

SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR WRITERS

April 19, 2011

Lynn Price (<http://behlerblog.com>), US editorial director, says:

Platform is very important in the course of selling books to the bookstores. They always ask our sales folks, "what is the author doing to promote?" When considering offering an author a contract, I always look at their platform. If they have a direct tie to their subject matter, this makes it easier to get booksellers excited about how the author will show their pretty face.

If they don't, then I still must feel comfortable that they have good ideas on how best to promote their book. This means understanding their readership and knowing how to find them.

When I fall in love with a book, my brain is already kicked into high gear as to how I plan on promoting their book. I need to be sure the author is on board with me and is ready, willing, and able, AND has a tie-in with their book.

Why you need to consider doing this now:

- 1) Promotional activities will happen once a book comes out. You're not getting ahead of yourself by doing this; you're being prepared.
- 2) It shows a commitment to your writing and your platform and, ultimately, your career.

With thanks to Nicola Morgan's excellent post

<http://helpineedapublisher.blogspot.com/2009/09/networks-and-platforms-must-i.html>

THREE STEPS TO STARTING YOUR ONLINE PLATFORM:

- 1) Decide on your goals, and be consistent.
- 2) Start tweeting.
- 3) Set up a blog.

Number 1 is up to you.

Numbers 2 & 3 we will discuss tonight.

REMEMBER: Once it's online, it's online forever. Don't rant, be negative, or act churlish.

For those keen to explore this further, see 'How to build an online platform' (90 minutes)

<http://bubblecow.co.uk/2011/03/how-to-build-an-online-platform-video/>

Author websites to visit:

<http://nicolamorgan.com/>
<http://alanbissett.com/>
<http://www.sarasheridan.co.uk/>
<http://www.lin-anderson.com/>
<http://www.terrymcmillan.com/>
<http://www.jodipicoult.com/>
<http://www.stephenking.com/>
<http://www.terrypratchett.co.uk/>
<http://www.jamespatterson.com/>
<http://www.alexandermccallsmith.co.uk/>
<http://www.jkrowling.com/>

Look at how they're structured - are they blog-based? How do they use photos? Do they promote softly or loudly? Look at their bios; what do they share? Then think about what elements you might want on your own website.

Reserve your own domain name at www.ukreg.com or www.godaddy.com (or any number of sites)

NUMBER 2: TWITTER

Might seem like a nightmare, as millions of people post millions of banal commentary, but it can also be an incredibly useful tool for writers.

How it works:

- You 'follow' people and see what they post. They 'follow' you and see what you post. All in 140 characters.
- People post interesting things: links to great sites, news items, promo items, invitations, photos, etc.
- You can respond directly to that person - so you can 'tweet' famous people or people you don't know
- You can 're-tweet' a post if something is interesting to you
- People who follow you see all of your tweets
- Unlike Facebook, anyone can follow you without your permission (though you can block people)

How to do it:

- Visit www.twitter.com and sign up - you can change your profile later
- You'll see an option saying 'find people' - this can go through your email address book, and it will come up with your contacts who are on Twitter.
- You've started!
- You choose which of these folks to follow; you can find out who they follow and follow them in turn
- Think about using a free 'twitter client' - such as TweetDeck - which helps you filter the people you follow into groups (friends, authors, agents, publishers, for example)

The basics:

- 1) **@Name.** The @ symbol comes before each name. There's no space between the @ and the name - @NicolaMorgan, @sarasheridan, @lin_anderson.

If you tweet something with the @ before the username, he or she will see it in their '@Mentions' column. You wouldn't say *Loved Alan Bissett's workshop*, because he wouldn't see it. You'd say *Loved @AlanBissett's workshop*.

- 2) **RT - retweet.** Use this when you like something that someone else posted and want to share it with your followers.

