

Marketing Fiction at Head of Zeus

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SPEAKERS

Gemma Jackson, Shannon Hewitt, Speaker 1



Speaker 1 00:03

Welcome to this episode of Inside Publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.




Gemma Jackson 00:13

Hi everyone. My name is Gemma, and I'm the podcast officer for SYP London. Today I'll be speaking to Shannon Hewitt, Senior Marketing Manager at Head of Zeus. We discuss the process of creating and delivering effective marketing campaigns, how departments across the publishing house interact, and how to make your cover letter stand out in a busy job market. This episode is very kindly sponsored by Bloomsbury Publishing. I hope you enjoy. So to start off, could you tell us about your career journey so far?



Shannon Hewitt 00:39

Yes, sure, yeah. So I'm Shannon, and I currently work at Head of Zeus as Senior Marketing Manager, and I've been here for just over a year and a half now. But I started my career in publishing at pr as international sales assistant, but I had done two work experience placements before that, and I did the UCL publishing masters as well in 2017, so yeah. So I worked at PRH for about 18 months, and then I moved to Lonely Planet as a trade marketing executive, and then the pandemic happened. So it was one of those things where great experience, but sort of had to go and think about what else to do. And then I moved to Hodder Education, which is now Hachette learning as international marketing executive, and I worked my way up there, so sort of, yeah. So I was marketing exec for just under a year, and I was senior marketing exec for a little bit longer, and then I left as an associate marketing manager, where I started at Head of Zeus as marketing manager. So, yeah.



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Gemma Jackson 01:57

Great. Did you always think you'd want to go into marketing, or was it something that just sort of came about?

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Shannon Hewitt 02:04

Yeah, honestly, no, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, which was why I did a few work experience placements. And I sort of thought about publishing. Because in my undergrad at Nottingham, there was a bit a talk on publishing in like, like, one of the lecture halls. So I went one day, and there was a few people from like sales and all different parts of business. And I thought that sounds interesting. So that's when I looked to get a few work experience placements. And I did an editorial one at a tiny, tiny independent publisher called Legend Press. I'm not sure if they're still called that now. And then, I also did a work experience placement at Hodder and Stoughton, which was sales, marketing and publicity. So I got to do few like different things, and also work experience. Placements aren't necessarily the exact thing that you do in the jobs, but I sort of knew that I didn't want to go into a tutorial, but it was just a matter of finding out what kind of skill set I had that was the most interesting to like, you know, the roles and stuff. And then I actually went home for a bit after university, before I started my masters, and I worked at next in like international like contracts and stuff, like buying and Merchandising, and it was super fun, but I still wanted to work in publishing. But I thought, oh, that's quite an interesting element, or, like, different way to get into publishing, because I had the international experience, so I was sort of looking at like rights assistant or international sales assistant jobs, and the PRH one was the first I applied to, and luckily, that turned out quite well, but it was pre pandemic, when things were slightly easier, and when I was there, that made me realize that I liked it was great experience to work in such a fast pace, like working across all the different PR divisions, but I liked the trade marketing stuff that I was doing more in my job than the sales calls. So yeah, that's sort of how it how it worked out for me. And then I tried to sort of frame my career more and move more into marketing, which I do I love, so I'm very happy I got here, but I didn't know straight away.

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Gemma Jackson 04:17

Interesting. Kind of following on from having done, like, the MA in publishing and work experience, how much do you think you sort of learnt on the job as you went?

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Shannon Hewitt 04:29

I think office jobs, there's always a nature of, when you start out as an assistant, they sort of, they all sort of bleed into, you know, like transferable skills and stuff like that. So I think I was quite lucky that I'd done an office job before I applied to Penguin, because a lot of what I used in my application, I think, don't get me wrong, I do think the masters did help show an interest in stuff, but they were sort of really interested in my transferable skills from the day to day of that job. So I do think that helped. But I do think the Masters was really good for, like, getting a well rounded sense of the industry and sort of the different kinds of things that you'll do. And like, the journey, like of a book from, like, the inception of it to, you know, it actually being published. So that sort of stuff, and like, the jargon and stuff, really does help to know, because everybody in the industry talks about things that, if you're outside of it, you've got no idea what

