

EPISODE 145: USING FACEBOOK ADS TO SNARE A NICHE AUDIENCE – WITH OCTAVIA RANDOLPH

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 and Mark on a dreary day here in the United Kingdom. We hope you're having a great week reading, writing, and selling.

We should say, Mark, it's the first of November that we're recording this, which means ... What does that mean in the writing world?

Mark Dawson: It means it was my birthday yesterday. What else does it mean?

James Blatch: Does mean it's your birthday. Quite an egocentric answer. It means NaNoWriMo today.

Mark Dawson: Does it?

James Blatch: It's the beginning.

Mark Dawson: I remember. There's a few things. It's NaNoWriMo today, and we've got a busy group of writers who are getting started with their words I guess.

Also, I have two author launches next week.

James Blatch: It does. It is a very busy week. Also, I'm off to Vegas to 20 Books along with hundreds and hundreds. Going to be a huge conference in Vegas. I'm looking forward to meeting loads of you.

I should bring some pins and some money for drinks. I've already got some interviews and chats planned with people when I'm there. I'm presenting on live video on Thursday morning if you want to watch that. It's going to be great.

NaNoWriMo; just on that for a second. I'm actually going to do that as well. I've got myself into a position where I really know where I am going for the next foreseeable. I've said to my editor, we're just going to press on now.

Probably 1,500 words a day, something like that, I'm going to do as a minimum through November. That means in a couple of months my draft is going to be done, which is exciting.

I think a lot of people use NaNoWriMo as a first draft, don't they? I've seen some screen grabs and all. There's a Facebook group.

We've got an SPF Facebook group for NaNoWriMo if you search on that to support each other. There's been some photographs that people have posted of lots of post it notes on a white board. Kind of mixing things up, but people ready to just to write, just to get that first draft down, which I think is what it's good for, right?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. That's a pretty good way to see I think. Just the question of getting the words down, and then the editing can come later.

I was going to NaNo, as a I mentioned on the previously on the podcast, but because I started to use dictation, I've actually got 40,000 words of the book I was going to write already done. I hopefully will use the time to finish a couple of things that I'm working on, including that one.

James Blatch: I'm excited about your police procedural. I'm going to give that one a go when that comes out.

Let's talk about today's guest. She is a remarkable writer, a remarkable person. Her name is Octavia Randolph, which is a great name to start off with.

Octavia lives in the East Coast of the United States. We met her earlier this summer, in July, we went to her house just north of Boston. At that time, she was planning a move to an island off Sweden where her books are based.

You'll see if you're watching on YouTube from the interview that Octavia is immersed in the epic romance stories I should say, the epics that she writes. She is somebody who has an interest in this area that goes beyond, I think, simply writing. She has a gift for telling stories and for writing.

What was uplifting about this story was how independent publishing has made her career. It has allowed her to live this amazing life. Before indie publishing, in fact she does reference you Mark I should say in this interview, before you and your course and the learning that she got on board online, there was probably a very little chance of a publisher picking up these books, at yet the result of her being able to find her readers has been transformational.

Let's without further ado, this is a really gripping interview, let's hear from Octavia. Then Mark and I'll have a chat off the back of that.

Octavia, why don't you start off by giving us the short form version of you who are?

Octavia Randolph: Thank you James. I'm so delighted to be your guest this morning.

I write historical fiction set in ninth century England and Scandinavia. I now have seven books out in the Circle of Ceridwen saga. I imagine that this series will probably go to 10 or 12 books, particularly since my readers are always finding new things for me to write about, which is lovely.

I began writing my first novel, book one, in 1991. Had some very good literary representation for it. Unfortunately, the manuscript never found a home in New York City. After many years of rejection, I just began continuing the story for my own sake.

I wrote what became a trilogy really for my own pleasure in 1998. I created a website, Octavia.net, and just started publishing the books for free on my website because I was so frustrated with the rejection I was receiving from traditional publishers.

