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Episode 134:

“Five Years Out: Bold Predictions for Publishing”

Mike Michalowicz:

Welcome back to the Don't Write That book podcast where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts. Myself, Mike Michalowicz and AJ Harper.

AJ Harper:

This is the thing that drives me nuts. You don't know how to write a book, so you didn't write one yet. So somehow you think you should know how to write it, and it should be really good, and you're gonna write it for the first time while you're learning to do it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Why? Yeah. Why do people do that?

AJ Harper:

I don't know,

Mike Michalowicz:

But that's true with everything. I see speakers say, I'm not gonna rehearse or prepare because I want it to be off the cuff, and it's, oh, is atrocious.

AJ Harper:

I think books are, I think, I think different books are different because most people wouldn't say, I'm gonna get up and be a speaker now, but people say, I'm gonna start writing a book, and they just get their notepad or their laptop out and then get going and, you know. Yeah. Okay.

Mike Michalowicz:

Maybe it's 'cause we speak so often, or so we know the, we know the language,

AJ Harper:

We see it in movies. It, it looks like something we could go do. I'm gonna go write my book now. It is. I've always been, I've always wanted do that. I've always wanted to do that. Is

Mike Michalowicz:

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It is perpetuated that way. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. That someone's like, I gotta write a book, and they go to that cabin in the woods.

AJ Harper:

Right. Which is basically means they're just gonna hate themselves by the time they leave <laugh>. It's true. (Yeah.) Because you need some sense of structure and understanding of how this all works. You also need to have some com level of, um, awareness of the creative process. Because that's what does you in, when you don't really understand the creative process, and then you feel like, uh, confused by how many times you need to change something or it doesn't feel good or Right. Um, how many times you think you failed, how many, how many times that it felt like a slog. All of that seems wait as evidence that you shouldn't be doing it. But if you were familiar with the creative process, you would just call it a day ending and why? You'd just be like, oh, all right. So it was a rough one today. All right, next, next, next

Mike Michalowicz:

One up.

AJ Harper:

Let's go.

Mike Michalowicz:

I noticed with home repair, so I, I can do light electrical work, um, some light plumbing, like just basic stuff, but maintenance. The reason I did that, what necessitated that was sometimes it's hard to find someone to do the repair you need in the timeframe you need it, or within the budget you do or don't have. So I'm like, I better, I gotta learn this stuff. So I asked my friends, I'm like, why don't you do some? They're like, oh, you're replacing the circuits on the switch, uh, on the, uh, the switchboard. See, that's how basic I am.

AJ Harper:

I don't even, I wouldn't even know how to say switchboard on

Mike Michalowicz:

The, on the pa, the panel. And, um, I'm, I'm putting a 15 amp circuit in or something, and my friend's like, um, why are you doing that? And I explained, I'm like, why aren't you doing it? Right? Because I don't know how to, I'm like, no one knows how to do anything until you learn how to do it.

AJ Harper:

I'll tell you why I'm not doing it. I, I don't want to.

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Mike Michalowicz:

Okay, well, that's different.

AJ Harper:

Yes,

Mike Michalowicz:

I want to, I don't, I'm not, it doesn't gimme joy, but I have a reason behind it. Hard to find someone expensive. Needs to be done fair. You don't wanna do it. Fine. But there's people who want to do something, but justify not doing it by saying, I haven't done it yet, which is this crazy circular trap of never getting it done because you won't do it. Sure. And I'm wondering if writers are doing the same thing.

AJ Harper:

No, I think writers are trying, people who are trying to write a book think that they should be able to do it right away,

Mike Michalowicz:

And then when they don't, they say, well, I suck and I'm done.

AJ Harper:

Or, or, they hopefully keep at it. Yeah. But I think people underestimate the power of learning the craft, you know? So they just wanna be able to sit down and write it. That's not, that's not, doesn't work for me after how many decades. There's a process

Mike Michalowicz:

And it helps to know what's coming down the pike. And you have some really interesting perspectives because of your background. So in today's episode, we're gonna talk about five years out, and the bold predictions that you

AJ Harper:

Have, this is your idea. Yeah. Do, do you remember that you wanted to do this episode?

Mike Michalowicz:

I do love futuristic conversations. Yeah. I find that, um, I find there's a, a saying, um, and I find it to be true, is that what humans estimate to happen within the next year is usually grossly overestimated. But what humans expect to happen in the next 10 years is usually grossly underestimated. Hmm.

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AJ Harper:

Okay.

Mike Michalowicz:

And so I'm curious if, well, we'll find out within five years where we fall in this. Um, you're listening to Don't Write that book. We are in our new studio, um, seeking feedback too. So if you like this setup, if you're watching on YouTube or not, do watch on YouTube. Tell us what you think about it. Tell us how we can improve the show for you. We'd love all that feedback. And, uh, please rate and review the show on whatever platform you're consuming. Join the studio with my colleague, my writing partner, uh, my great friend who's willing to have deep, heartfelt conversations. . Uh, and talk about the tough things you were sharing in last week's episode. Uh, you admire my relationship with my wife just as much as I admire your relationship with your wife. And what's rooted in that is candid, hard conversations. Not expecting easy riding the whole way. No. And problems and mistakes will happen. How do you navigate that? And, uh, we've been navigating that and you, you instigated a, a discussion, which was fantastic. So I just admire, you are honoring me by honoring you and, and allowing that conversation, or actually encouraging and demanding that conversation happens. I love that.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. I think we already admired each other for this, but I'll say it again that I admire that you were willing to have it. Yeah. Yeah. And you weren't. Um, and you're, you were a good listener.

