

EPISODE 63: HOW TO START AN INDIE PUBLISHING EMPIRE – WITH MICHAEL ANDERLE

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 along to The Self-Publishing Formula Podcast with Mark and James. Hello, Mark. How are you doing?

Mark Dawson: I'm good, James. How are you?

James Blatch: I'm okay, actually. And we've got a sort of slightly new setup here, we've got a little bit of colored light, little bit of blue behind you, little bit of ...

Mark Dawson: Pink behind you.

James Blatch: It's orange.

Mark Dawson: Oh, it looks pink to me.

James Blatch: It's macho orange, but we can change them.

Mark Dawson: We can, but remember, of course, there are people who are listening to the podcast-

James Blatch: Yes. You literally just said to me, "James, don't go on about the visuals, because most people listen." That was the first thing I did.

Mark Dawson: Yep.

James Blatch: It's difficult though, because I can see all this stuff.

Mark Dawson: It looks very nice, so for those who haven't been to the YouTube channel yet, it's worth a visit, so you can see James and me, and, of course, we're also broadcasting this into the Facebook group and to our Self-Publishing Formula page on Facebook Tuesday nights at 10 o'clock, nine o'clock?

James Blatch: Yeah. 10 o'clock in the UK. We're on British summer time now, so we are GMT plus one. You should be able to work out where you are in the world from that. We won't get into time questions now.

Mark Dawson: Please, no.

James Blatch: A special hello to the people who watch on Facebook Live, and what we try to do on that Tuesday night slot - GMT plus one, 10 o'clock - is we try to be in the comments if we can and answer some questions as they come up. But even if we're not there live, if you drop a question into those comments, we'll get to it as some point, as we always do in our Facebook groups.

Hey, we want to say a congratulations to one of our previous podcast guests, Mel Sherratt, who we actually have a date with coming up to record her again, so we're going to get Mel back and talk to her.

We're going to say congratulations to her, because she's had her book auctioned for a series on British television by a decent production company, as well, a production company that's done The Line of Duty. I don't know how well Line of Duty has traveled around the world. It probably will do at some point, but it's been a very compelling, very well-rated series, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Yes. It is written by Jed Mercurio, unless my memory fails me. She's done very well. I don't remember the title of the book now, but it's *Someone to Watch Over Me*, I think. One of her psychological thrillers has been auctioned, which really is great for Mel, so let's keep our fingers crossed that the money men line up in the right way and they can actually start to get that produced.

James Blatch: Yeah, this is something you know something about, because bubbling away in the background, a couple of 4 or 5,000 miles away in Hollywood is the possibility of seeing one of your characters on the screen.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, strong possibility. I'm still kind of hamstrung by what I can and can't say about this, but believe me if I could say I would because it's really exciting. The people involved now are kind of Hollywood royalty.

One in particular, one producer in particular, is very, very well known. The producers have a series of global blockbusters behind them, and the director is extremely well know. So, there's still loads of things that will almost certainly go wrong, but we've had an offer now to try and get the pilot produced, so we'll see. It will be a TV show for me, not a film, which suits me very well because I tend to watch more TV these days than I do film.

James Blatch: They're not making it for you.

Mark Dawson: They are making it just for me and Mrs. Dawson to watch on a Tuesday night in.

James Blatch: Can you imagine, "Mrs. Dawson, shall we watch this series again? I wonder who wrote this?"

Mark Dawson: I don't like the way you looked at John when you said that. John doesn't look anything like Mrs. Dawson. So, anyway, we'll see.

If it comes off it will be really cool. And one of the things I've said before, I do mean this, is that apart from the fact that it'd be great for my career, which it undoubtedly would, it would also be really cool for the indie movement as a whole, because there haven't been that many indie books that have translated across to screen.

I can think of *The Martian* by Andy Weir, E.L. James' *Fifty Shades* books were all self-published originally, although subsequently bought by a Publishing House and republished. And that's pretty much it, I mean I know Hugh Howey had *Wool* has been auctioned, and that's been sitting around for a while waiting for, I think it's Ridley Scott who's involved with that. It would be really great for indie authors generally to be able to say, look, everything that is available to traditionally published authors is also available for me, and here are some examples of what's been done with indie books.

So, yeah, finger crossed. Obviously I'm being selfish and hope, it's mostly for my benefit, but I think there is a quite useful side benefit for everyone else.

James Blatch: Is the Porsche getting lonely by itself in the garage?

Mark Dawson: It needs a Ferrari next to it, yeah, that's the plan.

James Blatch: We're a couple of those away from our Ferrari racing. Tell me, we'll mention it at some point in the future. How we got on. Well we might be sitting here in plaster.

Mark Dawson: Oh, yes, see, that's certainly a possibility. We're racing Ferraris on Friday, so when this podcast goes out ... No, the week after. The week before this podcast goes out.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: We will have been racing Ferraris around a track at Thruxton in the South of England. So that's going to be fun.

James Blatch: Do you read a lot of time travel novels?

