

EPISODE 147: THE MILLION DOLLAR INDIE AUTHOR – WITH SHAYNE SILVERS

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

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark. Good morning. Good afternoon. What it is? It's just afternoon, it's midday.

Mark Dawson: It's five minutes past 12, GMT.

James Blatch: The confusing cusp of ante and post meridian. How are you?

Mark Dawson: I'm all right. I'm fighting off a cold. I've been so busy over the last 10 days. It always happens when we launch things.

James is holding up some medicine, so we're both under the weather a bit. It's just because we work so hard, not that we're looking for sympathy, I think it's just that it tends to ... Sleep is less prevalent than might otherwise be the case, and longer hours and that kind of stuff.

Also, kids going back to school and bringing back all manner of biological weapons from the melting pot of primary schools.

James Blatch: I think I may have got mine in an aeroplane, which is another place to pick up the stuff, and lack of sleep and a bit of stuff going through your mind doesn't help. You get worn down and you become susceptible to stuff, and then what makes it worse, of course, you get a cold and then can't sleep even more.

I think it's as I get older. When I was a kid, I don't remember not being able to sleep with a cold, but you get older, you can't breathe and stuff, and you go to the chemist or the pharmacy and you realize there's a billion dollar industry in just stuff to stick up your nose, isn't there?

Mark Dawson: I'd say, multi-billion.

James Blatch: In addition to that multi-billion industry, a bewildering number of chemicals that ... I try to avoid drugs anyway, but I have taken the odd one.

Anyway, enough of us moaning. We are generally fit and fighting for survival here in Britain as we go through the machinations of Brexit, which is an exciting distraction to our everyday life.

Mark Dawson: Depressing, not exciting.

James Blatch: It is depressing, but who knows where it's going to end, the merry-go-round we're on at the moment.

Mark Dawson: Badly.

James Blatch: Probably. But the important thing is that we are future proofing ourselves. We are talking about establishing digital businesses that operate almost without borders, and where we do have those borders, we get over them quite quickly and we fill in the forms, and we will carry on trading.

I am absolutely certain, regardless of whether the people who make little big widgets and need to export them somewhere may not have the same easy ride that we have, but we're in a good industry for now.

We should say that the premium course, Mark's flagship course, Mark Dawson's Advertising For Authors is still open at the moment, and you can go and check out that course if you go to selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors.

And it's gone really well. It's always exciting to get a crop of new students on. They're flooding into the support Facebook group at the moment. We're seeing lots of photographs of people's workstations and their excited first impressions of the course, and it's always a fun time for us, isn't it?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it is. We never really know many authors are going to sign up, and it's always pleasing that there are always a good few of them doing so, so it's been fun.

As I say, it's been fairly hard work. I've done a couple of webinars last week with Nick Stephenson and Joanna Penn, and then I did a Facebook Live after the Joanna Penn one, and because I do it in the office, because the internet here is more reliable than it is at home. I've got to drive home after it, so I'm not getting into bed much before midnight. And, weirdly enough, talking from 8 til 11 is actually quite tiring, so, yes, been doing that.

But still, it's good. I've got a good presentation that I'm giving, and although this is going out on the Friday, so we're recording this on a Monday, it's going out this Friday, we will have done one for the SPF list on Wednesday, so this is not all that useful for people listening after it's happened, but it's a good webinar.

I'm teaching some stuff about Amazon Ads that people don't necessarily know, and some tactics that are working for me right now.

James Blatch: We've barely advertised and we're a few days out still, and I can tell you there's almost 1000 people already signed up for that webinar, so it's going to be a really good one, well attended.

It's an excellent webinar, yes, and it's absolutely pointless us saying that. I tell you what we should do though.

Have we done this webinar as part of SPFU?

Mark Dawson: No, I know what we should do.

This will go out on the Friday, so if people are interested in the course, they will still have five days, we think, to take advantage, so we should probably mention that there will be a replay of this webinar.

This is me speaking kind of off the top of my head a little bit, but we need to come up with a URL that we can direct people to. So how about SPF webinar?

James Blatch: Yes, we can go with SPF webinar, I think. If we can't go with SPF webinar, you and I have to get back together and rerecord this, but let's go with selfpublishingformula.com/spfwebinar, all one word, and, yeah, this webinar that we're talking about, which is excellent, and we've done quite a few over the years with Jo, and Jo was really effusing. Effusing? Ethusing? Effusing.

Mark Dawson: Effusive.

James Blatch: Effusive?

Mark Dawson: You can't be effusing. You can be effusive.

James Blatch: Effusing, no. She was effusive about this webinar and how much she learnt from it. It is a really good one.

So there's a bit of the stuff we covered in the masterclass last week, but some detail on top of that. So if you go to, yes, selfpublishingformula.com/spfwebinar, you can watch the webinar that we're going to do in the future, but it'll be the past for you, because that's how we roll. It's like we're broadcasting from a wormhole.

Mark Dawson: Well, yes, my office is a bit untidy, but, yeah, bit unfair.

It's an interesting webinar. As I said, when I did it for Jo and Nick, normally when I'm talking about advertising, it's in a very positive ... This is not an essential part of your business. It should be something you consider strongly, it's important, but it's probably not absolutely essential, which is a

slightly more positive message than the one I'm finding myself giving at the moment, which is I think it is now essential.

