



The Performer and the Agent

WHAT IS AN AGENT?

An agent in the entertainment industry carries out activities on behalf of a performer in return for financial benefit. The main role of an agent is to represent you in negotiations with employers about possible engagements. An agent is responsible for finding work for you and negotiating the terms and conditions for that work.

HOW DO I GET AN AGENT?

If you have graduated from a recognised acting school, the school will have organised a final year production to showcase its graduates to agents and the industry at large.

You will contact agents directly after graduation or at a time in your career that you believe you require representation.

The Alliance can provide you with a list of contacts in New South Wales (for other states and territories, contact the state branches). The Alliance also has a list of agents, which are members of the Drama Agents Association - a national association of drama agents. Its members agree to work in accordance with a code of ethics devised by that association.

In approaching agents, you should send a letter requesting an appointment with each agent. Include your resume and photo of yourself. You should follow up the letter with a telephone call. If you are appearing in a production, amateur or otherwise, send them a ticket to come and see you. Be prepared to do a lot of "door knocking"!

There are particular agents who deal in certain areas of the industry such as opera, film, television, dance and theatre. With a few exceptions however, most agents will cover several areas. This is particularly so for theatre, film and television.

HOW CAN I CHOOSE AN AGENT?

In choosing an agent you need to take into account a number of considerations.

For example:

- ◆ the type of work you want to do;
- ◆ the size of the agency;
- ◆ the reputation of the agent;
- ◆ the agents personality - will you get on together?

WHAT DO I DISCUSS WITH MY AGENT?

It is important that when you engage an agent both you and the agent clearly appreciate each others expectations about what you will get out of the relationship.

At the outset, you should discuss:

- ◆ what functions they will fulfil;
- ◆ what shape your career will take;
- ◆ what are the types of roles they will send you for;
- ◆ what happens when you want to leave the agency;
- ◆ if you have to pay them commission if you obtain work through your own efforts;
- ◆ the field of activity in which the agent is authorised to represent you - eg. only in live theatre, or film and television as well, in Australia or overseas;
- ◆ the period for which the agency will represent you; and
- ◆ any obligations of the performer (that is, any obligations you have).

ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY ACT 1989 (This section applies to NSW agents only)

The Act

In NSW, agents are regulated by the Entertainment Industry Act 1989. The Act sets out the obligations of agents, managers and venue consultants (booking agencies), in NSW. Agents must be licensed in accordance with the requirements of this Act. There are also regulations under the Act which refer to the prescribed level of commission among other things.

The NSW Department of Industrial Relations administers the Act. It also accepts and reviews complaints about agents, managers or venue owners. Contact: 02 9020 4540 (direct line), McKell Building, 2-24 Rawson Place Sydney 2000 (postal), <http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/about/services/entertainment/index.html>

Duties of an Agent

Under the Entertainment Industry Act 1989, an agent is described as a person who carries out one or more of the following activities for money, on behalf of the performer:

- ◆ Seeking or finding work for the performer;
- ◆ Negotiating the terms of an agreement for and the conditions of a performance;
- ◆ Finalising arrangements concerning the payment of a performer;
- ◆ Negotiating arrangements relating to the attendance of the performer at a performance;
- ◆ Administering the contract of the performer with an entertainment industry employer.

Commission

Under the Entertainment Industry Act 1989, an agent can only charge the following percentages of a performers salary as commission:

1. for an engagement involving film, television or electronic media - 10%;
2. for live theatre, live musical or variety performances - 10% for any period up to five weeks and then 5% for any period after;
3. in all other cases - 10%.

Commission is negotiated on the performers negotiated rate excluding:

- ◆ travelling and meal allowances;
- ◆ holiday pay;
- ◆ long service leave and superannuation payment;
- ◆ overtime or penalty payments which are paid on an irregular basis;
- ◆ Award or minimum payments in respect of rehearsals.

Payment of Fee

If your agent receives money on your behalf they are obliged to pass this money to you as soon as possible or within 14 days after they have received it. Your agent should provide you with a pay slip clearly outlining what the fee is for, including loadings, residual fees etc.

On the other hand, if you receive your pay directly from an employer, you are obliged to pay your agent's commission as soon as possible.

HELPFUL HINTS

Photographs

When you join the agency, the agent might ask you to pay a fee for a set of portfolio photos taken. As this can be quite expensive, you should ask your agent whether you can use any existing photos you have, or see if you can get your portfolio done cheaper through your own efforts. It pays to shop around!

Demo Tapes

There is a growing trend among casting agents to use demo tapes (audition videos). Be warned - a badly made video is more than useless and indeed could lose you the job!

Contracts

You should keep a copy of any contracts negotiated by your agent for your own business records.

Keeping Your Own Records

You should keep a diary in which you write down any jobs or interviews an agent has arranged for you and any special details your agent may have given you, for example who to report to on location etc.

Tax Exemption Form

You must complete a Tax Exemption form for every job you do, otherwise you will be liable to pay the higher tax rate.

**If you have any further inquiries about agents, please contact the
Alliance Information Desk on (toll free) - 1300 656 512**