Mark Dawson: No, I don't. But I would like to write one one day. So maybe we can have the time traveling, I don't know, Ferrari maybe that goes What's the, 70, at what stage is the flux capacitor kicking in?

James Blatch: 88 miles an hour.

Mark Dawson: 88, there we go.

James Blatch: Yeah, that was a DeLorean though.

Mark Dawson: I know. I'm just updating it.

James Blatch: I'm just curious about somebody who can, actually you describing what time a webinar starts is in itself a small time travel novel.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I'm always very accurate as well so it's always fun.

James Blatch: Okay, now, let's get on to our interview for this week. Actually it's a companion piece for last week's interview.

Last week we spoke to an author called T.S. Paul, Scott Paul, who writes as T.S. Paul, and he was encouraged to get going by Michael Anderle, and he has had phenomenal results with his rather eccentric approach to writing and marketing, but absolutely to be admired.

And behind him really is Michael Anderle, who's building a bit of a stable right now. So Michael Anderle has created a few series, actually one major series, brings another writer and does a 50/50 split with them on writing. And without question he's ambitious to run more of a stable an potentially

a sort of small inprint in the future. So, let's hear from Michael and then we'll have a chat off the back.

Michael Anderle: Hi, my name is Michael Anderle. I am an indie published author. My first came out in November second of 2015. I've done about 19 of my own titles, of which I would call 17 books and two of them novellas. I have another something like 16 collaborations that I've done, so we'll call it 35, 36 titles out right now. I'm a top 100 author on Amazon, and my series A Kurtherian Gambit, with all the collaborations, have a little over 120 million Kindle edition pages read.

James Blatch: Okay, that's quite an impressive pitch.

It's science fiction and fantasy, science fiction more than fantasy, how do we describe your genre?

Michael Anderle: I describe it as saying it's not written to market. It starts out with vampires and other paranormals, and then about halfway into book one you find out that it's actually a science fiction that totally skews the notion of where vampires and werewolves and things like that came from.

James Blatch: Sounds intriguing. And you say it's not written for market. Obviously everyone knows that you should really write something that you love, that you want to read, but then we're indies, so we do have to market it ultimately.

Has that been a challenge for you or have you turned it to your advantage?

Michael Anderle: It was a challenge in the beginning, and I was cognizant enough to know that I needed to market it to market, even if the book wasn't written to market. So the book series is broken up into three arcs of seven books each, and what I chose to do is market those first seven to a

more paranormal, vampire warrior woman type of cover. You know, the lady with the katanas.

James Blatch: You did a little bit of tweaking here and there, fan service as I think the Japanese call it to try and get that audience. Let's say it's gone pretty well for you.

Michael Anderle: It has done very well for me, thankfully very much. I don't know where to go with that because there's some people who have already known, but the first month was like 430 gross dollars and by month three I was over 12,000 gross dollars, and then I have a video out where I explained I had done over 50,000 net by July. So in a month.

James Blatch: Let's talk about the success, because I know that you've got a friend, Scott Paul who writes as T.S. Paul, who you've encouraged to write. And when we interviewed T.S. Paul, he said really the only reason he was writing is because you were the one in his ear saying, "You should write a book."

And he has been tremendously successful, as well.

Have you helped him on the marketing side as well or you simply encouraged him to write?

Michael Anderle: Some of it was encouraging to write. Scott certainly gets all the credit for all of his success and I think it's awesome, and I think really the only thing related to that was I was the final person who encouraged him to write.

His wife encouraged him, and others, and I don't want to take anything away from them. So, especially when I meet her later this month, I don't want to do anything like that.

But we did share some marketing, but Scott has everything to gain because one of the things that I think is wonderful is in his particular story is he wrote shorter fiction, right? The 20k, 18, 20, 22k, in the beginning, and he is impatient, kind of like I am.

You know that whenever you place and to publish the book it says "What price are you gonna be at?" Right? Well in this time frame, which was February of 2016, if he had asked me, if I had been awake, I would have told him, "Price it at 99 cents."

I wasn't awake, and he is impatient, and he used the Amazon that said, you know, "Where can you get the most money?" And Amazon told him 2.99. So that's what he did, and then he makes a killing at it.

Everybody at that time, that you would listen to, and others, were saying that you have to price short stories at 99 cents or no one's going to read it. And he took Amazon's suggestion and went to the bank with it.

James Blatch: We are going to go back to talking about you, believe me in a minute. But I want to talk about Scott a little bit more, because it is an absolutely remarkable story, and when I was interviewing him I was flabbergasted, frankly, at what he was telling me. The figures he was turning over.

And he seems to have broken every convention. You've mentioned the price there, but there are other things as well. He said his books have typos in them, they weren't particularly well formatted. I read one of them, he's reworked it, put it back up, and it's still got typos and stuff in it. Not as bad, I think, as it was before.

And yet, can you argue with his bottom line? He's hit a rich vein of something, and I honestly don't know what to make of it.

