

PODCAST 11: EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAILING LISTS – BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

James Blatch: Yes, we're here in we can say for once sunny United Kingdom, can't we, Mark?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's gorgeous. It's like 20 degrees outside so I'm going to go for a walk after this. Beautiful.

James Blatch: 20 whole degrees. That's something to celebrate in the UK. Yes, we are going to talk specifically and with authority and detail about the subject of mailing lists. Mailing lists are so fundamental, not just to modern authors in the self-publishing zone, but actually to pretty much every digital business, any business online will very much revolve around a mailing list in this day and age and understanding the fundamentals of it, the role it plays in your business, and what I'm really hoping to get out of this Mark, is some real actionable points about how to set one up, how to go about building it up because, as you know, I haven't established mine yet, so that is something that's looming for me shortly.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. We could definitely focus on that and it's very important for newbie writers, but equally as important for kind of older hands, and hopefully we can put some slightly higher level of advanced strategies in place, as well, to cover all of the listenership.

James Blatch: Okay, but before we get into that discussion, we have something very special to announce. You will remember when we launched the podcast, we had a competition to try and get the podcast shared, and it was a competition that rewarded you the more you shared it, and that's run its course now. Thank you very much to everybody who took part, everybody who shared the podcast, not just for the competition, we know

it's getting lots of shares and some chat online. That's brilliant. It's very heartening for us. There is a winner from that competition and, Mark Dawson, would you like to announce the winner?

Mark Dawson: Yes. The winner is Jules Dixon, who I think writes saucy romances.

James Blatch: Saucy romances is a pretty good genre to be writing in. Jules, you have access to Mark Dawson's Facebook Ads for Authors, which is his detailed premium course, highly acclaimed course, lots of testimony on how brilliant it's been for authors. In addition to the main course, which is worth about \$700 by itself, you get a modular on Twitter advertising, we've got YouTube advertising coming up, and there will be lots of bonuses, as well. Jules, all that for free. I will be e-mailing you in the next day or two, probably even before you've listened to this podcast, to ... Actually, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm going to hold off e-mailing for a week because it'll be a surprise for Jules to listen to the podcast and hear it announced, rather than get an e-mail from me. I'm going to do that, and then we will sort you out with access to the course. Well that was exciting having a competition. We should do another competition at some point, Mark, and we'll think of another great giveaway.

Mark Dawson: We'll wrack our brains. I'm sure we can come up with something.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. We're going to talk about the meat in our subjects, so no interview this week. This is going to be a detailed discussion on an area of value and actionable insights for self-publishing authors. As I said, it's the mailing list. We've given a bit of an introduction to the mailing list, but let's get into a little bit more detail about the role they play in the life, the marketing life of an author. Mark, and I think we've said this before, we mention it quite a lot because it's quite an important part of your process, you regretted not having a mailing list set up earlier for the very

obvious reason that you are selling books to people, and that was it, that was the end of your relationship with them.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I was a bit late to the party. We've gone through this story a few times so I won't go into full detail again, but I had a few free ones back in the day when I was getting tens of thousands of free downloads off the back of ads with people like Freebooksy, and I only had one or maybe two books out then and once people had bought the books and read them all, downloaded them and read them, they didn't have anywhere else to go. There was no second book to buy if they liked the first one, and there was no way for them to get in contact with me to give me their e-mail address, so I could then communicate with them down the line and tell them when I had something else to put out. It was definitely a bit of a false start and I probably retarded my career by six months or so by just not doing it properly.

James Blatch: Okay, so you do have one now. You got one set up in those early days, and what difference has it made to your selling career?

Mark Dawson: Fundamental, absolutely fundamental. It's the most important thing, my most valuable asset in my business is my mailing list. Actually, we should probably open it out a little bit and say that we've got a mailing list for self-publishing formula, as well, so it's, as you said earlier, it's essential for any kind of digital business these days, be that selling books or selling courses. Yeah, when I started for the books, when I tracked when I was doing some slides for some webinars that I was doing last year, and you could track fairly accurately, you could see the growth in my mailing list corresponding with growth of sales and income. It's not coincidental that they're definitely linked. Lots of different ways that we'll get into as we dig in.

