

EPISODE 67: SELF PUBLISHING – HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Speaker 1: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blache 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 to the Self-Publishing Formula Podcast. Yes, It's Mark and James for your Friday blast of everything you need to know to make it in the shark-infested world of indie-publishing. It's not shark-infested, it's full of lovely people.

Mark: Shark-infested waters, yes. No, there are sharks, and we try and point out where the sharks are, so people can avoid them.

James: But it's more a school of guppies. Friendly. Are guppies friendly? They're friendly. Thank god we're good at metaphors. That's why we're writers, or you're a writer.

Mark: Guppies, sharks, yes, whatever. Let's move on.

James: Yeah, let's do that. This is a big day for us, because we have launched our 101 course ... Well, actually, if you're getting this bang-on time, mid-morning, it's launching at 10:00 p.m., UK time. Which means in the States, that's going to be sort of mid-afternoon, tea-time, depending on where you are in the States. It's going to be later than that, of course, if you're in the East. Is that right? Earlier in the morning? Who knows?

Mark: Don't ask me.

James: Don't ask Mark. I can't think. But, if you want to have a look at what we've done with the 101 course, you want to have a look at possibly signing up to that, this is the URL you need to go to.

It's selfpublishingformula.com/101. Couldn't be easier.

If you're there ahead of time, before it's open there'll probably be a sign-up box to get an email when it does open, but it is going to open tonight. [Selfpublishingformula.com/101](https://selfpublishingformula.com/101).

And this is a bit of a 101-inspired podcast episode. The cost of self-publishing. So in a moment, Mark and I will be going through, in some detail, what costs you can expect to go from writing your book, through to publishing and marketing it.

But before we do that, I just want to make a small announcement, and that is the winners of our 2000 AD contest. You remember, we had Pat Mills on, the creator of Judge Dredd, among other things, 2000 AD, who's now writing a sort of serial killer novel, called Serial Killer, and he was giving away a signed copy of that, and a signed copy of a 2000 AD script, with three runners-up prizes of eBooks of Serial Killer.

The winner of that wonderful prize, the signed copy, is Charlene Siglash. Charlene, well done to you.

And the three runners-up are Kane G., Jeff Cummings, and Pete Ribetz. We had loads of entries, so thank you very much indeed, particularly thank you to Pat and Lisa Mills for generously donating that. I know that you're quite jealous about this, Mark, but you got that prize for your brother, not a prize, but you commissioned, didn't you?

Mark: I'm actually not that jealous, because Lisa sent me a signed copy of that anyway.

James: Lucky you.

Mark: I'm covered.

James: I have got a couple of books in here I'm trying to get through. We've got Chloe Esposito coming on soon, I've got her book. And quite weighty books, and quite chick-orientated books, so I might get Mrs. Blatch to read-

Mark: Chick-orientated books?

James: Yeah, that's a new genre.

Mark: Welcome to the '80s, featuring James Blatch and Mark Dawson.

James: Hey, look. They call it "Chick Lit." Why are you allowed to call it "Chick Lit," and not-

Mark: No, they don't. Not anymore. That passed over about five years ago. No, no. Women's fiction, I guess, these days. Though "Chick Lit," that phrase is been and gone.

James: You say that, but in emails to us all the time, people say, "I'm a Chick Lit author," so, they describe themselves as "Chick Lit."

Mark: Okay, well. I think the times are changing. I always felt that was a bit of a derogatory term, actually. Kind of a bit flippant, but, if they want to continue to call themselves "Chick Lit authors," that's fine. I'm gonna be the better man. Mrs. Dawson will kick my ass, otherwise.

James: Yeah, but I'm a hundred miles away, so. Okay, good.

Mark: Some long legs.

James: Yeah. Don't. Okay, here we go. So, let's get into this, then, because there's lots to get through.

The cost of self-publishing. This is a huge question mark, and it's one that's asked a lot by people, and we often get this posted in the Facebook groups, "How much can I expect to pay to self-publish my book?"

I know you're going to say in the beginning it's a bit, "How long is a piece of string?" because there's lots of options, but we're going to try and give a really good steer on this.

Mark: Yeah, we are. So if people are on our mailing list, and if not you should be, so go to selfpublishingformula.com and there'll be a big sign-up box there.

One of the things that we do is, people join up is, there's a very quick survey, and one of the questions I ask in the survey is, "What's holding you back from self-publishing?" or, "What's the reason why, if you haven't self-published, why you haven't?"

And three come back, usually, "It's too technical," "I don't want to do marketing," or "I'm frightened of the cost." So we can deal with the other ones later, in another podcast, but for now we're gonna concentrate on cost, because it's the easiest one to debunk.