Michael Anderle: That situation related to that is something that I

encountered as well, and part of it was the fact that you have stories, you have well edited stories, and then you just have well edited words on a page.

My personal belief in what happened both for Scott and myself and others is, our stories supersede the edit mistakes. And frankly, my experience has been, at times with some editors, they edit out the heart of the story. And I might get people upset with me for saying this, but I will go to the wall on this one. And I have seen situations where I've sent some things out, and you will get edits back that is like, "This is how it must be." And I'm like, "Yeah, well, so fine. But you just ripped the story out of it."

It's almost like they wave around the Chicago manual of style, and they say, "If it's not in here, it's not accurate." And I'm like, "I don't care." And between the two of us, I have the numbers that are in the bank to prove I'm right.

James Blatch: It certainly is disproving. And we are in a transition from more than a century of one particular way of looking at publishing, and that's all being turned on its head.

So it's not just about the marketing, I think you're absolutely right, how people want to read, what constitutes a good book in inverted commas, is changing as well. And probably the last people to acknowledge that are people working in the traditional industry, which tends to be where editors are. And that's not to denigrate editors, I'm working with mine at the moment.

Michael Anderle: Not at all.

James Blatch: And it's great, but I completely see your point. And, yes, I mean the book I read, although ... I don't want to use the word badly written, who the hell am I to say it's a badly written book.

It's not a badly written book at all, because I turned every page, and I wanted to know what was happening, and he created this compelling character in a compelling situation. This young female engineer who just got promoted to junior rank of officer and is stranded on the space station. **And you have to get through that story.**

Michael Anderle: The story behind that one is, when we were first working way back then he pitched a story that had to do, kind of like the alternate timeline, with a couple of wild west characters over here in the United States.

I read it, and I told him, I'm like, "You know, maybe this just isn't for me. It could be that I'm just not the kind of reader you need, but it didn't do a whole lot."

He came back and he said, "I've got this other idea I've been working on," and I'm like, "Great, shoot it to me." I remember the restaurant I was working in, I remember where I was sitting when it came across and I started reading the original Athena Lee. And I can guarantee you that what I read, and I have a copy, is the absolute worst edited thing you have ever read.

And I go through it, and I get to the point where he stopped, of where he pitched it to me, and I just wrote him back and this might have to get bleeped out but my exact words was, "This is the shit. Give me more of this."

Because I don't care about the rest of it, I have to know what's going to happen next. He had already grabbed me emotionally, and he has already grabbed me with what's going on and I care about the character. The rest of it can be fixed, but if you can't write that you're kind of screwed.

James Blatch: That's really good advice. I know I completely agree about the story and it was a very compelling situation he created straight away that got you in there.

He's continued turning out short stories, he loves writing a short and he does some stuff for free doesn't he on his website quite a lot.

Michael Anderle: Yes, he does what he calls Wilson's Wednesdays, which are shorts. It's one of his marketing ploys. And then what he'll do is he'll wrap those up after ten or eleven weeks and put it out as a collection. So take it off the website and put it up as a collection. Really good, really smart. Actually his Federal Witch books are a lot longer now, so they're 50, 60,000 words I think.

James Blatch: Let's circle back to you Michael, because I wanted to talk about Scott just because it's such a remarkable interview, and I think people genuinely will not really know quite what to make of it all. I thought we'd try to get some context from his sort of mentor, which I guess is probably where you were, and it's certainly how he captures it.

Michael Anderle: Encouragement, mentor. But then I mean, I've learned as much from Scott on different things as well, so I don't want to take anything away, this level. No, we're a good friendship.

James Blatch: Let's talk about your marketing. We try and focus a bit on marketing if we can on the podcast.

When you got going, how much did you know about indie marketing and where did you learn from and what did you do?

Michael Anderle: When I published my first book I knew absolutely zero about the indie publishing business. I did have a consulting company that was an integration of digital and offline sales, related more to enterprise level situations.

I can do websites, that was part of my business so that wasn't a problem at all. I had done Facebook ads, I had done Google ads, I had done YouTube ads, so I knew those as well.

I had been part of a company five years before where we had emailed millions of people. I had helped build the infrastructure for the servers to run that many. So I was pretty familiar with all the underpinnings, but the exact issues related to indie publishing I knew nothing at all about.

When it came time for me to write my series, to understand when I wanted to market it and how I wanted to market it, I took it from my previous experience and the fact that I am what I call a whale reader, someone who reads at least 50 books a year or more.

I knew what excited me because I'd paid attention to it for a year. So it had come up to a point where in 2014, my wife who's a global marketing director so she's traveling a lot, and every September or so she would go to a big event over in Europe.

In 2014 I started writing a book, and then by the time she got back I had 20,000, 30,000 words in it. And then for a year I just paid attention to what I liked to read, and more importantly what I liked to reread.

What was compelling to me about going back and rereading a series rather than finding a new book. And so when it came time for me to write mine in 2015, it was half bucket list for myself, half I wanted to know how to do it for my oldest son Joshua.

