

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



BOOK MARKETING: How to Make Money With Unconventional Book Marketing Ideas Interview with Tom Morkes

- Susan Friedmann: Welcome Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.
- Today, my special guest is a digital product launch expert who likes to help authors make more money with less effort from their book. Tom Morkes is a West Point grad, Iraq war veteran, and the founder and CEO of Insurgent Publishing, a creative advisory and consulting firm that helps entrepreneurs, founders, and CEOs grow their businesses through strategic large-scale book and digital product launches.
- Tom's clients and projects have been featured in major mainstream media outlets, leading television networks, and top rank blogs and podcasts. He's consulted on books that have hit the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and Amazon Best Seller list. He led the marketing and promotional effort that generated over \$450,000 setting a Kickstarter record for the most funded, non-fiction publishing project and has done multiple six-figure courses and digital product launches.
- Tom, what an absolute pleasure it is to have you as this week's guest expert and mentor. Welcome to the show.
- Tom Morkes: Susan, thank you so much for having me on, it's a pleasure.
- Susan Friedmann: Tom, one of the many things that you do so brilliantly is to take an unconventional approach to business. Tell us more about this, and how it can help our listeners be more effective and stand out from the crowd with their book.
- Tom Morkes: One of my favorite quotes is by Marcus Aurelius, and he said, "The key to all victory is organizing the non-obvious." I love that quote. I think it's interesting. I think when you're doing business or anything business-related to marketing sales, you have to approach it that way. I say

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



that because typically there are fundamentals that you have to abide by to get a business off the ground, to start making money for yourself, for sure. But, beyond the fundamentals, literally, there's thousands and thousands of way to make money, to create profit, and then to also create an impact for your customers and your consumers.

Some of the things that I've done in the past, and a lot of it by accident, I just stumbled across them through experimentation. I found some different ways to get my name out there, get the books that I wrote and published, and then other ones that we've marketed and launched, such as different digital. Some of those include "Pay What You Want" pricing, which, a lot of people weren't doing at the time. Actually, I still practicing this strategy.

Now, it's essentially finding unique ways to differentiate yourself, your product, whatever it is, your book, from a very noisy, overcrowded marketplace. I'm always looking for those opportunities of things that haven't really been tapped yet, and I try to avoid, as a rule of thumb, doing exactly what other people have done. So yeah, that's kind of the gist of it.

Susan Friedmann: Yes, I always love that approach. It's like if everybody's zigging, you want to zag. So, good. Congratulations.

Let's jump in and talk about that Pay What You Want strategy. I know that that's something that you believe in, and I know a few people who've done it, but let's hear it from your perspective and how that could benefit our listeners using that particular strategy.

Tom Morkes: I started using it because I was, honestly, just scared to price and sell my own books at the time. I was still in the army. I was writing on the side. I didn't really necessarily want anybody to find out what I was doing because I was just embarrassed by it, or I felt embarrassed, like I wasn't used to doing anything publicly, and all of a sudden, putting my name on something was kind of a scary thought, and then putting my name on a book and then asking people to pay money for it was really terrifying.

I mean, I don't think I got over the fear of writing publicly for months or years, honestly, so maybe some people could relate to that.

So the Pay What You Want came out of a desire to just not have to deal with the feeling I'm sure I would have felt if I put a price on something

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



and it totally bombed. Instead, I just offered essentially the second book that I published as Pay What You Want. The first one, I just gave away for free. That's how scared I was, I was just like, yeah, I'll just give it away for free. You guys decide the price you want to pay, whether you just take it for free or if you want to tip me and then pay for coffee or pay for a steak dinner or something like that.

At this point, I had a website. I had maybe 160-ish people on my email list, and that was the first, I guess you could say, product I released as Pay What You Want, I did about \$500 in that first month. It was eye-opening. I mean, now, for some people that's either very little money, but at the time, that was a lot of money to me.

It was more important it showed me a few things. One, that people would pay for the creative work that I was doing, which was really motivating. The second thing was that people would pay even if something is free, which is when I continued to write and publish books Pay What You Want. I did it in a bunch of different contexts, I did consulting with Pay What You Want pricing, I did in-person events as Pay What You Want pricing, I did all sorts of different stuff. Then I took a lot of those experiments, I interviewed a ton of people who had done this behind the scenes to get their experience doing it. I wrote a book called "The Complete Guide to Pay What You Want Pricing".

