



A practical guide for
literary agents navigating
the international rights
market

TOOLKIT FOR LITERARY AGENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this toolkit is to serve as a practical guide for literary agents navigating the international rights market. While primarily designed for new agents entering the field, it also provides valuable operational guidance for experienced agents seeking to optimize their workflows, expand their networks, or adopt best practices in rights management.

This toolkit is globally applicable, offering methods, templates, and checklists that can be adapted to different markets and cultural contexts. It focuses on actionable, hands-on guidance rather than theoretical discussion, aiming to provide agents with clear, step-by-step instructions for managing rights, preparing for book fairs, communicating with publishers, negotiating deals, and tracking contracts effectively.

A brief overview of the rights ecosystem is included to provide context: literary agents operate at the intersection of authors, publishers, and international markets, managing various rights types such as translation, audio, digital, film, and merchandising. Understanding the scope of these rights and the mechanics of licensing them internationally is essential to the agent's role. This toolkit condenses essential knowledge, tools, and procedures into a single, coherent resource that can be referenced and reused throughout an agent's career.

UNDERSTANDING RIGHTS & AGENT ROLE

Literary agents play a central role in the international book market, acting as intermediaries between authors and publishers to ensure that literary works reach the widest possible audience and achieve their full commercial potential. For new agents, understanding the scope of rights, the responsibilities of the role, and the skills required is essential. At the same time, experienced agents can benefit from reviewing best practices to refine their processes and expand their international reach.

Agents manage a variety of rights, each offering different licensing opportunities and revenue potential. These include translation rights, allowing works to be published in different languages; audio rights for digital or physical audiobook formats; digital rights for e-books or online publications; and film or television rights for adaptations in cinema, television, or streaming platforms. Some works may also generate merchandising opportunities, such as games, merchandise, or educational editions, as well as co-editions or subsidiary rights that involve collaborations with multiple publishers or localized adaptations. Maintaining a clear record of which rights are available and which have already been licensed is crucial to avoid conflicts and maximize revenue.

The work of a literary agent spans several interconnected areas. Rights management involves tracking available rights, monitoring contracts, and coordinating license agreements with publishers across different territories.

Market research is essential to identify potential foreign publishers, analyse trends, and understand the nuances of different markets. Promotion includes preparing pitch materials, catalogues, and presentations for book fairs and individual meetings. Agents are also responsible for negotiation, discussing advances, royalties, formats, and territorial rights. Contract oversight ensures that agreements are properly drafted and executed, while post-deal follow-up maintains compliance and strengthens long-term relationships. Building and nurturing professional networks with authors, publishers, and other agents is equally important, as opportunities often emerge from established connections.

Successful agents combine organizational skills with strategic thinking. They must manage multiple titles, deadlines, and negotiations simultaneously, while communicating effectively in written and verbal form, often across different cultures. Analytical skills are needed to evaluate titles for their international potential and to interpret market trends. Problem-solving skills help agents navigate conflicts, unexpected delays, or complex contractual clauses. Digital literacy, including the use of CRM systems, rights management tools, and online databases, is increasingly essential to maintain efficiency and accuracy.

New agents, in particular, may encounter several common challenges. Overcommitting by taking on too many titles can reduce the quality of follow-up and service.

UNDERSTANDING RIGHTS & AGENT ROLE

Rights may be undervalued or sold without sufficient contractual safeguards. Incomplete market research can result in pitching to unsuitable publishers or territories.

Presentation materials such as catalogues or title sheets may be unclear or inconsistent, and a limited professional network can restrict opportunities for sales and collaborations. A structured, template-driven approach to pitches, meetings, and contract tracking can help mitigate these challenges and provide a strong foundation for growth.

By understanding the variety of rights, the core responsibilities of the agent, and the skills required to succeed, agents can approach their work strategically and confidently. This knowledge allows them to avoid common pitfalls, manage their portfolio effectively, and build lasting relationships within the global publishing ecosystem.



