

EPISODE 109: FROM ZERO TO HERO – WITH FIRST TIME AUTHOR MARIA LUIS

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast with James Blatch and Mark Dawson.

I was going to say from a snowy United Kingdom, we've had a lot of snow, which is unusual for us. We get excited about any kind of extreme weather, but it's pretty much all melted away.

Mark Dawson: I'm just looking out the window, there's quite a lot here. We had tons.

James Blatch: Oh. You've still got it.

Mark Dawson: We had tons and tons. So yes, we're actually recording this on Sunday, which is very unusual, because my kids were off school from Thursday and Friday so I've had kids at home for four days, which has been challenging.

Especially given that they couldn't get out and do things apart from ... once they've made a snowman once, thrown a few snowballs, they get bored. So we've been on full crowd control, so I've done very little work this week. Which is great given how busy we are.

I've come into the office, one o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, and I imagine I'll be here til seven or eight just piling through quite a lot of stuff that needs to get done. But you know, there you go.

That's life as an internet entrepreneur I suppose and bookseller.

James Blatch: Yes exactly. Multifaceted income streams.

Yes I'm in the office as well. We've also had a bunch of snow, it's been absolutely lovely. I love the snow. I mean I know everyone says, "I like it for the first day then I get fed up with it." But for me, I kind of like the silence you get in that snow, the walks with the dog.

Mark Dawson: I love that too. I walked the dog on Friday to my village and it was pretty good research for an apocalyptic novel because there was no one around.

But interesting day yesterday, woke up at six, burst pipe outside, so that was gushing away merrily. That was entertaining to find the stopcock, switch it off, and then it was my son's birthday party, which was canceled because no one could get to the party. We had quite a lot of chocolate and my dog ate a ton of it.

James Blatch: That's poisonous to dogs you know?

Mark Dawson: A ton of it. Very poisonous to dogs, so at seven thirty last night I was in the vets with him, whilst he was injected with something and then vomited up an enormous amount of chocolate. So yesterday cost me about 500 quid between burst pipes and morphine injections for dogs.

James Blatch: That's why you're in the office today working.

Mark Dawson: I've got to make some money. It's hard work.

James Blatch: We did exactly the same with our Labrador puppy at Christmas so she got hold of a couple of Terry's Chocolate Oranges or something and she went to the vet, had the vomiting injection.

Mark Dawson: Dogs are stupid, you'd think they'd evolve that ... I'll die if I eat chocolate.

James Blatch: Well apparently-

Mark Dawson: More chocolate please!

James Blatch: More chocolate. Labradors apparently have a gene in them, which means they're always hungry.

Mark Dawson: Yes, they don't know when they're full basically. Same with mine. But yeah, they have another gene that makes them really stupid.

They're lovely but they're stupid.

James Blatch: They are, yes.

It's been busy because we are open for business in one of our periodic onboarding of students for the 101 Self Publishing Course, or Self Publishing 101 I should say.

This is our course which is our hugest course, it's enormous, it's 25 hours or something of video. But very well broken up and compartmentalized, and it is designed for the author who is just getting going, basically is getting going with their online marketing, so they might have a load of books already but they haven't really got online marketing cracked and not selling books in the volumes they want.

Or, for somebody who's basically just typed the end at the end of their manuscript and it's their next stage.

So it's how to do everything from the bottom up through to the more advanced areas of marketing.

If you don't know what formatting is ... and what I like about this course I think is the strongest aspect of it, it's not just how to format a book, it's how to do everything as well as you possibly can so that your book, as your mantra, is indistinguishable from a traditionally published book when it's for sale.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, and lots of different ways to do all the things as well, so kind of some of them will be free, others will be more expensive.

I put the course together after we'd done the advertising course and I realized that that was fulfilling a specific need but ignoring perhaps a more greater need for authors, as you say who are just starting out. Also who are intermediates, so have a few out but aren't selling as many as they'd like to.

And also actually we've had a few students who I know are big selling indies who've taken the course because it can be useful sometimes just to go through the process that someone else is using, so me in this case, and just refresh your memory and perhaps identify bad habits that you might have gotten into. I've done that for my own stuff as well, learning from other people.

It's a big course. I mean it shouldn't daunt people, it's very carefully organized, and I spent a lot of time working out how to make it fit together logically, so once you go through it the first time it's understandable, but it's also something that you can easily refer to later.

And we've got several students who've told us that they treat it as a bible now and they'll come back when they're ready to do something new. So it might be they're thinking about whether they should be in select or whether they should be wide, and there are modules on that. Or formatting

options or how to launch a book, so my launch process, that's all in there too.

It's something that people can come back to. We constantly refresh it. So this time, in fact just as we finish this I'll be rerecording the simple Facebook ads that we do. Thank you Facebook, of course they periodically change their interface, so I've got to make sure that that's consistent and up to date.

And then we add new stuff as well, so this time we've added a Facebook live module with Cecelia Mecca who's one of our students. How to use Facebook live to reach your readers. So tons and tons of stuff. And we continue to add things as time goes by.

James Blatch: The Facebook live course is great. It's Facebook Live for Authors, so it's a step-by-step guide of how to set yourself up and engage your readers using this new technology.

Cecelia's really good at making it, you used the word daunting then, I think people do find live videos sometimes daunting, but it's a good course to ease you into that and get you going on that. So that's going to be bundled in with 101 for the first time.

I can tell you it's a really good section that we've added, and in fact I'm adding this week, which is on how to use Wix to create your author website.

So we currently cover in the sort of tech library stage of the course, is how it's divided up as Mark said, very simple to follow. And the tech library's where you go down and you get your hands dirty doing stuff. So there's sessions on how to create your author website using Squarespace, how to create landing pages using Leadpages.

