

## **EPISODE 50: HOW TO LAND A PUBLISHING DEAL – WITH ALEX CLARKE, HEADLINE PUBLISHING**

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to episode 50 from the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

Voiceover: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James 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: We made it. Half a century, 50, I mean 50 sounds ancient doesn't it? Who would be 50?

Mark Dawson: Anyone in the room over 50? Hang on, one, we'll gloss over that.

James Blatch: We'll ignore the fact that someone might be 50 soon, but here we are episode 50 for the podcast and it started as something we thought because we think and breathe and live modern indie publishing and all the ideas that come up and we listen to other podcasts, we thought there was something we could do here. Each week to talk about an episode, talk about something that would be of use to people and here we are 50 episodes later.

We have thousands of listeners. The YouTube channel has grown, if you're watching us on YouTube, and yeah we love doing it don't we?

Mark Dawson: We do and we've got some fun things that will be coming down the line as well where we're going to be rebranding a little bit. The YouTube channel will get a bit of a lick of paint, but we'll still obviously

concentrate on just providing the content and you can choose how to consume it.

If you like seeing James and I, you can watch us on video or if you'd just rather have us go directly to your ears whilst you're running or doing the dishes or whatever, obviously than the podcast is where you need to be subscribing, but yeah we're pleased to get to 50. Well done.

James Blatch: Yeah, and we'd also be delighted if you left us a review on iTunes. That's very helpful for us if you'd like to do that. We do respond to every comment. If you comment on our YouTube video I always dive in there, even if it's mildly critical, which it isn't very often but occasionally. Here we are. We're digital people in the digital space.

I'm so pleased about today's interview and today's guest because it's somebody from the heart of traditional publishing who has now moved to indie on his agenda or his horizon anyway, he's a traditional guy.

In fact he's starting a new imprint and that's why we spoke to him. But what this interview shows his how much crossover there is between traditional and indie. We are all about books, first and foremost, we're about books. About loving books, about writing them, about coming up with good ideas, about making your books something that people are going to want to read. It doesn't matter whether you're doing this by yourself in your bedroom or you're a hoarder or penguin, you have to get all those things right, it's just a bit more pressure on this guy because he's looking after other peoples money in the big companies. He's got to make these decisions correctly, but it's a fascinating interview. He's an absolutely lovely guy. I think you know Alex, did you? How did you come across Alex?

Mark Dawson: I was in on a panel in London last year with, I can't remember what the topic was, but Alex was there, he was an agent there. Again, they were obviously from the traditional side of the spectrum and I was kind of the young turk, pushing the indie argument.

Alex is great and the way I look at it is like this, it isn't so much books, it's stories. We're in the story business, the storytelling business, and whether you distribute those stories by way of file, digital download, or with paper, it doesn't really matter, that's just the delivery mechanism. The story is the main thing.

We're just looking at different ways to get the story into the hands of readers. Alex has no axe to grind, and neither do we. I think that's important to lay out there as well. I am traditionally published in different countries so I've got traditional deals in Germany and Italy and the Czech Republic. I have been traditionally published in the U.K. before. I've got nothing against traditional publishing.

The difference these days is that I'm able to reach out to readers directly without needing to take recourse to that kind of way of doing things but in principle if someone came and offered me money for the Milton books and I thought it was a good opportunity, I'd be up for it. But the bottom line is, and this is kind of the, I was going to say curse and the blessing, it's probably actually neither of those, it's just the fact is I have a lot of data on how much my books, how they sell, what I can expect from them.

I can extrapolate what those books therefore are worth, so it enables me to make qualified decisions on how I chose to publish them. At the moment it looks to me that self-publishing is really the only way I'm interested in going, but all options are on the table. I'm always open to ideas.

James Blatch: In terms of what's going to be of use for me as a budding author listening to this interview and the questions I asked are really focused around really tapping into Alex's masterful view of books and what makes a book sell. What he's looking for in a book that he knows is going to, in his view has the best chance of working and that's valuable for us then because if you think the way that he thinks, with a very critical eye, I think you hear Alex talk about this very openly, it's an art not a science. But that's only going to help us listening to it the way that he views the way that

books come to him and what he's looking for. It's only going to help me craft my book and you craft your book.

His name is Alex Clarke, as I say he's starting a new imprint, I'll let him introduce himself in a moment and then we'll come back and have a chat afterwards.

