

PODCAST 46: MAILING LIST PART 1

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 46, from the Self-Publishing Formula.

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

James: Happy new year, Mark.

Mark: Happy new year James, how are you?

James: Yeah I'm really good, and rearing to go. We had a little break over Christmas, sort of a break. You basically work every day-

Mark: We did.

James: When you're running your own business.

Mark: Yep, yep, can't.

James: What did you call me? Unbelievable.

Mark: You can't stop.

James: That is going to get us the explicit tag, apologies to sensitive listeners. Yes we can't stop, but it's great. I love the work that we do, and 2017, I'm really hoping, praying is going to be the year that I become an author. I'm not saying necessarily I'll become a successful author, but I will become an author with a published book and it's really exciting. I'm getting back into my writing, which is very difficult to do during the launch period

but I'm doing a bit every day, and in fact I'll just on this subject that I have got quite into Brain FM, which is something that you introduced me to. You I think still use it, so if you don't know what Brain FM it's a kind of productivity ... Well it is a productivity tool, what happens is that it plays you some music, sort of ambient music and you can choose three different types. There's focus to help you focus on work, there's meditation I think and relax might be the other one. Best with headphones, it says, so a decent pair of headphones.

For me, the focus music actually is perfect for writing a thriller because it's quite tense music, quite portentous and it just rumbles in the background and it really, really works for me. I have a very cluttered office around me at the moment, I have lots of things going on and it's kind of a mental barrier for me to suddenly switch off from everything here and go into my novel and start writing. Actually Brain FM really helps me, I stick the headphones on, start the music and suddenly distractions are nowhere to be seen and the hour or so I set myself to work flies by. I'm not sure about the psychology behind it, we have actually reached out to them. I've contacted them and asked if they'll come on the podcast and I haven't heard anything back, and I think you've done the same thing, haven't you, at some point?

Mark: Yep, they've blanked me as well.

James: They've blanked both of us, but anyway, we are fans of their product, we're not affiliates and they don't talk to us so we have nothing to gain from this. I think these little things help, the old Pomodoro timer thing which I don't know if you've used those in the past Mark, but they're useful brain tricks as well, but for me there's something about this music and I strongly associate the book with it. I think it does somehow help me keep that sense of momentum going in the book, of what's going to happen. Even feeds in perhaps to the way that I'm writing, which is useful.

Mark: Yeah no, I used it this morning. I had two and a half thousand words today, and I had about three or four sessions, which I do half an hour

sessions and then go up and stretch my legs for a bit. That worked quite well, so yeah, I've been using it for a while. It's effective, and it could just be that it's a placebo effect but it doesn't really matter at the end of the day. If you think it helps you and you're getting your words in, it doesn't matter if it works or if you just think that it works, that's the end of it really.

James: Yeah it is, and we're going to talk about podcasts. We're not going to talk about, this is a podcast. We're going to talk about mailing lists today, and we're going to introduce that in a moment, it's going to be our main topic. We are overdue a full session on productivity, so we'll find if we come up with a Brain FM people just ignore us, we'll find somebody else to talk about productivity. I'm showing off my new Apple Watch 2, which I got this morning in the Apple store in Cambridge. Over Christmas I decided to stop ignoring the stand up now, breathe now things that come up on your Apple Watch and decided for a bit I would do them religiously, and again without sounding too gimmicky it's really worked for me, particularly the breathing. If you follow that once an hour I think it really does help your physiology and certainly standing up and circulating and getting circulation moving.

We know that sitting down is very bad for bodies, and so I think you start to put all these things together, you generally start to have a fresher, more energetic approach to life and to your work and goodness knows we need it, don't we, because we have a lot going on at any one time and to get it right does require not just doing it but doing it well.

Mark: Yeah exactly, I've had a standing desk put into the other room in my office just before Christmas and that's going quite well. I'll tend to be in this room to write, it's also quite quiet in here so we can do podcasts and things, and then in the afternoon normally I'll go and stand up and do emails and admin stuff that I can't get away from. That's quite nice, that works quite well for me. I try and get out and walk around Salisbury in the daytime as well. It's important to get the blood moving, definitely.

James: Good, okay. We said we were going to move on to our main topic of the day, and that is going to be mailing lists. There's barely an episode goes by on our podcast where we don't mention a mailing list, and that's for good reason. It should be central to your marketing plan as an indie author, and in fact any kind of online business generally revolves around a list today. Mark will suss out some of the fundamentals of why that's the case in a moment, but just before we move onto that Mark, why don't you just set out, because this is the first of three episodes we're going to be doing on this very important subject. Just suss out how the three episodes are going to work.