WordPress is in there as well, WordPress is quite a meaty, chunky one. But Wix has been done by Stuart Grant, and it's really good, it's a really great

step by step process of how to use Wix. Which looks like a really nice platform to create an author website.

And Stuart I think's got it exactly right, and I said to him, "You've got to have this, this has got to be able ... somebody who is scared, has never created a website before in their life should be able to create a website after watching this session." I think that's exactly what he's done. So it's that's really good. We're really pleased about that.

We've even got Dave Chesson as a guest into the course. Dave is an expert in really specific areas of online marketing including keywords and categories and how to really leverage what's available to you in categorizing your book and making it visible. And so we brought him in to do that little expert area. And I think that's going to help as well.

We should tell people they can go to selfpublishingformula.com/101, and there you'll get all the details and information about the course including a very comprehensive walkthrough if you want to know any more about it.

Good, well we have an author interview this week. Not entirely unconnected, because Maria Pinheiro who writes under the name Maria Luis, came to our attention after taking the course in the first place.

We got interested in her because the way that she methodically planned the launch of her career. She was working in a 9 to 5, can't remember what she was doing, marketing something like that. I think she says it in the interview. And she knew that she wanted to be a writer.

She actually wrote I think three books, followed the course and so on and lots of advice online to get them set up and then planned this launch. She even quit her job before she launched her first book, which is a ballsy move.

Mark Dawson: We don't advise this.

James Blatch: No. We don't.

Mark Dawson: This is not something I would recommend for most people.

James Blatch: Don't try this at home. I think there are a couple of other things going on with Maria as well for that, so not necessarily entirely based on the fact that she knew this was going to work. But it has worked for her, and it kind of doesn't surprise me the way that she's approached it.

So it's a really good author interview. And it's actually live real video, because I went down to see her in NOLA, which is New Orleans, Louisiana.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I've written about it in *Salvation Row*, available in all good bookstores. Just behind me, there you go.

James Blatch: Let's talk about Maria's books just for the moment.

Mark Dawson: Oh no, don't do that.

James Blatch: Okay, let's hear from Maria and then Mark and I will be back.

Okay. Maria, welcome to the ... I was going to say the BBC podcast.

Maria Pinheiro: Thanks for having me James.

James Blatch: I've regressed 15 years ... to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. It's really lovely to have you on. The reason, as I was explaining to Mark interesting introduction no doubt, the reason we're having you on is because you've just gone through the journey that so many of us are dreaming about, which is going from zero in terms of publishing to being published or self published, with an audience and making money. And in your case, making more money than you ever made.

Maria Pinheiro: It's a bit astounding, because sometimes I still don't know if it's real. I mean it is real, I see it every day, but sometimes it's still hard to kind of fathom that my trajectory has grown so fast.

James Blatch: Let's go through it then. Let's start with a bit about you and your writing. So you're really Maria Pinheiro.

Maria Pinheiro: Yes, I'm really Maria Pinheiro.

James Blatch: People will see you in the groups as that.

Maria Pinheiro: Yes I joined as my real self, so I'm in the group as Maria Pinheiro.

James Blatch: But the pretend Maria who writes books is called?

Maria Pinheiro: Maria Luis.

James Blatch: Maria Luis, okay. That's interesting as well.

Why choose a different name? Because you think Pinheiro's a bit more complicated surname?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. It was in two hands. The first part is Pinheiro is a really hard name, even you said, you were like, "So there's an H in there."

James Blatch: There's an H?

Maria Pinheiro: And like yes there is an H. It makes it hard for a lot of people to search. I like to look at Amazon as Mark has talked about in the course, and then I used to work in SEO and content marketing, so it is a search engine, and I can only imagine ... there's so many misspellings, and I don't want people to be turned off because they just can't find me.

Maria Luis was a good fit, and also Luis is my father's name, and since he passed away it's a bit of a homage to keep him with me on my journey.

James Blatch: That's really nice and sensible as well.

Right from the beginning you're thinking commercially about lowering resistance points to people ultimately buying your book?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. And that just comes even to from being back in the day, going to Barnes & Noble, going to book stores and trying to find a book, and I don't know how the author's name is spelt, or they've got four names shoved onto the book. And it just makes it, I think just streamlined sometimes is better.

James Blatch: Yeah Luis, Dawson, Blatch.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah exactly.

James Blatch: Wilbur Smith.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: Who knows what Wilbur's real name is? It's probably very complicated.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, no idea.

James Blatch: Dan Brown.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah Dan Brown. It's always a very like easy name, but I did keep Maria because it makes it easy for me to just respond to people, I don't have to think twice of ...

James Blatch: Yes, yeah.

Maria Pinheiro: You know that double take, like are they talking to me right now?

James Blatch: That's a level of complexity you don't need, yeah. Okay so let's wind back to I guess midway through last year. We're sitting here I should say in Autumn 2017.

In the summer of 2016 you had an idea that you wanted to be a writer?

Maria Pinheiro: I've actually always wanted to be a writer. I was a competitive gymnast, and so I fractured my back and that kind of ended my career. And I was in a back brace for eight months, and so I started writing then, because I wasn't allowed to even go to the mall. It was too much.

I always knew I wanted to write, but I always had that idea in the back of your head where everyone tells you, "That's not a viable living, you can't do it. You need to do other things. So what can you do in addition to writing?"

And so I was like well I can be an editor, I can be a literary agent. So I've worked in New York City for a literary agent, I've worked in editing. I have a traditional publishing background. Although I got into marketing and so that's sort of where I was at last year.