There's also been a few other surveys and posts I've seen over the last eighteen months or so, that have suggested that you need thousands and thousands of dollars or pounds to self-publish, and that's just not true.

So, I thought what we'd do, is we'd just go through some of the options available for self-publishing. We can look at it at a kind of a, "I have some money to invest," and, "I have no money to invest, or have minimal money to invest," and we can talk about the things that I would recommend. And the things perhaps you can dispense with, unless you've got deeper pockets to get cracking.

One of the things I'm really keen to avoid is writers who are sitting on manuscripts, and they're worried about self-publishing, cuz they think it's gonna be prohibitively expensive, when that's just not the case.

James: I know you've divided this up into the very sections, more or less chronological, but not necessarily, but we'll hopefully go through it in a kind of obvious, instinctive state, and we start, really, with writing.

Mark: Yeah, so there's plenty of options, obviously, for writing. You could from a typewriter, I suppose, if you wanted to go really retro, or pen and paper, but then, I'm looking at kind of the digital options.

I would recommend something that is, we'll always mention this, and it's something that comes up again and again and again, and that's Scrivener, as a really excellent writing tool, developed by a writer for other writers. I absolutely swear by it, and the amount of free publicity we give them ... I've been trying to get them on the podcast for ages and they just keep blanking me, so-

James: It is an odd one, Scrivener. It's an absolutely glorious writing tool, and I think once people discover it, and the reason it's so good is that you can move chapters around, you can move sections around, and the way that people write, some people might be incredibly logical in the way that they write.

I think most of us will think, "I'm a bit stuck here, so why don't I go off and write another chapter, or another scene that you've got in your head," and it's so easy to do that in Scrivener. You can get lost in a Word document. I did write my book originally in a Word document, and it was painful.

Mark: Yeah, me too. I started writing in Word, the first three Milton books were written in Word, and it was only when I started writing Ghosts that I switched to Scrivener, so I mean, it's not expensive. It's available typically at \$45, I think, but they do very regular coupons.

The last time I saw one was on AppSumo, I think. So if you go to appsumo.com and sign up for their vouchers, you can usually get it for half price, but for \$20, it is an absolutely ridiculous price. I would, I probably shouldn't say this, but I would pay ten times what they charge for Scrivener.

You look at how much Office costs, which is another option, to write it in Word, you're gonna be paying ten, twenty dollars a month, whatever, it's a bit less than that, but their subscription plan now is not cheap. But Scrivener will come in under that, and it's so much more suitable and appropriate for writers, so that's my recommendation for the actual writing.

If you're really, really trying to do something on the cheap, you can look at something even like Notepad, or Google Docs. There are plenty of places where you can get a word processor or document that you can type into for free, but I think for the saving of just your sanity, something like Scrivener is not expensive and will be well worth the investment that you make to pick it up.

James: I can't believe they haven't moved it over to a subscription model. I think most of us would pay \$50 a year for Scrivener and not bat an eyelid, because of the value we get from it, and then you'd be guaranteed updates and stuff.

But anyway, that's their business, and how they're gonna run it. I think it's very generous, very low-price point for what it does for your writing. For me, it's a no-brainer, and a small cost, but anyway. There you go, okay.

Mark: Let's leave the creative side of things. People have got their book done. And maybe they're now at the point where they've sent me that survey response, and they've said, "I've got a novel ready to write, or ready to publish, but I'm frightened it's going to cost me too much and I don't have the money to do it."

So, let's look at editing now. There's some things we're going to need to cover. We need to look at editing, and we need to look at formatting, publishing, cover design, and that kind of stuff. We'll touch on things like websites and email lists and all that. But the essentials, I would say, are, editing, formatting, and cover design. So we'll spend a bit more time on those subjects.

If we look at editing first of all, it is a subject that people get confused about, and we're going to have a couple of SPF books, free books, on editing.

My copy editor has written a 10,000 word short book for us, and I've also got another book coming from another editor, with some tips from an editor on how to write kind of page-turning fiction, so those will be available soon, and they'll be available to SPF subscribers for free, as all our books, so, again, just not pimping ourselves out too much. If you go to selfpublishingformula.com and sign up onto the mailing list, you'll know when those books come out, cuz we'll make that very clear.

The editorial phases that we're going to have you considering. The first one is developmental, then substantive or line-edits, then copy edit, then proofreading.

So if we deal with developmental first ... You can talk about that, cuz you're in the process of developmental editing with Jenny at the moment, Why don't you explain what that is and what it's done for your book?

James: I suppose developmental editing, in one way, is the most invasive editing, if you like, cuz it's not just about the smaller details of grammar and so on. It's about whether your story works.

