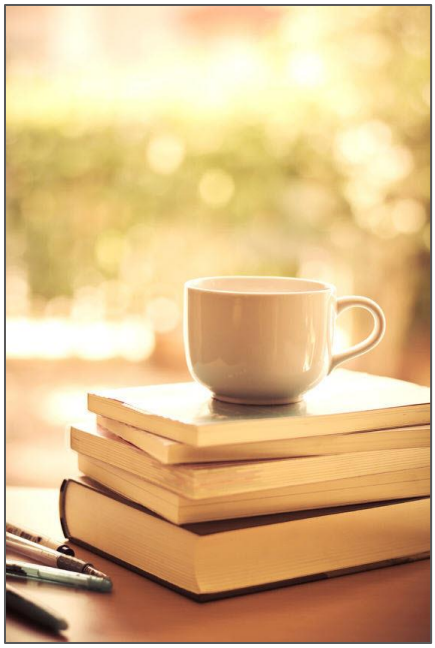
Report: How to Land a Traditional Book Deal (Nonfiction)

If you've set a goal to get published with a major publishing house, this report will show you the steps needed to proceed.



Traditional Book Deal Checklist

- ✓ Develop your platform for book sales. Publishers give extra consideration to authors with a large platform (audience).
- ✓ Decide on a concept for your book—something unique that will stand out against competition.
- ✓ Define your target audience to ensure you have a market for the book.
- ✓ Evaluate the competition to ensure there is market demand and that your book has a unique hook.
- ✓ Write a query letter to send to agents and/or editors. A query is your initial point of contact.
- ✓ Write a complete proposal and at least two sample chapters to send to agents/editors upon request.
- ✓ Research and then contact agents until you find one who is excited about your project—or research smaller publishing houses and contact them directly. Most agents and publishers list submission guidelines on their websites.
- ✓ Negotiate a contract and sign a deal.
- ✓ Finish writing your book by the due date outlined in your contract.
- ✓ Proceed through the editing process which can take months to complete.
- ✓ Launch the new book and market the heck out of it.

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler

LITERARY AGENTS

While most small and mid-size publishers accept book proposals directly, the largest publishing houses will only work with literary agents. If you want to receive a substantial book advance and get published with a big press (such as Random House), then you will likely need to work with an agent.



A literary agent acts as a liaison between an author and a publishing house. Literary agents take a percentage of the book deals that they make, which typically amounts to around 10% of U.S. rights and 15% if they sell foreign rights (the rights for your book to be published in another country). Many agents also charge back to clients for photo copying and shipping. Reputable agents do not charge fees to read a book proposal or manuscript so beware of any agent that requires a fee upfront.

Once an author signs a contract with an agent, the agent then helps the author fine-tune his proposal and prepare it for submission to publishers. When the proposal is ready, the agent then sends it to her publishing contacts and navigates the negotiation process and contract terms.

The agent and the author share the same goal: to get the largest book advance possible. An advance is what the publisher pays the author in anticipation of book sales. The publisher estimates how much revenue the book sales will generate and bases the advance on that figure.

Authors don't earn any royalties on book sales until the advance is earned back. Once that happens, royalties are paid to the author based on a percentage agreed to in the author's publishing contract, with rates ranging from 8-15% of either the wholesale or retail price of the book. For new authors, a book advance can be as low as $2,500. Some well-known authors receive advances well into the six-figures. Celebrities often receive seven-figure advances.

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler



Advances are typically paid in payments, which are made during the course of the agreement. For example, you may be offered 33% up front, 33% upon submission of your completed manuscript, and the remaining balance when the book goes to press.

When working with an agent, royalties are paid to the agent, and then the agent takes his/her cut and sends the remaining payment to the author. Royalty payment schedules are typically slow. Some publishers send payments just once or twice per year.

How to Find an Agent

Each agent has a special interest and focuses on books in certain genres. This usually reflects the agent's personal reading taste and the contacts he or she has at various publishing houses. It would be a waste of time to send a book proposal for a cookbook to an agent who specializes in children's books so it's important to research agents and their specialties before wasting anyone's time with an inappropriate pitch.

Authors should keep in mind that *agents need authors as much as authors need the agents*! The agents make their living off their authors, and therefore want to work with authors who they believe have the most potential for sales. Part of this equation is dictated by the publishers. Publishers don't like to gamble on new authors unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

Most of the larger publishing houses, and therefore agents, seek authors with a built-in platform. A platform is essentially the author's audience and ability to sell the book. The publisher wants to know that the author is well-known and has an audience of buyers at their disposal. A good author platform means that the author has a national presence through speaking

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler

engagements, internet exposure, social media, writing a national column, hosting a popular radio show or having some other kind celebrity status that reaches large numbers of potential readers.