Lo and behold, there were readers online for my work, and it was encouraging, but I still was never able to attract an editor who wanted to acquire the books.

Like many of us listening to this podcast, when Kindle, the advent of Kindle, came out, and I thought, "There's a real possibility here. I might be able to do something." In 2012, I published the first three books. They found an almost instant following, which was tremendously gratifying after so many years of struggle. That encouraged me to continue writing in the series, which I did.

Many things, of course, have changed in the landscape of self publishing since then. We would be foolish to pretend that it's not more difficult and more competitive now than it was then.

James Blatch: We'll get onto where you are now in a moment. I'm fascinated by the fact that you created this website in 1998 and uploaded your books. Talk about an early adopter.

When we interview people in self publishing, the early people, what early means is normally 2010 or 2011.

Back in '98, you uploaded your books in what form? Just pdf?

Octavia Randolph: As pdfs. Yes. I released them chapter by chapter.

Originally, at that point, I still had a literary agent, and so my idea was the word platform was a rather new one in those days, so I said, "Let's prove to editors, acquiring editors, that I have a platform. I'll do like Charles Dickens did and release a chapter a month and then you can go and say, 'Octavia has 5,000 readers, 10,000 readers,' whatever, because I can prove my downloads."

It didn't work. I mean, I ended up publishing all of book one then book two then book three to growing appreciation-

James Blatch: But a small audience?

You were putting the stuff on Octavia.net, but it was difficult for you to magnify, to get visibility?

Octavia Randolph: Yes. It did not matter to traditional publishers. Probably it even hurt me in retrospect because at that point of view, even though I ended up with 100,000 readers in 125 nations, to them probably said, "Oh well. It's spent. You've put it out there. We're not interested anymore." I think it actually backfired.

James Blatch: Well, they still think like that. We can ignore the traditional publishers for this type of thing.

Fast forward, I guess 10 or so years, 10, 12 years. The advent of the Kindle and the Amazon platform, and suddenly those things that you were trying 10 years before, you were able to find an audience?

Octavia Randolph: Yes. Again, once the gatekeepers had been removed and we're able to put our books in front of an audience, you may find those people that share the passion for your topic. You're able to create your own community. That's what happened.

James Blatch: How quickly did things happen for you?

Octavia Randolph: Back in 2014, I did a book BookBub promotion, a feature, back in the days when they were both very inexpensive and quite effective. That was really helpful because I gave away 33,000 copies of book one in one day. That really gave me a leg up. That was very, very useful.

After that, of course, it's nurturing those people. Only a certain percentage of people who download are ever going to open the book. Then you've got to have something more for them to go to. Not only going on to book two, but there's got to be something larger to draw them in.

Many people, of course, love the idea of a series. They want to be completely absorbed in the world you've created. Those are the readers that you're looking for.

James Blatch: We'll come to that in a moment, because I know that you've developed in terms of the relationship you have with your readers very important part of your marketing. Let's keep the narrative so I can understand how you got to where you are today, because we should say where you are today.

I think you've been very public about your figures. It's been amazing. Has it not?

Octavia Randolph: It's been extremely gratifying to be able to make a good income. My 2015 income was 33,000 US dollars. 2016 was \$160,000. Last year was \$237,000. This year I shall certainly exceed that.

James Blatch: That's fantastic. It's a tribute to your writing.

Octavia Randolph: Thank you.

James Blatch: Those gatekeepers back in the mid '90s could have 80% of that action, but they decided not to, so there you go. Who's having the last little laugh there?

We should mention, of course, far be it from me to bring Mr. Dawson and his courses into this, but that was I think a moment for you, wasn't it?

Octavia Randolph: It was enormous. Without Mark's course, I never would've been convinced to join Facebook. I was not on the Facebook platform, and it was taking the course that convinced me I must do this, and so I joined. I joined. Faithfully went through Mark's teachings.

Put my first advertisement on Facebook on February 15th of 2016. Had some really remarkable success. It was essentially a sign up ad giving away book one free.

