

Novelists' Ink

The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc.—a professional organization for writers of popular fiction

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Guide to Agents: A Further Look

By
JASMINE CRESSWELL

The 1996 Novelists, Inc. *Guide to Agents* produced a wealth of useful, factual information provided both by NINC members and by the agents themselves. NINC members who are currently contemplating a change of agent—or even members who are just curious to see how their agent stacks up against the competition—could do no better than to refer back to that *Guide*.

There were, however, a few useful pieces of information contained in the members' surveys that never made it into the 1996 *Guide*. Questions 33 and 35 of the survey were deliberately open-ended and prompted many interesting comments. The questions were:

Survey Question #33: Problems I've had with agents, and my solutions—if any!

Survey Question #35: Any further general comments?

Unfortunately, some of the most interesting comments were difficult to quantify or condense and didn't, therefore, lend themselves well to the fact-based format of the *Guide*. What follows is a somewhat impressionistic recap of the extensive commentary some of you provided on the thorny topic of author-agent relations.

The first thing to note is that although we hear lots of horror stories about agents, many NINC members are quite happy with their current representation. Of the 308 members who returned their surveys, 176 found nothing negative to say in response to Question 33. Some authors even felt motivated to express their satisfaction. As one member put it, "Call me blessed—I've had no problems."

This member has been with the same agent for nine years, and the survey shows that there are many of us who have enjoyed similar long-term relationships with agents we consider supportive.

But having mentioned the good news, it's only fair to point out that there were some truly horrendous problems with agents during 1995 and early 1996. Several NINC authors were represented by Eugenia Panettieri, who was arrested and charged with embezzlement of her clients' funds. (All due to the efforts of NINC member Constance Laux, by the way.) Not surprisingly, 100% of Ms. Panettieri's clients who responded to the survey stated that they'd fired her.

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Then there was the implosion of the Jay Acton/Adele Leone agency, with disastrous consequences for many writers. The client list for this agency was studded with big-name writers, and most of their clients were savvy professionals, well-established in their careers, who'd asked all the right questions before signing on with the agency. Which brings up the interesting point, made by several respondents, that there's a limit to how effectively you can interview an agent before signing on with him or her.

"It's a waste of time to ask questions," one member writes. "I asked the right questions, and [the prospective agent] gave the right answers, but then I found out she lied...." Or, as another NINC member puts it. "Face it—what kind of answer do you expect from someone if you ask if she is honest, trustworthy, respected, etc., etc.?"

Although no members reported theft or embezzlement as a result of the disintegration of the Acton/Leone agency, many authors felt that their careers were interrupted, perhaps fatally by the increasing difficulty of contacting either Acton or Leone over a period of several months. The following comment suggests the level of frustration experienced by some NINC members:

"That Adele Leone self-destructed at a time when I was submitting proposals to new publishers has set my career back at least one year! I am currently so far up shit creek I have begun to enjoy the view,

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1998 Officer Ballot Bios
and Proxies
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Novelists, Inc.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

WHAT CAN THE NINC CONFERENCE DO FOR YOU?

A lot of our members have never attended our annual national conference. They read the brochure and see that it looks a bit different from other conferences—although other conferences have begun to imitate our format—but no one can really understand what a NINC conference is like without actually attending one.

What's the big deal? you may be asking yourself. The first big deal is our size. We're expecting about 200 folks at this year's conference, almost half of them editors and agents. You don't need a calculator to figure those odds, which are pretty doggone good if you'd like to have a one-on-one conversation with one of those editors or agents. Many deals have been made and new alliances forged at our conferences simply because people had the time and opportunity to meet and talk. And while smaller, regional conferences have comparable attendance figures, none can boast the number of publishing professionals we'll have in attendance—and you won't be sharing their attention with a lot of wannabes either. In fact, there won't be a single wannabe at our conference, only seasoned professionals.

The second big deal is our focus. As you may have already noticed, every single workshop at our conference is geared toward the needs of the multi-published writer. And our sessions aren't limited to one speaker or even a panel of speakers. In NINC we believe that every member has knowledge and insight to offer, and we give every member a chance. While each session has facilitators with expertise to lead the discussions, everyone present can (and does!) share what they know, too. Often the most valuable nugget a member gleans from a conference is a chance remark made by someone in one of our free-flowing discussion groups.

The third big deal is that our conference energizes you instead of wearing you out. Are you looking for some inspiration? Some motivation? Some empathy or even sympathy? NINC is the place to go. Feeling like roadkill on the corporate highway? Or maybe your career is going great, and you want some insight into taking that next step. Whether you're looking for someone to share your joy or your misery, you'll find exactly what you need at NINC. Everyone there can say, "Been there, done that." And no matter what your present professional (or even personal) situation, you'll find someone at NINC who can offer a word of advice or a bit of eternal wisdom.

And the fourth big deal is that you'll have fun. You'll laugh, you'll diss, and you'll make new friends with your peers. Who else can offer you an opportunity like that? Nobody. Trust me.

Oh, and did you remember the conference is in Manhattan, where every editor and agent known to man will be only a short cab ride away even if they aren't actually in attendance?

So make your plans and your reservations and whatever sacrifices you must and meet with us in New York. You'll be glad you did.

A BAD PATCH:

Maybe you remember my mentioning that my career was going through a bad patch a few months back. Well, okay, it was in the dumper and the lid

**This Month
from the
President:**

*Why NINC's
annual con-
ference is a
"big deal."*

was closed. My former publisher had let me go and their sales figures pretty much guaranteed nobody else would want me. But my wonderful agent never gave up, and I'm happy to announce that I'm going to be writing an historical mystery series for Berkley. The best part is that I have, in my own little way, made a contribution toward diversifying NINC's membership by adding one more mystery writer to our ranks. There is no limit to the sacrifices your dedicated president is prepared to make for NINC.

REMINDER:

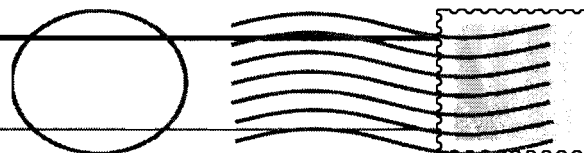
The ballots for the NINC election are included in this

issue. If you aren't planning to attend the conference, please vote and return your ballots. We need as many as we can get to ensure a valid election!

— Victoria Thompson

Members: to obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting, send \$2 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer's Report, send \$1 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Letters to the Editor is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will never be published in NINK. Upon the author's request, signed letters may be published as "Name Withheld." In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style. Letters may be sent to the NINK editor via mail, fax, or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.

Other Security Issues

Editor's Note: As follow-up on Chris Pacheco's excellent article on security for writers in the August NINK, we have received a warning that authors should think twice before using vanity license plates that could make them easily identifiable and easily tracked. The warning is based on an author who was attacked in her own home by someone who had identified her from her license plate and followed her home.

Great Books Search

Editor's Note: the following request was forwarded by a NINC member with the thought that it might be of interest to other members. The letter writer is looking for someone to take over the Great Books Search project, which she started.

