

Episode 180

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SPEAKERS

Carissa Andrews, Alex Smith



Carissa Andrews 00:03

The indie author revolution has been around for more than a decade, the Wii indies continue to push the boundaries of what we're capable of. From getting over initial prejudices, to staring down perfectionism and author impostor syndrome, we've become a force to reckon with. Now after years of hustling, grind, we indies are rebelling again. Gone are the days of publishing a book a month until we drop, and in its place, we're sowing the seeds of a better way away with more ease, abundance and flow. Get ready to learn about indie authorship from a whole new perspective. We're about to cover everything from releasing your poverty mentality to manifesting your millionaire author destiny. I'm Carissa Andrews, and this is the Author Revolution Podcast. Welcome back to the Author Revolution Podcast, I am so thrilled that you're here today, we have an interesting interview that of have no doubt in my mind whatsoever, you're gonna want to hear, because as we talked a little bit about 20Books and how things kind of went last year in my recap of everything. My guest today is actually one of the people that I met at 20Books and got to talking about the services that they provide. And my friends, this is Alex Smith from Book Bault is going to be on the show today. So we're talking about book vault and in specific, like all the awesome things that book vault itself does. Now book vault was new to me when I first ran into Alex at 20Books, I hadn't heard of it before. And so it was a cool introduction, like to learn a little bit more about what they do, and like how they operate. And of course, my husband's from the UK. So I am a little bit partial to anything that is UK based. Maybe, I don't know that Alex knows that. But that's at least you know, something that's always playing in the back of my head. So the UK Book Vault is a print on demand service. We'll get more into that into the podcast interview. But what's really cool about it is that as we're trying to expand into our author careers, and I think one of the biggest ways we've been doing that this year is through more direct sales. Direct Sales was a huge thing at 20Books. Like they were talking about it all over the place. Like how are we going to do more direct sales, direct audiobook sales, direct, paperback sales, direct sales, blah, blah, right. And so Book Vault, in my opinion, is a really awesome way to start incorporating print on demand directly from your site without ever having to send people to Amazon and to other sites, if you don't want to. But what's really cool too, is like, if you already have a store on your site, and you're fulfilling that, you know, the book sales yourself, this is a different option that you're gonna want to pick your errors about, because you can actually run the book fault app through your WooCommerce, or through, you know, Shopify, or whatever system you're using

right now. They fulfill all the book sales and the shipping and all that stuff. And really, you're just sitting back and collecting the funds from it. I mean, that's a really awesome thing. But that's not all that they do. Like there are so many cool things that I just I'm really excited to dig into getting my books on Book Vault, figuring out how it's going to work for me, I haven't done it as of yet. So as of the recording of this intro, I haven't put my books in there just yet. But it's reminded me of like, all the things I want to do this year, I have audio books that are set up going through book funnel right now, I still need to get them attached to my WooCommerce. And now this, this is just, there's so many cool ways that indie authors are taking back the power taking things into their own hands, and really making this industry their own. And so today, I hope you're going to perk your ears, have a listen to what Alex is going to talk about when it comes to book vault and how they are helping the indie author community. Take back power. Alright, let's get to it. Well, Alex, thank you so much for joining the Author Revolution Podcast. I'm so excited that you're here. Now I spoke a little bit in the introduction about how we met and obviously 20Books is amazing. So it's just great. Now, do you want to tell my audience a little bit more about who you are and what you do?

A

Alex Smith 04:11

Yeah, so thanks for having us on. My name is Alex. I'm one of the product leads at Book Vault. My specialization. I'm a software developer. So I deal with kind of the more technical side of things. But I also have a hand in the onboarding side attending events as well. It's nice to get the software development covered. They let me out every once in a while. So it's just a guest engaging with the community and kind of spreading the word of Book Vault as well.



Carissa Andrews 04:33

That's awesome. Okay, so you gotta tell me a little bit more about Book Vault. We talked a little bit at 20Books, but I'd love for my audience to know how it works. So can you explain it a little bit?

