

PODCAST 75: GETTING PAID FOR YOUR PASSION – WITH CREATIVINDIE'S DEREK MURPHY

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

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self-Publishing Formula podcast with Mark and James, who have just been discussing what pills we should take to help us live our lives. Legal.

Mark Dawson: Legal pills, yes. I need something to keep me awake. Young children waking me up at all hours. Yeah, definitely need something.

James Blatch: Well, the public school boy says "Magnesium, to help you sleep." That helps you sleep. But yeah, that would also help you stay awake during the day. He's off-camera. I shouldn't talk to him.

Mark Dawson: That's John.

James Blatch: You can stand over there, John. You can stand ... put yourself in.

Mark Dawson: No one wants that.

James Blatch: No one. We don't need that. Look, we can't talk too much this week, because we've got a good interview and it's 40-odd minutes, but very well worth listening to.

We often talk to people about very specific areas, and I think our guest today Derek Murphy has a very good sort of helicopter-attitude view on

working in this area, i.e. being somebody who creates something, a creative person but with a very commercial bent to it. Do they use that expression in America? Because otherwise it's going to sound odd, isn't it.

Mark Dawson: Or a helicopter ...

James Blatch: A commercial bent to it.

Mark Dawson: A commercial bent. Probably not. I'd say probably not. I'll translate it for our American friends. What James is trying to say is that he approaches things with a commercial view.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: He's always looking at things in a way that will enable him to make as much money as possible from the art that he puts out.

James Blatch: Basically, Derek's thing is, you don't have to be a starving artist if you box clever.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. Yes. You're mixing your metaphors royally today.

James Blatch: I love mixing my metaphors. Good. Okay, look. Let's hear from Derek. We'll have a little chat off the back of it.

Derek Murphy: I think I did more writing when I was younger, and then I got into art in high school. I actually started art history and fine art for a while. I was in Malta in Italy for a while, painting, which went okay but to have a career, like a full-time art career, was hard. I had to learn about stuff like selling art, positioning, branding, and then I had to learn web design to put up a gallery, and then online marketing and stuff.

I did that for a long time. I finally figured out the whole point of my blog which is Creativindie is that if you're an artist or you're a writer, and you're just trying to do the stuff that you want to do ... I know this is what everybody tells you in the creative industry. They tell you, "Don't listen to the market. Just listen to your passion, your soul, and do what you want to do."

But what happens is, 95% of creative people are making this stuff that they want to make without thinking about the market at all, so they make stuff that nobody really wants, or even if people like it, they don't know how to package it or sell it to those people in the right way, because they don't know what those people want or what they're interested in.

So I finally shifted. Once you start thinking about other people, and you start making things that other people can enjoy, then it's not that hard to make money with creative products. It could be art or writing, or whatever. But I do think you need to consider who's actually going to pay for it, and what types of things they pay for, and why they pay for those things.

I think creative people can make anything, and it's just a lot easier to live your life and to make things that you can sell easily, so you can spend more time making more things. A lot of artists or writers spend all of their time trying to market, and it just doesn't work because they have stuff that nobody really wants. They have to work so much harder.

James Blatch: And there may well be a few people, very few people in both art and book worlds, who get to write this rather idiosyncratic stuff that they absolutely love, and it's successful.

But do you know what? There's thousands of people below them who write stuff that they might think is a work of art, that nobody's going to buy. Ultimately, I don't think we need to be too pretentious about this either, do we, Derek?

In my other life we make quite a lot of commercial films. One of them was, we made some films about some of the great silversmiths around the world. Particularly here in Britain there was a great tradition of it. There's this amazing couple of silversmiths who work in a little workshop up in Scotland, and they create altar pieces for the great cathedrals. They're one of the few go-to people in the world.

What do they do when the bishop or whoever comes to them, is they sit down and they find out what they want. They think about how what they want and what they think is going to be the right fitting, and how they're going to ... right setting, or how they're going to bring that to work. So they're not sitting there saying, "This is what I create, and you must have this." They're the very greatest artists.

Derek: I don't think there has to be a difference between producing for yourself or producing for other people. I think you can totally make things that people enjoy that's also art, that you also do for yourself and you enjoy. But there's this ideology, especially with writers, that that's impossible, and that if you write for a market, that writing quality must be worse off or not real art, or not as pure as the people who are writing just for themselves. I think that's a romantic mythology that's not really true, but a lot of writers still believe it. I think that's damaging for people who want to actually start making a career with their writing.

