

Building Your Author Platform Online Transcript

This is a transcript of the audio seminar, edited slightly for easy reading!

You can find the audio version at www.writershuddle.com/seminars/august2012

Hi, I'm Ali Luke, and this is the August seminar for Writers' Huddle – Building Your Author Platform Online.

What's an Author Platform?

Something I get asked quite often by writers is what an author platform actually is, and it's really **your ability to reach people**.

You could think of your platform a bit like being able to stand on a stage and speak to an audience, and tell those people about your book, or whatever writing you're doing, and have the attention of those people especially.

Who Needs an Author Platform?

An author platform isn't just something you need to consider if you're planning to be a novelist or write a book or something like that, where you're going to be approaching publishers -- though that is important.

It's also a way that you can build your writing business, or you can establish a fan-base if you're going to self-publish, and so on.

Whatever position you're in as a writer, whatever your interests are (assuming that you're writing for an audience rather than purely for your own pleasure) then it's important to get to grips with what's happening online. Work out how you can be involved, and how you can perhaps stand out from the crowd and get some attention through some of the really great tools that we've now got.

Three Writing Situations That Need a Platform

For me, there are three key situations when you're looking at building your author platform:

#1: Approaching a Traditional Publisher

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is when you're approaching a traditional publisher, who will want evidence of your platform. Most publishers now are looking for this.

When I've done book proposals or looked at friends' book proposals, this is something that publishers want to know. They ask about maybe if you've got a blog or a mailing list, and what sort of contacts you've got in the industry and so on.

Publishers are increasingly turning down good books because the authors simply don't have the platform and the reach to promote those books.

In an ideal world, we'd have the publishers doing all the promotion and the marketing, and we could just get on with the writing. However, it's never been that way in the publishing industry, and it's certainly not going to go any further that way in the future – **publishers are looking for authors who can market themselves, as well as authors who can write great books.**

#2: Self-Publishing a Book

If you're not going for traditional publication, if you're going to publish your book on Amazon, or on Smashwords, then you might feel that you don't need a platform.

Of course, Amazon is going to give you a platform where your book is going to be up there with all the others, and people can find it, and so on. **To get the ball rolling with sales, though, you really need people you can market to, people you can tell about your book.**

Particularly as your career develops as a writer and you hopefully produce more books, you want to get fans of your first book onto your mailing list, or onto your blog or your Facebook or your Twitter, so that they can stay in

touch, and so that when you release a second book, you can let those people know.

So, platform's really important when you're self publishing, because you do have to go it alone, and even when your book's on Amazon, or on Smashwords or in any of the major online stores, it's not going to just sell by chance.

There's a chance that somebody will type in a particular search term and find your book, but in the majority of cases, the people who buy your book initially will be people who already know you.

#3: Building a Writing-Related Business

The third situation, which I know some Huddlers are in, is if you're building a writing-related business. Maybe you're a copywriter, or you're an editor, or a proofreader, or you're somebody who provides a particular service, so you charge people by the hour, say, and you produce a piece of writing for them, or you do some editing for them.

Obviously in this case you're going to need clients, and **one of the best ways to bring clients in is by having a strong online presence.**

You might have a blog that people tend to come to and read, and then those people can see that you offer writing services, and they might hire you. Or you might have a really big Twitter following, so that if one of your friends on Twitter sees somebody looking for a writer or an editor, they can easily point that person to you, and so on.

Like I said at the start, whatever position you're in as a writer, whatever writing you're doing, it's important to just start getting to grips with the idea of a platform, even if you're at a very early stage in your writing.

Of course, it's also never too late to start building your platform, or at least to start learning about some of the technologies that I'll be speaking about.

What about Offline?

Of course you don't just have to do platform building online. There's nothing to stop you going out and about in the world, making connections face to face, perhaps going to conferences or even speaking at conferences.

That can be a perfectly valid author platform – and something that I mention to publishers is that I've spoken at industry conferences like Blogworld.

I know, though, that for many writers, me included, it can be quite scary to have to go out there and to meet lots of people face to face and to maybe give out business cards, or tell people what we do, and so on.

Many of us are probably most comfortable in front of our computer screen or in front of our notebook, where we can craft our words carefully, we don't feel put on the spot, and we don't feel too shy about talking to people.

