

Contacting Casting Directors

Brian Dragonuk posed the questions on this page to the following Washington - Baltimore - Philadelphia area casting directors:

Mike Lemon - Mike Lemon Casting Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Diane Heery - Heery Casting Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
John Strawbridge - Pat Moran & Associates Baltimore Maryland
Betsy Royall - Betsy Royall Casting Baltimore Maryland
Hillary Sachs & Sareva Racher - Randallstown, Maryland

Since most of your offices have different rules & procedures I want to make sure the local acting community understands exactly how and when they should contact you.

Question--

First Contact -- a new actor, someone that just moved into the area; a seasoned theatrical actor looking to expand into film & video; an actor that lives & works in the next market over, etc. (someone that has never contacted your office before). Every actors dream is to be able to meet you in person, Impress you with their look & talent so they will be on the top of your list to call for extra jobs &/ or principal auditions. Exactly what is the best way to make contact and be remembered?

Mike's Response, Mike Lemon Casting, Philadelphia

Talent new to our office should come to our monthly open call on the first Wednesday of each month between 2 and 3:30PM. They should bring ten headshots with resumes attached and a fully memorized and prepared one minute contemporary monologue. If the talent has an agent, that agent can make an appointment for the talent to be seen outside of open call by calling and making those arrangements with Judy Anderson, our receptionist. Aspiring talent unfamiliar with the business should take our "Business of the Business" seminar held monthly to learn how the business works and how to work within it effectively before coming to open call. Details on both open call and the seminar are on our website <http://www.mikelemoncasting.com>

Diane Heery's Response, Heery Casting, Philadelphia

We have various ways for a "new" actor to make contact. First, we have a monthly open call available to anyone (novice or seasoned pro). Or, any actor with representation (an agent or manager) can be seen during a private appointment time, scheduled by their representative.

Or, the actor can mail in a picture and resume for consideration. I look at EVERY picture that comes in the mail personally. If an actor has an interesting headshot/intriguing resume, he/she may be invited in for an appointment-only general audition(without an agent).

Hmmmm... Be remembered? Making that great first impression is important. Be on time, be prepared, show your amazing talent! If an actor is interested in extra work only, he/she need only access our website, download the talent info form, fill it out and mail it in with one picture and resume.

But please... do NOT E-MAIL pictures unless we request them for a specific project.

John StrawBridge's Response, Pat Moran & Associates, Baltimore

First contact -- Headshot and resume. Plain and simple. I know every actor is looking for a way to get noticed or be remembered... but the truth is that it's all about the roles to be cast. If you can help us do our job by filling a role, you'll get noticed. If you impress us with your craft in the audition, you'll be remembered.

Incidentally, don't spend a lot of effort on the cover letter. My assistant opens the mail and discards anything but the HS &R before giving them to me.

Betsy Royall's Response - Betsy Royall Casting Baltimore

Submit a professional picture and resume and wait to be contacted to come in for open call. We are constantly out and about seeking new talent, so we want to audition you. Your headshot, monologue and professionalism will make you be remembered. Also, picture postcards are a great reminder.

Hillary Sachs & Sareva Racher's Response, Randallstown, MD

The first step that an actor should take to expedite our attention is to send a small handful of pictures and resumes to our office in Owings Mills. The package should include a nice, personal cover letter and complete information with regard to union affiliations and contact information. Phone calls are okay but the worst call is, "I sent in my head shot and I want to be sure you received it". If you mailed it with correct postage, we have it and have filed it for easy access for when a role comes up for your category.

Question --

Follow-up Contact--Every Actor out here KNOWS they have to be remembered by you so they will be thought of first when they fit the part. Some try phone Calls the Week After sending you something "Just to make sure you received it", others send small amounts (2-5) of headshots every 4, 6, 8, or 12 weeks so you will remember them, others send post cards about every thing they do or thank you notes for accepting their headshots. For your office, what Impression do these types of Follow-up Contact Give you of the actor and if you were the actor trying to be noticed / remembered in a positive way -- what would you do as a follow up?

Mike's Response Mike Lemon Casting Philadelphia

Postcards, greeting cards or letters are the best way to follow up. Email is acceptable only if the reason for contact is something other than blatant self-promotion, like an invitation to a performance or a serious question. Phone calls are not a good choice for marketing. In any case, the talent needs to understand the demands of our work and should not ask for or expect a response. It's not that we wouldn't like to do that, there are too often just not enough hours in the day.

Diane Heery's Response Heery Casting Philadelphia

A follow-up postcard is always the best way to stay in touch. Again, I look at EVERY postcard that comes in. They are meant to be handy reminders for us. If your agent / manager arranged an private appointment time, then all contact should be made through your rep. Sending unsolicited additional headshots is a waste of your money - wait for us to request more! A phone call "just checking in" may seem OK, until you understand that we could have hundreds of actors "just checking in"! - post cards are best.

