

PODCAST 44: MAKE MONEY TEACHING THROUGH SELF PUBLISHED BOOKS WITH JOSEPH ALEXANDER

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to podcast number 44 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 1: 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 stuff, 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 bands 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. 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 . 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 gamechanger.

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, "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. Happy Christmas.

Mark Dawson: Happy Christmas.

Speaker 1: 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.