

FINDING A FOREIGN AGENT

Chad Corrie

We've gone through just about every aspect of finding, keeping, and even getting rid of an agent, but there is still one more topic on the matter that needs some addressing. At some point, if you look to have sales outside of the US, you're going to have to deal with foreign agents. We touched on this before but in the capacity of you dealing with them through your agent who would deal with them for you. But what do you do if you want to find one yourself?

Maybe you might find a domestic agent that doesn't have contacts in some part of the world and you'd like to reach out into it yourself. Perhaps you haven't found a domestic agent and instead want to go a little unconventional in your approach and reach out into the foreign market first to drum up some interest and sales. Whatever the case, finding one isn't as hard as you might think.

In some ways, the process will be very similar to what was already shared in how to find an agent in America. What differs is where you look and how things tend to play out when you approach them. First off, you should be able to find agents for the major European countries fairly easily. The smaller countries can be a bit more of a challenge in trying to locate names and contact information, depending on your genre.

A good place to start looking are the websites for the major international book fairs. There are three of them that should be your first place to start: Book Expo America, Frankfurt Book Fair, and the London Book Fair. Each of these tradeshow has a website that lists not just publishers (which can be handy too) but agents in a given region or who cover a given region. Often times it's fairly easy to get a name of an agent and do some internet sleuthing to find their contact information. Most foreign agents will have a website of some type—at least for the ones that deal in the larger foreign markets.

Another option you can explore, though it costs some money to do so, is using Publishers Marketplace. This site lists publishers, agents, and deals, among many other things. Using it, you can simply type in what you are looking for with some degree of specify and find some foreign agents with their contact information. I think you might be able to buy access for a month at a time, which might be better than the yearly cost if you don't plan on using it more than the initial month. You'll have to see what works best for you.

The next place you can start looking is on some larger agency websites. Some of these larger places will list a section of the subagents they work with. You can than take your pick of the people listed, knowing that these have been vetted pretty well if they are working with a larger agency. The same is true of publishers. Go check out the larger publishers' sites and see what is listed there for foreign deals or foreign rights for various markets. Again, it will take some time to dig this all out, but they should be pretty well vetted, making your job easier once you found them.

The last place you can look, besides agent guides and such, is just with a simple internet search. You'll be able to find many places by looking up some simple key words. Depending on what region you're looking for and what genre, you could get a good many to sort through or hardly any. But there should be something—at least for most markets.

Once you've located your agents you just do what we already talked about in approaching them. Only here it might be a bit hard to get a bit of a track record on them, making the due diligence a bit of a challenge. The query letter should state in some way that you're an American author looking for foreign representation. They need to know also if you're doing this on your own or working with an agent already, as well as if you've had any sales or publications in times past. You'll want to make sure your query is simple and short. Use clear, simple sentences and try to avoid any confusing language or things that might not be fully understood. Remember, English is not their first language so making what you send as easy to read is a great help to all involved.

With your query letter a simple informational sheet about the work you're looking to sell should be included. Again, just share the facts and any reviews or promotion you have for the title(s) or your work in general. If you have a cover, great. If not, that's okay. On each sheet a simple biographical snippet should also be included. If you can make this a PDF, even better. Make sure you make it look good too as in many cases, if they take you on, this will be the thing they will send out to publishers advocating your book.

What you'll find with most foreign agents is that they will fall into one of two camps: those who work only with agents, publishers, or agencies and then those that are open to working with individual authors. This will narrow down the process from the beginning, depending on what you're looking to do. The next thing that will narrow them down is genre and if they have room for any more clients. If you make it past that hurdle then you can get to the next stage, that is seeing if they want to take you on or not.

Now, here is where things get a bit different. Not every agent will ask to see a manuscript or look to learn a whole lot about your work like a US agent would. Some will, but just as many do not. Instead, you might be surprised to learn that it can be a pretty quick process from initial contact to being told they'd like to represent you. This is especially true in the regions that are not based in Western Europe (western agents also tend to want to look at things up front more than other foreign agents).

Offers of representation often don't come with contracts. They will give you their rates and say what they will do and that will be it. Most will offer somewhere between 15% and 5%, 10% being the most common. However, there are some who might want more. You can always talk with them and negotiate a better deal if you like (as well as more on to another if you don't like their rates).

As odd as it may sound, you could very well have agents representing you all over the world who have never read your work. Strange to think about, but it's true. That's why it is very important you keep them informed with any and all develops that take place with the work. Any deal, any publisher that requests material in another country, cover art, reviews, etc. It's all tools they can use to show more interest for the work to the publishers they are promoting things too.

When it comes to you signing up with a foreign agent, it's pretty much more of the same as with other agents. Here though, you'll have to be a bit more aggressive in following up and asking for updates. You don't want to pester them too much but once a quarter isn't too much to ask from them in the way of an update. There should be something they can pass on. And be prepared for slow times too. There are many holidays and events that often allow for time away from the office. It's also not uncommon in the summer and even fall for many people to take weeks long vacations. You'll have to learn to be patient. When an offer and deal does work out for a publisher, you'll be happy you did.

Finally, when it comes to changing a foreign agent, it's much easier than you might think. In fact, some agents might dump you first if they don't think they will have much success in selling your work after a period of time. They want to do right by you and so feel bad if they haven't produced something after a given span of time. Others will stay around as long as you let them, if you let them. Should you wish to part all you have to do is tell them. It's a pretty easy process for both parties involved.

There's still the money aspect of things—that is if they have sold something they still get paid, which they then pass on to you. The nice part here, though, is that such deals aren't for perpetuity like some domestic deals are. Most foreign deals are really licenses to translate a work into their language and as such only last for a set number of years. When that time has expired so does the contract and the connection to the agent who made it. This allows for the license to be taken on with a new agent or to find a new publisher entirely, allowing you a greater control over things should you wish to change things up down the line.

So that's a look at foreign agents. It's not an exhaustive overview but a decent enough introduction to get you started down the path.

© Chad Corrie, all rights reserved.

No use of this material, save personal use, can be made
without express written permission from the author.