

**Christina Katz, *Get Known Before the Book Deal (Use your Personal Strengths to Grow an Author Platform)***

By the time I finally got to read Christina Katz's book, *Get Known Before the Book Deal*, I was already familiar with the term "writer's platform." It pops up everywhere these days – in blogs and newsletters, readings, workshops, over coffee with other writers – and always with a sense of urgency. Build your platform or be doomed to literary obscurity.

So I was clear about the need for a platform, even if I wasn't entirely sure what it was. Enter Christina Katz (*Writer Mama*), answering questions about her new book on one of my favorite blogs. I was pretty excited. I wrote her a question, and in so doing, entered a drawing for the book. I consider it destiny that I won. (Or, if not destiny, a lucky coincidence on a path I hope will be full of them.)

*Get Known Before the Book Deal* is a practical, how-to manual for platform building. The very first page defines what a platform is and why it matters, and then Katz takes you through the process of building one, step by step. I have to admit that I came to the book more curious than enthused. I'm not a born marketer. "Working the room" has never been one of my strengths, and I suppose I secretly believed that my inability to schmooze was a testament to my good character. I'm not rich and famous, but I'm not sleazy either.

That attitude lasted until page four when Katz writes, "that integrity, not image, is the new touchstone for emerging authors who don't want to come across as cheesy salespeople." Wait, what? Integrity *and* self-promotion? Here she was talking about being true to myself, using skills that come naturally, taking baby steps... having *fun*! It's not what I'd expected, but it's the tone throughout the book. Building a platform isn't easy (just like writing isn't always easy) but it isn't the big bad I'd been imagining either.

Simply put, your platform "encompasses all the ways you are visible and appealing to your future, potential, or actual readership." For some writers – especially nonfiction and genre fiction writers – identifying the target audience may not be a difficult task, but for the rest of us, Katz provides some very helpful exercises. She reminds us that, as writers we provide a service, and the first several chapters of the book help to define what that service is and who needs it.

Katz cautions against building a platform that is entirely internet based. She encourages both online and offline activities and even offers tips on how to start a reading series, get speaking gigs, find (or create) teaching opportunities. And there are far less scary steps to be taken. Join writing organizations, attend literary events, volunteer your services.

Each chapter of the book explores a different facet of platform building, but what I found most helpful were the constant reminders that a platform is built in steps. Because I'm shy, networking seems scary, but the first step – attending one literary event per week – doesn't sound daunting at all. It sounds fun. And once I've done that step, I can take the next one, and the one after that.

I was a little worried about whether the book would be helpful for a fiction writer, especially a literary fiction writer. It was. She uses the experiences of novelists (literary and otherwise) to illustrate her points quite often and when her advice differs for fiction versus nonfiction writers, she points that out.

My copy of *Get Known* is already dog-eared and highlighted and decorated with colorful plastic post-it tabs. It's my survival guide. If you've been wondering when to start your platform work, the answer is now, before the book deal, and Christina Katz is a really, really good coach.

For more information, check out Christina Katz's website, <http://www.christinakatz.com/>