

EPISODE 101: SMART BOOK DELIVERY – WITH DAMON COURTNEY, BOOK FUNNEL

Speaker 1: 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: Hello and welcome to The Self Publishing Formula podcast. It's Friday, so it must be SPF time. Thank you very much indeed for joining us.

I thank you very much for all your love for our 100th episode. And a lot of love for your beard as well, which I notice Father Christmas hasn't bought you a razor blade, Mark?

Mark: Well, he bought me half a razor blade, or at least I managed to shave off the sides, so I'm now ... I'm now rocking my ... for those of you watching on You Tube, I'm now rocking my hipster ... my Dalston hipster beard.

James: Oh right. So when you streamline your beard and point forward, that's a hipster beard is it?

Mark: Yeah. I could probably wax it now. I don't know, we'll see how long it lasts for. I'm still quite fond of it, but I think it might be time for a little bit of a change. Maybe go for a mustache.

I've been watching lots of The Crown at the moment, with Mrs Dawson, and there's a lot of mustaches in The Crown. I think it's about time the mustache came back again. So, you know, maybe next week?

James: Yes. In fact you may have just ... have you watched the episode where the mustaches are mentioned specifically?

Mark: I have, yeah, and they all get shaved off.

James: Yes they do, yeah, yeah, so that was a good episode.

Now, you've enjoyed *The Crown*. Let's just mention *Star Wars* for a moment. Have you been to see the new film?

Mark: Yes I have. I don't think it's very good.

James: Yeah. I noticed a few comments. I just wanted to say something about this because we're writers ... I include myself here, we're writers and we think a lot about story and script and so on, and I'm actually fascinated by the debate that goes on after each *Star Wars* film.

I suppose this really started with the prequels, which really deserved a lot of debate, immediately after them. And this one's been such a divider, and I think a couple of things, which is, I don't know whether this is pertinent to us as authors or not, but one thing is that when you become more popular, and this must be something that you've experienced Mark, you are inevitably going to attract more scrutiny and therefore be exposed to more criticism, something we've touched on before in the podcast.

Star Wars is at the point where two things happened to it: one is, everyone has an opinion, and they analyze it in a way that they would never walk out of a *Marvel* film and say, "Oh, there was plot holes there, I'm going go on to the internet and say, "Ugh, terrible plot holes," at least nothing like on the same scale that people would do with *Star Wars*.

And secondly, people who don't like *Star Wars* go and see *Star Wars* films and then come out and say, "I didn't like that *Star Wars* film," which I don't really understand. But other halves, who don't go and see sci-fi throughout

their life, will go and see a Star Wars film because it has that kind of family event feel to it, and that's ... I think, draws in criticism.

I was wondering if there is a parallel here, to what happens when you get popular? Because you're popular now, and I know you do get some criticism here every now and again, and I know it must sting a bit because you put so much time and work and you get a huge amount of love for your book, but how do you also deal with that?

Mark: I don't care. I don't care to be honest. People can say what they want. I do get bad reviews now and again but they're outweighed by dozens of good reviews, so it really doesn't concern me any more. It used to a long while ago, but I don't care. I got a few one stars yesterday ... ah, whatever.

But, you know it's interesting, it's always an interesting one. I love Star Wars, not quite as much as you, because you are very geeky, but I do really enjoy it and I don't think it is actually ... the reason why it's being criticized so much, isn't so much from people who wouldn't normally watch Star Wars, it is actually fanboys who are reacting badly to it.

I think there's a couple of reasons why that might be. The critical reception was rapturous, which was almost universal, "This is amazing. It's the best Star Wars since Empire," which is what they always say, of course, and so you go in there almost ready to be disappointed.

The other thing was, I think it's ... and I've read some very quite good stuff about this, it was Rian Johnson, who is the director, quite clearly went in there wanting to kind of cheekily put two finger up at the Star Wars obsessives, the Star Wars fanboys, a bit like you, and obviously it didn't work that way with you.

But there's one scene in particular, I won't spoil it for anyone, but there's a scene at the start where Luke receives something that's quite important from his past. It's an iconic artifact, and the way he treats it is completely out

of character, completely out of character from everything we've ever seen from him historically, and he just would not behave that way.

And it gave me a kind of a rye chuckle at the time, and then I thought ... the more I thought about it, it was such a bum note that it just didn't make sense to me. It was almost kind of like, "Yeah, those are your old Star Wars films. My Star Wars films are going to be completely different. I'm going to go into a completely different direction," and that I thought was emblematic of the problems with the film.

I did enjoy it. I thought it was fun, but it's by no means ... it's not as good as any of the first three. It's not as good as Rogue One. I don't think it's as good as the first of these new one's.

So, yeah, I enjoyed it, but I don't think ... it's nothing special.

James: Yeah. It's worth saying that I absolutely adored Star Wars as a 10 year old boy when it came out, and became an obsessive from that moment onwards.

And I really did not like Empire Strikes Back. I came out of the cinema as a 14 year old, 13, 14 year old, I just thought, "What happened to Star Wars? Where's my Star Wars gone?" And now, as a 50 year old, it's my favorite Star Wars film.

I think a similar thing has happened with this. There's been a left turn, definitely. I agree with ... the bit I agree with is there was a triteness to that scene which shouldn't have been there, and there was a triteness to several elements of the film which it could have done without.

Not to mention the flying superwoman moment, which was laugh-out-loud bad. How that go through the screenings I don't know.

But anyway, you've got to allow films to grow and explore and change, and goodness knows Star Wars has to if it's going to survive the next 40 years in the way that's it's survived the first 40 years.

Anyway, it's fascinating to me and there's the director there, and the writer of these films, who are reading all of this and it's one of the problems of success, and I think it probably affects some people more than others, and some people who say it doesn't affect them, probably it does a little bit, because it's difficult not to be affected by it.

I get criticism for the podcast. There was that bloke recently, I'm not going to name him, but he wrote to me ... no he wrote ... I'll tell you what he did, he wrote privately to me to say I'm going to criticize you, publicly. And then he wrote publicly on one of our forums, a long detailed explanation as to why I was a terrible interviewer and I never asked the right questions.

I thought that was an odd way of doing it, because I wouldn't have minded if he'd said something publicly and then wrote to me privately, to give me his feedback. And then he wrote to you, with an even longer ... after another interview, saying, "This is why this man is so bad at interviewing. I will never get through another interview of his again ... blah, blah blah."

Mark: He didn't just do that, he also praised me to the heavens. It was a really weird email. It was like, "You're such a talented author, why are knocking around with that Blatch?"

And I'm like, what on earth are you ... what do you think I'm going to say to that? It was the most ridiculous email I've ever read. And I think I was reasonably curt with him, because you can't ... it's just a very odd thing to do. So, anyway, I had your back there Blatch.

James: Yes, you did.

The other point I was going to make is that how many people have said to me, "That was a really good interview. You asked exactly the right questions. The questions I was hoping you were going to ask." Which is lovely when people say that, and they say that much more often than this rogue one element who writes to me and says that.

