

Comparing Book Fairs: Frankfurt vs. Bologna

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/comparing-book-fairs-frankfurt-vs-bologna/>

This entry is part 3 of 5 in the series [Bologna Book Fair 2016](#)

[Bologna Book Fair 2016](#)

- [Bologna Book Fair Impressions](#)
- [Unpublished Manuscripts at Bologna Book Fair](#)
- [Comparing Book Fairs: Frankfurt vs. Bologna](#)
- [Portfolio Viewings: What your portfolio MUST show Art Directors](#)
- [Getting Gigs the Book Fair Way: 4 Steps](#)

Comparing Book Fairs in Frankfurt and Bologna at first seemed to me an impossible task, because they are so very different from each other.

Every year, Frankfurt hosts the largest book event in the world, and Bologna hosts the largest children's book event in the world.

Here's how these two amazing book fairs are similar and how they differ, in 5 simple ways that lead to drastically different experiences.

[The Frankfurter Buchmesse](#) (or Frankfurt Book Fair) is an amazing fair showcasing millions of books from around the world. It's international; it's bombastic.

[The Bologna Children's Book Fair](#) is an amazing fair showcasing many thousands (I don't know how many because they don't publish this information) of books for kids – everything from baby books to YA novels. But the big draw are the beautiful illustrated storybooks that generally target kids between 5-9. It's international; it's inspiring.

Both of these book fairs are famous, both are in Europe and both are really awesome (read: actually inspiring a sense of awe) events - but for very different reasons. If you've never experienced these fairs or perhaps have experienced one, you might wonder about what they *offer*. What are their benefits and at what cost or compromise?

So that's what I want to share with you now.

About Price & how this affects the Publishers.

The Frankfurt Fair is chock-full of publishers of all sizes from around the world. Large publishers and small. The reason for this is because the fair offers special discounted prices for smaller businesses. If you review the prices for having a stand in Frankfurt, you'll find that they're very reasonable. Because of this, there are some tiny stands, barely larger than a card table. There are also enormous stands from the large publishing houses, sometimes as large as an *actual house* - one big enough for a family of 8, easily.

What's great about this price structure is that a budding publisher or even a self-published author can actually have a presence at the Frankfurt Fair.

The Bologna Fair has primarily large houses and some medium-sized houses. There are a few small publishers who team-up to share a space together, but there aren't really that many. For the most part, those who have come to represent their firm or organizations are pulling out all the stops and are there to impress. Stands are highly visual and bombastic.

There are no self-published authors and no brand new publishers present at the Bologna Fair, and I've no doubt it's because of the expense.

In Frankfurt, you pay only for the space you use. Walls, shelves and anything else you require are included. Also, your price per square meter is cheaper for smaller spaces than it is for larger ones. This is a great incentive for those wanting to try the fair for a first time.

In Bologna, you pay per square meter of space, but the price is flat regardless of how much space you rent. Also, you must rent every wall, every shelf, every lamp and any furniture you use – tables, chairs, etc.

Whether you have a stand or not, one of the most jarring differences is the organization. The Frankfurt Fair is highly organized. The Bologna Fair... that it actually takes place at all is a miracle. I'll be writing more about this in another post.

About the Agents.

If you don't have an appointed meeting with an agent in Frankfurt, you'll never talk to one. They are cordoned off in a special, secret agent floor. You cannot get in, not even just to look around a bit.

In Bologna, I bumped into several literary agents and art directors. They have more time, and they'll take the time (whenever they can) to roam around the fair and chat with people. I met some very nice, very interesting people.

About Portfolio Viewings from Publishers.

In Frankfurt, many publishers are open to a portfolio viewing, though between very specific hours.

In Bologna, most of the publishers present (especially those not from the US) are very interested in viewing portfolios. Many post when you can show, and you'll see a line of artists waiting when those hours hit. But some publishers are generally available all the time, and you only need to be brave enough to ask.

At both book fairs, you'll typically get 3-10 minutes to show your work. If they like your work, they'll ask for your business card and give you one of theirs.

About Publishers talking to Writers.

At the Frankfurt Book Fair, there's so much happening, there's very little time to really chat with people. So when you approach a publisher, you need to have an elevator pitch at the ready. But editors are interested, and if there isn't an editor available at that moment, someone will tell you when to return. At the very least, you'll walk away with the correct contact information for the editor best matched to your project.

At Frankfurt, you'll typically get 3-10 minutes to pitch your project. Never more than that.

At the Bologna Book Fair, people are either in a meeting or they're roaming the halls and ready for a friendly chat. So it isn't possible to seek out a specific person and talk to them about your project. You have to just get lucky.

At Bologna, you'll either get kicked away with the advice to check their website for Submission Guidelines, or you'll happily bump into someone and be able to converse with them and even pitch your project for 20 minutes.

In Frankfurt, everyone is quite friendly (publishers, distributors, printers - didn't meet any agents though), but there's a high-pitched fervor. There's a sense of serious business happening there, and big numbers. The tension, nervousness and excitement bristle in the air. It's everywhere.

In Bologna, not everyone is as friendly (strangely), at least not when they're working their own stand. But run into people around the fair and you'll find editors and agents who are willing and able to spend 20 minutes with you in an actual discussion. There is tension and excitement, and certainly a pressure to perform, but it's lower key as well.

About the Dresscode.

There's a drastic difference. In Frankfurt, the atmosphere is highly professional. Most people are wearing business suits or very expensive dresses. In order to not look homeless, I came in some of my best clothes.

In Bologna, anything goes. Purple hair, spikes, hippie clothes, ripped jeans. Whatever makes you feel comfortable enough to take a nap in it – you're good. It's the Bologna Fair way, and I can tell you why: it's the artists.

Artists dress however they want, and at the Bologna Fair, out on the floor and roaming the halls, they outnumber everyone else.

Still, you can generally see very easily who is who at the Bologna Fair. Artists pretty much look like artists. Agents are more casually dressed than they are while in Frankfurt, but they're still pretty easy to spot: shiny shoes, smartly dressed. Writers are typically the ones who have no fashion sense at all. Publishers in Bologna are in their Friday attire. When they're in Frankfurt, they wear their best.

Overall.

Both fairs are impressive. If you love books, you'll love going to these fairs. If you are a writer or an illustrator, I would recommend going to either, if only to expand your horizons and just learn as much as you can.

If you're an artist, the event you have to attend is unquestionably the Bologna Book Fair. It's focus is really on the illustrators, and there is absolutely amazing artwork everywhere. Some of it made me laugh out loud, some brought tears to my eyes. All of it was inspiring and made me want to get back to work!

If you're a writer, there are no specific or special events targeted just to you. You know, like at most events. We're the kids in the corner, watching. But as writers are great observers, I can tell you this: there is a wealth of real experience to be gleaned here, from both book fairs. You'll leave so full of new input, it will hugely impact your writing.

I cannot even begin to explain everything I've learned at these fairs – but I'm trying anyway!

[Here's my list of articles on the Frankfurt 2015 Fair](#). You can scroll through and get more details there. (You'll find me attending in October 2016. *If you're going, let me know!*)

[Here's my list of articles on the Bologna 2016 Fair](#). More details are coming!

There's much more to tell, much more to share. In the meantime, keep sending me your questions – be it about the fairs or the craft of being a writer. I've been getting some really great, really interesting emails lately. I love it, so keep those coming!

Keep creating, no matter what.

This entry is part of the series

[Bologna Book Fair 2016](#)

Be sure to check out the other posts:

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[Art Directors >>](#)

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