

**'What authors need
is good practical advice.
This book provides it.'**

Mark Le Fanu,
General Secretary,
Society of Authors



Marketing Your Book: an author's guide

SECOND EDITION

How to target agents, publishers and readers **Alison Baverstock**

Marketing your book

An author's guide

How to target agents,
publishers and readers

Second edition

Alison Baverstock



A & C Black

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Second edition 2007

A & C Black Publishers Limited
38 Soho Square
London W1D 3HB
www.acblack.com

First edition published 2001

© 2007, 2001 Alison Baverstock

ISBN: 978 0 7136 7383 8

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
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Cover illustration and design © Michelle Radford 2007

Typeset in 10/12pt Sabon

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, RG1 8EX

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Dedication

For Alasdair, Harriet, Jack and Hamish – still my most fruitful source of market research.

Acknowledgements

Particular thanks are due to Jacqueline Wilson, who manages to become ever-more famous but still has the time to support reading of all kinds, be Children's Laureate, and encourage her many other writing friends. I am very conscious of the support she provides, and am grateful for her new introduction to this book. I would also like to thank Sean McManus and David McClelland, who gave me a crash course in website construction and checked the resulting chapter. Derek Hudson, editor of *Writing Magazine*, assisted this new edition by commissioning me to write a series of articles on the process of submission to agents and publishers. The Society of Authors remains wonderfully supportive to writers, and I find their meetings a particular inspiration. Since early 2006 I have been working with Bloom Partners, who provide a training service for publishers in Australia and New Zealand; this experience, combined with attending the 4th International Conference of the Book in Boston in October 2006, has made me realise that publishers, agents, booksellers and authors are facing the same issues worldwide. I am delighted that many of those I have met and swapped notes with, either physically or in cyberspace, have provided quotations and ideas for the book you are holding.

As usual I consulted many people in my writing, and would particularly like to mention the following:

Clare Alexander, Fiona Allison, Trisha Ashley, Kate Atkinson, Michael Babcock, Jacqueline Banerjee, Victoria Barnsley, Carole Blake, Peter Bolton, Susannah Bowen, Celia Brayfield, Joanna Briscoe, Jenny Brown, Emma Burstall, Helena Caletta, Steven Carey, Linda Carpenter, Harriet Carrow, Catherine Charley, Jane Cholmonley, Genevieve Clarke, Chris Cleave, Julie Cohen, Alain de Botton, Antony Edwards, Shirley Evans, Rachel Feldberg, Katie Fforde, Jane Fisher-Norton, Terrence Frisby, Pauline Goodwin, Jane Gordon-Cumming, Jenny Haddon, Kim Hart, Jo Henry, Gill Hines, Peter Hobday, Deborah Hodges, Heather

Holden-Brown, Dotti Irving, Paul Jeffrey, Catherine Jones, Anna Kiernan, Marte Lavender, Jonnie Leach, Emma Lee-Potter, Mark le Fanu, Catherine Lockerbie, Wendy Lomax, Gian Lombardo, Sally Mays, Peter McCausland, Philippa Milne-Smith, Nicola Morgan, Ed Morrow, Tony Mulliken, Katharine Naish, Chris Perkins, Lakshmi Persaud, Kate Pool, Christine Poulson, Adam Powley, Philip Pullman, Wendy Perriam, Shoo Rayner, Susan Rhodes, Julian Rivers, David Rogers, Stewart Ross, Ben Schott, Liz Small, Nicola Solomon, Charlotte Steer, Linda Strachan, Chantel Sulaiman, Jane Tatam, Simon Trewin, Tony West, Jo and Susan Westwood, Sandy Williams and Chantal Zakari.

Finally I would like to thank my publishers at A&C Black, my agent Jenny Brown, my employers at Kingston University, and my family for a constant stream of new ideas – and challenges.

Foreword

I certainly wasn't an overnight success as a writer. I had my first children's book published when I was 24. For the next 20 years I wrote around 40 books. They all got published – and they mostly sank without trace. How I would have benefited from this brilliant book on marketing in those days!

I got lucky 15 years ago. I was invited to write for the publishers of my dreams. They all work as a team and everyone in the firm is very aware of the importance of clever marketing and publicity. If only all publishers could make this kind of effort for all their authors! But this book offers sound practical advice so that authors can do their best themselves to help make their work successful. We'd all like to think that our books are so beguilingly written with such a strong message that they will whiz up those bestseller charts by merit alone. Sadly it rarely happens that way. The greatest literary work is not much use if there are just a few copies languishing in a warehouse unread. Even the shyest and most retiring of writers want to communicate. They need an audience. Every book needs to be bought.

