

## **PODCAST 29 INDIE SUPPORT FROM THE ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS WITH ORNA ROSS**

**James:** The self publishing formula is looking for beta testers for it's 101 course on self publishing. After the success of the advanced Facebook Ads for Authors course, Mark Dawson is now creating a course aimed solely at authors who are starting out. If you're trying to launch your first book or trying to become commercially successful with your books, then this course is for you. It will cover everything you need to set yourself up for success as an Indie author. Beta testers will get the course for free in return for feedback. You can sign up for you chance to become a tester at [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com) and we'll notify those selected.

Hello and welcome to episode 29 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out. The other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Mark, here we are. Episode 29. We're going strong. It's the summer time. A lot of people have been away, but we have been busy, busy bees haven't we, doing lots of stuff getting 101 ready.

For people who are already in your course, we should emphasize, I always emphasize this. This podcast is not about you having to be a purchaser of our course or anything. It's about the community and us helping each other regardless of that, but we should mention to the people who are in the course, we've also released the Youtube ads for authors module this week. That's going into action. We're looking forward to seeing some results. It's an exciting area, Youtube.

Mark: Yeah, I'm very excited about the Youtube course. Obviously that's something that you've been responsible for coming out of SPF labs. I'm pretty excited to dig into that myself. We've had some great responses from the beta testers so far as well. All in all, very exciting stuff.

James: We're really used it properly in England, got lots of data on it in terms of advertising our course. The results there have been very strong. We've been very pleased with it. A lot of people are talking about Youtube as being the future now. There are lots of reasons why.

I suppose one of the main reasons is that Youtube is actually ubiquitous. People say that about lots of social media, but there are certain demographics drawn to Twitter, to Facebook, to Instagram. Youtube is the one that your 12 year old daughter through to your 85 year old father will at some point in the day probably find themselves on.

Also, you can be in London or you can be in Cardiff in Ghana or you can be in Australia or Russia and Youtube is there. It really is the one that reaches parts other social media platforms don't reach. That's important. Lots of exciting things happening in the future. We did a really interesting interview last week with Orna Ross, which is going to be our feature interview for today. We talked a bit about new markets with her. Mark was very interested in chatting with her about people who don't take advantage of translations, don't take advantage of foreign markets because they're worried about the complexities of it. She's a real advocate for breaking down those barriers. We talked a lot about India, a huge market, and Germany. I know you're pretty much broken some of those markets already, haven't you?

Mark: No, not in India yet, but it's set soon. I'm looking at it. I've published in Germany by a major publisher over there. I've got an Italian deal, Czech Republic, Denmark, I think should be sorted now. Weirdly enough, my accountant sent back the breakdown of last month's income. There's now quite a healthy chunk every month coming from rights that I've sold,

foreign language rights in those markets which is pretty encouraging. With these other markets coming online, Brazil's another big one that I'm excited about, there's so much potential for growth as we go forward in the next two or three years.

James: Yeah, that's going to be a key area for us to understand. I think it will be very much part of the podcast landscape in the future. I'd really like to do more than one episode actually on this. There are things to understand, dos and don'ts of it. Orna has already started to suggest some key people that we can talk to for specific markets.

You would think actually, it's a bit of an easy win, isn't it, if you're sitting there and you've already got good platform in the US and probably in the UK. An easier win for you rather than writing your next couple of books and expanding what you're doing here is just to use your existing inventory. Germany and India are the two ones being mentioned by Orna, of course there are plenty of others. Half the world speaks Spanish, oh and Mandarin. Mandarin and Spanish I guess.

Mark: Absolutely. I completely agree with that. If you've got an asset you want to put to work for you, it doesn't make any sense to leave any rights on the table. I do deals for the audio, there's film writers, I've got a deal for quite an exciting deal with a producer for a couple of my series and foreign rights. There's a lot of money that can be exploited from the properties once you finish them.