I rapidly built my mailing list to 33,000 people, and of course even though there's a lot of drop off between people who will not in fact read the book or continue on with you, it gave me a good core, a very, very good core, and of course taught me the fundamentals of something that I had never anticipated using or knowing about, which is how to advertise in a very direct way to people who had reading interests similar to what I could provide them in my own books. Yes, it was enormous. Absolutely enormous. Yes, Mark's course was a tremendous turning point for me. Absolutely.

James Blatch: You took this very well, very easily, but I don't know whether you'd had marketing or technical background.

What was your background?

Octavia Randolph: I do have a very good technical manager, who's my webmaster and who is enormously helpful in producing my videos and all of my ads and everything else. I cannot take a lot of credit on the technical side.

I am a communicator, and I have always had a desire to share my love of history and to tell stories, interweave personal stories, in with actual history. I think it's one of the reasons that people who, for instance, like Bernard

Cornwell's books also really like my books. We not only write about the same time period, but we actually use the actual history that's been received from the Anglo-Saxon chronical to tell it. We both have fictional characters interacting with factual characters. There's a tremendous thirst for that, and so it's really what leads me on.

James Blatch: You say a tremendous thirst, but on the face of it, your genre sounds quite niche?

Octavia Randolph: Historical fiction obviously does not have the legions of fans that romance or thrillers do. Completely true.

What it does have is a quality of reader that is willing to pay more for what we produce. That's very important to me. My most recent book, which came out in April, I priced at \$9.99 for the ebook. It's considerably above what most people with their own imprints, most self published writers, will do. My other books are largely \$7.99.

I took a big risk. I have not heard one complaint about the price. Part of it is because the writers that I'm most often compared to, when their books come out in Kindle format, they're \$13.99 US. My book still looks value priced.

That's an important aspect of it. Also, I just think that people are willing to pay for quality. I do have the seven books out now. It's a small number compared to many thriller and romance writers who have scores of books out, but I do believe that for me the pathway is quality.

I can't write more than one book a year. Absolutely not. Usually every 18 months is all I can manage because of the amount of research. They're lengthy books. It's the certain quality of reader that fortunately my genre enjoys which is also very, very helpful to the bottom line.

James Blatch: Another platform that I know is doing well for you is the Audible platform.

You mentioned before we started the interview that you really wanted to make the point to new authors, this is not to be ignored.

Octavia Randolph: Yes, I think that it is so demanding when you're first starting out and have one or two books. Having them recorded as an audio book is one of things that almost seems a luxury, like having them in print.

Neither are luxuries. They're really necessities. You must have print and you must have an audio book because that is the fastest growing aspect of all reading right now, is audio books.

It's my second largest source of income, month after month after month. So I strongly encourage, even if you have one novel out, is to find a really skilled actor, pay them well, and have it produced. Because you will find that reaps tremendous rewards.

James Blatch: Do you specifically advertise the Audible format?

Octavia Randolph: Yes. I'm running advertisement right now featuring the Audible of the brand new book. The cover which features the character's face on it and it's a little tiny video that says, "Know him, hear him."

And I talk about Nano Nagel who's an audio award nominated London actress who is the voice of the saga in the ad copy. Because of course, people who listen to audio books or are interested in audio books care about that. They are partial to certain narrators and they want to know that it's a distinguished narrator who's presenting the book to them.

So, yes. I do advertise specifically for audio books.

James Blatch: The narrator's important in audio books. I listen to a couple and you spend a lot of time with them when you listen.

Octavia Randolph: Yes and of course, the other thing I should say to new authors is that my books are long. Historical fiction books are long.

Recorded book one is 22 hours. My shortest book I think is 12 hours, something like that.

When people are using their Audible credits they get one credit a month, which is free in their 15 dollar membership, they're not going to want to spend it on a book which is 40 thousand words. I mean, my books are 175 thousand, 200 thousand words.

