

EPISODE 55: 13 MILLION REASONS WHY SELF-PUBLISHING ROCKS – WITH AUTHOR H.M. WARD

Announcer: 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, welcome along. We've been in launch mode. We're, hopefully, not looking too ragged and wearing the same clothes we always wear. That's how we are. Welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast, delighted to have you here.

We have a huge interview for you today, which looks good in video as well. If you haven't been to our YouTube page, and you want to go ... I think, probably, of all our interviewees, we've had the best looking set, haven't we?

Mark Dawson: Oh yeah.

James Blatch: For today's interview. Mark Dawson: Nicest house award goes to Holly.

James Blatch: Yes. Holly Ward. H. M. Ward, who is an inspirational author for those of us in the indie space. She's prolific, she's brilliant, she works hard, she's a lovely, lovely person. I requested an author interview. We've chased her down a bit. She was nervous about doing it, really nervous, and doesn't do interviews very often. But she was the most relaxed and interesting interviewee we had. I mean, obviously, probably you and I are not, necessarily, the demographic for her books.

Mark Dawson: Don't be so presumptuous.

James Blatch: Well, no. But that's not to say that there aren't many read her romance books. We've mentioned this before. It's something that I learned when I started reading some of the craft books, that women are the consumers of books more than men. That's why some of the biggest names in our indie space are authors primarily aimed at women.

H. M. Ward is somebody who's got that sorted out. Look, we're not going to ramble on. I am rambling a little bit. We're not going to ramble on too much because it's a great interview. We'll have a chat off the back of it. Here is H. M. Ward.

H. M. Ward: My name is H. M. Ward. I'm a New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today best-selling author. I've sold about 13 million books since I self-published in 2011.

James Blatch: Very impressive. Now, I can't remember from my questionnaire whether I call you H. M. or call you Holly.

Do people call you H. M.?

H. M. Ward: Holly.

James Blatch: I know some people work with initials, like C. J. Cregg. Okay, look, you have sold a ton of books, Holly, a very, very impressive back catalog. You're quite a prolific writer as well. I'd like to explore a few areas with you.

First of all, let's just start, the origins of the H. M. Ward story, when did this all start for you?

H. M. Ward: We have two starts. First start was rough start, children's books back in 1999, early 2000. I was an artist first, loved painting. Children's ministry, theology background, so anything to do with kids, totally was

there. Basically, I had made a bunch of children's picture books and had done the traditional query, try to get it published method, and after about 18 months of slamming my head into the wall, gave up. Things have a way of repeating.

After having a few other jobs and doing a few other things, I went back to writing and art because that's what I like, and that's who I am, and it makes me happy. 2010, I had wanted to change career directions, go back to something that was creative. I had just had a bout with owning a shop, which was a total nightmare, dealing with retailers, vendors. Not for me. Retail and creative people, at least for me, they don't go together. Anyway, I wanted to do something creative again, and writing's cheap. You need a pencil, computer, stuff you probably already have. Painting's expensive, so I went back to writing.

Basically, I hadn't written a novel before. I wanted to see how long it would take me. I'd been spending a ton of time on business message boards. I had business stuff, just, yeah, self-taught from having ... We had a photography studio, and then from having a boutique after that. It made me wonder how long it would take to actually write a novel. If I took all my focus and attention that I'd been putting into these forum posts and put it into a book. I wrote my first novel, which was a teen paranormal romance novel. That took about three months from start to finish. That's probably the longest it's taken me to write a book. I really didn't know what I was doing. I was bouncing all over the place. It had several rounds of, "Oh my God. Overhaul. Revisions. Throw that out. Restart."

Then, that was 2010. I researched the market like crazy and considered traditional publishing. I was going down that path. I didn't have problems getting an agent. They had started to shop my manuscript, and the more I got into looking at self-publishing, the more I realized that avenue is definitely more for me.

James Blatch: What was it about that that made you realize?

H. M. Ward: From 10 years of being self-employed and having my own business, I knew a lot about marketing, advertising, Facebook, social media, just how to connect directly with fans. At that time, they were called people.

James Blatch: Yeah.

H. M. Ward: I knew that from having the other businesses, and I was good at it. That was actually something that I'd been helping other business owners with. Anyway, when self-publishing stuff came up, and I found Joe Konrath's blog, which was a godsend because he tells it like it is, and you have all this information, and it's just right there.

That was at a time when he was pulling away from traditional publishing and Amanda Hocking was going into it. You had both sides, where they were right in front of you and it was easy to see. But just from watching and reading the discussions that were going on about it, and then the feedback that I was getting on my book while it was being shopped, and suggestions. It seemed like I'd end up writing a book by committee, which wasn't really appealing to me.

James Blatch: Yeah.