Again, it was just because it was one of those topics that a lot of people, I think, were interested in when I wrote a couple of guest posts here and there on the topic. You always get a ton of questions, and people are always so fascinated by it. I just realized that here's an opening in the marketplace for somebody just create something that will be useful in terms of using this kind of pricing technique. I've used it since, did that back in 2013, I think. Yeah, 2013, and I've continued to sell most of my books with Pay What You want.

It's been interesting. We can talk about pros and cons, and I'll say probably a lot of ways we can really deep on it, but the pro for an author and when you offer your book is Pay What You Want, especially if you're a new author, it lowers the barrier entry, which you're going to find as the major of people probably will take the book for free if you make the book zero dollars plus, but you can also put a minimum price on it if you want, like a dollar or plus or whatever it is. I'm talking digital or PDFs like, digital type books so there's no, it's not like you're going to go in the red offering something like this for free.

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



What I like about it is, even though you'll typically see about 50 to maybe 70% of people who'll take the book for free or its lowest price, you'll get a percentage of your audience, like 20 or 30% will pay something, and about 3% of that audience will pay much more than whatever your list price would have been, and that's across the board. So I'll still see to this day, people paying 2X or 3X or 4X more than whatever I would've done at a list price of say, \$10. So people contribute 30 bucks or 40 bucks or 50 bucks or 100 bucks sometimes. That typically offsets a lot of the people who take it for free.

What you end up getting is you still actually generate decent revenue, and you ultimately build your lists because that's what I use. I use Gumroad but there's a ton of tools for this where you can have people choose the price they want, if they purchase, then you can get them on your list.

Even those people who decided to take something for free, they're on my list now, and I can sell them things down the road if I want. It's a really interesting tactic for those who want to, especially for authors who aren't quite well known, to get their work out there and start building their list and also make some money from it in the process.

Susan Friedmann: And that differentiates from Kindle giving it away for free or pricing it at .99 or \$1.99.

Tom Morkes: Yeah, when I did this, I didn't offer it on Amazon at all. While I've done a lot of books on Amazon, like published a lot of books and worked on a lot of books that are published on Amazon or via Amazon or offered on Amazon, the ones that I started with, in this particular talk, it'd be the ones I still offer for basically Pay What You Want, you know, whatever price you decide. Those were all just sold from my website. The nice part is I'm constantly getting new people into my list, on my website, signing up, you know, either purchasing or signing up for my newsletter. Even if they grab a book for free, and now I have them on my newsletter, I can usually communicate with them, so I still see it as a win overall.

But yes, unfortunately you can't use this strategy with Amazon.

Susan Friedmann: Really interesting because I actually am one of those customers who went in, because I wanted to see how this works, and I ended up purchasing, I think, three books. I went in to purchase one and ended up

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



buying three of them, and I can't remember what price I actually paid. You'd be pleased to know, I didn't get it for free.

Tom Morkes: Wonderful.

Susan Friedmann: I don't know that I was one of those three times extra, but I did pay for it, so I just wanted to see how it-

Tom Morkes: Thank you.

Susan Friedmann: ... worked. I thought it's a great system and as you said, for the author who might be really scared to charge something for that book right at the beginning, it's a way to get over that, so, excellent.

What do you see is the biggest struggle or challenge is currently facing authors in this crowded marketplace?

Tom Morkes: I think it's probably what's in their face right now, which is just that we have this beautiful thing called the Internet. It's amazing the access that the average person has to decent technology and to Internet connection, especially when we're talking western countries and stuff like that. It's insane.

It's insane to think that the means of production are completely in your hands, especially when we're talking about books, which 50 years ago, you wouldn't have ... self-publishing was, it was just almost impossible. It was more vanity style but self-publishing, actually no, it didn't exist, I mean, even, like I guess, 20 years ago, probably 15 years ago, it didn't really exist. It's only really occurred in this last decade which is crazy.

