck with an awful producer who you hate and it just puts you off the whole process forever by some ... why not.

It's almost free these days to train and do these things so why not do it? It's not like you have to spend 30,000 pounds whatever it is to get an undergraduate degree when you can do a summer course.

James Blatch: It would probably help your writing anyway.

Cal Moriarty: Also, everybody, you were saying about your own stuff. Everyone makes references to films because many more people have seen many more films than they've read books. There's so many comparisons that you can make.

Also, the audience and read of your book, they have read a ton as well. That language of film is much more in our heads, most peoples heads, even novelists than novel writing unless you've not seen any films and not seen any TV shows.

I don't watch much TV, I still write TV but I don't watch a ton of it because I'm too busy writing novels because they take forever.

James Blatch: We notice that.

Cal Moriarty: TV watching. Obviously, you have to be fairly committed to being a novelist and actually, it's hard slog. Screenwriting, I was talking to another friend the other day, it's so much fun because you're collaborating with other people. You have to leave the house. You work with actors, you're developing the work, when you work with a good producer it's a god send because you learn so much about how to do your own job. It's a free master class with a producer.

You get a great director, if you can work with at least with a good director and maybe even a great director, again, you're learning all the time. Whereas with novels it's just you and an editor. A lot of it, obviously, is on you like 99% of the work is down to you and there's no hiding place.

Whereas in screenplays, it's much quicker and it's more immediate fun because it's collaborative. But if you end up with the wrong crew, the wrong set of people, the wrong producer, the wrong director, the wrong cast, the wrong executive producer, it's absolutely living hell.

There's nothing you can do about it. As a screenwriter, you're like the caterer. They'll get rid of you pretty quick and then the guy who makes the tea. You have to have a good agent a good contract and when you get that opportunity, ideally, if one person is interested in your novel turning it into a screenplay and maybe there's some other people who are interested and then you can go and essentially interview them and see, which one of them you might work with.

Who might be a better fit personality wise, it all comes down to personality, who is going to work with you maybe the person who is a bit brusque and is not really listening to what you're saying in a meeting or any of that nonsense. That's the people you don't want to work with, even if they're totally amazing.

The person that treats you with respect but is also bringing something to the table for previous success or money or both, ideally. That's pretty ... that might be a benefit for you.

James Blatch: I'm reminded of this, was it Christian Bale who was taped screaming at the DOP at the set of a film and I remember thinking I don't want to work in that environment. I think he did apologize afterwards but there was that.

YOU DO HAVE TO PICK YOUR PEOPLE CAREFULLY.

Cal Moriarty: That goes on all the time but most people haven't got their phone on in the set because it's messing up the signals. That happens all the time. Actors have melt downs, directors are just winging it because some of them, lots of actors I say most of them. They know what they're doing and they're hoping not to be discovered that they have no idea.

James Blatch: That's all of us, isn't it?

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Imagine being like that on a film set having producers breathing down your neck at you. You've got to do two and a half pages per day of script, film it and it's got to be ready to show an audience and it's just pressure, it's a pressure cooker. Of course, people go off the deep end.

James Blatch: Before we leave Hollywood. I just want to talk about, briefly, about writers who don't have ambitions or interest in being a screenwriter but are approached about an option. You talked about the screenwriter potentially getting 3%-5% of the budget of a film.

WHAT'S THE CASE OF THE NOVELIST WHOSE BOOK THE FILM IS BASED ON, WHAT CAN THEY EXPECT OUT OF THIS?

Cal Moriarty: It depends how big a success the book has been. How good your agent is at getting the money, how many other people are interested in the material because ideally you want an auction. You want people falling over themselves and writing much larger checks than they should be because as a writer the only thing you can ever be guaranteed is getting that money for the option check.

If you go with somebody who maybe is saying, we've got all the money in the world and we've got George Clooney! Not that he would do anyone else's script often.

We've got all of these amazing writers and directors and people that want to do your work. Then, if they can't get it made and that's all hot air then the only thing you're left with is that check. That little beginning check.

They want, obviously, your material. Let's just say they agree that when they make it, they're going to give you \$250,000 when they make it. That's a long way off.

Your option fee should be 10% of the \$250,000 you're going to get ultimately. That's the Writers Guild of America and if you are interested you should look up their website. They've got loads of the contracts on there, it's very open system because most the people who are selling script in Hollywood are selling to good producers, are selling them to people who are members of the Producers Guild of America, it's all unionized. It's not just like anybody can join. You have to have a track record, you have to be respected, you can't just be anybody sticking that label at the end of your name.

They're only allowed to work with people who are kind of accredited, as they were, for the Writers Guild of America. Sure they take on freelancers etc, there's slightly different rules for that.

A lot of the screenplays are getting optioned by people who have got good Hollywood careers and are working with good Hollywood companies. They will always be able to write you a check because they have the money and that's how they act and produce. They've got big studios, they're getting discretionary funds from the studios so they can write their own check.

The alternative, they have to go in and present the work and you sell it and see if they can get the check but they have money. You can get your option money. I hear people doing it, people that are even big selling, best selling novelist here in the UK singing up for free options with producers.

People do that because they're desperate because after maybe 20 years or 25 years of writing this is the first that someone has come along and wanting to option it. There's nobody else interested and because of that you can't get any kind of auction going.

Then you option for free but then who is you're optioning the work to because most producers should be able to pay. Always think of it like this, if a producer can't pay to option your work, even if it's for \$1,000 or 1,000 pounds or 1,500 pound whatever, a very small tiny amount of money, kind of looks the option where they're going to take it around for 18 months and don't sign an option for longer than that. When you realize this person is a joker basically, you want to get your option back as soon as possible.

If they can't pay the writer that tiny little bit of money, then how are you going to run a business? How are you going to get an assistant? How are they going to take people to the Ivy to wine and dine them to get them to put money into your film.

Always think of that because if they haven't got money to pay you, you can guarantee they have no money to pay anybody else and they should always be paying the writer because without the writer, I love writers; without the writer there is nothing. There is no production companies, there is no directors, there's not producers, there's no audience because you've got nothing to show them.

To me, it's all about the writer. I used to be a producer. It's all about the writer and if you can't treat a writer right, that doesn't really say much for your company or you as a producer. Even in the game, it's a very expensive game the film business and novel writing, as you know, it's expensive. You have to give up time from your other job to go and do this job, which I'm not being paid for and you might not get any money at the end of it either.

