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ABC's of Publishing – About Agents

By Lisa Hood

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While there's no Golden Rule to "Being Published"; it appears the only way to get your foot in the door is to have a respected literary agent hold it open. (I can't count the number of times my toes, and my ego, have been smashed.) Most of the large NY publishing houses don't accept unagented queries, and those that do will assign assistant editors to muck through the slush pile. A good literary agent has spent years in the publishing business, building relationships with editors, studying the market, knowing what editors are looking for and which publishers specialize in specific markets or genres. They will be your guide and your advocate to the publishing world.

The trick is finding a good literary agent. By now you have probably heard many horror stories about disreputable agents. If not, do yourself a favor and read the information at Writer Beware, <http://www.sfw.org/beware/agents.html>. Be wary of any agent that charges an upfront fee, regardless of what they call it, or an agent that requires an author to use editing or marketing services as a condition of representation. Agents who make their money up front, as reading fees or marketing fees, or who receive a kickback from referrals, are not motivated to sell books. The anonymity of the Internet provides an ideal environment for these creative con artists but it also lets us warn others. According to Writer Beware, here are few methods employed by dishonest agents:

- Reading Fees - This practice, once seen with some reputable agents, has been abused to the point it is now prohibited Association of Authors' Representatives for members.
- Evaluation or Critique Fee – If you feel that you need a critique, why not hire the services of a reputable editor?
- Submission or Handling Fee - Good agents make money selling books, not selling contracts for representation.
- Submission Expenses – Reputable agents don't routinely bill their clients out-of-pocket. These expenses may include a large number of manuscript copies, color printing, photos, etc.
- Sliding scale of Fees – Good agents do as much work as is needed to sell a book, all for the same 15% commission.
- Selling "adjunct" services - Websites design, book cover design, illustrations, etc. etc. It's a conflict of interest for an agent to offer paid services.

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As you can see from this list, dishonest agents are as imaginative and creative as the writers they swindle. Unfortunately, there are no licensing requirements, regulatory agency or competency standards for literary agents. One organization that self regulates literary agents is the Association of Authors' Representatives or AAR. To become a member of AAR, an agent must meet certain criteria, years in business, number of clients, no upfront fees, etc. While there are no guarantees, your odds of selecting a reputable agent will be greatly increased if they are a member of AAR or similar organization. According to AAR, <http://www.aar-online.org/faq.html>, "Literary agents are listed in many sources, including Literary Market Place, a directory of the publishing industry, which is available at most libraries. You may also ask for recommendations from editors, writing instructors, or fellow writers."

According to Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato, authors of *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write*

Great Serious Nonfiction — and *Get It Published*, you can also locate an agent at your favorite bookstore: "...check out all the book sections, to determine where your book would likely be shelved in that store. From that section, pick up a book similar to yours in content and presentation, one that you believe appeals to the same reader your book will appeal to. Turn to the "Acknowledgments" page, located either in the front of the book or the back. The author will often thank his or her literary agent. Put that agent's name on your list of possible agents." There are two online services that may be of use, for a small fee. "The first is www.publishersweekly.com, and the second is publisherslunch.com... they list each week's new sales to the publishing industry and the name of the agent who sold the book." The final suggestion offered by Rabiner and Fortunato is to attend writers' conferences. Editors are usually in attendance and you can ask for their recommendation of a good agent. (This is also useful when you submit your query letter: "Mr. Editor suggested I contact you regarding my book...") To contact an agent, write a short introductory letter which should be informational, no more than one page in length, to the point and professional. Tell the agent if your work is fictional, non fictional, include a sentence or two summarizing the book and then a brief summary of your credentials. Do not make claims that your book will be the next best seller, or comparisons to other works. Include a SASE (self addressed stamped envelope) if you would like a reply.

It is acceptable to submit your work to more than one agent at a time, however, you should let them know your work has been sent to other agents.

Many agents will not accept queries by phone, fax or email, so you should use snail mail for all submissions. Upon request, you can submit additional information, such as writing sample and story synopsis.

Once you have retained the services of an agent, you can expect them to provide guidance regarding the quality and marketability of your work. According to AAR, your agent may:

- Offer editorial guidance.
- Establish contacts for you with firms and persons who are acquiring rights to literary and/or dramatic material.
- Advise you about current trends conditions, practices, and contractual terms.
- Market your literary material and rights therein. Negotiate and review licensing agreements.

- Review royalty statements.
- Monitor licensees' marketing of your work.

Agent representation is valuable when it comes to submitting works to publishers. Publishers depend on agents as a first screen to marketable work. Inept agents who submit marginal work to a plethora of publishers will develop a poor reputation and likely be ignored. Agents must exercise discretion, and the best agents will be highly selective when taking on new clients.

Holly Lisle, author of several published works including: *Fire in the Mist*, *Diplomacy of Wolves*, *Vengeance of Dragons*, and *Courage of Falcons* offers advise on finding the right agent @ <http://hollylisle.com/fm/Articles/faqs3.html>.

"The majority of queries any agent receives—probably around 99%—are rejected because they lack whatever spark that agent is looking for. This doesn't mean they're hopeless—what is wrong for one agent might be right for another. Remember that the agent you want will love the genre you work in and know the publishers and editors who publish it, and will love the work you do. Make sure the work you send out is your best, that it is professionally formatted, free of errors, and entirely yours." She also recommends that you research the type of work an agent represents. "Read their descriptions of what

they're looking for and believe them—an agent who doesn't like science fiction won't like your science fiction, and won't appreciate having his time wasted by yet another beginner who has proved by querying him that he is a beginner, and worse yet, can't follow instructions."

Do you still wonder whether or not you need an agent? I guess the question to you would be: "Do you want to be a writer, or do you want to be an agent?" Lisle offers the final bit of advice on the subject: "Good agents do much more than find homes for manuscripts. If he (or she) did nothing more for you than remove bad clauses from contracts, the agent would be worth his ten or fifteen percent."

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Lisa Hood is the author of "Shades of Betrayal" and "Shades of Revenge". She has been writing for over 10 years and is presently working on her third suspense novel, "Shades of Jealousy." Other articles by Lisa Hood can be found at <http://www.bookjobber.com/articles.asp>. <http://www.BOOKJOBBER.com> is an Internet based company, which publishes and sells fiction and non fiction e-books.

Do You Know Your ABC'S?

By John Colanzi

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If you've been in business for any period of time, I'm sure you've heard of the KISS Formula and the AIDA Formula. I'm not sure you've heard of the ABC formula.

I have a daily study plan and I don't remember it being mentioned in anything I've read online.

So what is the ABC Formula?

A. Always

B. Be

C. Closing

ABC is the reason for every move you make. If it's not, it should be.

The old saying is still true. Nothing happens until something is sold.

The internet is like one giant chess board. Every move you make, whether it's a lowly pawn or your powerful queen is designed to move you closer to checkmate.

What is checkmate?

Closing the sale.

Every newsletter you send out should show a profit.

Every email course you offer on your site should have the potential for making a sale.

Every free ebook should have a link you can profit from.

Every single move you make, must be geared towards making a sale.

Closing the sale should be as natural as breathing.

It took me a long time to learn that.

If you're serious about your business, learn the ABC Formula.

Always Be Closing!

John publishes the "Street Smart Marketing" newsletter. To subscribe

mailto:streetmart@rapidreply.net Download your free copy of Secrets of Success.
http://www.internet-profits4u.com/streetmart.exe



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