And yet, of course, because I'm a human being, that's the one, it's worked you a little bit, and you kind of forget the pros. So there is an effort to go on here.

I went to a conference recently where they said one of things you should do, is when get an email with praise, just drop it into a folder somewhere, and every now and again go through the folder and have a look at what people really think of you, because it's as valid as the one criticism that you get that bites away at you.

Anyway. James, there's a lesson.

Mark: Or you could toughen up?

James: Yeah. Man up!

Okay, look, we've got a good interview today. We always have good interviews, I always say that, but we have a good interview today, with one of our friends, Damon Courtney.

Damon is the genius behind BookFunnel. And BookFunnel is this product that's made everybody's lives so much easier when it comes to giving away books. And I know you were very early to adopt him, and he mentions that in the interview Mark.

Damon's a great guy. He's a coder. He's a digital guy. By his own admission he loves data, and he's quite logical about that, which is brilliant, to have

someone like him behind the scenes for the indie authors, making things possible.

He's developed BookFunnel in new ways, and we're talking about the sales platform in the interview, but also, interestingly, he has this kind of overview because he sees what's working quicker than almost anyone else.

He sees the spikes and downloads, and he has a look at the campaigns that are being run by some authors and thinks, oh, okay, so 99p's now working, or the give-away box set it suddenly a thing; and he starts to pick up these trends. So they're putting that into a blog, which they've just started recently.

Let's hear from Damon. I caught up with him in Florida with him recently, and then when he is finished Mark and I will have a chat off the back.

Damon Courtney, I cannot believe we have not had you on The Self Publishing Formula Podcast before?

Damon: I know. And we haven't met, for all the times that we've talked over the couple of years, this is the first time we're meeting in person. Here you guys are, in the States.

James: Here we are. And we're sitting in a hotel bedroom, that's a suite I should say, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

Damon: Yep. Seagulls in the background.

James: Seagulls, but also pelicans and dolphins. There has been dolphins today-

Damon: Yeah, there have. You see some of those here.

James: It's a fantastic view. And we're here at NINC, we should say, which is Novelists Incorporated, and we've talked about that quite a lot on the podcast.

It's a very writer-centric conference, and obviously you find it useful Damon, to be here, as we do as well, to pick up this sort of interview, I guess, for us-

Damon: Yeah.

James: Why are you here?

Damon: Well, I'm a writer too, so I have my own self-published books, and so I like to come and listen to the talks and see what people in the industry are doing that maybe I haven't heard of, as a self-published author but also because our authors look to BookFunnel to ask questions about things that they should be doing.

And while I have some authority in some of those subjects, I can't claim authority in others, and so what we typically tend to do is, we say, "Well, we have seen a lot of authors doing this. Or, we've seen them doing this, you might want to give that try."

It's really neat to go to the talks. I think the biggest thing, probably, is just meeting other authors, some who are already using our service, and some who ... I would say there a few that ... there aren't many that I meet that have never heard of us at this point.

But the ones that we do meet that are already on our service or thinking about using it, and we like to sort of 'gather their pain points' is a phrase we use often in software, which is, "What are you struggling with, that we may be able to solve?"

Because we're an engineering company. I mean we distribute books, but ultimately we can build all kinds of solutions for problems that authors ...

they're not engineers, they can't build those solutions and so we ... I want to be able to build those for them.

BookFunnel is my own little play. It's in my own little sandbox, and so what we have built so far is obviously ebook delivery, but I'm always looking for ways that we can help the indie author community with tools that you can't put together, but we can.

And by talking to other authors ... I've been here two days and I already have a whole slew of ideas. That there is, "Do you know it would be really cool if BookFunnel did this?" And some of those are like, "Yeah, we'll consider that," and other one's are like, "Wow, that is a really good idea that I hadn't thought of."

James: Yeah.

BookFunnel is a classic, technological solution to a pain point, to a problem that authors were having, which was a lot of authors will use a perm-free give away, or give away a book, or interact with their mailing list; and delivery of a book, in this day and age, of different devices and different ways of reading books, was a real headache.

Damon: Yep.

James: And it was manual process and it was labor intensive, because quite often it didn't work and people would end up answering emails and Mark Dawson amongst-

Damon: You've got to do the support.

James: Yeah. Among ... other authors will tell you what it was like before you sat there.

So, when was the moment for you, when BookFunnel crystallized in your mind?

Damon: I had actually wanted to distribute my own book. So it was years ago, the advice that sort of started with guys like Mark and Nick Stevenson, basically saying, "Give away a free book to get people on your list."

Back in 2011 it might have been good enough just to say, "Hey, join my list," and people would join up without compensation of any kind. But then, as more and more lists and more and more authors came out it became, "Well, you really need to give them something, to get on your list." And so that was that whole idea of give them a free book.

So your choices were, to make the book free on all the stores, or somehow give it to them yourself. Well, I was going to give it to them myself, and so I looked around at other people who were already doing it and said, "What are the processes ... as an engineer, what are the processes they're using? Surely somebody has come up with a good solution for this?"

And there wasn't. The solution seemed to be, well here's a zip file that has all of the formats, and maybe there's a PDF that says how to get it onto an iPad, or something like that. And I said, "My mother would never figure this out," and so that was where the idea started to crystallize.

The funny thing was, I was in the middle of writing my trilogy, and I knew that if I ... when I have ideas like this, if I start working on code, if I start working on this, I'll never finish that other thing, that other project will languish. So I made a commitment that I was going to finish, put out my trilogy, so that at least the story was complete before I started working on BookFunnel. And I was about 18 months, between the time that I had the idea and the time that I actually started working on line of code one.

And the whole time I kept thinking, somebody's going to beat me to this, somebody's ... this is a huge problem, I would see it ... Joanna Penn talked

about it on her podcast, I'd heard Mark mention it several times, just all the support, what a big pain it was. And I was thinking, somebody's going to do this, somebody's going to beat me to it.

And then 18 months goes by and I was like, "I can't believe no-one has solved this problem yet." So that was where we set out, I was like, "I'm going to go solve this problem. And I don't know if I'm right or not, but I see a lot ... by looking at a lot of people talking about their pain points, this seems like a good path to go."

James: Yeah. Well, it seems no doubt to me, that it was a great solution to it. We're big fans of BookFunnel. You very kindly do a bonus for people who sign up to our courses-

Damon: Yeah, I love it.

James: But do you know what, it's the one that everyone takes up, and you know that because you see all the codes being used, it's the one that everyone takes up and makes it a fundamental part of their process. And that goes, obviously, well beyond SPF community as well.

Damon: Sure.

James: I now want to come onto that as well, actually, your kind of 'helicopter' view of the industry and what's working and what's not.

Anyway, but let's stick with the BookFunnel story at the moment. So, you've had your 18 months of very disciplined, I have to say, very disciplined of you to concentrate on your writing, slightly nervous that someone else was going to-

Damon: Really-

James: ... come up with something called BookShovel or something.

Damon: Yeah!

James: But they didn't, and so you then started coding. Is that your background, you're a software guy?

