An Introduction to the Publishing Industry Today

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**Part 1**

**Advice from the publishing professionals**

Once upon a time, not so long ago, I thought the typical publishing journey would go something like this… sign a book contract and then be instantly propelled to fame.

My dream was shattered at a Legend Press event in 2011 where I met real life Publishers, Agents and Editors. I want to share the advice they gave us because it was a real eye opener.

**In Part 1 we’ll be covering:**

What Agents are recommending you do before you submit your manuscript

What Editors are looking for in a good novel

What Publishers are expecting from you as the author

The Agents on the panel were quick to slice through our dreams with the reality.  
  
**They advised the following:**

* Research their websites thoroughly and check they represent your chosen genre before contacting them
* Present a CV that advertises your writing ability and publishing history
* Prove that you’re industrious – Do you regularly enter writing competitions? Have you exhibited your work at any book fairs? Are you raising your literary profile and building your readership? In other words, have you got an established tried and tested author platform up and running?

**This is what an author platform should contain:**

* A professional website that details your literary inspirations and aspirations, showcases your work, has a YouTube video of you reading an excerpt from your book, an Events page (book signings etc) and must be easy to navigate
* A blog
* Facebook and Twitter profiles
* Optional – a Google+ profile
* Optional – a personalised Facebook Page for your book

[Check out more information on developing your online presence and author platform.](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/category/author-platform-series/1.html)

**Harder to obtain but pure gold if you can get your hands on them:**

* A list of any literary competitions you’ve been shortlisted for
* An endorsement letter from a well-known book club such as [www.lovereading.co.uk](http://www.lovereading.co.uk/)
* An endorsement letter from a book buyer like Tesco or from the book retail trade

**You should be able to answer the “marketing questions” using these 4 headers:**  
  
**YOU** – Why did you write the book? Are you social networking yourself as a brand? Are you marketable as an author?  
  
**BOOK** – What is the hook? Is it marketable? Does the story link back to you and your life experience/s?  
  
**TARGET MARGET** – Who will buy your book, and why?  
  
**APPEAL TO TARGET MARKET** – How will your book appeal to the target market?  
  
  
**REMEMBER, THIS IS BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONALS ARE INVESTING IN YOU   
  
YOU NEED TO BE A BRAND  
  
YOU DO THIS BY CREATING AND CULTIVATING YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM**

Journalists love an easy headline and people are intrigued by real life.

We had an Editor from Headline and one from Simon & Schuster on the panel.

**These were the things they wanted from a new manuscript:**

* An engaging voice
* Emotional reaction
* Obvious selling points
* A brilliant “hook you in” first chapter
* An original twist on an established genre
* Unusual combinations like Eat Pray Love meets The Devil Wears Prada
* Unique Selling Point (USP) – what’s the marketing angle / hook for publicity?

There are only 5 or 6 key book buyers for the UK. Even if an Editor loves your manuscript, they still have to get it past their marketing and sales team and convince them it’s a winner.  
  
Nowadays, Publishers want hard evidence of tangible sales. This is why many debut authors are going down the self-publishing route first. Their aim is to prove there’s a market and readership for their work. If you can self publish, market and sell 2,000 copies of your book, AWESOME. If you can self publish, market and sell between 4,000 to 5,000 copies, that’s exceptional and a Publisher should be knocking at your door!  
  
Publishers expect your input in the marketing strategy and campaign. They want to know your REACH – how many people can you target in one hit with each individual marketing idea?  
  
**THERE IS NO MARKETING BUDGET FOR DEBUT AUTHORS**  
  
Traditional publishing houses still believe in reviews, but to move with the times, think about the hooks and angles of your story for a book feature. This is much more powerful.  
  
From signing the book deal, it’s usually a year until the publication date – and guess what – the publication date is just the beginning…  
  
It’s not just about the writing anymore. Check out [the 10 jobs of a modern day writer](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2013/07/the-10-jobs-of-a-modern-day-writer.html" \o "" \t "_blank) to prepare yourself for this mammoth and exciting journey!

**Part 2**

**Developing your author platform**

I mentioned the all important author platform in Part 1. Here I'm going to explain just exactly what it is and how to create and cultivate it, so it becomes a solid base from which to launch your books.

I always start with the bottom line so you can see where I'm heading and this is it - if you can go to an Agent or Publisher (if you still fancy trying your hand at being traditionally published) and prove to them you already have a fan base and readership in place for your book, it stands you in a far greater position of being considered for publication. Since there is little or no marketing budget for debut novelists, you are showing them the demand is there and all they need to do is work with you to build on the foundations.

**My advice - get working on your author platform right away. If I'd known about it, I would've started mine at least two years before I published** [Little Child](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_1?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=piara+strainge&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3Apiara+strainge&ajr=0" \t "_blank).

It isn't just about making yourself known. Through developing my author platform and becoming more visible online, I've learned about the changing face of the publishing industry. Tracking trends is so important also.

In the old days, an author platform was defined by television appearances and radio interviews ie. public, high gloss visibility in the national media.

Why has it changed?

Simply because the way people choose books has changed. Now people are more likely to visit Amazon (for example) and look through recommendations, then read reviews in the press or pick up tips from a television show.

The new model of an author platform still involves visibility and reputation, of course it does, but today it's more about interaction between the author and the reader *online*.

