

EPISODE 53: THE BOOK LAUNCH PROCESS – WITH MARK DAWSON

Announcer: 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.

Mark: Hello and welcome to the SPF podcast, but we've changed things around again, a little bit. What do you think of the kind of radio studio vibe we've got going?

James: I quite like it, the only thing I'll say is that viewers, or listeners won't be able to see this, but viewers who are watching, will have a very well-framed shot and what they won't see is Mr. Dyer hovering over to my right and a confusing mess of cables, and tripods, and lighting, and all kinds of stuff, but I think it looks really good.

Mark: Yeah, that's the magic of Hollywood.

James: Or Salisbury.

Mark: Or Salisbury.

James: Yes, the other Hollywood. We talked about Hollywood last week and a little bit of feedback around the place about it. It is one of these subjects, I thought Cal was fascinating to listen to, somebody who's been there and done it, and understands the cynicism of Hollywood and understands that it's a very brutally commercial world and ultimately it's easy to get ripped off in this.

Mark: Absolutely, yeah it was a good interview and also quite timely for me 'cause I'm actually speaking to my producer and someone from the director from his company this evening at 10 o'clock UK time, which I think is about 2:00 pm LA time so that was quite timely to think about that and listen to her thoughts.

James: How excited are you about that?

Mark: Not very excited. It's great that things are going on, but as I've said before on the podcast, it's not something that I'm banking on. I'm not buying million pound houses right now. If it comes off it's great, and it's very flattering that people, very serious people are engaged with the material and they're definitely pitching it to studios to try and generate some interest, but I'm not gonna get too excited until the ink's dry on the contract.

James: Yeah, well I think it's exciting, and we'll all enjoy that moment. We'll never see you again obviously, when the films get made.

Mark: We'll do it in Malibu next time.

James: Yeah exactly. This episode we are back to books and pure books, and you have just gone through a launch. It's been a pretty hectic time for you I have to say, and you've sort of disappeared off our radar for a little bit when your head's down writing the book. Just tell us a bit about the book first of all.

Mark: Yes, it's the 10th John Milton book. Milton is my flagship franchise, it's the one that most people know me for. For the 10th one I wanted to do something a bit special so I took some soundings from my audience and found out what kind of a thing they were interested in, what kind of adventure John should go on, and also asked which characters they enjoyed from the previous books, and I've brought a couple of them back again which has gone down very well.

I started writing it I guess November last year and we've obviously been quite busy with course stuff, with the 101 course that launched. And then I really accelerated in January, concentrated on getting the book finished, and it's been great. It's been my best launch by quite a long way for a number of reasons and we'll go into why that might be in this podcast. We can chat about the things I've done, things I've done to improve my process, and give listeners some takeaways as to what they might be able to do when they're ready to launch their next book.

James: Yeah, that's what this podcast is going to be about, it's going to be about how to launch a book, and long-term listeners of the podcast will remember that we did do this before, we broke down your previous launch which I think was your record launch then, so you've beaten that record.

Mark: Yeah, every launch I do beat the one before it and there's a number of reasons for that.

Obviously the main one is my list is bigger every time. I'm able to broadcast that message out to more people every time I've got one to go. Also, I'm refining the process all the time so I've done something, a couple of things this time I haven't done before, that have worked extremely well, and we can talk about that and go into a little bit of detail because they're quite simple for people to use those tips and tricks too.

James: Yeah, it's amazing the more you understand about this business, how detailed and complex each little part is, and the launch in itself is a bit of an art form isn't it, and something as you say you're refining each time, and each launch you learn new refinements.

Mark: Yeah it's like a finely tuned Swiss watch and I'm adding things in all the time so it would be good to get into some of that.

James: Good. Let's start breaking down some of the detailed facts. You mentioned that the YouTube viewers of the podcast weren't going to be

able to see the background, of course there is actually a GoPro camera up on that shelf and standing right in the middle of the shot there fiddling with things. Stop fiddling with things. He's our third amigo looking slim and energetic.

Okay, let's break down the launch.

So where do you want to start Mark, in terms of, I guess what we've got is a completed book that's been through its editorial process.

Do you start even as you're still putting the book together?

