

Finding A Good Agent

An agent's job is to submit your photos to art/creative directors and photographers, send you on go-sees, give you the necessary information pertaining to a booking, and negotiate and collect fees when you are booked for a job.

Photographers, art/creative directors, and the clients select models for jobs. All you can ask of your agent is to be submitted. An agent who has worked with a photographer or art/creative director for many years might be asked to suggest or recommend a specific model. If the photographer or art/creative director agrees with the suggestion, then that model will get top priority and have their photos shown to the client or requested at the go-see. The agent, however, does not select models for jobs.

Quite often there is no way to know why one gets cast. Sometimes, the casting process seems entirely arbitrary. For example, I was once cast as a construction worker. I was very surprised because I do not see myself as having the construction worker look. After the shoot I asked the director why I got the job. He told me that at every construction site there is always one person who looks like he does not belong there. So, oddly enough, I got booked because I did not look right for the part.

Fees for Agents

Agents who specialize in print advertising generally charge anywhere from 15 to 20 percent commission per booking. If you have an exclusive contract with an agent, you might be responsible for paying your agent a percentage of all of your bookings, including those you get on your own. Travel reimbursement (train or plane fare) is separate from the hourly fee and is not subject to commission.

Sometimes models get paid for the time they spend traveling to a job, when the shoot is in a distant location. Agents will take a commission from that fee.

Agents collect a fee only when they obtain a booking for a model. The only exception to this rule is when a model decides to be on an agent's Web site. I will discuss these in more detail in Chapter 8: "How to Get Work."



Listings of Agents

There are many ways to find an agent. Some are very traditional methods; others require using your creativity and ingenuity. A simple way of finding an agent is to purchase a list or a directory of agents in the area where you want to be represented. The list can be obtained through companies that handle modeling information and products. The Models Mart, 1-800-223-1254, (www.model-mart.com) sells modeling books, directories, and lists of agents. *Ross Reports*, 1-646-654-5746, (www.backstage.com) is a monthly booklet that lists many New York and Los Angeles casting directors, franchised talent agents, literary agents and prime time TV shows. *Ross Reports* is primarily used by actors, but some actors' agents also represent commercial models. You can find agents from every state in the United States by visiting www.howtomodel.com.

Contacting Agents

By using the Marcus Institute's National Directory of SAG and AFTRA Offices (for more information about this directory, see Chapter 12: "Resources."), you can call your nearest office and ask them for a listing of franchised agents who are signatories with SAG and AFTRA. These agents have signed contracts with SAG and AFTRA agreeing to honor and abide by many rules and regulations. Many of these franchised agents also have a commercial modeling division along with their TV and radio department. One quick phone call can give you a great start or advancement in finding a good agent.

There is no guarantee that these agents are wonderful and trustworthy, but you will have a much better chance of finding good representation with franchised agents than by picking names blindly out of a large directory.

Many agents listed in *Ross Reports* request no phone calls. Honor that request. If the agent allows calls, ask when the agent has "open call." Open call is when an agent allows new people to come to his or her office and introduce themselves. If calling is not appropriate, send in a composite sheet. If you only have a head shot, send the head shot and briefly describe your modeling experiences. Make sure your phone number is on your comp and cover letter, so the agent knows how to contact you. When sending a package to an agency, you should always address it to a specific person. Call the agency if you do not have a name. Do not address it "To Whom It May Concern." Your package will be viewed much more favorably when sent with the agent's name on the envelope and on your cover letter. This applies to all mailings.

Sample Cover Letter

Here is a sample cover letter. Keep it short and to the point.

Your name

Place your head shot under your name.

This allows people to see your face as they read your letter.

Union affiliation (SAG/AFTRA) (If you are a member)

address

city, state, zip code

phone number – cell number

e-mail address – Web address

Date

Jeremy Jen
C/O The Brooke Agency
6817 Nancy Way
San Diego, CA 91941

Dear Mr. Jen:

Enclosed is my newest head shot and composite sheet. I am a fresh face in this market, and would like to talk with you about representation for (choose the areas that are right for you) TV/radio commercials, feature films, TV shows, voice over, promotional and commercial modeling work.

I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest opportunity.

