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WHY YOU SHOULD GET AN AGENT AND HOW TO PRESENT YOURSELF TO ONE: A PRIMER FOR COMICS ARTISTS

So! An editor has expressed interest in your work through finding you online or meeting you at a convention, and has asked you to pitch to them! Awesome and exciting times! Or, you're an artist/writer or have teamed up with either one to create the bare bones for a great story, and you're trying to figure out where to go with this.

How can an agent help, and what is an agent?

An agent is an advocate for you as a creator and a business partner of sorts as you grow your career. Agents take the heavy work of negotiating contracts and making connections with editors off your shoulders. To submit to an agent is called a "query". An agent field rejections and acceptances to you, will ask where you want to go with a project to try to get the best fit for it. An agent will be there for you when you're having a terrible day and have received ten rejections and you need to cry into a sympathetic shoulder about it. **Agents do not get paid until you get paid. Any agent asking you to pay them a fee to represent you is a scam artist and must be avoided at all costs.**

Usually, an agent will take about **15%** (standard industry rate atm) of an advance and royalties for any project you sell to a publisher-- but they will also generally negotiate for a higher advance for you (it is in their best interest too, after all) and any additional rights you might want to keep (the option to keep your webcomic online for others to read, to post updates regarding the comic on your patreon so you keep generating income, etc).

An agent has expressed interest in representing you and you have set up a phone call or meeting to talk about your work and getting repped! What do you do?

Ask questions about their sales-- what deals have they made? Which publisher did they negotiate with? What prior publishing experience do they have? If you have a Publisher's Marketplace account, you can see a comprehensive list of the deals they've made. Don't be afraid to ask any questions-- after all, this is your career and a business decision you make, especially since they're going to be dealing with your financials and negotiating on your behalf.

You want to be comfortable with your agent. Sometimes someone can be a great agent, but not a person you gel with emotionally enough to be willing to work together, and that's okay. The best agent for you might not necessarily be the one who has made the biggest, flashiest deals, but someone who can handle your emotional needs as you make your way through the ups and downs of being in publishing.

Remember, most of all, to **trust your gut instinct**. If something feels even a little uncomfortable, don't go for it-- or ask them more questions, as you see fit. When I signed with my first agent, she was really hands-off and unresponsive to email. This didn't work all that well for me.

You are about to sign with an agent! What now?

Read the agency contract carefully and don't be afraid to ask questions and/or ask for wording to be tweaked. Don't be afraid to ask why or discuss any part of the contract at all.

You have signed with an agent! What now?

Your agent (with your input) will sit down and compile a list of publishers to send your proposal out to, trying for where they think would be a good fit for your project. Every agent operates a little differently, but they will give you a list of editors and publishers they submitted to, and discuss when they're going to follow-up if they haven't heard back in a certain amount of weeks.

Do I need my agent to negotiate every single project for me?

It depends-- if it's a small Kickstarter anthology project for a few hundred dollars, probably not. When I sat down with my agent for a meeting, I made it clear that there were some projects I was going to do entirely independently and didn't need her to negotiate for me, and she was cool with that. If you're the type of person who needs a lot of administrative help and advice, maybe your needs will be different-- but I have been negotiating with the help of my dad's legal background on smaller projects for awhile, so I only needed my agent to help if I got a bigger publishing deal.

What happens if, god forbid, my agent breaks up with me?

This happens sometimes, and it's totally okay! It doesn't mean you will never have a career again or that no agent will never want to work with you again. You query more agents and do the whole process over again. I was dropped by my first agent, but I have another one now and she is awesome!

What do I need to query an agent?

If a publisher/editor has approached you and expressed interest, I would open with:

Write the agent an introductory email. "Hi X, my name is ____ and I'm a graphic novelist based out of Z City. So-and-so at ____ Publishing Company has approached me to see if I'd be interested in pitching a graphic novel to them. I am emailing you to see if you're interested in representing me.

[accompany with standard query letter and proposal]

If you're cold querying:

[A reference article on graphic novel submissions.](#)

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[A reference article on what a query letter is, and how to submit a graphic novel proposal.](#)

What Do I Include in a Graphic Novel Proposal?

A successful proposal includes:

- A cover splash page with art and title
- Quick opening sales pitch/summary of the work in 2-3 sentences
- Format (page numbers, number of chapters, is it color, black and white, etc)
- Character descriptions with thumbnail portraits included next to them
- Marketing section with comp titles-- how will it stand out, are there similar books already?
- Longer summary (anywhere from 1-3 pages, 1.5 - 2 spaced)
- About the author
- Sample pages (15 is industry standard; you can include a chapter or more if you have the work).