

EPISODE 143: BOOKSTAGRAMERS – HOW TO REACH READERS THROUGH INSTAGRAM – WITH BEX GORSUCH

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 James Blatch and Mark Dawson from the UK on a Friday. Still sunny we've still weirdly got the summer in the UK, climate change?

Mark Dawson: It's true. It's quite nice outside but I think it's going to be very cold for us at the end of the week so I'm led to believe.

James Blatch: I'm going to Vegas I don't care.

Mark Dawson: Oh there we go.

James Blatch: It's always sunny.

20 Books to 50k conferences coming up in Vegas and if you're going there I shall be there representing, representing SPF by myself. I'll bring the credit card, is the most important thing and buy some beers. I'll bring some pins and a few people have already emailed me to try and set up some time to sit down together. I will definitely make myself available.

And if I can, we were doing a session on live video, it might be an opportunity for me to talk to people a bit about SPF and what we have available, as well. I'm trying to organize that with Craig.

Looking forward to 20 Books. It's a thriving organization. We are also a thriving organization within the indie space and friendly with each other. But there's a real energy about the whole 20 books movement. I know you're quite part of it as well you're going to Bali next year.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I am. It's growing fast and they're adding ... Craig told me they've got over 25,000 people on that Facebook group now. It's going very well and Craig and Michael are good guys, you'll have fun, I'm sure.

James Blatch: And there was an excellent post in the Facebook group from John Logsdon last week, telling his story.

Now, we know John of old because when you first launched Facebook ads for Authors and the free course and then Facebook ads for authors. He was one of the first people who suddenly had it change things for him.

He had been bumbling along not really quite sure what to do. And he was so ninja with this, he wrote to us and told us how he was building his mailing list and being paid to do so with a sort of, would you like fries with that offer?

Mark Dawson: He was and that was something automatically. He was up selling bundles to people who joined his mailing list and was getting paid 60 cents every time he added a subscriber. It's not supposed to work like, it's suppose to pay. But he was getting paid. And that was really impressive.

James Blatch: That was superb. And he's now the author, the founder of Reader Links and they're doing really well in the index space. I'm looking forward to sitting down with John and have a catch up with him as well.

And now we've got some people to welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast is our new batch of Patreon supporters. People have gone to patreon.com forward slash SPF podcast. And they have very kindly decided to help us out with the podcast and keep us going and be our supporters. And for that they get an honorable mention.

I'm going to say a big welcome to Michael Parker from Bognor Regis, in West Sussex, in the United Kingdom. Linda Sterling from the publishing circle in Vancouver, was also Vancouver, Washington there's a Vancouver in Washington, isn't? Which is at confusingly, quite close to Vancouver in Canada, I've noticed on the map.

TM Franklin who is in Sumner, also in Washington, in the United States, in the state, not the city. Cassandra L Shore, from Serena in Queensland, Australia, g'day. Cassandra from Jody Gibson, who is in Wang Garretta in Victoria in Australia.

Chris Kyle from Austin, Texas. Renny Melanson, who's from a place that looks like No Romo. British, Columbia, Canada not Nanaimo. She's from Nanaimo, I don't know how to pronounce that one.

I'm also going to welcome Mike McCandless, who thankfully doesn't have a location so I don't have to get lost in the pronunciation with that. So Michael, Linda, TM, Cassandra, Jody, Chris Rene and Mike, thank you very much indeed, for joining our thriving group of Patreon supporters.

You can go to patreon.com forward slash SPF podcast. You get a whole bunch of stuff, an opportunity to win a premium course, you get a pin, I believe if you're a gold level subscriber.

And we can also reveal, I don't think we're going to reveal who it is at this stage. But we can tell you that we have selected our fourth person to enter the Book Lab. That person was selected this week and I've emailed them they are squealing with delight at the prospect of being torn apart by our critics.

And the Critics have already booked their slots with me to give us their feedback. With that episode it's going to go in December, it will be the last Book Lab for this year. And that's been a really great part of this podcast series though, good idea.

One of those good ideas I had in a moment of genius.

Mark Dawson: What else do they get for being in our Patreon subscribers supporters. What have you forgotten?

James Blatch: They get an opportunity to win the course.

Mark Dawson: No, you said that. Carry on.

James Blatch: I said that, did I? They get pin.

Mark Dawson: You said that.

James Blatch: They get... what have I forgotten?

Mark Dawson: Well, they get to see the SPFU webinar. We had the one with Adam Croft and I did the first one. Adam did AMS and I did mindset and we've got a really good one coming up in November with Tammi Labrecque, who is really excellent on mailing lists. Not how to build them necessarily, but what you do with them when you have one. She's written a book called *Newsletter Ninja*, I think is which I read is very, very good.

And she's really affected the way I interact with my mailing list. I'm going to be doing bi-weekly posts and that's a change for me. I wouldn't normally email outside of releases.

I did the first one on Friday in conjunction with a Kindle countdown deal on the second book in the Milton series and sold, I don't know, 1200 copies over the weekend. So that's really fantastic.

And again, that's all down to Tammi's advice. So we haven't got a date for that yet. I think it's mid November, we will have signup details and all that kind of stuff in the Genius and Mastery groups and also for Patreon subscribers.

For the sake of supporting the podcast as a really valuable benefit. I'll be taking notes on that one for sure.

James Blatch: There's actually three webinars up there now. We've also added the cover design webinar to that selection.

SPF University. People who are in the courses and our Patreon subscribers can access to the SPF few webinars. It is a great thing. I can't see that scheduled, but it is coming up definitely.

