

PODCAST 14: SELF PUBLISHING PROMOTION WITH BOOK BUB – WITH KATE DONELAN

James: This podcast is brought to you by The Self-Publishing Formula's Facebook Ads For Authors Premium Course. Registration opens on the 3rd of June for a limited time. Hello, and welcome to podcast number 15 from The Self-Publishing Formula.

Recording: Two writers, one just starting out, the other, a bestseller. 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: Hello, and welcome along, yes, it's SPF podcast number 14. Mark and I are quite excited. Can we say we're very excited about this week's podcast Mark?

Mark: I don't think excited is a strong enough a word James. We're agog.

James: You're a professional writer. Come up with a better word.

Yeah, this is going to be a feature length interview with BookBub and yeah, we're not going to preview too much. We got as many questions as we possibly could stretching our time. We're not going to introduce it for too much just anything quickly to say. I know that you've had a bit of a literary, self-publishing literary celeb wedding this week, haven't you Mark?

Mark: Yes, I just got back from Nick Stevenson's wedding which was wonderful, so Nick and his wife, Kylie, and Joanna Penn and her husband Jonathan were there as well with me and Lucy so it was really wonderful event. Just lovely to have three of us together talking a little bit shop. Joanna I more than Nick obviously.

James: Yeah. You didn't sit across from his wife too.

Mark: No I think he would've gotten into an awful lot of trouble if we persuaded to do that. It was lovely to see, to be there for that. It was a lovely, lovely evening. Great to see Jo as always.

James: That's really nice. Just goes to underline what a nice community that we all operate in. Okay, without further ado, let's get into this interview. Katie Donelan is her name and we do introduce her in the interview itself. We're going to let it roll and we'll have a quick chat off the back. I reckon it's publishing law that when two or three writers are gathered together, then they shall mention BookBub, whether it's to boast of their recent bump in sales or pour out their grief of being rejected. BookBub is a dominant force in both the indie and trad world. We are delighted to be joined by Katie Donelan.

Hello Katie. You come from a traditional side of the fence I think, Random House and is this true, you are the third employee of BookBub, the first non-founder.

Katie: Yes. I actually like to say I'm the first even though technically that's incorrect but I'm the first non-founder and the third employee.

James: There should be some sort of plaque on the wall for that, okay.

Katie: Yeah, agreed.

James: Well look, Katie, as I said everyone talks about BookBub, it's very difficult to have a conversation about book marketing without BookBub coming up but let's assume there's some people who don't really know what we're talking about.

Can you give us the 101 on BookBub before we get going?

Katie: Yes, absolutely. First off, just thank you guys for inviting me to be here. I'm really excited to be talking with you.

BookBub is a company, we still call ourselves a startup although we actually launched in January 2012. We're now a little over four years old. We were founded by two men who actually came from outside of the publishing industry. We're both sort of in the digital media space and entrepreneurs in the past, our CEO actually founded two companies before launching BookBub.

They were actually helping a friend of theirs who had started a company that was producing ebook contents. She asked Josh and Nick to help her try and market the content she was producing. They jumped on board to help her with that and soon realized basically that the publishing industry was missing a lot of the direct to consumer marketing tools that they had used in other industries so they decided to actually test out an email marketing service and basically try to sort of hacky version of BookBub to start off with and it took off so they essentially split off from this other company and launched BookBub.

What our core product is, what it has been for the last four years, is our daily email in which we feature our featured deals. Which are essentially price promotions that are submitted to us by authors and publishers so they tell us about e-books that they're discounting to 2.99 or below for the most part and we have an in-house editorial team who curates all of the deals that get submitted to us.

We get about 200 to 300 submissions a day and our editors are picking the best, around 15 to 20% end up featuring in our email which goes out to now over 8 million members who get our email every day.

On the subscriber side, our readers tell us which categories they like to read and which retailers they buy their e-books from and their email every day will only show them books available in those categories and on those retailers for them to browse through and click straight through to the retailer to buy if they so choose. That's a quick summary of our core product. That's what's been around for the last four years. We are obviously

working on other things as well but that's sort of a top level overview of what BookBub does.

James: That's great.

Mark, it's worth you just chipping in here I think in saying what BookBub means to an author.

Mark: Yeah, sure. I'm slightly surprised. Then when I thought about what you just said Katie about how long the BookBub's been around, and I suppose four years would be about the time I can remember it being a thing. I think I was on board early and it seemed like it came out of nowhere with a big list straightaway. I think you've been building the list kind of in cloaks mode for a little while and then decloaked and everyone was like, "Oh my God, this new platform is around and it's very, very effective." I think I was pretty early to get on board. I had lots of experience with other email service providers, generally quite good but BookBub came along and immediately right out the gate was super effective. I can remember I don't know how many I've have had, probably 15 or 20 over the course of the last four years but every time you get one lined up is very exciting because you know that you're going to get attention put on your book and you're going to shoot up off the charts.

I've been in the top 10 in the US before on the back of BookBubs. I've had long tails, by which I mean. People will buy the book. I'm advertising then they'll buy the rest of the series. I can see that as a measurable metric over the course of the next two or three weeks. It's been fundamentally important for getting me into the position where I am, still very competitive and I still get turned down. I've been turned down three out of the last three which I had five successful in a row now. But I'll keep applying because they're just so, so good.