A

Alex Smith 04:43

Yeah, so we were part of a company called Print On Demand worldwide. So print on demand worldwide has been going for 27 years now. So we're a digital printer based in the UK. We've had a system called Book Vault for about 10 years, and that's all focused on on the print on demand side of things and it was always locked away to the larger publishers. So it used to service publishers like Taylor and Francis and Bloomsbury in the UK. During COVID, we decided to take a bit of a change of direction. And we've now decided to open it up to everyone. So instead of fencing it away to people, everyone can now access a service. So we offer a full print on demand service. So you store your titles and our virtual library as such, and then you can order them as and when you need them on a single copy of bases. And for us, I guess our big thing about how we do it is we want to make sure everything's good quality. That's that's kind of where we sit, we don't send out unless we're happy with how it comes off the end of our line. So the one thing I'd say people really like about our services is the color people, especially for children's books, really like how crisp and how well it looks, especially on our kind of coated papers, we offer coated papers, we've got kind of your textbook style papers, and also the creamy papers. So we kind of cater to all those different genres as such, and how they fit

within the industry. One One great thing as well, it's our bindings. So we offer six different bindings, we've got your standards, paperback, we've got hardback. So that's either as a printed hardback or a cloth, that we've got Wairoa, spiral and also saddle stitch booklets as well, which fits really nicely. We also have a range of I'd say special finishes as well. So with the cloth books, you can have gold or silver letters stamped on the spine or on the front cover, we can have jackets on the cloth binds and the car backs. So it kind of really gives that nice premium premium finish, and just enables you to I guess, have a nicer overall product as well, especially for those special editions as well. For sure. Yeah, definitely. So I think we offer the whole range of things. So we do the printing side of things, we also handle the distribution side as well. So we distribute your books kind of across across the globe, dealing with the author copies, so if you just want to order some to yourself, or whether you want to order them to a bookshop that you've done your own deal with, as well as what a big thing for us as well as direct sales as well. So that that really helps people get their books direct market without going through the likes of Amazon.



Carissa Andrews 07:05

Yeah, absolutely. Now, you mentioned that it's global. So if I'm over here in Minnesota, and you're over there in the UK, you can do it from anywhere, and it's not not a big deal?



Alex Smith 07:15

Yeah, so at the moment, we're solely based printing in the UK. So we we've got our facility in the UK, we are looking to expand into America, for starters, and then other areas. For us, it's just finding a partner that can offer the same quality, the same turnaround times and the same, just I guess ethos as us. I mean, for us, we can get a paperback out same day, we can get hardback out in about two to three days. So with the way that American Printing isn't the moment sometimes actually works out quicker for us to ship it from the UK than it does another pod provider to ship it from their factory.



Carissa Andrews 07:51

Okay, cool. Well, that's really good to know. So how does your print on demand cost compared to like Amazon or Ingram Spark? Do have an idea.



Alex Smith 08:01

Yeah, so obviously being UK base we've been very lucky in in such as, although there's been a small impact of the paper shortage that's been seen in America and been pumping the prices up higher, we've not seen so much of an impact on that. So that enables us to keep the cost price quite low. Also, we've got a fully automated production line. So there's very little handhold hand touching of the books. So it just, you press print, and it goes all the way through into this batch, and it's packed into a box. So for instance, a 250 page novel on a creamy paper, Kindle publishing generally works at around \$3.85. Ingram works at around \$4.78. And we booked well, it works out about \$3.82. So we really do sit quite quite low down there in the in the pricing. And generally I'd say dispatch may work out a couple of dollars more, but you're

saving on the printing. So overall, the price is much more so reasonable. And also the turnaround times as well due to fit really nicely. Again, kind of hard backs. KDP generally sits around \$8.50 For the same sort of specification, and we sit around \$7.46. So again, really nice within the price point, for sure. A good thing to mention as well with color printing. So the way that we do color, if a book has one color page, and it will only charge for the color page, we won't charge the whole book has been in full color, which is something that KDP and Ingram do generally. So I know we felt customers that like to have a nice the first page of their book to be a nice colorful title page. So they can do that and only pay for that single page as opposed to the whole book being color.



Carissa Andrews 09:32

That's really good. Yeah, for sure. So you mentioned that the turnaround times are pretty decent do have an example of like what that would typically be, if you were like let's say I'm over here in Minnesota, and I order 100 books, how long would that typically take?



