

HOW TO WIN AGENTS AND INFLUENCE EDITORS AT A WRITERS CONFERENCE

Part 1

Speakers: Thomas Umstattd and Rachelle Gardner

Welcome to “How to Win Agents and Influence Editors at a Writers Conference.” My name is Thomas Umstattd and I’m the CEO of Author Media. We’re a company that helps make authors famous on the internet by building websites and blogs.

We’re here with Rachelle Gardner who is a literary agent with over twenty years of industry experience. She’s done over 120 book deals with some of the biggest publishers in America. She’s a very sought after conference speaker and has one of the most popular literary agent blogs in the world. We’re very excited to have her share the inside scoop on how to win agents at a writer’s conference.

Rachelle, thank you so much for coming on today.

[Rachelle] Thank you, Thomas. I’m excited to be here and I love talking about conferences. This is going to be fun!

[Thomas] So how do you win an agent at a writer’s conference?

[Rachelle] Well, let’s get started. I want to start by saying I’m going to talk a little bit about things to do before the conference, things to think about during the conference, and things to do after the conference, and then we’re going to have some Q&A time.

[00:01:16] BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

Let’s get started and talk about before the conference.

[00:01:21] Know Your Goal

The first thing I want everyone to really think about before you even go to a writers conference is: What is your personal goal for attending a conference? Everyone might have a different goal. You might be going so that you can try and find an agent. You might be trying to find a publisher. You might be just trying to learn about the publishing industry. Maybe you want to make a lot of writer friends; that you can be a lot better at networking with others and continuing to learn about the publishing industry. It’s important to know your goal before the conference.

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If you don't know your goal going in, then you won't have any way to gauge how successful you are in the conference. It will make it harder for you to focus while you're there because you won't exactly have a feeling for why you're there. A lot of times people think, "Well that's kind of a no-brainer. I want to sell my book or I want to find an agent." But that's not the only reason to go to a conference. If your goal is not necessarily to get an agent then that's good because it's highly unlikely that you're going to actually come out of the conference with an agent or a book deal anyway. You want to have other goals. So the first thing I think everyone should focus on is knowing your goal for the conference.

[00:02:48] Research the Faculty

Another thing to do before a conference is to research the faculty of the conference before you go. The way that you can do that is if you are planning on attending certain workshops that are taught by certain faculty members who are either agents or publishers or editors, you can go online and see if they have a blog, see if they have a website, maybe a Facebook page, or maybe a Twitter that you can follow them on and get to know them a little bit. This is especially important if you are able to set meetings ahead of time with faculty members.

If you already know that you're going to be meeting with me as an agent before the conference then it's probably a great idea to go and check out my blog, see who I am, see what I do. You might even go to my page where I talk about what I'm looking for so that you have a good idea of what kind of projects I'm really interested in.

You can do that with any faculty member. You won't always find information on all the faculty members online, but do the best you can. If you're involved in any writers groups or Facebook groups or anything like that, you can ask around. You can just say, "Hey, I've got a meeting with such-and-such agent or editor. Does anybody know anything about this person? Is there anything I need to know before I meet with them?" Doing your homework, doing your research ahead of time is going to help you go in with some confidence about who you're talking to.

Does that make sense, Thomas? Do you have anything to add to that?

[Thomas] That's really good. One thing that I would add is follow them on social media. Follow their blog. So often authors sit down with agents who are not at all interested in their kind of writing. If you write a children's book, make sure that your agent is interested in children's books because otherwise you're wasting your time and the agent's time.

[Rachelle] Excellent. That's so true.

[00:04:52] Create a One-Sheet

Another thing that you can do before a conference is to create a one-sheet. Now a lot of people are not sure what a one-sheet is. I've put an example of one here, but one-sheets can actually come in so many different styles and designs.

The purpose of a one-sheet is really to use as a leave-behind if somebody wants to take something from you that would remind them of the project that you pitched. An agent or an editor might like your pitch and want to take the one-sheet. You can see on this particular example that I've put up here there's the title and the author, and then there's a little tagline up at the top, and then there's a brief synopsis that reads kind of like back cover copy, and some information about the author, and then how to contact the author. Who your agent is would go on there as well.