Alison Baverstock offers sensible useful tips that will help get our books known and appreciated. Authors often grind their teeth and groan about idle or incompetent publishers. She suggests channelling any irritation into positive action. We have to be grown up and take responsibility for our own manuscripts. We might write 'The End' when we've finished each book – but it's only the beginning. Every single author knows the sheer hard work that goes into writing any kind of book. It makes sense to work hard at marketing them too.

In this new edition there's a really helpful chapter on setting up a website. I am a terrible technophobe but even I admit that a good website is invaluable. There's also detailed coverage of literary festivals. Almost every town has its own festival now, and this can be a great way of reaching a whole new audience. It can be nerve-wracking speaking publicly, but I promise that you soon get used to it!

This is a treasury of up-to-date insider information, fascinating anecdotes, and imaginative advice. It will only take a couple of hours to read, but the knowledge gained should last a literary lifetime.

Jacqueline Wilson OBE
Children's Laureate

Introduction

Where was the author of this book when I needed her?

Three years ago I was asked to give a talk to members of the Society of Authors on how authors can market both their books and themselves more effectively. I enjoy giving talks like these. My professional background is in publishing, and although I have now been an author for several years (and had not long before the talk in question written the first edition of this book), I still enjoy explaining to authors how to understand publishing companies and agents, in the same way that the presenters on nature programmes display species that have unusual socio-organisational patterns and are not otherwise encountered.

Just before I was due to go, the phone rang. It was a close friend who works in psychotherapy, in a hospital that, having long been famous for its excellence, had just been cloned twice, with two similar institutions being built – one in Birmingham and a second in Crewe. Now, with both open for just a matter of months, they were threatened with closure. Never mind the investment of time and money involved, and the high hopes riding on these institutions, or the patients now installed and receiving treatment. Whom, she asked, did I know that she and her fellow health professionals could lobby?

I reeled off a couple of names without thinking. Our local MP, Ed Davey, is a strong supporter of mental health issues, feeling that both patients and doctors in this area are under-funded and highly deserving. I mentioned another MP my husband and I were at university with, and gave a couple more influential names (a managing director and a member of the aristocracy), and then thought of a few journalists whom I thought might be interested. I then picked up my briefcase and headed for the train.

Twenty minutes later, installed in my train carriage and gazing out of the window (one of my favourite places to be), I reflected. None of the people whose names I had passed on so freely had any idea that I write. Although officially an author, and at that stage of nine titles, I had never sent any one of them a book, or tried to prompt word of mouth through the organisations they are part of. I write about marketing in publishing; I have a working – or at least revivable – relationship with these people. So why did they not know about what I do?

For most authors it's so much easier if the product is someone else. My first book was written with Jane Austen-like privacy. (If anyone reading this has not been to the cottage at Chawton in Hampshire, and seen the table under whose blotter she would write, a squeaking door announcing the arrival of visitors and the need to put her writing away, it's well worth taking a trip.) I was living in Germany having left my job, and whilst writing a handout for a course I was asked to present, it suddenly struck me that there might be a market for a book telling people beginning as book marketers, as I had been eight years before, how to do their job. I ran the idea past a friend, whose response was negative; submitted it to a publishing house who liked it; remained mute when it was commissioned; and delivered the manuscript four days ahead of my deadline (the day my daughter was due and indeed arrived). And still I told no one – because I had spotted in the contract that publication was likely only if the publishers deemed what I had written 'acceptable'. Only my husband knew. I kept my sweet secret; I sat next to people at dinner parties who told me about their writing ambitions, without ever saying 'well actually, I have just written a book'. Pathetic really – and hugely ironic, considering the subject area I write about.

The transition from being 'published' to being 'a writer' is not automatic; you have to learn to take yourself seriously, and many of us still find that difficult. Most authors are filled with self-doubt: can I ever do it again? Would anyone want to know? We combine a curious mixture of feeling confident in what we have written with an anger that it's not more widely known. Most writers want to communicate and be read, and whilst there is a new breed of authors who see active promotion of themselves and

their writing as part of what they do, there are vastly more who combine a desire to communicate with a real disdain for the media that may review them.