Alex Smith 09:46

So it really depends we have three different levels of service. So you can pay for a priority service, a rush service or a general standard service similar to kind of how England do things. So if you were to spend it on the rush service, 100 bucks Looks good leave us if you were to order it before seven o'clock in the morning, our time that can leave us the same day be with UPS to send over to America. And UPS generally take two days to get to America. So in as little as three days, and certainly for single book orders as well, we can send those we've got a consolidated service. So we send it in a large box full of USPS parcels, they then get injected into the system. So general US Mail generally takes about three to five days from us. So again, it sits quite nicely with Yeah, we've how kind of quickly other pod providers are getting work out at the moment. When people see a UK printer, they get a bit scared thinking it's gonna fail.



Carissa Andrews 10:40

Yeah, that's why I thought I'd ask. Because heck, you're even beating like, if I order author copies from Amazon, it takes a week, at least even from them. So it's yeah, it's crazy. Well, that's awesome.



Alex Smith 10:54

Yeah, that's all standard sign of turnaround, we do three to five days. But there is, if you've got an event that you haven't quite, I guess it sprung up on you, and you haven't got time to get more than we can get them out a bit quicker, which which really helps customers.



Carissa Andrews 11:05

Yeah, for sure. Okay, so this is obviously a really big topic, and one that is really kind of gearing all the authors up right now, which is the direct sales from their website. So if I understand this correctly, you integrate Book Vault with like WooCommerce, and Shopify, and things like that

correctly, you integrate book vault with like woocommerce, and shopify and things like that from an author's own website. So could you tell me a little bit more about how that works?

A

Alex Smith 11:27

Yeah, definitely. I think for us, our big view is that direct sales is the future, especially in the Indian author community, I mean, not relying on the large giant that is Amazon that might all of a sudden decide they want to shut your account down or put restrictions on certain things. So that's why yet we've really focused a lot on direct sales. So effectively, all you would do is install the the app, whether it be Shopify WooCommerce, we've got another five launching before the quarter two, so June time, to include Wix, Squarespace and all the other kind of ecommerce platforms like that. So effectively with it being integrated into your website. As soon as a orders placed, we then receive a feed from your website, which tells us what needs to be ordered, and where it needs to go. We automatically picked up on that printer and dispatch it directly to the customer. Okay, so we will say you only pay for us for the printing and the dispatch costs, you keep the rest of the money, and we will automatically kind of handle the fulfillment sites will tell your website, it's all wrapped up automatically being fulfilled and where it's going and the tracking numbers. So it means effectively, as an author, you can just sit there, have your website set up in the backgrounds, building sales for you, all you need to focus on is the promotion side of things.



Carissa Andrews 12:40

That is so cool, especially for authors who are wondering like how many books do they have to have on like I myself, typically keep keep about 10 copies of each of my books on hand just in case, someone purchase it from my website, or if someone like wants me to go to a book signing or something. So have something back. So that's really helpful.

A

Alex Smith 12:58

Yeah, definitely, I mean, something that works quite well, as well as because we obviously shipping volume, we get a lot lower cost prices for shipping. So it helps make things a lot cheaper as well. And also it saves having the boxes in the back of your room and yeah, clutter and tripping over them and stuff. So it does work out really well.



Carissa Andrews 13:16

That's great. Okay, so one of the things that really like stood out to me too, in addition to obviously, having this awesome ability was the fact that if authors are interested in being able to offset their carbon footprint, you guys have a like a sustainable reading option. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

A

Alex Smith 13:34

Yeah, so I guess being a print on demand printer environments, kind of at the forefront of how we work, obviously, saving on pulping loads of stock if they don't sell or returns and all that

side of things. So obviously, just straight away printing on demand is a much more sustainable option. We partner with a company called ecology, they seem to be one of the kind of forefronts in environmental side of things. So as a company ourselves, we pay a monthly subscription, which offsets all the carbon of our all the workforce getting into the office, all the kind of production plants and stuff like that. And also, I mean, as far as the trip to Vegas, obviously went to Vegas, put that on there, and it offsets that as well. Also, that plant plants trees, but also it goes towards sustainable projects. So building more solar farms and stuff like that. But obviously, we do that ourselves. And we want to give authors and people are selling their books the opportunity to do the same. So we work out the carbon value of producing your book. And then at the point of checkout, you have the ability to offset that. So it comes up with the cost and then you're able to take that and that means that the book that you're producing has been sustainably produced. And it's kind of a carbon zero products. Not only that we've got a lot of authors that like to do promotions on their site. So if you buy a book on my site, we'll plant an extra tree so we give customers the option to do exactly the same thing. So when you're planning to get you can make positive impacts as well, which is, I think, a really important thing, because that's inevitably how the world was heading, we need to do something. So absolutely nice way of doing that.