But it was around last summer of 2016 where I realized I wanted to do the self publishing route. I didn't want to do traditional. And then as soon as I saw Mark Dawson's ... I started seeing the ads and seeing how much people were actually making, and then knowing from my previous background how much people were making in traditional, I was like this is dope. There's no question, I'm going indie.

And so I kind of stockpiled my books and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote, and so when I could release it was kind of at the faster pace.

James Blatch: And you described your books as sexy romance, contemporary romance.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, they're sexy contemporary romances. They're not taboo or dark romances, some people hear sexy and they think like the taboo side. I'm not on the taboo side, I'm just not on the sweet.

James Blatch: This is a whole world of definitions I'm not completely au fait with, but I guess it's the level of detail you go into.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. Yeah exactly.

James Blatch: So mildly erotic?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: It's like a PG13 sex scene?

Maria Pinheiro: It's like R with open doors. Yeah exactly, but it's not Fifty Shades. I think that's where my line is drawn.

James Blatch: I'm with you.

Maria Pinheiro: It doesn't go the Fifty Shades side.

James Blatch: And that's something that you felt was the genre you were going to be most comfortable with or did you choose it commercially?

Maria Pinheiro: That's actually the genre I'd been writing in. I write historical romances, I have so many in my desktop, and then I write contemporary romances.

My voice just fits well into both of those, and it's what I like to read. It's the genre I know, and I talked about this with friends before is that what would you do if you wrote in another genre?

And I always think, so there's a lot of people that cross-hop, and I think to myself, I love a lot of genres, but I don't know the ins and outs of other genres. So for me, romance was where I needed to be, and even if I have to work harder because it's a saturated market to earn myself a spot, I was okay with that.

James Blatch: Okay. So you started writing in your back in your brace, and by the summer ... I know you purchased the 101 course, I know that you're going to tell us in a minute that you followed that.

Before you knew about Mark Dawson, where were your plans, how were you going to move forward?

Maria Pinheiro: Everything that I had known was if you're self publishing, when everyone ... you would see posts about what was one thing that you made a mistake on that you wish you had known when you started?

And most peoples' responses, the ones that at least resonated with me was, I wish that I had more books on hand when I began publishing. A lot of people said that they had one book, and then they were writing, scrambling to write another, and it was a year later or two years later.

So I took a year and a half and I wrote three novels. It was a little bit less than that because I was also working full time, so it was about a year to a year and a half that it took me to write three novels. Even though they were done, even though they were waiting, I just sat on them.

I sat on them until I felt I was prepared, I had a newsletter set up, I had my website. Which I do websites, so that wasn't as much of a issue for me as it

might be for other people. I had my social media going. And then that's when I kind of made the leap, when I knew that I was ready at that point.

James Blatch: You had some inventory basically? Stuff on the shelf.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah exactly.

James Blatch: Yeah, so you picked up ... and it is an important thing, we get asked it a lot. Can I be successful with one book?

And the answer is definitely not absolutely not, but it's also not yes it's really easy. I mean it is more difficult with a single book, and the traditional way that Mark teaches and people follow is to have some trickle down. So when you look at how much you pay for a contact, your advertising, you know you've got sales coming down through your catalog.

You were thinking like that?

Maria Pinheiro: That's how I was thinking, and I knew for me when I published my first book in April. I mean I made mistakes, I can tell you all about them. Things to not ... I want to write a book one day is like how to fail your way to success. Like all the things you should never do.

James Blatch: It would be a bestseller.

Maria Pinheiro: It would be a bestseller. You always hear what you should do, but it's like don't do these things. And I've made my mistakes along the way.

But I knew for a fact that I had to have a fast production cycle at the start, and that was my game plan from even from last year when I found the 101 course. It was that I was going to have a fast production cycle, get those books out, make sure that I'm marketing them, and then slow it down to a pace that I can handle for the long haul.

I have five books out in about five and a half months, six months or so. It's six months. It was hard. I had three already written and two that I wrote in the last like seven months. So yeah, it was fast, and then now it's officially beginning a slower pace for me.

James Blatch: Okay. We'll move on to how you launched and marketed in a moment. Just to finish off on the writing side, so you've been prolific in your start.

How do you write? You write at home?

Maria Pinheiro: I do, I write at home. It's my couch and me and my dogs. No I'm just kidding. Sometimes I'm at the library, sometimes I'm at the coffee shop.

I have a few favorite coffee shops throughout the city and I kind of rotate depending on my mood and just seeing something different. So I can always be kind of going through.

I usually write first thing in the morning, and then I actually also write at night. And during the day is when I do my marketing. I'll check my ads and I'll do all that.

James Blatch: So first thing in the morning and late at night.

I often think people are either early birds or night owls, but you do both.

Maria Pinheiro: I do both, and I think it's because sometimes I need a break. So I'll wake up at like seven or eight and I'll write until noon, and I'll just all the words as much as I can, making sure I have everything done.

And then I switch off, I'll do admin stuff, answer emails, and then early evening ends up being more like social media stuff, because I find that my people are on early evening. If I post something in the morning, no one's going to see it, they're all at work.

And then I will write again, just because writing is my job it's also my favorite thing to do. So if you were to say, what do you like to do? Unless it's a favorite TV show is on, it's writing. So I just do it all the time.

James Blatch: And in terms of coffee shops we should say we're in New Orleans.

Maria Pinheiro: Yes.

James Blatch: It doesn't hurt to be in a fabulous city. My first visit here, but incredible, it's like walking around a museum this place.

Maria Pinheiro: It is, it is like walking around a museum.

James Blatch: In fact particularly with you, because you used to be a tour guide, and it is literally like walking around a museum because you know the history of almost every building.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, it is like that. I have one series based in New Orleans, and I do my very, very best to bring that cultural flair-

James Blatch: I bet that's authentic.

