

The Business Kit

The Basic Things Every Writer Needs To Network or Submit Queries & Manuscripts

Every writer who is serious about getting published needs a business kit. The purpose of this kit is to make it easier for people to connect with you, whether they are fans of your work or they are people in the writing industry with whom you should network. This list has been compiled from various writer references and from the advice we've been given by those in the industry.

1. A Good Attitude

Every writer needs to have a good attitude when approaching anyone else in this industry. The reason for that is simple: no one wants to talk to, help, or do business with a jerk. If you don't agree with a person you meet, or don't like them, you should still be polite and civil. You can still learn something from them, or gain a contact to add to your expanding network. This potential should override any negativity on your part.

Now does that mean that everyone you meet in this business will have the same attitude? No, it doesn't. But just because someone else is being a jackass doesn't mean that you should be. Does being polite and civil mean that you'll be doing a lot of brown-nosing and boot-licking? No, not necessarily. What polite and civil means is that you think before you speak. If you do that, you won't shoot yourself in the foot as you're starting out in your writer's journey.

2. Business Cards

Every writer needs his or her own business cards. They are handier than scraps of paper, easier to read than some people's handwriting, and are easy to obtain. You can have them professionally printed so that they look nice and pretty, or you can print them yourself. Whichever method you choose, be sure to include your name, phone number, e-mail address, and an indication that you are a writer.

There's a bit of debate on whether or not to include your mailing address. Some suggest getting a PO Box, others say that it doesn't matter and should be included. With the growing concern in some sectors over identity theft and stalking - yes, this does happen, folks - there are a few people who are leery about adding their address to the cards they plan give out like candy at conventions, book signings, etc. A phone number is okay because it can be changed with relative ease and can be unlisted in the phone directory. An address change requires a move, unless you use a PO Box.

If you strongly believe that you should put your address on the cards because of who you intend to give them to (i.e., editors, literary agents, and publishers) then do so. But if you also intend

giving cards out to fans, you may want to consider getting two sets, one with and one without the address.

Ultimately, this decision is yours to make.

3. E-Mail Address

Just about everyone has an e-mail account. Some people have as many as four or five. You can use any of them that you wish, but we recommend getting an e-mail account specifically for your role as an author. Use any of the free e-mail services out there, just try not to use e-mail addresses like “hotpantz2000@whatever.com” or “RejectionSucks@whatever.net”. You are trying to present yourself as a professional. Please choose e-mail monikers that reflect that.

E-mail addresses are a must. A lot of communication between you and people within the industry will be either face-to-face, or by e-mail.

4. Website

We have encountered authors - no, we're not naming names here - that firmly believe that there is little point in putting up a website to promote yourself as a writer before you are published. Our response to this is something along the lines of “horse hockey.”

Every writer should do what s/he can to get his or her name out there. We're in the Information Age, the era of internet usage, and we should by all means exploit that. Even if you're not the type to broadcast your failures (we don't recommend doing so), progress on your current project, or successes (we highly recommend that), a page that you can refer to agents, editors, and publishing houses is a tool you can use to make your name and face stick in their minds. Include a nice, professional looking picture, a short biography, and perhaps a sampling of your writing on the page.

If you can't afford the expense of launching a website yourself, you can always use services like Facebook or MySpace. However, you may want separate profiles for your writing and social networking.

A Word of Caution

Refrain from bad-mouthing specific people, especially on your website and/or blog. Everyone gripes a little and that's fine, but you don't want to verbally tear apart anyone in the writing industry and, worse, include their names. It doesn't matter that this agent screwed you over, or that book reviewer gave your work a bad review. You have to keep in mind that everyone in the writing profession reads and talks. If one of them doesn't like what you had to say, deems it unprofessional, and concludes that you would be more trouble than you are worth, you can be blacklisted. No one wants to be blacklisted, so please refrain from naming people and/or lambasting anyone.

Another thing to consider is that even when things are going good you shouldn't name the people in the industry with whom you are working unless you have spoken with them and gained their permission. If it's a fellow author who has given advice you'd like to share, or whose book you'd like to plug, that's fine. Agents and editors, however, are another thing. Just being agented or having an editor is enough to brag about (should you think bragging is absolutely necessary). Some people get very touchy about this sort of thing so if you'd like to use their names on your webpage please talk to them about it first.

5. Envelopes

For submitting query letters, you'll need a supply of #10 envelopes. If you are submitting a query letter with sample chapters, or are submitting the entire manuscript, you'll need an envelope that will hold all of the items you need to send: the manuscript (whole or sample chapters), the letter (cover and/or query), the SASE (Self-Addressed & Stamped Envelope), and your business card. With important items such as these, you want to consider using envelopes that are also waterproof. Go for the ones that are self-adhesive; they're more convenient for everyone involved.

Make sure that the SASE is of the same size envelope as the one being used to send all the items. If it's too small, you likely won't get any of them back should your manuscript be rejected.

6. Stamps

Standard stamps for sending out query letters and contracts (should you be lucky enough to get one) are a must. Keep them handy.

Mailing Your Manuscript

Unfortunately, the mailing expense of manuscripts varies according to weight. It's unlikely that you'll be able to stock the number and/or type of stamps necessary to cover the postage. However, there is a bit of compensation to be found at the post office. When you get to the counter, ask the postal clerk about media rates and what the qualifications are. Media rates can apply to manuscripts and are much cheaper than the standard cost of mailing your submission.

7. Formatting & Submission Specifications Checklist

Always - ALWAYS - check the formatting and submission specifications for the person(s) you're sending your query or manuscript to. If they don't list those specifications anywhere, then use the default industry standard. Have these specifications listed somewhere for your reference only and double-check your work to make sure that it meets all of the criteria specified. (For more on that, see our section on Formatting.)

8. Pen & Notebook

Jot down URLs, advice, book titles, names of interest that are mentioned, anything that might be useful and isn't on a business card or handout. If you write it down, people will know that you're taking their words seriously. It's the kind of thing that they appreciate.

Other Things to Think About...

It should be noted that this is just a basic kit. You can add other things to it as you like: personalized address labels, flyers advertising your website (if you post some of your work there for free, have a podcast/blog, etc.), a tote bag to keep everything in, a business card holder, whatever else you believe might be useful. Give the possibilities some thought and see where it takes you.