Carissa Andrews 15:10

That's a really cool option that obviously, none of the other printers as of right now are doing either. So that's really cool. I like that you do that.



Alex Smith 15:17

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think I'm hoping they'll catch up in a way. Because I mean, it's very important. It's something we need to do. But for the time being, yeah, I would say it's definitely a very unique thing from us.



Carissa Andrews 15:28

Yeah, absolutely. And one of the questions that just kind of popped into my head was, with all the cool things that you're doing, if someone wants to go with you, like, I personally would be like, Heck, yes, I want to do this thing. Is it easy for their books, then to find their way into like a bookstore, for instance? Or is it harder for them to get into bookstores?



Alex Smith 15:46

Yeah, so I think that's something we're really working on this year. So we're looking into venturing into other markets, certainly. So with our distribution side of things we distribute to Amazon, so the US side, UK side, or that, I mean, America quite strongly into Libra as well. So they list all the products. We also in the UK deal with gardeners, so they distribute all the bookstores and libraries. And we're also working on a partnership to try and get into England content group as well, that will obviously help a broad range into the US as well. That's great.



Carissa Andrews 16:14

That's awesome news. Awesome. Well, I'm definitely myself very interested in this whole endeavor, because to me, it's just when, when I was looking at everything that you do before, before we even decided to have the podcast interview, I was like, wow, look at all the cool things that these guys are doing that none of the other places are offering yet. And it was just that was one of the questions that I forgot to put on my list. But I just I'm like, this is such a unique opportunity for authors to not only have those direct sales that ever, you know, they were touting it all over 20 books, but just to be able to do it in a way that's sustainable. And that's I don't know, it just makes a better impact in the world. I like it.



Alex Smith 16:52

Yeah, certainly, I think as an author, it's, it's you, you have your own data. So if someone buys something on Amazon, you don't have the mailing lists, you can't retarget those and get them to buy the next release in your series. So it's putting yourself more in control, and just really enabling you to expand and at the end of the day earning more money as well. That's obviously generally at the top of everyone's list really?



Carissa Andrews 17:13

Yeah, for sure. Okay, so how much does it like if a new author is coming in, they want to try it out how much does it cost for an author to join and start using Book Vault.




Alex Smith 17:21

So it's completely free to create an account, there is a setup fee per title. So it works out at 19 pounds 95, which is around \$24.50 at the moment. So that's the setup of one title and handles the I guess file upload and the ingestion side up. For us. That's a one off costs. So unlike within grim if you replace your files or change specifications, there's a there's a thing there, it's just a one off cost, you can do that as when you want to. Also there's we offer plans. So we're aware that there might be certain people especially if you've got a large back catalogue, when you're first joining, we offer plans to kind of reduce the cost there. So if you're going to be uploading more than five a month, or sorry, more than two a month, we have a thing called book for indie. And that costs around \$31. And that enables you to upload a title for four pounds 99, four pounds 95. Sorry, as opposed to 9095. Gotcha. And then also, we have Book Vault Pro as well, which is \$110, which is and say seems quite scary. But with that you can upload as many titles as you want for free. So certainly, if you've got a back catalogue of say, I don't know, 2030 titles, you can jump on that plan, upload all those titles, but also the great thing is you're not tied into a contract. So you can swap and change plans, however suits your business if your business needs change.



Carissa Andrews 18:39

That makes a lot of sense. That's really cool. I was wondering about that itself, because I'm like, Okay, well, I've got 20 some odd books, like, Could I just do like one month of that hire plan and then drop down into like a more reasonable release schedule plan?

 Alex Smith 18:53

Yeah, exactly. And I think that's the thing, we're the kind of upload cost is more there as a way of I guess, stopping people releasing low content books stuff, which is still completely fine. I think it's just, we'd like people to have a bit of commitment in a way not just adding stuff out on when they want to.