What's amazing about that is now anybody can create anything, so you should start creating. I'm a big proponent of that. The downside is that because anybody can start creating, a lot of people do, and then what you have is tons of noise, you just have a lot of noise. If you look at it, I remember, I don't know if these statistics have been updated but I think it was from 2013 or '14, so you can assume that these numbers have increased, but it was to the point where about a book every minute or something like that was being published or maybe a book every hour. We'll say a book every hour, I think it's way more than that though.

So you think about that, you have books published non-stop right now. The biggest struggle or challenge is somehow breaking through that noise and finding an audience and getting your book in front of people

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



who would want to read it. That's the biggest thing. If you can get your book in front of the right audience, it goes with the assumption that the book is actually good, and I won't really touch on that topic, but assuming the book is good, like it deserves to be read, then the most difficult part is just getting it in front of an audience who, the right audience.

Again, this is where a lot of issues come up for authors. You see them struggle in a hundred different ways. I know because I'll ask when people sign up for my newsletter that number one thing they're struggling with is always revolves around this topic. What you see people trying to do is, again, what everybody else is doing. It's like, oh, I'll put it on Amazon and then I'll drop the price to .99 cents. Maybe it'll work for awhile, and I think there's times where that works as a tactic, but it's not an ongoing strategy, it's not a way to be successful long term, honestly, because you're going to make so little money from that.

The tough part is, a lot of authors are attracted to these quick wins, and these promises to quick wins. It's like, oh, if I paid 30 bucks here, pay somebody a fiver, I'll get promotion on Facebook, or if I do this discount promotion on this site, I'll make some sales. It's almost always net-negative. It's always a loss leader. You're almost always going to come out with less money. So of course that's debilitating for anybody who wants to be successful.

I would just challenge those authors and say you gotta stop looking for the quick win because you're just going to keep burning through your cash unless you just stumble, unless you just get lucky, really, but again, that's a strategy that's not going to work. But some people might, you know, who knows and then as that book sells enough that it's worthwhile or something, I don't know.

I would say stop trying to focus on these short term tactics, these hacks, these ways to boost your rank or something like that on Amazon or whatever it is and say, what does this platform need to look like? What does my personal platform, my author platform, or this thing that I'm building, my publishing business because every self-publisher is publisher.

If you're a self-publisher, then you're a writer and you're a publisher. That's your business. One is an author, and then the other is you're a publisher. So, when it comes to making money for your books, you just treat it like you're the publisher. So what does your publishing company

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



look like in 5 to 10 years? What are the things, what is the foundation you have to set to make that something that can not only produce full time income to you but hopefully a lot more than that, a lot more profit so you can do even bigger and better things.

I think that's the challenge is one, getting through the noise, and two, recognizing that many of us are attracted and we choose to go the short cut route but that's never going to turn out well. Ultimately, being able to say no, I'm going to focus on the long term, and I'm going to build a foundation that's going to be useful for me in the future, and not try to do any of these short term hacks, and of course, we can get into that if you're interested, but those are the two main things, I think, authors struggle with whether they recognize it or not.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent questions that give you enormous food for thought. Thank you.

What I'd like to talk about now is that your forte is created digital products. What recommendations do you have for our listeners to begin creating these digital products and services from their book, because that's, I hope, the way that they can make more money than just by relying on the book to make money.

Tom Morkes: I wrote a ... from one of my newsletters like in the last few months, I think, I was just looking at the past projects we'd work on in the last year or two. I've done maybe, I'd have to compile it now, but we're probably up to 45 maybe upwards of 50 different types of projects that I've worked on in some sort of marketing or sales capacity.

Everything from virtual summits to courses to books and of course the associated launch. Course launch, book launch, summits launch, however you want to describe it, and one of the things that struck me was that even, again, there's always somebody with a competing idea, but the reality is this. If you look between a book, a course, a membership site, and a service, what's going to be, I guess you could throw a physical product in there, but we'll ignore that as well because that probably fits somewhere around there, but let's just look at book, course, membership site, and then service, like what makes the most money.

Hands down, the service can make the most money. If you offer a service, of course you can make the most money from that. But, you get rid of the service element, and you just look at digital products as a

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



whole, courses are the most lucrative. They can just make you the most money upfront. A lot of people are attracted to these continuity-type, membership-type sites and programs, and that's fine but I don't people realize how much work goes into something like that to sustain it.

