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## CHAPTER 1

# THE BOOK THAT LIVED

The Harry Potter phenomenon wasn't born overnight. It's been nearly 20 years since J.K. Rowling first saw Harry's image in her mind, and during those past two decades, the Harry Potter brand has grown to a position of global behemoth touching diverse people around the world. How did a book grow to have such broad-reaching power? The seven books in the Harry Potter series have sold over 400 million copies worldwide, and they have been translated into 64 languages. Ultimately, seven movies will be released by Warner Bros to coincide with each book. It's been speculated that Warner Bros will make well over \$5 billion in box office receipts by the time the final movie is released. Even Universal Studios is cashing in on the brand, with a Harry Potter theme park scheduled to open in 2009. The books have caused changes in the literary and publishing businesses and opened marketers' eyes to the power of the internet and the role of word-of-mouth marketing in today's world. Today, the Harry Potter brand is estimated to be worth \$4 billion.

Throughout the growth in popularity of Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling went from poverty-stricken single mother to billionaire. J.K. Rowling didn't start out with plans to become the highest earning novelist in literary history. She just wanted people to love her books as much as she did. She poured her soul into the world of Harry Potter, and the world responded, making *The Boy Who Lived* a global phenomenon and a case study in marketing and branding that others will try to emulate for many years to come.

Will they succeed? Will we see a Harry Potter repeat within our lifetimes? As marketers, we must answer that question with an emphatic,

“Yes.” How do we do it? The best place to start is at the beginning when the pioneer brand, Harry Potter, was born into J.K. Rowling’s imagination.

**BOX 1.1** Harry Potter would become a seven-book series

1. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*  
(renamed *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in the United States)
2. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
3. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
4. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
5. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
6. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
7. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

**UNREMARKABLE BEGINNINGS**

J.K. Rowling was born on 31 July 1965 and lived an unextraordinary childhood with her parents and sister in Winterbourne and Tutshill, England. From a very young age, Rowling loved to read and would read anything she could get her hands on. She dreamed of being a writer, but didn’t have enough self-confidence to tell anyone but her sister and closest friends of her aspirations. Although she began writing stories during her childhood, Rowling never showed her writing to anyone. Her favorite authors, including literary icons such as J.R.R. Tolkien and Jane Austen, crossed a variety of genres and fueled her imagination. From a young age, she began working on detailed plots and characterizations, a skill she would perfect over time and would ultimately become one of the most beloved aspects of her Harry Potter series.

Rowling excelled in school and studied French at the University of Exeter, but she always preferred reading and writing to anything else. After graduating from university, Rowling stumbled through several jobs that failed to inspire her. Instead, her mind was on writing, and she took every spare moment she could to work on an adult novel she was writing secretly. She was relentlessly focused on her writing and penned two books, which she deemed inadequate to publish, before

she began the book that would change her life and impact the business and publishing worlds in a way no one had dreamed possible.

## **HARRY POTTER IS BORN**

In 1990, a 24-year-old J.K. Rowling was on a train from Manchester to London. She had been searching for an apartment in Manchester with intentions to move there to be closer to her boyfriend. It was a typical train ride for Rowling who passed the time by watching the countryside out the window. Suddenly, in a serendipitous moment, Rowling saw the image of a boy in her head. It was Harry Potter (although she hadn't named him yet) in full, detailed form. She even instantly knew his back story – a boy wizard (although he didn't know he was a wizard yet) with a lightning bolt scar on his forehead.

Rowling has recounted the story many times since that June day, and calls it “the purest stroke of inspiration I’ve ever had in my life.” She spent the remainder of the train ride creating plot lines and characters. Most important to what would later become the Harry Potter phenomenon, she knew before she stepped off the train that she would need to write a series of seven books to tell the boy wizard’s complete story – one for each year he attended wizarding school. From that moment on, she was consumed with Harry Potter and spent every moment she could find creating his world and by the end of 1990 had accumulated boxes and boxes of notes.

Sadly, while Harry Potter was being born in J.K. Rowling’s imaginary world, in the real world, her mother, Anna, was losing her long-time battle with multiple sclerosis. On 30 December 1990, Rowling’s mother passed away, leaving her daughter overcome with grief. At the same time, Rowling’s relationship with her boyfriend was coming to an end. It was at this time that Rowling decided to change her life. She left Manchester to teach English to students in Porto, Portugal. On a positive note, the new job required her to work nights, which freed her days to immerse herself in the wizarding world she was creating.