We've got lots of good stuff coming. I've actually done quite a lot of interviews recently, particularly when we're in the states and I'll do some more in a couple of weeks time but we've got Kinga Jentetics on Publish Drive coming up.

We've got Carol Beijing, who talks about wandering the world as a nomadic life as a writer. Erica Ridley is on newsletters as well. So we caught up with Erica in Florida and she's very good about her newsletters, very interesting person as well.

And all that to come.

Book Lab currently scheduled for 21st of December. Get on to patreon.com, if you want to be a part of that and also get access to the SPF monthly learning. Those webinars at patreon.com forward slash SPF podcast.

What have you been doing this week? We've both been busy this week and we're getting some course material together.

Mark Dawson: I had Salisbury Literary Festival on Friday night, which was odd actually. I may even post into the Facebook group about last week.

I did a session with Andy Marlin, who is another author, who's has also taken both of our courses and was nominated for the Kindle storyteller award this year. So that was in London a couple weeks ago.

And then he and I were interviewed by the festival director on Friday night and we probably had 30 people turn up. Normally I wouldn't bother with

small numbers like that, but I wanted to support the festival and also I'm a patron of it as well. We did that and it was really good.

I had one guy had driven from South End that evening to see me and then drove back. So it's probably eight hours of driving just to see me. Someone else came from the Isle of Wight. On the way to Bath he stopped off with his wife and a few other kind of diehard readers who had read everything that I've written. And we did a book signing afterwards with a few books.

And then there was another session after that, two authors called Charles Cummings and Mick Heron, who are both traditionally published espionage writers. I haven't read Mick before I have read Charles and they're very easy and good writer. And they had over 200 people in the room and it was really weird.

And then afterwards it was really wierd, they had tables set up for them. I didn't get a table and they were signing a long queue of people buying these books and I sat at the side watching, waiting so that I could collect the books that they didn't sell and then take it home again. I felt odd, I actually felt jealous.

And it was ridiculous. I drove home and spoke to Lucy about it. And if you think under any, kind of way of keeping score, I have nothing to complain about. I'm probably selling more than both of them combined. In terms of pure numbers. I'm certainly making more because just in terms of 70% playing against 10%. I've got readers all around the world.

Looking at their ranks and everything, I can beat them in every single measure probably. But at the same time, I still felt envious and it's weird.

The way I have come down to it is kind of an ingrained inferiority complex authors often still have. Even when you think about it, there's no reason to feel that way. And for me is specifically. I could probably go to London now and say, I've got a new series of thinking about writing, would you like to traditionally publish it?

I think I could get a few offers for that from big publishers. I'm fairly confident I could do that. But I would choose not to do it because, I don't want to. I make more money. I have more fun. But at the same time, I'm thinking like, is it still second best?

It is ridiculous, and especially coming from me, I'm saying this is because, that kind of inferiority is something that we can all feel and doesn't really matter how many copies of our books that we sell. Something we are all susceptible to. Me as much as anybody else.

It was interesting, and I've been thinking about it since the weekend.

James Blatch: You think that's changing, will change, or do you think in 10 years time they'll still be moving in those circles and the rest of us?

Mark Dawson: I don't know. don't really want to move in those circles. But at the same time I'm thinking probably still the case that most people would, even though we know this is not true. I'm publishing myself. It is a choice. I don't need to do this myself, I could get a trad deal.

But I think there is still within the community and especially outside the community there is a suspicion that this is not quite as good as being traditionally published. I'm not going to ruin our family friendly rating by saying what I really think about that but, there is a bit of that still to go and as time goes by that will change. There you go. It's being honest.

James Blatch: If you look at my Twitter handle, you see that I've lost my regular watching. There's a cultural arts program called News Night Review, or maybe it was Front Row on BBC Two.

Did you see this discussion?

Mark Dawson: I saw it a little bit.

James Blatch: They had a discussion about bookshops. And it was dominated by the traditional people world except Dreda Say Mitchell was

there in the discussion. And thank goodness she was there because they just lived in a world of their own.

And when Dreda was talking about... it's almost irrelevant to bookshop to and the author, because they take such a huge cut of the book, there's almost nothing left afterwards. We can do without them, it would be lovely and a nice thing to have.

And then the person next to... I won't mention I think probably it was mentioned on Twitter, said I think it's all a bit tawdry for writers to think about money and that's not what I do. And that was the tone of the traditional market when they had somebody making more money than them sitting next to them.

And he probably thought he's a better writer than the indies and maybe he is but you know, anyway. I was annoyed watching it, but she was brilliant. And good to have representation. I think she even named checked a couple of indie people.

We're talking about Instagram. And you know, funny enough. I was thinking about this actually the other day, if a traditional author's talking to me, what's the big thing about indie?

One of the things they might say, we have to do all your own marketing, and I would say to them, you have to do your own marketing anyway. I don't expect your traditional publisher, you could be published by Harper Collins, but they're not going to have a team dedicated to you there the whole time.

So actually the stuff we talked about a lot of the time, like today's episode on Instagram, it's a really good thing for a traditional author to understand this and work the Instagram accounts, etc and so on.

A lot of this works for both indies and the traditionally published people so we're going to be talking Instagram.

We're coming out with more directions with Instagram. Actually, we have a brand new module which has been authored and is being edited by me, at the moment is going to be added to the Advertising for Authors course which is going to open up for business soon actually.

I think seventh of November that's going to open its doors for enrollment.

And added to that, towards the end of the month will be Instagram for Authors: the detailed, instructional course, step-by-step on how to get yourself set up and make that platform work for you.

There's lots you can do now, without all the detail you're going to get in that course and that's what we're talking about in today's episode with Bex Gorsuch.

