

Get that book published

EVERY freelance has a book in them. Or so the huge turnout (over 80 members) at September's London Freelance Branch meeting would suggest. Getting that book ready for publication was the subject was the topic. We heard advice from former Virago editor Rebecca Swift, of The Literary Consultants – which helps prepare authors' book proposals for submission to a literary agent. She was joined by Matthew Hamilton of literary agent Aitken Alexander, who is a former Bloomsbury editor. Both are non-fiction specialists.

An increasing number of journalists are pitching non-fiction books, either in the hope of getting richer, or to increase their profile. "You get

more work once you've published a book," says Rebecca.

The first question a journalist turning book author should ask themselves, advises Matthew, is why is this a book? What is it about this that demands it be told in so many thousand words? Journalists have learned to cram everything into 500 or 1000 words, but when writing a book, you've got "more space than perhaps you know what to do with," cautions Matthew.

Both our experts noted book publishing is a much tougher world than even five years ago, and your book proposal has to show you're passionate enough – and have enough stamina – to pull it off. You need to convince an agent that you

have the enthusiasm to carry out a labour of love, and only then look at the pragmatic, market-oriented aspects of the project.

The preferred pitch to a literary agent is in the form of one – or increasingly two – sample chapters. Leave as little to the agent's imagination as possible. Rebecca advises a 3000- to 4000-word overview, an "extended blurb", an explanation of "why the world needs this book", and a chapter breakdown. The agent's job, says Matthew, "is to make the editor listen."

Submissions to multiple agents are common, but it's best to confess that's what you're doing. How long should you wait before following up on a submission? Try to get them on the phone after four to six weeks, recommends Rebecca. "Be pushy but respect their workload".

Non-fiction is easier to sell, because "you can measure what your likely market can be. With fiction there's no way of knowing," says Rebecca.

Fiction publishing is "flatlining" according to Matthew, "it's almost impossible to sell fiction on the basis of just a proposal". With fiction there "isn't much other way than trial and error, looking for agents on the basis of what other work they are handling," advises Rebecca. Matthew advises that journalists hoping to become fiction authors "should research the genre" and draw on "personal contacts and confidence: you as journalists are good at that".

© Matt Salusbury

Do you work at Sky?

Amid increasing concerns over workloads, hours, freelance rates, and budgets, the NUJ is stepping up its organising at the broadcaster. If you work at Sky let the NUJ know so we can keep you up to date with the latest union news/advice for your workplace. In confidence, email campaigns@nuj.org.uk



Matthew Hamilton

Photo © Guy Smallman www.guysmallman.com

Sign up for authors' rights in Europe

PHOTOGRAPHERS in Switzerland are resisting publishers' attempts to impose contracts that allow unlimited use of pictures for one fee, and want you to sign their petition.

Under Swiss law photographers cannot "assign" rights in their pictures – but publishers are trying to get the same sort of effect as UK-style assignment. An alliance of photographers' organisations is petitioning that: usage rights belong to authors – publishers must stop demanding buyouts for zero francs; the principle is: pay for each use; and anyone who wants journalism of the highest quality must pay fees that make it possible for freelances to earn a living.

The union Impressum, a member of the alliance and of the International Federation of Journalists, explains that "various publishers want to make freelances concede extensive usage rights without extra payment, for example the right to multiple usage including uses outside

the publication for which the picture was commissioned and created... and to exchange pictures and articles freely among themselves and to publish in different media." Go to www.londonfreelance.org/fl/0911ar.html for a link to the petition – and sign it, please.

Meanwhile in Germany, such broad contracts have been ruled illegal. On 31 July the district court in the city of Rostock struck down all-uses contracts which the Nordkurier group had tried to impose. The district court in Hamburg has also issued an injunction against Bauer Achat KG.

On 29 September the the WAZ media group agreed with the *Deutsche Journalisten-Verband* (German Journalists' Union) that it would abandon a contract clause that would have forced freelance photo-journalists and journalists in the travel newsroom to accept the re-use of their work within the

company or with partner media houses without any additional remuneration. The company accepted, on the court steps, that the clause was against the German law on contract and authors' rights.

© Mike Holderness

Google books late

THE GOOGLE Books Settlement is, as predicted, going to take a little longer. Following a critical US Department of Justice submission to the court that's due to rule on the fairness of the Settlement, on 22 September the plaintiffs (the Authors Guild and publishers) called for – and have been granted – an adjournment of the hearing on the Settlement, from 7 October to 9 November. The deadline for claiming cash if your book was scanned has been changed to 5 June 2010. For much more detail see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/0910goog.html.

Tarik is safe

Tarik Ramadan, the "fixer" who worked with photographer and LFB member Gary Trotter in Northern Iraq, is safe and well and has been granted asylum in a European Union country – though we aren't allowed to say which one. Tarik was arrested and later imprisoned without charge for 32 months by the Asaish (Kurdish Security Force) and tortured. He was released by order of Iraqi president Jalal Talibani following a campaign led by Gary, who said of Tarik that he "probably saved my arse on at least three occasions." (See www.londonfreelance.org/fl/0712tr.html.) Media outlets in Iraqi Kurdistan still falsely accuse Tarik – a former Iraqi Air Force pilot – of being one of the pilots who bombed Iraqi Kurds at Habaja with poison gas in 1988, even though Tarik can prove from his flight records that he couldn't have been there at the time. We hope to have more news on Tarik soon.