

Choosing A Talent Agent

Talent Agent *n.* An agent and personal manager for actors. Each agent is the exclusive representative for a small number of actors, called the agent's *roster*.

A *Talent Agent* is a professional talent manager who represents actors for film, television and commercials and helps them find and *book* work. When *casting directors* send out the *breakdowns* for their projects, they only send them to provincially licensed talent agents.

There are approximately two hundred agents in total working at the 100+ talent agencies registered in BC, and each agent represents 50-100 actors of various ages, looks, skill levels and ethnicities (a *roster* of actors). Agents are a necessary “gateway” to professional commercial, film and television auditions because there are simply too many actors for any of them to be effectively “self represented”. There are approximately 15,000 actors in Vancouver with professional representation.

With so many actors competing for the same roles, a good agent is careful about taking on a new actor. Ultimately the best agents will turn down anyone who is a “conflict” with the actors already on their roster, meaning actors that would audition for similar roles. Initially this may make it difficult to find a good talent agent, but think about it from the other side—this is exactly the behaviour you want from your talent agent once you're on their roster.

A real agent only makes money when their actors book work, so they're taking a risk by *signing* new *talent*. A typical agreement gives the agent 15% of whatever income their actors make. There should be no up front cost to join a talent agency. Extras agencies are a little different, for more info download the “Extra Work” PDF at www.bizstudio.ca/confidence

Acting Terms

Terms in *italics* are defined in the glossary on p.26, and additional definitions and URL's are listed at the bottom of each page.



Your Agent Works For You

“My agent said, ‘You aren’t good enough for movies.’ I said, ‘You’re fired.’”

Sally Field
Actress; 2 Oscars;
8 Emmy Noms,
3 Wins; 10
Golden Globe
Noms, 2 Wins
Los Angeles, CA

ESB Talent Agencies List

Talent agencies have to register with the BC Employment Standards Branch before they can submit their actors for professional auditions.

www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/talent/list.htm

Looking for Representation

The first thing to do is assemble a “short list” of talent agencies. Start with the ESB list, the URL in the sidebar will take you to a list of all 100+ licensed talent agencies. Then start assembling professional recommendations. Ask your acting teachers, ask your peers, any actor who has an agent, any professional actor you come in contact with. Assemble a short list of 15-30 agencies.

Now choose five agencies from your list to start with. Read each agency’s website carefully. Note of the name of each agent, and when and how they accept submissions from actors seeking representation. With most agents you can even check out their roster on IMDB Pro (www.pro.imdb.com) to check out potential conflicts. Note that only actors with professional film & tv credits (not commercials) are listed on IMDB.

Once you’ve got your short list, put together your submission: cover letter, headshot and resume. A personal recommendation from an actor who’s on an agent’s roster, or anyone else who can introduce you personally, is the best way to make sure your submission gets seriously considered. Otherwise, email or mail your submission per the instructions on the agency’s website and cross your fingers. If you don’t hear back, you’re probably never going to. They’ve seen the submission and they’re not interested. Pick five more agencies from your short list and start at the beginning.

Signing with a talent agent is the beginning of a business relationship. If at all possible meet with more than one so you can be sure you’re making the right decision. The more you trust your agent, the more effectively they can work for you.

Casting Workbook: New actors will be expected to purchase a membership on this casting site www.castingworkbook.com

Cover Letter

Keep your cover letter short and sweet. Agents won't spend more than about ten seconds reading it anyway. As a general rule, they'll spend ten seconds with your cover letter, ten seconds with your resume, and thirty seconds with your photo. Then they'll decide if they want to bring you in for a meeting.

Dear (Name of Agency),

My name is (Full Name), I am (age) years old and I'm looking for representation. (If you're going to add something fun about yourself or something about the agency that shows you did your homework do it here but keep it very brief).

I have some (types of performance) experience, and training in (types of performance). In the coming year I expect to do some (performance) and continue to study with (school or teacher).

Thank you for reviewing my materials. You can contact me at (phone) or (email).

Sincerely,

(Full Name)

Training & Experience

"I love to see training and experience in a submission, even if it is just one school play."