those things actually mean. But yeah, it was, that was what I felt like helped me the most my previous job was the thing that helped me the most when I started out as an assistant, because everything was like, so fast paced, and you just sort of had to, like, get going with your emails and understand, like, time management and organization and stuff like that, because working in international sales as well, like my manager, is honestly brilliant. Still love him to this day, and I miss, miss working with him very much. But he was the Nordic sales manager, so I think I had, like one day before he was off on a sales trip, and then he would go in like six week increments of like he would be away like three days of the week, and then back for two, and then the next week he would do two two trips in one so he'd be away for five days. And so it was a lot of learning on the job and not really having, like, a massive support network to be able to help you to do it. So yeah, you are sort of thrown into the deep end of these things.

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Gemma Jackson 06:37

Could you take me through the journey of a book from, like, the marketing department's perspective, from acquisition until publication day?

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Shannon Hewitt 06:46

Yeah, sure. So I think it's slightly different, but sort of similar in different houses. But what we do here is, and it's sort of funny in that you can be working on so many different things in a different kind of cycle, and it sort of depends on the book and the tiering system that we have as to how long we work on one, but realistically, the earliest we will work on a book is if we're pitching for for an auction or we're trying to buy something, and we need to provide a pitch deck or something like that, which is something editorial will do the most part with. And we can add our ideas and make it look nice and designed up, depending on the competition and what we need to do for it. But in a normal like life cycle of a book, from when it gets acquired, we sort of get it launched by editorial, and that's when we start to sort of work on it, once they've launched it. So our planning sort of starts around 13 months pre publication, and we have these things called vision sheets where we will all of sales, marketing and publicity will add on to the document, like what we aim to do, like overall campaign goals and the specifics of what we actually intend to pull off. And that's obviously dependent on budget and that sort of thing. So the difference of campaigns will be, how much budget and how much time.

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Gemma Jackson 08:27

Is that where you decide, like the tier?

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Shannon Hewitt 08:29

Yes. So yeah, we go from A to D with us. So A are like huge campaigns of the year, which we have very few, and then sort of mid range ones of a lot of time and energy, but maybe not that much money to do something with. And then D is sort of like our, I don't want to say 'list only' because I don't necessarily mean it like that, but more of like all of the standard stuff is like a tick box kind of campaign of just making sure that you've done everything to support the book without that much, like extra money going into it. So for the bigger stuff, the planning

goes a lot earlier. So some of our bigger books, we start, like, 18 months to a year out of like, even just behind the scenes, even if someone doesn't see that much, like, on the forefront of it, and but then some of our other stuff, like, we can book in events and stuff, but things won't really start until about six months and that kind of thing looks like covers. So that would be the first thing that people see like visually. So we'll do cover reveals in many different kinds of formats. We also give our opinions to the art team to make it, to make sure it's the best to cover for the market that we do and are aiming for. Then we do proofs. We like to have proofs around six months pre pub, because that will mean that publicity can send them to the long leads. But it also means that depending what we need them for in the marketing campaigns, that we've got plenty of time to be able to use them and sales can send them to booksellers, and then other kinds of aspects of the campaign. So we do some trade marketing, so to market to businesses and, you know, The Bookseller and that kind of thing. And like the book fairs, digital asset packets, so that authors have all of the assets that they need to be able to market their books, and we also use them too. We pitch books a lot, so pitching to like, love reading or different like kinds of third parties so that we've got our books on their radars. And those meetings are very, very fun. We do events like YALC. And pre order advertising. So, like, lots of digital ads, but also advertising on rare occasions for us, because we're a smaller publisher, like out of home, and, you know, like much more expensive kind of advertising, and then working with bloggers. So like sending proofs out, getting people excited for them, doing fun, mailing packages, newsletters. So we have our own and we can book in ads with news letters, within news letters with other companies. We do lots of Net Galley, of course, and then doing quite a bit of campaign reporting as well, like what's working what's not, but that tends to come after publication.

