

EPISODE 146: MASTERCLASS: AMAZON ADS – WHAT'S WORKING RIGHT NOW – WITH MARK DAWSON

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. From the United Kingdom this is James and Mark. We're both back in terra firma in the UK. I've been in Vegas. Where have you been? You haven't been anywhere. You've been in Salisbury.

Mark Dawson: I've been in Salisbury. I haven't moved from this desk in about two weeks.

James Blatch: I'm feeling all energized because Vegas. We did this amazing thing when I did a presentation I did say at the beginning of this, "This is not going to work," because it never does to set up from scratch a Facebook Live video with you as a guest in the United Kingdom.

There was whooping and hollering when your face appeared in front of 500 odd people in the auditorium. It all worked.

I've had a lot of pats on the back about that where they were very impressed that we were able to do that and show how easy it is actually to set up a Facebook live and make it look professional.

Mark Dawson: It was really well done actually. I watched. I was very meta. I streamed the presentation through the 20BOOKS group and took a picture of me in front of my screen whilst you were on stage.

Then I was getting Kevin Tumlinson and Mark Lebevre sending me pictures of them in front of you. It was like having mirrors in mirrors. It was fun and it went very well. It was an excellent presentation.

James Blatch: That's very kind of you. Thank you. Yeah, it was fun.

I was nervous about it beforehand obviously, but the level of presentations was very strong. I think what everyone said about this event was just being in such a large group of authors with a very similar mindset was amazing in its own right.

Just three or four days with 700 people trying to do the same thing at various stages of their career of course. There were people making very good six figures a month. Multiple people making very good six figures a month.

Many people making five figures a month and a lot of people down at my end just ahead of their career, hopefully. It was brilliant.

Of course, being the podcast people were very kindly. Every moment of the day someone would tap me on the back and say hello, that they listened to the podcast, it means a lot to them. People would hear me talking in the lift and say, "I know that voice," from people who just sort of jog and listen in the car.

It's a shame you missed that. You should come next time. Because it's a slog right, doing the podcast. Here we are. It's a Tuesday. We're both incredibly busy and every week in week out there's a huge amount of effort goes into producing this podcast.

And whilst we enjoy it, there's nothing quite like knowing that it means something to people and that people listen to it and appreciate it. So I'm feeling very energized about this as a result of 20BOOKS.

A big shout out to Craig Martelle, who organized this amazing conference in Vegas. I mean, it's a cycle now, because they've got one in Scotland

coming up, they've got Bali in January, which you're going to go to, which will be a smaller affair but more intense.

And Craig does it, I can see it's stressful because it's clearly a stressful thing, but he does it with good humor. Never fails to respond to some of the details, like I had a few things ahead of my presentation I needed him to sort and it's very impressive.

Michael Anderle who started the organization and Craig Martelle do an amazing job.

I think we should get Craig onto the podcast, because he's a really interesting guy to talk to and have a proper sort of 30 minute, 40 minute interview with him about the whole 20BOOKS phenomena.

Mark Dawson: I agree. I've had dinner with both Craig and Michael, and they're good guys. Putting on a conference like that is no small feat. I mean, we've thought about it before, but yeah, not right now. It's too busy for that kind of thing.

James Blatch: Well I think the great thing for us, and I had this conversation with Craig, is that there's a big overlap between 20BOOKS and SPF, and I think of all of the organizations out there, it's the one that's most closely aligned to what we talk about, that you talk about in particular.

So that's great; it feels to me like there's a big subset of SPF people in 20BOOKS community, so it's particularly a joyful experience for us to be there.

Are you going to come next year?

Mark Dawson: I think I am. Yeah, it would be the second biggest that I would do after IWA, so I will try and come next year I think.

James Blatch: The biggest indie gathering I think probably of all time.

And it's going to be a bit bigger next year, probably knocking on 1,000. They're going to extend it slightly, so.

Let's move on to this week. We've got some Patreon supporters to welcome. Patreon is the way that you can be an active and supportive member of the podcast community, and you can do it for as little as a dollar an episode just to say thank you to us, and also to enable us to get this on air ever week.

And up to three dollars, and there's various levels of prizes and bonuses available to you at the one, two, and three dollar an episode level. Three dollar an episode level is quite valuable, and you even get a pin.

Who has my pin? It's here somewhere. My room is a mess at the moment, I've come back off travel, but I have a pin somewhere and I handed out a few of those. And some people wore them to the conference, which was excellent.

