

The Secrets of Self-Publishing Transcript

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Enjoy!

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Henri: I'm here with Sean Platt today, who is a self publishing expert in a way and we're just going to have a chat and talk about what you can do with self publishing and why it's good. Welcome, Sean.

Sean: Hi. Great to be here. Thank you very much for having me.

Henri: Sean, what's your story, how do you get into self publishing and why do it and all that good stuff?

Sean: Well, I've been a writer for four years now and self publishing was actually the reason I went online in the first place. But, I didn't actually put out my first title until this year. That was just because I had to make a living.

Originally I thought I could start out, start a domain, I'd write powerful enough copy that everyone would love me and I would never need a publishing deal and my audience would buy my stuff and it would be magic.

Of course, that didn't happen and I had to do a lot of freelance work and I worked as a ghost writer. So I had experience writing books, they just didn't have my name on them. I was really hungry to put out my own books, especially fiction. But, fiction was a really hard way to make a living just a few years ago, unless you were a big name that everyone knew.

So I thought the money would be in information products and I was good at that, I was a ghost writer so I wrote a lot of sales copy, I wrote a lot of info products for people and I was heavy in product development.

But then this last January when – I mean, Kindle just killed it at the end of 2010 and for the first time in history there was more digital content being sold than print content by a margin of 3-to-2 actually, which is crazy.

But, what was even crazier, that would have been enough to get me into the self publishing game full time anyway, but what really made it just too compelling to ignore was that there were fiction authors like Joe Conrath and Amanda Hocking were the two biggest one, John

Locke came a couple months later. They were selling millions of downloads and they were fiction. And the top hundred Kindle downloads were fiction.

I just thought these people are doing exactly what I want to do and I can write really well, I know how to develop an online audience, I know how to speak to an online audience, that's absolutely what I need to do.

So I started to shift my business, but I had approximately 3,200 spinning plates, so it took awhile for them to stop spinning so that I could transition. But, since I think April was the first title we put out and we've put out six titles since then.

Henri: So it sounds like you kind of got stuck in the money first mentality in the beginning, like most people do.

Sean: Yes. Not exactly. I actually was all about passion, but I made a big plate of crap pie, because I came out and I thought "I'm just going to follow my passion," and if I was just a single guy or even just married I would have stuck it out a lot longer, but I had a family to support and it was really hard.

I was living in Southern California at the time and I bought a house at the top of the market and I was trying to juggle a Southern California mortgage while making my dreams come true and it just wasn't practical. The bills really started to pile up and it came to the point where I absolutely had to start taking some freelance or I was going to lose everything.

I ended up losing everything anyway, but it ended up being a really good thing for me because it kind of reset my priorities. I've always been about passion first, always, always have, always will be. But, those numbers in January were the first time where my left brain and my right brain were just happy together, because I knew that what I wanted to do was actually the thing that was going to make me the most prosperous anyway.

Henri: It's funny how that works, because most people are afraid of losing everything, but then if it actually happens it's kind of not that bad and sometimes it's a good thing.

Sean: I've never been afraid of losing everything at all. I dropped out of school, I started my own business at 18, I've always wanted to do my own thing. That's very important to me. I've never worked for anybody, I've always worked for myself. And I've never been afraid to risk.

But, it does change a little bit when you have a family. You can expose yourself to all the risk in the world, but when you have two people calling you Daddy it just changes the game. I'm not afraid, but now I've never felt so confident and that's a great feeling.

Henri: So, how did you actually get to the confidence part? I know a lot of people want to make this happen, they want to live their dreams, but they just feel like they're stuck and there's all this fear and stuff going on inside their head.

Sean: That's a great question. I think fear is something you kind of have to step into. I think that fear can be really constricting, but it shouldn't be because fear is the kind of thing if you stand on the edge of it and you just kind of take a big leap forward it's that hunger that will propel you.

If you're not ever scared, what's the quote? Courage isn't the absence of fear, it's being able to deal with it. Because we're human, humans are scared, fear is what keeps us alive, it's what keeps us away from predators, right? We've got thousands of years of fear embedded in us.

