

Introduction

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Just before I was due to leave my last in-house role as a Publishing Consultant at Random House, I was asked if I would like to contribute to an evening presentation for the general public entitled *Publish Your Book*. It was being organised by Alternatives who run weekly talks at St James's Church, Piccadilly, as well as seminars and workshops in other venues around London. The aim of the event was to provide writers with inspiration and practical information on how to find publishers for the books they had written or were hoping to write.

We were a team of four: two authors (who spoke of their personal experience of having their books published), a literary agent, and myself as the Publisher. To our delight and amazement the event was heavily oversubscribed. People were standing at the back of the room and eventually more had to be turned away at the door when we couldn't fit anyone else in! It was a huge success and an uplifting occasion for all concerned.

I came away from that evening with the realisation that there was - and still is - a great need for good-quality information to be made available to writers who are seeking publishers for their work. There are hundreds of courses and classes to help people develop their craft as writers and yet where do all of these talented individuals go next? All too often their work ends up in the 'slush pile' of unsolicited projects that are sent in their thousands to agents and publishers every week. From there it is only a short step to a standard rejection letter.

Publishing can appear to be a confusing and complicated labyrinth when viewed from the outside, and without the necessary information to find their way around the maze, writers can end up feeling extremely disheartened. The dearth of information for writers wanting to enter into the world of publishing was made abundantly apparent to me on the evening of our first presentation. The sheer numbers of people looking for help and the vastness of the gratitude we received in the feedback was a significant factor in my decision to consider how I might be able to contribute more actively to fill this gap in people's knowledge.

My own journey into publishing began in the 1980s when the industry climate was vastly different to the one we have today. It was a major turning point in my life when I decided to leave London and take up a role as a Desk Editor at independent publisher Element Books Ltd, based in Shaftesbury, Dorset. Although I had no previous publishing experience, I was passionate about the subject matter of the books Element published. That commitment, combined with the good connection I made with founder and Managing Director Michael Mann during my interview, secured my first job in publishing.

The Writer's Journey: From Inspiration to Publication

Learning from the ground up, I was fortunate enough to have joined the company when it was still small enough for me to become fairly quickly involved in many aspects of the publishing process. My desk editing work soon developed into a commissioning role and over the years led to me working directly with hundreds of authors. I grew with the company and the pace soon became fast and intense. Success led to further success and after some time as Editorial Director, I took on the role of Managing Director and Publisher of the company, which by that time was turning over around £12 million and publishing over 100 new titles a year.

My time as Managing Director gave me a broad perspective on the whole publishing process to add to the editorial expertise I had previously gained. These factors combined to stand me in good stead for my later role as a Publishing Consultant at Random House - which enabled me to experience at first hand the corporate culture of one of the largest publishing groups in the world - and subsequently when I came to set up my own business, *Firefly Media*.

When the time came for me to take the step into self-employment, my aim was to create a new way of working that supported my own creativity and expertise as well as offering me the opportunity to facilitate a similar process for others. It wasn't too long before it became clear that I could apply the knowledge and experience I had gained from 20 years in the business with a fresh approach by working on a one-to-one basis as a Publishing Consultant for writers as well as by continuing to present talks and workshops on the subject.

Sharing my publishing 'know-how' via these methods has proved to fit perfectly with my desire to build a bridge towards the publishing shore for writers seeking publication as well as increasingly to honour my own creative expression. This book is a result of all of these factors coming together.

The premise on which I work is that in the tough, competitive environment that exists in publishing today, where publishers are taking fewer and fewer risks with new authors, your best chances for success lie in knowing how to present yourself and your work to the right people in the right way.

The Writer's Journey is designed primarily to help you prepare your non-fiction writing for professional presentation to agents and publishers in a manner that will offer you the greatest opportunity for your project to be noticed, viewed in its most favourable light and, at the very least, considered seriously. Beyond that, your fate lies out of both of our hands.

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If you follow the guidelines I am suggesting, they will take you on a journey - your own writer's journey. The only place to begin such a quest as far as I am concerned is within yourself, and so your starting point is a brief exploration of the inner realms that fuel your creative fire, and developing your writing practice and the qualities you will need to become a successful published author. As you proceed through the chapters, gradually you will work outwards towards understanding something of the market and the world of publishing. The most important features of the book are the explanations of what you can do in practical terms to improve your chances of reaching the stages described in the final chapter. This covers the stages from contract to bound copies and beyond into the crucial realms of sales, marketing and publicity - all essential ingredients for success in publishing terms.

Although many publishing principles apply across the board, the emphasis in this book is on non-fiction, black and white publications. That is not to say that if you are a fiction writer or have an idea for a book that you think will work well in full-colour you should stop reading now. You will still benefit from much of the information that I have included. However, inevitably there are some differences between the fiction and non-fiction genres (for example, I do not cover the development of characters and plot that should form part of your proposal for a fiction title). Further, as far as colour, illustrated books are concerned, it is important to realise that international market considerations apply amongst other specific variables. The final decision-making process is also different with illustrated books because of the high costs involved in producing such titles. This means that such books have to be pre-sold before the 'go-ahead' is given to an author. Of course, the way these books are put together differs as well, but all of that is well beyond the parameters of these pages. Nevertheless, the principles relating to the preparation of yourself and your work for presentation to agents or publishers should essentially follow the same stages as outlined in each of the following chapters.

So will all of the hard work that I am suggesting you undertake be worth it? Only time and experience will tell. I could not possibly give a hard-and-fast guarantee that working your way through this book will lead you straight into a publishing deal. Nothing in life is that certain. And it is indeed true that some authors don't have to go through one or more of the stages outlined in order to get their work published. On occasions, publishers do 'pop up', seemingly out of the blue, and invite people who are already doing interesting work (visible through articles or seminars) to discuss the possibility of writing a book. I have done this myself on a fair number of occasions and happily some excellent books have resulted from those approaches. If such an opportunity arises for you, then I would be the first to congratulate you and wish you every success.

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However, what if it doesn't? Are you going to wait around on the off-chance that you will be approached by a publisher or do you want to contribute more actively to the

process? If the latter is true, I believe strongly that your chances of success will be greatly enhanced by following the course of action I have set out here. After all, as Louis Pasteur once said, 'Fortune smiles on the man who is prepared.'