

EPISODE 92: BUILDING A CAREER IN FANTASY – WITH MICHELLE MADOW

Speaker 1: 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. It's a Friday and here we are, James and Mark. So many people, Mark told us they do listen to us as soon as it's released on a Friday. That's good because Friday is a good day, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: It is and we originally ... I like doing this on a Friday because it gives people something to listen to over the weekend as well. There's obviously a few others in our space who go out on Mondays, Jo Penn, SPP on Wednesday, it gives us Friday, something for people to look forward to as they go into the weekend.

James Blatch: Something for the weekend, we should have called the podcast that. An old English barbershop expression.

It's been a very busy time for us because it's one of our periodic course launches. Ads for Authors. We call it an advanced course.

It's the course that gets into the nitty gritty of transforming your author career into something that finds readers and sells books.

One of the things we did this week, we add material to this course all the time, and we added the BookBub's for authors course to advertising for authors, and we had of course Adam Croft on a couple of weeks back.

That's gone down really well, particularly with people who bought the course a couple of years ago and are constantly surprised that they get all this stuff for free.

Once you're in, you're in. The feedback, credit to Adam, has been absolutely fantastic on BookBub ads.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's nice, we had a couple of posts in the mastery group, which is the Facebook group that's for writers who are in the ads for authors course. Very complimentary.

I think it's an excellent module. Adam is a good teacher, he's got a lot of interesting ideas on how to use BookBub ads. It's lovely to see people, first of all, grateful that they're still getting stuff after maybe they've been with us for a couple of years and also that they enjoy the content and they can see how potentially valuable it can be to them. We're really pleased with how that's gone down.

James Blatch: Yes, it's been a busy time running up to this but we sweat a lot about what we put out there and how good it's got to be.

Crucially for us it's got to be something that has to be able to have a valuable impact on authors' careers. That's our acid test of this. That's why actually we scrap stuff as well.

Twitter was there while it was working, and it was for a while and people were going great guns on it and we have very recently scrapped the course because Twitter has frankly stopped working for authors. We've taken that away but plenty of stuff has replaced it.

That's the dynamic environment in which we live in, right, Mark?

Mark Dawson: It is, yeah. You and me anyway, I'm not sure I'd ever call John dynamic.

James Blatch: If you produce a tray of doughnuts there's a real fluidity to the way that he scampers across the room.

Mark Dawson: That's a contracted John Dyer dig out of the way for the episode.

James Blatch: We'll get a couple of complaints of bullying in the workplace, which is probably justified.

Look, we have two author interviews for you in a row in the next couple of weeks. The first one is a much requested YA author, going to come on to her in a second, but just before we hear from our author today I just wanted to tell you that if you are interested in the course we have released the sales page, the link to get there, read all about it, which is selfpublishingformula.com/ads17, A-D-S-1-7. If you're interested in ads for authors, you want to learn more, there's a load of information on that page.

Of course, final plug for the course, we do have a 30-day money back guarantee. Mark and I are more than happy for you to have a look around. You get full access to all the courses straightaway.

If it's not for you, drop us an email and we'll refund you within 30 days. 30 days, by the way, runs exactly as it sounds. 30 days to the second. If you buy it on 7:00 PM on June 2, it will be 7:00 PM on July 1. Does that make sense?

I don't know why people leave it to the last day and then as it turns out they've got the wrong last day and then we end up ... It's quite complicated at that point because there's no easy mechanism to do it. That's the word from somebody who's on the receiving end of having to do this stuff.

Mark Dawson: Yes, exactly. We're pretty open and flexible as far as we can. The 30-day guarantee is plenty of time for people to have a good look at everything and decide if it's for them or not. We're quite happy for people to do that.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely.

From time to time people email and say what they'd like to hear on the podcast. We're always grateful to hear that, you can always email us at support@selfpublishingformula.com. We had a few requests for a YA author.

Whilst I was in the states recently I sat down with a couple of authors and we've got a couple of interviews coming up in a row about this.

It's not just about that YA genre, it's also about their particular approach to writing and marketing and how they got to where they're going and both these authors have been very successful. They've done it quite quickly and they've done it through a real focus on the type of advertising that Mark talks about and we talk about on the podcast all the time.

To hear the nitty gritty from them I hope is going to be both inspiring and valuable, I should say the two things we aim for.

We met Michelle probably 12 months ago or so I think for the first time. She came down to St. Pete's Beach for NINC last year to say hello to us, she listened to the podcast and had come from a traditional publishing background.