James Blatch: It's certainly damaging for putting food in the cupboard, isn't it? So let's push that to one side and say this. I think probably most people listening to this podcast don't have quite such pretensions, and they are already on the road to thinking, "How am I going to turn the thing I love doing into something that's going to pay the bills?"

Derek: Right.

James Blatch: I know you're very focused on that.

I think you've been honest in one of your blogs I read some time ago, that you learnt the hard way, this, right?

Derek: Yeah.

James Blatch: You spent probably a decade as a starving artist, effectively.

Derek: Yeah, about that long. I was lucky, because I did my masters and my PhD in Taiwan, and a lot of that time I was on national scholarship. So I actually had a stipend to be going to school.

During that time I could experiment with online business and building products, and things. It was actually kind of interesting. I was poor for a long time. I've been doing pretty well with book-cover design over the last maybe five years.

But then I graduated with my PhD maybe a month or two ago. Then, a month after I graduated, I launched my first online course, which did really well. It's kind of exciting to see.

I don't actually plan to use my PhD in Literature, but there's such a difference between my classmates who have a PhD in Literature, and now they have to try to find a job they can get paid for. Usually a PhD in Literature doesn't really earn very much, unless you have the right kind of a job.

But because I had been building my online stuff for a long time, I'm in the position to be able to put out new courses or new products, and make a lot of money really quickly, which is kind of exciting.

But to get there, you have to be producing value and putting out a lot of free content for a long time, I think.

James Blatch: Yes. I'm tempted to come up with a cruel joke about what do you say to somebody who has a PhD in Literature? "May I have fries with that, please."

Derek: That's a pretty good joke.

James Blatch: Pretty unfair. So, let's talk about specifics then, because you've got quite a YouTube channel going, Derek, haven't you?

I notice you've got thousands, tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of views.

Derek: Yeah, it's 330,000 now, which is kind of insane.

James Blatch: Wow. Yeah.

Derek: It's kind of exciting. I think my YouTube videos are really crappy. I'm really uncomfortable on video. It took me like a year to even be able to put up anything, and then the first year was really shitty stuff. I talk really fast and I think I provide a lot of value, and a lot of my stuff is tutorials, like how to format a book in Microsoft Word. There's just so many people searching for those things, so I get a lot of views from those. But I'm not a video guy. I'm not a YouTube specialist.

James Blatch: Yeah, well, you've done a great job. And I think it is that value thing. And as you know, this podcast, we always try to focus on that as well, and one of the reasons we've got you on is because you're the man who gives value and who gives tips.

Shall we start going through one or two of those areas that I know you've been instructing on, and you've been coming up with some plans? We're talking a little bit about list building.

It's one of the things, one of the central mantras in the SPF community is that the list is a central tenet of your business, your commercial activity as a writer, and list building can take place in various ways.

What are your top tips for list building? I think if I can steer you towards book giveaways, which you've already mentioned before in your blogs. Derek: I saw other people doing book giveaways, probably before I started. The idea is just you find maybe 10 bestselling books in your genre that you want your book to be associated with.

Then, I'll put that together, and I'll do Facebook advertising for people who like those books with those authors to win those 10 books.

And then, I use KingSumo ... there's different plugins you can use, but I think KingSumo works a little better than Rafflecopter or Gleam for getting email setups, and it encourages viral sharing.

I'll do maybe \$100 of Facebook advertising to get up to 1,000 people. Then I'll email those people and remind them that they can share to get more entries. I might remind them twice before the giveaway's over. Those people will share to all of their friends. I can usually get up to several thousand subscribers on a book giveaway, so you're really just paying for the price of those 10 books.

Then I'll also do things like, I'll share the giveaway with the authors on Twitter and tag them, so they can see I'm giving away their books, and they'll usually share it with their audience. That's also a really good way just to start building relationships with those authors in their genre, because they see that I'm promoting them.

I might also do the top 10 best thriller books of 2016, and because I'm saying nice things about their book, those authors are likely to share it, so that gets their platform back to my platform, and maybe sign up to my list for my giveaways.

I did a lot of those. I think I built like 12,000 people on my list before I launched my first fiction, so that certainly helped.

A lot of people, when you do book giveaways, they're not necessarily real fans. They might just be freebie-seekers, or if they get listed on those giveaway sites, you might get a bunch of people who aren't really interested in fiction so you have to weed out a lot of the extras every month or so.

But they work really well. I've done probably almost 10 of them in the last six months or so.