I went and found Scrivener, because by this time I had used Word far enough to go, "I can't do this. You know, I need something to break it up, because I was scrolling up and down and up and down."

I put out the first book, nine days later I put out the second, eleven days after that or so, thirteen I think I put up the third book, in about three to four weeks I put up the fourth book, and then it was about every five weeks after that that I put up a book.

James Blatch: So this is you having written them and edited them in advance. This is you writing in that period of time.

Michael Anderle: Yes. I wrote the first five, when I started and decided I was going to write it, I think I wrote the first book in maybe a couple of weeks, and then put it up there. And then NaNoWriMo of course is going, so I'm like, "Ooh, I just did this, let me do NaNoWriMo." So I wrote really hard and put up the second book in about nine days.

James Blatch: NaNoWriMo must be slowing down for you.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, it can. When I put out well over 120,000 words that month, so yes. But you know, part of it was the fact that business was at a point where I wasn't having to use my creativity, so I had a lot of it pent up, and I knew that it could start again and I really wanted to do this, and I knew I needed three books before I started marketing and things, so I wrote really hard.

James Blatch: What about editing?

Michael Anderle: Editing was a really hit or miss situation. I come from the IT field, where there's different terms for it. I've used the term minimally viable product to mean, put out something to find out if anyone has any interest in it whatsoever.

Not like, put out the worst piece of crap that you possibly can, which some people have taking it to mean that. And I used Grammerly or Pro Writing Aid.

It wasn't until book four that one of my fans started helping me edit, an excellent fan from Australia. Book five, Steven Russell came along, and then book six had a ton of beta readers, which Scott Paul was one of those. So that was in February of that year, January February.

James Blatch: Okay, so you're a true indie.

You built up a community, crowdsourced a lot of your editing and your business effectively, which is a great way to operate.

Michael Anderle: At that time, yes. Now obviously it's different, but at the time, you know, you reach out to editors and they're like, "We can put you on the schedule in three months," I'm like, "No way, I'm putting this out Thursday. So let's figure out how we're ... you know, grab a couple of bricks and slap some together. We're going to figure out how to make this happen."

James Blatch: Okay, so you've got your series that you first done.

Was that all one series, those first four, five books?

Michael Anderle: I'm still writing, I just put out number sixteen, what was that, Thursday or Friday, it's like number 101 in the store right now.

James Blatch: But that's the same series?

Michael Anderle: Yes.

James Blatch: Okay, so you've never deviated, there's no twin streams.

Michael Anderle: I have a few different things. So right now within the Kurtherian Gambit universe there are six other author collaborators that I work with, and they're all Kurtherian Gambit based books.

I've got the first book of a second series, this series will only be four. I affectionately refer to it as my apology, because I kind of killed off a major character that pissed off so many fans, and it wasn't 24 hours later that I was like, "No, no, he's coming back."

And the way I had done it I had done on purpose because I had seen enough about soap operas over here in the States related to, you know, they get rid of the character, but everyone wants him so he's coming back. So I left myself an out and I used it quickly.

James Blatch: Right, well we mention Conan Doyle from time to time, he famously killed Sherlock Holmes, throwing him down the waterfall and got a lot of grief the rest of his life about that.

So the way it works with the fans or co-writers who are chipping in now and helping within the Kurtherian, have I said that correctly?

Michael Anderle: Yeah.

James Blatch: Kurtherian universe.

Are you doing this as a commercial enterprise as joint venture with them?

Michael Anderle: Absolutely, yes, absolutely. We've done over 100,000 dollars in business in the last three months, with all the different collaborators, it exceeds that by a fair amount. But we absolutely do. LMBPN Publishing, which is my company, takes on a lot of the financial requirements of this, and so we front a lot of the costs and the costs then come out of the income. I have to be pretty assured that these books are going to make money, otherwise I don't get paid back.

James Blatch: You're a mini publishing house, indie publishing house, that focuses on one universe.

Michael Anderle: I don't know how quick this is going to come out, I'm presuming it comes out in a week, but actually we've got a second one under construction.

James Blatch: Wow, this is big news.

Michael Anderle: Yes. This is the first time that I've officially outed it, so to speak. There's only a handful of people that know this. And so I guess I need to turn around when we get rid of this and go back to all the people and go, "By the way, so you don't hear it on marketing."

James Blatch: We like to have breaking news. We can schedule this to your convenience Michael, so let us know when's a good time.

Can you give us a little hint of what this is and direction it's going to go in?

Michael Anderle: Yes, one of the things that I want is to play in the urban fantasy field. And there are certain aspects about that that I really enjoy. Now, my present series Kurtherian Gambit, it's really more paranormal and vampire werewolf based. And while we get into different areas, we have one called the Age of Magic. It is science based, it's the purpose.

I happen to have a lot of other interests in alternate history, if you want to call it that, and so based on a lot of that knowledge and working with Martha Carr, we've created a story related to two dimensions that merge and the issues that have plagued us since the last time we separated.

James Blatch: Okay, well that sounds good, intriguing again. Okay, well that sounds exciting venture for you.

