

## **EPISODE 51: THE VALUE IN A READER SURVEY – WITH MARK DAWSON**

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to episode number 51 from the Self Publishing Formula

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

James Blatch: If you are watching on our YouTube channel, we've changed seats so you're not David Letterman.

Mark Dawson: I am. Yes, I'm the funny one.

James Blatch: I'm hey now Hank Kingsley.

Mark Dawson: I don't remember that.

James Blatch: Hey now Hank Kingsley. That was Gary Shandling's, the late Gary Shandling, what's his name. Everyone's screaming at the podcast now because they all remember. Gary Sanders. Jeffrey Tambor brilliantly played Hank Kingsley. I loved that series. It was reasonably short lived and didn't do very well in the U.K.

Mark Dawson: Very influential.

James Blatch: Very influential. Gary Shandling was all the way along wasn't he? He did the Gary Shandling show where he broke the fourth wall, and he was just a young comedian in his 20's doing a TV sitcom but he kept speaking to camera saying, "Oh, this guy's coming around now."

And what we had later was Seinfeld and the Office and today Modern Family. I did see an interview with him once. I think probably Jerry Seinfeld actually interviewed him for his Comedian's in Cars Having Coffee show and he said to him, "What did you think when everything you see on TV basically extends from what you did?"

They loved each other. When they saw each other, Gary Shandling said I love you and they just really genuinely said that and they held each other and it was months after that Gary Shandling just died very suddenly, very sad. Influential, brilliant writing.

Seinfeld for me still is the sitcom in terms of writing that you listen to. There's not a word out of place. Not a word is wasted in Seinfeld. Every sentence means something, moves the story along, moves you towards the comedy, and I know that Larry David talked about it being the most stressful period in his life and in the end he really struggled to do it but I'm so pleased that he and Jerry did get that together because it was absolutely brilliant.

Okay, enough reminiscing about comedy. We've got a master class today which is exciting. There's no interview per se, in this episode we are going to be talking about reader surveys.

I think probably if you do a general introduction as to what they are and why we do them and then certainly as somebody's staring out who's not even begun that process yet I'm going to be asking you lots of questions. Mark Dawson: I've been doing surveys for at least two years, maybe three years now, and I always do it over Christmas. It's something that I look forward Christmas time because I know I'm going to survey my readers and as my audience site has grown, I obviously get much more data back.

The reason I do that is because I want to know about my audience. I want to know who they are, whether they're male or female, what age they are, what they like, what they don't like. Because when I know that kind of

information it enables me to make educated decisions on what I'm going to be doing in the next few years.

That could be on the one hand marketing, so it could be something that I know that my audience is a certain age so I won't advertise to people below that age. That enables me to get more qualified clicks, quite useful, can mean that the cost of whatever I'm trying to do comes down, is more efficient.

It could also have an impact on the craft side of things. If my audience tells me that they want more of one character and less of another, I can redo my production schedule so they get what they want. I can test them on different ideas I might be thinking up and all that kind of good stuff.

James Blatch: That's quite wide ranging.

I imagined before you answered that question it was really just going to be about marketing. But actually it's editorial as well, what people like.

Mark Dawson: It is, yeah. There's always a question in the survey where they can tell me anything they want and some of the most useful stuff comes from that.

Also of course these are my fans so that tends to be them telling me how much they enjoy my books. That's great for the ego. Most authors tend to be quite introverted and I certainly was like this back in the early days, lack of confidence in their writing so if you want a big jump of enthusiasm as you start the new year, this is something you can really do.

We'll talk about this when we go through but I've had nearly 5,700 responses to the survey this year and loads of those comments have been fantastic for my confidence and give me the kick up the pants I need to get started with the writing this year.

James Blatch: Okay, before we get into the practicalities.

The first thing to say is that's time consuming, 5,700 responses and you read them all.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I mean there's something like Survey Monkey, which is the one that I use, the app is very good. You can just scroll through them quickly. I don't respond to them individually, that would just be impossible and also it's an anonymous survey so people don't leave their email addresses.

But it is very easy just to flick through them as you got 10 minutes in a queue or you're waiting on a train or something along those lines. It's easy to just kind of browse those. You can do it at any time. I could look through them in February if I wanted to.

James Blatch: How big is your list now?

Mark Dawson: About 65,000.

### **James Blatch: What size of list do you need to do a survey?**

Mark Dawson: I think any size. You could do it with 150 just to start getting ideas about where you are. It'd be a little artificial for you because there's not much point in asking details about your readers because you haven't got any readers yet because you haven't released anything. But you could certainly start to ask questions about what people are interested in because there are going to be plenty of people there who will be your readers.

