



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 24, Fall 2005

The Art of the Pitch

A query letter sits on my desk from a first time author of non-fiction who has hired me to whip it into shape. At least two pages long, 50% of the text is consumed in explaining why the writer wrote her first book. Acquisition editors are not interested in an author’s motivation – all they want to know is what the book is about, if the book has a market that is panting for it, and if the author has a following

Pitches, aka concept statements, can be as short as one sentence or as long as a paragraph of about 200 words. The single sentence is harder to write and answers the question: “What is your book about?” I usually tackle this after I have written the paragraph. Here is the single sentence I used for my latest book: *Sing a New Song is about four Canadian bishops who pushed the envelope and changed the world.* This short pitch is more suited to conversations than written communications, but it also generates the book’s theme or mission statement. Once you have pinned down this sentence, you can measure everything you plan to include in the book against it. Very useful....

The longer version of a pitch is a brief summary of a query letter. It includes a description of the book, its slant, the market, why the book is needed, hints about why you are ideal to write it, and highlights some of the benefits and features of the book. To get all this into such a short piece takes tight writing, elegant word choices, and much revision. This pitch must also begin with a compelling hook. Here’s an example, with my thanks to Elizabeth Lyon:

Too many good Canadian writers are rejected by editors, simply because they lack the necessary insiders’ knowledge. Get Published on Your First Try! answers the plight of these writers by teaching them how to develop winning non-fiction book proposals. This how-to guide is written “writer-up” instead of “editor-down,” showing as much as it

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From the editor’s desk

As promised in the last issue of *The Beacon*, the lead article focuses on the art of the pitch. Whether it is written or verbal, this is the single most important piece of writing unpublished authors undertake. Firmly resist the urge to talk about why you wrote your book – the number one pet peeve of editors’. Pitches are your sales ad and if you don’t know how to write this promotional blurb, take a course or read a book on writing a pitch. (Resources on p. 2.)

With the fall season of writers’ conferences nearly upon us, what do you do if you simply cannot afford the fees to attend? Choose to go for only one day of the event; volunteer to help the organizers – you’ll not pay a cent and can take in sessions when you are not working; offer to transport a speaker from/to the airport – they become your captive audience for the journey. Once at the conference, plan what information you need and pick the sessions to attend that provide it. Talk to delegates and presenters at the breaks and, if necessary, think up some key questions before you go that will break the ice. Have your short pitch ready!

Julie H. Ferguson

Resources to help you write your pitch....

BOOKS:

- Allen, Moira. *The Writer's Guide to Queries, Pitches and Proposals*, New York: Allworth Press, 2001
- Ferguson, Julie. *Crafting Irresistible Queries*, Vancouver: Beacon Publishing, 2002. (Has a unique questionnaire to help mine the data required.) Canadian
- Herman, Jeff. *Write the Perfect Book Proposal*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2001
- Larsen, Michael. *How to Write a Book Proposal*, 3rd edition, Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books.
- Lyon, Elizabeth. *Non-fiction Book Proposals Anyone Can Write and The Sell-Your-Novel Toolkit*, New York: Perigee, 2003

ELECTRONIC:

- www.writing-world.com (US)
- www3.telus.net/public/lpwords/solutions.html (Canadian)
- www.writemarket.com (Canadian)

Forthcoming events for writers

For registration details and events for teachers and speakers, visit www.beaconlit.com/schedule2005.htm

- Sep 25 – *Word on the Street*. Free for writers and readers, around the Vancouver Public Library, 11am-6pm. See website for events: www.canada.com/national/features/wots/van_events.html.
- Sep 28 – *Crack Open Your Creative Channel*, 6:30-9:30pm; for all writers at Vancouver Community College
- Oct 1 – *Crafting Irresistible Query Letters*, 9am-4pm, for writers of books and articles; Vancouver Community College
- Oct 5 – *Getting Published in Canada 101*, 6:30-9:30pm, for aspiring authors; Vancouver Community College
- Oct 12 – *Writing Online*, 6:30-9:30pm, Vancouver Community College
- Oct 21-23 – *Surrey International Writers' Conference*. Join Julie for *Writing Online Simplified* and meet her in the Blue Pencil Café for an encouraging chat about your writing career and work-in-progress. Visit www.siwc.ca for details and online registration.
- Oct 26 – *Brainstorming Brilliant Bios* ensures your bio sells your writing; 6:30-9:30pm at Vancouver Community College
- Oct 29 – *Crafting Irresistible Query Letters*, 9am-4pm, for writers of books and articles, Surrey's Creative Writing Diploma Program.
- Nov 24 – *Brainstorming Brilliant Bios*, 6:30-9:30, Surrey's Creative Writing Diploma Program.
- Nov 30 – *Writing with Power!!* 6:30-9:30pm, Surrey's Creative Writing Diploma Program.
- Dec 7 – *Writing Online*, 6:30-9:30pm, Surrey's Creative Writing Diploma Program.

...The Art of the Pitch (cont)

tells by integrating examples of successful proposals into the text. As the most instructional book on the subject in this country, it features simplicity, step-by-step directions, and offers a template for the best proposal format. Written by author and speaker, Julie Ferguson, *Get Published on Your First Try!* makes liberal use of examples, exercises, and checklists to guide the aspiring author from inspiration through to a publisher's acceptance of their first non-fiction manuscript. (126 words)

The pitch is not enough for a query letter; it needs to be fleshed out more. However it can be used as the opening paragraph in a proposal. With a little tweaking, a pitch is ideal for a publisher's catalogue blurb and the copy for the back cover. Phew!!!

Previous issues of *The Beacon* are archived at www.beaconlit.com/beaconli/newsletter.htm



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