Okay, we're going to welcome our new supporters. So at the gold level, AL Wodell from Ontario, Canada. Melissa Pearl Guyenne is a gold supporter from Waikato in New Zealand. Thank you, Melissa. Terina Deaton who is from the United States, whose state code is AE.

Now that is a genuinely new one on me. Is that right, AE? Is there an AE? You'll have to google that, Mark. Come back to me.

Linda Washington, who is ironically from Texas is a gold supporter. Thank you Linda, lovely to have you onboard. And B. Harrison from New South Wales in Australia is a gold level supporter.

And further supporters, down here we have John A Bidell, who's a bronze, Anna Lowe, Christine Ray, Bruce Rob, and Lucy Johnson all bronze supporters. Thank you so much indeed. We appreciate everything.

AE, have you got it? Is that, what, Alaska hasn't got an E in it.

Mark Dawson: No, I just tried to google it and almost severed our connection, so I'm not going to do that anymore.

James Blatch: Oh. Then we'll be shouting. I get into so much trouble every time I read out these, because I get pronunciations wrong. That was a really tough one last week, the one that sounded like NaNoWriMo.

I did watch a very funny comedian's routine, I think it was on Jimmy Kimmel or something like that, about the people who decided the two letter state abbreviations. I'll have to dig it out and include the link with the show notes, because it ties in very nicely with the way that I murder this every time we do it.

Thank you very much indeed for supporting us on Patreon.

Mark Dawson: I know what AE is. Armed Forces Europe.

James Blatch: Oh wow, Armed Forces Europe.

Terina Deaton. Wow, that is a brand new one on me, so wow, there you go. Two letter code as well. Well, Terina I don't know whether you are the Armed Forces member or the supportive spouse, but we thank you for your service and here you are in Europe. What a lovely, lovely place to be.

Now, I was just waxing lyrical on all the benefits you get from being a listener, and this episode will be one of those, because we have our advertising guru Mark Dawson here who is going to present a master class on AMS ads.

This is a platform that I've watched this as a bystander, risen from new to pretty good to important up alongside Facebook ads in the space of about 18 months. It's also a platform that's changing a bit at the moment, so there's lots to talk about.

But before we talk about either of those Mark, just a broad thing that you and I were talking about just before we came on air is the feeling that

whereas maybe 18 months ago when we started this, two years ago, advertising was something that not everyone did or had to do, but it was a good idea to do.

I think your advice on that is changing now for authors.

Mark Dawson: There's a lot as we record this in the middle of November, there's a lot of panic going around the community for a number of different reasons, all really centered on Amazon.

What I'm about to say is not for the benefit of speaking to anyone from Amazon about this, it's just basically what I think or a couple of comments and communications I've seen with others and Amazon.

There are glitches going on at the moment, so pages, books are not visible to some non-US readers who are looking on the US store, so the last two or three days that has become a big panic in the community.

I think that is a glitch. I don't think that's anything deliberate on Amazon's part.

But for me anyway, of more concern I suppose is just how if you look at the way Amazon has operated for a long time, ever since I've been publishing as an author, it has built itself as the most powerful of the retailers, the one that everyone needs to understand and master, mainly because it has an incredible recommendation engine.

Amazon knows all about our shopping habits, it knows that if you buy a book by Lee Child, there's a chance you might like one of my books and Amazon will email you as a reader and occasionally will make that suggestion.

It will also do it in other ways. If you look on my UK book page or anyone's book page in the UK, you'll see a carousel of books that we know as the 'Also Bought' carousel. Which means that if readers bought book A, they also bought book B, and that is a really good way to find out some new

things to read given that there's likely to be some correlation between those books.

We also suspect that that engine is responsible for the email marketing that Amazon does on our behalf, and it seems to be something that's quite powerful in the background of the platform.

Now, if you look in the US, not all pages will be like this, and I think they're probably split testing this. They usually do, but the "Also Bought" carousels have gone from lots of book pages, including mine. And I noticed this in about the middle of September, and I don't think it's a coincidence that my sales in the US dropped by about 45% in September and they haven't recovered since.

I'm losing about \$1,000 a day now in terms of money coming in, and I can't think of a reason that would be.

I don't think it's seasonal, because I've never seen a pattern like this in seven years of keeping track of my data before. I've certainly not seen that level of drop.

There will be times of the year when people don't buy as many books, but 40% day on day, month after month. I haven't seen that before, so I think something is happening on the backend.