H. M. Ward: Then, I've always wanted to know more about the traditional publishing, how they go about marketing, and what they do. From having a small business for 10 years, I had developed a lot of different marketing techniques that work really well. Basically, I wanted to see which ones they were utilizing. They weren't really utilizing any of them.

What they were doing was very antiquated, where you're talking over a decade ago, where it just wasn't working now. I knew that from firsthand experience, even though it was a different industry, that that form of marketing, it's a lot of money and you're just taking a plate of spaghetti and

throwing it at the wall and hoping something sticks. I still don't like that kind of marketing now. There's a lot of it out there. Anyway, I decided to take my book and publish it on my own and see what happened. The first book, the first month I sold a few hundred copies. Then it just took off from there.

Numbers are a little fuzzy because we're about seven years past that point. But I think it was about around the 12 month mark that that first series had sold its first 10,000 copies, which was mind blowing to me. I knew that first hurdle to get over was going to be selling more than 200 copies. I thought that's usually the lifetime sell through rate on a book. That was going to be the first major barrier. I broke through that the second month that it was out.

James Blatch: Wow.

H. M. Ward: It was a lot of intentional planning, and just attacking it like a business. You have the really cool creative art side of things, and then you have the business side of things. I mushed them together and it worked out well. James Blatch: Yeah. This first book, when you said you wrote it over three months, was this all you were doing? Were you working- H. M. Ward: No.

James Blatch: Writing five or six hours a day?

H. M. Ward: No. I wasn't. I was writing, usually, towards nighttime. I was working full-time. We owned a boutique photography studio at the time. I was working full-time doing that, homeschooling two children, and I was pregnant, and writing a book. James Blatch: Wow. H. M. Ward: It was something I wanted to do. In the beginning, it was just to see if I can do it and see where it ends up. Writing's cathartic, and I like that part. Writing the book wasn't the hard part for me.

James Blatch: In your mind, the reason you were looking at writing, or moving into writing, apart from the fact you thought you might enjoy it, I get the sense from the beginning this was a business decision for you.

H. M. Ward: It was a business decision. I never expected it to get this big, where it became primary income and didn't need the photography studio. About 18 months after I self-published my first book, I was able to close the photography studio, which was incredibly difficult because we built it from the ground up.

There was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears in that place, and it was very successful. But, the book self-publishing became a lot more successful where if I put my time in there I'd have more time period, more time with my family, more income, more latitude, more career longevity, just everything. For the first 18 months I was self-publishing, I was working basically two full-time jobs because I was writing my books and I was still working at the photography studio.

James Blatch: The fact that you saw it in business terms, in terms of being successful and liberating your life and so on, probably informed the way that you looked at the traditional industry. I think that's interesting, because a lot of people, when they start off writing, don't really know the difference between the two, haven't explored it, and so inevitably will sign a traditional deal because that's what's presented to you, and that's everything you know.

What I'm interested in is how you went from running a photography studio, writing, to being in an empowered position to say "no" to traditional publishing, and choose the indie root. How did you discover all that?

H. M. Ward: A lot of it was hours and hours and hours of research. Making informed decisions is a huge part of being successful at anything. I didn't have that opportunity the first time. I know the internet was there in 1999,

but people weren't really talking about self-publishing. It wasn't as big. It was still vanity publishing, where you had to pay. The platforms, and the way to upload and directly connect with the readership wasn't there. The infrastructure wasn't there yet.

That first time around, I did my research and had my guides, and thought I did a fairly good job figuring out what I needed to do and where to submit, and it looked appealing for picture books. This time around, basically, I went back and went, "I'm going to find out everything I can about this." The more articles and things that I read about it. And just blogs, because you have people online talking about everything. Anything that you want to find out about publishing is there. I took that information and I made a business plan with it.

Also, it incorporated my lifestyle, what was going on with me, and our family's needs into it, which was really important at that time. In 2010, I was pregnant. We had a baby surprise, unexpected third child. My older kids were a lot older. Anyway, that was a bit of surprise. We wanted to make sure we weren't completely poverty stricken. Things were going that way because I was accruing incredible, tremendous financial debt from medical bills. I was getting sicker and sicker, and they couldn't figure out what was the matter with me. It took a long time, and there was a lot of different things going on.

But at one point they had told me I shouldn't be here now. They had pretty much told me, "You have five to eight years," and that I had a terminal illness. I had found this out right before the baby was born. That lit a fire under me. I'd been the primary breadwinner before then.

My husband does the books, and does things that are black and white, and is really good at them. But in terms of creativity, and selling, and sales, I excelled at that. Basically, we figured out a relationship, and it works really well for us. For the photography studio, the last few months we had it open, I couldn't stand up anymore. I'd shoot a photography session, and then I'd

go straight to the hospital because I needed help. I couldn't stand. I was incredibly exasperated with that too because, again, we built that from the ground and I was going to have to walk away from it.