This is why I think the online world is such a fantastic place for writers, and it's why you'll find writers very well represented in blogging and in social media and so on, because **we've got a natural advantage here – text is still the primary form of content online**, because it's easy for search engines as well as readers to get to grips with.

We are very good at producing text, we write well and fluently, which many people don't, and we can produce a really good impression through our words.

Three Key Ways to Build an Online Platform

So, there are three key ways you can start building a platform online, and they are using a blog, using a mailing list, and using social media. (Social media is sites like Twitter and Facebook and LinkedIn and so on.)

It's up to you which of these you choose. You can certainly do all three -- I've been doing all three and that's been working very well for me. When I started out, though, I focused just on blogging, and there'll be lots of other people who focus more on social media, or focus more on a mailing list.

What I would recommend is that you don't just build your platform on Twitter or Facebook or a social networking site, because then you're a little bit at the mercy of that particular site.

If their policies change or if they get a complaint against you or if the site goes under for some reason, there could be all sorts of potential catastrophes waiting to happen, where your Twitter account could be wiped out and you could lose all of your followers.

Obviously we hope that that's not a likely thing to happen, most of the big social media sites seem pretty solid and stable at this point, but you do need to be aware that **you're building a platform on somebody else's land, if you choose to build primarily on those sites.**

This is why it's a very good idea to also have a blog, or even a fairly static website that you can point people to, because that's your own space, it's your own ground, and you can do whatever you want there.

Method #1: Blogging

Blogging is a really good way for authors to start not only building up an online platform but to gain other benefits too – like getting into a good habit of writing on a regular basis, gaining more visibility, and gaining search engine traffic.

WordPress.com and WordPress.org

What I recommend to anybody starting in blogging is to use WordPress, and there are two flavours of WordPress.

WordPress.com will host your blog for you and give you a domain name for free. You'll have WordPress in your domain, so if I did that with my blog I'd probably be *aliventures.wordpress.com*.

WordPress.org allows you to install WordPress on your web server, and host the blog yourself, and then you can get your own domain name and so on, and it is possible to get your own domain through WordPress.com.

It's up to you which one you go for. If you're perhaps not too comfortable with the technology, then you'll want to go for WordPress.com. If you already have a website and web hosting, or you like to do your own thing with technology, then self hosted WordPress from WordPress.org would probably be right for you.

Finding Out More About WordPress

If you do want to know a little bit more about WordPress then please do email me or start a new topic in the forums.

There's also a mini-course in the Huddle on using WordPress.com ([Starting Your First Blog](#)) which will just take you through all the basics on just getting your blog set up. There are some little videos and things there, just so you can see what to type in and what to expect on the screen and so on, and actually it's really quite a simple and straightforward process nowadays.

Blogging has come on lots in the past few years, and lots of people who don't really consider themselves technical at all are using blogs very happily, so even if it's something that sounds a little bit geeky or complex for you, don't be afraid to give it a try. There are lots of great tutorials and people who can help you if you do get stuck.

What to Blog About

So, assuming you have a blog set up, one of the big questions that people have is what to blog about.

This is a particular problem for writers. **It might seem obvious to either blog about the craft of writing or to blog about your own writing in progress -- but that's only going to work if you're writing for an audience of writers.**

If, for instance, you offer editing services, it might be appropriate for you to have a blog where you give people some basic tips on editing, and how to do it themselves, and at the end of some of your posts, you say, *if you'd like me to help you with your editing then click here and contact me.*

I blog about writing on Aliventures, because my business focuses on writers, obviously the Writers' Huddle is for writers. All the services that I offer and the

ebooks that I've written more recently, certainly, have been aimed squarely at writers, so that makes sense for me.

Fiction Writers

Of course, it might not make sense for you. Perhaps you want to write is a novel. Some of the people who read novels are fellow writers, but many of them, probably the majority, are people who just enjoy reading -- they don't have any desire to write a novel.

They might have some interest in the writing process, but they won't want article after article with detailed tips about crafting dialogue, or creating a scene, or plotting a novel, and so on.

So, if you're writing fiction, **the approach that most authors take is to blog about topics that are related to the book** -- something that's maybe tied into themes in the book.