If you were to separate you as an author and the business you do, and the business done through the sort of indie publishing empire that you've built, where is that split in terms of income?

Michael Anderle: 80/20, right now.

James Blatch: Which way? To you as an author?

Michael Anderle: 80 to me. Me as an author is 80, my suspicion is that by December it'll be 60/40, still me. Because at the end of the day I'm 18 books in.

Some of these authors, even Craig who is a writing machine, Craig Martell, is five books in. He'll probably be ten by that time, I'll probably be 20 something by that time. Some of the different, Paul C. Middleton, my first collaborator, just off the top of the head you've got Paul C. Middleton, Justin Slim, Craig Martelle, Natalie Gray, C.M. Raymond and LE Burbont, and of course T.S. Paul are all collaborators but we've got nine more coming out in the next few months.

James Blatch: And are these people approaching you?

Michael Anderle: Some approached me, some were collaborators that reached out, were building in multiple different areas of the universe simultaneously, so it is pretty unique what's going on.

We just started our audio production at the very beginning of February, we've got ten that are in right now, we'll probably have I'm guessing 50 to 60 by end of the year.

We're presently negotiating with SAG-AFTRA. That's a hoot. SAG-AFTRA over here, Screen Actor's Guild, and others. So there's a guild we have to do for the audiobook narration.

James Blatch: Oh right, okay. So, in your long term, do you see the publishing side of it growing? I mean, you're talking about starting another series, another branch.

If somebody came to you and said, "Look, I'm a writer, I haven't got time for all this indie stuff, here's my romance series, can you publish it for me?"

Michael Anderle: Yes, that's actually one of the things we're going for. My goal has always been to become a publishing company, and I'm using the income from first my books and now my income from joint project to help fund that and move it forward.

The benefit is that I know that certainly Kurtherian Gambit universe is a very heavy money maker, and the goal is the second universe hopefully is also going to be that. So we're using what we've learned and the relationships, we have six to eight artists on staff, so to speak.

We have four to six editors that we have, not including other collaborator's editors. We have a Slack group of almost 50 people that we all are in and I make available to the collaborators because at the end of the day I want their success.

So an example would be that one of the artists that does a lot of my cover art and is contacted by someone else too for a project that has nothing to do with Kurtherian Gambit, or one of our book, the guys that lay out the books, you know one of the artists reached out to him because he wants his book done the same way or the same quality as what we're doing. And so I'm like, "Hey, he's in there, just reach out to him."

James Blatch: Wow. Your Slack must beep at you more than mine does, and my beeps at me a lot, because that's Mark Dawson on the other end of it.

We should say for people who don't know, Slack is a productivity tool that really enables teams to work together, and we use it in SPF as well. I think I go to bed hearing that bing.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, exactly, or whenever you get to one of the after a while you just hear (blows raspberry).

James Blatch: Yeah, you don't want to hear that. Well this is a really intriguing area in terms of how the whole indie world is developing. You won't be alone in this. There are other people who, and I think there are other people who probably could do what you're doing.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, I've encouraged too. I reached out to Michael Cooper, N.D. Cooper, and he had made mention one time, so I encouraged him, brought him into Slack and said, "Hey, here's how ours is filled up. You know, take a look at it, see if you'd like to do the same thing." And then also I had lunch with Richard Fox in Las Vegas a month ago, and encouraged him to do the same thing, so he's in the group, not because he's in there to be a part of it, he's in there to see what it's doing. So he's building it now. And the reason I like this is because I want to help indie authors.

There are many indie authors who need a help up, a leg up, and by writing an existing universe you can both benefit the existing author myself, right, and you can benefit them. They can make income.

One or more of my authors who are working full time are now leaving. They're leaving their job and becoming a full time author because of the power of being just a collaborator in the Kurtherian Gambit and facilitating their own future as well. I think that's fantastic, and I'd love to see more people do it.

James Blatch: That's great. And there's a little bit of a crossover here between fan fiction and doing it professionally with people who are collaborating in a, I don't want to say more professional way, because writing's writing. Some fan fiction can be fantastic, but you know what I mean. Coming at it from a business point of view.

I think Russel Blake told us people come to him quite often and just write stories based on his characters, and I don't think he has, if I get this right, I

don't think he has anything to do with it beyond occasionally reading them and having some correspondence with them.

But actually Russell could presumably set himself up like you, because he's got a great universe people like writing.

Michael Anderle: I think the Jet series has an Amazon universe, right? A Kindle universe? And so when you're part of that, and I looked into it by the way, but when you're a part of that there are a lot of constraints on the author and there's a lot of benefit.

One of the benefits is it's hands off. You know, here are all the rules, they take care of it, you don't have to worry about anything, you just get a check for your percentage each month, but I didn't want to do it that way. So I didn't set mine up like that. But yeah, Russell's great. We both have places in Palo, so I was able to have lunch with him last November.

James Blatch: Russell is great, he's one of the great characters in our industry, always love to hear from him. We must get him back on, he was a very early guest but I miss his humor.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, his humor, and he's so straight with it. He'll say it like it is.