PREPARING FOR BOOK FAIRS & RIGHTS EVENTS



Book fairs and rights events are among the most important opportunities for literary agents to connect with publishers, promote titles, and negotiate deals. Successful participation requires careful preparation, clear objectives, and strategic planning. The process begins well before the event itself, often six to nine months in advance, and involves several key steps.

The first step is to define clear goals for the fair. Agents should consider which titles they want to promote, which rights are available, and which markets or publishers are the most relevant. Identifying priorities helps focus efforts, allocate time efficiently, and maximize the impact of meetings. Researching potential partners in advance is essential. Understanding each publisher's catalogue, market focus, and previous acquisitions allows agents to tailor their pitch and anticipate areas of interest.

PREPARING FOR BOOK FAIRS & RIGHTS EVENTS

Once targets are identified, preparation of promotional materials is crucial. A concise and well-structured rights catalogue, title sheets with essential information, sample translations, and visual assets such as covers or illustrations should all be ready in advance. Materials should be clear, professional, and easy to navigate, as first impressions at fairs can significantly influence interest in a title. Digital copies are often necessary and having a standardized format for both print and digital presentations can save time and reduce errors.

Scheduling meetings efficiently is another important consideration. High-demand fairs often require arranging appointments months ahead, and agents must balance the number of meetings with the time needed for follow-ups and impromptu encounters. Keeping a clear calendar and prioritizing meetings with high-potential publishers ensures that no opportunity is overlooked. During the event, agents should remain flexible and open to networking outside of formal appointments, as some of the most valuable contacts emerge in informal settings.

Logistics should not be underestimated. Travel arrangements, accommodations, exhibition passes, and transport of physical materials all require attention to detail. Agents should also plan for contingencies, such as delays in shipments or last-minute cancellations, and ensure that all materials are backed up digitally. Maintaining a checklist of pre-fair tasks, materials, and deadlines can significantly reduce stress and allow the agent to focus on professional interactions.

Finally, agents should plan follow-up actions after the fair. Promptly sending additional information, confirming agreements, and maintaining contact with publishers helps convert initial meetings into concrete deals. Recording notes from each meeting, tracking interest in different titles, and updating contact information in a database ensures that no opportunity is lost. By treating the fair as part of an ongoing relationship-building process rather than a one-time event, agents can maximize both short-term results and long-term professional growth.

Preparation for book fairs and rights events is therefore a combination of strategy, organization, and adaptability. By setting clear goals, researching partners, preparing professional materials, managing logistics, and following up diligently, agents can make these events highly productive and strengthen their presence in the international rights market.



TITLE SELECTION & RIGHTS MATERIALS

Selecting the right titles and preparing professional materials is at the heart of an agent's work when promoting books internationally. The process begins with careful evaluation of the catalogue to determine which works have the greatest potential in specific markets. Agents must consider factors such as genre, subject matter, language adaptability, and current trends in foreign markets. Titles that align with publisher needs and market demand are more likely to generate interest and result in successful licensing agreements.

Metadata and documentation play a crucial role in presenting a title professionally. Each work should have a well-prepared title sheet containing essential information: the title, author, word count, genre, synopsis, rights available, and previous publications or awards. Where possible, a short excerpt or sample translation can help publishers assess the work's suitability for their audience. Visual elements such as book covers, illustrations, or other relevant graphics should be clear and high-quality, providing an immediate sense of the book's aesthetic and tone.

TITLE SELECTION & RIGHTS MATERIALS

A structured rights catalogue is another key tool. It should be concise, easy to navigate, and tailored to the audience. Organizing titles by genre, language, or market potential allows publishers to quickly find relevant works. For larger catalogues, agents may provide both a brief overview and detailed title sheets, ensuring that essential information is accessible while offering depth for titles of particular interest.

