

## **EPISODE 148: HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES WITH NON-FICTION – WITH JOSEPH ALEXANDER**

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 Blatch and Mark Dawson. We're doing an unusual evening. It's darker in both Salisbury and Huntingdon and these long winter nights. We're normally morning people, aren't we?

Mark Dawson: Yes, normally. We've had a slight change in schedule today, but, yes.

James Blatch: Are you a morning person?

Mark Dawson: I am, yes. I'm much more effective in the morning. I tend to slowdown this time of day.

James Blatch: Interesting. I'm a night owl, definitely.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, horses for courses, although, when I say that I often see in the Facebook group people are asking, "What's he talking about?" Don't know what horses for courses means.

James Blatch: Don't they? Is that just a very British expression?

Mark Dawson: I think it must be, yes, it must be. Yeah, horses for courses, what does that mean really?

James Blatch: Well, it means what's good for you might not be good for somebody else.

For one horse, the course is going to be ten horses who might all be equally of strength, one will win on one course because it suits them. Horses for courses. I think it's pretty self explanatory, isn't it? Is horse racing not as big a thing over in the states? The track.

Mark Dawson: Well, the Kentucky Derby I guess is quite big, isn't it?

James Blatch: I think it's called derby over there.

Mark Dawson: Yes, that's very true.

James Blatch: Okay, I feel we're getting sidetracked, but anyway, it's the end of a course opening period for us, we're now moving into Christmas.

I do like this period for for SPF because we spent, and I think individual authors could do the same thing, wherever you run your company, whether it's from the middle of July I think ours is, end of July each year, there's a natural end of year, a period for you to take stock, to look at what your achievements were in 2018 and look forward to 2019.

We're starting to modify some of the things we're doing now, like the blog posts, I've written one on what events you might want to go to in 2019 that Tom will publish at some point this year.

We'll do a few more other posts here and there about that. An SPF point of view, we'll think about what we did this year, where we're going to go for next year.

**In fact, I'm coming down to poisonous Salisbury this very week, am I not?**

Mark Dawson: You are, yes. Remember to bring your hazmat suit. You never know.

James Blatch: I shall pull into a lay-by in Aylesbury or somewhere and put on the hazmat suit for the final.

Mark Dawson: Is that a lay-by you normally pull into?

James Blatch: That's a joke I don't understand.

Mark Dawson: Does Mrs. Blatch know?

James Blatch: That's an old joke.

Yes, so I'm going to come down there and we can have a little chat about the future, but we need to have a get together. For us, it's quite nice because the course doesn't open again until March probably, I think, so we get a bit of time to spend on course creation.

I've got a couple of new things coming up, an Instagram module that's coming on stream, revision AMS. We won't mention AMS now, but we are going to obviously have to revisit it from time to time because it's a changing area.

There's lots of chat in the groups. What I would say about AMS, I'm getting lots of questions about getting to the advanced console, is pay attention to the Facebook groups because there's some fluidity there. I think I mentioned that last week, and that's where you're going to find the best information on that.

But we are also going to talk about the foundation. Our thoughts turn to how we're going to allocate the money next year to authors who are good at writing, have got a lot of the things needed to make it work, to make a career work, but are struggling to find the funds to get their career up and running.

The Self-Publishing Formula wants to support them, so we set up a foundation, your wife Lucy did a lot of the work here, it's called the SPF

Foundation. We awarded our first grants in 2018 to Ronny Verdi, Diana Ball and Laura Fife.

We've got to catch up with them actually, they're all doing pretty well, and we're going to give you a full update when we do an episode dedicated to this in the near future, but what I wanted to say to you at this stage is that applications for 2019 close on the last day of 2018, 31st of December 2018.

### **What's on offer, Mark? Do you want to tell us what's on offer for successful applicants?**

Mark Dawson: Firstly, it's with Reedsy. We work with Ricardo and Emanuel at Reedsy, and what's on offer is both of VSPS courses, and I think it's £2000 worth of-

James Blatch: £2000, yeah. \$2,500, so about £2000.

Mark Dawson: \$2,500 to be spent as the author wishes. On cover design, on editing, advertising, that kind of stuff, just to get them off and running. We're definitely looking for people to sign up, or to apply, anyway.

There's a fairly, I wouldn't say it's rigorous, but there are some criteria that need to be met, and all of the details are on the website, [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com).

Up at the top, there's a tab for foundation, and there's a little form to fill out. You need a sponsor, someone in the SPF community, and then send it off and Lucy looks through those. She shows me a few, and we decide, I think it will be three, three more people that we decide to give them a hand and hopefully get them started on their careers as full-time authors.

James Blatch: \$2,500 goes a long way. Reedsy.com is a bit of a one-stop shop for a lot of the essential services that you need, and then combine that with access to the Facebook groups that support the two courses and you've got a very, very good start to your career.

As Mark says, [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com), you can go start to /spf-foundation, but otherwise you'll see a tab at the top as Mark says. Get your applications in and we look forward to looking over those in the beginning of the new year.

Happy Thanksgiving just gone for everyone in America. Happy Thursday for everyone else, and now it's Christmas, what we call Christmas I think they call holidays, strangely. Holidays is like a beach for us, isn't it?

But in America, it's Christmas. Our lights are on, the music was playing for the first time in the house last night, everyone's getting excited about Christmas.

### **Is that the same at Dawson Towers?**

Mark Dawson: We had an auction at Samuel's school, my son Samuel's school, and one of the prizes was to go to a farm in a tractor and to pick a Christmas tree from their crop of Christmas trees, which they then cut down and deliver to us. We're going to to be doing that quite soon.

