

EPISODE 56: MASTERCLASS – AMAZON ADS – WITH MARK DAWSON

Speaker 1: 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: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark. I hope you've had a good week, hope you had a good week writing and selling, that's Mark, or avoiding writing and not selling because you haven't written anything, and that's me, hello. It's the two sides of being a writer, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: All neatly encapsulated in one podcast.

James Blatch: We should call this the Right and Wrong Show. Get it?

Mark Dawson: I do. You're very sharp this morning, James.

James Blatch: I should be a writer. Yes, no, I am getting on with it. Actually, the reason that neither of us have been doing any writing this week, we are incredibly busy. We are on the cusp of launching Facebook Ads for Authors for the fourth time, it's been rebranded, actually been renamed. We're calling it Ads for Authors because the course now encompasses all the paid advertising platforms that you should know about in detail, and it's been rebranded in its look as well, Mark, hasn't it? We're very excited about the look of the course, it looks beautiful.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, we do. We've spent quite a bit of money hiring a designer who's very well-known in the UK for working with some big brands, people like Green & Black's Chocolate and other similar, I think

Wagamamas as well, people like that. She's basically worked on our slides, our design, our image.

Also, what we're doing just to give people an idea of how seriously we treat the quality of the product that we're putting out, what we're doing at the moment is I'm re-voicing all of the sessions, because as you say, we've released this four times now, we've gradually added new content to the course every time we've released it.

That's meant that some of the early recordings are, say, two years old, and others would be 12 months old, 18 months old. The difference between them is obvious, and I'm not happy with putting out a product like that that just doesn't sound right.

So we're actually getting all of the transcripts done, and I'm going to sit down and revoice them over the next couple of days. That's probably 15 or 20 hours worth of me talking into a microphone. But I think it's important so that new students, and of course old students too, because they'll get all of this at the same time. It's just the most premium experience, and the most satisfactory experience that you can get out there in this particular kind of field.

James Blatch: That's our attention to detail. We have quite a team who've grown up, we've got people working in California and Canada, in southern England and quite close to me, about 40 miles away from me is Catherine who's currently editing the scripts for Mark ahead of him reading them, and then I get the voice files and then I'll re-edit the video files with the new voice on it, which is difficult and time-consuming and I may end up outsourcing.

If you are a video editor in the Cambridge area, get in touch, there's probably some work for you.

I want to mention two other things about the course. We are going to talk about the big reveal in the course today, which is we are adding a module on AMS ads. This is the Amazon's in-house advertising, paid advertising platform, which was launched just a few months ago.

Mark was on the beta team for that. He has got completely into this in the way that Mark does, so there's nothing he doesn't know. You've got a lot of money spent on the platform now Mark in terms of results, and we're going to go through everything you need to know about AMS ads. Obviously not everything you need to know in instructional detail, because that would be the course. But you're going to get great value out of this podcast with that. That wasn't a sales pitch, just obviously in a course module you can get into the nitty-gritty of how to do things. But we're going to go through the platform in the podcast.

I'm going to mention briefly Twitter ads as well. Now, when the Twitter ads platform, we first started using it, people who've done the Twitter module that came out in the Ads for Authors course will know that you have to work hard to get Twitter ads working for you. You can do it, but there's particular ways and we went into those techniques and it was a very, very precise use of the platform. You ignored 85% of it and you just used the lead cards to cut down on the user journey, and you use them in a particular way and you use your audience in a particular way. In those circumstances, if you've got your ducks in a row and a bit of pelt as well, bit of luck, you got good results. You got a conversion rate that was going to work for you.

Recently, Twitter took away the lead cards. In that single move, it has suddenly made it in my view, impossible for authors to get any kind of proper value, a reasonable rate out of Twitter ads.

I've put some notes out on the forums asking other people how they're getting on. The first few people who've come back have said exactly the same as my instinct was, that they can't make money on Twitter ads anymore as it stands.

Our advice is probably going to be in the future, for at the moment at least for Twitter ads platform not to be a place to go to for authors. Twitter organic growth however is definitely something that you can do and something you should be doing.

What we have done, bit of a pivot with the Ads for Authors course, there's going to be a bonus module on the detail of how to grow your Twitter author account organically without spending money, so we can reveal that today as well and that's going to come along in the next few weeks, so we're excited about that.

You'll remember Ian Sutherland who was on the podcast a little while back who's the guru in this area, written a book on the subject, he is going to be our guest author for that module, so we're very excited to announce that and I want to thank Ian for coming onboard with that.