Dear Editor,

The Great Books Search is the first international effort to find out people's favorite books regardless of language, country, or year of origin. At the Great Books Search Site, visitors can send recommendations for their favorite books (which are posted the next day) and they can vote. Each

e-mail address can vote for up to 100 books during 1997. The votes come to my e-mail via a script. It would be easy to change the script to send them to somebody else's e-mail. In addition, people who have book review sites (including The Great Books Foundation) get listed on the links page.

I've got a program that goes through the votes and puts them into a database. Then I count the votes by hand, and put the totals into the database. The database sorts by number of votes and I put that into the Top Books page, using HTML code for tables.

That's it. There's no money for this project. I paid \$50 out of my own pocket for the program that turns e-mail into a database. I'll be happy to give that program to anybody who will take over the project. I'll also rewrite the code to send the votes, recommendations, and letters to other e-mails. Right now, I'm using 3 separate e-mails for this. Juno gives all the free e-mail addresses anyone could want.

I've been doing this since January and I'm tired of it. I do hope you can find somebody who would like to take it over. It's fun to read the recommendations, and people seem to enjoy the page. And it's at GeoCities (free) where I've put the banner exchange on the page, so you might win a trip or something else useful.

— Lois J. Wickstrom
cormo@juno.com

Join the Great Books Search — <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/4863>

"You must once and for all give up being worried about successes and failures. Don't let that concern you. It's your duty to go on working steadily day by day, quite steadily, to be prepared for mistakes, which are inevitable, and for failures."
— Anton Chekhov

Further Guide to Agents

(Continued from page 1)

but my career may be past salvaging.”

In some ways, frightening as it is to find ourselves clients of a dishonest or non-functioning agent, at least the solution to this type of major problem is simple. “My agent embezzled my money, so I fired her,” was the succinct response of one Eugenia Panettieri client. And like Ms. Panettieri, Acton and Leone lost 100% of their NINC clients who responded to the survey.

In reading through the survey responses, it became apparent that it’s not these big problems that throw us for a loop; it’s the range of problems in the middle that are guaranteed to give most of us sleepless nights.

Here are some of the common problems we are finding as a group: slow or non-response to phone calls, letters, faxes, etc.; failure to submit proposals in a timely manner; unwillingness to read material; too many big-name clients who demand the agent’s time and attention; late checks; lack of knowledge about the industry/genre; refusal to consult with the author about long-term goals; unwillingness to allow author’s career to take a different direction.

And here are a few more specific problems that members have encountered. One author, let’s call her Mary Smith, found out by chance that her agent had sent out the wrong manuscript to a publishing house under the author’s name, so that the editor wasn’t reading Mary Smith’s material even though the manuscript was identified that way! Three authors reported being dumped by their agents without warning when their careers stalled, a double whammy.

Then there’s the question of whose side the agent is really on during negotiations. In theory, we all know that our agents are supposed to represent us. In practice, it doesn’t always happen that way. Several authors reported situations in which their agents did so much business with certain editors and/or publishing houses that they were unwilling to go out on a limb for individual authors for fear of reprisals or retribution against other in-agency clients.

None of the above problems are really surprising to anyone who’s been in the business for a while. What surprised me was that, in all the above circumstances, firing the offending agent was the unanimous solution suggested by respondents. If this survey accurately reflects the experience of our membership, courteous discussion, carefully worded letters that state your desire for change, or even emotional heart-to-hearts are not going to produce the sort of improved behavior we want. So for those members currently wondering if they are going to resolve energy-sapping problems with their agents by polite negotiation, it might help to know that, in the end, your fellow NINC members almost always resort to firing the agent. Although one respondent did suggest that there seemed to be *no* solution to the problem of the reputable agent who goes suddenly crazy “unless astrology works.”

On the other hand, *specific* problems with an agent can be resolved to mutual advantage by less draconian measures. One author wrote, “I felt [my agent] had become biased in her feelings toward a certain publisher. She liked a certain editor and couldn’t see the forest for the trees. Despite our long and profitable relationship, I was ready to walk. I wrote her and she ‘saw the light’.”

Note that despite “a long and profitable relationship” this member chose to write and explain her dissatisfaction with carefully chosen words, rather than attempting to resolve the issue over the phone.

Just for the sake of balance, we’d better acknowledge that not all problems in the author/agent relationship come from the side of the agent. One author sums up a point mentioned by several respondents. “My problem has always been with *me*—being too timid to ask questions, etc....Had to grow up businesswise.” Learning to distinguish between justifiable firmness and discourtesy is a real problem for those of us brought up to believe ladies and gentlemen must never make anyone feel uncomfortable.

Childhood conditioning isn’t the only problem we have to overcome. Our expectations are sometimes unrealistic, as several respondents pointed out. It’s no good blaming the agent for an unsatisfactory relationship when the reality is that we’ve failed to articulate our needs/ goals/problems. In addition, survey respondents all agreed that agents are a convenient dumping ground for our own failures. Sometimes an agent doesn’t sell our work because she is lazy, incompetent, and/or distracted. But quite often an agent fails to sell our work because it’s inferior, or fails to interest a publisher. Naturally, we prefer to blame our agents rather than our own work.

However, most of us do want constructive guidance even if it means a lot of re-working. When a manuscript fails to sell, we all seem to yearn for an agent who can tell us whether this project failed because it sucked, or whether it failed despite the fact that it’s brilliantly conceived and written. If the project is potentially viable, but not quite suited to the current market, we want input from our agents as to whether the project can be salvaged by tinkering, or major re-writes, or whether we need to put it in a drawer and wait for the cosmic forces to shift in our direction.

There is one final group of problems which I found the most chilling of all. What happens if our agent is failing us—badly—and we don’t even know it? One author wrote in answer to Question 35: “I wish there was some way we could find out what editors really think about specific agents. In an elevator at a national conference I overheard an editor say, ‘She will take any offer.’ I bolstered my courage and asked, ‘Who?’ The answer was my agent’s name. I work hard to be a professional and, hopefully, I am perceived as one. I expect my agent’s reputation, which will

reflect on me, to be equally respected.”

Then there was the horror story about an author, tied to an agent by an unbreakable two-year contract, who discovered—almost too late—that the agent in question had come close to destroying the author’s long-established career with a specific publishing house. “I learned,” the author writes, “that by the time [this agent] had finished her demands on my behalf (demands about which I knew nothing, I might add) they [the publishers] were almost at the point where they didn’t care if they ever heard my name again. *This is why I had an agent?*”

No, this is definitely not why we have agents. We are most of us torn between the dream of an agent who bolsters our creativity and negotiates superdeals, and the nightmare of an agent who steals our money and destroys our careers. Fortunately, most of us seem to have found agents who are a bit closer to the dream than the nightmare. As one

respondent wrote: “Agents are like lovers. One person’s dream is another person’s nightmare. Keep looking and you’ll find an agent that suits your present needs.”

Perhaps that’s the lesson we should take away from the responses to these two survey questions. There is no perfect agent, so we should stop searching for this mythical beast and concentrate instead on finding a decent, honest agent who *suits our present needs*. A modest goal, but one we can most likely achieve. **NINK**

Jasmine Cresswell is one of the five founders of Novelists, Inc., and a former president and NINK editor. She has written more than 50 novels, including Secret Sins, recently published by MIRA, and He Said...She Said, written with fellow NINC founder Maggie Osborne, published in August by Harlequin Books.