And when it comes to promoting ourselves in public, many authors have real difficulty. Firstly there is the illogicality of being asked to get involved in the first place. Why should someone who can string sentences together in print be comfortable doing so in front of a microphone? Why should authors have to turn strumpet and strut their stuff in front of a critical world? And why should those who are comfortable doing these things, and have taken the handy precaution of being surgically enhanced to make them even more photogenic (or not), be awarded contracts for doing something they have never demonstrated any talent for: writing?

Help is at hand. This book is packed with advice on how to get your book noticed, ensure that you yourself are taken seriously as an author, and build relationships with everyone: agents, publishers, readers and recommenders. The advice in these pages is not rocket science. I have tried not to overburden you with information on how the industry works, but there are things that writers really do need to know if they are to help their books along. So whether you bought this book to help you get a contract with an agent or publishing house, or to improve sales from the books you already have in print, I hope it will assist.

The observant reader will notice endless references to Kingston-upon-Thames and its environs. This is not (as those outside the M25 may hastily conclude) because I think the south of England best or, even worse, because I am parochial. My parents were from the Midlands; I was born in Suffolk, grew up in Shropshire and Hertfordshire and went to university in Scotland. Since then I have lived all over the place due to my husband's itinerant job (one publicity manager claimed that mine was the longest 'local press' list on an author publicity form that she had ever seen). Some of the best bits of this book were written whilst I was attending the 4th International Conference of the Book in Boston, USA. So whilst I am devoted to Kingston, and it's wonderful to finally feel settled, my knowledge of bookshops and other goings-on in my home area is also pragmatic. Authors do well to

cultivate their own acre of ground; their local bookshops, literary festivals, associations, libraries and so on.

Finally, I hope too that the book will boost a wider consideration for the author. Many now think of writing as a swift path to riches; something that can be achieved between lunch and tea on a series of wet Wednesdays. The reality is so different. The craft of writing demands long hours, is poorly paid and generally put down. Hence we need to offer each other encouragement, especially when doing something we do not feel comfortable with – which may include self-marketing.

Alison Baverstock
June 2007

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The background information that all potential published authors must understand

Two of the words in the title of this book are not natural bedfellows. I refer to *marketing* and *author*.

Marketing as a term is becoming more acceptable all the time. New generations of students happily enrol on university courses that bear its name, convinced that an understanding of the subject is key to their future employability, and the wholehearted embracing of marketing by political parties has convinced many otherwise sceptical individuals that attempting to communicate with your market, and persuade them to your point of view, can be highly effective. But whilst the onward march of marketing's impact is beyond doubt, there is still at least an association in the public mind between 'marketing' and the foisting of goods and services that are not really required onto the gullible and unsuspecting; a lingering perception that if things were any good, they would sell on their own.

This is partly culturally specific. British society is notoriously conservative about selling things – hence the attempts to disguise the 's' word in job titles, such as 'information manager/executive/customer-facing staff', rather than saying that they work in sales; certainly this is the case in comparison with North America. But how much marketing is desirable, is also an issue that applies with particular force in the selling of cultural commodities. Should individual voices and viewpoints *need* to be marketed, rather than simply be noticed for their own intrinsic merit? Don't most of us harbour a nostalgia for the writer or musician whose work we enjoyed in isolation, or the companionship of a few other insightful cognoscenti, before they became 'popular'?

The term *author* is similarly loaded; it's seen as a calling rather than a job, and a term that many writers are reluctant to apply to themselves too soon, for fear of risking bad luck or ridicule. Many writers keep their calling to themselves until they have reached a certain point of success. Scribes producing words for advertising campaigns tend to call themselves 'writers', or 'copywriters', and journalists refer to themselves as such, or as 'hacks'. Somehow being an *author* is perceived as (or is, given that the author is usually required to produce more words for each selling unit) a slightly higher calling, requiring more devotion to the writing art, and certainly years of rejection, low income, commiseration and patronage (whether in resources or in attitude) from friends and colleagues.