### **James Blatch: You won that auction? Did Samuel give you the eyes that said, "You are winning that, dad"?**

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I bid up so he could get that one. We've got a fairly, a large hallway with quite a tall ceiling, so we'll probably be getting quite a big one, put that in there. That'll be, it actually reminds me, I've got to do that now. Probably have to make a phone call tomorrow to go and select that tree, but yes, certainly it's coming.

James Blatch: Excellent. Well, I hope it's like the tree in 'National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation', which they move into the house and it has wildlife still in it, because it sounds like it's going to be if you're going to cut it down in the forest.

We're getting our tree this weekend, and it's good. Like I said, it is a time, however you organize your year, it's inevitable that your thoughts turn to

what you've achieved this year and what you're going to achieve in the future, so it's a good time for us on the podcast to start thinking about that as well.

Now, we talking to somebody who's achieved a huge amount recent years, today. His name is Joseph Alexander, he's been on the podcast before, because he was on a panel I think with you a couple of years ago at the London Book Fair, and we were listening to him talk about his non-fiction business.

He's killed it. Guitar lessons, quite niche for him, but specific types of guitar lessons. If you look up his books on Amazon, rock guitar and classic guitar, he's turned what was a very fruitful non-fiction business for him into a bit of a monster publishing house where he ties in with other people, including some very famous, in the guitar world, people. He's finally put pen to paper and explained to the rest of the world exactly how he's done that.

He's a big fan of yours and your methods, and we often talk about, well, we talk a lot about fiction authors and occasionally, not as much as perhaps we should do, talk about non-fiction.

**This is an important pillar in the non-fiction part of our community, is it not?**

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. Joseph's a good example of how ads can work. It doesn't really matter what you write, ads will enable you to find readers in whichever niche you're trying to target.

He's particularly good on Amazon ads, but he's done very well. It's funny, with him, with his ads, it's easy for him to target and I don't think there's a ton of competition, so it's a bit more tricky for fiction writers.

We often get questions when the courses open from non-fiction authors saying will ads work? Well, they actually can work and sometimes easier than it is the case for fiction writers. Joseph is a good example of that, and

he's turned his hand a non-fiction book on self-publishing. Certainly interesting to see what he's got to say.

Let's talk to Joseph. I'll tell you in advance that the book is called 'Self-Published Millionaire', there's a clue to how successful he's been, and then Mark and I will have a chat off the back of the interview.

Joseph Alexander, hello, welcome along. There's a man who looks like a Rock and Roll guy, leaning back, surrounded in Stratocasters, which I've just made that up, I don't know if that's what any of those guitars are.

Joseph Alexander: Yes, there's one.

James Blatch: Is there?

Joseph Alexander: That one, yeah.

James Blatch: Is a Strato.

Joseph Alexander: It's a Strat, yeah.

James Blatch: Is that what you call it, Strat?

Joseph Alexander: That's my main guitar, that's my go-to one really. Whole rack of them behind me now. I've got gear acquisition syndrome quite badly.

James Blatch: Well it looks very cool. I saw an interview with Paul McCartney recently, he was explaining that, because his two original guitars, I don't know what his original guitar is that he famously plays, but ...

Joseph Alexander: Well, he had like a Hofner violin bass, didn't he?

James Blatch: He said the first one's missing.

Joseph Alexander: Oh.

James Blatch: At some point, it disappeared.

Joseph Alexander: I've not got it.

James Blatch: He doesn't really know when, I but I reckon you've got it.

Joseph Alexander: That must be worth a fortune, that.

James Blatch: Macca's theory is that it's in the basement of some oligarch's house.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, maybe.

James Blatch: Or some German collector's or something.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah.

James Blatch: I do know, on an aside, I do know the story because I toured the Abbey Road studios a couple of years ago, a friend of mine worked for EMI.

There was a piano there and a new guy took over the studios and became its kind of curator and he was told this was the piano that Paul McCartney played 'Let It Be' on. It was in Studio 2, where The Beatles recorded everything, and he looked at a photograph and worked out after a while that it probably wasn't that piano, it looked very similar, but the markings were different.

He set off on an investigation, eventually tracked it down to a secretary who worked in Abbey Road in the mid '70s, had said to a neighbor, "Oh, there's a piano in the corridor, would you like it?"

They got a removals van, took this piano, it was in this house in Twickenham and they turned up there with a removals van and said, "I hope you've enjoyed having a piano that's Paul McCartney's piano, we want it back." So it's now back in Abbey Road.

Joseph Alexander: Oh my gosh, wow.

James Blatch: So it does, I'm not saying you've definitely got Paul McCartney's guitar, but ...

Joseph Alexander: Well, crime doesn't pay, I think we all know now.

James Blatch: No, in the end.

Joseph Alexander: You never know when Macca's going to turn up at my door.

James Blatch: Yeah, exactly. How cool would that be, though?

Joseph Alexander: It'd be alright.

James Blatch: Okay, look, let's talk a little bit about you. We've obviously, through our whimsical introduction, have revealed the fact that you're a musician and guitar is your thing.

Mark and I, we were just saying on the introduction, have been really amazed at watching what you've done. A lot of the people who we talk to had a close connection with Mark and got a lot of learning from him, but actually you were somebody we found who is doing the same thing as Mark but in a slightly different area, a very niche area.

**Give us a bit of background, Joseph, about how you became this multi-seller on Amazon.**

Joseph Alexander: Complete accident at the beginning, certainly. Obviously it turned into something I discovered was a viable career I guess, but it really just started for me teaching my students at home private lessons and writing down the lessons that I was teaching them.

I was saving them, I was just going it in Microsoft Word or whatever and doing a bit of music notation for them, and I was just getting piles and piles of stuff, and I figured I wanted to share that, I guess.

