



## JUNE 11 MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

### Agent Secrets

A great author-agent relationship can yield publication, subsidiary rights, foreign rights and more. If you've ever wondered how to find an agent who will help you sell your manuscript to a publisher, you won't want to miss our June meeting. Two authors who have worked with agents will share the ins and outs of the process of trusting someone else to find a publisher for your work.

#### We'll discuss:

- What it takes to attract an agent
- Useful tools that help authors find representation
- What an agent really does for you
- How to write a book proposal
- How to increase your chances for selling rights
- The kinds of books that do well in foreign markets

**Sharon Shinn** wrote her first book when she was 20 and sold her first book when she was 36—a long wait! Things improved when she found an agent, right around age 33. Since then, work



Sharon Shinn

has been steady: She's published 14 novels in the science fiction/fantasy genre, as well as four young adult novels, and assorted pieces of short fiction. A few of them have won awards: her first book, *The Shape-Changer's Wife*, won the William C. Crawford Award for Outstanding New Fantasy Writer; three later novels were nominated for Reviewer's Choice awards from the Romantic Times (and one of them, *Angel-Seeker*, took home the prize). Two of her other books, *The Safe-Keeper's Secret* and *Summers at Castle Auburn*, have been named to the American Library Association's lists of Best Books for Young Adults. More information about Sharon and her books can be found at [www.sharonshinn.net](http://www.sharonshinn.net).

**Edward Sylvia** was "discovered" by a Swiss agent who offered him a representation contract for the foreign rights to his first book. He'll share information on what kinds of books "travel well" into foreign markets, how to position your books for successful foreign rights sales and what the process is really like. Ed's first book, *Sermon From*



Edward Sylvia

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

### Get a Literary Agent

By Fern Reiss, CEO, PublishingGame.com

Finding a literary agent for your book can be extremely challenging—or it can be a piece of cake. And you can get a literary agent even after you've self-published. In fact, that might make it easier. Here's how:

Keep in mind that in today's publishing world, marketing is more important than ever. You might have the perfect



Fern Reiss

manuscript—but without a strong marketing plan, it's unlikely to be saleable. A mediocre manuscript with a stellar marketing plan has a better chance of being published than a great manuscript with no marketing plan. So make sure you submit a well thought-out marketing plan along with your proposal. (*The Publishing Game: Bestseller in 30 Days* provides hundreds of marketing ideas for your plan.)

Remember that attracting a live agent is like engaging in a mating ritual. Move too fast and you come across as pushy and undesirable. Move too slowly and you risk being overlooked because you've been too modest. Imagine yourself on a first date: Divulge enough to be interesting, but not so much that you bore. Send the agent just a one-page pitch letter to start with. If they express interest, send a proposal (with marketing plan!) Only if they are still interested, send them the complete manuscript.) (Details on exactly what to send agents, sample pitch letters and


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## June meeting: Agent Secrets ... *continued*


*The Compost Pile: Seven Steps Toward Creating an Inner Garden*, has had strong sales in bookstores as well as through various gardening and spiritual venues. His next book, *Proving God*, is scheduled for publication in early 2009. Read his blog at [www.thegodguy.wordpress.com](http://www.thegodguy.wordpress.com)

Join us the second Wednesday evening of the month, June 11, at the Lodge at Des Peres. Doors open for networking at 6:30 PM; meeting begins at 7:00 PM. The formal meeting concludes around 8:30 with networking continuing till 9:00. 

## Get a Literary Agent ... *continued*

proposals, and complete contact information for more than 300 agents can be found in *The Publishing Game: Find an Agent in 30 Days*.

If you're finding it difficult to get an agent, consider self-publishing first. Then, once you have strong book sales figures, you can re-approach agents with better ammunition. Here again, the importance of an aggressive marketing plan is clear. If you've sold 5,000 or 10,000 copies of your self-published book, agents and big publishers will be much more interested in discussing acquiring the book—because you've shown a track record. (See *The Publishing Game: Publish a Book in 30 Days* for more details on how to self-publish.) If you can demonstrate strong bookstore and library sales for your title—and the ability to do sustained publicity—you will be an attractive property for agents.