Alex Clarke: I am setting up a new imprint here at Headline and the imprint is called Wildfire. I had been at Penguin for 15 years where I was publishing director and at the beginning of the year I was asked by the MD of Headline if I'd come here and set up a new imprint.

Broadly speaking, the imprint is looking at quality commercial fiction and non-fiction. In terms of the balance of the list, hopefully longterm it will be about 50/50 fiction and non-fiction. In terms of commercial fiction particularly we're looking for crime thrillers, high concept thrillers, a bit of historical, and some of the more I guess commercial end of reader group fiction.

The bottom line for the ethos of the imprint is we've called it Wildfire because that's the kind of books we want to publish. We want to publish books that people love talking about basically, that you pick up, you read and you want to tell your friends about straight away. In terms of setting that tone, our kind of touch line has been basically books with a little bit of soul, books that you do feel happy talking about with your friends and family.

James Blatch: Commercial fiction and from your description you're talking about the books that people want to sit and read on the tube, and as you say, then have a discussion about afterwards. I'm curious about the choice between combining fiction and non-fiction.

**You talk very much about the commercial fiction and then how does the non-fiction fit into that? How can it be a stalemata?**

Alex Clarke: I've been very fortunate as a publisher that I've always published a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. I think from a personal point of view, it keeps my brain ticking over quite nicely.

But in terms of the dynamic of the non-fiction, traditionally I've published a lot of celebrity autobiography, a bit of historical non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, and so those sort of big ideas, whether it's science or whether it's issue led ideas type non-fiction.

That's very much the tone we're looking for for Wildfire is finding books, again, that are talking points. The way I publish has always been to find someone a bit different, a bit interesting, or well known to talk about such subjects so it might be gender equality, it might be environmental issues, or it might be a kind of particular historical figure or period and finding someone who can really reach out to as large an audience as possible in an interesting way as possible. That's how we're defining our hunt for non-fiction.

James Blatch: I would say that's a fair mix of non-fiction and fiction, so I don't think it's that unusual. I completely see the argument that it keeps you on your toes and keeps you interested because I think there's a lot to be said for that actually because there is a culture difference between the two and having to switch from one to the other. I suppose we'll talk about what's going to be, I suppose, more directly relevant to people like me and people who want to write and want to be published at some point in a moment.

I'm still interested in the thought process that goes into setting up a new imprint.

**I guess there are economies of scale within an organization, would they go across fiction and non-fiction or were you going to have an invisible line in the middle of the company?**

Alex Clarke: In terms of how you structure a publishing list, I think one always has to think about how is your publishing is going to be spread out throughout the year in terms of A, the investment you're putting in, whether it's advances or production or the marketing and publicity of a book. Whether it's repeat series fiction every month so that you're creating an engine in terms of your revenue and also your creative output and that allows you to think of the more seasonal non-fiction say, you'd love to publish a celebrity based book in the autumn, Christmas market, you might look to publish a more ideas based non-fiction book in a sort of spring market.

When I think about structuring a list, it's building a pyramid of repeat authors, brand fiction you know is going to hit the market in a certain way, and then you'll have maybe one or two books that are the big word of mouth books that you're hoping will become the next *Girl on the Train*, the next *Gone Girl*, whatever it might be.

You can only realistically as a contained publishing company, you're only going to get one or two shots at that kind of book per year so you've got to balance your structure throughout the year so that you're able to give space to that kind of big make book. It's lining up all the bits of revenue in as creative and as fruitful way for the individual books and how they might best land in the market really.

James Blatch: Okay. Well let's talk about what you look for and you talk about the talked about book and the recommended book. I can remember from my commute into London, I read *The Lovely Bones* and *The Davinci Code* and a few others just because I saw everybody else reading them. There's one book that comes up every now and again, *Girl on the Train* at the moment, and you want to find them and we want to write them.

**What are the top tips? What are you looking for? What should we be doing?**

Alex Clarke: It's very interesting at the moment. You reference *Girl on the Train* and things like *The Davinci Code* and traditionally there's usually every year, every season, there's one book that goes crazy, possibly in a year cycle you get one, two, very rarely three books that hit that level where they sell half a million, a million copies.

Obviously as a publisher that's the holy grail. It's very hard to predict that. I guess *Before I Go To Sleep* was the first of the new generation of psychological thrillers, as we call them in the publishing industry.

