







BookMarketingBuzzBlog

A unique blog dedicated to covering the worlds of book publishing and the news media, revealing creative ideas, practical strategies, interesting stories, and provocative opinions. Along the way, discover savvy but entertaining insights on book marketing, public relations, branding, and advertising from a veteran of two decades in the industry of book publishing publicity and marketing.

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Interview With Literary Agent Toni Lopopolo

1. Toni, your publishing resume dates back to 1970. How have you weathered the changes of the book industry? When I began my publishing career in the 1970's at Bantam Books and then Harcourt Brace, who would have thought we'd have devices called Kindles or Nooks and that book buyers would read fiction and nonfiction on little screens? Ebooks were not yet a concept. I remember the sales manager at Houghton Mifflin predicting the demise of hardcover books; that all books would be published only between paperback covers. That never happened.

In 1991 when I opened my agency, after I signed a client, I then had to sell that writer's proposal or in the case of fiction, a finished manuscript. I'd phone editors and pitch the book and they'd say yea or nay. If they said, sure send me the manuscript, and other editors also agreed to read what I offered, I'd have to compose cover letters to each editor, print a label for each publishing house, then pack the manuscript with the cover letter in a box, attach the label, then haul the boxes to the post office, or pay for hand delivery. Costly in time and money.

Today I email the pitch to the appropriate editors, and when I get a positive response, I click "send" and the manuscript or nonfiction book proposal goes off to the editors as an attachment. The editors then download the submission into their Kindles or iPads.

Today there are so many more and different publishers to submit to than there were in say, 1991, even 2000, 2005. I can now sell to publishers who present me with two contracts: one for the bound book and one for the eBook. I have received advances and royalties thru PayPal. I didn't become computer literate until 1998. When I left St Martin's Press where I served as an executive editor from 1981 to 1991, none of the editorial staff even had computers, though a few of the younger entry level staff brought their computers from home.

2. Where do you see book publishing heading? Digital. When the *New York Times* adds a bestselling list for eBooks this is telling. We've never had a bestseller list of Audio Books. I think there'll be more downloading devices available, and who knows, pretty soon a micro chip implanted behind an ear or in an earpiece. Maybe fewer hardcover editions in the future, though that's been predicted since the early seventies. With the convenience of publishing an eBook, many authors will self-publish and bypass the traditional publishers. Authors, even those published by well-known houses, must market and publicize their own books to create a reader base. Then maintain that book and audience thru social media. Many well published authors are thinking, why do they need an agent or a publisher? I hope not but that's what we're seeing more and more.

3. What do you love most about being an agent? Definitely the excitement of discovering new talent. Writers, who have mastered their skills, are talented storytellers, and who know today's markets.

4. You are well known for your Fiction Bootcamps. How did they become so popular? First you have the combination of two veteran editors, Shelly Lowenkopf and me, Toni Lopopolo, from the publishing world, who offer a combined experience of seventy years, working for publishers and working with writers. We are about to give our 9th Bootcamp. Writers join us because they know that we can take them 4 to 6 levels above their current abilities. And because we read, edit, and discuss each attendee's writing, they are encouraged to re-write and finish their books, with the skills honed in this intense two-day Bootcamp. What we do is teach and show what no other courses offer. Past attendees have told us that what they learn from our Bootcamps is not taught in any school or college writing courses. Our success comes from our reputations and from word of mouth.

5. What are the most common mistakes first novelists make? We have a Bootcamp which focuses on the 10 Most Common Mistakes. Here are three:

a. Not mastering the skills needed to write full-length fiction, one of the most important skills is self-editing.

b. The worst offense is what I call Premature Submission, i.e. sending your novel to an agent or publisher before your manuscript's been edited by a professional editor, meaning someone who's worked in publishing, not an English teacher. English teachers, even professors, are often the kiss of death for a novel.

c. Writing mundane dialogue. Writing pages of narrative summary without scenes.

6. What should authors do to promote their books? Learn basic marketing skills, develop a website for the author and one for the book, speak at events, hiring a book publicist if affordable, visit bookstores, speak at local book clubs and bring books to sell.

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