

Episode 97

📅 Mon, 9/6 12:19PM ⌚ 56:12

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

book, kobo, author, wide, publish, amazon, people, platform, read, mark, bookstores, algorithms, sell, podcast, mindset, ebooks, writing, industry, started, release

SPEAKERS

Carissa Andrews, Mark Leslie Lefebvre



Carissa Andrews 00:09

The indie author revolution has been around for more than a decade. But we indies continue to push the boundaries of what we're capable of. from getting over initial prejudices to staring down perfectionism and author imposter syndrome. We've become a force to reckon with indie authors now wear more hats than ever as we strive to create a career full of meaning prosperity, and potential. We've juggled the demands and continue to be rebels in the face of adversity. Now, after years of hearing the shelter, hustling, grind, we indies are rebelling again, Gone are the days of publishing a book a month until we drop, and in its place are the seeds of a better way to rapid release, a way that feels incredible as we build a sustainable, lifelong author career, that not only increases our visibility and royalties, but it's all done with intention and ease. If you're ready to buck the system and become the visionary entrepreneur, I know you're meant to be, you've come to the right place. I'm Carissa Andrews, international best selling indie author, and this is the author revolution podcast. Welcome back to the author revolution podcast. Today's episode is going to be a real treat for those of you who have an interest in growing your wide audience. Today I am chatting with Mark Leslie Lefebvre. Mark is the former director of self publishing and author Relations at Kobo, he literally designed Kobo writing life the platform we authors used to publish direct with Kobo, and now he's the part time Director of Business Development at drafted digital. Mark originally came into my circle of influence thanks to a dear friend of mine, miser Street. She's a wide author who every day inspires me to take my own author career wide and expand my reach further. Earlier this year, when I was moving some of my books wide, she recommended I joined the wide for

the wind Facebook group and get a book by the same name written by none other than, you guessed it, Mark, since read wide for the win, and I was super excited to chat with him about the book and the wide author mindset. I'm thrilled to be able to share it my recent interview with him today. So let's get to it. Well, thank you, Mark, for joining the revolution, five guests. I'm super thrilled that you're here to today to talk to my audience about being wide and who you are. So I've explained a little bit about your bio in the introduction and how I met you. But why don't you tell them out of your mouth, who you are and what to do?

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Mark Leslie Lefebvre 02:46

Sure. My name is Mark Leslie Lefebvre. And I've long been a writer since since I was a kid just wanted to tell stories. So I grew up just you know, reading comic books and, and writing stories and typing my very first manuscripts on Oh, yes, in the old day on that old kids on a manual typewriter, mailing them away to get rejected countless times. I finally started my very first short story that I sold was in a magazine in 1992. And that was the same year I joined. The book selling industry I started as a part time bookseller was temporary Christmas help. I got bit by the book bug. I loved books my entire life. I've been giant book nerd my entire life. But



Carissa Andrews 03:31

It's the worst thing to be though. When you're a book lover, and it's Christmas, just saying,

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Mark Leslie Lefebvre 03:35

Yeah, the book industry was like, Whoa, you don't get paid very much at all. But I just like writing, hey, you don't really make a lot of money in traditional publishing. Let's do this. And so 1992 is when I started working in the book industry. And also, that's when I started to I mean, I still accumulate rejections all the time, whether they're bookbub rejections, or publisher, rejections, whatever. But then, you know, started to get my work published. I self published my first book in 2004. Before all the cool kids were doing, it hid behind the stark imprints because I didn't want anyone to know why I was doing it. It's kind of like, masturbating, right, like people do it, but they don't publicly admitted.



Carissa Andrews 04:15

Right.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 04:16

Um, and then I had the luxury I was running a print on demand machine for university bookstore I was working at and authors were looking for help, you know, digitizing their books into print, but then I was helping them get set up with Kindle and Smashwords. And shortly after that Kobo was looking to create a self publishing platform because they're getting into their back end with the Excel spreadsheets and FTP and stuff was just way beyond what most authors could do. They hired me to create Kobo writing life, the self publishing platform and then and that's when I really started to leverage what can I do to help other authors succeed this way. And, and that's kind of where I've landed. So, I'm a fully hybrid author in terms of I work with traditional publishers, I Self Publish. And I also love the fact that I continue to be able to help authors understand the business of writing and publishing. So that's, you know, that's my 40 hour spiel in 10 minutes.



Carissa Andrews 05:18

I think that's awesome, though. For me, it's your take on things is so enlightening. I mean, I've been around the industry for a while as well. And it's like, I've always looked at wide, and I've always been drawn to wide. And I've always tried to do wide, it hasn't always worked well for me. And it's like, oh, because I used to now. Okay, so admittedly, I have to say that okay, you and I have both worked in bookstores. So that was where I started to, although I started in 94, I want to say, as a book bookseller, back in like a local bookstore, ended up at Walden books up in Duluth, Minnesota, we, and so for me, it's like, I've always been around that book, selling mindset and having the, you know, the tangible thing in the hand in my owner in that as well, but making sure when I'm reading it, it's also that way, so I can highlight and do things. But I'm thinking that the whitespace, a, digitally it was always it felt kind of like you're throwing it out into the wild instead of the wide. Like, who knows if anyone's actually gonna look at this thing and what's happening and, and so it's always been something that I want to grow. I don't know how to do it effectively. And so I'm, that's one of the reasons why I'm really excited that you're here because I suck at it. I need some help. So I'm alright. So one of the questions I've got then for you is, do you think being in that idea, or being in that industry of being a bookseller really helped you kind of grow your wife mentality? Like did that always exist straight out the gate for you? Or was that something that kind of evolved because of Kobo and that whole interplay?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 06:53

Yeah. So I mean, the the big challenge, the reason I self published in the first place is I was working in the book industry. So there I am a writer dedicated, I knew that's all that I

wanted to do. For my life. There was be a writer. And and people would say, so you're a writer and say, Yes, I'm a writer. And they said, well, where can I get your work? And I would say, Well, if you drive across the Canadian border, and upstate New York, there's a bookshop out you'll get, you get there, and there's a magazine on the shelf, you know, circulation 500. But oh, it's September 2, now, I swear they took it off the shelf, August 31. Sorry, you can't find any of my writing anywhere, which is why I Self Publish. So I think, yeah, I understood the business of publishing. When I first self published I made my book fully returnable. This is before Ingram Spark, I went direct to Ingram lightning source, which you had to really understand publishing. Yeah. And formatting and that, like, it's not wasn't as easy to use. Oh, for sure, though. Yeah. I think I think that working in the book industry, understanding why I mean, you know, this, the books have to pay rent, they can't just sit on the shelf and look nice. You have to carry books that you know, we're going to sell. And if they don't sell you return them, because you only have so much inventory. So yeah, from early on, I understood. Yes, we love books. Yes, we're passionate about the product. However, what's really important is, they're a commodity and people have to be able to sell them.