Katie: Yes, you should keep applying. I'm sure we'll talk about it that.

James: I think we told you Katie that we've been inundated with questions for this particular podcast, and I know we're going to talk about quite an exciting announcement as well shortly. Let's just deal first of all with that question that Mark mentioned so I think people will be heartened to hear that even Mark Dawson is rejected occasionally by BookBub.

The number one question people ask is why didn't you select my book?

I know you've got quite a lot of information out there on the selection criteria and I think the clue is 2 to 300 submissions a day is probably the major clue here, isn't it?

Katie: Yes, I would definitely say that's the major clue. I would also say that we do try and publish as much content about the selection process as we can because I know that it's the most common question we get as well. But I do actually think that talking to authors about it has always been really the most effective way to explain how it works and why we do it the way we do so I'm happy to rehash things here.

I think definitely obviously one of the most important factors is that at this point we just get so many submissions. Which is great. I mean we love getting so many submissions of course, but essentially one of the core problems is that we often have authors say why don't you just run more books? Which seems sort of like an easy solution to the too many submissions problem.

But I think one of the reasons that Mark can say such kind things about the BookBub products and why authors continue to want to work with us is because we've really tried to prioritize making sure that the promotion stay effective. Running a BookBub feature deal really does yield the results that authors are looking for with their marketing and to just add dozens more books to the email would sort of have a really potentially very negative impact on the individual promotions themselves.

That has been a core part of BookBub's business from the beginning, both on the editorial side on my team side, which is the team that works with partners and with authors and publishers and also on the consumer marketing side in terms of the kind of readers that are working to get on the list. But essentially, the selection process is competitive because we get so many submissions a day and I'm happy to get into as much detail as you guys want. But essentially what our editors are doing is looking for the books that are most likely to perform well with our readers. Obviously that's in our best interest but it also happens to be in the best interest of our readers and our author and publisher partners, in that if a book performs well for us, that's because tons of her readers are buying it and obviously that means it's performing well for the authors.

The things that play into that selection process are yes we have a bunch of minimum requirements that I don't think it's worth going over here. They're on our website. Aside from that our editors are there looking at a platform of the book meaning reader reviews, critical reviews, the author's platform in terms of bestseller list or accolades they've received in the past. And they're looking at historical performance meaning if we've ever run that author or that book before, the editors are looking at how the author or that particular book has performed in the past.

The last thing and I think the thing that usually is eye opening for a lot of authors is that they are looking at the content itself. We at this point have tens of thousands of books that we've run to our readers and our editors are looking very closely at the performance of each of those books relative to other books that we're running in the same category. What they notice, given that we have all this data, is trends obviously so on a certain list like historical fiction for example, there are dozens of different types of historical fiction we could run there. Some of them are performing really well right now and others aren't performing really well.

We take that as a sign that our readers are looking for, for example, World War II tend to do well with our members in historical fiction, and they're not

looking as much for biblical history or whatever other type of fiction we could be running there.

When our editors are given the choice between two great books which they almost always are, they often make the decision based on sort of what sort of subcategories and genres seem to be performing really well with our readers recently. I always like to say and I know this can be frustrating for authors, it really is always worth continuing to submit.

Mark you should definitely keep sending those books because it really comes down so much to what other books are being submitted to that category at the same time and also what's trending on the list at that time. It could be that the content of your book has been doing well for the last 4 to 6 weeks but next month it will be doing really well so if you resubmit, it could have a much better chance of being selected then. As frustrating as it can be, we really do always recommend that people continue to submit and I promise that is not just to make authors go crazy filling out that submission form every month.

Mark: Which is a lot better than it used to be.

Katie: Oh yeah, good, okay.

Mark: Just as a cultural question, BookBub, you're in Boston aren't you?

Katie: Yes.

Mark: If I was to go into BookBub HQ tomorrow, would I consider it to be kind of a data-driven environment or editorial led environment?

Katie: I actually love our company because I think it's both. I would say that we are probably more data-driven, but our books are hand selected by humans. I think of it more as a model that is editorial. We do have people

choosing the books that end up with the email but they are supplied with vast amounts of data to really help that decision.

We are definitely a culture in which when you make a decision, we have data to back up for the reasoning the decision we made. It's not as a lot of things are in traditional publishing, it's not just historical fiction sort of gut feel about a book and they happen to really love that novel. That's not really a rationale that we would use to choose a book. It's based a lot on data but it is a human choosing it at the end.

James: Okay, there's a couple questions just to throw in here from our SPF community.

Mark O'Reilly asks who are these editors and how do you find them?

Katie: That's a good question. Our editors are definitely from mixed background. We have a team of, I don't know the exact number but somewhere between five and 10 editors at this point. They come from different backgrounds. We have a number of editors that come from a traditional publishing background or they worked at an agency before or they write themselves. They usually tend to be heavy readers in the genres that they're responsible for selecting for. We hired them as we hire anyone else in the company. We have an extremely rigorous hiring process here where people go through multiple rounds of multiple hour interviews. We give them exercises. We give them sample selection tests to run through and we sort of critically evaluate everybody that applies and sort of choose the best editors we can.

