

EPISODE 136: HOW TO START THAT AWESOME AUTHOR WEBSITE – WITH JOHN DYER, STUART GRANT AND KRAIG MATHIAS

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

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with Mark Dawson and James Blatch from the still sunny UK. Delighted to be with you on this Friday or whenever you happen to download the podcast. I'm very pleased you've joined us.

We pride ourselves on podcast from SPF being value-packed and not being a waste of your time, actually adding to your author existence. And this episode is absolutely no exception. We're going to be looking at author websites with some really good, practical advice.

But before that, let me just welcome Mark. Are you well?

Mark Dawson: I'm very well, yes. I thought you might've forgotten I was here. But yes, I'm here. Very well.

I have a clear head which is probably something that you don't have. Or, in fact, my wife or your wife or plenty of other people who went to your 20th wedding anniversary party on Saturday night.

James Blatch: Yeah, we should say.

Mark Dawson: It was quite entertaining.

James Blatch: Mrs. Blatch and I marked 20 years. Actually, on Wednesday this week, but we had a little, a very informal barbecue at the local pub. Our local pub. And we had 50 or 60 of our closest friends there.

Mark Dawson: And us.

James Blatch: Delighted to see you there and much drink we've had as is the British way of marking any kind of event in life.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it was. It was quite entertaining as Liz said to me, "Seeing people in their 40s and 50s getting absolutely pissed out of their heads jumping around as lunatics at the ..."

James Blatch: Jump around, jump around.

Mark Dawson: That was the highlight.

James Blatch: Well, hang on. I can throw out some shakes on the dance floor as I think you saw.

Mark Dawson: I didn't just see them, I recorded them for prosperity and posted in the SPF community. And was distressed to find the comments were strong with goodwill. I was expecting division but there wasn't any.

James Blatch: Hey, that's the British way to rat on everyone. No, there was some very nice comments in the Facebook group. Thank you very much indeed for posting that image of me dancing at half cast.

Mark Dawson: There forever.

James Blatch: On the dance floor. It is as there forever, so put my digital footprint now. Yeah, it was really good.

And John Dyer was there and Catherine, one of our VA's, who some of you will hear from occasionally. And I think you spoke to Farmer David, as well, Catherine's husband is celebrating 'cause it was the day after harvest.

Mark Dawson: Yes, we did talk about that. That was quite interesting.

James Blatch: And such as other people's lives. Just a little glimpse into somebody else's life.

David's a farmer. So that was the day after harvest. Basically, Catherine doesn't see him for six weeks, however long it takes to cut the barley and et cetera. He stayed for hours.

The gin and the whiskey came out until about 3 o'clock in the morning. And then at 9 o'clock he had to leave because they start drilling, which is planting seeds for the next harvest on a Sunday.

Mark Dawson: That's real work. And I actually did say that to him, that that's ... I don't have a proper job. I sit around in my pants writing stuff and getting paid for it.

Whereas he said to me that working from six in the morning until 12 at night for several weeks. Hats off to David for that. That's impressive.

James Blatch: How did he react to you telling him, "I just sit around and get paid for writing in my underpants." Did he punch you?

Mark Dawson: He was surprisingly generous as I raised my glass and toasted myself. He, being a lucky bastard.

James Blatch: He's a lovely guy. I've known David a few years and the greatest thing is he let's me drive his tractors sometimes. That's not a euphemism either. I was actually driving his tractors which I enjoy doing.

Mark Dawson: It does sound like you do.

James Blatch: Catherine is an important part of the SPF team.

It was a really lovely ... One of those life events that I was very pleased. If I could invite everybody who listens to the podcast I would have done. But there is an opportunity to come and have a drink with us. And I shall be buying again. So will you.

That will be in Sun Peak Beach in Florida towards the end of September. We'll come up with a definite date. The talk of the place will most certainly be the Sharktooth Tavern of the TradeWinds Resort in Sun Peak Beach.

We'll come up with an evening of the week for you to come along and have a beer on us, if you're anywhere near that area of Florida. It's only a short flight away from places like Canada. So you can get there and get a drink with us. We'll give you that date shortly.

We should say that before we go on, that the 101 course is open as we record this on Friday. It's going to be open for a couple of weeks, so we will close it no later than the 26th of September. And Self Publishing 101 is the course.

Funny enough, it's the course that you dreamed of right at the beginning, but then realized it was far too big to actually get done when we first started this company together.

But quickly, 12 months later when we got the first course under our belt, you wanted to revisit it. And it's a monster of a course, but for a good reason, I guess. 'Cause you wanted it to be this all encompassing start for authors.

Mark Dawson: It's a course that I would have been very, very keen to get involved with when I started Self Publishing. So from the moment you finish your manuscript ... So basically you type, "The End."

We were close, you can see that coming, even if you think you might do that in the next six or 12 months. It's the course that takes you from that point and covers everything you need to do to get your books formatted, so they look pretty. Covers, everything. Upload it. Metadata added so they're searchable.

Websites, mailing lists, kind of low level advertising, launching, everything that I could think of that was important. I'd give you the best stuff possible for fiction or non-fiction. It doesn't have to be fiction to be some of the course we'll cover.

It's easy to navigate. It is a big course; there with 20 hours of content, but it's easy to navigate. People do dip in and out of it as they need to.

We've got things like tech library where we cover an account set up for pretty much anything that you could think you might need, so various email service providers, all the retailers, formatting, three or four versions for different options for formatting.

Things like the Reedsy book editor, on the other hand. Lots and lots and lots of more than useful, important and essential content for people as they get started with their option careers.

James Blatch: We've got a long list of people who've been knocking our door saying that they want to record testimonial interviews with us. And John and I get around to them as much as we can.

We have to be careful about saying life changing. When you say life changing, people roll their eyes a little bit, but that's what people say to us because people want to write and having a living being paid for doing

what they love is a huge, huge deal for some people. So if they can unlock that using the knowledge you've accumulated, the hard way mark, then that's our job done, isn't it?