Previous media exposure is also helpful. Has the author been on TV, radio, or in print? Your past experience also counts toward your platform. Publishers and agents don't want to hear what you will start doing AFTER your book is released *("I will start blogging! I will start speaking!"*) They want to know how you are reaching your audience TODAY.

Without a platform, it is far more difficult to convince big publishers to take a chance on a new author, though not impossible. Small and mid-sized publishers, however, may still consider a new author if the book idea is convincing enough.

Most agents and smaller publishing houses detail their submission requirements on their websites so that authors know what to send and how it should be delivered. In most cases, agents want to see a query letter first so they can get an idea of what your book is about and whether it is a good fit for them.

Many agencies accept queries via e-mail, while others require them through postal mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope so they can return a response. A query letter should include a brief synopsis of the book with a solid hook. This is your chance to convince the agent that there is an audience for the book and that you are the person to write about the subject. Include a brief author bio detailing your specific qualifications for writing the book. You don't necessarily have to be an expert on a subject to write about it, but if you're not, you should have statistics and interviews from sources who are.

If the agent is intrigued by your query letter, she will request a book proposal and sample chapters. Be sure you have your these items ready to go before you send out query letters.

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler

CONTACT PUBLISHERS DIRECTLY



There are hundreds of small and mid-size publishing houses that may be willing to consider your book without the assistance of an agent. The best way to locate these is to examine books in your genre. Find out who is publishing the majority of books in your subject area and begin researching your options. Most publishers have websites where they detail what they expect from the submission process.

Similar to the query letter that you would write an agent, you can use a query letter to contact smaller publishers directly. The following is an actual query letter that helped author Romanus Wolter sell his manuscript to Wiley Publishing:

Sample Query Letter THAT SOLD

Hi (Name of Person),

I would love to speak with you about my new book Kick Start Your Success and its ability to become a market phenomenon. I created this book to "compel people to take the right action for their success—now!"

I respect your time. Please feel free to call me at anytime to discuss the possibilities. My cell number is xxx and my work number is xxx.

Many people are overwhelmed with the challenges they face in their lives and in their careers. They are searching for action steps they can take to move forward on their dreams.

Kick Start Your Success is a short, wise book. I have listed below a few powerful best sellers that are similar in length to Kick Start Your Success (without a foreword or an index:

approximately 90 pages). These books became classics simply by making a difference in people's lives.

As my friends, family, colleagues and clients constantly remind me–people want to know what action steps they can take today to achieve success.

- ***Kick Start Your Success enables people to move forward on their ideas–in just in one sitting.*** *We all have the capacity to carve out two to four hours in a weekend or late one night. Otherwise, it seems as if "life always gets in the way of my dreams."*

- ***Its action steps apply to life, career and business.*** *Kick Start Your Success creates a solid foundation from which people can achieve life, career and business goals. Since readers will most likely write in the book—they will buy another copy for their next goal.*

- ***Penetrating the "gift" market****. We want to help people, especially our loved ones, succeed but do not want to overwhelm them. People will buy Kick Start Your Success for themselves and additional copies for their friends and family–enabling them to achieve their dream goals by inspiring others to help them.*

- ***Engaging today's audience****. We have become accustomed to receiving information quickly via television and the Internet. People will carry this compact book with them as they work on their goals, creating even greater word-of-mouth advertising.*

- ***Exciting the press.*** *Members of the press are used to getting succinct information—they must instantly attract audience interest. This is precisely why the 80-page On Bullshit, by Harry Frankfurt, is attracting a great deal of attention (#3 on Amazon.com and over 200,000 copies sold) due to its length and its content.*

I am passionate about making this short, powerful version a reality. My "work in the trenches" indicates that the book will be a bestseller. "Up next on Oprah—Kick Start Your Success: Helping you create a solid foundation for your goal in just one hour!"

I would love to become part of the (Publisher's name) family because of your dedication to the authors you serve. Please feel free to call me at anytime to discuss the possibilities – my cell is xxx.