Mark: We'll go a bit before that because I've obviously got an advance team, I've spoken about that before, it's one of the main benefits of having a list is that you can recruit people, super fans willing to staff an advance team.

I finished the book, or at least I was reasonably happy with it, I had a bit of a nagging question about one element, and I won't say what that was right now, I'll tell you about that in a minute, but I wanted to send it off for the advance team to look at it. So it had been proofread, and was in the process of being copyedited. It's quite clean, I wrote quite clean anyway.

I sent it off and immediately, within like a day, one guy wrote back and said, "I hate the ending. I hate the ending. The book is great but the ending is, it would have been a five-star book, it's a two-star book because of the ending."

I have had problems with endings before, I've got all kinds of bad reviews for the first Isabella Rose book, people hated how I ended that book. So it's not one of my strengths, ending it. And that was the issue that I had in the back of my mind, was that it isn't quite right. And the reason it wasn't is it was a bit too much of a cliff hanger. It wrapped up everything the characters were safe without giving too much away-

James: Safe or dead.

Mark: Yeah safe or dead, certainly a conclusion. But the bad guy, the main bad guy hadn't been dealt with. And my intention was, the sub bad guy was dealt with but the main bad guy had kind of escaped. And the intention was for the next book to pick that story up, and that's what I said to you before I had 20 thousand words of the next book ready to go, and a really good idea as to how that book might look.

But as they started emailing me back, so I had this first one that hated the ending, second one said I don't like the ending. So at this point my antenna is twitching because it was the thing I was worried about and I think all I needed was just some validation that I should have trusted my gut on that and my gut's normally right on that kind of stuff.

At that point decided to be a bit more proactive and I emailed my list, the advance team, and said, I want you to pay careful focus. The main thing I want you to think about is is the ending satisfying? I didn't say I don't think it is, I didn't want to tip them off too much as to what I thought they might say.

And they came back, I'd say 25% didn't love the ending. So that is a very clear steer, and there' probably 200 readers coming back saying I didn't like the ending. That would be a clear steer to me that I'm gonna get bad reviews for that book.

James: How big is your advance team?

Mark: I don't know, 600.

James: Oh, okay.

Mark: Something like that 600 people.

James: I'm sorry, just to draw on this, how do you get that feedback? 600 is a lot of people to read through a couple of paragraphs of an email.

Do you send them a survey?

Mark: No, they email me back, so it is a lot of work. Not all of them will respond. Of the 600, I guess I probably got 300 responses this time. It is a lot of work, I basically dump them all into a folder and then do it over a day or two. I'll go through all the comments.

So, there'd be lots of people picking up typos that have slipped through there, the process of correcting factual errors, some making plot suggestions, and I'll do that one after another. A lot of the typos, as soon as you've done one, everyone will pick it up. So you don't need to do that again because obviously you've corrected it.

It is quite intensive. A couple weeks worth of really serious focus on the text. I decided basically that I'm going to rewrite the ending so I took that 20,000 words that I had and the book was, I think when I finished it in first draft, it was about 80,000 words. When I finished it in second draft, it was 100,000 words.

Of those 20,000, maybe 5,000 were used, the other stuff I just junked because I don't think I will use it again. Which, I have no problem doing that again, it's fine. There's no point in forcing something in if it's not going to make the book better.

Then I wrote another, say 15,000 words of fresh content. And ended the book, taking the ending of what was going to be the next book, putting it to the end of this book. It's a really satisfying ending. It's got Peter McMilton, he's absolutely in this book. Then I sent that one out. So I said to my team, "I'm not happy with the ending, most of you agree with that, it's not the right ending for the book, so I've rewritten it, here's your new copy."

The responses I got back from that were ecstatic. This book is fabulous. I liked it before, I absolutely love it now. That's been reflected in the reviews. We'll get onto the reviews in a minute but as it stands, as we record this now, I think it's at 189 reviews, 187 are five star reviews and two are four star reviews. It's ridiculous. It's by far the most-

James: You haven't had one of those one star reviews, "I haven't read it yet".

Mark: No, not yet. They always come. Our book is bulletproof now. That's such a great response. The sales have been fantastic as well, which we'll get into some numbers ... I'm happy to share numbers at the launch as well. Picking up that process, the book then comes back to me, the comments come back on the second version.