James: Time to hear from Orna then. Orna's one of the founders and in charge of the Alliance of Independent Authors. This is a strong advocacy group. It's based in the UK as you'll hear, but it works across the world with membership across the planet. It's the organization is batting in your corner. Orna is a fascinating woman to listen to. She's a writer in her own rite as you'll hear. Without further ado, let's hear from Orna.

Orna: I'm an Indie author primarily and director of the Alliance of Independent Authors and it all happened by accident is all I can say. I had for various reasons, decided to become a full time writer back around 2010. I did that for a while. I was missing having a day job.

I found because I had always fitted writing into the edges of life. It was my stolen time, my magic time that actually having all the time in the world wasn't suiting me very well. I was writing less than I had ever written before which was really ironic and unexpected.

Then I had discovered self publishing. Very quickly I was looking. I'm a bit of a joiner. I like groups. I was looking for an association to join. There wasn't one doing what I thought really needed to be done. I was quite horrified what I was seeing happening in the space.

Authors were really being taken advantage of all around the track it seemed. So I thought we need an association. I need a day job. The two kind of came together. I formed ALLi as the Alliance of Independent Authors as a non profit because that was the way I wanted to go with it. Partly so that people could know it was trustworthy, but also because it seems to me that that's what the organization like this should be.

It's been fantastic. It's been absolutely wonderful, an incredible group of authors have joined and continue to join. An amazing team has serviced from that group. We work really well together. We just finished a team meeting there before I'm speaking to you. We have great bond.

We enjoy learning what we can and passing it on and looking out for the community in our way. There are lots of other organizations and all the people who are doing that too in their way, like you guys and many, many others and hooking in with them is also part of it too.

We have a reach that extends beyond our membership. Our reach is much wider than our membership and we take the information, we take it out in the community through our self publishing advice center which is full of all sorts of information. We have on an online conference for authors three

times a year; fringe to Frankfurt book fair and London book fair and Book Expo America. Everything we do is free. It's no charge. Our core aim is ethics and excellence in the self publishing sector in the entire sector as much as we can influence that.

James: You talked about ethics, which is an intriguing concept. You have an industry you've made up and it's most fragmented. What's your aim there in terms of when you talk about ethics?

Orna: We have a code of standards. It's something that we feel most people will be happy to align to. There are two aspects of the ethical side of things. There is the publishing side.

One of the reasons I founded ALLi was because of the horrific services that are out there and still are out there and John Doppler, our watch dog, calls them predatory. They're certainly profiteering in their motives. They have no interest in books whatsoever. They have no interest in authors. They are simply about making money and they don't mind how they do it. Their very heavy sales tactics, constantly up-selling, picking vulnerable writers deliberately, people of a certain age. They have absolutely no interest in the quality of the writing or in anything except getting one book published and promoted and maximizing the amount of money they can make from that.

We have a partner membership whereby we take in services that are doing a good job for writers and are at the opposite end of the ethical spectrum, who are very author-centric in how they go about their business, who care about writing, who know the publishing is a really important job in this world. They care about how they do it.

They need to align with the code of standards in order to be admitted as a partner member. Then we can recommend them to our other members through our directory and our database and say these are people who are

good services. They might be very small, one person freelance designer or editor working from home and everything in between. That's one side of it. Then about a year or two ago, we had quite an interesting development for one of our members. Jane Steen became very concerned about ethics in the author community itself and the kinds of things Indie authors were prepared to do to promote their works. The whole sock puppetry thing; people writing false reviews, getting their friends to write reviews, buying followers, all the various ways you can game the system on Amazon and all of these kinds of things.

We added, then, and it was a campaign for a while. I think it served it's purpose actually and we're moving onto a different campaign now, but it highlighted what was going on. There were a lot of authors wanted a badge that they were able to put on their website at that time to say "I am an ethical author." We provided that. The Book Seller ran the campaign and included us in there.

It's at that base ethical level. I think you talk about the variety within the community and you're absolutely right. It's one of the things I love about it is that everybody's not only different, but really, because they're Indie minded, and Indie spirited, really proud of their difference and really wearing it a lot of the time.