@kramblings Highland Lit Salon tonight with @Lin_Anderson

@Lin_Anderson RT @kramblings Highland Lit Salon tonight with @Lin_Anderson

You can comment on a tweet by copying and pasting it into your own tweet, or by simply clicking on the 'retweet' button (though you can't comment on it).

- 3) **# - hashtags.** At designated times, there are worldwide chats on particular topics, such as #writechat, #pubchat, and #fridayreads. These are a great way to meet more people with similar interests. Some are continuous (such as #amwriting, #amediting).

You can just add this hashtag to your post, or can join in a conversation. One is #litchat, which is Mon-Wed-Fri, 9-10pm UK time. Go to www.tweetchat.com, register, and follow instructions. Then the screen changes to a dedicated chat about books, moderated by #litchat. It's rather like the old days of the chat room. Sometimes these are fun, other times annoying.

- 4) **#Follow Friday.** Every Friday is Follow Friday, or #ff, when you can suggest other users for your followers to follow. This is a 'spread the love' day. For example, last week I tweeted this:

#ff for today: @searchforsam (talented writer & blogger) @MicheleJosue (filmmaker extraordinaire) @maybenextweek (love her blog & photos)

You don't have to comment or say why; you can just write people's usernames and that does the trick.

- 5) **DM - Direct Message.** The 'Message' button allows you to send a private message to the person you want to contact. This can be disabled. You are notified via email if you're sent a DM. Sometimes people say "DM me" if they want something to be more private.

You can only DM someone you follow, and vice versa.

Why should writers use Twitter?

- Keeping tweets to only 140 characters forces you to be concise and careful with your writing.
 - It helps you stay informed about the publishing industry.
 - It is great for networking. Editors, publishers, agents, and authors tweet.
- [Note: *Twitter is not a place to pitch.*]
- You can meet and share ideas with other writers.
 - You can promote and market your writing.
 - It's great for research.
 - You can link to your blog, and drive traffic to your website.
 - It can help with motivation (#writegoal).

WHAT TO DO:

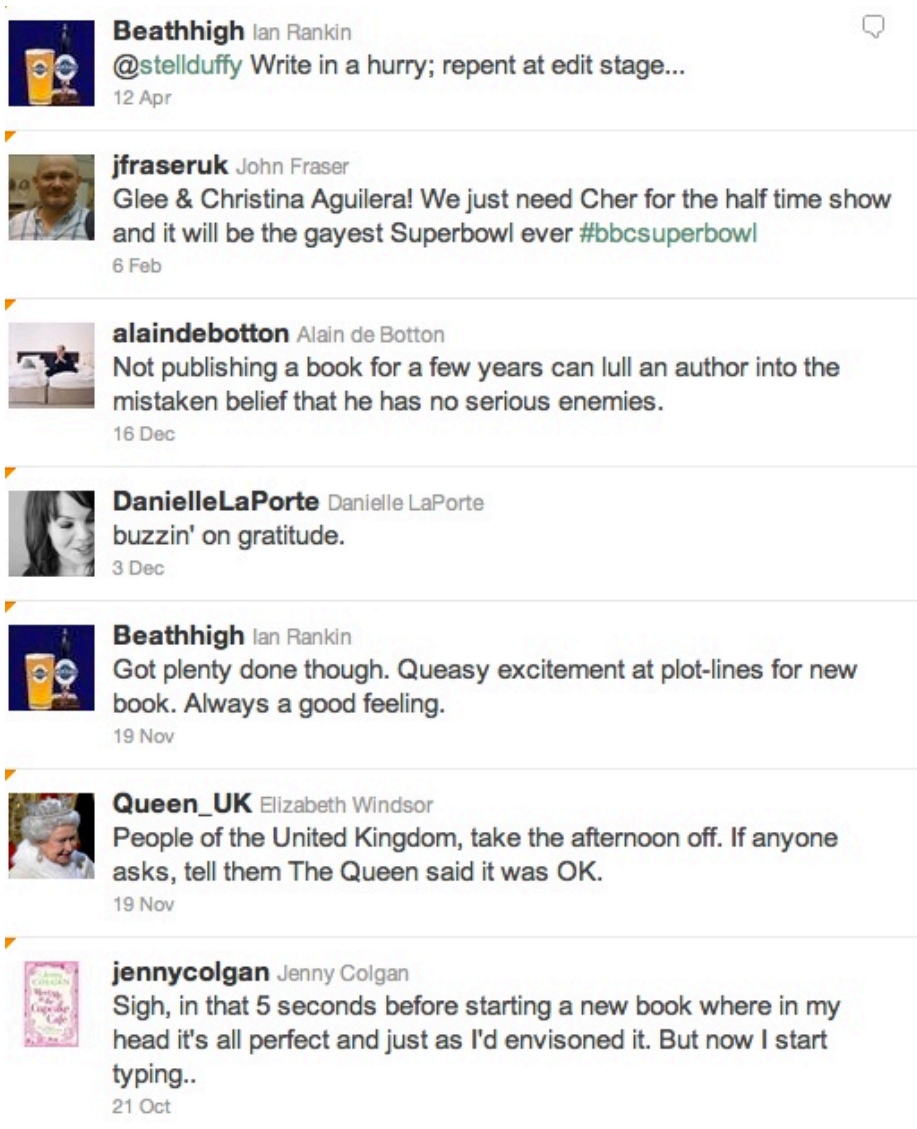
- Decide on your niche and stick to it. Keep in mind your 'author brand'.
- Be engaging. Make sure your posts are interesting.
- Be yourself. It's a challenge to do this in 140 characters, but it's also fun!