A lot of it came out of the experience I had at music college where I was bombarded by all these different resources and musicians, and I didn't really know where to start, especially with Jazz guitar.

What all my private lesson teachings turned into was just like a very, very step-wise route through how to get into playing Jazz. I wasn't going to do anything with that.

I approached, I think it was the registry of guitar teachers in London, said, "Do you want to put this out?" They were doing some books at the time and they said, "Well, you know, we really like it, thank you", but it was going to come with three DVDs of audio examples. It was totally financially unviable for them to do it, and they said they were struggling to sell guitar books and things like that at the time.

I thought well, okay, fair enough, it's not going any further, and I mentioned it to one of my students who was like, "Amazon do some sort of self-publishing thing."

I did a bit of research and figured I could stick it online. Terrible cover and bad formatting. I figured, well, it's the 21st century, we can make all that audio available to download for free, because you can't put a CD or a DVD with a self-published book through Create Space at the time, and KDP. Very basic WordPress website, it sort of started selling a few copies, I thought, "Oh, that's interesting."

James Blatch: So the download, they bought the book?

Joseph Alexander: Yeah.

James Blatch: Electronically, or in CreateSpace format?

Joseph Alexander: I think it started off with CreateSpace, I kind of found it backwards. I went to CreateSpace and then later went to KDP a few months later.

**James Blatch: And then there were links in the book to and get the downloads?**

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, exactly that. For the first year, it was just like, oh, we'll just make them available. I kind of twigged that actually if we asked for people's email addresses when they got the download, we could start to build an email list, which obviously ties in a lot with what Mark talks about.

It was being a musician, self employed, teaching and things, you don't really give much thought to a pension, but in the back of my mind I was like, "I'm really enjoying teaching guitar. If I don't do much with these books, at least they're going to trickle away and I can save a little bit of money with those."

So I wrote another one and that kind of really hit. For some reason that - excuse the pun - that struck a chord with people and I thought, "Oh hang on, there's something here."

I think I ended up writing about fourteen books in that first year, just based on what I'd learnt at university, music college, what I was teaching my students, my own ideas about music and things.

At the end of the first year, my girlfriend had seen my pictures when I traveled around Thailand a few years ago, she was like, "Well, do you want to go live in Thailand for a year?" So we did. I carried on writing there, she was teaching, and it suddenly became a career.

James Blatch: That early days, that first year or so, you were selling the books?

**Or you were selling the books and then collecting the email addresses when people downloaded the content?**

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, exactly that. Because a lot of what the theory about building a list at the moment is give away the prequel, give away another book in the series, which is really good.

The accidental but massive advantage that I had was that if you're learning music, of course you really want to hear what that sounds like, and my downloads were integral, are integral to getting the most out of the books.

It's not like we're having to try and come up with some superficial thing, not that books are, don't get me wrong, but it's not like get my free checklist kind of PDF sort of thing. It's something that's really integral, people want, and we can then ... Well, we'll probably talk about email marketing and automation later. I know I get asked about that a lot.

James Blatch: It's brilliant how you stumbled across that, and I think Mark's example of a similar thing is he created it for the purpose, as opposed to it being, as you say, an integral part of it.

I think he created a personnel file for John Milton, and people got to the end of the book, of course they've got to the end of the book, they've enjoyed it, and it to read this little extra, that went down really well.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, I can imagine. Stuff like that, that's what I mean; it's got to be something that really people care about to trade your email address for without it. Mark's a mate, but he's very, very savvy with this kind of thing.

As you said, Mark and I sort of found that we were doing similar things coming at it from different angles, and we met, I think it was about two years ago at the Amazon Academy, and I sat down with him. I'm sure he gets approached by loads of people, and I started telling him what I did and he was friendly, but when I talked about what we were selling it was like, "Oh." He was like, "Can we interview you?"

Then we see each other at Amazon events all the time, and we chat on Facebook and things, exchange ideas. Yeah, he's a really good guy. It was strange that we had this parallel kind of thing going on and we found out we were doing the same thing. Obviously there's something in it.

### **James Blatch: That first year, the books were selling?**

Joseph Alexander: Yeah. I don't really know why, there was no AMS there. I think I was just lucky that six years ago not many people were doing anything with indy publishing and guitar. I think there was a few people doing it with piano, but I think I was kind of a little bit ground breaking, I guess, in that sense.

Just through what I was doing up on Amazon and I think I showed you in the last interview I did what the covers looked like and the next stage was, you know, when it started getting bigger, so, okay, well, we'll invest some money, we've got nice looking websites.

I asked the guys who did the website to help me design a template for book covers where we could just shove another guitar in and change the title and things, and that worked really well because rather than my own sort of shoddy attempts at Photoshop, we got some really professional covers. I've got a few here, if I can show you what we're doing now, if you're interested.

James Blatch: Most people do listen to the podcast but ...

Joseph Alexander: Oh, okay. Fair enough.

James Blatch: But we are trying to drive people to this YouTube channel where it's all happening and you can see people in glorious technicolor, so absolutely do, do hold them up and let's have a look.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah.

James Blatch: I can describe them.

Joseph Alexander: I've got at least three guitars in shot at the moment, so that's probably one of the biggest books we've done. Martin Taylor, Beyond Chord Melody. Now, he's one probably one of the top jazz guys in the world and we reached out to him, he wanted to do a book with us, so that.

This is one we released last week. That's with a guy called Jens Larsen, who's an incredible jazz musician. He's all over YouTube, hundreds of thousands of followers.

