

EPISODE 102: THE RISE OF THE BOTS – WITH KERRY GARDINER

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 Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. It's a Friday and here are Mark and James in person to get your weekend off to a good start. Hope you had a great week writing.

This week, Mark we are going to be talking about the rise of the bots.

Mark Dawson: We are, yes or does my bot look big in this?

James Blatch: Yeah. That was alternative title.

Mark Dawson: I was shouted down unfortunately. Yes, it's an interesting subject. One I've been looking at for quite some time.

Actually the guys that have written Word Media, so Freebooksy and By the Book, so you have kind of a yearly predictions email or post that goes out every year. Ricky asked me this year what I thought would be interesting.

One of the things I'm most interested in is Messenger Marketing, which is what we've been looking at with Kerry today. It is an interesting area with tons and tons of potential.

James Blatch: Yeah. It is. Okay. Well, we're going to come on to the interview in a moment.

It coincides with the additional course that's gone into our Advertising for Author's course, which Kerry's authored for us, so we're going to talk to Kerry in a moment.

A couple of other things just to touch on before then. There's been a lot of talk this week about the Facebook announcement from Mr. Zuckerberg that he's going to tweak the algorithm.

This happens every time actually, it immediately precipitates a lot of panic from some people who put their head in their hands and say, "This is the end of it. The end of the world. Advertising's going to be ruined. Facebook won't work for us anymore."

But you and I both take the view that that's simply not the case. Right?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Absolutely not. It's was really, this post goes out from Zuckerberg last Wednesday or Thursday, then immediately and ever since, every day there's been someone else posting in the Facebook community, the SPF community, "How does this effect advertising? I've bought the course. Is this terrible? It's the end of the world."

It really isn't. I think it's completely opposite. What he has hasn't said, no one really knows the effect of what he has said. At the moment, I mean I've looked at this quite carefully and I've spoken to some people who know a bit more than I do about Facebook.

What he appears to have said is that they're deprioritizing page posts in the news feed. So by page posts I mean, brands. So the SPF page, you'll see less of those in your news feed. Authors will see less reach for their page posts.

What he hasn't said and what I don't think he's able to say is that the effect of advertising is going to be decreased. It's important to carve that out.

So the posts that you put to your readers through your page, that may well go down, but I've never advocated building pages by buying likes and all that kind of stuff. That's really a foolish thing to do. It always has been.

What he hasn't said is that advertising is going to be less effective. If you think about it a bit more it's probably going to be more effective because if the news feed, which is kind of at capacity at the moment becomes less cluttered with page posts it means there's more space and that there's more of a chance to get noticed with your paid content, with your ads.

It doesn't take too much to think about the question, would they throttle ads? Of course, they wouldn't. Facebook is a multi-billion dollar company, which has been built on a very, very effective and powerful ad platform.

I think this is an opportunity, that's what I've been saying.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: It's an opportunity, smart, savvy authors, by which of course, I include anyone who's listening to the podcast or watching on YouTube right now, you're in a really great position if you're prepared to learn how to advertise properly.

To have much better reach with your ads. I think they're likely to be more effective. I am almost horizontal, that's how relaxed I am when it comes to this. It's nothing to worry about.

James Blatch: I completely agree, and that's certainly my reading of it as well. I think actually he's addressing a reasonable issue.

I think that there's quite tasty bits of content, particularly the political stuff, which I find slightly boring, but some people, they'll repost an article that signals what they believe in.

Everyone who also has that kind of similar view, whether it's Daily Mail or Guardian or Washington Post, whatever, reposts it. You can often see it reposted four or five times in your same timeline because as gradually people catch up with it, that's what they're going to get rid of.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: Not get rid of, they're going to deprioritize that, so you see more posts from your friends and what they've been doing and less posts about the same Washington Post article about Trump's new haircut posted again and again.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Exactly. Some of the things that are kind of coming out of this. I would be looking at ... I mean this was actually in his email or his message suggesting that people should look at building groups now.

So instead of just having a page, think about building a group.

I haven't actually done it this year. I've got a group for my advanced readers, which is usually a quite fun place to hang out, but what I might start to do now is to give fans on my page the chance to join a group.

Remember pages and groups are completely different, where they can continue the conversation about my books and the kind of things that we normally talk about. It's pretty simple to migrate people across. You just put a pinned post on your page just say why you're doing it.

"It's less likely you'll see posts from this page. If you want to continue to learn about James Blatch's new books, Mark Dawson's new books then you need to go this new group. It's an exclusive new group. It's fun going on there."

There's loads of ways you can sell that, but get them into the group. Then, I think there's a better chance that you'll have better organic reach, without even having to worry about ads. So, that's one of the things I would be doing right now.