What unites us when you have a community of any kind is that kind of stuff; what you believe in, what you think is right or wrong, how you go about approaching your job and how you feel about your reader. I think that's really key to ethics or an understanding that you are actually, we all are in service to the readers and not on some kind of ego trip of our own, but of course our egos are in there as authors. We're not getting them out any time soon.

James: Nobody's without an ego completely.

Orna: No. Not possible, I don't think.

James: I couldn't agree more really with the observations you make, certainly in terms of organizations that are in the authors interests and those that aren't. I think hopefully one of the key differentiators, we place ourselves here is when the organization has as part of its makeup lots and lots of contact with other authors. It becomes a community place certainly SPF does. Our Facebook group is thriving.

That was one of the best things that happens in my daily routine is the contact with other authors. I think other organizations where that doesn't happen, and I have noticed them, where really they want a one on one relationship with you. That's not, for me, that doesn't feel like self publishing.

Self publishing is a bit of a campaigning organization. It's got the feel of almost a voluntary fraternity. Fraternity is a good word, isn't it?

Orna: Yeah, it is. It leaves the girls out, but...

James: Sorry.

Orna: It's so hard to find the word. It's such an interesting thing that you're raising. I completely agree. It's that whole unity thing.

We say self publishing and we call ourselves Indie authors, but actually we cannot do it on our own. It's not possible for a good book to be made without somebody holding it up. It's that old idea that it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a community to make a book.

The author's name goes on the book, but there are all sorts of people in there. Like yourself, the high point of my day is going onto the forum and finding out what's on people's minds and watching. It's unbelievable. I couldn't believe it when I started at first. I almost take it for granted now, but I have become more accustomed to it, but you're reminding just how extraordinarily amazing and fabulous it was to watch people coming in

behind other people and helping. It's definitely one of the most generous communities bar none.

I think it was a surprise to people just how generous authors were. This always went on. If you read any of the biographies of the writers who have come down to us, you see how much they relied on each other and how much they helped each other in every way. This is just a new and easier way and the tribes are bigger, but it's the same thing that's always there in the reading and writing community. It's a fabulous community to be part of.

James: It is. It's very supportive. Frankly it needs to be. It's an isolating career. You can feel under confident and insecure about it most of the time. We talk about ego, but most writers have a fair dose of the opposite as well which is feeling insecure about what they're doing. You don't work in a workplace, so you don't get that kind of validation and so on. You need that community, I think you're absolutely right. In both cases, my organization and yours, we play a role in that.

When some fresh authors are coming in, what's your advice for them?

Orna: We start where they are. There are so many different ways you can succeed as an Indie author.

The first thing is to see where people are in their own pathway and what they're looking for. We have people who quite simply just want to write a book. Perhaps only for themselves, their friends or family. We don't have a huge number of people fall into that category and certainly within the self publishing space there are far more authors out there who are like that than we tend to have in our organization. That's just because you focus more on people who actually want to do this and make some money at it, or even better, make their living at it. We have the other person who wants to really make a killing at it. Most of our people fall somewhere in the middle. First of all, they need learn how to make a good book, make a book that serves the reader. That means good design so that people know what the



book's about and what genre it falls into. It means good editing. We all know now, I think much more than we did three or four years ago what it takes.

We bring people through what we call the seven process of publishing. Very often an author thinks producing the book is what they think of as publishing. The production end of things, the formatting, the editing, the putting the covers on a print book, the getting it out there. That's production. That's only one of the phases. There's also marketing and promotion and running an author business.

Then the whole area of publishing rights and selling rights and all of that which is something that we go into more with our professional members. Our professional members are people who have to have sold fifty thousand copies or more in the last two years. Up at that end, they're more concerned with running a business; time and money, how to write faster, better, reach their readers more effectively and if their rights sold. At that end, we have a literary agent. We work with your license and pub matching and people like that who help people to find rights buyers and so on.

At the other end, there are people who are just coming in or preparing a book for a publishing, that's our associate membership. These are people who haven't published before either through the trade press or in any way and they are learning how to put that book together.