She did start quite poorly, and she explains this in the interview, she went into self-publishing and did what probably thousands and thousands upon thousands of authors do, which is to upload their books to Amazon, fold their arms across their chest and wait for the money to come in.

It doesn't quite work like that, does it?

Mark Dawson: What?

James Blatch: Maybe for you.

Mark Dawson: No, it doesn't happen like that. You got to get out there and do some marketing and some promotion.

Michelle has jumped in, she's obviously got an aptitude for both the writing and the marketing. She's using things that she learned in the ads course to really propel herself up the charts.

She had a book that was 200 or 300 in the US store. Obviously doing really well, making a good living for herself.

James Blatch: Yeah, she's a great traveler, Michelle. She was just about to get on to a cruise ship and go around Norway and parts of Europe when we met her in Florida. She's back as we speak now, but this was an interview recorded a couple of weeks back and I hope you enjoy it.

James Blatch: Welcome to the SPF podcast.

Michelle Madow: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

James Blatch: It's great to have you here, and not least because there's been requests for YA authors and your name comes up quite a lot in the community.

I know you post quite a lot in the groups and you've been an alumni of Mark's courses and you are very successful, you traditionally publish. We're going to go through quite a few things and, in particular for people who are also writing YA, I know that they're going to want to hear stuff about

how you devise stories, how you market, what's working for you, et cetera. We've got lots to cover.

Michelle Madow: Great.

James Blatch: You're excited.

Michelle Madow: I love all this stuff. I'm so excited.

James Blatch: Good. I know you're going to be great. Thank you for coming on. Let's start.

Why don't you give us the skinny on who Michelle is?

Michelle Madow: I write young adult fiction. I wrote my first book when I was a junior in college. The summer between my junior and senior years I got my first agent and I tried the traditional routes, and I actually did succeed in that.

After being traditionally published I wanted to take more control over my writing and my career, that's why I got into indie writing. I just have been writing a lot more YA fantasy since starting my indie career in the beginning of 2016.

James Blatch: That's interesting because a lot of people will get to that point of being traditionally published and won't necessarily start looking around to, as you say, take control.

What did you mean by take control?

Michelle Madow: I actually had another friend who had just started indie publishing around the time that the third book in the traditional trilogy had released.

While it was great to see my books on the shelves, I wasn't really happy with how it was going financially because traditional houses don't really pay most of the authors what I would want to earn as an author. It was much less than I would ever want for a trilogy.

I saw this one friend who was suddenly raking in money from indie publishing and I was like, "I could do that too and then I could have more control over my career and I could release books faster, I could release the books that I want to release."

Back track a bit, the series that was traditionally published was actually a contemporary young adult series called, "The Secret Diamond Sisters." While I loved that, my heart has always been in writing fantasy. That's just my favorite genre to read, it's my favorite genre to write.

When I was trying to be traditionally published, they were not looking for any fantasy, they wanted something different. I wrote something else for them but I wanted to have my career be writing what I want to write and that is fantasy that I also think readers want to read. That's very important to me.

I wanted to release books on my own schedule. I wanted to not be held back by a publisher's schedule. I wanted to take control of my marketing on my own because I didn't feel like the big publisher house really was doing a lot for me in that area.

James Blatch: That makes perfect sense on both counts. We're hearing it quite a lot.

There's two areas I think traditional publishing are going to have to deal with at some point and one is paying authors more.

You create the content, you create the product and receive 6% or whatever, I don't know what you were on before, but it does not seem like a fair reward.

Michelle Madow: Very low. Yeah, people ask me all the time why I switched from traditional to indie and all I have to tell them is that with my traditional series I was getting 9% royalty, with 15% of that going to my agents.

With indie publishing I'm getting 70% royalty and I get to keep that 70%. They're like, "Okay, that makes sense then."

James Blatch: Even my basic math.

The other half of it is people wanting to write what they intuitively know your readers want and then being told by ... I don't know whether it came from the publisher or your agent or whatever, somebody sitting in New York or somewhere, "That's not the direction we want you to go in."

That seems like a really odd way of dealing with an author as well.

Michelle Madow: Yes. I think that readers love vampires, I think they love any supernatural creatures. Just supernatural adventures, it's a huge thing that readers enjoy and love.

As a reader that's what I enjoy and love. I'm not seeing a lot of it in traditional anymore. I wanted to write what I love.