James Blatch: There are a few experts who are very eloquent about talking about mailing list and the power of them, Pat Flynn we've had on this podcast in the past and he's certainly a good place to go to. As always, with

SPF, ours is very focused on self-publishing authors, and so we're going to really get to how you should be operating a mailing list or list our advice on that area ourselves.

You talked about owning your audience, you talked about the difference and impact that it's made on the way that you've operated. Let me just ask you a question about e-mailing because there are so many different forms of communication now and I've noticed, I'm involved a few organizations where I live, and I've noticed that the younger people seem to like things like WhatsApp and text, and I'm hearing the e-mail is not as preferred as it used to be, but do you think it is still something that is a good way of communicating?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I think all of that kind of talk is overblown, to be honest. I think it's still the most ... I'm absolutely sure it's the most effective way to connect with potential customers and still, and e-mail address is something that's still fairly jealously guarded. It's not something that people give out willy nilly these days. There's a reason for that. It's imbued with a particular kind of weightiness rather than the transience of what's a WhatsApp message, something along those lines.

People do not give away those e-mail addresses easily because it is very personal, it's something that's coming to, say, onto their phone directly onto their PC. It's something that tends to attract attention. All the data that I've seen and all the data in the test that I've run indicates that e-mail is still much more effective than, say, Facebook, Twitter, all of the social media communication channels that are available to us now. E-mail still beats all of them.

James Blatch: They can be quite rich in content, so you can have a very nicely laid out e-mail, and we're talking in more detail shortly about the various platforms you can use to do that. A well laid out e-mail and you do good ones, I think. I think we do as SPF, as well. They do look good and they give a sense of strengthening who you are, your brand, I suppose.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. You can certainly brand e-mails. I don't go too big on using all the bells and whistles. It's something that MailChimp enables you to do, and partly that's because I'm not the best designer in the world and, of course, I could hire someone to do that for me. Mostly because I want

them to look professional but the most important thing for me is that they're written in a way that enables my readers to feel a connection with me. I'll write them very conversationally, I'll talk to them as if, this is a pretty good tip. When you're writing these kinds of e-mails, just imagine that you're having a conversation with someone that you've known for years. I will drop in information or news about new books, perhaps books I'm writing. I might, this is a nice day today, you could start an e-mail by saying I've just been for a walk, I've been for a run, it's beautiful weather, puts me in a good mood. Here's some more good news, I've got a new book out next week, something along those lines, but that kind of conversational tone is really important. It shouldn't be dressed up in business language, it shouldn't be cold. It needs to be open and friendly.

James Blatch: Okay, and in terms of workload, if people haven't gotten this yet and aren't quite sure how this system. I can imagine people thinking that there's huge amounts of work goes into sitting down and writing an e-mail every month and so on. Actually, quite a lot of the system can be automated. I mean, the creation of the e-mail is a very personal thing, needs to be done, but only needs to be done once, and you can have that same initial sequence of e-mails going out to each person who joins your list for the first time.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. We need to break down what the kinds of communications that come out into two kind of main categories. On the one hand, there's automated e-mails, which is what you just described, and you're absolutely right. There's a bit of work up at the front to write those e-mails, get them loaded into your e-mail service provider, and to check that they're serving properly, but that doesn't necessarily need to take up a huge amount of time. The other kind of e-mail is what you call a broadcast or a campaign e-mail. For me for example, I've got a book out on the 20th of May, so in two or three weeks' time from the time when we're recording this, and I'll draft a couple of e-mails, maybe three e-mails that will go out in the week to 10 days of that book's launch. Those will be original e-mails that would only be used once, but they're probably more important than the automated e-mails because they're launching a book or they're asking

for reviews or that kind of thing, and I get the most bang for my buck when it's writing those kinds of e-mails.

James Blatch: As you say, another powerful aspect of the mailing list is recruiting people to help you launch your book. Recruiting advanced reader teams and so on. It's your audience and they are surprisingly, perhaps not surprisingly, but pleasantly surprisingly happy to please you and happy to work alongside you in getting your books noticed.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I'm right in the middle of that process at the moment. I'm going to do or we're going to do a podcast on launching probably for the next two or three weeks. We will go into in a lot of detail with audio diaries with me explaining each step along the process of actually launching this book. Right now, the process I'm in is I've got the manuscript's been proofread, so not copyedited yet, it's been proofread to make sure most of the irritating errors have gone. I then send that out to my launch team and my advance team and they're in the process of reading it now. I've had probably 20 e-mails back in the last two days. They've only had it for three days. 20 people coming back and saying generally, they've enjoyed, a couple saying they didn't like it as much as previous ones, which is totally fine, of course, and making this suggestions.