Liz Coughlin
Agent
Collingwood
Management
Vancouver, BC

Headshot

A headshot is an 8" x 10" photograph used to promote you as an actor. Casting directors look at your headshot when they're deciding whether to bring you in for an audition. It's your introduction to the industry side of acting, so you should do it right.

Your headshot should look like you on a good day. Make sure that your full head and shoulders are visible in your headshot, no weird angles, no hats, minimal makeup, no weird hairstyles, no big jewelry, a smile is best for commercials, for film & television it should reflect your personality. Keep your wardrobe simple and wear the outfits that you look best in. Newer clothes generally look crisper and have a better shape, and it's a good idea to wear something close fitting so agents and other industry folk can get an idea of your body type.

Actor Promo

"For an actor just starting out, headshots are the most important investment you will make."

Elena Kirschner
Talent Agent
RED Mgmt.
Vancouver, BC

The bottom line with headshots is that if you can't walk in the door looking like your headshot, it's no good. The best glamour shot in the world is junk unless you walk in the door looking just as glamorous. Casting directors and talent agents both expect the person in the headshot to come walking in the door.

When you're ready to get professional headshots, expect to pay \$300-600 for several hundred shots and \$100 to print up 50 8"x10" copies of the one you choose. It's best to go to a photographer with extensive headshot experience so your picture makes you look like a pro. If you're under eighteen you can get away with using a recent 4"x6" colour photograph while you're looking for an agent, although it's worth considering that looking like a pro can help you get a better agent.

Find a Photographer: *Browse photographers' portfolios online at any repro company (i.e. www.rocketrepro.com)*

Resume

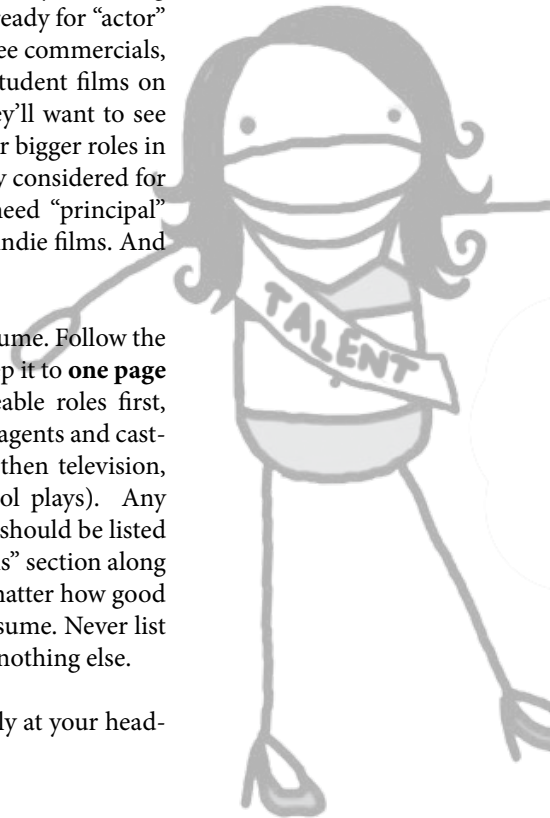
Your resume is a one-page list of your credits, training and skills. The first and most important thing to list on the top of your resume is your full name, and then your agent's name and contact info, or your contact info if you don't have an agent. Right below that put your height, weight, hair and eye colour. Women interested in modeling may also want to include their sizes.

The purpose of the resume is to present your current experience level so that agents know what size of roles to submit you for, and so casting directors, producers and directors can assess how big a risk they are taking by casting you in a role. Before you're ready for "actor" roles (1-2 lines) an agent will want to see commercials, and "actor" roles in independent or student films on your resume. For "principal" roles they'll want to see "actor" roles in fim+tv, or "principal" or bigger roles in indie and student films. To be seriously considered for "guest star" or "co-star" roles you'll need "principal" roles in pro projects or "lead" roles in indie films. And on it goes.

An acting resume is not like a work resume. Follow the sample formatting on page six, and keep it to **one page maximum**. List your most recognizable roles first, and remember who this resume is for: agents and casting. That means film gets listed first, then television, then selected theatre (including school plays). Any other kind of performance experience should be listed below your training in the "special skills" section along with sports, languages, etc. It doesn't matter how good you are, this is a professional acting resume. Never list extra work unless you have absolutely nothing else.