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Gemma Jackson 11:51

So how do you tell what kind of technique or like tool has been effective for a particular book? Or do you never really know that?

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Shannon Hewitt 12:03

It's a tricky one because we're quite small team, so we just have to keep going. Usually we don't have a lot of time to, like, sit back and be like, 'Oh, that really, you know, what was the thing that came out the best for that?' But I guess I think what helps in our roles, specifically at this company, is that. So I didn't say at the start, but I look after the marketing of two imprints. So I look after Apollo fiction and Aria. So Apollo fiction is our literary and historical fiction list, and Aria is our women's commercial fiction, but also, like, romance, romantic, that sort of thing. So all of our women's fiction basically goes into that list, but yeah, so I look after all of the books within those two imprints. So I think it does help in that I have the insights of everything else that I've done. So even if it's not something that I sit down consciously think and think what didn't work well, what did I have the context of the other campaigns that I've worked on that really help inform what I do for a specific book, which does help. But, yeah, of course, like, we have things that we expect to work, and then they really don't, and we sort of have to reframe it, or think about, if we're doing a book with that author again, then maybe we need to think about how not to do something, or, like, go down a different avenue. And you know, if I think sometimes it can be tricky, if, if you like, the budget thing is like a thing to have been like, 'Okay, well, I had this amount of money, so I did everything that I could with this amount of money. Was that enough?' Or, you know, so I think that that's when it's a bit harder, of like,

there can be ideas in your mind of what you want to do, but you don't really have the budget to for it to pay off. But yeah, I think because we have quite a lot of smaller campaigns, we have to be a bit more creative with them. So in that sense, we don't really have a lot of money to like, like, blow, if that makes sense of like, I can't really make like, super, super bad decisions because I don't have the cash to do it. But yeah, so just sometimes of being like, 'Okay, well, that mailing people weren't necessarily interested in that book. How can we reframe use that money somewhere else next time', you know, or like, reporting on, like, socials, ads and stuff, be like, 'Okay, well, those keywords didn't work. Why aren't people clicking on that ad?' You know, let's try something else. But I don't usually, like, use all the money in one go so that I can, like, adapt.

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Gemma Jackson 14:51

Yeah. I know comps seem to be quite a big thing, in like editorial and like pitching a book. How much do you use comps when coming up with, like campaign ideas?

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Shannon Hewitt 15:04

I think that the thing that helps the most with comps in my job is when we're supporting sales. So we do a lot of like design led stuff to help them out, so like slides and decks and that sort of thing. And sales really need comps to be able to sell in books. Otherwise, I don't think booksellers are interested if they don't know where where it sits. But I think it can be useful for me when looking to see what competitors have done, and looking to see. I mean, I'm always super interested in, like, other people's campaigns and stuff as well. But even just like, when it comes to cover, reveals to be like, Oh, that publisher did that book really well, or they did this specific thing with their campaign, which was really interesting. It does help you, like, think about it as in, rather than just be like, Oh God, what do I do for this book? Be like, Okay, well, the comp is this title. Let's see what happened around it, you know, and how can that help this campaign? Or what did you see that you really liked? And also, when it, when we do pitching, like on very rare occasion, it can be quite good in that we're not really sales people, so I don't need to go in at all girls placing. But it really does help when you're, I don't know when you're like, talking about books that could really work, and you have to sort of give an elevator pitch to be like, Oh, this book, I think could sit on that list really well, because I read it and it was like this one and this one, you know? So, yeah, it does help make a quick assessment.

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Gemma Jackson 16:49

Great. How would you think hardback and paperback campaigns will sort of differ like for the same book if it comes out in paperback, like nine months afterwards? How do you go about, like, the campaign for that?

