

**THE
COMMERCIAL
ACTOR'S MANUAL**

FROM A TALENT AGENT'S DESK

See You In Those Commercials!

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Dedication

*To All The Aspiring And Working Commercial
Talent Needing That Extra Direction.*

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“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

Don't Just Wish—Make It Happen

One of the greatest rewards as a talent agent in this industry was not only working with incredible seasoned talent but also with those just starting out, and witnessing them reach their dreams of not only booking their first commercials but continuing and growing their success in the commercial world.

Always believe in yourself—set goals—set a plan of action—stay dedicated—reach high—stay focused—research—train—train—train—stay on top of your game—package your materials—work hard—stay committed—take advice from working professionals—never give up.

Looking forward to seeing you in those commercials!

Introduction

LET'S GET TO IT

What makes commercials great is that even if you do not have any previous commercial and/or theatrical credits or bookings, you still have a great shot of securing representation. Making commercials an easier route when it comes to breaking it into the entertainment business. But having said that, commercial agents will not sign just about anyone that submits to them for representation. Far from the truth.

This is a Business.

One of the ways a commercial talent agency builds their success and reputation *is* based on their talent roster consisting of *professional* talent that understands this and has the same business approach and outlook.

The key piece is, if you want to break into commercials and have a successful and fruitful career you have to approach this business for what it is... a business.

Commercial agents earn a commission from talent earnings on a commercial booking. Therefore they are dedicating their time and are working free of cost until that booking. In the fast world of commercials, agents need to see dedication, availability, understanding of needed materials, training, and professionalism before considering and/or signing a new talent.

This industry is extremely competitive and it takes no excuses. As an actor, don't allow any type of excuses to come between you

and your goals. Don't overthink and complicate and the competition should only motivate you and make you work harder. But don't just work harder... work smarter. Skip over just "wanting" and "feeling" and go straight to the *doing* and *getting*. No distractions. If successful, working actors do it, you can do it too! Let's get started!

Section One

HOW TO GET NOTICED BY A COMMERCIAL AGENT

Always do your research. Reputable talent agencies will never take any upfront fees from any talent.

Distinguished Talent Agencies representing commercial talent are either SAG-AFTRA Franchised or are affiliated with the Association of Talent Agents (ATA).

A list of franchised and/or affiliated agencies can be accessed for your research through the websites listed below.

<https://www.agentassociation.com> (ATA)

<https://www.sagaftra.org> (SAG/AFTRA)

Research *any* agency you wish to pursue regardless of the agency's affiliation.

Every Talent Agency representing commercial talent will have specifications on new talent submissions with their adopted way for receiving talent inquiries regarding representation. Always research the agency you wish to work with so that you never fall into any missed instruction.

THE DIFFERENT METHODS ONE CAN USE

One of the most common methods used by talent is through email submissions and those can prove to be extremely effective.

EMAIL SUBMISSIONS

There is a large volume of talent submissions coming through to talent agencies and in order to get noticed you have to have yours stand out with the right information and materials.

YOUR COVER LETTER

Agents get extremely busy and in between their workload and the time they have to look through new talent submissions, the last thing an agent wants to do is read full-length, never-ending cover letters. Your cover letter should be short and to the point.

WHAT YOU SHOULD INCLUDE WHETHER YOU ARE A BEGINNER OR AN EXPERIENCED ACTOR

- **Your Union Status**—There are union (SAG-AFTRA) and non-union commercial opportunities and most agencies will consider both statuses. You can discuss your status with the agent you decide to work with.
- **Any Recent Bookings**—*Commercial* and/or theatrical. Although you are submitting for commercial representation, adding/mentioning your recent relevant theatrical bookings can be just the key in bringing you in. Theatrical credits are also used by commercial agents as pitching tools on specific commercial breakdowns.

When including theatrical credits, include your IMDb link for reference. If you do not *yet* have any bookings behind you, do not stress it. You will get there. Focus on your other selling points for now.

- Any Commercial Casting Offices that you might have continuously auditioned for and/or created a good working relationship with. Huge points. Omit if that does not apply, everyone starts somewhere.
- Relevant Social Media Following—With today's social media standing your significant following could just be the closing factor on representation. If it applies to you, provide your current *significant* number of followers and social media links and shortly elaborate on what it is that you do.
- Special Skill Sets You Excel In—Sports, instruments, dance, etc. In the commercial world your special skills are *extremely* important. Commercial casting is always looking for REAL Skill Sets. For example, REAL yogis, REAL motorcycle riders with license, REAL guitarists, REAL dancers, REAL fitness trainers, REAL surfers, REAL marathon runners, etc. Your special skill sets might just land you your next commercial representation.

Your resume should always include all your special skills, but referencing the one's you excel at in your cover letter can prove to be a great tip.

- Any Other Fluent Languages Spoken—The fact that you speak another language could just be the factor that sets you apart.
- Your Training—Your training will be one of your *biggest* factors when it comes to attracting commercial representation.