I must remember we're recording this a week ahead of it going out. I did say to Bex that by the time goes out I am going to sort out my Instagram account and start using it properly. I've got a few days left to do that, so it matches on Friday.

Okay let's hear from Bex.

James Blatch: Bex, welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. Great to have you here and we're going to talk Instagram and quite a few other things and branding but, let's hear a little bit about you first.

Are you an author yourself, Bex?

Bex Gorsuch: I am not. I am a book blogger and Instagram influencer and I think we are affectionately termed as Bookstagrammers. It's like our little corner of Instagram.

James Blatch: Another one of those words we have to remember a Bookstagrammar.

You do work with authors and writers and it is quite a lot. Why is that?

Bex Gorsuch: Yes, I am an Instagram coach for authors and writers, mostly because as I've built my own following, my own brand on Instagram for books, I've noticed this huge gap in the community. Bookstagram, Instagram for books, is this huge powerful force. It's an incredible online community, but it's missing one thing, which is authors.

I see it all the time. I'll be wanting to tag an author when I'm helping support their book and I won't be able to find them or I'll have the occasional author reach out to me, but they don't quite know where to start in order to really launch their brand on Instagram.

I saw that hole in the community and I'm on a mission to get that filled and have others come over to Instagram where there's this incredible community just waiting for them.

James Blatch: That sounds optimistic and positive for authors. I mean, is one of those things, I think that authors are primarily writers, rather than, the tech are people going to push ahead.

And a lot of that's happening at the moment, obviously, with the e revolution in publishing. But I know from our audience, it's not necessarily an author's first inclination to, let's discover the new social platform. And let me be a big presence on it, in the way that it is in some other online industry.

So it doesn't surprise me that you found out the authors a little bit slow in adopting some of the new areas.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, definitely. And it's interesting how I actually started on Instagram about three years ago, that's was when I decided to really go after the book aspect of it. But it's interesting how it's grown so much.

Just over these past few years, a lot of the major publishers are now really invested in Instagram. From my own experience, I've had a lot more interaction with publicists and PR firms, that sort of thing.

Major publishers are all investing time in Instagram now and time in working with influencers like myself. And there are tons of us out there.

It's sort of like a secret door number three, almost, that I think a lot of authors aren't aware of really exists. Lots of authors haven't even heard of the term Bookstagram, which is so surprising to me, because of the effect that community is having for book publishing and promoting really,

James Blatch: Let's talk about that failure.

Let's start with why an author should be on the platform.

Bex Gorsuch: We can actually go into a few different facets of that, but I'll try to contain myself a little bit.

One of the biggest aspects is connecting with your readers. But not only that, but using that connection to attract new ones. And really building genuine connections that lead to fans of your work, that are excited to support the sale of your books, time and time again.

People that are going to be excited to know about you, that are going to be interested in your conversation, about your life as an author or writer.

Another big why would be, why do you try new things? Not just Instagram, but for instance, like anyone who happens to follow me knows that I don't really eat out. I'm an introvert. I like to stay home don't eat out.

But I tried a restaurant a few weeks ago. So why did I do that? It wasn't because of an ad I saw or commercial I saw it was because a friend recommended it to me. And we are always going to trust our friends' recommendations more than we'll ever trust a traditional advertisement.

Not that traditional advertisements don't have their place and that they don't work because they absolutely do, but if you're able to harness something like Instagram you're able to build a community of friends, if

you're doing it the right way. Where you've built genuine connections with people who are excited to hear from you.

For instance, as an influencer, I think of my online following as a community, because that's really what it is. Why you wouldn't work with influencers and maybe even be become an influencer yourself is because when you have a recommendation, for instance, when I posted about a book people know me, they like me and they trust me, which are all big factors in convincing someone to try something, so let me know if that makes sense.

James Blatch: Yeah, it does. It's partly about you and your relationship with your readers, but it's also about the community of authors who can support each other because you've got 10 authors in similar genres with big followings each.

This personal recommendation, which is something authors do all the time by the way, with emailing each other, emailing their lists on their friend's behalf and so on, can work equally well in social media platforms.

That hasn't worked particularly well in Twitter, but Twitter does not work very well in quite a lot of areas.

But Instagram seems to me like an area that people are finding some traction with.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, and I think it's because the community is already there.

For example, on Facebook and Twitter you have to almost pull teeth to find your community, and on Instagram, it already exists. It's already this huge, really supportive community.

I've worked in other niches of Instagram before, professionally, and I can honestly say that nothing has been as supportive or community oriented as the book community has been, and I think that's just because of the nature of readers ourselves. Everyone's excited to connect with everyone else.

It's like as an author, you just get to walk into that community. So, it's not like Facebook and Twitter where you're struggling to find your audience. If you use Instagram the right way, all you have to do is just open the door and I think there's a lot of power in that. So, just join the community.

James Blatch: In terms of its commercial impact, we are not just talking about feeling good because you're talking to people.

There is a commercial benefit that you can demonstrate, you can evidence.

Bex Gorsuch: Definitely. All of my advertisements are through Instagram after doing Facebook. Of course, I don't have a book to sell, but when I promote my free trainings and things like that, I have much more success through Instagram ads.

I've noticed also a lot of publishers, major publishers doing book ads now on Instagram. So, it would definitely be something I would encourage people to just experiment with.

James Blatch: You use the paid ads platform as well as organic reach on Instagram.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, but just to clarify, I never promote an Instagram post. I would actually really discourage that because Instagram is all about authenticity to a certain extent. So, promoted posts won't have the same success that you would on Facebook where it might be a little more expected.