In the meantime, my copyeditor has made her changes and sent those back to me. I'm then ready to take the book and get it formatted so I take it to my formatters and at the same time, I also did a Vellum edition this time which I love.

James: So you worked in Vellum?

Mark: I did, yep. For the first time, I used Vellum. I highly recommend it. It's amazing. Very, very impressive piece of software.

I also had the print version formatted by Polgaris in Australia, the guys I use over there. So, that all happened.

I think I was supposed to launch it on the 15th of February, I don't know, basically I was a week early. I managed to accelerate stuff a week early. I put it up. I then emailed the advance team and said, "The book is live, ready for reviews", and I've mentioned how I go through that process before. Within 24 hours, it had 100 reviews so the team really came

through. A lot of them also bought the book, even though they got it for free because I put it up at 99 cents to start with. So they get the “verified” tag which means those reviews are less like to be stripped out by Amazon, and I was ready to go. I then emailed the list and then we started to see the actual real sales at the full price because I pushed the price up to sales price.

James: How long was it at 99 cents?

Mark: I think for about 12 hours. Maybe a touch longer than that.

James: What’s the reason for that? That’s to have a good burst of reviews.

Mark: There’s two reasons really. You can leave unverified reviews, so you don’t need to have bought something to leave a review. The problem with that is, those reviews won’t have the “verified purchase” tag, which means #1, they’re not taken quite as seriously by people browsing and #2, it’s probably a little bit more likely that Amazon will sweep those up. There have been cases recently where “unverified” reviews have been either taken off or made more difficult to see.

James: We’ve had a few postings in the group about that.

Mark: Yeah, that definitely does happen. The other reason is, even those 99 cent sales count towards the ranking.

I think I had about 150 of those 99 cent purchases from the advance team. So, when I was ready to launch properly at the full price, I think the book was around about 2000 in the rankings, which is a decent platform to start with. I’m able to really push that launch hard and get the book at a high ranking. It’s a bit stickier if you’ve had sustained sales over time rather than one big burst.

James: Yeah, okay. So, 99 cents for 12 hours or so.

Mark: Yep. Then the book goes up to 4.99. That was my launch price.

James: In U.S. dollars?

Mark: Dollars, yep. 3.99 in the UK. I sent out my emails to my various lists. I've always use MailChimp. It's been annoying. I'd rather just have one list, I actually have about 20 different lists so, they have to be sent out 20 different times which is a pain in the neck. It'll take ages.

But, the book went out and the average open rate over those initial send outs was about 45% so it's about what I'd expect typically from my lists. Some a little bit higher. The organic lists, the ones that have come in from the backs of books, probably about 60%. The colder lists, and things like that, maybe around 35%. Something along those lines. The average was around about 45%

Because I'm watching the KDP dashboard like a hawk, as this starts to happen and, it starts. You can see the sales coming in, and coming in, and coming in. It's across all platforms so, I had a pre-order going on, on Apple, and Kobo, and Barnes & Noble. That reminds me, remind me to tell you about the mistake I made at Kobo.

James: Let's talk about pre-orders as well in a minute because I want to ask you a couple of questions.

Mark: We can do that now.

Pre-orders work very very well on the other platforms but not so well on Amazon, for me anyway. Amazon counts those pr-order sales when those pre-orders are made. So, you'll have a rank, your pre-order book will have a rank but, my launching works best, at least it has done so far, by having

those sales at a time that I can control. As I said, a two or three day period. Rather than say, for a six month period.

James: Yeah, inevitably it's going to be a lower position when you spread the sale, the votes, the sales out over that period of time than having them in three days.

So, visibility wise, it works for you?

Mark: Yeah, on the other platforms, it doesn't work that way. On Apple, they give you a rank when the pre-order is made and then they also count the sale when the book is delivered. It's basically double votes.

James: That's a better way of doing it actually, isn't it? For a start, people can cancel a pre-order, so to count it as a sale is probably not the right way of doing it. Anyways, it's Amazon's way.

Mark: That's true. Apple were also very very helpful to me this time. They put the book up as one of their, "Picks for February".

James: Tim.

Mark: Yeah, I spoke to Tim. Actually I spoke directly to, you know, the big man.