Everyone likes to be able to do something for free, takes a bit of work and know-how, doesn't it Mark, but not everything in our course means that you're going to need an upfront amount of money to get going on it, Twitter organic growth is free.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. There's plenty of ways to do that and AMS ads don't need to be expensive either. There's lots of good value to be had.

James Blatch: Now, before we get on to the meat of today's podcast, which is the AMS ads, let's talk about our vault, which is something you can download. We know that there's been a lot of good stuff in the podcasts over the last year, hours and hours of it is there, but to find it you kind of have to listen to everything, it's a rather linear journey, or you can maybe if you're lucky remember which episode is of interest to you.

What we've done is we've put everything together into an e-book. The transcripts, all the relevant transcripts have gone into an e-book, which is searchable. For instance, if you did for instance want to start focusing on your Twitter platform, you can search on Twitter and go and find the

episodes where we've mentioned that and in particular the one with Ian Sutherland where he goes into great detail about how to do that. AMS ads obviously is going to come up, Facebook Ads and so on, whatever particular subject you want, all the authors you want to listen to and read their interviews.

That's going to be a very, very useful, incredibly useful e-book we think to people, and you can get it absolutely free. Just simply visit this URL, selfpublishingformula.com/vault. V-A-U-L-T. It's being put together at the moment so if you don't get it immediately you'll get a holding email telling you it's coming in the next few days. I say selfpublishingformula.com, we've had a week of it, haven't we Mark? In the midst of everything else. I've learnt a lot.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, site going down twice.

James Blatch: Our site's gone down. I want to say thank you to a guy called Mike who I've never met, we're going to meet him this week in the London Book Fair. Mike was up until three something in the morning. I think the last email I saw from him was about three twenty in the morning, he got our site back online, so he's done a great job, Stuart and Mike over there in east of England.

But yeah, all the things that we all have to deal with, whether you're an author running a small business, you're running a small business, and I think this is one area where it's a very disparate area. Doesn't matter who you are, you need a certain amount of know-how about how websites work, even just to get people to do the right thing for you, it's actually quite a difficult area to navigate.

The 101 course goes into quite a lot of detail on this and some of the nitty-gritty stuff, but that's definitely something we should come back to on the podcast I think, get somebody on who can just speak plain English to us

and explain to us what hosting is and what we should be looking for and so on.

Mark Dawson: It's been a stressful, but anyway we're moving now.

James Blatch: It has. John Dyer's lying down in a dark room as we speak. Okay, right.

Mark, are you ready for AMS ads?

Mark Dawson: I'm ready, bring it on.

James Blatch: You're ready, okay, so AMS ads. I guess this was an inevitability, I'm not sure how many people predicted it, that Amazon would sit there and they see people putting a lot of money into platforms like Facebook to run adverts to drive people to Amazon.

But actually, you've made it clear right from the beginning, and a lot of the Facebook Ads for Authors course at the beginning talks about how to optimize the way that you present your book to Amazon and the way you use your launch et cetera to get Amazon's own algorithms working for you, and that can be very powerful.

Amazon are sitting there knowing that they've got good algorithms, knowing that when they push a book, it's very, very useful for you and can really be very valuable. I suppose the logical step for them was to monetize that and say, "Look, okay, not everyone's going to hit our algorithm so everyone's going to get into the bestseller list, but if you want to give yourself a push, here's how you do it," and the AMS platform was born.

Mark Dawson: It was. It was born a couple of years ago. It was originally just something that people who were in Select could get involved with. I think I was in Select when it launched and I did try it and was really disappointed with the results and I basically put a few ads up and then ignored them,

because they weren't spending any money and they weren't selling any books.

I quickly moved away from there, went to Facebook and the other platforms that I use for advertising. But then about October or November last year we got a message in one of our Facebook groups from someone who said that I don't know if you know this, but Amazon ads are now available for any books regardless of whether they're in Select or not. That wasn't announced at that point, it was something that they'd changed. When I actually contacted Amazon to speak to them about whether that was true, and they said, "That's not true." Then they came back to me and said, "Oh yeah, it is true." We got slightly ahead of the curve there.

But as soon as I noticed that, I immediately started to test with the books, my Milton series is the best known one, that's everywhere, but I wanted to try and test those books on Amazon with these new ads. I've been running ads, quite a lot of ads actually over the period since it's been open to me, and I am much more encouraged by the success of those ads.