I've asked Amazon if they can help identify that for me, and they haven't been able to do that yet. So given that, you're left to speculate, and my kind of main culprit is the "Also Boughts" have gone on many of my books, and have now been replaced by sponsored posts.

So that leaves me in the position where, if I'm not getting as much organic visibility, which in other words free visibility that Amazon is providing me with, I now need to look at how I replace that and make up that shortfall, and it seems to me that advertising, if that's what is replacing the "Also Boughts" it makes the case for advertising even more strongly than it has been before.

Advertising may previously have been something that we ought to look at, in that it sells books and it finds readers. It's always been great at doing that.

I think it may be changing now from almost being optional to being close to being mandatory.

Or at least if you want to generate sales and you want to take this seriously, you want this to be your career, I think it's something that you have to give very, very strong consideration to.

Now, I have to caveat that of course. In complete honesty, we have a course on advertising which we will be talking about, so you might very reasonably say, "Well, Mark would say that we need to learn how to do advertising because he's selling an advertising course," and that is true. There's no two ways about that.

But at the same time, even if you don't learn from me, I think it is increasingly necessary that you will need to learn how to master ads. It could be Amazon ads, it could be Facebook ads, BookBub ads, whatever it is I think that that is how to react to that kind of decline in sales is to play that game and to look how to advertise more effectively.

James Blatch: The reason you have an advertising course is because of this, it's not the other way around. It's because you believe in this and you believe it's the way forward for authors, and increasingly as you've said, it's gone from essential to absolutely critical probably over the last year or so.

A couple of things I'll say. First of all, this is part of a longterm trend. So we've seen this with Facebook in recent years that the organic reach starts to go down, if you want that kind of reach you pay for it, you advertise, so it's not an unexpected turn of events really for Amazon.

And second thing is what good news this is. This is good news for people listening to this podcast, because there is going to be a million authors out there who won't advertise or who will advertise badly, who won't

understand the platform, and a small percentage of them who will understand how advertising works, understand it's how to drive their career. So it starts to narrow down.

It's not an equal playing field. It's sort of an equal playing field, but as much effort as you put in is what you're going to get out, and so if you're the one putting in the more effort, if you're the one understanding the platform and advertising, you get an increased chance to differentiate yourself from everybody else and to be successful and increase the place in the competition. So this is, in that sense, it's good news.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that is the way I would look at it. It is certainly the case that authors who have benefited from free visibility and may not get as much of that anymore, and sadly authors who are prepared to learn how to advertise and then actually there's a cost involved in advertising, invest in advertising, stand to hoover up more of those readers who are no longer being naturally sent to those other places. Yeah, there goes my book report. So that's just because I'm advertising.

James Blatch: Yes, exactly. Okay, good. Well that does bring us to the course, so I'm just going to mention it only be it ties in nicely and also it's open at the moment.

You can go to selfpublishingformula.com/adsforauthors, F O R in the middle, adsforauthors, and you can read all about the cost and make your decision about whether you want to take your training from Mark.

Now, that course involves several modules. Facebook ads for authors, AMS ads for authors, Pinterest, Instagram's being added in the next few weeks.

And the AMS ads for authors module, which is one you've tinkered with on more than one occasion to keep it up to date which is something we do, we always make sure things are up to date, and there's going to be a more significant revision of it in the next few weeks because we're going through that at the moment.

And that's brought us to this podcast, which is an update really on the platform on the changes and what that means for people and what they need to know about it.

I don't know where you want to start, particularly, with this, Mark?

Shall we, just for people who may not be as familiar with the AMS platform as others, why don't you give just a broad introduction to it?

Mark Dawson: All right. It used to be called Amazon Marketing Services, it's now called Amazon Advertising.

And if you look there's a report in the Economist, a week or two ago, advertising is a very interesting area for Amazon, they're definitely doubling down on that. They want to catch up to Google and Facebook.

I think they're lagging behind those two, in terms of ad revenue, and it's clear that they're making a play to increase their spend there, or increase their revenue there.

We've been able to advertise on Amazon for three or four years now. Originally, you had to be in Select, and you could only do it through the KDP dashboard, putting your ads up on the dotcom store.

The only ads that you could do were what we called 'sponsored keyword ads' where you're trying to get your ad shown in front of people who are searching for a particular thing. So, it could be 'Mark Dawson thrillers', that would be a keyword.

And if James Blatch wanted to pinch my readers, you would bid to have your ads shown when people search for 'Mark Dawson thrillers'.