Maria Pinheiro: It is so authentic. And I do enjoy putting in spots, putting in stories that have happened to me or that I've seen, heard things, and people are like, that just can't be true. And I'm like, but it is.

At the back of my book I'll have a dear fabulous reader, and I break down all the things that I've actually taken from reality.

James Blatch: That's a great idea.

Maria Pinheiro: To give them kind of a behind the scenes. And it's not long, in Kindle pages it's about three. So I keep it short, but it is fun to have people think oh that would never happen. I'm like, that was actually based off my old neighbor.

James Blatch: It's like Seinfeld's Kramer character who was based on literally his neighbor, and he had to keep explaining to her, because people just thought he was a clown character they'd invented.

That's a really good idea. In fact I'm certain I'm going to do the same thing. Military history you tend to get people who are very geeky and very knowledgeable.

Maria Pinheiro: They like it.

James Blatch: They like it, but I also have deliberately parte from reality for the story, and I just want to put something in the back to stop a lot of letters saying, "Yes I know, it wasn't like that. But this is why I did it for the book."

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. I think it just, it adds a nice touch to it. It gives a little extra without having people be overwhelmed. Usually at the end of a book they're still on a high.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Maria Pinheiro: So give them a little bit more.

James Blatch: At the end of a book I read the sleeve notes, everything about the author.

Maria Pinheiro: I go on the website, author's website, I'm like what else do they have?

James Blatch: Exactly, yeah, yeah.

Maria Pinheiro: I'm still that person that goes on their websites.

James Blatch: Of course the most important thing that you have is the link to your mailing list at the back of your book.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, always.

James Blatch: And let's move onto that bit then.

You got your inventory, which is a really good approach before you launched.

Maria Pinheiro: Yes.

James Blatch: And then the really exciting thing is you resigned your job.

Maria Pinheiro: I did.

James Blatch: Before you sold a book.

Maria Pinheiro: I did. Yeah, I quit. I mean I loved my job, I loved the people I worked with, but it was time for me to do something new. I mean I did prepare, I don't want people to think that ... again, because I've listened to all these podcasts and I hear all these things, and I don't want people to think ... I had saved money.

This was a longstanding move that I was planning since for over a year, where I was like okay how much do I need for six months if I make no money? You know, preparing for the worst, hoping for the best.

I do want people to realize that it was a calculated move, not necessarily in like a bad sense, but just a calculated in my own ... within the business. So what do I need to prepare myself for to do this?

And there were some times when you don't get paid for two months by Amazon that it was terrifying. But you live and you learn and you grow and you adjust. I left my job a week before my first book published.

James Blatch: But at that point you had instigated some teachings to get yourself ready for launch?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, so I had, at the end of March I had actually, the book that I was publishing was originally not supposed to be published, it was just going to be a reader magnet and that was all it was going to be. It wasn't going to be anything else.

I had everybody asking are you going to publish this one? Like readers that were getting it, they're like we want to buy it. They had it from Instafreebie which I had utilized, so by the time I had published I put up ... I ended up publishing that book on April 16th I think it was.

And so from the second to last week of March to April 16th on Instafreebie I think I had accumulated about 4,500 subscribers, and so I had put them through the automation sequence that Mark Dawson had laid out in the 101 course. And I had timed the release of the book to match when the automation, the first section of the automation sequence would finish.

James Blatch: When did you start list building?

Maria Pinheiro: I literally started list building the second to last week of March. That's when my reader magnet that I had planned to use ... so I put it up, yeah I think it went up on March 18th or something like that.

James Blatch: So your list had the book already that you then published?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay.

Maria Pinheiro: But what I did is I utilized it for reviews, so in the last ... the last email was an offer for ARCs, but the second to last one was, "This book is getting published on April 16th. Would you be interested in leaving a review if you enjoy the book?" And I had over 80 or 90 people say yes.

I have MailerLite, so I could have sent out an email, a mass copy email, I sat for an entire day. Again, this is the reader engagement side of me that is like I need to show how much I appreciate everybody. And I sat down and I emailed every single person individually that had said yes, and said, "You had mentioned that you would like to leave a review. The book is published tomorrow. Here's the link. Would you still be interested?" And every single person left a review the next day.

James Blatch: How many was that?

Maria Pinheiro: It was ... think it was 72. Think it was 72.

James Blatch: So you got 72 reviews on launch day on Amazon?

Maria Pinheiro: Yes. And it took time, like I said. It was not a slow process of emailing every single person, but every single person that did that for me is now in my ARC team, and they wait up on release day to leave reviews.

I'm getting emails at four in the morning saying, "I waited up. It went live. Here's my review." So it paid off for me in the long run. And that's kind of how I always look at my readers, is that it will take time for me to do everything, but they are going to repay me a thousand times over.

James Blatch: Wow.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: Who are your readers?

Maria Pinheiro: I have got quite a few. In the beginning it was mostly women over 50 I would say, and as the time has gone on I don't know if maybe just my books have been out longer, maybe my Amazon ads are hitting different, my Facebook ads go strictly to 45 and up.

I don't get much traction below that. Everything's too high, the CPC's too high, so I don't even ... I set it up and I'm like 45 and up.

But I think through Amazon ads I have accumulated a younger group of readers as well, because they've joined my Facebook page, they've joined my reader group on Facebook, and they're much younger nowadays.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay that's good, and growing a broader audience as you go on.

Maria Pinheiro: Yes. But mostly female, as romance tends to be.

James Blatch: Yes. Fair enough, yeah. Okay, so let's go to launch day then. This is exciting. So you've got 72 helpful elves out there who are on your side on Amazon.