James: A few questions Katie on the genres. I guess some people who don't find themselves fitting in easily to the existing way that you segmented the list always wondering whether you're going to expand that. Doug asks, Will you be going wider advertising offering readers things like new releases, novellas and things like that? I'll just link that in with Jay Faulkner who asks whether you're going to add a new category or two such

as dystopian post-apocalyptic which seems to be quite hot at the moment? How much you think about that in widening the segmentation of the list? Katie: I'll answer that in two parts. The additional category is in the daily featured deals email is something that we are always thinking about. The way that we launch new categories, it can happen in a couple ways. One is if we have an existing category where one subgenre is consistently underperforming on that category.

I like to use the example of paranormal romance here even though that's happened like three years ago now. We originally had one romance category and paranormal romance just never performed well in the general romance category so that was actually one of the first subgenres of romance that we split out into its own list. Because we knew obviously there's demand for paranormal romance. We had tons of authors looking to run paranormal promotions with us, but they just weren't holding up on the general list so we launched paranormal romance on its own and now that list has existed for a really long time and does really well. That's one way.

The other way that we can launch new categories is if we just say we think we should launch a dystopian category or one of the other ones that the author mentioned. What we will often do is actually add that to our readers' sign up page during the sign-up flow and basically see how much interest we get from readers when they are signing up. We have a critical threshold at which we consider there to be enough demand from readers to launch a new category and there have been categories in the past that we've added to the sign up page.

Sports romance was one we tried recently where the sign-up rate for our members just wasn't high enough to justify launching a dedicated list for that category. So again, very data-driven. Although we do come up with ideas for new categories, that's a human. But basically, we test new categories all the time and when we see enough demand both from readers during that sign-up test process or and also obviously we need to

get enough submissions from authors and publishers to sort of justify launching the list on them.

Mark: Just a question on how you decided to do a dystopian subcategory. The question is how would you go about building that list? So obviously the flow would change so that you'd include the question, "Are you interested in dystopian fiction?"

How would you then start to attract readers who have an inclination toward that?

Katie: That's actually also something that we've done in different ways over time. We recently split our mysteries category. We originally had one mysteries list into historical mysteries, cozy mysteries and crime fiction. When we launched those three subcategories, we actually just auto subscribed any members that had been signed up to the original mysteries list to all three of the subcategories and allowed them to opt out of whichever ones they weren't interested in overtime.

When we launched paranormal romance back a few years ago, we actually looked for members who had opted in to both romance and fantasy and subscribed the ones that overlapped in both categories to the new paranormal list. When we launched a new category like I think we recently launched business or history, we'll actually just start that clean add it to the sign-up page and new members have the option to sign up when they join BookBub and old members can add it to their list of categories when they go back and edit their profile so actually the way that we have members join a new list, it really varies depending on the category.

One: Let's go back one step beyond that. This is the question from Lakshmi and I'm interested in this so I think I knew what the answer might be. How do you build your list? Back in the early days, how did BookBub build such a big list?

Katie: Great question. We have a whole team at BookBub which is dedicated to our consumer marketing team. Again, I think it's a 10-ish person team. They spend their days basically looking for members. In the early days, a lot of BookBub subscriber acquisition was done through paid advertising and that's still a big component of how we find new members. I would also say that now we have some number of millions of Facebook fans and tons of Twitter fans and we have a much more viral presence now so. We also get a ton of word-of-mouth sign-ups for new subscribers as well.

Some of the strategies that marketing team use are typical paid advertising channels like Facebook and content marketing and Google, various types of platforms that you can use. But the thing that I find super fascinating about our consumer marketing team is how much analysis they do about the quality of the subscribers they're getting from each of those channels. If we test out a new marketing channel and discover that the readers we're acquiring from that channel are not as engaged or active as a typical BookBub subscriber, we actually will stop marketing on that channel because we'd rather acquire members who are going to be engaged and actually buy the books we're featuring than just add emails to our distribution list. Then some other less nonpaid channels that we use are obviously social media and then we've also launched a reader blog which is not the partner's blog, but it's just BookBub blog where we do a lot of content marketing on there and find readers in a more organic way coming to the blog and signing up there.

Mark: Yeah, that's very sensible. That's something that I'd recommend to all writers is to keep an eye on the health of your list. Obviously not everyone's going to have tens of millions of list members but the principles are the same. You've got people who aren't clicking or aren't opening emails is not really much putting in paying to have them to continue to acquire them from their source or to have them on your list. It's better to get rid of them which actually raises ... I'm trying to find who left this question so apologies, I can't find the name now.

Someone asked how often BookBub spring cleans or purges its lists.

Katie: I actually don't know the detailed answer to this question. I think we do it, there's some kind of system where if somebody hasn't engaged with the email in a certain amount of time we will unsubscribe them, I think. But the other thing we do now is actually offer a weekly subscription to people trying to unsubscribe from the daily email, we see if they've just want something less frequent because we know there are people out there who don't want an email every single day.