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Don't acknowledge new followers with DMs or otherwise; a simple 'hello, new followers' will do.
- Don't spam - i.e. don't just say 'Eating fish pie and drinking orange juice' or something.
- Don't be negative or offensive. Twitter isn't a place for rants. It's generally a positive place, and it is a public forum, so watch yourself.

Think of Twitter as a water cooler, where you can chat, learn new things, giggle, and let the brain cells chill out for a few moments before returning to real life again.

You can mark particular tweets as 'favorites' - here are some of mine.



The image shows a vertical list of seven tweets from Twitter. Each tweet includes a profile picture, the user's name and handle, the text of the tweet, and the date. The tweets are as follows:

- Beathhigh** (Ian Rankin) @stellduffy: Write in a hurry; repent at edit stage... (12 Apr)
- jfraseruk** (John Fraser): Glee & Christina Aguilera! We just need Cher for the half time show and it will be the gayest Superbowl ever #bbcsuperbowl (6 Feb)
- alaindebotton** (Alain de Botton): Not publishing a book for a few years can lull an author into the mistaken belief that he has no serious enemies. (16 Dec)
- DanielleLaPorte** (Danielle LaPorte): buzzin' on gratitude. (3 Dec)
- Beathhigh** (Ian Rankin): Got plenty done though. Queasy excitement at plot-lines for new book. Always a good feeling. (19 Nov)
- Queen_UK** (Elizabeth Windsor): People of the United Kingdom, take the afternoon off. If anyone asks, tell them The Queen said it was OK. (19 Nov)
- jennycolgan** (Jenny Colgan): Sigh, in that 5 seconds before starting a new book where in my head it's all perfect and just as I'd envisioned it. But now I start typing.. (21 Oct)

Directory of people in publishing on Twitter:

<http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2008/12/a-directory-of-book-trade-people-on-twitter/>

Directories of authors on Twitter:

<http://mashable.com/2009/05/08/twitter-authors/>

<http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2009/02/a-directory-of-authors-on-twitter/>

Useful Twitter tools for writers and researchers:

<http://lonewolf librarian.wordpress.com/2009/05/07/50-useful-twitter-tools-for-writers-and-researchers050609/>