I think writers is underpaid, they should be an absolute moratorium in the UK about writers signing free options. It's completely exploitative and should be stopped. Just like you can't go and work in an office for free, you have to get paid minimum wage. Even if you're a teenager, you have to get paid a minimum amount of money. Why are writers different to that? Are they a different species?

James Blatch: They don't eat.

Cal Moriarty: They don't eat. Exactly. Don't eat, don't need any rent paid, don't need to get a car to work or anything, the bus. I just think it's pretty disgraceful. I would like to see the Writers Guild of Great Britain come out and say that. No more free options.

Are you listening Writers Guild of Great Britain?

James Blatch: We'll make sure they are. That's brilliant Cal, that section of the interview I think will be really illuminating for people because it is an area that most people don't know much about. What they know about is what they see in comedy satire films about Hollywood.

Cal Moriarty: They've all being written by starving writers.

James Blatch: Exactly. The producers and everything else. Let's finish off about you as a novelist because you've been traditionally published by Faber.

I KNOW THAT YOU'RE CONSIDERING YOU'VE GOT A GREAT, FASCINATING BOOK IN THE PIPELINE, WHICH YOU'RE CONSIDERING SELF-PUBLISHING.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. I've got this book called the First Detective, which is about Dickens as a detective with his friend, inspector Field. He was essentially the first or the second, maybe, detective at New Scotland Yard. They used to go around and solve mysteries and crimes and get up to all kinds of no good stuff, back in the day. It's about that.

One stage a few years ago, when I had first written it it was getting loads of attention from people. Somebody actually wanted to make it into a television series as well. It was being, you know, chartered as a \$200 million dollar replacement for Sherlock Holmes franchise, which had gone missing somewhere. I still haven't done the third one of it.

This other producer, a fantastic British producer, wanted to make it into a television series and she sent it off to a production company. I won't let you know, it's a massive one and they even sent this thing back saying haven't you heard about this? I haven't heard about it and neither had she. The BBC were putting on a Dickens show, I can't even remember the name, I didn't watch it. I was so upset that it was a tiny bit similar to mine.

It was TV series but it got canned. It costs loads and loads and loads of money to make, of course, then that puts producers off. They see something that someone is part of the whole. They've built these sets on 40,000 square foot warehouse or something. You're talking serious, serious money and I think there was only about 6 episodes of it last Christmas time, just under a year. It just kind of stalled.

I had already written the novel of it and there's a play of it as well. Lots of things have been a bit haywire in life so everything got put back on the back burner. I'm coming to it again now and I really want to self-publish it. So much so that even though I don't know a bit about self-publishing, I've downloaded Mark's course.

James Blatch: Yep.

Cal Moriarty: I'm going to follow that by the book and give it its best shot. I'm going to get a professional cover, use a professional editor. Even though I edit other peoples work. I just think that we should self-edit your work. Sounds like lunacy doesn't it?

Kind of like people who aren't mechanic shouldn't fix their own cars.

James Blatch: Or surgeons should remove their own colons.

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Even though it's free. That's where that's going and it's a series, it's setting up a franchise and then hopefully if I can make this successful I'll go back to the producers who were interested in making it into a big budget movie for \$200 million, thank you. I go back to them and say, look, now it's been a success. Now you can see that people are interested in it.

I think it's the self-publishing thing that Mark and you were saying, you have to do everything so professionally. It has to be as if Faber have done it but it's just got your name as publisher on the cover instead.

You have to do a cover, you have get an editor, you have to get a copy editor, you have to employ the street team. All of those things, it's so important. I'm hoping Mark's course is going to flag up a few other things that I've probably forgotten.

James Blatch: Obviously, I couldn't agree more. Mark did a radio interview recently and when I talk to people, they immediately say, when I talk about an editor they say, I thought you were self-published. How have you got an editor?

I think people have no idea about the professionalism that goes into self-published books. In fact, there are so many smaller publishers these days, I dare say, that a fairly big chunk of self-published work is more professionally worked on then some of these small outfits that are turning around things very quickly.

We've come to our sort of 45 minutes bit, which is where we try and cap the interviews. It's been really illuminating Cal. Are you going to be in the one on one Facebook group, the genius groups?

Cal Moriarty: I may have signed up. I haven't been online probably for a couple of weeks. If I haven't signed up for them, I will.

James Blatch: I think it would be great to know you're there, first of all because we'll follow your journey and check out the book when it comes out but also, people may poke the old question at you. Saying, I've just had a call from Mr. Tarantino, what do I do next?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah, please do. I like to spend my life stopping writers from getting ripped off. That is the danger. People say, you don't need an agent or you don't need a lawyer and you just sign a contract and you're basically signing your life away to someone who knows way better than you what you're signing. If you get that call, I want the one on one page, just ask me. I'll tell you what to say to them, politely.

James Blatch: The film industries exploitative and full of sharks. Who knew?

Cal Moriarty: Who knew? Fancy that! The one that's calling you may be the same.

Mark Dawson: Great name. Cal Moriarty. It sounds like a film name, doesn't it? Erin Brockovich, Cal Moriarty, do you remember ...

James Blatch: It sounds like a film villain. Sherlock Holmes novel. No, she's great. She actually lives very, very near here. Couple weeks ago she came down to have coffee with me in a coffee shop just down the road that I go to quite a bit and we sat down and had a chat for an hour or so. She's a very good novelist in her own right. Obviously, lots and lots of experience. I didn't know that she was a private detective, that was interesting. Very, very switched on.

Runs courses, as she said. Has lots of high profiled authors go on those courses too. Certainly, someone I would rely on if I needed something clarified in the process that I'm going through, she would be on my

speed dial definitely.

James Blatch: It stands to reason, doesn't it, that having a big film deal and this sort of thing that's in the background for you may or may not happen would be a transformative moment in your career.

Mark Dawson: Hell yes. My wife is already looking on property websites for the house that we might be able to buy if this ...

James Blatch: In Beverly Hills.

Mark Dawson: Probably, yeah. We may be getting another one, two houses. Obviously the money that can be made is potentially vast. If you're looking at, lets say, I think to do this series that we're thinking about would be a minimum of \$50 million. Probably up towards \$100 million and then you're talking 1%-2% of that. It's pretty easy to work out you're looking at a very, very decent some.

I still think it's a bit of pipe dream. I don't think it will come off but I'm happy to imagine.

James Blatch: One of the people we're chasing is Lee Child to try and get on this podcast.