Publishing, specifically self-publishing, allowed me to earn a living from a hospital room, or from a bed, wherever I was. I didn't have to stand up. If I had insomnia, I could write at night. I didn't have to physically be anywhere. I know there are a lot of people that have medical problems where they may be looking at it for extra income, or something like that. It can be helpful with that. Honestly, that was a huge, life changing event for us, because I thought I had ... Basically, I made a five-year business plan with at the end of the five years I'm out of the equation and I'm not here. The interesting part is, I'm still here, right?

James Blatch: Yes.

H. M. Ward: It's seven years later.

James Blatch: I was going to ask.

H. M. Ward: I was misdiagnosed. The problems that I was having, there were several of them layered. I've had three surgeries now and I'm doing a lot better. Not only did I get my life back, but I have this huge career too that I didn't expect to be here for.

Anyway, it's funny how things work out. I think when you're stuck in the daily grind and you're ... You know, because a lot of people are working another job while they're trying to write, especially in the beginning where you're trying to launch some kind of career. It's hard. It takes a lot of time.

One of the things that they ask me all the time is, "How the heck can you do all this stuff?" I mean, even now, where being sick, and raising children, and homeschooling, and work, and just everything. A lot of it is putting on blinders for what doesn't matter and what can wait. If you think you're not

going to be here in a few years, it kind of makes you focus. The trick is to keep those on now that I know I'm okay. But yeah, it makes you utilize every minute you have, and not spend every single second working.

Back in 2013, when I thought I wasn't going to be around very much longer, I worked like crazy because I basically couldn't do anything, so I was stuck in bed anyway. My husband was taking care of the family and the kids. I felt like I can contribute my part to the family by providing as many books as I can so that they would have royalties to live on after I'm gone. I wrote like crazy then. It was cathartic too. I needed that outlet, because I wasn't very happy then either. Stuff kind of sucked, which is weird because I had tremendous success with career and tremendous ... Just, life was horrible. You know, actual life. It's interesting how things come and go like that.

James Blatch: The hidden blessings of a terminal diagnosis. Who would have thought?

H. M. Ward: Yeah.

James Blatch: There was that upside they never have noticed before.

H. M. Ward: Yeah.

James Blatch: But the way-

H. M. Ward: It's like, what can you do if you have no time left? Apparently, it's a lot.

James Blatch: Yeah. It sounds like the plot of a novel.

H. M. Ward: Yeah.

James Blatch: There you go. Now, talking about plots... again, I'm interested in the start. We'll talk about your later books in a moment. Paranormal romance was your genre choice at the beginning.

Again, was that a business decision? Or was that something that you thought was inside you and wanted to write?

H. M. Ward: My favorite genre to read is young adult paranormal romance with dystopian elements. That's why I had started there. It was more, see if I can even do it. I knew a lot of people started to write novels and never finished them. I wanted to pick something that I know I thoroughly enjoyed.

The idea of crafting a world intrigued me too. It had layered creative elements to it that I just really was attracted to it. That wasn't so much a business decision. I didn't know how much of a market share it had at the time, or anything about that. I basically knew it was a genre and I liked it.

James Blatch: Yeah.

H. M. Ward: So I started there.

James Blatch: Then as you started writing. How many books have you published now?

H. M. Ward: Now I have 95, 96 is about to come out.

James Blatch: Incredible productivity. You have quite a few series within that.

H. M. Ward: Yes, I do. I stuck with the teen paranormal for a long time. As I started to read market share information ... This is stuff that carries over from having a physical business, is you need to establish who your market share is and what's achievable. At some point, numbers started to make it

very apparent that even if I was at the top of the young adult paranormal romance dystopian crowd, it's not that big.

That's going to have a low ceiling compared to if I was writing something that was a much larger crowd, like just general contemporary romance, which that was a pure business decision to move over to that genre. When I first did that, I didn't really know what would happen, because at the time I had an established readership with the teen crowd and the paranormal people, and I really didn't expect them to follow me. Some of them did, which was awesome. A lot of them didn't because it wasn't their thing. Anyway, it was like starting over.

The first seven books that I put out did nothing. I remember being incredibly frustrated. The people that read them left really good reviews, and they liked them. I had some blunders with covers, where I chose ones that I thought were pretty and that I liked, because I don't really like traditional romance covers. That was really dumb.

I fixed some of those mistakes, and that was pretty much what made the difference at the beginning of 2013. My debut romance book was "Scandalous" and that was the first book that hit a list. That was January 2013, and it was right after I changed the cover from what I thought was pretty to something that was specifically contemporary romance.

James Blatch: Okay.