You had *Before I Go To Sleep*, you had *Gone Girl*, now you've got *Girl on the Train*, and what's interesting is that they are all performing to a similarly high level. Whereas you look at something like *The Davinci Code*, that was it's own unique phenomena and the same with *50 Shades of Grey*, and then everything kind of fell into the copycat, to use a sort of diminutive term, which I don't think is necessarily fair.

But everything that followed tends to have a sort of half life and eventually that trend sort of runs out of steam. What's been very interesting about the psychological thriller kind of trope within publishing, it hasn't seem to run out of steam. Actually these pillars come along, the *Gone Girl*, the *Girl on the Train*, it's just been as high as the last and each has had a wave of followup publishing afterwards.

At the moment I've just kind of, out of the back of the Frankfurt frenzy, a very significant percentage of the fiction we were receiving on submission from agents was in that psychological thriller area, category. I can't see it going away, certainly for the foreseeable 18 months of publishing.

Knowing what's been bought by publishers, including ourselves, the psychological thriller is here to stay so I think there's something in that in terms of picking what one is going to write about. I think you do have to write what's coming from within but also I think it does help to have a bit of a sense of what's working in the market as well.

James Blatch: I guess if you look at the movies, the psychological thriller going back to the 30s and the 40s and 50s and Hitchcock. Today it has been a mainstay of what draws people into seeing a story play out so there's some backing up there that it's got longevity. You say it's difficult, obviously it is difficult to spot that and you are having a lot of these pushed at you alone by agents and authors, so how do you do that?

### **Where's that magic formula that you're looking for when you're reading?**

Alex Clarke: I wish there was a straightforward magical formula. I think what is immediately impressive when you read something is, the very sort of cliché that it should start with a bang.

I think as a publisher, one doesn't necessarily have the luxury of reading 250 pages of every manuscript that gets submitted. Time simply doesn't permit it so starting with that kind of explosive beginning is a good way of getting your attention. It doesn't mean every book has to start that way but it does help.

One has a visceral response to a certain kind of writing, whatever that writing might be and whatever category that writing might be, and the quality is something that really jumps out immediately.

You can tell immediately whether someone has got that magical gift with words and I think being able to structure that within a kind of immediately graspable concept or hook or story. Being able to give me that one line pitch, that one paragraph pitch at the beginning introducing the book to me, so I know what I'm expecting and then you kind of get caught by that magical prose. That's what I'm looking for.

James Blatch: That high concept that you referred to earlier. I suppose we should be thinking about the tagline and the elevator pitch and if we've got that right and that works then it builds on that. That's a good start from your

point of view and you're looking for. Be careful with language, to reduce things but you're looking for fairly instantaneous gratification here. It's got to basically do what it's setting out to do from quite early on.

**As you say, you don't read 250 pages. I don't know how far into the books you get but it's got to be doing it pretty swiftly.**

Alex Clarke: Pretty swiftly, yeah. I think, as Ed says, we get very used to making our minds up pretty quickly. That doesn't mean to say that every book has to start with that James Bond-esque scene but you do get a sense very quickly of the ability of the prose.

As you say the elevator pitch is so crucial. If you as a writer are unable to pitch the book in one line to me, how am I as an editor going to be able to pitch it to my colleagues and then them to the sales retailers? That kind of immediacy of being able to say what your book is about.

James Blatch: Ultimately you can imagine the reader browsing the book store or online. They're the ultimate test of that aren't they?

Alex Clarke: People are very time poor when it comes to making judgments. The typical anecdote is that you have seven seconds of passing time as a shopper walks through the aisles of Tesco in the book section. As the publisher, I've got to convey exactly what as a reader you're going to get in that book. That's a title, that's the cover image, and it's a strap line. If you're thinking about your own writing in those terms, I think it also helps you have enormous clarity as to what you are trying to achieve. You can visualize your end audience as it were and what you're trying to do with them and I think that actually helps the writing process as well.

**James Blatch: How much do you know about the books when you start reading them? Is there space for the submission from the agent or the author, is there a place for the high concept elevator pitch?**

Alex Clarke: There is, yes. When I'm looking at submission I would always see how someone's positioning it. It gets my mind in the right place and it also saves me time in terms of thinking, "Okay I know I'm looking out for a crime thriller here, what kind of crime thriller is it? Is it a serial killer or is it a procedural?"