You can go and read all about the course and potentially purchase if you want to do that. If you go to selfpublishingformula.com/101. And like I said it will be open for a couple of weeks. Yet if you're listening to this at the right time on the Friday. What date is it today? So beginning of September, so the first Friday in September. 7th, I think, which is my parents' wedding anniversary in a funny kind of looping way.

Also, before we get on with today's practical side of the podcast, I want to welcome our new Patreon supporters, so patreon.com/spfpodcast is a place where you can go if you want to support the podcast for as little as a dollar an episode and you get lots of goodies in return for that as particularly at the gold level where you get a pin.

And you get an opportunity to have your book torn apart, metaphorically, by the experts of the cover, and the blurb, and they look inside, get properly analyzed by experts to help you turn in something that's going to sell even better. That's the gold level group.

We are welcoming our new Patreon supporters, Steve Davidson from Leicester in the UK, Rose Loretta from B.C., British Columbia, Canada, Tommy Donbavand from Lancashire in the United Kingdom, and Roderick B. Lacey ... There's a good name. From San Diego in the United States.

How lovely Tommy Donbavand to become a supporter of ours 'cause we are definitely supporters of him. Tommy, we have mentioned before on the podcast and you may know his story. He is a writer from the UK. And Tommy just had the worst possible news delivered to him a couple of years ago when he was told by his doctor that he had inoperable throat cancer.

He threw himself into the treatment, which were brutal and punishing and almost killed him. So he ended up in intensive care. I think he actually had one of those moments where the lights starts to go and then it got brighter again for him. He had hours to live, but came back from it.

That's been a very long and slow and painful hole for Tommy, but he is still alive. He's still here, he's still writing, and he's very much a part of the SPF community. We're delighted that Tommy is supporting us and wants to be on Patreon. Thank you very much Tommy.

We should say in return for that, that if you want to read about Tommy, read his blog which is actually inspiring in its own right. And also you can support Tommy in his fight against cancer at tommyvcancer.com.

Welcome all of you. Steve, Rose, Tommy, and Roderick. You can join them by going to patreon.com/spfpodcast.

All right, Mark. We promised some value on this episode and we are going to deliver because we are going to talk about author websites. Now, there are some things in the author world that you can pick and choose and maybe not do or maybe put off until later.

But having a presence on the web, a little bit of your own corner of the web is an essential. Right?

Mark Dawson: There's tons of reasons why it's important, but you do need a website. I've seen a few authors who don't have one and some of them are doing okay, but generally speaking, everyone is going to need a website, for lots of reasons really.

It's a place for people to contact you. It's a place where you can have your books with links going out to the various retailers. You can use it to gather up email addresses and add them to your newsletter list. You can do clever

things like retargeting with Facebook Pixels and Google Pixels to build an audience that you can then advertise to.

There are lots and lots of reasons why you need to have one. It doesn't need to be complicated. It's pretty simple these days. And one of the things that we'll talk about in this episode is just how easy it is and can be to put your own website together.

James Blatch: And the other exciting thing about this episode is we have a third presenter.

Mark Dawson: We do. We've unlocked the cellar door and left some cookie crumbs on the stairs and tempted John Dyer into the light.

James Blatch: Blinking into the light.

Mark Dawson: Yes, blinking into the light.

For the first time in a hundred and however many episodes we've done, he is actually a featured guest on the podcast. I should warn people who are watching on YouTube, with all seriousness, this is going to be quite a shocking experience for you as James and John talk about websites. I was going to say in all seriousness. But actually that is in all seriousness. Bear that in mind and enjoy the sight of ...

James Blatch: He's got a beard compared with yours. I mean, it's a slightly bigger beard. You've both got a father Christmas thing.

Mark Dawson: It weren't as if, I don't know, it's less gray. He's older than me, but I look older than he does probably, so that's the Indian complexion.

James Blatch: I've worked out that I'm the Frank Beard of SPF. Do you know who Frank Beard is?

Mark Dawson: I do, James. Yes. This isn't because we have recorded the episode twice because you didn't record the audio the first time. Frank Beard is the beardless member of ZZ Top.

James Blatch: He is. He's the one without a beard.

Mark Dawson: I think he's the drummer as well. Isn't he?

James Blatch: He is. Yeah, he's the drummer.

Mark Dawson: How'd you know if the drum riser is level?

James Blatch: I don't know. How do you know if the drum riser is level?

Mark Dawson: Drool runs equally down both sides of the drummer's face.

James Blatch: That's a drummer joke.

Mark Dawson: I know some drummers.

James Blatch: One of the long line of drummer jokes.

Mark Dawson: There were quite a lot. Yeah, anyway we're wildly deviating, so we should probably get straight to it.

James Blatch: The way this is going to work is that John is going to be the expert on Squarespace. We then will hand to experts in the relative field for Wix and Squarespace.

And Wix, you'll hear in a moment are fairly similar and then the step up from that, slightly more complex, more powerful option for you is WordPress and that's going to be Kraig Mathias. So let me hand over to me and the Dyer. A rare sighting of the Dyer.

It's a rare appearance. Isn't it? For the bearded one. Well, there's two bearded ones in SPF, but you're the Father Christmas beard.

John Dyer: I'm the more exotic bearded one. Should we say?

James Blatch: Self diagnosed exotic. John Dyer, welcome to the podcast. Not your very first appearance. In fact, you made a cameo at the end of the New York podcast, which was noted by a few people on Facebook.

John Dyer: I caused mayhem, I think.

James Blatch: You did. You moved into shot and immediately poured over the microphone or something else. But there you go.

John Dyer: That is my style.

James Blatch: Keep you away from the equipment.

As I said to Mark, a value packed episode. We're going to give people some useful information to help them put in place something that, whether we like it or not, is an absolute essential. Now we do get to the point with quite a few of these.

Our Facebook ads, probably because of AMS ads over the last year has started to become something you don't absolutely have to do. Although, Mark would probably argue with that and say you should be doing Facebook ad, but I know successful authors doing 40 or \$50,000 a month who don't run Facebook ads. They just run AMS ads.

But through all those changes, that will happen and that may change next year.

For this to happen, a website remains an essential. Right?

John Dyer: Absolutely. You can't do anything without a website, so regardless of whether you're using Facebook ads or Amazon ads or any other kind of marketing, you do need that shop front for your brand.

