***All About Going Indie – 3 Part Session***

*Part 1 – To Be or Not To Be* **Intro – A Brief History of the Indie Revolution**

* My Publishing Story (since they Intertwine)
  + I came on the scene in 2008, when I received my first publishing contract from a major Christian publisher, in what is now called “traditional publishing.”
  + Wound up writing 12 novels with them (and 1 for Guideposts).
  + Up until the end of 2014, I thought my writing career was all set and would go on like this forever.
  + But around 2011-12 the publishing world began to undergo a revolutionary change (YOU ALL KNOW THIS).
* What Has Changed –
  + Essentially, the Readers have (WHERE they buy their books).
    - 85% of Americans haven’t been in a bookstore the last 5 years.
    - When my first book came out in 2009, my e-book sales were less than 3% that year.
  + Now 85% of Americans own a Kindle, tablet, and/or smart phone.
  + Most major bookstore chains have gone belly up, or drastically reduced their number of stores nationwide.
* This massive shift in readers’ buying habits in a relatively short period of time is the primary catalyst for this surge and wide acceptance of indie publishing.
* Many successful writers started to look into indie publishing (or else their publisher dropped them).
  + Amazon is willing to give authors 70% of each retail copy sold.
  + In 2015, I made the LEAP. That was my first Full-on Indie Year:
  + I published 2 novels and a 31-day Devotional book.
* Between 2015-22, I’ve released a Total of 14 Indie novels (Now have 3 Complete series and a Sequel to one of my Trad-pubbed books).
* Indie Authors are actually doing better (on the whole) than Traditional authors.
  + 35-40% of All Ebooks Online Now written by Indie Authors
  + Up from Almost Zero in 2010.
* Having shared all this, I should mention a few words of caution…
  + Traditional publishing is NOT DEAD. It is surviving, although in a much different fashion.
  + Publishers who have survived, however, have made radical changes.
    - Like Accepting FAR FEWER authors
    - Paying MUCH SMALLER ADVANCES
  + Unless you’re an Author in that 1% CLUB
    - Steven King, JK Rowling, Grisham, Dean Koontz, etc.
* Also – There are OTHER OPTIONS in the indie world besides doing everything yourself.
  + Many writers don’t have the entrepreneurial skills to take on all the non-writing, publishing tasks themselves.
  + You can GIVE UP some of the 70% you could be making on your own to have qualified people handle these things for you.
  + Or, consider signing with a SMALL INDEPENDENT PRESS. They do much of what Trad Pubs do, only NO ADVANCES.
  + A Word of Caution: Don’t view indie publishing as a shortcut to writing success.
    - In the end, if you don’t put out a great book (great story, written well, that looks professionally done), you won’t succeed.
    - The indie authors I know who are making it are successful because they write well, not because they are indie.

**Defining Our Terms**

* + **Traditional Publishing** - Would have been simply called “publishing” until a few years ago.
    - A writer writes a book and gets it ready for publishing, then tries to secure a literary agent.
    - A good agent then “shops the manuscript” to mainstream publishers known to publish your kind of book.
    - Hopefully, they secure a publishing contract and the publisher agrees to pay you an “**advance**.” A royalty arrangement is also hammered out.
    - Another Term Sometimes used on the Internet – “**Trad-Pubbed**”
  + **Indie Author** or **Indie Published** –
    - “Indie” of course means independent or independently.
    - Usually when someone is an indie author or is indie published, they either by choice, or because they had no other choice, publish their books without involvement of traditional publishers.
  + What is the **difference** between being “**indie** published” and being **self-published**?
    - There may be none. The terms are often used interchangeably.
    - I believe the term “indie” arose because of the negative connotation formerly associated with being self-published.
  + Final Term – **Hybrid Author** –
    - As the name suggests, this is an author who does both. They write under contract with a traditional publisher, but also publish books as an indie.
    - A few years ago, this term didn’t exist, because trad pubs wouldn’t allow their authors to do this.