Damon: Yeah. Oh yeah, I've been a software ... I started coding when I was seven on a little, a dinky little computer that my dad bought home. So I've always done programing.

The writing, actually started with the self-publishing revolution, because I'd always ... I love stories, I love the idea of being a writer, but I hated the idea of trying to query and pitch and do all that stuff, and so it was like, "Well, I have a job, I do my job, and that's fine."

My wife bought me a Kindle for Christmas and I picked up a random fantasy ... I write fantasy, you know elves and dragons and such, and I picked up a random book on Amazon that was I think \$2.99 and I was like, "What, three bucks for a book, that's awesome!"

I think I got really lucky, because it just turned out it was an amazing self-published fantasy book, but I didn't know it until I got to the end. And I'm reading the author's note and I'm like, "What, you can just do this? You can just like ... I can just write a book and put it up there?"

Then I started doing a little bit of research and realized that you could, and I was like, "Well that's ... I'd be totally interested in writing a book if I could do that. If I didn't have to go down this whole path of, you know, can I have your permission please to publish my book? And so that was what I did.

But, yeah, software has been my whole life, and I still do, I like to tell people I serve two muses because sometimes I really want to write, and other times I see a coding challenge or some problem that can be solved. My wife's

fond of saying that I look at every problem as something that can be solved with software. And I'm like, "Well that's because at least 90% of them can!"

James: Yeah. I hope she doesn't say that in the middle of a marathon argument, where ... and you say, "Well, everything will be solved by the one or zero."

Damon: Yeah, exactly.

James: It's not always going to work.

Do you work in software now? Are you full-time? Is BookFunnel and authoring full-time for you now?

Damon: Full-time with BookFunnel now. That started in January of this year. So up until then I still had a full-time job with the company that I loved and I didn't leave.

Even over the years as BookFunnel was slowly sort of building up, I didn't want to leave, I liked the job that I had and liked the company that I worked for.

That company eventually closed. Well then it was kind of a, do I make a leap? Do I go find another software job? And at that point BookFunnel had gotten some traction, and started to make some money. It wasn't quite enough that I could cover all my bills, but it was enough that it had a lot of potential. So, yeah, that was starting back in January of this year and then it's been a full-time ride ever since.

James: Superb.

Let's just explain the BookFunnel process. Obviously, I'm familiar with it. You are very familiar with it, being its grandfather, but some people won't

know exactly how it works from either an end user point of view, or an author point of view.

Can you give us a little guide, a talk through?

Damon: So the author point of view is really, really simple: once you've uploaded your book and we require that you give us the epub and the mobi, which if you're not familiar what those are, they're basically the two main formats of books.

You can also use a pdf which almost everybody knows what that is, but that's optional. You can include the pdf if you want to or not, but the epub and the mobi, you upload through us.

And then, once you have the book up there, you would create a landing page that you're going to send readers to, Funnel readers to, as it were.

And that's pretty much ... I mean we have a bunch of other features, but that is the main thing that you're going to do with BookFunnel. You're going to sign up. You're going to put your book up there. You're going to create a page, and you're going to give that page to whom ever you want to download your book. So then we get into the reader process.

James: And that is effectively a link-

Damon: Yeah-

James: So a link that you copy in, you can send in an email out that link-

Damon: Yeah-

James: You can say, "Here's my book," then click on it, and then from the user point of view, what happens then?

Damon: So once the reader gets that link, they're sent to that page. They're given a beautiful landing page that shows off ... really shows off your book cover.

We try to nudge authors in the right direction, and so we ended up redesigning our pages at the earlier part of this year, to include things like, when you upload your book, we ask you for the tagline of your book, the hook. And we explain what that is and why that's important, and if you give us the hook we put that really big across the top of the page.

The hook, the tagline's the first thing that they see; and conversions went up for the authors who started doing that, because before that they might put something like, "Get your free copy of book, book title." And that's nice, it literally tells them what they're going to do, but it's not a hook that grabs them, you know?

So as we started designing new pages, we started trying to nudge authors in the right direction. Like, if you don't have a tagline, think about one. And we would see ... our support staff would see authors who had done a really good job with their product description, with their book description, and then they had, "Get your free copy of ... blah."

And we would look at those and go, "You have a great hook right here. The last line of your product description should be right up there at the top. That's the hook! That's solid!" So we started trying to encourage them to do that.

Once they get to the landing page, they get the cover, they get your hook if you have it, and then they get my book button. So they tap that and then they begin to walk through the process.

And the beauty is the process is different depending on the device that you're on. So if you're on an iPad or an iPhone, you're going to see something very different than someone on an Android would see, and that

was really what we built with BookFunnel, was this idea that readers didn't want to read in a BookFunnel app. They already have their favorite app.

They read in the Kindle app. They read in the Nook app. They read on their Paperwhite. We wanted to get the book to where they're already reading, rather than try to push them into reading on our platform.

If you're on an iPad, you're going to get a streamlined experience that will get the book to your app on your iPad as quickly as possible, and the same thing for your computer.

Believe it or not we have a lot of people that read on their laptops, which I would find maddening, but they're, "Oh, I love reading ... I read everything on my laptop."

James: And phones. I see people on their iPhone, on a train, and I think it would drive me insane. Well, certainly it would hurt my eyes ... but.

Damon: So yeah, the reader experience is very different, but when I built BookFunnel, I went out and bought every device that I could find. We have every generation of Kindle, every generation of Kindle Fire, even one's that were sold in Japan that you never saw; we have all of those.

We tested each individual device to find out what is the best, quickest way, to get them their book for each device?

There aren't that many choices when you get on the site, because we've already narrowed you down to, "Well you said Kindle, so which kind of Kindle are we talking about?"

We try to funnel you down to the actual device that you have, and sometimes they're the same; two or three Kindles might have mostly the same process, but then that fourth one, he's a little bit different. And so we ... once we get you down to that ... which is why it's complicated when

authors ask us, "Why would I use BookFunnel, and why not just give them the files themselves?" You don't want to do this.

James: No.

Damon: You don't want to try to deal with all the Kindles, and all the Kobos, and all the Nooks that exist, and knowing how to help each reader get to each one of those devices.

James: Yeah, I mean depending on how successful your campaigns are, **you could easily end up dealing with 10 email queries a day, just on people trying to download books.**

Damon: Sure.

James: And that's what you've solved. Very successfully.

Damon: Well, but the back up is, we have an amazing support team. So even with all of the work that we've put into streamlining the processes, and as meticulously as we could we cracked ... every word has been shopped and figured out over the last few years to make readers go in the right direction.

A lot of the readers that we deal with tend to be older, because they come in and they're usually very apologetic and like, "I'm so sorry. I'm terrible with technology. I don't know what I'm doing. Can you help me?" And that is what our support staff is there for.

We train all of our staff to kill them with kindness. Everything is kindness. Even if they're belligerent, and they sometimes are, just be as nice as you possibly can and usually they are, just super nice, little ladies that just want to get their book.

The thing that I love the most is, they're so happy when they get their book. Not just because they got the book, but because for once they actually ... with our help, they were able to do something that they'd never been able to do.