Mike Michalowicz:

Thank you.

AJ Harper:

Yes. I think we already said that, but it bears repeating.

Mike Michalowicz:

It ends up being, uh, when we, we met face to face, one of the best quiches I've had in my life

AJ Harper:

At Didier.

Mike Michalowicz:

It was garlic that just brought over the edge. It was the right amount. It was just a little touch. So it was spinach, mushroom, and just a hint of garlic. And the, the flakiness of the crust. It was remarkable.

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AJ Harper:

It's called Didier Duma in, um, in Nyack New York. And it is a patisserie. Didier is from Paris. Okay. And he landed in our neck of the woods about 15 years ago. And

Mike Michalowicz:

That's the place to go. It's a busy place. You're in there, it's worth the, the trip. And you said this Louis Swamp. We arrived right at opening, and it was just me and you and maybe one other person. And I'm like, I don't know. Uh, and we were in a deep conversation. I didn't notice anything around me, <laugh>. And then I turned around and shammed. Yeah. And there's these people clocking around, like, what's all this clunking? There's all these biker, like

AJ Harper:

All the

Mike Michalowicz:

Cyclists. Cyclists, yeah. Who've come all over specifically to eat here.

AJ Harper:

Yes. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Remarkable. How long you been publishing?

AJ Harper:

21 years.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh

AJ Harper:

My gosh. And before that, I was a playwright. So I've been a professional writer for a long time, but in publishing 21 years.

Mike Michalowicz:

And you've owned the publishing company that you built, you sold. (Yep.) Um, are you still, do you guide publishing? Are you still involved in, in it? Technically. I mean, I know you help your authors.

AJ Harper:

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I don't publish.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, you don't publish.

AJ Harper:

But I help authors navigate that world. For sure. And then I have my editor certification, which is helping people within the publishing world do a better job. Mm. But I'm not a publisher anymore.

Mike Michalowicz:

You have worked with how many different publishers over the years?

AJ Harper:

Oh, I don't <laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz:

Hundreds, dozens, or hundreds? Probably,

AJ Harper:

Uh, not hundreds. (Okay.) Not hundreds. You know, you kind of have the usual suspects, but I definitely, you know, sometimes people say, do you know such and such publisher? And very often, I don't, there's a lot of publishers out there.

Mike Michalowicz:

Let's go back 21 years if we can. So you're in your late twenties, early thirties.

AJ Harper:

Thank you. 30, 31.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Late twenties, early thirties. That's close. Yeah. So you're 31 years old. What were the predictions back then? I mean, if you can throw yourself back then,

AJ Harper:

I wasn't even thinking about publishing predictions. I was trying to make enough money from writing to pay the rent.

Mike Michalowicz:

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But were you hearing things that did or didn't come true? Oh,

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Oh, that's right. I meant, I did wanna talk about that. <laugh>. Um, yeah. So, um, everybody said at that time, because eBooks were popular and becoming more popular, "print books are dead." Do you remember that? "No one's gonna read print books anymore."

Mike Michalowicz:

I, yeah. I remember the Kindle. The iPad. Yeah. Too. Saying print books are dead.

AJ Harper:

They're, they're on their way out.

Mike Michalowicz:

And it made logical sense. I'm reading notes here right now. But look what's over our shoulders, behind our backs. Yeah.

AJ Harper:

Print books. Actually, they just came out with some numbers that print books are up. This, we're up in 2025. Print book sales.

Mike Michalowicz:

Really?

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Not for every genre. Business books are down.

Mike Michalowicz:

Do you have context? Um, I did a deep analysis. We've, we used an AI company, um, called Infinite Use to develop a dashboard. They've taken all of our data for self pub, uh, traditional pub, and now hybrid with page two, uh, international sales, everything. And they built this dashboard, which, um, maybe I can do some screenshots and share it. Yeah. Uh, what's so interesting in the analysis is the trend with eBooks, it went up a little bit, and then it's actually slowly declining and sitting flat work, maybe just under 10% now of our collective sales of books are an ebook. Audio is on a constant climb.

AJ Harper:

Yes. Which mirrors the marketplace.

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Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. So it just interesting. And print books, uh, for me are about 40% of sales. It's substantial still.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. And all, all of that is genre specific too. For example, if you are a romance writer, there's a lot more people reading eBooks.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, interesting.