And we got one of our authors being brands as part of our course and that is absolutely paramount when you come to think about how people are going to access you online. You've got to look good and you've got to look the part.

It's easy to have a suspect website. Let's be honest, we've seen enough of those over the years. But it's also pretty easy to have a really good professional website that doesn't cost the Earth.

James Blatch: That's what this podcast is all about. And a little bit of real estate that you call your own.

It's more than, I think, talk about shop windows as a very important part of it. And some people will do a little bit of due diligence on you as an author, make sure you're bonafide and they see a really nice slick website that's only going to contribute to your sales.

But that real estate is quite important because by their terms and service, affiliate links can only be on areas of the internet that you the owner have access to and you might want to list your books with affiliate links on your website completely, legitimately.

That's not to say some people don't use those affiliate links in advertising and so on, but TOS would suggest that you have them only on a place you own. So you want a bit of the internet that you own.

jamesblatch.com is my one. Ideally, it should be your author name .com, but we perhaps can talk about URLs in a bit as to what you do if your Bob

Smith or in a more common name certain in the western world, what you would do. But we're going to look at three hosts.

First of all, before we get into the three, how have you chosen these three?

John Dyer: The first one, Squarespace, I have quite a lot of experience with. In fact, you and I know that a separate business uses a Squarespace website and has done over the years and it has served us very, very well. It's what I call a cost effective, but looks premium type offering.

The other player that dominates a similar space to Squarespace out there in the market is Wix, which has come on in leaps and bounds. So again, it's a template based system like Squarespace. It's actually a little bit cheaper to operate than Squarespace.

Definitely worth a look because they added so much to in recent years including templates that will work especially for authors.

And the final option, and everyone will probably have heard of WordPress.

It's certainly the one that's for those that are up for a little bit more of a challenge, if you are going to be doing it yourself. It is far more flexible than any of those other two options, but you need to know your onions when it comes to dealing with the innards of it.

And as you know, our selfpublishingformula.com site is based on WordPress. And we've had a few moments with WordPress.

James Blatch: We have. And it's not the most passive option. You do need to be a little bit involved with WordPress and keep on top of it.

So that's a good guide right from the beginning when people think of which one to choose, is if you want the minimum amount of you involved in the website, Squarespace and Wix are probably going to be the choice.

John Dyer: Correct.

James Blatch: You want to be a little bit more advanced and hands on and you're not afraid of that. I mean, not massively. You can still have people looking after it and do nearly all of the leg work, but we have had occasions with WordPress, with it comes complicated.

Your developer will be onto you for things that you've got to provide for them to make it all work. So you do kind of need to know it. At least how to answer their questions and if you're really under confident about that area, probably Wix and Squarespace are the ones.

John Dyer: Coming up we'll talk to Kraig Mathias who is a WordPress expert. He's got quite a few useful tips in terms of how to approach the whole WordPress issue, if you're that way inclined.

James Blatch: Let's start with Squarespace 'cause that's your one and then we're going to move onto Wix and then we'll finish on WordPress.

We'll try to make this useful. You can make some notes in advanced which is great 'cause I'm not a webmaster.

Let's start with what Squarespace is.

John Dyer: Squarespace is a template based system. It's been around in excess of 10 years. It's gone very mainstream in the last few years, so you might have seen ads with the likes of Jeff Bridges and Keanu Reeves installing its virtues.

We used it way back for our video production website and what drew me to it was that there was no code involved. So for someone like me who didn't want to get their hands dirty with code, but just wanted to have a great looking functional website to show the world, this was the perfect option.

There were other options around there, but I think that Squarespace has seen them off. And it's still going strong today.

If you have a look at their website and hopefully for people watching this on video you'll see some cover ways to some of the templates that I'm talking about. They're very, very beautifully crafted.

It's easy to add content. It doesn't take long to get up to speed and it's got a fantastic support network in terms of videos and articles online. So you can very quickly find your feet. A lot of the hard work has been done, of course, 'cause you've got a template. So you're not sitting there thinking, "How do I fit that image into that space?"

One point, I will make which I think we make in all of the chats on the websites today is that your website, regardless of whether it's on Squarespace, Wix, or WordPress, or any other, is only going to be as good as what you put into it.

That is your copy content, but also images. Please make sure that if you've got a portrait image in there, it's not one that was shot in 2005. It needs to look good.

And of course, your book covers. It goes without saying really, they have to be tip top.

With all of those ingredients, with something like Squarespace, you should be able to create a really solid starter author website. Or if you've already

got a website that you feel kind of tweaking or polishing, Squarespace would be a good option for you.

James Blatch: I've created a couple of Squarespace websites including for my local cricket club. And I'm not particularly technically adept when it comes to these things, but found it really easy.

They have, it's a kind of frames system, isn't it? Which I remember maybe eight or nine years ago ... Was it that long when we started our first Squarespace website? It was a leap ahead of everything else that was around there. It looked beautiful. It scrolled really nicely.

We haven't mentioned mobile and tablet yet, but that's a really important part of it. Should we talk about it in a second. Did all of that. Now, everyone else has caught up a bit, but Squarespace is still a very impressive presence in the market. So probably the market leader on that front.

John Dyer: The templates, I think, a head and shoulders above everyone else. Wix is not far behind for the template based systems. I think this is a good feature of Squarespace.

In terms of mobile responsiveness which is ... If you wonder what we're talking about, what we mean is when you look at the website on a smartphone or a tablet, it's still going to look good. You're not going to get the mini desktop version staring at you.

Squarespace will automatically transpose a site to a mobile friendly version, whatever device it's being looked at on. That's great.

On Wix, you've actually got a bit more control over your mobile versions. But for me, Squarespace is quite honestly good enough, I don't have to think about it. It just does it automatically. And most of the time, it's spot on. It's really user friendly.

James Blatch: And it's really nice when you're creating your website, you can just move the screen into a different format and it automatically will reshape and you'll see how it will rescale for the different devices. It's going to look like it's very important.