You can go on my blog and find some examples of other one-sheets. Some of them are not as involved as this one. It doesn't have to be this perfectly designed. This was actually done by a professional designer. Or if you have a friend to whom you can provide some information and they can put together a one-sheet for you. A friend who's a designer, really good at graphic design, they could do that. Or you can just do it on your own and a lot of people just do that. It's not going to be make-or-break. You just want it to be something that you can leave behind if somebody wanted to bring something that was just a reminder. It's not a whole manuscript, but it's more than just a business card.

Whenever you do have a one-sheet, it's not something that you're just going to be passing around indiscriminately. It's the kind of thing you're going to ask somebody if they would like to take it with them. But creating a one-sheet is an important part of your preparation for the conference. One of the reasons I think it's important is because it can actually help you work on your pitch and work on what it is that's important about your book because you're having to put it together in a concise form. So creating the one-sheet can actually help you in your mental preparation for the conference.

Anything on that, Thomas?

[Thomas] Yeah, one thing that I would add. If you're looking at this one-sheet and you're feeling very intimidated by how well designed it is, I have a great resource for you for getting your one-sheet designed if you want to get it designed by a professional. That's elance.com. This is a site where you can hire freelancers to help you do these kind of projects for you. You'd be surprised how inexpensively something like this could cost.

[Rachelle] That's a great idea. Thanks, Thomas.

[00:07:54] Prepare Your Pitch

Another thing you're going to want to do (and this is going to actually be more important than creating your one-sheet) is to prepare your pitch. I think it's a great idea for you to prepare a 5-second pitch, a 30-second pitch, and an approximately 2-minute pitch.

You've got to think about situations in a conference where, when you're just maybe walking down the hallway, somebody asks you, "So what are you writing?" and it's just very casual. You don't want to launch into your 2-minute pitch at that point. You might just want to launch into a 5-second pitch where you just basically give a little bit. You say, "I'm writing such-and-such

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genre and such-and-such story about a woman who does this and that.” Then you’re leaving it open for more conversation, allowing the person to ask you for more if they want to.

You want to have a little longer pitch prepared that’s maybe about thirty seconds that tells a little bit more.

Your 2-minute pitch is going to be the one that you would give when you sit down in a one-on-one meeting or when you’re sitting at a table and, say, at dinner and an agent or an editor asks you specifically point-blank, “Tell me what you’re writing.” You have a little bit longer at that point.

I do have places on my blog where I’m teaching about pitches (elevator pitches, I call them) and how to craft them. We’ll talk a little bit more about that later. And it’s also going to be in the e-book that we send out to you after this webinar.

So making sure your pitches are prepared is very important. I think it’s also really important that you don’t memorize, but that you have a good idea of what you want to say. Don’t rattle off a memorized verbatim little pitch that sounds canned, unless you’re able to do that without sounding canned. It’s kind of walking a fine line. You want to know enough about your work where you can speak about it eloquently, but be aware of those time limits. Five seconds, thirty seconds, two minutes. It can go by really fast if you’re not paying attention and you don’t want to bore people. Preparing those pitches ahead of time is going to probably be your biggest job.

[Thomas] One thing to add to that. For those of you who are writing nonfiction, the worst way to give a pitch when Rachelle’s talking about her quick one sentence pitch, which is the hardest and most important of the pitches in my opinion, don’t tell people what genre you write. So if someone asks you, “What kind of writing do you do?” and you’re like, “I do nonfiction.” Boring. No one wants to read nonfiction. Instead what you want to do is tell people the value that your book provides. So say, “I write books that help parents connect with their teenager so that they enjoy that friendship.” Something very short like that. You’re not talking about genre, you’re talking about value. Then people will either be like “oh cool” or “oh cool; tell me more” and that’s the purpose of a good pitch.

[Rachelle] That is a great idea. I like the idea of pitching the value. That’s perfect for nonfiction. We will talk a little bit more about pitches later.

[00:11:17] Make Plans to Meet Friends

Another thing to do before the conference is make plans to meet friends. That may sound kind of silly, but if you have met people online - if you have met people on Facebook or on Twitter or people who follow my blog and comment a lot they kind of have known and met each other and gotten to know each other a little bit just through my blog comments - make contact with those people. Anyone else you know who might be going to the same conference, make contact with them ahead of time and make some plans to get together. Look at the conference schedule and make some plans to meet for coffee or have a drink or something. The more plans you do have,

especially to meet new friends, the happy and more confident you're going to be going in to that conference.