Hence the awkward collision of these two words in the area of *author marketing*, the subject of this book. A large number of authors find it distasteful. They want to write – not to have to talk up their book or do book tours or signing sessions, at which they feel uncomfortable and risk humiliation. Why, after all, should those who communicate through words on a page necessarily be articulate when placed in front of a microphone or large crowds? This is a completely different skill. Many writers feel awkward with the very concept of marketing, and believe that attempts to sell (or popularise) their ideas compromise their artistic integrity. Their work should be appreciated on its merits rather than be tweaked to suit the needs of commercial marketing plans that feel artificially imposed, or of an increasingly fickle market. Few writers find that they can support themselves by their writing straight away, and so must juggle jobs. This is easier in some fields than others. Within academia, for example, whilst a determination to share learning can be seen as an ethical responsibility of the teacher, based on Christian ethics ('To whom much has been given, much will be expected' [Luke 12; 48]), ironically the desire to communicate can be seen as a vulgar seeking of popularity that is incompatible with academic status. Alain de Botton has written that '...hostility to anyone attempting to communicate ideas to a broader public is a staple of academic life. You can either fight for academic status or you can address the world at large. But in the current British climate it's very difficult to succeed in both fields.'¹

1 *Times Magazine*, 26th August 2006

Whilst I understand the reluctance on the part of authors to get involved in the marketing of what they write, increasingly those who distance themselves from the selling process place themselves and their work at a disadvantage. Publishing decisions about whether or not to take on specific new authors are made at regular meetings, and the most commonly used word when discussing them is ‘promoteable’; an author’s willingness and enthusiasm for getting involved in the process does make a difference. It does not replace the need for a good manuscript or writing idea, but it does help – whatever is being written about. In some areas, the author’s saleability matters more than their ability to write; when commissioning a celebrity biography, for example, the skill is in selecting a ghost-writer who can create the voice of someone the public genuinely wants to hear from. In defence of publishers, whilst some writers may react negatively to this information, it is true that the market place is very crowded today. Potential customers have a much wider range of choice of entertainment than was available to their parents’ generation, and the contribution made by the author is often crucial in getting books noticed:

‘I think there is a real tendency to think, “Once I get published, I’ve done it,” and then you watch your book go nowhere. You can’t just be a writer – you’ve got to be your own cheerleader.’

Jodi Picoult, interviewed in *The Telegraph Magazine*,
2nd September 2006

Significantly, this is nothing new:

‘Every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished.’

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

What this book is for

This book explains what marketing is – how it works in general, and its particular application within publishing – and provides guidelines on how to market your own work, whether to an agent

or publisher before publication, or to the wider reading public afterwards. It's important to understand that *purchase (or reading) of this book does not replace the need to produce a well-crafted and readable book*, of whatever sort you are planning. It simply helps you to present your writing with the best chance of positive attention from those who are making key decisions about whether or not they should publish or read you.

Why I am writing this book

This is a second edition of a title that did well when first published five years ago. Since first publication, however, a number of important things have changed, and new opportunities arisen. For example, it now costs vastly less for authors to create and maintain their own websites, and there has been a huge rise in the number of reading and writing festivals. Both of these increase the market for books, and create more competition to get published. A new edition was called for.

In the meantime, I had published this book's prequel – a serious look at the resources you need if you are going to get a book published. Called *Is there a book in you?*, it came out in July 2006 (also from A&C Black). The book you are holding now follows on from where that title left off. It makes an assumption that if you are reading this, you are serious about trying to get your work published; that you have something ready (even if unfinished) to show publishers and agents; and that you feel compelled to continue with your work. In other words, it assumes that you *really* do want to get published. It will give advice on how to format, whom to approach and what to send. The guidelines included here will also be of great assistance if you have already published a book or books, and want to help your work get wider attention – whether from your agent, publisher, bookseller or the reading public.

I feel qualified to write this book because, as an author and publisher, I have been on both sides of the fence. I left university for the publishing industry, and worked in marketing on all kinds of published products, from high-level journals to educational books, from novels to children's titles. And whilst I now mostly write, I still work

freelance within the industry, offering training and consultancy. I have seen how particular authors help or hinder their chances of getting published because of their attitude and/or the way they behave. I have seen how authors' careers as promoted writers are affected by their own pro-activity and ideas, both positively and negatively.

I have been the publisher who wishes that authors would consolidate their requests into a single communication, rather than interrupt my working day with sequential phone calls: most authors have little understanding that there are books other than their own which need attention. But I have also been the author, feeling isolated at home and wondering if anyone really cares about my book apart from me. I have asked myself if publishers really appreciate just how hard it is to keep going as a writer, and how deflating their lack of apparent interest can be.