You've absolutely maximized your chances of doing well as an author if you learn how to advertise. And that may not have been quite so true before, although, certainly, your odds would be improved.

The reason I say that is because of some of the things that we've seen happening with Amazon, especially with Amazon over the last couple of months.

I just listened to Jo's podcast in the car on the way to the office this morning, and she spent about 20 minutes talking about this. After doing the webinar with me, I think she has some ideas, and I agree with most of what she said, and the gist of it is sales are down on Amazon.com.

For me and for lots of other authors who've contacted me, well over a couple of hundred, seemed to happen around about the same time and seem to be around the same amount, about 30-40% from the middle of September, and we can speculate as to why that is, I don't know, Amazon hasn't told me. I have asked, but I haven't got any kind of conclusive answer yet.

My best guess is that it's because Also Boughts, which are the visible manifestation of their recommendation engine that are telling readers, readers of this book also bought this book, it's a great way to get a recommendation from Amazon as to what else you might like to read.

Those have seemingly disappeared, or are in the process of disappearing in the US, so I have mentioned this in the email before that goes out with this podcast, and quite a few emailed back and said, "What are you talking about? I can still see them." Well, Amazon split tests, so you might be able to see them, but others might not.

They're not available on my books at the moment, or most of them, and I think it's something that's happening more generally.

So, if that natural visibility, which is perhaps underestimated in terms of importance, if that's going away, we need to find a way to fill the gap, and that carousel of Also Boughts, coincidentally, is now a carousel of sponsored posts.

In other words, we need to pay in order to get those books onto that carousel. That sounds slightly apocalyptic, but the way I would dress it up is to look at it as opportunity, because most authors either won't notice and will go, "Why have my sales gone down?" or, if they have noticed, they'll think, "Well, I'm not getting involved in mucky commerce and advertising and promotion, I'll leave that to the salesman."

That's fine, right, because that leaves the road is clear for people like us, who know that advertising is necessary, it can be done properly, certainly not sleazy, it's necessary to get our books out there so that readers can see them.

I think that puts us into a great position, effectively, to eat their lunch. So, if they're not prepared to learn how to do it and to compete, well, we're going to ride all over the top of them.

James Blatch: You're in exactly the right place to learn all that stuff, and that URL again for the detailed webinar on this subject is selfpublishingformula.com/spfwebinar.

Before you email us to tell us that Also Boughts are still there on your page, it is something that's clearly being implemented and rolled out around the world at the moment, so, yes, you might see the Also Boughts, but it's changing.

Almost every big change, and we always see this, there's always somebody in one of the Facebook groups, sometimes ours, sometimes others, who cries panic at the top of their voice.

There was a famous panicking character in a British sitcom playing by Clive Dunn, wasn't there? "Don't panic Mr. Mainwaring," about everything that

happened. And you are always the person who weighs in and says, "First of all, don't panic, things change and we adapt," and, second of all, works out the opportunity that this presented for us.

We have to joke about Brexit, because it's the only way to do it, but, actually, without question, there will be people, smart and savvy, who will make a lot of money out of Brexit.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, by betting against the pound.

James Blatch: They'll bet against the pound, or they'll work out when to bet for the pound, and, also, they'll look at the trade arrangements that start, and they'll be the ones exploiting them first.

You want to be one of those people. You want to be at the top of this, the head of the game. Not the ones going, "Oh, woe is me. This is terrible and nothing's going to be the same again."

There's always opportunity, and Amazon makes money, because authors sell their books on there, and they're not going to spoil that fundamental at any point soon.

Okay, now talking of being successful, we have a super inspirational interview today. Now, we had Octavia Randolph on a few weeks ago, and we got lots of really positive feedback. It was lovely to go and meet up Octavia, and the feedback from her interview was really warming, because people liked her, loved her story, and felt inspired by it.

I think people are going to have the same experience today with a young man called Shayne Silvers, who's already quite well known in his own sphere, to the point where he's had his own con, his being Shayne Silvers con. It wasn't called that, it was named after something in one of his books.

He's an urban fantasy author. He is a classic case of somebody who, bit like your own story, Mark, was bumbling along, not making any money. I think he says in the interview made something like-

Mark Dawson: Bumbling along.

James Blatch: Well you were in terms of sales before the indie thing hit you in the face with a brick. I think he said he made something like \$56 a month or something a month before.

Your course is mentioned here, because, like many people, a bit like Octavia as well, it unlocked it for him, this world of advertising and indie promotion. And he is now a million dollar a year guy, and it's exciting. He's lovely chap as well. We met him in Florida, so I was able to sit down with him in a quiet moment during the NINC conference. So this is Shayne Silvers.

James Blatch: Shayne Silvers.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

James Blatch: Real name?

Shayne Silvers: Real name.

James Blatch: Wow. That's a good name.

Shayne Silvers: I lucked out, yeah. Didn't need a pen name.

James Blatch: You didn't. Welcome to the podcast.

Shayne Silvers: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

James Blatch: We're delighted to have you here. You've got a fantastic success story, we couldn't be happier for you, and so we want to hear that in this interview, and I'm also going to talk to you a bit about process and what's working for you marketing wise.

So take us back, I guess 2012 might be a good starting point for you.