Best Wishes,

Your name

When I first wanted to get into the business I did not know the names of any agents. Nor did I know about any lists of agents that were available. I had to be creative. First, I attended a number of plays and talked to the actors afterward. I asked them for the names of the best commercial agents in the area. I contacted the local Chamber of Commerce to get the names of the largest advertising agencies in the area. I called a few art/creative directors and asked them which agents they use when booking actors and models for ads. I also asked them for the names of a few

photographers in the area. Then I contacted the photographers to find out which agents they use when booking models for commercial jobs.

In some areas, it can be very difficult to find an agent. An actor I know was looking for a New York agent. He sent out his head shot, copies of awards and reviews from plays he had appeared in (which included a wonderful review in *The New York Times*). He mailed his package to 160 agents, but received only one response. However, that agent signed him, and he has landed some wonderful film and TV roles. For print work as well as TV and film, you only need one great agent for your career to take off.

After contacting the agent, make sure you follow the agent's rules and policies. Once I was in an agent's office that had a sign on the door that clearly said "by appointment only." A model walked in asking for one of the agents by name. (There could be up to seven or eight agents working in one modeling agency.) The model told the agent that he had spoken with her a few months ago and wanted to drop off some of his composite sheets and set up an appointment to show her his mini book (a small book that contains the model's portfolio). The agent told the model that "the agency won't be interviewing new models for another six months." After the model left, the agent threw all of the model's comps into the trash can. I was stunned. I saw the comps, and they looked very good. I asked why she threw them away. She said, "If the model does not have the courtesy to follow our basic rule of not coming into the office without an appointment, how could we trust him to act responsibly on a shoot when he would be representing our agency?" By not following one of the agency's primary policies, this model lost the opportunity to be represented by a great agency. Different agents have different ways of running their agency. It is important to respect their wishes.

Make Sure the Agent is Legitimate

Most agents are honest and hard-working people, but there are a few scam artists out there that you should be aware of.

There are some people who call themselves agents but actually make their living ripping off models. They prey on people who make decisions based on their emotions instead of good sound judgment. Often, they will tell you that you have a lot of potential and that with their guidance they will make you a star. They might ask for up-front money to cover their promotional expenses. If that happens, walk out the door.

Legitimate agents make their money by getting a percentage of the bookings they get for the model. Corrupt agents make money not by booking models, but by receiving "up-front money" and by sending models to a photographer who actually works for them. The model will be told that all of his or her head shots and compos-

ite sheets must be shot by this one photographer. They will charge extraordinary fees for the work.

A few years ago I saw an ad in a Washington D.C. paper from a “New York” agent who was relocating and looking for models. It felt like a scam to me, and I wanted to see first hand how these thieves operate. I called and set up an interview with the “agent.” I pretended that I had no experience and told him that I wanted to be a model. He told me that he rates everyone on a scale of one to five. If I was a five he would represent me. He told me I was a four. I told him how disappointed I was and began to leave. I knew he was not going to let me walk out the door. As I put my hand on the door knob he said, “Aaron, you know what, you are a four but you are very close to being a five. In fact I know a great photographer who could turn you into a five. With the right pictures I could start sending you up to New York.” What he failed to mention was that the “great” photographer was part of his company.

I should have gotten an Academy Award for the excitement I showed when I found out that I could become a five and be sent to New York. I told him that I had never been professionally photographed; still he was promising to send me to New York. No credible agent would risk their reputation by sending someone with no experience to the largest commercial modeling market in the world. I asked the agent, “What do I do next?” He whipped out a contract and said “All you have to do is sign here.” I very quickly glanced at the contract and noticed the cost of the photo was \$1,200. I told him I definitely wanted to do this but I would have to look the contract over at home and come back the next day. He put his hand on the contract and told me that “the contract does not leave his office.” He also said that “a model’s and agent’s relationship is built on trust. If you can’t trust your agent then your agent will not be able to get work for you.” I told him that I would have to call him back, and left. This guy was a sophisticated and manipulative con man.

