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# HOW TO GET AHEAD IN PUBLISHING

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(FOR THE SOCIETY OF YOUNG PUBLISHERS AT THE LONDON BOOK FAIR,  
MONDAY APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2013)

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## INTRODUCTION

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So, I'm Alastair Horne and, come Saturday, I'll have been working in publishing for a decade. I've spent most of that time at Cambridge University Press, first as a project developer, testing educational software for primary schools; then as a project manager, working with internal and external teams to ensure that that software was delivered on time and to budget.

After that, I then spent three rather marvellous years as innovations manager, investigating new ways of doing business as the industry became increasingly digital, and prototyping new types of product; and now I'm Social Media and Communities Manager in our English Language Teaching division, formulating and implementing our social media strategy, and running webinars as part of our professional development community for teachers.

I also do quite a lot outside of the day job: I've taught classes on publishing at four different universities in the past six weeks, and I also write about the industry; I'm the author of the [Media Futures report](#) on the Future of Publishing, and had an article published in the Oxford Brookes journal Logos last year on how live events might usefully play a part in a future economic model for the industry.

I also tweet as @pressfuturist. A lot.

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## #1 YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT TO BE ENTRUSTED TO YOUR EMPLOYER: KEEP LEARNING

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Half of my day job – the community manager part – involves helping to run a professional development site for teachers looking to improve their skills and increase their employability. Language teachers take their professional development enormously seriously: most of them sign up on their own initiative, and often at their own expense too; they take courses; they attend webinars; they read articles – they're highly motivated and determined to improve.

We need to learn from their example. By all means, make sure that you get the most from the training your employer offers, but don't rely on that - keep an eye out yourself for courses and conferences that might benefit you, and ask if your employer will pay for you to attend.

Your employers may not offer the training that you need, though; and you may well have a better idea than they do of what skills are going to be required in the future.

You need to take control of your own career development: work out what you need to learn, and find out where you can learn it. You can do a lot for yourself, and for free. There are lots of free ways of developing your skills online. Teach yourself how to format and upload a book to Kindle, for example, or try a MOOC (a massive open online course) like those offered by [Coursera](#), to develop your own skillset.

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## #2 CREATE A FOOTPRINT: LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO

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To make the most of your learning, you need to reflect on it: to think about what you've learned, and how you're going to apply it to your work.

Those of you who came into the industry via a publishing degree may well have had to write a blog while you were studying - you'll certainly have had to write essays. Writing then served two purposes - it forced you to reflect on what you'd learned, and it provided evidence that you'd done so.

Both those purposes apply as much to people working in publishing as they do to publishing students. When you're applying for a job, you want to put evidence out there of what you're capable of; it's one thing to state in a covering letter that you can do X, Y, and Z - far better to demonstrate it.

So, write a blog about the industry, and what you're learning, tweet about it, and build up a profile around your professional development. Then put a link to your blog on your CV.

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## #3 THE PERSONAL IS THE PROFESSIONAL

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What you do in your day job may not be what gets you your next job. What you do in your spare time may turn out to be far more important.

When you got your first job in publishing, it most likely wasn't because of your vast experience within the industry; it would have been because of what you'd shown yourself capable of outside of work. As new jobs in publishing increasingly require new kinds of skills, this will increasingly be true not just of entry-level roles, but more widely too.

My last two jobs in publishing both came as a consequence not of all the stuff that I'd done as part of my job, but from all the things that I'd done that weren't in the job description. I got the job of Innovations Manager because I'd shown an interest in the wider publishing industry - and in technology - that went beyond what was required in my job as project manager.

I was offered my current role as Social Media Manager not because I'd got any experience of running social media accounts for business - I hadn't - but on the strength of having built up a personal following on Twitter of nearly three thousand.

So, by all means do your current job as well as you can, but focus also on the things you do outside that role.

## #4 JUST SAY YES

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A few weeks after I'd started in my role as innovations manager, I was asked by my boss if I would mind temporarily looking after a project that potentially involved collaboration with the Williams Formula One team: because it was a new project that hadn't been part of our publishing plan, there was no-one available from the regular publishing teams, so what was needed was someone who could steer the project past the concept stage until a team became available.