Whether the editor has a sense that they're engaged with a story that they like or dislike the character, and they want to know more. And if those key things are missing, your book's not going to work. At least, in their view.

So it's working with somebody, and I think particularly in the beginning of your writing career, for me it's absolutely essential, because I'm learning the craft of writing, excuse me.

I know, Mark, you're going to say that you'll get to a point where you feel that you don't need a developmental editor. I very much do, and obviously this podcast is aimed at people towards the beginning of their career, so.

There's different ways of working with it, so I think we're gonna have Jenny Parrett on the podcast soon, aren't we? Who's my developmental editor. Jenny was a bit hesitant about this idea, that I came up with, which is, we really go chapter by chapter, that she feeds back freely on the chapter, I take that into account, and then move on to the next one.

Now, I really got that from listening Shawn Coyne and his podcast, and they are doing scene by scene sort of developmental work on a book. And I think for me, learning, it's a good way of doing it.

Jenny's slightly reluctant about that, she'll probably talk about this on the podcast, is that she felt she needed to read the whole book to understand whether it was working or not. I can completely see that, but I've basically persuaded her to go with me on this one and see how it works out.

There's no reason why you can't have that conversation, and I know a lot of people do think about this as being a better way of working with a developmental editor at the beginning of your career. But find one who's happy to work with you and you'll get a load out of it.

Mark: Yeah, and the reason Jenny was reluctant was because one of the functions that they can perform is to assess flow, pacing, structure, that kind of thing. And when she's doing it in chunks, it's gonna be much more difficult for her to get a natural sense of flow from the book. So, that would be why, I could see why you'd wanted to do the other way around,

obviously she's happy with that. Basically James chucked loads of money at her, and now she-

James: Usually does the trick.

Mark: She did, so. I don't use developmental editors. I probably should have done when I started out, but I've written so much now that I've got a fairly, not bigging myself up too much, I've got a fairly innate sense of flow, timing, where the peaks and the troughs need to be. That's just something that I kind of know instinctively now.

But when I started out it would have been something that would have been helpful for me, and characterization and things like that. Also, I killed off lots of characters in the first book, and I still get ... I got an email today from someone, actually a review from someone, who said, "You're a real wordsmith, I love this book, but you killed off all your characters. I shan't be buying any more of your books."

James: Whoops.

Mark: I'm okay with that. My books tend to be quite realistic, so. That's the kind of thing that might get picked up in that kind of process, whereby she can say, "Well, I'm feeling sympathetic towards this character. I think you should pick this out a bit more, maybe look at considering this small tweak to the plot." That kind of thing.

Also, worth noting right now, is that what an editor says, you're not bound by this, you are the writer. This is just advice. You're completely at liberty to ignore all of that advice and do your own thing, but that would be pretty bad advice, because you're paying a professional for their professional opinion. So, it's definitely worth giving that some serious thought.

There's another level of editorial, between developmental and copy, called substantive or line-editing. Now, I would say it's not really necessary to dwell on that too much. It's not something that I do.

If you really want to belt and braces, then this is kind of like a super copyedit, which is gonna be more expensive. I would say, don't worry about it too much and move onto the copyedit, which is ... I still do this, I have a copy editor and a proofreader for my books. I actually just got my proofer document back this morning. But let's go one step back, to the copyedit.

This is where we'll go through your manuscript very very carefully, line by line, and we'll pick out spelling, grammar, punctuation errors, might find instances of incorrect word usage, and we'll correct those.

We'll also pick up things that will slow down paragraphs, maybe unnecessary words, repetition, things like that. We'll also go through and pick up things like incorrect use of vocabulary, of sayings, figures of speech.

We'll check that your spelling is consistent, so although there may be two accepted spellings of a particular word, if you're using one at the start and one at the end, you'll need to make sure that those are the same, so that will be picked up. They'll stamp on ambiguity or statements that aren't correct, and also do your basic fact checking, too.

So, my copy editor is Jennifer McIntyre, and she's in Canada, in fact so is my proofreader, and she goes through very very carefully, and makes sure that all of those things are correct in the document. I tend to get it proofread first so that it's a clean document, at least in terms of all these stupid typos have been taken out by the time that Jenny gets to see it.

Then Jenny can focus on those kinds of slightly less obvious errors in the text. Things like incorrect word use, paragraphs that are too slow, facts that

I might get wrong, and then she sends that back to me, then I can take some time thinking about that.

And then what I do then is I usually send it back for another proofreader, then I'll send it to my advance team for their thoughts.

You haven't got to that stage yet, have you, James?