Mark: Yeah I wanted to kind of do something for the new year, something that is important that the community can get behind and do together. Mailing lists was the obvious thing that jumped out to me, and what we've done is we've split up, as you say, the next three episodes will be effectively a one month challenge where we will look at a number of different strategies and tactics that indie writers can use to build their mailing lists. We'll start fairly simple with today's episode, and then as we go into the second and third parts we'll do some paid traffic and then we'll end up with instaFreebie. We've got some interviews lined up, he's a bit of a ninja on Twitter. We've got him next week I think, and then I'm hoping to speak with Ashley from instaFreebie, week, or would be week four, which would be the third part of the series. The aim is nothing too ambitious, it will be from zero to a hundred subscribers.

If you're just starting out, it will be a path that you can follow to get your first hundred subscribers, or if you are slightly further along the line it will be your next hundred subscribers. As is the case with the 101 course, the thing that we needed is a guinea pig and when I'm thinking about guinea pigs the first person that comes to mind is not your cat, James is looking behind himself for-

James: Cat's gone.

Mark: Those who are listening rather than watching on YouTube, the cat's gone. The guinea pig is you James, so we're going to be looking at your list which I think is around about 45 strong at the moment which is thanks mostly to the fact that you're in the SPF community and you've got lots of authors following you on board. What we're going to be doing now is to try and reach out beyond that and add some more people to that list so that when you're ready to launch the book you've got a ready-made audience to launch it to.

James: Okay, well I'm excited of course to do that, and the more people I tell that my book's coming out the more I have to write it and get it out, so that's always helpful. Motivational, another productivity tool, the law of unintended consequences, so good, okay, well let's get into this. This is just again to clarify the beginning, this is something that anybody can follow in terms of the fundamentals through to the more advanced stages of by the end of this, and certainly instaFreebie, it's something that we're doing. Lots of people around us are doing, you do a lot, but for me at my stage I don't really understand the mechanics of how I would get involved in that, so I'm looking forward to learning that. That will be more of use to people who are up and running already.

Mark: Yes, that one will be, but you need something, the freebie kind of gives it away. You need something to offer to potential subscribers for free in order to get them onto your mailing list. You might not be quite ready for that but you will be ready for pretty much everything else and especially today and good bits of next week as well.

James: Okay good, so let's start at the beginning. Why should I have a mailing list?

Mark: Well there are a number of reasons for that. We could have a whole podcast on why people need a mailing list, but I'm going to assume kind of a basic level of knowledge but the general principal is simple. In an ideal world, wouldn't it be amazing if we could go to Amazon and ask them for

an email address from everyone that's bought our books or downloaded our books, and that would be great for all of the other platforms as well. The problem is they're not going to give you that information. They can't give it to you legally because of data protection reasons and beyond that it's also, it's customer information, proprietary information very valuable to those platforms, so it wouldn't be something that they would be prepared to give out to people who use that platform because of course you could just circumvent them and go directly to those readers. The downside to that is you're kind of mortgaging your future on the whims of those retailers.

To kind of give a doomsday example, I'm not saying this is going to happen. I suspect it won't happen but it is possible that tomorrow Jeff Bezos rolls out of bed in his palatial Seattle mansion and decides that he's actually a bit fed up of giving greedy authors 70% of the cover price and he thinks it's more reasonable to give them 30%. If that was to happen, and we have no way of reaching our readers, we would effectively be ... There'd be nothing we could do about it. What you can do with a mailing list is you can reach out straight to your readers, into their mailing email boxes which is still the most effective form of marketing these days and tell them that they can buy the next book directly from your website, or they could go to Apple or they could go to Kobo, Barnes and Noble, whatever retailer you decide to concentrate on, you can pivot and send them there. You can't do that if you don't have a mailing list, so that's the main reason. It's insulation to protect you from those kinds of unexpected situations that could otherwise damage your business. Beyond that there are a couple other really, really useful ... There's dozens of useful reasons why you should have one, but two other ones that are important, you can start to recruit from a mailing list and build an advanced team. Advanced teams are just the most amazing ... They offer the most amazing facility for authors. You can get things like beta testing done, so after you've had your book professionally edited and advanced him to go through it and pick up errors that might have slipped through the net, you can get reviews when

the book launches. That's very important as you offer it out to a wider audience to have lots of reviews on that page.

Social proof just makes it more likely that someone who might not otherwise have heard of you will take a chance on you and write it because people are reporting that they've enjoyed the book. There's fact checking, you can build Facebook custom audiences with a mailing list, and advertise to them. There really are almost countless reasons why you should have one, so I'm going to assume at this point that I've been convincing enough as we're talking, James, and you have decided that you can see the value in having one. Assuming that you do, we will look at some simple tactics as to how you can actually go out and start to recruit.

James: Okay, I'm convinced, well done. Let's start at the very beginning and assume that we've just set up, as you ... People who've done one of our courses, will know that I've set myself up in Convert Kit, was my choice. You need to make a decision at the beginning of how you're going to physically gather the emails. It doesn't necessarily involve an email provider, does it? You could do this manually, but what are your tips for starting out?