So it's not reasonable to think that we're never going to be afraid, but allowing fear to restrict us rather than catapult us is just a huge mistake. I've been afraid plenty of times, but I make fear my bitch, because otherwise I'm just going to be at the end of my life thinking "Why didn't I do that? Why didn't I take a leap? Why didn't I try?" And you know, what ifs are just a pillow on the face of your best possible life.

I think that it's very natural to be afraid, but you kind of have to swallow it and move forward. The thing is, anytime you see what you want and it's on the horizon and there's a big pit of snakes right in front of you, it's okay. You've got to get past that snake and you may get bitten, you may fall, it may hurt, but it doesn't matter because no matter how bad that pit of snakes is there's something awesome on the other side and it's always worth crossing that chasm to get there.

Henri: Sometimes you realize as you move forward and come up upon the next pit of snakes you realize that there's actually a car to the left of you which you never saw before.

Sean: Totally, that's so true. The thing is, you know what? The biggest thing people are afraid of and it's crazy, people are afraid of making mistakes. To me that's just ridiculous because it's the mistakes that help you grow more than anything, it's the mistakes that teach you how to do things better, it's the mistakes that push you forward.

This is a very big theme in my life right now, because my daughter is really afraid of making mistakes. She's a really bright girl and she likes being liked and she likes knowing things. When she has to struggle through something she doesn't like it, she wants to just know the answer because for most things she just knows the answer.

I'm telling her constantly, "Hailey, you have to be okay with making mistakes because there's no way you're going to be as amazing as you want to be unless you're comfortable falling down,

because that's how you learn to get up, that's how you learn to walk straighter, faster, smarter."

Mistakes are the best resource you have. You have to be careful not to over produce that resource, there is such a thing as too many mistakes. But, the right amount of mistakes, I don't really think there's anything better to growing your business or yourself.

Henri: Exactly. It's really all about perspective and learning from your mistakes.

Sean: Right.

Henri: So let's get into the actual content here. What is self publishing anyway? Is it only on the Kindle or can you do it somewhere else?

Sean: Well, you can do it anywhere. Let me take a second to talk about the difference between vanity publishing and self publishing, because they are different.

Up until the Kindle and really just this last year or two self publishing was something that the entire industry looked down on and it was very difficult to be taken seriously as a self published author. Times have changed.

It used to be if I wrote a book then I would take it to a vanity publisher and I would spend \$10,000 for a print run and they'd put all my books out. But, what that told the book buying audience was, "Hey, look, this guy wasn't good enough to get published traditionally so he had to go spend his money to put it out." I'm not going to buy that book because it's going to be crap.

Well, that has totally changed now because anybody can upload a book and you don't need the gatekeepers of the traditional publishers. But, it's also changed the argument. It's digital that's changed it. Because if I still needed to put out my print books – and let me say, every single title we've had so far except our newest one, *Yesterday's Gone*, has gone to print and Kindle, and yet I'd say 98% of our sales are Kindle. Print is so not worth our time that we are strongly considering never putting anything else out in print because there's just no money there.

The magic of digital is that you can set your price to anything. So let's say I have a new book coming out and I want a lot of attention on it. Well, I can make it \$0.99. A traditional publisher cannot do that, they have way too much overhead, they're copyright royalties are totally different, so they have to put it out at \$9.99.

Well, if my book is \$0.99 and another guy's book is \$9.99, the old argument was this guy's book is \$10 and this guy's book is \$1.00, is he really 10 times better than him? Is Stephen King really 10 times better than me?

Henri: And now it's the reverse.

Sean: Right. So it's a different game, it's a different argument and self publishers have the power.

Now, here's the big problem. There is a lot of crap in self publishing. As backwards as traditional publishing is in many ways, they are gatekeepers for quality and that's a big argument against self publishing. However, I believe that we're just in the middle of a change and like anything the cream is going to rise to the top.

You're not going to put out a crap \$0.99 book and sell a million copies, you just won't because people won't tell their friends. You could put out a \$0.99 book, but the only way you're going to sell a million copies is if it's fantastic and people read it and they can't help themselves but leave a positive review on Amazon or share it with their friends or retweet it or like it on Facebook. That's the way you're going to sell a million copies.