One, this is quite fun, one question that I needed to get answered before this book goes out is there's a scene at the end of the book where my hero, Milton, needs to create a really big explosion, and it's kind of a slightly MacGyver-ish so he's locked in there and he's kind of in a room and he needs to create an explosion with the ingredient that he's got with him.

James Blatch: Our past as BBFC film examiners will come into play here because we spent a lot of time looking at MacGyver and people making explosions and trying to work out whether that was a real world risk if we released the video.

Mark Dawson: Exactly, so a lot of that has informed me, and I've come up with an idea and I think it works, but I'm not beyond what I can find on the Internet. I'm not particularly skilled in that kind of thing, so what I've done is an e-mail that went out to the advanced team, I've asked them specifically to focus on that one chapter, and I've had four or five responses from people who work in that kind of industry, gas safety, that kind of thing,

which is amazing, and they've said, "Generally, yes, this would work but your fuse method would be too dangerous. This is how I would create a fuse for this kind of explosion," which is fantastic. I could probably find that out on the Internet but it's quite hard to know what you're searching for sometimes when you don't know what the answer is. They've come back with some really golden tips that will make the book much, much stronger when it's finally released.

James Blatch: It also gives you a very dodgy Internet search history if you spend a lot of time.

Mark Dawson: Oh, I've finished on that square. When I went to America a couple of weeks ago, a couple of months ago, I was legitimately concerned that I wouldn't get through immigration on the other side because the NSA must know that I've given the books I write, I do searches on quite, well, worrying things, so I was quite concerned that I'd be taken aside, but it didn't happen, thankfully.

James Blatch: Good, okay. Before we move on to some of the nitty gritty, I'm going to start by asking how you initially set up your mailing list and how that's evolved for you personally, and then we'll talk about some of the options available now. I just want to talk about tone of writing a little bit and the reason for that is that it's very, very important and one of our previous guests, Marie Force talked all about how she talks to her audience. I've joined a few authors' mailing lists since we've been in this venture in the self-publishing formula venture and they do vary. I've noticed one in particular and another one to an extent, as well.

The authors have quite an underconfident tone and they talk about, I'm sorry to be an imposition on you today, but maybe you probably won't like this. I think they need to be more confident. I think they need to understand the reason I've joined their list is I really like their books and I want them to be confident about it. Look, I'm real excited about my next book and this is what it's going to be like, rather than, and I think it's natural. I think as writers, lots of writers are underconfident and I put myself there, as well, but I think your tone is confident and I think that's how you need to be.

Mark Dawson: I wasn't always confident and I understand where this lack of confidence comes from. I think it's because even though people have, as

you said, they've subscribed, they've wanted to be on the list, people do still get a bit nervous about sending something that seems as if it's a little bit unsolicited, especially if you have an e-mail for two or three months and then you're sending this e-mail out. The reason people are worried about that is because they're very concerned that they're going to get unsubscribes and abuse reports. If you get enough of those on something like MailChimp, and the threshold is reasonably low. If you get enough of those, then you can have your account suspended, which would be, that's a bad thing.

I think there is that kind of slightly, slight nervousness in tone, but kind of perversely, the fact that you're writing e-mails that way, I think makes it more likely that you're going to turn people off, and they're going to unsubscribe anyway, or they'd be more likely to do it. It's important to diagnose that as a problem, and then it's important to get around it, be confident, remember that they're on the list because they like your books, they want to hear about your writing process or when you've got a new book out.

There's a reason why if you look on MailChimp, the kind of the final moment before you press send, first we have to press it twice to kind of double confirm you want to send it. There's that kind of sweaty monkey that ...

James Blatch: High five monkey.

Mark Dawson: The sweaty high five monkey.

James Blatch: Oh, yeah. The monkey's sweating, isn't he? Yeah, it's a big thing.