Another thing that we now offer members who may not want an email every day is to just follow specific authors and get dedicated emails when that author either has a deal or comes out with a new really so we do have some alternate ways for our readers to opt in to BookBub emails without getting the email every single day.

Mark: That just goes from Monica Burns, that question. That's interesting. This kind of goes back to something that was mentioned earlier. This is from Sally Lyons.

In order to better serve BookBub's customer base, would you consider a new release or launch promo for a series that have already been featured and has a good record with download sales etc. or by authors that subscribes to following.

That's a relevant question for me. I launched a book last Friday. Did really well but I would have loved to have been out to juice it with a BookBub push beyond the automated email out to my followers. Is that something you ever thought about?

Katie: Again I will answer this in a few ways. In the future deals email, we historically have featured very few new releases. Typically, a reason for that is because authors submit a new book it usually doesn't have the platform - number of reviews, and reader feedback - that would make it competitive with other submissions we're getting for that category. So typically, they

just need to be out for a little while to get enough reviews to make them competitive.

That said, we have our new release alerts now, which I think are awesome as long as authors have claimed their profile and we're able to drive new followers for them. Because that's just a free service that we now offer authors alerting their readers to their new books.

The other way that we are now hoping to work with authors on new releases and I'm maybe jumping the gun here a little bit is with a product that we are announcing soon, the BookBub ads product so I don't know if we want to go down that road right now. But essentially that's the way that I'm thinking we will soon be able to be working with authors on their new release launches as well.

James: I think it's as good a time as any.

Let's talk about BookBub ad. I know that Mark has been on the inside of this hasn't he? You want to explain perhaps Katie explain the top line of what this is and how the product is going to work.

Katie: Yes, absolutely. Quick intro to ads. Some authors signed up to the email may have seen this new product. We've been beta testing it for a while which is why Mark knows about it. It's basically a new placement that is appearing at the bottom of the BookBub daily email. It's a standard banner ad unit so it's a 300 x 250 display ad that shows up at the bottom of the email.

We have introduced this unit for a few reasons. One is the daily email itself as we've been talking about here is a product where we are fairly limited in both the number of books we can run every day and the types of books we can run so as I just mentioned, we feature very few new releases. We don't feature any full price books of course because price promotions are the focus of the product. We can feature novellas. We don't feature multi-

author book sets. We don't feature samplers, so there's a lot of content that doesn't work in the existing email that we would actually love to help our partners promote.

The other reason is because as we've been talking about because our selection process is so competitive and we have a limited number response in the email, we actually aren't able to work with as many authors and publishers as we would like to work with and who want to work with BookBub. So this new product, BookBub ads, is essentially a way for authors, publishers any sort of book marketing professionals to reach BookBub audience to promote advertise book related content of any kind. You can promote new releases full price books, again multi-author book sets, novellas, any type of book related content.

The product is self-serve so authors and publishers will be able to go in and set up their own campaigns. They can design their own creative. The product is very distinct from future deals in that it is an auction-based advertising platform so there may be questions about this depending on how familiar authors are with platforms like Facebook or Google ads. But it's essentially a platform where you can set your own budget from \$10-\$10,000, however much you want to spend, and you bid the maximum CPM you're willing to pay or impressions in the ad product and you end up competing against other advertisers on the platform for the readers that you're targeting.

The last thing I'll throw in here, and then Mark you can jump in, is that I'm really excited about some of the new targeting options that are available with the ads product. We have the same targeting by category or retailer or region that we offer in featured deals but on top of that, advertisers can now target BookBub readers interested in a certain author. If Mark was running an ad campaign for a new release, he could target BookBub readers interested in himself or BookBub readers and / or BookBub readers interested in any other comp authors that he thinks would be a relevant audience for his own book. That audience includes not just readers

that have followed those authors but readers that have expressed interest in those authors in any way on the BookBub platform, whether it's by clicking on a featured deal or looking at the book page for one of that author's books on our website or whatever. It is so it's a targeted list of readers who have expressed interest in a certain author.

Mark: I've been testing it for a couple of weeks and the good news is it's very, very effective. And as you described it Katie, it's very, very similar to Facebook ads at interest targeting. So one of the things that we advocate or I advocate for people who are getting into Facebook advertising is the entry-level which is very effective is to target fans of other authors who are writing similar stuff to you.

What BookBub has done is open up another avenue for allowing you to get to readers who you can reasonably assume are warm towards at the very least kind of genre that you're writing and possibly the kind of book you're writing.

I've been testing it quite extensively. I spent ... I'll give you the topline figures because I think they are worth mentioning and then I'll just have you a little who I've been targeting. I've spent over the course of last 14 days \$3087.31 but that's brought in \$3880.66 so that's a return on investment of 28, 29% and on some days. Yes it's great and some days it's been over 100%.

Typically it's over 50%. That's good. It's difficult to argue with those numbers. Anytime you can spend one and get two back or 150 back, you keep investing in that. I've used the kinds of I suppose entry-level targeting so I haven't gone after genres so much because I think my experience in Facebook ads is the more you lose focus, the less effective those ads are going to be.