*Part 2 – Making It Happen***From Rough Draft to Book Launch – A Step by Step Primer**

* So, you’ve completed THE 1st Draft of your Novel…when are you ready to publish your indie book?
  + When the book is completely free of all errors.
  + Editing, story itself, spelling and punctuation, etc.
* This importance of **hiring a good editor and proofreader**
  + Before I get into the Nuts & Bolts of how to Pick a Good Editor, think I need to spend a Few Minutes talking about a Fairly Serious Situation that has Emerged in the Indie World…
* “Houston…we have a Problem”
  + And like the Doomed Mission of Apollo 13 back in the day, this problem has Dooming hundreds of Indie Authors to Failure.
  + What’s Our Problem? We have a **Quality Control Problem**.
    - We now have the Freedom to Publish all those books that were—in our opinions—unfairly rejected by those “Mean Publishers.”
    - Think it’s Fair to Say, in the Old Regime, 95% of the books submitted to Publishers were Rejected.
  + We’ve had this “Freedom to Publish Anything We Want” for 7-8 years now, and an UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCE has Emerged.
    - Judging by how Badly many of these “Indie Pubbed” books are doing (Dismal Sales and Poor/Low Reviews), it would seem that maybe 90% of the 95% of those Rejected books, NEEDED TO BE REJECTED.
    - Only now, the People doing the Rejecting are the READERS, not the Agents & Editors.
  + I read countless Heartbreaking Posts on Indie Boards with Authors who’ve gotten their books on Amazon (or other online stores), and aren’t experiencing ANY SUCCESS, and they seem totally bewildered by this.
    - But I see FAR TOO MANY putting the focus on things like “BETTER MARKETING TECHNIQUES.”
    - I think the Problem HAS TO BE we’re not spending the money necessary to hire the kind of HIGH-QUALITY EDITORS to review and edit our books BEFORE WE UPLOAD THEM.
    - When we finish writing our manuscript, what we need is to SIMULATE what happens to those SELECT AUTHORS who HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY BIG PUBLISHERS.
      * ALL OF THEM must submit themselves to the advice, opinion, AND AUTHORITY of the Editors HIRED BY THE PUBS to make sure their books are READY TO GO.
      * We NEED THOSE EDITORS. They are NOT OPTIONAL to success.
    - Why? BLIND SPOTS (we all have them in our writing, even the best writers).
  + The Reason I BELIEVE SO MANY OF THESE BOOKS ARE NOT DOING WELL is…READERS ARE SEEING THESE BLIND SPOTS.
    - If Indies were doing WHAT THEY SHOULD be doing, THIS WOULD NEVER HAPPEN.
    - Because they would HIRE A GOOD EDITOR to help them FIX WHATEVER IS WRONG with their books FIRST.
  + **WORD OF CAUTION** - The DIFFERENCE between Indies HIRING Authors and what Happens in Traditional Publishing IS SIGNIFICANT.
    - In Trad Publishing, the EDITORS ARE IN CHARGE, NOT YOU.
    - So in the INDIE EXPERIENCE, you need to VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT to these Editors and give them PERMISSION to be as RUTHLESS AS NEEDED with your book.
    - They know you are paying them, and won’t want to offend you.
* OKAY, so…How do you choose a good editor?
  + Credentials and References are Critical (Anyone can call themselves an Editor). They should provide this on their website.
  + Look for successful authors helped by them (writing awards, successful sales and reviews, etc.).
  + How do you know what level of editing you need (and when)?
    - Unless VERY Experienced, will likely need Both KINDS
    - 2 Basic levels: Macro and Micro
    - Macro (Developmental, Substantive) = the Big Picture Issues: Does the Story Work, Do the Characters Work, Is the Dialog Realistic, Any Plot Problems, is the Ending Satisfying or Problematic, etc.
    - Micro (Copy) = things like the Story’s timeline, copy editing, and proofreading (typos, etc.)
  + How much will this cost?
    - Some charge by word count, others by number of pages/chapters
    - Generally, more experience/proven editors charge way more than newbies and relatively unknown editors.
