

EPISODE 116: PUBLISHING 3.0 – WITH JASPER JOFFE

Speaker 1: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. It's Friday. It's Mark and James, and if you're watching on YouTube ... In fact if you're listening, you're gonna hear some hubbub in the background.

Mark Dawson: Hubble?

James Blatch: Hubbub. Hubble, hubbub.

Mark Dawson: Hubbub.

James Blatch: We are back at the London Book Fair, you can see behind us one of the two grand halls here at Olympia in London. Generally the only thing I really remember about Olympia is every year's the Horse of the Year show in here, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Is it?

James Blatch: Don't you remember the Horse of the Year show, from Olympia?

Mark Dawson: I do. It was in here?

James Blatch: Yes, in here.

Mark Dawson: Really? Good grief.

James Blatch: They put dirt down, and they have someone whose job it is to run out with a shovel every ten minutes ...

Mark Dawson: John Dyer.

James Blatch: Where is John Dyer? John Dyer's in America.

Mark Dawson: What?

James Blatch: He's missing the London Book Fair.

Mark Dawson: Good grief.

James Blatch: He's on holiday as we speak. He's like this on a rollercoaster at Universal, enjoying himself, and so he should. Yeah, so the Book Fair.

You do a lot of time on the Amazon stand when you're at these fairs.

Mark Dawson: I do?

James Blatch: Talking to a lot of our community who come and say hello. We're gonna have some drinks tomorrow night for people who do that. Do you get around? Do you go and visit Hachette and the others?

Mark Dawson: Hat Check?

James Blatch: Hat Check. Hachette.

Mark Dawson: I do. Actually, I've got a meeting with Bonnier tomorrow. Bonnier Publishing have shown some interest in some stuff that I'm working on, and are interested in talking with me about that, so I've got a meeting with them at half-four tomorrow.

Otherwise I might wander around. I know a few people in the industry, so I might hop around and say hello.

James Blatch: Yeah, press the flesh.

Mark Dawson: Essentially.

James Blatch: Well, we're gonna talk publishing in this podcast episode.

Mark Dawson: In our podcast about publishing? No.

James Blatch: In our podcast about publishing. Well, we talk about self-publishing, but this is publishing.

I can't use the word "hybrid," because that does mean something different, obviously, but we're talking about a small, bespoke publishing company who operates in the way that an indie would operate.

A lot of Facebook advertising, a focus on mailing lists, but enough fantastic attention to detail in terms of producing the books themselves, carefully selecting them, and I'm beside myself with excitement about this little company called Joffe Books.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I've known about Jasper Joffe for a little while. Well, certainly about Joffe Books, because they're quite hard to avoid on Amazon. They're in the charts very highly, all of the books ... Most of them, quite a lot of the time.

And I've seen their ads on product pages, including mine, so Jasper took the ads course last year and has been using Facebook ads and Amazon ads very effectively since then, and has sold a metric C-R-A-P ton of books since then.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: So I reached out to him a month or two ago and said, "Would you like to come on the podcast?" He said he went, and James interviewed him, and as we mentioned in the podcast last week, we had a little sit-down with him just 20 minutes ago, and I had to calm James down subsequent to that, because he is very enthusiastic about what Jasper's doing.

James Blatch: I've seen the future.

Mark Dawson: And it's bright. I gotta wear shades.

James Blatch: Yes, it is. Let's hear from Jasper.

Jasper, welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. It's a real treat to have you on. I think we're going to learn a lot from your experience over the last couple of years.

Why don't you start off by telling people who you are, and what it is that's happened in your business?

Jasper Joffe: Hi, James. I'm Jasper Joffe and I started Joffe Books about four of five years ago. I mean, seriously.

Before that, I was actually an artist, a painter of pictures, and it's been phenomenal. The growth every year has been doubling.

In 2017, we sold 1.24 million books. An equal amount of books read on Kindle Unlimited. We've been working with such great authors like Joy Ellis, Helen Durrant, TJ Brearton.

Our topselling author, Joy Ellis, whose books are just really popular, she's alone sold a million books since she's worked with us.

James Blatch: Wow.

Tell us a little bit about where you sit in terms of the old, traditional industry, the new indie self-publishers ... because I get the feeling the way you operate is somewhere in between?