AJ Harper:

They're reading them because they're reading, you know, sometimes 10 books a month, so they're just, just on the Yeah. A reader. But at any rate, print books are up. So, at the time, 21 years ago, people definitely said print books are on the way out. They also said, um, self-publishing was gonna be the main way

Mike Michalowicz:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

AJ Harper:

That

Mike Michalowicz:

No one predicted the hybrid, I don't think back 21 years ago, or we didn't,

AJ Harper:

No one called it that for sure. No one called it that. In fact, now we say indie authors, but we used to say indie presses that were separate from the Big Five. It was an independent presses, so they weren't part of this big conglomerate. Now, when you say indie, it doesn't mean that. Now it means self pub. So the terms change, but everybody said, oh, down, down with traditional publishing, who needs them anymore? (Yeah.) That's what everybody said back then. No one's gonna need them. There was a, they're on their way out.

Mike Michalowicz:

There was Vanity Publishing too, which maybe has also, that's just more, it still exists.

AJ Harper:

It's called Indie now.

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Mike Michalowicz:

So Vanity has become indie, but indie's become sell, I mean, become hybrid.

AJ Harper:

Well, I don't, hybrid really didn't exist in the same way. I mean, there were hybrid publishers that were not called hybrid publishers where you're making an investment. But, um, I mean, that goes back to the printing press where people were paying printing presses to help them get their stuff out. So, but I mean, these terms evolve and change. The point being, everyone said print books are dead, traditional, publishing's dead. Neither of those things are true. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. Bookstores about them.

AJ Harper:

Everybody also said, um, bookstores weren't gonna start closing because of the e-readers. So we did go through a period where our big bookstores started closing, remember Borders?

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah.

AJ Harper:

God, that was my favorite.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, why was that?

AJ Harper:

I just like the vibe. Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

I like Barnes and Nobles. I like the vibe.

AJ Harper:

That's fine. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

You don't like it as much as Borders. What was the difference between Borders and Barnes and Noble?

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AJ Harper:

I don't know. It just felt different to me. I just liked it better. They're gone. But all these indie bookstores now are actually having tremendous success. So very speci, you know, small town, local, but also genre specific. So a bookstore devoted just to mystery. A bookstore devoted just to, um, romance, Black-owned bookstores. Indigenous-owned bookstores, that type of thing.

Mike Michalowicz:

So let's, let's start going into our predictions here. Uh, I, I'll give you one thought right away.

AJ Harper:

Let's do, I think we should each do our biggest one, and then we can talk about different aspects of publishing.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Here's my biggest one is I think for the new generation, which is at Gen z, I, I don't even know what term we're,

AJ Harper:

Well, Z is, they're in their twenties.

Mike Michalowicz:

Gen Alpha?

AJ Harper:

Our kids are, our kids are Z'ers

Mike Michalowicz:

Z. Okay. So Z and younger. Yes. I think this will become the new third place. So, you know how Starbucks was called, is called the third place. Have you heard this? Yeah. Okay. And the idea is we had our generation, the home was Place one. Work was Place two. And the third place Congregation Social was, uh, a coffee shop. Um, the Gen Z and younger. It is funny, I was talking to my son in depth about this this past weekend. I flew out there to see him in Salt Lake City. It was awesome, by the way. And he's, I said, uh, what's the dating scene like? I, I still don't understand. I was just super curious. Like, he goes, it is changed radically. Um, and, and the data shows this, that in Gen Z, about 30% of kids are actively dating, meaning 70, 70% are not.

Mike Michalowicz:

I said, why is this true? He goes, because it's scary and unsafe. If I, he's a male, uh, go and date, uh, he's a heterosexual male date, he's a female. Um, and there's anything that she feels

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threatened or doesn't like, or, or, or anything is off. It goes on social media and it can destroy my reputation. So I'm very afraid of that. She goes, apps, he goes, apps are manipulated. So these dating apps are manipulated, so it's unsafe. Like, people are not representing themselves. So it is really risky to date. He goes, most people meet through one or two places, uh, which is the office or the home, but no one's at your home because you're a single person. So he goes, most people are dating, find their relationships through the workspace, but the workspace is going away. He goes, we don't have the third place dad.

Mike Michalowicz:

And then he says right after that, he goes, but I'm going to my gaming group. I'm like, what's the gaming group? He goes, we have a, a building. Everyone brings their board games. And there's people that are interested in these board games that they play. Photosynthesis being the best, by the way. Or which is? Another one called Pandemic that I played with him, which was even better. And he goes, it is just these board games and it's communal. I said, oh, bookstores are becoming this. So my son's in a book club. Uh, him and his buddies. And they do it virtually. I think there's, these book clubs are gonna come about genre specific, like you said, bookstores. But it's the third place. I wonder if what, I don't remember borders so well, but the Barnes and Nobles that I liked had nooks and crannies. It had little corners. That's gone now. It's just, it's, it's more warehouse-y. You can,

AJ Harper:

You can't even find a bench.

Mike Michalowicz:

You can't even find a bench. Yeah. That there's nooks and crannies. I think this becomes our third place. I think the, the human thirst for connection is so big. It just presents itself in a new

AJ Harper:

Way. So you think that the bookstores become like the community square.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's why things are gonna become Okay. Because, because you, what what it does is it says, here's my category of interest. It's safe 'cause it's public. And I can see other people with this common interest here. I think it becomes a new gathering point.