Shayne Silvers: Yes. In 2012, I wrote my first book. It was called Obsidian Son in my Nate Temple series, and I had, at first, tried to pitch that to a bunch of agents in New York City in all the traditional publishing companies, and I got a lot of, "This is good, but no. We've already got a wizard," or, "We've already got a fantasy book this quarter," or whatever, and so I just got a lot of rejections.

And then that was around the time that people were starting to talk about self-publishing as a good idea, and so I gave that a shot. Wrote my book, published it, and I did zero marketing. Did not have a website, didn't have an email list, did nothing, just published it.

James Blatch: So you uploaded it, basically.

Shayne Silvers: That's it. That's literally it. Didn't have a sequel, didn't have any information in the front or the back of the book, I mean, none of it, and so I just waited to become a millionaire, thinking that was how self-publishing worked. Obviously it didn't, and so I was finishing up school, I was getting a finance degree to be a commercial loan officer, so that I could actually pay some bills if I wanted to keep writing.

Fast-forward three years, and I had gotten the bug again. Finished school, got a real job, and I started getting the bug, "Okay, well why don't I try this again? Now that I know a little bit more about business, just got a business degree, why don't I give this a shot?"

So I wrote the sequel. A couple months go by, I have a couple, maybe 2 to 300 dollars a month tops in the end of 2015.

James Blatch: So still with real no marketing, but you had at least two books out there.

Shayne Silvers: Exactly. I had the sequel, that was it. I still didn't have any ads or anything like that.

I heard about Mark Dawson. He had a Facebook Ads For Authors course, and I'd been looking at a lot of different courses of any kind on self-publishing, and took a couple that weren't necessarily bad, but they didn't help, they didn't really teach you any of the fundamentals.

I found Mark Dawson's course and I really researched him, watched a bunch of his informational material that kind of explained what he does and that he actually has this success to back it up, as opposed to the people who just tell you how to win and they've never done it.

I decided to take a gamble, and so I cashed in my retirement account. Didn't tell my wife, but I cashed that in and took his course, and set aside the rest of the money for anything else I might need for the business.

For the first six months of 2016, I built a website, learned about audiences, came up with cover material, came up with the freebie novella to give away, started signing up for all these promotional services, really just everything that Mark Dawson talks about with his launch course and how to understand Facebook ads.

Six months later, I had the email list set up, I had all of the things that I would need to really treat this like a business, and July is kind of when I activated it all and started my ads, \$5 a day, and it took off to within two months I was doing five figures a month consistently.

James Blatch: Wow. So you cashed in your retirement fund, you rolled the dice here.

Shayne Silvers: Yes, definitely rolled the dice.

James Blatch: It paid off pretty quickly.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, it paid off very quickly.

James Blatch: So July 2016, you started, as Mark suggests, low, \$5 a day and scaled up, and, sorry, you're doing \$10,000 months within eight weeks?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, since then.

Within two months of starting that, I was doing \$5 a day, and then after about a week, it started ... I said, "Okay, well, why don't I try \$10 a day or \$7?"

Kind of like you talked about, I didn't just suddenly throw everything I had into it. I scaled it rationally and smartly instead of dumping all my money in, but I started seeing real results.

So I doubled down and really just started marketing it. I had ads for newsletter subscribers, I had ads for paid book, I had a new release planned and scheduled to come out for book three, so I really just kind of treated it like a business and it started paying like a business.

James Blatch: And where are you today? So we're now 2018.

Shayne Silvers: I was able to do this full-time as of April 2017, on my birthday, April Fools' Day, so my boss didn't like that very much, because he thought it was an April Fools' joke.

But it was just a birthday gift to myself. I started doing this full-time and since then, I'm doing very high figures; very high, five figures a month.

James Blatch: So, you're knocking on six figures.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

James Blatch: Haven't you had a six-figure month?

Shayne Silvers: We have. So, it'll be a seven-figure year.

James Blatch: Fantastic, a million dollar author.

Shayne Silvers: It's crazy.

James Blatch: In some ways, it must've seemed easy to you. We should put a health warning out here that's, you know, Mark's course is fantastic and it's unlocked everything.

Shayne Silvers: It's not a guarantee. Yeah.

James Blatch: P.S., not everybody who takes a course, runs a few ads and suddenly has a million dollars a year falling at them.

So, Shayne, the first thing to recognize is you're obviously a fantastically talented writer.

Shayne Silvers: I know there's better, but I try.

James Blatch: You clearly are, and people love your work, which is great. I know it's Mark, in this case, and let's not spend a lot of time promoting the course in this podcast interview because people will think it's just an advert.

Shayne Silvers: You need to give credit where it's due.

James Blatch: But, having somebody like Mark, and there's Jo and Nick, and there's others, who will teach you how to get visible, it obviously is critically important.

Shayne Silvers: Of course.

James Blatch: Strangely, you do hear resistant voices to that, saying, "You don't need this help. Everything's out there. You can find it for yourself". But you're living proof that that's not the case.

Shayne Silvers: Absolutely. I mean, that's what I was kind of telling you earlier before we spoke.

My first book needed work. It needed better editing. There's a couple things that have changed. But they were very minor. The spelling, you know, it's proofreading.