James Blatch: Good. Hopefully that's nailed that and we'll get a few less posts in the group saying, "This is the end of the world."

Mark Dawson: Don't panic.

James Blatch: Yeah. As we know it, the planet was floundering.

A couple of other things. We mentioned criticism last week and how to react to it. I mentioned the fact that I had a bit of criticism. As a result of that, I wasn't fishing for compliments-

Mark Dawson: Yes, you were.

James Blatch: ... we got a lot of love for the podcast-

Mark Dawson: You got a lot of love, I didn't.

James Blatch: Yeah. Somebody was critical of me, I think that was a joke. I think it was a joke. A lot of nice things said about my interviewing technique. I'm not the world's greatest interviewer, I'm not, but I work hard. I think I'm okay.

If I listen to other podcasts, I think I'm one of the better ones. I'm not being modest now. I certainly not a great interviewer in the world of interviewing, but within this sphere I think I'm probably slightly ahead of some of the others. So, I really appreciated your comments.

Mark and I, we do work hard at this podcast. We enjoy it, but we do work hard. It does make a difference when people are kind to us and nice to us.

The other thing I was going to mention is that I haven't been quite organized enough to give our latest Patreon subscribers a shout out this week, so I'm going to do that next week.

But I'm going to give you a little tip, which is, we've been giving away these splendid mugs so far, and they are brilliant, to all our gold level subscribers.

If you're gold level you get sent a mug. We're going to be changing that in February. So from February it'll be a pin, which will be frankly a very sought after item, but not as big and luxurious perhaps as a mug.

So if you're interested in subscribing to Patreon to support the podcast at patreon.com/spfpodcast, I would get in in the next couple of weeks before February gets going because that's your opportunity to get a mug. After February onwards for gold level subscribers it's going to be a pin.

Now the pins are going to be great. We're going to be wearing them all the time. When we have our live meet-ups, and I can announce a couple of those in a moment, you'll probably get one thrust into your hand, as well as a beer when you come and see us in person. Hopefully, they'll become a thing.

In the UK there's something called, the Blue Peter badge. I don't know what the equivalent is, whether there's a Sesame Street pin in America or anything like that. It's a unique thing. But for people not just our age, but generations know what a Blue Peter badge is.

It was long running children's television program. It was live twice a week by the BBC. If you wrote in or you did something special you got sent this badge. I don't know how much they're worth on eBay, but I'd imagine quite a lot because they were sought after things. I think the SPF pin's going to become the same thing.

Mark Dawson: It's interesting, an interesting idea. I just don't like the, "People of our age." What are you talking about? You're older than me.

James Blatch: Yeah. People of my age.

Mark Dawson: I'm much younger. Not that-

James Blatch: How old are you? 43, four? Mid 40s?

Mark Dawson: Yes, early 40s.

James Blatch: Early 40s?

Mark Dawson: Early middle age.

James Blatch: So, early 40 or 49, the early 40s. Good. Okay. In terms of live events, we always love meeting everybody who's in our SPF community, as many people as possible. We will certainly go to NINC again later this year in Florida, but I can announce that team SPF is going to be in New York on the East Coast of America, if you don't know where New York is, in July.

We're going to go for ThrillerFest. Mark is invited to speak at ThrillerFest this year. We're not sure exactly of the dates for you yet Mark, you'll be there midweek. So I think probably Wednesday, something like that. Something like the 10 or 11th, from memory, of July.

We will probably that night, the Wednesday or Thursday, hold a drink's reception in New York, probably at the Grand Hyatt or very close to it, in Manhattan.

Now, if you are within an hour or two of New York and you can get there, we will buy you a drink and give you a pin if you come and say, "Hello" to us. We'd love to see you.

You don't have to be registered at ThrillerFest necessarily, it's quite an expensive registration, I noticed. If you want to come down and share a drink with us and say, "Hello", we would absolutely love that.

I'll also say that John Dyer and I are going to be there a little bit earlier, so from Saturday the 7th, we arrive on the 7th, so that's not really doable that day, but the 8th onwards, if you have got something nice to say about any of courses, you know what I'm going to say, we will descend on you with our cameras and record an interview.

We can hire a car and drive, so if you are within two and a half hours or so of New York, just drop me a line, support@selfpublishing.com or come to New York and we'll find somewhere to film in there, and we'll buy you lunch as well. Yeah, that's SPF on tour. In addition to that, Mark is then going solo on to Denver, Colorado-

Mark Dawson: Via Los Angeles.

James Blatch: Via Los Angeles. Yes, he's going to Los Angeles to meet his producer.

Mark Dawson: That's right.