On Instagram, it's a little more like frowned upon to have a promoted post, but if you wanted to do like a story ad or you had a clear call to action which might be, "Check out this new book." Then I think there's definitely a lot of potential to have a lot of click throughs on that.

James Blatch: It sounds very similar to Mark's advice on don't boost posts on Facebook, but do use the ads platform.

Bex Gorsuch: Exactly.

James Blatch: That's interesting.

The way you talk about Instagram's culture atmosphere. Environment might be the better word, is being quite a fast type of ... trying to avoid using the word hippie, but a slightly more kind of, "Hey man, don't push things on us."

It's a little bit more less commercially obvious than maybe Facebook is because I go onto Facebook expecting to see the gadgets I'm going to buy, and there's several on this desk. But Instagram is a more creative area where it's image-led and people are there because they want to be inspired rather than necessarily buy something.

You do have to be cautious of that environment, which is what you're saying, I think.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, and I think you also have to approach it in a more ... I don't know if modern is the right word, but in a different way.

As we have more content in front of us now than we ever have before and I think it almost gets a little crowded. So, I think the advantage of Instagram, as I was saying before, is this like, know and trust factor. The ability to break the barrier between the advertisement and the consumer is really, really positive, and that is a stronger connection than just seeing an advertisement a few times.

James Blatch: The like, know, and trust factor. Sounds like we can start talking about how to get about building up a presence on Instagram that is going to be effective.

You sent me some notes before the interview and you said in the notes, you started like everybody else did, bumbling around not really sure what you were doing, but you feel now you've really got a grip on Instagram.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, definitely. I remember how confusing it was at the start and how lost it seems. I understand that anytime you're trying anything new like this, there's definitely a lot of trepidation, a lot of fear, and that's completely normal.

But, my advice is to just push past that. Let fear be your friend and recognize that it can be something that can get you to an opportunity that might really change things for you.

James Blatch: Can we talk about some specific advice for people who may be like me and others have an Instagram account, but haven't really got it going?

Bex Gorsuch: I actually do a whole free training where I go in detail on things, but we can absolutely talk about quite a few things.

To use my own profile as an example, what I guess I would want to talk about first is this concept of consistency. I could probably talk about that for a really long time. Consistency is like a buzzword. I feel like you see it almost everywhere. Like whenever you're searching for social media tips, it's just like consistency, consistency, but no one actually talks about what that means.

So, that's something I like to go into. What does consistency mean in all its different facets?

For things like social media, it's about creating expectations for your target audience and then meeting them every time. For instance, when you look at my profile, it'll be clear immediately to you that I am a person who creates content for book lovers.

It's immediate and that's completely intentional, right? Because I have my target audience, which for me as a book blogger is people who love to read.

So, if someone scrolls across my profile and they're not interested in books, then they're going to know I'm not right for them and that's good. I don't want that person.

But if they are interested in books, they're going to be like, "Oh, great. Maybe this is something, maybe this is someone I want to get to know," and that's how it all starts.

You want to be consistent down the line, but first things first is to be consistent in your profile, your branding. What are you putting out there?

Because, when people look at your Instagram profile for the first time, it's like an elevator pitch, your whole thing, right?

You are trying to sell somebody on what you are in a matter of seconds.

James Blatch: At a glance.

Bex Gorsuch: At a glance. Exactly. So, that's when having a consistent theme comes into play. Are you familiar with themes?

James Blatch: Yes. I mean, I know the basics of it.

Bex Gorsuch: It's just in case if you're listening and you're not sure, an Instagram theme is like an overall aesthetic, it's your color palette, it's your subject matter that's a big one. It's the overall mood and aesthetic basically.

James Blatch: I've often wondered when you're setting up the account at the beginning, and I think it was the same. I have to think a long way back to setting up my Twitter account, where they asked you what areas of interests that you're interested in and so on, but I'm not entirely sure where that manifests itself.

Do people search Instagram simply on subject matter or do they, like most of us find somebody else has re-tweeted in the Twitter case or re-posted, and you've followed them that way.

Bex Gorsuch: What's interesting about Instagram is that it doesn't have a native repost feature like a Facebook share or a Twitter retweet. Instagram instead is searched mostly using hashtags.

It also has a fairly complex structure where, for instance, since my bio says book blogger, Instagram knows that I'm interested in books. So, when I go to my native search feature, it will recommend a bunch of different people for me, a bunch of different posts based on a bunch of different factors that I'm not privy to how their algorithm works of course. It's interesting how they've set it up for your growth naturally.

If you have your consistent profile and you've defined yourself really well, then Instagram is aware of that and it will help you find others and help others find you.

I think a lot of people also misuse hashtags, which is a big part of the search function on Instagram, and I think there's a lot of confusion about how to properly use hashtags.

James Blatch: Shall we talk about hashtags in a minute because that is an interesting area. I think you're right, it does get misused, but just sticking with consistency, I can hear in my mind authors listening to this thinking, I mean, I'm historical military fiction and I can fill any social media posts with admirals in pictures of 1960s jets. That works really well, and I'm already working on Pinterest with that.

But, people who write, for instance, billionaire romance books as a genre, I often quote because it does quite well, but it's also quite niche, what do they post? They post to remain consistent and get a valuable audience, a relevant audience, do they post about them as writers?

Do they post pictures of the Brad Pitt type imagery or whatever they think their readers might be interested in.

How do they find content and remain consistent?

Bex Gorsuch: I think it's more about inserting yourself in the book community and following those trends. So, instead of thinking about it like Pinterest, which is another fantastic resource, but on Pinterest you're posting tons of other images.