Agents should also assess the international adaptability of each title. This includes considering cultural references, language-specific content, and themes that may resonate differently in various territories. Understanding these factors helps agents anticipate questions, suggest appropriate translations, and identify the most suitable publishers for each work. Titles with clear international appeal or unique selling points, such as a strong series potential or adaptation possibilities, often attract the most attention.

Finally, preparation involves standardizing materials to ensure consistency and professionalism. Using templates for title sheets, catalogues, and supporting materials streamlines the process, reduces errors, and allows agents to update information quickly. Maintaining an organized digital archive of materials ensures that files can be shared promptly with publishers and easily adapted for different events or campaigns.

By carefully selecting titles and preparing high-quality materials, agents increase the likelihood of successful meetings and licensing agreements. Thoughtful curation, clear presentation, and attention to international market requirements not only improve efficiency but also reinforce the agent's credibility and professionalism in the eyes of publishers.

PROSPECT RESEARCH & CONTACT MANAGEMENT

Effective prospect research and contact management are essential for literary agents seeking to maximize their reach and efficiency in the international rights market. Before approaching publishers, agents must understand the landscape of potential partners, their specialties, and the types of works they acquire. Research begins by identifying publishers who operate in the relevant genres, territories, and formats, and by reviewing their recent acquisitions, catalogue focus, and submission preferences.

Creating a structured list of potential contacts helps agents prioritize their outreach and plan meetings efficiently. Each contact should include key information such as the publisher's location, primary editor or acquisition manager, areas of interest, previous titles acquired, and any relevant deadlines or submission windows. Agents often find it useful to categorize contacts by priority or by territory, allowing them to allocate time and resources where they are most likely to achieve results.

Maintaining organized records is equally important. Contact management systems, whether simple spreadsheets or specialized CRM tools, allow agents to track communications, store notes from meetings, and monitor interest in different titles.

Recording details such as follow-up dates, agreements under negotiation, and previous correspondence ensures that no opportunity is lost and that communications remain professional and timely.

Data management also requires attention to privacy and legal compliance. Agents must ensure that personal and professional contact information is stored securely and that communications respect data protection regulations in different territories. Regularly reviewing and updating contact lists helps prevent outdated information from undermining outreach efforts and keeps the agent's network accurate and reliable. Finally, contact management is not solely administrative. Building and nurturing relationships over time is a critical component of a successful agent's work. Prompt follow-ups, personalized communication, and ongoing engagement with publishers help establish trust and can lead to repeat business and long-term collaborations. By combining thorough research with systematic contact management, agents can work efficiently, strengthen their professional networks, and increase the likelihood of successful rights sales across multiple markets.

PITCHING & COMMUNICATION



Effective pitching and communication are at the heart of an agent's role in the international rights market. Whether through email, virtual meetings, or in-person discussions at book fairs, clear and professional communication can determine whether a title attracts interest and ultimately secures a deal. For agents, the goal is not only to present a title but also to establish credibility, build relationships, and convey enthusiasm while remaining concise and focused.

Pitching begins long before the first contact. Agents should research each publisher to understand their acquisition focus, previous titles, and market priorities. Tailoring a pitch to reflect this knowledge demonstrates professionalism and increases the likelihood of engagement. A successful pitch highlights the unique selling points of a title, such as genre appeal, series potential, adaptation opportunities, or notable accolades. Including relevant context about the author, such as previous publications or awards, helps publishers assess the title's market potential.

PITCHING & COMMUNICATION

When communicating via email, brevity and clarity are essential. A concise subject line that immediately signals the content, a clear description of the title, and a short explanation of why it fits the publisher's market are key elements. Attachments should be limited to essential materials such as a one-page synopsis or title sheet, with the option to provide further details upon request. Agents should also be prepared for follow-up communications, responding promptly and providing additional information efficiently.