We hear all the time, "I've never been able to get a free book, that all these authors offer. I thought this was just a scam. I've never been able to get one. And now with your help I'm reading my book. Thank you." And I love that. It just makes me feel good.

James: Yeah. Absolutely. And I think, probably, because I went through the process as well and tested it, a bit like you, when we started putting our SPF books up, and I think maybe the mobi is the more ... more steps than getting it onto the Kindle Paperwhite than others? I don't know. But anyway, even that, it's about three steps-

Damon: Yeah-

James: It's really nothing from a user point of view.

Damon: And for the most part, once they've done it one time, maybe twice, then they know exactly what they're looking for, they know exactly how to get there, and they just ... they zip onto our site, we can see them now: somebody who used to go through a bunch of different clicks to find what they were looking for, and now when they come back it's just, bing, bing, bing, and they got their book.

James: Yeah. And if you want to see this in action, by the way, John Dyer I'm looking at you now: so it's selfpublishingformula.com/resources. Is that our books page?

John: It's just spf-resources.

James: Spf-resources. So selfpublishingformula.com/spf-resources. Just choose any of our books, and it is Damon's BookFunnel that you will be eventually, when the email drops you'll be clicking on that link so you can see for yourself if you haven't done that before.

But this is one area where, although it's a technological solution and not everyone's done it, I'm pretty certain that most people listening to this are familiar with BookFunnel. It just seems to be, you've been tremendously successful with it.

Damon: Thank you. Yeah.

James: It's been great.

Are there any competitors? Has BookShovel appeared? Or is there anyone else?

Damon: The only one that we ever get compared to is Instafreebie because they also deliver books, but they are more of an advertising platform, a marketing platform, and we are in the business of creating tools for solving authors' problems.

Book delivery was the biggest problem that, obviously that we've started with, but then, very shortly thereafter ... I built it thinking that people were going to use it for reader magnets, like, first book is free, go down, look at this.

Within a month people were saying, "This is great, I want to use it to deliver my ARCs, and this is not as convenient for that."

So that was one of the first features we built, was called Certified Mail, which is we'll handle all the ARC deliver for you, but rather than putting a link out there into the world that somebody could share with anybody else,

you give us the list of your 50 people on your ARC team, and we send each of them an individual link that is only for them.

When they download their book that link is dead, they can't share it with others to get your book, because authors were saying, "I want to put my ARC out there, but I don't want a link that everybody can just grab hold of and start sharing everywhere." Especially when they're six books into a series, like, "This is going to be a huge release for me."

And if you're a popular author, yeah, everybody will go and share that link, but if they have ... reader's have groups, just like authors. You know, there are reader groups on Facebook and people would post and say, "Hey everybody, you can grab a free copy of this author's six book ARC."

You'd be mad, but that's not what the ARC team was for. So we created Certified Mail as a tool because, again, authors were having this pain point of, just delivering a link out there for my art team isn't good enough.

And then we built in features like, you can track every single reader that we send it to. We track whether they viewed the link, and then whether they downloaded it, and what days ... the dates that they viewed and downloaded it on.

So you can see the people who grabbed it right away, the people who maybe waited a week to get it, and then the people who never got it. And just like in MailChimp you could create another campaign that says, okay, re-target everybody who didn't download it, and give them another chance to get the book.

Then we also give you all of the stats. What they downloaded to. What device they were on. They're reading the Kindle app. They downloaded it to their Android phone. So we give you all of that data to know more about where your readers are.

And then later on we added a feature that will send them a reminder halfway through. So if they didn't download in that first batch, they get a reminder email that says, "Hey, you haven't downloaded your copy yet. Are you going to do this?"

Authors love that because the biggest thing, especially with some of the bigger authors was, you can be on my ARC team but the deal is you've got to read it. You have to read it and then you have to review it.

But they had no idea who was downloading their books. Now, we give them a list. These are all the people that downloaded. Those are the people who didn't. And then they go back to those people and say, "Listen, this isn't a free book give away, this is a tit-for-tat." And so that was what we built that.

Then we have continued to add on features that authors ask us for. We continue to add tools that authors can put into their toolbox. And it's one of those things where this tool may not be perfect for you. This one doesn't do you any good. I don't do ARCs, so the Certified Mail is meaningless to me.

But at the same time we did Certified Mail we built a gifting feature, so you can just gift a book to one individual. So if you meet somebody at a conference, you'll be like, "Oh well here. Pull out your phone and I can literally send you a book from BookFunnel, and you get a private link, again, only for you, and it lets you download but it won't let you share it and give it to other people."

James: That's really nice.

How much of this can be automated? The ARC stuff, can you set something up in BookFunnel at the moment that would maybe after two weeks automatically email the people who haven't opened it or read it?

Damon: That's what the reminder does. You can set up your campaign to go out for, say, a two week campaign, and halfway through it will grab all the people who haven't downloaded and send them another reminder email.

And you can also include review instructions in the email that says, "Hey, if you've already picked up your copy, don't forget, click here to go to Amazon and leave your review." So you get to attach a message onto that reminder, so that part is automatic.

The other feature that we've been asked for that we've considered is authors being able to put in the release date when the book will actually go live, because so many times now they send the ARC out and then we get the email that says, "I loved it. I can't wait. Where can I leave the review?"

Generally the author has told them in the email, "Wait. It will post. The book will go up on the 28th. That's when you'll put your review out," but they didn't read that part. So they're just like, "I love this book! I can't wait to review it. Where do I leave my review?"

We're going to add in a feature that says, Give us the release date and we'll send out one more email on the release date saying, "Hey, the book's live. Go here to leave your review. You were on it, you downloaded the book, so presumably you're going to go and review it because that was the deal with the ARC ... being on this team." And we would go and send them that email.

We haven't developed that, but that was one that several authors had asked us for. Because, again, authors are always asking us to automate as much as the process as they possibly can, because I don't want to have to keep thinking about this. I'd love to be able to just send it out to my art team.

BookFunnel knows the email address of everybody, and it knows who downloaded it and who didn't.

James: Good.

You've mentioned the support; let's dwell on that for a second.

So are these virtual assistants? Have you got teams or do you have people on the ground in Houston? How does this work?

Damon: We're still a pretty small company. There are three full-time employees, and then we have two part-time support staff. So we have one girl Jamie, who's the main support contact for reader support.

My wife Julie and I ... I don't do much of the support any more though. I will come in for author support, depending on the technical nature of the question. My wife Julie does most of the author support.

Interesting fact, Jamie, depending on who we're talking to in support, I found this really funny but if we're talking to Americans, everyone always knows and assumes Jamie is a girl. If we're talking to Brits, they always call Jamie a 'mate'.

James: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Damon: They say, "Thanks mate. Lovely." And I'm like, oh, yeah, because that's more of a man's name-

James: Jamie Oliver-

Damon: Yeah, exactly. But that was something that we found that I thought was really funny; just one of those little differences.

James: You've got Jamie Lee Curtis in your mind or Jamie Oliver, depending on-

Damon: Depending on where you're from.