James Blatch: Yeah, and some of those areas that I think the traditional industry is probably being a bit snobbish over the years, romance is another area, they have blossomed under the indie world.

It's really showing people that when those romance authors were writing letters to publishing houses saying, "I think people really want to read this."

They're saying, "We're not doing tacky romance." They were right. The authors were right because they are selling in big numbers. There you go, that's liberating. That's our trad versus indie segment for the podcast for this week.

Remind me when this was, when was this transition for you? How did you get out of your trad contract? Did you have to buy yourself out or did it come to an end?

Michelle Madow: I did not get out of the contract. I was only contracted for a trilogy. That contract I made in December 2012, book one did not come out until February 2014, that shows a little bit of how long you have to wait.

Then I had book two come out that fall and book three came out in the fall of 2015, and it was actually that contract was completed and then I branched out with my "Elementals" series.

I decided to really look at indie publishing as a business and I started that in the beginning of 2016. I basically was starting from nothing with my business, because as I mentioned before traditional paid me practically nothing.

I started from zero with "Elementals" in January 2016. I have built that up now to a six-figure business in one year, mainly from the courses that I took.

James Blatch: That's fantastic, but also from the writing you're doing. Congratulations on that.

Michelle Madow: Thank you.

James Blatch: That's brilliant, Michelle. We're going to talk about the business side in a second.

Let's talk about writing a bit. "Elementals," what's the basis for the series?

Michelle Madow: "Elementals" is about a girl who moves to a new town and she finds out that she is a witch descended from Greek gods and her and four others start developing elemental powers and they learn that it's up to the five of them to save the world from the Titans, who are coming back from an alternate reality to come and take over the earth.

James Blatch: Cool. Sounds really cool.

That's the sort of thing that you've been reading as well, that type of genre?

Michelle Madow: Yeah, that's what I love. I actually wrote the first book of that when I was a senior in college.

My agent had tried to pitch it to traditional publishers and they just wanted nothing to do with it. It had been sitting around as book one. I was like, "I have this book, I'm going to indie publish it and write the rest of that series." That's what I did.

James Blatch: You haven't really looked back.

Success happened quite quickly for you then because we're only in autumn 2017 now. Not even two years.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, one thing I learned from looking at the indie market was that writing fast is really important because readers want to keep reading a series, they don't want to wait one year between a series. They want the next book to be available to them.

I feel like I have control to make that happen as an indie author because I don't need to keep waiting for the publisher to get back to me. When I was

trad published I would give them my final book and then it would be maybe six months before they gave me my edits back. That was a huge amount of time that the book could have been out.

James Blatch: Frustrating.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, it was very frustrating.

James Blatch: How many books have you got now?

Michelle Madow: I just finished writing my 16th book.

James Blatch: In "Elementals" series?

Michelle Madow: Not in "Elementals," total.

"Elementals" is five books. I recently started a new series called "Vampire Wish," which is a mix of "Twilight" and "Aladdin," with a little bit of ... It's a huge supernatural world with all different kinds of supernatural creatures. I'm having so much fun.

I just finished the fourth book, it just came out. Fifth book is coming out in December. I'm going to be expanding upon that world to focusing on different creatures, angels and fairies and demons and stuff.

James Blatch: Cool. Who are your readers?

Michelle Madow: I think my readers are mainly Kindle Unlimited subscribers, that's a huge chunk of my market. I know with fantasy, especially YA fantasy, KU is huge.

It's not the same for every market, I always say when people ask about KU, test it for your market first. That's a huge chunk of my market and I realized that even though I write YA people think I'm only writing for teens, which is

completely not true and that's a huge mindset that I had to change going into it marketing is that YA readers are not necessarily teens.

People who read YA are mostly adults. I had to go from the mindset of trying to market to teenagers by going to schools to marketing to adults online.

James Blatch: You learned that through what we're going to come on to now, is the way that you run your business and the advertising and so on.

Michelle Madow: Yes.

James Blatch: Okay, great. Let's move on to that then. You started from this standing start in 2016.

Michelle Madow: Yes.

James Blatch: Where did you start?

Michelle Madow: I started and I had just released "Elementals 1," it was January 26, 2016.

James Blatch: Tell me about that process then.

Cover, editing, where did you get all this?

Michelle Madow: Right. That book had actually been edited by my agent that I had had previously. We had tried to send that into publishers, that book had been looked at by a gazillion different people, it was pretty much ready to go.