A bit of our kind of business strategy at the moment, to reach out to very popular guitarists, like that's Levi Clay's, and this was just a little one that I wrote a couple of weeks ago, to sort of get it out in time for Christmas, and that's how to read guitar tablature, so-

James Blatch: Nice.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, we're just trying to sort of think of little things that haven't been done, but by working with lots of different musicians we can very quickly proliferate and I think that we're releasing our 30th book this year tonight, so we're kind of really pushing quite hard.

James Blatch: Wow. Okay. So you are a small, indie publishing house?

Joseph Alexander: Yeah.

**James Blatch: I say small; you're a seven figures indie publishing house.**

Joseph Alexander: It's gone a bit crazy, really. We've found an incredible company that we outsource to and now I'm getting the books coming in and sending them off to the company and they're editing, doing the layout, doing the covers and everything like that for us now, so they're kind of coming back in and that's sort of a set subcontractor fee each month.

For the first few months it was great, but it was weird because I had a lot less to do and then, me being me, I decided I was going to get busy doing other things, so I got bored.

James Blatch: I know that, when you think, "Oh, I've offloaded some work." And then within five minutes, you've filled that space very quickly.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, exactly.

James Blatch: Well, that's fantastic. And do you know what, the email we get quite often, particularly when Mark's ... When we've got a course open and people say, they're looking at ads for authors or 101 and they email us and say, "Does this stuff work for non-fiction authors? Is there anywhere a non-fiction indie author can make money?" And there's a note of cynicism in the email.

### **Joseph, what's the answer to that?**

Joseph Alexander: Do you want the actual number, what we're on at the moment?

James Blatch: Go on, let's have the number.

Joseph Alexander: I think it's about \$2.3 million at the moment in the last six years, and that's obviously grown a lot in the last two years.

I think when people ask me like that, things like that, I think actually it's easier with non-fiction because you're writing books that are targeted at a very, very clear demographic, and people are specifically looking for that title on Amazon.

Whether it's how to do DIY or cooking or makeup, whatever it happens to be, you can very easily integrate the search terms into your book titles.

So, actually, with this stuff, you're going to find that your AMS or whatever it's called now is super targeted, you're going to spend less on AMS and people will find your books organically much more easily.

I've got massive respect for guys like Mark, who are doing this with fiction, with novels, because I find that stuff quite hard to market.

I think there's just much more competition there as well.

James Blatch: I completely agree, and I think you've got to think about how people, as you say, search for things, because one of the great things about

non-fiction is they usually have a problem they're trying to solve and so it's not like thrillers.

Someone idly browsing ... there's a billion thrillers out there, so it's going to be quite difficult to catch their eye, but if they type in how do I become a lawyer, how do I become a teacher, and you've got the answer to that, or you're in that area.

Suddenly you've got a very niche, narrow, targeted audience and so, yeah, non-fiction I think does give you a lot of opportunities for finding your audience easier than, as you say, fiction genre, even though there's a bigger ... More people read fiction genre.

Joseph Alexander: Well, I think so, and also what we're seeing, and actually what we're starting to get involved with with the new company is people who are using Amazon to write books about their bigger company, their niche, whether they're in marketing or the building trade, or whatever they happen to be doing, people are realizing that Amazon is pretty much the second or third biggest search engine on the internet.

We're working for a marketing company and they're working with company's who are spending literally £200,000 a month on pay-per-click advertising, I won't name them but they're huge, huge, huge multinational, but they're saturated and they're saturated in all the obviously places, like Google and Bing and Facebook and all that sort of stuff.

But, actually, by using a non-fiction guidebook as the lead generation tool, they can get a book written which is one of the things we're starting to do and they can run very inexpensive adverts through that on Amazon and then that book is working as a lead gen into their £500,000, £10,000 product, so it's becoming quite a good way to get found in the wider world, let alone by selling books.

James Blatch: It definitely is, and that's a conversation that Mark and I have quite a lot, about the 101 course in particular, this is a slightly commercial

conversation, that's what we're having, the 101 course particular is a perfect blueprint for exactly that, for somebody who wants their book to be proof of their expertise and lead generation into their bigger product.

So some small tweaks to that and that will be something else we'll develop and try and help people out in that area, and help ourselves as well.

That's how it works.

You have written a book, which is why we're having this conversation.

**Tell us about that and where the idea came from.**

Joseph Alexander: I was really shy to do it, and I think I was talking to you about it almost a year ago, not last London Book Fair, the one before that.

You were one of the guys that were sort of pushing me to publish it and I spoke to a few people and I don't know, it was a bit of an ethical question for me because I didn't know whether it was something I wanted to be associated with.

I'm really into the guitar thing, but I started writing a book about how to self publish and it was a little bit sort of autobiographical, about what mistakes I've made, what successes I've had, what's worked, what's not, and how I sort of came to do it.

But also really just packing it full of absolutely everything we do on a day-to-day basis to create a book and market it and sell it, and actually get to an audience, build a mailing list, keep marketing and build that ecosystem.

I've called it *Self-Published Millionaire* and just to put it out there that this is a legitimate career path for the people who want to dedicate themselves to it. I'd written this book about 18 months ago, and since then I started working with the company I mentioned before who were doing the set up, and that's run by a guy called Tim.

Me and Tim have become really good friends, and Tim's got about 20 plus years in the traditional publishing industry and he's been responsible for thousands of books, literally, and he ghost writes. He's written some ... I won't mention who, because I can't, but, you know, ghost written books for some very big celebrities, and he was like, "Well, I really like your book, but how about we sort of go together on this and I put my insight from a traditional publisher point of view as well?"

So he's kind of gone through, re-written it, I've updated it obviously, and we just finished it and the book's going to be out on the 1st November.