When to “Divorce” Your Agent

By
ARDATH MAYHAR

An agent is, in a very strange way, something like a spouse, although the tie is economic rather than emotional. Deciding on a “divorce” leaves many of us feeling guilty, no matter how justified we may be in making the break.

However, there are important factors that should trigger a realization that such a divorce may be desirable. Perhaps the most important of those is a lack of common goals.

Goals: Most of us have personal goals for our writing and our careers as writers. Our agents should understand and support those goals. Their lack of interest in or inability to support our goals can take several forms.

Do you have several favorite genres in which you want to write, although your agent prefers that you stick to one in which you already have some track record? Is she unwilling to be flexible enough to try marketing your work outside the field she recommends? Can she do so successfully?

My first agent was excellent, honest, and a real friend. She opened a new field for me, and for several years she was just what I needed, since she specialized in science fiction and fantasy. As long as I was working in those areas, we got along fine. She sold a number of my science fiction and fantasy books, but when I began moving into westerns and non-fantasy juvenile books, she was less successful, since those were not the areas of her expertise or interest. At last I was forced to admit the partnership was no longer working.

Some years later, I worked with another agent who did well for me for a long while. He sold a number of books, the last ten or eleven of which were written “to order,” the subject matter being requested by editors. This sounds like the best of all possible worlds, but it is not, for me, a comfortable way of working. I realized that I must negotiate out of the last four-book contract.

The agent did that, but afterward his enthusiasm for my work waned. At last I realized that I had not had a new con-

tract for two years. Although I no longer wanted (and was no longer physically able) to write to contract, I had in hand 19 novels, only a handful of which that agent had read. He declined to market my sf and fantasy. Although I like and respect this agent still, I got another divorce.

Another aspect of this problem mentioned by one author comes when your agent seems to have no suggestions as to what you might do to get your career rolling again (other than writing to order, of course) when you hit a slow patch. “I guess she thought my starting over wouldn’t be worth her effort,” this author says.

The same writer also mentioned having an agent who seemed not to keep up with market trends and needs, which can mean that you are kept busy writing material for which there is no longer a market.

If you and your agent are obviously aiming in different directions for your career, and a good heart-to-heart discussion hasn’t gotten you back into synch, it’s probably time to change. While good agents do make career plans for their clients, those plans should coincide with the author’s own goals. If they don’t, you are not going to be happy with what you are doing, no matter how profitable it may be.

Money: The second most important element in your relationship with your agent is your financial arrangement. Does your agent pay advances and royalties promptly and in full? So far in my career, all of mine have, but a very prominent author of my acquaintance found his situation far different.

His agent withheld payment completely, though the writer’s books were earning well. It required a lawsuit to extract the money due from the agent’s hands. This is a serious situation, and if you have reason to believe it is happening, it is time to check on contracts, royalty statements, etc., to be sure you are getting every penny that is yours. If

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When to “Divorce”

he doesn't send you copies of your contract and royalty statements, assume that the agent is not being above-board with payments.

A very large agency, as mentioned by yet another writer, can be very slow in transmitting royalty checks simply because they have so many clients whose money comes in one big lump from the publisher. If this is going to be a problem for you, a smaller agency might serve you better.

It can get worse. In one sad case, an author found that while her husband was dying of cancer, her agent had been embezzling from her. This is not a common problem, I'm glad to say, but it does happen, and this is just one more reason to keep a sharp eye on the business end of your career.

Business Practices: Marj Krueger mentions a not-too-unusual problem that appears when an agent sits on your work without marketing it, wasting precious time because she “can't represent you with sufficient enthusiasm.” Krueger's agent seemed enthusiastic at the start, but never seemed to keep her promise to take her new client's proposal around “next trip to New York.” After several repeats of the promise, several months' silence, apologies, and more promises without ever actually showing the proposal to anyone, the agent let drop in a conversation that she was “waiting for the complete manuscript.” Grinding her teeth, the author sent the manuscript. After another long period of silence, Krueger called again. This time, the agent didn't recognize her voice or name.

An agent invests a lot of time, effort, and money in a client, and we must remember that agents, too, must pay bills and buy groceries. Yet books can, as another of Krueger's did, get caught in publishing house cutbacks and never come out at all, which leaves you back at square one. Her agent hadn't the nerve to let her know this was about to happen, suggesting that the editor call her, at last, to tell her the project was dead.

One agent I had was hesitant to make waves with publishers although there were vitally important issues to be resolved. Her reason, I found later, was that she had other clients with books under consideration, and those deals might have been affected. She also was close friends with several editors and didn't wish to offend them.

Linda Palmer mentions an agent who did not follow up on proposals, completed contracts, or revised manuscripts, waiting for weeks or months and having to be nudged before she would act. An agent who doesn't stay on top of your work and your career is one you can do without.

Palmer makes the point that sometimes very large agencies are reluctant to ask special treatment for you from publishers, no matter how well deserved, for other clients might want or need such extras. She says that after changing from a big agency to a small, new one, she became a star instead of low man on the totem pole. Sometimes this is a very wise move.

One author who responded to our request for agent in-

formation also suggests that when an agent's unprofessional behavior taints you as seeming equally unprofessional, it is time to make changes. Unprofessional conduct can come through breaches of house rules in submission of manuscripts to editors or in slackness in keeping up with contracts, royalty statements, or other vital business.

Such agents can cause you embarrassment, financial problems, and delays in advancing your career. Keep an eye open for such behavior and change at once if it is detected.

If you do not hear from your agent by letter or cannot make regular contact by telephone, it may be a sign that you should begin searching for another. Good communication is a sign of good business habits and a solid relationship; lack of communication sometimes means that something has gone wrong.

Personalities: If there are personal difficulties (disagreements as to contracts, payments, marketing strategies, etc.) you might be better served by someone who is more compatible. Writing is hard enough work without adding such unnecessary problems.

Personal differences can arise when an agent takes it upon himself to dictate subject matter or to line-edit manuscripts in ways you dislike. When that agent makes negative comments about new material you send him, or insists upon structural/editorial changes in your work to which you cannot agree, this is a sign of fundamental differences in approach and should bring about careful examination of both the material and the agent.

A few writers form emotional attachments to their agents, depending upon them for matters that should be personal concerns. Sometimes this dependency approaches a co-dependent condition, with the agent (often unwittingly) assuming control over the life of the client. This is an unhealthy situation, and if you suspect it might apply to you, it would be well to discuss it with a counselor as well as with the agent herself. It is not a good relationship for either writer or agent.

How do you decide whether to make that painful break?

With markets as difficult as they are now, everyone seems to be having a rough time. There are no guarantees of sales for the majority of authors, and it's not going to get easier any time soon. It's not hard to understand why someone who has an agent is going to hesitate before dumping him or her—an agent in the hand is worth two in the bush, and I realize that.

However, if you recognize situations in the foregoing material that could apply to you, it might serve you to analyze your dealings with your agent. Are there elements that hit close to home? Do you find anything with which you feel uncomfortable?