H. M. Ward: It started the ball rolling.

James Blatch: Sometimes you have to kill your babies and take a pure business decision.

Our instincts aren't always right on these things.

H. M. Ward: Right?

James Blatch: That makes a good business person that you are prepared to take the advice at some point.

**On productivity, how often do you write? How do you approach this?
How much are you writing at the moment?**

H. M. Ward: Right now I have a bunch of different things going on, so productivity for writing ... I'd like to say I sit down and write 500 words every day. That doesn't work for me. I tend to go in bursts where I really feel like writing, and I have to write, and I have so many words inside of me they're dying to get out. It's much easier and better to write when I feel like that than to do the methodical, every day method. That's been a recent change. I'll sit down and write.

Sometimes it's a few days, sometimes it may span over a couple weeks. It's basically until that urge burns out. If I'm in that zone, and in that mindset, I average about 2500 words an hour, typed. If I'm doing dictation, it'll be a lot higher. Yeah. A slow day, 500 words, where you just have to pull them. I stopped doing that and switched to more of a 'when I feel like it'.

One of the big things that has helped productivity a lot has been realizing that for creativity to come out, creativity has to go in. Because for a while I was sick. I couldn't go out. I couldn't do stuff. A lot of the creative input I was getting was computer, TV, other books. It was very limited. I like going to the theater. I like plays, culture, music, anything like that, museums especially.

Anything where I'm coming into contact with other artists, and stories, and where you're in a situation where you can experience life. I've increased that amount of experience and it really makes writing a lot, just, easier and fun. It doesn't suck the joy out of it, because at some point, I've felt like that and I know other people have too, it starts to feel taxing where you're like, "I just don't have words and I can't write this right now." At those times, for

me, it's been where I have had absolutely zero creative stimulation or input, I haven't seen a movie or show, I haven't done anything in a while. This year, one of the things that we've done is I'm intentionally taking breaks at times of the year where I know I go into full workaholic mode.

Where I'm banging my head against the keyboard trying to get words out, because for whatever reason, it's repetitive and it seems to come at these specific times of year. I'm removing myself from the equation. That sounds really weird, because basically I'm saying to increase productivity you should work less. That seems to be what actually helps with me though. More creative stimulation definitely makes words flow faster.

James Blatch: You say when you're going well and you are enjoying it, you're doing two-and-a-half thousand words an hour, did you say?

H. M. Ward: Yeah.

James Blatch: You can do a book in a week.

H. M. Ward: Yeah, yeah. I have. That first debut romance book, "Scandalous", was written in six days. Part of that, too, was I had just come across the [NaNoWriMo site](#), and I was like, "A book in 30 days? That's ridiculous." I just wanted to see how fast I could do it.

James Blatch: Turns out it was six.

H. M. Ward: Six. I was like, "Okay, it's not so ridiculous now."

James Blatch: In terms of plotting, is this something you do in advance? Do you sit there and seat of your pants?

H. M. Ward: Up until recently, I would have said I'm a pantsier and did it by the seat of my pants. I don't think that's true, because I've been thinking about it. I'll come up with an idea and turn it over in my head. I'll write down

little notes here and there. But basically, the idea sits in my head and keeps turning over and over and over again until I've run down every plot line and storyline that I could possibly go in, and then I pick the route I want to go. Usually, by the time I get to that point, I'm ready to write it. I don't start writing until I have that map and all the characters are defined. I know who they are; I may not know their names, but I know who they are, what they like, what they don't like, everything, which is funny because I was like, "Oh, no. I just made that all up."

James Blatch: Yeah.

H. M. Ward: But it was sitting in my head for a year. Right now, on the stories that I'm coming up with that I'm currently writing, they were dreamed up almost 18 months ago, two years ago. They're getting on to paper now. It could be partly because there's a backlog of them. With the first romance book I wrote, I thought of it over a few days and wrote it down, so it didn't have the plot complexities and all the goings on that some of my current works have. Then just, yeah, taking the time to actually write everything, it's more time consuming, or it feels like it is, than sometimes thinking up the stories.

James Blatch: You say you have them in your head, and these current stories go back 18 months.

Do you mean in your head? Or do you write them down somewhere and go and look after a couple months.

H. M. Ward: I'll write down key notes. I have a story right now I'm really excited I'm going to start. I can't start it yet because my main series is ending and I need to finish that one. But in my head, I wrote that two years ago. Anyway, I've got to get it on paper. I'll write down key notes or phrases. Basically it's a really ghetto outline that kind of clues me in if I forget, or forget what I was excited about, because that happens too. That

way it'll jog my memory enough to remember where everything was connected and what I was doing with stuff.

James Blatch: Let's talk about marketing for a bit. In those early days when you made your decision to go indie, you had your first book, you'd seen, in a disappointed way, what trad was doing, and you obviously felt excited about the possibilities of indie.