James Blatch: We've used KingSumo as well. So people perhaps are familiar with it, but if you're not, I think it's a plugin that works with a few platforms. Probably WordPress is the one we've used it for.

Derek: Yeah, mainly WordPress.

Have you heard of Gleam? I like Gleam also. It's a little like Rafflecopter, and it's cheaper. Gleam is better because you can set a lot of different actions, so you can get, "Like my Facebook page, like my Twitter, leave a comment here." You can make them do a lot of things to earn extra entries. I don't think it's as good for building an email list. I like KingSumo just for that.

But then if you have a list, and you want to boost the numbers on your Twitter or your Facebook page ... because I think that's important. When people see your Facebook page, they want to see you already have some followers, so it's pretty easy to run another giveaway with maybe a smaller prize, if they just like some stuff or follow you.

James Blatch: And you've got some pretty good figures there. I think you've got nearly 13,000 Twitter followers now, so that's a healthy

indication for somebody who's blogging in a fairly crowded space now, in the digital space, which is self-publishing.

Derek: It's a nice kind of an instant credibility boost, when people just look. I think if you're an author and they see you have less than 1,000 followers, I think that can be damaging. It's unfair, but it can be, so I would definitely work on getting those numbers above 1,000. That's not very hard to do if you do a giveaway.

James Blatch: You've talked about perma free as well. It's a philosophy that Mark certainly adheres to, and something he teaches in his courses, and it's worked very well for him. There's still resistance to that, and I know you've got some alternatives.

Are you a fan of the perma free?

Derek: I am. My original plan was actually to publish 10 books in 10 different genres that were not full books. They were kind of like the first five chapters or something. I'm up to four novels.

That's a controversial thing. I know a lot of people think readers will be dissatisfied or if you end on a cliffhanger, they'll be really angry. I get some comments that they don't like the way I'm doing it, but the majority of readers are happy enough with the first half that they sign up to my list to get the second half, when it's available. And so I have four books out.

I write young adult. Young adult's not really a genre. If you look in the free section of the young adult, if you look in paranormal romance or time travel, or dystopian, or Greek mythology, you'll find one of my three books in the top 20 of all those categories.

I still plan to put out more perma free books. This year I'm just building my platform.

The other thing was, it was actually really hard for me to finish a first full novel. I kept getting stuck. I had a bunch of half-finished novels that were pretty decent, so I just decided to put out what I had so far instead of waiting.

So this past maybe six or seven months, I get about 500 downloads a day between my books. That's a lot of free leads. In the meantime, I don't have to do any marketing or promoting, or advertising or anything.

People find my free books and they sign up to my list, and that's all on autopilot. Eventually, the plan is I want to finish a full book and then finish the series, and that first free half book is just a way into the series.

I can't say with confidence that my way is working right now, because I don't have the rest of my funnel built up. But the first part's working really well. I get a lot of signups that way.

James Blatch: Yeah, well once you've built a healthy list, a lot of things do normally follow naturally. Although I have to say, I haven't heard quite of that approach.

You must get a few emails from people saying, "Where's the second half of the book?"

Derek: Some people are upset because they want the rest of it right away. There are other authors who do serials, and there are other people who publish books that end on a cliffhanger, so mine, it's not that short. My half books are 40,000 words. One of them is 70,000 words. That's the first half of a full novel. They're not short reading experiences. It's more than enough for them. I introduce the world and the characters and the conflict. There's the first big development. It's enough to get them to want to read the rest.

I think, actually, if you finish a full book, they may read it and be happy with it, and satisfied, but it didn't really impress them enough to want to buy the

next one in the series. Whereas with half-books, they're really into the middle of the story, so if you drop them there and they want the rest of it right away, they'll sign up to your list.

Eventually, it'll be available so they can sign up and get the rest of it right away. Right now, they have to wait a long time, which sucks. But I still think it's better this way, because I'm getting the signups now, and eventually when I finish the book it'll be ready.

It's not ideal, and some people are upset. But still, I'm getting more rewards for the way I'm doing it right now than I would if I had waited a year and put out full books.

James Blatch: It'd be interesting to see how your preorders go, because you might find you get more preorders than others, using this particular method.

Derek: I should set up the preorders on the next part of the books, but I'm not really confident how ... I tried doing preorders last year, and many times I had to rush it or I missed a preorder date. I lost my preorder privileges for a year because I didn't publish in time.