So a value aspect for the audio listener, is how long is this book? So, keep that in mind. If your books are very short, maybe you want to put two of them together, book one and two. To make it a more satisfying length for someone to use that credit on it. Do keep in mind that audio listeners are a little bit different in the way that they look at how they're spending their time and money. So, long is beautiful if it's an audio.

James Blatch: Where you are now, so fantastic success Octavia. Congratulations again. Quarter of a million dollars a year and growing.

I'm fascinated that you haven't done AMS ads yet. Because it sort of feels to me, that could be a really good area for you.

You've not delved into Amazon Marketing Services ads yet?

Octavia Randolph: No. I haven't.

James Blatch: Well the course is sitting there ready for you because you've paid for it.

Octavia Randolph: I need to revisit that because I do have writer friends who've had success. Right now I'm deeply occupied. I'm speaking about Dragon Con so I'm writing that talk. I have other appearances to do. I'm in the middle of an international move.

James Blatch: Well let's talk about your move, because this is really interesting.

So, a little bit of background about you, you're living in the United States but your books are set in Sweden and ... in particular in Gotland?

Octavia Randolph: In Denmark and because the Vikings were actually Danes, those that had the most impact on the British Isles at least. So yeah, they're set throughout Scandinavia but particularly Denmark and Gotland.

In 1999 I was on a very large research trip throughout Scandinavia and visited Gotland because it's a very important stop for Vikings studies because there's some unique artifacts that have been left there.

These enormous standing stones, runic stones with wonderful pictures on them that tell us a lot about ship rigging and mythology and everything. Gotland's a really important place for anybody who's interested in Norse life.

I went there for the first time in '99 and fell in love with it, the beauty of the island and everything about it seemed enchanted.

I kept returning there as a place to work and a place for inspiration. The end of book three the surviving male and female protagonists end up living on Gotland, they arrive there. Gotland was a relative haven of peace and security in the ninth century so it was good place to get them out of the wars going on. Both in England and in Denmark.

I continued returning there and then recently have just felt, rather than going, renting homes and working, why not buy? Buy a home and move there full time.

So I'm in the process of doing that which is definitely a process. But I do now have a beautiful home in Visby which is this UNESCO World Heritage site town on the west coast of the island. Beautiful, beautiful place to live. I'm very happy to be able to return there.

James Blatch: That's amazing that you're doing that and able to do that. I was thinking if you're a science fiction writer you'll never really get the chance to live in the second B cyclon cluster on the outer spiral on the galaxy.

Octavia Randolph: More likely Mars.

James Blatch: Or even Mars. But you get a chance to go and live, well you're obviously very familiar with the place and you've been there quite a lot. Quite a culture change from the US?

Octavia Randolph: Oh yes. Of course. Yes.

James Blatch: You're ready for it, good. Also we should say if people are watching on YouTube, they can see how you're dressed.

I'm assuming you don't wear this every day.

Octavia Randolph: I'm dressed very much like a character from my novels.

This is a Norse gown. It's made out of linen. There's a linen shift underneath it and then an over gown. The important bronze brooches, these have little fresh water pearls in them. I'm dressed really like a character from my own novels.

James Blatch: Fantastic. You have amazing hair as well. Really goes to set that off.

Octavia Randolph: Thank you.

James Blatch: Thank you for taking the effort and doing that. You're obviously immersed in your stories. I sense that you think about them a lot. Probably doing all the mundane things that we do like driving to the supermarket, I can imagine you thinking through your stories quite a lot. I don't know if I'm right on that.

But one thing that's important for you is that type of feeling from your reader as well, I think you engender that immersion into the stories from your readers and that relationship you have with your readers.

I know you're very proud of and you believe it's an important part of your success.

Octavia Randolph: Building community is the one thing that really has been the most satisfying aspect for me. I have 23 thousand followers on Facebook.