Every good author platform should contain the following:

* A website
* A blog
* A Facebook account
* A Twitter account

How long you want to be around as an author and writer *online* largely depends on you. One thing's for sure however, it's a process that needs to continue for as long as you want a readership. Without your personal input and interaction through the above channels, your author platform won’t be viable.

**Part 3**

**The reality of being published**

I’ve had many questions about the industry and why certain things are the way they are with my debut novel, so here is the reality of today’s publishing experience for a newbie…

NB. Even if a traditional publishing house snaps you up some of this will still apply.

**Is the industry glamorous?**

Not unless you’re already a well-known celebrity. Before I went to my first networking event in January 2011, I thought the second you got published you’d become instantly famous.

**How long does it take to get published once there is interest?**

This depends. If you're lucky to hit the big time with a traditional publishing house, the book launch will likely be one year from signing the contract. For me, publishing with an Independent, it was faster and only took a month from signing the contract - eBook and paperback.

**Is an advance guaranteed?**

Sadly, no. Traditional publishers usually offer five or six-figure advances. Independents simply don't have the funds.

**Why are some books more expensive than others?**

With regards to pricing, I've published with an independent charity publisher so the price points are not as competitive as books published with the traditional publishing houses like Penguin, Orion, Harper Collins, Headline etc. Also, the way the book is printed and distributed greatly dictates the price.

**Why are some books only in eBook format, others in eBook and paperback and some in all formats including hardback?**

My publisher didn’t offer the option of hardback because it’s too costly to produce. Different publishers will offer different options depending on their clout in the publishing marketplace.

**Why aren’t all books in the shops?**

Independent publishers hold no sway with big stores like Waterstones and W.H. Smiths, and supermarkets only stock best selling authors, or "books of the moment". You have to fit one of three criteria to get into a bookstore:

1) You're a best selling author

2) Your book is about to become a film, TV show or series

3) You're a celebrity

We all know bookstores are struggling so they won't want to stock their shelves with unknowns.

**What can you expect to make per book?**

My average earnings from a paperback sold at RRP are 50p and from an eBook sold at RRP it’s 25p. Then I pay my agent commission from those amounts, so I earn peanuts really per book sold. That's why volume counts, but I'm hindered by my pricing - which unfortunately I can't control. It's a vicious circle! It's worth pointing out here that this is standard across the industry whether you're JK Rowling or little old me - you don't earn much after everybody takes their cut.

[99p?!](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2011/10/99p.html)

**Can you earn a living from writing novels?**

Not unless your book is being turned into a film franchise. Most full time writers freelance as well as writing their books to keep the pennies rolling in.

**Who is responsible for the marketing?**

Even if you publish with a traditional big name, there are limited marketing budgets for debut writers (unless there's a film franchise snapping at your heels). An author has to work harder than ever before to market not only their book, but also themselves as a brand. We are fortunate with social networking these days and having a worldwide audience at our fingertips, otherwise this could be a trickier business than it already is!

[Luxuries and Publicists](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2011/10/luxuries-publicists.html)

**Why are there mistakes in books?**

Unless you publish with a Traditional, the cost of editing and proofreading comes out of your pocket. I did the majority of the hard slog editing myself after paying for a copy editor to look over the manuscript and give me initial feedback. I read my manuscript many, many times checking for different things with each edit, but in the end, my eye was only seeing what it wanted to see. However, I read widely and it comforts me somewhat that even big names make mistakes. I've seen some howlers in best sellers.

[Self-publishing budgeting and funding](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2013/09/self-publishing-budgeting-and-funding.html)

**With the Print On Demand model, isn’t it easier to correct errors before more copies are printed and sold?**

This is true. However, there are significant costs attached if the errors are anything but formatting. My publisher, being an Independent, will charge me £300+ to resubmit the manuscript to the Printers. If there are formatting errors, they will pay to resubmit.

[The printing process](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2011/10/the-printing-process.html)

[Why self published printed books are expensive](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2013/10/why-self-published-printed-books-are-expensive.html)

**What are the levels of creative input and freedom with the traditional publishing deal verses publishing with an Independent?**

There are many benefits to publishing with an Independent (despite the lack of luxuries) primarily because you can take liberties. I kept my title Little Child, I ended the story my way, I choose my own photo for the front cover and I wrote the blurb and forward. Everything you see when you hold Little Child is MY WORK. Its integrity is intact. It was a completely self indulgent process which suited me for a story I had thought about, planned and plotted over so many years. Publishing with a Traditional would be rigorous for the good of the book and potentially it might sell better because books that are published traditionally are preconceived as “quality”. Nothing is guaranteed, however.

[The REAL deal](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2011/10/the-real-deal.html)

**What about self-publishing?**

The old vanity-publishing model has been given a face-lift and now it's perfectly acceptable to self publish. There are still challenges with pricing, but you can reach a worldwide audience instantly and sell volume. Love it or loathe it, Amazon makes this very easy and you, as the author, are in complete control of the entire publishing process. Yes, it would still be nice to be considered by a Traditional, but even these books can flop – and the fall from grace is further. If you never earn back that advance from book sales, you’ll never earn a penny of royalties.

[Why should you self publish?](http://www.piarastrainge.com/1/post/2013/08/why-should-you-self-publish.html)