That puts me in the right mindset and I think you can capture someone with a brilliant title and a brilliant kind of strap line pitch and you're setting their expectations perfectly. I think that's very important. As a publisher you go in with a certain mindset as you start reading and you're drawn into the tension, the intrigue, the buildup, whatever it is simply by that title, that killer title. Let me think, *Girl on the Train*, that's a good title.

**James Blatch: I've noticed quite a few a *Girl on the Trains* being published in the last couple of weeks.**

Alex Clarke: Well there's *Girl on a Train*, *The Girl on a Train*, *Girl on the Train*, so you know, having said that the title is something we all struggle with as authors and publishers. It's so important and I'd ask all aspiring writers out there to really focus on that title and test it, try it, because you can do so much work with a great title. In a way it's your most immediate marketing tool if you're being sort of strategic about it. It's hugely important and quite difficult to get right.

James Blatch: I was reading recently some of the stats on who buys and consumes books.

**It was laying out bare the fact that it is women who are the voracious readers and the main audience we should be thinking about. Is that your experience?**

Alex Clarke: It's very interesting. I started off my editorial career publishing for a more male audience in fiction terms. I was publishing a lot of big epic historical series, Romans, Napoleonic era stuff, and that market has

changed a bit, particularly with the advent of eBook and it's a bit harder to reach those people.

It doesn't necessarily mean they've gone away but I think for the most part statistically yeah, you are looking at women buying more books than men and whether it's they're buying the books and then passing them on, or whether they're buying them for themselves is a moot point.

But the holy grail is buying a book that both appeals to a male and a female audience and you'd be surprised at certain authors who'd you think actually might appeal to a certain gender, actually appeal to a much more broad mix of demographic. That's the holy grail.

On the male readership front I think what's been very interesting, I guess in the post *I Am Pilgrim* world is you've got books like *Crisis*, *Nomads*, recently Greg Hurwitz *Orphan X*. There seems to be a resurgence of the more kind of adrenaline, action packed, male thriller and that market has been very hard in publishing terms for the last five, 10 years. Actually this year it seems to have had a fairly significant Renaissance, which I wish I could tell you why. All I can tell you is I'm keen to find some books in that area now.

James Blatch: My book starts in a 1960s nuclear REF bomber so I'm not sure I'm pitching quite to the target female audience at the moment but who knows. I'm in the edit stage now so maybe I'll introduce, it sounds very cliché and horrible doesn't it? I'll introduce romantic storylines if that's what women are interested in.

*I Am Pilgrim* is a good example of that.

**There are some universal things we're all worried about or intrigued about, international terrorism, probably is one of them at the moment and those are themes that are probably going to work across both, aren't they?**

Alex Clarke: Yeah. First of all, which bomber?

James Blatch: Vulcan.

Alex Clarke: Brilliant, I mean you sold me straightaway.

James Blatch: High concept. I'm going to have to definitely put it in front of you.

Alex Clarke: I think there are universal themes and having said that I think it's always interesting how authors manage to come at it from different angles and that's what's exciting as a publisher is when you find someone who's taking a universal theme but just has a slight tote shift in terms of perspective or handling and that's what we're always keen to find.

James Blatch: I was going to move on to the mistakes that people make, or authors make, but in a way I suppose we just reverse engineer what you've said so far.

A rambling, unfocused beginning to their books and it doesn't really give you a sense of what the books about, it doesn't match the pitch and so on. That's an obvious one I guess you must come across from time to time.

Alex Clarke: Yes. I think, being very clear with your pitch is crucial and lack of clarity is an immediate alarm bell. If a pitch letter or a pitch document doesn't have that clarity, it doesn't necessarily bode well for the novel as a whole. That's not obviously universal trur and please don't think I'm speaking universally but that is a definite no no.

What else? I think some people can take a long while to get to the meat of their story and it's a real discipline to think, "Okay what is my reader journey here? What am I expecting people to do with the process of engaging with the story?"

Certainly a tip I often give my authors is when you're thinking about formulating your narrative arc and your structure, look at how screenplays do that process. There is such a discipline to creating, whether is a three or five act structure within screen writing, and there's some great books out there that give you really really good tips for that structuring of your narrative arc, your beats of tension and intrigue and sustaining your audience interests.