James Blatch: You've changed. I used to know this bloke. Is going to yes, do some casting or something.

Then you're going to RWA, aren't you?

Mark Dawson: Yes. I am going to Denver. Yes, I'll be in Denver from ... I don't remember the dates now, but yeah, it's around that time, so the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I'm speaking I think on the Thursday and Friday, I think. Yeah, if you're going to be at RWA then obviously come and

say, "Hello", we'll do something. Yeah, it was good fun last year in Florida. I've never been to Denver before either, so that will be fun.

James Blatch: The Mile-High City.

Mark Dawson: Mm-hmm.

James Blatch: You'll need to take some oxygen.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Yeah. I'm probably going to be gasping as I acclimatize, but yeah, looking forward to that.

James Blatch: Yeah. Good. So it would be lovely you see you.

You don't have to do a testimonial interview, but obviously that's a bonus for us, but you can just come along and say, "Hello", whilst we're in New York.

Get involved in the Facebook groups if you're not already. I'm going to post this information in there and perhaps that's the best place to comment and say that you're around and that you can meet us.

Let's get on to our interview. Rise of the Bots, which was the title we settled on. It is an important area and as Mark has spoken about a couple of times before, the conversion rate, the kind of interaction rate, the open rates are all off the scale compared to email and some of the other traditional areas, aren't they?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I have a suggestion, let's listen to Kerry first and then afterwards we can come back and I'll tell you about something I've done with Messenger in the last six months or so.

James Blatch: Let's do that.

Kerry, first of all, welcome to the SPF podcast. You're somebody who's been part of the SPF community for quite a long time now and helping to build the community.

Kerry: Thank you. Yes, It's been a couple of years now, think, hasn't it? It's got to be.

James Blatch: I think so.

Kerry: I don't do much, I just sort of sit in the background and use Mark's boot when people get out of control in the groups, but it's been fun.

James Blatch: It's necessary.

You started I think as a student of the course, so just tell us a little bit about your writing.

Kerry: Well I started writing back in 2014, and when I'd finished university. Honestly, it was just a question of in Google it was how to make money online.

I'm not going to claim to have any high aspirations of wanting to always be a writer, that wasn't the case. It's very simply a question of I needed to make some money.

I started in August 2014. Came across a different program, which introduced me to the whole writing and selling for yourself on Kindle, which I'd never known you could actually do.

My first couple of efforts sunk without a trace, and quite honestly, they were awful. But then, late 2015 I actually had three books out in the series and I got my very first BookBub. I was absolutely thrilled, obviously.

That month I made \$15,000. I mean I've never made that kind of money since, but I knew from there that it had potential, huge potential and that's when I stumbled across SPF.

James Blatch: What's your genre? What did you choose as you're commercially orientated writing?

Kerry: It's crime fiction thrillers. In fact, I did actually try to publish a hot romance, but it really wasn't my thing. I didn't enjoy writing it at all. It felt repetitive.

I decided to write what I read, what I enjoy to read. I love David Baldacci. I love all the big crime fiction writers. So it made sense to me to write what I read and that's why I went for thrillers.

James Blatch: That always make sense, doesn't it too?

Kerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James Blatch: That's what they always say isn't it? I think it's what most of us try and do.

Kerry: Yeah, I think so. Otherwise, I think it comes across that you're trying to squeeze a square peg into a round hole.

James Blatch: Yes. What's interesting about you Kerry is that you are an early adopter I think with things. You keep your eyes open on what's hot and what's not, which is why you were one of the first people to snap up Mark's course and get stuck into that.

Where we are now is that **you have picked up on the whole Messenger bot very quickly.** To the point where you are instructing others, and we're delighted to say that there's going to be a bonus module as part of the next release of Ads for Authors, which is going to be on Messenger bots.

Tell us a little bit about what first caught your eye about it?

Kerry: Well, you're absolutely right. I mean as indies I think it's important, we have to be at that forefront because we're going up against big budget marketing campaigns so we need to be able to be that one step ahead.

The Messenger bots, it was actually, I saw something Mark had posted in one of the groups and I thought, "Oh I'm going to go and have a look at that."

As soon as I saw it, it just blew my away, honestly. I mean the potential that this has because I've been saying for the past six months really before I saw that post, that email is on the way out. I do firmly believe that.

I think an email list is the gold standard and it absolutely should be the gold standard, done the right way, but there's definitely feedback that I'm getting there's definitely email list fatigue.

Where readers are signing up for a free book out of anthology of say, 50 authors and then getting spammed consistently by 50 authors. So they're blind to their inbox.

It gets harder and harder then for an author to actually make contact with that reader, because how do you stand out in that inbox? Because all it takes is for a reader to do that three or four times and they've got hundreds of emails.