AJ Harper:

I think that's smart. And I, that's how those indie bookstores are doing so well, by the way. Hmm. Is they're very involved in their communities. So they have events and they don't just have book events. They might have writing events where you can come and learn to write something. I've seen some of my favorite bookstores, they have like a puzzle night. Um, that's not anything to do

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with books, but they're gathering places and they keep creating these events for people to come and come and gather. So I think you're onto something there.

Mike Michalowicz:

Now. It's not publishing, of course, that was more distribution than retail.

AJ Harper:

No, I think, no, but that is publishing distribution in retail. Yeah. Yeah. Drives publishing.

Mike Michalowicz:

<laugh>. What's your biggest prediction?

AJ Harper:

It's related to that. Yeah. I think that because people are not gonna be sure if anybody wrote something I think two things. One is I think they're gonna require more in-person experiences with authors. And I think those authors who do more in-person experiences will do better. And I think people might start writing. Um, this is common in some fan communities, but I think people might start writing in front of people.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Awkward pause, because I'm trying to perceive this. Like, what does that mean?

AJ Harper:

Just what it sounds like.

Mike Michalowicz:

It's like vo it sounds like voyeuristic.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Yeah. So, so there are, there are writers already who have Patreons and they share a screen and they write, and people can watch them do it. And I think because people are gonna wonder, did that person actually write it or not? I think, you know how there's people who do the gaming and then people watch them game?

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. Yeah.

AJ Harper:

I think it'll be like that.

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Mike Michalowicz:

That's brilliant.

AJ Harper:

Now you would have to also have proof that it was actually you and not AI typing. Sure. So that you'd have to kind of figure that out. But I think some people will get into that and do it.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's brilliant.

AJ Harper:

People do it. It's just not that common.

Mike Michalowicz:

It happens in New York City. Uh, you, you, especially in the summer, you'll walk through Washington Park or something. And you'll see someone there with an old school typewriter.

AJ Harper:

My best friend in the world, Zoe Bird, she does this. She.

Mike Michalowicz:

No way.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. So she moved to Santa Fe, she's a poet. She's also the best copy editor on the planet. And she was a copy editor on the first edition of Profit First, by the way.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's right.

AJ Harper:

And she's copy edited so many amazing books. But she's in her, she's really a poet. And she's, um, a magnificent poet. Like she's, she's written some stuff that I just, I, I gotta admit, I'm not a major poetry fan. Mm. I'm not that well-read in poetry. It's sort of like an embarrassing part of me. I just, I don't know why.

Mike Michalowicz:

Have you read any Romy stuff?

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AJ Harper:

Yeah. Rumi

Mike Michalowicz:

Ru ROI Rumi. Yes. Isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. Talk about ignorance. I, I have Rumi's, uh, book in my, uh, office here, and I read it every day. Just one poem.

AJ Harper:

There is a line in one of Zoe Bird's poems that she wrote in, uh, um, Elegy for a friend of ours who passed that brought me to my knees. I'm gonna look it up so I can, so I can share it. But at any rate, she does this, uh, I think about once a month I see an advertisement for it. I come across my Instagram, she hauls her old typewriter to this vintage shop, and it's promoted. And she, for 15, 20 bucks, writes you a poem.

Mike Michalowicz:

I love it.

AJ Harper:

On her, in front of you, on her typewriter, and then hands it to you. Yeah. Old school. And I think we're just gonna have more of these type of really analog old school experiences. And I think writers who are engaging in them are actually gonna become quite popular,

Mike Michalowicz:

You know, podcasts. And I've been pining to do this ourselves and gone into theaters. And what we're doing here is then experienced by hundreds of people in an audience. And there is something really unique about the tactile experience.

AJ Harper:

People don't, but it's just because people don't trust, is this real anymore? Is any, is anyone really there? This Right. This what's going on? Yeah. So I think anything that's,

Mike Michalowicz:

That brings trust.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Brings trust.

Mike Michalowicz:

I, I have another prediction. Okay. Non-linear reading consumption may

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AJ Harper:

Increase. Yeah. It's going to, and it's because of audiobook.

Mike Michalowicz:

And I think it's where it started, but I think the consumption will be different. I, I think the ebook allows that.

AJ Harper:

I think it's the audiobooks doing it though.

Mike Michalowicz:

So how do you see audiobooks?

AJ Harper:

Because audiobooks, you can go forward to the chapter next. You can just go forward to the chapter you want, like you do with a song. Yeah. Like on an album. Yeah. I wanna, I wanna play that song. Yeah. And so you're gonna have to look at each chapter as standing on its own. So I've always said, let's make sure this chapter can stand on its own. But I really don't think I've been taking it to the level I need to where you can just do the chapter. And also, I was talking with Todd Statterson about this, you gotta make sure your chapter titles are when you're doing an audio book, that it doesn't say 1, 2, 3, 4. It's gotta say what it is.