A great example of that would be Into the Woods by John York who was the director of BBC Drama for a long time and he gives a brilliant outline of how to be very disciplined with your structural planning. I think it's always a real help for an author to think about keeping that rhythm of audience engagement and that five act structure or three act structure depending on how you do it. It's a really easy way of disciplining yourself in that process.

James Blatch: It was funny how much people talk in the industry about films and books and have them very closely aligned today. I'm not sure whether that's changed from where it was 20 or 30 years ago but my editor talks to me a lot about watch this film, watch this film, see how the structure works, rather than read this book and that book.

**Obviously it's a lot quicker to watch a film than read an entire novel but it must be more to do with the fact that films have really nailed how to tell a story.**

Alex Clarke: I think there's an interesting circle there because so many films are coming from books now. In Frankfurt many of my meetings are with film scouts who are looking for books to send to film and film and TV are so dependent on the creativity that comes out of the writing but I think you're right actually.

When you're spending, whether it's five million or 100 million dollars on a film production, boy do you get it right. There's such discipline over the exposition of story and they don't always get it right but there's a real

discipline to it and I think it just helps in terms of the experience filmmakers and TV makers, in the same way that writers have, of understanding their audiences' reaction is something that everyone can learn from.

James Blatch: They obviously have other tools in their armory in terms of creating this impression on the audience. I actually remember reading *I Am Pilgrim* thinking this has been written for the screen and it was no surprise to me after I'd finished it though, read up on the guy that wrote it was in fact a screenwriter, more than a novelist. That book read like a film to me.

Alex Clarke: I actually commissioned a novel when I was still at Penguin by a screenwriter. I had a drink with him the other day and it was really interesting hearing his experiences of coming from having been a screenwriter and what he was actually able to do more in terms of the internal voice, in terms of the kind of emotional journey writing for a novelized work. In many ways, he felt set free by that process.

James Blatch: That's interesting.

Alex Clarke: I think there are two sides to the coin. I don't think any one discipline can claim to be the more rich art, I think that's the joy of it.

James Blatch: Yeah, when you've read your book, obviously there's a few decisions you can make in the first instance and the majority of cases is obviously it's going to be this is not going to be for us. Some are going to be you'll look at them and think these are the fully formed product. But I'm imaging that most books you see them as interest to you at that early stage.

### **How much work goes on between you and the author, and I know you're going to say this varies a lot, but typically?**

Alex Clarke: It varies a lot, James. That is the most straightforward answer. I think every case is different. At the end of the day the important part of the process is that an author feels that they are getting the best out of their

writing and it's my job to help an author achieve the best they can possibly do.

I'm not the creative part of the equation, the author is, but my role is to make sure that I'm able to just tease out whatever strengths and iron out whatever wrinkles that we can, and that will vary absolutely from person to person.

I guess that's one of the great joys in working as a publisher is that you are on a different journey every time. As I say, the crucial thing from my point of view is it's the authors, it's their heart work here and it's my job to make sure that they are able to publish the best possible book.

James Blatch: We interviewed Clare Macintosh earlier this year and I was a little surprised that after she did the deal with the publisher, there was two years of rewriting and working with her book, which she seemed delighted with and delighted with the process. A huge learning process for her.

**I'm wondering what they saw at the beginning that made them know that this was going to be worth the investment, considering how much it changed in those two years?**

Alex Clarke: Again, it's so much horses for courses and I think so often you will be captured by a certain element to the story or a certain character or there are certainly different things that capture you. Authors like to work in very different ways and sometimes these things can take a lot of time and other times you need to do relatively little work with a story. I think our job is to make sure that that process is as creatively rewarding as possible. As to what we see in the first place, that's the sort of alchemy.

James Blatch: It's got to be a hunch. Quite a lot of time, isn't it? It won't necessarily be, as we alluded to, the fully formed article but there's got to be something there for you and I guess that's what you pay for, Alex.

Alex Clarke: Well I hope so. It is a hunch but it's more often than not it's a very calculated hunch and I think our job as publishers is to ensure that we are responding to the constantly shifting trends. The readership market and trends do change all the time, and also as a publisher my role is to make sure that our publishing is sufficiently broad to cater for a number of different genres or categories or interest areas.

From a creative point of view that's very rewarding but also from a financial point of view, you're spread betting effect, you're not putting all your eggs in one basket from a kind of category or a commercial point of view.