So at the simplest, easiest, most lucrative way to start making more money than you are right now is probably look into courses and say, is there something I can teach? It can be small, it doesn't have to be ... that's the thing, in fact, niching is probably the most important thing in this space right now. Generic stuff doesn't do really well, but a specific types of courses do very well.

If you can offer some sort of course or info product, typically, your margins are going to be 90% or more. The price point is probably going to be 10, upwards maybe of a hundred times more than what you would with a book. Think about that for a second. Not only do you make a bigger margin, but you can charge 10 to 100X more than you can with a book. I think when it comes to digital products, I just think it's important that somebody look at it and say ... have an honest look at it. I don't know if people actually share this stuff honestly online, I think a lot of people share different ideas and things like that, but the truth is you're going to probably make the most from some sort of info product or a digital course.

So if that's the case, how can you actually start knowing that that's going to be the most lucrative for you. Another question is, what do you crave? That is, ultimately, comes down to, it's very simple. It's who's the audience? Who's the customer, and what do they need?

That's why the idea of having a website and building your email list is a powerful and generally at least true statement, you want to do that, because if you don't have an audience, you don't have an email list, specifically, it's going to be harder to actually communicate with your potential customers. The idea is how do you get in front of potential customers and have that conversation.

There's a lot of techniques out there. One of them is if you're doing the website thing, you have a newsletter, you're creating content, you can survey, you can ask actual specific questions when people opt in, like just have the first email that people get, ask them a question, like what is their biggest struggle or challenge? It's going to give you so much insight that you wouldn't get any other way

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



That's it. So, if you find a problem, like say you do this and people are responding to that email, and you get a hundred people who have a similar problem, that's probably a good place to start. You probably have a good idea that this is something that these people really struggle with, you could probably put that into and create a digital product out of that.

Fundamentally, it comes down to knowing the target market, like knowing who that is, knowing what their major pain or problem is, and the next step of course, before you then run and create the course, I'm a big proponent of pre-selling things. I like to sell something before I create it. I like to get people's money to validate it before I start putting time and energy into something that I'm sure somebody will buy.

If you look at this, biggest companies in the world do this, Tesla does this. Their whole company is based on pre-orders, if you think about it it, it's insane, but it's awesome. Every company does this, at least the majority, and many of them use it as some sort of business model, like an aspect of it, is the idea of selling something before you actually produce it.

The idea being, if you're going to move that route, is I would look at, assuming you have access to that audience, you know what their need is, putting it out to them, saying, hey, this is what I'm thinking about creating. It'll help you with this problem, it'll help solve that problem, here's how. Is this something you'd be interested in? Ultimately, the next question is, okay, this is what I'm going to charge, I'm going to give a discount right now for those who choose to join early. I'm going to work with you as we co-create this. You actually use the user's feedback, the customer's feedback to build a better product in the end.

I've done that a number of times. A lot of clients I've worked with done it many, many times. It's the fastest, most risk-verse way to start making more money and actually produce better stuff to whatever it is, right? If it's a course or something else, because you're actually getting the customer's feedback as you create it. I love this idea of collaboration and co-creation. I think that's the way that you want to get started in the digital products base, honestly. It's the only way.

If you try to come up the gate with an idea and build it, unfortunately, I think you may find that there's going to be crickets when you go to release it. But you do it this way, you're going to have paying customers

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



before you ever create anything. It's going to be a much smarter choice in the long run for you.

Susan Friedmann: Yes, and I know that strategy. I've used it, and yes, it's enormously powerful. The whole idea of niching is just musical to my ears, so thank you for highlighting that.

My listeners know that I love to talk about mistakes, so let's just address a few common mistakes that you see that authors are making in this environment.

Tom Morke: I think goes back to some of what I said about the short-sightedness of looking for hacks. I think that's a big part of it and how that manifests. Some mistakes people make is just that, it's like looking for some way to get a leg up or do better than they're doing right now, but again, it's always unfortunately rooted in this short-term thinking, which I get it. I understand when you're struggling, you just want a quick fix sometimes.