On Instagram, it should be your own content. For instance, like my account, I'm sure you took a quick glance at it before we started, which has what we call flat lays. It's about the books I'm reading, just anything book related in general, right?

So as an author, I would really recommend that you insert yourself in the book community by posting about what the book community is interested in, which is books.

That would be books that inspire you, books that you're reading, and then of course your work as well. So, I think it's a balance between being an author and being a reader, and putting yourself in front of both of those audiences.

James Blatch: That's an interesting way of putting this. You don't see yourself as a leader of a community, you see yourself as part of the community so that you're enjoying seeing the things that your readers see alongside them rather than you sitting there as an author saying, "Now this is about me writing today. I'm writing tomorrow." I can feel that community building in a more realistic way.

Some people are very good at this naturally and other people have to really think about it.

Bex Gorsuch: You want it to be a balance. It's not like you want to pretend you're not an author or anything. It's just that you want to have value for your audience on a social platform. It needs to be more than an advertisement.

Again, as we were talking before about thinking about it in more of a modern way, it's about you as an author in a more personal sense.

We underestimate a lot of times when you're a content creator, like as an author, I think you start to forget the boundary that exists between you and your audience. I'd love to give you an example of that if I could using Mary Kubica who is a mystery thriller author.

This was at the beginning of Instagram where I had picked up a Mary Kubica novel at a library book sale for like a dollar. I wasn't super invested in it. It was just something I picked up and happened to read.

But I took a picture of that book, which I think was *The Good Girl*. Mary Kubica commented on it, and as a reader and a fan of somebody's work, I got so excited.

James Blatch: That's going to make you a fan of somebody, isn't it?

Bex Gorsuch: Exactly. Because you forget, when you're a content creator, that that boundary exists because you're on the other side of it. You forget almost how exciting it can be to have even a few words from someone whose work you've admired.

I think social media is a way to really break that barrier and then you're turning your readers into fans and it absolutely worked. I've talked to other people that's happened to. Even now I bug that Mary Kubica's publicist every time she has a book coming out because I'm just like ... and all it took, that's all it took was a comment from her and I was so excited and I still get excited about her work.

James Blatch: That's a really good example. Should we get into the weeds a little bit and then talk about some of the technical side of things.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah.

James Blatch: You mentioned hashtags and let's talk about frequency of posting as well, things like that. So, let's start with frequency.

How often should people be posting to be a part of the Instagram community?

Bex Gorsuch: I post every single day. I can't remember the last day I went without posting, but that doesn't mean that that's what you have to do.

On the low side of things, I would say post three to five times a week. If you need to take a few days off, if you just don't have that much content, it's totally fine. Of course, you won't grow as quickly, but it's enough to get you buy, to be present in the community.

Then on the other end of that, some people post what I think is too much. I think posting three times a day, which some people do, is exhausting not only on you for having to create that much content, but it can get exhausting for your audience as well because it almost becomes like spam behavior, if that makes sense, because it's just like constant, you're popping up in their feed.

You want to be there, you want to show up in the community of course, but you don't want to disappear on one end, and you don't want to over post on the other. So, I would say the sweet spot is definitely five to seven days a week.

James Blatch: That sounds doable for most people.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, and I think once you get in the rhythm of it, it becomes a lot, a lot easier.

In my coaching, I talk about learning how to plan your posts and have everything set out ahead of time so that you can make a lot of content in a few hours and then you don't have to worry about it anymore. You just dedicate a little time in the beginning, and then you can post a few weeks without having that pressure of, "What am I going to post online?" and feeling like worrying about it.

James Blatch: Can you schedule posts within Instagram itself, or is it you have to use a plugin or a third party?

Bex Gorsuch: You have to use a third party. I use an app called The Preview app, which allows you to grid out your photos. There is a timer in there but no app is allowed to post for you on Instagram.

Any app that says like scheduling, a scheduled timer, it will give you a little alert but it cannot post for you. Instagram doesn't allow it at the time for now. Maybe it will one day.

You would just be setting it up and then posting it yourself whenever that time allows. But, The Preview app and there's a few others like it, will allow you to draft out a caption and have hashtag groups.

Everything is ready to go so that, as I said, if you spend a little time planning, it will literally take you 10 seconds to post on day of.

James Blatch: It sends another part of them trying to keep Instagram feeling different from the other social media platforms. We should say of course it's owned by Facebook, right?

Bex Gorsuch: Things are definitely changing.

James Blatch: Yeah, but there's obviously a glass wall in the company, and Instagram feels different from Facebook. It sounds to me like they're trying to keep it that way. It should be a sensible thing to do rather than homogenize them, should be no good.

And we should also say for people not on the platform or not particularly familiar with it, it is an image-led platform, right? Each post is an image.

Bex Gorsuch: Yes. One of my students, at the beginning, she didn't have an Instagram account at all and she took a chance on me and Instagram. She said the exact same thing. She said she didn't understand how a writer,

someone who deals primarily in words could be successful on a platform that's so visual, but I think of course photography is important.

I think that it's going to almost be like learning to type, that you should educate yourself on how to take a decent photograph because that's just the world we're living in. It's a visual world.

I think if you can invest a little bit of time and a little bit of effort into just learning even simple photography basics, it can go a long way. But, that's not to say that the written word on Instagram isn't equally important because it is. I think a lot of people underestimate that.

If you have great photos but you're not posting engaging captions and you're not using the written word to share a little bit about yourself to interact with your audience, to engage with the community, then you're really only doing half the battle.

Your captions are a big part of what can make you successful or unsuccessful on Instagram, and as authors and writers, you guys already have an advantage in that camp.

