

Agent for an Hour



What does an Agent do?

- They look for manuscripts to sell to publishers for publication.
- They work with author's they believe in as an author and a writer.
- They keep a pulse on what particular editors and publishers are looking for and what the current trends are, trying to keep ahead of the curve.
- They work diligently through the agency proposal process with the author.
- They submit the proposal presentation to strategically determined publishers.
- They keep the correspondence up with editors and publishers for reminders, re-pitches, etc.
- They negotiate contract terms (ie. advance, royalties, ms due date, international rights, ebook rights, etc.). They provide valuable counsel to their authors regarding which publisher would be the best fit for the author with their future writing goals in mind.
- They serve as a buffer between the author and the publisher—giving counsel and perspective prior to signing a deal and even afterwards, as well.
- They serve as an invaluable coach, cheerleader, advisor, and friend having the author's best interests in mind knowing that the largest advance isn't always the best advance to accept.
- They are enthusiastic about the author's writing, topic and potential.
- They offer constructive critique to improve their work
- While accessing a manuscript for possible representation, an agent will make strategic business decisions and ask themselves questions such as:

- a) Does this book have a big enough audience to support a publishing contract? Will it survive in the marketplace?
- b) What does my past experience tell me about this topic and how it is being handled?
- c) Is this book compatible with the current trends?
- d) What is my gut instinct telling me?
- e) Does the author bring something fresh and unusual to the topic?

The Purpose of the Submitted Proposal for an Agent

- First impressions are critical: What does it say to the agent about the author?
- Is the cover letter pleasant and brief? Is this the type of person the agent wants to work with?
- Are they sending what is required? Are they following instructions?
- It shows how an author is able to organize and articulate their content (this will show an agent how the author works. (Diligently? Carefully? Articulately?))
- Is the topic something the agent can connect with? (Every agent is different!)
- Is the author knowledgeable?
- Is the agent willing to work for six months w/o pay to commit to this project?
- What is the agents load currently?
- What stands out and is making the agent look twice?
- Is the idea captivating?
- Is the writing captivating?
- Is their influence captivating?

The Three C's

- **Concept:** How captivating is the concept? Is there a felt need in the market?
- **Craft:** How well is it written? How well are the sentences crafted? How well is the concept articulated? How well is it edited?
- **Crowd:** Social media platform, endorsements, circle of influence—growing, stagnant, non-existent?

When an Agent Takes an Interest

- Requests the full manuscript or additional chapters

- Follows up with a phone call to chat personally
- An Agent's usual questions (among many!) :

1) Are you willing to take the time to expand your platform?

2) Are you open to revisions before pitching?

3) Are you willing to change the title?

What does an Agent look for in a Proposal?



Title: A title is a *key sales tool*. You will be looking for a short and catchy lead title, paired with a more descriptive subtitle.

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Intro Letter: The intro letter is the first impression you will have of the author. You will learn many things just from an author's intro letter.

You will be able to pick up the feel for an author's style, writing abilities, whether they are humble, quirky, confident, bluffing, etc.

How the intro letter is composed can make the difference between you deleting the proposal and you willing to take a second look.

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Overview: This is, undoubtedly, one of the most important sections of the entire proposal. The *Overview* will be your first introduction to the author's writing abilities. You will be

looking for how well they can enthusiastically articulate the passion and vision of their book. This section will be one of the most intensely scrutinized sections in the entire proposal.

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Table of Contents: The chapter titles in a Table of Contents are a key part of a book's sales strategy. You will skim the TOC first to decide if you think the book looks interesting enough to read. For this reason, it is important that you see chapter titles that are concise, compelling and parallel with each other in length and tone.

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Chapter Summaries: In this section, you should see each chapter title listed and 2-4 sentences *briefly* describing the content of each chapter. You will be looking for clarity, articulation, passion and well constructed sentences.

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Comparable Works:

- You know that demonstrating familiarity with the market competition is an author's important responsibility.
- You are looking for the author to show you how the book is unique within their specific market. Or, if it is a subject already well written about, look for what the author is bringing to the conversation that is new and fresh?

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Target Market: You are looking for the author to explicitly describe their particular audience(s). You know that this is not for the purpose of *eliminating* any market, but an attempt to identify a *specific* market for the purpose of placing their book in a particular market segment.

You will look for it to be organized and under at least two headings: *Primary Audience*, *Secondary Audience*.

- **Primary Audience:**

The primary audience should be very specific. The goal isn't for the author to try and include everyone who might enjoy or be interested in reading their book, but to create a picture of their *ideal reader*.

- **Secondary Audience:**

If the author has identified their *primary audience*, the *secondary audience* can be more general. It is through the primary audience that the secondary audience will be exposed to the book. Look for this connection.

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Platform: You know this is one of the most important sections in the proposal and you will be looking for an author who is engaged with his/her audience in various ways and shows a determination of doing more. How this information is presented, to you, can be just as important as *what* is presented.

NO POWERPOINT EXAMPLE

Biography: This is the section where you will get better acquainted, personally, with the author. You are looking for a *brief* paragraph which includes relevant information that shows how the author's life experiences have prepared them to write this book—and why they are the best person to write it!

The author should list their experiences and/or credentials that qualify them to speak about this subject in a meaningful and unique way. This is not, however, the place for you to hear the author's entire life story or the story of their conversion.

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Writing Sample

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Format and Deliverables:

1. Is the manuscript finished? Completion date?
2. Word count?
3. Auxiliary product?

Conclusion:

An agent is looking for:

- Something unique/a new twist/a different angle/a fresh voice
- A well executed proposal

- Articulate, succinct and brief content confidently presented
- “Scanable” information (bulletin points, etc.)
- Well written and sample chapters that are edited well
- A sense of the felt need for this book in the market place and where it could be positioned
- An author who is flexible, teachable and patient with the process

These qualities can all be assessed simply by reading a proposal!

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