Mike Michalowicz:

Mm. Because you want Yeah. That will sway people

AJ Harper:

Because they, they need to know what, what they wanna turn to. And I think people are just gonna go straight to the chapter they want.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. And maybe it's not even the chapter anymore. I, I wonder if we go into something that's even more non-linear where the reader can prompt their question. So the book, the authorized Oh sure. The book with Here's the a hundred questions that are answered or addressed, where are you?

AJ Harper:

That's not reading though. That's a reference guide.

Mike Michalowicz:

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I understand. I'm saying the way the consumers are. Sure. So most books that are consumed linearly is a person either chooses to read the book or not starts reading, and they start in the beginning and they fade off at a certain point. Or they see it all the way through. I think the new book will say, let's get you to what you need now faster. And I think authors just need to think that way.

AJ Harper:

Okay. But I'm gonna say, I think that's gonna be a problem for prescriptive nonfiction.

Mike Michalowicz:

How?

AJ Harper:

Well, because there's a, there's a process that has to happen. There's a transformational arc that needs to happen when you're changing someone's mind. You can't just tell them, this is how it is. There's an unfolding that happens where you're first unwiring what they used to think or what the world thinks. And then now you're telling them this is what's really going on. So it's like, here's the state of things and then here's what's really going on. And if you just jump to what's really going on, you're missing the whole unwinding. So you're less likely to adopt that as true. And so I think that's gonna be to the detriment of people who are trying to actually change someone's mind.

Mike Michalowicz:

Our producer, Matt Robinson, his book *Understanding Happiness*, we were just talking about this during a break of how one section builds the next,

AJ Harper:

The progression of understanding. That's what I call it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. And so I wonder if there's a way to measure a reader's existing understanding and identify where they fall in now and start the progression at that point.

AJ Harper:

Oh My God, you know what? That sounds horrible.

Mike Michalowicz:

It does sound horrible.

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AJ Harper:

I would never wanna write that.

Mike Michalowicz:

It's kinda like a movie. It's like saying, okay, you already know that Luke Skywalker was kind of orphaned and he didn't feel, uh, capable of being a Jedi. You know, like, let's just skip to where he is fighting.

AJ Harper:

We're talking about hacking the book. (Yeah.) That's what you're talking about. Maybe that's what people will be doing. But I think, I think, um, maybe a way around that is getting the key concepts together into an appendix or something so people can just flip to that as needed. But don't discount that book is long form writing, meaning it's supposed to take you on a journey.

Mike Michalowicz:

Other predictions you have for 2031

AJ Harper:

Yeah. I'm gonna look at my notes.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, yeah. Well, I'll give you another one. I, I wonder if a new format's gonna come about, which is the video immersion. Yeah. Because you kind of alluded to it with this writing in front of you. I wonder if, I will tell you when I'm speaking on Profit First and someone meets with me, there is a connection they have. They're like, oh, I know you so well. I feel connected with you. And I wonder if readers thirst for that more a book, I think to read, or at least how I read the book isn't paper, it's ideas. But I can start visualizing another party. The author speaking to me. I feel this connection, but I don't really know who they are. Maybe that's the right thing, but I wonder if there's gonna be that thirst for further connection and if these immersive video-based books will come about.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Yeah. I think if they're easy to have on your phone, if you don't have to go to a weird place to get them. So maybe like streaming,

Mike Michalowicz:

You know, Michael Bungay Stanier, he just did, uh, masterclass and I'm friends with him. He just, that's why I went into it. I'm friends with Michael Bungay Stanier, and I told him I would

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say that too. I am, uh, a fan of his, uh, he wrote Coaching Habit. The Coaching habit in other books, uh, hired by or went to masterclass to, to teach these concepts.

AJ Harper:

That's, that's so cool.

Mike Michalowicz:

But Masterclass is a version

AJ Harper:

Thing of Yeah, that's a version of the book. Yeah. Yeah. So maybe like that, but yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Hmm. Where, where are other predictions you have? Okay,

AJ Harper:

I've got a bunch more.

Mike Michalowicz:

Lay them on me.

AJ Harper:

So we did a whole episode on special editions. I think we're gonna have a lot more of those souvenir type books. Art type, um, custom collector's items.

Mike Michalowicz:

So that's triggered my marketing idea. I shared with you last week's, last week's episode. Um, was that special edition. It's just been, I've been, uh, ruminating on that, roomating on that. And uh, I was like, oh, this is an idea of a special edition, effectively. What else? That, that's interesting.

AJ Harper:

Okay. Let me, let make sure I, yeah, I gotta have my notes 'cause I'm of a certain age. Oh, okay. Um, we already talked about bookstores. I think they're just, the indie bookstores are gonna get even more popular. And then I like your idea about the public square. Um, oh, self-publishing. So did you know that we had more than 3 million <laugh> books came out last year?

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, I'm not surprised.

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AJ Harper:

I know, but that's, that's a, I mean, it's, I remember when I remember, I remember when it was just 1 million.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh, really? I, yeah. I'm not surprised. Yeah. And, and how much is self-published percentage wise, you think?

AJ Harper:

I don't re I didn't look at that number. I should look that up.

Mike Michalowicz:

Probably over 95%. (No.) You don't think so?

AJ Harper:

No.