How do you actually land an agent? The best way to make the initial contact, if at all possible, is in person. See if you can't get an introduction from a friend or professional acquaintance. Or go to a writing conference where writers are always cruising for new authors—Shawguides.com has a good listing. Or read "Hot Deals" in *Publisher's Weekly* magazine to get names of agents who've brokered recent sales. And good luck! 

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**FEATURED EXPERT:** This month, we're spotlighting **Fern Reiss**. She's the author of *The Publishing Game: Bestseller in 30 Days* (book marketing), *The Publishing Game: Find an Agent in 30 Days* (finding a literary agent), *The Publishing Game: Publish a Book in 30 Days* (self-publishing). For more information on Publishing Game books, workshops, and consulting, and on getting your book and business featured in the national media, sign up for the complimentary PublishingGame/Expertizing email newsletter at [www.PublishingGame.com/signup.htm](http://www.PublishingGame.com/signup.htm).

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### The Business of Forming Strong Relationships

**Greetings!** In a busy world, connecting the right people with the right projects is a priceless service and the agent who consistently is able to do this is appreciated by both author and publisher. I was lucky enough to be "discovered" by a great agent, not long after my first book was published. He handled foreign rights for me and it was an experience I would not have been ready to navigate on my own, so early in my publishing career.

A good agent specializes in a particular genre and spends lots of time getting to know the business of the publishers in his genre and their personal tastes. These relationships are everything. Editors depend on trusted agents not to waste their time with manuscripts that are not the best fit for their own business. That's why it's so much easier to get your book seen when it's in the hands of an agent. So unless you're willing to depend on luck making that special agent connection, do your homework.

**Publishing Central.com** a great source of additional articles on Literary Agents and many other topics. Check it out for more genre-specific information on Literary Agents. Here's just a taste of what you'll discover there:


*Agents FAQ* is an article posted on the Horror Writers Association site and while it's skewed toward those writing Horror, it's a great overview of agenting in general and is good advice especially for selling fiction. [www.horror.org/agents.htm](http://www.horror.org/agents.htm)

If you're writing and/or illustrating children's books, you'll find great information at The Purple Crayon's web site.

[www.underdown.org/agents.htm](http://www.underdown.org/agents.htm)

Another site, from Durant Imboden has a good series of articles on Literary Agents, what they do for you and how to attract the right one. There's also a list of helpful resources that's worth checking out. [www.writing.org](http://www.writing.org)

Martha Jewett is a Literary Agent, specializing in Business Books. Her site is a great place to see exactly what an agent wants from her authors and what you can expect from her. We've also got a tip list from her site in this issue. But visit her site even if you're in a different genre, just to learn Her site is a great resource to see, when you want to understand exactly "what an agent does." [www.marthajewett.com](http://www.marthajewett.com)

A good agent can be the best thing that ever happened to your publishing career. Good luck with your search! 

— Ed Sylvia, President  
[slpa1@staircasepress.com](mailto:slpa1@staircasepress.com)

## FEATURE ARTICLE

## What Your Literary Agent Won't Do

By Fern Reiss, CEO, PublishingGame.com

There are lots of good reasons to use a literary agent, but there are also a lot of things even the best literary agent won't do for you. I'm always surprised to discover what people think their literary agents could—or should—be doing for them. Here, in a nutshell, is what your literary agent probably won't do for you. (For more information on what they will do, see the dozens of other articles on the **www.PublishingGame.com** website, and sign up for the [free] email newsletter.)

**Bargain till they drop.** Working with a literary agent is much like working with a real estate agent: On the one hand, their job is to get you as good a deal as possible, and they don't make money unless you do, since they make a percentage (usually 15%) of your sales. On the other hand, their relationships with publishers are complex, and although they'd like to get as much as possible for your book, they also need to stay on good terms with the publisher for all the other books they're discussing. So in the same way that the realtor will try to get you a good price (but will be reluctant to jeopardize the sale by asking too much), your literary agent won't ask for a killer sum just because you think your book is worth it.