James: Oh, Steve.

Mark: Still looking down. They're great. I love those guys. I know this isn't something that everyone can do.

It's not easy for everyone to reach out to them directly. They did push that book up and promoted it in the U.S. store. We'll look at the numbers in a minute. It sold very well on Apple. On some accounts, all these sales as their coming across the platforms, and I think it got up to, over that initial

burst, the highest it got to was over night when I was asleep so, UK time. It was about #60 in the U.S. store. The highest I've been before was about 80ish I think.

When you get the difference from 80 to 60, and the 60 to 40, is between hundreds of books. To get from 100,000 to 999,000 may be one sale. To go from 60 to 59 is probably 200 sales. It gets much more competitive at the top. To get to 60 was great. I hope to hit 50 but I didn't do it this time. I'll most likely do it next time.

I think in the UK, it got to about #22 which was really fabulous. That's just with no promotion apart from the list. No ads at that stage, just people on my list getting the email going, "I'm buying it."

James: And the resulting visibility from being in the lists.

Mark: Yeah, that's something that's slightly short to medium term so, that may be over the first week. That's when you start to get the Amazon ... It wouldn't immediately start to email out. It's not something that happens immediately.

If you're ranking highly, then they'll start to contact other people that it thinks will like your books. Very, very good start.

What I then did a couple of days after that is, I take the unopeners from mail, terms are very very simple to work out. Which people didn't open that email, so the launch email, and then I send one, changed the headline and say, "Thank you.". So I said, "Thank you.", I had a little screen grab of the ranking, say, "This has been an amazing launch." And then I think I had a screen grab of the reviews, so 150 reviews, of that they say, 149 were five star. Basically you're demonstrating to people, "this book has got masses of social proof'.

James: And you're missing out on something.

Mark: You're missing out on something, yeah.

James: See, I got this email because I was away last run. I did something I've not done for years, which is, I turned my email off for seven days and had a proper break because we all work hard and I went skiing. I didn't open your first email. I was wondering why I got that email saying, "thank you".

Mark: Yeah. People say, "thank you", I think it's normal for people to think, "why is he thanking me?". It's just cute when you open it. From that, let's say, "of 40% of my list didn't open my original email", so they get the second one. 10% of the people who got that one, opened it and that added a good number of clicks so, you're increasing the visibility through the second campaign into your list.

Then what I did, I'm in the process of doing right now, and this is the new wrinkle that I'm testing out, it's working very well, is I take the people who didn't open either of those two emails I mailed to them, I export them into a spreadsheet, put them into Mailer Lite. So that's a nice new email service provider.

You put the "build new list" in Mailer Lite and then you send another email to them. Again, you change the headline. Also, you change the "sending from" address. Instead of my .me.com address, which is not a very good address to use on MailChimp because it does tend to trigger spam alerts on Gmail in particular.

I change it to my markjdawson.com address and my own hosted address. That so far has generated another 10% of opens. So, maybe another 2-300 clicks so I would expect that to translate into at least another 150 sales. Probably a bit more than that. I haven't gone through the bigger lists yet so, it's a bit time consuming, especially for me because I've got all those 20 lists. You've got to export them individually.

James: So you can't do that in MailChimp, what you just described. You enter Mailer Lite.

Mark: I'd rather send it from a different EMS. It's just changing the way the email is sent. You strip out things like images.

James: Because other stuff in the headings would be different between MailChimp and Mailer Lite. Which might be the difference between it being triggered as spam or not.

Mark: Yeah. So you change it. You want to make it look original. So, say it goes into your Gmail folder. The first one is caught by spam. This is a different email process with a different sending address so it's less like to trigger those.

That has worked very well so, I'm still going through that process but as I say, "It's led to another 10%", so I probably actually got up to around about 65% of my list now has at least seen the email. As we'll get onto in a minute, I have other ways of reaching them, the other 35%, even if they haven't opened those emails.

James: Okay, cool. By the way, in InfusionSoft, which you've moved over to, you can alternate virtually all of that, apart from this last stage you're talking about going to a different EMS. But particularly, sending a specific email to the unopeners at a certain period down the line. ConvertKit, I'm not sure. Probably-

Studio Member: Yeah, MailChimp can do that too. You can build a segment of unopeners. Reasonably easy to do that.