James: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Damon: Our support staff is always there. We try to answer everything as quickly as possible, but it's almost always within a couple of hours of a reader coming in, and it depends on where you catch us.

If it's during ... from nine to nine, central time, which is where we all live in Texas, then you'll get a response really, really quickly. Anything outside of those times, it can be a few hours before you'll get a response.

Our support team is always there, and we try to encourage authors and sometimes we almost have to force them, like some authors are just so nice that they're like, "Well I didn't want to bother you," but that's why we're here.

Or they'll email us and they say, "I have a reader who's having a problem, can you tell me what I need to tell them to help them?" And we tell them, "Send them to us," because the first question is, "Well what kind of device do they have?"

We have to go down this whole list of things in order to get them their book. If I tried to walk you through that, and then you tried to walk the reader through that ... no, no, no. That's why we're here.

James: Yeah.

I'm trying to remember how we did this now, setting up our BookFunnel ... when we mail it out. But you send the link and then the landing page itself,

presumably somewhere on there is for the user to click on the Help Support thing?

Damon: Yeah, there's a big HELP button up at the top, that we push people to.

And any email that they get from us includes a link that says, "If you need help, click here," and we'll take them back to the book and drop down a little help dialog. And we tell authors that, "Tell your readers if they have any trouble, click that HELP button at the top. We're right there. Our support staff will grab them."

And when we reply, the author also gets a note, if the author sends somebody to us by email, so that we get that aligned.

I know Mark, when he gets readers who have questions for him, he will forward them on to us, and anytime that happens, when we reply, we also reply with a carbon copy back to the author that says, "You don't need to reply. This is a little note from BookFunnel letting you know that we've picked up your reader and we've got them from here."

Because a lot of authors would email us a few days later and go, "Did you ever get back to this guy?" Because authors ... this is their audience, this is their readers, they want to make sure that that guy got his book, and that he's happy, and that he's reading my book.

So we started adding that in, because we wanted authors to know, "We got 'em. We're taking care of them."

James: Yeah. Cool.

How much does it cost?

Damon: Our cheapest plan is 20 bucks a year, and that includes 500 downloads a month, which is pretty ... I don't know too many authors who do most of ... unless you're bigger, or even for bigger authors, unless you're doing regular promotions, you're probably not moving too many books in a month.

20 bucks a year will get you 500 downloads a month, and not all of the features, but we'll certainly get you the best part which is the download process and our support staff.

And from there, the next line up is 10 bucks a month, or \$100 dollars a year. So you get a little nice, two month free discount if you pay on the yearly, and that will get you every ... 5,000 downloads a month and all of our features.

James: So that opens up everything, and that's it, the two levels?

Damon: Oh no, we have levels that go up after that, but those are the two main that you're going to be really looking at.

The level up after that includes mailing list integration. We integrate with MailChimp, MailerLite, ActiveCampaign, Aweber and ConvertKit, so any of those ... and the nice thing about those is if you use one of our give away pages that collects the reader's email address, we'll funnel them right on to your mailing list, whichever list you tell us to, at the same time that we're delivering them their book. So we deliver their book and then just ... boop, pop'em right onto your mailing list for you.

James: That's a really neat way of doing a whole funnel thing for your own list, without having to go to the expense of your own landing page even, you just send out that email link?

Damon: Well, and we also did a lot of work to make our landing pages ... we did a lot of A/B testing and a lot of work with designers, to make our

pages convert really highly for books. So there are plenty of places on the web where you can go build really beautiful landing pages.

Everything we do is for authors. There's not a tool that we make that is not built for authors and books. So our landing pages have been tested and tasked with the job of converting people into getting a book once they get to your page.

Not that you can't use Wix or Weebly or Leadpages or all these other services. They give you all kinds of customization and you can do amazing things with them, but our pages ... we have a lot of customization, we have a lot of power that you can with them, and the best thing is that we still box you in a little bit, so that no matter how much you change, we are still making it so that your book is front and center.

James: I noticed you've offered some more colors recently as well. You've enhanced that landing page. The process, obviously, is an important part of it, and the more that it ... everyone looks everything to look as beautiful and as optimal as possible-

Damon: Right-

James: And you're doing your part on that as well.

So, \$20 dollars a year, I mean that's pretty cheap.

Are you expecting that to remain at that level? I'm sure you think about this quite a lot, but you've got the right price point?

Damon: I think so. I mean, so obviously the \$20 dollar a year plan, we'd like you to upgrade, but we get a pretty steady stream of upgrades.

When we first started out I would have loved to be able to do a free account, and we just couldn't. We saw from a very early point how much

the support was going to cost, and so the \$20 ... I mean \$20 dollars a year is \$1.66 a month, and it was basically like, I don't think I could make it any cheaper and offer the level of support that we continue to offer.

When you look at people like, you know MailChimp will give you 2,000 viewers on your list for free. You get no support at that level. You cannot ask them a question. You cannot email them. You get nothing.

Our support, I believe, is the thing that people love the most about us, and so I didn't want to do some, "Well, it's a free plan, but we're not going to help you," I didn't want to do that, so the \$20 dollars were sort of our admission that this is about as cheap as we can go and still offer the level of support that I want to offer.

We're really happy with it. A lot of people sign up for that \$20 dollar plan, and then within a month or so they upgrade to the higher plans, because they see the value. They get the first plan and sometimes they get that plan and that's good enough for them.

They have their reader magnet and they distribute a few books a month, or 100 books a month, and that's just fine with them. But others come in with the \$20 dollar plan and kind of kick the tires a little bit and go, "Oh, okay, now I can see all kinds of cool ways that I can use this account," and they'll go upgrade.

On my Webinar we were talking about it the other day, we don't currently have any plans to change our pricing.

James: I'm sure people will be pleased to hear that. And you've created a great product, which is the best way that you can grow, because, as you say, once people start using it ... I don't think I've ever met an author who used to use BookFunnel.

People use it, and it becomes a part and parcel of their daily life.

Damon: Especially if you were somebody who had actually moved any books before you'd signed up. If you'd ever had ... we get the question sometimes, "Why do I need BookFunnel?" And it's like, "You've obviously never given away books, because if you had you would know right why you need us."

Mark was actually one of the first one's to reach out to us after we had sort of, I won't say we announced the product, we started talking about it in a few places, and he was one of the first one's ... very first one's to reach out to us, and said, "I have this problem. I want to use this to solve the problem."

Because, he was moving a lot of books, and anybody who's moving more than a 100 books a month, you're going to run into people with issues, and they're going to come looking to you for the help, because "Well, you've given me this free book, you need to help me if I can't read it then you've given me nothing."

James: Yeah. It's a great enabler. And I think for people at the beginning of their careers as well, who are finding their way through the whole thing of landing pages and campaigns, and suddenly they've got this ... with almost no effort at all, this link which delivers a free book to somebody, and that in itself could inspire them to start doing more with it, in campaigns, and getting people going, so that's great.