The approach I offer in this book is pragmatic and informed. I don't expect you to turn overnight into a 24/7 savvy provider of media-friendly sound-bites; rather, I aim to help you understand how books get noticed, and to equip you to use the media that offer the most positive opportunities for the wider promotion of your particular talents. My hope is that once provided with the information in this book, you will be better able to present your writing idea, in its most attractive form, to those with a serious interest in representing, publishing or reading it.

How trying to get a book published feels

Trying to get a book published is like:

- Attempting to get your child into an over-subscribed school. You worry and find yourself wondering what are the odds on success; how can you best improve their chances; what are other people up to? And the answer for some is pretty desperate, like moving house (and 'downsizing' to get into the right postcode); signing up for coaching at a very early age; providing a false address that does fall within the magic postcode area; dreaming up the 'special circumstances' that provide a shortcut to the top of the list. Anything to achieve that desired goal.

- Trying to get pregnant when it does not happen as quickly as you would like. Similarly, being approved as adoptive parents and then each month scanning the relevant publications to find a likely youngster, and then starting the process of asking for your papers to be forwarded to the relevant social worker. You spend the month in a state of anxiety and then it starts all over again.
- Applying for a new job. Presenting yourself as positively as possible; trying to make the right impression at the interview and then waiting for the outcome.
- Wanting to move house, and finding that new properties are in short supply, and so having to continually chase estate agents to send you information on properties that are interesting to you, before they inform your friends and neighbours, who are also planning to move. And then the angst that follows as you have your offer accepted but fear that the other party may pull out (unless you are reading this in Scotland).
- Standing on the starting line for a race – perhaps even that most competitive event, the fathers’ race at school sports day.
- Going into an open competition exam with your examination number ready to write down, with perhaps an associated fear that you might have left an incriminating piece of paper in your pocket (which would bring an accusation of ‘academic misconduct’).

If the thought of any of these situations gets the adrenaline pumping inside you, then you begin to understand how trying to get published will feel. But there is a crucial difference. In all the situations mentioned, you are aware of your rights as a consumer, patient or citizen. There are clear positions in law that entitle you to be heard/seen/have your views considered, even if you are ultimately deemed time-wasting, wrong, or fraudulent; you may not care what those you are dealing with think of you. When you are trying to get a book published you have all of the same longings, but none of the same rights. You must remain pleasant, and not give them a clue that you might turn difficult after a decision to commission you. And of course the ultimate difference is that you are doing this to yourself; you don’t have to take part – and a large proportion of your acquaintance and family will conclude that you are foolish even to try.

Grasping the essentials: the two opposing camps, who must work together if you are to publish a book

The subheading uses adversarial language – surely publishers and authors should be united in their desire to produce a good and widely read book? Why the reference to ‘sides’ and ‘opposition’?

Anyone who tries to get published will quickly understand that there are two main groups of people involved in the process: publishers (and I would include agents here, as they are part of the same system), and authors – and that frequently, it feels like a situation of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Gather any group of authors together and they will moan about their publishers – most usually about the lack of marketing for their books. Attend the London (or indeed any) book fair, and the authors, whose works form the main body of what is being bartered and sold on such occasions, are present only in picture form, like the sanitised mantelpiece of an elderly aunt who finds the images of her unruly relatives easier to deal with than their boisterous presence.

The views of publishers and authors about each other are often polarised. They need each other and cannot survive effectively without each other, but the problem for writers (potential and actual) is that *it's a buyers' market*; there are vastly more people wanting to get published than have the talent to make it, than there are production resources within the industry to put into print, or shelf space in shops to stock.

Authors often complain that publishers lack an appreciation of how what they provide is the basis of the industry they feed. They feel marginalised by publishers who have no real understanding of how much effort it takes to write a book, all the while conscious that their ability to do so again is not automatic – whereas publishers blithely assume that it is infinitely sustainable.

Without authors there can be no publishing industry, and yet still one gets the impression, whenever publishers are gathered together, that this is a party to which authors are not really invited; they would get on faster without them – and write the wretched books themselves if only they had the time.

For the first edition of this book I collected a series of authors' gripes about the industry, each one a tale of mean spirit, grudge or just lack of awareness of the potential of their major suppliers. The chapter was printed as an extract in *The Bookseller* magazine and caused a great cheer amongst authors, and a bit of a stir within the publishing industry. But even in discussing the reaction, the publishers somehow missed the point. *The Bookseller* editorial, which discussed the issue I had raised in the same edition, commented that it should be of concern to the industry that many authors 'whose work is central to the publishing process, feel alienated from it'.