I saw this and I thought, well the one thing that we all do is, spend an awful lot of time on social media, and if a message pops up in my Messenger inbox, I immediately check it, which I don't do with my email. I'll quite often not check my email for days, especially if it's in my other folder or my promotions folder.

So when Mark said about this and I looked into it further I thought, this is a huge opportunity for us now they've opened the API for developers, to actually reach our readers in a way that's going to be far more effective and doesn't need, doesn't require a reader to sign up for an email address.

We're getting rid of that point of friction. It just seemed a no-brainer to me really.

James Blatch: Yeah. I should explain, so when you said, "They opened up the API for developers", which not everyone will understand.

Basically Messenger used to be its own self-contained thing and then they decided to allow people to create a bit a software around Messenger and use it.

Kerry: That's exactly right. How it works is, I mean if you're a developer you can go in and you can write code for your own bot so that you can tell your bot what to say and what to do.

But for people like me who are not tech smart, companies provide software that you pay them a fee a month on a sliding scale, like you would with an email list, so they can start at free, going up to however many dollars a month, depending on the number of subscribers you have.

What that does is, it gives you an interface, which is very, very easy to use once you've got the hang of it. Click and drop. I'm trying to think of the word now, you can visually put together a sequence that you will then send out to your subscribers without having to have any technology at all.

At the moment, as I say, they do this with Messenger, but iMessage is going to be doing it soon and Google and WhatsApp, so the potential reach is going to be huge.

If people are getting in on it now, then it will be much easier for them to then roll that out to those other platforms as well at a later date.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Kerry: It's so exciting.

James Blatch: How many companies have sprung up around this? You say that their developers have created the software.

Is there a lot of competition or are there two or three big players so far?

Kerry: There are hundreds of smaller companies, but there are two big players I'd say in the market at the moment and that would be ManyChat, which is the one I use and Chatfuel.

James Blatch: Okay.

Kerry: Now, they're pretty much of a muchness. ManyChat is possibly just slightly behind them, playing a catch up in terms of some of the features that they offer, but for the user interfaces is much, much simpler.

So for people like me and certainly people who aren't interested in e-commerce it's a no-brainer. That's the way to go for me.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay. So you get your subscription to, in your case, ManyChat.

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: You say it's laid out visually to make it easy for you to set things up. Before we talk about the technical side of it, talk about the user experience that you want them to have.

How interactive is this going to be or is it simply going to be a broadcast message announcing something's available?

Kerry: Well, this is the exciting thing, it can be as interactive as you want it to be. Email, you try to build a relationship with your reader as best you can in the limited format, with a chatbot, there is no one way. So if you try and think of it as a pyramid.

When somebody makes contact with your chatbot they can answer question A, B or C. If they answer question A, they then get taken down path A1, B1, C1. That can build out and build out, and build out until it's absolutely huge. It's very, very interactive. You can use customs fields.

So depending on what their response is to one question would take them one way, another question would take them another. You can set it up so that it's character interactions, so they could play a little game with your characters.

You can set it up to offer promotions. You can set it up to just answer FAQs. It can be as in-depth or simple as you like. The feedback from readers is fantastic. They love feeling that they're actually interacting with you at that level.

James Blatch: Yes. Well, I'm just thinking ahead here, **you could almost do a clever branching novel like this couldn't you? Where you could output the first chapter. Then some messages pop up saying, "What do you think I should do? Should we fly to London or should we go to Los Angeles?"**

Kerry: Absolutely.

James Blatch: Then send out the next chapter depending on the answer.

Kerry: Absolutely and that's, it's a build your own story. I think one of the SPF students is actually building something like that at the moment and it's going to be a lot of fun to see what he puts together.

Like I said, the potential is just enormous. When you have that interaction from the reader they feel much more invested in you then. So you're keeping their attention. They haven't as yet given you their email address so that's great, you're not battling an inbox.

But then, when you do broadcast to them, when you do send them a message you're seeing 90% open rates. Some students are seeing 95, 97% open rates.

You compare that to an email, that's absolutely unheard of. I suspect even the best list builders don't get more than 50% open rates. Of those open rates the click-through rate is huge.

James Blatch: Yeah. I think traditionally authors do get better open rates than the rest of industry, which are lucky to get 5 or 10%, but even so, you're right. an email list, 50% is huge, but getting 90% is unbelievable.

Kerry: It's mind-blowing. People are using it in incredible ways. One of the other students in the group is using it. One of the things she's doing with it is getting reviews on her books.