The best one surprisingly has been to advertise against myself. So some of those ads as people who as you say Katie have clicked on at least

interactive with one of my BookBub ads previously or followed me or whatever, and those have been really, really effective. Also other authors, I am often sharing shelf space actually with, people like Lee Charlton, David Baldacci, James Patterson, not actually selling anywhere near as much as those guys but I know there's cross over there and those ads have worked really well. So it's a very successful test and this is a tool. I'm really excited to see how you continue to roll this out.

Katie: I know Mark is very sophisticated in your advertising campaign so it's really exciting to hear that you're seeing such good results. We definitely have been working on this product with the intention of making it flexible for authors based on the type of campaign they're running and what their goals are. So for us to hear that your goal was to run an ROI positive campaign and you've been able to do that is really exciting. I'm very happy to hear that.

The other great thing about ads is that if you really want to run a branding campaign and you're not as focused on ROI, it's easy to scale this and you can just run it, if you run a just targeted genre. ROI will be harder to achieve but you can reach potentially millions of members in a short period of time to do a big branding campaign as well so we designed it with the goal of allowing authors to do a strategic campaign based on their goals.

Mark: Yeah or launching. I've been advertising books at which always convert well. I mean I'm sure that's the case with featured deals with BookBub. It certainly works on them on Facebook ads. That's what I would advocate typically but I'm starting to test out a \$.99 single book so we'll see how that performs. And it would certainly work with launches if I got my act together in terms of getting the creative ready in time. I would definitely run some ads last week, just to juice the launch a bit more.

James: I've got a couple of questions, the first one maybe a bit dull. I don't know if I quite understood this. So you have an email list obviously segmented very subtly nuanced in the way that you distribute the emails,

when you have the advertising products, that doesn't work down the normal segmenting lines.

You can actually attach different advertisements to different individuals within particular segments. Is this a complicated system like that?

Katie: Yeah, it functions very differently from the featured deal. We built a whole separate platform for the ad product. I mean, it shows up in the same email but when you buy a featured deal, you're essentially buying a guarantee that it will be included in an email to this many members on a sci-fi list.

Whereas with ads what's happening is every time one of our members opens an email, we'll serve an ad to them. It's like a live option platform. We'll just show them whichever ad has bid the highest for the targeting that they fall into essentially. It can be like fairly complicated to explain and I definitely expect there to be some confusion between the ads product and our featured deals because they do function very differently. But yes, you're right, we're targeting by individual user and the buckets that they fall into rather than just reaching all the members on a certain category.

Mark: As someone who has a lot of experience in this kind of area, it's a very impressive product to take. The interface is clean and easy to use. I've had readers who have emailed me independently to say I just saw you advertise on BookBub down the bottom of the email that they can screen grab and send it to me, which is great so I know it's working. There's some small bumps, things that can be improved in terms of how the stats are relayed. It's a little bit slow than it could be but that's just to be expected. It's all to get ironed out.

James: Katie, the primary difference people need to obviously understand is that you're not pre-selecting in the same way. It's your choice to advertise as opposed to waiting for you to go through the criteria with the main body of the email.

However, I'm assuming you do have some criteria here, some sort of rules of engagement for advertising.

Katie: Yeah, exactly. You're totally right. The main difference is that there is no editorial selection process so as long as your ad meets our terms of service or policies for creative, it's fine. We do definitely reserve the right to remove creative if it's violating those policies. We're hoping to avoid running offensive creative of any kind. We are currently open to advertising book related content, so it has to be relevant to an audience of readers. The other things that we are currently restricting our campaigns that are advertising specific to drive sign-ups to a specific mailing list. I don't know how much it will change over time but for the time being, the creative can't say sign up to X email list just because it's potentially competitive with a product.

Other than that though, it's really open and again it's in beta so a lot of the stuff is, I don't want to be too constrictive here because as you roll out a product, we learn more, we get more feedback. We understand the types of ads that maybe won't work and those policies could change over time. But for the time being, it's pretty open as long as it's book related, we do review the creative that comes in and if anything looks particularly egregious, we might pull it, but otherwise it's great. It's really exciting because there isn't a selection process. It doesn't have to be discounted so authors will just have so much more flexibility to reach our audience with sort of things that they are prioritizing.

Mark: I'm pretty sure our listeners are going to be very, very excited about this.

At the moment there is a waitlist I think, what's the process from here on out.

Katie: The process is if you're interested in working with us on ads, there is a form on our partner's blog which you can find on the BookBub partner's

website which is BookBub.com/partners. If you go there, you can enter your information into this form that basically says I'm interested in running an ad campaign and you will be added to our BookBub ads waitlist.

The reason we have a waitlist is because the product is in beta, we have a lot of technical work to keep doing on the platform as we've been talking about. We've built an entirely new product here, so there's definitely still work to be done as Mark said and currently we actually just aren't equipped to handle hundreds of partners on there.

We want to start sort of collecting interest from members. We want to start finding out about what types of advertising campaigns they run and are looking to run to do some market research on our end. Once you've added your name to the waitlist, we will be rolling out in buckets or groups as fast as we can based on how quickly we are able to scale the product.

James: Great. I think that's something that we'll revisit Mark.