The other aspect of this, we mentioned this last night, it was the SPF drinks, here in NINC last night-

Damon: Yes, we did-

James: It's now the afternoon, so we're all got-

Damon: We're all recovered-

James: Yeah, life has synced back in. But I was really interested in something you were talking about last night, which is your helicopter view of the indie world, because so many people now use BookFunnel, and you see the spikes, you see the campaigns that suddenly have 10,000 downloads and spikes here and there.

You're starting to be a sort of guru of what's working, and what's hot and what's not?

Damon: That is not where we ever expected to be, but yeah, authors do send us questions so we started blogging just a few months ago, and the reason was that we found that we were answering a lot of these questions individually.

An author would email us and we would give a response, but that's one guy that we reached. It's one author we reached with, you know, an idea or a solution.

I tried to blog as my author persona, and I think I did three blog posts and I was like, "This ... I don't want to blog, this isn't for me." So I was hesitant to start a blog with BookFunnel because I would be afraid that we would do the same; we'd put out a couple of posts and then we'd just forget about it.

But we kept having so many people ask us questions, and they all ask the same questions, over and over again. And it was like, "We need to be putting some of this information out there. We have a lot of things that we know that could help the author community."

So last week we released our sales platform. You can now sell your books on your website, through your ... whatever medium you want to sell through, and BookFunnel will handle the delivery. So just like handing over a free book, you get the readers and you find them and you handle all that part: we'll handle the delivery part; that's what we're good at.

And that was our number one requested feature from the week that we opened our doors, was the first email that we got that said, "This is great. How do I sell books and let BookFunnel deliver it?"

One of the advantages is, if you go and you want to go and sell through the traditional store system, you have to put the book on all the different places that you plan to sell it.

If you put your book on Kobo, which is a great store, it will catch the readers who are on Kobo, the only readers that's interesting to is readers on Kobo. In the same way that if you put your book on Amazon and that's the only place that they can find it, then that's the only readers you're going to catch.

Whereas we deliver to ALL the devices. Every device you can come up with, we deliver to it. So if you sell a book through BookFunnel, not only are you selling yourself and you get to keep the profit, but we don't care what device they're on, we're going to help them get their book to it. That was us listening to our authors and what they wanted.

So, to answer what you were saying, a blog post we'll have out in a couple of weeks, that is talking about using this new sales platform, is now that we've released this we want to share the information that we have that we've gotten from other authors and from other readers, and the first tip was, don't just sell your book on your website the same way you're selling it on all the other stores.

In other words, don't make a page where you're like, "Here everybody, you can get in on Amazon and Kobo and Barnes & Noble and iTunes: or from me!"

That's just a me-too. You're throwing one more link and one more button in there that is just going to confuse them, because they're not sure. They

know what these stores are, but they don't know why they should buy it from you. So that's not why we built the sales platform, what we built it for was to do other kinds of content that either you're not selling through the stores, or a kind of discount and bargains and things that you want to do specifically for your readers, for your fans.

Don't just put book one and book two up on your site, and here's another button to buy from me.

Instead, take book one and book two, which you already have published in all the stores, box them up in a nice little box set and sell them for 99 cents only to your list, and only direct through you.

Because again if you're selling direct and we're delivering, then we don't care what device they're on, they're all going to get it, but you only have to send them one link and they can go buy that book.

And it's a reward for people who are on your list that are already your fans, "Here, I'm putting together the first one, or two, or three books, and you guys get a special discount. This isn't discounted in any other stores, anywhere else."

The nice thing about that is that if you go and you discount a book right now, then that book is no longer available for things like BookBub let's say, for the next six months, because when you discount a book they only will take books that have not been on discount in the last six months, because they want their readers to have a special deal.

They have their own fans and they're doing the same thing; they're cultivating those fans by giving them bargains you can't get anywhere else, which means if your book was discounted four months ago, that's not a bargain for my readers, because it was already discounted four months ago.

But you selling it through your own website is not the same platform as lowering the price on Amazon on a weekend, to give it to your readers.

James: So you're taking on Amazon then?

Damon: We don't want to be in the business of being a book store, and we're always fond of saying like, "We are in the business of building your brand not our brand."

I don't really care if anyone talks up BookFunnel. I don't care if any readers, even care who we are. Now some do, because they love our process, they love our app, they love our support. We have readers who email us every time they get a book, just to tell us how much they love us. They'll say, "Oh I got another free book and I'm so glad the author used BookFunnel. I just want to tell you I love y'all!" And it really is that.

We would get these emails and I just thought they were so sweet that they would tell us. Because I'm just a delivery guy. Nobody tells the FedEx guy, "God, I really love the way you guys deliver packages!"

I love that people love us, but I want to build your brand. I want to build the James Blatch brand. I don't care that they worry about BookFunnel. So any of the sort of sales stuff that we do is all going to be designed for you to sell on your site, or wherever you want to offer books.

I don't want to build BookFunnel.com as another bookstore where they buy books from.

James: There are some options for you in terms of ... I mean, there would be big decisions about going in different directions, and by the sounds of it you're not going to go down that route, but you certainly have the ability. You collect email addresses on behalf of authors, but the key, I guess you're going to tell me, is it's on behalf of authors.

You have no plans to be your own reader list?

Damon: No. And that's one that we get asked a lot, because we have a lot of readers that go through our site. Hundreds and thousands of readers go through BookFunnel every month, and they are looking for free books.

The mantra that we try to align ourselves under, in the last year or so, is help authors sell more books. And while I think free is a fantastic tool, too many authors are relying on it as the only tool to get readers. And it's great.

You've collected 10,000 readers on you list, but how many of them are buying from you? How many of them are going to buy a book? And part of the problem is you don't know.

So, I'm an engineer, I love data. Give me the data and I can use the data to figure out what I'm going to do next. One of the things that we've proposed, that we were talking to an author last week about using the new direct sales platform.

You've gathered up a list, from where you've used Amazon ads, you've used Facebook ads, and you've got these 8,000 people on your list. And now what you want is how many of them are actually going to be real buyers, and how many of them are freebie seekers? I mean just freeloaders.

We see them a lot, unfortunately, like you said, they reply to us, to our emails, thinking that we're the author. So we see the replies intended for the author and sometimes we see messages like, "I love this book. Tell me when the rest of the series is free." And it's really unfortunate.

There are so many readers out there now, that have kind of fallen into that training of, well there's so many free books, why would I pay for anything?

Our goal is to help you sell more books. And so we came up with this idea of, yeah, if you take that list of 8,000 people and send them ... you know,

people that came from ads, so they're not organic traffic, and we encourage them on BookFunnel, you can create as many links to your books as you want.

And you should, you should create dozens of links and use each one in different places, so that you have data about where those readers came from.

Did they come from the back of my book? Because if they did, that means they read the book and they're somebody who wants to be my fan, or at least they like my book enough that they wanted to read the free book that I have on offer.

Whereas, if you joined a big group give away with some other authors in your genre, those are readers that are potential leads, but they're not your readers. They haven't actually read your book yet and chances are good when they got your book they got 20 other free books at the same time. So you want to get them to read your book, but at the time you can't count them as a reader. They're just a lead. So you should have them off in a different segment of your list.

