



Talking Agents Ezine

THE FOG OF... FOG

Okay, it's not war, but the agents aren't doing us any favors either. The us in question is writers everywhere, and what it means to them when the agents begin collectively to back peddle on a recent policy of sharing more information rather than less.

Time was – back, for instance, in 1980 when Bill started collecting the AR&E data – when the rule in publishing was: everybody knows everything, because we all talk among ourselves, but nobody tells writers anything. We were at the absolute bottom of the food chain.

We still are.

But but by the early 2000's thanks to a few people – Paul Nathan, *PW* columnist back when *PW* mattered, Bill at AR&E, and Michael Cader of Publishers Lunch all come to mind – there came to exist among agents a certain competition for bragging rights. Even among the über agents it was for a time intense enough to provoke more openness about how much who got for what rights. A lot was masked by metaphorical categories such as nice, very nice, good, significant, and major (Cader's contribution to publishing jargon); but even that was a huge step forward. It meant that writers could at last know what everyone else in the business always knows. How good a deal was that really?

Lately, to use a good British expression, it's all gone pear-shaped.

By some alchemy akin to the instinct that makes bees swarm or lemmings head for the sea, the agents have collectively reminded themselves that no one can make them tell.

There's no dearth of reporting sales (though some, particularly the über agents, are doing less of that as well), but a huge fall-off in mentioning such details as the size of the advance or the nature of the rights sold. We don't for a moment believe this is an effort to hide things illegal or in current terms, toxic. The vast majority of agents are honest people. They're trying to spike competition, not hide anything nefarious. But this is particularly disturbing at a time when we're all reaping the bitter harvest of a lack of transparency.

Further, for writers this creeping coyness is enormously damaging. The requirement that we have literary representation if we are to sell our work is all but universal. As we pointed out in the last e-zine, the system is mutually beneficial so we're not griping. But we at least deserve an opportunity to choose that representation on the basis of hard facts. And yes, choose is the operative word. Even writers – those crazy people who are willing to spend their working life sitting alone in a room staring at an empty computer screen – ought to be able to pick the people into whose hands they are placing their livelihoods.

Get real folks. In the age of the e-book and print on demand the fable of the goose and the golden egg does have some relevance. At AR&E we have been

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**A SPECIAL EDITION
ABOUT YOU AND US AND,
OF COURSE, AGENTS**

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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in the vanguard of those saying self-publishing is a lousy alternative and we will continue to be, but if you make yourselves ice queens the equation could change.

A NEW DISPENSATION...

Until now we have sent our [Customized Reports](#) (the ones that help you find the right agent) only in hard copy. This policy that has been in place for the 13 years we've been in business.

It was established to cut down on the possibility of unscrupulous people setting them loose in cyberspace. That has been superceded by technology changes, changes in the general climate in which we do business (much more data out there, albeit not always a lot of information), and the fact that over these many years we have found our fellow writers very scrupulous and honorable indeed.

So – tasteful trumpet fanfare, please – in future we will be sending all reports as ELECTRONIC ATTACHMENTS to e-mails, unless someone specifically requests a hard copy instead. Meaning that the additional waiting time for snail mail delivery is eliminated.

Second point: For pretty much the same reasons, we are now prepared to offer queue jumps to any part of the world for one supplementary fee of \$50.00. (There was a \$75 - \$100 extra charge for a queue jump plus Fedex delivery.) So for those who need or want their report to arrive before the customary 16 business days and choose to go to the head of the line, a fifty buck surcharge insures that your material will go out electronically two business days after we receive the answers to the questionnaire and Beverly's follow-up questions. (Both have always gone out as e-mail – nothing new there.)

Right now we're making the site reflect these changes. Getting the text fixed is, of course, the easy part. It may take a little longer to get the shopping page up to speed. As many of you know, we don't put charges through 'automatically' on the net. We do it in a real office with real people. Nothing happens until we get your order and acknowledge it. So if you want a \$50 queue jump while the shopping page is still listing it at \$75 or \$100 depending on where you live, don't check the Expedited Order box, just order the [Customized Fingerprint Report](#) and follow up with an e-mail to info@agentresearch.com. Tell us that you've put through an order and want to add a queue jump at the new rate of \$50.00. We will acknowledge that, and make the charge accordingly. (Obviously, there's no need to put your credit card info in the e-mail – we'll have it from the properly secure and encrypted order.)

statement is included in its entirety: "Bill Martin and Beverly Swerling Martin are matchmakers for you the writer. The goal is to direct you to the literary agent who is right for your work. The Martins can be contacted at their website www.AgentResearch.com or at 215-563-1867. Copyright 2008, AR&E, Inc. All rights reserved."

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