James Blatch: For people a little bit ahead of me, you've got a book or two out but their list might still be small.

They might be starting out in the whole list building. Maybe they've got one or 200 people on the list. Is it still worth doing a survey?

Mark Dawson: Oh yeah, absolutely. All data is good data. You should certainly get into that as soon as you can. People quite like taking surveys and Survey Monkey's very easy. It's easy for you to create and it's also easy for people to fill out.

I find putting it out there I enjoy it. I think they enjoy it too. I also turn it into a competition so I'll randomly give some prizes out and they could be signed books, like I said the ones you've got behind you there or a good prize is to give away a Kindle so that's quite a valuable prize but you can load those Kindle's with your books so you can kind of personalize it.

I know once I was at a London book fair last year, gave me a Kindle, gave some authors, including me who were speaking for them, a Kindle, and then asked them to inscribe it with some kind of dental drill. We basically completely bugged these Kindle's up and then they gave it to me. Actually I did give that away because it was kind of a signed Kindle. It looked ridiculous.

James Blatch: I thought it was a mistake on the photograph that you were being asked to pose with a pen on a Kindle as a sort of joke but it was real.

Mark Dawson: It wasn't a pen, it was a drill.

James Blatch: Like a dentist?

Mark Dawson: Yeah it was. It was an inscription tool.

James Blatch: Yeah, so you can sign Kindle's. People who do book signings must get people coming up with their Kindle's and special pens these days.

Mark Dawson: You could probably do it with a Sharpie I guess on the back.

James Blatch: Okay, right, so can we get into some of the practicalities? You've given one thing away which is Survey Monkey is the software that you choose.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, before I forget, we'll do a PDF giveaway for this. We will have all of the questions and all of the answers.

Now, of course, it is very personal to me because these are my readers but it's useful, the data that we're going to mention is very useful for everybody. Some of it will be very specific with just talking about my books but things like what are people prepared to pay for a book, that's very useful for all authors. We'll touch on that when we get to the questions and we can talk about it but we'll also give that away, that will be at [selfpublishingformula.com/download51](https://selfpublishingformula.com/download51).

James Blatch: You say you're going to give away all the questions and all the answers.

Mark Dawson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James Blatch: You're going to give away all your answers?

Mark Dawson: All the answers that I received yeah. The data.

James Blatch: Oh okay. That's really interesting. I'd love to see that.

Mark Dawson: Well there you go.

James Blatch: Okay, so we'll give that URL again towards the end of the episode. That's going to be a highly sought after one I think.

How do we go about this?

Mark Dawson: Well, let's just go through the questions. We've got, let's have a look, about 12 questions and not all of them will be relevant for everybody but we'll skip over the ones that aren't and we'll concentrate on the ones that are just so that people can get an idea of what an audience might look like.

Remember I'm writing thrillers, action adventure thrillers so that needs to be taken into account. If you're writing romance, you're going to get different kind of responses on gender, which is where we'll start.

### **The first question I ask is are you male or female?**

For me, the responses come back, this would be quite surprising I think for most people, give that I write those kind of masculine books. You think that it would be quite a high proportion would be male but the actual split is 65% male, 35% female.

A very big chunk of my audience is female. That does allow me to then think about should I try running some Facebook ads just targeting women because I can start to write slightly different copy focusing on different aspects of the series, of the character perhaps more than the action or lots of variations you can draw out there.

James Blatch: I guess it also gives you the idea that within the survey questions you could ask women specifically, once they've said they're a woman. It's that possibility to branch the questions.

Mark Dawson: You can. I don't do that, but it is possible to have a branch.

James Blatch: Find out what they like about the books. The background on that of course is that women read more books than men. I mean that is a global phenomenon. Women are the voracious consumers of books more than men.

From a commercial point of view it's always worth thinking, even if you're writing thrillers, that there should be something in there for the female audience. This is not to gender stereotype by the way. There might be lots of women who like exactly the same things in the book as men do but there are also traits.

**Mark Dawson: The next question that I asked is what is your age.**

It's very interesting for me to know what the age of readership is that again will allow me to target my ads more effectively.

The split came back, .09% were younger than 18 so I'm not selling many books to under 18 year olds. .3% were 18-24, 5.7% were 25-40 and then we get into the huge majority are over 41. 41 to 65 is 54% and then 65 or older is 39%.