Mark Dawson: Not literally.

James Blatch: No, not literally. Well, maybe at some point literally. I'm going to put that out there, try and crowd source to get Lee on. I know a couple of our listeners do vaguely know Lee. He's going to Thriller Fest in New York and I think if he agreed to do an interview with us, one of us would hop on a plane and go and do it there and make it easy for him.

He's somebody whose life probably was transformed by that moment as well. A very good writer, well known books but, it just goes that ... it's exponential with Hollywood. Not everyone reads books but virtually everybody sits down and watches a film at some point. If you ask people before the films who'd

heard of Jack Reacher and afterwards you will find there's an explosion afterwards.

The same for Hunger Games and so on. Lets all hope for that moment that Hollywood comes calling him. I just think that there's, for me, if I want to go to cinema, I'd be looking for maybe a 1960's Cold War thriller. That's what I, personally, think would be a great film to make. Maybe the Vulcan Jet in it and slightly floored but young, quite good looking hero. If anybody would like to make that film, Podcast that Self Publishing Formula.

What do you think the chances are?

Mark Dawson: Hollywood producers are listening to this.

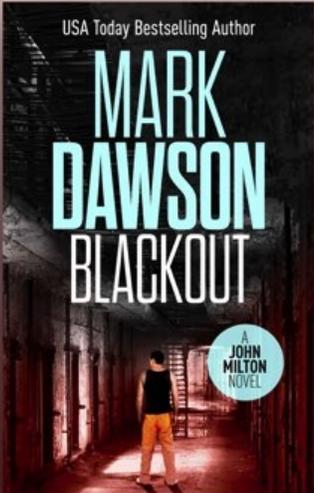
James Blatch: That was a fantastic elevator pitch. I'd be up for that.

Mark Dawson: We're done. I'm with you. \$50 million, 1%. 1.5%, let's start there. I'm down to 1.25. Great. Thank you very much indeed for watching, have a great week writing, have a great week reading because we're all readers. Have a great week selling.

We're going to speak to you for episode 53 next week, until then. Good bye.

CHAPTER 50

THE BOOK LAUNCH PROCESS - WITH MARK DAWSON



**BOOK LAUNCH:
10,000
SALES**

(AND HOW YOU CAN DO THE SAME)

Self Publishing Formula

EPISODE #053

Getting ready to launch a self-published book? You'll definitely want to listen to this Book Launch edition of the podcast. Last week saw Mark release John Milton's latest adventure, 'Blackout'. It turned out to be his most successful book launch ever. Find out how Mark fine-tuned his book launch process and secured 10,000 sales for 'Blackout' in its first week on the market.

THE STORY OF A BOOK LAUNCH

Mark explains the importance of feedback using advance reader teams and describes what kinds of ads and book pricing worked for him. He also details how he had to face up and deal with some unforeseen problems. These 'facepalm' moments will help others learn from Mark's experience.

THE BEST PLACES TO ADVERTISE DURING YOUR BOOK LAUNCH

Mark has three favorite advertising platforms. Tune in to find out what they are and how he uses them during his book launch to exponentially grow his audience. Learn how he used his lists to gain visibility and increase sales.

THE BEST FORM OF MARKETING - WRITE ANOTHER BOOK!

Want to increase your visibility and increase your book sales? Listen to this episode to find out how writing another book can be your best marketing tool! Along with lots of other great marketing advice, Mark talks about how your new book can generate more sales for the books you already have out in the market.

OUTLINE OF THIS EPISODE

- Intro to this episode about Mark Dawson's most successful book launch ever.
- Mark shares the process of his book launch.
- What about pre-orders and ranking?
- Ways to get responses from more of your audience.
- The best places to advertise your book launch.
- Book launch mistakes to avoid.
- Increasing visibility.
- The best form of marketing - write another book!
- Mark's publication plans. Congrats to Adam Croft, alumni.
- Final comments -- looking to the future of the podcast.

RESOURCES & LINKS MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE

- [Mailchimp](#)
- [MailerLite](#)
- [Book Report](#)
- [Kobo](#)
- ['Blackout' John Milton #10](#)
- [Adam Croft](#) (Thomas & Mercer - Amazon imprint)

TRANSCRIPT OF THIS EPISODE

Announcer: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson, and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

Mark: Hello and welcome to the SPF podcast, but we've changed things around again, a little bit. What do you think of the kind of radio studio vibe we've got going?

James: I quite like it, the only thing I'll say is that viewers, or listeners won't be able to see this, but viewers who are watching, will have a very well-framed shot and what they won't see is Mr. Dyer hovering over to my right and a confusing mess of cables, and tripods, and lighting, and all kinds of stuff, but I think it looks really good.

Mark: Yeah, that's the magic of Hollywood.

James: Or Salisbury.

Mark: Or Salisbury.

James: Yes, the other Hollywood. We talked about Hollywood last week and a little bit of feedback around the place about it. It is one of these subjects, I thought Cal was fascinating to listen to, somebody who's been there and done it, and understands the cynicism of Hollywood and understands that it's a very brutally commercial world and ultimately it's easy to get ripped off in this.

Mark: Absolutely, yeah it was a good interview and also quite timely for me 'cause I'm actually speaking to my producer and someone from the director from his company this evening at 10 o'clock UK time, which I think is about 2:00 pm LA time so that was quite timely to think about that and listen to her thoughts.

James: How excited are you about that?

Mark: Not very excited. It's great that things are going on, but as I've said before on the podcast, it's not something that I'm banking on. I'm not buying million pound houses right now. If it comes off it's great, and it's very flattering that people, very serious people are engaged with the material and they're definitely pitching it to studios to try and generate some interest, but I'm not gonna get too excited until the ink's dry

on the contract.

James: Yeah, well I think it's exciting, and we'll all enjoy that moment. We'll never see you again obviously, when the films get made.

Mark: We'll do it in Malibu next time.

James: Yeah exactly. This episode we are back to books and pure books, and you have just gone through a launch. It's been a pretty hectic time for you I have to say, and you've sort of disappeared off our radar for a little bit when your head's down writing the book. Just tell us a bit about the book first of all.

Mark: Yes, it's the 10th John Milton book. Milton is my flagship franchise, it's the one that most people know me for. For the 10th one I wanted to do something a bit special so I took some soundings from my audience and found out what kind of a thing they were interested in, what kind of adventure John should go on, and also asked which characters they enjoyed from the previous books, and I've brought a couple of them back again which has gone down very well.