[00:12:04] Prepare a Business Casual Wardrobe

Another thing that you should do before the conference is prepare a business casual wardrobe. Now sometimes when I talk about wardrobe and what you wear it gets a little bit controversial because it is really not about what you wear, it really is about what you are presenting, obviously. By talking about prepare a business casual wardrobe what I mean is pay attention to the look that you would like to convey while you are there. You want to be professional; you also want to be comfortable. You don't need to look like you're trying too hard. But you also just want to appear to be the author that you want to be.

If you hope to be an author who's going out and doing book signings or who's doing media, if you're thinking that one day you might want to be on one of the major talk shows on television talking about your book, then from the very beginning you're going to want to be seeing yourself that way and presenting yourself that way.

If you're a novelist and you don't have any grand ambitions for those kinds of things I think you still want to present yourself as a professional. There's no big necessity to look awesome or you don't have to wear designer clothes or anything. Just make sure that you look nice and professional and make sure that you're comfortable.

[00:13:33] Bring Multiple Book Ideas

One more thing I wanted to add to this "Before the Conference" part is to bring multiple book ideas besides just the main one that you're pitching. One of the reasons I like for people to do that is because there's a chance you can sit down at a meeting with someone and one minute into the pitch they could just say, "You know, that's not the kind of book I'm looking for," or "I already have a book like that," and all of a sudden you're done and maybe you still have fourteen minutes left in your meeting time and you don't want to just get up and go. You want to be able to talk about something else.

Thomas, did you have a little bit more to add on that one?

[Thomas] Yeah. I have some clients, one of whom is at a conference and she's pitching an agent and she pitches her first idea and the agent's like, "Not really into that. What else do you have?" and she pitches another idea. She goes through her four or five main ideas and the agent's interested in her as an author, just not quite excited about those ideas or has another book on that topic. So she's like, "Well, I have this one other idea and I haven't really written a proposal or anything for it, but it is..." and she goes into what the other idea is. The agent sits forward and is like, "I would love to see that. Send me that manuscript." And suddenly that's the first book that this author gets signed. She would have never gotten signed if she'd only brought her first idea because it wasn't until five or six ideas in to the conversation that she ended up getting the contract.

[Rachelle] That is exactly what we're talking about here.

Thomas, before we move into "During the Conference," do you have anything else you want to add to the "Before the Conference" section?

[Thomas] Just that preparation is key. Where a lot of authors really fall short is when it comes to preparing. As we get into what to do during the conference this preparation is going to help you have that confidence.

Another thing to do while preparing is to work on your education so that you're not going to a conference knowing nothing. The conference will teach you about the industry, it will teach you about writing, but if you've never studied it before it will feel like drinking from a fire hydrant.

A lot of authors are so overwhelmed at their first conference that they can hardly even speak. They just kind of walk around as a zombie, just trying to soak it all in. A great way to help with that is to come to webinars like this one. Another is to check out the Bestseller Society, which we'll be talking about a little bit more a little later on in the talk.

[00:16:03] DURING THE CONFERENCE

[Rachelle] Great. So now you are at the conference. What do you want to be thinking about while you are there?

[00:16:13] Focus on Your Goal

I think you should be focusing on your goal, what we talked about in the very beginning a few minutes ago when I said it's really important you define your goal for the conference. I want you to keep in mind your reasons for being there. You want to learn about writing, you want to learn about publishing, you want to make some friends, and you want to make some professional connections.

A lot of times people walk around conferences feeling very unconfident and feeling bad because they feel like they're not capturing the attention of agents or no agent has expressed undying love for their manuscript or something like that and they're just starting to feel like "this isn't going well" or "this isn't what I hoped." But if you are focusing on your larger goals, that there's more to it than just wow-ing an agent or editor, then I think you're going to have a much better experience. So focus on whatever your goals were that you identified before the conference.

[00:17:16] Make Friends

Another very important thing in focusing is focus on the other conference attendees. Don't isolate yourself. Talk to people. Get involved. Get to know people. If you're an introvert, don't let that take over at this point or you'll be wasting your time and money to be at the conference. One of the most profound benefits of the conference is making other writer friends.

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People who have been in this for a while, people who are published authors and have been doing this for a long time, you'll notice they're still going to conferences. They may have twenty books published and they're still going. It's not because they necessarily need that workshop on how to write better characters (although everyone can always stand to keep learning), but their main benefit is continuing to hang out with their writer friends and network and stay involved in the community of writers. So don't isolate yourself. Get involved.