John StrawBridge's Response- Pat Moran & Associates Baltimore

Firstly, if you want confirmation that we received your HS &R, include a self-addressed stamped post card or envelope. It is quite literally not possible to remember every one received, or to check the files to see if it's been received. Never call just to follow up. Never call just to check in. Never call just to be remembered. Following up with post cards is fine, but don't go overboard. Please do let us know if your in a show -- even though I am only able to attend a handful, I do like to know who's working where. As for headshots - in our office, we only need / keep one copy of your HS &R for our file. Send us an update if you change your contact information or union status in any way, our if you have a significant change to your credits. Send us a HS &R just to stay fresh if you haven't for any other reason in two years.

Betsy Royall's Response - Betsy Royall Casting Baltimore

No phone calls or additional headshots, please. If we can spend our energy on the client and less on the phone / mail, it works out best for everyone. I do suggest picture postcards with updates. Local theater is always a great way to be seen.

Hillary Sachs & Sareva Racher's Response, Randallstown, MD

The market here is small enough that just a p &r will ensure an actor a place in our filing system. This will get them in the door when a role comes up that they are appropriate for. If the actor is doing a play or can be seen in a television show, commercial or film, they should send us a flyer or post card letting us know well in advance so that we may do our homework by seeing them live or tuning in.

Question--

I received an e-mail from a very good established actor a few weeks ago looking for advice. He was on a set and received a phone call from another casting director checking availability for a job the following week. He felt the casting director must have been on a cell phone because the message was garbled and he could not make out the phone # to call back. Everywhere he looked he could not find a phone # to call them back. Now this actor works for 4 of you on a regular basis (and has for years) but this casting director does not call him often. ("I do not know Why but I have never been able to get on their regular call list") Obviously all important call back numbers should be in every actors cell phone, a card in their wallet or purse, a pocket address book --- something so they have them. Now he has lost a job he could have done but what is he worried about --- not being called again because he did not return the call. Now I do not think any of you would stop calling an actor because he did not return 1 phone call? But this raises an important issue --- we do not know if you are waiting for return calls from 3 actors or 500. Even if you say something in the message that leads us to believe you are only calling a few of us about this, it does not mean you did not also call 500 others about something else. Should we ALWAYS return a call even if it is to late to accept the part or if we are calling to say "Thanks for your call but I am already booked somewhere else that day"???

Mike's Response, Mike Lemon Casting, Philadelphia

Yes. Return the call. If it's worth our time to call the talent for audition or for work, it should be worth their time to be return the call. Better they call back in a timely fashion but better late than never.

Diane Heery's Response Heery Casting Philadelphia

YES! Always return the call! Many times, a client is waiting for YOU and we can't move on to someone else until we know your availability. Of course, all phone calls should be returned within a reasonable amount of time. We're not going to stop calling someone if they didn't return one call, but if it becomes chronic, we must assume that you're not interested in the work. Regarding your friend's specific incident, I can't imagine that he couldn't have called the casting office - I'm sure that's listed!

John StrawBridge's Response- Pat Moran & Associates Baltimore

Absolutely you should always return a phone call -- even if just to say "no". I think a lot of actors are afraid to do this, thinking we might be angry or offended. In our office, this will never be the case -- but we DO NEED TO KNOW one way or the other. We may be waiting to call someone else until we hear from you. If we don't hear, we may assume your number is bad. I'd rather know that I've made contact than wonder if the message was never received. And, believe it or not, "not available" is an acceptable, professional answer. You don't have to justify it to me. It's none of my business why you're not available. Well intentioned as you may be, turn down the job or audition if you must, and let me get on to the next call. I'm not angry... just really busy.

One other note on this subject -- Once I've left you a message, make it your job to get back to me. Don't leave me a voicemail after hours and expect me to call you again -- I've already made the calls on that role and have moved on to the next. Our schedule (particularly on a series) is so tight that there's not time to move backward, only forward.

Betsy Royall's Response - Betsy Royall Casting Baltimore

Yes, I know exactly who we are calling and for what jobs and it is very important to hear back. In the above situation an email would be fine. I think every actor should approach a call as if they are the only one to fill the slot. I know that it is a hard business for talent to feel secure in. I suggest sending a SHORT email or postcard saying, "Hey, I would love to hear from you, etc." The shorter the better. Nobody wants to receive a million of these, but I do know that for the actor doing something to be proactive is needed.

Hillary Sachs & Sareva Racher's Response, Randallstown, MD

ALWAYS RETURN PHONE CALLS!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Even if the return call is late, call. It will send a message to us that you are responsible and reliable. An actor should check his messages on a regular basis throughout the day so that problems do not arise and they don't miss out on work. I will move on pretty quickly if I do not receive a returned phone call as I am always on a deadline.