Not long after Rowling arrived in Portugal, she met Jorge Arantes with whom she fell madly in love. Despite early problems, the two married on 16 October 1992 in a small civil ceremony. Within just a few weeks, Rowling became pregnant, but she continued to teach and devote as much time as she could to writing Harry Potter. On 27 July 1993, Rowling gave birth to a daughter, Jessica. Unfortunately,

Rowling and Arantes' marriage broke down and Rowling left Portugal with her daughter and two suitcases with all her possessions, including the first three chapters of Harry Potter. She headed for her sister's home in Edinburgh, Scotland with no home, no job and no money.

## THE CINDERELLA STORY

Rowling arrived in Edinburgh penniless. She turned to public assistance to help pay for food and housing. In December 1993, she began receiving meager housing benefit and income support of less than \$140 per week from the Department of Social Security. She moved into an apartment only to learn she had no heat and the walls were infested with mice. Times were so bad that there were days she could afford to feed Jessica but not herself. Unwilling to allow her daughter to live in such a terrible situation any longer, she broke down and asked a lifelong friend for a loan. That money helped her move to a nicer apartment in a better part of town, but it didn't go far. Rowling found herself caught in the vicious circle of poverty wherein she needed to work to make money, but she couldn't afford daycare for Jessica. Rowling did not qualify by government standards to receive childcare support.

Throughout her struggles, Rowling longed to complete her first book in the Harry Potter series. Finally, she committed to completing the book, so she could then go back to school to earn the credentials required to continue her teaching career in Scotland. She did some typing work on the side, but primarily she spent her time writing. Rowling wrote fervently. She would take Jessica with her throughout the days and write in longhand in parks or cafés. Most frequently, she wrote at her brother-in-law's café, Nicholson's, with Jessica in her stroller. She wrote late into the nights while Jessica slept, simply to do it all again the next day.

At the end of 1994, Rowling filed for a divorce from Jorge Arantes, and she could see the light at the end of the tunnel. Her first Harry Potter book was nearing completion, so she set her sights on returning to school to earn her teaching certificate. She was accepted into a program that would begin in August 1995. That summer, she experienced three life-changing events. First, she finished the first draft of Harry Potter. Second, she received a grant from the Scottish Office of Education and Industry to help her financially as a mother and full-time student. Third, a friend gave her \$6,400, which helped her to afford childcare for her

daughter while she studied. Things were looking up as Rowling entered school to begin working on her teaching certificate. She maintained a rigorous schedule of studying during the day, caring for her daughter in the evening and writing at night, but with her eye on the goal of a completed manuscript, Rowling motivated herself to keep going.

As 1995 came to an end, so did the final draft of Harry Potter. J.K. Rowling still had no money, but her novel was complete. She typed the final manuscript on a secondhand manual typewriter. Since she couldn't afford to photocopy it, she retyped the entire manuscript again so she would have a second copy. Now after six years of creating and writing, she was ready to introduce Harry Potter to the world. Her next step would be to find an agent and publisher who loved Harry as much as she did.

### TAKING A CHANCE ON HARRY POTTER

J.K. Rowling looked to a place she knew well to learn how to publish Harry Potter – the library. In early 1996, she came upon a copy of the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* at the Edinburgh Central Library and copied the names and information for several agents and publishers who seemed appealing. The first agent and the first publisher she queried declined to represent her based on her Harry Potter submission. The second agency on her list was one she copied from the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* simply because she liked the name. That agency was the Christopher Little Literary Agency.

Rowling submitted her three sample chapters to the Christopher Little Literary Agency. Unfortunately, it did not represent children's literature at the time, so Christopher Little's secretary, Bryony Evens, relegated Rowling's submission to the reject pile. Serendipitously, however, Little's secretary hesitated. Rowling had submitted her sample chapters in a unique black binding. For no other reason than the unusual cover, Little's secretary opened the package and started reading. She was immediately intrigued and asked her boss if she could request the complete manuscript. Little agreed and shortly thereafter, Evens presented him with the full manuscript of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. After one reading, Little made Rowling the agency's standard offer, which Rowling signed immediately. She would relinquish 15 per cent of her earnings on the book in the United Kingdom to the Christopher Little Literary Agency as well as 25 percent of foreign and film rights.