What I mean by focus here is focus on your overall experience and don't allow yourself to get sidetracked by feeling like "I wasn't able to grab that one agent and now the whole thing is a failure." There's a lot more going on at the conference than just that.

[Thomas] One thing I would add to that. I was talking with an agent recently at a conference and he said that 95% of the new clients that he signs he gets from referrals from his existing clients.

It's very easy to go to a conference and think, "The only people here who matter are the agents and I'm just going to ignore the other authors," and that could not be a bigger mistake. Because if those other authors recommend you to their agents, that is most likely going to be your actual path for success, depending on what agent you're trying to go with.

So build those relationships. As Randy Ingermanson calls it, that's your graduating class. The friends that you make at a conference, once you get published and they get published, you'll remember each other from before you were big time, before you got published and that can make for some really deep lifelong friendships.

[Rachelle] It can also help you in a very real business sense. Referrals are crucial in this industry and, like Thomas said, if you get published down the road and someone else you met three conferences ago gets published as well at the same time, now down the road you have been friends forever and you love each other's books and you may be able to offer each other endorsements on your books. You become a part of that writing network together.

I do have to agree with what Thomas says. The referrals from my current clients are the main way I do get new clients, so it really will serve you to go ahead and do a lot of networking with other writers. Don't look at them as your competition, but as your graduating class.

[00:20:22] Impressing Agents: Give a Great Pitch

Okay. During the conference we promised in our pitch for this webinar that we would tell you ways to impress an agent.

One of the things I want to start with is the main way that you can impress an agent is to give a great pitch. Pitching is obviously a really big topic. We're not going to be able to go into super detail here. We are going to have more information in the e-book that goes along with this. It's going to be pretty detailed on how to create a great pitch.

But here's the most important part to remember. When you are going to pitch someone your book, you don't want to just launch in and start telling the story. You always want to remember that the most important parts of your pitch are the beginning and the ending.

You want to start by giving it context. If you're at the dinner table and an agent asks you what's your book about, don't just launch in with no preamble. You want to put it in context. What I mean by that is if you're sitting down at a meeting or at a dinner table or whatever it is, you want to make sure that you've introduced yourself. If you haven't, you start and say, "My name is so-and-so and I am writing in the genre of..." and you say what your genre is. And then you say, "The book I'm telling you about today is called [this]," and then you say, "and it's about..."

So the beginning part is all about context. Your name, your genre, your title, and then here's what my book is about. Then tailor your pitch to the situation. If you're literally in an elevator with someone, that can't be more than maybe a 20 or 30-second pitch; whereas if you're sitting in your fifteen minute meeting you can go full on out with your 2-minute pitch.

Ending your pitch is going to be very important as well. That's the biggest opportunity you have to have an awkward moment at the conference if you don't plan how you're going to end your pitch. Because otherwise you'll just say, "And then that's the end of the story," and then you're just kind of sitting there looking at the person that you're pitching to and that doesn't feel very good.

What you want to do is you want to come up with a couple different ways that you will end your pitch and then maybe ask a question. I always really appreciate when someone is pitching to me when they end it with a question because it's just like tossing it back to me. You're thinking of a pitcher and a catcher; at some point you've got to toss that ball back to me and I want to know when the ball is coming back to me.

You may end your pitch by saying, "So that's my story. What more would you like to hear about it? Or "would you like to hear more detail about it?" or "do you have any specific questions that will help me tell you more about my story or my book?" You're tossing it back to the person you're pitching to and you can come up with different ways to do that.

The beginning, giving it context, and the end (tossing it back to the person you're talking to), those are the most important parts of your pitch.

[00:23:44] Impressing Agents: Know When to Pitch

You really do need to know when to pitch and when not to pitch. If somebody is in a bathroom, you definitely don't want to pitch them there. If you happen to be just hanging out in the hallway and you find yourself hanging out with an agent or an editor and you're just chatting, at some point they may ask you, "So what are you writing?" and then that's a great time to launch into your 30-second pitch. Those are good times to pitch.

If you're trying to grab an agent who's running from place to place and they're walking really fast through the hallways and you try to grab them and so they're polite and they say hi, but they

keep walking, you don't want to pitch unless you ask them first. So you say, "Can I walk with you and tell you about my book?" or something like that. A lot of times they'll say yes, but sometimes they might say, "You know, I'm on my way to teach right now. I'm not really focused, this isn't a great time." You'll want to respect that.