If you're writing a thriller novel set in lots of exotic locations, you could write about those places, for instance. If you're writing a mystery novel that delves into some particular secret in the past you might write about that particular period in history, and obviously it's up to you.

Other people who do fiction will maybe have a blog that's slightly more tied into the world of their novel, so they might post interviews with their characters, or they might post little short stories or flash fiction or something that's set in the fictional world of the novel itself.

The approach you take depends on your genre, depends on what sort of fans you're hoping to attract, and so on, and it certainly takes a while to build up a following for fiction.

Non-Fiction Writers

If you're thinking of writing a non-fiction book, or even writing non-fiction articles for books and magazines and looking to build up your expertise in that area, then blogging is a really good way to move forwards.

You can pick any topic you want, and write about not only what you know about that topic but also about what you're learning, and about any great posts or books that you've read recently.

So, if you want to write about cookery, you could have a blog about cooking, if you want to write about gardening then you can have a blog about gardening.

It might be the case that you want to write about several different topics, and in this case you are going to need to decide what the focus of your blog is going to be. You might be able to combine two related topics in your blog, but you're going to struggle to blog about three or four very diverse areas.

Journal / Diary Writers

And then the final option for blogging, which was perhaps much more common in the earlier days of blogs, five or six years ago, is to have a journal style blog.

Rather than perhaps writing on a specific topic like cookery or gardening or writing purely about your book, you write more about your daily life. You write about interesting things that have happened to you and what's going on with you and so on, and that can work.

There are still blogs like that which are popular and which do well, but this is quite difficult to pull off. You have to be naturally entertaining, you have to have the sort of content that people want to come back to and read – this is a bit like being a newspaper columnist -- and you really need to have a strong writing style.

With other sorts of blogs you can draw people in just on the basis of your information, by having really interesting or engaging or useful content for them.

When it's purely about your own life, though, or your family or what you've been doing in your day, then there really needs to be something in your writing that grips people.

I think if you are going for a journal style blog, then a good way to do that is to try and have a particular focus for it, so for instance you might focus on

parenting if you've got small children, or you might want to blog about your love of food. You don't necessarily have to blog recipes or cookery tips every day, but you could at least have a food theme running on your blog, maybe blog about the places you go and eat out or something.

So obviously it is up to you what you choose to do with your blog. During my time in blogging over the past four or five years I have shifted between different topics.

In the case of Aliventures, I've shifted the blog between being about primarily about personal development, life, that sort of thing, to being primarily about writing.

Blogs are a nice fluid form. If you've maybe changed your mind about what sort of direction you're going in, you can always change the direction of your blog, presuming you didn't give it a title that is so tied to your original topic. If you do have perhaps a blog name that's really focused on your original topic and you want to move on then you can create a new blog.

Obviously it's nice if you can start off as you mean to go on, but even if you're a bit unsure at the moment on how to begin, or you've got several possible directions in mind, **my advice is just to jump in and make a start. Begin to build an audience, and begin to get some experience with blogging, and get comfortable with it.**

Of course we all make mistakes and of course we all change our minds at times, but it's better to be doing something and making those mistakes and learning from them than sitting back and thinking "Oh, it's not the right time to start"" or "I don't know what to blog about yet."

You may find that you just need to get in there and start doing things before you find your voice and find your topic as a blogger.

Guest Posting for Bigger Blogs

Then, something else related to blogging, which is particularly important for building a platform, is to write posts for other blogs. In most cases you won't

get paid for this. There are some blogs that pay for content, but they may not give you some of the same benefits that guest posting, which is typically free, will give you.

When you guest post, you write a blog post and you give it to a blog which is on your topic. Hopefully their readers will enjoy that post, and at the end of the post you get to put a short bio, which is just who you are and what you do and a link back to your own website, or maybe a link back to your book on Amazon, or wherever you want that to be.

This is a really good way to build up relationships with other bloggers in your field, particularly big name bloggers who might not really notice you from just commenting on their blog or you retweeting them on Twitter or something.

It's certainly worked very well for me to have some of those relationships and to get to know some of the bigger people in the writing-blogging world and the blogging-blogging world.

It's also a really nice way to get your work in front of a bigger audience when you're starting out, so if your own blog only gets two or three comments, then you post on a bigger blog and it gets fifty comments, that can be really encouraging, and it can make you feel that it's definitely worth continuing with what you're doing.