Then when I got them back, I had to really rush those books. Some of the people who preordered my book, they got sent a really crappy rough draft that wasn't finished yet. I had to apologize and email them, and tell them that they need to get the clean version, because I just didn't get the clean version uploaded fast enough, so now I'm a little more wary about putting it on preorder until I'm sure my book is ready.

James Blatch: Yeah. No, definitely want to make sure the book's ready to go. That's one way of scaring the living daylights out of you with a deadline.

Derek: Yeah, I agree. I really need that kind of a deadline. If I have people waiting on it, and I know people have paid for it already, it's a huge productivity-booster to make me do the work and get it out. I do like doing it, but I need a clean rough draft. If I don't have that, it's too early to do a preorder.

James Blatch: We talked earlier then about choosing to create art partly with a commercial head in mind.

You've chosen YA. Was this a carefully-researched genre for you? As you say, it's not really a genre as such. It's a category of reader, isn't it, rather than a genre.

Did you choose it because you could write in different genres within it? Or did you choose it because this is a growth area or most likely to be commercial?

Derek: I like reading young adult, and part of it is because young adult's usually fantasy or magical realism, so there's a lot of supernatural in it. But also, there's a lot of revolution.

A teen, almost always, is up against an evil political oligarchy, and they have to just destroy civilization, and they have to destroy everything and tear everything down, and start over.

I did my PhD thesis on 'Paradise Lost', which is about political revolution. So I did a lot of research on that kind of stuff. I like that topic, and you can basically put the political revolution into any genre.

I also like that young adult is very templated, so even though, even in traditional bestselling young adult, they still have the same tropes. There's definitely rules to the genre, so it's pretty easy for me.

As a new writer, I think you have to learn with the training wheels on. If I read 10 books in a certain genre and they all do the same things, I know I need to put those things in my book.

Then I have an outline, and I have things that have to happen to satisfy readers, and so it makes it a lot easier to map out or plan your books, and I know they're going to be pretty successful because they do everything right.

So even if the writing is not perfect or the story's not perfect, I know they'll hit all those same emotional buttons because I structured it well, and I put all the stuff in that I needed to.

James Blatch: It's an interesting link between 18th or 17th century, I can't remember when John Milton was, and modern young adult writing. But you cleverly linked the two, so I guess as we often say, nothing new under the sun.

A story is a story, and maybe the young adult people are the ones who are the most imaginative stories at the moment.

As you say, templated, but less restricted in terms of where the story's going to go.

Derek: Yeah. It's funny, because in traditional publishing, they're definitely looking for something unique but the same.

They take all the same young adult tropes, but they have to put it in a really new world.

However, in self-publishing, most of the bestsellers, they're not that original. There's still a lot of vampire romances or werewolf romances that are selling extremely well.

Readers still want those kind of books, but traditional publishers wouldn't publish those kinds of books, because they don't think they're artsy enough. But they earn a lot of money, so if you're self-publishing, you can definitely just do what's already popular, and just try to do it a little bit different or better.

James Blatch: You've made your choice, then, and you've explained that very well of young adult. You talked about the advantage of seeing your name in various top 20 lists at the moment, with the giveaways.

Did you decide right from the beginning to write across different genres? Was that a deliberate policy of yours?

Derek: Kind of. Because my background's kind of in mythology, and literary comparison, so almost all my books are based on some specific type of mythology.

One is based on Orpheus in Greece. We went to Bulgaria last month to kind of research all the places that Orpheus and Dionysus were. That's the background mythology.

Right now we're in Ireland and I'm doing a mermaid romance. It's based on a lot of the Irish history and civilization, a lot of the mythology.

So I'm taking myths as a backbone, but then putting it into a modern setting. My first four I think were paranormal romance, with different paranormal boyfriends.

And then my next four are all dystopian. I'm really attracted to the dystopian genre also. There's time travel dystopia. There's survival dystopia. There's different genres in there, also. But they're very popular books and categories.

Young adult readers read a lot of books. That's the other reason I like young adult, is that adult readers might read maybe a book a month, but probably not. Whereas young adult readers can read five or 10 books a month, so they just consume a lot more content.

So if they like your books, and they're reading all the time. And young adult is not just high school. It's people who are like 25 to 30, are reading a lot of young adult, too. Or college students.

There's a lot of older readers who are reading young adult, but they consume more, because they read faster, and reading is more like a lifestyle instead of a distraction. So I think if you're writing in young adult and you have a lot of material, a lot of books, I think it's possible to sell more copies, just because the readership is consuming more.

James Blatch: Did you say you're in Ireland at the moment?

Derek: Yeah.