Mark: There are two ways you could do this. Both are fine, you don't have to have a mailing list provider, although my advice would be that you should have one. It's probably beneficial to have one right from the start, but if for some reason you don't want to go down that route right away you could collate email addresses on a piece of paper with a pencil if you wanted to. I'm not recommending that as a way forwards, but you need some way to maintain those addresses and that would be effective. Alternatively you could open up spreadsheets, Google sheets, or you could open up an XLS and record them there. When you have something to say to those people it would just be a case of opening up your email client and then dropping them in your BCC field and emailing out. The downsides to that, and this is from someone who did this when he started out because

he's an idiot, it's quite time-consuming as you get more and more people joining your list.

You have to send out emails every day, you have to manually put those addresses in then you've got to cut and paste, put the email in. If you're giving them a free book you've got to cut and paste the book, the file into the email, send it out. Assuming that you haven't jumped off a bridge after doing that for two or three weeks, the other downside to that is there is a good chance that your email service provider or your ISP will suggest that you might be spamming people by sending out the same email over and over and over and over again, and it is possible to have your account shut down. Those are kind of the downsides to that. The other way of doing things, as we say, is to actually get an account with a professional email service provider. For the purposes of this quick discussion we'll focus on two and I'll make kind of a third suggestion for those who are more advanced.

The first suggestion and this mirrors what we said in the 101 course, is that MailChimp is still a very valid way of starting out with an email list. It's cheap, in fact it's free until you have your first 2,000 subscribers. The features are fairly plentiful, they're quite easy to use. There's a very good reason why it's the big player, that they are entry level and powerful enough to satisfy most needs. That would be my kind of recommendation for most people. If you're a little bit more confident with that kind of service and with the software then it makes a bit more sense, I would say, to future-proof yourself and give yourself a little bit more power in reserve for when you're at a level that that power will become useful. As I look back on having a MailChimp list for four years, and I've got like 65,000 people on that list now, it is starting to get, in fact it is beyond starting to get, it is very complicated.

There are lots of different lists, emailing, doing a mass email out to my list requires me to copy emails, send them out 12, or 13 times. It's not efficient,

people get them more than once if they were on more than one list. Generally just a pain in the neck.

James: Is it worth just explaining, again, for people like me at the beginning, and this is something I've discovered, is the slightly different way that MailChimp and the early startup ones work from the more advanced ones. You talked about having different lists there, so when you bring people in you set up a form on a landing page or somewhere, people type in their name and email address and you decide at that point what list they're going to go into within MailChimp and that's nice and organized for you, particularly at the beginning so you might just have one list or you more likely will have a campaign that you ran over December and they go into that list.

Then later down the line you'll do what you've ended up doing where you'll think, "Well I'll just combine these two lists," because they're basically the same people now. Or you may run a campaign specifically at those people and not the other people, and it gets complicated. At the beginning it's quite useful and you could talk about it being powerful in terms of marketing because you've got different lists and you can target your emails more specifically at people, which is a key part of getting marketing right. When it gets to the point where you have 20 lists it becomes silly, and it becomes very difficult and unwieldy. You go up to the next level, with ConvertKit, and at the top end Infusionsoft, and there are quite a few others. The way they operate is fundamentally different, so they're based more on business CRMs which are these big databases of all your customers.

You have effectively one list, might be one way of thinking about it. On that list you can tag people to identify them, so you could tag them and you can create as many tags as you like. Have a thousand of them if you want, but probably 50 or 60 is more likely. For instance when you set up that form on your landing page you'll have a tag because they come in on that form, that form will say how they came into your list in the first place. If they've

opened an email they get another tag, if they've bought a book of yours they get another tag. In the end you've got one big list, people only appear on there once but you've got a lot of history about each person. That is very powerful because that means you really can then write an email very specifically to people, for instance, who downloaded your free book but did nothing else, or bought one book but did nothing else.

That's a different email to somebody who's read three of your books and is waiting, is on the advanced reader team for instance. You can see, that's the fundamental difference between those. There are some other differences within that in terms of the bells and whistles available to you. Fundamentally they are the difference between the entry ones, you talk about MailChimp and the more advanced ones that we're moving on to now.

Mark: Yep, that's it. I mean, MailChimp is list-based and Infusionsoft and ConvertKit and Intraport and Active Campaign, all those kinds of alternatives are subscriber-based. The subscriber-based ones are neater and more powerful but they're also more complicated. That's kind of the split. For the purposes of people who are just starting out, MailChimp is absolutely fine. I wouldn't recommend getting into the heavier stuff, we are just converting our SPF list across into Infusionsoft, and we can see the power that it offers but there's a reason why it's called 'Confusionsoft' by some people. That's worth bearing in mind, but for the purposes of this discussion I would say if you're literally just starting out then it is fine just to have a spreadsheet for now. We can import those names into your service provider of choice later. Otherwise, get a MailChimp account. Doesn't cost anything, and it's pretty easy to use. Either those two will be fine for the purposes of this little session.