But one thing you could do using direct sales, you could also do it through the book stores too, I don't want to push BookFunnel as the one solution for everything.

Let's say you had a four book series, you might take books one through three, or books one and two, and package them up for 99 cents and offer them only through you, to your list. So you're not changing your prices on any of the other stores.

If you have discoverability, let's say you're moving units on Amazon, you're not ruining that price point. If you're already selling at full price and you're moving units then you're not touching that, you're just doing it straight through you, through this one little link that you've created so that they can

buy the book. Send it out to that list of freebies, and basically make 'em an offer they can't refuse. "I'm going to give you the first three books in my series for 99 cents." If they don't click that, if they don't buy that, they're probably never going to buy a book from you.

You could send it out once, and then maybe a week later re-target the non-opens and give them one more chance and say, "Hey guys, this is it! Last weekend only! Three books in the series, 99 cents! Get 'em right now. Only from me." And if they don't click it ... if they don't at least click the link like they're interested-

James: Just tell them to clean them.

Damon: You can probably clean them off your list. Because it's either one of two things happened: one, they're not getting your emails. So like they didn't see it. They never opened it. They never clicked. They never saw it.

At which point they're not of much value to you, because it's not like the next email is going to magically show up when all the other's didn't.

Or, they're just never going to buy. And you will actually get responses. We've seen authors send out deals like that and get responses and go, "I can't believe you're trying to sell me stuff. Let me know when the book is free."

And that's unfortunate, but those are the kinds of readers that you don't need on your list, and you're going to pay for them. You're going to pay to keep them on your list all the time. And at some point you need to figure out which one's are actually going to be buyers, and which one's ... And, as an advantage, it's like, "I've given you the first three books."

Now we've seen, we know from our data that a reader who receives a three book box set is far more likely to read it than one's who picked up book one. Free books are out there for everybody, and almost invariably book

one of a series is always kind of the entry point that an author's going to ... I give away the first book for free, because I'm hoping to get you into the series where you buy the rest.

But everybody's got a ton of book one's and they know that if they finish that one, the next one's going to cost me. So they're choosy about which one's they're going to pick to read.

Now, ultimately, I want them to read my book, I want to make a fan out of them, so by giving them books one, or two, or three, you have a better chance of being read because know if I start this story, I got three whole books before I got to buy the next one.

James: We've never sold a book through BookFunnel. Tell me how that works. How does the sort of cart system work?

Damon: So, we just released it last Wednesday.

Here we are, it's been out for exactly a week, so I have no data. All we have so far are the ideas that authors have been pitching us and saying, "Can I use it to do this? Can I use it to do this? And, can I use it to do this?"

Through those emails we've started to get a picture of the ideas that authors have had, that they can use this for, that we never thought of. And so that's really neat, and that's actually what my NINC talk is going to be about tomorrow, is the ideas, the things that we have seen authors doing that are just, "Wow! That's a really good idea, and I hadn't thought of that."

The sales process is just like the current process. So what we did was, we chose three sellers, Payhip, Selz, and PayPal, that you can choose to sell.

The great thing is, the money thing has been solved for a long time. If you want to collect money from people on the internet, there are a dozen companies that will do all of the for you and they've solved that problem.

The problem was once they bought it, how do you get the book to them? Well that's the thing that we do best, so we decided that rather than trying to build up our own sales platform, we would start with other sales platforms.

And they're listed by level of how much involvement do you want? Payhip is a great English company, that they do all the taxes, they handle all the VAT, they do everything for you, for a few percentage of the sale. And then, they take care of everything. Well, once they've bought it from Payhip, they get the email from us for the delivery. So we handle the second half of it, which is the delivery part.

Same thing with Selz and same thing with PayPal. PayPal, if you want to sell it on your own website, and you want to do it all from your site and do it yourself, PayPal collects the money and they immediately get their book delivered by email and they get sent to the download page, it's just ... boop, boop, boop, right through. And then once they're into that, they're into the delivery process that we've already talked about.

James: Yeah. So it's just that front bit.

And that's obviously rolled out successfully, and working and these things?

Damon: Yeah, except we don't have enough data on it yet, but we've already been seeing sales roll through. We add a little note to our dashboard to see which authors are now selling the most books in a day. We already had a little ... we have the leaderboard on our dashboard, that'll show you who's getting the most downloads in a day and who's getting the most in this month.

We add a little note that says who's doing the most sales and we've actually started to see ... you know, initially, it was authors just buying their own

book and sort of testing it, but now we're actually seeing real sales come through, so, so far the authors have been really pleased with it.

James: Fantastic.

We could go on talking for a long time, but we have been talking for quite a while. I've got two more quick questions, then we'll wrap things up.

First of all, in terms of technological development, we mentioned the MOBI file being a couple of steps. Obviously, Amazon have the proprietorial API, whatever you call it. I'm going to get out of my depth quickly here. Whisper delivery, so you click on the link on Amazon, and suddenly it magically appears on your Kindle.

Is there a way that you are going to be able to progress to that at some point, and make the process even easier? Or similar, in the other delivery areas?

Damon: So, on Kindle Fires and on Androids, we actually have an app that the only job of it, right now, is just to get the book to your Kindle library if you're on a Kindle Fire, or to whichever app that you want to read on, which often times is the Kindle.

Of all the downloads across our entire store, 65% are mobi files, the other 35 ... I would say 33 are epub, and then maybe 2% are pdf.

MOBI. Most people are reading on a Kindle device or a Kindle app on their Android, or their iPhone, or their iPad. So that is where most of the readers live, and so yeah, we are trying to improve the experience on that.

The biggest thing that we're going to add in the future is our app is going to include a library that collects all of the books that readers already have gotten from us. And then with a quick tap they can send it off the app, the

reading app of their choice. So hopefully that is going to make it a lot easier.

The only problem that we really see right now, once they get the books onto their Kindle or their Kindle Fire is they've lost their device, or their device died, and now they want to get their books back.

That was the problem that we were trying to solve there, is to help those. Now we have all that data internally. So usually if they email support, we will turn around and email them back and say, "Well here's all the books that you had, click through and download the ... get the one's that you want to get back."

Because, of course, readers download hundreds of books and then ultimately they really only wanted like 20 of them back. They were really only going to read 20 of them.

The other one's, they don't really care that they lost those. So that's part of the thing that we're trying to make easier. And that dovetails into the sales platform.

We believe once you buy a book, it should be available forever. So we don't want to give you a link that's going to expire in a couple of weeks. We want you to be able to get back to that book any time. You paid for it. You should be able to.

So we're working on it. We're always working on polishing that process, because we want it to be as easy as possible, and we feel like we've made it as easy as it possibly can be, with the limitations that we have. We are playing in Amazon's house.

James: Yeah. Sure.

Damon: And so we have to deal with their rules, and work within the system that they've given us, but we deliver to ... directly to your Paperwhite. We deliver directly to that Kindle Voyage that you bought.