For instance, it is important to make clear your own goals and needs to your agent at the beginning. If you didn't do so at the start, ask yourself if you've done so since. A letter setting forth your personal goals and needs can be very helpful. It is not unreasonable to ask for such a letter from her in return.

Whatever your concerns, I suggest that you write a letter to your agent setting forth exactly what you feel is (or

may become) a problem. FAX or e-mail it to him. Plain print on paper is there to be re-read, preventing misunderstandings. Phone conversations can become emotional, but a letter lets you say what you mean without complicating an already uncomfortable situation.

Whatever the issue or issues you're dealing with in your letter, give your agent time to think about them before calling to talk over the situation. If the problem can be resolved, that's great, but if not, it's time to find another representative.

Before you leave, be sure you understand your agreement with your agent. Did you sign a contract that defines the steps you must take to break your relationship? Many agents do not use contracts—letters of agreement or simple handshakes often substitute for them. You need to know just what you've gotten into, and how to get out if you decide, for whatever reason, that that's necessary.

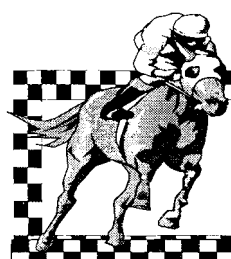
Try never to part company in anger. Keeping a friend (or at least not leaving behind an enemy) is as important as

finding a new agent. Agents are professionals, as are we, and changes happen. We are all in the same business, and even when our goals diverge, we should wish each other well.

Remember that you are the only client you have. If you do not keep a sharp watch on your career, both business and literary aspects, things may go wrong that you will never suspect until it is too late to remedy the problem.

A bad agent is worse than no agent at all. Patience is a virtue, it is true, but if we are too patient (and I have been guilty of this more than once), we can do great harm to our work and to our careers. **NINK**

Ardath Mayhar has written, thus far, 60 books, mostly novels, of which she has published 39. As Frank Cannon (Westerns), John Killdeer (mountain main books), and Frances Hurst (Oregon Trail novel), as well as herself, she has worked with a number of major publishers and is presently working with a small press, as well.



The Fast Track

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the *USA Today* top 150 bestseller list. (A letter "n" after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.) Members should send **Marilyn**

Pappano a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone/fax number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: pappanor@gorilla.net. Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com> (Et al.: written with other author(s) who aren't members of NINC)

Member	Title	July 2	July 9	July 16	July 23	July 30
Jo Beverly	<i>Something Wicked</i> , Topaz	140				
Sandra Brown	<i>Exclusive</i> , Warner Vision	11	11	24	36	41
Sandra Brown	<i>Fat Tuesday</i> , Warner	26	23	30	43	57
Jayne Castle	<i>Zinnia</i> , Pocket Star	97				
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Maze</i> , Putnam		37n	62	106	87
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>The Main Corpse</i> , Bantam		36n	28	44	48
Christina Dodd	<i>A Well Pleasured Lady</i> , Avon			109n	73	112
Julie Garwood	<i>One White Rose</i> , Pocket	19	31	45	75	88
Julie Garwood	<i>One Pink Rose</i> , Pocket	103	112	110	122	122
Julie Garwood	<i>One Red Rose</i> , Pocket			5n	7	19
Tess Gerritsen	<i>Harvest</i> , Pocket			166	104	97
Joan Hohl	<i>Ever After</i> , Zebra				130n	75
B. J. James	<i>Whispers in the Dark</i> , Silhouette	150n				
Joan Johnston	<i>The Virgin Groom: Hawk's Way</i> , Silhouette					94n
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Sweet Wind, Wild Wind</i> , Mira			128n		
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Touch of Enchantment</i> , Bantam	81	104			
Paula Detmer Riggs	<i>Mommy by Surprise</i> , Silhouette	145n				
Nora Roberts	<i>Finding the Dream</i> , Jove			3n	6	14



ONLINE

Web pages. I've discussed them in this column in the past, but as quickly as things change on the Internet (and to follow up Sally Schoeneweiss' informative article last month) I'm going to tackle them again. More and more of our members are either putting them up or considering doing so. One question that arises regularly on NinLink is, "How much do/should they cost?" That will be my main focus this month. I conducted a very informal survey on NinLink and discovered a wide range of prices and services out there.

If you want someone else to take care of the design and maintenance (updates) of your Web page, you have to pay for it. Members reported paying from \$100 to \$250 for the initial design of a page, then maintenance fees of \$50 to \$200 a year or an hourly rate (\$40/hr was quoted) for updates. Those who responded were all fairly happy with the services they'd received.

For those willing to do some work themselves to save money and have more control, Linda Barlow had this to say: "Most ISPs provide server space for their customers to put their own Web pages online. And designing the actual pages is now as easy as using a word processing program.

"You don't have to know html—although there's nothing particularly hard about learning html. Microsoft's FrontPage, for example, is a pretty sophisticated product that will allow you to do point-and-click design of sophisticated Web pages, including graphics, multiple font choices, and a wide range of colors and backgrounds.

"If your ISP is one of the many that officially enables the use of FrontPage for its customers, extensions of the program will be installed on the ISP's servers. These server extensions allow you to *easily* create and manage highly interactive Web pages, including information submission forms, guest books, threaded discussion groups, Web site search engines, Java and ActiveX plug-ins, database connectivity forms, etc. By 'easily,' I mean no programming skills are required. Goodness knows, I am not a programmer :) but I run several complex Web sites using FrontPage and other tools that I've found on the Web.

"The advantage to doing it yourself is that the costs are minimal. I can't imagine having to pay someone to add links or make content and design changes to my web pages." Other software programs frequently praised for making Web page design and maintenance easy include MS Publisher 97 and Claris Home Page.

How useful a Web site will be for you depends on how many people will visit it. Those with sites agree that content and registration with search engines are what make the difference. As Ms. Schoeneweiss pointed out in her article last month, one easy way to improve content is to have your page be part of a site with plenty of content already.

Two sites I've heard good things about include Eclectics (<http://www.eclectics.com>) and <http://www.sff.net>. The latter has the advantage of offering *free* membership and a 5MB Web site to NINC members. A 20MB page is available there for \$8.95/mo (less if you pay by the quarter or year). I recommend checking out both of these sites.

Those I polled on NinLink reported receiving anywhere from 100-500 "hits" (visits) per month at their Web sites. Registration with search engines makes a difference there, and it's easier than ever. Ms. Schoeneweiss's article listed several, but the easiest are the one-stop registration sites Submit-It at <http://www.submit-it.com> and Easy-Submit at <http://www.the-vault.com/easy-submit>. So what are you waiting for?

And if you're *still* not on NinLink, you've been missing some great discussions! Over the past couple of months, we've talked about male vs. female authors on the NYT list, who gets the big money (and why), taxes on foreign royalties, stuff we have taped to our computer monitors (what a varied group we are!), the ethics of ghostwriting, the origins of clichés, and the fabulous NINC conference schedule, among other things. If you're feeling "out of the loop," the cure is easy! Just send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: Subscribe Your Name (as it appears on the NINC roster)

Body: subscribe NinLink-Digest Your-Email-Address

Once subscribed, post messages

To: **NinLink@ninc.com**

Until the conference next month,

I'll see you online!