It's pretty comprehensive, right through from planning a book to every stage that you can imagine in there, which I won't list because your listeners know what the stages are in doing a book, but actually then having your physical book, marketing it and building ... Building sustainable environment for yourself to continue doing that.

We've thrown the kitchen sink in. Everything we do is in there. We've been very honest about it as well. *Self-Published Millionaire's* going to be out ... I think we're going for a launch on the 1st November, so we'll include some links to that if we can.

James Blatch: So it's interesting that Tim brought in the traditional publishing aspect of it. How much does that differ?

**Is there an overlap or is there specific lessons in there that are a little bit different approaches for trad and indie?**

Joseph Alexander: I think that there is, but it stops at the writing stage. If you are going to a trad deal, and a lot of people want that, you're not necessarily going to want to do your own covers, you're not going to necessarily do a huge amount of your own editing.

You want it as good as possible, but you have to realize at some point when you've written that book, if your agent and your publisher think there's mileage in it, they're going to reshape it, that sort of thing.

So if you go to a trad publisher with a completely finished product, they're going to probably say no to that, because they're going to have their own ideas, quite rightly so, about who they're going to be marketing that to, how they're going to get that into stores, and they might have a different vision of that book for you.

However, if you don't go that way, it does seem more and more these days that there's almost nothing that a traditional publisher can do for you that you can't do for yourself, with the possible exception of book placements in stores.

But, it's swings and roundabouts. They might be able to sell a lot more copies of your books but you will take home a massively reduced percentage of what you could do if you were selling that yourself.

And if it is your vision, your baby, and you want to create that, I think these days it is difficult to suggest somebody goes the trad routes, and the people that I know ... I was talking to Mel down at, you know, the Kindle Store retailer where I was the other day ...

James Blatch: Mel Sherratt.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, and she's just got a really big trad deal, we're all really excited for her, but they've allowed her to keep her indie stuff, they've allowed her to keep her pen name stuff as well, so it's kind of, for her, working in tandem.

It's a great other avenue, but she's managed to keep everything that she's done before, so it's fantastic.

James Blatch: Funnily enough, Mark and I had a conversation last night. We did a live webinar for our Gold Patreon supporters, [patreon.com/spfpodcast](https://patreon.com/spfpodcast), if you want to get that live monthly webinar, and last night was about mindset with Adam Croft.

There's a new author who has just got an agent and was about to go out to try and get a traditional deal and she was saying, "I'm really having my head turned by all this stuff about whether I should go indie."

We were making the point you've just made really, that if you start indie, it's a really helpful thing to do because you'll end up in a position like Mel, even if you want to go trad later. But instead of sitting there with nothing behind you, no sales and no real clue as to how the whole thing works, accepting a deal on a shrug of shoulders, because nobody really knows what the going rate is, they'll try and get you as cheap as possible, and there's Mel. Think of the position she's in, negotiating a traditional deal now.

And Bella Andre, who negotiated a seven figure deal, because she just showed them her spreadsheet and said, "Well, this is what I'm doing, what are you offering me?"

Hugh Howey, who famously turned down a seven figure deal, he still thought it wasn't worth it.

**I think just on that subject, starting indie, even if traditional's going to be your ultimate goal, is such a good thing to do to get some proof about your abilities and understand the market.**

Joseph Alexander: I think any sort of publishing industry, and there's a real analogy here with music, being a band and getting a label, getting signed, there's a huge analogy there because if you change hats and you look at yourself, if you were a traditional publisher, of course you're going to be risk adverse.

It's a huge undertaking to take on an author, invest that into a book, set up... well, not set up the distribution channels but take that risk on sale or return with all those titles, and if you can go to a trad publisher and say, "Yeah, listen, these are my numbers, here's my spreadsheet." And you can go with a mailing list that's buying your stuff, they want to know you've got

fans. They want to know that straight out of the gate, they're going to sell however many thousands, tens of thousands of copies to your audience because your audience love you.

If you're a trad publishing company, that's a no brainer. It's something that we've tried to model a little bit, albeit in a hopefully a better paid way for our authors.

We were approaching people who are massive on Instagram or YouTube and things like that, where they've already got a following, because they're great musicians, because they've got something to say on the instrument, but also because we know that there's a built in audience, which not only helps the initial sales, it also helps spread the word about what we do. Because as soon as you're in our email system, then they're going to be finding out about other related books, so it works really well for everyone.

I think we're coming up to 60,000 on our mailing list now. We can just push sales to Amazon like that when we want to, so we'll never guarantee anything but the author knows that they're going to get the best launch possible for their book and it's just a very symbiotic relationship with what we do. And it's working, it's really working very well.

**James Blatch: That's great. On the music front, what is the situation with the indie and trad world when it comes to bands and music? I have to say, I'm hopelessly out of touch.**

Joseph Alexander: I'm so out of touch.

James Blatch: All right.

Joseph Alexander: I really wish I knew. I know basically it's, as I said with traditional publishing, that you can be the best band in the world but if you've got no fans, then why is the record label going to pay for all that studio time, and all that promo, and all the distribution and everything like that, because music's an incredibly expensive thing to produce, and

produce it well and if you're going to be competing with the Katy Perrys and Kanye Wests of the world, it's big money.

The situation, as far as I know, is that bands that are great, and they're approaching record labels with the view to getting signed, then they're going to be looking at how many people are coming to your gigs, how many people are in your mailing list and it's kind of similar stuff.

James Blatch: We were talking about is that the advice to authors is to start indie and build up a presence before you go to try and get your trad deal if that's your ultimate aim, is very much how organically it now works in music, bands have to build up their own ecosystem, if you like, as proof and as credibility to try and get a deal.