Possibilities,

Romanus

"The Kick Start Guy"

Resources for Finding Agents and Publishers:

- ✓ The Association of Authors Representatives is a member-based organization for agents who follow a defined code of conduct: www.aar-online.org.
- ✓ *Guide to Literary Agents* by Chuck Sambuchino.
- ✓ Publisher's Marketplace offers a directory of agents: http://www.publishersmarketplace.com/.
- ✓ Go to the bookstore or library to check out books in your genre. Most authors give a special thanks to their agent or editor in the acknowledgements section.
- ✓ If you locate an agent and aren't sure about his or her reputation, try a Google search. You can also ask for referrals to other authors who have worked with the agent. Remember, the agents need authors as much as we need them and you have every right to do your homework and make sure the agent is a good fit for you.
- ✓ Search competing books on Amazon and locate the publishers, then go to each publisher's website and look for submission guidelines. Many small- to mid-sized presses accept pitches directly (no agent needed). This is an especially good strategy for authors of books on niche topics.
- ✓ Here are guidelines for writing a query letter.

ELEMENTS OF A BOOK PROPOSAL



A good book proposal should be convincing, thorough, and fully edited for spelling and grammatical errors. Keep in mind that your proposal reflects you and your professionalism so you want to make sure it is high-quality and follows industry standards. Proposals can range from 10-50 pages. Remember to check the website of the agent or publisher you are pitching to see if they provide specific guidelines for proposals you send to them. They will typically require some variation of the following.

In general, a proposal should have the following elements:

- ✓ Typed on 8.5 x 11 white standard bond paper.
- ✓ Contents should be double-spaced.
- ✓ A footer should indicate the author's name and book title.
- ✓ Pages numbered consecutively.
- ✓ A standard font, such as Times New Roman, in 12-point size for easy reading.
- ✓ If sending via postal mail, it should not be stapled or bound with anything other than a large binder clip.

The following is an outline you can use to create your book proposal:

- ✓ **Cover Page** – This should include the book title, sub-title, author name, estimated word count for the final book (typically 60,000 – 80,000 words), and author's contact information (address, phone number, e-mail address and website URL).

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler

- ✓ **Overview** – Two to five pages that highlight the most important elements of the book. Keep in mind that your first few paragraphs are your best chance to hook the agent or editor. If these paragraphs aren't immediately engaging, the rest of your proposal may not be read. Explain why the world needs this book, what the book is about, and why you are the best person to write it. If you are able to obtain any endorsements from celebrities or well-known authors, list them.

- ✓ **Market Analysis** – One or two pages that explain who your target readers are. Are you targeting single mothers, people with food allergies, or corporate executives? Baseball fans, dog owners or teenagers? List any recent statistics that support your case for a broad audience.

- ✓ **Competitive Analysis** – List at least five books that would compete with your title. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of each and how your book will be different or better. Make sure to cite the author, publisher, and date of publication for each book. If you haven't read your competitors' books, you will need to do so in order to complete this section. It is also a great way to help you structure your book since evaluating the competition is sure to give you some ideas for ways to make your book better.

- ✓ **Promotion Plan** – Two or more pages that describe how you will market this book. This is an important element of your proposal so put a lot of thought and substance in this section. List any media experience and contacts that you currently have. If your website receives a lot of traffic, you write a national column, you are a public speaker reaching thousands each year, you have a massive social media following or have any other major audience credentials, list details here.

  Keep in mind that most publishers don't spend much money to promote new authors. You can offer to do a book tour, but will most likely have to fund the tour yourself. If you have a significant amount of money that you plan to contribute to promotion efforts, indicate this here by saying, "The author is willing to match the publisher's promotion budget up to $xxxx.xx." If you plan to spend less than $5,000, leave this statement out.

- ✓ **Chapter Outline** – Include chapter titles and key points for each chapter. This can be a bulleted list or several paragraphs describing each chapter.

- ✓ **Author Bio** – Give a brief overview of your qualifications, previous writing credits, and anything that will justify why you are a good person to write this book. This is not the place to list your hobbies, pets, or other irrelevant details. Stick to the topic at hand and demonstrate your authority on the subject. Most importantly, if you have a large following (huge mailing list, regular speaking engagements, etc.), make sure you indicate it here.

- ✓ **Delivery Information** – This is a short paragraph that lists the estimated word count of the completed manuscript, and the number of months needed to complete the manuscript.

- ✓ **Sample Chapters** – Include one to three sample chapters.

- ✓ **Supporting Documentation** – Include copies of published articles, publicity materials, and anything that demonstrates the author's talents, accomplishments, and promotional abilities.