First of all, you've got the amazing trip of putting a book together, fiction or non fiction. That in itself is an incredible learning journey. Then you've got of writing it, putting the words together, then you've got putting the digital art back together or the printed book. Then you've got the job of reaching your readers and finally selling rights.

We're there for the long term. Each of those is a journey in itself. Each of those is a learning by doing journey. There are people who can help you and support you in different ways. You need to work out what support you

need and where you're going to get it and what you're going to do yourself. It's a process. It takes time.

It's just now we're getting to the point of seeing people who came in who were looking around thinking, "I haven't got a clue. What is an Amazon KDP? What is that?" Who are now up and running and leaving the day job and selling well and really, really happy. That's amazing.

James: In terms of the practical side of that, how does that manifest itself? Is it peer to peer help within the Alliance?

Orna: There is an awful lot of informal peer to peer help. What what we do is we have a self publishing advice centers. That is run by our members for the wider community. Within that, people share their knowledge, their information and their expertise.

We have small and large forums where people get together and help each other and train. We don't have an actual one to one mentoring system in place. I think one of the things we would like to do is set up genre one to one where people we would match somebody who's actually doing well at something that somebody else wants to get into. That is something that we're thinking about a little bit further down the track. It's the forums really. It's all online because our members are everywhere.

It's the connections that are then made and people break off into their own informal groups. We also have live groups. We don't actually run them at all. We don't take any responsibility for them. Members, one member in an area saying any ALLi members in this vicinity? Let's get together once a month. We facilitate that. We don't run them. They look after them. They're not under rights. It's a very loose sort of arrangement, but we do manage them for the administration end of this just through meetup.com so that they can know what's on when and are able to attend it. There are some of the ways in which it happens.

James: You mentioned geography just then. You're in London today. We should mention you're Irish. I think some people will be able to tell that for your accent. A nation of some fine writers from history of course. But the Alliance is very much international.

Orna: Completely. It's global and was from day one. I think actually being Irish is a big advantage there I have to say because of our history of immigration and because I myself moved away and at various stages gone back to Ireland, then lived away again. Also, just being a small nation, you have bigger windows on the world.

The average person from the UK or the US who just doesn't realize how much they are in their own world. I think it has been very useful to be Irish in this job. Also, it has been amazing to watch what can happen across those borders. That's one of the things that I think is very useful is the way in which we have somebody in US who wants to break into the UK or the Australian market or whatever the way in which members can help each other to do that. We can have cross collaboration. People putting themselves at the end of each other's books and so on in different countries.

Very often we get somebody on the forum who says, "Will you take a look at my page and see what my price is over there?" Or whatever. You've got all that going on. It's very global.

Having said that, the majority of our members are almost 50% of our members now are US. I think it's about 40% Europe, and then roughly 20% the rest of the world. That balance has kind of settled in now. When we started, we were about a third, a third, a third. Now it's there. I think that's where it will be for a while.

James: It would be interesting having a look at those figures and say a year's time, two year's time. There's no question that America is a very vibrant place for self publishing. I'm not sure whether that's cultural or just

there's more of an entrepreneurial, natural spirit there or whatever. It's an exciting environment to be in.

One of the things on our list ... unfortunately you get so busy that it's not going very far further up the list, but I really want to have a serious look at India. I think that it's a huge potential. There's a billion people. You mention getting some advice on pricing in different markets. That's an area you need to look at very carefully when you move into somewhere like India. I'd be very interested.

We're getting a lot of contact now from Indian writers. I think vice versa, there's a big potential market of English language readers in India who have a voracious appetite.

Orna: There's no doubt about that. We have a number of Indian members actually. We have an Indian ambassador and also a partner member who is very dedicated. I agree with you. It's definitely a definitely close area. The other one I think for people to watch is the German market at the moment. I think there is really there a space now for English language in Germany in publishing, but also it's the first quarter call I think for translation.

James: Even ahead of Spanish?