But it's my group, there's a dedicated fan group with now about 1800 people on it and those core readers are extremely dear to me and tremendous brand ambassadors and I'm so honored and delighted to have so many people who read and re-read the books and talk to other people about them.

I can't emphasize enough, to people just starting out, that community can give you things that no level of advertising can ever give you. There is no substitute for word of mouth recommendation. None, none.

James Blatch: It's the best isn't it?

Octavia Randolph: None. And you know you've got it when you have people writing to you who are saying, "My husband told me I had to read your books, my sister told me I had to read your books." Then you know it's really working.

I do spend a tremendous amount of time every day, it's a huge commitment, two to three hours every single day, seven days a week. I answer every comment on every ad and on my page and in my fan pages and my email. I spend a tremendous amount of time interacting with my readers and it is a joy, but it is demanding.

That time commitment is something that's so well spent because people are invested in the story in a way because they understand that you care

about the world that you've created for them. And the sort of friendships that are formed in the saga group are fantastic. I

We've had just an amazing group of men and women in that group that are just so tight and so behind the books and supportive of each other. It's priceless. So build community by all means.

The other thing I really want to stress is, like Neil Gaiman, who's often times said he realizes that his fan base is made up of many small cult groups of people that maybe don't have a lot to do with each other. You have to find your fan base where they are.

I'm astonished that Dragon Con asked me to come and speak because there's no fantasy elements in my novels. It wasn't until one of my readers said to me, who's a very large into cosplay and Dragon Con, She said, "Octavia, the reason we want you there is because you can tell us what really happened, because we need to create our world based on historical facts so it has more veracity."

James Blatch: Well there's a huge crossover isn't it? The war gaming, a lot of war gaming is based on World War II or medieval wars.

Octavia Randolph: That's right.

This is a whole new thing, it's opened my eyes. It's opened my eyes because I was never aware that I had so many readers that also are fantasy readers.

So that's an example of a group of people that I didn't even know that were loving my books. My meticulously researched historically sound books are very popular with certain segments of fantasy readers. So, look for those little niches, they may be vertical niches but you put enough of those together, you have a real large readership. I would ask people, be mindful of that.

James Blatch: That you don't even know is there. And again this is a difference with the traditional industry where it's worked in the past and they wouldn't necessarily know who the readers were, and certainly that's much more feasible today. To work that out.

Octavia Randolph: You absolutely can find people much easier now.

James Blatch: And that work you do to respond to every comment, wherever it is on the various platforms.

I suppose a little personal contact from you can go a long way with an individual reader.

Octavia Randolph: It's huge. Again, because people understand that I care. I care about their reading experience. I care to make sure that they get book one for free and there's no hitches there.

They know that I am interested in their reading experience and every single person I interact with, if I feel it's appropriate, I will say, "Please stop by the group and see if you'd like to join that." Because there's all kinds of special exclusives I do, just do for the group.

Special videos and special content for people that are in the saga group. So that there's a real inducement for people to want to join.

And of course you can communicate much better on Facebook with a group than you can in your ordinary page these days. Because there's almost no organic reach anymore on the page but in the group it's really a direct conduit. I'm always inviting people to do that and they'll join constantly so the group's grown quite rapidly.

James Blatch: And you use live video?

Octavia Randolph: Oh yes. And do fun things.

Last month I have a superb partner in Nano Nagel so is the voice of the saga. She has recorded all the audio books. We had her live, Facebook

Live, in the group. So, all of my audio listeners, all the audio book people, could speak to us live and that was fantastic.

People really enjoyed knowing about Nano and how she records the books. How we met and so on and so forth. So there's all sorts of special things that you can do in a group that adds value to it and cements that relationship so people want to identify as your reader.

James Blatch: You checked the broadband connection in Gotland?

Octavia Randolph: It's excellent.

James Blatch: Good.

If you remember we filmed in Gothenburg once and I remember sitting in the hotel, it's probably 6 years then, I couldn't believe the broadband. I remember now, Sweden's very good.

Octavia Randolph: Yes. That's important for me.