Obviously guest posting can help you to bring in new readers to your site, so I know that whenever I make a guest post and I link back to Aliventures, or to a post on Aliventures, I will get more readers, my subscribers will go up.

Nowadays I have a newsletter, and quite often I'll link back to the newsletter page, and I will get new subscribers from that. It's a very clear and very obvious effect.

The other benefit of guest posting is that, from Google's perspective, it's a link back to your site from a big site that has lots of authority in the eyes of Google. It can be quite hard to get big blogs to link to your posts generally, there's a bit of luck involved in things like that, but if you write a guest post you will get a link back to your site.

You can also choose the text that you want that link to have, generally, so you can use text that has useful keywords, so for instance if I linked to Aliventures, I could say “Ali Luke writes about writing”, and link the word ‘writing’ to Aliventures, rather than just linking the word Aliventures.

Most people online aren’t searching for Aliventures, they’re searching for writing, and the people who are searching for Aliventures are probably people who already know about my blog.

If you do have some strong guest post connections inside your field, it’s definitely worth mentioning that as part of your author platform when you’re speaking to publishers, or even if you’re hoping to speak at a conference in the industry and so on. With those bigger sites, there’s name recognition, and it just shows there’s a quality to your writing if you’ve been accepted on those sites.

So, blogging in general is a really really big topic. I’ve been learning about blogging since I started, back at the very end of 2007, and I know that I still have more to learn.

I’ve also written an awful lot about blogging over the years, and probably from about October this year, I haven’t finalised the timing, **I’m going to be starting my *Blog On* course as a course within the Huddle.**

So if you want to learn more about blogging, it will be about a 9 week course, it will be included in your Huddle membership so there’s nothing extra to pay or anything like that, and you can join in hopefully alongside some other Huddlers, and you can get some feedback on your posts from them.

Blog On is a course which just takes you through the process of writing posts and writing pages for your blog, so if you want to know a bit more about blogging, keep an eye out for that in October.

Before then, you might want to go through the WordPress mini-course in the Huddle ([Starting Your First Blog](#)) and maybe just get your blog set up and maybe try out a few posts, maybe just to get to grips a little bit with the

technology, and then you'll be in a really good position to start the *Blog On* course when that gets going.

Method #2: Using a Mailing List

So, the next possibility for building your online platform is your online mailing list.

This is an extremely valuable way of building a platform, because you will have people's email addresses, and that means that you can directly contact them when you've got a book out, or you offer a new writing service, or whatever it might be.

Those people who have given you permission to email them, which is really important, because if you just start emailing people -- maybe not quite at random, but if you just pick email addresses off the internet of writers and email them all, then you may get into trouble for spamming.

Although people can subscribe to a blog by email, many of them won't, they'll just read your blog on the web or they may subscribe by RSS, and then you won't have their email addresses and you won't have any way to contact them. Obviously you hope they'll read every blog post, but they may not necessarily remember to return to the blog, or they may not read all their feeds in Google reader, or whatever it might be

It's definitely a good idea to at least think about a mailing list from the early days of building your platform. Most people begin with a blog because it's a bit easier just to get started with, and then they might add a mailing list once they're feeling comfortable with a blog.

Of course you can have a mailing list and no blog at all, you could just have perhaps a web page online where people can go and sign up to your mailing list, and you can promote the mailing list in the back of your books, or when you do guest posts, or whatever you want, that is a possibility.

For me it works best to have the blog for longer articles and to draw people in initially, then I have my mailing lists for short, regular articles, and for promotions, and so on.

Using a Mailing List Service

So, something to be aware of here is that you can't just build a mailing list within your own email account. Let's say you use Gmail, you can't just go into your Gmail account, and put in the email addresses of 100 people who've signed up for your list into the BCC field, and then email them all your newsletter.

While that may be technically possible, it's not a good way to do things, because it means that you have to do quite a lot of list management where you're constantly putting on new names, or taking off the names of people who want to unsubscribe from the list.

In many cases you may not even be able to email that many people through your email provider. You may not be able to email more than, say, 100 people an hour (which is the case with my email, provided through Dreamhost) without your web host or your email host thinking that you're attempting to spam people.