I started writing it I guess November last year and we've obviously been quite busy with course stuff, with the 101 course that launched. And then I really accelerated in January, concentrated on getting the book finished, and it's been great. It's been my best launch by quite a long way for a number of reasons and we'll go into why that might be in this podcast. We can chat about the things I've done, things I've done to improve my process, and give listeners some takeaways as to what they might be able to do when they're ready to launch their next book.

James: Yeah, that's what this podcast is going to be about, it's going to be about how to launch a book, and long-term listeners of the podcast will remember that we did do this before, we broke down your previous launch which I think was your record launch then, so you've beaten that record.

Mark: Yeah, every launch I do beat the one before it and there's a number of reasons for that. Obviously the main one is my list is bigger every time. I'm able to broadcast that message out to more people every time I've got one to go. Also, I'm refining the process all the time so I've done something, a couple of

things this time I haven't done before, that have worked extremely well, and we can talk about that and go into a little bit of detail because they're quite simple for people to use those tips and tricks too.

James: Yeah, it's amazing the more you understand about this business, how detailed and complex each little part is, and the launch in itself is a bit of an art form isn't it, and something as you say you're refining each time, and each launch you learn new refinements.

Mark: Yeah it's like a finely tuned Swiss watch and I'm adding things in all the time so it would be good to get into some of that.

James: Good. Let's start breaking down some of the detailed facts. You mentioned that the YouTube viewers of the podcast weren't going to be able to see the background, of course there is actually a GoPro camera up on that shelf and standing right in the middle of the shot there fiddling with things. Stop fiddling with things. He's our third amigo looking slim and energetic.

Okay, let's break down the launch. So where do you want to start Mark, in terms of, I guess what we've got is a completed book that's been through its editorial process.

DO YOU START EVEN AS YOU'RE STILL PUTTING THE BOOK TOGETHER?

Mark: We'll go a bit before that because I've obviously got an advance team, I've spoken about that before, it's one of the main benefits of having a list is that you can recruit people, super fans willing to staff an advance team.

I finished the book, or at least I was reasonably happy with it, I had a bit of a nagging question about one element, and I won't say what that was right now, I'll tell you about that in a minute, but I wanted to send it off for the advance team to look at it. So it had been proofread, and was in the process of being copyedited. It's quite clean, I wrote quite clean anyway.

I sent it off and immediately, within like a day, one guy wrote back and said, "I hate the ending. I hate the ending. The book is great but the ending is, it would have been a five-star book, it's a two-star book because of the ending."

I have had problems with endings before, I've got all kinds of bad reviews for the first Isabella Rose book, people hated how I ended that book. So it's not one of my strengths, ending it. And that was the issue that I had in the back of my mind, was that it isn't quite right. And the reason it wasn't is it was a bit too much of a cliff hanger. It wrapped up everything the characters were safe without giving too much away-

James: Safe or dead.

Mark: Yeah safe or dead, certainly a conclusion. But the bad guy, the main bad guy hadn't been dealt with. And my intention was, the sub bad guy was dealt with but the main bad guy had kind of escaped. And the intention was for the next book to pick that story up, and that's what I said to you before I had 20 thousand words of the next book ready to go, and a really good idea as to how that book might look.

But as they started emailing me back, so I had this first one that hated the ending, second one said I don't like the ending. So at this point my antenna is twitching because it was the thing I was worried about and I think all I needed was just some validation that I should have trusted my gut on that and my gut's normally right on that kind of stuff.

At that point decided to be a bit more proactive and I emailed my list, the advance team, and said, I want you to pay careful focus. The main thing I want you to think about is is the ending satisfying? I didn't say I don't think it is, I didn't want to tip them off too much as to what I thought they might say.

And they came back, I'd say 25% didn't love the ending. So that is a very clear steer, and there' probably 200 readers coming back saying I didn't like the ending. That would be a clear steer to me that I'm gonna get bad reviews for that book.

JAMES: HOW BIG IS YOUR ADVANCE TEAM?

Mark: I don't know, 600.

James: Oh, okay.

Mark: Something like that 600 people.

James: I'm sorry, just to draw on this, how do you get that feedback? 600 is a lot of people to read through a couple of paragraphs of an email.

DO YOU SEND THEM A SURVEY?

Mark: No, they email me back, so it is a lot of work. Not all of them will respond. Of the 600, I guess I probably got 300 responses this time. It is a lot of work, I basically dump them all into a folder and then do it over a day or two. I'll go through all the comments.

So, there'd be lots of people picking up typos that have slipped through there, the process of correcting factual errors, some making plot suggestions, and I'll do that one after another. A lot of the typos, as soon as you've done one, everyone will pick it up. So you don't need to do that again because obviously you've corrected it.

It is quite intensive. A couple weeks worth of really serious focus on the text. I decided basically that I'm going to rewrite the ending so I took that 20,000 words that I had and the book was, I think when I finished it in first draft, it was about 80,000 words. When I finished it in second draft, it was 100,000 words.

Of those 20,000, maybe 5,000 were used, the other stuff I just junked because I don't think I will use it again. Which, I have no problem doing that again, it's fine. There's no point in forcing something in if it's not going to make the book better.

Then I wrote another, say 15,000 words of fresh content. And ended the book, taking the ending of what was going to be the next book, putting it to the end of this book. It's a really satisfying ending. It's got Peter McMilton, he's absolutely in this book. Then I sent that one out. So I said to my team, "I'm not happy with the ending, most of you agree with that, it's not the right ending for the book, so I've rewritten it, here's your new copy."

The responses I got back from that were ecstatic. This book is fabulous. I liked it before, I absolutely love it now. That's been reflected in the reviews. We'll get onto the reviews in a minute but as it stands, as we record this now, I think it's at 189 reviews, 187 are five star reviews and two are four star reviews. It's

ridiculous. It's by far the most-

James: You haven't had one of those one star reviews, "I haven't read it yet".

Mark: No, not yet. They always come. Our book is bulletproof now. That's such a great response. The sales have been fantastic as well, which we'll get into some numbers ... I'm happy to share numbers at the launch as well.

Picking up that process, the book then comes back to me, the comments come back on the second version.

In the meantime, my copyeditor has made her changes and sent those back to me. I'm then ready to take the book and get it formatted so I take it to my formatters and at the same time, I also did a Vellum edition this time which I love.

JAMES: SO YOU WORKED IN VELLUM?