James Blatch: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kerry: The reviews she's getting, she's not asking, "Give me a 5 star review." She's saying, "Please, will you leave a review?" She's getting tons of reviews because people are getting that message popping up in their inbox, in their Messenger inbox. They're thinking, "Oh yeah. I'll go and do that. I'll go and pop and leave a review."

There's so many other things you can do with it now. You have integrations with Zapier so that you can link it to getting their email address once they're within your bot, they can then be zapped over.

You've got Google Docs, Google Sheets. There's a huge number of integrations and it is limited only by your imagination, quite honestly.

James Blatch: Yeah. In terms of being able to use it. You haven't used the word, intuitive, but I think that's what you're getting at, that it's a kind of intuitive process, it's not particularly technically difficult.

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: Can you just give us an idea of how this might work? How you might set up a sequence?

Kerry: Yeah. How it work is, you sign up for ManyChat and you get your subscription. It's very, very simple to do. That bot then, you go in and you click a page.

So if you only have one author page you just connect it to that one author page and straight away it's there sat on the back end, if you like, of your Facebook page. It doesn't go live until you tell it to go live.

In that back end then you can set up a menu so that when readers interact with your bot in Messenger there's a little menu on the left-hand side that they can click, the help and subscribe, or show me your books or what have you. You build that. You put in there anything that you want to put in there.

Then you set up a welcome message, for example. That welcome message, you can ask them a question, "Are you interested in my books?" Or, "Do you want to contact me?"

James Blatch: So that pops up when somebody visits the page, that will just pop up will it?

Kerry: Yeah. That will pop up when they click, send message-

James Blatch: Okay.

Kerry: ... when they send the message to your page, but this is barely scratching the surface. There are such things, they call them, growth tools within ManyChat, that you set up. You can set up a landing page. You can set up a direct link that will take people straight into Messenger.

If you look on my profile page you can see that I've got a circle with blue lines around my face. It's a scan code. So that's something that people can scan from within Messenger that will automatically take them to my bot.

You can use that on things like printed materials, on bookmarks, on leaflets that you're giving out, even on the back of your book.

James Blatch: So this is like ... just explain that for me Kerry.

I have seen those things, are they the yellow backed square, with what looks like a QR code type.

Kerry: It's like a QR code, yes. It just sits over your profile image. It's a blue circle. It looks a bit like a QR code.

James Blatch: Someone scans that?

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: Then it doesn't matter where. As you say, it might be on leaflet, on a bottom of an email or something, once they scan it then it links with their Messenger and sends a message?

Kerry: It takes them straight into the Messenger bot as soon as they scan it.

This is another thing, somebody doesn't have to be on Facebook for this to work because Messenger now stands alone from Facebook-

James Blatch: Yeah.

Kerry: ... and a lot of people have Messenger without having Facebook. So if somebody say, picked up your book at a conference, a book conference and they've got this code on the back of your book, they can go into the Facebook Messenger on their phone. Scan it and straight away they'll get a message pop up that you've programmed from your bot say, "Hi. Welcome to Kerry Books. What would you like to do next? See the rest of my books? Get a free book? Sign up for my email list?" Whatever you want it to do. That's just on a code and you can use that anywhere.

James Blatch: Mark did do a little demo of this on the webinars that we've just recently hosted. I noticed that you could have quite a sequence of a conversation, the branches in different directions at this point.

Kerry: Yeah huge, and they're adding more and more now as well. You have got this limited AI now.

A lot of people are best using it purely automated, as in, somebody clicks a button and takes an action. But you can program it to respond to certain keywords.

You can program your bot to respond to help or dragons. The bot will recognize that that customer has free typed in, dragons, and will respond in the way you've programmed it.

So it could be, "Oh I see you like dragons, would you like to see a list of my dragon books?" Then they'll say, "Yes, please." and Bob's your uncle. I mean it's really quite incredible.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Kerry: It's just getting better and people are not aware of it yet. It's quite frustrating for me because I feel quite excited about this. More excited than any other marketing opportunity that I have done since 2014.

To me, this is brand new and this is exciting. With 1.1 billion monthly users on Facebook Messenger, I really do think that we are leaving something on the table if we're not getting on board with this now.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay. That's why it's been added to Ads for Authors as a module and why we're working hard on this area.

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: You know, it makes sense. I'm involved in a few groups. I'm probably, despite being relatively tech savvy, I'm quite happy with email. But I've noticed that groups I'm involved with are all organized on WhatsApp now.

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: Everyone uses WhatsApp or Messenger group. It just seems to be a more natural, instantaneous way of communicating that has an edge over email, which now feels, what? cumbersome in that sense. I'm with you, I agree, there's a place for email, I'm quite an email user.

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: In business, I think it's absolutely essential, but in terms of this kind of informal communication, this Messenger environment seems to be much better.

