

The REPRESENTED Actor

a Matthew Harrison essay

As a rule, my essays focus on the art of acting, and not the business.

Well...rules are meant to be broken.

So many actors in Canada have written, phoned, or come to me asking for advice on how to get an agent in Los Angeles, that I thought I'd better set it to print.

Though the worlds of Vancouver (or Totonto or Winnipeg) and Los Angeles are very different, many rules apply for both:

- you need to be diligent and be aggressive without being annoying
- in both cities, relationships rule the business - "who you know" gets you in the door
- make sure you have some "heat"...a recognizable role in a recognizable movie, a good guest star on a major show, a stage play in LA...anything that sets you apart
- know your "hit". In other words know your product and what makes you marketable. (Yes, you can "do anything" as an actor because you have so much talent...but they need to see how to sell you. Be specific and realistic. Know what you're selling).

Here's the bad news:

If you're looking for LA reps...it needs to start now. Any reputable agency is done setting their next year's pilot season roster by Nov 1st. In fact, the very best time to get a new agent is either May or June when they've recovered from pilot season, purged their rosters, and are about to go on vacation...or September, when they're back from vacation and gearing up for next year.

It is VERY, VERY difficult getting a good agent right now. The market is limited and the competition excessive. If you don't have "heat" (i.e. a major US lead in a film or a recurring guest star on a series), or else if you're not 18 and drop dead gorgeous, you will not get an "A" or "B" list agency. That said, a solid "C" list boutique agency would be ideal to have anyways...but even there, they have huge submissions and only see people that are marked as special, meaning:

- great (and I mean, *fantastic*) demo reel and headshots
- a recommendation from a seriously important person (casting director, star, director)
- a person relationship of some sort

The good news:

They're all looking for that next big thing. So you just need to get in there.

The really good news:

You're Canadian. It's huge. It means:

- you probably have experience, some good credits from a few major networks at least, and your resume is probably better than ninety percent of your competition down here.
- More importantly, you have the opportunity to get yourself that "heat" you need by auditioning in Vancouver.
- you have a Canadian agent to help you.
- They love Canadians down here...we're "fresh faced" and "un-jaded". (At least, that's what they think.)

Here's what to do:

- Get your photo and info on www.imdb.com right away. Seriously. It gives them a "hit" to look at.
- Get a killer demo together if you don't already have one. You don't need a lot of big material, just professional stuff that sells you. Fast, tight, sells your ONE casting hit. Three or four minutes tops. Nothing amateur looking.
- Don't cold call or mail envelopes of material. It's a waste of time. Agencies here get thousands (literally tens of thousands) a year and don't even bother opening them.
- Get your Canadian agent to set up meetings.
- Call in favours with absolutely everyone you know...friends with agents, casting directors (CDN and US), friends' agents, anyone who can give you a name to drop when you call LA agents yourself to try and set meetings. (I got my LA manager through an agent in Vancouver that I know because I coach her actors.)
- Decide if you also want a manger. A manager in LA can help with submissions while you're waiting on an agency, and more over, can really help in getting agency meetings. Once you have the agent, the manager earns her/his money by working with the agent to get you meetings and also get you seen in places agents can't. The same rules apply for getting a manger: know your hit, know the market, have heat.
- Get that list together, come down to LA, drop off headshot resumes and demos to the people that you've called.
- Get into an agency/casting director workshop in LA while you're here. In Vancouver they are organized once in a awhile. In LA they're done all the time and considered part of the business. Meet people, get numbers. Drop off more packages.
- Do follow up calls...and get in there.

If you don't get an agent:

Set yourself up right for the next pilot season...by staying in Vancouver (or Toronto or Winnipeg). In Canada, you're lucky enough to have a busy market with relatively little competition.

- Get a really good relationship going with a Canadian casting director or two. Again...get "heat" by booking something noticeable to the LA market.
- Hit up everyone for contacts.
- Save money...pilot season is expensive.
- Get your agent to put you on tape for as many pilots as possible (for which you're good casting), for two reasons: (1) so that agents in LA see your face and name. I know from experience that they remember you when you get back in front of them after you have your agent and start auditioning. (2) I have two clients who have booked a pilot from sending down a tape, and then flown to LA to screen-test. Needless to say, they got an agent after that!

Come down to LA for a month now and then between work in Canada. Dig around. Meet people. Take a workshop or two, or three, feel it out. Talk to other actors. Talk to Canadians down here. Get ready to be here in May, June, and/or July to hunt down an agent. Get into a Los Angeles theater company and do a stage play, or scene presentation, etc. Do the **Sixty five Things An Actor Can Do** – only do it in LA.

Yes, I know. It feels like all that work you did in Vancouver you did for years to get an agent and get work has to be started all over again down here. But you have great head starts. Experience, credits, and Canadian contacts to help.

And really...you're an actor thinking of working in Hollywood. Isn't life fun?!