But I think the reality is, there's no such thing as somebody who creates like writes one book and then really, that's it forever. Even somebody who creates a brand out of one of their books is going to have to do a lot more beyond that book. There's always so much more work to be done. I think if you're a serious author, you're going to know that there's a lot of work. It's not just, write a book and then make lots of money. Typically, there's a ton more work behind the scenes, whether it's writing many, many more books or doing a lot more work afterward.

I think the biggest mistake is how that, then, manifest, is looking for that short-term fix or not playing the game like you're serious. One of my favorite authors is Steven Pressfield who wrote "The World of Art" and "Turning Pro" and a bunch of other amazing books, he's also got great fiction. That's his big thing is the idea of turning pro, and I think it's a great concept. It's like you have to take yourself seriously, and you have to take your work seriously. I think it's saying how do I focus on the long term and do things that'll be good for that because those are going to be different things than what will be good for the short term fix.

So it's saying, well, if my book's not selling right now, what would I have to do to make sure it's selling in a year? It's very different conversation than what do I have to do right now to get my book selling more tomorrow? It's a very different question. It's going to elicit different answers, and it's going to elicit better answers from you, even if you're just doing this yourself and doing this kind of brainstorming yourself.

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



Start asking better questions that will help you produce better answers and start thinking more creatively, and I think you need to root it in the long term, in the long term game and say I'm going to be doing this for the next 10 years. What do I need to do this year to make sure in two to three years that I am crushing it.

Susan Friedmann: That's really important because I know so many authors come to me and they're like, how do I get a best seller without doing any work in the shortest time possible? It's like-

Tom Morke: Exactly.

Susan Friedmann: ... that's not going to work. Not quite that easy. Thank you for mentioning Steven Pressfield because funnily enough, only the other day I was on his website looking at his videos, looking at some of the other materials that he's written and ... such a pro.

How can our listeners find out more about your services, Tom?

Tom Morke: I think the best place to go is just tommorkes.com. It's T-O-M-M-O-R-K-E-S dot com, and from there, you'll see a few different things that I have. I have just finished and will be rolling out hopefully this weekend. It's actually already live, some people have gotten into it. I don't know how, I made a mistake or something like that, I released it early, but it's called "Zero to Bestseller".

So, there you go, for those people who are really craving that bestseller with doing as little effort as, you know, little work as possible, which I don't encourage but this actually ... my strategy's a lot of work, so I wouldn't come and read my stuff if you're not interested in doing the work, right?

But check it out, if you come to tommorkes.com, you'll see that on the home page, you just scroll down, you'll be able to see that course, it's called "Zero to Bestseller" and that's the particular strategy I've used with probably like a dozen self-published books that we've worked on where we've released it for free, and then what we did to then turn that free book into a perpetual moneymaker for months and years to come. It just goes in a lot of depth, so if you're curious about that, if you're a writer, that'll probably be a course that will be very useful for you. Just go to tommorkes.com, and you'll find it right on the home page.

BOOK MARKETING MENTORS

Helping authors get their books noticed!



- Susan Friedmann: I'm going to check it out. If you're going to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, what would that be?
- Tom Morkes: I would leave you with a Machiavelli quote, "Develop the strength to do bold things and not the strength to suffer. All courses of action are risky, so prudence is not in avoiding danger but in calculating risk and acting decisively." Actually, I kind of reversed that quote, but it's, you put, mismatched, it's still good.
- The point is, you've gotta put in the hard work now. You gotta put in the hard work now, plan for the future, and it's okay to make mistakes as long as you're making mistakes in a positive direction, right? Don't be a afraid of failure. I know it doesn't feel good, and I'm still ... it still hurts when feel like I failed in some way, shape, or form. It's awful. Terrible feeling, but you have to get used to that discomfort, I think, and be willing to be comfortable with that discomfort and treat it as just a learning point, a data point along the way of you getting to whatever that goal is that you have in mind, that vision of what you want to become and embrace that.
- Susan Friedmann: Thank you for sharing your wisdom, and thank you, listeners. If you want to take your author marketing to the next level of success, make sure that you go to bookmarketingmentors.com and sign up for a 15 minute complementary coaching session with me, Susan Friedmann.
- I want to thank you for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview, and I sincerely hope it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books.
- Here's wishing you much book marketing success.