Henri: It's the same with blogs. You can start a blog, but it has to be great content for people to actually share it and link to it, which makes it rise to the top.

Sean: Right. There are hundreds of millions of abandoned blogs, they're just the dead skin of cyber space. There's going to be another 3,400 started today and 3,380 of them are going to die. But, the cream will rise to the top. If you put out epic stuff then you'll get epic attention.

Henri: So my next question was going to be why self publish, but you actually covered some of that. Self publishing is getting easier and easier as time goes by, but it still has to be quality stuff, like you said. So now the obstacle or the tough part is actually getting people to read it and share it instead of just creating it.

Sean: Right, exactly. And that's hard. I would say that traditional publishing is still great and probably the best decision for a lot of people. If you are a great writer, but you have no ability to market, traditional publishing probably is for you, it's probably a good space for you because the traditional publisher will take that ball from you. Not like they once would, you're still going to have to do some of it yourself.

But, for someone like you or me, we know how to speak to an online audience, we know how to do our own marketing, so there's no benefit for us with a traditional publisher because we're going to be doing a lot of their job anyway, but they're going to own our copyright and they're going to be taking a way larger chunk of the royalties.

Where Amazon is a great partner, anything that's \$0.99 and under they take 70%, which is pretty steep, but you're using their info structure and fair is fair. For anything \$2.99 and over

you get 70% of the royalties and that's a crazy high percentage, especially if you're moving high volume.

But again, if you don't know how to market and you need someone to get your attention and you are a quality writer, then traditional publishing can be a good choice.

Now, John Locke signed a deal earlier in the year, just maybe two months ago, and it was awesome. It's the only deal that I could see really taking. He maintains 100% of his royalties for all digital rights and they handle print. To me that is the best deal ever, because I would totally take that deal. I would never make a traditional deal right now where I lost control of my digital rights. But, if somebody else would handle print, get my copies into bookstores, handle distribution, I would bow down and say "That's an awesome deal."

Henri: So it sounds like Amazon is really the best platform right now. I know there are several different ones, but Amazon really is where you should be focusing your attention?

Sean: Yes, absolutely. If it wasn't for Kindle I don't think my year would have been the same as it has been. I think my strategies would have been a little different. And I think it's evolving, I think it's changing, I think there will be other players in the space, but right now it is Kindle and you can't ignore it.

There's another argument that people keep saying there's going to be a saturation point and you can only put more ebooks out and eventually people are going to stop listening and stop reading. You know what? That is such a ridiculous argument, because no one has made that argument about print ever. No one has said, "Let's stop making print books because we've hit a saturation point. No one wants to read anymore, let's stop making magazines, let's stop making print."

It's a crap argument and it's an argument made by people who either don't understand the shift that's happening or are afraid of the shift that's happening. But, the truth is, right now there's less content being uploaded than the demand for it. I think that's going to happen for awhile. I don't think of it as a gold rush, because I think gold rush implies that the gold is going to run out. I think it's a great opportunity and if you're a reasonable writer, whether you want to write fiction or nonfiction, it's just a fantastic place to be right now.

Henri: So how do you actually do this, do you only need an account at Amazon and then you can upload anything or are there specific rules you have to follow?

Sean: There are specific rules you have to follow. That's another great question. I'm really fortunate, I'm really lucky because I have a great team. I could not do this all on my own, there's no way I could have put six books out all by myself this year. My publishing partner,

David Wright is fantastic and not only does he help me write content, but he does all the final edit and the layout and he gets it up to Kindle.

So I don't have to do any of that heavy lifting, which means I can really focus on the writing part, which is what I really want to do. So again, I'm lucky. But, there are services that will help you with that.

One service I've not yet tried, but I am looking into it because it seems good for some of our titles is called [Book Brewer](#). You basically upload your Word document to Book Brewer and I think it's for \$60 they'll do all the layout for you and upload it onto Kindle.