James Blatch: The photograph thing is interesting. You say you've got to be good at photography. I've always been interested in photography, but it's never been easier to be a good photographer than it is today.

I'm going to demonstrate this point by doing a nice Instagram post for this interview.

I put it onto the square photography mode, and I'm now going to go and use the filter. So, people who aren't familiar with Instagram, most people have played with it a bit I think, will learn very quickly that ... and if you're watching on YouTube, you'll see some of this.

There's the picture. Then you get to apply various filters to it, which gives it a, what we call a shallow depth of field, and cranks up the contrast and just

makes it look artistic for want of a better word. We could go with a nice black and white one. That's quite nice there, doesn't it?

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah.

James Blatch: A little while ago, not that long ago, this was quite complicated to do all this in Photoshop and you had to have a good composition eye. But people now, John Dyer for instance, our colleague here at SPF who I don't let near my big cameras because he breaks things, is a fantastic photographer and his Instagram account is really worth following on.

He's just been on holiday in Croatia as I speak. So, that's probably the one I'm going to go with on this. Doesn't that look like somebody spent some time on that photograph rather than 35 seconds whilst I've been having a conversation.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah. Absolutely doable. I've had a lot of people ask me if it's possible to have a successful Instagram with just an iPhone or just your smartphone, and yes.

James Blatch: Absolutely.

Bex Gorsuch: That's how most people do it, is just the iPhones.

James Blatch: I've got big cameras everywhere, but I would only ever use the iPhone or only ever need to use it for Instagram and my other posts. In fact, I sneakily use the Instagram app to create photographs for my Facebook feed as well because I the love of them.

Once you've created them on Instagram, they save back to your photos with the new filters on them so you can then use them elsewhere as well, which I find certainly useful.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, and there's tons of apps like Afterlight, Snapseed, Visco, tons of apps out there that have even more options than just Instagram natively.

That's what a lot of fashion bloggers and a little more aesthetic type bloggers end up using because there's just so much more options. It can be done. It absolutely can be done and it's really easy to learn quick through YouTube searches and you will be way better off in 10 minutes than you would have thought.

James Blatch: And it's fun right? And you don't have to put yourself in it. Some people don't want to be in photographs on social media and I think that's absolutely fine. Honestly, taking a picture of a bumblebee in your garden looks amazing on Instagram and people love that. People love to see it. Saying if you do get bumblebees. The poor bumblebee are dying out.

You mentioned hashtags and people misuse them. Now, it's a little bug bear of mine and I don't know what your view on this is, whether it's the opposite, but I'm not a great fan of long lists of hashtags and you see it on a lot of platforms. I've been shopping today, #boughtsome, #imwinning, #this, #that, and I'm bored of the hashtags at this point. I'm probably angry about some friends that do that now but that's for me irritating.

Is it the right or wrong thing to do?

Bex Gorsuch: I think on platforms like Facebook when people use hashtags I get really annoyed because it's not necessary and people don't use it that way.

But on Instagram it's a huge part of what you need to do in order to get your posts seen so I use almost the full 30. That's what you get. That's your limit on Instagram at the moment is 30 hashtags so I use 23 to 27 every single time and you'll see it on every single of my posts.

James Blatch: Really? See, I've just criticized you as being one of the people.

Bex Gorsuch: You're allowed.

James Blatch: I have to apologize though. It really shocks me you're saying that's the right thing to do.

Is that because of the search function and the visibility you get from the posts as a result of that?

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, let me explain.

What I think a lot of people are doing wrong is that they're using the wrong hashtags. They'll sort of make up a hashtag which really drives me crazy. You don't want to be just making up a random hashtag because no one's looking for it.

For instance, sometimes I'll see people make really long, random, complicated hashtags. Like if they had a dog they would be like #buttercupiscutetoday, #mydogbuttercupisawesome. No one is searching for that hashtag so it doesn't make any sense for you to be using it.

But what you want to do is think of hashtags as almost like file folders. If you have a file folder.

James Blatch: Indexing.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah. If you have a file folder jammed way back in the back of that cabinet and there's two documents in it, two posts, then you know that no one's checking that file folder. No one's looking at it so no one's going to see it if you add your own post or your own document to it.

On the other end, if you have a hashtag that is so full of files, like everyone's checking it, it's on there all the time, a lot of people are adding to it, then you might have gone too far in the other direction and no one's ever going to be able to find it because they're so many.

You want to find hashtags that have a more agreeable range of likes. Probably nothing lower than 10 or 20,000 posts under it and nothing more than a couple million. Especially when you're starting out.

James Blatch: How would you find these? You simply click on, tap on a hashtag and it comes up results.

It should tell you at that point how many postings are with that hashtag?

Bex Gorsuch: Yes. #bookstagram is a big one. I still use that one. That is one that has millions of posts. You'll see a great just cross section of the book community on Instagram with that. Once you type that in it's going to give you suggested hashtags right at the top.

Bookstagram, bibliophile, bookblogger, the list goes on and on. And then there's different aesthetic hashtags that people create that get a big following behind them like post it for the aesthetic.

On Wednesdays we wear pink. I think that's when a lot of pink ... Pink's very in on Instagram right now for some reason. That's sort of how you find them. It's not as convenient as there's just a list of hashtags waiting but if you start with one, start with bookstagram, start with #bookblogger, then you'll be able to find other ones that will relate to that subject and if you find a post that you really like, check the hashtags that they're using and use some of them yourself.

James Blatch: Wow, this is a revelation to me. There was I thinking this is people who don't understand how hashtags work and they're the ones who understand how hashtags work and I'm the one who doesn't. At least when it comes to Instagram.