Frankly this reaction annoyed authors even more. Most feel they are not 'central to a process', but rather that the 'process' would not exist without them. We do not have a 'process of publishing' as an independent good, like a constitutional monarchy or democratically elected government. You do not search for authors as a commodity in the same way that you indent for chairs or paperclips; rather the role of the writer, the person who comes up with the ideas, is crucial. In any case, most authors would feel that the publishers seldom have to go searching, in the way that a production director would seek out new materials. What they have to do is recognise the merit of what has already been offered to them, sent to their doors, with return postage supplied.

'I don't believe that it's the writer's job to respond to some vague idea about what readers want. Readers don't know what they want until they see what you can offer. Nowadays, we're told, they're all asking for the next Harry Potter, but no-one ever asked for the first Harry Potter. It took JK Rowling to think of him before people realised that this was something they might like to read. The writer and the idea always come first, and are always the most important thing.'

Philip Pullman

It's true today that many 'published' authors have not actually written the books (celebrity biographies are a notable example), but it is still the 'author' – or name on the cover – that draws the interest. Interestingly this often catches publishers by surprise, when figures such as Sharon Osborne and Katie Price (aka

Jordan) go on to be huge bestsellers, simply because people are fascinated by their lives.

The things authors dislike about publishers

Publishers do not understand how hard writing is

Authors often complain that publishers have no idea how difficult it is to write a book. They don't know how long it takes, how lonely is the process, how much – once it is over – you worry about ever being able to do it again. Authors can't tell publishers just how much they want to be published; the extent to which rushed decisions made in meetings affect their aspirations and lives; how spur-of-the-moment phone calls, when they sound keen one minute and full of doubt the next, can play with authors' hopes and desires. Contact with publishers is exhausting: you can swing from optimism to pessimism, and all before 11.00 in the morning.

All this uncertainty is further complicated by the fact that publishers frequently seem to have their own writing ambitions. Authors worry that this may impede their judgement of other people's writing talent: because they are so often thinking 'that's not the way I'd write it', their instincts get in the way of spotting stories that other people want to read.

Publishers are not effective communicators

To be frank, many publishers are not good at communicating with authors (or even each other). Ring a branch of your building society, and via the 'security questions' that follow, the call-handler ensures that it is you calling; he or she then has access to a screen of information about you, giving all the details of your previous relationship (you can tell because they try to read it before talking to you – 'can you just bear with me for a minute'). More information will be added during each conversation, and it will all be available to the next person who takes a call from you.

Publishers don't work like this. Information that you send to your editorial contact will not necessarily be passed on to the sales department, who could benefit from it too. The information stream is poor the other way: lots of things that the author might

like to know – how many books are being printed; where and when; how they are selling? – are simply not communicated. Some speculate that authors are kept in ignorance in order to prevent them from interfering in future/trying to negotiate a better deal.

Over the whole area of marketing, which might seem an obvious area of overlap between publishers and authors, some houses give the distinct impression that they would rather authors did not get involved, and left everything to them. Whilst they have the history, and no doubt a range of set procedures, leaving it all to them is a big risk to take.

'I do think (and you can quote me on this) that it's *remarkable* how much authors can achieve, sometimes by working with their publisher, but sometimes just by doing it anyway. A publisher's knowledge about what *normally* works can blind them to what *might* work, and the author's naïvete and "ignorance" can actually be a boon, because we sometimes come up with off-the-wall ideas which *can* work. Of course, we have to make sure that what we do doesn't interfere with what the publisher is doing – but some publishers fear that too much. I think the ideal situation is when the author and the publisher recognise each other's values and strengths.'

Nicola Morgan, children's author

Publishers keep changing jobs

During the lifetime of a book, authors will find themselves dealing with many different people. Of course the different functions require different people, but within each role, changes of personnel seem to be very frequent. There are notable exceptions (the first edition of this book appeared five years ago and I'm delighted to say that the same team are in place this time around), but publishers tend to job-hop a lot. This can be a devastating experience for a writer: just as you find someone who really likes your work, they move on and the next incumbent is not so keen, leaving you feeling orphaned.