James Blatch: So is this a writer's retreat?

Derek: Yeah, kind of. We're kind of free now. My wife and I, we just rent nice Airbnbs. The idea was, often if you rent per month on Airbnb, you can get a bigger place at a big discount.

This place actually has three bedrooms. It's a super-nice, big windows facing the northern sea. We're in Portrush. It's beautiful, and the idea was that I could invite my followers to come and stay with us, or I can give mini writing retreats.

The problem with my lifestyle is that we're traveling all the time, and we don't really get to have a community of people. I think it's so valuable, if you're a writer, to be around other writers or to be doing writing retreats

together, just to talk shop and also just to have a supportive community, because writing can be really isolating.

So in the future, I really want to focus on building more real-time events or writing retreats, just to have people around me, because I think that's important for me, because I have a lot to share and offer, but also just to have people around me is good for my own personal productivity.

James Blatch: Obviously you've struggled a little bit to hit deadlines in the past, and you've found the retreats as an effective way of doing that. I've never been on one. I'm quite attracted to the idea, just because of all the clutter in my life. We run a couple of businesses, and I do struggle to find time during the day. And when I do find time during the day, it's in between everything else happening.

But the idea of trying to turn off some of the taps, relocate yourself somewhere. I've been near Portrush. In Northern Ireland, isn't it? On the north coast.

Derek: Yep.

James Blatch: It's a beautiful part of the world there, very, very green and lush.

So for those of us who haven't been on one, what are the specific advantages, beyond perhaps being away from distraction of writing, especially if you've got other people there with you. Is that, in a way, not a distraction?

Derek: It depends. I think it's got to be a pretty big place. This place is actually a little small for having a group. But normally if I'm writing, I just put my headphones on and I can focus pretty well.

But actually next month we're renting a castle in France, and it's a really big place, so we'll actually have a lot of space to spread around.

Cal Newport has a book, something about work, or 'Do The Work', or something [ed note: [Deep Work](#)]. He talks about the grand gesture of productivity. He says when J.K. Rowling was working on her book, she had trouble on the seventh book, so she started checking herself into a really fancy five-star hotel just to do the writing. She ended up liking it, and she did most of the book there.

I think it's not only about unplugging from your normal life, but I think it's also committing to a certain time to focus on your writing.

If you pay to go somewhere, like if you rent a really nice hotel or an Airbnb or something, I think if you've spent money on it, and if you've devoted the time to do it, then you really feel like you have to get your money's worth. Like, right now, I feel like if I'm not working on my mermaid novel right now, I'm totally wasting this opportunity, because I'm actually in Ireland. That's why I came here. Otherwise, we could have just stayed home.

I think investing in yourself and doing some grand gesture, some big thing, can be productivity-boosting in itself. I don't think it has to be a writing retreat or even with other people, but I think going on a vacation or definitely going to a new space ... I don't know.

There's something to be said for habits, too, just finding a place in your home and having the cup you use and the hat you use, and just planning your day the same every day, so that you can get into the writing mode. There's something to be said for that, too.

But for me, I'm probably not great with productivity. I need a hard deadline, and I need people waiting for me, and I produce pretty well, as long as I'm late. Then it's okay.

James Blatch: It's interesting you mentioned Cal Newport, because he's on my list. We haven't contacted him yet because we've got quite a few interviews in the can where we're sitting at the moment, but I would like to talk to him. It's, I think, '[Deep Work](#)'.

Derek: Yeah. He's got some really great work.

James Blatch: Yeah, and he's very much one for losing distractions and being able to focus in a world of distractions, which is definitely something I think a lot of people who are writing, particularly those people who are yet to establish themselves as professional writers in the sense of having quit their nine-to-five, they need to be more disciplined than anybody else. So yeah, that's definitely a good area to talk about.

The other thing I suppose we need to be honest about ... I'll talk to Cal about this hopefully at some point.

Different things work for different people, right?

Derek: Yes.

James Blatch: The retreat might work for somebody, but obviously, I think the bit you talked about that resonates a bit is a gesture that prioritizes the writing, because then you almost can't ignore it, and you have to do some writing.

Derek: People always ask me, "How do you balance your time?" Because a lot of my friends, especially in young adult, there's a lot of mothers who have two or three children, and they're trying to write full time and also manage their life, and they just have to juggle a lot more.

For me, I'm like ... what do you call it? I hate a lot of tasks at the same time. I have to be focused on just one thing.

James Blatch: Right.