Got a new cover fitting the genre. But really, the only thing about the actual story that changed was getting it in front of the right people. And that was Mark's course, because that was the only thing that I didn't know how to do, was to get it in front of the right readers. As soon as I did, it exploded.

James Blatch: It blew up.

How has your life changed since you started bringing in a million bucks a year.

Shayne Silvers: It's night and day. It's night and day, because before I was working full-time as a banker so I would have to be professional and wear a suit, and walk in and talk numbers.

Then I would sneak away on my lunch breaks to go write or go play with my ads, or go do some copy, or listen to one of Dawson's newest sheets on AMS or whatever quick podcast that just came out. And so, I would sneak away and do that, and then I would go home.

And I would hang out with the family, and then as soon as my wife and toddlers go to bed, I'd go right back to the ink mines and start writing, or start advertising or doing that. And so I was working very often, I'd say, 95% of the time, 20 hours a day.

James Blatch: Wow.

Shayne Silvers: For about a year and a half. I don't have to do that anymore. And so, I still like to because I love the job, but it's gotten to the point now where I've found another author like myself that knew how to write but he didn't know how to sell.

So I turned my publishing company that I made for myself into an actual publishing company. I let him join my world, join my universe and write his own spin-off series. And since then, he launched this July, or this June, 2018. I think he's hit six figures already.

James Blatch: Wow.

Shayne Silvers: So, he's doing pretty well, too.

James Blatch: Do you think that's the direction that you might go in and take on a creative stable?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. I know that there's a lot of indy presses, I guess you could call them, or vanity presses that are really trying to basically just trying to become the new traditional publishing.

I don't want to do that. I don't want to have 100 authors to take care of. I'd like to take a select few that I can really bank on ... and not just financially, but that I can trust and we will have a rapport, we really get along, and that I know they have the talent.

I'd probably take a handful of authors that are really ready to work and that would definitely help them out.

James Blatch: You're from Springfield, Missouri.

Shayne Silvers: Yes.

James Blatch: And you're working as a loan officer. Suddenly, the publishing side takes off-

Shayne Silvers: Yes.

James Blatch: And what other changes in your life, clearly quitting the job and being a full-time writer is the biggest thing-

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

James Blatch: What else has changed for you?

Shayne Silvers: We were able to get a better house. So we moved into a house that's got a lot more land, a lot of area for the kids to go get in trouble.

Now, we can wake up in the morning and there's deer and turkeys and all these things just kind of running around the yard. Where, before, we were in a neighborhood, and so we had houses 10 feet away from either side, either direction of us.

We've got a nicer home, more fun. It's got more work space for me and I finally got a decent car. I got a new car. I was always driving an old Toyota.

James Blatch: And what are you driving now?

Shayne Silvers: An Audi. I got a nice, fun car.

James Blatch: Have you talked to your wife yet? That you cashed in the retirement fund.

Shayne Silvers: Yes, I have. So, after the success, I went ahead and showed her, "Hey. These are the daily sales. You know, I took that course a while ago, here's the results".

And she's like, "Wow. That is really good. That's awesome, so, how do we make it better?" And I said, "Oh, by the way ..."

James Blatch: "I'm glad you feel that way because ... "

Shayne Silvers: "... I actually cashed in our retirement to do this". And so, she couldn't be mad then because I'd already made the money back. But it was funny. It's something we laugh about now.

James Blatch: It was a gamble.

Shayne Silvers: Yes. It was definitely a gamble.

James Blatch: Let's talk about the books for a bit, then.

Urban fantasy: is this something that you have always read and wanted to write, or is it something that you chose commercially, or ... ?"

Shayne Silvers: I'd always been a fan of fantasy, in general. So, there's traditional, epic fantasy, which I actually tried originally, and I just couldn't get an agent to look at that, or to accept it, I guess.

So I decided, "Okay. Well, what else do I like to read?", and that would be urban fantasy. And so, I wrote my first book.

Ever since then, it's been urban fantasy all the way. I've got interests and ideas for more traditional fantasy or different kind of spin-offs into different sub-genres or different niches that I might do in fantasy, but urban fantasy is kind of my favorite.

James Blatch: And your lead character, your hero, Nate?

Shayne Silvers: Nate Temple. My whole premise with writing is that I would like to take characters that have flaws. They're not perfect. They're actually kind of bad.

In a way, they're anti-heroes and they've got a lot to learn and overcome to become the hero that everyone wants to see. And so, with my first book, Nate Temple, he's kind of like an Iron Man with magic.

He's a billionaire, he's kind of a jerk and he's very elitist. He's got everything he needs. He doesn't need anyone to tell him what to do. And the whole point of the first couple books is to show him that no matter how much money you have, how strong you are, you can always get better.

He falls hard and he learns a lot of things in the first couple books. And so the rest of the series is him kind of picking up. So it's kind of like a fallen angel story.

Where they crash to the bottom and they have to claw their way back up to become a decent human being. And so, that's kind of the point to all my characters that I focus on, is that they have some major flaw that they're trying to overcome.

James Blatch: How much did you plan that from the beginning?

Shayne Silvers: A hundred percent, because I always got bored with characters that were just so perfect or so soft and so just, I don't know, just boring to me. There's no room for improvement.

James Blatch: But I mean, had you planned three books?

Shayne Silvers: No. I planned one series for sure.

