



# Talking Agents Ezine

Welcome to the latest edition of the *Talking Agents Literary E-Zine*, the free successor to the hard copy/subscribers-only-online *Talking Agents* newsletter we published ten times a year for ten years.

## WHAT YOU DO SPEAKS SO LOUDLY...

How would you feel about getting paid for your gigs rather than your books? By which we mean earning your living as an author not from what you write but from the events you dutifully attend to promote what you write.

That was the idea put forth by Charles Leadbetter, described as an "author and blogger," in a piece in [The Bookseller](#), reporting on a seminar at the British Library billed as 'Authors and Publishers in the Digital Age.'

According to the article, Leadbetter was responding to remarks made by the c.e.o. of the Publisher's Association, who stressed that though he was "sanguine about the future," publishers needed to find new business models. Leadbetter's suggestion was that, "authors be paid not necessarily for their writing, but for what is scarce." Scarcity, he said was represented by the writers rather than their books. His suggestion: compensate them for live performances.

Oh God. What are they going to pay for that talk at a Barnes & Noble in Pawtucket where eight people show up and the three in the front row drift off the moment you open your mouth...

Acting in her role as chair of the Society of Authors, bestselling author Tracy Chevalier (*GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING*) suggested that the current model of advances and royalties was fast becoming outmoded in a digital world. But her suggestions didn't sound very practical for Britain, and less so for the US. Chevalier, by the way, is an American who lives in

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**Talking Agents Literary Ezine** is a complimentary resource for writers (and sometimes their agents) from Agent Research & Evaluation, Inc., the firm established in 1996 by Bill Martin and Beverly Swerling Martin.

This Ezine is an occasional mailing meant to serve the interests of writers relative to (a) finding the right literary agent (b) understanding how to work with a literary agent (c) building a platform to assist in marketing via author's web sites, (c) staying abreast of web neutrality issues and (d) various developments in our business.

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Britain, so she can be presumed to understand both sides of the pond. Or - with all due respect - misunderstand both. Hands up everyone who thinks we can get the entire nation - US or UK - to pay annually for the right to read. Or that the government should sponsor a writers' academy.

### ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH...

When we started this free e-zine we promised to keep you abreast of "net neutrality," i.e., making sure it is not legal for providers of Internet access to charge clients with deeper pockets for faster download speeds. Here is the latest in that important discussion. Preceded by full disclosure: 1. AR&E is an Internet based business that would be negatively impacted by an online universe where you could get fastest to the biggest businesses, which would pay for that privilege. 2. As an author Beverly depends on her website to help keep her name and her work in front of the public. (We need not tell you about the advertising budgets in the book business.)

That said, one or both of those circumstances applies to you or your clients, so the following info should be of value.

In February of this year *The Washington Post* reported that the US Federal Communications Commission held hearings about cable provider Comcast deliberately slowing down the speed of access available to broadband subscribers seeking to download material using the file sharing protocol from Bit-Torrent. Because, Comcast said, Bit-Torrent uses a huge amount of bandwidth and it is Comcast's job to "manage" that usage. Comcast made noises about free market forces but opponents pointed out that they own a competing Video-on-Demand application. Which made their action look like flagrantly unfair competition.

Comes next, [The New York Times](#) runs a 3-28-08 story saying that Comcast has agreed to work with Bit-Torrent so that they can solve the problem together.

The links above will take you to both stories, so we'll spare the non-lawyers and non-techies the painful details.

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This is but one salvo in a battle the broadband providers are not going to lose without a hard, well-financed fight. And if they win you - writers and their agents - lose.

You have, however, allies. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D. Mass.) is chair of the House Energy and Commerce sub-committee, and he supports net neutrality. You can arrange for an alert connected to his name from whatever major newspaper site you regularly visit.

Another major player is an organization called [Free Press](#), an advocacy group founded as a watchdog acting in the public interest against media concentration. Who wouldn't love folks who discovered that Comcast had paid people to appear at a hearing representing themselves as public-spirited supporters of the ISP's position, shot a video of the shells asleep in the front row, and put it on You Tube. Finally there's your friend and neighbor, Verizon.

No kidding.

In the US broadband is mostly supplied by fiber optic cable and the companies (like Comcast - Time Warner is another) who paid huge sums to lay the cable got contracts giving them exclusive use of it in given areas. If you live in their territory, that's the way you get cable TV and broadband Internet. The only way.

In the UK, on the other hand, the favored application is ADSL, e.g. advanced DSL. This system allows data to be carried alongside normal calls on standard telephone lines. Meaning you can use the phone and the Internet at the same time. Eventually "cable television" will be available from those same sources. In Britain ADSL offers technical excellence (unlike the original DSL offered in the US) and has resulted in intense competition for subscribers. So Brits get to choose a broadband provider. Making those providers less likely to screw around with "managing" speed of access to one way or another line their pockets.

Oh yes, Verizon. In some US markets they have begun offering ADSL. No doubt other phone companies will soon get in on that act (for all we know they have). My enemy's enemy is my friend. Go Verizon! And all you other phone companies.

## WHY US?

It's interesting to us that the published writers who come to us (some 60% of our business) are far more trusting of what we do than the newbies. Probably because the latter have so frequently been burned by the scammers, and have run up against so many brick walls. Maybe because they simply can't write - self delusion in this area is rampant - but also possibly a result of not knowing the right questions to ask. Quoting from a recently received e-mail:

1. *What makes your services and site different from free sites and services out*

*there such as Agent Query, Preditors and Editors, Writers Beware, and countless others? Am I going to find the same info that you offer from your pay services as I would from the free sites?*

2. *What is your success rate in terms of unpublished writers successfully using your services to find legitimate representation and getting their books published?*
3. *Do you offer any guarantees for paid services and provide explicit details regarding the literary agent?*

By way of reply we sent a few pages of Andrew Wylie's report. [Click here](#) to see the same thing, and remember that you're looking at three or four pages of a twenty page database report. On it we rest our case re the unique aspects of our in-depth research. But knowing a lot about any agent or many agents will not of itself get you good and legitimate representation.

Our evaluation of them and of your work is the second string to our bow.

We also explained to the writer of the e-mail that we offer absolutely NO guarantee of anything, except:

- Agents recommended by us are legitimate.
- They are active now and regularly sell books to major publishers. (Most of whom are in NYC - so that's where the agents are as well. Not always, but almost always.)
- Every agent out there would kill for the next major bestseller (including Mr. Wylie) but few are willing to plough through mountains of dross to find the nugget of gold. You have to know how to make it easy for them to find you. We can help with that.
- Those we recommend for you are selling work that is like yours - and that's a nuanced and complex judgment made by people with long years of publishing experience after interacting with you about your book.

One of the ways new writers improve their odds of being noticed/read is to understand that vis-à-vis the agent, what they are pursuing is a business relationship. Some agents are excellent first readers and even editors - many have an editorial background - but their primary function is to make business for you. In the main, editors work for publishers. Learning the difference between the two roles is one of your jobs if you want to succeed in this very tough business.

Agent Research and Evaluation, Inc; 425 No. 20th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130  
563-1867 Fax: 215-563-6797 Email: [info@agentresearch.com](mailto:info@agentresearch.com) [www.AgentResearch.com](http://www.AgentResearch.com)

Tel: 215-