It's definitely worth a podcast by itself. Some of the alternatives to the major social media platform advertising. It would be interesting to hear some of the results when things have settled down a little bit in some of our community as well.

Katie: I would love to do that. I also think that we are going to have a lot of room to do education. I imagine I mean from what I can tell thus far there's a huge range in how much experience our author partners have with platforms like Facebook, the auction platform on Facebook and as we mentioned earlier. It really can be quite confusing so I would love to do something where we can ask questions about we're obviously going to be publishing a ton of blog content about best practices but I'm happy to do another one where we talk about what's the most effective targeting and how to accomplish various types of goals etc.

James: Great. That would be really good, yeah I mean obviously the huge advantage you've got for our audience here is you are a list of readers. Facebook is great. There are hundreds of thousands of millions of readers.

There were also lots of people who like tractors and airplanes and everything else, finding your way between them is obviously the trick. Okay well, that's great, new products, exciting new announcement we'll definitely revisit it in the future. If you don't mind Katie, we're going to crack on with some of the other questions as well that we have in advance. A few questions on geography I noticed, Patricia, Linda Wilcox, I think Christy Rose.

Things like, what are the main differences you see in terms of success between the US and the UK and India and Australia? Whether you notice particular genres working better in different zones? Another question was whether you could select more than one territory more easily. I think somebody said that they wanted to be included in Australia and the UK but couldn't select and only have the UK to go with.

Katie: Our international expansion has been very interesting. I'm not sure where the specifics of the selecting various regions but I'll just outline how the process works now.

We recently combined our international regions into an international bundle so when you submit to BookBub now, you can tell us you can either run a US only promotion, an international only promotion or a worldwide promotion. You basically have to buy all the international regions together which currently includes UK, Canada, India and Australia.

Once you opt into international bundle, you can opt out of specific regions if you don't want to include them but the bundle itself is just a flat fee. So if you're running a worldwide promotion, you're paying for all of the region and if you want to opt out of a specific one, you can, though we definitely encourage our partners to run in as many regions as they can during their promotion.

For the differences in between regions, I would say that I think there's definitely room for us to evolve in terms of how we are customizing content

by region. I think that answering the differences between regions question can be a little challenging because a lot of the differences boil down to category specific tropes that don't work particularly well in certain regions. For example cowboy romances don't really do as well outside of the US. I mean as they do in the US which is probably not surprising. But I remember I think there was also a question about cover specifically and we definitely do see especially between the US and the UK, there are definitely different cover tropes in those two regions. Unfortunately we don't currently have the ability to run a different cover in in the UK edition so that's another area where we could make some incremental improvements to our international regions for sure.

Mark: Okay, you just pointed to question I had actually noted down, in terms of covers for book sets.

What do you find converts better, 3-D book sets covers or flat TV covers?

Katie: In terms of conversions, definitely 3-D. We have some admittedly fairly complex policies about what covers we are able to run for which kinds of box set but I would say that if you are running a deal with us for a box set of full-length books, definitely run a 3-D image, they convert better.

Mark: Okay, I thought you might say that. Michelle Nato asks:

BookBub gives an amazing spike in sales. I just experienced it yesterday but how does one keep the momentum going after the BookBub ad is complete, what would you say to that?

Katie: I would say run a BookBub ads campaign later. That's one way that I'll be answering the question moving forward. I think there actually will be really exciting opportunities to test extending the price promotion and continuing to advertise either the different categories or the same categories after a featured deal and/or advertising a book at full price to

different categories or the next book in the series at full price to the same category.

There will be a lot of opportunities to do that in the ads. I realize that her question was not about ads. So in terms of other strategies after a featured deal, the advice we typically recommend to our partners is to well first I should say there's always going to be a spike and it will always be a spike. I think it's unrealistic to assume that the sales momentum will continue at the rate that it does at the top of the spike.

That said, obviously the ultimate goal is to have sales settled back down at the rate that was higher than pre promotion. We think some of the best ways to do that are essentially make it as easy as possible for readers who have either discovered you for the first time or read the book at a discounted, that they bought through the featured deal to move on to another one of your books. Or on the other hand if you're marketing that specific book, just make it as easy as possible for them to share that book with other readers.

We are big advocates of using back matter of honestly collecting email addresses and using your own mailing list. Essentially you want to make that process of especially doing like a series promotion or something. When you discount a first book in a series with us, we have a lot of data around the fact that discounting a first in a series is far more effective, making it free is far more effective. We see 8 times the sales of other books in the series during the promotion when the first book is free as opposed to being \$.99.

When you can include a link to the next book in the series in the back matter, we see a three times higher increase in sales of the rest of the series after. The post promotion one, there is a link that leads the reader right to the next book in the series.

Mark: That's good to know. This is a kind of a follow-up to that. Free is still effective for you. There's some kind of chatter on some of the boards that \$.99 is as effective as free as Nato and BookBub obviously is the best place to comment on that.

What's your view on \$.99 against free?

Katie: A lot of my pricing advice is really based on the specific partner's goals. I think both free and \$.99 can be extremely effective price points. We see 10 times the downloads of free books that we do of \$.99 books so in terms of volume of eyeballs, if you're going for maximizing the number of eyeballs, free is definitely the way to go. I think that for a series, I really do believe that first in series for free is still an incredibly effective marketing strategy for many of our partners.

