

EPISODE 68: HOW TO GET STARTED

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the self publishing formula podcast with Mark and James. It's yet another nighttime edition. Actually, it's June, we're approaching the longest day, it's light out there isn't it? Past the Pink Floyd light scheme.

Mark Dawson: Very true. And I do live near Stonehenge so there's probably going to be some sacrificing going on soon.

James Blatch: Do you and your wife get naked and go up there to the solstice? Is that what you do?

Mark Dawson: No. Move on.

James Blatch: Just assumed everyone around Stonehenge does that. Yeah. We should visit Stonehenge, do some filming there, it's the iconic landmark near you.

Anyway, that's slightly off topic to be honest.

What is on topic in this episode, Mark? We are talking about authors at the beginning of their career. We're talking about the journey from the end of your book. Because, we don't really deal with writing, Mark and I don't deal with writing openly.

We'll have guests, of course, that will talk about that, but we do talk about getting all the other stuff right, we talk about the journey of the self

publishing author, about becoming a business, about becoming a one author publisher who does things as well or in many cases better than some of the big traditional publishers.

How do you get to that position? And it is, to characterize it, Mark, it is a bit of a, I'm going to a minefield, perhaps not quite the right word, as if things are going to blow up in your face.

It's large complex area that you have to navigate.

Mark Dawson: It is a big complex area, and I remember, when I started out, that it was something that I didn't think that I'd be able to get my head around. There was a lot to learn. I suppose, even more relevant, is that there was a lot of stuff that I didn't know, that I didn't know to kind of, to quote here; is it Cheney or Bush, not Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld.

James Blatch: We don't know. The unknowns and the knowns, and known knows and the known unknowns.

Mark Dawson: Yes. Whatever. I didn't know what the unknowns were but, yeah it is something that is quite daunting when you get started and it's useful to have mentors and guidance that you can turn to and I know that when I started out, I listened to Joanna Penn.

The Creative Penn podcast was very important to me and weird enough, Joanna has just asked me to provide a quote for the new edition of her book, How to Market a Book, which is one that's going to study weird circular events where if you'd said that was because of music I would say that that was crazy but, so that's quite fun. It is complicated. There's lots to learn and it is easy to be daunted as you get started, there are people and ways that you can use to get around that.

James Blatch: Okay. Let me just explain the basis of this particular podcast, of this edition, and it's based around the fact that this week we've got our

101 course open, might be closed by the time you listen to the podcast, might still be open, we're just going a few more days.

We get asked a lot of questions about people who are looking at the course, who are at this stage, who are at the beginning stage of their self publishing career, so we answer them in a lot of detail and actually all those answers together are quite a useful little crib.

So that gave us the idea for this podcast, that we would put together a discussion about this stage and how you go from the end to selling... on focusing on having a good platform to work on and focus on selling.

At the same time, it is a bit of a plug for 101, no question about that, although, if you listen to this week after next, you're going to be waiting until some time in 2018, I think, before you can enroll.

And we're going to hear from 1 or 2 of the students to spark our ideas and they're going to talk about what they got out of the course and why it did move them along this journey.

We'll try and structure it Mark. Let's talk sort of at the beginning, we're not going to laboriously go through the course.

Building your platform is something you talk about right at the beginning.

"Building your platform", some authors won't really know what it is you're talking about.

Mark Dawson: Well it's platform, really, what they won't understand. You take your asset, which is your finished book, and then everything else, you need to build around it to, ultimately, the end goal is to reach as many readers as you can.

Your platform will enable you to do that. So it's basic things like getting a website, a mailing list, we speak about that almost every week, the importance of having a mailing list. Social media channels, choosing them, getting them right, and then kind of underpinning all of that, is how you actually communicate with your readers, it's frequency, your tone, content, how you do it.

The equation, as I see it, and I have mentioned this before, is to take people who stumble upon you on Amazon, at that point, they are just basically browsing, turn them into readers, then turn them into fans of your writing, turn them into ambassadors for your writing and then at the end, you should see them as friends.

I was thinking about, at the moment, when the end of the editing process for the next Middleton book, for the first time, I invited all of my advance readers into a closed Facebook group. About half of them took it. So there's about 300 in the group at the moment, the kind of to and fro at the moment, as they discuss the book that I'm in the process of finishing, is really interesting for me.

It's great for their enthusiasm, to have people saying that they love your book, obviously. I mean, also, sometimes saying that there's bits that could be improved and some of that could be quite robust, which I'm perfectly happy and able to deal with.

I would say that if they were in London, I would go and have a pint with them. That's the kind of end goal for me, if I could have that relationship with all of my readers, then, obviously, every time I release something, they're likely to go out and buy it and recommend it to their friends and that's always my motivation.

James Blatch: And already, we are seeing a significant difference in the way that the traditional publishing industry works and the way that independent industry works.