Derek: I'm not very good at handling everything, but I'm pretty good at shutting everything else out and doing the thing I have to do. You can't do everything at once.

I'm pretty bad at some of the responsibilities that I need to be doing, but I try to do a little bit every day, and I focus on one big thing. Over time, you make progress.

James Blatch: Well famously men can't multitask. I mean, that's the thing.

Derek: Is that the thing?

James Blatch: Apparently.

Derek: That's my excuse, then.

James Blatch: Yeah ... have an advantage over us. Okay, so that's where you are, in lovely Northern Ireland at the moment, lucky you, and enjoying that.

Now, in terms of taking us back to marketing, you've got a very good web presence. You have a great blog, which we should say is [creativindie](#), without an 'e'. It does have an 'e' in the first part of 'creativ', but not at the end, if you're looking for it.

And, I know that you also use Facebook a lot, not just advertising which we'll talk about in a moment.

You have quite active groups of your readers, don't you?

Derek: Yeah. I've been working on it. I made a mistake with my fiction. I think groups work a lot better than pages, and I think most authors will set up an author page.

I don't think pages have as much reach, or get as much engagement, as groups. My fiction page has three or four thousand likes on it, but it doesn't get super-engagement, although a lot of that's just my fault, because I don't steer the engagement like I should.

In the most recent book giveaway I'm doing, I said I'll give some runner-up prizes if you just comment on the Facebook posts with your top three, the books you want to win. So I've had like 100 comments on that. If you do that kind of stuff and get more comments, your pages, your posts will have more reach.

But for groups, the one that I've done pretty well, because I knew I wanted to be writing in young adult and because I don't have any platform, I haven't been a fiction writer, so people don't know me in the young adult fiction space.

I started doing these book giveaways and emailing or telling the authors about them, and then I started a group for young adult authors, which is the Young Adult Authors Alliance. So when I meet or reach out to a new young adult author friend that I want in my group, I'll invite them to come into my group.

Some people in my group say that we're too focused on the sales, because we really like talking about when one of our members gets a New York Times bestseller, or a USA Today bestseller. We like to celebrate that. I have some people in the group who write maybe literary fiction, and not going to be bestsellers because they're writing in more limited genres, they don't have as big of a readership.

I think in my group we focus less on the art of writing, and more on the marketing and building a platform. But it's really helpful, because now that group has almost 1,000 members so when I want to do any group promotion, I try to support them as much as I can.

I'm always providing value to all of these authors who have their own platforms and their own readerships, and I think longterm that will help me out a lot in my own fiction, just because I'll have spent years supporting other writers in my genre. So when I ask for help, if I ask for help, I'll have a lot of authors who will be happy to share me with their audience.

James Blatch: We were joking about not being able to multitask just now, but actually you do have quite a broad spectrum of work. You talk about the covers and your writing, and your blog and so on.

In terms of your revenue streams and where you see yourself in the future, what are you working on in terms of revenue? Is it primarily the books that'll be your focus?

Derek: I have been doing services for a long time. I was doing book editing, and then I started book cover design. The problem with services is that it's limited. I can only do so many covers a month.

What actually happens is, I ended up being the writing coach or the publishing coach, so they paid me one time for a cover, but then I might be still giving them advice three months later.

So if I have 10 or 20 authors a month, after a couple of years, I have hundreds of authors asking questions all the time. And because I put out so much free content online, I get a lot of people asking me questions, or asking me about my free tools, or they had a problem with my free tools. A lot of my time is actually just spent helping people, which I love to do, but I also need to stop because it's so consuming and it's really stressful to have so many people trying to ask you questions.

What I've been trying to pivot towards is courses. Because the course, I can just pull out a video and say, "Here's my video course. Here's my free tutorials or templates. You don't need to ask me any questions because you can just go to my blog post here."

I've been putting a lot of resources like that. I have a site that's for book cover design templates, and I have a site that's for book formatting templates, and so I actually get probably 50 signups a day from those sites. I don't do anything with them very well.

I've tried to sell design templates, but that's hit or miss. But if I fix that funnel a little bit better, I would provide a lot of value. I would help answer all their questions, and then in a few weeks I would offer them my course about publishing or book marketing.

If I could get one or two sales a day, then that would be enough of an income that I could focus on writing fiction full-time.

I think fiction can be very profitable. I'm not there yet, because I've been putting off three books to build my platform, and I haven't, because I'm still kind of working. I haven't really been able to write as much as I would have liked to this year.