Mike Michalowicz:

You think of 3 million books that more than 5%, 'cause 3 million times five is 150,000 books would be traditional or, or hybrid. Do you think it's more than that last year?

AJ Harper:

I don't think it's 95% self-publishing. Okay. I, I'm not, I'll look it up. Yeah. Okay.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Um, so what do you think's gonna happen with self-publishing? What's the prediction?

AJ Harper:

I think that it, I mean, I think that people are going to find ways to do, to do their own self-publishing in ways that differentiate them from ai. So we're gonna see maybe some changes there in the way that people produce their own books and the way that people help other people produce their own books.

Mike Michalowicz:

So I'll add to this then, if I, I concur and I think there'll be some kind of certification or nomenclature saying this is human generated, not AI generated.

AJ Harper:

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People are putting that on their, on their books. And there are tests out there. I'm not up on all of it. I feel like it's still sort of wandering around trying to decide what it wants to be. But yeah. Some sort of certification. There is, there is one now. Um, one of my students, Robin, um, mentioned this to me. Um, but I do think that the audio book thing is, first of all, I think it's mandatory now to have an audio book

Mike Michalowicz:

For prescriptive nonfiction? (Everyone.) For fiction. I'll tell you the one area, maybe you could dispute this, I don't know about children's books. Um,

AJ Harper:

Why

Mike Michalowicz:

Just 'cause my own experience with a children's book. It just doesn't, it is an audio. It just doesn't translate.

AJ Harper:

Okay. But then maybe people will be writing them so that they do. Yeah. 'cause audio books have had double digit growth for so long now, and they're just continue. I mean, there just doesn't seem to be an end in sight. Yeah. And now with, um, Spotify buying FindAway Voices, and now people, more and more people ridiculous numbers are listening on Spotify now.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. That's right. That is right.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. So it's, I think it's really, and the, I think that the payment model is gonna change drastically for audio books. I think it's gonna just be a streaming model, um, which means it's probably not gonna be as much money for,

Mike Michalowicz:

It's not. And,

AJ Harper:

But it's a great tool. 'cause every, you have to think about the audiobook selling the print book. So now you've gotta really think about this. My audiobook sells my print book. Why would people want the actual print book?

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Mike Michalowicz:

Hmm. You know what's interesting is, um, with Audio Audible specifically, it is effectively streaming in that people get a subscription and when they buy your book on a subscription. The amount that gets distributed to the author is less than if they bought the book outright as an audio book. It's a, to me it's a version of Stream,

AJ Harper:

But they've already unleashed this new program where it's actual streaming to compete with Spotify. Yeah. Which makes sense. So they're piloting it to roll it out. Probably. It's just gonna be the way it is going forward.

Mike Michalowicz:

And it makes sense. So Yeah. But they'll, they'll measure what book is being streamed the most and which one isn't. Right.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. It's just, I think it's gonna be less money for the actual book itself, but I think it's gonna be better for print books, because I think it's gonna sell the print if you do it right. Yeah. People are gonna listen to your audio book to see if they want the book, then, then they're gonna buy the print book Yeah. As a souvenir of that. Or to do the exercises or to just have it on their shelf. But I think audio books are gonna shift so that you can have a contin, this is a bold prediction. We want it bold. I think audio books are gonna shift so that they are no longer just the text. So as you've been doing it already with your interviews, I think they're going to be a multi, um, maybe even release thing. So that a book, a book's life continues on long after the print book is released. So your additions or additional information comes through over an audio book.

Mike Michalowicz:

I like that. Uh, bold prediction. And you may not like this, but I wonder if there's AI integration where you can immerse the reader into the book itself. They're, they're already doing this in movies. So you can be the main character in a movie, uh, if you want. Sure.

AJ Harper:

I'm sure they can do something like that. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

So that may be coming. What, what about book advances? You wrote, wrote it down here. Are they going away? Are they coming back bigger? What, what's going on with advances?

AJ Harper:

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I, I think that they're always gonna be book advances for people who have figured out how to, how to sell it.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. So you don't think that would change necessarily? No. Um,

AJ Harper:

I think they'll be crappy for people who, you know, the publishing industry is deciding what are the trends, where can we make the most money? Sure. And it's gonna be, it's gonna be the same, but I think people will have to pay attention to their book advances and think about, um, all these new technologies and how, how it's affecting their book advances.

Mike Michalowicz:

And the advances, what I heard, tell me if this is true, is that, um, the, the big payouts, the, the big advances have been reduced, but there's more advances being made to more authors at a lower level. The money's being redistributed. Is that,

AJ Harper:

I mean, I've got authors getting significant deals. So it's hard to tell.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah.

AJ Harper:

I just, I just, you know, they just, publishing just whips itself into a frenzy. This is, this is hot, this is urgent. And they'll just land on it. And then there's the money. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Money goes where the money is. Yes.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Mike Michalowicz:

Okay. Um, you, you mentioned AI here. Do you have predictions around AI? Even if you don't like 'em, do you have predictions of where AI's gonna go?

