



**An Indie Author Moves Away From Books
Interview with Jeff Rivera**

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KENNEALLY: The rise of independent publishing, also known as self-publishing, has changed the book business as dramatically as social media has affected the news cycle. What once were closed systems that gatekeepers strictly managed for their own benefits are now open, expansive, and welcoming. When the tables first turned earlier in this decade, authors rejoiced. But in 2018 the celebration may be dying down.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for *Beyond the Book*. According to Belker, (sp?) more than three quarters of a million ISBNs were assigned to self-published titles in 2016. In 2011, book title registrations of the same type were just under a quarter million. For 2016, the latest available figures, numbers of print titles rose 11% year over year, a sharp fall from a 34% hike in 2015. E-book title registrations also dropped in 2016 by 3%. Belker identified an ongoing maturation and stabilization of the self-publishing industry in those numbers.

Now, certainly self-published authors like Jeff Rivera can confirm that the market winds have shifted. A best selling author of dozens of titles in a wide range of genres, Rivera rode the self-publishing wave to considerable heights, though he recently announced in a blog post he will suspend his book writing to focus exclusively on filmmaking. He joins me now from his home in Costa Rica to explain the reasons for the move, and why he thinks other indie authors should be reviewing their options. Jeff Rivera, welcome to *Beyond the Book*.

RIVERA: Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're looking forward to chatting with you about this because your blog post caught my eye, Jeff, and it seemed to me a very timely one, and one that addresses what is the underlying of many in the independent author community, and that is, which way the future? Self-publishing was once a bad word in the book business. Clearly that's changed. To be sure, Jeff, you are a hybrid author, Hachette published *Forever My Lady* in 2007 after you had already sold thousands of self-published copies. But you have focused on e-books and



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Amazon's Kindle Direct publishing program. It's all made for quite a rollercoaster ride, hasn't it?

RIVERA: It has. I've always been sort of a practical person. I thought, what's the best thing for my career and my direction? At one point it was traditional publishing, and then it shifted to self-publishing, now it's shifted to something else. So I'm really excited about what's going to happen in the future.

KENNEALLY: Describe the work that goes into writing as a fully-employed self-published author. There's a lot of material that has to be poured out. It must take a toll emotionally and professionally, as well.

RIVERA: It is, it's a lot of work, but it was also a lot of fun, too. I enjoyed having total creative control, everything from, of course, the writing of it to having hands on in terms of editing it, in terms of marketing it, in terms of the PR involved, in terms of choosing the book cover or formatting. I enjoyed collaborating with different experts who are really great at those sort of things, and also sometimes doing the whole thing myself. It's a lot of work, it is, and for those like me who enjoy that process, it's something that's also enjoyable, too.

KENNEALLY: Has it given you insights into the business itself? I guess as an author, your first responsibility is to write the material, of course, use your imagination to the best you can, but there's so much else that goes on once you turn off the computer.

RIVERA: Oh, I've learned so much about the business. Having come from the traditional world and having quite a few friends and colleagues in the industry, I got to see firsthand all that's involved when you roll up your sleeves, positioning your novel in such a way, presenting it in a certain way toward the public. It's a lot of work, it really is. I think that some people, when they look at a book, they don't realize all that goes into creating that and putting it out to the world.

KENNEALLY: It's certainly true people don't realize that. They just plunge into the story and that's what they care about the most. But this has given you a deeper look into the publishing world, particularly in the indie publishing world. What is the change that you're seeing here? We hear that indie publishing numbers are growing, they still are, they aren't growing quite as fast as they once were. So what is it you're seeing, and what are you reacting to?



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RIVERA: Well, definitely there's a shift. There was the big indie publishing boom about maybe five or six years ago, and that was around the age of Amanda Hocking, whatnot, and then later came other people like Hugh Howey, so there was a huge wave. But then (inaudible) this happened with the primary source of income for a lot of authors, and that is Amazon. They have a system called KDP, and they offered an opportunity for readers to be able to do all you can eat buffet of books, or a Netflix style which is called Kindle Unlimited. This was great for the consumer. As a consumer I loved it. As an author, it really made a lot of changes in terms of authors – how they get paid by the page that was read. Maybe Amazon wasn't as transparent about how that was done, so you're not always able to see are the numbers accurate, are they inaccurate? And then a lot of people were taking advantage of the system, so that really created a lot of issues.

But what I noticed mostly, and I have for the last few years is consumer attention in general. I looked at my own consumer attention in terms of entertainment. What am I looking at? Am I reading more? What am I reading? Am I listening more to audiobooks? What I'm listening to? But I noticed that a lot attention the last year and a half has really shifted from reading not only physical books or e-books, but more to social media, more to gaming, more to live events, more to music, more to films, more to Netflix-style television binge watching. I had to take a real practical realistic look at consumer behavior and think to myself, where do I want to be? Do I want to keep on holding on to where I want it to be – where they want the attention to be – or do I want to be where the attention actually is right now. It's not even what's happening in the future, it's what's happening right now when you take an honest look at where consumer behavior is, that's where I want to head.