Mark: I did, yep. For the first time, I used Vellum. I highly recommend it. It's amazing. Very, very impressive piece of software.

I also had the print version formatted by Polgaris in Australia, the guys I use over there. So, that all happened.

I think I was supposed to launch it on the 15th of February, I don't know, basically I was a week early. I managed to accelerate stuff a week early.

I put it up. I then emailed the advance team and said, "The book is live, ready for reviews", and I've mentioned how I go through that process before. Within 24 hours, it had 100 reviews so the team really came through. A lot of them also bought the book, even though they got it for free because I put it up at 99 cents to start with. So they get the "verified" tag which means those reviews are less like to be stripped out by Amazon, and I was ready to go. I then emailed the list and then we started to see the actual real sales at the full price because I pushed the price up to sales price.

JAMES: HOW LONG WAS IT AT 99 CENTS?

Mark: I think for about 12 hours. Maybe a touch longer than that.

JAMES: WHAT'S THE REASON FOR THAT? THAT'S TO HAVE A GOOD BURST OF REVIEWS.

Mark: There's two reasons really. You can leave unverified reviews, so you don't need to have bought something to leave a review. The problem with that is, those reviews won't have the "verified purchase" tag, which means #1, they're not taken quite as seriously by people browsing and #2, it's probably a little bit more likely that Amazon will sweep those up. There have been cases recently where "unverified" reviews have been either taken off or made more difficult to see.

James: We've had a few postings in the group about that.

Mark: Yeah, that definitely does happen. The other reason is, even those 99 cent sales count towards the ranking.

I think I had about 150 of those 99 cent purchases from the advance team. So, when I was ready to launch properly at the full price, I think the book was around about 2000 in the rankings, which is a decent platform to start with. I'm able to really push that launch hard and get the book at a high ranking. It's a bit stickier if you've had sustained sales over time rather than one big burst.

James: Yeah, okay. So, 99 cents for 12 hours or so.

Mark: Yep. Then the book goes up to 4.99. That was my launch price.

James: In U.S. dollars?

Mark: Dollars, yep. 3.99 in the UK. I sent out my emails to my various lists. I've always use MailChimp. It's been annoying. I'd rather just have one list, I actually have about 20 different lists so, they have to be sent out 20 different times which is a pain in the neck. It'll take ages.

But, the book went out and the average open rate over those initial send outs was about 45% so it's about what I'd expect typically from my lists. Some a little bit higher. The organic lists, the ones that have come in from the backs of books, probably about 60%. The colder lists, things like [Leegen 00:13:51] lists and things like that, maybe around 35%. Something along those lines. The average was around about 45%

Because I'm watching the KDP dashboard like a hawk, as this starts to happen and, it starts. You can see the sales coming in, and coming in, and coming in. It's across all platforms so, I had a pre-order going on, on Apple, and Kobo, and Barnes & Noble. That reminds me, remind me to tell you about the mistake I made at Kobo.

JAMES: LET'S TALK ABOUT PRE-ORDERS AS WELL IN A MINUTE BECAUSE I WANT TO ASK YOU A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS.

Mark: We can do that now.

Pre-orders work very very well on the other platforms but not so well on Amazon, for me anyway. Amazon counts those pr-order sales when those pre-orders are made. So, you'll have a rank, your pre-order book will have a rank but, my launching works best, at least it has done so far, by having those sales at a time that I can control. As I said, a two or three day period. Rather than say, for a six month period.

James: Yeah, inevitably it's going to be a lower position when you spread the sale, the votes, the sales out over that period of time than having them in three days. So, visibility wise, it works for you?

Mark: Yeah, on the other platforms, it doesn't work that way. On Apple, they give you a rank when the pre-order is made and then they also count the sale when the book is delivered. It's basically double votes.

James: That's a better way of doing it actually, isn't it? For a start, people can cancel a pre-order, so to count it as a sale is probably not the right way of doing it. Anyways, it's Amazon's way.

Mark: That's true. Apple were also very very helpful to me this time. They put the book up as one of their, "Picks for February".

James: Tim.

Mark: Yeah, I spoke to Tim. Actually I spoke directly to, you know, the big man.

James: Oh, Steve.

Mark: Still looking down. They're great. I love those guys. I know this isn't something that everyone can do.

It's not easy for everyone to reach out to them directly. They did push that book up and promoted it in the U.S. store. We'll look at the numbers in a minute. It sold very well on Apple. On some accounts, all these sales as their coming across the platforms, and I think it got up to, over that initial burst, the highest it got to was over night when I was asleep so, UK time. It was about #60 in the U.S. store. The highest I've been before was about 80ish I think.

When you get the difference from 80 to 60, and the 60 to 40, is between hundreds of books. To get from 100,000 to 999,000 may be one sale. To go from 60 to 59 is probably 200 sales. It gets much more competitive at the top. To get to 60 was great. I hope to hit 50 but I didn't do it this time. I'll most likely do it next time.

I think in the UK, it got to about #22 which was really fabulous. That's just with no promotion apart from the list. No ads at that stage, just people on my list getting the email going, "I'm buying it."

JAMES: AND THE RESULTING VISIBILITY FROM BEING IN THE LISTS.

Mark: Yeah, that's something that's slightly short to medium term so, that may be over the first week. That's when you start to get the Amazon ... It wouldn't immediately start to email out. It's not something that happens immediately.

If you're ranking highly, then they'll start to contact other people that it thinks will like your books. Very, very good start.

What I then did a couple of days after that is, I take the unopeners from mail, terms are very very simple to work out. Which people didn't open that email, so the launch email, and then I send one, changed the headline and say, "Thank you.". So I said, "Thank you.", I had a little screen grab of the ranking, say, "This has been an amazing launch." And then I think I had a screen grab of the reviews, so 150 reviews, of that they say, 149 were five star. Basically you're demonstrating to people, "this book has got masses of social proof".

James: And you're missing out on something.

Mark: You're missing out on something, yeah.

James: See, I got this email because I was away last run. I did something I've not done for years, which is, I turned my email off for seven days and had a proper break because we all work hard and I went skiing.

I DIDN'T OPEN YOUR FIRST EMAIL. I WAS WONDERING WHY I GOT THAT EMAIL SAYING, "THANK YOU".

Mark: Yeah. People say, "thank you", I think it's normal for people to think, "why is he thanking me?". It's just cute when you open it. From that, let's say, "of 40% of my list didn't open my original email", so they get the second one. 10% of the people who got that one, opened it and that added a good number of clicks so, you're increasing the visibility through the second campaign into your list.