James Blatch: I noticed that, yeah. He certainly does. But it's an exciting area, and I do think back historically, again, the traditional industry moving a bit slow in this area. But there are so many series from history that people have attempted to write.

All the way back to Jane Austen people write sequels to Pride and Prejudice all the time. I love Douglas Adams and those stuff from the 80's, and a lot of people write fan fiction there.

But there's an opportunity to formalize that and turn it into more of a business, which the indie side seems to be doing and the traditional side doesn't do so often.

Occasionally, James Bond books still get written for money I think.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, you're right. You're absolutely right. I would find it really interesting to sit down with a lot of trad pubs and just kind of ask them what they think, because at the moment, I'm reaching out and finding out, okay, how do I break into trade.

Not necessarily trad pub companies, but how do I break into the stores? Because the reality is if you look at it, yeah, indie and ebooks are probably about half the market ish, so to speak. And we know that the future is going to be that it's going to be a downward slide for paper.

But have you looked at how much paper is worth? It's still going to be worth a lot. I'm okay with just a percentage of that. I'm willing to make that effort, because even if it's only there for another three to eight years or nine years, you're still talking about potentially hundreds of millions of dollars.

James Blatch: And how are you doing your deals with authors? Are these done individually or is there a formula?

Michael Anderle: In general it's 50 percent for each of us, and that's obviously net of net. We do 500 dollars per cover, I front the cover, the cover cost comes out half half from the income.

Marketing is agreed that we'll do each individually unless we pre-agree on something. I have told every one of my authors, if you get a BookBub, I'll pay for the first one, you don't even have to ask me. So if you get it, just give me the bill.

Other than that, and that includes everything. If we were to get a movie deal on one of these, they'd get 50 percent. I have the ability to go and negotiate any contracts in the Kurtherian universe because I own it. It's my universe, I'm going to do it. If I go and do a radio play in Zimbabwe, and I make a thousand dollars, I'm obligated to give them 500 of it. They just wake up and money is there.

So, that is kind of the gist of everything. Their name is on top of mine, you'll see every single book, their name is on top, our names are the same size. If it's left right, which we had to do, then their name is first on the left. So there isn't any of the situations where there's a huge Mike Anderle then in tiny little print their collaborator name. So they deserve the credit for a lot of this, and they're working their tails off.

James Blatch: Again, something the traditional industry does do at the moment, I've noticed with some fairly big named authors, including one or two who've passed away, and their name still appearing quite large on the book, and then you obviously realize someone else has written it, quite small letters.

And in turning to the marketing then, so do you run a mailing list for the Kurtherian Universe?

Michael Anderle: Yeah, I pulled up the numbers so that we could talk about them.

In 2016 I did 14,924 dollars of Facebook ads. This is less than three percent of income. 2017 we're at 9,000 already for the first quarter, so assume that's going to be 36,000. Once again, this is gonna be just a couple of digits of percentage of income going forward. So it really isn't a big amount. But we do Amazon ads, so Amazon marketing service, that really helps the Kindle unlimited part.

The email list is approximately, well right now it's 2823 names, and that is mostly driven by links inside the books, and it's a call out due to my somewhat horrific editing in the beginning. I did something I call the apology around book five, and I said, "Hey, you know, we're getting these, the editing is getting a lot better and I sincerely apologize, and for everybody that has been following along and suffering through this for the sake of the story, I will put up the next book at 99 cents. And if you'll get in my email list, I'll make sure to let you know in advance or during that time so you can pick it up at the cheap price."

And what happened is it became every single book, not just that one. And so now it's 2800, but it's a 50 percent open, 27 percent clicks for the last one that we did. And the fans, there are some fans that are ravenous and jump on it and there are other fans that frankly will wait until it's 3.99, they don't care.

James Blatch: That's impressive. And so in fact this often is the case when we do these interviews, the people who've had great organic growth, call it organic, it makes it sound like it just happened completely naturally. But good stories the people like, word of mouth, all that very good traditional stuff, but then they kind of start to reverse engineer the more traditional mailing list route, which I think is probably where you are now.

I strongly suspect in two or three years time your mailing list will be significantly bigger. Do you think so?

Michael Anderle: Could be. I mean, once again, I've had email stuff before, right? I believe that everyone that goes up even a similar mountain, like "I want to make money for my books," is an example, there's multiple ways to get up it.

On my Facebook advertising, I don't go to a list to give away free books, I go straight to buy the books. How many people I capture is not necessarily

more than two percent, but each person that I put into funnel book one is worth 20 to 30 dollars to me now. So I can easily afford that.

Part of it is because I'm also technically lazy. I know how to do all of this, I don't want to do all of this. And so for me to think about having a 30,000 name list that aren't people that are like, "Yes, I tracked it down and got on it," I'm not that fond of. I have names from giveaways and generally speaking I haven't had as much success with those so I just don't bother with them anymore.