I got a cover recommendation from someone that I knew. They recommended me to a graphic designer who designed that cover. I just

put it up on Amazon and hoped that it would sell. I got some bloggers to read it.

James Blatch: You did the formatting yourself?

Michelle Madow: I did, yeah. Now I actually use Vellum for formatting, but back then what I did was downloaded the free Smashwords guide and I formatted it myself in Word. I followed all the instructions in that guide and to get a clean Word document.

James Blatch: Okay, you fished around using ... Google was your friend, right?

Michelle Madow: Yeah. I put up "Elementals" and crossed my fingers and hoped it would sell. I did a blog tour and nothing that I was doing was working.

James Blatch: You did a blog tour. How did you organize that?

Michelle Madow: I went to a blog tour organizer and had interviews posted on different blogs. That really was effective back in 2011, but this all was doing in 2016, and times have changed a lot and I hadn't realized because I had been in the trad world from 2012 to 2016. I just didn't know.

I was doing the trad way of doing things and I was just refreshing my Amazon page and seeing my rank just getting worse and worse and getting really disheartened because I had a friend who had put their book up and it just started to do amazing out of nowhere.

I was like, "Why can't that just happen to me?" Then I was like, "I can't just sit here and cross my fingers and pray, I need to take action." I started Google searching how can I sell more books, how can I market my book better and random stuff like that.

One day I was scrolling through Facebook and I saw a Mark Dawson ad saying here's how you sell more books, learn about lead generation ads on Facebook.

I signed up for the free three video lead generation ad offer that he has and I learned how to do the lead gen ads. They did really well for me, I started to see people consistently coming in to my newsletter and from there I knew I had to sign up for the course when it came out in May so I could grow my business even further.

James Blatch: Okay. I don't want this to sound too much of an advert for the course but obviously that's absolutely fine, it's true. Mark helped you find the power of Facebook advertising and social media advertising.

Michelle Madow: Yes.

James Blatch: That was presumably the beginning of where we are now, to the six-figure business.

Michelle Madow: It was what made all the difference. I learned that I needed to really focus on getting a boxed set out.

In 2016, I was learning about marketing and advertising but I was also focusing on learning how to write faster. I outline all my books before I write them. I'll have very detailed outlines.

My outlines are probably about 5,000 words and they're scene by scene and I sometimes hear what a character is going to say in those scenes and I'll write those down in my outline so I don't forget them. I deal with any plot issues in my outline.

It makes my process go so much faster because that way when I'm done drafting and I'm editing I don't have any major plot issues to fix because

I've fixed them all in the outline stage. That was huge in just increasing my productivity where I could get that draft out.

I will just sit down every day and make sure that I get 1,000 to 2,000 words written. I know there are some authors who try to write 5,000 to 10,000 words a day, and that works really well for them, which is awesome, but for me that's intimidating.

I try to look at it as 1,000 to 2,000 every day and by doing that I can release a book every month or two months, which I think is a great pace. At least it is for me.

I got my boxed set out in December, exactly on Christmas, 2016. From there I started advertising that and everything really took off for me in January 2017.

James Blatch: Great. It's funny you should say that because we're at the end of this ... We're actually flying back to London tonight from here, we've been here for a couple of weeks, talked to lots of authors, talked to Johnny and Sean from Self-Publishing podcast and so on.

In the back of my mind in all these interviews, I haven't bored them to death with my own story but I'm thinking I'm really struggling with the rewrite of my first book and doing stuff.

Funny enough last night, having had a few conversations in the last week, I started a detailed 5,000 to 6,000 word outline and I think I'm really feeling quite energized now.

I think what was missing when I sat down to write was not really knowing where I was going, and it, as you say, for some people that's the only way they can write.

I think Lee Child writes like that, doesn't he? Famously sits down and knocks out his book.

I thought it was going to work for me, you perhaps thought it's just not for everyone.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, I've always outlined, but there was one book where I sat down and I was like, "I'm going to try not to outline because I don't want to judge something without trying it." I sat down and I tried to write a book with no outline and I just got so overwhelmed by not knowing where my book was going that I wasn't moving forward with it.

James Blatch: I know that.

Michelle Madow: It just wasn't working for me. I know that I need my outline because I like to get all my plot down and have the plotting done.

That way when I'm drafting all I need to think about is getting my words down. I don't need to worry about plot issues or anything else because that's already taken care of.

James Blatch: You're writing the scenes.