How did you start, and what did you start doing?

H. M. Ward: A lot of people think I'm very extroverted. I'm not. I'd live in a cave if I could. I don't like talking to people. The fact that I'm talking to you is bonuses, man.

James Blatch: We feel very excited that you're talking to us.

H. M. Ward: You got me out of the cave. Anyway, I'm just not an extrovert. The whole public speaking thing, that didn't appeal to me. The traditional side of things, it's very reliant on geography and then physical stuff. I'll explain that in a minute. But with the photography studio we had people flying in from all over the place to come here. Physical limitations were one of the things that drove me nuts.

One of the huge things about self-publishing is it's not physical. You're dealing with intangibles, which means you can have a worldwide platform. You're not limited by time or space, which gives you such a huge advantage. It's insane. With the traditional side of stuff, and having to go speak here and physically move around, that wasn't possible for obvious reasons, too. But also, I'm antisocial. That doesn't appeal to me.

The computer, the internet, man, is like your best friend. You can live in a cave and still have a computer. You can talk to people on Facebook, but it doesn't have that extraversion drain that talking to people in real life does. It has the global platform without leaving your living room. I took all those

things that we had learned from the previous business and applied them to publishing, and basically saw what carried over.

The very first thing I did was to tell people I wrote a book, which was absolutely horrifying because they're like, "Oh my God what's it about?" I couldn't tell people. Yeah. It was too nerve-racking. I finally told my husband. He didn't even know I wrote a book. I was writing a book every night for three months and he didn't know. I told him when I was done. I told everybody else way later.

I think it was about six months after, because I decided I was going to get an agent. I went, "Okay, if I'm going through with this this time, I'm just going to tell everybody, and we're going to do a public crash and burn, or a public success. We'll see." But I'm making it public partly because I knew that would light a fire under me to actually follow through with it and not just go, "I wrote a book," and then leave it on my computer. I wanted to follow it through to wherever it went. I put up a Facebook page for that book, which was "Demon Kissed", and it's still there. It has about 50,000 fans on it.

This was back when you didn't have to pay for people to see your business page, and reach was natural. Anyway, that page, before the book was even done, or I sold it, or was publishing it, I was on there and talking to fans. I had fans. That's weird. There's no book. How do you have a fan? They were there. I had fans. Basically, we talked about stuff that interested that demographic. They're teenagers. They like angsty books. I got that, that's good, so do I, see we have stuff in common.

Basically, it was a public platform to be able to talk to readers all over the world and get them excited about that book. We started six months, and then it launched in March. The page was there for about nine months before I self-published the book. By the time I published, we had about 20,000 fans on the page, 25,000. That was mostly through just natural growth, from talking. People are like, "Holy crap, an author's talking on a

Facebook page.” It’s like, I wasn’t even published yet, I didn’t understand why they were excited. But I was okay with it. They told their friends and their friends came over.

We had a little writing club for teen writers for a while. That was cool too, because they were just very excited. But that gave a platform to spring off of when I started. In the beginning, telling everybody that I was doing it and not being shy about it ... Which was really hard, because, like I said, cave, and not talking to people, including my family and best friends. Didn’t want to tell them, because failure’s scary.

Anyway, but by telling them and putting up the page, it made it real, and it made it a tangible thing, and it made it a goal that I wanted to do something with this. I wanted to see it through to publication either traditionally or self-published. People like to watch either train wrecks or success stories. You’re either the train wreck or the underdog, and that’s interesting. The first few hundred people came from word of mouth just from my own social circles. I

had all the stats on Facebook, and how to grow fan bases and stuff from the previous business. You have a lot of the same hurdles you have with publishing where your average Facebook user, this was back then, had 200 friends. You had to get past that 200 mark to be able to break into other social circles effectively. I used a bunch of that stuff too. But, the main thing that’s been at the middle of it ... Because then I would have told you the book’s at of the middle of it. It wasn’t the book, it was me. They were showing up to see what I was going to do. That’s kind of nerve wracking, but it worked really well.

James Blatch: That’s incredible, that you built up an online audience of 20,000 people just on the idea of you writing a book.

H. M. Ward: It was just on the idea. There was no cover to start with. I just had the title, which in America, naming something “Demon” something or

other was just cringe worthy. That, I would have said, was a marketing mistake. Could have picked a better title. They showed up anyway, and that was at a time where people were going, "Facebook doesn't work. You can't use Facebook for businesses. It doesn't do anything." It does. You got to figure out how to use it so that it's doing what you want it to do. In this case, it was to make people aware, and interact with them, and that was it. When the time came, they wanted to see what I did, so they all grabbed the book, which was awesome.

James Blatch: Wow. You hadn't collected their email addresses at this point. This was on Facebook.