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Shannon Hewitt 17:06

I think it also depends on genre, really, because, like a lot of my Apollo books go out in hardback for first format, and and I think, yeah, it depends on, on what sort of the rest the wide team are sort of doing with it. So like, I'll have a hardback campaign for something, but I'm also

sort of aware that don't really want to give out lots of them for free because they're expensive. So it tends to be like, we'll do lots of libraries for first format, do lots of stuff for the sales team, because, you know, like, the shops have all of their hardback sort of like just just released, like new arrivals and stuff. And with it, if it's like a bigger book, then we'll be able to do POS for for shops. If they're interested. We can offer that out to stores. And then we tend to do sort of more of like a follow up thing for paperback. So engage more with like readerships, rather because we can be a bit more we can distribute them a bit more widely, so like blog tools or all that sort of thing, or like, submit them for book clubs and that in that kind of stuff. But it sort of does depend on who you're going to and what they sort of want, if that makes sense. But, yeah, it is sort of two markets that you have to do them for. I don't when it comes to Aria, we were usually sort of first format is paid back original. So we'll just go out the gate with with one kind of thing. But, but that's because the market sort of is much more suited to to paperback. So yeah, I think it does depend. But I'm also not, not an expert on this, because we have other imprints that are way more like. Non fiction is a completely like different beast, you know. So that's way more focused on hard back kind of thing. But yeah, so we sort of split it out like that, and it does depend on the budget that we're given again for either or or, sometimes I will be told you have this much money and it's for paperback and hardback. You think, okay, how do I split this? But yeah, does that answer your question?

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Gemma Jackson 19:37

Yes! What's your favorite campaign that you've been involved in?

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Shannon Hewitt 19:48

I think... it's tricky, isn't it? Because I say, I'd say, like as a career kind of thing We have the new Elodie Harper coming out in August, and, and which is very exciting-

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Gemma Jackson 20:01

I'm very excited.

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Shannon Hewitt 20:03

But so joining Head of Zeus towards the end of the Wolf Den trilogy was was really great. And I I loved that I was able to work on those books, because it's such a brilliant trilogy. But also, like working on an Elodie stand alone and going out the gate with something entirely new, but, like, something that she's so brilliant at, yeah, and having it as a standalone is really fun too, because you think about that in a different kind of way, I guess. So that's really fun. We've been doing lots of fun stuff for that. And it's also, you know, the biggest fiction book of the year. So that's that's always, like, exciting. But I do think even if it's not like a big, big book, way you get loads of money to work on it, like other things can still be fun. Like, we have a debut coming out this month called Work Trip, which is just such a brilliant hook. Of, like, it's two colleagues, and they're sent into the Scottish Highlands with only one tent and they're told, like, you have to do, like, a survival trip. And like, see you in a few days. You've got to get back here. And it's really funny. And Chloe is just such a lovely author to work with. And when it's a

debut, it feels bit more like special as well. Of like, you know, you're setting someone up for like, Well, I hope she's a success, because she's brilliant. And then also getting to work on authors that, like, I'm like, a super big fan of like, everyone in the office laughs at me because I am Annabel Monaghan's like biggest fan. So when we got to publish her books summer romance last year, I made that book my whole personality. So yeah, I think stuff like that. So it can go in two different ways. Of like a book that, obviously I love Boudicca's Daughter, and it's brilliant, but that's sort of in the sense of, I can make an amazing kind of campaign with it too. But other stuff where maybe there's not as much money behind them, like when you actually really love the books as well, they can be just as sort of special to work on. So yeah, those ones here.

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Gemma Jackson 22:10

Are there any books that you didn't work on but you would have loved to have, like from other publishers, genres?

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Shannon Hewitt 22:19

Yeah, I think I really love what. I'm sure it's Vintage that publish it, but, you know, Tomorrow & Tomorrow & Tomorrow, I just think that campaign has been so brilliant, even just from, like when they sent the proofs out and they were like, VHS tapes and the Big Magic Eye thing that they did. And I just love that it like consistently keeps going as well. Like, I saw that they did all of these stickers all on the tube recently too. I think it might have been for the paperback release. So it might have been just for, like, think it was around, like, Valentine's Day or something, but they put all these little wave stickers all over the tube. And I was just like, Oh, that's so fun. But like, consistently, like, they've still got all of these brilliant ideas for it. So yeah, I think that one, that one is brilliant. And then, just from like, a perspective of like, I work on quite a lot of romance books, but I'm also like, such a big fan of Ali Hazelwood, so I think, like, one of her steminist ones would have been like, great to work on. I think that could have been like, super, super fun. And I always think that they do like they always look so good, all of their proofs always look so good. So that would have been quite fun too.