I said at the beginning, I think this is something that the indies do do better, they have a live relationship with their readers, not afraid of them, they don't treat them slightly disparagingly like kind of the old; "Here comes a reader."

You sit behind your desk and you'll sign something and they go off. Here, you're actively involved with them, they're involved in the books and that forms a part of, not just of your business, because it's a springboard for selling it, it forms a part of your writing.

Mark Dawson: Yeah it does. And it makes everything better so the actual writing is more fun because you're writing something knowing that there's an audience waiting to enjoy it at the end of the day.

And they also direct me sometimes as well. I put a poll into my Facebook group, that I've got an idea for 3 new books or 3 different projects and I wanted them to tell me which one they thought was most interesting.

This is quite interesting as well, I haven't mentioned this before, in the end, we decided that I'm going to do a book that's under the code name of Vector at the moment. And it's going to be, without saying too much, it will involve a bio weapon being released and then a kind of an investigation in the aftermath of that. So I'm a lawyer by trade and then I watched pornography at the BBC with you for 10 years. Not with you James.

James Blatch: Yeah, sometimes yeah. Awkward.

Mark Dawson: Heard enough already of that. One thing I am not is an epidemiologist. I can just about say it but I'm certainly not qualified to talk about diseases and all that kind of stuff. So I put a call out to my Facebook group saying that I needed some help to talk about smallpox and things like that. Literally, within 24 hours, I had 2 people from the CDC in Georgia saying that they wanted to help me.

James Blatch: Wow.

Mark Dawson: I had a quite eminent professor from John Hopkins University in the States, wanted to help me. And also a senior epidemiologist in the U.K.

So I've got 4 very eminent, qualified, scientists who have read my stuff and would like to be involved in the process of writing this new book. You cannot buy that. I told my agent and she's like, "How do you do that?"

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: It's quite a big platform.

It's circling back to what you said at the start. That is what the platform can do for you.

James Blatch: People hopefully have an idea of that.

I am at the moment, building a list, I've had some fun this week, because one of my early emails I put out to my list had a photograph, I used to have it on the wall around here, I don't remember where it is now, of my dad flying in the 1960s. It's a very distinctive bit of land behind the aircraft. I've always thought with Google Earth, I'd be able to find it, just out of interest, to see where actually the picture was taken, and someone from my list, just out of the blue, didn't know he was on my list, contacted me and said, I've got a friend who flies out of there as a test pilot today.

I sent it to him and he instantly recognized it as being a place in Wales, as your father would've done in the 60s. And that was great. And that kind of interaction, that forms another email, and it goes out to the whole list. It's a very enjoyable communication. So different way of doing business. It is a different way of doing business from the old days.

I imagine that some of the better authors, the Stephen Kings, have always enjoyed some interaction with audience but there are a lot of authors for whom they just didn't really get to their readers. They got occasionally the ones who were motivated to write to them.

But even that's quite difficult in this day and age because you don't really get authors email addresses. They saw them at signings, when it's a very artificial situation, you're kind of the VIP and they cue to see you for a few seconds, and that's not having them as part of your platform, or making up your platform, is what we're talking about.

Mark Dawson: No, not at all. I didn't have any contact with any single reader when I was traditionally published, so I had 2 books out. But no, at any point, did I get any contact with readers.

James Blatch: I gave you some feedback.

Mark Dawson: You did, that's very true. And you did give me some feedback and I stopped writing afterwards. When I went to book signings, I had a signing with Will Self, who's a bit of a, someone I look up to, and it was the most embarrassing thing ever. It was like you meeting Carrie Fisher.

James Blatch: I have met Carrie Fisher.

Mark Dawson: I know you have, that's why I said it. I was tongue tied, "Oh, hello, Mr. Self. I'm a big fan, will you sign my book?"

James Blatch: If you're watching the YouTube version of this there's now a picture of me being hugged by Carrie Fisher, not the other way around. But yeah, Will Self.

Mark Dawson: Will Self was entertaining but embarrassing for me to be so tongue tied in front of someone I looked up to, so but yeah, there we go.

That's not how it is these days, it's much more one to one, sometimes one to many when you use a platform like your mailing list or Facebook, you can reach out to hundreds or thousands of readers at once and build those relationships one at a time.

James Blatch: We run our self publishing formula stuff, in the same way, it's very meta, our business, we do exactly the same thing with mailing list and with advertising and with our audience.

So we're going to hear from Cecilia in a moment. And for instance, this week, you and I have been talking about creating a mini-course. We've got quite an advanced mini-course about using Facebook adverts for exploding, growing your mailing list.

But it's quite techy, quite detailed, we feel that we should have a mini-course that's free, because not everyone is going to buy a premium course. A free course that gives people a really head start on some key areas of getting going at the beginning of their career.