Try a FREE 14-Day Trial Membership in the Nonfiction Authors Association.
Get Your Free Trial Here

PUBLISHING CONTRACTS

If a publisher offers you a contract, get ready for your head to spin. These contracts can vary greatly in what they offer and what they expect from the author. In general, a contract will outline the following:



Payment Terms

A book advance fee ranging from $2500-$10,000 is most typical for first time authors without a substantial platform. Advances are often paid over time; some pay half at contract signing, and half after the manuscript is accepted (after the final editing process is complete). Some pay in thirds: one third upon contract signing, one third upon acceptance, and one third when the book is published.

Royalty rates are paid after the book earns back the initial advance. Then royalties are paid based on a percentage of the book's retail, or more commonly, wholesale price. Typical percentages are 8-15% of the wholesale price, and the percentages may increase on a tiered scale depending on the number of books sold. You will also receive a separate percentage for ebook sales.

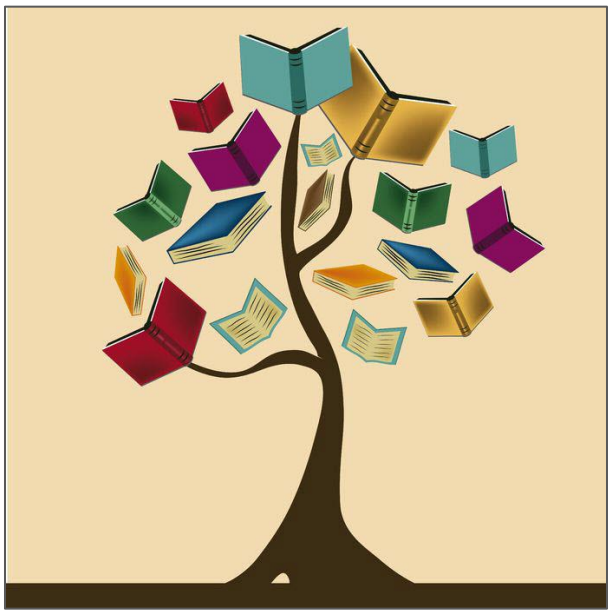
The terms for sales of foreign rights, audio or book club rights are typically split 50/50 between the publisher and the author. For example, if the publisher sells the rights to reprint your book in France for $2000, they will deduct any related expenses and split the remaining balance with you.

Rights

Generally, when you sign a contract with a publisher, you are giving up much of the control over your work. The contract may require that you do not reprint any portion of your manuscript in any other format. You may be allowed to use portions of the text for reprinting in

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler

magazines or other promotional venues. The publisher may also request the right to change the title of your book and often will have full control over your book's cover design.



The publisher will also specify the amount of time they have in order to publish your book. This timeframe can range from 12 months to three years. Yes, really! If they don't publish within the agreed timeframe, you have the right to cancel your contract.

Remember that you will also be involved in the editing process. Your manuscript will be reviewed by a copy editor and sent to you with requests for revisions. This process can take months and you may go back and forth several times before you receive the final copy for approval.