It's very different from how it was before in bottom line terms. I'm actually selling books and making a pretty good profit on the spend that I'm putting in. We can go through what the ads are, the options available, some tips for optimizing them, making them work, and definitely give listeners and viewers a really good idea about how they can start to run these ads for themselves.

James Blatch: Let's start with what they are. Where do they appear?

Mark Dawson: They obviously appear on Amazon, which is a very good thing in itself. Because the thing with Facebook Ads or Google Ads, YouTube videos, Twitter, whatever it is, you're directing traffic to the place where the books will be bought. It's sending traffic to, it doesn't have to be Amazon, it could be Amazon, Kobo, I don't know, whatever your retailer is.

There is an extra stage that you've got to put potential customers through before they can actually buy your book. Then also on top of that, if you think about platforms like YouTube, people are there to watch videos, Facebook, they're there to hang out with their friends. They're not necessarily on either of those platforms, in fact any platform including Google, they're not necessarily there to make a purchase immediately.

The difference with Amazon, when you're on Amazon you are probably wanting to buy something, you're looking to buy something. Then coupling to that is the fact that you can buy something with a click. The path to purchase is much, much shorter, and people are in the mood to make a purchase. If you can start to get ads working on a platform like that, it stands to reason that everything else being even, they should perform quite strongly.

There are two particular kinds of ads that we'll talk about, and we'll talk about one more than the others because I'm having better success with one of them.

You've got product display ads and sponsored keyword ads.

Looking at them individually, the product display ads, they appear on the product pages right beneath the buy button. If you just visualize your Amazon product page right now, the buy button is over on the right-hand side, and then beneath that will be a little tiny piece of real estate that you can have an ad in there, so there's that.

You can also get those ads to appear on Kindle lock screens. If you pick up your Kindle and it's been on your bedside table overnight and you open it up, sometimes you'll be presented with an ad there, and they can be ads that you've bought through product display, so that's that.

The other one, and this is the one I'm having more success with so we'll spend longer on these, they're called sponsored keyword ads.

The difference with these is that first of all, with product display ads, you're targeting ASINs, so Amazon's standard identifying number. You're targeting other books and you want to get your book on those pages. For me, I might be targeting James Patterson's new book or Terry Hayes's new book, and I'll be using those ASINs to target my ads.

With the sponsored keyword ads, you're actually targeting the keywords that people are searching for in the Amazon search box. Say I Am Pilgrim, that's a well-known book from last year that I will get some mileage out of advertising with that, my keyword will be I Am Pilgrim. If people search that, then if I win the auction, my books will appear in the search results. They can also appear on the product pages as well. That's kind of the fundamental differences between the two.

James Blatch: Is it clear to the Amazon browser that these are adverts? Because Amazon does a lot of their algorithm pushing, don't they?

Mark Dawson: They do. They're listed as sponsored. If you look on the sales ads, the keyword ads, they'll be down towards the bottom of the page of ads, usually the last couple of lines and it will say sponsored. I think that's the case also for the product display ads.

James Blatch: We've got the product display and sponsored keyword are the two primary different ads.

Mark Dawson: Yes, correct. That's right. I'm focusing on the latter. I've done lots of testing on product display ads with some success. I've spoken to another author called Brian Meeks, he was listening I think to this show and he's a data analyst by profession so he's a really good person to speak to. He's also done loads and loads of testing on these ads, and he conversely has more success with product display ads. It's definitely worth testing both. I can only speak to my own, the more successful of the two that I've done, and that would be the sponsored keyword ads, so that's what we'll focus on.

To get into the ads, the first thing you need to do is go to your KDP dashboard and then there's two ways you can get into them for the first time. If you go over to the books page, there will be on the right-hand side where you've got things like the price, the detail, all of that stuff, there'll be one that says promote and advertise. You can get into them that way to advertise the individual book.

You can also go onto your dashboard with your sales data, your reports, and I think the bottom left of the options above the sales graph is advertising, so you can click in there as well. You go in through your normal Amazon account, it's really simple, straightforward to start running these ads. You can get them running in minimal time.

Another good thing is you don't actually need visual assets, because unlike Facebook where you do need an image that's tailored to sell books, in this case it's going to be using your book cover. You don't need to worry about engaging a designer. All you're going to need to do is work on the targeting and then to work on the sales copy.

