

Pitching Your Book to Publishers

Unit 1: Sourcing Publishers - Four Great Ways

Get a group of editors together and before the night is through, they will be telling slush pile stories.

The slush pile (more optimistically called the treasure trove by some) is the pile of unsolicited manuscripts which land on publishers doorsteps every day. Some of the stories editors tell are about the best seller that was plucked out of the pile and has now gone on to sell millions. Others are about the 'one that got away' and was grabbed by another, luckier publishing house.

The biggest concern editors have about the slush pile is the number of totally inappropriate manuscripts. People send love stories to National Geographic, deep and meaningful novels to business book publishers and even erotica to publishers who only publish children's books.

So to reduce your chances of rejection, first target the right publisher.

1. Check out awards

Look on the web or in literary magazines for award winners. The list of winners and short listed authors, not only tells you what are the best books around - they also tell you who are the **publishers** of those books.

E.g. Is your book in the crime genre? Just to give you the idea, here are a couple of titles extracted from the short list of the Davitt Awards:

- *Lady Luck* by Kirsty Brooks (Wakefield Press)
- *Murder in Montparnasse* by Kerry Greenwood (Allen & Unwin)
- *Split* by Tara Moss (Harper Collins)

2. Hang out in libraries

You could loose yourself for hours in libraries, but the trick is to stay focused.

Jen McVeity

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A 2003 Churchill Fellow, Jen showcased 40 Australian authors to top USA publishers. She tours six months a year in Australia, Asia and the USA as a professional speaker.

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E.g. Looking for non-fiction business publishers? Go to the business section and start pulling out books. These were a few I found in just two minutes.

- Butterworth-Heinemann
- Hale and Iremonger
- Hodder
- Simon and Schuster

3. Invest in marketing guides

These are the one-stop-shop for writers. They don't give a good 'feel' for the types of books a publisher prefers, but they are a fantastic overview. The two best ones are:

The Australian Writer's Marketplace: This details magazine, newspaper and script markets as well as giving lists of publishers, agents and manuscript assessment services. Also includes awards, courses and literary events.

Queensland Writer's Centre. Web: www.qwc.asn.au Tel: +61 7 3839 1243

The Writer's Guide (by Irina Dunn): This gives lists of children's and poetry publishers, festivals, literary organisations, agents and assessment services. A large part of the book is excellent practical advice on everything from agents to employment opportunities to working with a publicist.

Available through the NSW Writers' Centre: www.nswwriterscentre.org.au
Tel: +61 2 9555 9757

4. Make friends with your local book shop owner

Here is the perfect overview of both new releases AND the books which are top sellers. Why? Because book shops operate on a 'sale or return' policy. For twelve months after a book's release, shops can return a book if it doesn't sell. So that means the books on their shelves are usually less than a year old - or they are strong titles that owners definitely know will sell.

E.g. You have a picture book? Head to that section in the shop and see who is publishing great books. Here's just three in any order...

- Allen and Unwin
- Koala Books

- Lothian

Enjoy. And don't forget to buy lots of books!

But do they accept manuscripts?

You might have the names of publishers, but that's only half the story. Many publishers only take submissions from agents or previously published authors. So what's the next step?

- Check their websites for submission policies.
- Find smaller niche publishers who are often more open to submissions.
- Get a manuscript assessment - sometimes publishers accept manuscripts if accompanied by a favourable report. Writers' Centres and marketing guides have the names and contacts of manuscript assessors.
- Get an agent. (Usually just as hard as finding a publisher!)

ACTION ACTIVITY

1. List the top ten publishers you would like to publish your novel.
2. Research the Web and discover their submission guidelines. Probably, (if this is your first book) you are now down to a much shorter list.
3. List FOUR publishers - including their postal addresses - who accept your type of manuscript.

So now you have your target publishers. Next step, next week, is what to actually submit.