**James Blatch: How do people get to you, Alex? Obviously agents are an important part of your life but you must get a lot of unsolicited manuscripts as well.**

Alex Clarke: We do get a lot of unsolicited manuscripts. The bottom line is 99% of what we do is through agents, simply because of the volume involved.

The first filter process is through a literary agent. Having said that, we're always looking at whether it's self-publishing platforms, whether it's places like Wattpad or there are any number of different areas where people are using words in very creative ways, particularly in the non-fiction.

For example, my first non-fiction title for the list next year is based on a Facebook blog and we're constantly on the lookout. My job is to try and keep eyes on as much as cultural output as possible.

How to reach us, the straightforward answer is through a literary agent but I think there are certainly ways in which, whether it's through a Faber Academy writing course, whether it's through a brilliant piece of self-publishing, or whether it's through, as I say, a Facebook blog or some other kind of blog platform.

There are certainly ways in which one can garner attention from your creative work and I think that's what's brilliant about publishing at the moment, is we're in this kind of perfect world of so many different areas of creative energy going on out there. It's brilliant. I mean we're inundated with very talented people.

**James Blatch: Do you find yourself trolling around? I mean this Facebook blog for instance, is this something that you spotted and you made the approach or was somebody savvy enough to work out there was potentially a longer form project here and approach you with it?**

Alex Clarke: I had spotted it but it had come to us through a literary agent. Literary agents are very canny at keeping their eyes open to these things so the agent had approached the blogger and then signed up a deal and pitched the book, pitched a proposal so agents are brilliant at that and thank God they are. It makes our publishing jobs much easier.

Having said that, I'm constantly approaching people whether it's for a non-fiction project because of their particular expertise or whether it's because I've seen a piece of creative writing on whatever platform. I do approach people and that's a great, very rewarding, part of the job is getting out there and hustling to find interesting projects.

James Blatch: Now, Alex you mentioned self-publishing. I was thinking probably most of our listeners are like me and that's probably the route that we're looking at in the immediate future. Although most successful self-publishers at some point become hybrid, whether it's the foreign books or just a different series or so and we'll start to move in trad as well.

**From your point of view, what's the impact on your industry from what is frankly an explosion at the moment of self-publishing?**

Alex Clarke: I think it's a very interesting development for publishing as a whole. Several of the authors I've taken on over the last number of years

have come from that background. Someone like James Oswald for example, a Scottish crime writer, had self-published his first two book crime series extremely successfully than got a literary agent.

We actually republished those two books before publishing the third in the series. I think there's an interesting kind of dynamic now as a self-published writer. Not only are you doing the sort of hard graft on the writing, you're also marketing yourself, you're thinking about your positioning, you're thinking about how to get people to notice your books.

That's a very interesting new dynamic in the publisher/author relationships and what we can learn from self-published authors and how they've managed to get themselves noticed and what we can add to that process in terms of traditional publishing and distribution and the sort of marketing and publicity we're able to bring to that.

I think there's an increasingly fruitful circle developing here. I'm always keeping my eyes very much open as to what's going on, which authors are breaking through in that arena.

James Blatch: That's good to hear because that's how it should be I think as well. The bottom line, Alex, I mean there's obviously for self-published authors who are doing well, and Mark's a good example of that, they can show you a spreadsheet which is considerably helped by the 65% that they get of the income from their books and against traditional deal which don't normally work like that, certainly haven't in the past.

### **Is it affecting the way that you're doing deals now? Are you having to adjust your expectations?**

Alex Clarke: I mean the traditional publishing contracts there's lots of tweaks that happen over time to publishing contracts we all have agreed boilerplate's with various agencies, and these evolve over time, but

because of the nature of print distribution and that's still a very significant portion of the publishing business.

**James Blatch: That's expensive right?**

Alex Clarke: It is expensive and in terms of the upfront risk a publisher takes to print and distribute a book, there's a significant financial expense there. I think those contracts that we have with authors are pretty much the same as they were say five years ago and there are little evolutions.

There will continue to be little evolutions but the business model isn't radically changing because of the nature of the print, digital balance. It still is as it is at the moment and I think as long as that's how the marketplace is keen to experience their books. Just as many people want to read the paper object as people who want to read it on Kindle. As long as there are those people I think the business model will stay fairly similar.

James Blatch: In 10 years you don't think there's going to be a significant change?