James Blatch: That happens automatically, does it? It just brings in your cover because you've told it what product it is?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it does. You'll be advertising, you tell it what you want to advertise. For me, it will either be a box set, I'm also having success with single books, which is something that's more difficult on Facebook, but it does seem to be working on Amazon right now. You put all of that in there and it automatically picks the product up and then you just need to work on the copy. It's quite simple.

Let's think about those sponsored ads. Well actually let's just think about the benefits of advertising generally, because there's more than the obvious one, being that you're going to sell books, that's a obvious benefit. If you're selling enough to make more revenue, then the cost of advertising, that's obviously a good thing.

There are other benefits as well. Every book you sell is going to increase your rank. That will increase your organic sales as well. Amazon will in the same way that any kind of advertising will raise the rank of a book. If you start to sell more, Amazon on the other side of its business will notice and you'll start to get that kind of organic algorithmic push that you would normally see as your book rises up the charts. Anything you do to stimulate that is a good thing and these ads will do that.

But the other thing about these ads, and no one really picks this up, I think it's a really, really valuable benefit, is that you only pay for clicks. You set a bid that you're prepared to pay for a specific click, and if you get a click, let's say you win the auction for that click at 25 cents, that would be what you bid.

But in order to get clicks, your ad needs to be served to get impressions, and you don't pay for those impressions. If you have no clicks, you're still getting the benefit of your brand being broadcast quite widely on Amazon, which is an extremely valuable place to be advertising.

Since I've been running these ads more aggressively since, let's say late October last year, for the grand ... I mean, we'll go through some numbers as well. I've spent just short of two thousand dollars. I'd love to spend 200 thousand dollars, but we'll get into scaling which is an issue in itself in a minute.

But I've spent two thousand dollars and I've had 16 million impressions on Amazon. If you just think about that from kind of a traditional advertising viewpoint and how much it might cost to get your product broadcast that widely to a specific and relevant audience on a place like Amazon, it would cost a hell of a lot more than two thousand dollars. That's a really valuable benefit.

Everyone should be doing this, even if the ads aren't working and you're not selling enough books, you're getting a massive benefit from that exposure.

James Blatch: Well, that takes us back doesn't it to the seven touches, the whole philosophy of advertising that people don't see an advert and buy a product immediately, it starts to seep in after a while, they become familiar with the imagery and the brand and then they'll make a purchase down the line.

That's why each one of those impressions, which as you say, you don't pay for, are actually of great value to you.

Mark Dawson: Yep, it's very valuable.

Just in terms of getting on to the numbers, I've spent one thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight dollars so far. That's brought in a profit of two thousand six hundred and ninety-five dollars, which is a return on investment of about 42%, so that's really healthy.

A 0% return would be acceptable, break even, because that doesn't take into account things like readthrough. It doesn't take into account Kindle Unlimited reads, it doesn't take into account audiobook purchases as well. That's kind of the base, so it's actually likely that that return is probably up towards 60 or 70% when all of those are added in, which is a fabulous return. You know, they are working, there's no two ways about it, they are working, it's just optimizing them is the challenge right now.

James Blatch: Is that your total spend, is it two grand so far?

Mark Dawson: Yep. That's the spend.

James Blatch: For you, in terms of spend on a platform, that's quite a low rate, and you mentioned scaling. This is something you actually mentioned to Amazon themselves isn't it, when we dropped in there last week.

Do you want to touch on scaling now?

Mark Dawson: Actually I reached out to Amazon to put me in touch with the AMS team, so I've had quite a long conversation with quite a senior member of the team in Seattle. We're doing some work to optimize my ads, and obviously as that work gets done I'll pass any good information on to the community as well.

But yeah, scaling is the issue. It's difficult to get Amazon to spend the budget. I think if I calculate how much I've told Amazon I'm prepared to spend on these ads, I mean some of them are up to a thousand dollars a day, others are, say, five hundred dollars to a hundred dollars. The actual exposure were a switch to be flicked somewhere in Seattle and those were all spent, I would probably be looking at 30 or 40 grand in a day were that to happen.

Now, obviously I'm monitoring those ads, and it is quite easy to do that. I don't want that to happen without me knowing about it obviously, so I'm monitoring them every day and it's easy to keep on top of that. But at the moment I probably spend about 50 or 60 dollars a day on these ads and maybe make back a hundred.

Obviously, that's great, but I would much rather spend five thousand dollars a day and make back seven thousand. I'm selling a ton more books like that, which all the other benefits would come into play. But that is the issue, it's getting them to scale. I mean, we can kind of jump around there. I've got some suggestions on how to do that.