Jasper Joffe: Well, yeah. Actually, I came across Mark Dawson and self-publishing and I've learned a lot from it, and so when you told me you wanted me to be on, I was really excited.

In fact, I've only ever read the transcripts of all the interviews. I never watched the podcast, so strangely enough, this is strange to be in physical form with you.

We are a publisher who works not as, obviously, a self-publisher. Sometimes people go, "Are you a self-publisher?" No, we don't publish our own books.

We publish other people's books, but we have some of the same flexibility, I think, as a self-publisher. We work exclusively with Amazon. We only sell through Amazon, so that simplifies our distribution. We've found that to be just an exceptional and simple way of selling lots of books, but we work with lots of authors.

We pay them royalties, so like a traditional publisher. We tend not to pay advances. I don't know, I think the difference is we don't have all the infrastructure and sort of ... "traditions" is maybe the wrong word ... of an old-fashioned publisher.

We just do the things that we need to do, to get the books out to the public, rather than probably all the other stuff that other publishers do.

James Blatch: I suppose one important difference is you're a lean organization because you're just starting up and you're agile and you don't

have the tall buildings in West London or wherever to have to pay for every day. Does that have an effect?

Obviously, I realize there's commercial sensitivities about the deals you do, but does that have an effect on the amount of royalty that you take?

Jasper Joffe: Yes, I think so. I can't, obviously, give exact details. That's confidential between us and the authors, but as far as I've seen from traditional publishing contracts, quite a significant portion more to the author.

The other thing is, we spend money on the things that help the books do well, and make the books good. So of course, we get loads and loads of submissions, and we only choose a very few of those authors to work with.

We spend a lot of money on editing and a lot of time on editing, and then we spend a lot of money on advertising, and we don't spend money on other stuff, so my office looks a bit bare because there's no need to have ... I don't know, whatever anyone else spends money on, but I don't understand what the other stuff is all for, really.

We want really great books. We want to reach the reader, and we want to reach as many readers as possible. So that's as far as I can see ... I mean, I'm willing to learn, but what else would you spend money on?

James Blatch: I think that's great. I think it's really exciting. I suspect, although you sit in your office and you say it doesn't look great ... The rest of it looks fine, your office, by the way ... but I suspect what you are starting to realize is that you are in the vanguard of that type of industry.

My personal view is, I can't see the big traditional publishers surviving in the long term. I think people will either go indie or people like your organization will come along, a much fairer split, in terms of ... It's just not

right that the person who writes the book ends up with something like 8% of the cover price coming to them. For me, that's unfair, an unfair split.

I know it's difficult marketing and selling a book, but creating it has got to be worth more than that, right?

Jasper Joffe: Yes, the author comes first. I always say that to our authors. I say, "Look, we do our job and we try and do it as well as possible, and we pay attention to every little detail, but you've written the book. You're the important person. You've put all that work in. You've put months of writing, and we think you're really good at writing books, so we just wanna get you out to the people, and get you selling your books because you've done the amazing bit."

I don't see there's a sort of war between indie and trad publishing. I love reading books. I don't care whether they're on Kindle or in paperback or if I read them on my phone. Actually, I like reading on Kindle the best, but there's room for everyone.

Whether that model of doing all those things that traditional publishers do will hold up or not? Honestly, I hope they do, because I want to read some of the books they produce. I want to read some of the books that indie publishers and self-publishers write.

I don't think there has to be a hierarchy like, "Oh, I've got a trad publishing contract. I'm publishing indie. I'm self-publishing." What matters is, the book is good.

James Blatch: I just think about the fairness to the author in terms of how the traditional industry works at the moment, and whether there needs to be an adjustment.

So not necessarily that they won't be around in the long term, but they would have to adjust their model, particularly if your type of company is

better known and more obviously an option for people, then they're gonna start to do those sums and think, "But why would I go with a bigger contract where I might get a bit of initial attention, but then it kind of slides ..." and that's a very traditional story we hear from the trad publishing.

I noticed you went to school with Zadie Smith. The big names, they get constant attention. There's momentum.

But for every one of them, there's a hundred other names that have one or two books on the advance and they didn't really get any traction after that.