But, Kindle does have some specific rules and a lot of people are breaking them right now. Here's what I think... For example, you're not allowed to put affiliate codes in a Kindle book, a lot of people are doing it anyway. You're not allowed to use PLR in a Kindle and a lot of people are doing it anyway.

But, what I think that Amazon is doing is they're allowing all that through because they want to report certain numbers. So, for example, at the end of 2010 they were able to say, "Digital downloads on Kindle are outselling print books on Amazon by a margin of 3-to-2." Well, a lot of those crappy internet marketer ebooks were a part of those numbers.

So I think that they want their numbers inflated right now, but as soon as their numbers are just the juggernaut they expect them to be by the end of this year I think they're going to clean house and what you're going to see on Amazon is a lot like what you've seen on Google with the Panda update or the Florida update or all these updates that just knocked out a bunch of spammy behavior.

I think you're going to see the exact same thing with Kindle where all of a sudden these spammy ebooks and people who are putting them up there, their accounts are deleted and their books are vapor.

Henri: So you mentioned PLR, what is PLR for those that aren't familiar with it?

Sean: PLR means private label rights. PLR can be awesome and it can also be terrible, it totally depends on the quality, what you get and how you use it.

A great example of PLR that we use is audio. We just cut a trailer for our latest project and we bought PLR audio. I think it was \$14, but it's a really cool music track. What we wanted was a real Inception vibe for the trailer, but we couldn't steal the Inception music and we certainly weren't going to pay for it because I don't have \$100,000 lying around. So we got a fake version that sounds enough like the Inception score to kick ass, but without costing us anything more than \$14. That's a great use of PLR.

Now, how a lot of people use PLR is that they'll – it just means private label rights, it means you can buy the content and redistribute as your own without paying any further royalties other than what you paid for it up front.

Now, in the ebook sense let's say you had a book on how to fix your transmission and you bought a PLR book. You can take the exact same content, put your name on it and say you wrote it and put it up to Kindle. Well, Amazon knows that there are seven versions of this book that are exactly the same, so they're PLR. That's against their rules, you're not supposed to do that.

A good way you could use PLR is if you buy really high quality PLR and just rewrite it. Then that's good, because it's information based, so the information doesn't change, it's only the voice you're changing.

However, for me personally, I found that I'm not really comfortable with PLR because it often takes me as long to rewrite something as it would to just write it myself. But, again I'm a writer, so that makes sense. But, for somebody who isn't a writer, but wants to get up on Kindle, PLR is a good way to start. I strongly caution you to so thoroughly rewrite it that the information is as valuable as what you originally had, but there's no trace of the original content.

Henri: I find it's often much more fun to actually write it from scratch and if you PLR it's usually because you don't know anything about the subject anyway, so you shouldn't be writing about it.

Sean: Exactly. Really, how can you truly benefit the reader if you don't know what you're talking about? It's pretty difficult to do. Yet you're a ninja to somebody, right? There's something that you know that somebody will pay for. So just focus on that. Even if it's just worm farming, I mean you know something that somebody wants to know.

Henri: Even if you just started a blog you can teach someone how to start a blog who has never started a blog.

Sean: Right. And that's the mistake a lot of people make, because they think "I don't know enough about this subject to teach anybody. Nobody is going to want to hear what I say." But, if there's a scale of 1 to 10 they're assuming that everybody is looking for information that's up around the 8 or 9, and that's simply not true. A lot of people don't want 7, 8, or 9, because it's too complicated. They're looking for information that's more on the 4 or 5 scale.

If you're only a 5 or 6 then you can still teach the people who are 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. So you can always teach somebody. The best way to get going is to get started. You don't have to be great to get going, but you have to get going if you want to be great.

Henri: Yes. The funny thing is that even if someone is at a 4 and you're at a 5, they can relate to you better because you're not this expert who makes millions and has all these blogs up.

Sean: Right. There's a huge disconnect between the whole guru and newbie thing. It's funny, because I study this a lot with copywriting and I think if you don't know better you would always want to show – let me just go with an example.