I suppose there are two ways really. Amazon is going to, in the same way that Facebook does, it rewards relevance, trying to say that without getting my words sounding like Jonathan Ross. Reward relevance.

If you have a campaign that's particularly relevant, so the keywords are in alignment with what the people are searching for, it's likely that your ads will be shown more. That, therefore, means it's likely that you'll get more clicks, which means that you'll spend more of your budget.

I'm always trying to optimize my ads to make that more relevant.

But the other way to do it, and it's easy to illustrate this with an example. If your aim is to spend a hundred dollars a day on your Amazon ads, there are a couple of ways to do it.

You could have 10 ads and you want them to spend 10 dollars a day. Now that's going to be quite difficult. Most ads won't spend that much every day.

The other way to do it is a brute force method, is to have a hundred ads that each spend one dollar a day, and that is possible. That has been the way I have increased my ad spend. I'm actually running at the moment 202 different campaigns. It's quite easy to copy and replicate them, just tweak a few details, but that has been successful.

James Blatch: Identical campaigns?

Mark Dawson: Not identical, the targeting will be different. I'm targeting different keywords. Sometimes I might have a suite of, say, a thousand keywords in one ad and I'll run different products into those keywords. I might have a box set, a single book.

Or the other way around is to say I'm advertising the box set and I'm changing the keywords every time, so I'll be advertising to keywords that I

think are going to be being used by people who like James Patterson's books, searching for his books or Vince Flynn or Baldacci, all that kind of stuff. It's a combination of all of those different things. But by building up that big armory of ads, that's been the way that I've most successfully spent more money.

It is kind of weird, I said to Amazon that I want to spend more money. I've never had a problem with Amazon taking my money before. Normally it's quite the opposite, it's not that I don't want to spend too much. But that is the challenge right now.

I think the reason it is difficult is because Amazon doesn't want to flood their platform with irrelevant ads. They want the experience to be pleasant for their customers, which is in the same way that Facebook won't show irrelevant ads because they don't want to bombard their users with ads that have nothing to do with them, so there is that. I think those two factors are the key things that you need to bear in mind as you try to scale these ads up.

James Blatch: It's a relatively new platform and not everyone is going to be as savvy at targeting as you and our listeners. We know that because occasionally we have a laugh when we see an advert on our Facebook timeline. I think you saw one the other day from a traditional publisher, and it was targeting people who like e-books.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that was a face palm moment.

James Blatch: A pretty broad target.

Mark Dawson: If only there was a course they could take to learn about that, I don't know.

James Blatch: If only, yeah. Where would that be? Look, before we go on I just want to go back to the product ads because I'm quite curious as to why you're not favoring these so much at the moment.

What's your theory about why the product ads aren't working as well?

Mark Dawson: I have one idea. It could be those ads appear as I said mainly just below the buy button. If you think about a customer journey, let's say I'm searching for the new James Blatch novel when that finally sees the light of day.

If I'm on the page for the novel, I've probably already decided or I'm close to deciding that I want to buy it. To see the ad just below the buy button, you've got to have an incredibly compelling ad at that stage to change someone's mind. I think when they reach that stage, they're hovering the cursor over the buy button, they've pretty much decided that that is the book they want to buy. They're not then going to reverse and start to reassess that decision then choose something else.

The sponsored keyword ads appear slightly earlier in that customer journey. They're in the search results, people may just be browsing. They've probably got an inclination towards, say, James Blatch, who hasn't got an inclination towards James Blatch? But let's just say that they've decided that they want to read that book, but they haven't made their mind up to quite the extent that they would have once they've actually reached the product page. That's my theory right now.

James Blatch: I think that sort of makes sense to the buyer's journey. It's quite late in the process isn't it to suddenly get them to pivot and buy something else.

We mentioned scaling and that was a good little bit of detail for people potentially to get around the problem of Amazon not taking your money. What are the other issues that you've discovered in your work so far?

Mark Dawson: Finding the keywords is a challenge. Amazon allows you to have up to a thousand keywords in each ad, and some of mine do have that many, others will have 50 or a hundred, but I tend to go bigger rather than smaller.

Getting those keywords researched is challenging. But there are some ways that you can short circuit that, and this is by applying learnings from Google CPC campaigns.

Google have been doing this for 15, 20 years now, so there's lots of things that we can learn from people who are advertising through that platform that we can apply to Amazon.