AJ Harper:

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Okay. You're gonna think I'm ev-- everyone's gonna disagree with me. I think it's gonna be a thing that's, I think the way everybody says, it's so cool right now when it comes to publishing, I think it's gonna be like, um, what is the right way to say this? I don't wanna say it incorrectly. Um, it's gonna be that thing that the word's escaping me, I wanna say like, persona non grata, but that's not, that's for a person. It's gonna be like bad meaning if you even have a hint AI that that you absolutely are in a completely different lower class. I hate using that term too. See, I'm searching for the right word. Yeah, I understand. Because I don't really wanna call anybody lower class or upper class, but I think it's actually gonna burst. So everything that everybody's saying is so great for writers. I think it's actually gonna be Ew. Yeah. Like MySpace.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. I remember in swimming, they came out with a suit. These are for SP racing, you know, swimmers, racing swimmers. Is that what, where they use speed swimmers?

AJ Harper:

I don't know.

Mike Michalowicz:

Uh, they made these suits called like shark skin and literally emulated a shark skin. And what's unique about a shark is the channeling of the outer skin flows water and almost causes it to propel you fast. It does cause you to propel you faster. So how that channels water. So they made these suits and, uh, since somebody swimmers started to win, and then was that cheating? Like when is, is it no longer human because it's been augmented too far and they took the suits back? I, I may be bastardizing that story, but I wonder if at a certain point the augmentation is too much.

AJ Harper:

It is. And I think what we're going to discover is people are going to get to that essence of humanity. Yeah. And so then anything, but that is gonna be a shoot. At least in terms of creativity.

Mike Michalowicz:

I a hundred percent agree. There's a book out there called The Comfort Crisis. Yeah. Forgive me, I can't remember the author. But I think that's what's happening is at a certain point we use so many tools, so many things that we just lose the human journey. And then that's the worst of the worst.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. I think we're gonna come to a new understanding about that in terms of creativity. Yeah. And a new reverence for not being using technology at all. I also wanna go back to audiobooks

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and ai. I think for fiction, we're gonna be more ai because, so if you're a self-published author and you write fiction, you, it's very expensive to be able to hire somebody to do the audiobook. It's thousands and thousands of dollars. So you are probably not gonna do it. But now they can use AI generated voices. So for fiction, that's already happening all, all over the place. And it's making it easier for self-published and for small presses.

Mike Michalowicz:

Here's a bold, bold prediction. Within five years, the first fiction author writes their own book and creates their own movie that gets national attention and demand. And I

AJ Harper:

Think, hasn't that already happened? <laugh>?

Mike Michalowicz:

Here's a bold,

AJ Harper:

I feel like it's probably happened.

Mike Michalowicz:

Bold past someone's created their own movie. Like actually no. The whole thing. Like a one person.

AJ Harper:

Oh, you mean a one, A one person band?

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. One person band on writing the book, creating the movie. All right. And distributing. I'd love to see that. I think that's, I think that's within five years. Okay.

AJ Harper:

Uh, and distributing it, that's a real problem.

Mike Michalowicz:

Well, there's channel channels like YouTube, so I didn't say national notoriety, but it's not, maybe it's not in your theater, but maybe it is.

AJ Harper:

Maybe it

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Mike Michalowicz:

Is. You think about these indies. What, what was that Indie? The, um, I see dead people. Not that I see dead people. The the witch one. The witch Blair Witch Project. Yeah. That was an indie, right. That got so much momentum. Yes. Going into theaters. I think it's within five years. Book clubs, what's happening with book clubs.

AJ Harper:

I think they're gonna be bigger. I think they'd be more influential. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

That is the most common scam for authors. So any author listening in probably can relate to this. You probably get 'em all the time. I get daily emails. From someone at a Gmail account. That's the first tip off that says, uh, stroke your Ego. Stroke your Ego. I have a book club, all these thousand people, and here's the fee to get in. And it's like, so my team almost fell. One came in, they're like, oh, we should tell Mike, thank God I was in the office, the benefit of the physical office and overheard. I said, I'm not trying to eavesdrop, but those are scams. We get 'em constantly. I've been filtering

AJ Harper:

Them. I I get every, all of us get them. Yeah. It's really hard. But I do think book clubs are going to become more specialized and powerful and influential. Kind of like book talk influencers. I think there's gonna be influential book clubs beyond Reese, uh, Jenna, Oprah. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about indie sort of groups. Much like, almost like offshoots of the indie bookstores. You know mm-hmm <affirmative>. That'll be influential Clubs.

Mike Michalowicz:

I like that. Those book influencers. Yeah. And the, the more niche, the better. It, it's so interesting. The, I was watching, uh, advertising and back in the day, 50 years ago, 60 years ago, if you could just have the budget to run commercials on television enough times, like for Folgers or Filter the Brim with Rim, you dominated the space. So there was like four or five coffees. You go to coffee, any aisle out of a supermarket, there's hundreds of these indie coffees. And gosh, if you go to a special store, there's thousands of them. And it sounds like the same thing's gonna happen with books.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. And direct sales, I think are gonna go through the roof.

Mike Michalowicz:

Do you think the length of the book is gonna change?

