

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO GET PUBLISHED?

By Jerry D. Simmons

Author and former executive with The Time Warner Book Group

It's probably hard for any writer to believe that large New York based trade publishers are constantly on the lookout for new product (books). In fact, it's crucial to the life of a trade publisher to have a constant influx of new product, i.e. new titles, new authors, possibly even new categories. Publishers need product to keep their seasonal lists fresh and well rounded. This means they cannot simply publish best-selling authors, the kind that everyone sees on the New York Times bestseller list. They need to publish a complete list of books.

And booksellers are always looking for what's new, too. When a publisher presents their list to a book buyer, the typical first question is: what's new? Books by John Grisham, Danielle Steele, Stephen King and the other well-known authors are exciting but also very predictable. They will sell a predictable number of copies and that of course is a very good thing for books sellers. They need these authors to bring customers into the stores and to generate a large number of sales. But they also need the next sleeper, the newest and different title that has the potential to rise from the bottom to become the next big book.

Agents, too, are always looking for new books and new authors because their existence depends on it. So if the publishers and agents are on the hunt for new and different, why is it so hard to get published? Certainly the intensely competitive nature of the publishing industry is one answer, but the truth is that your four largest trade publishers (Random House, Simon & Schuster, Harper-Collins and Time Warner) are risk averse! In other words they want new, but *safe*. They're looking for different, but the *same*. Make sense? Of course not, and this is why getting a contract to have your book published is so hard and why recognizing these titles are so difficult.

Publishers today are not willing to take financial risks on books that are not reasonably predictable. A first time author of a romance or mystery novel for example, depending on the writing, will sell a predictable number of copies. Books on cooking, business or other related non-fiction categories, for example, will sell a predictable number of copies. Manuscripts that are new, different, and predictable, yet offer the slightest possibility of breaking out of the mainstream, are what they *want*, what they *desire*, and what they are constantly *seeking*.

Because of this, every writer should have a thorough grasp of their genre. Who publishes the titles in their category, which are the best-selling authors, how are they packaged, priced, etc. Then you must ask yourself: how is my writing unique? What makes my book new and different? If you've read most of the best-selling authors in your category and you can provide a good answer, then you have what publishers and agents need.

Now you must aggressively market yourself to the agents and be confident enough in your work to say, 'my writing is new and different'. It is also critical that you have a basic understanding of the business side of publishing and a good idea of what is happening

in the marketplace. To summarize, you must write something that is new and different, you must be confident, have a basic understanding of the business, and knowledge of the marketplace, all of which are possible! Who said getting a book published was difficult?

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Jerry D. Simmons spent more than twenty years as an executive with The Time Warner Book Group in New York. He is the author of **INSIDE The Business of Publishing** ***What Writers Need to Know*** and the creator of www.WritersReaders.com, where information essential to writers and their careers is available, **FREE**.

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It should always be about the writers and the books....