The next step was for the agency to find a publisher who believed in Harry Potter enough to invest in the unique children's book from a first-time author. At 223 pages and around 90,000 words (50,000 words above the established norm at the time for children's fiction), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* broke all the rules for children's fiction. It was too long. The plot was too scary. There were countless reasons why publishers like Penguin, Transworld and HarperCollins rejected Rowling's manuscript. After 12 rejections and a year of searching, Rowling's work finally struck a chord with one publisher. Barry Cunningham, head of the newly formed children's division at Bloomsbury, read Rowling's manuscript and instantly loved it. In August 1996, Bloomsbury offered Rowling a meager \$6,500 advance against royalties, and changed her pen name to J.K. Rowling from her given name of Joanne Rowling, under the assumption that boys wouldn't read a book written by a woman.

Soon after signing the new author, Barry Cunningham invited Rowling to lunch in London where he told her there was no financial reward in children's books. Rowling had been told this before, but she did not write the story of Harry Potter for money. She loved to write, and the thought of seeing her book on the shelf of a bookstore and knowing other people would read and enjoy it was reward enough. She took her advance and a writer's grant from the Scottish Arts Council and began writing the second book in her seven-book series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. She still wrote in longhand, but she bought a computer and gave up her secondhand manual typewriter.

With all players on board and J.K. Rowling starting on book two, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published on 26 June 1997 with a print run of 500 copies. Thus far, the journey of Harry Potter had consumed J.K. Rowling's life for seven years. Little did she know, the adventure was really just beginning, and soon her life would change forever.

### SERENDIPITY STRIKES A THIRD TIME

At the 1997 Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy, Arthur Levine, editorial director for Scholastic in the United States, was doing exactly what everyone else at the fair was doing. He was looking for foreign books to buy and publish in his country. There he stumbled upon a book from a new British author, J.K. Rowling. Levine started reading *Harry Potter*

and the *Philosopher's Stone* during his flight back to the United States from Italy, and like other readers before him, he instantly fell in love with the story. He committed himself to buying the rights to publish *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in the United States.

Just three days after Rowling's debut novel was released in Britain, Bloomsbury auctioned off the rights in the United States. Levine knew he would be the highest bidder no matter what it took. The auction generated a bidding war, which Levine ultimately won for an unprecedented \$105,000. It was the largest amount ever paid to a first-time children's author, and the world took notice. Within days, J.K. Rowling's Cinderella story as the destitute single mother turned successful author earning the biggest children's fiction advance in history became a dream come true for the press, who willingly ate it up and dished it back out to the world.

By the end of 1997, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* had sold 70,000 copies in Britain, and Bloomsbury was ordering reprint after reprint. J.K. Rowling earned approximately \$7,500 from her book during that first year, which seemed like a fortune to her at the time. It wouldn't take long for that \$7,500 to seem more like pocket change to J.K. Rowling as *Harry Potter* was set to explode globally.

Within a few weeks of the release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in Britain and signing her contract with Scholastic, Rowling delivered the completed manuscript for the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, to Bloomsbury. At that time, her first book was climbing up the bestseller list as children and adults found themselves caught up in the wizarding world. Rowling was also gaining critical praise and being recognized with various writing awards. To her surprise, she found herself at the top of the bestseller list again when *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* was released in Britain in July 1998. It's a position she'd become quite familiar with during the next decade.

### **BOX 1.2 A series of serendipitous events brought Harry Potter into the world**

1. Harry Potter popped into J.K. Rowling's head out of nowhere while riding a train from Manchester to London
2. Bryony Evens of the Christopher Little Literary Agency relegated J.K. Rowling's submission for the first Harry Potter book to the

slush pile as the agency did not represent children's literature. It was the unique black cover Rowling used to hold her three sample chapters that piqued Evens' curiosity and prompted her to start reading

3. Arthur Levine from Scholastic stumbled upon the first Harry Potter book at a book fair in Italy. He began reading the book on the plane home to New York, and immediately knew he had to have the U.S. publishing rights no matter what the cost would be

## HARRY POTTER COMES TO AMERICA

A month after the second book in the Harry Potter series was released in Britain, readers in the United States would finally meet The Boy Who Lived when Scholastic published *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States. The title was changed for the U.S. market to make it more appealing to a non-British audience, but the story remained the same. The U.S. audience responded to the story of Harry Potter as so many had before them. By the end of 1998, Scholastic had ordered seven reprints of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and sold 190,000 copies. The success of Harry Potter was unheard of, and this was just the beginning.