But starting on Amazon first of all, the easiest place is to look, if you're targeting other authors, then a good place to start is to look on your also boughts on your author page. For me, go to your author page and you'll see Vince Flynn, Child, Baldacci, Patterson, all those kinds of guys.

So you can start and dig those out, put them onto a spreadsheet and then you can start to research them. Click on them, go to their author page and find out which other authors reader's buy who also buy those people, and you can continue to build those audiences up that way.

You can use a tool like yasiv.com, so it's Y-A-S-I-V. That will, in a visual form, demonstrate, if you type in a product it will then nest out, or like a spider's web it will connect other books that other readers have bought. It's quite a good way to visualize what also boughts can look like sometimes.

Then there are lots of other tools and I won't mention all of them now, but another good one is the Google AdWords Planner. You'll need a Google AdWords account for that. We don't need any money, you just set the account up, then you find the AdWords Planner. You can type in a phrase like Lee Child and Google will tell you the other phrases that people who search for Lee Child have also used, so kind of connected search terms. Then you can just pull those out as a spreadsheet, dump them into AMS

and then start to run those keywords and see how they perform. That's a pretty good way to get scaled quite quickly.

James Blatch: It's worth remembering that people use Amazon as a search engine. In fact, I think I saw an interview with Elon Musk where he said that the number one search engine in the world for a huge amount of what people search for is Amazon, not Google. People go to Amazon and search.

Mark Dawson: Amazon's the third biggest search engine in the world.

James Blatch: But for some products, for some areas it's number one.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, yeah. The difference between Google and Bing and Yahoo and Amazon is Amazon's got your credit card details and you can buy something with a click. You can't do that quite so easily with Google. That's the reason why these ads are so powerful. You are in exactly the right place where you want to be.

James Blatch: In terms of search, we say keywords, but actually often a better way to think of it I think is search terms.

Mark Dawson: Key phrases.

James Blatch: Key phrases and search terms, certainly in YouTube actually typing in, "How do you self-publish your novel?" is quite a good "keyword" for you to have. It's a complete phrase but it matches very closely what people have gone on there to do, and then hopefully they find us as a result of that.

I think that probably is the same on all the platforms, doesn't have to be individual words as some people seem to think.

You've got to find your keywords and you've got some ways around that. I mean, that's applicable obviously to other platforms as well.

What are your tips then to forge ahead and make these work?

Mark Dawson: I've touched on a few best practice points, and we'll go into massive more detail in the course as well. But just for the purpose of this podcast some things that people should bear in mind.

If you're going to be running loads and loads of different campaigns, you've got to get your naming convention set up at the start so that it's easy for you to search through the results later when you want to find out how things are working.

I would say a really good convention right now is to ... first of all in the naming box it gives you quite a few characters to play with, is to say first of all what you're advertising. For me it could be box set one, or it could be Cleaner or Driver being the names of books.

Then I would say have a little dash to separate the two pieces of information, and then mention your targeting. It could be Vince Flynn or it could be hundred best thrillers, that kind of information so that you know what the targeting was for it without having to go into the ad to actually find it yourself.

Then another piece of useful information is to just set out what your bid was per click at the end of that string, so another dash and then it might be 25 cents, or it could be a dollar or 75 cents, whatever it was. Those three pieces of information are the ones that you would need most regularly, so it makes sense to have those available in an easy to digest fashion rather than having to dig into the actual information itself to find that out. That's a fairly good place to start.

The image of your ad as I've said, that's going to be your book cover so you need to make sure that, and this is not something that's specific just to ads, this is something that you should've mastered anyway, it needs to look great in a thumbnail because it's going to be a smaller image than would be the case on your product page, so make sure that you check it on a thumbnail, that it looks good.

James Blatch: It's also worth remembering to check what it looks like in black and white and on the Kindle for potentially placing the advert there. Something I showed people in the 101 course, within Vellum you can do that very nicely. In Vellum, you can see what it's going to look like on the front page of a Kindle, because that could be a very important place that people go to or have it presented to them.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely. Definitely a good tip. The destination is going to be, so people click on the ads, they're going to go to your product page, though again this is all standard stuff, but you need to make sure that that page is perfect.

No typos, plenty of reviews, good image, everything made as effective as possible. We go through that in tons and tons of detail in the 101 course, but that's all fairly obvious stuff.