Your suggestion, quite rightly, is to ask people. Here we are on the podcast asking you to give us ideas, if you had a three-part course what would those three parts be?

It would be free to you, so will it be about formatting, will it be about setting up your first mailing list, will it be about cover design?

What are the 3 things that you would like to see from a Mark Dawson mini-course?

And you know what good quality those things are. So you can drop us an email: support@selfpublishingformula.com with your ideas for that, just put something in the subject line.

We get lots of emails at the moment. So podcast idea or something like that. So that we know what that is. We will create the course based on what people want.

Let's hear from Cecilia, someone who took our course the first time 101 was open. She lives in Moscow Pennsylvania, and she gave us a little bit of feedback when I spoke to her a couple of weeks ago.

Cecilia Mecca: I'm sure at some point, I would have pieced all of this information together. Actually probably not, because Mark has some tidbits that are really invaluable.

What the course did for me was pull all of the things that I had been finding in lots of different places all together in a very clear step by step process. Minutes it saved, I'd say months, if not years, from research.

I've talked to veterans that see what I've done in the last few months, you know, people who have been publishing for a few years asking me, "How did you get to where you are so quickly?" And you know, asking advice from me and honestly, obviously I'm happy to give advice and happy to share some of the things you've seen me do.

But really if Mark opens his course up again, I know you're maybe a few years into this, but if you don't know that then let Mark tell you. Grab the course. That's really my best advice. Every time I've asked a question directly of the SPF group, it's been answered.

So whether that's from you guys, from Mark, from other members, I've never had a question go unanswered. I know some people are shy to ask questions. I myself am an educator and I know how important it is to learn from others.

That community to me, has been completely invaluable. I'm now part of 2 communities, the Genius group and then also the ads and I know pretty much from top to bottom, if I have a question, I can find a trusted resource.

There's a lot of resources out there. There's a lot of courses, there's a lot of Facebook groups. The difference is, I can go to a place that I know the information is good, and that makes all the difference. I ran through the course, once full through.

And actually, my husband has been a great help and we've decided to tackle this thing together, so we watched from beginning to end knowing that I wasn't quite at the point, my book was finished, being edited, I was learning that process.

I didn't have an Amazon page so I was watching very advanced, for that time period, modules, that I knew I didn't need to do yet, but I kind of wanted to get a sense of the whole thing and so we did that. I took a lot of notes which I didn't really need since he has all the supporting documents.

And then, I just took it step by step, kind of having the whole thing, in my head, when it came up. Your section, for instance on Velum. Once I downloaded Velum, I said okay, now it's time to go back into that and watch that module.

That's really what I would advise, there's a lot, he covers pretty much everything so it's a lot at once to take in. I would suggest using it as needed and doing it in those small chunks, it's absolutely not intimidating at all. You use it, the modules, when needed. And it really is a roadmap. It took me from start to finish and I'm looking for SPF 102, I want to take it to the next level.

James Blatch: Cecelia, I suppose that gives an idea that the 101 course certainly has brought this large complex area down to. That's the one repeating thing that people are going to hear through the interviews that

we've got is that they've found everything in one place and it's suddenly brought a lot of stuff together.

Probably the stuff is out there. You don't always know whether you're getting the best advice or not but hopefully what you got in 101 is a one stop shop for a lot of that aspect of it.

It was great to hear that kind of sense of relief almost from Cecilia that she had been able to get on with the business of being a writer, rather than fretting about how she was going to do the other bit.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. It's lovely to hear those kinds of things, that she's getting good value. The thing that I also take away from it, and this is something that we've seen as new writers have come into the Facebook group, this week, has been, just the amazing inclusiveness and cooperation.

People are asking questions and threads are quickly going to 20 or 30 replies with loads of really helpful stuff. Sometimes, I'll get involved. Often, I don't even need to because there's just a barrage or useful information going in there and it's supportive and people are getting infused.

It's always one of my favorite things is to put the last message into the group before we open the course for the next bunch of registrants and I always thank them for the atmosphere and their attitude over the previous 6 or 7 months.

And I ask them to welcome the new students in, the welcome is always, every time I've opened one, the welcome has been uniformly positive and it's one of the things that we have come to know and love about the indie community, it is that kind of atmosphere, but it's always nice to see in action.

James Blatch: It's absolutely another one of the differentiators from the traditional publishing industry, I think, is that sense of community. I'm not saying that people are unfriendly in traditional publishing, they have lots of long lunches and they're very friendly.

But that sense is almost a pioneering spirit. People want each other to succeed.

Virtually everyone you meet is supportive, is excited about what you're doing and you are excited about what they're doing and that's a lovely, lovely place. It's the nicest industry I've worked in, in my life. And I hope I'm going to be here until I'm old.