Vegas knows what they're doing, right? Vegas knows how to separate people from their money. You'll see if you walk into a casino and they have you can win and they'll have a picture of somebody who won, you never see a picture of somebody who won \$30,000,000 and they look like Tom Cruise. What you see is a toothless old lady holding a check for \$10,000, because that's realistic. You can picture yourself winning \$10,000. It's really difficult to picture yourself winning a million.

So people will assume just go for the higher number, people want to be millionaires, but that's not true. Not everybody wants to be a millionaire, as hard as it is to believe. Not only that, but not many people have an easy time picturing themselves as a millionaire, but they can picture themselves with \$10,000.

So in the guru space they may not be able to picture themselves making millions of dollars and running a network of 20 blogs, but they can picture themselves having one successful blog that's making five figures.

Henri: Exactly. In terms of self publishing, what if you're not a killer writer?

Sean: Well, that's a great question. I think you either need to partner with someone who is or stick with your strengths. What that means is find something you can write about or find a different channel.

If you can't write fiction, don't try, because there's too many people who can write fiction who are going to kill you. Write nonfiction on a subject that you can really voice and really do a good job and offer a service to your readers.

Or just go backwards, like what we're doing right now, we're having an interview. When this interview is done there's going to be a lot of quality information here and you can turn that into a transcript and then give that transcript to an editor so that it has flow. That's actually one of my best ways of writing a book.

What I would suggest is if you can't write then outline and what you should do is take a nonfiction subject that you want to teach and think of 12 things that you really want to talk about. This is actually the exact strategy I used to write my *Writing Online* book, so I'll just lay that out.

What I did for *Writing Online* was it was actually mostly verbal. I took the 12 topics, I ended with 15, but I started with 12, the main topics that anyone would want to know about building a writing business online, building a list, social media, blog, passive income, marketing, all of that. So then I had my 12 chapters.

Then for each chapter I thought of 12 things I would want to talk about. So what are the 12 most important things any writer would need to know about marketing. Then what I would do is I would take each section and write it separately, but I didn't actually write it, I would just get my Dragon Dictate and I just spoke it. I would ask myself questions and I would answer those questions and then I had everything transcribed and that was my rough draft. It was 100,000 word rough draft, but I did it in under a month, just a little bit each day.

That sounds like such a monumental undertaking, 100,000 word book, but it really isn't if you section it off that way. You don't have to be a great writer to do that. What you need to do is know your subject well enough that you could fluidly talk about it when you're answering the questions you asked yourself. And in addition to that you have to have the resources to pay a good editor and a transcriptionist, and then be able to tweak your final copy.

The beauty of that model is that you're speaking, so your final copy is going to be really conversational. So it's going to sound like you're a great writer even if you're not.

Henri: Exactly. That's the same kind of process I use when I write books. I just begin by outlining, coming up with the headline, the title of the book, and then going through the chapters and outlining the actual chapters, and then asking questions and just dumping my brain on the first draft and rewriting it, then polishing it up.

Sean: Right. And it makes a big difference on the conversational tone. Really people aren't looking for magic writing and that's a rabbit hole I fell down a long time ago and I just recently climbed out, and it's the best thing I ever did. When I first started, you know we were talking about passion versus money, and I always wrote to my passion, I made things sounds great, they were elegant. But, I was writing more for me than for the reader and you don't have to be a great writer to write for a reader, you just have to be communicative.

That's the thing, people get lost in being a writer and they self edit when they write. But, if you write like you speak you're not going to run into that problem. How often are you having a conversation with a friend where you self edit what you're thinking? You don't, your conversation flows. If you could get that kind of flow while you're writing and doing it with dictation software, for some people that's a great way to get that flow. You come closer to your natural speaking voice and the closer you can get to your natural speaking voice the more powerful your copy is going to be and the more valuable it's going to be to the reader anyway.

So I think it's a misconception in our culture that the faster you do something the worse quality it is, especially when it comes to writing. Imagine if you had a plumber and he came over to your house and he took four hours to fix the pipe. You wouldn't be like, "You did a great job, that took you four hours." You'd think "Why did that take you four hours? The last guy did it in 20 minutes."

