

Getting A Publisher & Getting What You Want

In the basic scenario of book publishing, a writer finishes a book and then finds an agent who helps sell the book to a publisher. When someone asks, "How do I find a publisher?" they're often looking for the details of this scenario. But let's backtrack a little. The answer to this question has to do with what you as a writer want out of the publishing process as well as what the publisher wants. It's best to be as clear as possible on both counts. Here are a few things to consider.

What You Want

What exactly do you want for your book? It's possible that your answer can save you a lot of time and heartache. Here's an example. A writer recently emailed me about wanting to find a publisher for his book on dealing with sickle cell anemia. He said he felt it was a really important book and that people would be interested in the information. That's great, but if his main goal is getting his book into the hands of those coping with the disease, he doesn't have to go with a big traditional publishing house in order to do that. He can self publish and take the book directly to doctor's offices, support groups and sickle cell organizations.

Do you want a book that tells a family story that will be a legacy for your children? Do you want a book that will establish your expertise and help you get started on the speaking circuit? You can accomplish these things by self publishing. A prominent ghostwriter recently published a book about his trade and landed a television interview where he discussed how politicians get their books written. The author was introduced as a "ghostwriting guru" and his book was prominently displayed at the end of the story. There was nothing that would have told you the book was self published. It didn't make a difference that it was. He still got the notice, was still seen as an expert.

Do you want to go for the whole enchilada--traditional publishing house, book tour, the status of having the validation of a publisher? That's fine too.

Which brings us to...?

What Publishers Want

Publishers are reviewing tons of manuscripts daily. How do you get your submission package to stand out from the others? By giving what they're looking for.

They want good writing. That's a given, but how do you deliver? First of all, be in a mode of constantly learning about your craft. Take classes, workshops, join a writer's group. Next, hire someone to help you. There are many editors who assist writers in getting a manuscript ready for submission. Some agencies even provide editing as part of their services.

The next part is harder. It has to do with that magical term "platform". Everyone these days talks about how publishers buy on the basis of your platform. In fact your submission package, fiction or non-fiction, will be all about showcasing your platform. Here's what they're looking for and how to demonstrate it.

Who you know and who knows you: Have testimonials and blurbs from known and noted people featured in your package. If you have a few big names behind you, that's more power for your marketing machine.

Do you have a following? If you put out a newsletter or other regular media you'll want to show how many subscribers you have. If you have a killer website, tell the number of hits you draw each month. If you sell a product, give sales figures to show you know how to produce what your customers want.

Are you in front of people all the time? Tell what media you already have under your belt. When and where were your last speaking engagements?

Describe any radio, television, newspaper or magazine interviews you've done recently.

If you're lacking in any of these areas, it's never too late to change your situation. Polishing your prose and your persona are the best steps you can take to attract a publisher. They'll also help ensure your success if you decide to go it on your own. Remember, any improvement on your writing or marketing fronts will never go to waste!

About the Author

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