And the Kindle Fire? Yeah, we can deliver right to that. We have different methods of getting it there, but ultimately, like I said, once a reader gets through it one time, they have almost no problem getting through it a second time.

James: Yeah. That's great.

Well Damon, thank you so much for finally making it onto the SPF podcast. It's been an absolute delight to chat to you, and I've particularly enjoyed the occasional text and female voice, that Damon's graced us with today. That was quite exciting wasn't it, when that happened? I can imagine a little bonnet just to go with that tonight. In fact if your voice is in good order, there is karaoke tonight.

Damon: Oh, I kill it at karaoke.

James: The Draft2Digital guys are going to love you.

Damon: Yeah, you've got to be there to see my performance. Hopefully nobody will film it. I don't want that to end up on line.

James: We're going to speak again. I've no doubt that you're going to be a guest in the future with us Damon.

Congratulations on a fantastic product that is really at the heart of the kind of self-publishing boom, at the moment, and we wish you well for the future.

Damon: Thank you very much. I'm glad I got to meet you guys and be on.

James: Okay. Damon Courtney. Nice guy. Also, he mentioned at the end that he kills at karaoke, and he did. He really was murder on the dance floor that night.

Mark: I was so sad I missed that. Can you tell the sincerity is dripping out of my voice there.

James: We were all under pressure to do karaoke.

Mark: Under pressure? I see what you've done there. Very clever.

James: Well, I did a clever thing, is I was the only one out of the small group I was standing with, of middle-aged men, who were all quaking at the possibility of doing karaoke. I think I mentioned this before, some were brilliant, they were unbelievably good, it was terrifying competition, but I just put in a request for a Pink Floyd song that I knew they wouldn't have. It also would involve me standing there listening to music for about 20 minutes at a time, so I got away with it.

Anyway, I hear there's going to be a lot of karaoke in Thrillerfest this year, in New York. It's going to be a big, big karaoke thing, and there's going to be, I think, speakers only karaoke sessions in the evenings, so we're all looking forward to that Mark Dawson.

Mark: Well, I'm an excellent singer James, so I'm looking forward to clearing my pipes for a ... actually I'm not, I'm terrible.

James: What! I have to apologize to our listeners for that visual image.

We love Damon. Let's talk about Damon for a second. What difference has Damon made to your day-to-day life?

Mark: He's made a big difference. Yeah. I think I was one of the first to really push BookFunnel as a service that was worthwhile for authors, and he was

involved in, possibly in the first launch or the second launch of the ads course. I can't remember how that played out exactly, but we pushed him quite hard, because I could see immediately, how potentially valuable that service was going to be.

I get pitched this stuff all the time, and nine times out of ten I'm quite skeptical, and I turn things down much more often than I will accept them, and I won't recommend them to other authors unless I'm very sure that it's a good service. And I could see within five minutes that BookFunnel was a great idea.

Since I've been using them, I guess ... I'm not sure how long they've been around for now? Maybe three years I guess, since I've been using them I don't have any more of those customer service emails where I'm adding people to my reading list, my mailing list, all the time, 30 or 40 a day, probably.

I used to get quite a few people saying, "I don't know how to side load this onto my Kindle." If, when I get those these days, all I do is just forward them to Help@BookFunnel.com and Damon and his team handle it, and that is ... they do lots of things that are helpful, but that is the most helpful thing that they do, and it's saves ... it's probably saved me several hours certainly, probably several days over the course that I've been with them, in not having to handle those, let's be honest, quite irritating tech service emails. I mean it's better for me to be writing books and marketing them, rather than handle that.

BookFunnel is fantastic. I really strongly recommend it to everyone, and it doesn't get the seal of approval very often, but that's one I can unhesitatingly recommend.

James: Yeah, I mean it doesn't just save you money, I think it makes growing to the size that you and some other authors around here in our community have got to, it makes it possible, because you need a team

around you to do things. So either you're employing virtual assistants or, in this case, you're offloading a huge headache, and you know ultimately they do the support, so they pick up those irritating emails.

But, ultimately, the reason that this is successful is because it's a good platform and it works smoothly. Most people can download their books fairly comfortably, and once they've done it once or twice it becomes a routine.

Okay. Good. Well it was great to catch up with Damon, and interesting to hear him talk about some of the trends in the industry as well, at the moment.

We have selected our Book Lab person. They're going into the lab now. We're recording the bits and pieces of feedback. So that's going to be a really exciting episode.

It's actually going to be an additional episode of the podcast, so if you are subscribed on Stitcher or iTunes, it'll be coming down the pipe to you in the usual way, so don't worry about that.

But it will be an additional, so they'll be one week basically where there are two podcasts and a Book Lab will be coming up. I'm hoping to turn it round the next two or three weeks, so we're going to try and do it as quickly as possible and get that one out there.

We've got a couple of interesting things coming up. We are going to talk to Stuart Bache soon. I've mentioned it before, but he's done a really, really fantastic course on Becoming Your Own Cover Designer.

This is not just any cover designer, this is Mark Dawson's cover designer, and Frederick Forsyth and so many others, and it's a man who really understands how covers sell books.

And in the course, he takes you through Photoshop and shows you things, and how to do things. It looks complicated when you see the final product, but when you start with just, in some cases, one image, he starts with, and then font. It's gripping. The course is gripping.

So that's coming down the line. We're going to get Stuart on, and he's going to talk about that. And it's the first time we've launched kind of mini standalone course like this, Mark.

We're going to try and do more of that, this year, we think, in addition to the Big Foundation 101 course, and the Ads For Authors course, but smaller courses for people who want to understand niche, just to help them with their set up, like cover design is a good example of that; so we're going to kick that off.

So that's just in the edit at the moment. We're going to look for some beta testers for that in the next week or two, and then we'll get Stuart on in a couple of weeks probably, and talk about that.

Good. I think that's it. Shall we mention Patreon? You can mention Patreon.

Mark: We should always mention Patreon. So we have I think several ... over a hundred Patreon subscribers or supporters now, and it's really helpful for us. It allows us to put the podcast together really.

It's not cheap for us to do this every week, and our supporters can subscribe for as little as I think \$2 dollars per show, maybe even \$1 dollar a show, I think it is and-

James: A dollar, yeah?

Mark: A dollar show. So for \$4 dollars a month you can support us. There's lots of benefits for the various levels of support. And if you're one of the

Gold Patreon subscribers then you are eligible for lots of cool stuff, including the chance to get on Book Lab.

I think people will be quite excited when you see what that is going to look like, when we're ready to go. So we've picked the first one, and if you want to be in the hat for the second one, then the best place to go is patron.com/spfpodcast. That's right isn't it?

James: Absolutely right. It's the first time you've ever got that right first time.

Mark: It's my Jedi beard.

James: It is. Don't shave the beard. You'll lose your powers.

Okay. That's it. Thank you so much indeed for listening and I hope you enjoyed the interview with Damon today. Have a lovely weekend ahead of you, if you're listening to us on a Friday, and a great week writing, and a great week selling your books.

We'll see you next week.

Goodbye.

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We'll see you next time.