Jasper Joffe: Yes. The other thing is, we pay quarterly for example, because I used to be an artist. I've published a book.

For some publishing companies, they pay yearly. How can anyone live on a yearly payment? We get the money in, we pay it out to the authors. That's how I think it should work. There's not so many layers of people.

I also work with some authors who have agents, but the more people you have involved, the slower things are. It's not just that, at every stage, they take a bit of money out. It's also that you can't make decisions very fast.

If we think we've got something wrong with a book, we change it that day. I tend to answer emails within an hour, and I'm running the company, so there's this kind of flexibility and we adapt to, if readers start wanting something else, we can change the cover. We can change the blurb.

It's that indie kind of spirit of being able to do everything and do it yourself and not have 50 people who you have to pay, who you have to talk to, who you have to reach some sort of compromise decision with, and maybe that's not the best decision.

But as I say, I'm not against trad publishing. They obviously produce some amazing books, which I want to read too, so I don't want to see it as them and us.

James Blatch: Yeah. You say you tend not to do advances, but I suppose if you're investing advertising and editorial rounds, that is in a way an advance, so you're investing in the book.

And then I'm assuming the way it works is you'll pay that off from the royalties as they come through?

Jasper Joffe: Well, no. It's very simple. We pay the authors a royalty and whatever our costs are, of course we don't take it out of their percentage. They get the same percentage however much we spend on the book.

We spend an awful lot of money on advertising at the moment, but obviously we think that's getting a return on investment, but no, there are no costs to the author besides. They get their percentage and that's it.

James Blatch: That makes more sense, and that seems a very fair way of doing it. Well, let me ask you then. I can see some of the growth figures you've had look exceptional.

I'm guessing that some books fly, other books are harder work, but overall you're making great progress, yeah?

Jasper Joffe: Yeah, we're doing well. At one point this year, we had 16 of the top hundred Kindle books. Some days I can't believe it. Some days the authors can't believe it.

We work with Faith Martin, who's a great mystery writer, and we just sent her a royalty statement, and she was like, "Is that for the year?" I was like, "No, that's the quarter." It's fantastic.

These are people who've worked, often their whole life writing books, who are extremely talented, and just to put it in brass tacks, they've never earned that much money before. And it's so exciting.

Their lives are changing, of course where my life has changed being a publisher. Even in the last three months, we've sold 700,000 books, plus an equal amount ... because we're exclusive to Amazon, all our books are in Kindle Unlimited, so we reckon about the same number if you add it all up in terms of Kindle Unlimited.

So effectively, we've sold 1.4 million books in the last three months alone. Which is a lot of books. I sort of sometimes can't get my head round it, that there's a lot of people reading these books.

James Blatch: That's terrific. Congratulations on that, and you're obviously getting a lot right in the way you do it.

I agree with you about the exciting bit is sending that check to the author, because I think, since I've been in this industry, I have read two articles, almost identical, both published by ... I think The Guardian, so there's possibly just sort of a recurring theme here, of Booker Prize-nominated authors who've gone back to their professions, because they haven't made any money.

One's gone back to being a solicitor. I can't remember what the other profession was. Everyone who reads that, you think, "Well, they must have sold a volume of books as a Booker-listed author, but I'm wondering how much of the money they ever saw?"

Jasper Joffe: Exactly, and it's probably only at that point where they're nominated for the Booker prize or win the Booker prize that they get all that money and then the sales probably decline.

It's a great moment every quarter just paying out more and more money to the authors, and the authors are just ... They're really happy. They're overjoyed.

James Blatch: And so they should be. Okay, let's talk a little bit about the detail on this. You say advertising.

Principally, where are you advertising and spending on?

Jasper Joffe: We actually signed up for Mark Dawson's course, so I just want to say thank you for that. I'm not trying to publicize it. I learned a lot from it. I try and learn all the time.

That's the other thing about running the company as an indie, is that you're always looking for new information. I'm following your podcast. I'm Googling stuff all the time. I always want to learn how to do things better.

Haven't got it all sorted out. It's not perfect. We could always get better.

Our main advertising platforms are Facebook and AMS ads. Up to about probably six months ago, it was all Facebook. I sometimes see the bills and they're shocking. Obviously I see the bills all the time, but sometimes you're like, "What, we spend 2000 pounds in three days?" Sort of thing.