Carissa Andrews 08:20

So Mark, I was listening to one of your podcast episodes, I realized that for the past couple of episodes of my own, I have been saying your name incorrectly because apparently listening to other people say your name is not the same as listening to the person themselves, say their name. So sorry about that.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 08:39

You find often you're you're in the majority, could never spell or pronounce Lafave, which is why I would never have published my books for writers under Mark Leslie Lafave except for the fact that I built a name in the industry already and I was recognized as you know, like guy who had created Kobo writing life and all that stuff. I was always writing all my fiction and some of my nonfiction is under Mark Leslie. So I use my middle name because most people even if they go lezlie, they still write and spell it and find me. Yeah. And in the early days, it was so they could find my books and bookstore shelves. Right. But now it's like so they can type it into an online bookstore and find me quickly. So, Lefebvre I probably saw more books if I didn't use that name.



Carissa Andrews 09:30

I have gotten the girl to spell it well, a car is a I've never been able to pronounce your

name properly. I was super weird like Andrews. Andrews is such a hard name. No, right. Yeah, I picked that for the last name of the main character in my werewolf series. Nice. How to Michael Andrews. Michael easy to spell Andrews easy. Yeah. I like it. I approve. I also love relationship skills behind you by the That's really cool. Yeah, thank you that is part of my, the author side of my brand. The freaky stuff seem to I mean I some of it I mean, with my this stuff, it's got more ghosts and I have a necromancer and whatnot coming into it. So secret legacy for those of you listening to the podcast I've forgotten man. It's not just a video Hello guys By the way, okay, but they're awesome. So if you have not yet head on over to YouTube to check out these really cool skulls, I encourage you to do so because it's really awesome all over yourself. Well, okay, so I'm really close friends with Eliza Street. And she has been on me to reach out to you for quite a while. And so finally I was like, Okay, I think I'm ready. I've I've read all a wide for the wind. I think I could actually talk to mark intelligently, maybe ish. And so let's have him on the podcast. How do you think I should contact him? She's like, Oh, I'm on this. So she contacted you for me. And so I'm very excited love her very much. In fact, I'll be talking with her later today was that I'll send you the money later. So there you go. There you go. But obviously, the first thing she I guess sent my way of yours was wide for the wind. So again, we'll promote the book, which obviously I bought and then read. So for my audience, can you tell them a little bit? There you go, right. Tell them tell them what the book is all about and why they should get it and why you chose to write it.

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Mark Leslie Lefebvre 11:25

It's it's based on a movement created by Erin Wright's Facebook group of the same name. And and the whole idea is that everywhere you go 98% of the advice on how to sell ebooks and how to be successful in the author is all about Amazon all the time. And an Aaron had actually contacted me when she was first going to write a book by that name. Yeah. And she had read killing it on Kobo, and like following the alliteration. She's like, hey, I want to do something similar but help people with everywhere. Yep. And similarly, I didn't release killing on Kobo until I left Kobo because it felt like it was like if I worked for Kobo, it was too much of a conflict of interest or whatever. So, so I wrote killing on cover the year after I left Kobo, because I wanted to help people with Kobo, even though it wasn't there helping people with Kobo directly anymore. Right. And so yeah, so she followed the same motif just to want to help them everywhere. And then since then, I've continued to want to help people sell everywhere, not just at Kobo, that was part of you know, wanting to you know, a couple writing life is hugely successful love the team there love Kobo. Still, that's where I read books. Most of my ebooks are on Kobo, but then wanting to help them out elsewhere. And then when Aaron realized she was better off writing her romance because her readers were were upset because that's a new book. And I was like, I gotta go back to this thing that I make a living on. Right? And so I said, Well, can I can I use the name. So

the whole concept of wide and it comes from indie author community with publishing your ebooks exclusive to Amazon or publishing wide. Now my wide is a is a capital letter wide, that just goes beyond thinking about ebooks, it goes beyond being open to the traditional publishing open to beyond books open to all the ways that an author can leverage their IP. So what I tried to do is wanted to create a baseline basis. And again, I thought it was going to be 200 pages, it ended up being 400 pages. And then I actually had to stop because I kept wanting to add more and more and like, no, I got it. Cuz that happened, Aaron. Yeah, he's working on the book, and I'm working on the book, and then things would change, and she would add stuff. So yeah, I decided to change. And this is Joanna pen gave me this advice. When I was like, Joe, this is really frustrating because they change everything. The minute I write a chapter about this platform, they change something. So I shrunk down the specifics of each platform, right, and went more with mindset. And I know, I know, you want to talk a little bit more about mindset. But I thought, if I can help authors with mindset first and help them understand how to embrace wide, yes, I'll give them some specifics on how they can work with, you know, Barnes and Noble and Google and Apple and Kobo and in the various dozens of other emerging platforms that they should be paying attention to. Right. I think that that was that's kind of the wide for the wind. That's, that's, it's meant to be a baseline where you can read it and go, haha, he's not telling you exactly what to do here, here. And here. He's inspiring me to come up with my own brilliant genius ideas because I'm way smarter than him anyways, that's what I hope writers get out of it anyways.