Kerry: Yeah, absolutely. I mean email is always going to be the gold standard because that's your property.

As we know, Facebook has a habit of moving the goalposts, but they're investing hundreds of millions in their Messenger platform. As are all the other platforms as well because they know that this is place to be, this is the future.

You send an email, and as I say, it'll sit in somebody's inbox. It's luck if they see it. They're certainly not sat at their desk waiting for your email and when it pops up they immediately open it.

That is the huge benefit with Messenger of course, because it will pop up on their phone, it will pop up on their desktop if they're sat on their desktop.

I think this has been one of the reasons that people have been quite resistant to it, because they've immediately associated that with a spam element. Bots are never a good word to use around authors anyway, but there is a feeling that it can be spammy.

I think it's really, really important, the people who are saying this don't understand how it works. I think it's very, very important that people understand, **you cannot contact anybody on Facebook Messenger unless they've contacted you first and expressly said that they want to be contacted by you.**

I think that's a really important point to get across is, it's not as though you can just go through a list and get a list of names and randomly message people, that doesn't happen. It's not allowed.

James Blatch: Kerry, when they've contacted you once then they do sit on a kind of a distribution list.

So then at some point in the future, if you've got something to say you can send that message to everybody who's on that list effectively?

Kerry: Yes, effectively. I mean there are limitations. Facebook does say that you're not allowed to send promotional messages 24 hours after their last interaction, but that's a safeguard and it's a good one. So all you have to do is, you message your subscribers and say, "I have a great free book today, would you like it?"

Once they click, "Yes, please", that's it. Bob's your uncle. You can then send them the link, the information or whatever it is that you're offering them.

You can also, another interesting thing, just my mind tends to go at a 100 miles an hour, is that you can actually set it on time zones as well. You can set it so that most people will be at their computer at 10 o'clock on a Monday morning.

You can set it to send 10 o'clock on a Monday morning to each time zone. So you're not having to worry about, "If I send it now I'm going to wake somebody up at one o'clock in the morning because they haven't turned their phone on to silent and they're going to be really upset with me."

James Blatch: Yeah.

Kerry: So that's another. I mean it's immense. It really is.

James Blatch: Obviously this is an early area, and you say there's nothing at the moment for WhatsApp and one or two of the others, but they're in the pipeline?

Kerry: Well, they are and I mean Facebook owns WhatsApp. So that's the next logical step for them. It's available on Viber in a limited capacity.

I have actually been looking at that and I actually do have a broadcast account on Viber. But as I say, it's quite limited and Viber is mostly used in the Middle East. So possibly not of huge benefit to us right now, but it will be available on WhatsApp. It will be available on iMessage and on Google Messages as well.

As soon as they release those APIs, as I mentioned earlier, and the developers can then quickly ... I mean it will be a matter of weeks, once they're released before the platforms are open hopefully for us to use.

James Blatch: Is the ultimate aim to direct people to your Amazon pages so they buy your books, or is your ultimate aim to get them onto your email list and cultivate that relationship with them?

Kerry: Well it depends, to be honest. I have several sequences and each sequence is designed to do something different.

I have a sequence at the moment that is fed by a Facebook ad. That Facebook ad is a comment ad, so when somebody comments on that ad the message pops up. They're then given a free book.

I then say to them, "I'm giving away one box-set every single day. Just give me your email address." At that point I'm getting their email address.

Now, probably I'd say 50% leave an email address and 50% don't, but I've still got that other 50% on my broadcast list, so I'm not losing them by the wayside. So my dollar or my 25 cents or whatever it's taken me to get that person to my bot is actually doing more than one thing. It's getting them on the bot, plus it's also getting them on my email list, a percentage of them as well. So that's what one of my sequences does.

One of my other sequences is literally just to drive them straight to my free book. I'm not asking them for anything at all.

I have another sequence. It's asking for reviews. I have another sequence still that I'm building up for my new release.

I think this is going to be the test for me because of that enormous open rate I can have a relatively small list. A bot list, if you like, and I still expect to do much better on my newest release than I would do through my 7,000 odd email list.

I think that is going to be the test. I'm building that up. I'm hoping to have about 6,000 on there by the time I release. If 80 or 90% of them open and then 40% of them click, that's going to do well as well.

James Blatch: Yeah. That is going to do well.

It's all about those conversion percentages isn't it?

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: Getting people onto your Messenger. If they land on your Facebook page and send you a message, that's one way to get on?

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: You've got this code, which you can put around the place, that's another way.

How else do you draw people into the list?