James Blatch: I was going to say because here you are sitting in clothing that could have been worn a thousand years ago but actually you're immersed in the very leading area of digital-

Octavia Randolph: One needs to be. Worldwide following. Many, many readers in Australia and that's also been very interesting to me as well. When I'm there I'm in a better time zone to talk to them.

James Blatch: Maybe the newer the country, the more interest there is with the past.

Octavia Randolph: Yes I think that's very true, very true.

James Blatch: We should just mention that Dragon Con, this invitation that's been extended to you:

People may have heard of Comic Con and Dragon Con, but these are big events right?

Octavia Randolph: Yes they are. It's wonderful exposure for me and for the saga. So I'm extremely excited and interested to find out what the experience will be like. Again, they're inviting me to speak on women's legal rights in the ninth century.

James Blatch: Quite a niche.

Octavia Randolph: Yeah. Quite a niche. I'll be pricking a few balloons about the media presentations, the Hollywood presentations of what we think Norse women were doing vis-a-vis television series like The Vikings and so on and so forth. Really injecting a note of reality into what women's roles were like. So it's going to be provocative and I think it's going to be a great deal of fun

James Blatch: You know how many people go to Dragon Con?

Octavia Randolph: I have been warned 80,000.

James Blatch: Yeah, this is a big event. Well done on being invited there because it's going to be fantastic and in Atlanta later this year?

Octavia Randolph: Yes, it's over Labor Day weekend, four days, first weekend in September. So yeah.

James Blatch: Great. Okay, you do a lot of this work by yourself. You mentioned that you have some technical help. You've hired in some professional help here.

Tell me how that works and how much you do yourself.

Octavia Randolph: Well, obviously no one can research, write the books or interact with the public except for myself because I mean, I couldn't even have a virtual assistant do what you do because oftentimes, they ask

questions that only I could answer, either about the books or some aspect of history. So I do all of that.

I have a very good professional book cover designer. Of course, we all know that that's very, very important and I've already mentioned my wonderful artistic partnership with Nano, who does my voice work for the audio books and other than that, it is a technical manager who really helps with the advertisements.

James Blatch: How much does the technical manger do? Because you must write them and source the imagery.

Octavia Randolph: Yes and a lot of the imagery I think is ... Right now, I'm running a video ad, short video ad of me dressed in this ensemble in front of a medieval wall in Gotland and talking about the latest novel.

So a lot of times, it's not a stock image. It's me as the image and so those are the sorts of advertisements I'm running that's sort of accommodation of branding and the book as well.

It's putting yourself out there so they can associate your name with the book series.

James Blatch: And you do the video yourself or you have somebody who films you?

Octavia Randolph: It's a combination of setting up a tripod and letting it run and also help. On Gotland, I always have help.

James Blatch: You're not afraid to get involved in any aspect of this yourself, are you, which I love.

Octavia Randolph: One must be fearless if one wants to be successful.

James Blatch: Well, you have been fearless and successful. That could be your motto. You have to find new readers as well through advertising, as

well as your word of mouth and Facebook Ads is the platform that you're most involved with.

Octavia Randolph: Yes, and of course, through using the interest filters and finding offers that are similar to what you think your readers are reading.

James Blatch: What you're discovering all the time is not necessarily what you thought.

Octavia Randolph: That's true. So that's, again, not be afraid to poke and prod a little bit in those categories because you may find that you may think of your books as one breed of cat.

But they may be quite different to another reader and that is something that really bears some reflection on, that you may have several vertical niches there that you can join together as one big group of your readership.

James Blatch: Do you experiment with the interests and authors?

Octavia Randolph: Yes, of course and experiment with different types of ads and creative dynamic and all the different features that they're doing there. My Facebook rep is always stressing to me that everything changes every 28 days and I don't think everything changes. But obviously, people's habits change.