It's much better, then, to go with a professional, dedicated mailing list service, that will send the emails for you, and that will not only increase the chances of your email actually reaching people, getting into their inbox, not getting filtered out as spam, it will also provide you with some very useful tools.

You can see how many people opened up your email, at a glance, you can see which people opened your email, you can see if somebody hasn't opened your email for two months or something.

The service I use for this is [AWeber](#), which costs \$19 per month at the most basic level, and for me I found it very easy to use, I found it intuitive, I like all the different reports and the ability to track things that it gives me.

Another really good option is [MailChimp](#). That is free to use, at the basic level, and it's perhaps a slightly more quirky service than AWeber. They've got a little chimp/monkey thing, and you know, the way it's designed, for some people it's more fun and user friendly, other people may prefer the AWeber interface, so you may even want to try both of them out.

I think AWeber currently has a trial period where you can get a month for \$1, so you can just try out the service and see what you think of it.

Creating Content for Your Mailing List

Whether you decide to go with AWeber, or MailChimp, or a different mailing service altogether, it's important to think about what you're providing to your mailing list, and what you can offer people to encourage them to sign up.

When people sign up to my mailing list at Aliventures, they get access to a mini-library of e-books -- free content that's exclusive to the mailing list, just short, to-the-point ebooks in PDF format that they can download and use.

Then, every week I send a short email with an article about writing, or something related to writing, maybe just a little bit of personal news about what's going on with me, because I like to build up my rapport with those people.

Occasionally I'll send an email to the mailing list which is more promotional, so if I re-open Writers' Huddle, for instance, then I let the mailing list know, and they can join up. If I've got a new e book out, I'll let the mailing list know, and they get a discount code for that.

Frequency of Emails

So, it's good to just think up front what you might be using the mailing list for, roughly how often you're going to want to email people, so you can let them know what to expect before they sign up.

If somebody joins your list expecting to perhaps receive an update once a month and you email them every day, then they're going to unsubscribe quite quickly.

It's absolutely up to you how often you email people. I would say if you email them less than once a month then they'll forget who you are, why they joined the list, and they might unsubscribe because they think it's spam and they don't remember why they wanted to be on that list in the first place.

If you email more than every few days, that may well be too much for people, and you can ask your audience what they prefer.

I used to do an email once every two or three weeks, it was a little bit sporadic. Then I asked the newsletter readers what they would like to see in the newsletter, and I asked how often they would like to receive it, and to my surprise by far the most popular option was weekly.

I thought that people would prefer not so often, not so much as weekly, because then they'd feel overwhelmed with emails, but no, they wanted weekly emails. After that it was easy to commit to doing a newsletter every Wednesday, and with very few exceptions the newsletter has now always gone out weekly.

Like I say, it might be that you or your audience want a slightly different frequency, so it could be that you find that for you committing to once a month is as much as you can manage.

Alternatively, for your audience, they perhaps just signed up for updates on when your next novel is out, and they don't really need an email every week telling them that you've written another half a chapter or something. In that case you may just want to email them every once in a while to tell them how things are progressing with the book, to tell them that there's another short story, or some other little treat on your website for them. This keeps them engaged with you, and helps them to remember that you exist and that your next novel is going to be coming out.

Method #3: Social Media

Then the final key aspect to an online platform is social media, so this is websites like Facebook or Twitter or LinkedIn, or Google+, where people create an account and they can interact with one another.

Obviously you'll get some level of interaction with your account through comments and some interaction perhaps with your email list, because they might hit reply and tell you what they thought of a particular email, but social media is probably the easiest way to connect to people where they are in an environment that they're comfortable with.

I would recommend that you focus on one or two networks. Rather than trying to spread yourself thin between every social network that seems to be popular, concentrate on one or two where it seems that your audience are likely to gather.

For me, my networks are Twitter and Facebook, primarily. Twitter is the one that I concentrate on the most, because there are a lot of writers on Twitter and I have quite a strong Twitter following. Facebook, I've started more recently, but I'm definitely building up a following there, and that's something that I'm perhaps going to put a bit more time into now that my Twitter account is well established.

Choosing Which Networks to Focus On

So, it's really up to you which networks you decide to focus on. It will depend a bit on who you are, so if you're already a really keen Facebook user, you want to focus on Facebook.