Orna: Just in that it's warmer market. I know that Spanish is a huge language, the whole Californian phenomenon, the south US states makes Spanish attractive in that way, but what I feel is that the German market is really warm now. It's really warming up.

Two years ago, people were talking about it, but I can see here that's sort of a tipping point that we saw in the UK that we saw two years ago if you know what I mean. I think it's one to watch. If you're thinking getting a translation, I would say German first. It depends, it totally depends on what you're writing as well.

James: I can see a couple of future podcast episodes already going down onto my list here. I think breaking India is one.

I think foreign language publishing for English writers is something a lot of writers are interested in. It's a huge potential area that's under exploited at the moment because of complexities, at least the perceived complexities.

Orna: Exactly. It's something we're looking really closely at. Rights in publishing has always been almost treated as the Black R. Nobody knew what they did over there. It's all about contacts. It turns out that in the land of email, contacts are not actually that difficult to make while trade publishers would say to you, "It's so important to meet them and to get warm, press the flesh and so on."

Maybe, but if the book is right, it tends to sell. What's really key for that is that you understand the publisher and what they publish and what they look for in their territory. Once you get a grasp of that, it's actually relatively easy to get the sale.

We have some members who are doing some really interesting things there with just an assistant, somebody who has no experience in writing, just takes the orders. It's very admin heavy. Lots of interesting things happening there. Let me know when you're thinking of it and I can get you some interesting people.

James: For sure, Orna. We should give out some practical detail shouldn't we?

If people have had their interest peaked by the possibility of being a part of the Alliance for Independent authors, how do they go about joining and where do they find you?

Orna: We're at [allianceindependentauthors.org](http://allianceindependentauthors.org). Our self publishing advice center if you just want to dip in your toe and see what we're all about is [selfpublishingadvice.org](http://selfpublishingadvice.org).

James: I know you had a presence at the London Book Fair. We bumped into each other there. Do you go to other world wide fairs and conventions?

Orna: There are three publishing fairs that get our attention. We could be on a constant kind of circle of fairs, and it would be lovely and interesting and we'd meet lots of the authors as well, but it's not possible. We focus on the three biggies which is London Book Fair and obviously as we're here in London, and Frankfurt because it is the largest rights fair in the world, and Book Expo America, to keep us in touch with what's going on in the American market.

What we do then, is we run our Indie author fringe event along side each of those fairs. We bring the fair as it were, to the Indie authors who can't go themselves, tell them what we've found out there, what's happening, what the trends are, what's happening in trade publishing as well because that is relevant to Indies particularly to those who are thinking of selling their rights. Also, though in recognition of the fact that a lot of the author world is not particularly clued in to self publishing. Most of our members could actually give these talks rather than go and attend them.

We thought out the information that we feel is missing from the fair online so that people can keep up with the latest in what's happening. It's a great way for us to be in touch with a lot of people all at once.

We got some good tape there from Mark when we were there. You came to our rescue on the audio, remember? Fairs are a great way for us to speak to lots of people all at once and find out what is current and what's happening because self publishing changes so very rapidly. The advice we were giving a year ago, some of it still stands, but some of it doesn't. Even

the services that were here in the UK a year ago, some of them are not here now and so on.

The fair is a great keep in touch with authors and keep at the head of the information stream.

James: On that subject, I was a little surprised at London Book Fair how tucked away the Indie authors seemed. It was certainly in percentage terms a pretty small number for the footprint of the whole place. I couldn't really work out, looking at the big traditional publishing stands, whether there were people there who were very savvy as to the changing industry and positioning themselves so they can survive that or whether they were rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Do you get a sense of that side of things going back?

Orna: I think it's the latter sadly. I see more open doors in trade publishing now. One of the campaigns we run is Open Up to Indie Authors. That campaign is specifically about explaining and educating the publishing, industries, the literary festivals, the competitions people, what is actually going on and how you are missing out and how this is what we need to do to kind of meet you. This is what you need to do to meet us in the middle. We get a lot of resistance. It's really surprising how many people will cut off their nose to spite their face because they don't like self publishing. There is a lot of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic going on there. The traditional publishers are generally going to the fairs as they always have done. That world is carrying on as it always has done in the main. They are picking up some learnings from self publishing authors connected to reaching the reader mainly.