James: Okay, so that's the starting point, making a choice about that. Let's for instance say, I mean I'm working in ConvertKit but I think MailChimp's a more likely option for people. We haven't talked about price actually, it's just worth saying, isn't it, that MailChimp do have this really attractive offer

which is they are free to use up to 2,000 people on your list. That's really enticing for new authors, so there's no commitment at that stage. 2,000's a fair size, that means you're getting well into your startup of your author career before you have to pay a penny with the others don't necessarily offer that option. Let's talk about MailChimp perhaps from now on even though I'm actually going to be working within ConvertKit. I've got MailChimp, yeah I've got MailChimp set up, what \$29 a month, set up and now I need some names on it. Obviously I've got my dad, I've got you, I've got Mrs. Dawson and John Dyer.

Actually in my case I've been very lucky as you say because I host the podcast and lots of lovely friends in the SPF community, and people like Andrea and Lucia and Michelle over there in the States, and Jackson I think and John have all jumped onto my list and given me some good feedback on my emails as well. I've got a little start with 45 noses, probably above average who've literally just started. People are probably going to have maybe six or seven names from their immediate family that they can persuade to go on there. How do you go beyond that?

Mark: Well we're going to assume that actually people have got zero, so what we're going to do, the first weeks we'll break this episode down into the first two weeks. We look at kind of optimizing passive growth in the second half of this episode, and to start with we're going to look at just asking. I want people to just sit down and have a think and then reach out to 10 friends or acquaintances and just ask them whether they'd like to be on your mailing list. In fact I wouldn't even mention the words mailing and list, what I would say is something along the lines of, "I've got a new book out," and then I'd say, "It is," and then you give them the elevator pitch. It could be in your case, it's about experimental bombers in the 6, there's a crash, or whatever the very, very quick, two sentence pitch. Just finish it with, "Would you be learning more about that?" You can communicate that message by way of email.

That's obviously the most congruent and the most obvious way of doing it if you say it's people at work, I just sent them an email giving them that kind of information. It's equally valid, you could say to people that you meet at the gym for example or church or wherever you are, you can just pass that message over, see what they say. Your next step obviously is going to be dependent on what they do, so let's assume first of all that they ... You're going to get plenty of people who say yes, so your closest friends will say yes because they don't want to piss you off, right? We'll assume that you asked me and I said yes so you've got my email address, that's on your list. If you get a few people who are saying no, that doesn't necessarily have to be the end of that particular attempt to get someone on the list. What you would do next is, first of all you mustn't feel slighted or grieved that someone has said they're not interested in learning more about that particular book.

As authors, that's something that we're going to have to develop. We're going to have to develop thick skins because you're going to get bad reviews, you're going to get people unsubscribing from your list or reporting you for spamming them even when you didn't, all of this kind of thing is going to happen quite a lot so we need to toughen up early on and make sure that doesn't bother us.

James: I think that's important because it's not so much telling people to have a thick skin when this happens but I think the fear of people saying no will actually stop some people asking in the first place. Just remember, don't be afraid if people say no, don't worry about if it's going to happen, don't let that stop you asking.

Mark: Also some people, this is something generally we are afraid of asking ... I think there's another podcast on this but you could probably have a psychologist on the show to talk about why this might be but I think there is a kind of a natural inferiority complex because we were indie publishers. Even though the stigma is pretty much gone now at least within our community, many people still see it as a less attractive way of publishing

than going the traditional route. I think that does bleed through into a number of other consequences, one of which is that we can sometimes be reluctant to push our work. This is an example of doing this, is to say, "Look, I've got a book. I'm not going to be too bullish about it because it's not really that good, you know?" All that kind of stuff and I'm as guilty, I was as guilty of that as anybody. I'm not really anymore, I know my stuff is entertaining so I don't have a problem with offering it to people.

The way I'll tell you to get around that is to say that you're not asking them for a favor. You're doing them a favor, you're telling them about something that you think they will like, you've got to be confident about that. It's not an imposition to ask someone to learn more about what you're doing, look at it the other way round, that you're offering them an opportunity. Maybe it's a non-fiction book that they'd be helped by or maybe you're offering them several hours of entertainment for free because this is the kind of book that they'd like to read. That's the kind of mind shift thing I think is important, but let's go back and think about if someone has said no to you. You can still spin that into another opportunity because what I would recommend in that instance is just say, "Okay well that's completely fine, that might not be for you but do you know anybody who might be interested in my book about 196 fast jets crashing in Cambridgeshire, right?"

Then we can see what they say, it's possible that they might then broadcast that message outside of your immediate circle of friends into theirs, possibly beyond that. This isn't costing anything, it's just asking people whether they know anybody who would enjoy what you're doing. You can always parley something that could otherwise be seen as a negative into a positive.