— **Brenda Hiatt Barber** :)



"The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen."

— **Frank Lloyd Wright**

INTRODUCING...

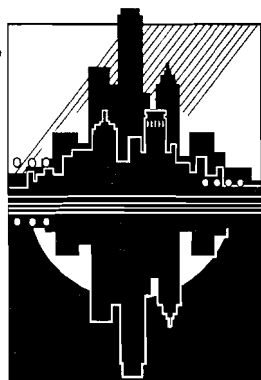
The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

New Applicants

Joyce Adams, O'Fallon MO
Julie Beard, Wentzville MO
Victoria Leigh Erbschloe (*Victoria Leigh*), Monument CO
Carmen Green, Lawrenceville GA
Kristin Hannah, Seattle WA
Christiane Heggan, Medford NJ
Jaye W. Manus (*Sheryl Lynn*), Colorado Springs, CO
Nancy McArthur, Berea OH
Glenna McReynolds, Fort Collins CO
Donna Valentino, McDonald PA

New Members

Jo Ann Algermissen (*Anna Hudson*), Smithville TX
Merline Lovelace, Oklahoma City OK
Suzanne McMinn, Granbury TX
Kimberly Morris, Houston TX
Anne Marie Rodgers (*Anne Marie Winston*), Waynesboro PA
Mary C. Schaefer (*Kathryn Shay*), Rochester NY
Justine Wittich, Lancaster OH



NINC: Please tell us a bit about NINC's first-ever art show.

LR: Well, I was originally afraid we wouldn't get enough professional cover artists. Now I'm afraid we'll have too many. That's why we're asking Victoria Thompson to give up the conference suite and sleep in the corridor.

NINC: Is it true you're getting the equipment for the art show from an insane asylum?

LR: No, no, they're not lunatics, they're Lunarians: New York City's local science fiction/fantasy community. They kindly voted to let us borrow their equipment. Andrea Senchy, a long time director of sf/f art shows, is donating her time and expertise to NINC; we couldn't accomplish this without her.

NINC: Is it true that Elvis will be at the conference?

LR: (smiles beatifically) No comment.

NINC: Let's talk about the program. Is it true you've replaced the "Short Fiction Markets" panel (which, let's be frank, no one cared about anyhow) with something else?

LR: Yes. Catherine Coulter recently passed through my home town on her first book tour, whereupon she volunteered to be on a panel warning innocent writers like herself (I speak figuratively, of course) about what they need to know before going on tour.

NINC: How did you get a New York Times bestseller to "volunteer" to headline a last-minute NINC program item?

LR: (smiles innocently) No comment.

NINC: What else have you lined up

since printing the registration brochure?

LR: Bantam's mystery and sf/f art director, the delightful Jamie Warren-Youll, has agreed to appear on a panel on Saturday afternoon about cover art and design.

NINC: Any additions to the list of attending publishers and agents?

LR: Yes, several! But I don't have that information handy right now. Look for it in next month's NINK.

NINC: Finally, on a personal note, is it true that Brad Pitt left Gwyneth Paltrow for you?

LR: (smiles mysteriously) No comment.

Questions? Call:

Binnie Braunstein (410) 486-6178—PR
Sandra Kitt (212) 569-8076—Art Show
Pat Kay (281) 558-7075—Program
Laura Resnick (513) 723-1248—
Everything else, or to ask about Elvis and Brad.

"AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA RESNICK"

Getting In on the Booming Regional Trade Show Market

By
GAIL LINK

“With the downsizing of the national ABA Booksellers’ market, regional trade shows are ‘where it’s at.’”

That was the opening sentence from a letter I recently received from Jerrie Hurd, president of Women Writing the West, regarding the group’s participation in two upcoming regional booksellers’ trade shows (Pacific Northwest and Mountains & Plains). It clearly demonstrates what so many in the publishing industry (writers especially) are finding out—that, indeed, regional book shows are the place to be, for many reasons.

First: it’s a great opportunity to promote either oneself or a genre specific organization, or both. A recent article in the Sisters in Crime newsletter from one of its members, Elizabeth Quinn, addressed the benefits of making the connection with local booksellers. As a writer who lives in the Northwest and sets her mysteries there, Elizabeth discovered attending a regional show and meeting booksellers could “provide an author’s biggest opportunity...to persuade them to stock your book.” In her opinion, with the number of members of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers (indicated in her article as over 1100), “You’ll get far more permanent sales by spending two days at a bookseller’s convention than you will be spending two days signing books for the public at individual bookstores.”

Groups like SINC and WWW are finding that increasing awareness of themselves as a group and their members as individual writers is a savvy marketing tool in today’s ever-shifting marketplace. This is being accomplished by targeting specific regional shows via booths that are staffed by writers and which feature promo material, catalogues, and book signings. Hurd comments that bookseller reaction to WWW’s booth at these shows has been “stupendous.”

It’s also a tack taken by several chapters of RWA who have large numbers of published authors among their members. New Jersey Romance Writers have been a presence at the former Mid-Atlantic Booksellers trade show in Atlantic City (now called the New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association and being held in Philadelphia) for several years. They’ve targeted the show specifically to increase awareness of local writers via a media-friendly guide to forthcoming books for the next calendar year. Booksellers interested in romance are encouraged to stop by their booth and pick up a copy of the guide, along with additional promotional material supplied by NJ-RWA writers. It’s a welcome opportunity to meet and greet, both for the writer and the bookseller. This year several chapters of RWA in the New England area are also taking a booth at the New England Trade show in Boston. Handouts will include signed copies of books, a catalogue of titles by the members, and other assorted promotional items.

These efforts at skillful marketing today have the potential to turn into increased sales in the future.

With cutbacks at the major houses, smaller publishing output, the erosion of the midlist title, and less money for author promotions, it falls increasingly on writers to do for themselves in getting their work noticed and talked about.

“Reaching out and establishing a presence in your own geographical backyard” is the reason Pocket Books author Mariah Stewart gave when asked why she attends the annual regional show in her area. While still a relatively new writer, Mariah signed copies of her then-second book (provided by her publisher) and thus made direct contact with booksellers, the very people she hopes to influence. “Putting her book (literally) into the hands of the people who can read and (hopefully) recommend it to their customers,” is how she sees this opportunity. By making this one-to-one communication, she (or you) can establish herself as a real person, not merely a name on a cover.

According to Mariah, “adding the personal touch, genuinely making an effort, can go a long way to fomenting a relationship with a bookseller, who may then want to keep the connection alive via store signings, prominent displays of each new title, and the all-important hand-selling to the customer.”

Publishers are also finding it a smart move to broaden a writer’s appeal by sending them to trade shows not in their own locale, thereby exposing them (and their work) to a wider audience. Two years ago Avon used this marketing concept when they had contemporary romance author Susan Elizabeth Phillips and mystery author Jill Churchill sign copies of their latest works in Atlantic City at the Mid-Atlantic Booksellers conference, giving both a chance to shine in a new territory.