James: No, I haven't got to that stage, yet. I'm not sure what prices you've actually given out, yet, or not, but we have put together, a PDF with all these prices and a brief description of what each service is. And if you want to download that, go to selfpublishingforum.com/costs, you might even want to have that PDF with you as you listen through the podcast.

Developmental editor; can we just recap on the prices, before we finish the section?

Mark: On the low-end, I'd say you're looking at a thousand dollars, and on the high-end, I mostly think you can pay as much as you want, but I would say the high-end would be paying more than three thousand dollars.

Now, I know that at this point, some people are gonna be falling off their chairs and saying, "I can't afford a thousand dollars, I can't afford three thousand dollars, whatever." None of these things are necessary.

I would say that as we get to the end of the podcast, I'll tell you what I think is necessary and what I think is good to have but not absolutely essential. And developmental edit is something that I would say is a nice-to-have, but it's not something that needs stop you from publishing.

As I said earlier, it's not something that stopped me from publishing back in the early days, and I've done pretty well since then, so don't worry too much about that. If you've got the money, it's a good investment, but it's not gonna be something that should stop you from publishing.

And then, the copy edits. It's cheaper. So, I would say you're looking at around about \$750 for a hundred thousand word novel, and these typically tend to be priced on a per-word basis, so it'll be 0.05 cents per word, or something like that, my maths are terrible, so we'll put that in the PDF to make sure that's correct.

In terms of the actual cost, I'd be looking to spend between 750 and 1,000 dollars for a copy edit of a hundred thousand word novel.

And then, on proofreading, so this is the, as should be fairly obvious, this is the kind of final check, the sweep to make sure that there are no obvious typos. Just to go through it, correct everything that you got wrong.

Proofreading tends to be the cheapest of the editorial functions, and I would say, I think I was just charged around about \$400 for a hundred thousand novel world. And again, you can pay more than that, but I wouldn't be paying much more than five or six hundred dollars for a proofread.

James: If you really have no money to spend on proofreading or copyediting, I guess you've got family and friends, you might have somebody who's quite good at going through things, and that, for me, is an absolute minimum.

We all know just from writing emails that you miss your own mistakes, you do need a fresh pair of eyes, so you need to persuade somebody, at least, to go through it.

And then there is an online tool, Grammarly.

Mark: Grammarly is a useful tool. It certainly shouldn't replace any of these editorial functions, but what you can do is, put your document up in Grammarly, and it will check some of these things that we've been mentioning.

It's not something that I have ever used, but I know that plenty of other SPF students and people in the Facebook groups have used Grammarly and think it's a pretty good first stage.

I think it's free. It's definitely worth having a look at, if you're at the stage where you're ready to go but you don't have any money to do this, and anything you can do at all to improve your manuscript is going to be a good investment in time and/or money, so definitely worth looking at that, if you don't have the money for a professional.

James: That's editing, and editing's such an important part of producing the product, the book, at the heart of it, and one or two of those figures were, they were quite high.

I think, just at a quick glance down here, that's going to be the single biggest expense you're going to face, and it's a very important one. So, other things that we're gonna go through now are not as expensive, but ... Should we move on? So, that's editing.

Mark: Reformatting would be the next obvious thing. You've got your manuscript back to you, you've gone through your changes from your editors, or whatever your process is.

I would send it out to my advance team now, so I'm actually gonna be in the process of this over the next couple of weeks, and then I'll be getting ... well, it goes out to about 700 advanced readers, as I've mentioned before. I'll probably get, say, two to three hundred response back. And then I'll go through the document.

There will be typos that have slipped through both of the editorial stages, some will be suggesting, I've got facts wrong, so I'll again, once again Mark's putting safeties on guns that don't have safeties and stuff, all that kind of nonsense.

Eventually, I'll get to the stage where I'm happy that the manuscript is clean and ready to go, and then I'm ready to format it.

The options for formatting are, by that I mean, you're taking a document, so it could be a Scrivener, it could be Word, and you are turning it into a document that's ready to be uploaded to the various platforms.

You need a MOBI file for Amazon, and an ePub file for pretty much anywhere else. Scrivener actually is a good option, we didn't put this on the notice that we're looking at here, James, but Scrivener will compile into all the formats that you need.

If you've got Scrivener for say \$50, it can do that, and in the 101 course, we've got a session from Matt Morris talking about formatting with Scrivener. So that's a good option for doing that.

If you're not using Scrivener, personally I find Scrivener's compiler a little confusing, I don't think it's the best thing about the software. It does work well but it's not the most intuitive.

There are other ways that you can get your books formatted.

The best way, bar none for me, is Vellum.