As a practical example as to how that's helped me. When I originally started doing Facebook ads you have the option to target your ads to certain ages and the cut off for Facebook is 65 and up so you can't do 65 to 75, 75 to 85. The natural cutoff is 65.

I was originally reluctant to advertise to people in that bracket on the basis that I'm going to be catching 95 year olds who probably don't read that much anymore. A bit of a generalization but it's probably true. Just that survey question has demonstrated that to me that that is probably because 40% of my audience are over 65 so that's a practical example of where I am, also makes me slightly nervous.

James Blatch: People do live longer though Mark.

Mark Dawson: I know but just think 94% of my audience is over 41. I'm definitely, obviously as people are getting older they fall into that bracket again. Perhaps that means that people don't have time when they're



younger to read so much or it could be slightly more worrying, they just don't read as much. It's quite hard to say but that was very useful to me.

James Blatch: There are a lot of distractions for today's younger people that weren't around when your 75 year old was 20 that's for sure. Having said that, the populations are growing around the world and particularly in some parts of the world, Africa and South Asia are growing faster than they are here. Actually I think they're declining slightly in Europe but nonetheless yeah I wouldn't worry too much about that. There's enough fish in the sea for you.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: For my point of view in the digital world we just have to think how many people enter the digital world every day who weren't there before. Particularly in your demographic I would think. That's probably the fastest growing area. My dad's, actually he's 86 next month and he joined Facebook last year. Don't worry.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I feel much better now. That was interesting.

### **The next one I ask is where do you live?**

The split there, again this is very very useful for me in terms of marketing, also when I'm pitching books to other publishers they might want to know what my platform is in different parts of the world. I'm obviously a U.K. author but my audience is 60% in the U.S., it's 29% in the U.K. and then 4% Canada, 3% Australia and then 5% other places. That was interesting.

I remember going back a few years, it was 90%, 10% U.K., U.S. and I couldn't work out to crack the American market and I wanted to obviously because that's where most of the Kindle readers were in those days and something happened. I think it was possible the book that I released was quite international, quite Bondish in that way and that seemed to be the

ticket that enabled me to get into the American market and since then, as you see there, twice as many of my readers are in the U.S. than in the U.K.

James Blatch: Yeah. That's not a dissimilar split from SPF actually. SPF is slightly more slanted towards the U.S. but slightly ahead. Most bigger populations and slightly ahead in terms of digital take up in parts of the states.

Mark Dawson: Certainly in terms of Kindle, the Kindle they're about a year ahead of us in the U.K. and then places like Australia, Germany, behind the U.K. so you can see a split. I would expect the U.K. to continue to grow. Those are the demographics.

I think that's important to get those down. They're fundamentally important for lots of different reasons. Then get into some stuff that will be very interesting I think to everybody. It doesn't really matter what you're writing.

### **The next question is how did they discover me.**

I want to know where they found out about me so I can do more of that and less of something else perhaps. We've all had an email from Amazon, by that I mean Amazon algorithm where we'll be sending out emails to people who it thinks are going to like my books because they know what they've read before.

James Blatch: I've had them.

Mark Dawson: Yup, you would have and Amazon very very good at pushing those out there. 10% of the audience found me that way so that was pretty good.

Amazon Also Boughts, so those are the stripe on the sales pages of your books that will say readers who bought this also bought this. People perhaps say they were looking for a Lee Child book or a David Baladachi

book or Barry Eisler or whatever, they found on that page and linked back to one of my Milton books. 19% of the readers found me through that, so that was a pretty fruitful avenue for me. This is great.

For our friends at BookBub, 21% of my audience, so that is in fact the biggest slice, found me through a BookBub ad.

James Blatch: Wow.

Mark Dawson: I probably need to tell BookBub that. I think that would be the kind of thing that they would be quite interested in.

James Blatch: Was that the single biggest?

Mark Dawson: That's the single biggest. I mean just ahead of Amazon but that was BookBub. I've probably run, I don't know exactly how many, probably about 20 BookBub's now. I was right there at the start and although they knocked me back a fair bit I still get in probably more than I'm turned down.

That's a really good indication, apart of kind of the short term benefit of immediate return on investment, two or three times what you spend on the ad. You're building audiences through that. They see the book at 99 cents or free through the ad and then you hook them and they're back for more. That's the most important facet of a BookBub promotion is not the short term benefits, the long tail that you're trying to develop.

The other book recommendation services, like FreeBooksy, InstaFreebie, and Book Sends, those kinds of guys, 5% coming through that way.