H. M. Ward: Nothing.

James Blatch: Were you thinking about an email list at that point? Had that occurred to you that you needed that in the future?

H. M. Ward: I knew I needed an email list and I'd been on so many email lists that I don't like what they do where I went, "I don't want to bother them with that." Since Facebook, at the time, had direct communication with them where it was very easy to talk to them, and appearing in their news feed wasn't a problem, I really didn't go after the email addresses until I had to. Honestly, it was ridiculously long time until I went after the email addresses, like 18 months after I published. It was something I knew I should do.

When I started to do the email addresses I looked at emails that I get on a daily basis, or weekly basis, whatever, the ones that I like, and kind of emulated what they were doing. That's very few and far between, emails that show up where you're like, "Yes. It's my Disney store one," or something from photography boutique, or ... That's the exception. The goal with the newsletter, initially and still, is to be that exception, where people are excited to see your email. Yeah. The email list started late. Start your email list sooner.

James Blatch: I'm assuming you have a pretty healthy email list now.

H. M. Ward: Yeah.

James Blatch: Had your audience so warmed up.

H. M. Ward: Yes.

James Blatch: Before you'd even published. Transferring them to email was probably relatively-

H. M. Ward: Right.

James Blatch: Quite successful I imagine.

H. M. Ward: Right. The email list, for me, they got there after they read a book instead of before. I know that method, for me, is a little backwards too. But, I put the 'text to sign up' information at the end of the book, so that way ... If they're on an e-reader or not on a tablet, clicking the link is a problem, so that way they can just text. Most of my readers that are on that email list did text to sign up. The bulk of them, 80%, 90% of the list, texted to sign up. That was also a huge turning point for me to actually collect those email addresses.

James Blatch: That's a really good tip. People text, how does the system work, your email address to a number?

H. M. Ward: It's automated. I believe MailChimp has it now too. I'm still using Constant Contact. I know that's funny. Anyway. But they have the text number and the whole thing's automated. Constant Contact prompts them through it, asks for their email address, and puts them on whichever list I said they should be on. That way I'm not involved in that aspect of it. I also,

for marketing, I do have direct-to-cellphone texting services also. A lot of people ask me about that, because I really think that's going to be ...

The next thing is going to be getting to them not through email, where you still have buffers, and barriers, and spam filters, and Gmail classifying you as promotional crap so that they don't see you even if they wanted to. I think everybody has their phone with them all the time. I think it's going to be interacting with them either through an app or through texting where it just makes it easy for them to remember you're there and get whatever new book you happen to have out. I've been doing the texting service for about a year now. It's a lot more expensive than the email service, but if your list is good it could easily pay for itself.

James Blatch: We're just trialing an app at the moment. The idea of the notification having more impact and more immediacy than an email or text even.

H. M. Ward: Right.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's definitely one that we're looking into as well. Some neat little things you can do with apps. You probably, wanting to live in your cave, don't do public events very often. But, if we turn up somewhere ...

I noticed you went to LBF last year. Didn't you?

H. M. Ward: Yes.

James Blatch: I don't know if you're going this year. Are you Holly?

H. M. Ward: Not this year.

James Blatch: Okay. But you could, for instance, set up this alert so anyone who's got your app, as they arrive in this geographic area, get a text that

you're there, and where you are, et cetera. Sort of things you can do with apps which are ... We're just starting to look at. But I think you're right. Not everyone gets emails. In fact, we know, just from our business ... We'll send an email out with a bit of important information in it, and three weeks later people are emailing us saying, "Why doesn't this work anymore." I said, "Well, because ..."

H. M. Ward: Right.

James Blatch: It just shows how many people don't actually get the email.

H. M. Ward: Right. Yeah. We have an app too. I've had it for about a year now. We've been considering different ways to use it. At first, I had been thinking that we'd put my e-book library on it, because a number of my fans, especially because I have shorter works, are reading on their phones. Until we figure that out, there's stuff with with ROI.

If you have an iPhone it's still going through iBooks. Using apps that are still using the iBooks apps, it doesn't get around that, so you don't get a bigger profit share. Then you end up with a product that is not as good as the iBooks app. Finding things that integrate into the Kindle and iBooks app has actually been good, and it still looks nice and goes into the library the way they like it. The app, I think, is the new thing, the direction things are going in, that and texting.

James Blatch: You've got your list now, which I'm assuming is pretty healthy. You communicate with your list.

Are you advertising on social media? Are you doing Facebook ads at the moment or not?

H. M. Ward: I do Facebook ads, not too frequently. Right now, actually, I'm running Facebook ads on the Kickstarter. We're making a film, woo-hoo.

James Blatch: Oh.