Vellum is a software, we've had the two Brads from Vellum [on the podcast a few episodes ago](#). It's a really beautiful piece of software, really powerful, it will take your document and seamlessly produce everything that you need. And they're also adding print soon, so print is coming soon for Vellum, too.

James: I think that's today, isn't it? It's June the 2nd, that's the big release of Vellum 2.0, and that's gonna be a slight rework of the whole thing, but including this addition of print.

Mark: Vellum is great, and it works on a license basis, so I think it's \$29, \$30 for one book, so one output, or \$200 for unlimited output. So, again, it depends on if you've got the money and you think you're gonna be doing more than however many books that is, maths again, terrible, what's that, six-

James: 200 divided by 20, that's 5.

Mark: 30.

James: Oh, 30.

Mark: It's about six. Six and a half, I think.

James: Again, check the PDF for all the details.

Mark: Don't listen to me.

James: [Selfpublishingformula.com/costs/](https://selfpublishingformula.com/costs/) is the PDF where you'll get all the actual prices.

Mark: It's \$199 for an unlimited license, so that's what I went for. That is a really great way to get there, if you want to do the formatting yourself.

If you don't want to do it yourself, and you want to hand it off to a pro, I would recommend Polgarus Studios in Australia, they've actually done all of my books, Jason and Marina over there are really great to work with, and they'll format a hundred thousand words book into all the formats that you need, including print, for around about \$80, I think.

That would be a decent price to pay, and there are also plenty of other pros who will do that for you, but I recommend Polgarus, they've always done a great job for me.

Now, if you're trying to save a bit of money, to do this on the cheap, then you can look at places like Draft2Digital. That's an aggregator that will also upload and distribute your books to a place like Kobo, Apple, Barnes and Noble, and a host of smaller distributors.

They'll also format your book from a Word document into the various formats that you'll need, and that's a free service that they provide. Even if you're not going to use Draft2Digital, it's pretty good just to do that on a quick button-press basis, and then you can take those documents and use them yourself with your advance team, if you wanted to.

Reedsy, our friends at Reedsy also have a book editor that they've put together, and again we've got this in the 101 course as well, a demo from the guys at Reedsy, on how to use the book editor, and again that's completely free and formatting all of the various formats that you'll need, and Smashwords offers a conversion tool as well that is also available on a free basis.

So, the takeaway there is, you can pay \$30 or \$100 on the top end if you want a pro to do it for you, but there are options to do a pretty good job on formatting that don't need to cost you anything.

James: Okay, and depending on how technical you feel about it, I mean I have to say, I really enjoyed the formatting in Vellum, it's actually quite a pleasurable experience, it's quite exciting. Having done the hard work of writing a book, then to start seeing it come to shape as something that's gonna be in someone's hand, and then you see on a Kindle for the first time, and so on, so.

Mark: Yes, you did just hear James say that formatting is pleasurable.

James: Formatting is fun.

Mark: The publishing stage of stuff is free, so we don't need to worry about any kind of cost about getting those books onto the various platforms.

This is a good point for me to say this, I try to say this as much as I can, but if you find a company that says that you will pay them, or they'll offer to upload and handle the publication process for you and they'll charge a fee for that, run like mad, because these are the sharks that James mentioned up at the start, here.

There are plenty of predators around. I'm not going to name any names here, because I don't particularly want to have to fight off lawsuits, but there are plenty of companies who will do this for you.

They might take care of everything, so formatting, they'll say they'll edit it, they'll do a cover, but they're going to charge you five or six grand to do that, so, it's completely unnecessary.

It makes me angry when these guys pop up on my Facebook feed saying, "Have you got a novel to publish? Let me take care of it for you." Run like mad. They're basically sharks, so definitely to be avoided.

You don't need to worry about that. So the publishing should be free, you're not gonna need to pay Amazon, you don't need to pay Barnes and Noble, it's all going to be free to get those books up there.

Cover design is the next essential thing.

There's no two ways about it. You're going to need a really good cover for your book. But you don't need to spend a fortune doing that. There are ways and means to get your covers done. My recommendation is always gonna be someone like Stuart Bache, who's my designer at bookscovered.co.uk.

Stuart's prices are pretty reasonable. I think I usually pay around about 300 pounds for a cover, and then a suite of assets that I can use on social media, in my mail ads, so Facebook ads, banners for my Facebook page, banners for my MailChimp emails, all of that kind of stuff Stuart will include.

He also does pre-mades, so these are covers that Stuart has create. Typically for me when I commission him to do something, he'll do three variations of the cover, and then we'll decide which one works best for the book. Now, otherwise he would have wasted his time doing those two covers, so what he tends to do is to put those onto his site and then offers those variations, obviously with changes, title, author name, all that kind of stuff-

James: They have to have your title and author name to go with their book.

