An Interview with Chris Stead – Old Mate Media

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at
Time with Tannia
(http://timewithtannia.com)

By:

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1.) From award winning author at age 7 to a publishing house owner. Would you consider that award as a validation of your creativity which paved the way to become the man you are today? Please share your journey with our readers.

I always loved to write. In hindsight, it's amazing to think I used to win the creative expression awards at school at such a young age given where I've ended up. I've always written, and even as I set out on a career path to become a scientist, I was still working for magazines in the background. As it turned out, I never did science professionally. I just kept writing.

After the best part of two decades making magazines and websites for other publishers, I began to get frustrated with being the creative force, but owning none of the product and getting only a tiny piece of the pie. So, I started Old Mate Media and began to turn all I had learned over the years towards creating content that I owned, controlled and got all the profits for releasing. Plus, I wanted to have something I could pass on to my children (should they have similar interests).

Initially I stuck with video gaming, the medium in which I had won awards and been very successful. I created a new magazine and website called Grab It, which did well. Then when my first born came along I started making up stories for him. He loved them, so I decided to try my hand at Children's Books as my skills transitioned across without problem.

I enjoy it so much that we've kicked the whole business in that direction, and now we're not only releasing a lot of books and experimenting with what is possible in digital media, but also helping other indie authors and illustrators realise their dreams of getting published, too. And because of where I came from as a creative, we know how important it is to make sure indies keep 100% of the rights to their own work.

2.) What came first, *"The Wild Imagination of Willy Nilly"* series or Old Mate Media?

Old Mate Media was in existence, but had started as a digital publishing company focusing on video gaming content.

After creating The Wild Imagination of Willy Nilly, we expanded the company to work more on publishing children's books. We still make a lot of magazines and web content as well, but my heart is with the books.

3.) How did you choose the illustrator for your first series?

Great question. It's almost like it was meant to be. We had reached out to several artists we had encountered through places like Instagram and Linkedin looking for samples. When Ronzkie sent in her idea for the character and world we just loved it. It had a great mix of Eastern and Western styles; the characters were so expressive; and her colouring was very rich. She was very proactive in taking ideas and giving them her own spin and adding extra details. We just worked really well together. We've worked with probably over 30 illustrators in the years since, but I still very much enjoy the creative relationship we have through Willy Nilly.

4.) After that series, Old Mate Media became an independent book publisher. What prompted you to expand your services to other indie authors and illustrators across the world? How do you choose your illustrators?

After successfully publishing seven children's books we started receiving enquiries about helping other authors publish their books. There was a large gap in the market between the traditional publisher model and what actually worked for indie authors who want to be creative and experiment without over-investing.

With decades of experience working across all facets of the publishing industry, and a number of successfully released books in the market, we knew we could provide these services at a fraction of the cost. Plus, we were happy to empower authors with knowledge and all the assets they needed for a successfully publishing life without us, rather than set up complex royalty systems or hold the finished product to ransom by keeping the files. We think this gives indies the helping hand they need, while keeping them fully independent.

Soon enough, people started to find us, and use us, and were thankfully happy to share their experiences with other authors, allowing us to continually grow.

5.) What type of awards has Old Mate Media won?

I've received several personal awards from Australian media foundations. Best writer, best editor, best cover design, best publication (a number of times). Our first digital publication managed to pick up a runners-up award in the international Digital Magazine Awards, losing out to veteran tech publication Wired. That was great.

We've been included in the honorary lists for Local Business Awards here in Australia as well. Meanwhile our books have picked up awards here and there from various sites. However, I'm not overly thrilled with the way many Indie Book Award programs are run – lack of transparency, cost of submissions, etc. – so, maybe we should launch one of our own in the future?

6.) When did you decide to expand your publishing services from picture books to other genres?

Actually, our first handful of books included just the one children's book. We did a cookbook, a sci-fi novel and a video games information book in those first few months, so we were always diverse. It was more that children's books fit so well with us as a young family that we put them front and centre.

Nowadays I would say our two focus areas for publishing are picture books and non-fiction. My wife Kate's extensive marketing and sales background made non-fiction an easy fit. For most non-fiction authors, their book is just one element of their overall marketing strategy. Kate works closely with our non-fiction clients to help them best position their book to sell strongly and provide that touchpoint to drive more customers to their broader business offerings.

7.) Why do indie authors choose Old Mate Media for their publishing needs?