**Play hardball with your publisher.** Again, agents make their living by having good working relationships with publishers and editors. They'll track your payments and make sure you're getting a fair shake, but they're not going to jeopardize those relationships by being obnoxious, aggressive, or overly demanding. So don't expect them to play hardball. That's not their job.

**Be your phone buddy.** It's important to remember that while agents need to stay in touch with their authors, that's only a small part of their job. They also need to: Read the slush pile for new properties, read a lot of current books to see what's selling, deal with contracts and lawyers and payments, meet editors and publishers for lunch to discuss other books, go to conferences and trade shows to keep up with the rest of the industry, and a myriad of other activities. And agents, unless you've gotten to know them well over a long period of time, are your business partners, but not necessarily your friends. So don't expect your agent to stay in touch daily—or even weekly. Some agents are better at keeping in touch than others, but most agents are too busy to be as attentive as their authors might prefer.

**Never run out of patience.** It would be lovely if agents, once you finally find one who is dying to work with you, would be faithful and submit your work forever. The reality, however, is that agents tend to be excited when they first sign an author, and are able to maintain that enthusiasm only if they're able to sell the book

relatively quickly. It's a rare agent who is incredibly responsive to your phone calls after 18 months of unsuccessfully peddling your book.

**Help with your publicity.** This may be the single most common misperception of what a literary agent does. Literary agents help you get your book to a publisher. They oversee your payment. If you're incredibly lucky with your choice of agent, they may even help to oversee your career, recommending books for you to read and conferences for you to attend. But one thing they absolutely, positively won't do is help you with your book's publicity. Agents get paid (a percentage) because of the work they do in brokering the agreement between you and the publisher. They don't take any responsibility for the publicity of your book after a publisher has accepted it. (Unfortunately, neither do most publishers, these days, which means that most books are off bookstores shelves in just six months. See my book, *The Publishing Game: Bestseller in 30 Days*, if you want to learn how to publicize your book successfully.)

Having said all that, having a relationship with a literary agent can be a valuable and rewarding experience. Just keep in mind what you can, and can't, expect. 

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## Great Foreign Rights Opportunity:

Display with PMA at the Frankfurt Book Fair

10/15/2008 - 10/19/2008 • Frankfurt, Germany

This is the largest international book fair in the world. PMA has been attending this for 18+ years and has a list of more than 600 international contacts with whom we meet and attempt to license the right to publish your titles throughout the world. Books that have the most success at this show are in the health, business, computer, self-help, relationship, esoterica or new age, religious/spiritual, parenting, inspirational, motivational, and certain childrens picture books or mystery/thrillers, especially those with an international thrust. Books that do not do well are cookbooks, general mainstream fiction from authors not known throughout the world, books that contain too many references to the U.S. Or U.S. Practices, too many photographs of people that are definitely identifiable as Americans, and poetry, which cannot translate into other languages. Many of our members have achieved great success through participation in this bookfair and can now boast Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, German, Japanese, Dutch, Italian and French versions of their titles.

**Cost for individual title: \$95.00**

**DEADLINE for individual titles: August 15, 2008**

You must be a member of PMA (now IBPA) to participate. For more information, visit **www.pma-online.orgFrankfurt**.

## FEATURE ARTICLE

Find a Literary Agent or Self Publish:  
How to Decide

By Fern Reiss, CEO, PublishingGame.com

You've decided to publish a book. You've done the hard part—you've finally got the manuscript written. Now all that's left is to publish it—and that's the easy part, right?

Welcome to today's new world of publishing, and the options that await you. In the old days (we're talking 15 years ago) there was really only one choice for writers who wanted to release their words to the world: You sent your manuscript to a publishing house, and then you prayed. (Sure, even then you knew you were supposed to find a literary agent first, but that seemed a harder quest even than nailing down a publisher.) Six, eight, twelve, sometimes 24 months later, you'd get that sinking feeling in your stomach when your familiar, brown-wrapped manuscript turned up again in your mailbox. Sometimes it would be accompanied by a scrawled, "Sorry, not for us," or a day-brightening, "Try us again!" More often it would come with a form letter, explaining politely that they get a lot of manuscripts and they publish few. After attempting in vain to remove the coffee stains from your once-virgin pages, you'd type the thing up afresh and start all over again.

