

WHY AN AUTHOR NEEDS A LITERARY AGENT

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Why does an author need an agent?

Many authors have struggled with the question of whether to invest the time and energy seeking the services of a professional Literary Agent. They wonder if that time might be better invested sending out queries, book proposals, and manuscripts to publishers. Here's a few good reasons why finding a good professional Literary Agent is a good idea:

Accelerated Access:

The first, and most obvious answer to the agent, but possibly not known to the author, is that a lot of the major publishing houses will simply not accept an manuscript unless it is represented by an established Literary Agent.

The publishing houses that do accept unsolicited (what unagented manuscripts are called) manuscripts put them at the bottom of the many piles, "slush piles," in their offices. **Agented manuscripts get read and considered for acquisition first.** So where it might take an editor three months to get to and read an Agented manuscript, it could take over a year (or even longer) to read an unagented one.

In many instances, unless the agent is new to the business themselves, in all likelihood established literary agencies have developed professional, and sometimes personal, relationships with specific editors at specific publishing houses, and by virtue of their contacts, can get a manuscripts considered much faster, if not moved right to the head of the line.

Imprimatur of Quality:

An agent is the editor's first line of defense. If an agent takes on a manuscript and submits it, the editor *knows*, and depends upon the fact, that the manuscript will be of professional quality, submitted in the correct format, is the right manuscript for the right editor, and will hopefully work for that editor and publishing house. **Agents save editors time.** It's physically impossible for an editor to evaluate every single manuscript submitted. Therefore, agents provide a vital level of screening/filtering to ensure that the editor is only evaluating the best material available.

From the author's perspective, having a professional Literary Agent present their work automatically puts consideration of that work into a more favorable light. In the minds of many editors and publishers, if a manuscript isn't of sufficient quality that an agent honestly believes it has commercial value and agrees to represent it, whereby they can earn income from it, then the editor doesn't want to waste their time on it either.

Contracts and Legalities:

Another major consideration is that an agent has more power, expertise and experience in negotiating legal contracts: money, royalties, subsidiary rights and so on. Usually contracts are six to ten pages long or more. A new author would not know what to stand firm on and what to give in on. There are elements of give-and-take in negotiations where an agent knows how to get around a problematic item that the editor does not want to give in on, but does so in a way that the editor will not lose totally, but that the agent will win something more than the original.

The Buffer Zone of Conflict and Seemingly Endless Administrative Details:

An agent is also the go-between. Normally agents stay out of the editorial back and forth between editor and author, but when there are problems an agent can step in and play the part of arbitrator and try to smooth things out. If not, and there are future books involved, an agent can talk to the editor and see if any changes can be made so that no one—not the editor or the author, or even the book—will suffer.

An agent keeps track of contract details with respect to the author:

- Money due the author
- Cover Art and any promotional items the publisher is supposed to provide
- Keeps tabs on the publishing date
- Monitors and follows up on statements due and correct money being paid
- Tracks releasing of rights that might have been negotiated
- Facilitates reversion of all rights of the book when the time comes

Coaching and Mentoring:

A good professional agent has probably seen most, if not all, of the various pitfalls that authors must avoid. They are intimately aware of the type of material editors are looking for, and what they reject. They can spot common mistakes in the writing itself and provide an objective analysis and constructive criticism in terms of how to make a manuscript attractive and salable. And, of course, the agent is there for support and encouragement. The publishing business can be very cold and heartless at times, and having someone on your team to help fight for you can make all the difference in the world.

The bottom line is that an agent does all the paperwork, leaving the author free to do what an author does best: **WRITE**.