In July 1999, Scholastic released the second book in the United States. The same month, Bloomsbury released the third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, in Britain and sold more than 60,000 copies in the first three days. Just two months later, in September 1999, Scholastic released the third book in the United States. By this time the Harry Potter books were worldwide bestsellers with nearly 30 million copies in print in 27 languages. That summer, J.K. Rowling earned her first royalty check that exceeded \$1 million. Harry Potter had taken on a life all his own, and J.K. Rowling was along for the ride. How she would protect Harry Potter over the next several years would turn her into a respected brand guardian.

Soon after the first Harry Potter book was released in the United States, the movie studios came calling. J.K. Rowling turned down initial offers from several studios. It was only when Warner Bros agreed to meet Rowling's requirements that she agreed. She signed a contract with Warner Bros for \$1 million, which allowed her to have final say

in a variety of areas to ensure the movies stayed true to the books and to Harry Potter as a whole. Warner Bros then sold the merchandising rights to many companies who would manufacture and sell Harry Potter-related clothing, toys, games and much more. As part of the deal, J.K. Rowling maintained some control over merchandising activities as well.

Soon production on the first movie began while J.K. Rowling completed the fourth book in the series. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was released in English-speaking countries at midnight on 8 July 2000 amid much fanfare. Sales broke all previous records, and Rowling found herself in the top four spots of the *New York Times* bestseller list. One year later, the first movie was released in November 2001, and over the next decade, fans would welcome the remaining books and movies in the series into Harry Potter history.

### **BOX 1.3 Significant statistics in the history of Harry Potter**

- Over 400 million copies of the seven books in the Harry Potter series have been sold worldwide
- The Harry Potter books have been translated into 64 languages
- J.K. Rowling is estimated to be worth over \$1 billion, more than Queen Elizabeth II
- Twelve publishers turned down Harry Potter including Penguin, Transworld and HarperCollins
- Scholastic paid an unprecedented \$105,000 for the U.S. rights to publish Harry Potter
- The first five Harry Potter films earned worldwide box office grosses of over \$4 billion
- The Harry Potter brand is worth \$4 billion

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO BRANDING**

From the very beginning, Rowling loved her character and the story she would create for him. That love for her product compelled her to bring a consistent brand message to consumers throughout nearly two decades. Many elements played into the success of Harry Potter over

the years, which will be discussed in further detail throughout this book, but at the bottom of it all is J.K. Rowling acting as brand guardian, ensuring nothing is done to harm the Harry Potter brand in her eyes or the eyes of her fans (branding will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2).

Helping Rowling along the way were other people who believed in Harry Potter. From Christopher Little to Arthur Levine, everyone who came into contact with Harry Potter loved the story. Throughout this book, you'll learn that at the core of the Harry Potter success story is a good product. As marketers, we must work to create a good product, recognize when we have a good product, and sell that product by capitalizing on opportunities and taking calculated risks. Importantly, you'll learn that by having people behind your product who believe in it and *live your brand promise* with you, you'll have a greater chance for success.

#### **BOX 1.4 Unusual honors**

In addition to countless literary awards and honorary degrees, J.K. Rowling earned several unique honors in recognition of her work on the Harry Potter series, including:

- June 2000: Queen Elizabeth II named Rowling an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)
- April 2006: An asteroid was officially named Rowling
- May 2006: A newly discovered pachycephalosaurid dinosaur, which was on display at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indiana, was named *Dracorex hogwartsia* (The Dragon King of Hogwarts) in reference to Rowling's wizarding world. The name is a combination of the Latin word for dragon, *draco*, which is also one of Rowling's character's names, and the name of Harry Potter's wizarding school, Hogwarts



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Note: Page numbers in *italics* refer to figures. HP refers to the Harry Potter book series, and JKR refers to J. K. Rowling.

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