In-person or virtual meetings require careful preparation as well. Agents should structure conversations to cover the most important points first, presenting the title in a compelling but concise manner. Active listening is critical; understanding the publisher's feedback, priorities, and questions allows the agent to respond effectively and adjust the pitch if needed. Taking notes during meetings ensures that follow-up actions are accurate and that future communications reflect the conversation.

Follow-up communication is an integral part of the pitching process. Agents should send thank-you messages promptly, provide any requested materials, and track responses to maintain a clear record of interest and next steps. Consistent, professional, and personalized follow-up helps build long-term relationships and demonstrates reliability. Over time, this approach not only supports immediate sales but also strengthens an agent's reputation within the international publishing community.

By combining research, tailored messaging, structured presentations, and attentive follow-up, agents can communicate effectively with publishers and maximize the chances of successfully licensing rights. Strong pitching and communication skills are therefore essential tools in every agent's professional toolkit.

MEETINGS & NEGOTIATION BASICS

Meetings with publishers are a central part of an agent's work, whether at book fairs, rights events, or in virtual settings. The purpose of these meetings is to present titles effectively, understand the publisher's interests, and negotiate terms that maximize both the author's and the agent's goals. Proper preparation and a clear structure are essential for making each meeting productive.

Before any meeting, agents should research the publisher thoroughly, reviewing their catalogue, recent acquisitions, and areas of interest. This knowledge allows the agent to tailor the conversation to the publisher's priorities and anticipate potential questions or objections. Preparing a concise agenda helps keep the meeting focused, ensuring that the most important points—title presentation, rights available, and potential deal terms—are addressed efficiently.



MEETINGS & NEGOTIATION BASICS

During the meeting, clear and confident communication is key. Agents should present the title in a compelling but concise manner, highlighting its unique selling points, market potential, and author credentials. Listening carefully to the publisher's feedback is just as important as speaking; understanding their needs, preferences, and concerns allows the agent to adjust the pitch, clarify information, or explore alternative opportunities. Taking accurate notes ensures that details discussed are not forgotten and provides a basis for follow-up actions.

Negotiation is a natural extension of meetings. Agents need to be familiar with common deal components, such as advances, royalties, territorial and language rights, formats, license duration, and co-edition arrangements. Being clear on what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable helps agents advocate effectively for their authors while maintaining professional relationships. Successful negotiation also involves flexibility, finding mutually beneficial solutions, and recognizing when to compromise without undermining the value of the rights.

Following up after the meeting is critical to converting discussions into concrete agreements. Agents should send any requested information promptly, confirm key points, and maintain an organized record of agreements under consideration. Tracking each meeting's outcomes in a central system ensures that opportunities are not overlooked and that communication remains professional and timely.

By preparing thoroughly, presenting titles effectively, listening actively, and negotiating strategically, agents can conduct meetings that are both productive and professional. Mastery of these skills strengthens relationships with publishers, builds trust, and increases the likelihood of successful rights sales.

CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS

Contracts are the foundation of the rights business, defining the terms under which a work can be published, adapted, or otherwise licensed. For literary agents, understanding contracts is essential to ensure that both the author's and the agent's interests are protected, that rights are clearly delineated, and that agreements are enforceable across different markets.

A typical rights agreement includes several key components. These often cover the scope of the rights being licensed, such as language, territory, and format, the duration of the license, and financial terms including advances and royalties. Many contracts also include provisions for sub-licensing, co-editions, translation approvals, and delivery obligations. Knowing which terms are standard and which can be negotiated is a critical skill for agents, allowing them to advocate effectively for their authors while maintaining professional relationships with publishers.

Agents must also be aware of potential pitfalls. Ambiguous clauses, unclear reversion terms, or poorly defined reporting obligations can lead to misunderstandings or disputes. Careful review of contracts, ideally in consultation with legal professionals when necessary, helps mitigate these risks. Maintaining organized records of all agreements, deadlines, and obligations ensures that agents can monitor compliance, track payments, and respond promptly if issues arise.