Yet with writing for some reason the longer something takes the more credit we give it, "Oh that book must be amazing because it took him an entire year to write." I just don't think that's true. I think that writing is like any other skill, if you're great at it you should be fast at it. I think that if you force yourself into speed sometimes you're going to force yourself into quality too.

Henri: Yes. Most people forget that actually writing the first draft is not about getting it perfect, because the polishing comes later so you just write what you want to write and then rewrite afterwards.

Sean: I totally agree.

Henri: What do we have left to cover here? I guess what can someone expect if they write a book and they upload it to Amazon and they pass all the rules and that stuff, what can they expect? Are they going to start selling books right away or what's going to happen?

Sean: No. And if they do expect that they're going to have a world of disappointment, because that's when the marketing comes in. That's when you really have to start pushing your product.

This is a good time to talk about the latest thing that we did, which is a serialized fiction and it's called *Yesterday's Gone*. It's probably the best work I've done so far since starting online. I'm ridiculously proud of this. But, as much as I love the book itself, I love the business model even more because it's smart and it's in alignment with the way people want information now, even if it's just entertainment.

What we did is we were looking at everybody who was selling all of these books on Amazon and they all had one common denominator and that was multiple titles. There was nobody, there's not one person that I know of, and I study this stuff all the time, there's no one that I've seen that's selling five digits worth of downloads a month who has one or two titles, they have multiple titles.

Conrath was able to do it because he had a whole backlog that he was able to put up. Amanda Hocking had nine titles, John Locke had five titles. In fact, John Locke didn't even start marketing his first title until the fifth one was out because he knew it was wasted time. In his words, which I love, he says, "The worst thing you could do as a writer is to get your readers to

fall in love with you and have nothing else to sell.” I think that’s brilliant. It’s so simple and it’s so true.

So this was back a few months ago when we were looking at our catalog and we had five books to market, but they were in four different markets. It’s like having one book, it just doesn’t matter. We had books on writing, we had children’s literature, we had horror, and we had contemporary fiction. There was not one book, I mean you can’t sell your *Writing Online* book and then turn around and sell the children’s poetry, it’s not going to sell to the same customer.

We knew we needed to get five or six books to market within just a few months and the idea of writing five books and putting them out at \$0.99 – oh and that’s the other thing... \$0.99 is the magic number. Once you’re a known author you can get a lot more for your books and you really should because \$2.99 is the least you want to charge for something because that’s where you get your 70% royalty, which is what you want to aim for. At \$0.99 I split every single book sale with my partner, which means I get \$0.15 per download, and that sucks. So I don’t want those downloads, I want higher priced downloads. But, I want my name known, so \$0.99 is the magic there.

But, I couldn’t picture writing six books at \$0.99, it just didn’t work, I knew it would take too long. So Dave came up with a premise for a serialized fiction that I just loved. It was basically if you read the Stephen King’s *The Stand* or a little bit of *Lost* in there, it’s just a post-apocalyptic thriller and it’s really great. We didn’t model it after books, we modeled it after serialized TV like *Lost* and *Dexter* and *Sopranos*, and more like the way Dickens did it a couple hundred years ago with his serialized fiction.

We thought it would be really great to put out 100 page titles for \$0.99 that ended with awesome cliffhangers that made people really want to buy the next one. Then I just took everything I learned from ghost writing internet marketing stuff over the last couple years and I built a funnel.

So what we basically have is a bucket offer. We want the pilot to be free ideally, but you can’t make your book free on Amazon, you can only make it \$0.99. But, if you put it on Smashwords and make it free Amazon could price match it, which is what we’re hoping for. But, regardless, the pilot at the most will be \$0.99, that’s the first episode.

Once someone is done reading that episode we really try to hook them into the second episode with an awesome cliffhanger that starts up with second episode. All the other episodes are \$1.99, but the full season is only \$4.99. So if you read the first episode and you really like it you’re much more likely to go and buy the full season. That’s what we want readers to buy, because that’s \$3.50 so we each make \$1.75 on that.

That's just a much better model. You can do it with nonfiction too. The thing is, it works really well with fiction because people love cliffhangers and they want to know what happens next. But, it works with nonfiction.