Then what I did, I'm in the process of doing right now, and this is the new wrinkle that I'm testing out, it's working very well, is I take the people who didn't open either of those two emails I mailed to them, I export them into a spreadsheet, put them into Mailer Lite. So that's a nice new email service provider.

You put the "build new list" in Mailer Lite and then you send another email to them. Again, you change the headline. Also, you change the "sending from" address. Instead of my .me.com address, which is not a very good address to use on MailChimp because it does tend to trigger spam alerts on Gmail in particular.

I change it to my markjdawson.com address and my own hosted address. That so far has generated another 10% of opens. So, maybe another 2-300 clicks so I would expect that to translate into at least another 150 sales. Probably a bit more than that. I haven't gone through the bigger lists yet so, it's a bit time consuming,

especially for me because I've got all those 20 lists. You've got to export them individually.

JAMES: SO YOU CAN'T DO THAT IN MAILCHIMP, WHAT YOU JUST DESCRIBED. YOU ENTER MAILER LITE WITH.

Mark: I'd rather send it from a different EMS. It's just changing the way the email is sent. You strip out things like images.

James: Because other stuff in the headings would be different between MailChimp and Mailer Lite. Which might be the difference between it being triggered as spam or not.

Mark: Yeah. So you change it. You want to make it look original. So, say it goes into your Gmail folder. The first one is caught by spam. This is a different email process with a different sending address so it's less like to trigger those.

That has worked very well so, I'm still going through that process but as I say, "It's led to another 10%", so I probably actually got up to around about 65% of my list now has at least seen the email. As we'll get onto in a minute, I have other ways of reaching them, the other 35%, even if they haven't opened those emails.

James: Okay, cool. By the way, in InfusionSoft, which you've moved over to, you can alternate virtually all of that, apart from this last stage you're talking about going to a different EMS. But particularly, sending a specific email to the unopeners at a certain period down the line. ConvertKit, I'm not sure. Probably-

Studio Member: Yeah, MailChimp can do that too. You can build a segment of unopeners. Reasonably easy to do that.

James: You can also make this in advance. So, when you set up your first automation, you can say, "After seven days, anyone that hasn't opened that email gets this email."

Mark: Right. Yeah, I don't know if MailChimp can do that. Probably not.

James: All the different EMS's, obviously you've had a bit more of that, so.

LET'S TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE FAMOUS FOR MARK, WHICH IS THE ADVERTISING. SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING, I'M GUESSING HAS PLAYED A PART IN THIS LAUNCH.

Mark: Wonder what you hear bad and honest then. I'm famous for lots of things. I don't know advertising.

I concentrate on three specific kinds of ads this time. We did Facebook ads, Bookbub ads and Amazon Marketing Service ads. We'll get to AMS ads in another podcast in early March. We're going to dedicate a whole hour to those because they're very exciting right now, I'm getting quite a lot of success. But, I want to spend a bit more time in depth on those so we'll skip over those very quickly. I'll just touch them a bit.

It's Facebook and Bookbub that I think we'll concentrate on right now.

For Facebook first of all, I took my mailing list. That 65,000 strong list, a bit more than that now, put that into Facebook and told them to match up those email addresses with people who had Facebook accounts. That's brought a new audience that I can advertise to on Facebook.

Of around about 40,000. That was a good start. I then also added onto that, using the Facebook pixel, people who visited my website over the course of say, six months and then I used a new custom audience that is basically about engagement on Facebook. People who visited my Facebook page, interacted with me, like adverts, all of that kind of stuff. And all of that being accumulated together, built a new audience like I'd say, around about 100 and something thousand strong across the world. So, that's pretty good.

Then I started to run those ads so it was a very simple ad, it had an image of the book and had a bit of copy which was basically, I think the hook was, "an offer he couldn't refuse, a murder he can't remember", that was the two sentence hook, with a little bit more saying stuff with buy links to the development stores.

Of the ads I ran, for about two or three days, I was quite aggressive with the spend so I could get the message out as quickly as possible, I spent \$734 and sold 864 worth of that book.

Now, what I'm not taking into account, there are other books. There are people who would also have bought the first book, they may have bought the box set, some people would buy much more than just that book. Taking that out of the equation for now, the return investment was 17% so, decent, and sold 209 copies over the course of that two or three days so, pretty effective.

Then at the same time, Bookbub obviously had a very similar ads platform to Facebook. We've spoken to Bookbub before, we'd probably speak to them again quite soon. Might maybe have a chat with them at London for the book fair.

Their ads platform is becoming more mature now so, I wanted to run more ads there and I haven't run any for a little while. I ran about 10 different campaigns, targeting authors quite like me. I'm also targeting myself because, you can send ads to people who Bookbub things like you. That's obviously going to be the best ad that you can run. From that particular species of the ad, to people like me, I spent \$210, sold \$350 worth of books, which is a return investment of 67%. That's pretty effective.

Then just looking at one of those other ads, I also targeted Barry Eisler, who was an Indie author, in fact is an Indie author, he was traditionally published, like similar books out of my Milton series, very similar. I spent \$210 on ads to his fans on Bookbub, sold \$332 worth of books, making a return investment of 58%. That kind of return, we've seen across all of those ads so, I probably spent maybe \$1000 and made around about \$1600 back. Something along those lines and sold several hundred copies to get there.

All of those things together were able to ... and combine with those Amazon ads I mentioned. I ran a few of those. We're able to really make that rank quite sticky and it hovered around the 200ish mark for about a week. It's still is bumping around 500 so, it's still selling really strongly, even two weeks after it was released.

JAMES: THAT'S REALLY INTERESTING THAT THE BOOKBUB PLATFORM HAS MATURED AND BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE, DO YOU THINK, FOR YOU?

Mark: Well, the audience is always getting bigger. I haven't run any ads for about six months.

All ads go stale eventually. Facebook has to take longer to go stale because it's a much bigger audience to serve into. Bookbub ads go a little staler a bit faster because obviously their audience is comparatively much smaller than Facebook's. So, I haven't been on that platform for a while.

I also got Stewart, my designer, to do a nice image that matched their specifications, had a nice pull quote from one of the reviews, just phenomenal, with an Amazon reviewer. That was quite a hook, and it works. It went really well. Those ads were really effective. I've continued to run those until quite recently so they've done well.