Michelle Madow: Right.

James Blatch: You know what's going to happen in the beginning, middle, end of the scene.

Michelle Madow: It's like transcribing the movie in your mind that you've already written the outline for.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Michelle Madow: Yeah.

James Blatch: You did Mark's course and picked up what you could from other people and then you started to advertise on social media. Talk to us, I'd be interested in a little bit of detail of that.

You were using lead gen ads and how was your targeting? How were you setting up your targeting?

Michelle Madow: I started with \$5 a day in lead generation ads and I targeted other authors in my genre. I believe that ... I still have this one running actually.

I started one, it was March 2016, that I'm still using because it gets me about 30 cents a lead consistently. I'm like, "Great, that can just run in the background."

I think I target "A Shade of Vampire," which is a very popular fantasy YA series, Jennifer Armentrout and Amanda Hocking, because I know that she was indie before going traditional. I thought that indie readers would probably have liked her page. That has worked really well for me.

I did a lot of testing, of course, of a lot of things that didn't work. This one happened to work. It was a lot of playing around with the ads, for sure, playing around with images and my ad text that I was using and then comparing them and seeing which one was performing better and then stopping the ones that weren't working until I came up with this one golden ad.

James Blatch: This does sound very Dawsonian approach to life. The wording, what in the end was working for you?

What were the key phrases?

Michelle Madow: The key phrase is, in all capitals, I say, "Limited time offer." That's huge, it's the first thing that you see, limited time offer.

James Blatch: Isn't that funny that it sounds like something Mark says and other people in the industry say is that not we're not reinventing the fundamentals here, we're doing old fashioned advertising.

It's all been around for hundreds of years in a different way. Limited time offer is a phrase that's worked in newspapers, in magazines, on billboards, for decades if not centuries. There you go. Who knew?

Michelle Madow: People don't want to miss out on something that's limited time. They want to get it now.

James Blatch: Yeah. We always like the podcast to add value and I think a lot of people will be scribbling that down now thinking ... Adjusting my ad now. Those started working, you started building up your mail list.

Limited time offer presumably was a sale advert.

Michelle Madow: First I was giving away different books depending on where I am in my career. Yeah, everything is technically a limited time because at first I was giving away "Transcend Time 1," this was before I was even in KU so I could give that away.

Then I entered KU so I could not give away anything in KU. I had this "Elementals" short story.

James Blatch: Did you write that specifically for this?

Michelle Madow: Actually no, I had written it in 2011, when my agent at the time told me I should write a short story. I don't know why she told me to do that. I really have no idea.

James Blatch: Turned out to be good advice.

Michelle Madow: I had it. I had the short story. I call it a bonus "Elementals" story. I'm giving that away now.

My next thing I'm going to be working on is a prequel novella for before my "Vampire Wish" series, because that's going to be my new long series. That's going to be what I'm going to give away.

Yes, when I start giving away my vampire prequel novella the short story won't be that offer anymore. It is limited time.

James Blatch: Before you came across Mark and others at that time, did you have a list? Did you know what a list was at that point?

Michelle Madow: Yeah, I did have a list but I was getting people to sign up by saying, "Sign up to get new updates." It would just be in the back of my book, if you want to hear updates from Michelle Madow sign up here.

I wasn't really getting a lot of signups. I was doing a few giveaways and then importing those people into my list but I didn't have a sequence for them to warm them up. They just started getting random emails from me and that didn't really work.

I had a list but it was small just because I didn't have an offer. The free offer is the best way to get people on your list.

James Blatch: Then as you say, you mentioned it briefly there, a sequence of emails that are set there automated that basically onboard people onto your list.

An important part of those sequences that people underestimate is also gets rid of people are just in the wrong place. You don't want your list

being bloated with people who aren't ultimately going to buy your books but it's the right phrasing. You do that now.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, I have a bunch of sequences. I use Convert Kit for my list just because I feel like if you're doing more intermediate or advanced marketing it really is great because I can get subscribers and put them into the list that's right for them based on how they got onto my mailing list.

I can analyze how people are getting on to my mailing list so I can put more of my marketing money toward those things that are working the best.

I have a variety of email sequences. One of them for people who came in through a giveaway import because they need a little more warming up than other people.

I have a sequence for people who got my "Elementals" short story. I'm going to start one for people who get my vampire novella that I'm going to write soon. I have one for people who do ... People do still sign up because they want updates but very few people. They have one too.