And I knew that the series would go on for about 20 books.

Right now, the Nate Temple series has 10 books out. And the last book, number 10, just hit Top 25 in all of Amazon on launch day. So, Top 25 in the store.

James Blatch: It would have been easy, the way you described the character's journey, you could have done that in a single book, right?-

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

James Blatch: And some people do do that. But, right from the beginning you thought, "Nope. There's going to be a long way to go".

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. It's definitely not an easy path for him.

James Blatch: Was that a commercial decision, or was that just because you felt you wanted to write a series?

Shayne Silvers: It was personal. I didn't do a lot of market research. I think I just kind of lucked out in that regard. I just wrote something that I would want to see. I wanted to see a character that isn't perfect and isn't great,

and they're not the typical, helpless person. They start out as the opposite. They've got it all, and then they lose it all.

James Blatch: So the big planning is in your mind about potentially 20 books, or a big series, with this character's flawed journey, flawed character's journey.

What about individual books. Do you plot them in detail?

Shayne Silvers: It's different. I'll come up with a very basic outline and I've got a lot of the conflicts and the stressors that happen throughout the book.

I try to time my books so that every chapter, some kind of conflict happens. Whether it's internal, external, you know, some character does something that is good for that character, but hurts my main character. There's always some kind of conflict in every chapter.

On the outline side, I'll go through that and kind of have an idea of, here's the high points of the story. And then I'll write the book, and the way I get to those points could change, but the main conflicts are still there. And so I definitely outline that.

James Blatch: How many chapters in your books?

Shayne Silvers: My books are typically 100,000 words, plus. Right around there, give or take. So, about 50 to 60 chapters most often.

James Blatch: Okay.

You've got your points you're going to hit. And then you get down to writing. How do you actually write? How, where and when?

Shayne Silvers: When I write, I spend a lot of time on that outline process.

I'll spend two to four days, just depending on how complicated I want to make it. Because I really like to twist and mess with the reader. So I'll lead

them down a path, for them thinking that this is how things are going to happen. And then I always twist it on them. Whether it's humor, or dark, or something, I always twist it on them.

And I have a lot of fun doing that. So it's kind of like with the thriller or suspense, you're always making it worse, or tricking the reader. So I do that a lot. So I'll spend two to four days on the outline.

And then when I write, I can typically do probably 10 to 20 thousand words a day, whenever I sit down and write. I'm not one of the authors that sits down and does maybe two hours a day. I'll sit down all day and write. I'm all or nothing. I'll have an ads day and then a writing day. I can't really juggle all at the same time.

James Blatch: Okay.

Shayne Silvers: A little different than a lot of people.

James Blatch: What do you write in?

Shayne Silvers: Microsoft Word, because I've always done it. I'd like to use Scrivener. I've heard that there's a lot of cool aspects of that with note taking and linking a lot of plot lines. I know there's a lot of unique things that I could learn there. But just ease of what I already know how to do, it's Word.

And then I transfer to Vellum.

James Blatch: What's your editing process?

Shayne Silvers: I've got an advance team of about 250 people. I write the book. I write the first draft. Then I go back through it with a fine tooth comb and just make sure that it's consistent, that I didn't change a shirt color and you know, all the silly things like that.

And then, I'll send it to the editor, they go through it and then I do a last step where it goes to the advance team. There's about 250 of them.

They get it about 10 to 14 days before launch. It's what we've done in the past. Might be changing some of that by a little bit recently, with new launches. But they get a stab at it, to look at it, and read it, critique it, send me any errors that they may have, and then make those changes and publish it.

James Blatch: You have an active reader team?

Shayne Silvers: Yes. My advance team, the reader team is about 250. They're very active. And then I've got a Facebook group that's kind of a street team; more like just promotion and tell everybody about the book. And I think there's 3800 people in that group, I believe.

James Blatch: Okay, so that's the writing process and marketing wise, I would say I've reference that, Mark's course.

I'm assuming you're on Facebook and AMS adds?

Shayne Silvers: Yes. I run Facebook ads. AMS adds, I'm just starting to play with a little bit. Well, I say a little bit, but I'm doing quite a bit of it now.

I'm just starting to really understand it better with all the keywords and trying to figure out what works, what doesn't, what's acceptable, what's not. When you want to bid for impressions versus actual sales.

Sometimes it's good to just get your name seen. So, AMS adds are probably the cheapest way to get your name in front of millions of people, whether you actually get a sale from it immediately or not, you're doing the seven touches, the marketing.

James Blatch: Yeah. The planting, the familiarization in people's minds.

Mark Dawson: Exactly.

James Blatch: That's really good advice. It definitely works on some level, doesn't it, without saying?

Shayne Silvers: Yes. Absolutely.

James Blatch: And you talked about your mailing list. The mailing list you started right away in 2015?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. Well, 2016.

So, about halfway through Mark's course, I was starting to apply all those things and set that up with a freebie novella. It's a permanent, free, novella. It was a prequel to my Nate Temple series and so, I set that up, and I think right now I've got about 20,000 to 25,000 subscribers across the different lists.

I had ads initially going for that, to kind of build it up. For the last 12 months, I haven't had any ads, trying to get new subscribers but I've just got the information in the back of the book.