Marketing directors from the major publishing houses are aware of the increased traffic from local booksellers at the regional trade shows in recent years and use these venues to give specific titles a chance to make an impact. Just as forthcoming movies are hyped at trade shows for theatre owners via advanced screenings or trailers, books are also pushed in the places that can do the most good. The results are more and more ARC’s (Advanced Readers Copies) of upcoming titles that a house hopes will generate a “buzz” among the booksellers, thus making for word-of-mouth bestsellers and future hand-sell items. Getting the word out early and often on a new title can mean increased rewards for the author in terms of store orders and/or print runs.

And in this year when several of the big houses did not attend the Book Expo America national convention (formerly titled the American Booksellers Association con-

vention, or ABA), the houses recognize the value of coming to the smaller regional shows to make their lists known.

Increased sales are the name of the game in our business, and thus whatever we as writers can do to facilitate this (especially in today's unstable and shrinking market) is important for our long term careers.

Joan Hohl, who writes for *Silhouette* and *Zebra*, has attended several MABA's and sees the local trade show as a way to meet not only the regional booksellers, but to "get to know the sales reps." Establishing a good relationship with them can be very important to a writer, no matter how long they've been in the business. They're the people who solicit the orders and work hard at trying to get as many booksellers as they can excited about an individual author and/or title. This doesn't mean that one holds them captive while they're trying to do their job, namely, sell books. It means being courteous and polite, perhaps setting up a later time for a one-to-one chat and getting to know them, and, in turn, letting them get to know you. Again, it's a way to establish personal contact as opposed to being a mere name or ISBN number in a catalogue.

Publishers Weekly magazine has recognized the expanding role of the regional trade shows in the business of book-selling by presenting for the first time this year a Regional Supplement to its August 18 regular issue. Co-sponsored by Ingram Book Company, this new item will also have distribution at all the trade shows and feature regional retailing campaigns, authors, independent publishing houses, marketing plans, distributors, etc.

Regarding distributors, in this era of ever-decreasing numbers of independent distributors, if you have a local one in your area and they exhibit at the trade show, it might be a good idea to stop by their booth as well and say hello.

Another factor in attending the smaller shows for a writer is their very compactness, their accessibility. Anyone who has ever attended the massive BEA will find the smaller shows much more relaxing. The pace is slower, the timing easier. And, it's a great place to go research hunting. By this I mean taking the time to look at the booth and see what's on display. Picking up a publisher's catalogue and browsing through, searching for books that can be used in your research. Jotting down ISBN numbers for books on display that catch your eye for later ordering at your local store. Or leaving a card and asking to be placed on a mailing list. I usually come home with several tote bags full of publishers' catalogues and spend hours pouring over those which might be helpful to me, ripping out pages and filing them in a notebook for future reference.

You might be surprised at what you can find of interest on a publisher's table. Don't overlook the children's publishing houses, either. When asked about research materials at a recent booksigning, Catherine Coulter she liked to use children's books as well as other material because the children's books were so straightforward with their information. I agree with her.

I hope that I've given you some insight into why regional trade shows are an increasingly important fixture of this business we call writing. First—for local area impact,

whether to establish yourself or a group. Second—for getting to know the people who help sell your books, the booksellers, the sales reps, and those who order your books, local distributors, along with the people from Ingram and Baker & Taylor. Third—for understanding the importance that the publishing houses place on regional shows as a growing factor in marketing both the author and the book. And lastly—as a research information source for the writer.

In addition, be aware that since they are smaller in scale than the national BEA (thus reducing the number of badges given out per house), it may cost you to enter the show. If you're slated to sign, your house may be able to procure admittance for you. If not, you may want to consider registering for the show as a chapter of your particular writers group (whether it be SINC, WWW, RWA, etc.) and sharing the cost, or dipping into your own funds and going solo.

Besides keeping a copy of the August 18 issues of *Publishers Weekly* as reference for the regional trade shows schedule through 1998, authors interested in finding out what's scheduled for the next couple of months should check www.bookweb.org/events for detailed information on shows and contacts for them. *NNK*

Gail Link is the author of six historical romances from Leisure Books and is also now writing for Silhouette Special Edition, and has recently completed a trilogy for them. Lone Star Lover, the second in the "Buchanan Brothers" series, is an August release.

HarperCollins Ties Strings to Advances

When HarperCollins Publishers acknowledged cancelling at least 106 book contracts last month, it said that it would pay the balance of the advances due under these contracts. (Legal considerations—rather than kindly impulses—appear to have led HarperCollins to adopt this policy. HarperCollins' liability may significantly exceed those advances.) We've learned that HarperCollins is trying to impose unwarranted conditions on these payments.

HarperCollins is asking authors of cancelled works to sign waiver agreements. One version of this agreement asks the author to repay a substantial portion of the advance if the work is sold elsewhere. The author is asked to report to HarperCollins twice yearly for five years on efforts made to resell the canceled book. Only on agreeing to these conditions, and waiving claims against HarperCollins, would the author receive the balance of the advance due.

Where it has breached, HarperCollins is not entitled to recapture advances. If you've been affected by HarperCollins' actions, we recommend that you seek professional advice before signing any waiver.

Contact Ed McCoyd at the Guild office for more information.

The Authors Guild

(212) 563-5904 • staff@authorsguild.org



EAST OF THE HUDSON

The Big Keeper Shelf

Here's a piece of advice to all budding smart-asses from one who gets paid for it:

The moment that it's easiest to be flippant is the moment to stop and reconsider.

I come to this sober conclusion after watching the scribblers and blabberers of the general press have a field day with the nasty little saga of plagiarism by one of popular fiction's leading practitioners, Janet Dailey.

In case you've been in the woods for the past month or two, here's the scoop: Janet Dailey, one of the women who invented the modern American-style romance novel, last month issued a public confession. She had cribbed significant chunks of at least two of her recent novels from the work of another writer.

Dailey's high-powered spin doctors put as brave a face on the matter as possible: they spoonfed the press the idea that the plagiarism was committed during moments of personal crisis and that the pilferage was the result of some sort of psychological disorder for which Dailey was already receiving successful treatment.

But the truth was unavoidably ugly: One of America's best-known authors, with sales between 200 and 300 million copies, depending on who's counting, the woman who wrote 50 category romances, one for each state, has turned into an artistic thief so bereft of creativity that she was reduced to sitting at a computer keyboard with someone else's paperback novel open on her lap, copying spicy scenes almost word for word.

The image is laughable, except that it is also so very, very sad.

What makes the scene sadder, and even more bizarre, is that the victim of the theft was Nora Roberts, a writer who once looked to Janet Dailey as a role model and who is about as famous today as Janet Dailey was a decade ago.

The popular press had the usual mad-dog reaction: some reporters suggested this plagiarism was the reason romance novels all read alike. Others imagined a rivalry between the two authors, making the whole matter sound like nothing more than a cat fight between a couple of inconsequential scribblers of romantic fantasies.

The truth is simpler. There was no rivalry. Janet Dailey is, at best, a fading star. She lost her passionate, core romance audience a long time ago, and she never really caught on with the so-called general fiction audience.