    - Macro - (for a 300-page, 80k book) - Prices I’ve seen on internet: $405, $760, $1,600/$3,000
    - Micro - (for a 300-page, 80k book) - $360/$525/$1,500
* Cover Design and Formatting
  + A great cover matters a great deal –
    - You’ve heard the saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”
    - Don’t believe it. In the world of publishing, the opposite is true.
    - Aim for Top Shelf Quality.
  + Unless you are a gifted with graphics and proficient at programs like Photo Shop or PixelMator (Mac), you need to hire someone to do your cover.
    - Costs range from about $150 - $600 (depending on who you use and what genre you’re writing in).
  + Back Cover Copy – A necessary feature, for ebook AND print editions.
    - Endorsements Matter Very Little to Ebook readers (Care MUCH more about the Quantity and Quality of Reviews)
    - More About Reviews in Part 3 of this Session
    - A compelling blurb (paragraph that summarizes and entices). Work on getting good at this (a difficult thing to master – reducing 300 pages to a handful of sentences).
  + The need for ISBNs (vs ASIN’s with ebooks).
    - $100-150.00 for 1 book, WAY cheaper if buying several at a time.
  + Formatting - Hiring Someone vs Do it yourself.
    - Formatting involves taking your finished manuscript (from Microsoft Word) and reshaping it so that it works well in e-book or print formats.
    - This is something you can do yourself, but there’s a learning curve.
    - Programs that will help you format your book: Calibre, Scrivener, Adobe InDesign (VELLUM for Mac) are popular programs.
* Time to Upload your Book
  + After you have done all the above things, you are ready to upload your book to online stores, like Amazon.
  + It’s a fairly involved process, but these online stores have made it fairly easy to accomplish.
* One of the biggest decisions every author has to make is: *Do I go with Amazon-only or should I “Go wide*”? (MUCH MORE ON THIS IN MARKETING SESSION)
  + Amazon-only means your books will only be available online through Amazon (print or Kindle).
    - You can still sell books directly to customers (like with PayPal), but not through other stores (like Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iTunes and Christianbook.com)
  + Going wide means Amazon will be just one of the places people can buy your books (can be purchased in all the other venues, also).
  + How pre-orders work
    - Amazon and others will allow you to set up a preorder for your book.
    - Usually you offer your book at a discounted price during preorder phase.
    - Allows you to promote and market your book in advance of its release date. WITH A LINK THAT IS PERMANENT.
  + Print books – Why You Should Make Them
    - It’s true, it’s nearly impossible for indie authors to get their books available in traditional stores.
    - Retail stores only take books from traditional publishing houses.
    - But sadly, THEY are shrinking an even disappearing.
  + Some of the reasons why you should still print your books.
    - It’s fun having a real book in your hands with your name on it.
    - With POD, print costs are very reasonable ($3-5/book), and you only have to print as many copies as you need (I typically order 5-10 at a time).
    - The only extra expense involved is to have the cover design include the back and spine, and to pay a little extra to have the print book formatted (unless you do this yourself).
* Deciding your Book Launch Date (Do Have One)
  + It’s important to figure out a book launch date vs. just winging it and releasing it “whenever everything comes together.”
  + Here’s how to Plan it:
    - Create a schedule that begins with the completion of your manuscript (unedited).
    - Then list out all the various action-steps we have just gone over and think through how much time you’ll need for each one.
    - Allow for some overlap between certain steps (Example: while my cover is being created, I can have my proofreaders going over the final edit of my manuscript).
    - When you’ve done this, you have a reasonable date you can use.
* When You’ve Done all this, you’re ready to Launch Your Book