James: Okay, so we get over that, we start to think, and again this goes back to something we talk about a lot, about mindset and getting ourselves into business brain and detaching ourselves a little bit from the emotional side of things, treat it like a business. We've reached out to our ten people, and just so I'm specific on the aim here, do we keep going until we've got ten, that's the idea, rather than reach out to ten until-

Mark: I would, yeah, so this is the first week. So if you reached out to ten, then think about it and reach out to another ten, most people have more than ten friends or family. Reach beyond that and see if you can get some more. I say just keep doing that until you feel that you've reached the limit of the kinds of people who you're comfortable with asking. When we were working in the office we could have probably found ten people in the office who might have been interested, other people will find that in their work environments, their friends and their family, all that kind of stuff. Keep going, so that's the task for the first week is to try and get some of those people to say yes. Assuming that they do say yes, some people are going to say yes, what do you do next? The most important thing is you've got to maintain that information, so it could be that you take out your pen and paper and you write that down.

It could be that you put it into your spreadsheet, or preferably you import them into your MailChimp list, you'd add them to that list. Nothing else, you don't need to do anything else at this stage. You don't have anything necessarily that you'd want to ... You have nothing to sell them, you haven't really got anything to give away at that stage. I've seen some of your emails, James, on your list and apart from the fact that they're really excellent and I've told you that before, they're building anticipation for your book when it's ready so you could start to do that. For the people who want to see James' emails we'll put that link in the show notes so we can get people to sign up. See, I've found you ten new readers already James.

James: I think it's Salesforce.com

Mark: There you go, Salesforce.com It's worth signing up just to see what James does when he doesn't have anything ready to offer right now.

James: That's my ten done, isn't it?

Mark: Yes your ten, you can rest and put your feet up now. Your task is a hundred, ten's too easy for you so we're going to get you another hundred. Once you've added them in, I think it's just a good idea just to email them back and just to say, "Thank, that's great, glad to have you on board." If you haven't got the email just because maybe you asked them verbally then just say, "Look, what's your email address, let me know. It's the most convenient way for me to reach you and tell you about this project and tell you when I've got something that you'd be interested in." Get them to give you that email address and then record it, and that is a tick in the box, you're good to go.

James: You've got your recording system, which we're assuming might be MailChimp, it might be just doing it very manually. Second you've reached out, you've got their names, without being too very basic about this at some point I know you're going to talk about other ways of reaching people in a moment. Can we just mention what you should do in terms of sending the people emails at this stage, particularly if you're doing it manually?

Mark: I think email them back and say, "Thanks for saying yes, I'm delighted that you're interested in my project," whatever that might be. Just say, "Look, I'll reach out again when I've got something that I think you'd be interested in hearing." Just to acknowledge-

James: I've done a series of three that does effectively that, tells a short story in each. You could just do that as a single email at this stage, "Thank you for being on the list." Do you worry at this stage of it going dormant or quiet for a little bit? I know people start to panic if they've managed to get, say 60 names on their list, how often should they ... I don't want to jump ahead Mark, I know you're going to move on to these things but how often should they be thinking about sending an email?

Mark: That depends on the author and the genre and the expectations that you've set. I don't email my list very often, probably not often enough

actually but I'm kind of on the, if you've got a spectrum I'd be on the side that doesn't do too many emails apart from when I've got something that I think they might be interested in. It could be a free Birkenhead or a competition, or especially a launch. Other authors, I mean Wayne Stettin, who we had on the show last week, as he said in the interview he has a compact list of about two and a half thousand readers but they're very dedicated to him and he nurtures that relationship by emailing them twice a month, and I've seen Wayne's emails. They're exactly what you'd expect, they're avuncular, they're friendly, certainly what you'd think you'd get from Wayne. That's another way of doing it, other authors will do it every week but it depends on ...

There's no point emailing if you've got nothing to say because you'll certainly get people unsubscribing if they think, "Oh God, here comes another of James' emails where his bloody cat," whatever it is. Find a natural rhythm. Don't feel that you have to communicate with them every month because if you haven't got anything to say because you're busy working on that novel then it might be better to wait until you've actually got something concrete to actually tell them about.

James: Okay, all right, so so far we've asked people.

Mark: Yes, we've kind of asked them, asked our immediate circle of friends and maybe a couple of circles beyond that. What I would say next in the first week, so before we get on to the other bits and bobs the next thing to do is to try and repeat that process on whatever social media platform that you're most prevalent on, the platform that you've chosen or the platforms perhaps. Facebook is the one for me, that's the one I'm most active on. Just put a message and definitely don't spam people about this. No-one likes authors who are always going, "Get my free book, get my free book," or whatever, just always pushing that message. It doesn't work like that, it's the same kind of principle. Put out a message in those early days, just saying that you've got a project you're working on and would you like to learn more about it so that you can communicate? Just try and reach out to

people that way. You could do it by way of direct message or you could do it as a kind of a broadcast to the followers of our profile.