The other ones are called 'product display ads' and they actually appear on the sales pages of book themselves. So they don't depend on search. They're easier to scale up. It's easier to spend on those, because you're not

waiting for someone to type something in, to bid on a search term, those will just appear as people look on those pages.

So those were the main ones. I tried it out originally and found it didn't work very well, so I stopped. I only went back into again when it was opened up to non-Select authors, because at that time I was wise. I looked into it again and started to experiment a bit more, and found that they were working a lot better.

Now, subsequent to that, and what we're going to do that in this little lesson, these little masterclasses, we're going to look at five things that I think are worthy of attention for writers to look at.

The first one, segueing into that, is that there are two version ...

Well, let's back up. If you think of the Amazon advertising system as a big eco system, there a number of ways that you can get into that. It's also something, you can advertise anything on Amazon, if you're selling anything. It could be T-shirts, or widgets, or tech, or DVDs, or video games, or books. Whatever it is you're selling, you can advertise through the Amazon advertising system.

Now, there are different ways to get into that, and different ways of getting in will give you a different outcome. So what we've always been given is the simple way to go in through the KDP dashboard, which is the one that Amazon recommends. It's the one that they will support for authors who are going in.

But, in my opinion, it's substandard. The dashboard is atrocious. It's almost impossible to work with it and to find daily trends and things like that, you just can't do it.

You have to download all your data, every day, or at certain intervals, put in into Excel and then manipulate it. Which you can do, and I did it for a while and it's a bit of a ball ache and it's not optimal.

The other way to get into the system gives you a much, much more sophisticated dashboard with much more ability to slice and dice the data, do it chronologically. You can drill down into actual performance.

There is so much more in that. And that's the dashboard that you would use if you were selling T-shirts, or DVDS, or those other things that I mentioned.

Now, we're not going to go into how you do that in his podcast. We do cover that in the course. The reason I'm slightly reticent is that it is really complicated. The situation is you won't get support from Amazon advertising if you go in that way and you're selling books.

They definitely prefer authors to go in through the easy way, which is they will support authors who go in that way. If you go in the other way and get to what we call the 'advanced dashboard', you're kind of, not on your own, but it's not the approved way of advertising, so you need to bear all that in mind.

That being said, I've been doing it this way for over a year now, both in the U.S. and in the U.K., and it's working. There's no two ways about it: it's definitely working.

So that's the first one. **The first tip is to look at using the advanced dashboard.**

James Blatch: I just want to ask one question on that. So the two types of adverts are still the same?

You don't get access to new ways of advertising?

Mark Dawson: Yeah. You also get what they call 'sponsored brands'. They used to be called 'headline search ads'. And they appear, if you search something you can have an above the fold ... maybe we'll stick this in the YouTube version, but you can stick an above the fold ad, with three books and an icon and a bit of copy as well. So lots of real estate to play with.

Quite flexible. And those ads can work quite well. You can only do those through the advanced dashboard.

And, also, more importantly than that, you can only advertise outside of the U.S., as an author, through the advanced dashboard.

I'm doing a lot of ads in the U.K., at the moment, and I'll be doing ads in Germany next year, when I have a trilogy that's going to be translated and released next year. So I'll be doing German ads over there as well. You can only do that through the advanced dashboard.

James Blatch: Okay. I've been getting my head into this. People will notice that, on Facebook, of how to access it, that it is more straightforward for the .co.uk platform. It is more complicated for dot.com.

And it might be that even when we go to print on the new AMS module, that we don't have a definitive advice for dotcom, but we can give people some ideas on that.

Also, without question, it's fluid at the moment, and I think Amazon is in a ... It wouldn't surprise me if, in a years' time, this is all resolved and authors have full access to it, but they are in a period at the moment where that's not the case.

That's number one. What's number two?

Mark Dawson: Well, it's really some strategies, now, to what's working right now. And some top line ideas on what you can do with your ads.

So the first one of those would be getting yourself into a mindset where you're identifying where readers are, and then you're trying to serve your ads to those places. So that your tribe, the readers who like your books, so they can see your ad, hopefully be intrigued by the ad, go to your sales page and then buy your book.

You've got to think that way. And three good places that you can start.

Think about traditionally published authors in your genre and look at when they have new books out.

Again, I'm going to use Lee Child as my go-to example here. He had a new book out, it's either out or it's coming out quite soon, called "Past Tense". Now, I will try and get my ads onto that product page. I'll use product display ads to make sure that they're there. I'll bid on keywords, like "Past Tense by Lee Child", and variations on that.