James Blatch: We bumped into Alexis from ConvertKit in New York at the beginning of this trip and had a good chat with her and she's very keen to work with SPF and we're going to come up with an offer I think for people. I use ConvertKit.

Michelle Madow: It's wonderful.

James Blatch: It's great. Yeah, we use Infusionsoft for our big business for SPF, I use ConvertKit for my author business.

I'm at the point now where I would be saying to people I know Mailchimp's free and if you really are starting very small, but actually porting lists is quite difficult.

ConvertKit, if you can get in early with it, it does everything you're going to need it to do up to the advanced stage.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, once I joined Convert Kit actually I started seeing my email list explode. I was in Mailchimp at first, like most people are.

James Blatch: Of course.

Michelle Madow: Yeah. It was great, it was still growing when I was using all the techniques. Once I was able to use ConvertKit and see where more people were coming from is when I was able to just grow my email list by thousands.

James Blatch: Yeah, you've really taken to this side of things. Was there something in the background for you before this period of your life?

Were you tech savvy or you quite like social media?

Michelle Madow: Funnily enough, when I was in high school I was very into MySpace.

James Blatch: I remember MySpace.

Michelle Madow: I used to design MySpace layouts for fun. I had a MySpace called Mich Layouts, where I would design MySpace layouts that were themed off of "Twilight," which is still my all-time favorite book series. Claim to fame here, Stephenie Meyer used one of my coded layouts for her MySpace back in 2006.

James Blatch: Get out. Shut the front door, as they say.

Michelle Madow: I was 19 years old and I was just starting doing this coding thing for fun, and whoa, Stephenie Meyer is using a layout I coded.

James Blatch: Wow. There was something there in terms of design and getting online and doing stuff.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, I always loved the online world. I actually wrote a lot of fan fiction also before starting my own stuff.

I wrote a lot of "Twilight" fan fiction and "Harry Potter" fan fiction, because those are two of my favorite fandoms. I had a bit of a following with that.

It was fan fiction on MySpace but I had a lot of people following it and I was creating all these worlds and stories.

Then I figured I'm creating all these original story ideas in other people's worlds, but why not create my own world with my original stories and actually profit from it?

James Blatch: Yeah, but a good place to learn your writing.

Michelle Madow: Yeah. My first book was actually publishable but I think it was only publishable because I had done so much fan fiction for years before even starting to write my first book, because my first fan fiction was terrible. If that had been my first attempt at a book I could not have published that.

James Blatch: Yeah, it's depressing for those of us starting out.

I think Mark once said it takes a million words before you find your voice properly.

Michelle Madow: Yup, I definitely wrote a million words of fan fiction before starting my own books.

James Blatch: Wow, you're quite prolific in that sense. Today, let's jump forward to today, you're making a living out of this it's quite clear.

Michelle Madow: I am, yes.

James Blatch: You're still feeling it growing?

Michelle Madow: I am growing, yes. I look at this with "Elementals" just as the beginning of my indie journey, because when I started "Elementals" I had written "Elementals" for traditional publishing.

Luckily was able to pick up with indie but I feel like the market of readers for indie and traditional is a very different market, especially for YA.

In YA the traditional market is much more geared towards actual teens who are buying books in book stores.

There's a huge YA market in indie of readers who are not necessarily teens but just love to read YA. People like me, people like all of my friends who love YA.

I get emails from people who are retired senior citizens who love reading YA and they love my stuff. I write for them.

"Elementals" was definitely my start. I only planned that as a five-book series in that world, but now I'm starting to think bigger. I see how vampire books are doing well.

Vampires, as I mentioned, have always been my favorite. I was a huge "Twilight" fan, I've always wanted to write vampires. My current series, I'm calling it the "Dark World" series, it's going to be multiple story arcs of five books within my world. It's all going to be interconnected. I'm definitely thinking much bigger and I really am going to be focusing on that in the future and trying to make that take off.

I'm actually now writing a book a month. I'm not sure if I can maintain that forever, but with "Elementals" I was doing a book every two-and-a-half to three months. I'm really just amping everything up and trying to grow even more than I'm already doing.

James Blatch: Where and how do you write?

Michelle Madow: There's a room upstairs. I have my bedroom and then I have a bathroom and then I have a study area.

I have a big La-Z-Boy chair. I do recline. I used to write on my bed because I wrote my first books in college. I actually never worked at a desk ever my whole life.