That would be another way to do that, but look at Facebook, Twitter is the same. Just to reach out to people who you might be connected to and then try to slowly build that list up from those other sources.

James: Social, and we're talking organic at the moment rather than anything too advanced here. There's no money going into this, this is simply where you exist. Lots of people I think, probably you're Facebook, I'm probably a mixture of Facebook and Twitter but we're that generation we're more likely to be Facebook. Others listening to this, who are dare I say it Mark, younger than us-

Mark: We don't have young listeners, James.

James: No, it might be more Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest-

Mark: Snapchat most likely.

James: Where they're hanging out. And Snapchat of course, yeah. Anywhere that you hang out effectively, you can start to use that. Again, keep it friendly, keep it personable, as if you've met a couple of friends you haven't seen that often in the pub and they ask you how you're doing and you say, "Oh yeah, I'm writing a book. If you want to hear more you can find out here," that type of approach you were talking about. Not overloading, overboarding, not making yourself sound spammy.

Mark: Yep, no, absolutely, very low-key, very friendly, conversational, that's the way to do it. The preferable way is probably to reach out to people individually, there's a better chance that those messages will get through. For goodness' sake don't spam, because that's not the relationship that you want to be setting up early doors.

James: Yeah, there's a whole are there and I hope we can get into it, not today but in one of the other two episodes we'll talk more about frequency I think. I keep quite a close eye on the authors in our community and wider, and how often people are emailing. I've noticed quite a high profile name who we've had on the podcast in the past has suddenly ramped up how often they are sending out Tweets and links to their books, and they've obviously made a conscious decision about that. Before we say, "You shouldn't go too overboard," it's worth us perhaps fishing around a little bit and finding out what sort of results people have had. There's a couple of other names that come to mind, of people I think are very active in terms of putting this stuff out about themselves and the books and that, basically all their social media account is. I'll be interested to know how that operates as opposed to you and I being slightly more-

Mark: I'll give you a clue.

James: You don't think it'll work at all?

Mark: Badly, no of course not, I know who you're talking about. No, it's not a good idea.

James: There's a couple actually, there's somebody else you probably don't know, I was talking about her, I have noticed has suddenly started ramping it up. Anyway, okay good. So we're still in basically week one here.

Mark: Yes, we are. The second part of week one, or kind of this should be done pretty much right from the start because it's a little bit of work at the start which will pay off without any further work forever. What I'd call this is optimizing passive growth, so it's looking at primarily those social channels that we just mentioned and making it as easy as possible for people who stumble across your various profiles to sign up to a mailing list. The principles are the same as we mentioned when it comes to the retailers, there's not much point in for example trusting Mark Zuckerberg with the list of people who are interested in our books because as he demonstrated

five years ago Facebook went from being a platform where you could reach almost all of your followers with one broadcast out to being one where you'd reach 1 or 2% of your followers and to get the other 98% you had to pay.

Obviously that's opened up loads and loads of opportunities for authors who are prepared to learn how to do that. We want to make sure that we get them onto a platform that we control, not anybody else. We want to get them onto our mailing list. Traffic will be increasing to us through our social channels as we become more set down as authors. We want to make sure that it, as I say, it's easy for people to get onto the list. Let's start with Facebook. I did a webinar when we were promoting the 101 course, and we looked at some of these things. It was all about mailing lists, and one of the things that we did was I basically surprised you with a question in the middle of the webinar where we looked at the Facebook page for my books and I asked what the three avenues were or the three opportunities that people could take to join my mailing list. I think you got all three of them, can you remember what they were?

James: Yes, I remember that you can ... First of all there's a button which you can choose, which I think you're going to talk about in more detail in a moment. There is the banner itself which is the one I know that not everyone works out, but you can actually do something so that you can click the picture itself. From memory, I can't remember the third one. There's another learn more somewhere, isn't there? Or about.

Mark: It was an app, yeah.

James: That's app.

Mark: There are three, so the easiest one is actually the call to action button. As you set up your Facebook page which is something that takes literally ten, or I don't know, 30 seconds probably to do those, very, very straightforward. One of the things that you can do is to assign a function to

the button, if you look on the top right-hand-side of a Facebook page, so you look at mine, I think it's Mark Dawson Author on Facebook. You'll see something like Subscribe or Learn More or Sign Up or something along those lines. That's something that you can assign and if people sign up and it's connected to your MailChimp account for example then people will join your list by doing that, it will take them through to a landing page where they can then sign up and they're on the list. That's really, really easy. The second most easy way to do it, and also as you say the one that people don't often realize is possible, is to provide a link when people click on the banner.