And something else I like about Squarespace, but I'm not sure whether Wix did this or they probably do, but I'm not familiar with Wix, is that ... So people need to understand if they don't understand this already, that your URL is hosted somewhere. Now that's normally different from the company you go to for your website.

Traditionally, for instance, even the early days of Squarespace, you go to somewhere like 1and1 or GoDaddy. You get a URL or you buy jamesblatch.com, for instance.

You would own that, then you'd go to somewhere to build the website and you'd link them together with a little bit of following instructions on how to do that.

But one thing that Squarespace does is it offers that hosting built in as part of the subscription. So if you haven't got your .com at the moment, you can actually go onto Squarespace, build your website and then simply say, "I want to use this .com." As long as it's available, Squarespace will grab it.

That will be wrapped up as part of your subscription all in one place which is nice, neat solution. So you don't end up having to, for instance, answer questions to a webmaster saying, "Give me your 1and1 login details." And all that stuff.

John Dyer: It's a blessed relief in terms of that approach. So yes, it's a one stop shop, really.

James Blatch: Yeah. It can be a one stop shop. You can still host it separately.

John Dyer: Yes, you can.

James Blatch: We probably do that.

I want to ask you about cost before we go on then. So people have an idea and then more interested in Squarespace which presumably are going to be the lower cost options compare to WordPress.

John Dyer: For Squarespace, you're looking at around for the basic option which should be absolutely fine for 95% of authors out there, and that's about \$12 a month, the current rate. So peanuts, really.

I think Wix comes in at slightly cheaper. I think Stu talks about that in our chat later. So these are not high cost options.

As with Wix, there's a free trial and offer. Squarespace as well. You can actually get in there, get your hands a little bit dirty, throw in some images and content, and see what it looks like and see if it floats your boat.

But the cost element is something that you shouldn't be too worried about going forward either. And it's very manageable.

James Blatch: You've written a list of pros for Squarespace here to kind of sum up why Squarespace is a good option particularly for, sort of the entry level author website. So you wanna go through those?

John Dyer: I remember them.

James Blatch: I've got them written down.

John Dyer: They're in front of you. Go ahead.

James Blatch: **Templates.**

John Dyer: Templates take all the hard work out of designing because unless you are a gifted designer, you're always going to spend a lot of time and you're going to struggle ultimately to come up with something that everyone's going to find it feeling ... So big tick for templates.

James Blatch: Flexibility.

John Dyer: You can pick one of the templates and you can work with that template religiously and strictly and just drop content in, but you can also tweak it and make it your own.

What Squarespace uses is these things called blocks, that you can move around the page. There's all kind of blocks. From a video block, for example ... So you can drop video content in there. To other blocks that provide integrations with other services such as MailChimp, which is a useful interaction.

You are not stuck with the same design or a very limited design. You can make it really work for you.

James Blatch: How easy is it to change the template once it's up? Say after a year, you want to refresh your website.

John Dyer: You can change the template. Now, there are certain limitations with that because what Squarespace will let you do is preview a template change, you can have a look at that change and decide whether you want to go through all of the kerfuffle of changing it completely.

Now sometimes the switch can be very straight forward and easy, it depends on the template itself. Some are structured in a way that would make a template switch quite difficult and would probably give you a fair bit of donkey work to do to change it over. Others are much more simpler.

James Blatch: If they are closer aligned.

Animations.

John Dyer: This is an interesting one because animations on Squarespace at the moment are fairly limited. Now, animations are really there to just add a little bit of sparkle or fairy dust to your website.

It's an area where Wix is actually made greater improvements than Squarespace. I suspect we'll see it on Squarespace in the months and years to come. So they're missing on Squarespace at the moment, available on Wix.

The one note of caution is, and this is coming from Stuart as you'll hear it is don't go over board with the animations because they can become very distracting and annoying, but they do add a nice professional touch if used correctly.

James Blatch: App market.

John Dyer: When I say app market, I'm talking about all the various integrations that you can use. This applies to Squarespace and Wix. So these systems don't just sit there in isolation. Wix, for example ... And this actually this applies to Squarespace as well.

You've always got the option to drop in a bit of code. Now, I know when I say code, a lot of people start getting panicky and worried and I would ordinarily. But a system like MailerLite, for example, will allow you to just take a bit of code from your account with them and drop it into Squarespace or Wix to make sure that you can get sign ups all linked directly to your account.

It is really easy to do. I've said code, but please don't be worried by that. It is dead straight forward to do. So, both of these sites are great examples of sites that are designed to work in the real world with different situations.

James Blatch: You've mentioned integration.

The final pro of Squarespace is automatic back ups. Although, I'm assuming there's back ups on both WordPress and Wix as well, right?

John Dyer: Correct. It's something that you don't need to have sleepless nights about. Your site is automatically backed up.

Let's be honest. You and I both know we've had situations whereby there's been some kind of issue at Squarespace, for example. But they're normally resolved very quickly and I've noticed of late there are far less issues.

James Blatch: Yeah. They have probably this time last year, there were a couple of times when Squarespace was going down. Parts of their server were going down for a few hours and it happened, everything happened once to us at a fairly critical time in our company.

You followed them on Twitter and they're saying, "Yeah, we've got a problem." But it does get resolved in a matter of hours. But I haven't seen an outage on Squarespace for some time now.

John Dyer: I think they've shoveled up their act.

James Blatch: Shoveled up more coal in their boiler there.

John Dyer: Yeah. Yeah.

James Blatch: Okay. Good. All right.

Well, that's the summary of Squarespace. And it gives people an idea. Obviously, you can go to squarespace.com and have a proper fiddle about and have a look at that.

And as John says, there's a free trial which enables you to effectively create the website and see what it's going to look like before you're committed to the monthly subscription, which as John has mentioned is very reasonable, I think, for Squarespace. So, these are the minimal things you should be looking at by the way.

There are other website builders out there. And I think Microsoft still ship that awful one that they did for years and they are simply not good enough anymore.

The reason we're covering this and what runs through this and Mark and John and I will all say this is you should be aspiring to a very pro looking website. That's indistinguishable from another commercial entity that's turning over a lot of money. And you can do that with these services for Squarespace.