Carissa Andrews 14:35

Okay, I don't know that that's the message I got out of the book. But all right. I think the message I got out of the book was Oh, there's actually like, truly a wide mindset. I mean, I think I've always used whenever my books have been wide, I've used the wide mindset where, you know, it just makes sense to me to make sure I'm using a link that goes everywhere. The books are for instance, you know, the books to read link or whatever, or promoting if it's a specialty special promotion on say Kobo promoting just the Kobo link. And so that kind of mindsets always been there for me, I think. But understanding the long game of it, especially in the beginning, as an indie and trying to figure out like, Where, where is my market? Where am I readers trying to figure out what's happening? You know what I mean? It's like, there was a lot of, I think, and like you said, everybody out there is promoting a lot of Amazon stuff. And so it's like, the strategies are very specific to that. And so it throws a lot of indie authors off in the beginning, as they're trying to figure out that strategy for themselves. Right, you know, and so your, your book, I think, was really beneficial to me, and like, just understanding the long term aspect of it, and how to kind of play that all out without, I guess, freaking out over it. And going, hang on, I sold like, four books this month, what you know, or whatever it might be. But you know, what I mean,

especially in the beginning, when you've got one or two books, and you're thinking, How do I, how do I build this platform? But okay, so, so like I said, I've always been in the industry, well, not always, but a long time since 94. Five, myself. And like I said, it's been a struggle to gain that traction, being wide. And I've, I've had a lot of advice from mentors, even like paid mentors, that I look in upon looking back, especially listening to your podcast, I go, geez, I wish I would have had a better mentor for this particular situation, or whatever the case might be, you know, for wide or otherwise. So just set that record straight a little bit. What do you feel is the best thing that we in the authors could do to build that wide presence or wide mindset right off the bat.

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Mark Leslie Lefebvre 16:44

Understand that it's a wide world intended, it is a wide world, and there's lots to learn. And just like you probably learned Amazon, you know, you've focused on Amazon and learn that because it's the world's biggest bookstore, one of the things I recommend is maybe you're not going to get it all at once, you're not going to understand it all. You can't run before you can walk. So take baby steps, maybe pick a platform that's pertinent to you, maybe it's platform you you like like it, maybe if you don't read on Kindle, like, do you read on another platform, try, try actually reading or embracing that place as a reader, and see what the reader experiences. So you can fully understand that most authors is just they think Amazon's the start and end of everything. And it's not. There are countries where Amazon doesn't exist. But apple and Kobo and Google and Smashwords as a retail environment exist and have for a long, long time. And so I think that's one of the issues. The other thing, I think, and this is, it's related to I think when we were chatting earlier, I think he had mentioned this is, you know, a lot of people they publish the books, why'd they just put their books up? Why? And they're like, okay, it's someone else's responsibility. I'm gonna go, you know, do something else. And yet those same authors publish to Amazon, and then invest hundreds, if not 1000s, if not 10s of 1000s of dollars into Amazon ads every month, and go, Well, I invested \$20,000 in Amazon ads, and I made \$30,000 on Amazon this month, but I only made \$5 on Kobo. Well, um, did you promote it? Because Amazon certainly isn't promoting your book for you. You're doing all the work, you're paying them to play? Why wouldn't you do the same things with the other platforms Barnes and Noble, has Direct Publishing opportunities. Kobo has the same thing. Google has launched some really cool DIY promotional opportunities, even though they're a lot more algorithmic based. So I think I'm taking the time to learn at least one of them first, getting comfortable with it, doing some tests, doing some experimentation of bookbub ads, you can target your own website, you can target specific retailer, if you want to try focusing on that. You can do the same thing with Facebook ads as well, it doesn't always have to be all Amazon all the time. So I think I think starting off with that understanding can probably help authors go okay. You mean I'm not going to get it all at once. I'm not

going to be successful on all the platforms immediately.



Carissa Andrews 19:10

Right, right. A lot of people think, Okay, well, Amazon has a native ad platform where none of the other ones do at the moment. And so therefore, it must be the best one because it's gives you that built in thing but that didn't always exist either.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 19:24

Works 100% of the time for Amazon,



Carissa Andrews 19:26

right? Absolutely.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 19:28

It's your money 100% of the time.



Carissa Andrews 19:30

They make it as convoluted as possible. Absolutely. You're kind of screwing yourself up unless you take some really in dep th courses.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 19:39

It's a great cottage industry. There's a lot of authors making a lot of good money selling how to sell Amazon ads.



Carissa Andrews 19:45

Yes, yeah, absolutely!



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 19:46

Which is genius. Brilliant folks who figured it out and are trying to help others



Carissa Andrews 19:51

Right? Because it's such a pain. Okay, so now we talked we touched on the wide mindset so for you, what does the mindset truly look like if they're brand new fresh out of the gate, and they're trying to decide do they go Amazon exclusive? Or do they take on the wide mindset? Like what? What would you say differentiates that?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 20:12

Well, I mean, every author has their own decisions to make and their own, I would say, do what feels right for you, with your comfort level. And again, understanding that it's hard to know everything at once. So of course, you're probably going to default to picking the world's biggest bookstore first, because the best return on your time investment initially, even if you do no promotion whatsoever, right, you're going to be broadly available in the major English language. But I think what I want authors to understand is, just like, because I've been in your work in traditional book selling, is we had to learn that a book is not 300 pages bound between two pieces of cloth, that ebook opened up new possibilities. And we are only at the beginning of a long term revolution in publishing. I'm reading a really thick, wonderful academic book called book wars. It's actually taken about the book industry, but I think it's John Thompson is the author. Okay. And it's fascinating to go back as far as 2006. And remember, oh, my God, yeah, that's when Sony actually revolutionized E and Caribbean on an even greater the year before Kindle showed up. Right. And all of these days, I remember when Stephen King launched an E book in 1999 2000. And it was only available, there wasn't even an E book or E pub. It was just this online reading experience. Okay, and, you know, King only sold what 50,000 or 60,000, the average author like what, 60,000 I'll take it right. But I, you know, I, to me, that feels like ancient history, but I have to remember that that's new. And so going back to the white mindset is remembering that we had a book industry for 500 years that was initiated when Gutenberg, you know, Movable Type in the printing press. And it really, in the last 25 years, has probably seen more dramatic changes than ever before in the history of publishing. And we're only at the beginning of the possibility and opportunities were digital opportunities are going to allow storytellers to tell stories, to audiences that want to receive their stories, you'll notice I say storytelling and tell stories and share stories. I'm not saying specifically print books and ebooks and audio books.