James: You can also make this in advance.

So, when you set up your first automation, you can say, "After seven days, anyone that hasn't opened that email gets this email."

Mark: Right. Yeah, I don't know if MailChimp can do that. Probably not.

James: All the different EMS's, obviously you've had a bit more of that, so.

Let's talk about what you're famous for Mark, which is the advertising. Social media advertising, I'm guessing has played a part in this launch.

Mark: Wonder what you hear bad and honest then. I'm famous for lots of things. I don't know advertising.

I concentrate on three specific kinds of ads this time. We did Facebook ads, Bookbub ads and Amazon Marketing Service ads. We'll get to AMS ads in another podcast in early March. We're going to dedicate a whole hour to those because they're very exciting right now, I'm getting quite a lot of success. But, I want to spend a bit more time in depth on those so we'll skip over those very quickly. I'll just touch them a bit.

It's Facebook and Bookbub that I think we'll concentrate on right now. For Facebook first of all, I took my mailing list. That 65,000 strong list, a bit more than that now, put that into Facebook and told them to match up those email addresses with people who had Facebook accounts. That's brought a new audience that I can advertise to on Facebook.

Of around about 40,000. That was a good start. I then also added onto that, using the Facebook pixel, people who visited my website over the course of say, six months and then I used a new custom audience that is basically about engagement on Facebook. People who visited my Facebook page, interacted with me, like adverts, all of that kind of stuff. And all of that being accumulated together, built a new audience like I'd say, around about 100 and something thousand strong across the world. So, that's pretty good.

Then I started to run those ads so it was a very simple ad, it had an image of the book and had a bit of copy which was basically, I think the hook was, “an offer he couldn’t refuse, a murder he can’t remember”, that was the two sentence hook, with a little bit more saying stuff with buy links to the development stores.

Of the ads I ran, for about two or three days, I was quite aggressive with the spend so I could get the message out as quickly as possible, I spent \$734 and sold 864 worth of that book.

Now, what I’m not taking into account, there are other books. There are people who would also have bought the first book, they may have bought the box set, some people would buy much more than just that book. Taking that out of the equation for now, the return investment was 17% so, decent, and sold 209 copies over the course of that two or three days so, pretty effective.

Then at the same time, Bookbub obviously had a very similar ads platform to Facebook. We’ve spoken to Bookbub before, we’d probably speak to them again quite soon. Might maybe have a chat with them at London for the book fair.

Their ads platform is becoming more mature now so, I wanted to run more ads there and I haven’t run any for a little while. I ran about 10 different campaigns, targeting authors quite like me. I’m also targeting myself because, you can send ads to people who Bookbub things like you. That’s obviously going to be the best ad that you can run. From that particular species of the ad, to people like me, I spent \$210, sold \$350 worth of books, which is a return investment of 67%. That’s pretty effective.

Then just looking at one of those other ads, I also targeted Barry Eisler, who was an Indie author, in fact is an Indie author, he was traditionally published, like similar books out of my Milton series, very similar. I spent \$210 on ads to his fans on Bookbub, sold \$332 worth of books, making a

return investment of 58%. That kind of return, we've seen across all of those ads so, I probably spent maybe \$1000 and made around about \$1600 back. Something along those lines and sold several hundred copies to get there.

All of those things together were able to ... and combine with those Amazon ads I mentioned. I ran a few of those. We're able to really make that rank quite sticky and it hovered around the 200ish mark for about a week. It's still is bumping around 500 so, it's still selling really strongly, even two weeks after it was released.

James: That's really interesting that the Bookbub platform has matured and become more effective, do you think, for you?

Mark: Well, the audience is always getting bigger. I haven't run any ads for about six months.

All ads go stale eventually. Facebook has to take longer to go stale because it's a much bigger audience to serve into. Bookbub ads go a little staler a bit faster because obviously their audience is comparatively much smaller than Facebook's. So, I haven't been on that platform for a while. I also got Stewart, my designer, to do a nice image that matched their specifications, had a nice pull quote from one of the reviews, just phenomenal, with an Amazon reviewer. That was quite a hook, and it works. It went really well. Those ads were really effective. I've continued to run those until quite recently so they've done well.