How did the launch go?

Maria Pinheiro: So this is mistake number one if you're ready for it.

James Blatch: Okay.

Maria Pinheiro: These are the things not to do. I had this grand plan that I would put the book for free for five days, and I would collect pre-orders for the next book.

So again, the book that came out with the 72 reviews was never planned to be published. In my head I was thinking, well whatever it does it does, and I'll just, I'll take it and then hopefully I can utilize it to propel for the real release that's happening on April, I think it was 28th or 27th or something like that.

And so I put the book for free, and it hit number 13 in the entire free Kindle store. Really good. And I mean it did propel the pre-orders like I had planned. I think I had over 300 pre-orders for the next book.

Would I do that method again? Absolutely not. I would not do it again, but it did help. All my reviews then became verified purchases because of course they downloaded the book for free, so when they uploaded the review it was verified. So some people like that, some people don't. I think I had over 13,000 free downloads.

James Blatch: Wow.

Maria Pinheiro: I think. Yeah 13,000.

James Blatch: Why wouldn't you do it again?

Maria Pinheiro: It's tough. I think I would do it again if it wasn't the only book I had out, if that makes sense. I think it helped me with my plan for pre-orders. My game plan worked.

If I hadn't had that, how many pre-orders would I have had for the next book? I don't know.

James Blatch: But are you thinking you left money on the table?

Maria Pinheiro: I think I left a lot of money on the table, because that book stayed in the top 2,000 for over a month and a half, and I can only imagine if ... even if I had released at 99 cents, even if I hadn't done full price, I think that I could have ...

James Blatch: Bought a new car?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, I could have done a lot of things. But because it was free and there was directly no other book immediately to go read, I think that was money left on the table.

James Blatch: Okay.

Maria Pinheiro: It would have been better used if I had even waited until that other book came out, and then done free so they could immediately cross right over.

James Blatch: Another way of putting it is it was a really successful launch.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, it was a super successful launch. It definitely was, just not necessarily the method that I would probably do again.

James Blatch: Sure.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: So did you then put it for sale after five days?

Maria Pinheiro: Yes. It went to 99 cents. I think I fell prey a little bit to the idea of ... I think a lot of new authors, you fear pricing your book high. Who's going to buy it? Why would they want to buy that book?

And so I kept that one at 99 cents for about a month. The book that came out two weeks later, that went to 2.99 a week after release. But the first book that I published Power Play, I kept at 99 cents because I again, had that fear of oh I need something, a gateway, I need people to find a way ... no you don't.

You can price your book at full price. And if you have proper marketing tactics and advertising, people will buy your book.

James Blatch: Okay, good advice from the how not to do things forthcoming book.

Maria Pinheiro: How not to do things.

James Blatch: From Maria.

Your next book then you published in short order afterwards?

Maria Pinheiro: So I published two in April, none in May, but what I did do ... so the next book came out on June 27th. But what I did do in May and June and July was I created a weekly serial on my website.

I don't know if you recall when ebooks first came out and they had these like choose your own adventure type books where you could get to the end of a chapter and you'd have three options, and which one do you want to take? And it would take you in a different path. I knew I didn't want to do that, because that's so labor intensive.

James Blatch: That's three books for every one.

Maria Pinheiro: Very multiple variations. I couldn't do it.

But I really wanted to make myself a one click author as fast as possible. I wanted to ... instead of what would take a year to make that happen. And

how do I do that is to engage my readers. So I set it up on my website, on my blog.

James Blatch: When you say a one click author, can you just explain that?

Maria Pinheiro: I want to become an, and I think I am there and I want to become more so, is the author where if a reader's read my book before, they don't have to think if they want to buy my book.

They're going to buy the book, whether it's via KU if they're in the Kindle Unlimited subscription, or if it's paying for the book directly.

I don't want them to ever think, oh well you know this other author has something out, maybe I'll get that and I'll get Maria's book later. No, I want to become the author, Maria has something new out, I buy that book today. There's no hesitation.

So how do I do that? That was my thought process. How do I become that?

The way I looked at it is I need to give content. I come from a content marketing background, so how do you do that? You give them something and you make them want it more.

So I put up a weekly serial on my website, I wrote the first chapter, and then at the bottom I had a link that took you to the google form, like it was a very simple form. I didn't spend extra money or anything.

I would give four options, and people could choose. And I would take the one that had the most votes for it. And I would write it for the next ... so it went up every single Tuesday.

I had people commenting on it, like how could you do that to us? Oh my goodness, I don't know what to do. I would have readers, and I should have

changed this, but I would have readers that didn't know what they wanted, so they would go and refill out the form multiple times because they wanted all of the options.

I also created a mailing list just for those people. So I called it my love serial alert. So every single week I said, "You'll get one notification every Tuesday when the next part is live."

They all wanted it. And so every single week people were voting. It had over 200 people on the list. People were voting, wanting more, and when it wrapped up I actually gave them the option to sign up so if they wanted to keep ... because I planned to publish it at some point. It'll be out in December.

I gave them the option, if you want to stay on, and I even involved them in the cover making process. So my designer always gives me two options, and so I said, "If you sign up and you want to know, sign up on this form, and I will show you, and you can help me vote on which."

I really involved them from start to finish on that book. I have a section on there that says, "When it goes live, if you want your name mentioned in the back of the book as one of the people that helped make it what it is, because you voted every week, you can list your name."

So people listed their names. And so that, for me, even though I didn't have a release for almost two months, by the time the next book came out I was ... everybody was like, "You got to buy this book. Maria's one of our favorite authors." It worked.

James Blatch: Wow. What a brilliant level of engagement that you've engendered there. That's excellent Maria.