Mark: It's not a good idea, no. He changes those and then you can grab those. And typically, I'm not gonna swear by this, but I think it's around about \$150 for a pre-made. Something like that. So this is a pro cover, and no one else will have it.

Once you buy it, it's yours. But you can get that for almost a hundred pounds, so \$150, or something ... it's in that ballpark. It doesn't have to be very expensive. And this is a kind of primo, grade-A cover from a professional designer.

James: Stuart's great. I think that's really good value, really 300 pounds, so you see the quality of the covers that he produces, yours are great.

The one he's done for me is fantastic, it's actually, there you go, up on the wall, good enough to be framed on the wall. And I actually saw him in our Facebook group, looking for some lucky beta testers to go through to his new website, his new off-the-shelf service that Mark was talking about, so that's now being tested.

I think probably will be available at the time that we're releasing this podcast on Friday, 2nd of June. So, definitely worth looking at. And of course, we're great friends with Stuart and huge admirers of him, but other cover designers are available, and there are other off-the-shelf options.

Just before we leave covers, worth saying that, this is sort of a semi-announcement, and it's a little way off, but I'm just gonna put this out there. We've been so impressed with the stuff that Stuart's done, he's also a very good teacher, so he's done a little bit for us in the 101 course.

Actually, it was the ads for authors course, so he did a module on designing your own Facebook ads, and how to go about that using Photoshop and Canva, which brought us the idea that we think there is space for people like me at the beginning of our careers, and even people who are further into their careers, who want to understand more about the cover design process.

Stuart and I are fleshing out, at the moment, a course that he's going to write, that will do two things. One is, it'll fully inform you about the conversations you need to have with a cover designer to get the best out of him or her, the research that they will do and the research that you can do, to really make sure you do end up with the right cover.

Because I think that's, from a cover design point of view, something that's not always there, from the author they get very vague instructions.

And the second half of the course is going to be about how to do it yourself, how not to use a cover designer, to listen to a professional like Stuart, who'll take you through the process using Photoshop or using Canva, one of these online tools, to create your own covers and make them look as professional as possible. That's clearly not going to be for everyone, but actually will be for quite a lot of people, and again will save you money in the long run.

We'll make some announcements in the summer about that course, and where and when that's going to be around, but that is coming in the future. But that does highlight the fact that you can design your own covers, as well as go to a professional designer.

Mark: Absolutely. You can do it, and that sort of thing's not going to cost you anything, so that is an option, too. Okay, so those are kind of the three essentials, formatting, cover, and editing. The kind of associated bits and bobs.

None of these will prevent you from publishing, once you've got those things done you're ready to go.

But, in order to build your author platform, to take this seriously, there are a couple of other things that you're going to need.

The first thing is a website, so you're going to need a website for sure. It's going to be your place on the web that you own.

It's also going to be a place where you can get people to sign up for your mailing list, which we'll go onto next.

Websites, of course, you can pay whatever you want for this.

I'm in the process now of getting my website redesigned. I had my original website, markjdawson.com, was put together for about 500 quid, by a friend of mine, who, luckily for me, happens to be a very good designer and a good ... had a web agency as well, and that site has been with me for five years now, and because people seek to emulate me, especially people who have gone through the course, that kind of format has now become quite popular.

So one of the thing's I've decided to do this year is to redesign that.

The way that I'm doing it now, I'm lucky enough that I have a bit of a budget to invest in this, now I've actually engaged the guys who do Katy Perry's website, Pink Floyd, James is very happy about that, and the Beatles, and people like that. So these guys are doing my website, and that is going to be about a 10,000 pound job, so that is not cheap by any stretch of the imagination. I would not recommend that for 99% of authors starting out-

James: But for rock stars-

Mark: For rock star authors-

James: Like you.

Mark: No, no, no, not really. That's something that I'm able to do, but I've been working at this for five years, but when we get down to starting, and this is what I did, five years ago, was to, I got a friend to do it for me, as I said.

That didn't need to cost me very much, but there are options. You can get websites designed for much, much less than that.

One of these options we have in the 101 course is a website built to my specification, and I'm not completely sure I'm going to get this right, but I think it starts at as little as \$250, something along those lines. It may even be cheaper than that, but it's in that ballpark, isn't it?

James: Yeah, and it's gonna be in the PDF, the up-to-date figures, we were just going through that now, just ahead of the launch, but there is an entry level.