H. M. Ward: I'm not sure if I told you anything about that. But, as "The Arrangement" series concludes, it's 23 books long. That's been a fan-driven series where the fans were interacting and giving me feedback on the storyline, and actually helped shape the storyline and certain characters. It's about three years since it first started. Even though it's been fan-driven, I kind of went, "Let's wrap this up," so this is the last book.

While all this stuff's been going on, we've been trying to shop around to find a film home that's appropriate for it. The subject matter is a little bit dark, so it kind of ... Okay, it's very dark, so it kind of freaked a lot of people out. After a lot of talking and a lot of near misses where we got people excited and then they're like, "This character's too dark for us, we need to lighten him up," been talking to the fans and since it's a fan-driven series, we decided to do it together. The Kickstarter is going on now. If you want to see what crazy authors can do when they feel like it, it's at ferromovie.com.

We put it up to commission the script, the screenplay. We hit that goal. Basically, we're going to roll right along with that until we get the whole movie made. That's going on right now. "The Arrangement" series is concluding. So Facebook ads, are going to be running on the series once it concludes, and then they're running on the Kickstarter right now, because that's been one of the main problems with Facebook in the past seven years ... I've been doing this too long ... is that the fans don't know what's going on. Communication's been cut off. Unless you pay for it, they really don't see it. Being thrifty with ads is helpful. Getting them to be involved and to know what's going on is a necessary evil.

James Blatch: The film project's fascinating. You're now executive producer of your own film here.

H. M. Ward: Yep.

James Blatch: Trying to get it going.

You're going to go out to somebody else to write the screenplay? You didn't fancy a stab at that yourself?

H. M. Ward: I took a stab at it myself, and then went, "I want it to be a really good screenplay. Not a debut screenplay". Someone that has a lot of experience is doing that, not me.

James Blatch: How much ... I'll have to look at the details. I don't know how much ... Kickstarter, normally, you specify all the amounts that you're going for.

H. M. Ward: Right.

James Blatch: What are you planning on raising here?

H. M. Ward: The initial goal was about \$8,000. It's not too much, but it's a significant chunk. Right now, we're just shy of 11,000. I told the fans that I would pledge match them up to 15,000. If it's at 11 now, then we're at 22.

James Blatch: Okay. Yeah.

H. M. Ward: Which is a healthy chunk to get stuff rolling.

James Blatch: Beyond that, it can get quite expensive making films, right?

H. M. Ward: Yes, it can. I have everything all mapped out because I'm OCD like that. I know exactly what we need and when. Part of the fun with this, and with "The Arrangement" series ... It sounds nuts to go, "You wrote a series." ... It was open-ended, and I allowed fans to shape the storyline. It

was kind of insane. But it worked out really well for the series. I liked the challenge. The entire "Arrangement" storyline wasn't mapped out in my head. A bunch of it was made up as I went. Basically, I had brackets for certain books, and when I finished one of those mini-brackets I went, "Should I keep going?" They were like, "Okay. Yeah, let's keep going," so I made another one and extended it, and they kind of got to choose which directions we poked into. I know it's not quite orthodox to involve fans the same way in a film production, but I really want to try to, so we'll see what happens.

James Blatch: That's really exciting. Really exciting. Your energy level is incredible. Also, I can tell you're focused and organized. From the outside you look at somebody who's been so successful as you have, and you think, "Well, what's the magic ingredient?" As we always discover on this podcast, do you know, it's not magic, it's organization, it's, as you said at the beginning, making good decisions, informed decisions, and just doing all that stuff right. Wow, you're really inspirational, Holly.

H. M. Ward: Thanks.

James Blatch: You should come out of your cave more often.

H. M. Ward: I know, right?

James Blatch: We're so grateful that you've spoken to us. We've been rattling on for, coming up to 50 minutes now, so I'm going to let you go. Remind me, are you in Texas?

H. M. Ward: Yes. I'm in the middle of Texas.

James Blatch: Okay, I can see that glorious-

H. M. Ward: I am a native New Yorker in case you're like, "What is up with that accent?"

James Blatch: Okay. I can see that glorious sunshine outside your windows, and we're in dreary, cold England at the moment. But it feels lovely. Holly, I hope you'll come back and speak to us again, maybe in a year's time. We'd love to follow the film project. We've got a podcast episode ... From where I'm sitting now, which is ... Where are we? Coming up towards the end of January. I think in a couple of weeks we're doing an episode just on what to do when Hollywood calls.

H. M. Ward: Oh, cool.

James Blatch: How not to panic, and who you speak to, and how you behave on those ... We will have done that by the time this interview goes out. But here's a whole new way of doing a film. You don't need to go to Hollywood, because you've got your own Hollywood. That's great. That's a really interesting project and we'd love to catch up with you again and see how that's going.