James: You did get some good reviews, which is great and very pleasing for you. Stewart's cover was great. There was a hint of Freddie Mercury about it.

Mark: Yeah, Several people have said that.

James: It occurred to me straight away when I saw it, as well. I don't know if ... I haven't read the book, I should confess.

Has Milton bulked up a little bit? Was that part of the imagery? He looks like it a little bit. Bulkier than he was before?

Mark: No. Generally covers don't reflect that kind of granular detail. So no, not really.

James: Describe in granular detail for the YouTuber.

Mark: And for listeners, James. I think I may need to get binoculars because I think he's flexing his muscles. Put the guns away James.

James: Put the boys away.

Mark: I'll finish with sales in a minute. A couple of things are worth mentioning. A couple of learnings on this.

The error I referred to with Kobo and pre-orders, this was a complete, well, an embarrassing faux pas that was rescued by Mark Lefebvre and all the lovely guys over there.

I put up a sample. When you do a pre-order, you need to have a little sample up so people can have a look. I put up the first chapter, which was pretty much locked down quite a long way before the rest of the book.

Of course, I forgot to change the sample and when it went live at the full price, people were buying the first chapter. I started to get emails from people saying, "I can't believe it. I've only bought the first chapter, how can I get the rest of the book?". No one was really angry, they were just a bit perplexed as to why they hadn't ... They were like, "I love the first chapter, I want to read the rest of it."

James: That was a short book.

Mark: Yeah. Kobo were amazing. I spoke to Marcus and Lyle. "I think I made a bit of an error. I wonder if there's anything you can do to help me?", and I think I sold about 100 copies so 100 readers had a "not satisfactory buying experience", which makes me look bad. It also makes Kobo look bad and it's through no fault of theirs whatsoever.

So, I said to Mark, "I've changed it now. The new file, the correct full file is live. Do you automatically replace the file?", and I don't think they do. What Mark did with one of their customer service guys, who was wonderful, she basically reached out to all of the people and said, "Look, the author's made a mistake,". I didn't see the email but I hope that's what they said. "and here's the final version for you to enjoy.". So, kudos to the Mark and the guys in Toronto. That was extremely helpful.

James: I'm gonna guess, you know Mark, we've met Mark, but I'm gonna guess that if you're in that position, Kobo is a very helpful organization and very keen to sort errors. A very honest mistake, probably easier to deal with Kobo and Bookbub than it is with Amazon, which is a bit more of a beast to get through to.

Mark: Also the numbers would have been much, much bigger, which we'll talk about in a minute. So that would have been a real problem. I did so much, there was so much stuff going on there that it was just a case of, "I just dropped the ball on that one". One of those things where it was ... we managed to pick it up quite quickly so, no problems there.

James: Okay. We should say, for people listening with keen ears, this is a cohabited building. There are some noises off and we've had a bath being run earlier but, we're gradually getting there. We'll soundproof this place eventually. Yeah, just to explain those.

So, that's your launch advertising.

Mark: One more error.

James: Another error, Mark?

Mark: Another error, yeah. I knew this was probably gonna happen at some point. If you're using Amazon affiliate links, which is what I do for lots of different reasons. Not for me to make money but to track. So I can work out how effective ads are. Don't put them in emails.

I've known for ages this is an issue and generally I don't do that. Again, it slipped my mind this time. So, I put the affiliate links in the emails. You're only really supposed to use them on websites.

James: This is a Terms of Service issue, is it?

Mark: Yeah.

James: There's no other reason for not doing it.

Mark: No, it's just against their TOS. I put the links out and lots of traffic is being generated. So, somewhere at Amazon associates HQ, it would have been triggered that there's a lot of activity coming in on these links and they investigated. I got an email saying, "We've think you're in breach of your affiliates Terms of Service. We think the reason is, you're using links in emails."

It's an automated email coming out, and it basically gave me five days to correct, basically put the house in order. You have to come back and say, "I think I fixed it.", and if you haven't, they'll shut the account down after five days. Touch wood, that's been fixed now. That's one thing, I suspect quite a lot of authors still use affiliate links in their emails. Again, I have done before and this is the first time I've been pulled out.

James: Your list is bigger now so it's going to trigger more.