The next source of people becoming aware of me was the thing that I'm most famous for and that's Facebook ads. 16.4% of the respondents came in through Facebook advertising so that's pretty interesting. Actually less than BookBub. BookBub has a bigger reach.

Even though those ads are expensive, probably, I haven't actually sat down and worked this out yet, I imagine those would be cheaper leads than the ones I'm getting through Facebook. On the other hand Facebook has an almost infinite reach so I'm not going to be chewing through Facebook ads anytime soon in terms of the people that I can find and I can run a Facebook ad whenever I want. BookBub is going to tell me when and when I can't but Facebook doesn't care. As long as I pay them, I can continue to run those ads.

James Blatch: Just to go back, this survey goes to your list?

You're surveying people about being on your list, how they heard about you, etc.

**At this stage it's possible that some of your respondents have never bought a book.**

Mark Dawson: Yes, it's possible.

James Blatch: It's very unlikely that they'd reply to a survey to an author they never read but it's possible.

You're really talking about how you got into the list, now how you bought my book.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. This question is how did you find out about me. I can concentrate on optimizing those areas.

The next one is, and I think this was a badly phrased question on my part is, 'You saw an ad on Amazon.' By that I mean an AMS ad and that was a marketing service ad which we'll talk about on another podcast. I've only really been running those for a couple of months.

I think people here think I'm talking about sending email out from Amazon. I'm kind of going to disregard that and I'm going to push it in with the other one. That's 10% and when you put that together, Amazon does become the biggest source of referrals, which isn't that surprising. 12% of others which we won't go into because it'll take too long but the final one for 5.6% is recommendation from a family or friend so that's always going to be one of the most powerful forms of advertising, referral, personal recommendation.

James Blatch: What size was that?

Mark Dawson: 5.6%. Pretty good in terms of the chunk coming through but that's very important. Okay, again another question.

### **Question five that will be relevant for all authors is, 'What first attracted those readers to my books?'**

There are four things and then another catch up, which we won't go into here, but in terms of people, that old cliché, cover is the most important thing. I've been guilty of that too and it is fundamentally important.

I think you're not likely to get people to look at your offerings if your cover sucks. I mean it's just a fact but we might be putting a bit too much importance in that. I'm certainly not saying don't worry about the cover too much because it's not as important as the other stuff because that's not true necessarily.

I think it's very very important to do that but we shouldn't over estimate it because when I run that question and ask what was the thing that attracted people to my books, cover came back at 6.7%, so quite low down actually in terms of the hierarchy.

The most important one, or the most influential one, was blurb, so blurb came in at 35%. Several times more influential than cover.

Look inside, so that's the free sample that you can get on Amazon, that came in at 21% so that's pretty good.

Then reviewed was 26% so the second biggest factor for people joining the list because they saw the reviews that the book had and that was the social proof they needed to make that decision to purchase.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's really interesting isn't it because all those little bits and pieces that go around outside of actually writing the book, which some people are clueless about quite understandably because it's quite complex area and others really understand the nitty gritty of it.

Most of us are somewhere in between. The sort of thing we spell out in our 101 course by the way in detail but that's for another day. They are so important, all those bits, the bit at the back of your book, the bit at the front of your book.

When you look at this survey and start to look at your income over a year and put those percentages against that, you can ask, How good is good blurb? You can quantify it and it's worth a lot of money.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I outsource now so I get someone to make a first pass. Actually Bryan Cohen, we've spoken to before, he's very very good at writing blurbs, good formula for those, I'll pay him a couple hundred dollars to do the first part of the blurb and then I'll amend it.

I consider myself to be a pretty good copywriter but it's one of those situations where I think it doesn't hurt if you have the funds to just get someone not connected to the book to make a first go at it. Often times with Bryan I'll actually use his with minimal amendments. But even if I do cut it around a bit, it's great to have a starting point that's original that I haven't had a hand in. That's question five.

Question six, so a little bit more specific to me. I'll just kind of mention what the question was and then people can have a look at the data in more detail if they want to in the free PDF we'll give away.

### **Question six is, 'What is your favorite book by me?'**

Not surprisingly when you think about this a little bit, the two biggest ones, I think the two biggest ones, certainly the biggest one is the first Milton book. The reason is it's way way ahead of all the others.

Let's have a look, 31% of respondents like The Cleaner, which is the first Milton book. The reason for that is that's part of my giveaway offer so there's a lot of those out there. It's also the first in the series.