On the other hand, \$.99 can work really well if you're trying to drive revenue from the actual promotion. Obviously it's easier to do that way. Although I will actually say that we have a lot partners who tell us they make more money on a free promotion as long as there are other books a in the series because the follow-on sales are just so much higher.

I'm obviously a big proponent of free but we of course run tons of \$.99 promotions that are really effective as well. The one other caveat I'll add in here is that, just going back to the selection process for a second, if there are any authors listening to this who are having trouble being selected and they are submitting for \$.99, I will say that our editors review free book in a separate bucket. It can often be easier to be selected for a free promotion than a discounted promotion. If you're willing to give free a try, you just listen to all the super compelling reasons to do so, I would encourage you to try submitting for free.

James: Okay, a couple of quick ones, another question about genres so the quick ones I think they're going to be quicker.

Alex Nichols says any plans to expand into French language and Tony says any plans expanded to audiobooks.

Katie: Both of the short answers to those are not in the immediate future. French, I think we have more room to expand into additional English language books before we do French, but it's something we definitely have on the eventual roadmap.

For audiobooks, this is an area that I personally would love us to go into. We haven't cracked how to do so effectively. The audio market doesn't at the moment lend itself particularly well to replicating the featured deals model for audio so it's not something we can just add on to the existing product. But it is something that is also on our radar and I would love us to get involved in audio at some point so not a super satisfying answer.

James: Okay, there's some hope there for Tony Botowski. Okay couple questions from Angela Reyes.

Katie: It's a little hard to say. It really fluctuates a lot. I would say trend wise though, romance has always been by far most competitive and all the sub genres of romance so we definitely get a disproportionate number of submissions to the romance categories.

I think potentially unsurprisingly, a lot of our smaller newer categories end up being the ones where we're looking for additional submission so in sort of like chick lit or LGBT or time travel romance or I'm sorry time travel romance is not true because I'm sure you got a ton in there.

Some of our smaller list are the ones where we are always looking for more submissions but again this actually really does fluctuate from month to month. For example in October, we get just like a ton of amazing horror submissions that we really wish the horror authors would spread out throughout the rest of the year. So horror authors you can promote your books in months other than on October but yeah it does actually fluctuate from month to month.

James: Okay, a couple of questions, similar theme from Andrea and Alan who want to know about the mix between spots for trad publishing and indie publishing.

Do you have percentages allocated, does that move, do you see it moving in the future?

Katie: We do not have percentages allocated. Books from traditionally published authors or publishing houses and self-published authors go through the exact same editorial process and who they're coming from does not factor in to the selection process. We don't have like targets that we're trying to hit every month or percentages or dedicated spots for trad books versus indie books. We have had about balance between the two of about 50-50 for serve as long as I can remember now, definitely not the earliest days of BookBub, we absolutely started working with independent authors and they were by far the earliest adopters of BookBub. For the past I would say at least a year or two, it's been about 50-50, that's actually a breakdown that we're very comfortable with. We are not actively trying to push it in one direction or the other. I think if we saw that percentage change dramatically in a certain month, we will definitely investigate and figure out why, but we're actually really comfortable with an even mix of books coming from both sides of the marketplace. We really just want to be featuring the best books in the categories that we have regardless of how they are published.

Mark: Okay. I've got one from Lakshmi again. This is quite a good one. Who do you think your main competitor is?

Katie: Yes, that is a great question. I think that's there are two ways to look at this. For the featured deals product itself, there are obviously a number of other services that do the same thing that BookBub does and those are the natural conclusions for who our competitors are. I think we have a few advantages over a lot of those, one being scale and another being that we are retailer agnostic.

I think that overall, the direction we see BookBub going in is more of a discovery service generally than a price promotion specific service. When we think about the future of BookBub, we think of our competitors more as really any service out there who is sort of helping leaders discover content basically. And I would say almost on an even bigger scale, we think of our competitors as like phone games or like any entertainment apps out there because really what we want to be doing is capturing the attention of readers and have them get a book from BookBub and read it rather than playing Candy Crusher.

I don't even know what the new trendy game is. Yes, I would say like book discovery platforms and almost more on a greater scale sort of any sort of entertainment service out there.

Mark: You said your platform is agnostic, which obviously it is. The ultimate agnosticism would be to actually start selling books yourself. Is it something that BookBub has thought about?

Katie: I think we ultimately landed on our featured deals product as a great price promotion specific discovery tool. I think what we ultimately decided was there was so much more room in the discovery space specifically for us to help authors and publishers market other types of books that we really want to focus on that. I feel like there's a big opportunity to continue evolving on the discovery side of things both for readers and authors and publishers. We decided not to go down the retail direction.

Mark: You mentioned funding so obviously there are Venture Capitalists involved in BookBub now.

What are the odds BookBub will be bought out in the next five years?