You had this period, you've given up your job which you did caveat as being a longer term plan, but nonetheless you're backing yourself here to

be successful. You've done your launch. You see some sales coming in, you probably think you've missed some sales with your first book. You see sales coming in for the second and third book.

You probably haven't been paid at this point, have you, because of the lag?

Maria Pinheiro: No. I didn't get paid until June, and then of course April I had ... April because of the free book, really it-

James Blatch: It still hurts?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, it still hurts. I'm like, don't do it.

But no really, it is a good method, it is a good method to utilize if you apply it appropriately and you have a plan. There's a reason behind it. I don't think putting a book for free just to put it for free is a valid plan, but if there's a reasoning like I want to pre-orders. So it worked towards what I wanted.

I did not get paid, so because of the free book and then the next book only came out within the last three days of the month of April, it was really only a week of April that I actually saw money for. It was like rent. I was like oh I paid rent, this is great.

May, the money increased, but because I had heard a lot of don't do heavy advertising until you've got a few books out because there's no readthrough. So that's also where the serial came into play, I wasn't really doing Facebook.

I was dabbling in Facebook ads and Amazon ads just to teach myself. I was looking at the Ads for Authors course and applying what I knew, so when I was ready to start advertising I already knew what I needed to do.

I dabbled but it wasn't a moneymaker if you want to think of it, and I wasn't utilizing it that way. I focused on reader engagement. That was my goal.

By the time June came around with the first paycheck and July, and then July is when I really kicked off advertising, and it skyrocketed from there.

James Blatch: You say skyrocketed, so when did you start seeing ... it was July, the income came in?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah the July income which was when I had officially three books out. The third one had come out in the last two days of June. And so on July first I put all the ads into place, so all the ads that I had been dabbling with for two months to teach myself how to do it, make sure I knew, I immediately put into place, and immediately shot to over like four figures, like it went ... it was crazy. It was really, really fun actually.

James Blatch: How exciting.

Maria Pinheiro: It was really exciting, I was like oh I can do this.

James Blatch: And we're a few months on-

Maria Pinheiro: Yes.

James Blatch: Now. Has it stuck?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. I'm making now triple what I did in my old job. So I was a marketing director.

James Blatch: You weren't badly paid before?

Maria Pinheiro: No, I was not ... it was not badly paid, but I'm making triple now than what I was making. And that is very exciting for me, because one it proved that I wasn't on this path to nowhere. I wasn't on a circular path

where five months down the line I would have to go back to my job, like come crawling back, like will you take me? I made a mistake.

But it also showed me that my growth every single month has been exponential. Like it's grown almost every month by over \$800.

When I use Book Report and I see that growth, it's really interesting to see, because at that point I know that by December I could be easily making over \$10,000 a month. If I keep that same level of growth. Which I think I will.

James Blatch: Five figures a month is a very nice.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, it'll be very nice.

James Blatch: That's a pretty decent annual salary.

Maria Pinheiro: It is a pretty decent annual salary. Especially here in New Orleans, it's not that expensive here.

James Blatch: Yeah, yeah, that's a lot of decent coffee. Okay. Well again, congratulations.

Maria Pinheiro: Thanks James.

James Blatch: Because what a fantastic launch and a start, and I can see your energy that you've put into it. I almost said methodical, but it's not methodical, I think you've been quite pragmatic as you go along, you've realized you've made mistakes, but the reader engagement stuff's fascinating and quite inspirational I think for people who perhaps haven't done as much in that area as they could do. I think that's been really strong for you.

Maria Pinheiro: I think sometimes people fear with engagement. I don't know if it's my background where I worked as a tour guide when I lived in England.

I worked as a tour guide when I moved back to New Orleans before moving into marketing directly. But I don't know if it's that background. I don't think that I have that level of fear of putting myself in front of readers.

Because I hear a lot of people they're like, "I'm not sure how I feel about that." And I'm like, but you have to. There's only so far I think, and again it's not like I've been in this for years so I can say yes or no, but I think there's only so far you can get if you're not willing to really converse with your readers and really talk with them.

I have a few that they are aspiring authors themselves. So I'm like, jump on 101 when it opens. Here you go, you need to look into this, you need to look into that. It's also about giving back, at least for me.

When it comes to reader engagement that is my ... yes, I do the ads and that has to happen. I have my foundation with my newsletter and everything, but my reader engagement is at the top. That is my number one priority.

Because if I don't have those readers, if I don't have those fans, I really ... they're word of mouth, that's really what they are.

James Blatch: Which is very powerful.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: It's one of the lovely things about self publishing as well, and I often think that the traditionally published authors have ... some of them might think that the last thing they want to do is to meet their readers, but I

think a lot of them feel, and I've heard this experience firsthand, it can be a bit of a dismal experience.

You sit behind a desk in a bookshop twice a year or at launch time and there's a queue of people, you have very brief conversations with them, and that's the only time really, apart from people who are motivated to write to you, and people don't do that so much anymore.

Whereas the self published author typically has this day to day relationship with the people, and the reason you're writing is those people. It's an important contact to keep you going.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, I mean you have to.

I have a reader group on Facebook, and I started it in August but it's already almost at 200 people. And I've done no, other than putting it in my newsletter and putting it in the back matter of my books, and every day I have more people that join.

So it's a very organic ... but that's how I like to look at social media in general. I need it to be organic, and that comes from my background of knowing when you ...

I think it's also like, when you have ads people naturally like it if they like what you're offering, but I am very not a firm believer in like social media hops where you have a giveaway and everybody has to come like your page to ... it ruins your entire organic reach.

