

Questions for: Laura Summers

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The BookMachine founder contributes to our Q&A series



Describe your job

I drive the growth of BookMachine - that means continually sharing our vision with the team and our partners, thinking up new ways to reach our goals, and generally looking at ways that BookMachine can serve our community and clients so that we are always adding value to the industry.

What was your first job in the book industry?

My first job was at Pearson Education, where I was an ELT editor working across print, digital and multimedia. I made great friends, and met my husband through that job (though we were there at different times), so naturally I have very fond memories of that point in my career.

Who has been the most influential person in your career?

I was last employed by YUDU media (we built ebooks and apps for publishers), and our CEO Richard Stephenson was my biggest influence. He taught me the value of repetition - I admire the way he continually repeated his vision until it really filtered through to everyone. He was also a trusting leader, which I try to emulate with my team.

How has the industry changed since your first job?

I started in publishing in 2006, the same year that Jack Dorsey co-founded Twitter. I'd say that once Twitter became mainstream it changed the industry enormously. It made it easy for professionals to connect with each other and helped create a more level playing field. No longer did you need a fancy job title or friends "in the know" to get involved in the community and build connections. It was an exciting time, and we made the most of the buzz to launch our own community in 2010.

What's the biggest challenge in your job?

My biggest personal challenge is knowing where to invest my time. I tend to see opportunities that align with our goals every time I log on. My challenge is to decide which opportunities are most beneficial for our business and to try not to spread myself too thin. As a small business (with a huge community), time is our most valuable commodity and there are only so many hours in the day.

What's the best piece of book-related advice you've ever been given?

I think the line from Murakami really sticks: "If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking."



What are the most interesting things you're seeing in the industry?

I am interested in how publishers are taking responsibility for the environment and trying to remove their climate footprint. Bonnier Books and Bookshop.org have achieved carbon neutral certification, Cambridge University Press has said it is on track to be 100% carbon neutral in the UK by 2022, and PRH (also carbon neutral) has reduced its direct carbon emissions by over 65% since 2018.

How are you coping with working from home?

Working from home whilst home-schooling was a challenge I would rather not repeat! Aside from that, I don't really mind working from home. We have great tools which enable us to collaborate and communicate as a team throughout the day. However, this is all going to change from October as we open our new offices at the Design District in North Greenwich. I think it's going to open up our minds to new ways of working and new partnerships, and I really can't wait to move in.

How do you think the industry will come out of the Covid-19 crisis?

Overall as an industry we have seen backlist sales boom, big names exceed expectations and a number of debut authors doing well. This is all great to hear. However, some authors make their money from school visits and others from performing at festivals and making appearances at libraries to generate interest - so I wouldn't want to assume that everyone has been able to overcome the challenges. Everyone has had a different experience of the Covid-19 crisis, but I think it's fair to say that we will come out better than some other creative industries.

What do you most like doing when you're not working?

I like reading, running and travelling - though with two small children I don't get to do any of these things as much as I used to. We live in London and have family in Scotland, so when we break from work we like to set off on road trips up and down the country - visiting different places and meeting various people on the way.

What are you reading?

I'm reading a book by Joeli Brearly, a campaigner for the rights of working mums. *Pregnant Then Screwed: The Truth About the Motherhood Penalty and How To Fix It* is a manifesto for change and offers shocking insights into how many working mums have encountered discrimination in the workplace. It's not written just for mothers, it is for everyone who cares about the future of work.

How do you like to read: on screen, on paper, or do you listen to audiobooks?

Always on paper. I like to curl up on a bed, a sofa, or anywhere really and switch off from my devices to concentrate on what I'm reading.

Laura Summers runs BookMachine, the fast-growing community for publishing professionals and creative agency specialising in book marketing. With 15 years of experience working with and connecting people in the industry, Laura aims to provide every publishing professional with the knowledge, ideas and connections to help them to progress in their careers - as well as grow their businesses with stand-out digital marketing, interactive training and unforgettable events.

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