50 Writer Uses for Twitter: <http://www.meryl.net/2009/01/27/50-writer-uses-for-twitter/>

50 Power Twitter Tips: <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/50-power-twitter-tips/>

Sources (worth reading!)**The Creative Penn: Overwhelmed online?**

<http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2009/08/14/3-steps-to-start-author-platform-building/>

Help I Need a Publisher: Twittering is Not Just For the Birds

<http://helpineedapublisher.blogspot.com/2009/10/twittering-is-not-just-for-birds.html>

The Book Deal: Strategic Tweeting for Authors

<http://www.alanrinzler.com/blog/2011/03/20/strategic-tweeting-for-authors/>

InkyGirl: The Writer's Guide to Twitter

<http://inkygirl.com/a-writers-guide-to-twitter/>

Ben Johncock: Twitter and the Book Trade

<http://futurebook.net/content/twitter-and-book-trade-good-bad-and-ugly>

Erica Robuck: A Case for Twitter

<http://erikarobuck.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/twitter/>

Kristen Lamb: Twitter Tuesday tips

<http://warriorwriters.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/twitter-tuesday-14/>

FACEBOOK

Facebook can also be a big part of social networking. Many Scottish-based organisations are on Facebook. Once you have a profile set up, you can search for and 'like' these for updates, information, and advice:

Highland Literary Salon
Hi-Arts
Aye Write!
Writer's Digest
Scottish Book Trust for Writers
BooksfromScotland.com
Book2Book
Fuel Your Writing
Write for your Life
Northwords Now
Highland Libraries
Creative Scotland
National Library of Scotland
BubbleCow
Publishing Scotland
Publishing Talk
Scottish Book Trust
Skye Literary Salon
PENning - Scottish PEN's e-zine
Two Ravens Press
Sandstone Press

NUMBER 3: BLOGGING

Reasons to be blogging:

- 1) To make contacts and create a platform
- 2) To follow other blogs about writing
- 3) To make friends amongst other writers
- 4) To have the opportunity to write!
- 5) To get instant feedback

Nicola Morgan's tips for Happy Blogging:

- 1) Have something to say: content is king! People need a reason to read your blog.
- 2) Be yourself: develop your own voice and style.
- 3) Have a 'theme' or 'brand', or 'personal style'.
- 4) Have links to relevant blogs on your blog.
- 5) If stuck for something to say, post links to articles, videos, or pictures. Always give credit where it is due.
- 6) Keep your blog tidy and well-organized.
- 7) Blog regularly - 2-3 times a week is good.
- 8) Link to your Twitter feed.
- 9) Blog shouldn't just be about you; it needs to be more giving than that.

See *Help I Need a Publisher: Reasons to be Blogging for more:*

<http://helpineedapublisher.blogspot.com/2009/09/reasons-to-be-blogging.html>

Here are statements from authors who are members of the Writer Unboxed Facebook group:



Kristin Pedroja

Dear all, I'm giving a workshop on social media for writers on Tuesday. What are your hot tips for novices? What social media has helped you with your writing? Please include your author website as I want to include some examples. Much gratitude to this vibrant community of scribblers.

on Friday · Like · Comment · Unsubscribe



Kim Downes Bullock I don't have an author website yet, but since I hope my novel in progress resurrects the legacy of a landscape painter sorely neglected by history, I did create a website for Carl Ahrens. You can see it at www.carlahrens.com
Yesterday at 2:21pm · Like



Kim Downes Bullock FB wouldn't let me finish! I wanted to add that due to this website I have found over 300 pieces of art and hundreds of original letters. I've also been invited to write two articles and give speeches at two exhibitions of Carl's work that never would have occurred without the site.
Yesterday at 2:23pm · Unlike · 2 people



Erika Shephard Robuck I just did a post on Twitter 101: <http://erikarobuck.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/twitter/>
Yesterday at 2:27pm · Unlike · 1 person