With the *Writing Online* book I was talking about earlier each of those chapters, I figured there's a lot of people who want to know about marketing, but they don't necessarily need to know how to build a blog because they already have a blog. They don't need to know how to build a list because they already have a list, they want to know what to do with it. They want to know how to build passive assets. So we started to slowly release each of those titles as what we call Kindle Singles. So *How to Make Money Online as a Writer* is one of the chapters in *Writing Online*, but it's also available for \$0.99 on Kindle by itself.

Now, here's the magic. This is why Amazon is so powerful and the best partner a writer can have. We put out that single a few weeks back and we didn't link to it, I never posted it on Twitter, I didn't blog about it, nothing. And we still started selling it because people who had bought other writing books, Amazon then promoted that. So it started showing up in searches. If people were looking for books on Twitter or social media, our single started to populate on their page. That's amazing and that's the magic.

So once you get a name and people are leaving positive reviews there's a snowball effect, just like you see online. You're blog will start out really small, you don't have any subscribers, it feels like you're yelling down an empty hallway, no one can hear you, you're frustrated, then you get that first few subscribers, then more, then more. Then all of a sudden once you get to 1,000 those subscribers kind of carry the ball for you a little bit and it's not as hard anymore because all you have to do is focus on the content and your audience will help you to spread it.

The same thing happens with Amazon, except better, because not only are the readers helping you to spread it, Amazon is helping you to spread it. So when we come out with season two of *Yesterday's Gone*, Amazon is going to send an email to everybody who bought the first season and tell them that the new season is out. That is immeasurably powerful.

Henri: When you talked about the singles, you just took one chapter out of your *Writing Online* book and then you put it up as a separate book on Kindle?

Sean: Right.

Henri: How many pages is one of those singles?

Sean: I think the *Writing Online* single is maybe – I don't know how many pages, it's about 5,000 words.

Henri: Okay, so pretty short.

Sean: Pretty short, yes. And its \$0.99, so you never have to feel like “Is this good enough?” because it’s \$0.99 and it is good enough. You want to ask yourself that question, because if it’s not good enough then no one is going to buy your next one.

For us it’s lead gen, because Kindle is a great source of lead generation. Let’s take that single. It doesn’t end with just the last word, it ends with calls to action, so I’m trying to get people back to GhostWriterDad, I’m trying to get people to follow me on Twitter, like my page on Facebook, buy the full Writing Online book, maybe buy another one of my books like *How to Write a Sales Letter that Works*. Those are calls to action that are at the end of the single. So it’s just another way of getting your name out there, except Amazon is one of the most powerful affiliates you could ever have.

If you’re smart about the way you write your singles and don’t be clever with your titles, but really keyword specific, you’re going to do a lot better too. How to Make Money Online as a Writer isn’t the most clever title, but it’s pretty specific.

Henri: So it sounds like success really comes from persistence and writing many books instead of just one.

Sean: Yes. If you expect to write one book and start sipping your margarita, it’s just not going to happen. It’s really hard work, it’s really grueling. Again, I’m fortunate because I was able to put out a lot of content because I had written a lot of content over the last few years, so I was able to just kind of package what I already had. I have a writing partner who is really fast and I’m really fast, so we were able to put together *Yesterday’s Gone* in seven weeks and it’s 700 pages total and it’s killer kick ass awesome page turning fiction. But, I could not have done that myself.

I highly suggest if you want to do fiction breaking it into pieces and doing something serialized simply because you can get more \$0.99 titles out there that will help to have that snowball effect, because if you don’t hit critical mass then you’ll never ever do it. Your title has to be so above and beyond amazing if you expect to sell – 10,000 is what I consider the magic number. I don’t know if that’s the magic number, we’ll see, but that’s what I’m pushing for. I want to move 10,000 units of *Yesterday’s Gone*, because I feel like if we hit that number then Amazon is going to just start populating everybody’s page.

But, I don’t think we ever would have – in fact, we wrote another book, it’s called *Available Darkness* and it’s a horror book and it’s really good, it’s vampires which Amanda Hocking, it’s what she wrote. It’s a very good book, but I don’t think it’s good enough.