And then, AMS has got better lately. I'm sure I've seen you guys talking about that. AMS being advertising on Amazon itself, which makes a lot of sense because people are buying books on Amazon.

Why not advertise to them on Amazon? And I'm slightly worried that I'm gonna tell you this and my cost per click is gonna rise for my AMS ads, but ...

James Blatch: We always remind people that it's actually a very small percentage that we talk to on this podcast. It sounds like thousands of

people, and it is thousands of people, but it's out of the wide world of people who are doing this, there's this small percentage of you and Mark and other people who know this is happening, so I wouldn't worry too much about that.

Jasper Joffe: Okay.

James Blatch: Mark's convinced we have no effect on the cost per click of anything. Good, well that's great to hear.

Thank you for name-checking the course, I'm sure Mark will be thrilled with that when I come back to chat with him again in a moment.

I'm intrigued by this, because we occasionally go to the literary launches, which is very nice, and have a glass of champagne at the big ... I won't name them, but the big traditional publishers, and when I start to have this conversation, they're fascinated with us, but they are also clueless. I mean clueless in a polite way.

It's just not really in their area of expertise, and a lot of them have said to me, "Oh, can I have a look at the course? That sounds amazing," and I'm thinking, "You're selling books. You should really be all over this stuff."

Jasper Joffe: "You should know this." Yeah.

James Blatch: But they're not.

Jasper Joffe: Although recently, I have to say ... because I'm always on Facebook looking at our ads, checking our returns. There have been more traditional publishers using quite similar Facebook ads to the indies and the self-published authors.

The funny thing is, I see them but they're not ... What I think is, as I say, they're just not integrated in the company. They probably have a

department doing that, or they outsource it to someone, and so you don't feel like they have that knowledge of the book that they're selling. The readers, their audience.

It's like getting a Facebook comment and responding to it straight away, as opposed to someone who runs an advertising department for a company, who doesn't probably have that same engagement with readers that we can have.

Obviously at a certain point, we're going to get so big, we will have to have more people doing all this stuff, but I still think there's a real advantage is being so hands-on.

James Blatch: Yeah. It's not like the old days of advertising where you sit and design the billboard or the newspaper ads and so on, and then sort of fire and forget.

Facebook advertising is a hands-on experience of day-to-day experience, and those little tweaks, those margins, that can be where the difference is.

Jasper Joffe: Yeah, exactly. People say, "How do you become successful?" And I say, "There's no magic. It's just attention to detail on every single aspect of the book."

The first thing is getting the right authors and getting great books. It always starts with that.

It's then really good editing. We send every book through two whole editing processes. Copy editing, proofreading. Still things go wrong, but that's a lot of work on each book, and then it's the same with the marketing.

It's the same with the blurb. It's the same with the cover, and being adaptive, and massive attention to detail on everything, and learning from

the readers and listening to them as well. You might get a comment on Facebook saying, "Oh, why have you said this?" Or, "This is wrong," and you're like, "Okay, so we'll change the blurb."

Or you get readers writing in saying, "When's this book coming out?" Or, "Why have you called it this?" And it's all great and useful information.

James Blatch: I think a close relationship with the reader is very important, and that's a real trait with indie as well. Lots of traditionally-published authors will tell you they don't meet their readers very often, apart from the rather staged exceptions where they're book-signing in a shop.

Whereas that's a very different experience with people like Mark, who has a daily interaction with his readers. I think he did a Facebook Live a couple of days ago, making some announcements with lots of comments coming down.

You're having that from a publisher point of view, this close relationship with the immediate impact the book's having on readers, which of course helps shape the way you market them and do the next book.

Jasper Joffe: Exactly. I love it, and even the authors ... They all have their own Facebook pages. We have a Facebook launch group, so the authors talk to each other. They get people who like their books talking to them.

They get great feedback from the readers, but we get on our own Facebook page, just a lot of feedback.

We have an email in every book so that people can write directly to me, tell me what's ... Even if there's a mistake in the book, we wanna hear about it. I mean, if we get a typo sent into us ... I'm afraid we do get the occasional typo, we haven't managed to eradicate them completely ... We can fix it.

