

Frequently Asked Questions for Agents

What is the most important thing that potential clients should know before they submit to an agent?

The most important thing potential clients should know before submitting to agents really isn't about the agencies in question at all. An author should have a solid idea about where he or she want to go with their writing -- how they will build a solid relationship, how they will keep it, how their actual writing will serve their business goals. Only when they know exactly what they want does it become time to find an agency that will complement their goals.

A good agent will probably tweak and modify a writer's plan in order to make it more successful; after all, it's their job. But if a writer goes after an agency, any agency, just for the sake of having an agent, then more than likely it won't mean success for either party.

What should potential clients be asking before they sign with an agent?

Apart from researching the history and reputation of an agency, and then asking the standard questions about commission, expenses, contracts, etc., there are some often overlooked questions that may be helpful for an author to ask. These questions aren't necessarily vital depending on the kind of writer you are, but they could help an author get a better understanding of what kind of working relationship to expect from an agency.

1. On average, how long will it take an agent to send out a manuscript after receipt from the author? (This question is meant to give an author insight into an agent's basic turnaround time.)
2. How "hands-on" is the agent's approach to the author's writing?
3. How does the agent keep clients informed of efforts made on their behalf? How many times per week/month does the agent interact with a given client? (This reply will vary, but it may give you an idea of the agent's range of interactions, letting you know whether the agent prefers an open, collaborative relationship, or an "I'll do my thing, you do yours" relationship.)

What, if anything, are you looking for, apart from a salable manuscript?

In new writers, we love to see potential clients who not only have the writing skills, enthusiasm, and imagination to make for a successful career, but who also have: **1) A solid five-year plan, and 2) A plan "B" in case that doesn't work out.**

There are many writers out there who simply want to write what they want to write, with little thought of establishing a faithful audience within a given genre or form. One day they want to write paranormal romance,

and the next, legal thrillers. Some writers have had success with this approach; however, we tend to get excited by writers who intend to make their name a brand by holding true to a given form and sticking to a strategic (but flexible) career plan. A word of advice to new writers – woo an agent by proving you understand the link between the stories you're writing and the “business” of writing.

What is the most important piece of advice you could give an unpublished author?

The best advice we could offer ANY writer is just this – write better. Always. When you've pushed your abilities as hard as you can, push harder. Be critical of everything you write and everything you read. Write better – the world won't be able to ignore you.

-- By Lisa Van Auken