There's new people on Facebook or more active on Facebook. So month to month, things that have worked well one month, you need to retool. It's constant experimentation and the one constant again is trying to build your group on Facebook and nurture that group so that they will go out and also be your acolytes.

James Blatch: You're in that group every day.

Octavia Randolph: Oh, many times a day, absolutely.

James Blatch: What a world of difference from a traditionally published author from 10 years ago or 20 and I think a lot of the best authors, I think about the Stephen Kings and Douglas Adams in my case, people I've admired over the years. I think they would absolutely love the world that is possible today, this constant contact with readers.

It just wasn't possible in the past and that's a lovely thing and I get the feeling now that I think you alluded to this earlier that some of the storylines in your books and where your characters are going to go and what's going to happen next are inspired and influenced by feedback from your readers.

Octavia Randolph: Absolutely and that's really fascinating for me because when you are in close communication with them and they begin asking, I want to know about this character. What was her backstory?

The most recent book is the origin story of the lead male character, Sidroc, and so people were fascinated with that and then they're saying, "Well, we want to know about this person or this," and so it's really intriguing to me that oftentimes secondary characters are not at all secondary to your readers.

And you wouldn't know that unless they're telling you that and if you make it possible for them to communicate with you directly, you learn all kinds of valuable feedback and inspiration, as well as just the pleasure you get from communicating with them and enjoying the fact that they're deriving pleasure from your creativity. That's a tremendous reward in itself. It truly, truly is.

James Blatch: That's great, Octavia and it's really interesting to hear how hard you've worked to build that community and how much I think you enjoy it. You seem to enjoy it. Doesn't sound like a chore.

Octavia Randolph: It's tremendously demanding. But it's hugely rewarding, absolutely and I'm now at the position where not only am I being asked for

more appearances, but production companies have expressed interest. So it's giving to another level now.

James Blatch: You mentioned the Vikings, the TV series, and Games of Thrones, of course. Game of Thrones is a great example of the mixture of fantasy and historical fiction because it looks very historical, as if it could be based on Saxon, England.

Octavia Randolph: So Cornwall's The Last Kingdom would be probably a better example of something that the saga would be made into. But yes, so it's a whole nother level.

I have a lot of attorneys now, an entertainment attorney in LA and an international-

James Blatch: Well, you're in Boston. It's like the home of law in America. So yeah, you're in the right place. Well, also, you are dressed for the part for the first auditions.

Octavia Randolph: Yes.

James Blatch: If you don't get a cameo in your own TV series, I'll be very disappointed.

Octavia, it's been absolutely tremendous talking to you. You've been a name we've been very familiar with from the very early days of SPF and Mark was thrilled when you wrote to him and said to him, "Mark, I want you to know what's happened to my career since I took your course," which is a lovely email to get and you've been quoted.

Octavia Randolph: Thank you, Mark.

James Blatch: It's shame he's not here. He's going to be down the road in New York next week if you get a change. But it's thrilling to come out here and meet you and I wanted to wish you good luck with your move to Gotland.

Octavia Randolph: Thank you. It's very exciting for me and thank you so much for your interest and I hope that I've shared something of value to listeners and some encouragement as well.

Stay strong. Keep writing. Build community.

James Blatch: There you go. Remarkable. I really enjoyed it.

We had lunch with her afterwards and spent the best part of a day with Octavia and it's a beautiful part of New England, actually which I had not really visited before up there in the United States.

But she's going to be off to Gotland in Sweden and is going to live there.

And the other thing that we touched on in the interview, which I probably didn't touch on enough is she's a great user of video, Octavia, and she does a huge amount talking directly to her readers, which, again, is a real trait of independent writers, I think, much more than traditional.

Mark Dawson: Oh yeah, absolutely. You'd struggle to find any traditional authors who use some of the tools that are available to us now. So, good for her.

I remember Octavia posting her early results in the Facebook group. I think it must be the second time we launched the course and she was doing \$30,000 a month after a high of 8 or 900 a month. So she was really fantastic and also a great example of not the biggest niche in the world.