Mark: It is bigger but, I think there's a risk this can happen to anybody. It's worth just bearing in mind as you do launches.

James: Where do you stand? Where do people stand now on the affiliate links and Facebook ads?

Mark: It's clearly in breach. I've seen a couple. Two or three people have done that and reported that they've had their accounts closed down. I think it's fairly obviously a breach.

On the other other hand though, I've seen hundreds of people who do still do that. The safest way, the way to be absolutely sure you're complying with their Term of Service, is that link to a landing page from the ad and then link up to the relevant store.

James: So, as long as your affiliate link is on webpage that you own, your dot com, then you're very firmly within the TOS of using the affiliate links?

Mark: Yeah.

James: Okay so, that's the appetizing mistakes and all. What's in all, you always get what's in all with SPF, as a learning for all of us. Those are a lot of work. A lot of money to get those sales but they really are the tip of the iceberg in terms of launch. They're very targeted sales in a short period of time to try and get visibility.

Actually, most of your sales come from as a result of that, don't they? Of that visibility?

Mark: Yeah. Sales will be generated ..typically the first 30 days tend to be the best. That's their notorious 30 day cliff where, after that, you tend to find

books become a little less sticky. There are ways that you can mitigate that but, I've been pushing it quite harder than a lot of Facebook stuff so, regular Facebook messages, I've posted into my groups, some on my page with good news about the rank, about the sales, all of that kind of stuff.

I'm getting loads and loads of really positive feedback. The goal being reached being high because Facebook knows that they are relevant. My fans are responding, they're commenting, they're liking, they're loving them, all that kind of stuff, so it gets seen by many more people. I've also done some Facebook live stuff which has again, really big organic reach right now.

So, I've been really pushing hard. It has been worth it. We'll get to in terms of, I don't mind telling everyone how it's done.

James: Yeah. If you're happy to share that, I think it's absolutely fascinating to those of us at the beginning of our career, to understand what the financial impact can be of getting it right and being a successful Indie writer.

Mark: Yeah. I look at all the stores. The only one I won't do is Google. I have eyes on Google and it has sold a few on Google but I haven't had time to grab those numbers this morning. The sales on Amazon, across all stores, Amazon is 7,407 copies sold so far, which has brought in \$23,186.51. So, pretty good.

Apple, as I said, has been a very strong performer this time. Apple is probably about 25% of my sales across the board now so, I'm definitely making a lot of progress with those guys. We've had 1,280 sales, making \$4,471.04.

Kobo, 319. Of course the first 100 were not optimal but we fixed that and sold over 300 on Kobo, bringing in \$1,114.26. Barnes & Noble, 235 sales, bringing in just a touch over \$800. The grand total is, and I suspect that

actually is ticked up by now because it's still selling about \$1000 a day at the moment, is \$29,584. That's in just over a week so, that's pretty-

James: That's more than another hot tub, isn't it?

Mark: I could have a fleet of hot tubs with that.

James: It's actually a swimming pool.

What was the advertising spend? Did you note that in total?

Mark: Yes, that's about \$2000.

James: Okay. That's 28 odd thousand dollar profit there. Everyone who bought that book, who's not already a fan, and there will be a percentage in there, who, for them, this is their first Milton book, then there's a trickle back effect there as well of course.

Mark: Yep. I've seen them. I'm using Book Report now to make better sense of the KDP dashboard. Highly recommend that. If you guys haven't seen that yet, it's fabulous.

James: Well, it's one for the white board, isn't it? I think the whole analysis and tracking area is complicated, and Book Reports in itself is a brilliant tool and I've seen your emails flying around about that. We'll get the guy on in the future.

Mark: He's been in touch. He wants to come on a podcast.

James: Let's get Liam.

Let's talk about tracking and how best you do that. In addition to what you get in terms of the dashboard.

Mark: To answer the point, I have seen sales increase across the board. The first book has sold more, quite a bit more actually, since Black Out came out because, people would have seen book 10. They may not have bought book 10, or maybe they did but, they've been interested enough to go back and read book one. Even though Black Out is effective as a stand alone, you don't need to have read the other books. And, the box set sales have gone up.