Carissa Andrews 22:39

You've been talking to Joanna Pen, haven't you?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 22:43

Those are three of the three of the possibilities for storytellers. You know, when you create an idea, and I'll give you a perfect example is I sold the rights to a traditional publisher haunted Hamilton. by Mark Leslie is a book of ghost stories of Hamilton, Ontario city I was living in at the time. Now I licensed them all the rights, you know, in that, yeah, I have a publisher, they're gonna put my book in bookstores, right. He's like, here's the here's all the rights. Yeah. And I've since learned via Kristine, Kathryn Rusch, I'm like, No, I can. This is no gay negotiation, I can change the terms, they will not let me keep my ebook rights, because I could do a better job selling ebooks than they could ever dream. But also audio book rights, they've never made audio books, but they want the rights. So even though they had the audio book rights, when I was approached by voicemap, which is a GPS enabled app, I was able to create virtual walking to her because no, it wasn't the text of the book that I licensed to dundurn. And they still own



Carissa Andrews 23:41

right.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 23:42

It was the IP I created when I did reference research for the book. And so the same research that I use to write a chapter or two of the book, I was able to turn into a half hour walking tour, and which I still sell to this day. So yes, even though I licensed the audio book rights, the audio rights and different rights related to that research is completely mind to exploit. And so why mindset has been open to the possibilities. And we don't even know the possibilities that are going to exist in the next three to five to 10 years. So sure, open to the possibilities allows you to properly exploit your IP in a way that you as a storyteller can find your audience and get content to them. Right. Ideally, there will be an exchange of money that's going to you. Right, that's just part of the bigger process, I think.



Carissa Andrews 24:36

Yeah, Joanna and I were talking when she was on the podcast about like even audio books and AI generated audio books and how, like the the wide mindset is really powerful there too, because when you have an AI generated audio book, you can also have your person audio book and you know, all the rights that go along with all the different variations of all of that sort of thing. It's really interesting the way AI is coming into it. The industry and how that might, again revolutionize the way that we're kind of as indie authors or authors in general, coming at what we do. It's really interesting.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 25:08

Well, Jo and I have AI voices already. And we've we've shared episodes of our podcast where it's already AI voices having a conversation so you don't get the inflection and the humor. However, I did release when I released the seven Ps of publishing success, which is a smaller book, I narrated the audio which costs like a full 699 us it's only about 16,000 words or whatever. Okay, um, but then I use an AI voice that I sell for 99 cents. And now that I have a mark Lafave AI voice, I'm probably going to release a mark Leslie Lafave. Ai voice version. So Brian, British male computerized voice, you get for 99 cents if you only care about the content. Or you can get the Mark leslieville fav version AI voice for 99 cents, which I have to work on that that does take some work, because you got to trick the AI. It's just read the text properly. Yeah. And then there's the full version. So the whole idea is that if people only care about the content, not the inflection in the personality, go with the computer version.



Carissa Andrews 26:05

Sure. Or hey, I'd rather get it anyway, like in real life. Like, why might I need to listen to an audiobook? I don't get it.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 26:12

Yeah, yeah, exactly. So that's the technology. And it's only going to get better. It's only going to get better I can imagine. And I know Joe's talked about this as well as well, I want this book, but I want it to be read by SamuelL



Carissa Andrews 26:27

L Jackson.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 26:28

Yeah, yeah. And it's the swears version. But But again, like that possibility exists. Now the person that I want to ride the wave like, Joe, I want to be there. That's why I want to be there putting my voice out there in a way that I can maybe get some micro payments, every time someone wants to use my voice. Rather than go, Oh, well, they use my voice, what am I gonna do? Right, I want to be in control of it. So I want to I want to be at the forefront. So I've, I think I've signed up with three different AI companies. And I'm testing things out because I want to be able to be there. And be be an early adopter, when when that takes a hold.



Carissa Andrews 27:05

That is super cool. I think it's just fantastic. And it's something that I'm also looking into, I haven't gotten to the point of signing up, but I haven't actually tested them out yet. Mostly because it's just been a little bit hectic this summer with four kids being weird, right? Like, I can't wait to leave and go back.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 27:21

Writing books, running the podcast, raising a family,



Carissa Andrews 27:24

Just a few things going on here, whatever. So in my core program, Rapid Release Roadmap, I talk a lot about my experiences, and I talked to them about especially when new authors come into my world and they're going oh, my gosh, there's so much to do with the concept of number one rapid releasing, or just trying to the way I teach it is trying to help build a sustainable career where you're trying to release at least four books a year, it's not so much about the it's not like Michael Andre, rapid releasing necessarily, you know, books today. Yeah. Right. I don't even know how he does that. It's more about building that sustainable author career that keeps moving forward each year and doing those things. But it can still to the newbie, indie feel like it's a lot of work or a lot of stuff coming at them. And so one of the ways I had pieced or parsed it back was to say, okay, just focus on the one first, you know, obviously, to do the thing, and focus on the one that you're going to probably be earning the most royalties from. However, after reading your book, you have changed my mind. So you're saying in here that, you know, obviously, a lot of people do say that, for me, it was more about, I've seen the confusion and the overwhelm, and the burnout, and then people stopping writing altogether, because they think they can't handle it. Um, but so for me reading this, you you mentioned in here that you recommend, you know, building that wide mindset straight out of the gate. And by doing that, by, obviously, still picking Amazon, if that's, you know, what you think is going to be the lion's share of your stuff, your royalties, but then picking another platform to be able to use it doesn't have to be necessarily drafted digital or anything like that. But it can be, you know, Kobo or Barnes and Noble or whatever. So, what, what sites do you recommend? If authors pick one additional one to just try right away? Which one would you recommend?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 29:10