Joseph Alexander: I think so.

James Blatch: And do they need a deal? Mark would say he'll take a traditional deal if it's worth it, but he doesn't need one.

### **In the music world, do bands still need labels behind them?**

Joseph Alexander: I don't know. I think it's one of those things where it's starting to be that you can get on iTunes and Spotify very, very easily, so if you're in a position where you can drive sales, and it's like we've got like a sneaky idea.

We know that when we get 100,000 subscribers, why don't we write a tune, put it out there and see what we can do with it? We can get, what, 10,000 sales on a day or something like that, then you're going to be number one.

James Blatch: Number one.

Joseph Alexander: And they must be like, "Who the hell are these guys?"

James Blatch: You'll be on Top of the Pops, if only it still existed.

Joseph Alexander: That would be amazing. Man, that would be so cool. Go full circle, but I feel like it would be cheating a little bit.

I've got friends who aren't signed but they're very, very good at self marketing, and they're doing really good friends, actually, a good friend of mine, you mentioned Abbey Road, he's got a great studio at home but he goes down and masters all his work at Abbey Road.

James Blatch: Wow.

Joseph Alexander: And it's one of those things when you're in that environment, you do get the contacts and the inside information to make things work, and, yeah, he's doing really well.

He's not signed to a label but it's one of those things where it's traditional musician's life, where you're doing gigs but you're also selling your own stuff, doing a bit of teaching.

Library music as well, he writes a load of library music that gets used on TV and things, so, it's just all these different streams that you have to work at. like I say, it's very similar with self publishing.

James Blatch: I think SPF spends four figures a year on library music, so we're probably contributing to his income.

Joseph Alexander: Oh, wow.

James Blatch: I was interested just to ask you about music because obviously there is a parallel with the book publishing world and it's interesting to see how they reflect each other there.

Back to your book, Joseph, when you first had the idea, when we spoke about it, whenever that was, 18 months ago, I think I wanted you to write the story, because it was an incredible story, and it was inspirational to people.

That was the bottom line for me, and I thought it needed to be out there. I could see you were a little bit reticent about it.

**When you started it and where you are now, who is the audience in mind, and what do you want the book to do?**

Joseph Alexander: We want to help people. I think that's got to be the bottom line of anything that we do.

I have a knack for writing non-fiction tuition books that sell, and it's sort of, "I figured out how to do this with self-publishing, so let's help, let's give it away really and help people find their own path through it." It's something that we've tried to balance.

Obviously, I'm a non-fiction writer, and a lot of the stuff is aimed at that, but we've tried to find parallels when we can with fiction stuff and novel writing.

Who it's for, I suppose in a nutshell, it's either somebody who wants to start writing their book and wants to not go down the wrong path with it. So many ways you can go when you're writing, and I think writing for market it's quite an important part of that, and we talk about that, but it's also maybe you've got your book, and it's like, "Well, what now? How do I edit this?"

"How do I get this done? What resources are out there?" Of course, we've included a lot of resources at the back of the book, but essentially it's all about what we've done, and everything is road tested, everything is kind of, we know works and that we know it works for us.

Either first time authors, setting out to do something, or really anyone at the stage, right through to, "Okay, I'm ready to market this." We talk about all of the facets in the book.

What that's led into is we've started up a new company, which is at self-published.co.uk, where we're providing consultations, or putting people in touch with editors, and to cover designs and things like that, where we're

providing services to self-published authors, but 90% of what we talk about is in, well, a 100% of what we talk about is in the book. I think some people just always going to want to have that done for them I suppose. That's something we're doing as well at the moment.

**James Blatch: Is there a lot and equally for fictional authors as non-fiction?**

Joseph Alexander: Probably a little bit less, because we can't really talk about the craft of fiction writing, but we can talk about how to plan and structure, and get good book covers, and find editors, and market your book as well.

Like I said at the top, it is harder to market a fiction book, we think. I think a lot of the strategies are very, very similar, and giving people an insight into that, will at the very, very least put them on the right road.

It's strange for us, but a lot of people don't know what AMS is. "I've got this book, now what do I do?"

The book is designed to not only raise your awareness of what tools there are out there, but give you some insight into using them. I think it works for fiction authors as well. I think there's something in there for everyone.

James Blatch: We should never forget that most authors don't know what AMS ads are and wouldn't run a Facebook ad. We just surround ourselves with the ones who do.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, that's it. We live, there's a lot of us here, and I know that you've got a wide audience, but really there's, what, seven billion people on the planet, and everybody says they've got, they feel they have a book in them.

Hopefully it will save a lot of time for people as well, who can just be kind of put onto the right track.

James Blatch: When is your novel coming out, Joseph? When's the story of the young kid from Macclesfield, who's brought up on the wrong side of the tracks and ended up in the world's biggest rock band.

Joseph Alexander: I think that I would have to address the being in the world's biggest rock band thing first.

James Blatch: Well, it's fiction, you can enjoy that bit.

Joseph Alexander: Oh, yes, I suppose I can make it up. Yeah, it'd be fun. I don't think anyone would be interested in my early years.

James Blatch: I don't know. I think the Queen film looks fabulous. I don't know how excited you are about it.

Joseph Alexander: I am.

James Blatch: Bohemian Rhapsody. By the time this podcast goes out, it may well be out, and we may have, who knows. They can make films look brilliant in their trailers, but I'm really hoping, touch wood, it's going to be a good film, it looks great.

I was thinking of you watching the trailer because I think it was the same LBF, where we first met. You wondered off for lunch, and you came back with a picture on your phone of you and Brian May, which was the weirdest thing.

