

The Best Ways to get an Agent

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<http://greatstorybook.com/the-best-ways-to-get-an-agent/>

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This is about the BEST ways to get an agent - specifically, a literary agent. Not *all* the ways, just the ways that are most effective.

In today's book market for young readers (everything from illustrated storybooks to YA novels), the standard expectation is that you have an agent to represent you or

your work.

Twenty years ago, the most common method of finding an agent was by printing out your materials and snail mailing it to an agent. Fortunately, this is no longer the case.

Many people would still suggest that you email your submission to an agent, the idea being that you replace the paper version with an electronic one. I disagree fully and I'll tell you why.

Why the standard submission doesn't work

Even a brand new agent is going to be inundated with electronic submissions on a weekly basis. If they have no connection to you and are not expecting to get anything from you, your luck just went from slim to nil.

As the trends in book publishing for young readers has changed so much in the past 5 years, there are now agencies (read: not just individual agents, but entire firms) that no longer accept any kind of submission unless they have met with you personally.

You might be thinking: "WHAT?!?"

It's true. Some of the top literary agencies for children's books state clearly on their website that they only accept email queries from writers they have *met in person*.

So this begs the question: how do you meet an agent? I'm going to tell you.

Where I Stand

If you are wondering, I do have an agent – but not one who represents my illustrated storybooks. There are different types of literary agents, and the one I have represents my screenplays. Today, his business has changed so much, I doubt I would have won him over the way I did back then (email).

At the [Frankfurter Buchmesse 2015](#) (the largest book fair in the world - you can [read about my 2015 experience HERE](#)), it became very clear to me that editors today expected me to have an agent for my storybooks. They were kind and patient, but only one person didn't ask me who my agent was.

This was a surprise to me, because just a few years previously, two individual agents had told me I needn't bother with an agent for kid's stuff. There wasn't enough money in it, they said. Well, that has flipped over completely. There's plenty of money in it.

So I need another agent: one who will represent my writing for young readers (illustrated storybooks, middle grade novels and soon, YA novels).

What to do to get an agent TODAY

So the best way to get an agent is to meet one in person. HOW?

1. Attend an Excellent Writing Conference

There are writing conferences and seminars where agents also attend because they're looking for new talent to represent. This is your chance.

Here's a list of the writing conferences with reputations for really boosting a writer's career:

- [The San Francisco Writer's Conference](#) (February 11-14, 2016)
- [SCBWI Summer Conference in Los Angeles](#) (July 29- August 1, 2016)
- [SCBWI Winter Conference in New York](#) (February 12-14, 2016)
- [Writer's Digest Annual Conference](#) (August 12-14, 2016)

If you cannot make it to one of the big events, go to a local one. Even if there aren't any agents attending, it will nonetheless be an experience where you can learn something.

To find a local book event, just do a simple search on the Internet for “(Your-Town) Book Events.”

2. Attend the Right Book Fair

There are book fairs too. What you need to know here is that some of the book fairs focus on the distribution and rights aspect of the industry, and other fairs focus on the creation aspect of the industry.

The next [Bologna Children's Book Fair](#) will be April 4-7, 2016. If you are a writer &/or illustrator, this is the place to be. There will be hundreds of literary agents there who specialize in books with pictures.

The fair also offers [The Illustrator's Café](#), which is an exclusive café where agents, publishers, illustrators and writers are able to meet and mingle.

So how do you mingle with agents? Just talk. For many writers, this is a task that raises worry and sweaty palms and a queasy feeling in the stomach. Stop that. Agents are people. Really, they are.

Don't drive yourself mad trying to think of everything that could go wrong or what the cleverest thing to say would be. Just know how to pitch what you've written - and know not to pitch unless the agent asks.

So how do you know who is who at these events?

Agents attending an event will be listed on the website of that event and most agents provide pictures of themselves. So you can find out who is attending and be able to recognize them once you do find yourself in the same room with them.

That means you can introduce yourself knowing exactly who they are and what they've been doing with

their career.

“Industry Oriented” Event: what this means

There are many book fairs around the world. Just be aware that the words “industry oriented” means it isn’t really for the sole writer unless that writer plans on exploring the business of publishing or book producing (read: not POD).

Industry Oriented Events are chock full of agents, but the chances that any of them will want or be able to talk to a writer are extremely unlikely. Their mindset at such places is to sell what they’re already representing, not to find someone new to represent.

3. Attend Book Signings

You should attend book events of any nature, and a book signing – especially one at a local bookshop you love or a culturally invested café – is a great place to meet writers and other creative people. Chances are good that those writers know other writers and editors and agents. This is how you immerse yourself into the publishing network.

I don’t want to suggest that you get to know people just on the off chance that you’ll snap up an agent. Far from it!

The key here is in becoming a part of the community you want to join. If you don’t place yourself in locations where you know writers will be, you will never become part of that world. If you want to join in the business, then join in where you can.

If you cannot make it to the international event, go to the local one. Even if there aren’t any agents attending, it will nonetheless be an experience where you can learn something.

4. Research Agents

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that you could convince *any agent* to represent your work because it’s so awesome. How solid your work is doesn’t matter. Well – it does, but it isn’t *enough*. You have to get the right agent for your awesome stories.

So it’s essential that you have a grasp on which agents out there would be interested in your work. If you write historical non-fiction for middle graders and the agent is only interested in urban fantasy YA, you won’t match-up.

You don’t need to meet an agent to find this out – not anymore. Thanks to the Internet, most agents express more or less what they want to represent right on the short biographical information they provide on their agency’s website.

Too, most agents have Twitter accounts, many have blogs and some even post the occasional Wish List of what specific manuscript types they need or want right now. So what agents seek is becoming less

elusive a thing for the savvy writer who knows about all this.

Without leaving your chair, you can find out who sells your type of work and what they specifically are looking to deal right now. So find that out and make notes.

When an agent declares that they annually attend X, Y and Z book events, you know they'll be there. They probably make arrangements a year in advance.

What to Take Away

You've got to read what the agent posts and writes very carefully. Every word. If they're accessible at all over the Internet, agents will indicate or at least hint at all the basic questions you would want to ask of them.

Just know that you can't get any agent, you need to seek the agent that really suits you – and that takes time and a great deal of effort.

It doesn't hurt to send a query (only so long as the agency website announces that they are accepting queries!), but be aware of how incredibly busy literary agents are. And know that your chances of catching their attention are much higher if they've met you in person.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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