At the London fringe fair we had a young woman from one of the trad houses who had left. She had left through sheer frustration because she just was being constantly laughed out of the place because she was

thinking about readers rather than retailers. There's that whole thing of the customer base.

Trad publishing thinks of the bookstore as the purchaser whereas we as authors think of the reader. For example, they have a website where they can sell books. These kind of radical ideas. They're beginning to look at Facebook ads as an author would use them and all of that kind of thing. They're beginning to support their authors to make those warm contacts with readers and so on.

It's very, very slow. The business is not surviving as it was. It can't. It simply can't. It will have to change. How it's going to change exactly is anyone's guess. I don't think anyone's quite sure what's going to happen there. In terms of the author presence at fairs, London's the best, James, by a mile. It's so much better than anywhere else. They make a space for authors. It's nice and roomy. There's plenty of space around their tables where you can sit and be able to sit down at one of those tables beside the author's space you would have to buy it for fifteen hundred dollars. They have a long way to go.

I think London Book Fair's motto is authors at the heart of the business. I think every author that sees that is kind of hollow laughter because authors are not at the heart of the traditional publishing business for sure. That's one of the reasons why self publishing is so vibrant.

However, I think we will see a meeting in the middle. I think there will be a lot more blurring of lines. We are seeing people who started off at self publishing who then got a trad deal and were delighted with that and who are now coming back out either to exclusively self publish again, or else to do some kind of mixed arrangement where they sell some of their rights, or rights to some of their books, but not all of them.

I think we're going to see the two coming together much more in the future. Eventually, we probably won't be able to really tell one from the



other. What will distinguish people I think is not your mode of publication, but your attitude.

To me it's all summed up in that word Indie. It's an independent spirit which isn't seeking validation. It's seeking something else which is either that connection to the readers or your own creations response to what you're producing and your own relationship with that or to make a living or to make a lot of money to commercially succeed.

It's an independence of mind that isn't saying, "Publish me, please. Somebody tell me I'm good." I know we all have those moments. We always will, but to live from that place is very unhealthy. I think it's one of the reasons why we needed something to come along like this. We've got exactly what was needed.

James: I mentioned in the interview, Mark, that we bumped into Orna at the London Book Fair. She feels that she's in my debt because I sorted out some recording in a session at the last minute. I think the guy recording their session had let them down and I ran over to the desk with my equipment to plug it in. That's a small example of how we always happy to help each other. That's the whole point of that organization. I know you're quite provisioning ALLi as well, the Alliance of Independent Authors.

Mark: Absolutely. I've had all kinds of useful information, help from them now and again. I'm really for places where authors can hang out, swap information and just talk to other authors. People are going through the same things that they're going through. ALLi is one of the best places on the internet for that.

James: We gave the web address away in the interview, but I'll just repeat it now. [Allianceindependentauthors.org](http://Allianceindependentauthors.org). You can go there, you can find out about being a member. There are various levels of membership, but as I say, it's an organization that works for you. It's good to support it back as well.

Great. We're going to go back to authorship for next week. Orna is in fact an author, but we are going to be talking to quite a famous and quite a sought after in terms of podcasts. We're going to be talking to A. G. Riddle.

Mark: Yes. A. G. Riddle, Gerry Riddle is the author of the Atlantis Gene, a million selling Indie author, film deals, foreign rights, the works. A really interesting story. Very smart guy, good writer. This will be something that I think people will be looking forward to listening to.

James: Absolutely. That's next week. That'll be number 30. Thank you so much indeed for joining us this week. It's been our pleasure as always. We'll speak to you again next Friday.

Speaker 2: You've been listening to the self publishing formula podcast. Visit us at [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com) for more information, show notes, and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.