Today's publishing world is radically different—and that's very exciting for us as authors.

First of all, there are many more outlets today to which to send your work. Twenty years ago, there were a handful of top-notch literary agents. Today, there are several hundred good literary agents across the country. (Partly this is because the large publishing houses have downsized and been gobbled up in recent years, and many of the former publishing house editors have now hung out shingles as literary agents.) Regardless, there are many more outlets for your work, and many more opportunities to capture a literary agent than ever before. (There are also more venues in which to meet a literary agent. With writing conferences popping up all over the country, you can pretty much pre-select your agent of choice and then track down the conference where you can most easily meet him!)

There's also the new viability of self-publishing today. Although there have always been self-published books (Ben Franklin and Mark Twain are among the literary forefathers who supposedly self-published) the technology has now become accessible and affordable for all. You can print a 250-page paperback book in quantities of 1,000 for just \$2 per copy today—making self-publishing a truly viable option for many. And there's the new buzz word in today's technology, print-on-demand, which promises to pave the bumps in the road even further for authors. Although I don't recommend print-on-demand publishing for most situations (see my article on POD) there are circumstances in which POD is an affordable, easy alternative for authors seeking to publish.

So given all the options, how do you decide? What are the tradeoffs? What are the caveats? I give all-day Publishing Game workshops on these topics, but here are just a few things to consider:

**Cachet.** Being able to refer to your literary agent and publisher is now, and probably always will be, more impressive than publishing yourself. When someone at a cocktail party asks what you do, if you can say, "I'm an author, Harper-Collins published my latest book," that's classy. When I say, "I'm Peanut Butter and Jelly Press," it's just cute. So it depends on your goals; if you're in it for the prestige, the traditional literary agent/big publisher route is probably best for you.

**Control.** If you want to control the details of your book—the editing, the cover design, even the content—you need to self-publish. Although the best publishers give you some input, you're never able to control all the details unless you're publishing yourself.

**Profits.** If you have a clear sense of who your audience is, and how you can reach them, you might be able to generate much more income from your book by doing it yourself. When you work with a large publisher, you make only 10% of list price (and the agent takes 15% of that.) So the book that sells for \$10 retail is netting you—85 cents. As a self-publisher, you keep all those profits—so that same \$10 book, once you've paid off the middlemen who sell to the bookstores and libraries, will generate at least \$3 to \$4.50, or even more for books sold back of the room at talks or directly over your website. You can be just 10% as successful as a large publisher—and make the same amount! (The downside is that you'll also incur all the financial risk. With a big publisher, you may not make money, but you won't lose it either.) Still, there are an estimated 50,000 small publishers in the US today, and we're generating over \$14 billion annually in book sales. You can be one of us.

**Speed.** Mainstream publishing is painfully slow. Even after you find a literary agent and publisher, the time lag between their acceptance of your manuscript and the final publication of your book could easily be as long as two to three years. Be sure your topic won't wither in that period of time. (My book, *Terrorism and Kids: Comforting Your Child* came out one week after 9/11. All the big publisher books on 9/11 came out nine months later, way too late for the market—and most of those books ended up being remaindered.)

**Shelf Life.** With a big publisher, you have no control over the shelf life of your book. Most books today—even those which receive huge advances of money—have a bookstore shelf-life of only eight months. So if you want your book to be around for longer, you need to consider self-publishing. (I turned down a

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## Free Tips for Business Book Authors

By Martha Jewett

### Seven Things A Literary Agent Does

**1. SCREEN.** The agent screens book proposals for book publishers, rejecting the proposals that do not have commercial appeal. Publishers increasingly rely on this careful screening, knowing that an agented book proposal is generally of higher quality than an unagented (or “over the transom”) proposal. Some publishers, such as Simon & Schuster Trade Group, will not review a book proposal unless it is represented by an agent.