KENNEALLY: This is all creating what you refer to on the blog as the perfect storm for lower readership.

RIVERA: Absolutely. I think, as a consumer, things like Kindle Unlimited are wonderful, but I've even noticed that although my primary source of income was actually from Kindle Unlimited, even that has shifted from my most passionate fans, they're paying more attention to social media, that's where their eyeballs are. So I know that if I want to make a living, that I have to go where those eyeballs are if I'm looking at where the attention is right now, where it's heading.

KENNEALLY: And you are based in Costa Rica right now, but you travel back and forth to New York City quite a lot, and you said on the blog that you were riding on the subway and just noticed something that had changed in the 10 years, really, since you've been away.



RIVERA: Oh, dramatically. Let's just talk about riding the subways. Riding a subway in New York is wonderful because you get a cross-section of not only all of America, but all the world. I paid attention to, back then about 10 years ago, how many people, what percentage of people on the train were reading. About that time about 25% of the people would be reading physical books, magazines, e-books, that sort of thing. On this recent trip a about a month and a half ago, when I rode the train I noticed that I was lucky to find maybe one person that was reading anything at all – a magazine. In fact, I talked to her, that one person on the car of hundreds of people that were there, and we talked about that, how rare it is we see anyone reading. I'm sure there were people who were listening to audio books, but not quite as many as I'd like to see.

So that was a real eye-opener for me, a real validation that I was making the right choice in the direction that I was going.

KENNEALLY: Let's talk about that direction you're going, because you're going from wearing quite a lot of hats as a self-published author to wearing at least as many and maybe more as an independent filmmaker.

RIVERA: It is, it's really funny because many of the reasons why I wanted to be an author was because I wanted to see my stories on the screen. Now, in many ways it's easier than ever to have that happen. You just have to be open to what type of screen that you want your readers or your viewers to see your story. I've always been passionate about filmmaking, I have been since I was a little kid, but I put that dream aside in my early 20s because I had some negative experiences as a filmmaker and decided to put my attention to more books. I'd always wanted to be an author, as well, so I had an opportunity to do that for the last 10 years or so. Just now, at the age of 41, I'm reinventing myself as a filmmaker, going forward again, learning a hands-on how to do my own cinematography, how to do my own sound, how to do my own editing, but also CGI work – computer generated imagery – learning how to use that as a tool. There's so many opportunities to be able to get in front of people through Netflix, through Google Play, through Amazon video services, through Hulu, all through different distribution sources that are a nominal fee, and it's really kind of amazing.

KENNEALLY: It's interesting, there's a parallel experience here because the self-publishing revolution came about because of the technology, the tools that were suddenly in the hands of authors that they had never had access to before, and just the tremendous advancement in the quality of video photography today. It's now



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nearly inseparable from the screen, from what we thought of as being feature films. In fact, there are feature films now being shot on the iPhone. So what we've got is an opportunity to pick up that technology, and you are doing that, and tell those stories in a way that will be indistinguishable from a story maybe told by a small studio, anyway, in Hollywood.

RIVERA: Absolutely. The tools are available, they're affordable. It's possible to make your own film without even leaving your bedroom. It's possible to make your whole story with your own iPhone or own android. It's amazing what's available. Let's say 15 years ago, that wasn't possible. It was a big deal just to have a digital camera, let alone to be able to use your own mobile phone to tell a story with the same quality that you – therefore a layman would be indistinguishable from something that would see from Hollywood. Maybe someone who's actually in the industry would nitpick about the technicalities and that sort of thing, but for the average person, they really can't see a difference between the two qualities, so it really empowers artists to be able to do what they want to do affordably.

KENNEALLY: And finally, Jeff Rivera, it really all does come down to storytelling after all. You're just taking a different media and using your talents in storytelling there.

RIVERA: Absolutely. No matter what, no matter how much money you spend on the screen, off the screen, at the end of the day it is about storytelling, it is about whether you captured the hearts and the minds of the viewers. The audience doesn't know how much money you spent, whether you have two crew members or 2,000. All you know at the end of the day is, is this story something that's compelling? Is this story something captured my heart, captured my mind, something I want to share with other people. At the end of the day, that's all that matters.

KENNEALLY: We've been chatting today with Jeff Rivera, best selling author of independent publishing novels and short stories and looking at some new directions for Jeff Rivera, and where, in fact, independent publishing may be headed. Jeff Rivera, thanks for joining us on *Beyond the Book*.

RIVERA: Thank you for having me.

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Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Join us again soon on *Beyond the Book*.

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