Mark Dawson: There's a reason why that monkey is sweating because MailChimp is acknowledging that it can be a thing, a big thing to send an e-mail out to 20,000 people and to be concerned that they're all going to hate it. There you go. That's a good indication that this isn't something that's specific to, to writers, it's something that is general. You can get over it. It's not something that bothers me too much these days, and it's just a

little bit of confidence. Once you send a few e-mails, then you're not being deluged with unsubscribes. It's something that you can get over.

James Blatch: Yeah, be confident, sell yourself, and make it feel like what it is, which is part of a community based around your books, which is an amazing thing.

Mark Dawson: Okay, let's move on to some of the detail then, and let me take you back all those years ago, months ago, really, when you started your first list. How did you go about it?

James Blatch: Well, okay, so I'll be completely honest about how awful I did this, to start with. I realized reasonably soon after that mistake that I needed to correct that, so I'd probably been listening to a few podcasts, reading threads on cable, and kind of the penny drops. I needed to get a mailing list. What I did, because also because I'm cheap, was to put my e-mail address in the back of the book. My normal e-mail address that everyone, people can get to me on, I put that into the back of the book, and then encourage people, if they wanted to, to be on our list or get news from me. I say, "Just e-mail me and I'll take care of it."

People would e-mail into my normal inbox. I would then cut and paste that e-mail address and put them onto an Excel spreadsheet, and then when I had something to sell or to tell them about, I open up my normal e-mail program and cut and paste all those e-mails, put them into the BCC field, and then send them out that way, which is wrong on about 100 million different levels apart from the fact that it's a miracle that my e-mail account hasn't been shut down for suspicious spam behavior by the provider.

It's a stupid idea. It takes ages and ages and ages, it's massively time intensive, just generally a bad idea all around. I did for about six months and then I thought, okay, let's look at doing this a bit more professionally. I looked at the options, so there are plenty of beginner options out there. MailChimp is the big player, so very, very well-known. They sponsor lots of big podcasts. They sponsor Serial, for example. They're all over the place. I think they must have millions of subscribers now, so that's certainly the biggest, most reliable platform.

The other option is AWeber, pretty similar to MailChimp in terms of its feature suite, and they both offer that free level, up to 2,000 subscribers, you don't have to pay anything. You don't get full automation for that price, but you can get around that with a couple of clever hacks. I looked at them both, I went for MailChimp.

Mark Dawson: Is there a reason for that?

James Blatch: I felt it's a little bit more user-friendly, at least its interface is a bit cleaner, it looked a bit easier to me. I think AWeber is fine. I know people of people who use AWeber and swear by it, but for me, MailChimp was the easier of the two choices.

Mark Dawson: Okay.

James Blatch: I set that up and replaced the e-mail address in the back of my books with the MailChimp landing page that is presented to you when you open a new MailChimp list, and I started to get people in that way and immediately made it a lot more straightforward for me, a lot less cutting and pasting for one thing. That was another thing. When I was getting e-mail addresses in exchange for a free book to sign up, I was e-mailing them individually, cutting and pasting a kind of a pro forma e-mail, sticking it into my e-mail system, and then pasting the books on. It's just ridiculous.

Mark Dawson: That was your automation system. Physically take e-mail addresses. I was wondering how you did it because, obviously, once you've added them to your list in a totally manual environment, everyone gets every e-mail but you're filling up a block of the send column.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Okay. Wow, that was laborious.

James Blatch: Really, and stupid, so yeah. I got out of that as soon as I could. MailChimp takes a load off your plate, so it will maintain the list for you, it will present it in a fashion that's easy for you to interrogate. You can get all kinds of different information, you can see how active the subscribers are. Are they opening the e-mails? Are they clicking on links? Plenty of useful information that you're able to dig into.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and a couple of things I'll just add from a beginner, total beginner point of view on MailChimp because I've come to much later than you have. The first thing I say to people, I've recently got my local

cricket club using MailChimp because they were doing what you were doing and it was silly, and actually, we did get e-mails blocked by the service provider who quite rightly thought it looked like spam. I've got them using MailChimp and I had people who weren't very technical looking at it and they couldn't get started until I said to them, "Lists and campaigns are separate in MailChimp. You get your lists on one side and you can have different lists full of e-mail addresses, and then you set up campaign and then you link the two. You tell the campaign we want to send it to that list." Actually, although it sounds very intuitive when you start using it, that's not intuitive at the beginning, and people were going into the campaign and they wouldn't even start creating their e-mail because they couldn't see who they were sending it to and they didn't understand it. Once I explained that, so that's a good little beginner tip, MailChimp lists are one thing, campaigns are another, and you link them together at the end of the campaign creation.