The reason I'm doing that is because I know that his publisher's going to be spending \$250,000.00 on traditional campaigns to try and drive lots and lots of eyeballs onto those pages, and to be making those searches, and I know that his readers, organically, will be going there.

I can take advantage of that big spend at a much lower rate. So I can piggyback on that for a fraction of the cost, and get my message exposed to a very specific and targeted group of readers, and effectively have that paid for by whoever it is who publishes his books.

So that works quite well. You've got to be aware of the market, see what's coming up in your genre, and then be ready to go on that.

James Blatch: Although you have now given away this top tip which is, of all the top tips you've given away, that's a very specific one that other thriller authors listening to this podcast may take advantage of. You might be competing there?

Mark Dawson: I can outbid them all, so it doesn't matter.

But, yeah, that's very true. I don't mind.

If I was worried about that I wouldn't do an advertising course would I?

James Blatch: Yes, of course.

Mark Dawson: The next one is Amazon Publishing. So, again, I am Amazon published with Thomas & Mercer for some of my books, and I know that they will continually generate traffic with Amazon campaigns. So I know that they'll be doing emails out. I know they'll be doing special offers and advertising those.

They'll continually be pushing readers onto that page, the readers who like my kinds of books and, often, who like my books specifically. So it would make sense, if you're writing to a similar audience as me, to get your ads on My Amazon Publishing. I'm probably losing sales every time I mention this, but there you go. I'm a giver.

But you want to make sure that you get your ads on the APub pages of authors who are writing the same kinds of books as you. And again the principles the same, you're taking advantage of traffic generated by somebody else, and then trying to cream off a few of those to buy your books, and get into your series.

James Blatch: I like this. This is high level thinking of how to do it. This is Ninja stuff.

Mark Dawson: Common sense, actually. It's not rocket science, but it's just thinking laterally.

And then the third one, again, is similar: it's BookBub.

So you know when the BookBub email goes out, there's going to be a flood of traffic coming into the books advertised on those emails. And if you're quick you can at least take advantage of the tail of that traffic.

So my BookBub email, in the U.K., comes around about two, three o'clock in the afternoon. If I'm really quick I can look at the thrillers there, advertised that day, and run product display ads going to the product pages of those particular books.

Now, I know that thousands of people will see that email from BookBub, and a good number of them will go over to investigate that deal. So, again, a good chance for me to do that.

And, of course, think about the readers who are going there. They're bargain savvy readers. They subscribe to a newsletter that tells them about deals. They're probably not going to be as interested in a £4.99 book, as in the 99 pence book that they saw in the BookBub email.

So you might want to think about advertising your cheaper books or your Permafreeds on those particular pages. But that's another good tactic, to take advantage of traffic coming in from another source.

James Blatch: So you can use the AMS platform to push your books which are zero, are free?

Mark Dawson: You can. And we're going to talk about that in a minute, but you can, yes.

James Blatch: Okay. So these tips, I think that was number four wasn't it, if I've kept count?

Mark Dawson: Well, that was sub-tip number three, of tip number two.

James Blatch: Three ... Okay. Oh, we're still on two?

Mark Dawson: Oh yeah, we haven't even got started yet.

James Blatch: I'm making notes here. Okay. We're still on two. Excellent.

Well, that's, basically, to give that a broad term, is looking for product displays that are going to have some money and some traction put into them by someone else, whether that's BookBub, or Amazon putting its own weight behind them because they're Amazon published, and so on.

Picking those, and piggybacking. And piggybacking Lee Child was a good example of that.

An important part of that is staying briefed about the market, keeping an eye on the market, which not everyone's good at. But looking at who your competition are. What they're doing?

And this goes across the board, actually. It also means trends in cover design, and blurb, et cetera, as well; making sure you're there. But this is a particularly important way of making sure that you don't miss an opportunity to live off somebody else's investment.

Mark Dawson: That's the plan, yeah. Absolutely.

Tip number three. The first one is go advanced, look at the advanced dashboard. Second one is target traffic.

Number three is look at automatic keywords. This is something that is more effective on the advanced dashboard than it is on the basic dashboard.

But in your sponsored keyword ads, and also your sponsored brands I think, but definitely the sponsored keywords, one of the options is to tell Amazon that you want them to pick the keywords that you're going to target.

Remember, a keyword is a phrase that someone's typed into the Amazon search bar when they're looking for something to read.

Amazon will select some keywords for you and will then bid on those words on your behalf.