James Blatch: You said the different lists. How do you segment yours?

Shayne Silvers: I've got it segmented down into different groups based on interactions, if they're interested in just audio books, e-books, print, different countries, maybe.

Or, if they've clicked or none clicked on certain ads, I'll start segmenting them out just depending on what their interests are and what their activities are.

James Blatch: E-books and audio books ... like, print and audio books, you just mentioned.

Do you do both of them, for everything?

Shayne Silvers: Yes. I do everything. I've played with hardback through Ingram Spark, as well. The pricing is just not really there to make it beneficial for everyone, the reader especially. You have to price it very high so that it gets put into bookstores and all that. So, we'll see if I continue that.

James Blatch: And how is audiobook?

Shayne Silvers: Audiobooks are really good. I do about five figures a month. I know there's a lot of room for improvement with audiobooks because I think that's the next emerging market.

I've even heard of some authors that surpassed their e-book sales with audio books. So, if that's the case, then I'm very interested in beating my e-books sales with audio books because that'd be fantastic.

James Blatch: What social media do you do outside of those little paid ads?

Shayne Silvers: Primarily, I'm on Facebook. I'm still learning how to use Instagram, Pinterest. I know Mark and you just had that course with Pinterest adds and I got to see that a little bit ahead of time.

But that was a good course. And there's Instagram. I don't really play on Twitter. I'm there. But I don't really do anything there. But I'm looking into the new options here.

There's Snap Chat, there's all sorts of new apps that people, different age categories like and prefer. And so I'm really just kind of looking into those and seeing which ones would be more beneficial.

James Blatch: You need to find a 13-year-old to talk to you on the Snap Chat experience.

Shayne Silvers: Tell me about it. I would not do that myself. I promise that.

James Blatch: Do you do any video?

Shayne Silvers: No, actually. I haven't yet. It's definitely on my top 10 list, of doing Facebook Live and different kind of readings and all these things that I've seen some others start to pick up. I think that would be really good.

James Blatch: Yeah. I could see you doing Facebook Live. I think you've got a nice manner about you.

People want to meet you. We can see that.

We did a Facebook Live session this morning. We talked about how it seems to be a newly adopted area, but it's going ahead of the crowd. But easy to do now, easier.

Do you have a lot of interaction with your audience-?

Shayne Silvers: Yes. Very much so.

James Blatch: On Facebook?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, definitely on Facebook. I'm always in my group. It was getting to the point for a little while that I could not even keep up with them. Because I was trying to write a lot, and so I was taking time away from the group.

James Blatch: I'm sure they'd understand that.

Shayne Silvers: They do, yeah. They don't mind. But at the same time, I like being involved with them. They're a very active group. I love hanging out with them, talking to them.

And actually, because I was so active in that group and I kind of built such close ties with them, they actually held a convention last year in St. Louis for me and some-

James Blatch: What?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. They actually set it up themselves. And so, I think there was over 100 people that showed up kind of last minute. And we had a big, blow-out weekend and they've already got it set up for next year. I think there's going to be a couple hundred people there.

James Blatch: Wow.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

Shayne Silvers: That was wild. Because they said, "Hey, do you want to do a convention?" I said, "Well no one's going to come, so I'm not going to do that. If you set it up I'll show up." Lo and behold, a hundred people.

James Blatch: How did your wife react when you told her that these people are going to hold a convention for you?

Shayne Silvers: She was excited and concerned obviously. You don't know what kind of fans, you know, there's always potentially one fan that you maybe don't want to meet. But no, they were all great.

It was such a great time to really get to know them and just to hang out, answer their questions, and just kind of be a human for a while, not just some distant author. Because a lot of readers, I think that was the biggest problem, is that readers can't ever get in contact with the authors. They're so used to that, that he's almost like a robot that doesn't exist, or an alien that they can't ever talk to.

So the fact that they actually get to shake hands with me, share a beer with an author, which is kind of what Facebook Live is. You get to hang out with them for a minute and see them directly respond to your questions. That's huge. They love that.

James Blatch: I think Facebook Live will work really well for you, so it'll be interesting to see you do that. So you've got your own con, Shayne Con, what do they call it?

Shayne Silvers: It was called Friendsgiving, because there was a scene in one of my books that was called Friendsgiving, and so ...

James Blatch: They had to go with a-

Shayne Silvers: So they picked that, so it's called Friendsgiving.

James Blatch: A slightly more nerdy reference that only Shayne Silvers would get.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, exactly.

James Blatch: Have you had any film companies knocking on the door?

Shayne Silvers: There's been conversations. I can't really get into more details on that. I'm definitely pursuing it, but I want it to be done right if it is done. They're not quick processes.

You can get someone one week that tells you they're super interested, and then six months go by and nothing's happened. So I'm interested in it, if anyone is interested in repping me, contact me, I would love to talk to you.

James Blatch: Your character, Nate, where does he come from?

Shayne Silvers: He's in St. Louis.

James Blatch: Okay. That's a good answer, that's a very straightforward answer. I suppose what I mean is, where does he come from?

Is he a bit of you? Is he a bit of your father? Is he someone you knew?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, so a little bit of everything. I know a lot of authors go in and they try to come up with a character that's them on steroids, or better, or whatever. So what I try to do, is I try to take a lot of my flaws and exaggerate everything. I say there's a lot of things wrong with Nate that he needs to learn how to correct.