I mean, take a take a look at the market first depends on what you're writing and listening

to what well, other authors who've had experience saying, well, this sells really well on this platform. And you never know, or picking the platform, like I mentioned earlier, that you're already comfortable with you know, so if you're in the US, we'll we'll look is big in the US, but it doesn't exist anywhere else. If you're in Canada, maybe you're gonna gravitate to cocoa bean the other place because you know, that's where Kobo is probably strongest. So, I think that there's that it's always what you're comfortable with. I don't think there's one guaranteed one. If you love algorithms, well guess what? Google's your friends. They do no merchandising whatsoever, right? Whereas Nook and Apple and Kobo are a lot more like traditional bookstores, where they curate and hand select stuff. So But I think that the idea of picking a couple platforms, you're like, Okay, I'm gonna learn Amazon. But instead of just biasing all of my learning on a single infrastructure, pick another one and maybe picking one of the ones like nokor, apple, or Kobo, which is a lot more human curated. So you, you understand, okay, I'm going to game the algorithms over here. And I'm going to establish relationships with real people over here. And I'm going to understand that there are more than one way of getting my book in front of the right people. One of the ways is tricking algorithms and constantly guessing what's going on and how to do that. And the other one is actually trying to maintain authentic relationships with real people who may decide



Carissa Andrews 30:42

It's really interesting to me, because when, obviously, as someone who came in right as the Amazon Kindle thing was booming, and it was, it was the biggest thing. I think that that's the part that's the disconnect I've had in the beginning with being wide because I didn't realize that the other platforms did it differently. I felt like it's the digital era. Everybody's digital. So there is no people necessarily watching this, because it's all computer stuff. Now, you know what I mean? And so to hear well read your stuff, and obviously being in the white for the wind group itself, and just kind of watching what's happening in there. I'm more of a lurker because I like I like to absorb information.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 31:21

I think I think everyone should absorb as much as they can.



Carissa Andrews 31:24

Yeah, absolutely. So it's, it's just been really interesting to me to go, oh my gosh, I didn't realize how much effort and like you said, Merchandising, and curation really goes into it from a human perspective on Kobo, Barnes noble, and Apple, I really honestly had no idea

until probably even the past year has really opened my eyes as I've really decided to take eight of my titles and go wide leave them there. You don't I mean, and so it, that was really fascinating. And I don't think many indie authors realize that part of it. And so I really appreciate that. Number one, put it in here and share that because I didn't even know that, honestly. So it's weird.

M

Mark Leslie Lefebvre 32:04

Yeah, well, it's not to say that the algorithm, they don't have algorithms, because they do I know, for example, because I worked at Cobo is they do a lot of automated things and algorithms and connecting books like the also bots exist everywhere. Yeah, but there's also the also bots working in conjunction, it's kind of like the factory where the they've got, you know, the manufacturing cars. And in the early days, it was just hand manufacturing, moving things from then they automated some of it with robotics and the do i think i think there are a lot more like those factories that have human and automation rather than completely automated or completely human driven. And I think that allows for some brilliant variances and human biases that always come into play. Oh, yeah. So of course, Kobo is probably going to be partial to Canadian authors,



Carissa Andrews 32:54

right.

M

Mark Leslie Lefebvre 32:55

And of course, Apple is probably going to be partial to people who use only Apple products. And really love the look of something that has to be perfectly designed in order for it to function effectively. Right. So



Carissa Andrews 33:09

And really follow their guidelines when it comes to how you use your URL and

M

Mark Leslie Lefebvre 33:13

And have pretty covers, thank you very much, right, that kind of stuff. Because it just doesn't look right. It's not a good customer experience. Yeah. So understanding those things, I think is really important.



Carissa Andrews 33:24

Very cool. Well, another thing that I'm wired for the wind inspired in me, which I really obviously, because I'm still trying to figure out this whole wide situation, how this is going to work for me going. Right. And so one of the things that, you know, I'm teaching, rapid releasing, I'm teaching how to do these four books a year thing, and I'm trying to figure out how to incorporate wide into it. And then I read your book, and I was like, Oh my gosh, I never thought of it that way. So you mentioned something about how you could, you know, still use Amazon as a rapid release platform in a sense, where you're putting it out even, you know, probably a month Part Two weeks apart, drop it all in one day, I guess whatever. But you're using the other platforms, Kobo, you know, use draft to digital, whatever you want to do to be able to put your books out as they're finishing. So if you're the kind of author wants rapid release a series, let's say, you know, a month part, you put them out individually on all those other platforms first, ignoring completely KDP and Amazon in general. And so then it's not even a thing out there until the series is complete. And then you rapid release, obviously keeping it alive. And and then it works in both kind of favors. Because don't Kobo and I know Apple really loves new releases until you're kind of know juicing up those good things, but then also being able to use and leverage the rapid releasing on Amazon.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 34:45

For sure. Yeah, like all of these traditional booksellers that do the merchandising, they care about frontlist and they're looking for frontlist. Well, what are we going to feature that's coming out this week or next week or the next month? libraries as well. Most of the library systems are focused on frontlist and they don't even want to see backlit Short. backlist is more than six months old. Yep. So they're always interested in what's coming next, what can we put in front of our most passionate readers? Whereas with them, and now you have to be careful, because I know that retailers hate it, especially when authors who are exclusive, they say, Why publish these books in 2014 and 2015 2016? And now I'm just going to publish them. Why didn't they all have the same pub date? Well, the reality is that book is was not published in August or September of 2021. That book was originally published in September 2014. Right, yeah, cuz I can go to Amazon, I can see it was available. So don't lie to us. And don't lie to our customers. Be honest. Yeah, they may be new to this platform, but it was published six years ago. That's not gonna hurt you on Amazon, you can put, I think you can put previous updates when you publish, but it's only now available. So all the algorithms that love the 30 day cliff, and all that stuff will benefit from it. So you don't have to lie to the customers to pretend that it's a new book. Yeah. But you can leverage that. And that way you can leverage pre orders because again, none of the other platforms penalize you. If you have to change your pre order date, there's

only one that will come and kneecap you. They'll knock on the door and then they'll just like, take your kneecaps out, and they'll walk away and laugh



Carissa Andrews 36:11

and then say you can't publish for like for another year.