Most industry people will look carefully at your headshot, but only skim your resume.

Online Resume: *Keep your online resume up to date at www.castingworkbook.com and www.imdb.com*



FULL NAME

CONTACT INFO

HEIGHT
WEIGHT
EYES
HAIR

(your height in inches)
(your weight in pounds)
(colour)
(colour)

Phone ()
Cell ()
Email ()
Parent's Names

FILM & TELEVISION

<p>NAME OF PROJECT all in capital letters, don't worry about putting a heading "Name" "Role" etc. you don't need to spell it out whoever's reading will get the idea i.e. JANE'S LIFE</p>	<p>SIZE OF ROLE, listed all in caps; no lines = SOC, 1-2 lines = ACTOR, 3-6 lines = PRINCIPAL, more lines = SUPPORTING or LEAD; If it's a very recognizable play or movie you can include the character's name in brackets after the size of the role , i.e. "LEAD (Jane)"</p>	<p>NAME OF DIRECTOR/NAME OF PRODUCTION COMPANY. If it's a student film list the school, i.e. "Jane Smith/VFS" for director Jane Smith at the Vancouver Film School, etc.</p>
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COMMERCIALS

JANE'S COMMERCIAL	SOC	JANE SMITH/COMMERCIAL PRODUCTIONS
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INDUSTRIALS/MUSIC VIDEO

JANE'S MUSIC VIDEO	ACTOR	JANE SMITH/MUSIC VIDEOS INTERNATIONAL
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COMEDY/IMPROV

JANE'S COMEDY IMPROV SHOW	LEAD	JANE SMITH/VANCOUVER THEATRE
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THEATRE/LIVE PERFORMANCE

JANE'S VARIETY SHOW	SUPPORTING	JANE SMITH/VANCOUVER VARIETY THEATRE
JANE'S HIGH SCHOOL SHOW	LEAD (Juliet)	JANE SMITH/VANCOUVER SEC. SCHOOL
JANE'S LOCAL DANCE SHOW	LEAD	JANE SMITH/VANCOUVER DANCE SCHOOL

TRAINING

JANE'S ACTING CLASS	INSTRUCTOR	ACTING SCHOOL (VANCOUVER)
CONFIDENCE ON CAMERA	MICHAEL BEAN	BIZ STUDIO (VANCOUVER)

SKILLS

A list of anything that you can imagine being asked to do on film—especially any sport or physical activity, languages, and all performing skills including dance, singing, theatre, improv, clown, etc. Don't lie, and don't "pad" the list with things that aren't really skills. List only the skills you might be asked to do on film, which means you can leave out babysitting, essay writing, etc. You can include anything that you can do at a 3/10 level where 0 is not at all and 10 is total mastery, and you may want to include brackets after some skills with your skill level i.e. Skateboard (basic), Baton Twirling (Champion), Squirrel Imitations (Intermediate). Feel free to include one or two funny or strange skills as conversation starters, as long as they are things you can actually do, just to give casting directors an excuse to ask about those things and talk to you more.

Demo

Some agents will ask for a demo when they're considering you for representation. Typically a demo is a two minute video used to show agents, directors and casting directors your range and skill as an actor.

If you're new, your demo should have two short contrasting scenes shot in medium closeup (head and shoulders). Use footage from an acting class that shows off your range, or record a couple of scenes yourself. You can find scripts online or at the public library. The video quality of this kind of demo doesn't matter much, but the acting quality matters a lot, because anyone watching it will assume that it represents the best acting you can do. Be prepared to throw it away and start again if it isn't your best work.

By contrast, a professional demo should include clips from commercials, film and television, professional, student and independent (indie) projects that you've worked on. One of the best reasons to do student and indie films is to build your demo—the whole film doesn't have to be good as long as you get a 30 second clip for your demo that showcases you well.

Talent Agents + Demo Reels

The demo reel gives us a sneak peek at your skill level; this can help us decide if you move on to the next step, the first interview for agency representation."