You know how KDP works. We can fix it within an hour. Compare that to maybe a traditional publisher. How many layers would that have to go through before they could fix something?

James Blatch: Yeah. Yeah, it's a different culture, isn't it?

Jasper Joffe: It is.

James Blatch: And you say you're exclusive to Amazon, you talk about KDP a lot, but are you using the print on demand service as well?

Jasper Joffe: Yes. Every single book is now paperback and Kindle. We also sell audio rights.

We work with a really good a traditional agent who sells foreign and audio rights and all sorts of rights, called Lorella Belli, who's well-enmeshed in the publishing world, and she's fantastic. She sells, for most of our authors, she sells the audio, foreign and translation rights.

We're now, I suppose, we want to get our authors into all those kind of things that maybe they could have only done if they'd had their own agent or if they'd worked with a big publisher, we wanna be able to provide that for our authors as well.

James Blatch: How do you manage? How many Facebook campaigns have you got running today?

Jasper Joffe: I could tell you now, but ... Well, we've only got about eight at the moment, but we're launching two books this week, so they'll be up to about ... We have a UK and a US one for each one.

How do we manage? Well, there's a lot of people doing good stuff. We've had a lot of different people working here. Usually from home in fact, not in

this office, and I'm just on my phone 24/7 as my kids would say, checking things, changing things.

The amazing thing is, 50% of the work you can monitor and do from your phone. That's why people get emails from me at like 11:30 at night, because I'm not in the office. I'm just on the bath or something replying to an email.

James Blatch: Is it a family business? How big is it? It's not just you, Jasper.

Jasper Joffe: It's not just me. I have my amazing assistant, Rudy, who's out of the office while I'm doing this interview. There are lots of people. They're mostly, as I say, freelance, working from their own space.

We have great editors. We have a person, Jill, running our social media and blogging. We have a person doing everything, but it's generally not all ... They don't all have to come into my office and work 9:00 till 5:00. Some people say, "Okay, that's bad. That's the gig economy."

But for a lot of people who live all over Britain, even some in other countries, that's the way people work now, you know?

James Blatch: Yeah. I think there's a bit of a transformation going on, and I understand some of the concerns about the freelance stuff, but we do the same thing.

"Virtual assistants," we call them, and I think I'm right in saying I don't think any of them would want to change the arrangement, because it's ultimately flexible for them, and that suits our business as well, allows us to grow or contract.

Luckily we haven't contracted yet, we've just been growing, but it's nice to have that option.

Jasper Joffe: The problem we're facing is this. We're growing so fast and we've still got room to grow, and we're still looking for really great authors.

If you're an author watching this and you're interested in what we're doing, you can look. We have a very clear submissions page on joffebooks.com.

What we don't want to do is just turn into an old-school publishing company. At the same time, we want to grow in a logical way, so we may need some of their infrastructure.

However, what we can do with our way of doing things I think is pretty good, and our sales figures are getting up towards an old-school publishing company, certainly in the digital realm.

James Blatch: Let's talk about submissions then, because then some ears will prick up here.

I can imagine in particular, the people who like writing and produce their series, but have always struggled because for them, getting in the weeds of Facebook advertising is just not quite for them, so I can imagine them being quite drawn to this.

We're often asked, "Do you do ads on behalf of somebody else?" We don't, and financially I think it would be difficult.

You've obviously got a process to go through to make sure you've got the right book like a traditional publishing.

Jasper Joffe: Yes.

James Blatch: I know you said you've got your spread pages.

Can you explain a little bit about the submissions process?

Jasper Joffe: We have an open submissions policy, so an author could email their full manuscript ... I still don't understand why people want three chapters.

If you want to read the book, you're going to read the whole book. If you don't want to read it, doesn't matter whether it's three chapters. It's the same thing.

A synopsis, a bit about you, what kind of book you're writing, and your book sent to us, usually in Word. It's actually much easier to send a Word document to Kindle than a pdf.

We get a lot of submissions. I'm afraid we don't always reply to say "no," we only reply to say "yes," just because otherwise we'd spend all day replying to people, and we want to get on with publishing some books.

I know it's disappointing. I know what it's like to submit a book and not get a response. I'm totally respectful and admire people just for having written a book.