The second thing about MailChimp is there's a good little hack in there, which is to keep it free without automation. You do get the option and it's a sort of tick box when you set up the list, is to send a welcome e-mail, which at the beginning of the process, when people opt in, there's automatically a system, which forces them to confirm that they want to join the list, which is quite right as part of the data protection and the etiquette of e-mail lists. You have an option within MailChimp to send a welcome e-mail, which you can construct.

Now actually, if you're a new author, that could be the e-mail that delivers the book. If you've got a landing page and you're giving away your book and people join your mailing list, that part of it at least could be automated. This welcome e-mail will go out and that is still free of charge within MailChimp, so that's a really useful aspect of it. I'm not sure whether AWeber has the same hack in it, it may well do, I don't know, but MailChimp certainly does.

James Blatch: Yeah, I don't know that one, either, but yeah, and that's something that I do, so the first e-mail people get is the confirmation e-mail and that has the first of the books that I give away. It's quite useful to do that. To get your e-mails whitelisted, so in other words, I'm going into the

right inbox and not going into spam or promotions, if you're on Gmail. Getting the recipient to actually do something on the e-mail indicates to Google, for example, that it's something that they wanted to receive. Having something early on that they click on, so the free book, will make it more likely that your future e-mails get through to them. Let's flesh out the opt-in side of it. There's opt-in something called a double opt-in. Can you explain that to me?

Mark Dawson: Yep. Some e-mail services will allow you to recruit or get new subscribers who just basically only have to click once. It might be that they see a landing page on your site. They click, they've got their e-mail address in, they click, and they're opted in. In other words, they're included on your relevant list from that stage. The alternative is double opt-in. They'll go through that landing page process, they'll enter the e-mail address, click they want to join, and then they'll receive an e-mail from MailChimp saying, "If you want to be on this list, just click this link and you will be opted in." As you say, it's kind of more slight, I wouldn't say single opt-in is frowned upon because that wouldn't be right, but it's certainly more convenient to have single opt-in and you'll find that you'll get more people subscribing because it does happen quite a lot. Those double opt-in e-mails don't get opened or they lost, they're not delivered properly, and so people who wanted to join don't get the chance to join. On the other hand, double opt-in means that they're more qualified, so you know that they're less likely to be spammy, there certainly won't be spam bots. It will be someone who has indicated twice that they want to join, which suggests is good evidence, certainly better evidence that they're going to be engaged subscribers than people who just click the once.

James Blatch: MailChimp for instance, is a double opt-in system, yeah?

Mark Dawson: Generally, yeah. It is at the kind of the level that we'll be looking at, so signups in the backs of books, that will require double opt-in. If you import people into your lists, that can effectively be single opt-in because you just, if you got a list of e-mails and you put them individually, you don't need to double opt-in those.

James Blatch: I think that technically, that stage is you ticking a box saying that they are happy to on your list, so you've done it for them.

Mark Dawson: Correct.

James Blatch: Okay. We're going to come back, I think, just briefly to Infusionsoft and ConvertKit and more advanced in a moment, but let's just press on at the beginner level or the sort of early level for authors and stick with MailChimp and AWeber. In terms of how you would then operate the platform and in terms of lists, for instance, would you have just one list with everybody on it?

Mark Dawson: No, I don't. I've got about 10 different lists, but perhaps even more than 10 now, and each of those is linked to one signup, which goes into one book. For example, the first Milton book is called The Cleaner, there will be a list called The Cleaner in MailChimp, and the only people on that list are people who've seen the link at the back of that book and have clicked on it to join. There are ways around that. You can do what's called segmentation and creating groups, but I don't think MailChimp does that very well, and I prefer just to be a little bit more basic on this.

The benefit of doing it that way is if people come into The Cleaner list, I know that that's the book that they've read, so the first automated e-mail they'll get is one advertising the second book in the series, the St. Death, and conversely, if they join the St. Death list, they'll know that that's probably the first book they've read and I might offer them the first book to get them up to speed on the book, the one before it. It does enable you to know the information of when they joined or what they did before they joined. Enables you to be slightly more bespoke when it comes to your e-mail marketing going forwards.