It will depend a bit on who your audience is, so although Facebook is by far the biggest of the social media sites, it may be the case that your particular audience are more likely to gather on Twitter, or they might be on LinkedIn or on Google+.

You might want to have a look around those sites, see what the demographics are. You may want to run a survey on your blog, if you have a blog, to see which social media networks people use. Whatever social media network you do decide to go with, it's going to require a regular investment of time, which is why I recommend just focussing on one or two rather than trying to do too much.

It's hard to build much traction on social networks if you're only logging in every couple of weeks or something, so ideally you want to be logging in to Twitter or Facebook pretty much every day, just to leave an update or two or to interact with other people there.

I'm not suggesting you spend your whole life on those networks. It might be only five or ten minutes a day, or it might be that you check Twitter in coffee breaks or something, because they can become a distraction from writing.

Reasons to Use Social Media

Then, some of the reasons to use social networks beyond just reaching an audience, building up a fan-base and so on, is that **it's a great way to network with peers.**

For instance, on Twitter it's easy for me to be in touch with some other writers, some of the people who I work alongside, maybe in partnerships or as a colleague, or maybe just people who I want to share some tips and ideas and advice with.

Some of those people have more followers than me, some of them are maybe not quite so established in the writing world, but it's an easy way for us all to interact together.

In the early days of using Facebook or Twitter or other social networking sites, it might seem like not much is happening, you're perhaps talking into a bit of a vacuum, you don't have many followers on Twitter or many fans on Facebook, there's just not much interaction going on.

It's just like if you started a blog, probably in the early days you didn't get many comments and so on, **so it's definitely worth persevering and keeping on putting some time into it, and you will see things growing, and increasing.** You'll get more followers, there'll be more interaction and so on.

So, if you're on Twitter, in particular, a good way to do this is to look for some Twitter chats related to writing, so you'll find there are regular talks and discussions on Twitter using a hashtag, where people will gather at a particular time and they'll talk about some aspect of writing, maybe it's self publishing, maybe it's editing and so on.

They'll use a particular hashtag, which is a word with a # symbol before it, so that other people can all follow that conversation.

Twitter chats can become very fast and a little bit overwhelming, so you may find that you don't like those so much, but another way to find writers and to find people you might want to connect with is to search on Twitter, so search for the word 'writing' or the words 'self-publishing', or the words 'publishing', or whatever part of writing you are particularly interested in, and you will find

people who are other writers, and you can choose to follow them, and they may follow you back, and you can interact with them by sending them a message, and so on.

What to Say on Social Media

So, in general, when using social media, one thing people wonder is what on earth to say. What to talk about, especially perhaps when you've got quite a limited space on Twitter, or perhaps on Facebook where you've got a bit more to play with in terms of how much you can write, but people have a short attention span.

Something you can do which is quite simple, is just to tweet or to post on Facebook about what you're currently reading, so that could be a link to a great blog post, or a mention of a book that you're really enjoying.

A good tip here is that if the author of the blog post or the author of the book is on Twitter, include them in your tweet, so you could say "I'm reading a great blog post by @Aliventures", and then as well as the people who follow you reading that tweet, I will see that tweet.

I'll see that you're reading a blog post by me, and that you've been kind enough to tweet about it, and there's a good chance that I'll send you a reply and say "thanks for tweeting" or "glad you've enjoyed the post" or stuff like that.

So this is a good way to just very casually get onto someone's radar, and it's a really good way to give some value to the people who follow you, who might not otherwise have found a great blog post or a book, or some other resource that you're recommending.

Then, of course, something related to this is that you can share links to your own blog posts, or to your own book, or whatever it might be. I think this is a great thing to do, but you perhaps need to do it in a little bit of moderation, especially when you're first starting out.

If every single message you post is "Buy my book, it's here, follow the link" or "read my blog post, it's here", then people may feel that you're just there to

promote yourself, you're not interested in having a conversation, or in helping another writer out by promoting their material, and so on.

So, by all means, use Twitter and Facebook and so on to link to your blog posts, because some people will follow you on Twitter but not subscribe to your blog for instance.