What I mean by that is I would put it up against something King wrote, I think the quality is there, but it’s only one title. So if somebody goes to buy that title and they love it, there’s

nowhere else for them to go. So there's just no way for us to build critical mass, because the number of people who would have to buy that is so high.

Yet at \$0.99 for *Yesterday's Gone* with all the other ones, once they buy that one they buy the next one, and then the next one, and all of a sudden we have several titles that are all moving up at the same time and Amazon says "Wow, this author, people really like him." Amazon behaves very similarly to Google, they want to make their buyers happy, they want to make readers happy. So if you have a lot of positive reviews and you have a lot of content out there, then they know that people like you and they're going to reward that affection with more attention. It's very similar to blogging or the way Google treats you, it's an attention economy and that's never accidental. You don't get attention just because you work hard, you get attention because you work hard, you persevere, you know how to speak to your audience, and you're relentless.

Henri: So to wrap things up, what do you suggest to someone who is just beginning and maybe they're writing their first Kindle book, or they already have their first Kindle book, how should they start marketing themselves? Should they start a blog or should they get in touch with book bloggers, what's the process you recommend?

Sean: Absolutely, everything you said. You must have a blog, there's no question about it. You need a blog where you are connecting with people. You need Twitter. Facebook fan page too, although admittedly I'm pretty weak at my own Facebook presence. I'm barely there, I need to do a lot more there. But, I'm strong enough on Twitter I think it makes it okay. But, I would suggest a blog, Facebook and Twitter, I think that's kind of the holy trinity of making it all work.

You're absolutely right, you really want to be involved in the space that you're writing for. That's the big ingredient that I'm missing here, because *Yesterday's Gone* is awesome, but it's not an IM product. If it was an IM product I would be able to email a few of my friends and have them mail their list. I can't do that, this is fiction. The only people who are going to make this work are readers and I'm not connected with the readers, because I've not spent any time connecting with them over the last couple years.

But, if you're going to start writing a book now and you know it's going to be done in six months then it would serve you very well to spend time each week or day on the forums and message boards and spend time where the people who are reading the book that you are trying to write, that target audience that would love what you're going to write, spend time getting to know them so that all the heavy lifting is done. When your book comes out you have a network of people who will like it, who will talk about it and will help you spread the word.

Henri: And if you don't know where to start, just start somewhere. Start a blog or start a Facebook page or get active on Twitter, or something.

Sean: Absolutely. And the same goes too even if you're not a self publisher, even if you're just a writer and you want to get noticed by traditional publishing. You're not going to get noticed without a blog. You're not going to get noticed if you're not on Twitter. It's a different world, you have to be social.

Henri: Yes. Before we wrap things up, do you have any last words to budding self publishing authors out there?

Sean: Just don't give up and don't let anyone tell you your ideas are stupid. Really learn on the craft. I cannot state enough you have to focus on quality. Don't rush things to market. Things like your cover, your product description, the quality of your work, your layout, your final edit, that really matters. If you put out a self published book and it has a ton of typos in it, you will get ripped apart. You will get poor reviews and your book will go nowhere.

So perseverance is important, but really getting the highest quality content to market that you can, there's nothing more important than that.

Henri: For those listening, if you're listening to this on the blog then I'm going to link to Sean's trailer and some of his books that you can check out, so go there if you want more information.

Sean: We also have a little group that we're starting of people, we're going to send them extra chapters and things like that that we're not putting out on Kindle, they're fan only stuff. But, people on this call may be interested because we're also going to be sharing some of the behind the scenes marketing process and our sales number, things that I don't necessarily want to talk about publically, but I really want to talk to a smaller group about them.

Henri: Okay. So do you have an address where you do that, or what's the secret access code?

Sean: We haven't put the page up yet, but I think it's going to be serializedfiction.com/be-a-goner. By the time this posts for sure we'll have that page up, I think we're doing it in a couple of days.

Henri: Okay. I guess that's basically all the questions I have about self publishing. Thanks for doing the interview, Sean. I'll see you around.

Sean: My pleasure. This has been fantastic. Have a great day.

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