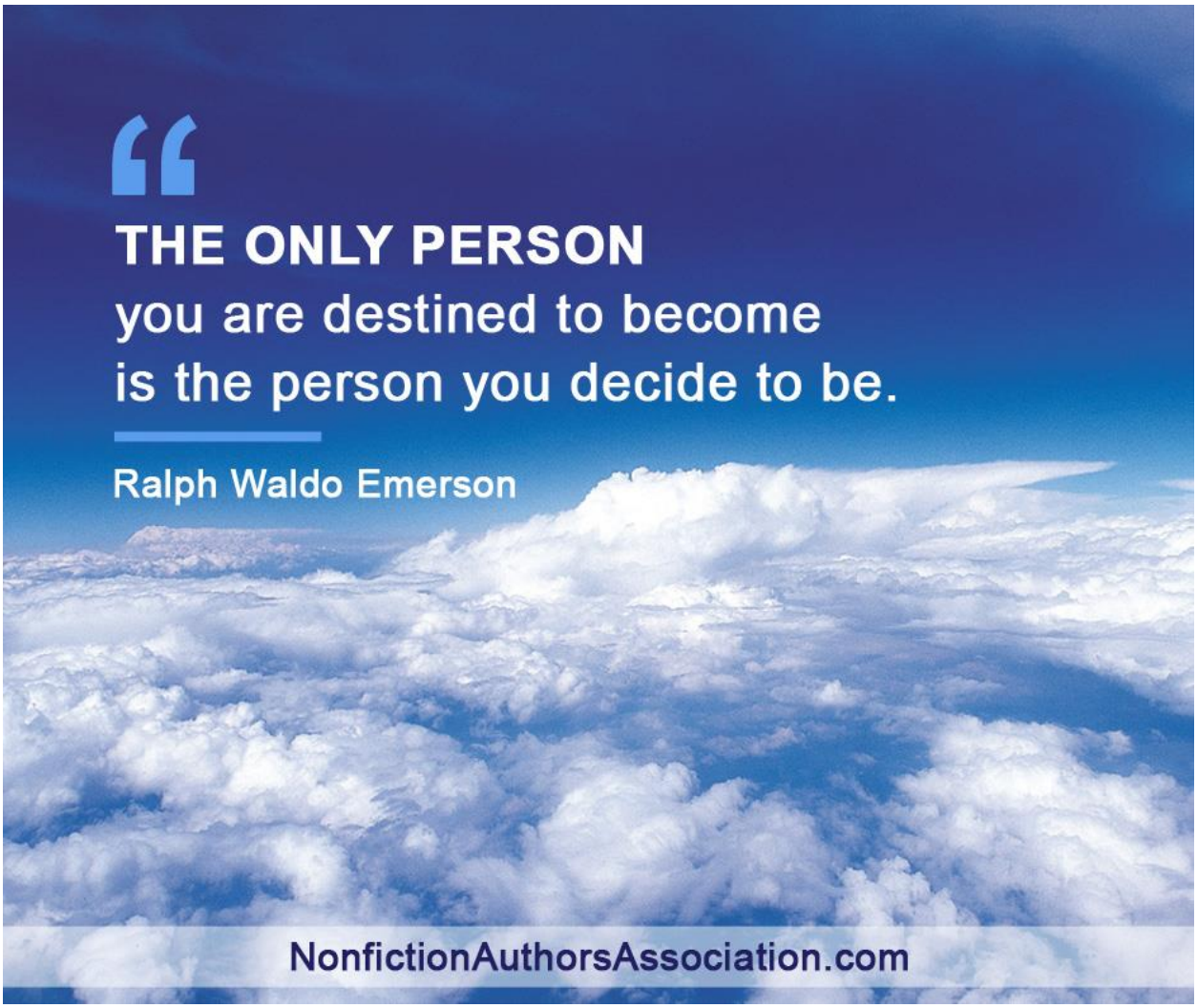
If you receive a book contract offer directly (without an agent), use due diligence and hire a literary attorney or experienced consultant who can help you review the terms of the contract and understand typical negotiation points. Whenever you sign your name to any legal document, you should be well-informed and know exactly what you're getting into. Determine what criteria are most important to you and don't be afraid to ask for some changes. The publisher may or may not be willing to negotiate, but you won't know unless you ask!

Additional Resources

- ✓ *How to Write a Book Proposal* by Michael Larsen
- ✓ Nonfiction book proposal outline from Ted Weinstein, literary agent: http://www.twliterary.com/bookproposal/
- ✓ Literary attorneys: Dana Newman (http://dananewman.com/), Francine Ward (https://francineward.com/) and Helen Sedwick (http://helensedwick.com/).

The process of pursuing a book deal can provide good industry education for authors. You may receive feedback from agents and editors that help your book be more successful in the long run. Just know that the process takes time. Locating contacts, doing research, sending queries and sending proposals can take months or even years. And if you are offered a deal, you will again wait at least another year before your book reaches book shelves. But if this is an important goal for you, these timelines should be just small obstacles to overcome.

Best wishes for a successful journey!



If you like this report, you'll love the Nonfiction Authors Association!

Our members receive many benefits:



- **Media Leads for Authors:** A round-up of podcasts, blogs, and other media outlets seeking guest contributors, delivered to your inbox every Friday
- **Weekly Educational Teleseminars**: Featuring industry pros, plus event recordings archived for one year
- **Exclusive Content:** Templates, checklists, worksheets, and other content released weekly
- **Private Community:** Access to our active members-only Facebook group
- **Marketing Homework:** Quick tips sent via email every Monday
- **Meet the Members Program:** Share your book announcements with our entire mailing list, plus get featured on our blog and social media networks reaching 100k+
- **Chapter Meetings:** Complimentary admission to any NFAA local chapter meeting across the U.S. and U.K.
- **Partner Discounts:** Lulu.com, Findaway Voices, Office Depot, IngramSpark, PR Newswire, ProfNet, Foreword Reviews, and more
- **Member Discounts:** Save on the Nonfiction Book Awards, Nonfiction Writers Conference events, online courses and our exclusive Author Toolkits

Join the Nonfiction Authors Association!
https://NonfictionAuthorsAssociation.com/join

Copyright © 2020 by Stephanie Chandler