The main thing to remember, I think, for any kind of submission, is the email is the first thing that anyone reads.

If you make that email to the point, you understand a bit about the company you're writing to, and you understand what type of book you've written.

So many times you get an email and it's like a blurb, but you don't actually know if they've written a mystery, a thriller, a romance novel. Because they could just write at the beginning of the email, "Dear Jasper, I've written this mystery book. It's about a detective in London ..." and I'd be like, "Okay, that sounds interesting."

I look at the submissions. We look at every single one. About half of our authors did come to us via open submissions.

And then at that stage, we often send it off to another reader to check what their opinion is on it.

I can't think of anything else to do with submissions, but the main thing is, as I say, just get that email short and sweet and telling us what type of book you've written.

The thing I say is, indie authors are amazing, and the ones who can do it, I'm like, "Well, why would you come to us?"

But there are authors who just don't have a clue and don't want to spend all their time marketing and getting their profile up and finding someone to format their book and finding an editor and all these kind of things.

At that point, you might want to spend more of your time writing and work with us and we do all the stuff besides the writing.

James Blatch: I can imagine there's authors who are good at doing at, but don't see themselves doing a lot of Facebook advertising, and do more writing.

I guess they're also in a strong position when it comes to the negotiation, because they can turn their laptop around and show you their spreadsheets of what they've been doing over the last couple of years, and that is a different type of conversation that takes place now.

I guess traditional publishers might be starting to get used to that.

We've had a couple of guests on the podcast who have negotiated big deals with traditional publishers on that very basis, because they say,

"Look, this is what it's worth to me every year." Makes a big difference.

Jasper Joffe: We have actually had some traditional publishers trying to pick off our top authors, and they've said no. I mean, our authors have generally said no to other companies.

If you're thinking of submitting to us, at the moment we're looking for mysteries mainly, or crime thrillers. Definitely a series helps. And we're not ... I don't understand, some publishers are like, "If you've published it yourself before, we won't look at it."

We'll look at anything. I mean, obviously, if you've published it yourself and you've sold 10 million copies, we're probably not gonna add anything, but if you've published it yourself and sold a few thousand, we can look at it.

We sometimes reissue whole series like that. We always edit and proof them and put them up to our, hopefully, standard of publishing. We're interested in all sorts of authors. With a big back-list, new authors ... so have a look and think about it, and I think we have a lot to offer.

The other thing we have to offer, I think over time is, of course we are pretty good at what we do now, compared to someone trying to do it themselves, and we have economies of scale.

We know how to run Facebook campaigns. We know how to run AMS ads. We know how to do book pubs. We do a lot of this, so you get better at it. At that point, I think that gives you quite a lot to offer an author.

James Blatch: You say about half of your writers have come from open submission?

Jasper Joffe: Probably more, in fact.

James Blatch: Where do the others come from?

Jasper Joffe: Sometimes I, in my sneaky way, go out and look for authors just in the world. I see an old edition of their book on Amazon or I practically seek out authors. I try not to poach authors from other companies, generally. I don't want to do that.

James Blatch: You're talking about indie authors whose books you like and think are going to work.

Jasper Joffe: Exactly, and I'll get in touch with them and say, "Maybe we could have a discussion about working with us."

James Blatch: Yeah, that sounds fair enough. It is exciting. I don't think we've spoken to anyone quite like you, Jasper.

Do you know of other companies that are operating in the same way that you are and growing like you are?

Jasper Joffe: Of course there was Bookouture, that was bought out by Hachette I think, which was the sort of model for us.

I don't know if your audience know about Bookouture, but they were an independent publishing company focused on digital. They did some great crime thrillers, some women's fiction.

They were eventually bought by one of the big publishers, but I saw what they were doing, and I thought, "That's what we want to do."

In fact, one of our authors who's published a couple of books with us, founded their own publishing company called Bloodhound Books, and they're doing a great job. They're growing really fast. I think I've seen them mentioned on your podcast at some point, but I can't remember.

James Blatch: Yeah, I think Bloodhound have, and Michael Anderle also springs to mind, who is getting a stable of indie writers into his, what has almost by accident become a publishing company in its own way.