James: You did get some good reviews, which is great and very pleasing for you. Stewart's cover was great. There was a hint of Freddie Mercury about it.

Mark: Yeah, Several people have said that.

James: It occurred to me straight away when I saw it, as well. I don't know if ... I haven't read the book, I should confess.

HAS MILTON BULKED UP A LITTLE BIT? WAS THAT PART OF THE IMAGERY? HE LOOKS LIKE IT A LITTLE BIT. BULKIER THAN HE WAS BEFORE?

Mark: No. Generally covers don't reflect that kind of granular detail. So no, not really.

James: Describe granular detail for the YouTuber.

Mark: And for listeners, James. I think I may need to get binoculars because I think he's flexing his muscles. Put the guns away James.

James: Put the boys away.

Mark: I'll finish with sales in a minute. A couple of things are worth mentioning. A couple of learnings on this.

The error I referred to with Kobo and pre-orders, this was a complete, well, an embarrassing faux pas that was rescued by Mark Lefebvre and all the lovely guys over there.

I put up a sample. When you do a pre-order, you need to have a little sample up so people can have a look. I put up the first chapter, which was pretty much locked down quite a long way before the rest of the book.

Of course, I forgot to change the sample and when it went live at the full price, people were buying the first chapter. I started to get emails from people saying, "I can't believe it. I've only bought the first chapter, how can I get the rest of the book?". No one was really angry, they were just a bit perplexed as to why they hadn't ... They were like, "I love the first chapter, I want to read the rest of it."

James: That was a short book.

Mark: Yeah. Kobo were amazing. I spoke to Marcus and Lyle. "I think I made a bit of an error. I wonder if there's anything you can do to help me?", and I think I sold about 100 copies so 100 readers had a "not satisfactory buying experience", which makes me look bad. It also makes Kobo look bad and it's through no fault of theirs whatsoever.

So, I said to Mark, "I've changed it now. The new file, the correct full file is live. Do you automatically replace the file?", and I don't think they do. What Mark did with one of their customer service guys, who was wonderful, she basically reached out to all of the people and said, "Look, the author's made a mistake,". I didn't see the email but I hope that's what they said. "and here's the final version for you to enjoy.". So, kudos to the Mark and the guys in Toronto. That was extremely helpful.

James: I'm gonna guess, you know Mark, we've met Mark, but I'm gonna guess that if you're in that position, Kobo is a very helpful organization and very keen to sort errors. A very honest mistake, probably easier to deal with Kobo and Bookbub than it is with Amazon, which is a bit more of a beast to get through to.

Mark: Also the numbers would have been much, much bigger, which we'll talk about in a minute. So that would have been a real problem. I did so much, there was so much stuff going on there that it was just a case of, "I just dropped the ball on that one". One of those things where it was ... we managed to pick it up quite quickly so, no problems there.

James: Okay. We should say, for people listening with keen ears, this is a cohabited building. There are some noises off and we've had a bath being run earlier but, we're gradually getting there. We'll soundproof this place eventually. Yeah, just to explain those.

So, that's your launch advertising.

Mark: One more error.

JAMES: ANOTHER ERROR, MARK?

Mark: Another error, yeah. I knew this was probably gonna happen at some point. If you're using Amazon affiliate links, which is what I do for lots of different reasons. Not for me to make money but to track. So I can work out how effective ads are. Don't put them in emails.

I've known for ages this is an issue and generally I don't do that. Again, it slipped my mind this time. So, I put the affiliate links in the emails. You're only really supposed to use them on websites.

James: This is a Terms of Service issue, is it?

Mark: Yeah.

James: There's no other reason for not doing it.

Mark: No, it's just against their TOS. I put the links out and lots of traffic is being generated. So, somewhere at Amazon associates HQ, it would have been triggered that there's a lot of activity coming in on these links and they investigated. I got an email saying, "We've think you're in breech of your affiliates Terms of Service. We think the reason is, you're using links in emails."

It's an automated email coming out, and it basically gave me five days to correct, basically put the house

in order. You have to come back and say, "I think I fixed it.", and if you haven't, they'll shut the account down after five days. Touch wood, that's been fixed now. That's one thing, I suspect quite a lot of authors still use affiliate links in their emails. Again, I have done before and this is the first time I've been pulled out.

James: Your list is bigger now so it's going to trigger more.

Mark: It is bigger but, I think there's a risk this can happen to anybody. It's worth just bearing in mind as you do launches.

JAMES: WHERE DO YOU STAND? WHERE DO PEOPLE STAND NOW ON THE AFFILIATE LINKS AND FACEBOOK ADS?

Mark: It's clearly in breach. I've seen a couple. Two or three people have done that and reported that they've had their accounts closed down. I think it's fairly obviously a breach.

On the other other hand though, I've seen hundreds of people who do still do that. The safest way, the way to be absolutely sure you're complying with their Term of Service, is that link to a landing page from the ad and then link up to the relevant store.

James: So, as long as your affiliate link is on webpage that you own, your dot com, then you're very firmly within the TOS of using the affiliate links?

Mark: Yeah.

James: Okay so, that's the appetizing mistakes and all. What's in all, you always get what's in all with SPF, as a learning for all of us. Those are a lot of work. A lot of money to get those sales but they really are the tip of the iceberg in terms of launch. They're very targeted sales in a short period of time to try and get visibility.

ACTUALLY, MOST OF YOUR SALES COME FROM AS A RESULT OF THAT, DON'T THEY? OF THAT VISIBILITY?

Mark: Yeah. Sales will be generated ..typically the first 30 days tend to be the best. That's their notorious

30 day cliff where, after that, you tend to find books become a little less sticky. There are ways that you can mitigate that but, I've been pushing it quite harder than a lot of Facebook stuff so, regular Facebook messages, I've posted into my groups, some on my page with good news about the rank, about the sales, all of that kind of stuff.

I'm getting loads and loads of really positive feedback. The goal being reached being high because Facebook knows that they are relevant. My fans are responding, they're commenting, they're liking, they're loving them, all that kind of stuff, so it gets seen by many more people. I've also done some Facebook live stuff which has again, really big organic reach right now.

So, I've been really pushing hard. It has been worth it. We'll get to in terms of, I don't mind telling everyone how it's done.

James: Yeah. If you're happy to share that, I think it's absolutely fascinating to those of us at the beginning of our career, to understand what the financial impact can be of getting it right and being a successful Indie writer.