Kathryn Magendie One of the things that SM has done for me is to connect me with so many wonderful people: other writers, my readers, colleagues/professionals, and just general wonderful people out there – things I miss a lot being a bit reclusive, especially with deadlines and things that keep me hidden away. I've had some wonderful experiences with FB, Blogger, and Twitter – but I find Facebook to be the easier of the three to keep up with timewise!
Yesterday at 3:33pm · Unlike · 2 people



Barbara Forte Abate I've met some of the most fabulous people, learned valuable tips, and made excellent connections by simply taking a bit of time everyday to stop in at other writer's blogs, read interviews, and keep on the lookout for stimulating posts. When you come across something or someone you appreciate, it's important to take a moment to comment, click the "like" button, or pass it on. The sharing of info is fabulous, and it's awesome when we all do our part to keep the best stuff moving. And of course you really want to dip into FB and Twitter, not only for the writerly comrades, but you'll expand your territory and gather a wealth of knowledge at the same time. My website: <http://www.barbaraforteabate.com/>
Yesterday at 5:55pm · Unlike · 1 person



Stacy Stenberg Jensen I use social media to connect with people, ideas and resources. I also use it to gather a lot of information on writing, conferences, agents, etc. Twitter is my favorite. When I found Twitter, I was in a small Mexico-Texas border town. I didn't feel lonely being hours from other writers. I connected with Tweets.
Yesterday at 6:20pm · Unlike · 1 person



Krissy Brady Good luck with your workshop! I just did a presentation on marketing last night, and one half of it is about online marketing. Let me know if you want me to e-mail it to you. I use my writing blog throughout the presentation as an example for them.
Yesterday at 6:42pm · Unlike · 1 person



Anne Greenwood Brown Twitter. Definitely a "must have" in your social media tool belt. I made nearly all my writing contacts that way, got referrals to agents, query help, etc. Now my tweeps are helping me drum up excitement for my debut and I expect they'll be there for me when it comes out!
Yesterday at 7:01pm · Unlike · 1 person



Therese Walsh Definitely jump into the Twitter pond (sky?), where networking feels the most effortless--in part because of "referral days" like #WriterWednesday and #FollowFriday. Download the Adobe software for TweetDeck, then establish your columns so you won't miss important tweets by industry pros, agents, and other authors. <http://ThereseWalsh.com/> and <http://WriterUnboxed.com/>
Yesterday at 7:11pm · Unlike · 1 person



Vaughn Roycroft Gotta jump up to TweetDeck. I'm growing bewildered without it already (one week in). You suggested that before, Therese, but I just have yet to get it done.

To contribute to the thread, I was a lone writer for years before this WU page yanked me into reality. Like Kathryn said, I feel so fortunate to have connected with such wonderful people through Social Media. I've learned a lot, but, in taking on this difficult and solitary calling, I think the feeling of connectedness is the most valuable aspect.

Yesterday at 7:35pm · Unlike · 3 people



Therese Walsh Twitter is both overwhelming (too much information) and underwhelming (why is this so popular; I don't get it) without something like TweetDeck to order the information. Highly, highly recommended. :-)
Yesterday at 7:53pm · Unlike · 2 people



Kristan Hoffman Even though I went to college and got a degree in creative writing, I was extremely uninformed and naive about the publishing business. Thankfully the world wide web (does anyone call it that anymore? lol) educated me. I learned the most from writer and agent blogs, and then Twitter and FB and the like have hooked me up with a great support network that's more about motivation than information.
23 hours ago · Unlike · 4 people



Kristin Pedroja Excellent suggestions, all – thank you so much!
21 hours ago · Like

Write a comment...