And the next one is Wix, John, which is another. It's come along. It advertises heavily on YouTube with people introducing themselves at the beginning. I've never heard of them, but I'm sure other people have who are someone in the world of YouTube.

Wix is pretty much like Squarespace. Right? But perhaps is a little bit more funky in places.

John Dyer: Yeah. It's slightly cheaper to get started. A little bit more funky in places as you say. Definitely worth a look and again just give it a go. It's a free trial.

You can get a website up and running, see what it looks like. Show it to friends and family, whatever, get some feedback before you make your

decision. And obviously, the chapter that's going to follow is with Stuart, who has created our Wix module on the 101 course.

And it might be timely to remind people, I've done the Squarespace equivalent on the 101 course. And of course, Kraig you'll follow further down the line with his blurb on WordPress. Has done a similar module as well.

James Blatch: These are detailed instructional guides to how to actually build your website that we haven't got time to go into. And also people wouldn't buy 101 courses. I'm joking. We give as much out as we possibly can on the podcast, but we can't 'cause detailed instruction on how to build your website. But that's all included in 101.

Let's hear from Stuart, who is our resident Wix expert. And then we'll have a chat off the back of that.

John Dyer: Hello, Stu. How's Stu? Big event has happened in your life. What is that?

Stuart: Yeah, I've had a baby. Well, I haven't obviously, but my other half has had a baby last week or two weeks ago, so she was two weeks old yesterday. So yes, it's been ... Well, if you stop talking too long, I might fall asleep.

John Dyer: That's what I'm concerned about. It's either that or there will be something to do with little one, but congratulations.

Stuart: Thank you very much.

John Dyer: On behalf of all of us. Anyway, let's cut to the chase because of course time is of the essence.

You're here to talk about Wix. This fantastic website platform which has grown and grown and grown in the last, sort of, five years or so. And it's now become a serious player.

If you're looking to host your author website in a functional stylish, but in a cost effective way as well. Anyway, just tell us a bit more about Wix from your perspective, Stu, because you've gone and done the module for it for 101, so you should know what you're talking about.

What is Wix?

Stuart: Wix is an online template-based website builder. The online bit means that you can access it from any computer, any time, anywhere, which is really handy. It's not something you download to your computer.

And it comes with lots and lots of functionality, but the basic structure is that you can choose a template that you like, something that kind of suits you. And then you can adapt that and make it completely bespoke for your business or your personality or whatever. So it's really easy to use. It's really intuitive and with a little bit of understanding of how things work, you can pretty much make your website in a very short space of time.

John Dyer: It sounds like it's definitely in the running for authors who are considering, especially authors who are considering their first author website. Just a few questions.

Why would it be good for an author, for example, especially one starting out?

Stuart: There's lots of competitors out there. Lots of people to talk about. And I know we're doing a bit about WordPress on here, but 25% of all websites are built on WordPress. Which means 75% aren't. There's a lot of people using these kinds of tools to build their first or later websites.

And trust me, Wix is not a start up kit version. It is a really sophisticated advanced builder which will give you a website that's mobile responsive. It allows you to completely change whatever you're looking at. You can change fonts, colors, backgrounds, the way it's laid out, everything. Right down to the wire, really.

So in terms of an author that may be starting out or coming to it later, maybe they've had another kind of service and they don't like it or they're not happy with it, Wix is definitely one to look at. Just simply because it's so easy to use.

There's so much help out there for it as well. You can Google anything about Wix and there will be a help page on it or someone has done it before you.

If you've got your assets ready to go and it's always a good starting point to make sure you've got an idea of what you want your website to look like in the first place, with high quality images. Then you can really just get in there, stick them in, change the text, and get on with it.

Wix actually offers two kind of things, really. One is the ADI, which we talk about in the 101 course. Which is really, really clever. I mean, you just literally put in that you want an author website. You put in some of your details, hit go, and it basically creates the website for you with backgrounds and colors and everything else. And that's literally a 10 minute job. And you'll have a really nice looking website.

If you don't want to use the ADI or you want to be a little bit more sophisticated, you can use the Wix editor which is a little bit more in detail. You can change a lot more. It's got a lot more functionality, but as a starting point, just to get a feel for the thing, you can go in and just create a website and see what it looks like. And that's one of the great things about Wix is, well, you can sign up for free, and you don't have to pay to play.

You can just basically set up an account and off you go and just play around with how you think it looks, what you want, you don't have to publish that, and then you can go on to the editor or you can change what you're doing on the ADI. There's a lot of flexibility within that for free.

John Dyer: Brilliant. I mean, this automatically sounds like a fantastic proposition and here's an obvious question for you. I'm assuming with all this technology that the website that you create is mobile responsive.

It's going to look good on an iPad or a smartphone.

Stuart: Yes. It even has a little icon at the top which says, "Preview on" and you can look at your website on a mobile device, on a tablet, on a phone.

And they're distinct as well. In other words, you can actually change what's on the mobile as against what's on the desktop, so there actually can be two different types of website.

It's one of those things people kind of look at it and think, "Oh, this is really complicated." But just a few minutes spent trying to play with it, you can't break it. And I take you through in the course right from the start of even signing up with your email address and how you get from there to a website that you can then publish if you want to.

The other thing is once you've done that and you've had a play, it's really cost effective. I mean, the middle tier is around about 8 Pounds, so about \$10 a month. And that gives you plenty, enough of what you would need for an author website. Everything you would need. And that includes your hosting, so you don't have to have it hosted elsewhere. So you're actually paying Wix to have your website hosted.

John Dyer: So, in terms of domain names, they'll look after that as well.

Can you purchase a domain name for your author website through Wix?

Stuart: You can. It's not always the best idea to do that. It's better to hold your website name elsewhere. Just because, if you wanted to separate them at any point, it becomes a little bit more complicated. But you certainly can do that.

So if you've already bought a domain name or you want to buy one, it's no problem attaching that to your Wix website. And that's really simple. There's a really easy to use kind of guide as to how to do that.

John Dyer: If we talk about mailing lists next, is it possible to integrate a tool such as MailChimp with Wix? Generally what are the integrations like?

Is it easy, straight forward, and who do they cater for?