To help you choose a reputable agent, I have put together a list of things to look for when interviewing with an unfamiliar agent:

- Make sure your appointment is scheduled during work hours.
- Always meet the agent at his or her office. Do not meet with an unfamiliar agent anywhere else.
- Look around the office. Are there copies of ads (tear sheets) they have booked for their models? If so, this is a good sign.
- Are the phones ringing? You want to see a busy office.
- Ask to see the head shots and comps of the models they represent. Do they look good? You might want to request to see the comps of a few of the models whose ads are displayed in the office. These charlatans have been known to fool people by placing ads in their office of models they do not represent. If an agent is really

working with a model, he or she should have the model's composite sheet on hand.

- Do some research prior to your appointment and see if the agency has a Web site. If so, look at the talent they represent.
- If you know any models who work with the agent, call them before your interview. Do they like the agent? Do they get work through the agent? Does the agent treat them well? Are they paid on time? (Generally payments are made within 90 days.)
- Do you feel comfortable with the agent?
- Call the local SAG, AFTRA, or ACTRA office. They have nothing to do with commercial modeling, but they might have some information about the agency.
- Go to the **Better Business Bureau's Web site** (www.bbb.org/) to see if any complaints have been made against the agency. Having a few complaints doesn't necessarily mean the agency is bad.
- If the agent lies to you, makes outrageous promises, or asks for money (to cover phone calls or consultations), keep looking. Legitimate agents do not ask for expense money.

Signing With an Agent

Some commercial modeling agents ask models to sign exclusive contracts. If you sign an exclusive contract, you may only accept bookings from that agent. You may, however, be able to accept a booking with another agent if you obtain permission from your agent. If you are not signed with an agent, you can freelance and accept bookings from any agent. Agents in certain markets, like Los Angeles, require models and actors to sign exclusive contracts.

There are pros and cons to signing with an agent. On the positive side, you will have one person working very hard on your behalf. You will only need to supply one agent with composite sheets and head shots. Life is simpler. When you are not available to work on certain days, you only need to notify one agent.

On the negative side, if your agent is not getting calls for the bulk of the projects in your area, work could be very slow for you. When you are first getting started, it might be better for you to sign with one agent and see how things go. If you are not happy with your representation, you can always change agents.

If you are just beginning, don't sign long-term agreements with an agent you are unfamiliar with. If asked to sign, find out how many other models in your "category" are already signed. Your "category" includes other models who could be booked for the same job as you. There will always be other signed models in your category. However, it is not in your best interest to be one of 100 others who could be submitted for the same job. If yours is the only agent sending models to a go-see, you have a much better chance of getting booked for the job if there are fewer mod-

els in your category. See if you can work out a trial period of six to twelve months. If you like the way you are being represented, sign a longer-term contract.

Before signing with an agent, make sure you understand everything in the contract. If you are not sure about something, show it to a lawyer. Be cautious. To research an agency or file a grievance, here are some helpful Web sites: **Internet Fraud Complaint Center** (www.ic3.gov) and the **Federal Trade Commission** (www.ftc.gov/). Don't feel you have to avoid an agency just because a few negative complaints have been filed against them.

Getting an Agent's Attention

If you want to be represented by a particular agent, but you are having a difficult time making a connection, here is something you can try. Book a job on your own, and ask the agent if he or she will handle the booking. Chances are the agent will be glad to represent you. It will be easily made money for the agent. The small percentage that you will lose will be well worth the connection you will have made. The first time I gave a booking to an agent I actually made money because the agent negotiated a much higher fee than I could have.

Managers and Casting Directors

Managers and casting directors normally work with actors, but, since many commercial models are actors, I decided to discuss them in this book.

A manager is the person who helps guide and counsel every aspect of an actor's career. Unlike agents, a manager works with a smaller group of people, offering more personal attention. The manager gets paid by taking a percentage (approximately 15%) of any jobs the client books. The manager does not negotiate fees for the actor; that is the agent's job. To learn more about managers and how you can find one, visit the **Talent Managers Association** at: www.talentmanagers.org.

A casting director is hired by a producer to find actors for a project. Actors audition for a casting director in order to be considered for a role. Many casting directors will only accept head shots that are submitted by agents or actors they know. However, you can always send your head shot to a casting director who is working on a show that you feel is right for you. To make contact with many casting directors, visit **The Casting Society of America** at www.castingsociety.com.