I have friends that say, "Well how do you put up a post and you have 30 ..." not 30,000 that'd be great. It's like, "You have 30 likes and 25 comments on your fan page. I can't even get a like."

And I'm like it's because I've let it grow naturally, and I've let it grow organically. And I've really again, focused on the readers, and knowing that

everything will come as it should in the time that it will. So my page might not have 5,000 people that like it, it might have a little over a thousand, but it is very active.

James Blatch: Very engaged.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, very engaged page.

James Blatch: And the voice you used, which I sense is very natural, but you give up quite a lot of you and you're very personable with people and some of the secrets. And there's no pretending there's a magic wall that you don't peep behind. You're open with the writing process.

Maria Pinheiro: I'm open with the writing process, and even with my readers every week I call it the hump day chat because it's on Wednesdays.

James Blatch: You call it the what?

Maria Pinheiro: Hump day chat. You know how Wednesdays they call it the hump day because it's halfway through the week.

James Blatch: No idea what you're talking about.

Maria Pinheiro: It might be an American thing. It's like the camel hump, so you have ... in America they call Wednesday the hump day.

James Blatch: They do?

Maria Pinheiro: They do.

James Blatch: Okay.

Maria Pinheiro: Fun fact for the day. So they call it the hump day, so I call it the hump day chat because it's on Wednesdays.

James Blatch: If you called it a hump day in the UK I think people would think something else is going on on Wednesday.

Maria Pinheiro: They would totally look at me funny.

James Blatch: I've heard of wine Wednesday.

Maria Pinheiro: I mean I could get behind that too. I do that every single Wednesday and I invite authors on, so I use a program that authors ... like I can do dual screen.

I think that's one thing my readers like is that I'm the same ... even my family and friends will say this, they're like, "Maria, you're the same way that you are with us as you are with your readers." And I'm like, well yeah but this is a long term game, I don't want to put on a performance of somebody that I'm not.

I am not loud, but you know I'm bubbly and excitable and I respond in the same exact manner that I would ever respond with my friends. And so I think readers get that, and they see that I'm a real person, and I'm not just like a figurehead that's just sitting and writing, you know writing books. And someone that they can talk to.

I get emails all the time about what's going on in their lives. And I answer them, because again if I don't have those readers then it's going to be a sad journey.

James Blatch: That's great.

Maria Pinheiro: A sad and lonely journey.

James Blatch: I mean you may well get to the point where that is difficult to manage-

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah I'm sure it will.

James Blatch: And you can get help, but that will be a problem with success and it will be a nice thing to have.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: We should say just before we sign off, you've done brilliantly, absolutely brilliantly, and I think people will be very impressed and will really enjoy listening to your story.

A little bit of credit to Mark Dawson as well? Because I think he's helped you along the way.

Maria Pinheiro: He has, yeah. I won't put him on the free book thing, because he did not say to do that in the course.

Mark Dawson's, the courses, both the 101 and the Ads for Authors, have been the launching pad that I needed. And if I ... we talked about it earlier, but if I had not done those courses, I think I would have been back at my job.

James Blatch: With your head slightly bowed.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, with my head slightly, like in my office just like please don't, please don't judge me.

James Blatch: And they're looking at you like, we knew you'd be back.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah, like you were coming back anytime, and I'm like oh no. But yeah, no really without the courses I would have been, without the courses, without the Facebook group, without that support system it would

have been a really lonely journey, and that's sort of to be honest what I had expected going on.

Because that was the experience I had in traditional publishing that I had watched, was authors being very solitary, it's very solitary job. And that is not the experience I've had, whatsoever.

I have chats with two other girls that have been in the class, and we chat every day, like all day long. Especially the ads, that's helped me to stay sticky.

Everyone talks about well, you launched a book, but what do you do next? Well the Ads for Authors helped me to keep that, it helped me to stay sticky, which therefore makes my income go higher, which makes me happier.

And then of course the 101 has been ... my strategy has been the 101 strategy. What Mark Dawson lays out in the course is exactly how I have laid out my release strategy and what I do when I do it, so that my books can stay active.

James Blatch: Superb. Kudos also to the SPF community, which is a lovely, wonderful community to be in.

Maria Pinheiro: They're my favorite community.

James Blatch: Yeah we all enjoy. And you don't have to have bought a course to get into our Facebook, there are Facebook groups specifically for the courses which I think you benefit from and enjoy, but there's a community group which is called [facebook.com/groups/spfsecretgroup](https://www.facebook.com/groups/spfsecretgroup) I believe.

But if you just google self publishing formula on Facebook you'll find it. Or search for it. And you can join that without being in a course and that's also

a place to get that support which is very important. Particularly very early stages where you're a bit lost and ...

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah it's easy to get lost, that was one thing I was concerned about last year at this time. Because I scrolled past the SPF ad around end of September October. I think 101 went live in November didn't it?

James Blatch: Yeah I think so yeah.

Maria Pinheiro: Like early November. So it was about two months before that, I was lost. Quite literally, like I knew what I needed to do but you see all these books and you see them do well, or alternatively you see them not doing well, and you don't know what they did to end up in their separate ... like how did one book, they both have nice covers, they both have good blurbs, but how did one just fall? And how did the other do well?

I didn't know. Because again my background is in traditional publishing, which is a very standard procedure, there's not much adjusting, it's they have ... at 90 days there is a drop in price in discount. At 120 ... you know like it's very formulaic and it doesn't change per book. And so that's all I had to go on. That was it. What is an automation sequence? I have no idea.

James Blatch: Why would you know? It's a whole world.

Maria Pinheiro: It is a literally whole world.

James Blatch: It's like knowing nothing about motor racing until you start getting into it, and then suddenly it opens up to you. But yeah, it's complicated world.