Let's get back to some of the nitty-gritty. For people listening who want a bit of value out of this as we always say Mark, without going into ridiculous amounts of detail that we're not going to be able to do in this podcast. We talked about building the platforms, so when you finish the book and you're looking at it, you've got the book there, you know you might be running some adverts at some point, you've got this vague idea, but there's quite a lot of stuff like, for instance, what you put at the back and front of your book.

The way that you run up to launching that is not intuitive, you've had to work this out and perfect it.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: Can you give us a little idea of how that works?

Mark Dawson: In the course, the longest module, I think, in terms of the number of sessions is the second one and that is what we call pre-publication so it's all of the things that you need to do in order to take your, say your Word document, or the Vellum file. Whatever it is, your story.

The things that you need to do to get it ready to ultimately sell to readers and that includes, obviously, things like covers and blurbs. But it also includes things like meta-data as you say, the front and back matter.

What you should be using. Pricing strategies. Do you go high, do you go low? Do you go somewhere in the middle? And the benefits of those kinds of steps.

The product page, how to make it look as enticing as possible to increase the chance that people will convert, in internet marketing terms, you get conversions and that just means sales. Browsers go to the page and then, essentially, they'll end up buying it. You want to increase that as much as you can. With the mailing list and automation and automation and all that kind of stuff, it's all really important.

I know, when I started out, I pieced it together from loads and loads of different sources. I've probably forgotten about 90% of where I got the stuff from, but I know most of it wouldn't have been from the indie space. I would've gone beyond that and looked into people who had been selling things online for 20 years. The principles are the same ultimately, it's all about engagement. It's about reaching out. It is sometimes paid traffic.

All of those kinds of exercises have been tested to distraction by other people, so it just made sense to me to try and incorporate that in my business. Tweaking them as necessary, because we were selling books. We're not selling widgets.

That is exactly what that module does. It's intended to be a step by step process, logically arranged from having your story finished, as what we say; as soon as you type: "The End." To getting it ready to upload to the platforms and then starting to sell it.

James Blatch: A lot of this, as I say, is not intuitive. You talked about front and back matter, which is another kind of expression that's bantered about,

that people might know what that means. It means literally, how you place call to actions, things like that.

Beginning and end of your book. What you put at the beginning of your book to get people onto your mailing list, how the end of the book, you make sure that they aren't just folding the page or putting the Kindle down. That they are then going to be somehow contactable by you for the future. There's a way of doing that to make sure that works well. I'm not holding it back because I want you to buy the course, I'm holding it back because we haven't got time to do that level of detail here.

You talked about the product page. You talked about the Amazon product page, wasn't it. I actually see quite a lot of examples of quite poor Amazon product pages. Some authors, not in our community, who all start to learn, it's a more common than not to find an author page that doesn't look good.

Mark Dawson: We put a little bit of advertising behind these podcasts every week just so that we can push it as far into the community as we can. The [one last week about the cost of publishing](#) I knew that would get that response from some people.

We're talking about the minimums that I would say you should be looking to spend. It doesn't have to be a lot of money, in the grand scheme of things. But I think an investment is probably necessary.

We got plenty of comments on the ad saying, "I didn't spend a red cent on my book." So I said, "Okay. I'm just interested. Can you send me a link to your book and I'll have a look at it." And I did it's ranking in the millions somewhere. The cover was probably done on Microsoft Paint. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

James Blatch: Right.

Mark Dawson: Just looked at the look inside. It hasn't been formatted, it hasn't been edited and there's nothing to stop that guy from publishing and I've never suggested that he shouldn't but... He was kind of suggesting that you don't need to invest in order to have a career as an indie author. I think that's probably BS. In his example. He's not selling many books.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: I didn't answer back. Let him toil on quite happily, I think.

James Blatch: There are some hard truths in this world. And that is one of them that you do need some investment. We talked about that last week.

One thing, this sounds like is quite techy, and I'm aware of that, I've got my beginner ear on so I intervene every now and again when Mark gets carried away with his jargon. It was very pleasing, in fact, it was the same with Mark's ads course when I interviewed people after that who said to me, "I was not remotely techy."

And our next interviewee we're going to hear from is from the U.K. She lives an hour and a half north of where I am up in Yorkshire called Imogen Clark. She's a good example of somebody who would in no way describe herself as a computer expert. I'm certainly not describing her as incompetent on the computer. She wasn't at all.

It does go to show that with the right lessons, the right tutorials, you don't have to be an expert at this.

Imogen Clark: It's made a huge difference. I've listened to lots of podcasts over the years so I knew what it was that I was supposed to be doing, I just had absolutely no idea how to achieve it.

People would say things like, "Go permafrees or use BookFunnel." All these terms, that I understood what those things were going to do for me but I didn't know how to start to actually do it.