James Blatch: Can people not end up on more than one list that way, though?

Mark Dawson: That is possible and it does happen, but it's not a disaster. You could, if you wanted to, try and prune those down. It's a bit of a bind. You'd have to search them, find out if they appeared on more than one list, and delete them off the duplicate ones. I would say don't worry too much about that. If people are in more than one, the odds are they'll unsubscribe from one of them and do it for you. Again, don't be worried about unsubscriptions, it's not disastrous, and it just helps you to keep things cleaner.

Something like ConvertKit or Infusionsoft has more powerful features that means that doesn't happen, but at the basic level, I wouldn't worry too much about that with MailChimp.

James Blatch: Okay, so separate lists, which basically are different journeys that readers have taken different ways that they've got onto your list and that enables you to manage their experience with you in the future. That's a good tip and a trick. In MailChimp and the others, you get quite a lot of information, actually, an amazing amount of information, on who's opened what and who's clicked on what, and that's obviously a very important part of how you make changes going forward.

Mark Dawson: Yes. A kind of practical example that I sent out about an hour ago. We mentioned the contest for the SPF right at the start of the podcast. We had about 700 entries for that competition and so we downloaded or I got a download of a spreadsheet of the people who had entered. I put those into a new MailChimp list, which I call something like Podcast Launch Competition, and then because they had only given us their e-mail addresses as part of the competition, I'm not going to drop those straight into a normal SPF mailing list. It's bad etiquette, it's rude, they didn't ask to be on that list. At the same time, they might be want to be on it, so I just sent out an e-mail to them saying that the competition has been drawn, the winner's been drawn.

If they wanted to stay on our list and get the free marketing stuff that we prepared the videos we've done and all that kind of stuff, all they needed to do is to click a link that then took them to the Self Publishing Formula website. All I need to do after that is to put out a report that says, "These people have clicked that link." I can then pull their addresses and then put them into the main SPF list. It's kind of another way of doing double opt-in, just a way to, they don't need to e-mail and tell me they want to be in, just clicking is enough and that makes it very easy for me then to just put them into the main list.

James Blatch: Likewise, if you sent an e-mail out, for instance, your an author and you've got a giveaway, a PDF giveaway. I think you've done something like this in the past, Mark, you've created sort of an MI6 document or something for somebody, so this is a bit of a bonus. When

you look at that a week or so after the e-mails gone out or a couple of days after the e-mails gone out, you can see how many people have clicked on it. If you're getting very low click rates, that gives you an indication that maybe the e-mail wasn't constructed very well or the idea is very good, or maybe the subject heading was misleading. I mean, this is important information, isn't it, for optimizing going forward.

Mark Dawson: That's the kind of stuff you need, especially in the early days when you're starting to fill this kind of thing out. It's important to look at those reports that are provided to you, analyze what's working, what isn't working, so the next time you've got something to send out. You can tweak it and make it more clickable or more attractive, whatever needs to be done, just you can improve the e-mail.

James Blatch: That's one example, by the way, of something you could do, so depending on what genre your book's in, you could be a romance author, and you know that people have read your first book and you're trying to get them to read more. You'd like them to be more engaged. You could create a letter from one character to another that doesn't appear in the book, it's a bit of background information, refers to something that happened maybe five years before your story, but a lovely little thing for somebody who's enjoyed the book to then have. That's just one idea and I know you're quite good at thinking about these things, a little bit of value added material.

Think of it, I suppose, like getting a DVD and looking at the extras.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that's right, and an author called Chris Fox, who will be well-known to some listeners of the podcast, he does pretty good with his new book, and he's created I think it's a very small novella, but it addresses some questions that he deliberately left unanswered in his main story, in the novel, and he said, "Look, if you want to know the background or you want to get answers to these questions, the only you'll be able to do that is by downloading this free story." He's getting a very high conversion

rate percentage of people who are just finished the book and really want to know the information that he's offering. That's exactly right, he's very clever. Just think outside the box. He came up with some really cool ideas that will get people clicking.