Publishing is not well organised

To authors, publishing often seems like a randomly operated business: working low margins; launching too many new titles;

making gimmicky and speculative approaches to markets rather than planning sustained campaigns – publishing can look gloriously amateur. In their defence, it's very hard to predict the reading taste of the public, and the most unlikely titles become best-sellers. And because the products have low prices (around £7.99 for a paperback novel, £14.99 for a hardback), and sell in relatively low numbers, marketing budgets tend to be low too – hence the pursuit of free publicity through the media.

Publishing has never paid well, and has traditionally attracted lots of well-brought-up young ladies who were thus respectably occupied until marriage. Whilst this is no longer universally true – and there have been a number of initiatives aimed at widening entry – the workforce remains predominantly white, middle-class and well spoken. This can lead to real confusion – authors who feel that they are being encouraged are in fact being given a polite brush-off. Authors also complain that publishers do not understand the wider markets to which their limited life experience does not expose them. But publishers have full-time jobs, and authors who work from home have more opportunity to experience and explore daily life in all sorts of different ways. One could conclude that it is up to them to educate publishers about markets that would respond well to their writing, rather than berating them for not knowing about them already.

Publishers have big egos

See below.

Things not to say to a publisher

I've always wanted to write a book.
Even if I don't get published I'll still carry on writing.
I've tried everyone else.
Such and such a firm said there was no room on their list just now, so I hope it might suit you ...
I invite you to peruse² the chapters I enclose.
I sued my last publisher/was involved in a lawsuit.

2 All publishers seem to hate this word

The things that publishers dislike about authors

Authors fail to appreciate that publishing is a profession, and effective publishing is the product of experience

Stories of manuscripts picked up from the slush pile are motivating, but they stand out because they are rare; publishers get it right more often than they get it wrong. Authors persistently underestimate their professionalism.

There are authors who think that all the publisher has to do is press a few buttons, wait for the books to be delivered and then count the takings. This is a gross misrepresentation of how much care and skill is involved. Pitching a book to a market, preparing a manuscript that is fit for publication, planning how the book should look and feel, commissioning a cover and preparing the cover blurb that will make it appeal to the market in question, all take time and experience. In any case, it's not always the author who comes up with the idea for the book – it's not uncommon for the publisher to have an idea, draft a contents list, choose someone to write it, propose the idea in-house and create enthusiasm for it, rewrite what is submitted as it is not up to the required standard ... and then watch the 'author' take full credit. Successful publishers must often bite their tongue.

Authors are self-obsessed

Publishers are inclined to view some authors as over-indulged children: attention-seeking, neurotic and narcissistic. Over the years, I've given many talks on self-marketing to groups of authors, and whilst the majority of the audience are pleasant, the stereotype definitely exists. Publishers are wary.

Of course each author is producing their own books, but the publishing house has the rest of their list to be concerned with. An accusation that authors think only of their book, and not of the rest of the output, is a common one.

Authors are unrealistic and too demanding

Just because an idea occurs does not mean it is a good one. Not every idea thought up by an author is automatically printable.

There are authors who view the industry as a branch of the NHS, from which they are somehow entitled to receive attention and production, irrespective of the merits – or saleability – of their manuscript (and they don't want to be told that it's unpublishable). Not every book can land the author an interview with Richard and Judy or Parkinson.

Authors are rude

There are authors who demand the earth, but never bother to comment on anything that goes well. Failing to thank for a launch party, or any extra effort by the publishing house, such as getting books to an event that the author only informed them was happening at the last minute, is particularly annoying.

Authors are needy

A writer's life is like a rollercoaster. The difficulty is that most authors want publication so much: it's something they have worked towards, in incremental degrees, through writing for parish newsletters and local papers, until at last, the goal of a book in print appears like a mirage before them. It's difficult to be strategic and objective when you want something so desperately; every word a publisher utters will be dwelt upon later, dissected and examined for wider meaning. Is this proof of author neediness, or just evidence of their enormous desire for what publishers can offer?

Authors can be unhelpful

Marketing in publishing often relies on a search for free publicity, and because opportunities may occur at the last minute, you may get asked questions you have been asked before. Responding with 'I have already told your editorial director, I suggest you ask him' is not helpful, particularly if the latter is away and the information is needed urgently. And if someone has had a bad experience talking to you, it's an opportunity that may not come again.

Similarly, the marketing department of a publishing house is seldom on stand-by waiting to leap into action once they hear from an author. The workload has to be juggled. Leaflets can't always be provided at the last minute, but with enough warning they can be produced. Remain in touch about what you are up to;