Stuart: So, in a previous incarnation, Wix was actually integrated with MailChimp completely. They were like partners, but they have separated.

But that doesn't matter because what Wix have done is they've actually set up their own kind of MailChimp within Wix, so you can sign up to their internal mail server or email server.

Again, I wouldn't necessarily recommend that in terms of then putting your MailChimp or your MailerLite or whatever it is into your Wix website. It's really simple.

Essentially, when you sign up for your MailChimp or MailerLite, every time you create a form, it will give you a piece of code. And then you can embed that code into the website wherever you want it. And that will be a form that people can sign in and as long as you've made it look like the same colors and the same background and everything else as the website, it's seamless.

You wouldn't even know it was integrated. And actually, that sounds like something alternative, but that's actually what most people do. Most people will embed a form from their mail server into their website, whether it's WordPress or Wix. So yeah, that's really simple to do and again, there's help listings on there to tell you how to do that.

John Dyer: Is that something you go through in your module?

Stuart: Yes, it is. Obviously, we can't go into too much detail about how to get the code itself from the mail server 'cause they're all different, but again that's really simple to do. And even if you know a website developer, they'll be able to help you with that.

It's a 10 minute job when you know what you're doing. It's very, very simple.

John Dyer: That's fantastic. So to sort of sum up, really. The pros and cons of Wix.

What would you say are the big pros of going with a template based system online such as Wix?

Stuart: Just the ease of use. And I would honestly challenge most people to tell the difference between a website built on something like Wix from any other kind of builder, whether it be WordPress, or something like Strikingly or whatever, because they are so sophisticated, they're so slick.

You can have all the animated backgrounds, all the animated moving stuff. You can have beautiful layouts. All the different templates. It really is impossible near enough to tell the difference between what's built on Wix and what's built elsewhere. So, from that point of view, it's a really good intro to getting building a website.

Something like Strikingly is a similar thing. Again, that's running it around \$60 a month including hosting. That's not got quite the sort of sophistication of Wix, but again, just a really good entry level starting point to build a website.

I actually build most of my websites on Wix or Strikingly. And Weebly is another, if you wanted to look at that in comparison. It's got loads of integrations. Loads of apps. Beautiful looking websites. Fully responsive. Really reasonable cost. And from somebody just wanting to have a play and try something out, I think Wix is a fantastic starting point.

John Dyer: That's fantastic. One point that we should make, which we've always made all along is that, of course, a website whether you're using Wix or another service is only as good as the sum of its parts.

So people have to make sure that their book covers are good. They have to make sure that their portrait shots of themselves are good and that there's nothing amateur in there because, of course, that will turn people off.

This is your shop front basically for you. The brand that is you and the books that you sell. So that's an important point to make.

Are there any cons to Wix?

Stuart: Not that I can think of, honestly. I mean, as I've said, it's cost effective and they look great. I mean, there is some level of knowledge needed.

With everything like this, you do need to have a little bit of understanding of how these things work. So, perhaps that's a con. Some people can overload their website.

They get on there and they see all these fantastic apps and animations and things flying and pictures spin around and all this. And people can over do

that a little bit, sometimes. And that can make your website pretty, what I call, sort of heavy. Which means it loads a bit slower.

So don't be tempted to sort of throw everything at it just because it's there. I honestly can't really think of a con that would put off from using it if you're looking for a website builder.

John Dyer: And I understand that you can actually trial it before you buy it?

Stuart: Yeah. As I say, it's free to get in there and set up an account and have a play. You get full access to everything. And then you can decide what level of subscription you want.

I think it ranges from free, right the way up to about 16 Pounds, so about \$20 a month. But the middle one, which is about \$6 or \$8, \$10, something like that is probably completely sufficient for what an author would need.

John Dyer: Okay. That's fantastic. It seems to me then Wix is a great choice for those who want to give it a go, who have a very basic technical proficiency. Which kind of sums up me, really.

And you should be able to get a very good author website at the end of it. I know that some of our students, some of our very successful students use Wix. People like Maria Luis, Jenny Crouch, Susan Gable, Matt War, they all stand by Wix. So I think it's definitely a great option for people to consider moving forward.

And whether you've already got a website and you want to upgrade it to something a little bit more contemporary and eye catching, I think Wix still fits that bill.

Have you got any final tips for people considering Wix moving forward, Stu?

Stuart: Wix certainly shouldn't be seen as a second choice option. It's a really good contender for fantastic websites.

My tips would be, get in there, play with it, you can't break it, have a play with all the bits and pieces, move things around, see what they do, and really get under the skin of it.

If you do sign up for the 101 course, I do try and take you through as much as we can in the time we've got, so you can follow that and have a play along.

But as you said, really, just make sure you've got good content to go in there. And have a think about how you want it to look, what kind of colors, all that sort of thing. And you can change all of that as you go along.

And then if you get five weeks into it and you decide you want to change something, again, you can just go in and do it. It's really, really simple. So tips would be, don't be afraid, have a play, and make sure your content is great.

John Dyer: Perfect. Stu, thank you ever so much. I think we've done very well considering the time constraints. I'm sure you've got to go and sort out some laundry or warm some bottles or whatever it is, I just can't remember that far back.

James Blatch: Okay. So that's Wix. And as we mentioned before, Stuart has done an instructional tutorial as you have for Squarespace as part of the 101 course. So, there's something to think about if you want to be able to follow along and build your website.

But actually, when I watched the course, I edited the video that Stuart created for that course, I was converted a little bit to Wix. I really like some of the platform. It is culturally a little bit different from Squarespace. It works

in a different way, but I really like the options and ultimately, again, like Squarespace the accent is on a visually impressive website.

John Dyer: Agreed. And I think hopefully, YouTubers, and I know not everyone is watching this or listening to it on YouTube. You will have seen a little extract of an author website example that sits on Wix and it's pretty damn impressive.

Like you, I was taken aback because Squarespace is like my first love in terms of website design or simple website design. But Wix is definitely worth checking out and giving a go because it could be the one for you.

James Blatch: And you can, of course, at Wix.com. You can have a look at the templates they've got and see those ones and they've got examples. In fact, loads and loads. I'm gonna say dozens and dozens, but they've got hundreds probably of these.