Ways to integrate Facebook into your online platform:

<http://www.authortechtips.com/7-ways-to-integrate-facebook-into-your-online-platform/>

From the Guardian Edinburgh, 14 April 2011

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/edinburgh/2011/apr/14/edinburgh-sara-sheridan-digital-rights>

Why writers must embrace social media, no matter the genre

Guest blogger and local novelist **Sara Sheridan** shares her digital journey, arguing that writers need to grasp social media or risk losing their rights - including freedom of speech



Living in Edinburgh I consider myself particularly lucky - we have the biggest book festival in the world, a plethora of fascinating libraries and museums and some of the greatest architecture in Europe. It would be easy not to look outwards at all - our capital city is a comfortable puddle for a novelist. We are awash after all, with writers of all stripes. But that's not my nature - and I'm very aware we are the first generation ever to have such incredible opportunities to express ourselves publicly to a worldwide audience.

As an historical novelist - there are few jobs more retrospective. I dumped science at an early age. I expect that initially my interest and indeed patience for Twitter, blogs and html came from the fact I live with the Greatest Geek alive. So enormously scientific and complex is his day-to-day job that I still don't really understand what he does. Suffice to say it's something that enables 30 million users to simultaneously log onto a website without it crashing.

Before I met the Greatest Geek I avoided technology and only adopted what my more savvy friends had road-tested and recommended. I was the last to get an email account in the late 1990s, the last to indulge in online shopping and I still sport a brick of a mobile phone rather than a flash Android or iPhone (this last because one of the prerequisites for my mobile phone is that I have to be able to fling it at a wall if I lose my temper). However, I'm a professional writer and I consider it part of my job to publicise my work and these days part of that job is done online.

Beyond the book festivals

I was reluctant. The Greatest Geek poured me a whisky and sat me down and said he'd help, but that this was my job and I'd have to do most of it myself (his time being taken up with the 30 million users). I started by building a website for my work on Google Sites and soon I was clicking the html button with aplomb and could understand enough to delete rogue lines or alter links.

Then, on a trip to London I was introduced to someone in the digital marketing department at HarperCollins who told me I ought to try Twitter. My soul rebelled. This wasn't my thing. No way. But I started - tentatively at first, and then surprisingly, I found I really enjoyed it. Writers don't get to meet readers very often and when they do it's only for a short time (after a book festival or library event, for example). On Twitter, people who had read my book followed me and I could see what else they were reading, why they'd liked what I'd written and by the by, more about them than I'd ever elicit from two minutes in a tent at a book festival, stuck at a signing desk. It was fascinating.

Next I started following and being followed by librarians and archivists, schoolteachers, events organisers, writers, bookshops, agents and publishers. A whole network was opening up. People were interested and fun and generous. I was offered a couple of event slots and the opportunity to write for a magazine. A famous writer to whom I got chatting gave me career advice. Then I decided I'd try blogging and wrote (non historical pieces) for other people's blogs rather than starting one of my own. The response was wonderful - people got back in numbers and told me what they thought - not something that happens when you're writing a story based in 1840s China or Arabia.

After that, I tried Facebook (which didn't really suit me as it has a bias towards personal rather than professional data) but unperturbed I continued to blog occasionally, to tweet and also administer my own website.

I joined LinkedIn (to which events professionals seemed to respond) and bought a Kindle (which I love). Then people, or rather, festivals asked me to come to talk about it. And there, I think, was where I became an evangelist.



The screenshot shows Sara Sheridan's Twitter profile. Her bio states she is a Scottish writer, curious about books, films, and history, and a dedicated word nerd. She has 1,999 tweets, 2,606 followers, and 3,113 following. The timeline shows a tweet from AvonBooksUK praising her review of 'The Secret of the Sands' and a tweet from sarasheridan about a news item regarding a book purchase.

Sheridan has more than 3,000 followers on Twitter, but admits initially her 'soul rebelled' against it

'What do you tweet?'

I was in a book festival green room surrounded by luminaries when I first realised there was a huge split in the writing community. I asked if anyone else was on Twitter - in fact, you'd have thought I'd asked if anyone else had recently stabbed their kids in the heart. It just poured out. Writers who'd seemed retiring and quite reasonable started to hiss about intrusion of privacy and the importance of paper books and how un-green it was to sport a Kindle. What, I asked, innocently, less green than felling trees like billy-o, transporting them all over the place and then pulping 40% of them? Privacy? Is anyone asking you to blog or tweet or even Facebook (if you must) your personal life? This is about reading and books - it's an interesting way to meet people and share information.