So the great thing that the 101 course has enabled me to do is to just go back to basics and teach me the things that seem to be second nature to all the people on the podcast that I listen to but it was like talking in Swahili to me.

The 101 course, because it's so straightforward and so clear, for somebody like me, I mean, I'm not bad on the computer but I'm not very technically adept. It's made a massive difference because I can sit there with a tech library open and just work my way through things until I achieve them, which I hadn't a hope of doing before.

If I do get stuck, I just put a message on Facebook page and that's such a supportive community because there are so many people who are so much further one than me, they always help.

There are also people who are in a similar place to me, and so we can have a moment together about how hopeless we are and then go back. It's really nice to not be isolated.

When I first came across Mark, you could see how far he's come in a relatively short distance and clearly works very, very hard. The advice that he gives, very generously, I think, is really easy to follow. That makes a great difference.

You could have somebody who's got where the rest of us want to get and just sort of pulls the drawbridge up after them and he absolutely hasn't done that. He's sharing what he knows with the rest of us. That's inspiring, I find that really helpful.

Because it just shows that with some hard work and some application of the right tools, that this can be done. This is something that can be achieved and that's good to know.

I did stop and think because it is quite an investment but because at the beginning, there were some modules available to have a look at, and also, I asked Mark a couple of questions. I sent him an email to say, "I have no skills at all. So will I be able to do this or is it going to be beyond where I can."

He came back and answered those questions and then of course there's the guarantee. So if I had got into and decided it really wasn't for me, I could always ask for money back.

That guarantee just gives you confidence. Of course, once I was in the course, there was no question of ever getting it back. Because the modules I've done over and over.

Every time I listen to one I get something else from it. So the first time, you sort of take surface level and the next time, when I have little bit greater understanding and I'm a bit further down the path, I'll go back to the module just to check and think, "Oh yeah. I didn't really get that the first time I heard him say that but actually now that makes perfect sense."

Definitely value for money, the time I've spent on it, you're working sort of dollar per hour or whatever, however that works. It's definitely worthwhile.

James Blatch: That's Imogen Clark. Imogen is somebody who's eyes lit up when they started to get into the detail of the setup process that you teach, Mark, in the 101 course. But also who started to open up to how things are done because regardless whether it's our 101 course, which this podcast is going to be out there for a long time and may well be months away from anybody being able to sign up.

What we're really talking about is the kind of business approach that you need, the technical approach that you need, to go into this business as a self publishing author. And it is not something you can sit there and guess.

I talk to people all the time. You probably will as well. Last Saturday was a good example, being at a party, and someone saying to me, "Oh, I must talk to you. Because I've got 2 books. They're on their 3rd novel. I haven't published any of them." A quick conversation with them.

This person has worked in broadcasting. It's actually a sort of well-known name. Worked in broadcasting all their life. Absolutely clueless. To not know where to start. He said, "How does the book actually go onto Amazon? Do you give them the manuscript? Do they edit it for you?" Literally did not know where to start. There's not point in mocking somebody like that.

That's a natural position to be in, I think. Why should people know? Imogen and Cecilia we just heard from, and we're going to hear from 2 more, in this podcast. Are people who cannot wait to get on with that side of things to turn them into the author, because it was the other half of the equation that they're missing.

Mark Dawson: I've said this before as well. We live in an echo chamber where it's easy to forget that 95% probably of the writing population have no idea of what's possible with independent publishing.

Just because we surround ourselves with independent authors, we assume that that is the level of knowledge that everyone must have this base level, in fact, it's not true.

We are at the vanguard of something right now that is important to remember that.

The other thing that came out of Imogen's testimonial there is that, she's not completely comfortable technologically. That is something that I would also apply to me. I wouldn't know how to do a website. I could learn, obviously I'm not an idiot. I can get a book. In fact, I have done.

Before I started writing I had a film review website. I put most of that together. I did mostly myself. It wasn't great. I haven't done my author website, I'm in the process of having a redesign right now, and I'm not doing that, I'm just telling someone what to do.

When I need to get things done for SPF, I tend to annoy you two. You and John, so we go that way. You don't need to have a fundamental understanding of how to build a website. But what we did in the course...

This is the thing I'm probably most proud of, is the tech library. Every time we have a new tool that we think is useful, or we have a process that authors need to understand. It might be using Instafreebie or BookFunnel or it might be formatting or uploading to all of the different platforms including the trickier ones like Apple. We will shoot a film, it might not be me all the time, it could be you. You did quite a few. John's done some on websites.

We woke him up, pushed him in the right direction and he's done some great stuff for us as well. John's got a really good design eye. We'd done covers or Brian to talk about blurbs.

We are able to put together the tech library which is a complete resource, it's intended to be something that people go back to time and time again as they want to learn how to do something different. It's also something that we can continue to update, we can put new things in there as new things develop.