Katie: I do not know the answer to that in the next five years. I think I would say that we again, see like a really big opportunity for other things we can do. It's so hard to look five years in the future at a company like ours. I think

in the next couple years, it's unlikely that we would get bought out because we really are digging in to the products we're working on now and it's going to take us a while to become right and I think we really want to invest in that.

Mark: I suppose the halfway house on the selling would be some form of subscription model. I guess you've considered that and considered it in the same way that you have retail. There's not really an option for you but it would seem a natural commercialization of your list to offer premium subscription service, a bit like unlimited or something like that with people submitting their books for a percentage.

Katie: Yeah, that is an interesting other idea and honestly I don't see us pursuing it in the near future.

Mark: It works so well as a list in its own right. You don't want to tinker with it too much. You want to work on the bits that are working well which is I guess expanding the genres, making sure that you're feeding the voracious appetite of your readers and that's the heart of this. We're talking about the writers a lot but I'm thinking about all these thousands of people who just consume book after book. Romance readers are particularly voracious but I think quite a lot of the other genres. We should give our thoughts tonight to all the readers, which is us as well, of course, but it's such a huge part of your business.

Katie: You're absolutely right, and I've definitely been focused on authors here because that's who we are talking to. But I would also say that really from the beginning of BookBub, readers have been the focus of how we designed the product and how we've built the business. A lot of decisions we've made about not just adding more books to the email and not just acquiring a bunch of email addresses really quickly because really are focused on making the experience so great for the reader, that really is our focus. As long as we have a list of highly engaged readers who are

buying books all the time, that inevitably makes the product sort of more valuable to our author and publisher partners well.

James: Great. We've been through them. Sorry, if we didn't get your question directly. I think we pretty much covered all the topics that were brought up. I'm going to end with one final question which is going to bring us back to the beginning and allow you to repeat something you said at the beginning and it's from Sean McGraw:

"After how many attempts should I give up applying to BookBub?"

Katie: Don't give up. Don't give up. You absolutely should not give up. And again, I totally understand that it can be very frustrating for authors but really because of what I said earlier, timing plays such a role in the selection process that it is not in your best interests to stop submitting. If you're getting super frustrated maybe you can just space out your submissions. Give yourself a couple months to not submit and then try again.

James: Good and on that hopeful note, I wanted to bring it back to full circle. Katie, it's been an absolute pleasure and fascinating talking to you. Thank you so much for coming on. I think we may have a date in the future to talk more specifically about advertising and how that's working for you and how it will work for authors as well. We'll let the product mature I think for a bit and maybe you can come with some data that will be helpful.

Katie: Yes that would be awesome. I would love to do that.

James: Katie was absolutely brilliant, Mark. I thought it was really interesting listening to her. It was good of her also she answered quite a lot of questions I know that get asked a lot and I know that they've got stuff on the website as she said, it's better when people hear her saying it than reading an FAQ in the website as to why your book may have been rejected. I thought it's really interesting and hopefully really helpful for people.

Mark: Yeah exactly. We had loads and loads and loads of questions that came in and we answered as many of those as we could, and that it was really good to get Katie to talk about the new ads product that they're offering. As I said to you my initial feedback on that is it works very well 50, 60% return most days so really useful to get her to describe it. We'll take her up on the offer to come back and see how things are getting on in the next two or three months.

James: Yeah, I mean really, isn't it and I'm pleased BookBub have done it, it's a slight change in direction for them but it's been interesting hearing people feedback on Facebook having been on the receiving end of them because of course lots of writers are on the BookBub list one way or another to get recommendations for reads and a few of your ads of popped up on some of our community.

Mark: Yup and I've had several and my readers actually sent some screen grabs of the emails that I've got so I know that they are generating sales so first impressions are very good for this one. I'm quite impressed.

James: Good. Again it just goes to underline the fact that I know some people think Facebook advertising is becoming saturated or whatever. Too many people are on there which is nonsense really. The returns are still very good and there are more and more platforms of a similar ilk opening up. I've been really delving YouTube advertising over the last few weeks and had some really good breakthroughs in the last week or so that's definitely going to be a platform we're going to talk about a lot in the future and hugely underutilized. BookBub getting early be one of those trendsetters who makes the most of it in its early days, I think.

Mark: Yeah exactly, and just on the subject of Facebook as we would be remiss if we didn't mention the fact that the course opened again for new students third time we offer the course on Friday, the 3rd of June at 10 PM UK, 5 PM Eastern time. I haven't completely nailed this down but I think what we'll be doing is I'll be doing a Facebook live Q&A right about 9:30

UK time so 4:30 Eastern and then we will take around for a half an hour and then we'll open the course up and be happy to take questions on that next week. Of course, people can email us, leave comments on the page. We'll get to as many of those as we can.

James: Yeah, we're really excited about onboarding our next clutch of students and having a journey with them as they enter the exciting world. Every time we do it, we get this crop of amazing stories from people. One of those stories who's a guy who onboarded last time in the autumn of 2015, Adam Croft, it's changed his life, absolutely change his life. That is our next podcast probably going to be released next weekend and Saturday, Sunday something like that. That's certainly not one to miss that's about it so we'll say goodbye for the recently sunned Mark Dawson and the stuck inside not invited James Blatch.

Mark: Exactly yes. See you next time.

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