Joseph Alexander: It was. It's beautifully sort of serendipitous that Brian May was the reason that I picked up the guitar in the first place. There he was at one of the little kiosks at London Book Fair, and he was launching his own book, which I think it was like Queen in 3D, or something like that. There was all these people kind of diving on him, and he was just sort of quietly trying to have a meeting.

I thought, "Wow, I'll wait around for a little while," and then I had my own meeting, like a distribution meeting for, with an American company. So I

had to go and get that, and came back and he was still there, and at the end I went up to him and had a chat to him. I tried not to go too like fanboy, but it was like a huge moment for me.

James Blatch: Yeah. Well, it's impossible.

Joseph Alexander: I haven't, it was really weird actually, but strange. I had one of my books in my hand as well, because I'd just come back from this meeting with the distributors, and he signed my book for me.

James Blatch: Wow.

Joseph Alexander: It was strange. Yeah, I've got it on the wall downstairs.

James Blatch: That's great. It's great timing, and I'm looking forward to the film. I think when you are in any kind of entrepreneurial industry, or creative industry, other people's stories are endlessly fascinating

And I think about Brian May, because a lot of people think about Freddie Mercury, and I think the film is Freddie's story, but if you think about Queen, Brian May's guitar is as big a part of the sound of Queen as any other aspect of that group.

I always think about how companies work, and how an individual brings something that is unique, and the better, the more unique, can you say that? The more standout somebody is within an organization, the more successful the group is going to be as a whole. Which is, I know, it's an old hat type of thing to talk about, but you can see that in creative endeavors as you can in any kind of entrepreneurial areas, I think.

Joseph Alexander: I think that's true. Especially that does apply to being an author, it can be quite a lonely business.

Without exaggerating, last November, I was ready to walk away. I was getting more work in than I could handle, and I was getting really stressed, and then it was, again, like I feel very lucky. I was doing that book with

Martin Taylor, the jazz guitarist, and he invited me up to one of his guitar retreats in Scotland.

That, obviously we got that book done, which has been fantastic, but I met two guys. I met a guy called Steve, who's just like, I'm swapping him guitar lessons, and he's like, I can't really say, but he's a sort of big time company manager, and he's sort of retiring from that, and he's getting into sort of mentorship.

He's been mentoring me with the business side of things, and the personal side of things, and trying to find a better work-life balance. I met Tim, who runs the self, the company that we're using for the editing, and things like that.

We just became first, like really firm friends, and it just so happened that I just put one of those self-indulgent Facebook posts up. It was December at this point, and I put six manuscripts on my floor that I really wanted to get out before Christmas.

Tim just got in touch, he said, "Like completely pro-bono, mate. If you want any help with that." I was like, "Well, yeah. That'd be amazing. I can't promise any future work. I normally do all the editing myself."

He did a couple, and then pretty much the sort of next email that I sent him was like, "Listen, man. Do you want to run my company for me? This is all getting a bit much."

James Blatch: There you go. It goes to show.

Joseph Alexander: Thankfully, he said no, but we've had this amazing relationship now where it is great, because we talk on the phone a couple of times a day, and talk about projects and things that are forthcoming.

Actually, that working with someone has inspired a lot of new projects and contacts and things like that. The work that we're putting out now is better than what I was managing to do by myself.

It's a bit more like inspired, it's more creative, and it's more fun. If there's one thing that I can sort of stress, getting a writing partner, or finding someone to share that load with, and whether that's a freelancer, just to take some of the load off, or a friend, or a writing group, or anything like that, because it can be a very solitary life. I'm not comparing myself to Brian May and Freddie Mercury-

James Blatch: I think you should.

Joseph Alexander: ... in any way, but I think-

James Blatch: That's the point. It's the sum of parts.

Joseph Alexander: You spur each other on. Yeah, you spur each other on, and that's what all good bands do.

You can play some great riffs in your bedroom at home, but as soon as you combine that with base, drums, and a vocal, and then everyone adds their own thing, and it just becomes bigger than the sum of its parts.

James Blatch: I think that's brilliant. To carry that on, so even an author working by themselves, and I see this now. I can name you people who've met through SPF, who are firm friends, and they're thousands of miles away, but talk every day, and are a huge part of each others business, for free, because they're just supporting each other.

Even as an isolated author, you can become, the end product is the sum of parts of a number of people. I completely, because it's a very, very important part of it. You don't have to do this alone.

Joseph Alexander: It's true. It's one of the wonderful things that Mark's done really, the SPF community is really tight. And you can sort of see the same people commenting on things, and just becoming friends sort of in front of your eyes. I think a lot of great relationships have been formed through that, and providing that forum for people to connect is a wonderful thing.

James Blatch: It is. We've met, Joseph.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah. No, totally.

James Blatch: We were having drinks with Jamie Lee Curtis the other night, weren't we?

Joseph Alexander: We were, yes. Louise Ross, and James.

James Blatch: That was a slight exaggeration that Jamie Lee Curtis was in the room whilst we were drinking.

Joseph Alexander: Ssh, don't tell them. Don't tell them. Lorraine Kelly, man. Did you go to the Storyteller?

James Blatch: No. Was Lorraine Kelly there, was she?

Joseph Alexander: Lorraine Kelly was presenting it, so, you know.

James Blatch: Oh, okay.

Joseph Alexander: I can't think of anyone bigger.

James Blatch: LJ Ross, and Mark Dawson, and Joseph Alexander. It was a star-studded night.

Joseph Alexander: I wouldn't include myself as a star, but like Mark and Louise were there, and stuff, and we've all become really good friends.

James Blatch: Well, you are an indie superstar. You have to take the label now. I'm officially anointing you.