Mark: Yeah. I look at all the stores. The only one I won't do is Google. I have eyes on Google and it has sold a few on Google but I haven't had time to grab those numbers this morning. The sales on Amazon, across all stores, Amazon is 7,407 copies sold so far, which has brought in \$23,186.51. So, pretty good.

Apple, as I said, has been a very strong performer this time. Apple is probably about 25% of my sales across the board now so, I'm definitely making a lot of progress with those guys. We've had 1,280 sales, making \$4,471.04.

Kobo, 319. Of course the first 100 were not optimal but we fixed that and sold over 300 on Kobo, bringing in \$1,114.26. Barnes & Noble, 235 sales, bringing in just a touch over \$800. The grand total is, and I suspect that actually is ticked up by now because it's still selling about \$1000 a day at the moment, is \$29,584. That's in just over a week so, that's pretty-

James: That's more than another hot tub, isn't it?

Mark: I could have a fleet of hot tubs with that.

James: It's actually a swimming pool.

WHAT WAS THE ADVERTISING SPEND? DID YOU NOTE THAT IN TOTAL?

Mark: Yes, that's about \$2000.

James: Okay. That's 28 odd thousand dollar profit there. Everyone who bought that book, who's not already a fan, and there will be a percentage in there, who, for them, this is their first Milton book, then there's a trickle back effect there as well of course.

Mark: Yep. I've seen them. I'm using Book Report now to make better sense of the KDP dashboard. Highly recommend that. If you guys haven't seen that yet, it's fabulous.

James: Well, it's one for the white board, isn't it? I think the whole analysis and tracking area is complicated, and Book Reports in itself is a brilliant tool and I've seen your emails flying around about that. We'll get the guy on in the future.

Mark: He's been in touch. He wants to come on a podcast.

James: Let's get Liam.

LET'S TALK ABOUT TRACKING AND HOW BEST YOU DO THAT. IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU GET IN TERMS OF THE DASHBOARD.

Mark: To answer the point, I have seen sales increase across the board. The first book has sold more, quite a bit more actually, since Black Out came out because, people would have seen book 10. They may not have bought book 10, or maybe they did but, they've been interested enough to go back and read book one. Even though Black Out is effective as a stand alone, you don't need to have read the other books. And, the box set sales have gone up.

This month already has been the best month I've had for about six months. That is a really good take away. We can talk about advertising until we're blue in the face and in fact, sometimes we do until we're blue in the face.

This is a terrible cliché but it's really true. The best form of marketing is just to write another book. It's another way for you to be discovered, you can sell to your list, you'll get sales, Amazon and the other platforms will then market widely if you're selling. It's a really great way to invigorate your back risk is to just to put another one out.

James: Well fantastic. Congratulations Mark.

WHAT ARE YOUR WRITING PLANS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR?

Mark: I've got another book out in April which has already been finished and has been sitting on the shelf for about six months. That's an Amazon Thomas of Mercer book.

James: Isabella Rose.

Mark: Yep, Isabella and, that's early April. I'm about 20,000 words into the next Milton book which is going to be called either, "The Finest" or "The Witness". It's in Brooklyn so that's coming along really well. I'm very pleased with that. That will certainly be finished in the next ... I'd like to promise that in May if I can.

There'll be at least one more Milton book and then possibly one after that and possibly a new police procedural I've got boiling away at the moment.

James: So, if you replicate those launches, forgetting back sales and forgetting ongoing sales, you're talking about knocking on 200,000 pounds of income from those five or six launches? That's \$260,000, quarter of a million dollars a year just from those launches. That is a tidy sum.

Now, we should mention, in terms of launches, that one of our alumni, Adam Croft has had a spectacular launch as well. He's had one of his books published by, I always want to call them Proctor&Gamble,

but they are Thomas and Mercer, which is the Amazon's own imprints.

Adam was working hard, working his craft, eight or nine books out but, it was really stumbling across your teachings on Facebook advertising that accelerated his career, really lit the blue touch paper and he had an amazing success with Her Last Tomorrow, his previous book.

Got a deal with Amazon for that imprint and found himself happily retweeting the screen grabs of him being #1 in the UK store and #1 in the U.S. store at the same time a couple weeks ago. So, we want to say a hearty, "Congratulations", to Adam for that and it's a spectacular result for him and it's so pleasing to see one of our little students.

Mark: That sounds patronizing doesn't it?

James: Also, we should probably say, "Congratulations" to Adam because he's become a dad for the second time? No, for the first time, and he's called the child?

Mark: Mark.

James: James.

Mark: You're kidding me?

James: He's called the child James because I think I just had that impression on him. I think it's probably after an uncle but yeah, congratulations Adam. Great news and we love sharing your success with you.

Good, well that was a great breakdown of the launch. Really interesting. You seem to have survived it as well. It was hard work for you and obviously you had a couple of days when you realized you had a couple of-

Mark: Facepalm moments.

James: Facepalm moments, but you got over those and yeah, well done.

Mark: Thank you very much. It's great fun. It's always amazing. I love launching. It's so much fun to see the reviews come in. Especially when they've just been so enthusiastic this time. It's really flattering. And to see so many people buying the book, it puts all that hard work, which actually isn't really hard work, it's telling stories. It's a real high point to see the book out there.

James: Yeah, and it's a team effort. People like Stuart and all the various people, like Mark Lefebvre... all the people who've helped you at various points in that and building up a team around you of fellow professionals is an important part of it.

You can watch every episode of the "Self Publishing Formula" podcast on YouTube. You can hear every one in audio from our website at selfpublishingformula.com. You can email us at podcast@selfpublishingformula.com.

We are working on something exciting, which we're going to announce in the next few weeks, which will be an opportunity to have a one stop place for all the knowledge we've disseminated through the first 50 odd podcasts. That's an announcement coming up in the next few weeks.

We've got some good guests coming up as well. I'm going to do an interview tomorrow about a guy who has had incredible success. I believe the kid's called, "Killing It With Short Stories". And I mean killing it. He's raking in four figures a month, just publishing his short stories. We're gonna find out how he did that, we're gonna talk about Dragon Dictation in the next few weeks.

Mark: Who else are we interviewing tomorrow?

James: Tomorrow we are going to a well known online retailer.

Mark: Worlds largest river?

James: The worlds longest river. Yeah, we're going to go see Amazon tomorrow and talk to the horse's mouth at the center of this industry, you and I in London. Great. Thank you very much indeed for listening, it's always a pleasure, never a chore. And we'll speak to you next week.

AFTERWORD

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