

## Why Getting Published Takes So Long

By Linda Rohrbough

I was sharing with a pre-published friend that IF his favorite agent signs him tomorrow, it will probably take three years minimum before his book hits the shelves. But it can take six months to a year to hear back from a single agent, which makes the process even longer. Of course, he then asked the question that I hear the most: why does this take so long?

There are lots of reasons. On the agent side of things, it's a matter of supply and demand. A lot of people want representation, so the queue is long. Agents get hundreds—if not thousands—of query letters each month. It's your job as an author to figure out how to get yourself to the top of the stack.

One of the best ways to get ahead with agents is to actually meet and pitch the agent in person. That's one of the main reasons the annual conference is so important. Bringing in a fairly large number of reputable agents and allowing authors access to them is why Pikes Peak is known as one of the top conferences in the country.

Another way to be ahead is to have a great pitch. This is a very different skill than writing the book and one authors struggle with. However, I'm honored to be teaching a workshop at the conference this year on how to talk about your work in a way that attracts interest from an editor or agent. This interactive workshop presents a simple, three-step formula for an effective, attention-getting pitch that works for any book—fiction or nonfiction. I'll also teach you how to look like a pro in this business.

But even after you have an agent, there's a considerable wait. My fiction agent told me he represented one author for eight years before selling her first book. Part of the delay for pre-published writers is many publishing houses create a stack of submissions from new authors and only look through it once or twice a year.

In publishing, a lot is done by committee. This means if an editor loves a book, he's still got to sell it to other editors at a group meeting before the publisher will agree to take it on. So the editor waits for an available slot at this meeting, which may be held once or twice a month. (This is also true for agents who work at literary agencies.)

Sometimes the committee torpedoes the book and unless the editor wants to stake his career on the success of the tide, he has to let it go. Sometimes a bunch of questions or ideas will come up in that meeting that need investigation. Once the book makes it through this process, the editor then becomes the champion for the book and goes to bat for resources for promotion and other perks for his or her "babies." Editors can make a name for themselves with the books they acquire and, of course, every editor wants to acquire best-sellers.

The economy has affected the book market as well. Even though well-known authors are selling better than ever, publishers are reluctant to take on unknowns. As publishers make further staff cuts, editors report to me they're piled even higher with the number of authors they're assigned and the number of books they're expected to edit. Authors with a track record are getting deals faster, but the publishers have in some cases lowered print runs because they're worried about sales. Usually, what happens in a situation like this is they end up with a shortage at some point.

Authors who benefit are the ones who've kept themselves out mere and available for that moment when die publishers wake up and realize they don't have enough new tides.

Bottom line: this can be a very long process, even in a good economy. And the time line doesn't change much even if you're a published author. But once you're published, you're working on several projects in different stages of development, and so it feels like things accelerate and time flies.

As a pre-published author, you can be doing three things with your time while you're waiting.

**First:** keep writing. No one wants a one-book wonder. If one book doesn't sell, you'll have something else to shop.

**Second:** develop good writing habits. I've met a number of authors who signed multiple book contracts, published the first book, and never got any further because they couldn't deliver. Keep learning about how fiction is developed by reading, attending workshops, and talking to other authors so you can hone your skills.

**Third:** generate new ideas and hone your pitching skills so you're able to talk about them. This makes you ready to strike when die iron is hot. That's what pros do. Then when their editor or agent is available, they're ready with fully fleshed-out ideas they can express in an interesting and succinct way. I had the opportunity to do this with my fiction agent this summer. Now I'm working on the first three chapters and a synopsis for the first book of a new series that he wants to send out, even though he's still waiting to hear back on my first series.

So, publishing is a long process and it's probably not going to speed up significantly any time soon. Prepublished authors feel it more because they're waiting. One of the concepts I like to present in my workshops is to prepare for success. You can fail without any effort at all, but making it takes planning. I hope you'll use the three suggestions I've offered to make time pass faster while you're waiting for your success.

Prepare for Success While You're Waiting:

1. Work on a new book.
2. Develop good writing habits.
3. Generate new ideas and use your pitching skills to talk about them.

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