

Is Amazon the Devil?

SO, IS Amazon the Devil? This is a key question that would-be authors must ask themselves, according to Tim Dawson, speaking at the November LFB meeting (see below). Whatever the answer, it is very difficult to pursue only the other (non-Amazon) options if the intention is to take a commercial line. Smashwords is good, Tim said, but it will not add big sales if used on its own.

In terms of getting started, Tim recommended turning to Kindle's manual – just fifteen pages long. The process is very simple, at least for text-only files. This involves making a Microsoft Word file with Word's own indexing system, and then uploading it to the Kindle site. Adding pictures will complicate matters. The product can be tested on a Kindle, and tweaked, before final acceptance of the file. The whole process, excluding writing the book itself, should take under twelve hours.

Marketing is very important, as potential readers must know that

your product is out there and available. Some help is available from Amazon, said Tim, particularly once sales hit treble figures, which is when Amazon's algorithms kick in.

Amazon will pay 70p in the pound of all money taken in sales. The bigger the file size, the more the author's share decreases. It is worth making shortish books and pricing them cheaply. Go for the price of a cup of coffee, suggested Tim, because people will take a chance on that.

LFB member Humphrey Evans stated that while he has made £100 from his ebook sales, it cost him £138 to restore his email account after Microsoft decided, wrongly, that he was spamming internet users when he emailed potential buyers from a relevant mailing list.

Other ebook formats? Hina Pandya pointed out that formatting needs careful double-checking where multiple platforms are being considered, as Word or epub files may not translate easily to KDP,

Kindle's own format. Hina prefers to prepare her documents as PDF files. InDesign can also be a good choice, as it reflows well on other devices.

Publishing service Lulu was recommended as being able to cover both print and ebooks.

One member said that they had had reviews on Amazon, but no sales, despite having signed for Amazon as an option when they signed up to Lulu.

Any product sold online can raise complicated tax questions. Clarifying the position on US tax, Emma Boyes said that the new system uses the W8-BEN form, available on the Amazon website.

This indicates that the seller is not resident in the US and is not liable to pay US tax. Where it asks for an EIN number, a British tax number will do.

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• See links to useful resources at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1412amaz.html

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in, Peter asked for crowdfunding to continue – he had no other source of income. He rapidly raised £20,000 because people were so interested the trial – he had 16,000 Twitter followers – and because he stuck faithfully with covering the trial from April to Christmas.

Having done this oddly fragmentary reporting, Peter thought there was much more to say and there must be other ways to say it. He took a gamble on the interpretation of “contemporaneous reporting” as protection against libel, and it seems to have worked. He crowdfunded a book version. This came out within a few weeks.

Before the next related trial, he asked his followers and whomever to “pre-buy” – to pay for the book of the trial before it was written. He

got 1500 orders, wrote it in a month and sent it to those “subscribers” in e-form.

Peter also asked those subscribers to do proofreading and errata on the version he'd just sent them – it was never on sale to the general public. Peter then took in corrections, sent the corrected version to those subscribers and also put it up on Amazon. Says Tim, “As a model for funding journalism that is complete genius.”

@ Phil Sutcliffe
and Fiona O'Cleirigh

• See also “Is Amazon the Devil?” above.

• Phil Sutcliffe's own non-profit e-publishing venture *Nobody Of Any Importance: A Foot Soldier's Memoir Of World War I* is on Amazon, in print via philsutcliffe47@gmail.com



LFB Vice-Chair Fiona O'Cleirigh introduces Tim Dawson (seated), speaking on new funding models for journalism at an LFB event on that topic in 2012

Photo: © Tony Rizzo

Petition – RIPA and spying on journalists

PLEASE GIVE your consideration to signing the *Press Gazette* petition (linked from the online version of this article) calling for Interception Commissioner Sir Anthony May to take action to ensure the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) is not used by public authorities to secretly obtain journalists' phone records and identify their confidential sources.

The *Press Gazette* campaign has already had an effect: when it had received around 1000 signatures it apparently prompting Sir Anthony to order all UK police forces to re-

veal any instances in which they have used RIPA to spy on journalists by grabbing their phone records without a warrant from a judge – usually to uncover journalists' sources. The Interception Commissioner has, we hear, now ordered an enquiry into the practice.

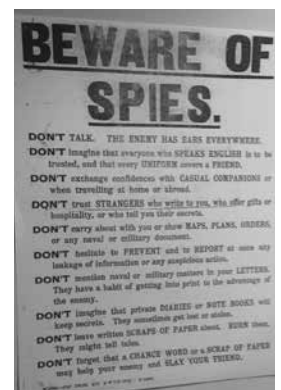
The Met used RIPA to seize the phone records of *Sun* journalist Newton Dunn, to uncover police whistleblowers who'd passed details of the “plebgate” affair to the press.

And it's not just police that have been using RIPA against journalists. The *Derby Telegraph* discovered Der-

by Council employed RIPA powers in an apparently amateurish 2010 “direct surveillance” operation that involved two members of the council's audit department snooping on a *Telegraph* journalist and their sources meeting in Starbucks.

Detractors of the Human Rights Act (the dissing of which is a suddenly fashionable pastime right now) may like to note that it has been invoked on numerous occasions to curb the excesses of RIPA, such as councils spying on parents suspected of school catchment area fraud.

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A 1914 public information espionage warning poster currently on display in the Ipswich Museum

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