James Blatch: This does enable a whole new type of communication with readers, so a relationship between authors and readers. I know when I get the end of a book I really like, I read everything on it, I go on and read reviews, I read the sleeve notes, I read the bio about the author. That's pretty much it. Usually, it's despairingly little that you can read about something in that bereft feeling when you just have to put the book down and move on, but I love this new era where you might get an e-mail from the author with a bit of extra stuff about the book.

I think about it in that way, think about the opportunity of making it a more enjoyable experience for your readers and, again, going back to what I said earlier. Don't be underconfident about it. They're on your list because they want to hear from you and they want to hear more about your books.

Mark Dawson: That's the main benefit of having an e-mail list is it enables the two-way communication between author and reader. If you do it properly, the trick is to turn those people from readers who ... Or customers even, customers to readers, then make them fans, and then make them friends. There are ways to do that. I mean, just being a normal person is a pretty good way to start. I still answer all of the e-mails I get and I get quite a few now, and that's not a chore. It's a real pleasure to get those e-mails and to get the chance to interact with my readers that way.

I know that every time I do that and give someone an interaction that they appreciate and remember, it makes it much, much more likely that they'll buy another book by me or they'll buy the new book when it's ready to go and more like that they'll tell their friends and that their friends will their friends, and before you know it, you've created new readers just from the pretty simple steps, sensible commonsense step of just replying and being pleasant. It's not rocket science.

James Blatch: Yeah, and I think that when you're starting out and you get your first two or three new readers who are genuinely new readers, not your auntie and second cousin, that's an exciting period. The way that you write to them, and you got this tiny little community who you're thrilled that are reading your books, the way that you write to them. As you grow and you get to the point where Mark, I think you're talking about 40,000 plus on your list now, but you write to people in the same way that you wrote to them when it was 50 of them, and it was just a small group, and that's a really an amazing aspect of this digital world, that personal touch you can still have.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Very important, actually, is to just remember how it felt like. I can remember very vividly getting with the first e-mail from MailChimp saying this person has indicated that they like your stuff enough to give you their e-mail. That was really, it was one of the kind of the main steps along the journey for me. Yeah, and just remember what that felt like and remember the kind of content and the kind of tone that you put into the e-mail when you applied to that first person and keep doing it, because there was something, it was magical. When I was growing up, if Stephen King had answered one of my e-mails or Martin Amis or Bret Easton Ellis, someone like that, I would have been doing back flips.

It's easy to become a bit blasé about that but for some readers, it is something really special about to correspond directly with their favorite writer like that.

James Blatch: Yeah, okay. Just before we move on to I want to give, talk a little bit about launching in a moment just to sum on that area. You get this information back from your mail service provider, MailChimp, AWeber, or whatever, shows you how many people are clicking on links and opening, and look at that information. If you're not getting the rate of open that you want, look at how you've written the e-mail, look at the subject heading, change headlines, and try and improve those open rates as time goes on, use that information.

Just before we leave, tips and tricks and actually we've been talking for quite a long time, so we do need to wrap this up in a moment. Before we leave the subject, you're doing your launch at the moment and we are going to go into more detail about that in a future episode, but there are some tips and tricks you can talk about now.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I'll just kind of throw in not so much launches, just kind of general mailing list strategy and mindset, as well. One of the first things I would say, and this is important, we've touched on it already, is don't be worried or scared or offended when people unsubscribe, because it's going to happen all the time. People will have subscribed to a list they didn't mean to join, they subscribed and they'll want to get off. MailChimp can, if you wanted to, e-mail back and tell you individually as people unsubscribe, so I probably wouldn't recommend that. Just get one at the end of the day or even don't bother. Just check when you go into MailChimp.

You mustn't be upset by that, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're annoyed with you. One thing I would say is if people want to unsubscribe, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to do that. You don't want people on your list who don't want to be there, you'll get an unhealthy list, you'll be much more likely. Eventually they'll click this is abuse or spam and that isn't a good thing to happen. What I do is I actually create a small section of the e-mail in MailChimp in slightly smaller type and I'll put it up right to the top, just one of the first things that people see, and I'll say something along the lines of if you want to unsubscribe, that's totally cool, you just need to click the unsubscribe button below.