**2. TAKE EDITORIAL RISKS.** The agent takes a personal financial risk in representing a book proposal. Since the agent’s income derives from the sale of the proposal, if the agent doesn’t make the sale, the agent doesn’t get paid. The agent must therefore educate him or herself about the potential market for books, current publishing trends, and “hot” authors.

**3. SELL.** The agent sells editors and publishers on the book proposal, the author, even the idea and the very market for the book. The agent’s enthusiasm for a project makes a difference, because enthusiasm “sells.”

**4. NEGOTIATE.** The agent negotiates the best deal for you, the author, and vets the contract.

**5. FOLLOW UP.** The agent oversees the publisher’s prepublication efforts, following up to ensure that the publishing process stays on track.

**6. TROUBLESHOOT.** The agent troubleshoots and problem-solves with the publisher on the author’s behalf.

**7. OFFER CAREER ADVICE AND COUNSEL.** The agent offers advice and guidance with respect to the author’s writing career, including such matters as what is the best idea for the next book.



An independent literary agent and editorial consultant specializing in best-selling and high-impact business books, Martha Jewett works out of her home office in Pine Brook, New Jersey. Martha’s experience in business book publishing includes executive editorial positions at John Wiley & Sons, HarperBusiness, and McGraw-Hill, where she won the McGraw-Hill Award for Editorial Excellence. She was responsible for originating the “Tips and Traps” series (over 1 million copies sold) and for acquiring and developing classic titles such as Graham & Dodd’s *Security Analysis*, fifth edition, *SPIN® Selling* and *Major Account Sales Strategy* by Neil Rackham, *The Analysis and Use of Financial Statements*, and *Power and Accountability* by Robert A. G. Monks and Nell Minow. [www.marthajewett.com](http://www.marthajewett.com).

## How to Get a Top Literary Agent and Sign that Coveted Six-Figure Deal

By Susan Harrow

Top literary agents get about 400-1000 unsolicited queries every month from hopeful book authors. Publishing houses sometimes juggle 5000. Most of my private clients and participants in my seminar, *How To Get A Six-Figure Book Advance*, ask me “how is an author supposed to get an agent’s attention when there is so much competition???”

First of all, don’t write a book—write a book proposal. Publishers buy ideas not books. To capture a reputable literary agent’s attention you’ll need to show that you’re a media star, or a star in the making. Good writing can be bought but star power can’t. Here are five more tips to landing a top literary agent & a six-figure advance:

### 1. Do your research.

Literary agents specialize in very specific interests. For example, my agent loves tearjerkers but won’t take on books that involve children in peril. You want an agent who has represented books similar to yours, who sells books on a regular basis, who is devoted to you, and has the time to give you a little guidance through the literary labyrinth.

Sometimes a newer, less experienced literary agent who is hungry for business is more dedicated and has more time to spend with you than an established one with a reputable cadre of authors. I recommend two ways to find the literary agent right for you:

- Look in the acknowledgements of books similar to your topic. A happy author always thanks his literary agent. Once you’ve located your ideal agents become familiar with their tastes, learn everything you can about their interests, pet peeves and preferences, and review their websites for submission guidelines. Show that knowledge in your query letter or initial phone conversation.
- Read *Publisher’s Weekly*, *Publisher’s Lunch*, and *Variety* to see who sold what and for how much. You will get a sense of an agent’s sensibility and be able to speak knowledgeably about the types of books they prefer when you know what’s happening in the industry in general and in your area of expertise in particular. You’ll know more than most people who submit proposals as you’ll be apprised of books that aren’t even published yet and movie deals in the making. And you’ll get a sense of market trends.

### 2. Write a book proposal that reads like a thriller.

After you’ve located the agents you want to approach, the next step is to complete your book proposal. Once interested by your call or query letter the very best literary agents move at hyper speed. They’ll want to see your book proposal—now. They’ll either ask you to FedEx or email it.

There is a real art to writing a best-selling book proposal that makes the literary agent you’ve chosen say, ‘I want this person as a

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## How To Get a Top Literary Agent ... *continued*

client'. To make your book proposal read in one sitting you'll want to write in short paragraphs with strong headlines. Be sure to give the chosen agent an immediate impression of how your book will read by writing the proposal in the same style as your book.

