

Sydney Writers' Festival 2013

Publishing Seminar

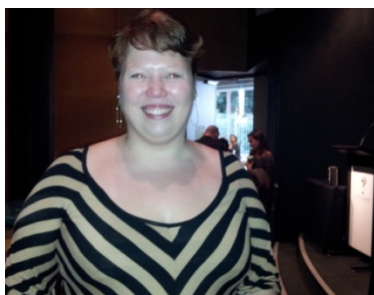
The Sydney Writers' Festival Publishing Seminar at the NSW State Library was overflowing with people wanting to hear the latest buzz about the publishing scene.

Emily Maguire, journalist and novelist, spoke about a writer's life and her experience of pitching to publishers. Her income from teaching and mentoring provides 'freedom to write what I want to write'. Emily believes in being accessible to her readers, responding to them, maintaining an online presence, connecting with other writers and promoting her books, although she admits that it is incredibly time consuming.



Emily Maguire

A panel comprised of representatives from various publishing houses (Alice Grundy from Giramondo; Shona Martyn from Harper Collins; Alison Green from Pantera Press and Kate Cuthbert from Escape) generated discussion about innovative ways of interacting with readers in a changing publishing landscape, which includes digital or e-publishing. Some genres now go straight to digital. Shona Martyn emphasised that a manuscript for e-publishing needs to be well developed, 'almost ready to go'. Kate Cuthbert added that Escape has 'a two-week response to manuscripts—and a four to six month publishing process'. She said that a 'barrier to digital publishing is the speed of the process, so manuscripts must be near publication stage'. In addition to being well developed, manuscripts should be well edited and proof-read. One vital piece of advice was not to submit a manuscript too soon, as publishers rarely offer to take a second look at it.



Kate Cuthbert

Kate spoke about the importance of creating a ‘buzz’ to promote books, without it being ‘cheerleading’. The sales pitch and marketing should be aimed at getting people to talk about the book. Social networking is seen as a good way of starting the conversation—Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn are all effective because messages may be shared by others who may have thousands of followers and friends. Kate also mentioned the importance of a genuinely appealing and interactive websites for promoting books. Online reviews are seen as crucial, with Goodreads and Amazon apparently among the most trusted.

Author proactivity was emphasised: organising events, book signings and arranging publicity through various media will see results—though, as Kate points out, ‘it always comes back to the quality of the book’.

During the third session, ‘To Market To Market’, Haylee Nash from Booktopia explained that some books do better if digitally published, or first digitally published, particularly what she calls ‘disposable fiction’ which may include cheap paperbacks, ‘airport’ novels, some romance novels where digital publishing retail prices can be as low as \$2.99 online. Brett spoke about ‘taste testing’ a book on mobile devices, such as tablets, where sample chapters can be downloaded. He added that there is ‘now more market research than ever before’. Even the design of a book cover has changed, which needs to be visually appealing in print but also when fully enlarged on a screen or displayed as a ‘thumbnail’ image.



Alison Green and Haylee Nash

Brett Osmond from Random House added his views of the importance of bloggers and book reviews. As print reviews become fewer, ‘bloggers help people discover a book’. Online book clubs offer another opportunity to spread the word. Anne Treasure from Momentum advised writers to make their platform ‘friendly, relaxed and fun’. Injecting a touch of humour, she added that including conversations about ‘coffee, food and cats’ can rapidly bring visitors to a website. Haylee emphasised the need to build a community of readers, rather than just trying to ‘flog stuff’.

In summary, the advice was to do plenty of research and choose your publisher wisely; make sure your manuscript is sufficiently developed and well edited so that it is as close to publishable as possible before submitting; create and develop an online presence through social networking, blogging and online media. The most important piece of advice: ‘it always comes back to the quality of the book’.