People, even if they read through the series, they will have read that one for sure, so it's not surprising that it's had the most exposure. What is perhaps a little surprising is that that it is people's favorite because I wrote that book when I was a less practiced writer than I am today and I think the later books are technically more proficient than the early ones. But that tends to be the one that comes back as the favorite.

James Blatch: Does it worry you at all that your books that you've written subsequently aren't as good as the first bit you wrote?

Mark Dawson: No because the reason, people can only tick one box so most of those people will only have read that book so they can't tick anything else.

James Blatch: Yeah. I suppose it's also if you really like a series, and it's the same with a series of films, is usually a kind of emotional romantic association with the first one. Whether it's Back to the Future or Star Wars or your first Milton book that turns you on to the rest of them.

Mark Dawson: It's interesting to look through the other answers. You see the book that I would have considered to be not in the top five in the series, is the third and this is called The Driver. It actually comes out as 7.6% of the audience that was their favorite, so that was probably it's like number three I think in terms of the hierarchy of favorite books which is a good reason why sometimes you're not the best judge of how good your books are.

Your audience will tell you what their favorite is and so maybe what I can do from that kind of information is look back at what that story was about. That book is a more contained story, more like the Equalizer episodes that The Cleaner was originally based on. So less globe trotting, more one location with a more kind of realistic antagonist. Perhaps that's what my readers want. Maybe this year, in fact this year I will be writing a book that's a bit more like that. That's useful.

Then just kind of funny stuff. The first book that I self-published was called The Black Mile, a long time ago now, and .8% of my audience like that. Still 45 people but we're nowhere near as popular as the Milton books are. That's question six.

Question seven, this again is going to be useful for all authors I think. It's not necessarily the data but why I ask the question and how I ask it and then what you can do with the information you get back.

### **The question is, how many Mark Dawson books have you read?**

Their response comes back, very very quickly tell you what it is because as I say it's more about why I ask is important about what I'm getting back. I'll break it down. One, two to five, six to 10 or 11 to 14 or more than 15. Let's just quickly run that. More than six books, so from six upwards, it's about 60% of the audience.

The reason I ask that is because I want to know how much I should spend on acquiring a new reader. To put it in internet marketing language, a new



lead because if I can work out how many books they're likely to read once they start reading, I can then work out how much they're likely to spend and I can work out what the median is.

And then once I've got that information I can work out how much I should spend to acquire them. I go into this in a lot more detail in the advertising course but once you have that kind of number you can then make really educated decisions and if you're on one side of the line with your ads, than you should continue to invest. If you're spending too much, than you should cut back and try and refocus and go the other way to try and make them a bit more efficient.

**James Blatch: Did you ask if anyone hadn't read a book? Did it start at one to something?**

Mark Dawson: We actually started with one.

James Blatch: My theory that some was just one to two survey with not really a book.

Mark Dawson: I know some do because in some of the comments in the free text comment, maybe three or four said I haven't read any yet but I'm looking forward to starting.

James Blatch: I mean you talked a lot in the past about the value of a lead and although it does start to sound technical, people can start to see here exactly how you've extrapolated that figure on why you put so much effort it.

We read comments from people who are starting off in this path, people like myself, who feel a little aimless and should I be paying 50 cents what I'm paying \$1.50, do I stop my campaign because \$1.50 a lead is too much and so on. But very quickly with this data, well not very quickly but at some point with this data you've got the answers that you're looking for and as

you say, informed decisions. Then everything starts to get better and better and more focused as you go on.

Mark Dawson: There are other ways to calculate, it's called read through. You can look at your relative sales numbers for books in the series and try and see trends developing there. I think that's a bit unscientific because people can come in on book three without reading book one, book two, so read through is a little bit ambiguous.

Asking this kind of question specifically is a much more accurate way of finding out what your subscribers are worth to you.

Then, speaking about worth, the next question.

### **This is question eight, is what do you think a typical Mark Dawson book is worth?**

Now this is valuable for all Indies because we do tend to, we mentioned this before, we do tend to suggest that our books are worth less than a traditionally published book and we tend to be nervous about charging a little more than perhaps we ought to.

The answer to that, I put all the options down, 99 cents that's the first one, 2.8% of the audience responding said that that was what they thought my books were worth. \$1.99 is 6.6%. \$2.99 12%. \$3.99 16%. \$4.99 19%. \$5.99 16% and then the biggest one of all, more than \$5.99, 25%.