Now, when I first thought about this, I was, like, "No. That's not going to work." I saw the keywords that they were looking at and they looked like trash and they also looked obvious. So I thought, "I'd rather do this manually. I can do this better than Amazon can," which is ridiculous of course. Amazon is much better at this than I am.

And when I got over myself and started running some of these auto keyword campaigns, they have always been the ones that are the best in terms of return on investment, or the 'ACOS' score, as Amazon terms it. Average cost of sale, that stands for.

A good tip is to start running those. Run a few of them. Run five or six. It can be the same book. Just run them at five or six different bid levels.

You're bidding maybe 30 pence, or 31 pence, 32 pence, whatever it is, 20 pence, on maybe five of those kinds of campaigns. And then in the advanced dashboard, what you can do is you can download a spreadsheet of the keywords that Amazon has chosen for you, and you can see how they're performing.

So you kind of get a double whammy for this. You should find that the campaign itself is profitable. And I've got automatic keyword campaigns that I've spent \$200 on, and made \$1200, over the course of six weeks, so that's pretty good, especially if you're running 10 of them.

And then, what you can also do is you can analyze those keywords, look at them in Excel. You filter them by way of whatever is the metric you're interested in. Could be click through rate.

Sales is a good one, which one has produced the most sales. Which ones have produced the most impressions, so have been served the most times.

Then you start to look at all those and you pick out the star performers, and you put them into a manual campaign. So you're bidding on those, maybe, 30 of the best performing keywords that Amazon has used in its automatic campaign, dump them into a manual campaign, and then start running those.

What you can end up with is a really well-targeted campaign using the benefit of Amazon's algorithmic research, and then you start firing those ads out as well. So you kind of get bang for your buck twice there.

James Blatch: That's interesting. I think the AdWords platform is very good for being able to get granular detail on keywords and break that down by demographics, and I would be lost without being able to change the bid on individual keywords and see how they're performing.

But one difference might be that I have personally found, in our business, that the auto-generated keywords have not been as successful as the ones that I've done.

But then Amazon is a retail platform, so it understands that language, whereas YouTube is primarily a video platform, a user-generated video platform. So it doesn't surprise me to learn that Amazon does know what it's talking about when it generates keywords. Its algorithm picks and learns all that stuff, up.

Mark Dawson: That's a good tip, and that's one you can experiment with.

Mark Dawson: The fourth one is another good one, and that's to target yourself.

I call this defensive advertising so people will be, I did a funny presentation at NINC about this.

I found that an author who shall remain nameless was targeting my books, with his ads and actually he was a cheeky bugger.

He was actually using the language that I had, I'm pretty sure I originally came up with, and he was using that and sending them back those ads at my readers on my page, which got my goat a little bit I have to admit. Although all's fair in love and advertising.

But anyway, I thought, well this isn't, I'm not having this.

So I then countered, first of all by bidding on my own keywords, my own name, those keywords that I mentioned. Mark Dawson thrillers, Mark Dawson, John Milton, everything I can think of, maybe 500 variations of

that. And when we look into keyword generation in the course, there's a very big and useful session on ways to find keywords.

I put together a big list of keywords and then I bid fairly highly on those to make sure that if he was going to bid, if he really wanted to be on my page, it was going to cost him a lot of money to do that. And lo and behold, he disappeared.

But because I'm a nasty bastard sometimes, I thought, well, I'm not having this.

I then bid on his page at a fairly high level that I didn't think he'd match. And then if you now search this author and I won't mention who he is, but I will go into a bit more detail in the webinar, we should note later on. You'll now find my books proudly displayed at the top of his sales page and they've been there for about six weeks.

So on the one hand it's defensive. So you want to make sure that your readers aren't getting funneled off somewhere else by a clever advertiser trying to take advantage.

And then you can if you want to, I mean I'm not recommending this, I only do this because I'm being vindictive, was the kind of first shot across his bows and so, if you want to mess with me, don't bring a knife to a gunfight and all that kind of stuff.

James Blatch: Target yourself which also sounds a militant title at some point.

Yes, this is part of the joy of this world for of us. In the old days, advertising was done over there, probably not even in the building. It was in a publishing house. The advertising was ordered, but an agency probably ran all this and here we are running all this stuff ourselves, at we say granular level to this level of detail.

For me it's great fun and I look forward to it. I know it frightens some other people, but you're not. I can tell people you are not the most tech savvy person I know.

Mark Dawson: What?