Then what you do at that stage, because they click the unsubscribe button, then MailChimp and the other platforms will present them with a list of options that they can tick that will say why they want to unsubscribe, and at least one of them, maybe even two of them, say that it's spam or I didn't sign up. If those get ticked, that will be counted by MailChimp as abuse,

and you don't want too many of those. Because if you do, you do run the risk of having your account suspended.

What I do is I just make it really explicit that the easiest way to unsubscribe is just to tick the box that says you don't want to receive the e-mail anymore. That will just count as a normal unsubscribe and you can have many, many more of those than you can abuse reports before MailChimp steps in and takes action. That would be a ... That's a pretty good tip just to help people get off if they want to get off the list.

James Blatch: Great, okay. Thank you, Mark. Final area that I want to talk about is an advanced area. This is for people with bigger lists and I think particularly with multi-genre series of books. In fact, you got a bit of that going on, as well, Mark, different types of series. The more advanced e-mail service providers like Infusionsoft and like ConvertKit have quite sophisticated elements to them where they can start to work out and segment people for you. Pat Flynn talked a bit about this with ConvertKit. He's a big fan of ConvertKit. He now knows subject areas that section of his audience are interested in, and so future campaigns can go only to them, and this doesn't need to be done in separate lists. This is more advanced but it actually can be very powerful as your business grows.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, for him, what he does is one of the first e-mails you get will give you a chance to answer click on a link. He'll say, "Do you consider yourself to be effectively beginner, medium, or advanced level?" Depending on what one you click, your e-mail address is tagged as it goes into one mailing list on ConvertKit, and it'll be tagged with that level of competence. That then enables him to put you into an automated funnel that will depend upon your level of qualification, and in the future, if he wanted to do a broadcast e-mail with a product that was for beginners, he could just send that to beginners rather than potentially waste the time of people who've already got a website. They don't need help on website creation, they've already got one. They wouldn't see that offer, which

means that he'll get less unsubscribes is more congruent for his audience, that kind of thing.

It's very powerful and it does have application. I mean, it has application for us in our course but it also has an application for me and other writers as writers. Rather than having this multiple list, which is the way I do it in MailChimp at the moment, I would be able to tag people as they came in depending on what link they've clicked, which would be specific to one book. Instead of having 10 lists, I could have one list but each of those e-mail addresses would be tagged with the book that they clicked as they came in. It's a lot more elegant and less time-consuming than the way I do it at the moment.

I'm looking at that but the downside to this is that I'm so entrenched now with MailChimp, with the automation sequence, with the links that are in all of my books, there would be several days worth of work to correct all of that and migrate myself over to a more powerful platform. It's probably not something that I will be looking to do in the near future. It might be something that we do with the course, but.

James Blatch: Yeah, I mean, that's a real possibility that we'll move to ConvertKit and we'll certainly detail our story as we go along with that. I know Pat Flynn's obviously a big guy in this area and he does, he likes ConvertKit. Infusionsoft does a lot of the same things. Pat and others have said they find it Confusionsoft I think is how he called it, can be a little bit confusing. My view on software is it's often the case that the one that takes a little bit longer to get into at the beginning can give you more benefit in the long run, but our minds are open on it. If we move to ConvertKit with the course, we'll give the benefit of our experience, certainly.

Mark Dawson: Yep, definitely.

James Blatch: Mark, we've got to approach three quarters of an hour, which is a long time for somebody to listen to you and me talking, but I think it's

been useful. I can tell you from my point of view, probably the most important stuff I've picked up has been about how to write and how to approach writing, and that motivational stuff. The second most important stuff has been about the e-mail list and how a mailing list works and why it works, and I think having that crystal clear in your mind.

Even if you've been doing a mailing list for a couple of years, I hope listening the benefit of Mark's experience, who's become very strong in this area, has been useful to you. Maybe we'll prompt a few changes. Be confident, right?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, be confident. That's a good takeaway from this is you don't need to be worried about this. It's not technically demanding and you're just sending e-mail, so don't be nervous about it. Don't be apologetic because that doesn't sell and it won't be the experience that your readers who want to be on your list, remember. It won't be the experience that they want to get from you.

James Blatch: Okay, great. Look, we're into May, that's why the sun is shining, but it also means that April has gone and therefore Mark's income report is up and out. Should be coinciding with the release of this podcast so you can get Mark's income report for April. We will be back next Friday with another podcast in the Self Publishing Formula. Thank you so much for listening.