36:14

Yes, like so now. Hi, good luck preordering now.



Carissa Andrews 36:18

Right? Unless you come grovelling to us an email us, please.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 36:22

Yeah, yeah, but But again, this so that way you can, you can even cut your chops, I've seen authors that actually picked, I saw one author who said, I'm just gonna release it on Kobo, I'm going to focus on that. And then once I learn how to do things, then I'm going to go release on the other platforms. Right? So yeah, there's no one way of doing it. It just depends on on your comfort level, and how willing how much you're willing to experiment to?



Carissa Andrews 36:45

For sure. I know, it's definitely one that I'm going to try in the future. I'm in the it's kind of a struggle, because I'm in the middle of a series right now. That is, it's doing okay, with K u, it's an urban fantasy. So it's like whatever. And I want to be able to try out this new strategy. And I've got a like a pen name that I'm gonna be pulling over from Bella and creating it like a completely different series. And I'm thinking I'm going to try this the wide strategy first so that I can put the series out that way and then end up putting it in Kindle at some point whenever it's finished. Yeah. But like, what if what if you have others who are like, gosh, I really wish I was wide now. And but I'm right in the middle, like, I'm on Book Three of this series? Would you recommend like saying, whatever and just try it? Or would it be like, oh, probably not what the middle.



37:30

So here's the thing, you you have built a base of readers, you have to remember the reader experience, right? They're following you, you've built an expectation of release into Kindle Unlimited, and they can read it in air quotes for free. It's not free, they're paying a corporation for the privilege of that. But you have to retrain your readers, you can't just change them, you can't, if you're releasing a book a month, you can't just go to six, your book every six months, without at least letting them know or warning them that something's coming, you're going to change this or Hey, you know, my books are in Kindle unlimited up till now. But I'm going to be going wide in a few months, grab them now while you can, because you can still read them in two years, right? Once you've liked a little bit from from then on any of my new releases, please check with your local library, because you can actually read them for free there. Hey, everyone can read them for free, not just Amazon customers, or a select group of Amazon customers. So I think that's that's an important aspect to consider the other thing I am I am an advocate for why but I have actually sat down because I do one on one consultations with authors. I've sat down, we've looked at their KDP dashboard, and we've looked at their KMP sales and I go, yeah, you know what, you better have money in the bank for at least a year. Because when you take that series out of Kindle Unlimited, you're going to get a dramatic drop in your sales, because you're not going to get your patriots. Yep. And chances are you're not going to start earning the same amount of money. Why for at least a year, so and be prepared for that. So I often advise Well, if you have multiple properties, well, what's earning you the least? That's your Kindle unlimited pagereads. Yeah, start with that. Because we're not making money anyway.



Carissa Andrews 39:13

Yeah, I went through the catalog and tried to figure out okay, well, these ones they're earning but they're not earning as good as the newer ones that have gone into k u or whatever. So I've moved them over and I'm like, Okay, now I'm going to start experimenting with how to really do this properly wide. And so it's it's been I'm really more in the learning mode than I am the implementation mode, although I do have my first Kobo promotion happening next week. So I'm very excited Labor Day promo. Was that is it Labor Day promo or? No? I don't think so. Maybe it is. It's like that. No, it's the free sci fi Why am I something? Yeah. Yeah. So thank you. I'm very excited about it. Make sure your metadata is all lined up so that they can get into Book Two Book Three. Yeah, hopefully I think it is. I'm pretty sure just



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 39:57

make sure it's clean. Okay, Kobo will automatically link them on item pages for you, you'll be



Carissa Andrews 40:01

able to tell if it's I will, I will double check that. But I'm pretty sure it is. I mean, I did it all individually. So now I'm like, oh, gosh, I'll check it. I'll check



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 40:11

checking because because then then they do have systematic things where they will people who've started reading the book, then they'll send automated emails that say, Hey, did you book who's available? And they do it based on all these weird back end algorithms that nobody can predict. Okay, but, you know, help the systems help you right? For



Carissa Andrews 40:29

sure. For sure, it will seem these are the things where it's like, it's really helpful to know that like, I didn't even realize it until talking to Eliza and, and being in that white for the wind group. That there there was even a promotions tab inside Kobo, like I had no idea that that was a thing or in Barnes noble, but they have their own promotions tab. So the actual promo tab that not everyone gets that you haven't made, right, and it was like, wait a minute, what's happening here? What is this? And so as it was definitely lies as push that she was like, you need to go do these things. Okay. And I actually started with Kobo, I have, I have the dashboards for Barnes and Noble and apple. But I haven't done anything with those two yet. There's everything's still in draft to digital. For the other ones, but Kobo. I'm on it. I'm close enough. I'm in Minnesota, right? Oh, gosh. Okay, so obviously, you work part time for drafted digital. So you don't have a problem with aggregators or distributors? What is the difference between both of those they kind of are interchangeable in my world. But if some somewhat Yeah, but I know that there are some sites that you recommend going native with? And I think I've just touched on them. So do you want to say which ones you think are the best to go meet up with?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 41:41

Well, honestly, it's a personal decision. And I honestly think it's up to each author to decide because it's not just, oh, if I go direct, I make 10% more. Or, you know, for example, obviously, I'm biased towards draft to digital, but I use almost all of the aggregators and

distributors out there in one way, shape, or form I always have is that sometimes it may be better to go through a distributor if the distributor has better promotion opportunities, or not. Other times, it's like, well, my virtual assistant, I don't want it's a violation of Amazon's Terms of Service to actually give them my KDP login. Right. And, and Kobo doesn't have a way to do that. So if I wanted to have secure support, you know, I know Apple has this and oak has this. Amazon doesn't Kobo doesn't draft a digital does. There are different tools and opportunities like payment splitting is is another example. Obviously, I'm going to be very positively biased towards draft to digital. Personally, I use Kindle Direct Publishing directly. Yep. Except when I'm doing payment splitting for draft to digital or anything. It makes my life so much easier. Who cares about the 10%? Yeah, yeah, go direct to Kobo. Most of the time. Again, I created the platform. So I'm a little biased towards that. And again, you they prefer promos, milk is very heavy handed and says, well, we're not going to help you unless you're direct, like Kobo does. So that makes a lot of sense. For me. Honestly, it's too little too late to this Canadian who couldn't get in the system and then took forever to get anything useful. Done. And like, I'm done, I don't have patience for you people anymore. And I and again, I think it's romance heavy handed there. So I'm like, I'm good. Just going through a distributor to get to you. Because who knows what you're going to do you back down to the UK? Who knows what you're up to? I'm not going to waste sorry. Yeah, I don't mean to be. And and I do want people to be open minded. I want not to be successful. I want BNN to be around. I really think I go direct to Google, you can use a distributor for Google. But why you have to have a direct account anyways, in order to use a distributor. So if you have one,