So that's something that we are very proud of and I think that that's the kind of thing that someone like Imogen would've gotten lots of benefit from. That's exactly what I wanted when we put that together.

James Blatch: We're going to hear from 2 more people, we're going to crack on with this because we've been talking for quite a while, and what

needs to be inspiring to people as well, to know that it's exciting when things start falling into place for you. So this is Sarah O'Flaherty.

S. O'Flaherty: Huge, huge, huge difference. I think before I did the course I was really treating my writing like a hobby and I was spending a huge amount of time trying to figure it out, looking at how to self publish and what to do.

Using friends to do my cover design and just not really treating it like a business and I did his course pretty quickly. As soon as it came out, I just worked through it. I took all his advice.

I re-titled my book and got the cover professionally done. Started promoting it, made it permanently free, as Mark suggested, so pretty much by the end of January, that was relaunched. I cannot believe the change to be honest.

I had a mailing list of maybe 200 people it's now up to over 2000. So really quickly it's increased. My book has been downloaded something like over 6000 times a month, which also kind of just blew my mind.

I feel like this next book is going to blow my mind. I've been really thinking about how it's looking and writing the blurb professionally and having a launch plan and all those things that Mark talks about in his course. I really felt connected to Mark and yourself and John, quite early on. Like, you guys really authentically connect with everyone, which I think makes a huge difference.

I love the Facebook community so from that community, for example, I'm now part of a mastermind group so these 5 or 6 of us who do non-fiction work that are working together to help each other.

It's the mental state change, it's the practical things I've learned it's the networking that's happening. It's just a lot of factors that are interrelated, I think.

I'd spent probably, already, a couple of years playing around in the self publishing area and I have a background in advertising. I still learnt a huge amount from it. I think that if you have no experience at all.

Invaluable. You could have not really got into self publishing and would find it, just so useful, you could've done 1 or 2 years, or even more, of self publishing work. Even having experience in advertising, I still learnt a whole lot about advertising just from that real specialist perspective on self publishing. So I think it works for quite a broad range of people to be honest.

I was just so impressed by the amount of content as well, like so much valuable content in there, it was great. I cannot even remember what I've spent on it now, to be honest. When you buy something and it's just so invaluable, you don't think about it after you've bought it, so I think that it's still a bargain.

James Blatch: Sarah from Australia. That's an easier way of saying it. Again, somebody else who is an excited author who is now getting some success, turning the writing in to a career. I mean that is it.

That's the offer from listening to this podcast. That's the offer from getting into the SPF and the Mark Dawson sphere of influence because you're putting a foot forward to quitting your 9 to 5 and earning a living from this.

Not everyone is ultimately going to achieve that, but more people will as a result of, not secrets, but it's how would you describe it Mark? It's not a trick, it's not secrets. It's knowledge though.

Mark Dawson: It's just a process. It's a number of processes that put together are intended to improve the odds of being able to do that. So there's no guarantees obviously, at the end of the day.

The books are the most important thing, and I cannot write books for anybody else. I write my own books. It's packaging them the right way. It's advertising them, finding readers and nurturing those readers and if that's done right, it is possible to do this as a career.

It's never been more possible to write full time than it is right now. We've had plenty of students who have gone from selling maybe enough to put half a bag of shopping, or something like that and then 6 months later, a year later, they're handing in the notice and they're having a go at doing it full time. That's always the best moment when fledgling writers like Adam Croft leave the nest and end up rather well for themselves.

James Blatch: And Adam's not the only one. Literally, I think, our first course when we flew to the States and did a load of sit down interviews with people, and we're going to do that again later this year, and we spoke to person after person.

With Charlotte and Andrea, kind of well known names now, from the podcast, Charlotte was somebody else. Charlotte Bird who made pin money, paid the odd bill, was quite pleased to do that. By the time we interviewed her, her husband had quite his job in the pharmaceutical industry, to be the marketing person for her career and that's the sort of money that they were making that was very exciting for them.

Very exciting for us. And inspiring for people like me, at the beginning of our career.

The last area, Mark, I want to talk about together is attitude. It's what you don't get in terms of the technical step by step instructions to follow, it's

about mindset and again, it's something that we can feed. It's not necessarily intuitive, the type of mindset and openness you need to it. It's absolutely essential part of being successful isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Mindset is critically important and one of the things. It's also something that is easier to foster when you're surrounded by like-minded authors.

When I started out it was something that took me a little while to get right because I was basically on my own and I didn't really know anybody else. I wasn't in any groups like this, I had some bulletin boards, as they might've been called then.

It took me a while to get that and to get that determined attitude that you never say "Die." Nothing is beyond being solved. That kind of attitude takes a little while to get right but it is, it's very important, if you're going to make a good go of it.