In addition to negotiating terms, agents are responsible for managing the lifecycle of contracts. This includes ensuring timely delivery of manuscripts or materials, verifying that royalties are reported and paid correctly, and monitoring the expiration or reversion of rights. By keeping contracts up-to-date and actively managing obligations, agents protect the value of the rights they represent and maintain the trust of both authors and publishers.

Clear communication is also essential throughout the contracting process. Agents should ensure that authors understand the terms of any agreement and are informed of any updates or changes. Similarly, maintaining professional communication with publishers helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters long-term collaboration.

By combining careful contract review, proactive management, and professional communication, agents can navigate the complexities of rights agreements with confidence. This not only protects the author's work but also strengthens the agent's reputation and effectiveness in the international rights market.



POST-DEAL MANAGEMENT

Securing a deal is only the beginning of an agent's responsibilities. Effective post-deal management ensures that both the author's and the agent's interests are protected and that the licensing agreement is executed smoothly. This stage involves tracking deadlines, monitoring payments, and maintaining clear communication with publishers, all of which are essential for long-term success in the rights market.

One of the first steps after a deal is signed is to confirm the delivery schedule. Agents must ensure that manuscripts, illustrations, or any other required materials are submitted on time and in the correct format.

Clear tracking of these deadlines helps prevent delays that could jeopardize the agreement or strain the relationship with the publisher. Monitoring financial obligations is equally important. Agents should verify that advances are paid according to the contract, that royalties are calculated correctly, and that payment schedules are adhered to. Maintaining organized records of payments and accounting statements allows agents to quickly identify discrepancies and take corrective action if needed. For many agents, using a structured tracking system or spreadsheet is an effective way to stay on top of multiple deals simultaneously.

POST-DEAL MANAGEMENT

Reporting and compliance are another critical component of post-deal management. Agents may be responsible for ensuring that publishers provide royalty statements, reports on sales, or other contractual information. Timely review of these documents helps agents track the performance of a title and informs decisions about future licensing opportunities or renewals.

Maintaining the professional relationship with the publisher throughout the post-deal period is equally important. Prompt communication regarding any changes, issues, or updates demonstrates reliability and fosters trust. Agents should also stay aware of rights expiration or reversion clauses, preparing in advance to negotiate renewals or retrieve rights when they become available again.

By approaching post-deal management systematically, agents can minimize errors, protect the author's interests, and strengthen their reputation in the international publishing community. Careful tracking, clear communication, and proactive problem-solving turn a successful deal into a foundation for long-term professional relationships and future opportunities.

PROMOTION STRATEGY FOR RIGHTS SALES

Promoting titles effectively is a key component of a literary agent's work. A well-planned promotion strategy can significantly increase interest from publishers, attract better deals, and establish the agent's reputation in the international market. Promotion should be approached as a continuous process, integrated with preparation for book fairs, ongoing communication with publishers, and rights management activities.