Kerry: Well you can have a button on your website that connects them straight into your Messenger. You can do that whether you know how to code or you don't, it's really simple. You can have a customer landing page

so that if you just want to run a Facebook ad to landing page you can do that. But there's so many different ways of getting on there. I mean custom links. As I say, Facebook Ads, the growth tools.

James Blatch: So you do use a Facebook ad to send somebody to a landing page where they then enter it into the Messenger?

Kerry: They can do it that way or-

James Blatch: Or can you do it direct from a Facebook ad?

Kerry: Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay.

Kerry: Yeah, you can literally put in JSON code, which is you select Messenger as your destination when you're creating your Facebook ad. Then there's a bit of code.

Now it sounds complicated, it's really not. From within ManyChat you create the message that you want your reader to get the minute they click the Learn More button.

Once you've created that message and you're happy with it, it gives you a bit of code. All you do is copy that code, pop it in the box that Facebook gives you for that purpose and then your ad is connected with your Messenger. So, as soon as they click that, Messenger pops up and they start a conversation with you and that's great.

I mean it used to be an issue because a lot of people would click on it and then not want to go any further, so you ended up with hundreds of unknowns, if you like, on the back end of ManyChat, but they've got rid of that now, so that works really nicely.

James Blatch: Okay. All right. It all sounds like a sort of innovation that people need to ... I know that lots of people listen to these type of conversations, they go, "Oh it's something else. It's something else I'm going to have to master." But do you know what?

That's what this world's about and you do have to get on top of the next thing when it happens, and this is the next thing, right?

Kerry: Well, this is it and if you don't do it somebody else will. That somebody else is going to be scooping up all the readers that love the technology and love the interaction that you're not scooping up.

I know it's daunting and I know it's scary but there's a lot of preconceptions about this whole Messenger bot thing. What I've found with my course, and I'm actually putting together another business as well at the moment, purely based on Messenger Marketing is that, people who don't understand it dismiss it rather than go and look into it and find out what it's all about and how it works.

I think that's really important. If you don't understand it, speak to somebody that does. Find out about it.

Go through the module in the mastery course if you've got the Ads for Author's course because the training's in there. Find out about it because it really is a huge opportunity, it's not going anywhere.

James Blatch: Yeah. Yeah. I think we've got a quite proactive community in SPF and a lot of people will be gunning to get hold of this. As you say Kerry, you've authored the module within Ads for Authors, which we are putting together at the moment.

Kerry: Yes.

James Blatch: I'm not sure when this interview is going out. It probably will be added by then so people get that. You also have your own training available.

I know you've got that available. Where would people go to see that?

Kerry: I don't have a landing page at the moment because I'm actually working on, not rebranding, but re-recording the contents. So it's actually offline at the moment.

James Blatch: Okay.

Kerry: But if you went to www.bookbotbob.com/authors-

James Blatch: What?

Kerry: ... there's a link.

James Blatch: Say that again.

Kerry: Bookbotbob.

James Blatch: Bookbotbob? Okay.

Kerry: Bookbotbob and I have bookbotbill.

James Blatch: Okay. Bob and Bill and Bob's your uncle as well.

Kerry: Yeah. There's a lot of Bobs.

James Blatch: Bookbotbob.com is the place to find you. As I say, you're in development process at the moment with various training materials, but that's a good place to visit down the line. As I say, if you're in the Ads for

Author's course all the premium content from Kerry is there as part of that as well.

Kerry: Yeah and all the updates will be in there as well.

James Blatch: Yeah. Brilliant. Okay. Kerry, well this is shining a light into a world that most people will know a bit about, but not very much. So hopefully we will know a lot more after this interview. I think you've been really clear in the way you've explained it as well. It's been excellent.

Kerry: I hope so and I'm always happy if anybody wants to PM me or just tag me in any of the SPF groups, to do what I can to try and, as you say, shine a light on it and make it clearer, because I really do think as indies this is an opportunity that it's not going to take over everything you do, but it absolutely should be a part of the marketing process going forward, because as I say, it's not going anywhere. If you're not doing it, other people are.

James Blatch: Yeah. Superb. Kerry, thank you so much indeed. As you say, people can find you in the Facebook groups.

Kerry: Yeah. I'm always there.

James Blatch: I should say a particular thank you because this is a Monday morning and as writers this is never a great time to be communicating with anybody. So it's been brilliant. You've been excellent Kerry. Thank you very much indeed.

Kerry: Thank you. Thanks James.

James Blatch: That is SPFs very own Kerry Gardiner who's very kindly authored a course on bots. I mean it's a fast changing world.

It's one of the issues we had editing the course actually and getting it up there is noticing that Facebook changes every now and again, but the bot's world is changing quite quickly.