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Gemma Jackson 23:29

Have you got any tips for people or young publishers wanting to get into or ahead in marketing or publishing industry?

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Shannon Hewitt 23:36

Yeah. I mean maybe what I said at the start, like office jobs, you know, there's so many transferable skills that just make sure that, if you're doing an application that you sort of like align them to the key responsibilities in like the role and like, the the role that's advertised. So you know, if they they will always sort of ask for, like, time management organization, like, you know, working in like, a busy environment, that sort of thing. So just making sure that you have, like, lots of key examples, that even if it's something like publishing specific, like editorial, or, I don't know, publicity, like anything that you've done in previous, like roles can

still work if you just frame them in in the right way. And I also think for applications, it's super important that you sort of get a sense of the industry, and I know it's hard when you, like, it's not your full time job, and you don't, you're not involved in everything that's going on, like day to day, and you have the accessibility of, like, you know, The Bookseller and stuff like that. I get, I get that. It's hard, but even just if you're applying to a publisher and just mention in like, your first few lines, just which books that they've published that you really like, to like, why you want to work for that specific publisher, because they all are slightly different, and they'll all have a bio somewhere that you can find, that you can say, I don't know, like, I'm sure HoZ we say, like, 'We're an independent publisher that likes great books and good storytelling,' or something like that. So you can frame it like that, you know, of like, I liked Bunny because I think it's a brilliant, like show, of like, good storytelling. I know that's like, a very vague answer, but you know, you can really align it to what they they put as their like values. And I would say for marketing jobs specifically, just to mention a campaign that they've done that you really like, I don't think that's difficult to find either, because you could just go on the Instagram page and be like, okay, they've done a foiled proof for that thing. That's cool. Just mention that like, oh, I don't know, I saw your full proofs for this book that, like, is on my radar, because I love that authors, like previous work or stuff like that I did. Yeah, so I think it doesn't need to be, like, extremely, extremely detailed, but just to recognize that you've done your research and that you've looked at the key specifics of the job ad, and you've like, used your experience in to like, link it to that, if that helps. Yeah.

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Gemma Jackson 26:34

So what do you think are the key kind of, like, competencies or skills or things that would kind of apply specifically to marketing that people might be looking for?

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Shannon Hewitt 26:48


Yeah, so marketing, we always laugh here that no day is the same. So you do so much in like your day to day, you really never know what what you're gonna have to like do when you turn on, look at your emails, but so there's always quite a lot of admin because, you know, like invoices to code, which is pretty much the same for any job, and lots of grids to work on, like filling in publication details of stuff. So I think showing that you've got administrative skills really helps. But I also think with marketing, sort of, you have all of that, but you also have, like, quite a lot of things that you can do creatively too. So I don't know, trying to, trying to show that in some way, like we work a lot with designers for, like assets, cover reveals, like slide decks, yeah. So even just, like, even internally with the art team, you know, we need layers for like, lots of different things. So showing that you're you can be quite creative as well as analytical, I think helps and coming up with, like, fun ideas. So if you like thinking kind of creatively, that kind of well rounded skill set, I think helps. I don't think you need to have worked in a super creative job, but it does help if you show that you sort of had your own ideas about things and you've used them to, like, I don't know, make something fun.


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Gemma Jackson 28:21

Thank you. That's all very useful stuff.

 Shannon Hewitt 28:25
I hope so!

 Gemma Jackson 28:27
Well, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast today.

 Shannon Hewitt 28:30
That's okay. Thank you for having me!

 Gemma Jackson 28:38
Thank you for listening to Inside Publishing, and thank you again to Bloomsbury Publishing for sponsoring this episode. I've been your host, Gemma. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple podcasts Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcast, it really helps us to reach more people. Also feel free to let us know your thoughts on social media or send suggestions our way at podcast.syp@gmail.com. See you next time!