I was making two or three thousand a month, the first couple months after I started publishing fiction. I don't think that would have lasted, because I think when you launch a book that your rank will stop dropping.

But now that I have the three books, when I start putting out full books and when I start putting out a whole series, I'd like to have 10 three-book series in the next three or four years. When I get to that point, I think my income will be a lot more substantial.

The nice thing is that it's scalable. With those kind of things, the courses or the books, I can double my traffic and double my income, whereas before I

could double my traffic and I just couldn't handle more work, so I would have to turn clients away, and say I'm too busy.

James Blatch: Well, you're talking to somebody who helped build a service business in video production, and knows all about that lack of scalability and difficulty of that.

So yes, we've made a similar move to you, having fished around for something that's going to work and be scalable, and be of value to people and what we've created here.

I don't think we've mentioned yet that we've mentioned yet that you also have an editing service. Is that 'The Book Butchers'?

Derek: That's right. ['The Book Butchers'](#). I started an editing service. It's my first online business. Then I learned a lot about branding and I started working with authors. I wanted to make a new editing service that was more author-specific. I think it's got really nice branding. I think people like it because the branding is really good.

James Blatch: It's brutal.

Derek: I don't do editing myself, anymore. I was excited about the idea, and I designed the site. I think it's very good branding. I try to look for experienced editors who have really good credentials.

I think editors don't really get paid as much as they should, and I know, because I've edited a lot of books, how much time editing takes. A lot of people will come into editing and they'll start at a lower price.

Because I don't do editing, I wanted a platform where I could put some really high-quality editors and authors could find those editors easily. Most of the time it works really well.

I don't know if they make money from it. We get, I don't know, probably five or 10 clients a month and they're happy, so we're helping as much as we can.

James Blatch: Well, I love the branding.

Derek: Thanks.

James Blatch: I'm just trying to scroll down, which is the pricing, The Quick Kill, Extra Bloody, or the Perfect Murder.

And actually, unusually for an editing service, right on the front there is the price per word that you're going to pay, and the type of service you're going to get for that. That's a really nice setup, and a good place for you to plan at an early stage.

Derek: If you have to email to ask how much something costs, I just think that takes an extra amount of time for both people, for the author and also for me, because I have to reply to every inquiry.

The way it's set up is that, they'll submit a sample and some of the editors, if they want to work on the project, they'll do a sample edit. Then, if it's a good match, the author chooses the editor.

So most of the time, because they've tested each other out, it tends to work out pretty well, whereas most independent editor sites ... if you hired any other editing company, you're really just working with one person. Not every editor is equipped to handle every kind of fiction or nonfiction. I think people definitely have their strengths. This way, it kind of tends to work out that people who are really good at one type of a project will usually get those projects.

James Blatch: It's a nice way of doing it as well, because people often try to work out whether they need a structural editor, proof editor and so on, and then you've got the options there, and then the very clear prices.

What is it called again? The Quick Kill. I think that puts a professional editing very much in reach of people, particularly if you're starting out at the beginning. Although I'd always say, and I'm sure you'd agree with this, that actually splashing out more on editing is probably the best money ... That and the cover is the best money you're going to spend at the early stage of your writing career, particularly to try and get a structural edit.

Derek: Yeah, actually it's controversial but I don't always recommend book editing. A lot of people get upset about that. The only reason is, I don't think it's fair to say that only authors who have a certain budget are allowed to publish their fiction.

That's what a lot of people say. They say you shouldn't publish at all unless you can afford an editor, and a lot of writers don't have a disposable income of \$5,000 for a book cover and for editing and for everything else, so I think if you can't afford it, you should still be able to do the best you can and afford whatever you can, and put your work out there, and reach readers.

If you have the money it's great for your writing, especially because when you start writing, if you have a really good editor they'll identify writing common flaws that you can get better at.

But on the other hand, I think especially for fiction, story always matters over everything else. A lot of writers, they might pay for editing and get a really clean manuscript, but the story doesn't satisfy a reader. So that's not going to be a successful project.

I think with a story, my favorite books are 'Plot Perfect' 'Story Grid' and 'Story Fix'. I recommend those three all the time, just because they really focus on the fundamentals of plotting fiction. I think if you plot your story really, really well and you have decent writing.

I mean, you can't have a lot of typos or grammar mistakes in your book. If you have too many, the readers are going to drop you. But as long as you have a handful in a huge manuscript, most readers will overlook it as long as the story is good.