James Blatch: I'll tell you one aspect of mindset that's important and we know this from the SPF course creation business is being agile. Changing the way that you do things, adapting to it.

We've already revised the courses and the modules and the sessions quite a lot, there's a list of things that are going to change in the next 6 months with them. And gradually they will start to transform so that in 5 years time, if we're still doing this in 5 years time, what we're teaching will look very different from what we're teaching today.

Mark Dawson: Exactly and there's something that I'm quite interested in at the moment is just Facebook messenger ads. So able to serve ads that appear in your messenger feed.

The open rates on those are ridiculous. And the click rates are ridiculous, way more powerful than the email messaging at the moment but lots of

challenges that email doesn't have, but that's something that I'm looking to include in the ads course when we release it in November. Provided of course, I can get it to work effectively first but that will be one of the things that we will look to include.

Instagram we'd like to do. There's loads of new content we hope to include. It's constantly evolving the 101 course. Maybe with 102 in a years time will be something completely different. We always keep it fresh.

Another example today, we released the Amazon ads bonus module into the ads course and that's something I've been working on for a couple of months now and it's, I don't know how many, hours you edited, probably 2 hours of content I guess, on Amazon ads?

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: That's how they are now and that's something that we included and all previous students have got that too so that's something that we're quite keen and it's constantly refreshed and included new stuff all the time.

James Blatch: I think the self-publishing authors are in an ideal place to be the most agile of the new kind of generation of business people. And it is happening now, you get lots of people working by themselves, more it's happening very quickly actually.

Funny enough we're in the middle of an election in the U.K. There was a debate about what they call zero hours contracts in the U.K. So basically, your employer doesn't guarantee you any work but in the same way you don't guarantee to be there for them. There's a political debate. Putting that aside, there had been a real growth in them over the last few years and actually, partly, I think that's fueled by people like me working from home. The virtual assistance who we employ in our industry who work

for multiple people and log on when they want and do some work and then log off again.

That agility and that flexibility is what big business does not have. And in my other business, video production, we work with corporates all the time and they're killing themselves over it. They always say to us, "How do we become as agile as we were when the 2 people who started this company worked together and kept changing their mind about what we're going to do and then focused on something and pivoted. We cannot do that anymore, we're too big an organization to make those changes."

They're never going to solve that at that scale but you can, you and I can, we're small, we're agile, we can change. That keeps us alive. That gives you life. As long as you're prepared to learn, as long as you've got a thirst for what's working and what's next, that will be your edge over Bloomsbury, Penguin, Random House.

That's a big edge to have right?

Mark Dawson: Absolutely, we have a lot of advantages over monolithic organizations, not that there's anything wrong with them at all, but we're more nimble, as you say, more energetic, able to pivot quickly, whereas it takes them a little bit longer to realize something is hot and to give it a try. Facebook advertising, for example, seems to be, wait a minute, this seems to be working. We should do some. We've been doing it for 3 years now. So yeah. That's a good example. Lots of advantages for us.

James Blatch: We're going to finish. Our last interview is going to be with Shannon. Shannon Kuzmich who lives in California, Nevada border, around there. Shannon was again, one of the early students on the 101 course. Shannon Kuzmich: The course came out, just really, at the perfect time for me, it took me out of the darkness, and into the light, as it were.

I have a much more confident sense of purpose and direction now, I understand the industry better. I understand how all of the component parts of the machine work together. I know that there are many options that I have and the opportunity to be creative and how we use the different pieces of the machine gives me.

It's like I don't have to spend a lot of money all the time, if I want to make things easier for myself, and I want to engage some help from organizations like Zapier to take care of some workflow stuff for me, while I'm working on building my email list, I can do that, but I don't have to.

And the nice thing about the course is that it gives you all of the different options, there's a spirit of generosity behind what you guys are doing with the course. I don't feel as if, and this is a huge turnoff for me, I do not feel as if I'm being sold or pushed on something that is a lot of fluff and no substance.

This is probably the most substantial online learning experience I've ever had and as a consultant for that many years, I've done a lot of different things and I was a trainer, I did course development, I understand the work that it takes to go into something like this, and what you guys have delivered is really world class.

It's such a wonderful experience to connect with like minded people. And be learning. We're on the same journey and the spirit of helpfulness, the good manners, of folks, they're very gracious, and always willing to step in to a thread on Facebook and offer suggestions, and I use it quite a bit.

The frequent users and the frequent posters tend to be, also the people who have done a lot of research and are really investigating a lot of different avenues for getting things done and so they offer really good ideas.

It's quick too, I mean you can put a post up there and within an hour, you've got 3 or 4 responses that are very helpful. It's wonderful because when you change your life like we did, you lose the connections with the people that you used to work with.

This has really started to reestablish a community that I can share this new life with. It's been great. I really don't understand how you guys keep up with all of this, it's just phenomenal, you've created an environment within which a new person like me can thrive.