The image for my page at the moment is a grab from the New Milton Cover for Blackout, which is out next month, and available at all good bookshops by the way. I'm such a professional.

James: Spammy.

Mark: If you click on that banner ... Spammy, exactly. It provide them with a kind of a link that they can then click that you can direct them to say a shop if you're selling something or to a sign up page, to a landing page, which is what I do. The third and final way is bit more complicated and people will need to Google this because it's a bit beyond what we can tell people in this format, but you can get what Facebook refers to as apps and they slide into certain spaces in the left hand side of the page. One of those apps is a little software snippet that will connect your MailChimp account with your Facebook profile or your Facebook page and will enable people just to ... I think mine says, "Get more books," or, "Get my books." Clicking on that will then take you straight through again to MailChimp and you can sign up that way. By doing that, the reason why you need to do this is, maybe let's say that takes an hour to set that up.

It doesn't take an hour to do that but let's just say on the pessimistic side that's how long it will take. You do that work in that first week and then it will continue to pay you back ad infinitum. Every week I would suspect, I

haven't tested this for a little while but I think I'm getting between 20 and 25 signups through that Facebook page, through those three ways of getting in. There's no other work involved in that, it is completely passive. Anything that you can do that will deliver you a benefit without you needing to do too much work is a good thing, so that is something that we should definitely make sure that listeners and our guinea pig, looking at you James, making sure that you've got all those functions set up on your page.

James: Yeah, that's definitely something I need to be doing and making sure that's all there. Two things occur to me about that, first of all it's a fantastic way of when you look at your spend and people who have already started dabbling in Facebook advertising, Twitter ads to build their list and they look at how much they're paying for conversions, of course you've got to look at that holistically and these 12 or 20, whatever you're going to get a week from that should go into that total figure you got against your total spend, and that makes your per email much better, starts to make it look better so it's a really important thing where you have an opportunity of getting them for free, set that up. The second thing, a really important point to make is that the journey that somebody takes once the click one of these buttons has got to be right. It's got to be a clean, purposeful, targeted journey.

It's funny, we talk about landing pages and I talk to fellow authors, look at me, fellow authors, other authors who say, "Yeah yeah, I'm all across landing pages and it's so important," and you look at what you hit when you click on, "Learn more" off their Facebook page or even their adverts and you get this blog site that has a list of menu options at the top, it has their latest blog at the top, below it, scroll down, everything they've done for eons. Over the right hand side there might be a sign up button by which time the person who's clicked on something saying, "Sign up now for a free book" is completely lost and then having to navigate their way through this page. You want at that point, somebody clicks on that banner, clicks on a learn more button on your Facebook page you want them to hit a

traditional landing page. Clean, uncluttered, if you go to Jamesblache.com you can see the one we created for me for the course.

That's about as much as you'd ever want on that landing page, a little bit about the author, a little bit about the book, nice bit of blurb, but right across the middle of it somewhere to click and put your email address in.

Mark: Yeah exactly, it's a big focus in the ads course on building clean landing pages. As soon as you start to implement those simple deletions really, removing stuff from the page, you'll see your conversion percentage will go up and up and up. Instead of converting, by which I mean if ten visitors sign the conversion percentage's for one person, so that would be 10%. You'll find that will go up by four to a 50% by just removing those distractions and enabling them to do what they wanted to do when they clicked, which was join the list. They didn't click because they wanted to read a blog post, they wanted to join the list or learn more about the list. To make that as simple as possible, so yeah that's really good advice, definitely people should look to do that. To round off with the other bits and bobs on the [inaudible 00:42:31] and the passive growth, so we've done Facebook. Twitter is just the same, Twitter enables you to pin a tweet to the top of your profile. As people click on your profile name they'll see a pinned tweet, which will in this context should be directing people to the mailing list, that's very, very easy to do. Again, costs nothing, five minutes' worth of work which will deliver you subscribers. Not many but some, and these all add up of course so it's worth doing. There's two more before we round off this week, this episode. People are obviously sending loads and loads of emails, so email is another really good way to just broadcast that message but it needs to be done right. There's no point in all of the emails that we send forcing a message in about why people need to sign up to your mailing list and there's no point when you write to your bank manager about the mortgage that you haven't paid, "PS, I've got a new book, I'm writing a new book. Would you like to join my mailing list," because that isn't going to work.

Obviously that's a slightly amplified example but what I would say is you can use little kind of software add-ons, especially on web-based email clients like Gmail where they will generate automatically a little signature, a stamp. The one that I would recommend is something called Wise Stamp, so W-I-S-E S-T-A-M-P. You can include a little picture, you can have a little bit of a call to action and a clickable URL that people can then go across to the landing page and sign up. I don't know how many emails a day I send but it's certainly in the three figures, and that message, it's obviously just kind of a passive inclusion, it's not something that I'm forcing down people's throats. By doing that you can be sure that people would like, "I didn't know Mark was an author, I'm going to check that out and see what he's all about." You will get signups like that, so again, no cost or minimal cost.