 Carissa Andrews 19:11

For sure. Well, and it helps you kind of keep your your foot to the pedal so that you're getting it out there and getting it finished to exactly yeah, definitely. Well, is there anything else about Book Vault that we need to know that authors need to be aware of before they make a decision or go check things out? Like is it is there anything we missed?

 Alex Smith 19:29

No. I think very much. The way that we we work is we're not we don't want you to be exclusive. So we were well aware that there's other platforms that may help help you I guess it's Book Vault can definitely assist in your author journey. So it's a case of it may not take all the boxes, but it'll certainly take a lot of them. So I guess you can use it in conjunction. A lot of customers like to use Book Vault for direct sales and their own orders. And then also use KDP because I mean, Amazon sell really well on Amazon. They're obviously good. It's their store. They I would like doing so yeah, it's it's definitely I'd say, whatever works? Well, we're happy to work with.

 Carissa Andrews 20:07

Gotcha. So does that mean you can pick and choose kind of like, you know, draft a digital or something along those lines where you pick? which sites you are going to publish using default to? Yes, yeah.

 Alex Smith 20:18

So you can choose which retails you want to work on. So, specifically, I know a lot of people that use KDP don't particularly like listing additionally on Amazon, because it can cause metadata, mismatches and stuff like that. So yeah, you don't want to list on Amazon, it doesn't doesn't matter. You can do whatever pleases you. Really. Oh, gotcha.

 Carissa Andrews 20:36

That's a really unique way to be able to do it. And so if you wanted to do all the direct sales and not have to worry so much about Amazon or anyone else, you can run it all through Book Vault, just from your website. You guys are like the main the main deal for all that?



Alex Smith 20:48

Yeah, exactly. As I say, we were aware that, say, people want to choose what they want. We don't want a tiny one. And it's all about choice and what works best for you.



Carissa Andrews 20:56

Very cool. That obviously if they can, and they like their quote, the quality, which it sounds like it's stick, then yeah, maybe a no brainer. Just spread it all around.



Alex Smith 21:05

Exactly. Yeah, that's the thing I don't like to it's always sounds very big headed. When people are like, well, I keep going on about our quality. But aside from 20 books, it's people really are happy, especially children's books. I know there's a real gap in the market really, for really high quality glossy kids books, I mean, even illustrations within I guess novels, and stuff like that just it really does come out really nicely. I mean, something we've worked on, whilst I've been here, we've got a new ink, we got a new inkjet a couple of years ago, we were working with them, and it's just really crisp, nice, clean images.



Carissa Andrews 21:40

That's great. I love that. Well, if my audience wants to find out more about you or find out more about Book Vaults, how do they look you up?



Alex Smith 21:49

Yeah, so the the main point, of course, our website. So that's BookVault.app, we've actually got a promotional code as well, for the podcast. So if you use the promo code revolution, that will give you a first title free. So it will just help I guess, you can do the platform, see how you look. And then see if you want to kind of carry on and I say, get all your your products that loads onto that. On there. We've also got blogs at help, guides and stuff like that, and also download templates. So it's a really good portal in a way to even if you're not jumping straight onto the platform to help start your journey and get in the know how of how to how pod works. And on that side of things. We also have Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook as well. So on there, we occasionally release promotions as well, whether it's free titles, percentage off your print, and stuff like that, as well as kind of keeping up to date with what we're planning to do in the future as well as new releases on the platform as well. And then also, we're we're attending a lot more events this year, as well. So in the UK, we'll be at London Book Fair and the self publishing show live. And then as well in the US, obviously attending 20 books, Vegas again, it's absolutely fantastic event. So we're really looking forward to that. Yes. as well. If you have any questions as well, you can always reach out to us via email, we've got a live chat as well. So we're very much about helping people. So let us know, there's no ticket system, you won't get stuck in a queue for a week, we generally reply within around 12 hours as well.



Carissa Andrews 23:14

So that's fantastic. Well, thank you so much, Alex, I'm so glad that you're here and explaining this because for me, when I first learned about you at 20 books, it was such a, like I was kind of like, Oh, I didn't know they existed. And so I was doing more digging and looking around. And I'm so excited to kind of play around with the way that your system works. And I'm definitely looking at it for the WooCommerce side of my website so that I can do more direct sales this year. So I'm excited to learn more myself. I'm kind of a newbie, and I'm so thrilled that I was able to meet you at 20Books.