Just on this subject because I know people will be interested in this, you read it and it goes through that process, which I can understand.

What sort of percentage are you getting at the moment in terms of how many you can pick up realistically?

Jasper Joffe: Realistically, it's not very many. It's probably one in a hundred or less.

It's just because, in order for us to work with an author, we're going to invest a lot of time and money, and it's not worth it unless we think that author's gonna do really well.

I say to authors, "I can't guarantee anything," but if we think they're good, we hope that they're going to have pretty much a Top 50 bestseller. We don't set targets for them, but that's where I feel they should be, if we're going to work with them on Kindle and hopefully, we're also trying to go for the American market as well.

Obviously that's a huge market, and we want them to be able to do well in both the UK and the US. It's a very, very small percentage of our submissions that we pick up. We're happy to keep doing that and happy to keep looking at people.

James Blatch: You say you're looking particularly at mystery and thriller at the moment, also crime thrillers. Is there a particular reason for that?

Romance is a big indie area as well, but is it just your own personal specializations?

Jasper Joffe: Yeah. In the past we did have some romance writers, and we're still publishing them, but it seems that we're better at selling detective mysteries, basically.

That's what I've noticed, and so we put our resources where we think we're going to add the most value.

We could publish more women's fiction or romance fiction or literary fiction, but I honestly don't think we're going to add as much as we're going to add to crime thrillers and mysteries.

I think we've got some great authors in that field, and of course we're building a big mailing list who are interested in those authors. There's a building and a cross-fertilization of the authors and their different audiences.

James Blatch: Yes. Becomes self-fulfilling, I guess, after a while in that area. You're obviously a huge book fan, Jasper.

Are you a writer as well?

Jasper Joffe: Yes. I am quite old now, I'm 42, but in my 20s I wrote a novel, which was traditionally published. That's the thing, I understand. I submitted it to agents. I submitted it to publishers. I remember getting that "yes" from the publisher and just being over the moon, and seeing ... Do you remember Borders bookshop?

James Blatch: Yes.

Jasper Joffe: It used to be a big bookshop chain which went the way of most bookshop chains, and I did a reading in the Charing Cross Borders, and I remember like 30 people turned up, and I did one in somewhere like York, and two people turned up.

Then I did one and no one turned up, and I was like, "I'm not doing any more of these readings because no one wants to come to them." Yeah, so I wrote a book years ago, and I love reading. I read all the time. I read mainly literary fiction, actually, for my own enjoyment.

James Blatch: You actually have time to read books for enjoyment, as well as the huge amount of submissions you get?

Jasper Joffe: It is crazy, but I just read all the time. Obviously, I have a Kindle. I read in the morning before I get up for work, and then I read before I go to bed, and then I wake up in the middle of the night and I read. I love reading.

I just read a phenomenal books at the moment. In fact, I've only been in publishing for five-six years, but I read more than I ever did before, for pleasure as well as for work.

James Blatch: Yeah, great. Well, sounds like you're in exactly the right place, Jasper. It's been really illuminating talking to you. We should just give the website again. It's joffebooks.com.

Jasper Joffe: That's right.

James Blatch: People will find the submissions there.

It just feels like you're in the right place at the right time. Does it feel like that to you?

Jasper Joffe: Yes, it's amazing. It's fantastic to be publishing and selling books and people reading them. Someone is reading one of our books every 11 seconds. That's what I worked out the other day. Every 11 seconds, an actual human being is reading one of our books. Just imagine that.

James Blatch: Yeah, that is amazing. Oh, I should say Joffe is J-O-F-F-E.

Jasper Joffe: That's right, and you pronounced it correctly, which is actually quite rare, strangely for a five-letter word.

James Blatch: There you go, yes. That's probably a first for the podcast that I pronounced something correctly, so I did well.

Jasper, look, thank you so much indeed for coming on. I know you found us in a way, and we found you at the same time. It's been really interesting listening to you.

It's another example of how this industry is changing, and it's changing quite quickly. Not everybody is aware of quite how quickly things are happening.

You feel to me a little bit like a guy with a spade who's just hit a well of oil, at the moment. I don't mean that in crude ... "crude," excuse the pun ... financial terms. I just mean in tapping into the way that the market is taking publishing, and it's exciting for everyone.