It's effectively a landing page website with a how-to sign up to your lists and how to buy the books, and it looks beautiful. I mean, it looks great, and it's a great starter, and it's, as you say, so cheap.

Mark: Yeah, we've had lots and lots of students who have done that, and that's kind of the entry level. Then there were two others that we recommend. I think the top one is going to cost you a few thousand if you've got the money to invest in that, but you don't have to go to that level.

You can get a website done for cheap, or of course you can do it yourself. If you've got a little bit of technical knowledge, and there are books and websites that will enable you to learn how to do this.

You can put up a WordPress site yourself reasonably quickly, it's not difficult. I've done that before, and I am certainly not technically-minded when it comes to things like building websites. But if I can do it, then most writers will be able to do it, so that's an option too, in terms of money saving.

Then, what goes hand in hand with your website, is your mailing list. And this is absolutely essential. I've gone on about it so many times, so I'm gonna be brief here. You're gonna need one, and you're gonna need integration between your website and your mailing list.

And then you'll need to put your mailing list sign-up URL in your books, and on your website, on your author page, everywhere you can, basically. Social media, all of this kind of stuff.

MailChimp is the one I'm going to recommend, there are others available. Mailerlite is making strong strides to attack the author community, and get as many of us on board as they can. You can get some good deals from Mailerlite. ConvertKit is another that we recommend, a bit more expensive, but has more functionality.

MailChimp is free up to 2,000 subscribers, and one of the things that's ... they held back until you paid was automation, so ... an automated email

that would go out once someone's subscribed. But in the last month or so, they've made that free as well, so there's not really any reason to hold back.

And looking at something like MailChimp, it is the market leader, it's easy to use, there's plenty of help, their help desk is good as well, so nothing to stop you from doing that. But it is something that I would say is pretty essential for getting that done, is getting that mailing list up.

James: I would say, one of the interesting things I think about when you're looking at prices for ... and this applies across different industries. Website and email providers. Email providers, very transparent. You go online, you can see how much they're gonna cost, you see how much they're gonna cost in the future, and most of them are based on the size of your mailing list, as you go up.

But the previous section, website, people don't know where to start, and I often see people posting into our Facebook group, saying, "I've been quoted for my website at \$5,000." And I say, "Well, what are you getting for that?" And they're getting a really minimal kind of landing page, and they're paying five times too much, at least five times too much.

That's the thing about websites, that it's, how long's a piece of string? People don't know what to expect in terms of the answer, so I think that's a really important one to take away from this discussion here, that you can do this very cheaply if you get to the right place and don't go down the charlatan route of being overcharged for something like a website.

Email providers, they'll say, quite a lot of these other options are, more transparent, but also some of these areas are tricky to navigate.

Mark: It was actually one of the, in the Facebook, I can't remember exactly what the figure was, but someone had paid \$25,000, I think, and I don't know ... I think it was more than just a website, there may have been some

marketing involved in there as well, but, it was just unbelievable, I couldn't understand that.

Anyway, so let's sum up. What I've ended with here is just the amounts I would say you're looking at for the full package. So if you've got money to invest, and you want to give it the kind of first class treatment, and then the bare bones package, where you don't have, as I was when I started out, you don't have quite as much money to invest, but you just want to get a professional product out there, then the minimum viable product, as Seth Godin might say, then get out there and upload it to the platforms. Starting with the full package.

Scrivener, I'd say, you don't have to spend this all, but this is what I'd recommend. Scrivener's going to be \$45.

I would say a developmental editor, if you budget for 1500, for a hundred thousand word novel, you'll be in the right kind of ballpark. Proofreader, say four to five hundred.

Get Vellum on that one book license, 25 bucks.

A cover, I'd say \$299 there, cuz that's what you'd pay at [99Designs](#), which is another option we didn't mention. A good place to go and get covers is [99Designs](#).

Website and hosting, I've allowed \$350, MailChimp is free.

That brings a total of, unless I change those numbers after I calculate this, I think it's round about \$2,600.

It's not cheap, but that is the minimum amount for a really kind professional top-grade package, but if you don't have that much money, then these are what I'd recommend as the most important things. You can kind of pause the rest.

Less expensive plan

Scrivener, again, I'm gonna stick it in there cuz it's so cheap and so powerful, I'm gonna suggest that we include it. So, that's 45.

A proofreader, 400, so I'm going to say skip the developmental edits, that is something you can come back to later.

Formatting, you can get that for free, through something like the Reedsy book editor.

Cover, you can get a pre-made from someone like Stuart for a hundred, hundred and fifty dollars.

MailChimp is free, and if you're prepared to learn how to do it yourself, then the website can be free, too.

That comes at a grand total of \$594.