Your training will be one of your biggest strengths and selling points as it is your indication of your *Know-How* ability.

But the key to capturing a potential agent's attention is not just having training but having the right, relevant, and recognized by commercial agents and casting professionals type of training.

Reference your recent and ongoing on-camera commercial and IMPROV training.

KEY NOTE—IMPROV IMPROV IMPROV

In commercials, aside from on-camera commercial classes, your improv training is what most agents skim through to find on your resume.

I cannot stress enough the importance of improv for commercial talent. In the Los Angeles market having UCB (Upright Citizens Brigade), Groundlings, and/or Second City—just to name three of the most respected improv houses—on one's resume is like music to one's ears when it comes to commercials. Even better if you belong to an improv troupe!

If you are in your beginning stages and have not yet invested in your training make it your *first goal* to do so. Remember your training becomes your biggest strength. It's not just about you getting the agent to trust in you and your ability...it's about *YOU*. You will be competing and building your own reputation in those casting rooms. Know your craft, sharpen your skills, get the knowledge needed to win over those rooms once the opportunity is there!

There will be *trained* competition within your realm, so give yourself a fair shot. Make it your goal never to fall behind due to your lack of training and/or knowledge of your craft.

- Any Comedy Experience—Reference any relevant stand-up and/or comedic experience.
- Your Casting Profile Link –For commercial talent in the Los Angeles market this will be your *LA Casting* profile link (Casting Networks).

Every commercial actor will need to have an online casting profile account. Depending on the market of representation the casting service sites on which an actor will have their profiles set up on will/may vary.

Casting Networks (better known as *LA Casting*) in the Los Angeles market is one of the most important casting service sites on the commercial side. There are two other essential casting service sites one must be familiar with and I will cover all three including *LA Casting* and their importance in detail in the following sections.

- ▶ **Bonus To Your Cover Letter**—If you are submitting to an agent whom you recently saw in an online informative video, showcase, outing, etc., including a short note referencing that circumstance adds a personal touch that can most definitely be used and appreciated.

Even if you might not have any reference you can use, do a little research. Always make it a point to address your submission within that department to the right agent. Make sure you have the correct spelling of their name. Sometimes it's even the smallest details that count and set you apart. It shows the agent you are doing your own homework and targeting them specifically and not just "fishing around," even if you are.

Additional Notes—This goes without saying, but please include the fact that you are submitting for commercial representation. Some agents represent actors in other areas aside from commercials. Include anything additionally that might set you apart, anything you might be currently or in the immediate future working on as far as your career. Agents love proactive talent!

Remember, keep your cover letters short and to the point.

ATTACH YOUR PHOTOS, RESUME, AND ANY COMMERCIAL /REEL FOOTAGE.

► **Attaching The *Right* Type of Photos to Your Submission is Extremely Important**

For all experienced commercial talent you would attach your *recent professional* commercial headshots.

Key Note—There is no standard one given number on how many photos an actor should include in one's email submission. That will all depend on each agent individually and their guidelines. If none have been given, a good general to follow would be anywhere between a total of one to four.

For all talent, just starting out not having a professional photo package of headshots *just yet* is not necessarily a deal breaker. In that case what you can include is a quality photo of you (headshot) that can speak to your personality.

Personality, without going over the top, is key.

Any photo submitted to an agent should always speak *quality*, as that photo will be a representation of you.

Photos should have good lighting and good framing and no busy, distracting, and/or dark backgrounds.

Whether you have that great relatability feel that people love to connect with, and/or that great character type sense, and/or your own unique beauty feel... it's about who you are.

A good commercial photo to a potential agent should project your personality without going big or going over the top. It's who you are with a subtle sense of expressiveness, whether in your smile and/or through your eyes. What commercial agents look for in a photo is your confidence, personality, and what your marketability will be. A great photo almost *speaks* with great subtle energy.

Once you have acquired representation your agent will discuss with you the needed professional commercial “type” photos for your marketing package.

Key Note—For talent ready to get new/updated professional photos taken, I would recommend obtaining representation beforehand and/or seeking professional direction. All too often actors find themselves with unusable photos once representation is obtained and before understanding what it is that they need when it comes to the business side of agent/casting headshots.

When it comes to an actor’s photo package, everything from the photographer to the wardrobe to *suggested* character types matters and is extremely relevant as your photos will become the first thing that a casting director will see.

I will cover examples of needed photos within one’s marketing package and the reasons behind their importance in the upcoming section.

► **Including Skill Shot Photos is Secondary**

If you are submitting to an agency and you have an *excelled* skill set as one of your strengths, include a skill photo in your submission; meaning your “in action” shot for that skill set. It could prove to be a great bonus.

For that example, if you are an *expert* yogi, attach a photo of you in an advanced yoga pose. If you are a trained ballerina, attach a photo of you in that element. Someone who is advanced at parkour would attach a photo of them showcasing that skill, and so on. Make sure those photos are “real” and speak quality.

Skill Shots are considered secondary photos and are only considered useful when showcasing specific strong/excelled skill sets.