Even when I was doing homework when I was in high school, I would just lay on my bed and work. I hate sitting at desks, I just feel super boxed in and I can't really move around. I have ADD a bit. I like to lean back and recline and write. I work on my big comfy chair.

James Blatch: Thank goodness you have this cool life as an indie author, you'll never have to work at a desk.

Michelle Madow: Exactly.

James Blatch: Yeah, one of the reasons for doing it. Jerry Seinfeld said the reason he's a comedian he doesn't like getting up early.

Michelle Madow: I don't like getting up early either.

James Blatch: There you go.

Michelle Madow: That's another thing I love about this. I can wake up when I'm ready to wake up.

James Blatch: That's very cool.

Film, TV, have they been knocking yet? Is there any interest?

Michelle Madow: Not really. With my traditional trilogy, the Diamond one, I had a Hollywood agent but nothing ever came from it, it just fizzled.

As much as I love watching TV and movies, I don't know, Hollywood is a little scary. I feel like they're all sharks out there. I'm very happy in my little book world. If someone does come to me I would definitely listen and everything, but it's not something I've really been pursuing because I've been focusing on the writing side of the business and the book side of it.

James Blatch: It's such a huge and vibrant reading area, isn't it? You're a great example of there's an appetite out there for this type of fantasy.

I'm a little surprised, the success of "Harry Potter" and "Twilight," that they aren't falling over themselves to do a little bit more fantasy-based. I know there's stuff with sci-fi elements going around at the moment. I'm a little surprised.

Michelle Madow: It's out there, there's "Shadow Hunters" TV shows, but I'm not Cassandra Clare, she's an international number one author.

But one of the things I love about indie is I don't have to be Cassandra Clare to make a living. I don't have to be a Stephenie Meyer or a JK Rowling, which I feel like in traditional you do have to be like that to make a living, or a James Patterson.

Whereas I can just be a regular selling author and make a very healthy income from that. I love that.

James Blatch: We come back to that basic percentage math, right?

Michelle Madow: Yeah, I'm not a mathematician.

James Blatch: We can all work out that 9% and 70%. In terms of your current advertising then, Facebook ads you mentioned you're still running, they're still working for you. Are you advertising or working on any other platforms?

Michelle Madow: Yes, actually I do a ton of AMS ads. I found huge success with AMS. I do BookBub ads as well.

My main ones are Facebook lead generation ads and Facebook ads for my books and then the AMS ads I've found have been great for my boxed sets and the BookBub ad for my boxed set as well.

James Blatch: Let's talk a little bit about the BookBubs and AMS. People are trying to get to grips with those at the moment. I'm reading a lot in the forums of people who particularly BookBub ... In fact both AMS and BookBub are complaining they can't get them working and other people are weighing and saying, "They're working for me."

How long did it take you to turn those into a good ROI?

Michelle Madow: With the AMS ads pretty quickly actually. My first AMS ad that I did was on my "Elementals" boxed sets. I did a bunch of testing with my ad text until I found one that worked and then I just kept keeping the keywords running that were working and turning off the ones that weren't working.

I think that ad right now has 66%, which I'm in Kindle Unlimited, I have to take into account that a lot of that is Kindle Unlimited people will borrow and read.

I'm happy with 100% or less with those ads, I consider that 66% to be excellent with a KU book, I keep that one. I use author names for my targeting. I just found that really worked well.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Michelle Madow: For the BookBub ads I just did what Mark does for his Facebook ads in his course. He has his Excel sheets. I just applied it to BookBub, the same sheet calculating the ROI and changing the targeting and I apply that to my BookBub ads.

James Blatch: Great. We know that Adam Croft is doing a module for the next course. It will be very interesting to see people do that and what success they have. Adam writes in a different genre as well, he's having success with BookBub as is Mark. Working well.

Michelle, it's really fun talking to you. Like I say, YA is such a vibrant area and big area and it's exciting. By the way, also cool people. Everyone we meet who writes YA are the coolest people.

Michelle Madow: Thank you.

James Blatch: First of all, if people are watching on YouTube they're going to assume you've done all of this by the age of 17 or 18, because you are blessed because you look very much younger than you are. You're actually a little bit older than that.

Michelle Madow: Right. I'm 30 years old.

James Blatch: 30 years old, there you go, secret's out. Nonetheless you've done a lot in a short time considering this whole world that you now occupy started in 2016.

Michelle Madow: Yeah, and there is one thing actually I think I forgot to mention is to read a lot. I read tons.