Carissa Andrews 43:45

Yep, yep



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 43:46

And really sexy tools there. And then I typically use Draft 2 Digital, Smashwords, Publish Drive, Street Lib, to get into all the other places that I can. But again, it's up to you as an author, how much time do you have? Do you have time to log into eight different places? And so it's really a personal decision. And that may be why you start with one or two, get used to it get comfortable. And then once you've built the routine and or you have a virtual assistant to help you then it's like, oh, well, who cares? I'm paying someone to do this. But you know, when you do a price promo, he's like, Oh, my God, I gotta log into five different systems to go and change that and some of them don't let you schedule price changes. Yeah. Amazon, I think the only one that doesn't like to schedule price changes. So I can say, hey, I've got a promo coming up Thanksgiving weekend. I'm going to set it now. And not forget about it, because you don't forget about it. But I don't have to sit

there at midnight and go Okay, I hope it changes to 99 cents.



Carissa Andrews 44:41

So that fear that they won't do it.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 44:43

Yeah. And so that's one of the benefits of some of the direct platforms or some of the distributors that allow for that. That's cool.



Carissa Andrews 44:51

Okay. Well, now I realize this is kind of a loaded question, and we've covered a lot here, but for the newbie authors who are brand new to this whole concept, What is the best advice for just getting started? Like when they're brand new? They don't even know where to turn quite yet. Maybe this is their first introduction to why'd what would you recommend they do?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 45:12

v go easy on yourself. I've always long said, patience, practice and persistence. It's, it's not going to be easy. You're going to see these stories of these seven, six and seven figure authors. And you're gonna go, but I only sold the book this month, or I haven't sold the book yet. Or I only sold 100. I have a lot of authors coming to me ago, I only sold 100 books this week. And I said, Do you realize you're in the 1%? Already, right? Most people don't sell any books ever, period. That's the reality of the situation. So I think authors are tough on themselves. They don't apply enough patience. And they don't apply enough persistence to keep at it. You can't just publish books and expect them to sell overnight. On the wide platforms, it can take an average of nine months before you get any traction. And going in and out is the worst thing you can do. Commit, be dedicated to being exclusive or be dedicated to being wide. The more wishy washy you are, the more in and out like a yo yo you are, you're not doing yourself any favors. You're not doing the customers on those platforms, any favors. And you're definitely not doing the retailer's any favors. Because you're you're setting yourself up as an unpredictable mess, rather than somebody who's actually committed to this. Think about that one of the relationship, right? And you're dating someone, and they just don't show up one day and you're expecting, like, are we supposed to go on a date? Nah, I decided I'm going to be exclusive to this other, right, like or whatever. So that's the kind of thing and guess what some of the

some of the platforms pay attention to the fickleness. It's like, well, do we want to? Do we want to waste time doing a promo with this fickle author who we're not sure is going to be there in two months? Because they're kind of go back to exclusive? Or do we go with them? The author that has always had their books here? And always well?



Carissa Andrews 46:57

Yeah, yeah. No, that's, yeah. Well, that's, that's a component of it. Like truly that I don't think many authors realize. I mean, when I was trying to list come, last year, I had a mentor who literally told you that this is how you're supposed to do what you're supposed to be in, you know, wide, obviously, to be able to listen to him. And then once the week was up, pull it and put it into you. And so it's like, when you follow recommendations, and you look back, and you're like, why, you know, like, why was that the thing? Like, it's not like it had like a huge bonus effect to anything. And it's like, I look back and go, why would they recommend that sort of thing.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 47:34

But that's like, that's like dating advice, saying, hey, I want to attract this person over here, I'm gonna, I'm gonna have I'm gonna use I'm gonna use another person and play on their emotions in order to get something I want over there. That's, I mean, maybe it works. But I like to think about I like to operate with a little bit of integrity and respect for the people involved. I mean, really, you're setting up those readers with expectation, and then you're just gonna leave them high and dry. Right? Well, that's, that's a tough thing to do. Unless you're clear about it and say, Hey, this book's coming down, you want to get it on Kobo or Apple or whatever, you better get it now. So long as you're, if you're clear with those expectations, it makes it a little bit easier. But that's like saying, Hey, I'm just using you. We're gonna we're gonna fool around a little bit. And then I'm going to take off we're in this.



Carissa Andrews 48:22

Like, Hey, I was remember. Yeah, that's what you've built. He did have us be very clear like that. It's going to be only available. I mean, it's up for pre order for almost the whole year. But it was only going to be available up until x date. So like, there was a lot of promotion around. It's only until x date. But and



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 48:38

I think, yeah, the clarity, there is good. There's integrity there. But I also but then I worry about well, what does that what does that teach you that it's okay to just use other people? Yeah, your own benefit. And that's what I think a lot of digital publishing is as well. It's just, it's just algorithms. There's no, there's no people whose jobs are on the line here. There's no, they have no feelings.