James Blatch: Is he a young guy?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, he's early 30s. I was 20 something when I wrote it, so he was older than me. He's got a lot of flaws, he's very arrogant, he's a billionaire, he was raised as that trust fund, silver spoon kid. So I definitely wasn't that, but I would've liked to be. It would be nice.

He has a lot of flaws. Everything's been given to him, he's always been a strong wizard, he's always got these great things, and so my goal is to show someone who's got it all and just knock them off their pedestal and then see them have to really learn their flaws to climb back up to the top and be a decent human being.

James Blatch: If it did get made into a feature film, who would you like to play Nate?

Shayne Silvers: There's a lot of fan casting in the group that try to do that, but I think the overwhelming vote so far seems to be Jensen Ackles, which is a guy from the Supernatural TV show. I think he'd do a really good job actually, but there's a lot of people that can do it if they've got humor, snark, and just they can play the arrogant person really well.

James Blatch: You mentioned Tony Stark, so Robert Downey Jr. type. Is it Robert Downey Jr.?

Shayne Silvers: It is, yeah. So him, younger, yeah, that would work.

James Blatch: Slightly quirky sort of character.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. Or Ryan Reynolds maybe in Deadpool, because some people describe the Temple books as Dumbledore meets Deadpool, so it's got magic but also adult version I guess.

James Blatch: Is it humorous?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. Oh very much so. There's a lot of jokes and a lot of twists and puns.

I'm already talking like there's a film, but the first book he cow tips the Minotaur, in the first book. That's kind of a thing that happens in Missouri, is people go cow tipping and they'll try to-

James Blatch: I've heard of this.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, they'll try to knock over a cow in the middle of a-

James Blatch: Have you ever tipped a cow?

Shayne Silvers: I have.

James Blatch: Oh, I could tell straight away, yes.

Shayne Silvers: Alleged. Allegedly.

James Blatch: Has tipped a cow.

Shayne Silvers: I try to take twists like that. So he cow tips the Minotaur in the first book, and then in other books he does a lot of similar type things with other famous legends and gods. You know, playing beer pong with Hercules. It's just something like that, so there's always a twist on one of the major legends, and they're all major characters in the book.

James Blatch: You've set it obviously in your locality, you're from Missouri, or you live in Missouri.

Shayne Silvers: It's a couple of hours away. Yeah, it's in the same state. I've got St. Louis for the Nate Temple series, and then I've got a newer series that's, it's called the Feathers and Fire series and that kind of starts midway through Nate Temple series, so they cross over, kind of like the Marvel movies, where they're all in the same universe, but they're their own storylines. She's in Kansas City, Missouri. They run into each other a lot and butt heads a lot, and that's kind of fun.

James Blatch: Did you choose these locations, beyond them being convenient because you know them, did you choose them for any other reason?

Shayne Silvers: I did. St. Louis anyway is nicknamed the Gateway to the West. So, with a lot of western philosophy and western gods, the Greeks, all these things that I incorporate into my books, it was a fun angle to take, that St. Louis is kind of the start of all this and all these monsters, and legends,

and gods, and everything are coming to Missouri and everyone's wondering why, Missouri's in the middle of nowhere.

But because it's the Gateway to the West, it's kind of a fun way to start it. Everyone's got New York, or Miami, or some big city. I wanted to use something a little different, a little bit more unique, and it just happened to be the state that I ended up moving to. It wasn't because I lived there that I did it.

James Blatch: That's a great concept, the idea of the gateway being there and these creatures moving through it. Just to check, you don't believe in this stuff?

Shayne Silvers: No.

James Blatch: Any of your fans believe in this stuff?

The only reason I ask this is because we did interview the guy in New York earlier this year called J. D. Barker who discovered that Bram Stoker did believe in vampires, because he went through his original notes, Dracul is the sequel.

Shayne Silvers: So he's a little like, "Oh, maybe it is real."

James Blatch: I think Bram Stoker's editor cut out that aspect from-

Shayne Silvers: I'm sure, or else you're publishing a crazy person.

James Blatch: Exactly. Good. Some of your fans may, I don't know.

Shayne Silvers: They could. It's fun though, I get to take a lot of different cultures. I've got the Greeks, the Vikings, the Norse Gods. I get to play in all the playgrounds of philosophy and fantasy and mythology. So I get to incorporate all these characters, the Minotaur hanging out with Achilles, and I get to have all these fun aspects.

James Blatch: Where do you get all that knowledge from? I mean, did you learn classics at school?

Shayne Silvers: Yeah.

When I was a child that was my escape, is mythology. So I'd read Iliad and Odyssey, and anything I could find on Greek mythology, Norse mythology. Then I did martial arts for a decade, and so I would learn all about eastern philosophy. So then martial arts, and I would get to learn about Buddhism, and meditations, and all these things.

I accumulated all these things and then realized, "Well that's perfect. Why don't you put it all together in one big melting pot?" So that's kind of what I've done. So all of those main characters show up in my books at some point.

James Blatch: Have you calculated how many books you've sold?

Shayne Silvers: It's hard because it depends on if you look at page reads as books, because technically they could be. I mean, if you kind of give yourself a average page number per book, I mean people read that entire book.