**Before We Close Part 2 … Do you Really Need an Agent as an Indie?**

* My Short Answer? NO, you don’t.
  + That is, if by the term “Indie” you mean you’re doing everything yourself.
  + Why would you need/want an Agent?
    - The process is simple enough if you’re dealing directly with Amazon or one of the other Online Stores.
    - Upload the book, select the Royalty Percentage (70% or 35% if under $2.99). Start getting Paid.
  + One Qualifying Factor –
    - Some Agents have opened up Shop to Basically take care of all your non-writing tasks for 15% (or some other %).
    - If that’s the case, and you don’t want to do all the legwork. I’d say that’s a great deal.
* Another Reason you Might want an Agent’s help.
  + If you are doing the Hybrid thing (Self publishing some and going with a Traditional Publisher too).
  + In that case, see if your agent is willing to only rep you on the Trad Pub side (again, unless they’re willing to really do all the legwork for the indie side, too).

**So, Your Indie Book is Done and Uploaded – Now What?**

**Part 3 – INDIE MARKETING**

* What is Marketing, Really?
  + Put simply, Marketing is all about getting your Books and Potential Readers to CROSS PATHS.
  + There’s a Marketing Word I’ve heard tossed about every so often. It’s DISCOVERABILITY.
* What will it take to get your book *Discovered* by Readers? That’s what Marketing is all about.
* Let’s Start with My Best Marketing Advice –

***Write a Great Book!***

***The Better the book, the easier to Market***

* This also means, what is NOT being said is ALSO just as true – “A Mediocre Book is very Hard to Market.” The worse it is, the harder it is to Market.
* If a reader isn’t…
  + **Drawn** to your book by an **excellent cover**
  + **Sucked** into your story by a **compelling** **back-cover blurb**
  + **Captivated** by a **gripping read** in the **first 10 pages**…
  + …**No Amount** of **Marketing** effort will **help it succeed**.
  + Which means, you should **make writing a great book** your **aim**, NOT **marketing**.
* **Further Proof** of This – Think about **what you do** AS A **READER**:
  + When you **get hold** of a **book** you **can’t put down** once you start.
  + You actually **look** for **opportunities** to **keep reading**.
  + When you **reach the end** you are **totally satisfied** and actually **sad** that it’s **over**.
  + WHAT IS **YOUR REACTION**?
    - I’ll tell you what it is – **It’s Marketing**!
    - You **look to see** what **other books** this author has **written**
    - You **tell friends** who **love to read** how much you liked the book
  + **Sadly**, think of **your reaction** to a **Boring Book**:
    - You **struggle** to **stay** **interested**
    - **Wade** through lots of **Blah-blah-blah**
    - Find yourself **skipping a lot of paragraphs** (maybe even some **pages**)
    - **Only** keep **reading** because you **paid for it**.
    - But at some point, you decide, “**Life’s too precious** to spend it on a **boring book**.”
  + What is the **chance** you’ll **buy another book** from this **author**, or **tell** **anyone** **else** about it (other than to complain)? **ZERO**, right?

**Make Sure the End Result is Totally Up to Par**

* Your Book **MUST look like** it came from a **Trad Pub house**
* Why **learning** the **craft** is still **so critical** for an **indie** (maybe more so).
  + For an indie (who usually has **little to no money** for **marketing**), it will be the **quality** of the **writing** (the book itself) that will be the **number 1 reason** the **book sells well** and the author **grows** a **readership**.

**Customer Reviews – The Bread and Butter of Indie Success**

* Online Customer Reviews are perhaps the **most important ingredient** to indie success.
  + A great book will create STRONG MOTIVATION for someone to leave a great review.
* Suggest you make ONE OF YOUR FIRST BACK PAGES an appeal for them to leave a review (and a link). I DO.

**Marketing – Back Pages (Overlooked Goldmine)**

* If you’ve written a Great Book, you now have a BRIEF WINDOW where that reader is LOOKING for more information about you and your books.
* After my Books End, I make the VERY FIRST PAGE of my Back Pages, “*Want to Read More*?”
  + I talk about the book they just read, let them know of other books they would like if they liked this one.
  + If part of a series, talk about the NEXT BOOK in the series.
    - Provide a little cover photo, back cover blurb
    - Sample chapters (end with a hook), usually 3-4 (ebook only, not print books).
    - Amazon link to Buy Now
  + If NOT in a series, I suggest a similar book of mine they would love (and provide the same info).
  + Then I provide a PAGE of OTHER LINKS to my other books, grouped by series or category.

**Publicity vs Marketing (What’s the Difference?)**

* Both are about getting the word out about your book. The difference?
  + Publicity involves things you do for free (only cost is your time).
  + Marketing OFTEN Costs Money – Need to get Comfortable with this Concept.

**IT TAKES MONEY TO MAKE MONEY**

* + If you don’t get comfortable SPENDING MONEY, you can never succeed at Indie Publishing and/or Marketing.
  + But when you understand how Marketing Works, you’ll see Money as a Tool, (like a Hammer and Saw is to a Carpenter). That’s Because of ROI.
* **ROI – Return on Investment – An Essential Marketing Ingredient**
  + The BIG QUESTION – “How much should you spend on Marketing?”
  + The Answer has EVERYTHING TO DO with Return On Investment (ROI).
  + ROI is, basically, how much money will you make for every dollar you spend promoting your book?
    - The rule of thumb is…if you make at least $2 for every $1 you spend, it’s a worthwhile marketing effort.
    - If you make $3, it’s EXTREMELY worthwhile.
  + WHY? Because…IF you are making $2-3 off of every $1 you spend, it’s really not an Expense, is it? It’s an Investment.
  + You’re getting more money back than you spent (and growing readers)