Knowing when to pitch and when not to, just being sensitive to what people need at that moment, is going to be really important.

Did you have something to add to that, Thomas?

[Thomas] I did. Another thing that's really key with this pitch (and you're going to hear us talking about this a lot during this talk), but it's to read their facial expression and know when to shut up. There's a reason why people still listen to the Beatles and still like the Beatles forty years later, however long it's been. The reason is that the Beatles' songs were shorter. So when you're done listening to a Beatles song you want to hear it again, which is very different from more modern music. A Beatles song is two minutes long. Typically nowadays songs are four, four-and-a-half minutes long. So when you're done listening, you're done.

It's important to stop talking soon enough so that then the agent asks for more and the agent hears herself or himself asking for more. It'll help make your pitch more successful.

[Rachelle] Excellent. Kind of going along with that, if you do have a one-sheet or if you have a business card or a book proposal and whether or not you've showed it to them already in the meeting, always ask them if they'd like to take it with them. Just because you've got it out and they looked at it doesn't necessarily mean they want to take it. Some do, some don't. Some people will say, "I don't really take any paper with me; I would just prefer that you email me," and they'll let you know what they want.

It's always just the most respectful to ask them for what they want. Do you want to take the business card? Do you want to take the one-sheet or not? That's just basic respect.

[00:26:29] Impressing Agents: Treat Them Like People

You can also impress the agents by treating them like people, trying not to be so nervous, and just trying to remember the main thing is we are all at this conference together for the same reason basically. We are all trying to get good books published. The agents and the editors, they are at the conference to meet you.

If you think about it that way and you go, "Oh wow. They came here because they want to meet me and all my other writer friends that are here," it can help you to just have a little bit of a different attitude about it, not be nervous, and not feel like every little thing you say or do is being judged because that's not what's happening. We are all just looking for good books and you guys are there to tell us about good books. We're all on the same side.

[Thomas] Here's a tip for those of you who are like, "I can't not be nervous around an agent," and some of you are like, "I'm going to be nervous, there's nothing I can do." One thing that

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really helped a lot of authors, helped me, is just spend time with them hanging out before you pitch them your book.

Here's a little secret that a lot of people don't know about writer's conferences. The faculty typically show up a day early or sometimes a half a day early. They're there just hanging out, off with themselves. Some of them have some faculty meetings or dinners or whatnot. If you come early, you have a chance to hang out with the faculty as real people before you pitch them.

Realize that they take out the trash just like everybody else. They live real lives. They're not these super gurus living in gated mansions and with them butlers and chauffeurs and bodyguards. They're normal people just like you and they really are at the conference to hear pitches because that's how they make their living, is discovering authors like you and connecting them with publishers.

[00:28:35] Impressing Agents: Focus on Other People's Needs

[Rachelle] True enough. Treating the agents and editors just like people, trying not to be too nervous; one of the ways you can keep yourself from being so nervous is don't make your conference experience all about you.

Think about your fellow writers that are there. You can be looking around to see if there's anybody else who has a need that you can fill; if anyone seems lonely and like they need a friend and you can talk to them.

If it's getting towards the end of the conference and you've got a meeting with an agent who just looks exhausted (and many of us do by that point), don't be afraid to say, "Hey, you look really tired. Can I bring you a cup of coffee or something?" I'm not saying that because I want you to bring me a cup of coffee, I'm just saying you can help yourself be less nervous if you're focusing on other people's needs as part of your conference experience. That can help you have a happier time there as well because it's not all about you. Everyone knows that when we spend too much time thinking about ourselves and worrying about what people are thinking about us, then we have a much harder time.

Smile, be personable, and be friendly. That's the best thing you can do to impress agents. Leave them with just a great impression of you, thinking you were just the nicest person, and they will remember you.

[00:30:02] How to Talk to a Booked Agent

Thomas mentioned on the website that we would be telling you how to talk to an agent who's already booked solid without staking out the bathroom. We have a few quick ideas for you here about that.

As we've mentioned before, you can try and sit with them at a meal. You can walk with them between events. If you catch somebody and say, "Hey, mind if I walk with you for a minute?" You can catch them just hanging out in free time. They might be just having a drink or hanging

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out in the hallway or the lobby before an event. You can catch them and see if they have a moment to chat.