You can do this for free with most of these applications, and potentially adding subscribers as we go along. Then finally, again, connected to signatures, thinking about the forums where you hang out. Most forums will allow you to set a custom signature, so a forum where I hang out now and again, not as much as I used to but certainly I'll be in there every day probably is K-Boards. It used to be called Kindle Boards, it's a really good resource of authors to learn about all this kind of stuff, and you can create your own custom signature which would include, I would recommend that it would include an offer to join your mailing list. K-Boards is not the perfect environment for that because it's lots of other authors, and there's one thing, we get this a lot in our Facebook group, authors coming in and going, "Buy my book." That's not really very sensible because you're trying to persuade lots of other authors to buy your book.

That's probably not your audience, but for you, if you were in a forum about people who are interested in Vulcan bombers and I know you are, you're nodding, and I know you're a bit of a Vulcan nerd.

James: There may be somebody called Vulcan9901 in these forums, I don't know, yes. I mean they do exist, these Cold War jets, aircraft spotting forums and I have occasionally frequented them as a bit of a geek, so yeah.

Mark: That's your perfect audience, in some ways it's also your most challenging audience because these are the people you're going to have to persuade that you know what you're talking about but they're also the perfect audience, they're going to be interested in your subject matter. Again it's very, very simple just to change your signature so that it's just kind of background information that people can sign up, you definitely shouldn't be posting in the forum again and again and again that you've got this book because that's a pretty good way to get yourself thrown out of the forums. That's why signatures and forum customizations like that exist, this is a really simple, really easy, non-intrusive way to get that message across. That's definitely something that authors should be looking to do.

James: Yeah okay, and we are talking about online forums, not social media and Facebook and so on because they don't work like that. Certainly when we run our groups we don't want people posting, "Please sign up to my list," on all their links because that changes the nature of the group a little bit and we'd expect other groups to be exactly the same as that. Good, this is really exciting, I'm feeling quite energized about all of this. I've noticed also we're coming up to 50 minutes, quite a lot of talking at this stage. Are we still in week one at the moment?

Mark: Well we're done, that's week one done. You've got your homework, I want to come back next week James and I want you to have a hundred subscribers, that's your challenge. We'll shame you publicly if you haven't.

James: We mentioned quite a few resources in this podcast, you can see our show notes at Selfpublishingformula.com. We'll put the links for resources like Wise Stamp et cetera will be there. Hopefully by the end of this we'll put together some sort of giveaway, won't we Mark, and get that out to people.

Mark: Yep, absolutely.

James:

Which will sum up all the key points. Great, we're not going to get into any more detail in this episode, so that is episode one of [inaudible 00:48:01], that's one of three, it's going to be a mini-series. You have your tasks, I'm aiming to get a hundred new names on my mailing list in the next seven days. You have your task of getting at least ten and you can let us know about your success, either post into our Facebook group ... If you just look at Facebook, what is it, .com, what is our Facebook group now called? Ads For Authors.

Mark: Ads For Authors, yeah.

James: Ads For. A-D-S F-O-R A-U-T-H-O-R-S, Ads For Authors.

Mark: You didn't use the four, like trendy kids do.

James: No, no, because I'm an idiot. Alternatively, people can leave comments on the show notes page on selfpublishingformula.com.

Mark: Yeah, or even email us in an old-fashioned sort of way, podcast@selfpublishingformula.com.

James: Only if your signature has been changed.

Mark: Yes, because we'll be checking that.

James: In which case, otherwise don't bother. I'll send you an angry response.

What do you think about the title for my book, what do you think about V Bomber Down? If you remember going back to this, people thought Vulcan Down wouldn't work because Vulcan reminds people of Mr. Spock.

Mark: No, don't like it.

James: No, V Bomber Down? No, okay.

No. I thought of that one just drifting off last night, I sent my wife an email from my phone, is the only way I could make a note as I was in bed going to sleep so I scribbled, you know you can do the scribbling thing on the phone. She got this email this morning saying, "V Bone Ber Down," didn't know what it meant but I did. Okay, so that's ruled out, brilliant, thanks very much, that's useful. Good, thank you very much indeed for listening and for watching, indeed it's been a bit of a struggle. We are never going to record a podcast after 3:30 in the afternoon again in the UK because certainly my internet supplier, it goes down as all the kids come home and ramp on their YouTube videos. It's been a real struggle, you've stopped and started visually but we've hopefully got the sound absolutely perfect. If you're listening it should be perfect and if you're watching the sound should be perfect.

Mark did stop and start a few times visually. Good, can't wait till next week, can't wait till I get told off by Mark for either not doing my homework or getting it wrong in one way and another and hopefully you will do better than me, and we will see you next time for part two of Email Listing Podcast 47, until then, bye bye.

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