It's life changing. Definitely. And I know that sounds dramatic, but it truly is for me. People would be very surprised how sophisticated the indie world has become.

It's like the secret backdoor entrance into it and you get all the goodies that nobody else knows about. So if you want to be serious and if you are seeking to be a professional for the long term, you need to do this. It's a foundational piece of your starting this career as an indie.

James Blatch: There's Shannon. Really lovely to talk to Shannon. She's got a wonderful story behind her as well. I'm really hoping when we go to America in the Autumn, that we're going to try and drop in on Shannon. Shannon talked about what she got out of the community but she's a good example of somebody who puts into that as well. Who's become a really important voice in the SPF community.

You don't have to be an expert to help somebody else, you have to be somebody else, you have to be somebody who's going through it at the same time and has solved some of those problems literally the day before maybe.

And actually, in some ways, that's more useful to you, because it's actually quite energizing if somebody is like, "Oh yeah, I had that problem and this is what I did." Rather than somebody who had that problem 5 years ago

and is all over it. So that's kind of how the group works, each trench, each time we open the new course, a new bunch of students go through that all together and that's useful.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. And it is lovely to see that. One of the things we've done, I've done this the last time as well, is ask people to post a picture of the course on Facebook of their workspace. We've had, I don't know, 50 or 60 variations.

We had one today from a coffee shop in New York. We've had one looking out onto mountains, loads and loads of different spaces. Some messy, some not so messy. We're all writers, learning at the same time and giving their careers the best shot of being able to do something a bit special. It's a lovely atmosphere in the group right now, as I knew it would be.

James Blatch: We talk about the difference between the traditional industry and the self publishing industry and I don't want you to think I think everything in the self publishing industry is amazing and the traditional publishing, I don't know what they're doing.

It's absolutely not that way at all. In fact, there's lots brilliant people in the traditional industry who are trying to work out how to make this work for them and do different things.

Actually this week or next week I think I've got scheduled in an interview with Chloe Esposito who's a British author, is about to, I think she won the Britain's got Talent type thing they do at the London book fair. I'm not sure I've got that quite right but I think she's certainly with somebody who picked up a deal in that sort of...

Mark Dawson: She's got a big deal for a 3 book series and I've also got Felicia Yap as well so these are 2 of the biggest debut novelists in the U.K. in the summer. Both their books are launching around about the same time

and yeah they've agreed to be on the podcast so that's going to be really good.

James Blatch: I want to mention Chloe, because I've got her book here and this is what I really love about this book, is that it is a 3 book series, a trilogy. So this is a 3 book deal, Mad, Bad and Dangerous to know.

If you're watching on YouTube, you can see what I'm doing here, they've got a brilliant cover for this. This is Michael Joseph which is an imprint of Penguin. They've done a really good job, and I've had a lot of contact with Chloe's publicist who's doing a great job for her. Innovative, it's an exciting book.

It's extraordinarily rude, I can tell you. And I cannot wait to interview Chloe next week about it. My wife read this book in about a day and a half so it's going to be huge. I'm sure it's going to be huge. So we've got Chloe coming up and Felicia Yap as well.

Thank you very much for coming up to the hour Mark. Do you know, you and I thought, how long are we going to talk?

We've talked a lot and really scratched the surface of this. The whole point of this was supposed to be giving a little bit of an idea of those first few steps of what it takes, what you can learn, as well as talking about our 101 course unapologetically as well.

I hope it's been inspiring for you to hear from those authors.

I've got one bit of housekeeping today, we ran a competition, you might remember, you had an opportunity to win an enrollment in our 101 course and we drew that a few days ago and the winner was Francelia Belton, and I've heard back from Francelia, she's delighted with that.

Francelia has got an enrollment with 101, thank you very much indeed for entering, I had lots of entries, had quite a few emails from people saying, "Did I win? Because I'm going to buy it." And I've had to tell them, "Unfortunately you didn't, Francelia won that prize." We'll have more contests in the future, won't we?

Mark Dawson: Yes and the other, you have 2 pieces of housekeeping of course, the second thing is to say that if after listening to us chatter on about self-publishing and getting started and if you are at that stage where you're interested in pushing and trying different things.

I think this goes out on the Friday course and that means the cart will be open for a few extra days and if people want to learn more about the course, including a video, some testimonials and all the details that you need, in terms of the content, you can go to selfpublishingformula.com/101 and everything you need is there plus far too many pictures of me but anyway, there we go. Selfpublishingformula.com/101.

James Blatch: It's got nice new pictures of you. Okay. Great. Mark. Thank you very much indeed, thank you for listening, we will speak to you again next week. Bye-bye.

Narrator: You've been listening to the self publishing formula podcast. Visit us at 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.