Bex Gorsuch: It depends on what you're doing too. As I said, on Facebook I really don't think it's necessary at all and then to me as well it can be really irritating.

But on Instagram if you're using only two or three hashtags and they're not really great hashtags that don't really relate to what the subject of your post is, then you're just limiting yourself. Some people, some big accounts will only use a couple of hashtags but I think when you're really trying to grow and you're really starting out and you don't have that audience base, that's the way to get yourself seen.

Now I would suggest when you're writing a caption and you include your hashtags at the end is separate it from your caption. That's what I do every time so I have my line breaks and then like three periods on the line so that they know, content's over. This is just sort of like a file system.

James Blatch: Okay. You're not supposed to be reading them. That would make it a bit more tolerable for me. And just on the point you say about it doesn't work on Facebook where people do just invent hashtags to describe their day type thing:

There's a reason perhaps not to cross post between the two platforms?

Bex Gorsuch: I think it really depends on your audience but most people's audiences aren't following you on every single platform. That's a pretty small group that's doing that so I don't think that they would probably mind too much.

But I also don't think that you should just duplicate things everywhere because that does frustrate people. But if you're talking about specifically like if you posted something on Instagram and then you just clicked the Share to Facebook book option and then all your hashtags are going to come with it, then yeah, I would say go in and delete the hashtags for your Facebook post.

James Blatch: Okay. You can post the same content but do it as a Facebook orientated post or an Instagram orientated post. Good. All right. Hashtags and finding them.

For instance this post, which I should do after the broadcast if I'm clever I'll put a calendar note to do it at the time that the interview goes out so it's contemporary then rather than do it now, which I'm not sure when the interview is going out. This is obviously the slightly crazy world that we live in with podcasting but I'll try doing it contemporaneously.

Bookstagram sounds like a good hashtag for this.

What other hashtag should I be including in a post like this?

Bex Gorsuch: Writersofinstagram, writersofig, authorlife. You know what, let's look up some.

James Blatch: Okay. Let's do this live.

Bex Gorsuch: There's one called writewritewrite, womenhowrite, novelwriting, amwriting, writersofbookstagram, that's probably a good one, writerslife, writerscommunity, authorsofinstagram.

And that's all from just one search and then I clicked on someone's post, which was successful and I saw which ones they were using.

James Blatch: I should do a bit of digging on that.

If I'm doing this from my account and this is people listening to this, thinking about they're own account and what you want to achieve through it, what sort of relevancy do you want with your audience.

In my case it might be more to do with SPF and podcasting that I want to focus on rather than writing. But I know for this post we'll do something that's writing orientated.

Good, okay, well look, we've got a few minutes left. I just wanted to quickly talk about the paid ads platform then we'll talk about the course you've got. I know you've got an offer for people.

The paid ads platform, Mark is a big advocate of paid advertising for authors to really move their careers forward. It's a bit more advanced level but he's living proof of the fact that these platforms work and can drive sales and create careers.

Instagram is an area that's still new to us and we're yet to develop a really good set of teaching on it for Instagram but this is a platform you're actively using.

Yes, for supporting my course and that sort of nature. Again, I never promote a post. I think you'll have more success with Instagram as in stories because it's more native for people to swipe up. They're used to that feature there. And it doesn't feel quite as intrusive.

And of course, just like with Facebook you want it to look more native, like it's meant to be there and not like a megaphone, this is an advertisement.

What I did was, with my most successful ad, was I made it as if I was about to do an Instagram story. I didn't have any extra crazy features, it just looked like a normal story someone had posted but with quick call to action and information on what it was that was quick and concise.

But it looked like all the text features I made natively in Instagram so it could have just been anyone's Instagram story and I think that is probably what got me more click throughs on that.

I think on the feed, the grid advertisements, videos tend to do better but again I think when people are scrolling through Instagram on the grid and they have this idea in their mind of what Instagram is I think that people are still really hesitant to click through on an Instagram ad in the feed.

They think on stories where if you have over 10,000 followers like I do you can ad click through links in your Instagram stories natively so that's already the place where people are used to that feature. You're more likely to have people saying, "Oh, okay." They know what to do and they just swipe up.

James Blatch: Do you think it's possible for authors to be successful using the paid Instagram ads platform bearing in mind books are a low value item? They're hugely valuable but low value in terms of dollar that you charge for them.

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah, I completely understand. I think that is just going to take sheer experimentation.

I know Facebook ads themselves have gotten more expensive as time has gone by, of course, and we'll have to wait and see what happens with Instagram but I think it's absolutely worth testing out a few Instagram story ads and seeing how it goes. Make them quick, make them seem native, make it a little more fluid.

But I definitely think it'll be really interesting to see where that goes as far as books. Because as you said, advertising fees are expensive and you need to have a product that can handle your advertising fees. It would be interesting to see some results on that for sure. But again, I have seen major publishers experimenting with that so I think we'll see more and more as we go on.

James Blatch: It's an area we're definitely getting into so we'll report back when we have some results.

Bex Gorsuch: I would love to hear it.

James Blatch: In our last few minutes Bex let's talk about this course.

You've got a free three-part course. Just explain what the content is.

Bex Gorsuch: I actually set up a Three Days to a Better Instagram challenge. It's going to teach you what you're doing wrong as far as posting now, how you can fix it. It's going to talk you step by step through what you need to create a winning profile.

It's going to talk about consistency as a concept and how crucial that is for success on social media.

I really believe in actionable concise videos so they're all really quick. I know everyone has busy schedules. The first two are going to take you 15 minutes or less so you just sign up and then every day for the next three days you'll get an email from me with a quick video to watch. A little bonus worksheet on each day that they can work through.