I don't know where our group is going, and I think you guys probably can speak to this a lot better than I can. And I've often wondered, and would love an opportunity to hear; where do you think the industry's going with the quality of email names when we have now taught so many readers about free books? I'm just curious.

James Blatch: It's still a growing market. You always have to remember the digital, the people who are active digitally who join emailing lists, that number is growing. So there are millions of people every month who discover this whole world.

It's not as if we've got this one pool of people who are becoming a bit saturated. That's one of the things you have to consider with this area. I've mentioned it before. My grandad, he's long dead, my dad is 86 and only joined Facebook a couple of years ago, and every month I have him on the phone, more than that, having discovered a new bit of digital stuff that we've been doing for a while.

And that ad the older, they're quite good readers actually, older people as well. So, I don't know, we're a long way from feeling saturated I think, but who knows exactly.

Michael Anderle: 'Cause we're so English focused, but within that it's like, what about when Spanish, just the general language even though there's a

ton of different dialects, you know they're not really ebooks. What's going to happen at that point? So we have a huge amount of people that can, but I don't know how to crack that nut because trying to do translations is a very expensive way to lose money.

James Blatch: You have to spend more time in your place in Mexico.

Michael Anderle: Yes.

James Blatch: Get somebody down there, you're going to need some people you know. Okay, look, I want to pick a couple more areas over, we've just gone past the 30 minute mark so I'm going to try and wind it up in a moment.

We should say that the success that you're having, a key part of that, and it's the same with Scott Paul, is the number of products you've got. You've got books that people like reading and you've got a lot of them, and as you say you get somebody in on book one, that's very valuable to you.

Michael Anderle: Yes. The situation I believe is, I'm going after whale readers, which are people like myself that like to see and stay with a group of characters for a long time.

I like to see them coming out, and I will, if I'm reading let's say I find a group of five books, I might go through those five books in a weekend. And if I don't see book six for two months I'm already on three or four series past that.

You better hope that you really have my attention for me to come back to you. So by staying active on Facebook like I do and by putting out so many books, we're constantly in the eye of the whale readers.

I think one of the huge mistakes, and if I haven't yet to say that I'm guessing on this, but for trad pubs is realizing that it isn't five million people each

reading one book a year. It's 10,000 people reading 50 books a year, and then you have 50,000 people reading 40 books a year, and then you have the situation of people only reading four. So you can't really do it.

We all know the understanding of romance readers who read a book or two a day, that's 350 to 700 books. So you're not saturating anybody by doing that, and there's this missed opportunity. I recognize shelf space, so why is it that we can't come up with new and unique ways.

There's honestly plenty of places that we can stick something that only takes up two square feet on the floor. And then it comes to really going, "Okay, you have a limited amount of shelf space, how do you get those books back on the shelf efficiently?" And you can look at someone like Dell computers who staged their parts much more effectively. We can get past this, but I'm not too sure people are wanting to do that.

James Blatch: Funny enough, however modern this industry is you end up dealing with quite traditional issues, just in a slightly different way, that people have wrestled with before for a century.

Michael Anderle: Yeah.

James Blatch: How do you write, Michael? Just a final topic area. People will be fascinated by your productivity. What's the physical set up?

Michael Anderle: I write in Scrivener and I write on a MacBook Pro. I have a reg beats on an Excel spreadsheet. I refined my concept of beats on an Excel spreadsheet by actually reading a Russel Blake post that he had, I think back in middle of 2015, and that helped me align what I wanted to do.

I typically will knock out a book in about two to three weeks, so let's say it's six weeks in between books. For two weeks I'll be working on different

projects, and then I'll slowly get back into it and then for about a week and a half, two weeks tops I'll be writing hard.

Each time I finish around two to four chapters it goes from me to my production editor. He reads it, he highlights anything he doesn't understand and tosses it back to me, I fix those parts, it goes from him to beta readers, and from a beta readers ... If he can't fix what they, because he understands my voice. If he can't fix it, he'll give it back to me.

Once it goes through that it goes through one more beta editor, it's to me, I read the whole book and I make any changes that got switched that I don't agree with, if it happened, and then before about 18 to 30 hours, it goes to what are called just-in-time readers.

These are eight to twelve people who read the book and find mistakes, we fix them in that time, and then drop it. So we might still find another 40 to 70 or even 100 mistakes in the last 24 hours, finish it, clean it, drop it.

James Blatch: And what's the timescale from you sitting down to start writing or start plotting it in excel, to dropping it?

Michael Anderle: 21 days, 25 days. Tops. And that's with me juggling other stuff, I mean we could shrink that but not now, it's too big.

James Blatch: How many words are the books on average?

Michael Anderle: 70,000, 70 to 72,000.

James Blatch: Wow, that's very impressive.

Michael Anderle: Thank you. This is, what are they call it ... It's not pulp, yeah it's pulp fiction. I mean, it's a lot of fun but it's not something where I have to research days to figure out how to kill somebody with this weird root from Africa.

James Blatch: And do you find many errors get through, or things that you change get through to the publication stage?