I suspect we'll do revised versions of that course quite often in the future. This is an area you got really excited about very quickly didn't you?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I got excited fairly early on about this, and the reason I was excited is because email is still king. Email is going to be the thing that everyone should have an email list. I've seen some people closing the group that they don't think there's a point in that, so those people are idiots.

What email doesn't have right now is the sky high open and engagement rates because email is, it's ubiquitous. We get lots. We don't open all of it.

So finding new channels and new ways to reach our readers is something that we should always be looking at. We've always got eyes on this and we look at apps.

We've got an SPF app. I've got a Mark Dawson app, which we talk about that in another episode.

But another really good channel is Messenger, as Kerry said. What I found with campaigns that I've been running is that I'm getting open rates.

I'm getting delivery rates of a 100%, open rates over 90%. Then click or engagement rates of 35, 45%. So way, way, way better than email. It's three or four times more effective than most email campaigns.

Then you can do some really cool things as well. Kerry, I haven't heard the interview as we record this, but did Kerry speak about the bot that she built on my page?

James Blatch: She said she'd been doing some work for you, yeah.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. So, if people want to see that go to [markdawsonauthor](#) on Facebook. I think it's [facebook.com/markdawsonauthor](#), or just search my name. Then just send me a message.

You'll see as the Messenger window opens there'll be a permanent menu at the bottom of the page and there's some options there that you can click-through.

One of the points that we worked was a curated introduction to my books. First of all we'll ask, "Are you a new reader?" If you're a new reader you'll go down a certain path. If you're an existing reader it might ask you for a recommendation, you could ask for a recommendation as to what you'd like to read next.

This happens automatically. You build it once and then don't worry about it. You can present people with a list of questions that they can be engaged with. Then at the end of that series of questions there's a link to go to the retailer to go and buy the book.

If you think of the psychology of it also, once someone is engaged in that decisions process, so if they feel that they have agency and they're answering these questions, and then deciding where they want to go, by the end of that process they feel invested in that process and are more likely to go over to the store page and they're more likely to buy the book.

This can lead to passive sales of books, which is kind of the Holy Grail. We should always be looking to ways to passively sell our books, that can be through email autoresponders or in this case, this kind of automated Messenger.

Then on top of that, so whenever anyone interacts with that bot, so if people want to see that, the bot in action, one thing they should know is, as soon as they send me a message they become a Messenger subscriber.

So when I have a new launch, not always easy to unsubscribe, but when I have a new launch and I'll be sending out messages through Messenger, it will go to everyone who's interacted with the bot.

So building the audience up all the time. I think about 10,000 readers on the Messenger platform now with that really, really high open and engagement rate, which just means that every time I launch I can reach people in different ways and hopefully sell even more books.

James Blatch: Yeah. Makes you wonder what the next thing is? What are we going to be talking about this time next year?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's hard to say. I mean I wouldn't have predicted Messenger 18 months ago, so it's very difficult. It could be a new platform. It could be probably like something that Amazon does, but who knows? It's fast moving.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: One of the things that we always do here is, we will report on it on the podcast.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: People who have our courses will get ... We didn't have Facebook Messenger module last year because it didn't exist, but as soon as it did exist we built one. People can have that now, people who are in the Advertising for Author's course can now go to the course and they can enjoy and learn from Kerry as to how they can go about setting up their own Messenger bots.

James Blatch: Great. Mark, good. Thank you very much indeed. Hopefully that was a valuable episode for people.

Kerry has her own bot's course, which I think we mentioned in her interview itself. Obviously, if you're part of Ads for Authors you get it wrapped up in there.

We've got so much on I can't even begin to tell you. A lot's going on in the background with SPF and all the stuff will be revealed during the year, but we are busy, busy, busy bees at the moment. So I'm going to go off and do another one of these.

Don't forget, patreon.com/spfpodcast. You've got 10 or so days left if you want a mug, otherwise you end up with our wonderful pin. You could be one of the first ones. We should serial number them, that's the trick isn't it? Because then 001, in 20 years time once you're in Hollywood, living there saying, "I've got SPF 001 pin."

Mark Dawson: Wow. Yeah. That's pretty glamorous.

James Blatch: I'm going to start calling you Harvey.

Mark Dawson: No, don't do that.

James Blatch: On that note. Okay. Thanks very much indeed for listening this week. We'll be back. Next week I can tell you we are going to talking to our friend Joanna Penn, Jo Penn about the healthy writer, a really important episode about how to use some physical exercise and other mental health exercises to make sure that you remain healthy.

This is not necessarily the healthiest of careers, let's face it. So an important episode next week. Looking forward to that and we'll speak to you then. Have a great weekend. See you next week. Bye, bye.

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