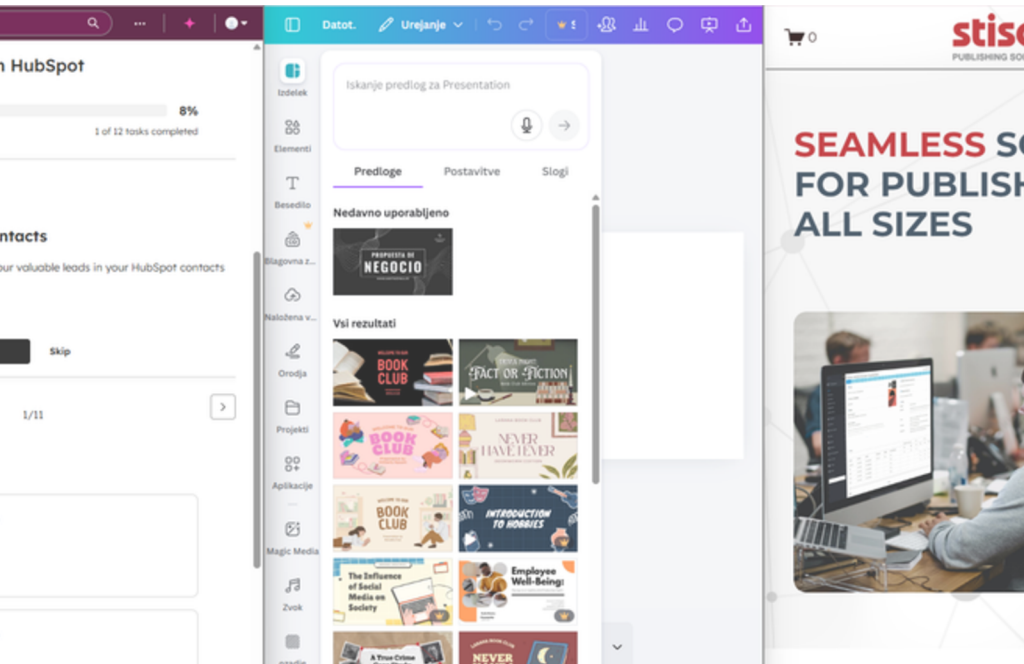
The first step in promotion is timing. Agents should plan campaigns in advance of key events, such as major book fairs, awards announcements, or seasonal market peaks. Preparing promotional materials early ensures that catalogues, title sheets, digital presentations, and sample translations are ready to reach publishers at the right moment. Coordinating the release of these materials with targeted outreach maximizes their impact and demonstrates professionalism.

Targeted campaigns are more effective than broad, generic promotion. Agents should identify publishers who are most likely to be interested in specific titles, based on past acquisitions, genre focus, or market trends. Personalized emails, one-page summaries, and title highlights tailored to each publisher's interests increase the likelihood of engagement. Combining multiple channels, such as direct emails, newsletters, and social media updates, allows agents to maintain visibility and reinforce key messages.

Digital promotion is increasingly important in the international rights market. Agents can share materials through secure online platforms, digital catalogues, and professional networks, making it easier for publishers to access and review titles. Visual assets, sample translations, and clear metadata enhance the discoverability and appeal of each work. At the same time, agents must balance accessibility with copyright and confidentiality considerations, ensuring that materials are shared securely and with the necessary permissions.

Monitoring the results of promotional activities is essential for continuous improvement. Agents should track responses, requests for additional materials, and engagement levels to evaluate which strategies are most effective. Adjusting campaigns based on feedback and performance helps optimize resources and ensures that future promotion efforts are more targeted and productive.

By planning campaigns strategically, targeting the right publishers, leveraging digital tools, and tracking outcomes, agents can increase the visibility of their titles, generate interest, and strengthen their position in the international rights market. Promotion is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process that supports successful sales, long-term relationships, and professional growth.



DIGITAL TOOLS FOR LITERARY AGENTS

In today's international rights market, digital tools are essential for managing titles, contacts, contracts, and communications efficiently. Literary agents benefit from using technology not only to organize their work but also to improve accuracy, save time, and strengthen relationships with publishers and authors. Choosing the right tools and adopting consistent practices can make a significant difference in the agent's productivity and effectiveness.

Customer relationship management (CRM) systems are central to contact and deal management. These platforms allow agents to track communications, schedule follow-ups, store meeting notes, and maintain a comprehensive history of interactions with publishers and partners. Even a simple, well-organized spreadsheet can serve as a basic CRM, but specialized systems often include automation features, reminders, and reporting tools that make managing a large portfolio of contacts easier.

Rights platforms and databases are also increasingly important. These tools provide access to international market information, publisher profiles, acquisition trends, and rights availability. Agents can use them to identify potential buyers, benchmark comparable titles, and monitor the performance of similar works in different territories. Keeping track of this information digitally enables quick reference during meetings, pitching, and negotiations.