Find unusual, quirky, provocative tidbits about your subject that will entice the literary agent to say, "Wow, I never knew this." Imagine the kind of tips that a terrific magazine article would include. When an editor at a top New York publishing house is reading your book proposal they are thinking, what kind of media exposure will we be able to get for this book? Can we get magazine feature articles, newspaper pieces, radio shows? Will the subject matter and the author interest the producers of *Good Morning America*, *the Today Show*, and *CNN*.

### 3. Prove you have a platform.

The one thing that thrills a New York publisher the most is your platform. Your platform is simply your reach. How many people are influenced by your ideas worldwide? To simplify this even further, a publisher wants to know one thing and one thing only (once they are interested in the subject matter of your book), and that is...how many books are you going to sell and to whom. You'll need to demonstrate that you're a great media guest, that you have an audience eager to snap up your books and that you have a proven track record for selling your books or wares.

### 4. Reveal how your past performance predicts future behavior.

Map out each venue and determine how many people are in attendance and how many of those people will buy your book. Include workshops, seminars, fairs, media appearances, book signings, keynotes, teleseminars, webinars, events, newsletter lists, blogs, partnerships etc. Quantify everything in great detail. Estimate and base potential sales on past sales you've completed.

### 5. Show you are the one.

Show that there is a clear need for your book and that you are the only one who can write it. In other words what problem are you solving and why are you the undisputed expert? What gap in the market are you filling? One of my clients whose topic was about how to be the very best at what you do and who you are, had a black belt, was a concert violinist and had given seminars at The White House. She walked her talk, and lived her words. You need to have top-notch skills in order to gain the interest of a high caliber literary agent.

Follow these tips, and you can land a top literary agent and a six-figure deal. I hope to see your name on the *New York Times* bestseller list! 📖

Media coach & marketing strategist, Susan Harrow, can help you get paid \$100,000 or more for your book. For over 17 years, she has helped speakers, authors and entrepreneurs get six-figure book advances. In her book, *Get a Six Figure Book Advance*, Susan explains the 15 steps to making big money on your next book proposal. Buy it now and receive \$450 worth of free bonuses at: [prsecretstore.com/sixfigurebookproposaljanal.html](http://prsecretstore.com/sixfigurebookproposaljanal.html)

## Find a Literary Agent or Self Publish... *continued*

six-figure advance for my book, *The Infertility Diet: Get Pregnant and Prevent Miscarriage*, because I was concerned that it would be yanked from shelves prematurely. By self-publishing, I was able to ensure that it stayed in print—and on bookstore shelves—forever. That book has now been selling for six years—and it still sells like hotcakes.)

**Business.** If you like to write, but you have no interest in business, leave the publishing to someone else. Self-publishing is a business. To make money at it, you need to like those sorts of business things. (You may, on the other hand, find that you love those sorts of business things—I have!)

**Publicity.** Finally, no matter which way you ultimately decide to publish your book, remember that you—and you alone—are responsible for your book's publicity. No matter how much money the big publisher throws your way, it's unlikely that they'll be doing any publicity for your title. (In fact, several large publishing houses are now buying my small press book, *The Publishing Game: Bestseller in 30 Days* and giving it to their authors to encourage them to do some publicity on their own!) If you want your book to sell, and sell well, you'll need to learn how to do book promotion. Fortunately, it's a learnable skill, and with a little practice, you'll get good at it.

Finally, remember that publishing is a game. Whichever way you decide to publish, sit back, relax, and enjoy the experience! 📖

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## Questions About SLPA?



Contact Membership Chairman:  
Christine Frank at 314-205-2679 or  
Assistant Membership Coordinator:  
Linda Austin at 314-822-1170

## Next Deadline ▶ June 21

### Don't be late – no kidding!

Send us news on your new releases or upcoming appearances or anything else you wish to share.

Get your news and articles in EARLY! Send your information, articles and announcements to [newslettereditor@stlouispublishers.org](mailto:newslettereditor@stlouispublishers.org).