Maria Pinheiro: And I will say actually that I think I'm actually relatively glad that I found and took the 101 course so far in advance from when I actually published the book.

Not that you can't go back and do it, because I still use the 101 course now to make sure that I'm lined up correctly. Obviously it still works for me and it works well.

But I'm glad that I actually took it far in advance because I always see people like well I don't have a book to publish yet, like I'm a year out. Should I wait, should I take it now?

I'm glad that I took it then, because it gave me almost seven to eight months to make sure that everything was exactly the way the 101 course was set out. When you should start setting up your newsletter. When you should start ... and it just laid it out for me. '

And so it was a very calm lead up. It was not stressful, and it was not me scrambling trying to figure out what to do, because I think that's one of the things that people miss a lot when they're publishing, is that there's no plan. You have to be able to adjust and turn the corner and say, "Okay, that's not working. What do I need to do to fix it?"

But you have to go in with a plan. And if you don't have a plan, I like to write mine out because it helps. If you don't have a plan then it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard. So the 101 course gave me the foundation for that plan that I use every single time.

James Blatch: Okay great. Maria, look it's been really, really interesting. Thank you so much for your time.

Maria Pinheiro: Thanks James.

James Blatch: Talking to you. I know you've been listening to the podcast so here you are with your own episode now.

Maria Pinheiro: Yay.

James Blatch: And here we are in, I'd like to say sunny New Orleans, but if you're watching on YouTube you just see behind Maria it's-

Maria Pinheiro: It's not sunny.

James Blatch: It looks like England out there.

Maria Pinheiro: Welcome. It's like you never left.

James Blatch: Except it's 85. But it's gray and raining, and I keep getting flood warnings appearing on my watch. So I'm going to get in my car and drive east.

Maria Pinheiro: And hope to beat it.

James Blatch: Yeah, but thank you for a lovely night in New Orleans last night as well.

Maria Pinheiro: Of course James.

James Blatch: And we will follow you. We'll follow Maria Luis. L-E-W-I-S?

Maria Pinheiro: L-U-I-S.

James Blatch: L-U-I-S?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. Portuguese way.

James Blatch: As in Portuguese?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: Oh okay. Have you got a Portuguese heritage?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah.

James Blatch: And some Greek heritage.

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah half and half. So straight down the middle.

James Blatch: Some American in there as well right?

Maria Pinheiro: Yeah. It's in there, it's grown as I've grown older.

James Blatch: Excellent. Thank you so much Maria.

Maria Pinheiro: Thanks James.

James Blatch: Good. There was a lot of me at the beginning of that interview. I don't know why I was talking for so long, but then Maria was very kind to show me around NOLA in the evening.

We did the walk around all the usual places. Actually we kind of avoided Bourbon Street. Because it's very, very ... I mean it is ridiculously kind of in your face. Couple of blocks as you move away from it, all calms down a bit and becomes a bit more genuine.

She showed me this area that I never would have found by myself. If you know New Orleans you'll know it, but if you leave that big area around the center of Bourbon Street, you walk quite a few blocks it becomes very quiet and very residential, and then it starts livening up again.

And this is all in the French Quarter. It starts to become some little squares, every bar has its band going of course as you'd expect in this great music city. And it was really wonderful.

We went into a couple of bars and watched a few bands playing, it was fantastic. So I had a great night. In the rain actually in Louisiana, in New Orleans with Maria.

But we should talk about her. What an impressive person.

Mark Dawson: Yeah she's done very well. It's always very pleasing to see students do what she's done, and she's not the only one. Obviously there are lots, and in the emails that I send out around launches I try to pick out a selection of different authors writing in different genres, different stages of their career, and put their honest thoughts about the course.

This is in some ways, it's probably one of the busiest times of the year for us, but it's also one of the most enjoyable because I get to filter through lots of really pleasing testimonials, pleasing for me and for us, because the course has helped people.

It's also great for them, to see them doing so well, and in her case leaving her job. Cecelia's left her job. We're we're responsible for the rise in unemployment rates all around the world. It's great to see.

James Blatch: It's the changing economy.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, yeah.

James Blatch: We're helping that shift from the slavish nine to five to the liberated working from home.

Mark Dawson: We basically stick it to the man every single day, that's what we do.

James Blatch: Well you know that's what I've always been like.

Mark Dawson: Oh absolutely. Comrade. Comrade Blatch.

James Blatch: That's me. Good, well it was a delight meeting Maria. I'm so happy for her.

We're going to catch up with her at some point. Hopefully she'll make it to one or two of the conferences. She might even be in RWA, because it's a romance genre she works in, so I'm sure she'll make a beeline for you. She's a big Mark Dawson fanboy I have to tell you now.

Mark Dawson: Fangirl.

James Blatch: Fangirl. Yes sorry, fanboy in the generic sense.

Mark Dawson: Sorry Maria. I'm here to make sure James doesn't make terrible mistakes. It's all I'm good for these days.

James Blatch: Maria's other half I think is a burley detective in New Orleans, which sounds to me like it should be a book as well.

Mark Dawson: There you go. There you go. I'd read it.

James Blatch: Yes. Sounds like a good start. The Burly Detective, that could also be the romance genre.

Just a reminder the 101 course is open for another 10 days or so, something like that, so that will be available for you to browse and have a look at, at selfpublishingformula.com/101.

Great. Well you can get back to work Dawson.

Mark Dawson: Yep.

James Blatch: Slave drive you. Me as well. I've had a cracking day doing some forensic accountancy. Find it strangely stimulating. And yeah, I've got

some editing to do as well. So we will get on with our jobs, and I hope people have a great week reading and writing, and we'll speak to you next Friday.

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