'What do you tweet?' one eminent writer sneered. 'Do you tell the world whenever you've had a scone?' 'Nope. Just when I'm off at a book festival or reading something interesting,' I told him. 'It's a great way to meet readers and they've all been so nice.'

This buttered no parsnips. One or two people said they simply didn't have time for 'that kind of thing'. These are people who would have dropped everything to do a newspaper interview or appear on radio. People who complained that their readership was falling and their publishing contracts were not being renewed. Even people whose readership was in the 12-16 age group, who (as yet) didn't have a website despite the fact that kids of that age are enormously active online.

One woman texted her daughter every five minutes whilst saying she had no time to write an 140 character tweet (lady, it's the same thing). It was simply odd. Other writers and book trade professionals who were taking part in the social media revolution were, like me, bemused. Then some weeks later, I was verbally attacked at a public event by a writer who was mortally offended that I'd suggested she give it a shot (at worst you might not like it, at best it could revolutionise the way you work, I'd said. She hadn't taken it well.).

These days, to be honest, as a result of that experience, I never evangelise unbidden though I am increasingly being booked for festival and writers' groups events to talk about my experiences online. I tend not to argue with writers who put up a barrage about how impossible it would be for them to have a website or start a twitter account or a facebook fanpage. It makes me sad that these are writers -

professional communicators - who are shying away from a medium that is crying out for their skills and demonstrably is the best way to communicate with a wide readership.

Implications for freedom of speech

Most of all this is an era where our digital rights are being defined and because so many writers consider it beneath them, many important issues are not being considered and decided by writers themselves but by the digital operations departments of major publishing houses, online booksellers and other corporate entities.

I am not thinking only of digital copyright - net neutrality is probably the most vital issue for freedom of speech online and should be at the top of any writer's agenda. Most don't even know what that means (it's that the fastest broadband speeds might be chargeable at a rate well beyond small scale bloggers or individuals). If net neutrality is abandoned, individual voices will download so slowly that they would be unheard. This has huge implications for writers, yet in the writing community net neutrality is largely unspoken.

The net has provided a level playing field for criticism and comment - anyone and everyone is entitled to their opinion - and that is one of its greatest strengths. We're all (quite rightly) demonstrating about library closures but I worry that at this critical time in our history that many people are thrusting their heads into the sand rather than opening their eyes to what is happening - both in terms of opportunity and possibility and the actual structure that will contain us as an online community if we allow it to do so.

I didn't expect to love being online as much as I do. I've met some wonderful people and discovered that however arcane some of my interests that there are people out there who are interested too. It's also been a lesson in what my readership do and don't like and what does and doesn't work in terms of promoting my work. And best of all I've made some friends.

Sara Sheridan lives in Edinburgh and has just released her latest book, *Secret of the Sands*. She can be found tweeting @SaraSheridan.

Highland Lit Salon friends to follow on Twitter:

@loveandzen (Kevin MacNeil)
@simon_varwell
@sandstonepress
@peterurpeth
@nicolamorgan
@sarasheridan
@lin_anderson

Other suggestions of useful folks to follow on Twitter:

@hprw - Jane Smith (<http://howpublishingreallyworks.blogspot.com/>)
@benjohncock - Ben Johncock (<http://benjohncock.tumblr.com/>)
@iainbroome - Iain Broome (<http://writeforyourlife.net>)
@Book2Book - trade news (<http://www.booktrade.info>)
@bubblecow - reading and editing service (www.bubblecow.co.uk)
@ThereseWalsh - Therese Walsh (<http://writerunboxed.com/>)

Thanks for listening! @kramblings (Kristin Pedroja)