Alex Clarke: If I knew that James ...

James Blatch: Don't know what's happening next month, but you know.

Alex Clarke: Yeah, never make predictions. If you're looking statistically at the moment, it seems that there is a bit of a flattening out of the growth of eBook reading as opposed to the decline of print. They seem to be in something of a stable period at the moment. It seems that people are still split however which way in terms of reading on Kindle or reading in paper.

**James Blatch: I've just ordered a vinyl turntable so if that's anything to go by, if that's a trend. Vinyl's made resurgence isn't it?**

Alex Clarke: It has. I published this ridiculous Atlas last year, which was an absolutely beautiful piece of paper production and it did very well as a 25 pound Atlas. It was a crazy piece of publishing actually, probably never have gone there but it worked really well because people loved the artifact. It's almost this sort of fetishized object, isn't it? A book. You love the feel and the smell of the paper and you love the experience of engaging with that.

James Blatch: Yeah and however good the eBook platform can become, and I suppose ultimately you can view using some of the Apple software, etc., on a laptop, there are some books that are never going to be replaced from the paper versions.

Alex Clarke: No. I think what's brilliant about the evolution of digital is that it's so much easier to walk around and listen to your music, read your book when you're commuting into London, whatever. There are so many different options but at the same time we're getting evermore beautiful productions of paper books which is great. So being able to do both is like having the vinyl edition and being able to listen to it on your iPhone.

James Blatch: Exactly, which is probably where we're getting to. That's great Alex. Thank you. What's going to be of value and of use to people listening to the podcast, because time is precious.

**If people take away one lesson I guess it's what we were talking about of being able to describe your book in a sentence or two and then your book matching that description.**

Alex Clarke: I think so. I think as a piece of marketing or so, which is a horrible phrase, sorry, but also in terms of actually it's really helpful in terms of your creative clarity. I think it informs the process of writing as well. If you're able to stick to that clarity, and this doesn't apply to every kind of book. There are certain kinds of books that defy that but in terms of

commercial category fiction, that is very much a useful tool to have in your armory.

James Blatch: Yeah. I mean books do work like that but then authors, they often read the exceptions. I love Ian McEwan, he's my favorite author but I have no idea how his books work. I love reading them but I couldn't tear apart his books or work out why they're successful but I often think just enjoy that, read Ian McEwan but don't think about that when you're writing.

Alex Clarke: Yeah. As I said, there are always going to be books that do defy definition. I think certainly in the area I work in, which is commercial fiction, so much is about positioning, about categorizing, about being very very clear to the consumer. If you love that kind of book, you're going to love this kind of book, and just having that crisp vision and being able to communicate that instantly is a great asset to your writing.

James Blatch: Give them what they want.

Alex Clarke: Give them what they want and yeah exactly.

James Blatch: Excellent. Alex thank you so much today for joining us.

Alex Clarke: Not at all James. Thanks so much for having me.

James Blatch: Alex Clarke, absolutely lovely guy. I loved doing that interview and obviously we do talk to people most of the time who are immersed in the digital revolution of indie publishing and there is a bit of us in them in some areas of the industry. Going into that interview I wasn't sure how it was going to fit into our flow but it fitted in absolutely perfectly because of course as it turns out we're all trying to sell books.

Mark Dawson: Exactly and I think I'd be right in saying he's asked you to send your book to him.

James Blatch: I peaked his interest so I don't need an agent, I'll go straight to Alex.

Mark Dawson: You don't need me. That's what will call it a day. No more. We'll stop at 50.

James Blatch: I'm off. No, I loved talking to Alex. Really nice guy and definitely keep in touch with him and I'll talk to him at least once a year. He's somebody also who understands how books are changing and this whole thing about the book that everyone's reading on the tube, the Girl on the Train or The Davinci Code a few years ago, whatever it is, that trend is something of course he's keenly interested in with his new imprint.

Mark Dawson: I forgot to say at the start of the podcast today that after I met him, he offered to buy me lunch so we went out in London. He took me to a nice restaurant, we had a nice lunch for a couple of hours, it may have involved some alcohol. He's interested in Facebook ads, he's interested in mailing lists, he's very switched on, he can see what people like me and other indies are doing. He's savvy enough to know, more than savvy enough to know that there are some lessons that they can take away from that. We can teach them.