I would say a good starting point for an Indie author, I would say \$3.99 is about the right price. I tend to price now at \$4.99 or \$5.99. I don't go higher than that unless it's a boxset in which I'll go up to \$10. If you think about that, \$3.99, that's 35, 45, 51, 76% of the respondents would pay more or think the book is worth more than \$3.99.

James Blatch: But the biggest single one there is more than \$4.99.

Mark Dawson: \$5.99.

James Blatch: \$5.99, but you won't price above that?

Mark Dawson: No I won't. I think, you probably could and there are some authors, there's an author called Elizabeth West who is in the community. She has done really well at \$9.99 and of course even at \$9.99 were still under pricing by a considerable amount what the traditional publishers will charge for an eBook. The new Reacher book is going to cost you \$16 or \$17 in eBook, which frankly is a bit insulting.

James Blatch: Don't say that. I'm trying to get Lee Child on here.

Mark Dawson: It's not his fault. I'm sure he'd be happy to charge a little less but it's a publishing tactic to maintain print. From a reader, you have a tangible item in a book that you can put on your bookshelf or a file. It doesn't seem right that one should be much more than the other.

Anyway, that's interesting for me and what I'd like people to take away from that is just be confident about charging a little more and feeling that you don't need to be stuck in that 99 cent ghetto and being unhappy about charging more than that.

What would you charge for your book?

James Blatch: Well of course it's my very first book and it's going to be effectively a lead magnet, but I have been thinking about charging 99 cents. Partly because I've had so many people saying I can't wait to buy your book and they want to buy to support me so there's going to be an initial bit of that.

Rather than give it away, I actually feel that they should be able to buy it just because they want to feel that they've contributed to my career at the

beginning which is great. In longer term, my bigger audience who I don't know yet and who are purely judge me on the book, I've got to make a decision about whether I stick with 99 cents before I've got anything else to give away or whether I give it away.

Mark Dawson: For a first time author, yeah I think you'd be looking to give it away. I think there's not much point in charging 99 cents because the actual amount you'll make, you're making 30 cents on the dollar.

James Blatch: Have a coffee in a cheap café.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, so not huge but what you can do, the subscriber is going to be worth much more to you in the long term so actually if you want to write four books by 2018, I think I read on the blog post last night, so that would be something that you need to think about.

James Blatch: I have got some questions about that but we'll come back to it. It's its own area, isn't it, pricing and so on and perhaps we'll get somebody on to talk specifically about pricing.

Mark Dawson: Definitely could.

James Blatch: Because I've got quite a few questions so I'll approach that point. Oh yeah, go on.

### **Mark Dawson: Question nine, how do you read your books?**

What's the format that's most popular with my readers? Print comes in at 3.9%, that's about right. I don't push print too hard. They're all available in print, I'll probably make a grand a month in terms of print sales, perhaps a tad less than that but it's small in the grand scheme of things.

Amazon Kindle comes in at a whopping 66%, very interesting. Barnes and Noble Nook, 2.55%, Apple, 12%, Android, 6% and Kobo, 2%. Small when

you think about them individually, apart from Apple which is 12% of my revenue but when you combine them you're looking at about 20% there, so that's useful for me.

We'll get on to Kindle Unlimited in a minute but if I was to go exclusively with Amazon again, and I have been before, I would immediately be turning off 20% of my audience so I'd need to know that Kindle Unlimited could make up that short fall but there's no guarantee of that.

I've spent a lot of time on working on my relationships with those retailers, especially with Apple and you can see that is something that has born fruit now.

Then audio book comes in at 2% and then other is 4.2% but audio book that's an area that's definitely growing. I'm doing quite well with Audible. I think one of the biggest selling Indie authors on Audible, at least in the U.K. and that's accounting for a fairly small percent of the market but there's a lot of potential for growth there.

James Blatch: There are presumably higher costs associated with audio books?

Mark Dawson: Well in the sense that there's a production involved, technically yes you'd be right in thinking that but there are ways to get around that. I sell my books to Audible studios because for me, I probably mentioned this before, it makes more sense for me to have them produce the books and then have skin in the game when it comes to ...

James Blatch: Have what?

Mark Dawson: Skin in the game. Never heard that before?

James Blatch: No. It sounds quite rude.

Mark Dawson: Skin in the game just means that you are invested as I am.

James Blatch: You've got dog in the fight.

Mark Dawson: Dog in the fight, there you go, exactly. You've got dog in the fight. So it makes sense for them to promote something that they've made too.