Carissa Andrews 48:59

Right? Well, and it's so easy, because when you're when you're praying that it's just Amazon, it's like, you know, there's not someone going, Oh, yeah, we really want, you know, Mark's books to be the best. So we're gonna like, boom, when you know, it's not that, then it's like, it's hard to think there's actually people on the other end of any of the other platforms, it really is. It's super weird. And it's like, what a lightbulb moment, I think at least I had where I was like, that makes total sense. And especially when you're talking about how like the rest of those platforms. Were all based in like the real book selling industry. So that's, of course going to be the mentality that they're going to be, you know, dragging with them.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 49:34

Yeah, merchandising, they think of it as like, well, what books are in our virtual front window, what books are in the main aisles, right? What are the books we're gonna try to spotlight and feature as opposed to just all the ones that are spined? Yeah. So it's not all that different, right? The relationships you have as a bookseller, if I had met an author, and they were not a jerk, and they had an interesting anecdote they shared with me you know how many hundreds of times I would use that when talking to a customer and putting that book in the customers hands. No, no, it doesn't happen digitally in the same way. But you know via you know, Joanna pen got into a massive promo and Kobo where Kobo paid her money for to write stories for for release that she later got the rights back to anyways. Yeah. And it was only because of that serendipity of going, Hey, we need someone who likes Dan Brown kind of stuff and is willing to write short fiction in his in his experimental and owns their own IP. And you're like, Well, I know someone



Carissa Andrews 50:31

Right?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 50:32

That same sort of thing. But you never know the serendipity can happen at any time. You just have to you have to be available. You can't be hiding in another room and exclusivity.



Carissa Andrews 50:43

I totally get that one. And I get to like the whole concept of like, when you when you have that human curation, I mean, when I was a bookseller that there were so many times where if it was a book, I've actually read and someone was like, I'm really looking for a book that has XYZ. And it's like, oh, I know exactly what you need. You need this book that I just read. Here's this really cool thing. And there could have been 100 different books on that shelf that were the same sort of thing. But because I personally didn't know. I gave him the one that I read. You don't know me?



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 51:11

Yeah, that that that is, I mean, I guess people who've never worked in the industry don't recognize. And when you put that book in that person's hand, that's kind of like getting a bookbub deal. Like it's the equivalent of a bookbub deal, because suddenly, that customer doesn't just have this book, but I have a personal recommendation from caressa. Who, who, who loved this book, and I could see the glow in her eyes when she talked about how this book resonated with her. And when I come back to the bookstore next week, and I tell her how much I loved it, she's gonna help me find something else. Right? Like, those are the things that that that's where the true magic happens. And it's hard to measure in an algorithm. And it's also why I miss bookstores so much. We don't have we have none up here.



Carissa Andrews 51:53

There's it's so terrible. I have to drive almost two hours to get to the nearest bookstore.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 51:58

When you get in there, you will, you know, provide everyone's vaccinated or whatever, they give them a big hug.



Carissa Andrews 52:04

Right. Right. Absolutely. Well, Mark, thank you so much for joining the author revolution

podcast. This has been a real treat. And I'm so glad that you said yes. When laser was poking you. I have no idea what she said. But so glad you said yes. When I bribed her to get on your podcast. Thank God, right. Whoo. So for those who now are like, Oh, my gosh, this guy's super cool. Where do I find him? How? Where do they find you in your online space, and your podcast, and all the good fun stuff, you can find everything you want to know about me and many things you don't want to know about me over at Markleslie.ca. There's links to my podcast, all my crazy social media, all the fun things. They're awesome. And I highly recommend the podcast. There are some really interesting tidbits out there. I've listened to I think both four or five already just this week. And some of them were I'm like, oh, man, he's gonna hate me as an author. any of this?

M

Mark Leslie Lefebvre 52:59

No, that's good. I'm glad. No, but I'm glad that the reason I'm doing it is I'm learning still about the industry. And I want to just share, yes, I'm continuing to learn as I struggle my way through this.



Carissa Andrews 53:10

That's awesome. Well, I really appreciate that you are sharing it, because like I said, there's so many different things that you you've talked about, whether it's in your books, or whether it's on the podcast that I am like, I have never looked at it that way before, which is really, you know, in some of the times, it's like I should have because of the background, you know what I mean? And I'm like, I never What did I never think of it like that? And it's like you're you get so like entrenched in like whatever thing you're trying to do, or the people you're trusting at the time, and and then you don't pay attention. I don't know or don't trust your own gut. I don't know. It's weird.

M

Mark Leslie Lefebvre 53:41

Yeah, yeah, it's a strange one that and that's why, you know, taking in information from as many different sources as you can, and then figuring out, well, how am I going to adapt this to me? Yeah, and what works for me, that's the that's the biggest challenge is just going okay. Because when you don't know much, it's kind of like when you when you don't know something, it's harder on the people around you. Because you don't understand something. It's one of the things that sometimes when you start to learn a little bit, you realize just how much you don't know, I've been in the industry since 92. And I don't know so much. Right? I don't know.



Carissa Andrews 54:14

Because it's another thing to the more you learn the less, you know,



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 54:17

Yeah, I feel it feels like that, which is why I have to keep keep taking information and listening to as many sources as I can to try and figure this thing out.



Carissa Andrews 54:25

Yep. And it's like extrapolating all the information from all the different sources and trying to figure out where they overlap and going, Okay, there's the truth, and then pulling that are in there. It's as grainy. It's so weird. Oh, my gosh. Well, thank you. Again, like I said, I'm so glad that you you said yes. And came on the podcast and I'm glad she was able to coerce you. I was gonna fill out the form and like, I fill out the form. And she's like, No, no, I got this.



Mark Leslie Lefebvre 54:53

Well, thank you, Carissa. I appreciate it was so wonderful to get to chat with you.



Carissa Andrews 54:56

Yeah, it was nice to get to meet you and I'm so glad that you are now in my Fear of people that I can trust to learn more about being married. Wasn't that a fun episode? Mark is one of those kind of guys that makes it totally easy to chat and just hang out and talk books. Now, I hope you got as many wonderful tidbits from him as I did and I really do encourage you to go out and read his book wired for the win, as well as obviously some of his other fantastic books. I know I am definitely going to be reading killing it on Kobo next. Now I'll make sure to list everything we talked about in today's episode in the show notes. So just head over to authorrevolution.org forward slash 97. If you want quick links out to the things like wide for the winds Facebook group or Mark's website, podcast and books. While my author revolutionary, that is all we have for this week, go forth and start your author revolution.