He's obviously taught us lots of things in this episode but he knows that indies tend to be pushing the boundaries quite a lot and we can teach them plenty of things that will enable them to sell more books too.

James Blatch: If you think about potentially developing other revenue streams for yourself, I'm not talking about you, I'm talking about potentially people listening to the podcast who have perhaps taken your course or are good at the Facebook advertising, really good at sorted, seeing their own income grow, there's got to be the potential there for smaller imprints or smaller publishers using the services of somebody who's cracked it, who knows, who can come in, maybe it's once or twice a week and run campaigns for digital. I know it's not something you've got time for.

Mark Dawson: I've been asked loads of times.

James Blatch: I know you have.

Mark Dawson: I did it last year for my agent. They had asked me to come in and help them set up their imprint so I did come in for about three months I think every week and they paid me a lot of money to do as well which was very flattering.

But there's only so much time that I can spend on things and it isn't really for me. But there's definitely a space there for an indie writer who would like to spread out a bit and have different income streams to offer themselves as consultant. There's a lot of opportunity for that right now.

James Blatch: Definitely. Have to think about that, so when you crack Facebook ads, it's not necessarily just for you, you could leverage that skillset that you've developed for other people.

Before we go we've got a webinar coming up, haven't we? Do you want to talk about that?

Mark Dawson: We do. David Siteman Garland who was on the podcast way back, within the first 10 episodes I think, he is probably the best, I'd say the authority on building online courses. He's the guy that we went to when we were building the first Facebook ads for authors course, we followed his structure, it works.

Nick Stevenson also is an alumni of David and he is going to do a webinar for us on Wednesday the 8th. We'll put details in the show notes, where you can sign up to that.

What we're going to go into is David's tips on how to build a course. It's going to be perfect for non-fiction writers, especially those you can see that the book need only be their first part of the business. In fact you could do

much better from positioning yourself as someone providing an online course, big booming area, obviously because we know. We're in that fairly firmly with our courses.

Also though it could also be of use to fiction writers. It's possible. I'm a fiction writer and I've obviously branched out into doing courses. Fiction writers you could do a course on writing fiction for example. You could, all kinds of things, research, you could look at, there's loads of things, using Scrivener. There's another writer that we know, Matt Morris, who's done a course on using Scrivener. There's lots of potential there. David is really switched on, he says boom a lot and he's very American, which is great.

James Blatch: Quite excitable.

Mark Dawson: He's very excitable. He's an excitable little puppy and yeah, he's a good guy and I think it will be well worth coming on board. I don't remember the time off the top of my head but we'll put that in the show notes over at episode number 50.

James Blatch: That's the webinar, get the details, [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com) for this episode 50. You mentioned Matt Morris. I'm currently liaising with Matt. Matt is an expert on Scrivener. Scrivener's such an important tool for many of us writing and I think most of us know that we don't really, we've scratched the surface with the software.

Matt did a fantastic set of sessions for our 101 course on using the formatting, compiling aspect of Scrivener. What I want to get Matt to do is to come in and do a webinar for everybody, a free webinar, and just give us a masterclass on using Scrivano.

Off the back of that, some of you may be interested in his course so we'll make it worth his while, he can talk about course a bit but really it's just sitting down for an hour and listening to somebody who understands Scrivener to take us through maybe the top five things that we're not doing

in Scrivener that we could be doing to make our writing easier, so I haven't got a date for that yet, I'm in negotiations with Matt over it but that will certainly be available to everybody listening to the podcast when that comes along, probably in March. Okay, great. Date of the webinar again?

Mark Dawson: Wednesday the 8th of February.

James Blatch: Okay. Thank you very much indeed for joining us. Episode 50, our half century, is 50 significant in American school? 50 home runs in the season, that Sammy Sosa and Matt McGuire and those people, that was about 60 wasn't it? 62, 63 they did. I don't know what the record is now in baseball. It's probably 70.

Mark Dawson: I was going to say I know it's Superbowl 51 this year.

James Blatch: Superbowl 51, okay, so they're one ahead of us.

Mark Dawson: They're one ahead, we'll catch them on the next one.

James Blatch: But it's only the 45th president.

Mark Dawson: It'll be the 46th next week.

James Blatch: Who knows. Fast moving world of politics. Thank you for listening, thank you for watching, do leave a review on iTunes if you can. We'd love that. We will see you for episode 51 next week.

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