

How to Sell Your Manuscripts at Write-to-Publish

by Jennifer Schuchmann (who did!)

I went to Write-to-Publish (WTP) in 2004, hoping to get someone—anyone—interested in my book. When I left, I had four editors and my preferred agent ask me to send them a proposal and sample chapters. Within six weeks, I had 11 CBA publishers and three agents looking at my proposal and sample chapters, all at their request. Here's how I did it.

Before WTP

I wrote the best proposal I possibly could, using Jeff Herman's *Write the Perfect Book Proposal*.

I crafted a one-minute and five-minute pitch. This was a summary of the summary in my book proposal, made up of the best three or four ideas about my book. I practiced it aloud and worked it into conversations with friends and family until I could communicate the essence quickly and concisely. In addition to practicing the words, I learned to judge the reaction of the person I was speaking to, so I knew whether he or she was interested in more or if I should move on. Speaking and then pausing helps too.

I thoroughly researched every editor and agent coming to WTP. Before I left for the conference, I printed out that information, including the pictures of the people I wanted to meet, so I would recognize them if I bumped into them in the lunch line, which happened.

I submitted the maximum number of copies of my proposal for evaluating. If my sample chapters had been ready, I would have paid extra to have them evaluated also.

While my goal was to get interest in my book, I also took samples of my other writing, including several inspirational articles that hadn't sold yet.

I signed up to eat all meals in the dining hall to have a chance to meet people.

At the Conference

I arrived early, so I could read all the materials and learn the locations of key places like lectures, appointment sign-ups, and lunch.

I signed up for as many appointments with editors as I was allowed. For my registration status, that was two. Since I had studied the markets and editors who were coming, I used my ranked list of whom I wanted to meet with to choose which appointments to make. If I couldn't decide, I always chose the person who had the fewest slots remaining, hoping others would be available later. (And this happened since some people canceled appointments.)

Additional appointments became available after Wednesday morning. I made sure to sign up for more, again following my formula of choosing those whom I had ranked on my list and who had the least available appointments.

After I had maxed out my appointments but there were still people I wanted to meet, I watched to see if they had slots that weren't filled. When one magazine editor had a 3:15 slot available at 3:14, I asked and received permission to meet with him. I would not have done that had I not prepared by bringing my magazine articles with me. It was a good move. He requested four articles from me.

I chose classes not only for what I could learn but also by whom I wanted to meet. If an editor's slots filled, taking his class gave me a chance to get to know him and follow up at another time.

I missed classes when necessary for appointments and then bought CDs. I never missed the editors' panels, though, as they were an introduction to editors I didn't know well. One editor whom I thought did only children's books announced that she wasn't taking any children's books but was actively acquiring adult nonfiction. I wouldn't have known that until it was too late if I had missed the panel.

When I wanted to meet the above editor but she didn't have slots available, I looked for an opportunity to catch her between events. Then I asked her if I could have five minutes. She agreed, and I pitched my idea. In less than five minutes, she heard my pitch and requested my manuscript and sample chapters. I did the same with another editor from a different house; in that amount of time, he said no. I thanked him and moved on. Later I heard someone say that she tried to talk an editor into her idea. I never did that as I felt it was a waste of my time and the editor's.

I had an agenda, but I trusted God. At one point, my highest priority appointment got canceled because the person wasn't coming in until the next day. Uncharacteristic of me, I prayed and patiently waited for God to work it out. He did, and I was still able to meet with him.

After the Conference

I sent the requested materials.

I included a handwritten thank-you note that referenced a conversation we had that might help that editor remember me.

Conclusion

On the first day of the conference, one of the workshop leaders said, "God cares more about your manuscript than you do." I cared very much about my manuscript, and my preparation proved that. But God cared more, and He proved that all week by sending the right people my way. He created divine appointments, and I took advantage of them. I continued the relationships I made at WTP a few weeks later at ICRS, which resulted in additional contacts with publishers.

As I look back, I can see how much I gained. The magazine editor I met with during that 3:15 appointment decided to hold two of my articles for future publication. He passed a third off to a sister publication he felt it was more suitable for. The editor of that publication bought the article. The ironic part is that this editor had already rejected the same article when I had submitted it through the mail—twice! The sale would never have happened if I hadn't had a chance meeting with that editor at 3:15.

Through contacts I made at Write-to-Publish, I eventually had 11 publishers who had all requested my proposal and sample chapters. Interestingly, one of them was a senior editor at the same company of the man who wasn't interested in my manuscript after my five-minute pitch. It made me glad I hadn't tried to talk him into it. Chip MacGregor, then an agent at Alive Communications, agreed to represent me; he sold the book to Judith Perry at Beacon Hill Press. I met both of them at WTP. My book, which was little more than an idea before I went to WTP, came out a year later.