I jumped at the chance; I'd not been involved in developing a product concept before, but this looked to be an exciting project. By taking it on at the concept stage, and demonstrating that I was capable of handling that stage effectively, I got to lead from the Cambridge side a project that eventually won us a BETT award for the best digital product for primary schools; I got to stand in the pit lane at Silverstone during final practice, introduce driver Nico Rosberg to a class of schoolchildren, and – as you'll see from the photo – wear a set of driver's overalls to promote the product.

So, if someone asks you to take on a task that might develop your career, even if you're not sure how you're going to do it, just say yes.

Later on in the project, post-publication, when my counterpart at Williams phoned a teacher we were meant to be visiting the next day to discuss how she might use the software, he was asked by the teacher whether we wanted to speak to her or the children – if we wanted to speak to her, then we'd need to postpone as she was madly busy; but if wanted to speak to her children, then we could go ahead as planned.

A short conversation later, and the next afternoon, I found myself teaching a class of 30 ten year olds about teamwork, pit stops and air resistance. We ended up visiting about ten schools, and at each one I taught a lesson using the software.

So, don't be afraid to say yes when you're asked to do something outside your comfort zone: you can always work out how to do it later.

## #5 A STRAIGHT LINE IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST ROUTE BETWEEN TWO POINTS: DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRIANGULATE

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Twenty years ago, I was newly-graduated and working in a glue factory, putting nozzles on aerosol cans and packing boxes; fifteen years ago, I was failing to finish a PhD on novels about novelists, and preparing to spend three years in Japan teaching English.

Ten years ago, I was just starting out as an assistant editor at an online publisher of reference and educational materials, writing short descriptions of towns too small to be featured in the reference books that we'd licensed.

And five years ago, after three years as a project manager, I was on the point of packing it all in and returning to Japan when I was offered a job as innovations manager in Cambridge's New Directions Group. And now after seven years of working mostly in technology, I rather unexpectedly find myself on the fringes of the marketing department, working in social media.

This isn't the most conventional of career-paths, but every aspect of it has proved useful in its own way. (Admittedly, the key lesson I took from the year I spent working in a glue factory was "never work in a glue factory" but still...)

So, don't be too tied to a conventional career trajectory: be prepared to take the odd sideways step, or occasional leap into the unknown, if it might offer you skills that will be useful in future. A wide range of experience is an advantage.

Which leads neatly into point #6...

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## #6 THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN BOOKS, YOU KNOW: OR, WHY NOT WORK FOR A START-UP?

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Does your next job need to be with a traditional publisher? There are plenty of start-ups growing up around the publishing industry that need people who know the industry and how it works. They're generally small, fast-moving, and offer an excellent opportunity to learn skills that you're unlikely to pick up in the mainstream industry, but which will be useful within the mainstream industry sometime in the future.

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## #7 WE'RE ALL IN MARKETING NOW: MARKET YOURSELF

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Build your own brand. Everything you do needs to be selling yourself, showing how wonderful you are.

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## #8 ONLY CONNECT

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If you're not on Twitter already, sign up; if you are, then start taking it seriously. First of all, social media skills are increasingly important throughout publishing. Secondly, social media are a great way of developing your publishing career.

Use it to find out what people are talking about – particularly people in the area you want to move into. Use it to get better informed, and then join in the conversation. It's a great way to connect with influential people. 90% of the people I know in publishing I met through Twitter, and I learn so much from them - they share what they're reading and thinking about.

## #9 BUILD YOUR OWN JIGSAW: PORTFOLIO CAREERS

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As I mentioned before, although I'm now Social Media Manager for Cambridge, that's not all I do – I do a bit of teaching on the side, the odd talk here and there, and write the occasional article or blogpost. One of the key reasons I do all this is because it offers me a reason to keep up with what's going on in publishing, and it gives me a chance to do something useful. It also helps keep my profile high, so if I did ever want to change jobs, I'd be in a better position.

Don't necessarily expect to get all the fulfilment (or pay) that you need from the day job. If there's stuff that you want to be doing but you can't at work, start doing it somewhere else. (You may need to get permission from the day job, but provided that you're sensible and don't want to start working with a competitor, they should be cool with it.)

## #10 JUST DO IT

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Why not give it a try?

Thanks; I've been **@pressfuturist**; chat with me on Twitter if you want to talk more about any of this.