

PODCAST 38: HOW AUTHOR ADAM KOLCZYNSKI CAN GIVE YOUR BOOKS GREATER VISABILITY

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 38 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 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 then 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 responsiveness 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 fit's 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 embedable 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.

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