This month already has been the best month I've had for about six months. That is a really good take away. We can talk about advertising until we're blue in the face and in fact, sometimes we do until we're blue in the face. This is a terrible cliché but it's really true. The best form of marketing is just to write another book. It's another way for you to be discovered, you can sell to your list, you'll get sales, Amazon and the other platforms will then market widely if you're selling. It's a really great way to invigorate your back risk is to just to put another one out.

James: Well fantastic. Congratulations Mark.

What are your writing plans for the rest of the year?

Mark: I've got another book out in April, which has already been finished and has been sitting on the shelf for about six months. That's an Amazon Thomas of Mercer book.

James: Isabella Rose.

Mark: Yep, Isabella and, that's early April. I'm about 20,000 words into the next Milton book which is going to be called either, "The Finest" or "The Witness". It's in Brooklyn so that's coming along really well. I'm very pleased with that. That will certainly be finished in the next ... I'd like to promise that in May if I can.

There'll be at least one more Milton book and then possibly one after that and possibly a new police procedural I've got boiling away at the moment. James: So, if you replicate those launches, forgetting back sales and forgetting ongoing sales, you're talking about knocking on 200,000 pounds of income from those five or six launches? That's \$260,000, quarter of a million dollars a year just from those launches. That is a tidy sum. Now, we should mention, in terms of launches, that one of our alumni, Adam Croft has had a spectacular launch as well. He's had one of his books published by, I always want to call them Proctor&Gamble, but they are Thomas and Mercer, which is the Amazon's own imprints.

Adam was working hard, working his craft, eight or nine books out but, it was really stumbling across your teachings on Facebook advertising that accelerated his career, really lit the blue touch paper and he had an amazing success with Her Last Tomorrow, his previous book. Got a deal with Amazon for that imprint and found himself happily retweeting the screen grabs of him being #1 in the UK store and #1 in the U.S. store at the same time a couple weeks ago. So, we want to say a hearty, "Congratulations", to Adam for that and it's a spectacular result for him and it's so pleasing to see one of our little students.

Mark: That sounds patronizing doesn't it?

James: Also, we should probably say, "Congratulations" to Adam because he's become a dad for the second time? No, for the first time, and he's called the child?

Mark: Mark.

James: James.

Mark: You're kidding me?

James: He's called the child James because I think I just had that impression on him. I think it's probably after an uncle but yeah, congratulations Adam. Great news and we love sharing your success with you.

Good, well that was a great breakdown of the launch. Really interesting. You seem to have survived it as well. It was hard work for you and obviously you had a couple of days when you realized you had a couple of-

Mark: Facepalm moments.

James: Facepalm moments, but you got over those and yeah, well done.

Mark: Thank you very much. It's great fun. It's always amazing. I love launching. It's so much fun to see the reviews come in. Especially when they've just been so enthusiastic this time. It's really flattering. And to see so many people buying the book, it puts all that hard work, which actually isn't really hard work, it's telling stories. It's a real high point to see the book out there.

James: Yeah, and it's a team effort. People like Stuart and all the various people, like Mark Lefebvre... all the people who've helped you at various points in that and building up a team around you of fellow professionals is an important part of it.

You can watch every episode of the "Self Publishing Formula" podcast on YouTube. You can hear every one in audio from our website at selfpublishingformula.com. You can email us at podcast@selfpublishingformula.com.

We are working on something exciting, which we're going to announce in the next few weeks, which will be an opportunity to have a one stop place for all the knowledge we've disseminated through the first 50 odd podcasts. That's an announcement coming up in the next few weeks.

We've got some good guests coming up as well. I'm going to do an interview tomorrow about a guy who has had incredible success. I believe the kid's called, "Killing It With Short Stories". And I mean killing it. He's raking in four figures a month, just publishing his short stories. We're gonna find out how he did that, we're gonna talk about Dragon Dictation in the next few weeks.

Mark: Who else are we interviewing tomorrow?

James: Tomorrow we are going to a well-known online retailer.

Mark: Worlds largest river?

James: The worlds longest river. Yeah, we're going to go see Amazon tomorrow and talk to the horse's mouth at the center of this industry, you and I in London. Great. Thank you very much indeed for listening, it's always a pleasure, never a chore. And we'll speak to you next week.

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