Michael Anderle: Not as many anymore. I mean, the reality is that everybody has errors. Trad, us, but for myself not as many, but even after release, we have what we call readers help at our website, and we'll email those in and we'll fix them as we get them.

And then we have a professional editor who, on her schedule, once again it's a scheduling thing, she will come back through, clean up the book because it will go through professional editing before we go to audible.

James Blatch: I rarely read a book, and I read lots of traditionally published books, that don't have the odd typo in them, so it's not a ... I'm just wondering how the process works. Look, Michael, we've hit our time limit really.

It's been fascinating talking to you. We always, if we can, would like to stay in touch in a years time and we'll see how your empire has grown. I want to see you there with a big mustache and cigar with this huge media mogul thing going on, which wouldn't surprise me.

Michael Anderle: I would love to.

James Blatch: And you have a tequila with Russell next time you see him and tell him we're going to get him back on as well.

Michael Anderle: Yeah, yeah. If you want him he's on Facebook, he's easy to get a hold of.

James Blatch: Yeah, yeah. We know where he is. We'll get him back. Thank you so much, indeed Michael. Fascinating.

Michael Anderle: Thank you James.

James Blatch: So, interesting listening to Michael. He's obviously got a slightly different approach to self publishing, that most of us, most of the people listening who are really thinking about them, their books and how to sell them. And Michael Anderle's looking a bit broader than that.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, quite a few indies, or the kind of bigger indies, I can think of a handful who are setting up small presses, often to publish their own books but sometimes to publish books by other authors as well. Michael's doing extremely well. He's very open about what he's done, there's a series of really useful posts that he's written to set out what he's been doing, and he's also got a very good Facebook group, I think it's called 20 books to 50k, which the name kind of gives away what the intention is there. But it's a big group now, six or seven thousand authors in there with lots of information being passed to and fro.

So, yeah, he's got some fairly big ideas. I thought about doing something similar to that, six months to a year ago. It might be something that I come back to look at a little bit later on, but I'm slightly more hands on than he is and I'm very, very cautious about introducing new writers to the audience that have grown up with my particular kind of writing. It's not to say that I'm better than anybody else, although I am.

James Blatch: Obviously.

Mark Dawson: No, not really. It's just I don't want ... I'm slightly cautious about expectations and things like that. So, I've not done that so far and I probably wouldn't do it with my Milton books or my Rose books, but with something else I'm working on, thinking on at the moment, would be potentially quite interesting for that kind of a near contemporary dystopian espionage thriller.

James Blatch: Have you had any fan fiction written without request?

Mark Dawson: Not that I know of. I did have a couple of really good writers, we were thinking about doing books in the Milton world. And they wrote one chapter, I didn't want them to write any more. And although the chapters were good, they were so different, the voices were so different from me.

James Blatch: I remember this. You were struggling to let go of your control.

Mark Dawson: I couldn't. I wasn't able to. I just think it would have been, for me anyway, I think I would have disappointed a lot of readers because they would have thought, even if I said, readers don't always read their emails properly and you can sometimes get people disappointed, and I would be quite upset if a reader had bought a book thinking it was by me, even though I said that it wasn't, and even though the cover said "Mark Dawson and John Dyer." Oh, heavens.

I think there's a potential for disappointed readers, and the last thing you want to do is disappoint readers. So I think if I was going to do something like that, it would be something brand new where I would write an introductory novel and then I would allow other people into the universe to spin off from and do that.

There are other things as well, I mean things like accounting. Every month you'd have to write down through your accounts which books have sold, and then for Michael's example, he's paying 50 percent of the royalties to each author, he's got six different authors, say, maybe 20 different books. That in itself becomes like a day's work, so you almost need to have an accountant to do that.

James Blatch: I run the affiliates for our courses, and believe me, I know the work that goes into producing those figures everyday.

I'll tell you who was quite sanguine about it, I mentioned it in the interview, is Russell Blake. Because when we spoke to Russell, and I promise we will get Russell back on again, because I'm keen to talk to him again, he's such an interesting character. But he's had fan fiction written, he kind of hasn't even read. He sees it, he's completely relaxed about it.

Mark Dawson: That's Kindle world. So, in America at least, Amazon offer selected writers the chance to open up their worlds to anyone, and then you can write a book in Russell's Jet world. And yeah, he is very relaxed about that. But he's on the beach all the time drinking margaritas, so I'm sure he's relaxed on most things.

James Blatch: When I say we're going to interview him, we're going to go to his and interview him.

Good, okay, we mention it every week but you can get a fabulous book that contains all the best bits of the Podcast in textual form, and you simply go to selfpublishingformula.com/vault, V-A-U-L-T, and we'll send you that ebook. It's searchable on the subjects that we've talked about.

That's it for this week, thank you to Michael Anderle, thank you to the controlling Mark Dawson. And I guess there's a possibility that this famous, as yet unnamed Hollywood producer calls during the week, we may or may not see you next week. But let's hope.

Mark Dawson: It's possible.

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