That's Wix and that's Squarespace. And they're sort of side by side, a little bit, so it's which one you happen to like the look of. And we've worked extensively with Squarespace and quite like that Stuart is a rare advocate of wix.com and honestly there's not a lot between them. So just choose your flavor.

The step up from that, the more powerful website that will enable you to do a lot more. For instance, if you wanted to develop the commerce side and occasionally I talk to James Loscombe, of the authors we've had on the podcast in the past who lives here in the UK. And he's very big on eCommerce side of things.

An author selling your own books on your website and I think he's told me recently it's set to overtake Amazon for him. Once you put an effort into it. Now, if you want to do that, you probably want a website with a better set of commerce options and that's likely to be something like WordPress. So, WordPress is the next one up.

And it's becoming pretty industry standard in our space, isn't it now, John?

John Dyer: Yeah. WordPress is huge. You'll hear some stats with the chat I have with Kraig and it is a go to option for an awful lot of businesses, whether its authors or much, much bigger businesses.

It's a tougher call to jump on board with this option than it is with Squarespace and Wix. So if you are shy of a challenge, I would say perhaps skip the next interview, but stick with Squarespace and Wix.

But if you are up for a bit of a challenge and you're looking for something more robust, multifunctional, I think we've advertised our sites with Kraig. For the authorpreneur out there, then definitely have a listen to what Kraig has got to say. It could be for you.

Kraig, just give us a break down. In terms of WordPress, what it is? How does it operate? I've heard of things like wordpress.org and wordpress.com, what does it all mean?

Kraig: I'm a developer and a designer, so I'm not necessarily an expert of the history. So I had to pull this stuff up and get ready for this a little bit John.

John Dyer: I'm excited.

Kraig: Awesome. WordPress is what they call a free and open source system, so it's something as opposed to some companies develop a proprietary software that's closed and you have to pay for it and it's copyrighted, so you can really dig into the code. You can't use it yourself.

WordPress was built to be free where you can use it without paying anything and it's open source, so you can actually dig into the code itself.

You can modify it. And it's a pretty cool system for certain people and we'll get into that.

But I think it was built for developers, really. People that wanna get in and dig into the code and expand it and things like that. It looks like it was created in 2003, it was launched. So what is that? 15 years ago?

John Dyer: Yeah.

Kraig: And so, since then it's obviously grown a ton, so today, I think as of 2018 it powers 30% of the top 10 million websites. So it's very, very popular out there. One of the biggest, most well used content management systems on the internet.

John Dyer: Okay. That's a great introduction. Thanks. I hear you mention words like digging into the code and developers. This will strike terror into some authors out there who perhaps don't have any experience of using code, let alone designing and building a website.

Do you think it's a good solution for first time authors?

Kraig: It depends. The reason I started using WordPress ... And a lot of people will say, "Oh, it's easy to use." It sort of is. It is easy to set up a WordPress site. Because of the numbers of people using this, you can go onto Google, you can pull up millions of articles about how to set up a WordPress site, so that would be step one. You can go do it. You can get it set up.

What's gonna come into play is a learning curve. You have to put quite a bit of time into figuring out how it works and how to set it up properly, how to make it look good, so is it a good option? It's a good option for beginner authors if you want to put the time into.

If you actually want to learn how to do this stuff and if you're sort of a DIYer ... All right? So if you wanna be writing books and you just want to get this website taken care of, I'm not sure it's a good option for you. It's gonna take quite a bit of time, so it's right for the DIYers, I would say who have a lot of time and patience to put in this.

John Dyer: Clearly, one of the great things about WordPress is its power and its flexibility. And that's where a developer can get in there and really create something that's going to be like nothing else out there. And that's why it has an advantage over the likes of Squarespace and Wix and those other template based site.

I'm assuming that WordPress takes all the boxes in terms of things like being mobile responsive, that kind of thing, correct?

Kraig: Yeah. I think as far as being up on the times and being modern using all the latest and greatest technology and software, I think WordPress is definitely there because it's got ... It's really sort of developed by a couple of guys a long time ago, but it sort of built on and improved and updated by a variety of people in the community.

There's a WordPress community out there and they're digging into it, updating it, checking for bugs, so it's really updated as far as all the SEO stuff. Very SEO friendly. Mobile friendly. It's up on all the latest and greatest. Believe me.

It's also good for another set of people which might not be the audience here, but it's people that want something very specific, very custom, they know exactly what they want.

I've done sites for romance authors. They want it really romancey, you know what I mean? They don't just want it looking like any other website out there, they want a certain feel to it.

And so, the customization of WordPress is you can customize it to meet any needs out there. It's just a matter of getting it done. And most of the time I would suggest it's good for people who want to hire someone to get that done because unless you're a professional web designer/ developer yourself, to take advantage of how flexible WordPress is and how great it can be, how much you can do with it, you probably need to hire it out.

So you're going to have to have a decent budget for that. It's good for that author that has a good budget for those things and also that if you don't have a budget, you better be willing to put a lot of time in learning into this thing.

John Dyer: Okay. That's fantastic.

In terms of integrations as well, so being able to integrate your WordPress site with MailerLite or MailChimp, is that an option? Does that work well?

Kraig: Yeah. And again, it's because of the popularity of WordPress, I think you're going to find more integrations and more up to date things that allow you to talk to different pieces of software. You're going to find more of that, I think, with WordPress than any other solution out there just because of the sheer population of people using this.

John Dyer: I should put my hand up here. I do use a WordPress site because the Self Publishing Formula website is based on WordPress. So I do go in there.

I've got to admit, when I first started using it and if you remember Kraig, you were helping us out with the first incarnation of the SPF website of WordPress, I was very nervous. I think it kind of scared me a lot, but very quickly becomes second nature. And I know my way around it very well.

Kraig: Good. But again, you hire out sort of those big things like setting it up initially and designing it and things.

John Dyer: Yeah.

Kraig: Which I think you would fit into that second bucket of people that want to use the expandability and the customization of WordPress, but you're not going to sit there and learn this for an entire year. And it might not even be what you wanted. That's not your skill set.