But one has to ask why a fading star would copy the work of one of the most popular and prolific authors of the 1990s. Dailey must have known that Nora Roberts has a huge and particularly loyal audience, one with keeper shelves as big as her own. She must have understood that the similarities would be noted. It is almost as though

Dailey, in copying Roberts, was begging to be caught and exposed.

I've been trying hard not to judge Janet Dailey and her personal problems too harshly. Maybe it's as her publicist says. Maybe her brothers' deaths and her husband's illness and the pregnancy of her dog did so unsettle her that she pulled a stunt no sane author would undertake. I can imagine being in such turmoil that I might lose my mind. In truth, there are some who say I already have, but I'm not sure I'd ever copy other, recently published and widely distributed works from my own genre. That kind of behavior is artistic suicide, and I can find some pity in my heart for someone so scrambled as to have done it.

But I am troubled by something else about this story, something that I didn't see mentioned in any of the popular press stories about the incident.

Janet Dailey wasn't alone in bamboozling the reading public. At least two of her books, both of which contained pilfered storylines, dialogue, or descriptions, were published by a couple of New York's biggest and most respected houses. Those houses threw wads of money at Dailey, not because they thought her work was wonderful, but because they hoped to cash in on her popular name.

Sadly, one of those houses didn't even see fit to withdraw the plagiarized work from circulation once the truth was known. I'm told by a friend of Nora's that the publisher even released an audio version of the plagiarized work weeks after they were informed of the problems with it.

Such behavior ought to remind us what this sorry mess was about. It was about money and the jaded values that money can create. I can't tell you exactly how these books came into existence, but I can guess: Janet Dailey was offered a big, fat contract for a book. She took the advance, then ran up against a blank sheet of paper. Stumped for a plot line, she grabbed a book she admired off the shelf and started typing.

Maybe some of the scenes she created to fill in the gaps were a little flat, so she spiced them up with dialogue and description from the admirable book. Pretty soon, she had an assemblage that seemed like a complete and publishable manuscript.

And the publisher put it into production without a question and without a whimper. Why? Because the marketing department said, "Hey, yeah, we can sell a million of them, just on the basis of her name. The wholesalers will eat this one up."

In this literary marketplace, the name on the cover is much more important than the words that are inside. Publishers, in general, are less interested in publishing a good novel than in publishing any novel, even a tainted one, with Janet Dailey's byline on it. It's called survival of the bean-counters.



The writer carries the can in such cases of plagiarism, and that is as it should be; but the stimulus for this crime is both personal and corporate avarice. Plagiarism is part of the same impulse that spawns ghost-written celebrity novels, posthumous publication of minor works by brand-name authors, and the plastering of big-name author bylines on short stories or novels that were concocted by silent partners or paid scribblers.

Too much of modern publishing is based on the belief that merchandising is the only thing that really counts. Successful books must have a marketing hook of some sort—the endorsement of an Oprah, or the reassurance of a brand-name author's byline on the cover. Without such an imprimatur, a book is midlist, which is to say dead; with it, success is guaranteed, or so the corporate bean-counters believe.

Nobody has said how much these two tainted books were worth to Dailey. My guess is that the amount was well into seven figures or she wouldn't have been tempted to do what she did. I would also guess that if one publisher had not offered such an advance, another would have. There aren't many houses in New York who would pass up a chance to publish an author who has already sold 200 million or 300 million copies.

As a professional writer, I am sorry to see someone like Janet Dailey publicly humiliated, and I am even more sorry for Nora Roberts, who did absolutely nothing to deserve what has happened to her.

But mostly I am sorry as hell that modern publishing has suffered such a loss of integrity in pursuit of big-name, brand-name success. It's one thing to sell product, much as one sells potato chips; it is quite another to sell pretty covers with sorry plagiarisms in between.

What's Happening Here?

Journalists and ex-journalists pride themselves on something called "news judgment," the studied or unstudied impulse that says a particular fact is worthy of public note. I spent 20 years in the news business making judgments every day about what was or wasn't important enough to bring to the attention of readers. I thought I was pretty good at it.

That's why I am puzzled by the understated way the following item was presented in one of our leading trade publications, *Publishers Weekly*. It was a bland little data box that appeared, without comment, in the July 21 issue. Under the headline, "May Massacre in Children's Paperback," the magazine reported that book sales in a number of categories were sharply down in May and in the year to date.

Indeed, the sharpest decline was noted in juvenile paperbacks, where monthly sales were down 75.2 percent and YTD sales were down 44.9 percent.

But even more important—to me, anyway—were the figures for adult hardcover, which were down 40 percent in May over the same month last year. Equally dismaying was the 39 percent decline in mass market paperbacks during the reporting month.

Year-to-date figures for adult hardcovers were down by 12.4 percent and mass market paperbacks by 20 percent.

Sales figures like that would seem to warrant a bit more commentary. If such declines are commonplace, they needed context; if they aren't, they deserved 96-point banner headlines, or so it seems to me. (Care to guess how the news would have been treated if the same figures had been in the plus column?)

I am going to be interested in checking next month's sales totals as compiled by the Association of American Publishers. Something seems to be going on here and it doesn't appear to be good news.

But then, I guess bad to worse doesn't qualify as news, period.

All Numbers Have Equal Value, Right?

The *New York Times* reports that the company that brought order to the reporting of pop music sales is working on a system that "could bring precision and efficiency to an industry struggling with declining sales and bloated print runs."

That industry is book publishing.

Soundscan, which tracks actual cash register sales of records and CDs, is developing a similar system to track the sales of books across the country. If perfected and put into use, Bookscan, as it is called, would provide specific information about supply, sales trends, and perhaps even about the characteristics of customers buying particular books.

Creation of the system is an admission of sorts that existing bestseller lists are less than precise measures of actual sales performance.

(No, I'm not muttering "I told you so," under my breath, but I *did* tell you so, repeatedly, ad nauseam.)

So far, the Soundscan system is still in the talking stages. Reporter Doreen Carvajal guessed that it might cost \$3 million to set up and maybe \$5 million a year to operate. That cost would have to be absorbed by subscribers, presumably the publishers, and no one is sure publishers are all that interested in hard numbers about sales.

Soundscan, the music tracking system, was successful because it charted an industry that is even more market-driven than modern publishing. Record companies use Soundscan data to make all kinds of marketing decisions—shipping, publicity, even tour schedules. Book publishers seem to have been content in the past to make those decisions by gutting chickens at midnight under a full moon.

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(Continued from page 13)

I'm not even sure I like the idea of Bookscan. Modern mass marketing robs life of idiosyncrasies.

On the other hand, an honest system of sales reporting, unfiltered by literary politics of the sort that characterize contemporary bestseller list compilation, might be a good thing for those of us who call ourselves "popular" writers.

When Soundscan came on the scene several years ago, music publishers suddenly discovered that Garth Brooks and the rest of the country stars sold the socks off some of

the highly promoted and much ballyhooed urban genres like rap and heavy metal. At least for a time, the music business was forced to pay attention to the heart of its public appeal; that is to say, the heartland of the country.

Popular fiction has always done better in the heartland than in the urban centers, yet the urban centers have always dominated the so-called cultural life of America. Anything that reminds the folks east of the Hudson of another reality can't be all bad.

I hope.