► **Attach Your Resume**

Your resume should be well formatted as it speaks professionalism. Do not include any “featured/extra/background” work on your

resume. Make sure your skills are accurately listed and you have all your information up to date.

Note—Please use your best judgment when inputting special skills on your resume, listing only relevant special skills and no weird type skills should go on your professional resume.

► **Attach Any Commercial Reel/Footage**

Tip—For actors that have booked previous on-camera commercial work, you can use websites like **Ispot.tv** or even **YouTube** when trying to locate one's commercials or aired spots when creating a *quality* marketing commercial reel for your agent/talent submissions. This could also be a great bonus.

Note—Any attached materials should always be correctly resized and any links provided should be easily accessible with no password restrictions.

WHAT TO AVOID IN YOUR SUBMISSION

Skip referencing any case that you were “destined” to act or “dreamed of being on the big screen” and just “*need* that right representation to take you there.” Please do not do this. Talent agents know this narrative and have read/heard it a thousand times. Nothing personal. Go straight into your *strengths* and avoid any vents.

Do not send your email submission including other potential agencies email address in that same submission. Talent agents understand that as an actor looking for representation you are submitting to other agencies at the same time. But sending one email including other agencies information in the “cc” section does not speak professionalism and is not often well received.

REGULAR MAIL SUBMISSIONS

There are current prominent talent agents who will accept and prefer direct mail submissions over electronic ones.

When doing mailings, include your cover letter (always printed, never hand written), enclosed with your headshot and resume. Your resume should *always* be evenly and neatly stapled to the back of your headshot. Following any additional instructions that might have been given by that agency.

OPEN CALLS

Some commercial agencies hold Open Calls in search for new commercial talent, making this yet another way to get considered and seen.

► **Attending an Open Call**

Although this can vary depending on the agency, one should always be prepared to be provided with a short commercial copy and to go on tape.

Important Note—Always remember to bring your commercial headshot with a resume stapled to the back. Whether you are meeting an agent or attending an open call audition always have your headshot with your resume ready and with you.

Actors 101—Never neglect to have your resume not stapled to the back of your headshot.

For the Love of Peanuts!

“I forgot.” “I couldn’t find scissors.” “I left it at home.” “I was running late.” “This never happens, but of all times, today.” “I made changes and never printed the updated version of my resume.” And the famous “My printer broke down” and/ or “My printer just happen to run out of ink.” All are tales/excuses agents heard and know all too well, when what it really projects is that an actor just isn’t that

serious when it comes to their opportunity. Please don't let that be you. Stay on top of your game at all times. If you seem not to take this seriously no one else will either.

► **Tips When Going On Tape**

Remember to slate your name *clearly* and not to hold your commercial copy in front of your face during your commercial read as the agents going over your footage won't be able to see you.

Dress accordingly. I have seen some questionable wardrobe choices. Remember this is a reflection of you. I am not suggesting one shows up in a suit—and please don't, seriously, there is no need for that—but do not come in your bathing suit either. Find a nice, casual medium that represents you.

Do not allow the other talent in the waiting area to intimidate you.

Don't oversell it. Stay confident. Sprinkle your personality and let your training guide you through.

**Competition should never stop you; it
should make you work harder.**

SHOWCASES/COMEDY/ IMPROV PERFORMANCES

Showcases, comedy, and improv performances are a great way to get seen and scouted by agents. It never hurts to send a postcard or include your upcoming performance details to an agent you wish to get attention from. You might just find them sitting in the audience.

Key Note—There are many reputable outlets/studios within one's market showcasing great talent, that receive respect in the industry as they offer/prepare talent with a wealth of knowledge on this business.

BUT—There are certain establishments that one should be extremely wary off.

Always be wary of any establishments luring talent in with “promised industry exposure” for a hefty price attached to it. Please do not fall prey to spending unreasonable amounts of money on promises of being “discovered.”

Be cautious. Always—Always—Do Your Research.

REFERRALS—REFERRALS—REFERRALS

One of the *BEST* ways to get seen/noticed by a talent agent is through referrals.

It could be any industry professional’s referral that could land you your next commercial representation.

Casting Director, Manager, Acting Coach...

This industry is made up of hard working professionals; one might say a small community on a large scale constantly networking and/or working together. A referral helps tremendously in getting you through an agent’s door.

Even a fellow actor with great representation can be a great referral!

If you happen to have a friend that has great representation, asking them for a referral could be just the key in getting yourself a meeting with great potential representation.

Talent agents take preference in referrals.

REASONS AN AGENT MIGHT NOT CALL YOU IN FOR A MEETING

There may be numerous reasons why you might not get called in for a meeting regarding potential representation.

Do not let that discourage you!

In some cases it might be as straightforward as having too many of your commercial types on one's current talent list or you sending in your materials during their busiest times.

Other reasons might include agents simply thinking you might just not be ready for representation within their agency based on what their current roster's guidelines hold. Whatever the reason, do not let it discourage you. Keep submitting to agencies and building your materials.