John Dyer: I think that's a point well made. And as perhaps the viewers on YouTube will have seen some of Kraig's websites played out whilst we've been talking. So you'll get an idea of what he's talking about in terms of the extreme and very super functional custom website designs that he creates for clients, SPF students.

I think, what we've discovered with this discussion is that actually if you're looking at the simplest starting options, it's probably not going to be WordPress. It might be something you'd have a look at, perhaps a little bit further down the line and certainly if you've got the budget to actually invest in a crack website maker such as Kraig here.

Is it possible to trial a WordPress site before you actually commit?

Kraig: Yes. Definitely. Because it's free, really the only cost to getting started with WordPress is you need to host it yourself. So you can go and grab a hosting account.

You probably recommend several of them. And a lot of those accounts, those hosting accounts offer a 30 day money back guarantee, so just make sure you find one that has a money back guarantee. And what you can do is just get that trial of the hosting, go and install WordPress. A lot of those hosts have a way to install WordPress easily.

Then you can play with it. You don't even have to set it up on your domain. A lot of them will create a temporary domain for you. And you can play around and just see how it works. Try setting up the site.

You might find very quickly in the first day that it's not for you. I would at the same time, use those other solutions that you're talking about here, Squarespace and Wix. I believe, they probably have free trials, too, right?

John Dyer: Yeah, that's right, they do.

Kraig: If I was an author starting out, I would probably create a free trial on all three and try to create a site and see how ... If you're the type that's going to create it yourself, I would try to dig in and create these things yourself. If you're the type that's gonna hire it out. I think WordPress would be a very attractive option.

John Dyer: We should mention that for students of the Self Publishing Formula 101 course, Kraig actually has a session on building a WordPress site and he will talk you through how to get started with that. So, that might be a good starting point for those students who are intrigued by what Kraig has got to say.

The one thing that I will say about WordPress sites is that there are a lot of them. A lot of them are stunning. Kraig's websites are beautiful to look at as well as being very functional. So they must work.

They've been around for a long time now and they are robust and should deliver plenty of bang for your buck. And at the end of the day, this is all about creating a shop window for your brand. Your brand is gonna be in books and writing, so you want to make sure it stands out and gets noticed. And actually gets you more book sales, right? That's what it's all about.

As with all of these site, there's nothing to stop you getting a little bit of help if you feel it's needed. As luck would have it, we've compiled all of this

useful information into a single PDF, which you'll be able to access when we launch this podcast. So, if you head over to selfpublishingformula.com/authorwebsite.

James Blatch: It's forward slash author website.

John Dyer: Oh, god. Yeah. Thank you.

James Blatch: No, it's all right. Let's keep that mistake on this. So people understand.

John Dyer: At least I'm not treading on cables.

James Blatch: It's not all well rehearsed. You haven't poured anything over yet. Although, I can't see for certain about that.

John Dyer: I removed all liquids.

James Blatch: [Selfpublishingformula.com/authorwebsite](https://selfpublishingformula.com/authorwebsite)

John Dyer: That's the one.

James Blatch: That was the other one. So we'll put all the links in there, too. Everything we've discussed today.

And probably include links to Kraig Mathias because he offers a bespoke service for you that is slightly higher end, but if that's what you're looking for I'd say this unhesitantly, but if used extensively, we would recommend Kraig Mathias. And we wouldn't include his name if we didn't.

John Dyer: Definitely recommend Kraig. He's a man who knows his onions when it comes to WordPress sites.

James Blatch: Yup. Great. I think that's it. So we've done Squarespace, Wix, and WordPress. There are other providers out there, but you can get overwhelmed with choice and we've chosen three that you can't really go wrong with, we don't think.

With that accent on the aesthetically pleasing professional looking website that you need to have as an author.

John, I'm gonna say thank you very much indeed for joining us. Thanks for not putting anything over or stepping on the dog during the podcast.

You have stepped on the dog during a phone call of mine before. I heard it yelping. But then she shouldn't sleep under your desk. So yeah, thanks very much indeed.

We'll remind people again, selfpublishingformula.com/authorwebsite and you can get the links to everything that John and I have been discussing.

We throw out a few links there and we've put together some bits and pieces for you that might help you on a PDF, so if you want to go to selfpublishingformula.com/authorwebsite, you can download that PDF and give you those links to it.

They may include an affiliate link, but even if it is an affiliate link, which obviously we would then get a cut. If you use that link and sign that, but we only ever put links to products that we recommend and never simply because it's an affiliate link.

And now, there are those products that we don't mention and we haven't turned down and we haven't passed muster with us, so this is not a cheap thing to say.

I hope that was useful. And we just reiterate what we said at the beginning, kind of a theory that goes through this. And it's a very Dawsonian theory is

that everything you do as an author needs to look popping and amazing and professional and if somebody Googles your name because they've seen your book or someone's mentioned it, what they land on needs to be absolutely indistinguishable from a mainstream author whose published by Random House or Hachett or anyone else.

And that's the absolute thing that should be on your mind. And that's why we've chosen these three platforms, 'cause they can all deliver that to you.

Squarespace and Wix, they can deliver it to you frankly for peanuts and fairly easily as well. So it's the Dawsonian theory, looking distinguishable from the big boys.

Mark Dawson: More better. If you look at most, well not most, but you look at plenty. It doesn't take long on the internet to find well known authors who have absolutely awful websites.

One of the biggest selling authors in the world, I won't mention for fear of getting sued ... As you know, I wouldn't get sued. But anyway, he has an absolutely terrible, terrible website. I'm surprised it hasn't been changed.

So it is important to get it looking as nice as possible and you can do better than a lot of the big boys that have actually the budget they would spend on their websites as well. Definitely an option to do well there.

James Blatch: Great. Okay. A reminder, if you want to have a look in more detail at the 101 course, you can go to selfpublishingformula.com/101.

And that is it for Mark and I for this week. We will be back next week.

We'll have a date for that drinks meet up in the United States in Florida, if you can make it. It shall be towards the end of September. Until then or until next week, we will speak to you again then. Have a great week. Bye-bye.

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