

Publishing and Professional Courtesy

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Some say that with the rising popularity of digital publishing and self publishing, getting published will be easier than ever before. Actually, the converse may be true. As even more manuscripts flood editors' inboxes, the need for quality control will still be an issue.

In fact, when it comes to getting published, nothing has changed. Readers still want a good read no matter how or where it is produced. To get published, authors must still write with skill and either tell an entertaining story or provide information, and they must approach the job of getting published for what it is—a job.

It does not matter if you want to earn a living off your writing or supplement your income, the “trick” to getting and staying published is to be professional.

Publishing is a business, not a hobby.

There are two sides to publishing: the creative side and the business side. The business of publishing is often overshadowed by the creative process that produces the material publishers need. Too many authors fail to appreciate the business side. Both the self-published author and moguls like Rupert Murdoch know that publishing is a business where finances, legalities, marketing, logistics, and other aspects need to be considered.

Authors should always treat their approach to getting published in the same manner as they would when applying for employment because the parallel is exact. The “employment” is in the form of independent contractor, but that does not make it any less important with regard to professional behaviour.

Submitting a manuscript should be taken with the same care as submitting a resume for employment. The author has done their research in whether or not the publisher has an opening for new talent and if their talent matches those requirements. If a contract is offered, the author has taken the time to read, understand, and negotiate terms if necessary before making a commitment.

Contracts

Speaking of contracts, authors should treat contracts with a lot more care and seriousness. A contract is a legally binding document, and when an author signs a contract with a publisher, both parties agree to the terms therein.

Unfortunately, both authors and publishers can share the blame on the perceived weakness of contracts when authors are allowed out of contracts early with little or no consequence. Many authors treat contracts as having less value than the pixels that create it on the computer screen. Both publishers and authors need to change this attitude for the sake of professionalism.

Thanks to the Internet, people have come to skim or ignore “the fine print” a contract contains. How many times have we glossed over the Terms and Conditions of a new

app or software program? If we really took the time to read and understand the user agreement on the things we use and the possible penalties involved for breaking the terms, it may affect our computer use entirely.

No one forces an author to sign a publishing contract. If the author has any reservations or questions, the time to ask and get it sorted is **before** signing. If you agree to a contract with a publisher, sign it, and then change your mind or decide to try your luck elsewhere, do not expect to get out of your contract easily if at all.

Some self-appointed experts may suggest that if you are unhappy with your contract and/or publisher to make yourself so disagreeable that your publisher will want to drop you. Why anyone who wants to be seen and treated as a professional would follow such unprofessional advice is beyond me. Not only will this hurt you in the end, you may find your reputation preceding you. Read on, and you will see what I mean.

Watch what you say, how you say it—and where you say it.

There was a saying not too long ago that people seem to have forgotten: “too much information.” Social networking has made this an issue because too many people have given away too much information in a public forum.

Did you hear the story about the employee who was fired because of their Facebook profile? No? Well, there is now a Facebook page highlighting such horror stories!

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=63470796208>

More and more publishers are checking the references of people who submit to their house to see how they present themselves online even before considering offering a contract. A publisher, like any other business owner or entity, has the right to make sure that any person they contract with will be an asset and not a liability. It is amazing what a simple GOOGLE search will turn up.

For writers starting out who have yet to publish, if they haven’t attempted to make an online presence with a blog or a website, that may count **against** them because in this digital age of publishing, having a spot on the web is vital.

Publishers can wear different hats. Some publishers are writers, editors, and they are definitely readers. A publisher could be on any number of social networks wearing any one of these hats. They don’t call it “lurking” for nothing. If you have a tendency to rant in an online social group and end up ranting about a particular person or publisher, it would be wise to reconsider this course of action. Why? You don’t know if the publisher, publisher’s representative, or someone who *knows* your publisher is in that group. The Internet makes the publishing world very small indeed. Word can travel fast and bite you where you least expect it.

There is a growing, disturbing trend among authors to give into “snark” and tear down the achievements made by others or even to try and actively destroy another person’s reputation by creating a smear campaign or using witch-hunt tactics.

I am going to be blunt. We are all adults. If you think that you should not be held accountable for your words or your actions, you are not an adult. You certainly should not be writing.

I was directed to a blog recently where the author refers to a particular literary agent using profanity while also publishing said agent's name and address. This blogger has opened up to being on the wrong end of a potential lawsuit. I could give you the link to this blog, but, believe it or not, I prefer not to draw attention to a person who does not deserve it.

The behaviour of people like this makes it hard for serious authors, and I strongly urge you to avoid or ignore these "toxic" people. Your life will be so much better. Not only that, but if you expect to be treated as a professional, you should associate with professional people.

If you ever consider doing something like this—even in the guise of being "anonymous"—ask yourself a simple question before you begin: "How is this going to benefit me as an author?" I think you will find the answer to that easy enough. Some things are best left unsaid. If you really must "say" it, write it down, keep it to yourself, destroy it, and move on.

Hiding under an assumed name or being "anonymous" will not help you. If someone wants to find out who you are, they will, especially if they are attempting to bring legal action. Internet service providers are not going to risk their business just to protect you.

Here is another recent story to illustrate this. Unlike the previous example where an unknown, aspiring author has effectively trashed their chance of being taken seriously, here is a case in point where two people with professional reputations have just trashed their name, their reputation, and have put their careers at risk.

<http://ebooks.epicauthors.com/?p=276>

See? Even Amazon reviews can get you into trouble.

In the end, when it comes to getting published:

Take pride in your work.

Take pride in your name.

Take pride in your reputation.

Take pride in your professionalism.

Zetta Brown's debut erotic romance, *Messalina - Devourer of Men*, has received excellent reviews from The Original ChickLitGurrl, Coffee Time Romance, and Erotica Revealed. A native Texan, Zetta now lives in Scotland with her husband, Jim Brown. Together, they own and operate LL-Publications/Logical-Lust Publications where she serves as editor-in-chief.