If you wanted to, you could take out the proofreader. If you wanted to maybe trade skills with someone, another writer, or as James says, you could ask a family member who has a forensic eye for this kind of thing.

Nothing is stopping you uploading it without any of this at all. You could do it for free, but I think there are some minimums that you need to do to increase your odds of success. But you know, even with that professional proofreader there, you can still get this for just a touch over \$500, so not cheap.

We are fortunate enough that this business that we're in doesn't have a very high barrier to entry when it comes to the financial outlay that we need to make it at the start. And there aren't many businesses, are there, James, where you don't have to invest anything, we're quite lucky that this is on the lower side.

James: Absolutely. I mean, considering the potential gains, and you can see yourself and other people who have made an extremely nice living from it, yeah, the entry barrier, the beginning, is unusual.

This is not my only business, we have other businesses, and each one of those required an investment, a slightly scary investment at the beginning of it, but that's not the case with self publishing. Even if you think \$2,600 is a lot of money, actually in starting a business that can pay your mortgage and give you holidays, it's not a big investment.

Mark: No, exactly. Okay, so, we've spoken about this a bit now, and the next question is, where can people get recommended services from? There are plenty of options, now, for all of these.

There's loads of editors, loads of cover designers, loads of website developers. It can be quite daunting to look at the options and to choose the right one, so what we've done is ... It may not be ready, in fact it won't be ready when this podcast goes out, but we are in the process of putting together a directory of services that have been recommended by students.

Either by me, so ones that I've used, or by students in the SPF Facebook group, so editors that they've recommended, including things like price, a few comments on the service, all of that kind of stuff. So, fully vetted by other authors like you.

And that, we're going to call it something like The SPF Directory. Again, as all of our SPF books, it's gonna be free, and ... I don't know if, do we have a landing page for that, James, did we get it ready?

James: Let's get the landing page ready, so let's call it selfpublishingformula.com/directory.

Mark: If listeners go to that URL and sign up, we'll make sure that when the book is ready, you'll be emailed a copy of that. And it's also something that we will update.

We're quite keen to make sure, this is certainly true for our courses, and it will also be true for our books, that as things change, we'll make sure to update those books and especially this directory to include new services that we like, and possibly even take out services that we've heard bad reports about.

So, that will be a really good place to start, and for those in the UK, there's the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, which is a really good resource for finding agents and publishers and stuff like that. That's the kind of thing that we're trying to develop with this kind of indie yellow pages, I suppose is another way to look at it.

James: I'm just going to finish off with a little plug for the 101 course again, just because, if you didn't sign up for it last time, and pretty much almost everybody did, so there must be somebody left who didn't sign up for it last time.

You will get in that a really detailed view of how to go about going from the end of your manuscript to publishing, and included in that, I should just point out, and I'll give you the cost of the course in a moment, is a series of offers where some of these things that we've talked about, you will get a real deep discount on, so for instance that website for \$250, etc. And quite a few discounts here and there as well. So how much does the course cost?

The course is gonna cost you \$49 a month for 12 months, or a single payment of \$497, and that's your course that's gonna see you through from literally writing the end on your book ... When does that happen, Mark? At some point. Through to seeing it on Amazon and being able to sell it and market it and give you visibility, and that's the key thing.

I've been doing the testimonial interviews over the last few weeks, and that's the one thing people keep saying to me. It's now, "My book is visible and I didn't really know how to do that," so I think that's the one big takeaway from the 101 course. So that is a gratuitous plug for the 101, and you can find out more and go to the course sales page at selfpublishingformula.com/101.

Mark: Very good, yes. I hope that was useful. I've been meaning to do something like this for a while, cuz I do see authors being charged what I think is a bit too much, and other authors who aren't getting their books out there cuz they think they can't afford it. I hope that that has removed some misconceptions and given you the confidence to push on and get your books out there.

James: Finally, one URL. I know we ended up with lots of URLs in this podcast. We always try not to, but selfpublishingformula.com/costs, to get that PDF and get all the figures that we've been talking about, including we'll make sure everything is up to date on that. I know Vellum's new releases is going to be the day of this podcast release, so we'll need to check that their new figures are going to be the same as the old ones.

Great, that's it, Mark. You and I are busy bees at the moment, aren't we? I'm about to interview Mel Sherratt, one of our authors we had on briefly at the London Book Fair back in 2016, we're gonna have a long interview with her in a moment. I think we're gonna be broadcasting that in mid-July, so we've got that to look forward to. And I know you've got lots of things to do, as well, we shall say goodbye, shall we?

Mark: We shall, yes. Farewell, until next time.

James: Adieu.

Mark: Adieu.

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