Old Mate Media creates world class publications on an indie budget. They're beautiful, professional products that will stand the test of time and can be used anywhere – from an iPad to a boutique book story on Broadway, and everything in between. We also educate and coach authors through the process, supporting them during the publishing journey and empowering them to go fully self-published in the future if that is their goal.

Our authors love that we work so closely with them, helping them navigate the maze of indie publishing. They love that we strive to realise their vision, taking the time to get the book right. We care about their book. Plus, then we hand over all the files, giving them complete ownership of their creative work.

8.) As an indie author myself I know, first hand, the importance of having your book professionally edited. That is one of those services you offer to indie authors who want their book to stand out among others. How do you determine the level of edits and cost for children's picture book, YA short story, comic, magazine or novel?

Editing is so important for any author and it is an investment. It's important to do early on, too. We get many authors who reach out to us with works that have yet to be edited, for example, yet they've already gone and got art made or commissioned. Even covers done when they don't even know the final size of the book! Then you edit the book and establish that some pages need to be altered or shifted about and all of a sudden a lot of money has been wasted.

We focus our editing services on picture books and have a set rate for a standard-length book (under 1000 words). The editing will vary depending on the book. Some stories need help with traditional editing (grammar, spelling, punctuation). But we also focus in on the actual story flow, themes, character development, narrative arcs, and all those pieces of the puzzle that need to come together to help your book be an effortless and entertaining read.

Part of the process involves pagination and working out if and where we might be able to trim the fat, as more pages means more production (art, design, print) and that costs more money. So, we can look for ways to save money for authors there without compromising the story.

Really, we cater it to the project. Even just having that conversation about best book dimensions, layout ideas and that final end product can then impact how you re-imagine the text to work. Our editing process is about getting the story from words on paper, to a product that is not only print-ready, but has a path to completion spelled out that the author can then walk (with or without us).

Ultimately though, editing is about providing suggested changes and improvements – the story must always be that of the author.

9.) Is that service also available for authors who are not publishing with you? If yes, how can those authors contact you?

Yes definitely. We want to help as many authors as we can, and we understand that some authors will only need help with just one part of the publishing journey. The best way for authors to reach us is to pop their details on our Contact Form or book in a time to chat with Kate.

10.) Marketing is a huge headache for many indie authors. How do you cope with this issue and help authors to reach their targeted audience?

Marketing for an indie author is a marathon, not a sprint. We ask all our authors to consider their goals, resources and opportunities and then we suggest marketing methods that work best for them.

For example, one of our authors sings in hotels in Torquay. He sells his books as part of his show, ordering 50 or so copies at a time through IngramSpark. Amazon is not a focus for him and nor should it be. Another author is using Amazon sales to drive new eyes to his business, so keywords and Amazon ads are very important to him.

Everyone is unique and their path to book sales will be just as unique.

11.) A word of advice for authors who are struggling with the decision of "how" to publish – traditional vs indie. What are the key elements that should be taken in consideration during the analysis and decision making process?

There's a whole interview just in this question. But there's few key things authors can consider.

Timing: Traditional publishing takes a lot longer – if timing is important, go indie. You could spend years sending off emails and requests and maybe never get accepted (or even a reply!)

Marketability: Is your book on trend? Will it sell well to a broad audience? Sometimes niche books which don't have a broad appeal are just not viable for traditional publishers.

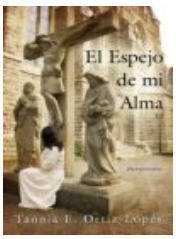
Control: Traditional publishers control illustrator choice, cover design, final editing, pricing and marketing. Ultimately, they control the files and all you get at the end is a royalty rate – often as low as 5%. Many authors will like that as 5% of a lot of sales is worth considering and if you're not wedded to your story, it can be less stressful to hand over much of the production. But for us, controlling and owning your work is vital and we enable that.

Budget: Do you have the resources to publish your book? If you have a fantastic story but no money for an illustrator, you may be better placed to invest your time pitching your story to publishers who will cover those costs for you.

12.) New releases for 2020?

We are very excited to release more Willy Nilly books in 2020. We are aiming to release at least four across the year including a very fun choose your own adventure style digital book that is fully interactive. It's called ***Willy Nilly's Silly Billy Magic Hats***.

We're also hoping to release book two in the Adam Exitus series, a young adult science-fiction novel and an early chapter book about a pit pony, Gentle George. We actually have around 20 completed works ready to go, but a priority for us is our clients, which often means we push our own works back to help our indie authors.



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