Alex Smith 23:45

Likewise. Yeah, as I say it's something we've we've not really been in the American market. But we're really starting to hopefully go over there with stone. So yeah.



Carissa Andrews 23:53

I love it. Thank you.



Alex Smith 23:56

Thank you, for having us.



Carissa Andrews 23:59

See, see what I mean. Isn't Book Vault amazing? The more I listened to Alex and the more I dig around their website and just kind of play around with the idea of putting my books through their system. When it comes to especially the direct sales side of things, the more excited I get. So I know I'm on the right track of something, right? We talk a lot about how when you're taking inspired action, it feels like good news. It feels like elation. It feels like enthusiasm and eagerness to try this new thing. Well, that's what I'm feeling when it comes to Book Vault. So one of the things that I'm going to be doing probably this next week, is getting set up myself with Book Vault, obviously using the amazing coupon that Alex shared. So remember, if you want to be able to get your first title for free, use promo code revolution to do so. And I'm just excited to just get moving on it and just start seeing like what does the quality look like? He talked about the quality and I'll tell you what, I haven't been impressed with the quality of KDP print for a long time and so I'm excited to just see how it looks, see how it works. And who knows, maybe I'll end up using Book Vault as my POD distributor. So here we go, we'll see what happens. Alright guys, if you're looking for the transcript of today's podcast interview, head over to authorrevolution.org/180, you can obviously download it there, I will also have links going out to Book Vault, and a reminder of the coupon code to use. If you're signing up and getting everything up and running. Now, just as a caveat, I want you to know that the coupon is only good until the end of May. So May 2023. So make sure that you're using it ASAP. Got it, and get signed up, go check it out. If nothing else, just put one title on there and see how it works. Check out the quality for yourself, right. That's what this process of being an indie is all

about. We get to experiment and play around and see what works best for us. And this is just one more way we can do that. Right? All right. And speaking of indie authors taking back their power, don't forget that I'm going to be speaking at the Idaho writers conference coming up here in May. So if you are looking for some inspiration, if you're looking for some guidance when it comes to your author, career, and you feel like traveling, or if you live in Idaho, definitely check it out. Because we're going to have some incredible conversations about what it means to be an indie author, how we level up how we become more and do more. So definitely check it out. I'll have the link to that as well in the show notes. But otherwise, you can just search it up Idaho Writers Conference, it'll come up you won't be able to miss it. I'm so excited about that one. And of course in June, we have Ingress Con. So there's all sorts of fun things coming up very soon. And if you're interested in expanding your author career and doing more with what you have, check it out, like go to some of the conferences, see what's available in your area. And if nothing else, come join us for Idaho Writers Conference and Ingress Con I'm going to be at both of those, I'll be speaking. And it's going to be an incredible time and opportunity to really discuss the things that are most important to our author business. This year, to me has been about growth. It's been about growth and expansion, not only for my author career, but also for author revolution. And I don't know if you can feel the vibes, but it's definitely growing, right? We are getting out there, we're expanding, we're doing more, we are becoming the thing that we have always been destined to become. And that's why we're taking the power back. That's why we're doing more direct sales. That's why we're using things like Kickstarter to really make an impact and have fun and have like a launch in a way that is going to be really cool, right? We're imaginative, awesome people. So we're taking all of that and we're making everything come together in a way that really just supports us and feels good and starts to give us the empowerment that we've been looking for. And but Vault is one step in the right direction. So I hope you're gonna check it out. I hope you use the promo code revolution to get that free setup so that you don't have to worry about at least book one. And for the most part, I just hope you're having a good time this year. I hope you're elevating you are doing all that you came here to do as an indie author, hang in there. Like if things are a little bit questionable. Or if you're still struggling with some areas of your business hang in there. It gets better, especially when you know and trust in your abilities to get you to where you want to go. You've got this we've got this right. All right. Have a wonderful rest of the week getting all of your words out getting your promotions scheduled, getting all of the things going and of course using Book Vault, and we will see you again next week. Go forth and start your author revolution.