However, just be aware about how often you tweet something that's very self promotional, versus how often you maybe reply to someone else on Twitter, or tweet something funny about your own life, or tweet a link to somebody else's post, and so on. (And obviously this applies to sites other than Twitter, many of them work in a similar way.)

Then, something else valuable you can do with updates is to ask questions, so rather than perhaps running a whole survey of your blog readers, if there's just one query you're interested in getting opinions on, you could just ask it on Twitter, or you can post it on Facebook.

On Facebook you can even create a poll, where people can vote on different options, so for instance you could ask "What e book would you like to see me write next?" and you can give three or four options.

Alternatively, could even ask something that's just for fun, like "Who's your favourite character in my novel?" and give them the name of the characters, and sometimes that can even be quite illuminating as well.

Questions are a great way to get some interaction going, because we all will naturally just respond to questions, whereas if all your tweets are just statements, or updates about your life, then people might not be sure what's best to reply, or they might not think of giving you a reply.

Then, something you can certainly do if it's appropriate for the platform you're building, is to share how your writing's going. So, obviously, you may not want to constantly talk about your word count, or the problems you're having with your novel scene, or whatever it might be, but certainly people will be interested in how you're progressing.

Other writers will probably be happy to support and encourage you, your readers may just be interested in knowing that you're writing on the next

book, and that can be quite encouraging for you personally. It can be a good way to connect with writers or with readers, and again I would say don't overdo this -- if every tweet or Facebook update is a word-count, that can get a little bit tedious for the people who are following you.

So, for a great example of how to use social media, and indeed blogging and mailing lists very well, Joanna Penn from [The Creative Penn](#) has done amazing work in building herself a very strong online platform.

She's got a blog, The Creative Penn, she's got a newsletter that goes out every so often, and she's got a lot of followers on Twitter, she's got a very strong Twitter account.

If you follow Jo on Twitter, you'll see that she is really good at finding great resources and tweeting about them, and that makes her look like a nice person, and it makes her look like somebody who's helpful and who wants to support other writers, and also it makes her look like someone who has her finger on the pulse of what's happening in the writing and blogging world.

In fact Jo *is* someone who really is at the cutting edge of what's going on in writing, and particularly in self-publishing / indie publishing right now.

I definitely recommend you follow Joanna Penn on Twitter, she's [@thecreativepenn](#) on there, and just see what she does, and see perhaps what tips you can pick up from her.

Your Next Steps

So, in general, do take some time to look into blogs or mailing lists or social media or even all three.

Think about what you might want to start putting in place, perhaps this week, perhaps this month. **Where could you begin to build a platform online?**

If you already have a blog, or a mailing list, or a great presence on Facebook or on Twitter, and so on, then maybe think about ways you could build on that, or ways that you could just give you another level to your platform, to give you a further reach or to give you a new audience.

Why Author Platforms are So Important

This is something that will only become more important to us writers. The digital world is not going to go away at this point. Just as ebooks have really taken off in the last three years or so, a strong online presence has really become important in the writing world.

Sometimes it can seem like just another thing to do, another distraction perhaps from the actual writing, but the thing is that it's really encouraging to have people reading your blog posts, or replying to your tweets, or telling you how much they loved your novel and are looking forwards to the next one.

Sometimes as a writer it can feel very isolating just to be on your own in a room typing away, just wondering if anyone's ever going to read it, or if anyone's ever really going to care about those words that you're putting on the page.

In the online world, through blogs and mailing lists, or through social media, you've got a great opportunity to really connect with your audience, and to know that they are reading, and to know that they are interested and that they're engaged.

I know for me personally, and I think for a lot of other writers, that can be hugely motivating on the days when the writing perhaps isn't going so well.

So, by all means pop some questions in the forums, if there's anything I've talked about that you'd like to see another seminar on, or if there's something that I've said that you're not sure what I meant, because I know that this can get into quite technical areas.

Remember that the Q&A format has changed now, so if you put a question in the Q&A forum, I will try to reply to that as promptly as I can, usually within a couple of days, rather than all your questions being all bunched up together in a Q&A recording, so you can get a fairly quick response from me there in the forums, and of course if you post in the writing chat forum, then there'll be other Huddlers who are happy to share their experiences with building their online platform as well.

So the very best of luck with your writing and with your platform building, and I'll hopefully see you around in the forums.