And on the other side they'll probably have a whole different idea of how they can really start using Instagram to build their brand and support the sale of their books.

James Blatch: If people go to selfpublishingformula.com/instagramchallenge, all one word, [instagramchallenge](https://instagramchallenge.com), and then we'll send out the link to you and you can go off and get that training.

Bex Gorsuch: Awesome.

James Blatch: Superb.

Bex Gorsuch: Thank you. I hope people get a lot out of it.

James Blatch: I'm sure they will. It looks like a really good thing as you say. You've taken account of the fact that people have a lot of do.

Every time we talk about a new platform I know that some people listening are, "Oh, I've got another platform to learn," but we've mentioned it several times in the interview: Instagram has got a fresh, enjoyable, lovely feel to it as a social media platform. I really like it. And I say my colleague John Dyer is a real hero in Instagram. He loves the visual medium.

And it's an enjoyable social media channel right?

Bex Gorsuch: Yeah. It's an app that I think especially in the book community that it's just a very welcoming place. It's a very happy place to be. It's a nice

place to invest some of your time and you can get a lot out of it as far as turning your readers into fans, learning to work with influencers who have audiences in the tens of thousands to get your book out. I think there's a lot of potential in it for authors and I'd love to see more people taking advantage of it.

James Blatch: Superb. Okay. We got there. We had a couple of technical issues right at the beginning before we pressed record didn't we Bex and you just briefly sounded like a dalek in the middle of that sentence but we got the gist of it somewhere between here and Washington, D.C. the daleks are invading but we got there and that's brilliant.

Thank you so much in deed for joining us. It's been really interesting and I've learned huge amounts, not just about hashtags, but about the channel as well and each time I talk Instagram I sort of pledge to myself I'm going to be more active. Well see what happens this time.

Bex Gorsuch: I hope so. It's been an absolute pleasure. I'm so glad we got to have this conversation.

James Blatch: Thank you Bex. Appreciate it.

James Blatch: There we go. Let me just remind you I think I came up with this in the interview and I have to check afterwards but the landing page to get involved in that challenge is selfpublishingformula.com/instagramchallenge, all one word, and we'll send you in the right direction to join Bex Gorsuch's challenge. That's selfpublishingformula.com/instagamchallenge.

I learned loads there and I think Instagram is the least well understood of the platforms. I think people understand Facebook because we all, certainly our generation use it quite a lot. I think people understand Twitter. They either don't like it or do like it and use it.

And I think most of us understand enough to know that it's actually commercially quite difficult to make a lot of progress and traction on Twitter.

But Instagram's the one I know least about to be quite honest and I learned a lot in that interview. I learned more about hashtags than I thought I would ever need to know in one interview. I know Lucy is an Instagram person in your household.

Are you an Instagram person?

Mark Dawson: No, not really. She does the Instagram accounts for both SPF and me as well, so she's in charge of both of those.

I know she told me the other day she's very pleased we've got to a thousand fans or not I'm not even sure what they call Instagram followers on Instagram so she was pleased with that for SPF. And yeah, she does all of that for me as well.

I agree, it's a valuable platform. But from my perspective, my focus is on Facebook. That's kind of where I'm most comfortable but Instagram is up and coming definitely.

James Blatch: Good, okay. And I saw we're coming at you on all fronts on this. We have a book which is being ... It's in the last stage of publication and Stuart Bache is going to provide the cover this week. He's going to get it to me by Wednesday. I know he's such a busy guy. Stuart also, I don't know if I shouldn't say this or not. I'm going to say it anyway just to put pressure on him. He's told me he's going to do NaNoWriMo.

Now he's a fantastically busy person so that's quite a commitment for him but I can tell from the conversations I have with Stuart, he's desperate to get writing. He's surrounded by writers, he loves the trade, he loves reading and he thinks he wants to be, like I do, he wants to be a writer. Now I've made that public without his permission. He's committed to it.

Just tell Mark said it, if anyone asks.

Again the cover on Wednesday and you can go to this page to get the Instagram book, which is completely free. You can download it completely for free. If you go to selfpublishingformula.com/igbook, igbook.

I must make a note of this landing page before we finish the interview because I have to go off and create it. Now it should be there I would think by the middle of the week after if it's not there by Friday but if you go to that landing page you'll get an email and you'll get sent the book as soon as it's there.

Well, that was a busy episode. You've learned about Instagram so I expect to see you improve in that area.

Mark Dawson: I'll just hand that off to my resident expert.

James Blatch: You've got a team now. Team Milton. Team Dawson Milton.

Are you riding the microphone like a DJ now?

Mark Dawson: Well I'm sitting here because you were having troubles with your levels earlier so I thought I'd put it right in front of my mouth so you have no excuses.

James Blatch: Yeah, it's like you're in Ibiza now.

Good. Okay. Excellent. Have great week. We're going to be back.

We're going to be recording a master class. The master class episodes I can tell you by looking at the downloads are the spike episodes for the podcast so when you do a master class people tune in and listen.

We're recording one next week and what is the subject going to be Mark?

Mark Dawson: Amazon ads. So some interesting ideas for making Amazon ads work a little bit better because I'm using them quite a lot at the moment and they're going really well.

James Blatch: Excellent. We're going to be recording that next week and that is going to go out on November the 9th so very soon indeed. Good.

Thank you so much indeed for listening and being with us today. We hope you have a really brilliant week reading, writing and selling your books. I bring reading in because you've got to read to be a good writer and until then, we're going to say goodbye. Goodbye. You going to say goodbye?

Mark Dawson: Bye.

James Blatch: Smooth.

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.