Cataloguing and document management tools help agents organize title sheets, rights catalogues, sample translations, and marketing materials. Storing files in a structured digital archive ensures that documents can be shared quickly and consistently with publishers. Using standardized naming conventions, version control, and backup systems prevents errors and allows multiple team members, if applicable, to access materials efficiently.

In addition, digital communication tools, including email clients, video conferencing platforms, and secure file-sharing services, support professional interactions across borders. These tools enable agents to pitch titles, conduct meetings, and exchange documents with publishers anywhere in the world. It is important, however, to maintain security and confidentiality when sharing sensitive materials and to comply with data protection regulations.

Finally, some agents are beginning to explore AI-assisted tools to help with administrative tasks, such as generating draft summaries, managing schedules, or analyzing market data. While these tools can save time, agents should apply professional judgment and ensure that all communications and materials reflect their expertise and the author's vision.

By integrating CRM systems, rights databases, cataloguing tools, and secure communication platforms into their daily workflow, agents can manage their responsibilities more efficiently, maintain accurate records, and focus on strategic and creative aspects of their work. Digital tools are not a replacement for professional judgment but an essential complement that enhances an agent's capacity to operate successfully in a global rights market.

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR LITERARY AGENTS

PRACTICAL CHECKLISTS & ANNEX

Practical tools and checklists are essential for translating knowledge into action. They help agents stay organized, reduce errors, and ensure that every step—from preparation to post-deal management—is carried out efficiently. While the main chapters provide guidance and context, this section focuses on ready-to-use operational resources that can be adapted to different markets and workflows.

One of the most important tools is the book fair checklist. This includes all pre-fair, during-fair, and post-fair tasks, such as scheduling meetings, preparing title sheets, confirming travel logistics, and following up with contacts. Having a structured checklist ensures that no detail is overlooked and that the agent can focus on professional interactions rather than administrative tasks.

Contract and deal management checklists guide agents through reviewing agreements, monitoring deadlines, verifying payments, and tracking rights expiration. These tools provide a framework to prevent common errors and allow agents to act quickly if issues arise.

A deal tracking template is useful for managing multiple agreements simultaneously. It records title, publisher, rights sold, territories, financial terms, deadlines, and follow-up actions, providing a central reference for all ongoing negotiations and active contracts.

Finally, the annex includes a sample book proposal template, designed for rights promotion. This template offers a structured approach to presenting a title, including a title page, brief and extended synopsis, author profile, market positioning, unique selling points, available materials, and detailed rights information. Agents can use this template as a base for all titles, customizing it to the publisher, market, or language as needed. It serves as both a practical guide for creating proposals and a professional standard for presenting works internationally. By using these checklists, templates, and tools, agents can streamline their workflow, maintain a high level of professionalism, and ensure that no step in the rights management process is overlooked. They provide a practical, operational foundation for agents at the beginning of their careers and a valuable reference for more experienced professionals working in the global publishing market.

CONCLUSION

Navigating the international rights market is a dynamic and ongoing process. This toolkit provides the foundational knowledge, practical templates, and operational guidance to help agents manage titles, communicate effectively with publishers, and conduct professional negotiations. But knowledge alone is only the beginning. Success comes from applying these tools consistently, learning from each interaction, and adapting practices to the realities of different markets.

Agents are encouraged to treat this toolkit as a living resource. Use it actively in preparation for fairs, when drafting proposals, or during negotiations, but also update and refine it with your own experiences, insights, and feedback. Each meeting, deal, and correspondence offers an opportunity to improve, deepen networks, and enhance professional skills.

Ultimately, the value of this toolkit lies not in the pages themselves, but in how agents use them to take confident, informed action. By combining preparation, attention to detail, and proactive relationship-building, agents can turn knowledge into tangible results, strengthen the careers of the authors they represent, and contribute to a vibrant and collaborative international publishing ecosystem.

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