**Some Other Must-Have Indie Marketing Tools**

* The need for an **Author website** and **Mailing List**
  + Author Website - Serves as your showroom, your primary “facility.”
    - Don’t skimp here, pay to have it done right.
    - Will often be the first impression people have of you (See Examples of mine, cost $2,500).
    - Can be done for less, but Spend what you Must
  + Gives you a PERMANENT PRESENCE on the internet.
  + Build a Mailing List
    - Places like Constant Contact, Mail Chimp, Mailerlite, etc.
    - People who read/like your books are usually willing to sign up (get inside info, special deals, first alerts to new works coming out).
    - Only way to guarantee people will see what you post/write (FB now goes to less than 3% of your “Likes,” a little higher for FB Friends).
  + How much time should we devote to other social media (like FB, Twitter, Goodreads, etc.).
    - WARNING – A Time Trap (can easily waste hours and hours of writing time here).
    - Suggest 80/20 ratio (80 – writing; 20 – social media and marketing). 60/40 at the least.
* Developing A Street Team to Help Launch/Promote your book
  + People who will read and review your book around your launch date
  + May take time to grow something like this. Will necessarily involve giving free copies of your book to people in exchange for helping to promote it.
  + ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies).
    - This is what you will send your Street Team.
    - Because you have to bear the cost for this, I start off by asking for people to receive an e-book format edition (Kindle).
    - Book Funnel is a great new service that doesn’t cost very much ($20/year to start). They provide a safe website and downloadable links to your e-books, all in one place.
* Facebook: Profile vs Author Page
  + Profile = Friends / Author Page = Likes
    - Must have Profile to setup Author Page (I have and use both).
    - Note: 95-98% of people who “Like” your page will not see your posts (unless you pay for them).
    - Will need the Profile Page to take advantage of all the Reader groups on FB (can’t access with Author Page).
  + Christian Indie Authors a MUST FB group for indies (but also talking about promo/marketing groups).
  + The NEED to NOT make your posts primarily “Buy My Books.” Another place for an 80/20 or 60/40 ratio.

**BIG MARKETING QUESTION - Going with Amazon-only or “Going Wide”**

* Defining Terms
  + Amazon Only = (Exactly as it sounds – for eBooks Only)
  + Going Wide = Amazon, B&N, iTunes, Google Play, etc.
* Why would anyone choose Amazon-only?
  + Everyone readily admits Amazon is the “elephant in the room,” getting the **overwhelming majority** of book sales.
    - Amazon has created a number of incentive programs to make it financially worthwhile for authors to sell exclusively through them (KDP Select).
    - Such as KU (Kindle Unlimited) – people pays $9.99/month for unlimited use of Kindle books enrolled in the program. Kindle pays authors $/page for every page read by KU folks.
    - KU Income is OVER HALF of what I make or more.
    - I tried “Going Wide” the first few months, then did KDP Select. Made 2x as much money on Amazon (why I stay).
  + Why would anyone choose “Going Wide”?
    - For principal’s sake - resent a big company like Amazon dominating everyone else.
    - To reach customers who may buy elsewhere (Nook, iTunes, Smashwords, etc.)

**CLOSING PERSPECTIVE ON MARKETING**

* 2 Final Pieces of Advice – 1 From Winnie The Pooh, 1 from Scripture
* Pooh shares some advice to Combat Fearful, anxious thoughts.
  + “What if you try all this and nothing works?”
  + Pooh would say, “What if it does?”
* The Book of Ecclesiastes actually shares some TIMELESS INSIGHTS about Marketing.

“Send your grain across the seas, and in time, profits will flow back to you. But divide your investments among many places,for you do not know what risks might lie ahead.” (Eccl 11:1-2)

“Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don’t know if profit will come from one activity or another—or maybe both.” (Eccl 11:6)

* In Essence? Work Hard at it and Keep Working Hard at it.
  + Evaluate then Try Lots of Different Things
  + Pay Attention to What Works (Measure Results), stay Flexible as Time Goes By
* Keep Praying, Asking God for Wisdom, Trust in Him to Guide Your Steps

“Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart, and Lean Not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.” (Prov. 3:5-6)