

# Writers all over the world rave about an app - run from a spare room in Cornwall

By David Wells

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Keith Blount - the developer who created Scrivener

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Millions of people around the world are fans of their work – tuning into their television shows, poring over their novels and losing themselves in

their plot lines.

Few fans of television, film or literature will, however, be aware that many of the greatest works by some of their best-loved authors and screenwriters were composed with the aid of a genius bit of creative computer kit developed by a former primary school teacher – from his spare room in Cornwall.



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Now the content-generation, writing studio app called Scrivener, created by Keith Blount, is not only used by best-selling novelists, writers, authors, journalists, academics and other creatives all over the world – many of whom swear by its usefulness – but Scrivener has also grown into a global business with a turnover of around £2 million.

Many writers, including Neil Cross, who has used Scrivener as he was writing for the BBC show Spooks, Doctor Who and the hit TV series Luther starring Idris Elba as Detective John Luther – a show that last year pulled in five million viewers for the opening episode of the third series – say that Scrivener is such a useful tool in the creative process that they now wonder how they managed before without it.

Other best-selling names in a long line-up of authors who sing the praises of Scrivener, and suggest their creativity has been aided by using it, include writer Michael Marshall Smith, author of One of Us and Only Forward, mystery novel writer and journalist David Hewson, who wrote the popular Nic Costa series of books, and Marie Phillips, author of Gods Behaving Badly.

Author Michael Marshall Smith whose 2007 novel The Intruders has now been adapted for an upcoming television series on BBC America called Intruders, was so impressed by how he has been able to work with the software that he offered a testimonial to the app, saying: “Scrivener is where I live. I’m planning the next novel, two screenplays and a couple of short stories with it and it’s amazing how fluid the

software makes the process. I genuinely think this is the biggest software advance for writers since the word processor.”

Keith has spent the best part of the last decade building up his company Literature and Latte on the back of sales of Scrivener – which sells from about £25 upwards and has now sold more than 200,000 copies worldwide and has a long list of writers offering their own testimonials to the app on the company webpage.

Despite that, Keith said: “I still get excited when I hear of another author using Scrivener – every time. It’s great to hear how it is being used and it is still exciting every time I hear of a new author or writer saying they’ve used it to create a novel or something like that.”

The magic of Scrivener lies in the fact that it works like a writer thinks – working as a notebook, index cards, cork notice-board and ring-binder all in one flowing content system like none before it.

That idea – to make it work like a writer might organise notes on a wall-mounted notice board – was inspired by double-Booker Prize-winning Westcountry writer Hilary Mantel, who lives in Budleigh Salterton in Devon and is the author of the highly acclaimed novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up The Bodies*.

Keith, who runs the Literature and Latte business with his wife Julia from their home in Truro, where they live with their three children aged four, eight and 10, explained that about 10 years ago, he had read about how Mantel would ‘grow’ a story idea.

He said the essay told how Mantel carried around notebooks and index cards on which she would write down ideas, rip them out and then pin them to a cork notice-board at home because at the beginning of the creative process, writers do not know how the story might emerge and notes can be moved around, developed, expanded upon and edited as the original idea develops.

Keith said: “Years ago, I read a book of essays and she wrote about her method of putting scraps of ideas into a ringbinder and taking index cards and plotting with those cards, moving them around.

“That’s kind of the point of Scrivener as it allows you to work in just that way, the way a writer might work.”

He said that is what Scrivener allows the writer to do – writers can expand on scraps of notes, hammer out details, fine-tune and reformat in a way that word processing programs do not allow. Writers can shuffle, outline, storyboard, annotate, rewrite in any way they want, in small sections or notes, or the whole lengthy document. What is more intriguing about the growth of the Literature and Latte company, which now employs a team of about seven staff based in offices around the world from London, to Sydney, Australia, to Portland, Oregon, in the US, including Keith’s journalist wife Julia who now runs the press and publicity for the firm, is that Keith never set out to run a software company at

all in the first place.

Keith said his main ambition had always been that he, too, would one day be a writer.

He said the idea for Scrivener, which began life in about 2006 when he was living in London where he spent time as a school teacher in Lewisham and also worked for a time in the NHS, first came about during his initial attempts to write a novel and while he was struggling to write academically for a PhD.

He said he became frustrated with all the word-processing packages on the market as none of them worked the way his mind worked – how the mind of a writer in a creative flow might work. He set about trying to create his own software package that would bend to his needs – teaching himself programming to learn how to build a software app.

Then, Scrivener really began to take off after he moved with Julia, who is from Cornwall, to bring up their children in the Westcountry, and be nearer to her parents in Bodmin. The development of the software became a distraction from trying to write a novel and his academic work, and slowly began to take over his life.

Keith built up a small, online community of followers, mainly in the south of England, who began spreading the word of how the app was a ground-breaking tool for writers.

Before long, there were other writers picking up on the app, and its popularity began spreading with authors swearing by it as a must-have tool for creative writing.

Now, there is a global following and the Literature and Latte brand just keeps growing.

Authors from all over the world have since become enthralled by the app, with many saying they could hardly work without it now they have used it.

Bradley Spinelli, who lives in Brooklyn, New York, and is the author of the novel *Killing Williamsburg* and other works, is just one of the authors who have been inspired by Scrivener, so much so that last month he posted on Twitter: “I think @ScrivenerApp should be paying me a commission – I’m selling it to novelists like a religious fanatic at the airport.”

Spinelli told WMN on Sunday: “I’ve been working on a Bangkok-based novel, and the first draft ballooned to 170,000 words (the size of *Catch-22* or *The Fellowship of the Ring*).

“Scrivener is unparalleled in terms of organisation, giving you multiple options of how to tag and track characters, devices, or threads. Being able to instantly view the work as a whole, and easily move entire sections, is priceless in constructing larger works.

“Best of all, Scrivener is ultimately customisable – almost any feature can be tweaked to your specific needs, which is a godsend to anyone who’s spent hours wrestling with the defaults and limitations of Microsoft Word.”

Reviewers say while the task of writing a lengthy novel or research paper can often be daunting as countless notes, folders and scribbles mount up and often go missing, Keith’s app can help manage the project by keeping all those words together and organise the work in a way that the writer sees fit – whether or not they like to work in a methodical way or enjoy some spontaneous chaos.

Kelly Falcone, associate professor of Health and Kinesiology at Palomar College in San Marcos, California, on her blog last year, with a post entitled @ScrivenerApp, how I love thee! My dissertation savior!”, she wrote: “I just recently found out about Scrivener.

“I am not a writer and was not searching for software to write a book, rather I am a doctoral student with mounds of research articles and was in need of a way to organise my research, my thoughts, and my writing for my dissertation proposal.

“Prior to Scrivener I would say I had a pretty good organisation system, but it is nothing compared to how organised I feel now with Scrivener!”

Keith and Julia still run the entire Scrivener operation from the same spare bedroom where much of the original programme was developed but Keith says that has now been turned into a proper office which acts as the company’s Truro headquarters. And his friend David Johnson also now works for the company from his base in Cambourne.

However, despite the success of the project, Keith says the ambition of writing a novel himself still burns inside him.

“Ultimately,” he says, “that is still my goal.”