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AJ Harper:

Yeah. I It'll gonna be shorter.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah. Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

AJ Harper:

I wanna, I'm, I'm talking in non-fiction. Yeah. Non-fiction and non-fiction.

Mike Michalowicz:

You know, the pendulum swings. I wonder, I wonder if it's gonna swing back to super immersive, super long. I don't know. Particularly if we have this non-linear reading and consumption. Hmm. I don't know.

AJ Harper:

The direct sales though. Don't sleep on that. Yeah. That's huge. And I think Big Five is gonna get super involved in it. Just like they've been getting involved in hybrid and providing distribution for hybrid.

Mike Michalowicz:

Uh, a lot of things. Uh, one thing that a lot of people don't know about traditional was maybe 10 years ago to 15 years ago, they didn't care about audio at all. Like, like literally when, when we published Profit First, we should have bought, I should have bought the audio rights. I should have retain them.

AJ Harper:

Oh my God. Can you imagine?

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh my God. That, that would've been literally millions of dollars. Yeah. And I had the opportunity, I'm like, I didn't really get it. So they they outsourced it to some third party company.

AJ Harper:

Yeah. They just point, they just sell their rights point

Mike Michalowicz:

Off. Right. Yeah. Get rid. Yeah. So then I, I called them and said, you can make a lot more money if you control these rights. They're like, really? I'm like, yeah, penguin. And so I asked or

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insisted that they get the rights back, which was a fa I should have said, just give 'em to me. Which I don't know if they would've done. Um, but that's long gone. That keeps the lights on for them. Uh, any other predictions you have coming up? Workbooks in the notes, workbooks?

AJ Harper:

Oh, I think for nonfiction, I think, um, and I've been telling my people to do this from the get put the workbook out immediately. So we used to do workbooks if a book was successful enough to warrant it. Yeah. Now I say write it in tandem Yeah. With the main book and ha release them at the same time. And I think we're just gonna see more of that.

Mike Michalowicz:

Didn't do it work.

AJ Harper:

People trying to control so that the AI bots Yeah. Are not making money and off their content, but worse, destroying the brand destroys

Mike Michalowicz:

The brand. There's hundreds of AI Profit First workbooks. Yes.

AJ Harper:

Horrible. And there will never be Horrible a Profit First workbook.

Mike Michalowicz:

And I, and I can't 'cause of the publisher. Yeah. The Money Habit. We should get right to that. Um,

AJ Harper:

You should,

Mike Michalowicz:

Last thing before we wrap things up here, just looking at the, the clock. Anything that authors can do to stay on top of this stuff?

AJ Harper:

Well, I mean, listen to Don't write that. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz:

Oh good. I was gonna say, yeah. Yeah. Makes Read. Subscribe to this show. Yeah.

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AJ Harper:

I would say listen to other, to people. I also really love Joanna Penn's, um, podcast. I think hers is great. Hashtag I'm writing is great. Um, ink in her veins, which is Rachel Heron's podcast, these are all podcasts I recommend they keep the finger on the pulse. And, uh, those are people that I think have a lot of integrity and, um, know what they're talking about. So if you, if you wanna learn more about this stuff, you'll hear a lot more fiction over on those. Um, so if you wanna hear that variant. And then also, um, I highly recommend following Jane Friedman, F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N. Um, who knows every single thing there is about publishing and she's a woman of high integrity. So I would also just start following her at a minimum. And she has a great blog with lots of guest posts. She keeps her finger on the pulse of everything.

Mike Michalowicz:

And go to ajharper.com, sign up for your newsletter. I

AJ Harper:

Do have a newsletter. I know that is true. I get it every, I'm not really newsy in it though.

Mike Michalowicz:

No, but it's, it's extremely informative. I get it. Every Monday. Is that what you said? Friday? Every Friday. Okay. Yeah. Once a week. I look forward to it. Wealth format is consistent. It's awesome. Um, so go to ajharper.com plus you of coursework and stuff and, and I got a bunch of stuff, tons of stuff going on. Next week we might talk about hybrid versus traditional revisiting publishing path, pros and cons. The reason I say might is we inserted an episode, uh, with, depends on

AJ Harper:

This one. Well, I think we'll still be doing that one. It's just

Mike Michalowicz:

We will, but, but if another thing comes up on week, Griffin, it's true. We may insert that. We might have

AJ Harper:

An update.

Mike Michalowicz:

Yeah, we have an update or something like that. So

AJ Harper:

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You know what I would love, I would love if our listeners want us to talk about something that's in the news and want us to give our take on it. And I mean, publishing news, just so we're really clear. No other news. Um, you know, we haven't done a ton of it. We did a little bit. We did the Mel Robbins and we did um, Amy Griffin. But if there's something you want us to discuss, we'll be happy to insert another episode.

Mike Michalowicz:

That's brilliant. Yeah. That's brilliant. Alright, my friends, get the day, the free resources. It's at dw.tb.podcast.com. Visit [ajs site](http://ajs.site) aj.harper.com and uh, please rate and review the show. That helps us out tremendously. Uh, I think we're good for today. Just remember this. Don't write that book. Write the greatest book you can.