The other way of course is through using ACX so that's Audiobook Creation eXchange, which is another Amazon company which basically hooks up authors on the one hand with producers and their agents on the other hand. You can do that on profit share where you're not out of pocket at all. That could work really well. There's another option there but audio books definitely could be one of the growth areas as we go into the rest of the year.

James Blatch: You can quantify this because you can look at exactly how many you sold and how much you spent and how much you're actually getting from it.

Mark Dawson: Yup, exactly.

**Question 10**, getting to the end now actually. Very simple question with a yes, no answer.

### **Are you in Kindle Unlimited?**

Kindle Unlimited, most people know what that is, it's a subscription service whereby you pay I think it's 10 pounds or \$10 a month and you can borrow books. The Netflix model.

Works very well and Amazon pays you on a pages per read basis, so something like .0045 cents per read, which sounds minuscule but when

you have a million reads, a million pages read, suddenly it can be worth a lot.

Those authors that we met in Saint Petersburg, people like Lindsey Hall who were doing very significant amounts of money, most of that would be coming through KU. The answer from my service, are you in it or not? Yes was 20% and no was 79%.

The great majority are out and remember just linking that back to that question I said before, where is my audience based and there's an awful lot on other platforms, 20% of my audience is on non-Amazon platforms so that makes me think if I'm gaining perhaps 20% of the audience on KU, that's still quite a lot for me to make up in order to make that cost neutral switch.

James Blatch: Yes, and the point too that if you go into Kindle Unlimited there's an exclusivity.

Mark Dawson: Yes, you've got to be exclusive. You couldn't be on those other platforms. The other benefit is there is effectively a new marketplace, a new very big marketplace with lots of other readers who wouldn't buy my books. They're only interested in the subscription model so potentially you can reach thousands and thousands more.

Would I make more money by going that way? Maybe. It's possible. Would I feel more secure knowing that all my eggs are in one basket? Definitely not. That's the things you have to weight up.

James Blatch: You have, silly question, some books in KU and some books out of KU and that's completely normal and up to you?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's not per author, it's per book so I've got I think all of my Amazon Thomas and Mercer books are available in KU, as you'd expect. They're owned by Amazon now so they're going to put them in their

programs. I've got three books, the three original noir books that are all exclusive to Amazon because they did me a year long special deal to put them exclusive in return for some promotion. Now that deals expired, I'll probably put them wide again.

This is a very interesting question for authors who have mailing lists and then don't know what they should do with the subscribers they've got on the list, specifically how often should they be communicating with list members.

### **I ask another simple question, 'How frequently would you like to hear from me?'**

The answers come back with just when there's new book 35% of the time, 35% of the audience; once a week, thank God this one didn't win because there's no way I'd be able to manage this but 10% would like to hear from me once every week.

Once a month is the winner with 46.69% and twice a month gets 7%. I've settled on the once a month model and I have been guilty over the last year or so of not hitting that and that's because I've just been so busy with everything else but I am trying to maintain that kind of monthly contact with my readers now.

They're will usually be something to say, so I've just got the first Milton box set, has just recently been available in print so I did a mail out to the list last week just saying I had the survey responses, I emailed out about that and the next month on the 15th there will be a new book release to go out. I can maintain a monthly basis. Weekly I think I'm just going to be talking about the weather so probably not going to be that interesting.

James Blatch: Do you broadcast in the sense that you will once a month sit down, write an email and send it to your list? Or would you sit down and write the next six months worth of emails and schedule them?



Mark Dawson: No, they'd be broadcasting. You could put it on an autoresponder but then if you're writing something that's dependent on the time, so you might say it's summer in Salisbury but those emails could go out in the winter because you just joined your list. You're slightly hamstrung by how flexible you can be.

I think auto responders and automation sequences are best as you onboard people, so talking about stuff that isn't dependent on anything other than the books that you're giving them and that kind of stuff. Getting towards the end now. I ask, what would you be most excited about in 2017?

Again, this is helping me to work out what I should be writing more of and less of. 70% of people want more Milton. Isabella Rose, 11%, Noir 7%, so no noir, 2.35% and a new series, so one I'm thinking of writing I've actually got planned out and might start to write this year, 10% of people were interested in something new. That's interesting too.

**James Blatch: Did you tell them what the idea was or did you just say something new?**

Mark Dawson: Just a new series.

James Blatch: I'm a little surprised. There's such a big gap between John Milton and Isabella Rose.

Mark Dawson: Well there are 10 Milton books, two novelas, three box sets, and I've never advertised the Isabella Rose series, that's an Amazon exclusive.