More books, better royalty rates for authors as it should be, better access to the market and better access for readers to writers who otherwise might not see the light of day.

Jasper Joffe: I completely agree. Firstly, it's a real honor to be on this podcast. Just want to say that. I honestly was thrilled to be asked.

And secondly, yes. I just wish that newspapers wouldn't publish these articles saying publishing's dead, falling ebook sales ... It's nonsense. It's a really, really exciting to be in publishing.

The whole point about publishing is people writing books and getting people to read them. Who the hell cares whether it's Kindle, indie, self-published, trad published, Big Six, whatever you wanna call it.

You can now publish a book the day you finished it, if you want to. That's what it's about. It's about publishing and reading books. That's all it's really about.

The negative stuff about this is rubbish, I think. This is an amazing time to be a publisher and a writer and whatever you want to be.

James Blatch: And a reader.

Jasper Joffe: And a reader.

James Blatch: I could not agree more, and that also sounds like a great place to leave it. Thank you, Jasper.

Jasper Joffe: Thanks, James.

James Blatch: So there you go. I think you can see now why I was so excited listening to Jasper talk.

First of all, he's an absolutely lovely guy. He's passionate about books. He is competitive in terms of wanting to be successful and wanting his authors to be successful, and that combination is killing it in the market.

Mark Dawson: It is, yeah. It's a combination of canny pricing, aggressive advertising, and good covers, very distinctive covers, good blurb, and of course good books. He's doing extremely well. I think he mentioned in the interview he had 17 out of the top 100 top books at one time.

James Blatch: Yeah, 16 or 17. Yeah, incredible.

Mark Dawson: So I've seen his books surrounding my books in the charts. It was good to get him on, and really good just to see what he's doing to generate all that traffic, and doing extremely well on Amazon.

He's Amazon-exclusive, so doing extremely well with KU, which has mirrored my experience going back into KU after a couple years, as I've mentioned on the podcast previously. Yeah, good. Well-done, Jasper. Fantastic job.

James Blatch: And one of the things I love about being at the book fair, this type of event, is the passion for books. Which sounds like a really silly thing to say. It should be obvious.

It isn't always, because you look at large companies and their big corporate institutions and they're sometimes negative stuff, particularly about the traditional industry, perhaps on our side, and it's potentially warranted in one or two areas.

But standing on those stands behind us, working in those companies are individuals who are passionate about books and want books to be read and authors to get out there.

I really felt that with Jasper and I think he's a credit to the industry. We had a quick chat earlier and I was prophesying the fact that, for me, I can see the industry going that way. I can see the Big Five, which is already three now as the merger's taking place, I can see a myriad of smaller companies publishing 20-30 authors each, all doing well.

Mark Dawson: A lot of times I agree with that 100%. I think there is going to be some fragmentation, although you look at someone like Bookouture, a company very similar to Joffe Books in their kind of stature.

Bookouture's bought out by Hachette, and it's possible that Jasper will take an offer from a Big Five publisher. We may see fragmentation, we may see consolidation. It's quite hard to know.

James Blatch: Hedging your bets there, Dawson?

Mark Dawson: I'm very good at hedging.

James Blatch: I hope you enjoyed that interview with Jasper. We'll definitely keep track on his progress and stay in touch with him, because I think it's a fascinating area.

That's it from episode two of three for the London Book Fair. We're going to be back in the next week.

We're going to talk about the difficult subject of negative reviews. This is not just gonna be an interview where you're gonna have a pat on the back and say, "Get over it. Buck your ideas up." There's going to be some practical tips on how to deal with negative reviews.

Mark Dawson: "Get over it."

James Blatch: As Dawson would say, it's got practical tips including a handout to go with it of what you should do and how you should react to them ...

Mark Dawson: "Toughen up." I'm joking.

James Blatch: ... and how you can make them work for you in the future. Good. You're a slavedriver. Right, thank you very much indeed for joining us. Have a great week writing.

Mark Dawson: And a great week selling.

James Blatch: Hey.

Mark Dawson: See you next week.

James Blatch: It's like a double ax.

Speaker 1: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. Visit us at selfpublishingformula.com for more information, show notes, and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.