[Thomas] The best time to catch them at free time is during the keynote presentation. Everybody goes to the keynote except often the faculty because oftentimes the person you're really excited to hear at the keynote the faculty have already heard that person speak at another writers conference somewhere around the country. So they hang out wherever the lounge is during the keynote. If you're willing to sacrifice going to a keynote, that could be a key opportunity to talk to multiple agents at the same time.

[Rachelle] Very true. You could also call up or email the conference organizer ahead of time and ask if you can help out with the conference, if you can maybe be one of the monitors of the room where the agents and editors are having their fifteen minute meeting.

You can also volunteer to be a driver in case any agents or editors need a ride to or from the airport. You can offer your services. I know from experience that when I have people picking me up from the airport I just appreciate that so much. There might be a half an hour drive between the airport and the hotel where the conference is and that is prime pitching time where that person has my full attention and we end up having great conversations. That is a great time to catch an agent or an editor if you were not able to get them in a meeting.

Thomas, did you have something to add to that?

[Thomas] Yeah, just that what she's saying about giving rides is really key. If you call up the conference organizer and you say, "Hey, is there anyone I can pick up or drop off at the airport?" they'll love you forever and it really does work.

We picked up a major client because the conference organizer actually volunteered me. She's like, "Thomas, we have somebody. Can you pick them up at the airport?" I was like, "Sure." It was a forty-five minute drive because it was a conference retreat center and by the end of that forty-five minutes she had purchased a website. That wasn't my goal. I didn't even know she wanted a website. She was like, "Oh, I was hoping to meet you. I really need a website." We got chatting and for forty-five minutes we were able to just chat back and forth. That's where they become a real person and they're not an agent or a big man person, but just a regular person riding in a car. Great tip.

[Rachelle] And it's great also not just to have as your goal, "I want to get this agent to represent me," because some of the best conversations I've had in a car with people have been we get into a conversation about their book and then I might have some ideas for them and we're actually sitting there brainstorming. Have you thought about this and have you thought about that. They may not be in a position yet to be pitching their book for representation because they're not quite ready, but now they've just gotten a whole bunch of free ideas from me because we've been able to sit there and brainstorm about it for a while.

The one caveat that I want to tell you about giving the rides is at the front end of the conference picking up an agent from the airport and taking them to the conference is great and is going to be

prime time. You may have a little less luck on the tail end of the conference having a really good conversation simply because the person is going to be so tired.

You will have an opportunity to make a connection, talk a little bit about your book or your conference experience or whatever, and definitely you will have the opportunity to make that connection, but you definitely will not get the faculty member at their best because they're pretty spent by the end.

[00:34:35] Avoiding Amateur Mistakes

Let's just go over real quickly how to avoid those classic mistakes that scream amateur.

You don't want to be the person who pitches in the bathroom or at any other inappropriate moments. You've heard it a million times, but most of us are not making it up. We have been pitched in the bathroom. We're trying to wash our hands and we're trying to rush off to the next thing and it's just very, very awkward. So let's not do that.

If you sit down and you're pitching an agent or an editor and you are not able to identify your target audience and you say that you have written a book for everyone, that screams amateur. You've got to be able to identify who your audience is.

Since we go to a lot of conferences for Christian writers, playing the God card is one of the things we hear a lot. Unfortunately it does make you look like an amateur because if we are at a Christian conference, we're sort of assuming that everyone there feels a calling from God to write their book. You can keep it to yourself if you feel that calling from God because it doesn't actually help you sell it and it doesn't really set you apart all that much from all of the other Christian writers that are there. It ends up sounding like you're trying to use God to help sell your book and you don't want to get into that territory. No matter how strongly you feel that God has called you to write the book or given you the ideas, you might not want to be talking a lot about that.

[Thomas] It can also be a form of manipulation. If somebody was to come up to you, if you were single, and say, "God told me that you are going to marry me," that's not really appropriate. Instead you keep that to yourself and pray that God would tell the other person that same thing.

That applies the exact same way in a writers conference. If God has told you that Rachelle Gardner is going to be your agent, then you need to pray that God also tells Rachelle Gardner that you're going to be her client. You don't go and tell her, "Rachelle, God has called you to be my agent." Yeah, don't do that.

[Rachelle] It sounds like we're exaggerating, but unfortunately we do have these conversations a lot and it can be very awkward in person. Just try not to look like an amateur by doing things like that.