If you're looking at that, I'm over a million. If you're looking below that, I haven't checked it recently, but I can definitely say I've had 500,000 for sure. If you're counting the page reads it's over a million.

James Blatch: How does that feel?

Shayne Silvers: It's just crazy to say it. It doesn't compute. I don't know, just kind of, it's a number and I just want to keep going, keep writing.

James Blatch: Does the writing feel different now you've got that success under your belt, than it did at the beginning?

Shayne Silvers: No, no. I'm having more fun. I'm also further in the series though too, so there's a lot better understanding of the voice, and the

characters themselves, and the big picture project, how far away I am from the end.

I'm much more familiar with the characters and their weaknesses, their strengths, and the bad guys, and how to do that. So the writing has actually gotten easier, but my stories have gotten more complex. Just because the writing is easier, I try to really mess with the reader now a lot more.

James Blatch: Shayne, we're so pleased we bumped into you here in Florida, and it's a fantastic story. Obviously we always like to hear success stories about the course, but it's just a joyful thing to hear that a writer has, almost like you've hit that oil well. Do they have oil in Missouri?

Shayne Silvers: I don't know. I'm not sure actually. I know in Texas they do.

James Blatch: Geysers or geysers.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah. Geysers, we probably have geysers here.

James Blatch: We have geysers, yeah. Well you used to live in Wales, so you know what geysers are like.

Shayne Silvers: Exactly.

James Blatch: That's great. We celebrate success and we'll keep a track on how things go in the future.

Shayne Silvers: Yeah, absolutely.

James Blatch: Particularly looking forward to the Ryan Reynolds mini-series.

Shayne Silvers: Yes, me too. I'll let you guys know, I'll call you first if that happens.

James Blatch: I mean, clearly we have to say, and I think I said it in the interview, the guy writes good books.

Mark Dawson: He does, yes. I actually read one of his books on the flight back from Florida and it's funny, he's a good writer, he knows what he's doing. It was very enjoyable.

He writes good books, he writes them reasonably frequently, and he has spectacular facial hair. Let's not forget about that.

James Blatch: He has a good beard.

Mark Dawson: ... a fantastic mustache.

James Blatch: He has a good beard and mustache, and he has a good trainer.

He did attribute his success to you. The reason I say he's a good writer is just to make it clear that you have to have the product in order to make this work.

I noticed somebody commented on the YouTube video from the Amazon masterclass, AMS masterclass last week saying, "This is not working because I've run two ads and I haven't sold any books."

Now, there's a whole raft of reasons as to why, when you start advertising it might not work for you, but you do have to look at the product, you have to look at your book cover and everything else.

Shayne's an example of somebody who just does this methodically, and yes, he's used your instruction to go through that process and position himself, and it's paid unbelievable dividends, unbelievably quickly.

Mark Dawson: I remember seeing his ads actually in my newsfeed, and it took me a while to realize that he was a student, because his ads are brilliant. He has really fantastic, colorful images, that are perfect for his genre. Then his copy is funny as well, so talking about cow tipping a Minotaur.

James Blatch: Yes. That's the opening line, isn't it? Opening passage of his first book.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Given that I come from places where cow tipping is something we used to do in my time, and no cows were injured in the filming of this podcast.

No, it's funny, he's a funny guy, and those are really effective ads. I was pleased to see that they were as effective as they deserved to be because out of all the ones I've seen over the last couple of years, his would be up there in the top five, so yeah, it's fantastic to see how well he's doing.

Lovely to see him in Florida, he's actually coming to Bali as well, so be hanging out with at the 20Books Bali Conference in January, so I'm looking forward to that.

James Blatch: Excellent. Yes, it was really nice to meet Shayne and he's a good chap to hang out with. I'm sure you'll have fun on the beach in Bali.

Mark Dawson: I will and I'll tell you all about it.

James Blatch: We'll try and do a live with you while you're out there. I don't know what timezone Bali ... You're going to be ahead, you'll be ahead of us in the east.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: I was speaking to someone the other day from Australia and they said, "Bali? Really, you're going to Bali?" Their version of Bali is very different from ours.

In the UK, and I'm not sure what it's like in America, Bali summons up Mauritius, Archipelagos in the Pacific or Indian Ocean, very beautiful, lots of sunny beaches.

In Australia it's a bit like saying you're going to Jersey Shore or Ibiza.

Mark Dawson: Oh lovely. I like both of those places.

James Blatch: Just to warn you that it might have beautiful beaches, might also be, you'll be going down bonkers nightclub on a Tuesday night.

Mark Dawson: No, we won't be doing that, we'll be staying in the hotel all the time. Lucy's talking about excursions and all that. I'm not going on an excursion, I'm staying in the hotel.

James Blatch: You're going to sleep, aren't you?

Mark Dawson: There will be sleep involved definitely. This is after Christmas with two sets of parents, two children running around with a crazy dog. This is going to be five days of recovery time for me and Lucy.

James Blatch: I'm going to have to give you a camera and a sound device so you can do some podcast interviews while you're out there, and try and train you up.

Mark Dawson: I could do that.

James Blatch: Need to do some work while you're there.

I want to say thank you to Shayne Silvers, our guest today.

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Probably summer 2019 I think we'll onboard the next crop of students.

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