It just goes to show that with targeted social media and digital advertising, you can find plenty of readers for whatever it is that you're writing, regardless of the size of the niche.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely. Octavia's now knocking on \$300,000 a year doing what she loves and, boy, does she love it and, boy, is she good at it. We could not be happier for Octavia and I invited her to one of the big

Cons, the Comic Con type thing. I think it was Epic Con was it? Or Dragon Con. Dragon Con she was invited to, which is huge and great for her.

So we're so excited and, yeah, you can get a piece of this action as well. As Mark said at the beginning, the course is being reopened again. The course has changed lives without question. You can read all about it, see if it's going to be right for you, if you go to selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors and that's all letters. There's none of that 4, digit 4 in the middle, selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors and there's lots of information about the course, including, I think probably somewhere buried on that page is a dip inside one of the actual sessions so you can get a good idea of that.

Now whilst we're on, I should say that we have shifted our advice about YouTube ads because it's being increasingly clear over the last probably 13, 14 months when this began with Google that they have made changes to the Ad Words platform.

Particularly for YouTube advertising that has made it more difficult for smaller organizations to make a profit using ads and the long and short of it without going into the details, I've written quite a long detailed post into our Facebook groups.

The long and short of it is that a one man band and low priced items are going to really struggle to make a profit on YouTube because they've just set the bar too high to be able to get hold of the good stuff, like uploading audience data, like linking back to your own domain rather than a generic domain and you can't do any of these things unless you've got a thousand subscribers, 4,000 views, which is a nonstarter for most people who start out on YouTube.

So we're going to say and we say this robustly having done lots of testings that it's really not worth using the paid ads platform for books at the moment until things change.

However, YouTube is an incredibly fertile place to find your audience, engage your readers and turn your readers into fans and your fans into super fans and so that's where we're changing our focus and part of the ads for authors course will be a very exciting, very comprehensive dynamic new module on using YouTube and really unleashing the power of YouTube for authors. We can't wait.

That's going to come online towards the end of this year, January, at the very latest and I can't wait to see that.

Okay, that's all inside Ads for Authors. If you want to have a look at the course, selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors and that's it for this week, Mark. I'm about to get on a plane and go to the US. I need some sun. It's gray and drizzly here.

I'm going to go into the 28 degrees of the Nevada desert and you are going to just continue to talk into your microphone and bash books out I guess is what you're doing at the moment.

Mark Dawson: Well, it's raining here. I'm going to be walking into the office in a minute and doing some preparation for the course launch next week. So I'm pretty busy for the next ... Well, I'm always busy. But I'm even more busy than normal for the next while.

James Blatch: Sorry, we shouldn't go into too much detail because it's a quite complex subject.

But I know you've really got your teeth into AMS ads at the moment and that's one of the big, exciting developing areas for the coursework.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, in the next two or three days, I'll be rerecording the entire module on Amazon ads. It's a very important area. We will need to be on Amazon Ads for a number of different reasons.

Organic reach is being reduced. I think deliberately reduced by Amazon and being replaced by sponsored posts and sponsored reach. So we need

to be on top of this and that's what I'm going to be trying to do in the revamped course.

I'm getting lots of success with Amazon ads at the moment and looking forward to sharing some of those tips and practices with students inside Ads for Authors.

James Blatch: Excellent. Great. Okay, look, we'll both enjoy the rain and enjoy NaNoWriMo. We're going to be with you mentally every step of the way and I'm going to be with you as well doing that.

So I should keep you updated during November with my own progress and I'll look forward to quoting some of your successes or otherwise the realities of NaNoWriMo as you post into our group and our Facebook groups.

Great, that's it for this week. Have a really brilliant week. We should say that the course is going to be open for a couple of weeks, minimum, might go maximum to three weeks. But you're probably advised to get in early if you want a slot and that's it. Have a great week. Can't wait to talk to you next Friday. Bye-bye.

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