Another thing that can make you kind of look like an amateur is if you grab an agent in the hallways, someone who's walking from one place to the next, and just launch into a pitch. That's

not good at all. When I'm walking from one place to the next or I'm sitting somewhere, I don't mind if somebody grabs me and says, "Hey Rachelle, do you have a minute? I wanted to introduce myself." I don't mind at all. If I'm going to be walking somewhere and it's going to take a couple of minutes I'll say, "Sure! Tell me about your book." We may only have one or two minutes and so if I hear enough to interest me I'll say, "Why don't you give me your card and then why don't you email me after the conference." Something like that. But you don't just want to grab people and launch into a pitch.

The last big thing that can brand you as an amateur is if you haven't learned anything about the publishing business and an agent asks you something like, "Do you have a book proposal? Because I'd really like to see it," and you say, "What's a book proposal?" I know most of you who are attending this webinar have probably learned so much about publishing already and you know what a book proposal is. If you don't, that's okay, but you're probably going to want to learn before you go to a conference. Learn about publishing basics.

Thomas, did you have any other classic mistakes that scream amateur to add to the list?

[Thomas] Well, one to add to that one. That's what the BestsellerSociety.com is for. You go there and it's an entire writer's conference in a box so that you can learn about the basics. How to create a great pitch, how to create a great proposal, walk you through it forums where you can get your questions answered so that when you show up at the conference you're there more as at the sophomore level instead of at the freshman level. That will then give you the confidence to be less nervous, make it easier in networking with other authors, and every other tip that we're giving you is going to make it easier if you've already gotten some experience, if you've already gotten some education. This really isn't to be underestimated.

There are not just resources like the Bestseller Society, but there's also great books on writing. There are books on the publishing industry. [*Book Proposals That Sell*](#) is one of the tops books on book proposals and I recommend that you read it, walk through the steps. The more experienced you are, the more training you get ahead of time the more confident you will be and the more successful you'll be once you're at the conference.

Oh and another thing, since we're talking about mistakes that scream amateur, is not being googlable. Agents are going to Google you to see if you show up, to see what kind of platform you have. You want to make sure you're present when they Google you. You want a rank for your own name. You want to decide what your name is going to be; if you're going to have a pen name or which of your names you're going to have or you can have letters for some of your names. Have a professional front, have a good Klout score, etcetera.

[Rachelle] Now if you don't have that yet and you're heading out for a conference in two days, don't freak out. You've got time to create that. You just want to make sure that it's on your list of goals that you are googlable and someone can find you.

I have recently been looking for good publicists to work with that I can put my clients with and people who would really understand how to get clients to be very strong in social media. You would maybe find this hard to believe, but a high number of the publicists that I have been

checking out don't even rank for their own name. I'm trying to Google them and I'm having the hardest time finding their Facebook or their Twitter or their website or their blog just based on their own name. I might have to go through several pages of Google responses to find them.

That's a publicist and obviously that's not going to impress me. You would think the publicist would be working hard at ranking for their own name so that I can be sure that they can teach my authors how to do that. So things like that are becoming very important.

[Thomas] We have a question. Someone's asking, what does it mean to rank for your own name? We mean ranking on Google. When I type in your name into Google, do you rank? And what helps you rank on Google is a good website, a professional website.

[Rachelle] The ranking on Google means I am not going to have to scroll through fifty pages of results for that Google search before I find you.

I have been doing this for a long time. If you enter my name into Google, you're going to get a lot of pages that are mostly me. There are a lot of Google responses on those pages, different web pages that it's pulling up, and almost all of them are going to be me. There are a whole bunch of other Rachelle Gardners in the country, but I'm going to be most of the responses. You're going to be able to find lots and lots of web pages, things that other people have posted on their blogs or websites and many, many web pages from my blog.

So to rank means somebody's going to be able to find you. Think about it. When you do a Google search, you're looking for something. You typically will not scroll through more than a couple of pages on Google to find what you're looking for. If it's not in the first couple pages you're probably not going to find it. Is that right?

[Thomas] That's right. In fact the trend is if you're not on the first page, people typically change their search before they click page two. So they'll change what they've searched for and not even go to page two at all.

Ranking number one. To give you an idea, number one gets twice as many clicks as number two and by the time you get down to number ten you're hardly getting any clicks. So when we say ranking we're really meaning ranking in the top three if possible.