— Evan Maxwell



Advocacy Committee: *Changes and More Changes*

George Carroll is an Assistant Sales Manager for Aramark, one of the largest wholesale magazine and book distributors in the U.S. His primary daily responsibility is visiting Aramark customers, seeing store managers, and looking for opportunities to increase their magazine and book sales through better category management. After hearing him speak to a writers' group, we asked him to answer a few questions for our column.

1. There have been major changes in the wholesalers' market over the past 18 months. Have we seen the end or are there other changes coming? If so, what do you anticipate they will be?

Two years ago there were about 300 magazine and book wholesalers across the country providing service to their retail customers, primarily in their own "territory." Today there are fewer than 60 wholesalers, and five of these represent 90% of all periodical distribution in North America. The benefit to retailers (chains like Wal-Mart, etc.) of vendor consolidation are, of course, higher profit margins, lower costs associated with having fewer vendors (fewer checks to cut), and consistent levels of in-store service (ability to execute promotions).

More change is imminent. Mergers and acquisitions in the wholesaler industry will continue. Additional change will occur as retailers themselves consolidate through merger and acquisition (Example: CVS buying Revco). And the "brave new world" in which wholesalers find themselves will be one of incredible challenge in a rapidly changing environment.

2. What are some of the concerns of this "new" wholesaler?

The #1 concern of the wholesaler right now is an immediate return to profitability. For wholesalers, delivering to stores over ever larger geographic locations comes at a very high price—the cost of delivery and service has risen while the wholesalers' margins have shrunk. Every effort is being made, at every level, to do more with less. To become more efficient. To become profitable once again.

3. Explain the concept of "category management" or "narrowing"?

Retailers have a limited amount of shelf space devoted to a category like magazines and books. Let's say a store has a 4' section devoted to paperbacks. You can fit about 77 paperback titles on the fixture. Retailers want those 77 titles to quickly move in and out (through the cash register, of course) of the store. It is the responsibility of the "category manager"—the wholesaler—to select the titles that meet the needs of the customers in that store. In a sense, every pocket must "pull its own weight." The days of having slow-moving titles in stores are numbered. Sell-through percentages must increase (to at least 50% or better) to justify the cost of handling the product. "Narrowing" would be the decision of the retailer to offer only the "best of the best" in a category. For instance, in a convenience store like 7-11, they might only carry 50 cigarette brands instead of 200.

4. Recently, I noticed in my local Wal-Mart that Harlequin/Silhouette books are being double pocketed (two titles in the same pocket). As a reader, I found it hard to find the back book this way. What is the rationale for doing this, and isn't it some sort of a violation of your agreement with Harlequin for the distribution of its books?

This is a "merchandising" issue. The person who actually places the product on the shelf (more than likely a part-time person) probably just made a mistake. It is not standard practice to "double pocket" books. One title, one pocket. Perhaps the merchandiser had too many copies of a title and "tucked" it behind another book rather than place it into returns. As a customer, just see the manager. He or she will bring it to the wholesaler's attention.

George Carroll is willing to answer other questions NINC members may have. Please forward your questions to Cathy Maxwell, 14216 Chimney House Road, Midlothian VA 23112 or Cathy.Maxwell@msn.com

Announcing the Random Audit Lottery

***While the random audit will directly benefit one member...
it will indirectly benefit all members...***

The Board of Directors is very pleased to announce that Novelists, Inc., is again sponsoring a royalty audit for a member to be selected by lottery. The audit will be conducted by Paul Rosenzweig and Gail R. Gross of Royalty Review Service, Inc. who have extensive experience doing publishing audits.

The results of the audit, together with an explanation of the findings, will appear in *NINK* as a service to members. The author audited may choose to remain anonymous, and all costs of the audit will be paid by NINC. Any moneys recovered will go to the author.

All NINC members are eligible to enter and may enter as many books as they wish. Entries are to be submitted to the NINC post office box and will be forwarded, unopened, to the Audit Committee Chair, Georgia Bockoven.

The Chair will number the entries, then remove the author's name, address, phone number and book title before submitting the entries to the rest of the Audit Committee. The Committee will examine and qualify the blind entries.

The winner will be selected by random drawing from among the qualified entries. The winner will be asked to submit a copy of his/her publishing contract and all applicable royalty statements directly to Royalty Review Service.

Paul Rosenzweig and Gail R. Gross will then examine the winner's publishing contract to determine final eligibility.

The audit will be funded out of proceeds NINC has received from foreign reproduction royalties distributed by the Author's Coalition. (These reproduction royalties are the reason why dues renewal forms included a questionnaire concerning publishing credits. NINC receives Coalition money for all areas in which individual members are published, not just book-length fiction.)

The Board felt a random audit was an excellent use of the Coalition money for several reasons. First, because Coalition money is to be used to benefit *all* members.

While the random audit will directly benefit one member monetarily, it will indirectly benefit all members by serving notice on publishing houses that NINC is monitoring their auditing practices.

Any accounting practices detrimental to authors will be made public so that authors can be on the alert and houses encouraged to make changes.

Second, members have been clamoring for this as a benefit of membership in NINC, and the Board is only too happy to be able to offer it. ***NINK***

***...serving notice on publishing houses that NINC
is monitoring their publishing practices.
(Please use Audit Lottery Entry Form on back page.)***

Qualifications for Entry in Audit Lottery:

Novelists, Inc. is now accepting submissions for the 1997 Random Audit. Since the previous audit was of a book published by Harlequin, this year's audit is open to all books *except* those published by Harlequin, Silhouette, or any other Torstar imprint.

1. Author must be a member of Novelists, Inc.
2. Book published 1991 or later.
3. No restrictive "audit clause" restricting examination of less than two years.
4. Contract must be with publisher, not with a packager (unless packager has consented to allowing author to review publisher's records on behalf of packager).
5. Title cannot be cross-collateralized ("basketed") with other titles.
6. Book is not out of print and/or rights have not reverted.
7. The winner must submit a copy of her complete publishing contract and all applicable royalty statements directly to the auditor. If the contract for the book selected is found to contain a clause that would, in the opinion of the auditor, in any way impair the audit, that book will be disqualified and another will be selected.
8. Entries must be postmarked no later than October 15, 1997.

Audit Lottery Entry Form

[Please read the Announcement and "Qualifications for Entry" (page 15) before submitting this form to assure that your entry/entries meet *all* the qualification standards of the 1997 NINC Audit Lottery.]

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

TITLE OF BOOK _____

PUBLISHER _____

PUBLICATION DATE OF BOOK _____

TYPE OF CONTRACT: _____ SINGLE BOOK / _____ MULTI-BOOK

TYPE OF SUBRIGHTS SOLD (if any) _____

Please include:

- _____ A copy of the contract clause concerning the examination of accounts
- _____ A copy of the contract clause showing the royalty rate schedule

Entries must be postmarked *no later than October 15, 1997*. Mail entries to:
AUDIT LOTTERY, Novelists, Inc. P. O. Box 1166, Mission KS 66222-0166

Novelists' Ink

Novelists, Inc.

An organization for writers of popular fiction
P.O. Box 1166
Mission KS 66222-0166

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