Now the next thing, and this is where you have the most leeway, and that's with your copy. You do have to write some copy. You have a very limited amount of space, it's only 50 or 60 characters, which goes very, very quickly.

Just basic copywriting 101, you need to think about it from the perspective of your potential reader, the potential buyer. Really good standard practice in this is to ask a question, and to engage them personally. Obviously this has been copied ad infinitum now because I started out with this copy on Facebook, but it's, "Do you like X, then you might like Y."

That does work very well and it's working on Amazon right now, I'm still using that kind of formulation some of the time. You can also ask intriguing questions. It could be, I think one I've used is, "How would you catch the most dangerous man in the world?" Something like that, so just a really interesting question that immediately people start to think about, oh, how would I do that.

And then using words like you is quite useful too, so you're immediately posing that question to the person who's reading it specifically. It's much more effective than saying, "Buy James Blatch's new novel right now. It's really good." You know, so you've got to make it more of a two-way process there.

Don't follow the herd. I'd say write something original. Come up with something, use those kinds of principles that spin off something and do it yourself, otherwise you'll get lost amid the noise there. Everyone starts to do the same thing then nothing will work, so I think it's quite useful to come up with your own ideas.

Don't copy your blurb. Even if you've got a really great blurb, I think you need, people are going to be seeing that when they go on to the product page, so you've got to get them something that hooks them so that they do eventually see that. Just copying it verbatim, not the best tactic for me I don't think.

And then obvious things again like use social proof. If you've got a great quote from Lee Child say, then I would definitely be using something like that. If you've got lots and lots of great reviews, I'd probably be using something like that. But just check Amazon's guidelines at the same time, because they are quite specific about what you can and can't say.

You can't make claims about your book that would suggest that it's better than something else, so you couldn't say, "James Blatch's new book is more exciting than Craig Thomas's Firefox." You'd have to come up with

something that hinted at that, but you can't be as explicit as that. If you're using superlative claims, so you need to source them, so if say Lee Child did say that Mark Dawson's new book is great, then I'd have to say that that's from Lee Child. Of course, I would do.

You can't reference review scores, so you can't say, "I've got a hundred five-star reviews on Amazon." They don't like, I don't know why, but they don't allow that.

Then just on what you can and can't use, your image will also be subjected to restrictions that aren't present when you upload the book onto the product page. You can't use threatening images, don't have guns pointing out at the reader, sexually suggestive images can't be used because these are ads, they appear embedded in people's search results for example, so Amazon doesn't want to be upsetting people.

Also, I don't think this has changed, you can't advertise erotica, so that secret book that you've been writing on the side James, you're going to have to find another way to advertise that I'm afraid.

James Blatch: I did have a bit of a laugh during putting together the course, because obviously you go into a lot of instructional detail in these very areas. What the example advert Amazon used for this is a sexually explicit image so don't use this sort of thing, they've changed, I don't know if you've noticed, I've uploaded the new ones in there.

One of them has the strangest arrangement of feet at the end of a bed, and I'm not even sure if it's supposed to be like an in-joke, because it's not a ... anyway. It's not normal, I'll tell you that, so yeah, that's a little treat if you get into our course. Good, okay. Look, we're cracking on on time Mark, how much more have we got?

Mark Dawson: I'll give some quick tips.

It's worth adding a print edition, if you haven't got print yet through CreateSpace or KDP books it's definitely worth doing that. Since I started running these ads my print sales have doubled, so that could only be because of this, so I'm getting tons and tons of prints as well.

One thing that I hadn't done until recently is actually have a print edition of my box set. This is like an 800 page box set, so on a device it's irrelevant how many pages it is. You can do CreateSpace up to that kind of level, so I've got this massive doorstop now, which retails at about I think 15 pounds in the UK, 25 bucks in the States, something along those lines, but I'm getting sales on that now as well, which I've never had before. I think there's loads of traffic, eyeballs coming onto that page through the ads. Some people will see it and will prefer print, so makes sense to have that out there.

James Blatch: There's no reason not to have print now, it's so easy to get it done.

Mark Dawson: Exactly, yeah. When you're testing, so when you're monitoring, the score that Amazon gives you is called the ACOS score, so the average cost of sale. What that is is it's just the amount that you've spent divided by the revenue, provided that you are under 70%, so it's not 100% because you're getting a royalty on the cover price, you're not getting all of it, so you'll get 70% of the cover price.