James Blatch: I'm not saying you're incompetent with technology, but you're not a programming geek type person. You're a writer primarily and you've really nailed this stuff, and it's an important point to make because this is ninja tips and they're great, but it's possible for anyone to learn and do this.

Mark Dawson: Absolutely. I'm definitely not a programmer that's for sure. I know how to use Excel to the level that I need.

Although Lucy, my wife, is very good in Excel. She talks about things like pivot tables and my kind of, my brains leak out my ears when she starts to explain that kind of stuff to me.

I'm not by any stretch of the imagination a genius on Excel or crunching numbers. I got B in maths. I got 10 other As, but then I got a B in maths, so that's not really my strong suit.

But even saying that, it is possible with a fairly basic level of understanding of those kinds of tools you can do quite well with this kind of stuff.

All right, so the last one is we mentioned this earlier, is permafrees, so advertise your free books. Now, the obvious first thing to say is you're going to lose money on those immediate ads.

So many ads, most ads these days, in fact, it's possible to make an immediate profit, which never used to be the case. You're used to people advertising stuff on billboards, didn't know how much they were making on those ads and they probably didn't make an immediate return. It was one of those seven touches that we talk about that eventually is parlayed into a

purchase. So then they're profitable down the line by way of raising awareness.

Typically, what ads do, with digital ads, it is possible to make an immediate there-and-then profit. Now that's not going to be possible with a permafrees because the price is zero, so you're going to be spending say twenty cents per click and you're not going to make any money back if someone clicks on that ad, downloads your book.

So you need to bear that in mind, but the upside to that is that those ads, you should get low CPC on those because it's a very attractive offer. The book is free.

If you target it right, and your copy is good and your cover is good, it will say zero. So if somebody's looking to try a new author, there's no friction there to them trying that. They can download it. No transaction required.

Now, the way you make money on those is that there's kind of three ways or not, not just money, but the way you benefit from those.

The first one is money. So it's read through. So this has always been the case with permafrees. The aim is to get your free book out there as widely as possible.

Now it goes without saying that that has to be a fantastic book. It has to be as best as you can make it because your goal is to get people to the end of that book and then you put an offer in front of them whereby they can get the next book, which they will at that point probably have to pay for.

And for someone like me, I've got two free novellas that I occasionally advertise, that leads into 13 novels and if someone bought all of those novels, I make about, I don't know, \$40 or \$50 and that does happen sometimes. I think my average, my read to average is around, is between five and ten dollars per sale of the first book. So maybe people will on average buy two or three books after the first one.

But that's where I'm introducing them and it's effectively me standing on the corner offering Mr. Blatch a free sample of my whatever drug I'm trying to shift today, knowing that when he comes back, when he's hooked and he wants another fix, he's going to have to start paying for that fix. So that's a fairly standard tactic.

The other things you can do with those permafrees, you just basically changed the end matter, so instead of directing the reader to the next book in the series, if you're aiming for read through, you might want to build up your mailing list so you could at that point when they've just finished the book, they're very predisposed towards you. They've got that warm and fuzzy feeling that you know, they've had nine or 10 hours in your authorial company.

You're at that point say, would you like something connected to this book? Doesn't have to be a novel. It could be anything, a pdf. I've spoken about the things I've used before, but in return for getting that very congruent bonus after reading my book, you're going to need to give me your email address so I can send it to you.

At that point of course, they're on my mailing list, which means I can then start to sell them other things, other deals, new books, whatever, when those are ready to go.

We're not going to talk about mailing lists today. We've got a whole three part mini series on that, but if anyone listening doesn't have a mailing list, stop this at once, go and set one up immediately and then email me later in a month's time and thank me because I've just given you the best bit of advice you'll get as you're starting your career.

So the final thing, if you're not looking for mailing lists, you're not looking for read through. You could look for reviews. So if you have a book and eventually you think you're going to put a price on it, you might want some reviews, first of all. So you could use that as a permafrees, and then at the end of that book, encourage people to leave reviews.

My average rate is about one per thousand free downloads, you'll get reviews. It can be more than that depending on if you optimize it effectively.

James Blatch: What's that rate for paid books?

Mark Dawson: About one in a hundred.

James Blatch: Okay.

Mark Dawson: So it varies. Those numbers are a little bit out of date and they're basically me licking my finger and holding up in the wind as best I can to work out what those ratios might be, but it's in that kind of ballpark.

So there you go. That's permafrees. That's the fifth thing.

So just to go over them again.