Some people are asking a lot of questions about search engines and optimizations in the chat and unfortunately we don't have time to go into that. I have an entire one hour talk on this on the Bestseller Society that just scratches the surface of things you can do to help rank number one. So, Rachelle, I'll let you go on to the next talk because I could talk about Google forever.

[00:43:34] AFTER THE CONFERENCE

[Rachelle] I know, I know. Let's just do a quick five minutes on things to make sure you do after the conference and then we can take some time for Q&A.

[00:43:45] Follow-Up

After the conference it's time for follow-up. Obviously you're going to follow up with agents and editors with whom you met in a timely manner. If anyone has requested materials from you, you definitely want to get them out as soon as you can. If you met with people or you spoke with people and they were nice to you, it's always nice to send a thank you note.

A lot of times what happens is you're at the conference, you pitch something to an agent or an editor, they request it, and you're so excited, and you can't wait to send it to them. Then you go and you take a bunch of workshops, then you suddenly realize, "Oh my gosh, my project needs reworking. I need to revise it. It's not ready to send." And now you're in a quandary. Well, the agent requested it, but I don't think it's ready. What do I do?

What you do is you go ahead and still follow-up in email and you say, "Thank you so much for the meeting. I really appreciated your time. Thank you for requesting my manuscript. I learned so much at the conference that I'm going to take a little bit of time to revise it and I hope to have it to you by such-and-such a date." That might be a month or two months or three months. I've had people send something to me six months after a conference.

It's totally fine. If you need to revise then go ahead and revise. Just keep the contact. Most of the time they will remember you, especially if they did request something from you. You want to do that follow-up. But be sure to follow up...

[Thomas] Can I ask something?

[Rachelle] Yeah.

[Thomas] On the flip side of that, don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good. Rachelle, how many times have you requested a proposal from someone and they never sent you anything?

[Rachelle] Oh yeah. Many times.

[Thomas] Right. You can always be better. You can always make it better. You want to get it good. You want to get it as good as you can get it, but then you've got to ship, or mail it in this case.

There's a great quote from Steve Jobs. He's there and his engineers are working on the next version of Apple and they're like, "It's not perfect. We can't launch it. We can't launch it. It's not art because it's not good." And he's like, "Real artists ship." It became a very famous quote. You're not an artist until you ship it out the door.

[Rachelle] Very true. That's a great one.

Besides following up with your agents and editors, be sure to follow up with any new friends you made. Determine to keep in touch and nurture those relationships. Don't just let them fall by the

wayside once the conference is over. That just goes to what we talked about earlier which is how important those relationships will become over time.

[00:46:25] Don't be Hard on Yourself

In the aftermath of a conference try not to be hard on yourself if you didn't get the results you wanted or you didn't feel like you really reached your goals. Everything is a learning experience. You can make notes about what worked and what didn't and make plans for the next conference and set goals for the next conference.

A lot of times people come away just feeling really overwhelmed and not sure how they feel. Or they feel a little bit bummed like, "I didn't really impress that one agent" or whatever, but you've got to realize we're all in this together. We all have a very busy and exhausting time there. Don't be hard on yourself because you're going to be able to go back, go to another conference, meet people again. Just look at it as a learning experience.

[00:47:11] Tools for Follow-Up

I think Thomas had one more thing on follow-up.

[Thomas] Yeah. There's a great tool for follow-up called [CardMunch](#). It's an iPhone application. You take the photo of someone's business card and it will automatically add them as a contact to your phone and allow you to connect with them on LinkedIn and maybe some of the other social networks. I'm not sure. But it makes it so much easier to follow up with people.

You can do this on the plane on the way home or in the airport. Take a photo of the card, add it as a contact, you shoot them a quick email, and then you do the next one. You work through that pocket full of cards.

I can't tell you how many people will get a whole stack of business cards (and this is your opportunity to build really valuable relationships) and then you just keep the cards for a few weeks and then you throw them away.

So check out CardMunch. I believe it's a free app. You may have to pay a little bit per scan. It's only for the iPhone, so you Android people are going to have to search around for an Android alternative. But there are a lot of business card scanning apps out there that you can use.

Somebody's asking about a QR code on your business card. That's not a bad thing. But if you put a QR code on your business card make sure it goes somewhere other than the homepage of your website. It should really go to a page on your website specifically designed for mobile phones so that it looks good, it's easy for you to connect.

Somebody is posting of a [Yolu Card reader](#) for Android as an alternative in the chat.

[Rachelle] Cool.

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