Brilliant, thank you so much, for being on the podcast, but also thank you for putting any reticence aside and writing this book, because I think it's going to be enormously inspirational and helpful for people.

Joseph Alexander: I just hope it helps people. I was saying, that's the thing, that there are so many questions that sort of keep coming up. I thought,

"Well, actually, I've walked this path now," and we're still learning, don't get me wrong, but everything that I've done, over the last six years, is in there really.

We've included the stories about the things that haven't worked and why they've not worked and things. If it can just save people some time, it would be great, but also hopefully there's some insight in there that can really help you sell books, and become, well, make this into a career, because it's fun. It's really fun.

James Blatch: It is fun. "You either get it right or you learn," I heard someone say the other day, and I quite like that.

Joseph Alexander: Yeah, I think that's it. Sometimes you learn very, very hard.

James Blatch: Yep. Everything is hard sometimes. Okay, so very finally, Joseph, just remind us again, author name, title, and where people can find the book.

Joseph Alexander: Okay, it's going to be *Self-Publish Millionaire*. That's by myself, Joseph Alexander, and Tim Pettingale. We're aiming for a November the 1st launch, so it'll be in all the usual places, but we're going to go wide I think on this one. We're having an audiobook as well, so you can listen in your car.

Paperback, Kindle, all the usual stuff.

Our website, if anybody wants to get in touch about any kind of self-published services from just a consultation, right through to marketing, book covers, that's [self-published.co.uk](http://self-published.co.uk), and you can contact me directly through there if you've got any questions.

James Blatch: Great. Joseph, thanks so much for coming on.

Joseph Alexander: It's a pleasure, man. Thanks very much for having me. It's good to see you again.

James Blatch: There we go. As Joseph mentioned, and I should mention, he's co-written the book with Tim Pettingale. A good guy, particularly for people in non-fiction, but I think a lot of the principles that he talks about, as with you, cover fiction authors as well.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely. Advertising isn't really, it's nothing, this isn't something that's specific to fiction writers, or writers. It's something that is tried and tested in every single industry, so it's hardly surprising that it works for his books. He's nailed it. Lots of things to learn from him.

James Blatch: Good. Okay. Well, Mark, it's time for bed.

Mark Dawson: Well, not quite. As we look at it now, it is, it's half past five. I am quite tired, but not that tired.

James Blatch: I have to ask you, is the guest wing ready to receive me?

Mark Dawson: Yes, it is. Although, I was told today, our cleaner broke the shower. We'll have to see whether we have smelly Blatch, or fragrant Blatch. I'm hoping for fragrant Blatch.

James Blatch: I'm not getting out of my hazmat suit the whole time I'm there. I'll just be sat at dinner in the evening in my hazmat suit.

I'm looking forward to seeing you on Wednesday. I'm going to set you up with a camera.

James Blatch: It's all part of our work towards our relaunch of the podcast, which is coming up in December. Between now and then, we've got a load of good interviews. In fact, we've got a full covered, some excellent interviews.

Our recorded one with JD Baker this week. Now we had JD Barker on briefly. When did I have him? From New York, from ThrillerFest.

Mark Dawson: ThrillerFest.

James Blatch: We knew right away that we wanted to speak to him again, so I spoke to him. Now that's scheduled for the beginning of next year, and is an excellent interview. We've got that coming up, and plenty more.

If you'd like to support the work of the podcast, you can go to, [patreon.com/SPFPodcast](https://patreon.com/SPFPodcast), but not only will you help bring the podcast to fruition, but you will also be entitled to a load of goodies, depending on what tier you choose.

To mention again, the SPF Foundation, so if you'd like our courses, two and half thousand dollars to spend, [reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com), to get your career off to a start, go and have a look at the criteria at [selfpublishingformula.com](https://selfpublishingformula.com) under the foundation banner, to see if you qualify, and you can apply for that. We need applications by the end of this year, 2018.

Mark Dawson: One thing we should add. We've got SPF university, open brackets, not a real university, close brackets.

Tammi Labrecque, who is really excellent on newsletters, so she's got a great book, Newsletter Ninja, I think it's called, which I read a while ago, which is excellent. Tammi is coming on, and it will either be a chat with me or with James, about best practice for newsletters. I've done quite a lot of work with my own newsletter, so Tammi basically reminded me of some things that I've forgotten, that I should be doing.

Since I've been emailing my lists a bit more regularly, I've had a launch on Friday. Actually, on Black Friday, which was, I didn't even realize it was Black Friday, and it got to number four in the .co.uk store, and it's at top 50 in .com, which was the highest that I've managed.

There's a few things that might have contributed to that, but I think having a more engaged list is one of them.

We've got Tammi coming on. If, all Patreon subscribers, supporters, get all of those SPFU webinars and additional contents, plus tons of other stuff as well.

We've also got Dave Courtney coming on. I'm going to do another one quite soon. In terms of stuff, additional content for people to get their teeth into.

James Blatch: Yes. Yeah, so you get access to these monthly webinars, as Mark says, if you're, the easy way is to become a Patreon supporter, which you can do for as little as a dollar per episode of the podcast, so at [patreon.com/SPFPodcast](https://patreon.com/SPFPodcast). If you've bought either of our courses, any of our courses, you automatically get enrolled in the SPF University.

I haven't got a university degree, so I'm quite excited.

Mark Dawson: I'll whisper it every time you say it.

James Blatch: ... put that in small letters on my degree certificate. Yeah, and anoint me.

On that note, let's say goodbye, and I'll see you in a couple of days, and hope that everybody listening has a great week writing and reading, and shall we say, starting the long wind down to Christmas. We'll see you next Friday.

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