H. M. Ward: Yeah. That would be awesome.

James Blatch: There you go. I told you it was a good set.

Mark Dawson: It's a great set. Yeah. I liked that house very much.

James Blatch: I'd like to think that if we interviewed Dolly Parton it would have been a similar backdrop.

Mark Dawson: I think there'd be more rhinestones.

James Blatch: Lovely to talk to Holly. I thought she was fantastic and great to speak to. Lots to learn, really, from her. Certainly prolific in the way that she writes. Certainly disciplined. Yeah. She's just been getting it right.

Mark Dawson: She's amazing. She's a really hard worker. I didn't know the stuff about her health. That was interesting that she thought she had ... Well we've all got an expiration date, but she thought hers was a little sooner than what otherwise has been the case.

So, just so pleased that that's turned out to be not true. Interesting that that was a good motivation for her to really crack on and leave a body of work behind. Now, even though she's got the 'all clear', she's still working very hard, still putting out regular content for her vast legion of fans.

James Blatch: Yeah. It's not a bad psychological trick to play on yourself, is to think, if you were given that date ... Say you've got 12 months left to live, what would you do, and do it. You know?

Mark Dawson: I'd move to Vegas.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Sorry children. Your inheritance ...

James Blatch: Get those books written. Set up a stable income. Really, really focus your mind. She had that happen to her. But we should all think ... I don't want to get morbid about it, but you know, as you say, we all have our expiration date. But also, just because we're not ... A relatively limited time on planet Earth, make the most of it.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Yeah, it's a good state of mind, I think, to get into. But she's amazing. She's done really amazingly well. She has, as I say, a vast army of fans. The thing with romance fans ... There's a reason why romance is the biggest selling genre. There's two reasons really. I mean, I think it's probably true, without being too general about things, that women do tend to read a bit more than men if you look across all genres. But romance readers are certainly the most voracious. You get plenty of readers. You get plenty of authors telling me that their readers will read a book a day.

James Blatch: That's amazing isn't it?

Mark Dawson: You've got that vast readership also reading extremely quickly. There's a big demand for books. It's not that long ago that Scribd, I'm not entirely sure how they pronounce that, took the ... You weren't allowed to subscribe to that service for romance books because people were chewing through them so fast they couldn't actually afford to pay the authors. It was disproportionate as regards to the other books.

A good example there just of how fast those readers get through the content. If you're in romance, or in any one of the probably hundreds of subgenres, it's a pretty fertile field to be selling your book.

James Blatch: This is why you don't write romance or erotic thrillers.

Mark Dawson: Terrible.

James Blatch: But the sex scenes are great. Yeah, okay. Absolutely. Look, we've got an announcement to make.

We've had a lot of information, fantastic, valuable information contained in these podcasts. It takes a lot of hours to listen to them all, so what we've done is we've created an e-book. The e-book contains the very best ... Almost all of them, it's just of them aren't particularly relevant for the e-book so they've been taken out.

But for most of the podcasts, they're there. You get a description of the podcast, you get all the hyperlinks you need, and then you get a transcription of everything that's happened. That e-book, indexed by the subject, is a very useful thing for you to have. You can have it for the one price of \$99.99 every month. No, it's absolutely free. I'm joking. It's completely free to you, if you'd like it.

All you have to do is to go along to this address: selfpublishingformula.com/vault, V-A-U-L-T, because that's what it's called, the vault. As I speak, at this moment, the final touches are being put to it, so it's possible that you'll go onto a waiting list and get it a week or two later, or it might be available straightaway by the time you sign up. But it's there, or thereabouts, now. Is that your stomach rumbling?

Mark Dawson: No.

James Blatch: Was that ... It's a lorry.

Mark Dawson: That was a lorry going past the window. I also should point out that page seven of the vault features a nude picture of Mr. John Dyer.

James Blatch: Yes it does. Yes.

Mark Dawson: Don't let that put you off.

James Blatch: No, no. Warnings are appropriate for that. Yeah. [Selfpublishingformula.com](https://selfpublishingformula.com) ... God, I've gone all funny ... Forward slash, vault, V-A-U-L-T, to get that. We'll probably make this an annual or biannual thing and put those together. We think that'll be very useful.

Tell your friends about it. Some people just don't listen to podcasts, right? But this is something you can flick through in your own time. It's useful to have all the links in there as well. Good. Thank you for listening. I really hope you enjoyed listening to H. M. Ward. As I say, an inspirational author. Whatever genre you're in, I really, really welcome guests on the podcast.

We've got some really good guests coming up. We've got an anonymous guest coming up in the next few, he's called Data Guy. Can't say anything more than that, some of you will know who he is. But none of you will know who he really is. Until then, you can email us at podcast@selfpublishingformula.com, and you can get all the podcasts on

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