1. We've got go advance and look at the advanced version of the dashboard.
2. Target traffic. Think about where the readers are, make sure your ads go there, so they're waiting to be seen by fervent readers.
3. Look at automatic keyword campaigns when you're doing sponsored keyword ads.
4. Target yourself, so defensive advertising. Make sure that you're sealing as many leaks on your product page, on your search results as you can so that your books appear there rather than your competitors.
5. And then finally consider advertising permafrees and optimizing either for read through, mailing list signups or reviews.

Those are the five things I think are worth, they're working right now and even for me, and I think it's worth it.

James Blatch: Excellent. Okay, now you alluded to a webinar in the middle of that chat and we should say that we have introduced SPFU which is you

have to say it in a New York accent. It's the terrible name we've got for the University of the SPF. And this is an exciting new thing. I'm really pleased we're doing it.

First of all, it's a monthly webinar at the moment and we're going to go into great detail, more detail than we've been able to in this podcast on subjects such as AMS ads.

It's available to anybody who's ever bought a course from us at any point and retained ownership of that course and it's also available to anybody at any Patreon level. So even the dollar an episode Patreon level, and it'll go out too.

So these webinars, what have we done so far, Mark, on those webinars?

Mark Dawson: We, I'm going to have to correct you, first of all.

The SPFU webinars we've done, you're right, they're a bonus for students and also for Patreon subscribers. We've done, what did I do? I think I did something on Facebook ads. I've done one on Amazon ads.

We've had Adam Croft on Mindset. We've got Tammy Liberec coming up to talk about mailing lists. We've got Damon Courtney from BookFunnel coming on.

So roughly one a month continuing hopefully ad infinitum. What I'm talking about with the webinar is not an SPFU webinar. It's an AMS ads webinar as part of the launch of the ads course, so ...

James Blatch: Open to everybody?

Mark Dawson: Open to everybody. Yeah, now I don't remember the URL and you probably aren't going to have time to search that now. I'll just waffle on for a bit whilst you try and find it. But yeah, we have a webinar and it'll be with me and James will be on the line as well.

There will be a full Q&A afterwards and I'll go over those subjects again in a bit more detail with images, with a kind of a live walk through the various platforms. We'll identify the various breeds or the brands of ads that we can access.

James Blatch: Okay, I have the URL to sign up for the AMS webinar for the 21st of November. It is selfpublishingformula.com/AMSads. AMSads, no hyphens, nothing.

And in that you'll have more time I think to go through stuff in more detail and crucially something we can't do on the podcast easily is to have a live Q&A, so really worthwhile being there.

Mark Dawson: Yes, absolutely. Always fun. I'm doing a couple of webinars this week, but then the one next week is one just for SPFers.

James Blatch: SPFers. And yes I did mention the SPFU webinars which are monthly as well, but that would be a good one AMS on the 21st of November.

I think we've come to the end have we of our what's hot and what's not with AMS ads.

Mark Dawson: I think we have, yes. Absolutely. So, I thought it was useful. It's definitely, it's a platform I'm very interested in, and I'm doing as in a number of different ways, a couple which I haven't mentioned yet that are very, very expensive that I'll mention in another episode of the podcast.

James Blatch: I've seen a sneak peek of some of these things and they are exciting, but some of them are quite high level I guess for people at your level.

Some of them like all these things, it's a bit like the things they do to racing cars in Formula One that eventually come onto our Ford Focuses and they pioneer them there. So that's how that works.

I was thinking through, so the master classes, I mean I know from history of looking at the stats of the podcast episodes peak on these master classes, people liked them and watched them again and it's been a while since we've done some of the foundation stuff, so I always have my ear to people who are just starting out in this world.

It's been a long time since we've done the master class on mailing lists, and some things have changed in that area, so I think probably we need to schedule one or two of those at that level as well. Mailing lists would be a good one to revisit at some point.

Do we have anything else? I didn't make any more notes so I think we can probably wrap this up. Thank you.

If you came to Vegas and tapped me on the shoulder and said hello to me, it was a real thrill to meet so many of you. I can't name you, although I got quite a few selfies done which are appearing at various points on my timeline with people and it means a lot to us to have that contact.

You can always drop us an email at support@selfpublishingformula.com anytime you like. You can become a part of the podcast by going to Patreon.com/SPFpodcast. And we will be here next week. I can't tell you at the top of my head what it is, but it'll be exciting and we look forward to seeing you then so, I'm going to say from Huntington, goodbye.

Mark Dawson: And from Salisbury, adieu.

James Blatch: Oh, you're so posh. Okay. Bye, bye.

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