There's not much point to me advertising that. The margins are much smaller because I get 30 whatever percent rather than 70%. It doesn't make much sense for me to do that. If you think about the Milton books, I have no

idea, I could work it out quite easily what the impressions have been over the course of the last two years and impressions that's the number of times an ad has been served. It would be in the millions, probably 10 million now, probably something like that. It's much much better knowing that series, but 10% of 65,000 size mailing list is decent. That's not bad at all. That does quite neatly work out what I want to focus on this year.

There will be more Milton at least this one in February. There will be one directly after that, probably another one towards the end of the year. There will be another Isabella Rose.

And I might if I get time, depending on all kinds of things, write this first book in the new series that I'm thinking of but being able to validate that, get that pre-writing approval from your audience is quite a useful thing to know. I know for example, that if I wanted to do a new series, at least 10% of my audience would like me to do that. You can probably extrapolate from that another 20% will buy it for sure and so it's going to be a worthwhile exercise whatever I decide to do.

James Blatch: Yeah. Good. Any more questions?

Mark Dawson: That's it really. We kind of just mopped up with is there anything you'd like Mark to know if and you'll get, it's quite funny I just saw a couple here.

We had one guy said, it's not all praise, which is great. I want it to be honest. "Sometimes it's evident that you haven't visited a location just for research. Eg, your books set in Australia had so many errors it grated. Perhaps get a native of the country to proof it as well." I haven't been to Australia and I have had a native of the country in fact several checked it and were happy with it but obviously I didn't get everything right.

Then we had, where are we, we had one of The Sword of God, "I was very impressed with the accuracy of the upper peninsula setting," so that's in

Michigan, "Which I'm very familiar with," because I haven't been there either, so it just goes to show sometimes you're going to get it right, sometimes readers will think you've got it wrong.

James Blatch: Right and you need to go to Australia.

Mark Dawson: Yes I haven't been to Australia. Strangely enough.

James Blatch: I thought that as you were walking past the main park in the square because I thought when I was there to work for the regime it was different.

There's a general point to make here as well which is an obvious thing, which is clearly you've got very valuable data, empirical evidence that you can use to make informed decisions in the future.

For those 5,700 people who already feel that they're part of your community, that's a better connection with them as well and each time you do an exercise like this, you talk a lot about turning fans into super fans and super fans into really amazing close fans, that's part of this as well isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's demonstrating that I'm listening and a number of times, I mean in the thousands of comments that I've gone through, the number of times that has come through and that people appreciate that I ask and love their connection that they have with me.

The number of times you'll hear people say I've never had a connection with an author like this before, it's amazing, and it doesn't take very long to do that. These are not difficult things to work out. They don't need to be expensive. It's just common sense really. It's reaching out and making connections. That turns them into people that are likely to, as we saw from that question, will buy an average eight of my books. My books cost say \$5, do the math.

James Blatch: 40 yeah. That's great. It's the right way to do business, to think of yourself as a business and this is exactly what you'd find big companies will be doing all the time in fact. We're slightly plagued by them in this day and age. That's the other side of being a consumer, it's very difficult to visit a website without something popping up saying have you got time to take our survey and you have to pick and choose how much time you have on those fronts.

You've been referring a lot if you're watching this on the YouTube version you'll see that Mark's been referring to his laptop a lot through this so that information, everything there, all that, the data that he's been referring to is available to you to download if you go to [selfpublishingformula.com/download51](https://selfpublishingformula.com/download51) and you will be able to get all of that really really interesting stuff.

And there will be stuff in there, particularly as you mentioned at the beginning, the pricing that could be of value to you in your own books but it will certainly give you an idea of, in Mark's case, what is the ideal, not quite the ideal survey for you because you said did you get one of the questions wrong and you need to refine that in the future, but great. I've really enjoyed. That's been very interesting.

Mark Dawson: Good. Mission accomplished.

James Blatch: To make it interesting to me. Good. Excellent. Don't forget you can get all our podcasts at [selfpublishingformula.com](https://selfpublishingformula.com), you can subscribe to us via iTunes, leave a review if you'd like. That'd be great if you can. You can subscribe to our YouTube channel and you can watch us in glorious color as well. We're going to be back next week. I want to wish you well this week, that URL again to download the survey information, [selfpublishingformula.com/download51](https://selfpublishingformula.com/download51). Have a great week Mark.

Mark Dawson: You too James.

James Blatch: And have a great week you. Good bye.

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