It's so important to know your market before you write it and that's what I did with my vampire series. You have to know what's selling in your market and read a ton to analyze why. I think I read about 80 books a year and I read all in my genre so that I can get a feel of what books readers are enjoying and try to make sure that I'm writing books that people will want to read.

I think that's so important because it's much easier to sell a book that people want to read than to sell a book that people aren't as interested in reading.

James Blatch: Yeah. That makes complete sense and that's advice you do hear from people. Show me a good writer and I'll show you a good reader.

Michelle Madow: Yes.

James Blatch: You often hear.

Michelle Madow: I think Stephen King is one of the ones who is known for saying that.

James Blatch: Yeah, there you go, you're living proof of it as if we needed that.

Michelle, thank you so much indeed for joining us and for hosting us in your home today. It's been really exciting to bump into you again. We met you in Florida this time last year.

We're going to look out for your ads on Facebook and follow your career and look out for that huge Hollywood blockbuster, which just around the corner with your name, based on a novel by.

Michelle Madow: That would be very cool.

James Blatch: Thank you.

There's Michelle. I told you it would be an inspiring interview. I think she's amazing, Michelle, I think she's dedicated to her readers, she loves the genre that she writes in, which I think shines through in the way she talks about it.

She's got this steely focus about her which is I need to know how this is going to work, I need to learn it.

She got your course. Very nice to hear her being very praiseworthy about. She soaks up the information, implements it and aren't we all thrilled that she's been successful with it?

Mark Dawson: Yes, she's really great. Lovely to meet her last year. I didn't go to NINC this year, but I was there last year.

As you said earlier, she drove two or three hours from where she was down to St. Pete's to meet us. It was I think there are two or three others; Alicia Hyder was another who traveled to come down. Not to go to the conference but just to meet us and thank us for the course.

I was very flattered to get people doing that, it's not something that I expected. It was lovely to see and it's great that 12 months later Michelle is still doing extremely well and has built up a really lucrative and viable long-term career for herself doing what she loves, which is what we all aim to be able to do.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely. She lives in Boca Raton in Florida, which is a really nice area of country clubs, golf courses and multimillionaires who plant their houses there.

In fact the gated estate that Michelle lives in were a couple of people, the guy who founded and owns I think it was Penthouse magazine and that emporium and also a couple of the real players from the "Wolf of Wall Street" film, the ex-wife, who appears in the film as a feisty individual, and the right-hand man played by ... Who is his friend all the way through it? Struggling for names now.

Mark Dawson: Jonah Hill.

James Blatch: Jonah Hill, yes, played by him. The real life version of him. If you google Daily Mail I think they did a couple of stories about this estate where they live.

Mark Dawson: Don't do that. Don't google it. Honestly James, you don't want to send traffic to the Daily Mail.

James Blatch: Worst website on the planet, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Very interesting insight into James's psyche there. First of all mentioning the owner of Penthouse, and then seguing naturally to the Daily Mail. That's all you need to know.

James Blatch: Turn the camera around to my bookshelf over there.

Mark Dawson: No, don't do that.

James Blatch: It's publishing, right?

Mark Dawson: Of a sort, yes.

James Blatch: Yes, of a sort. No, it's a really lovely area and I think Lindsey Hall lives very nearby as well, who is somebody else who came across to see us in NINC last year and she was there this year as well. You were

missed this year at NINC, you need to definitely get across there next year. You are going?

Mark Dawson: They've asked me to go next year, I'm going to go next year. I've got the contract came through yesterday to speak at Denver at RWA, I'll be in Denver next year. At least two times in the states next year. We'll see, maybe a third time.

James Blatch: Have you been invited to ThrillerFest as well?

Mark Dawson: Yes, I am. I'm speaking at Thriller Fest, that's three. Either three or four trips to the states next year, that's great, very exciting.

James Blatch: Yeah. Good. I think NINC, that particular time in Florida, is becoming a bit of an SPF gathering time and it's a really fun place to be. Look forward to that again next year.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay. If you are interested in the course, it's selfpublishingformula.com/ads17, A-D-S-1-7.

We have another author interview for you next week, somebody who's literally in the last 12 months gone from a standing start to quitting her job and living off the income.

She's writing in what most people consider a tough genre to sell online. Another really good inspiring interview for you next week.

Until then have a great week writing and a great week selling. Bye bye.

Speaker 1: 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.