Brenda Wong
Agent, Talent Co.
Vancouver, BC



Online Demo: Put your demo on your website or on Casting Workbook so your agent can send it to Casting Directors.

Glossary of Terms

Actor: A person whose profession is acting on stage or screen.

Audition: An interview for a particular *role* or job as an actor.

Background Performer: People that appear in the background of a shot to make a film set look more real by sitting, walking, driving, riding bicycles, etc. (see *extra*)

Book: To engage an actor for a role (i.e. “He *booked* four days on the film.”)

Breakdown: Details of a character the casting director is trying to cast (i.e. “STUDENT, age 14-16, riding a unicycle”). Sent to licensed talent agents via casting services like Breakdown Services or The Casting Workbook.

Call Back: A second or later audition for the same job.

Casting Director: The person responsible for finding actors to fill roles in a film, television or commercial project.

Cover Letter: A letter sent with, and explaining the contents of, a submission from an actor to a talent agent seeking representation.

Demo: A demo or “demo reel” is the motion picture or video equivalent of an artist’s portfolio. It is typically used as a tool to promote the artist’s skill, talent, and experience in a selected field, such as acting, directing, cinematography, editing, special effects, animation, or video games and other graphics.

Director: The head of the crew, in charge of making key decisions about actors and action.

Headshot: An actor’s eight-by-ten-inch (8”x10”) publicity photo.

Indie: An Independent Film—any film not produced by a major studio or production company, or any low-budget or no-budget film.

MOW: Movie of the Week—a movie made for television only.

Pilot: The first episode of a new TV series. Often a production company will make a pilot in an attempt to secure funding to produce more episodes.

Producer: The business person who runs the production company and oversees major aspects of a production.

Representation: Referring to actors on the roster of a professional talent agent (i.e. “Do you have *representation*?” or “I’m currently seeking *representation*.”)

Resume: A one-page summary of an actor’s experience, skills and training.

Role: An actor’s part in a play, film, television show, commercial, etc.

SAE: Skilled Actor Extra, an *extra* hired to perform a special skill on camera. Can be anything from lifting weights to juggling to walking in high heels.

SAG: Screen Actors Guild is the union for film & TV actors in the USA.

Script: The written text of a play, movie, commercial or television program.

Signing: To obtain *representation* with a *talent agent*.

Stand In: A person hired to “stand in” for the main actors so that the production crew can set up lights, etc. Also called “second team” by the AD’s (i.e. “First team you can relax, let’s have second team in here.”).

Stunts: Anybody who falls, tumbles, climbs, swings, lifts heavy things, sets themselves on fire, or in any other way does something potentially dangerous on-camera. If you’re interested, start learning the skills now—martial arts, gymnastics, dance, stage fighting, how to take a fall, firearms, stunt driving, etc.

Submissions: Actors suggested by *talent agents* in response to a *breakdown* issued by a *casting director* (i.e. “How many *submissions* did you get for that *role*?”).

Talent: An actor or other performer.

Talent Agent: An agent and personal manager for actors. Each agent is the exclusive representative for a small number of actors, called the agent’s *roster*.

BIZ STUDIO **PROFESSIONAL SCREEN ACTING FOR KIDS+TEENS**

"It tells me something if an actor is taking classes... it means that this person believes in themselves enough as an actor to invest the time, to invest the money, to train, to work on themselves."

- Judy Lee, Casting Director, Vancouver

"Biz Studio is like an acting boot camp for kids... the results are staggering. Michael Bean is brilliant."

-Stuart Aikins, Casting Director, Vancouver

Biz Studio is Vancouver's top professional screen acting school for kids and teens. Each class only takes six students so that instructors (all working actors) can give each participant a maximum of support and individual attention. All classes are on-camera in a working casting studio, and mix audition skills, scene study, and acting exercises to help students develop the skills they need to audition successfully and to work on set. We are passionate about preparing our students to work in film, television and commercials.

For classes, info, and audition listing for kids+teens, visit www.bizstudio.ca



Michael Bean, Owner+Head Coach at Biz Studio.

"Kids that study with Michael seem to book more work, and isn't that the goal!"

- Brenda Wong, Agent, Talent Co.