So I definitely think focus on the story first, because that's the main problem most writers have, is their story just doesn't satisfy readers. But then, yeah, if you can afford it, editing is very valuable.

James Blatch: You've mentioned quite a few resources there. We'll make sure they're all in the show notes here. 'Plot Perfect', I've just added that to my list as somebody who worries a lot about the story and the plot before it goes off to an editor.

Derek: The other one, 'Story Grid' is really interesting, because it's ... I want to say Shawn Coyne, but I'm not sure if that's the right name. It's Steven Pressfield's editor, and it's really fascinating because Steve Pressfield has always been about, do the art and don't worry about how it'll work, don't worry about the reception.

Then, it's really funny because Shawn Coyne put out 'Story Grid' that's more about the editor. Basically, the artist produces this crazy work that has no market, and the editor's job is to turn it into a product that people will buy. But then more recently, Steven Pressfield has started ... His most recent little book is 'Nobody Gives A Shit About Your Work'. I think that's the title of his book, which is really surprising. I think he's becoming more aware that you do have to make stuff that people give a shit about, because otherwise you're not going to earn any money. And you don't really deserve to earn any money if you're making something that nobody cares about.

James Blatch: Shawn Coyne's 'Story Grid' comes up from time to time as well, so yeah, definitely one well-referenced. Well, I'm jealous that you're enjoying yourself in Ireland, although I have to say, you're on the Atlantic coast there and you probably get battered from time to time by the wind. Have you had some good weather since you've been there?

Derek: It's been sunny, sometimes. It's been rainy and windy a lot, too, but that's fine. It's definitely helpful for my novel, because my novel's really kind of a dark, slow almost-thriller, so there's a lot of dark clouds and rain and wind and stuff.

James Blatch: That's good.

Derek: I think it's good.

James Blatch: Yeah, well that's definitely something that the United Kingdom and Ireland can provide for you, which is weather so bad that you have to just be in and write.

Derek: That's awesome. Yeah. Maybe we'll stay. We might come back.

James Blatch: So that was Derek. Yeah, creativindie.com is his little bit of real estate on the internet. I really liked the idea that you don't have to sit around saying, "If only people appreciated me as an artist and then I'd be wealthy," you have to think, "Well, how do I make what I do and what I want to do commercially successful?" And you take the positive steps to make that happen.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and we've said this hundreds of times. Success isn't going to magically fall into your lap as soon as you put your first book out there. You need to work very hard.

Almost everyone will need to work very hard. Some people may strike it lucky, but the odds of that are really long. The harder you work, I think there's probably a direct correlation with the odds of being successful. That might mean you need to write three or four books. It might mean that you need to engage in the marketing activities that we often talk about on the podcast, or it might mean you've got to do both of those things and a lot more on top of that.

Make sacrifices, work hard, get up early maybe, work over your lunch break, whatever. But the harder you work, the better your chances of making a successful career are.

Also, of course, 10 or 20 years ago it wouldn't have mattered how hard you worked. You'd still have been dependent on gatekeepers, agents, publishers, marketing departments, cover designers. These kinds of people

would actually hold the keys to success, and you would require an element of luck to get through that process.

It's not the case these days. I probably bore people to death about this, but it is a golden age now to be a writer. The odds of being successful, as Derek mentions, have never been better than they are right now.

James Blatch: Absolutely. Derek covers a lot of the areas, quite a lot of the areas that we cover, actually, at creativeindie.com. But I like a lot of the little blog posts he has, special areas of just making sure that you're finely-tuned to the market as possible, whether that's the blurb and the description, whether that's the particular advertising and marketing that you do. So a useful site, and a great guy as well.

I should apologize. I think we did that interview quite a long time ago with Derek. I know some podcasts take like a year before they produce it. We're normally contemporaneous, to use a really posh word. But we did, yeah. I spoke to Derek some time ago, but it's great to get that aired.

Good. A quick reminder that you can get the back catalog of our podcast from a self-publishing formula. Simply go to iTunes or Stitch or wherever it is you normally pick up the podcast.

You can download the app from the app store or the Google Play store, just search for Mark Dawson's Self-Publishing Formula. And you can get a book specially designed for people who find they're getting value from the podcast. If you go to selfpublishingformula.com/vault, V-A-U-L-T, and you will find the previous episodes that are in there, searchable in a text-based form, which is useful.

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James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely. Okay. That's it. Thank you very much indeed for listening. I hope you're enjoying the summer in the northern hemisphere, or not shivering too much in the south, and we'll be with you again next week. Bye bye.

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