Provided that your ACOS score is below 70, you're making a profit on that ad. But it's likely because things like KU reads aren't included, readthrough rates aren't included, so if I sell book one I'm likely to sell more books because my data suggests that people read more than just one book once they've read the first one.

Audio's not included either. The true margin is probably up towards, as long as it's like 90%, maybe 100%, I'm still probably making a profit on

those ads when all the other additional factors are added in. There's that to think about as well.

Plenty of things to think about. It's an interesting new area. I've had a lot of fun experimenting with this, and I'm really excited to include, and obviously there'll be tons more in the course itself. You know, there's only so much I can mention in an hour on a podcast.

I'm definitely looking forward to getting that out there for people, because it is I think, if you were to ask me right now what's the most exciting advertising platform for authors as we push into 2017, it would be Amazon right now. It's got loads of potential. Facebook is still amazing, but everyone should be advertising on Amazon, but I think this is something that you also need to add to your armory as an indie author.

James Blatch: Great, okay. Really good, excellent stuff Mark. Thank you very much indeed for that. We've got a couple of things to mention before we sign off. You can hear my laptop is now in full reheat mode. I'm actually getting warm from it, so it's about to break on me. But let's get a couple of these things out. We have an author advertising a webinar coming up, I've got on my notes here.

Mark Dawson: Yes. I think it'd be quite nice wouldn't it if we actually put together our own SPF webinar where we can talk about what's working and what isn't working right now in author advertising. I just realized we haven't actually got a landing page for this setup yet, but we were thinking of the 4th of April as, I think that's a Tuesday, which is the day before the Ads course closes for the fourth time. We'll have the full details later, we'll probably do an email out.

James Blatch: We can do that. Let's say the URL. If we've put selfpublishingformula.com/adsupdate, A-D-S update. We use that. Okay, it'll be on the screen if you're watching on the video version. Selfpublishingformula.com/adsupdate, A-D-S-U-P-D-A-T-E.

Sign up for that and we will go through in more detail where we are with advertising, paid ads and the world of the independent writer.

Okay, we talked about the vault earlier, just mention that URL as well, selfpublishingformula.com/vault to get your e-book of all the good stuff that's come out in these podcasts over the past year or so.

Mark, I was going to ask you, is it possible that you could put together some of your best examples of AMS ads that we could give away?

Mark Dawson: I think what I'll do is I'll grab a good selection of ads that other people are using, and then I'll put some comments with them why I think they're working or not working, how they could be improved, that kind of stuff. We can give that away as the giveaway for this particular episode of the show.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. That will be one more URL for you. That will be selfpublishingformula.com/download56. Download 56, you'll get a selection of ads that are working in AMS so you can get a good idea of which direction you should be going in with that.

We're almost there, we're on the cusp of our launch, our fourth launch for Advertising for Authors. We're getting lots of lovely messages in our Facebook groups, people excited about the launch coming up. I'm excited to reveal this course. It's our most beautiful looking course yet, and it's a high standard that we set ourselves and we worked to, so we're proud of that. It's going to go live on the 22nd of March and that is going to be at 10 p.m. UK time, which is 5 p.m. if you're in New York. What time is that if you're in Los Angeles, Mark?

Mark Dawson: I haven't got the foggiest idea. 2 p.m., there we go, I think it's 2 p.m.

James Blatch: Do you know what, it's 2 p.m. in the afternoon, but I haven't checked when that dreaded period is where America changes its time a week before we do. Do you know what, it's around the blooming 22nd of

March, I think we may even have chosen the weekend of the clocks going back.

Mark Dawson: Excellent.

James Blatch: We always do that. Mark is brilliant at lots of things, but not at telling the time. Can your children tell the time, have you taught them to tell the time?

Mark Dawson: Well, they don't need to know the time in Los Angeles, so we haven't got that far yet. I'm still slightly ahead of them, but it won't be long.

James Blatch: They're millennials, they need to know the time in LA as much as anything else. Okay, brilliant. Thank you so much, so much indeed Mark, that was excellent. We're going to get busy getting everything ready for the launch.

We're recording this just before we go to London Book Fair. It's going out on the Friday of London Book Fair, so if you came to LBF, how brilliant was it to see you, but we'll say a proper thank you in the next couple of weeks, and we've got some good stuff to come in the future. We will put all those URLs up again on the video screen and in the comments if you're watching this live on Facebook, and otherwise we will see you next week.

Speaker 1: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. Visit us at selfpublishingformula.com for more information, show notes and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.