

Agents of Success

As this year's graduates begin the search for work, Jennifer Reischel talks to two agents about what they look for in new clients, how recent graduates should approach getting someone to represent them and how they encourage their performers

with respected accredited training or good professional experience. But rules are there to be broken, and there are always exceptions.

How many drama school showcases do you attend per year and how do you select them? What makes a graduate stand out?

PC: Mountview Academy and Arts Educational. What makes me take note is star quality and that special something that attracts the eye.

NR: As many as I can, but inevitably I attend some schools every year, based on the quality and range of the actors or showcases they turn out. Quality of communication from the school is also a factor. What makes someone stand out can be a myriad of things – truth and quality of their work, appearing completely relaxed on the stage, as this puts the audience and casting professionals at ease.

What are the chances of you attending showcases of new work or new talent that are not connected to an accredited drama school?

PC: Not very likely, but it would depend on the circumstances.

NR: I attend fringe productions regularly. I attempt to see all my clients' work, so I often view the work of other actors performing alongside them. When sending out invites, give plenty of notice and include not only details of the production but also what the role you are playing showcases about you.

How best can a young, aspiring actor prepare themselves for the industry today and approach their career?



Peter Charlesworth

Peter Charlesworth started his career in the music business in the early fifties and became an agent in 1956. He has since represented a multitude of leading performers in both the musical theatre and legitimate stage.

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of photographs is vital. Extra skills such as singing, dance, languages, and especially instrumental ability are all bonuses as they open up far more opportunities. For my style of management, it is also crucial that I like working with my client and that they are professional and proactive.

probably have to let them go. Also, unprofessional behaviour and or continually upsetting other industry professionals is something I cannot tolerate from a client.

NR: Being unprofessional or dishonest is unacceptable. As uncomfortable as it might be, the courtesy of a face to face discussion is the best way to address any issues on either side. If I believe a change of agent would bring a new impetus for my client, then I will discuss it with them.

How much commission do you charge for each category (film/TV/theatre/commercials)?

PC: 15% for everything.

NR: 12% for theatre and live work, 15% for audiovisual work.

How do you feel about clients taking on fringe/unpaid/profit share work?

PC: If it will further their career and get them seen, then yes, I am supportive. However, I would say it's not advisable too often as it prevents them from being available for paid work and auditions.

NR: I encourage my clients to value their professional skills. However, sometimes an unpaid job might offer the chance at a great role or venue, or to work with a renowned director. Sometimes an unpaid fringe job could be useful to reignite confidence and passion.

Jennifer Reischel is an actress and author and edits the Stage Grads' Club newsletter

If it's entertainment agents rather than theatre agents you're looking for...

Peter Charlesworth

Peter Charlesworth started his career in the music business in the early fifties and became an agent in 1956. He has since represented a multitude of leading performers in both the musical theatre and legitimate stage.

Nicola Roberts Management was launched on July 1, 2009. Having originally worked as a business analyst and information consultant in the cut-throat world of insurance, Roberts went on to train at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and worked for ten years in TV, theatre, voice-over and the corporate world. She also had a six-year post as head of part-time training at Arts Educational Schools London, where she devised, developed and managed foundation courses, and directed and tutored acting.

What do you look for in a new client - look, acting ability or vocal/dance skills?

PC: The basics, like acting ability and vocal/dance skills, are certainly important but, for me, this must be combined with presence and personality. There are many people who are very gifted, but when they walk on the stage nothing happens. You repeatedly hear the cry, "I can do it all, why don't I get work?", but the truth is that great performers are born, not made.

NR: In all honesty, it's a mixture. Talent and ability is, of course, top of the list - I have to believe in someone and feel passionate about their potential. The look is important, the quality

Nicola Roberts

of photographs is vital. Extra skills such as singing, dance, languages, and especially instrumental ability are all bonuses as they open up far more opportunities. For my style of management, it is also crucial that I like working with my client and that they are professional and proactive.

What would be the best way to submit myself as a potential client?

PC: Get in contact via email or telephone initially to see if it is worthwhile writing. Great photos and a demo tape/showreel are essential and very welcome with your submission. If you don't possess the latter, good photos and a CV are vital.

NR: Being aware of the cost of mail-outs and of reproducing photos, I would far rather receive an email as it is easier to deal with administratively. More importantly, your cover letter must be informative and demonstrate what you have to offer - what are your unique selling points? Check your grammar/spelling/address and put a hyperlink to your Spotlight CV within the email, not just your view pin.

How do you feel about taking on clients without drama school or any other formal training?

PC: Fine, if they have some kind of unique personality. At least twice in my career I have represented clients of this kind and they turned out to be natural performers. But, of course, it is very rare and formal training can certainly be beneficial for most.

NR: As a rule, I only consider actors

clients' work, so I often view the work of other actors performing alongside them. When sending out invites, give plenty of notice and include not only details of the production but also what the role you are playing showcases about you.

How best can a young, aspiring actor prepare themselves for the industry today and approach their career?

PC: Get another qualification in a trade that will be financially beneficial while not working.

NR: Do your research, know your industry and its key players, read plays, go to the theatre and get some quality training. There is always something new to learn or improve upon, whether you're just starting out, a new graduate, or a seasoned pro of several decades.

What do you see as your prime challenge taking on a new actor?

PC: To get them seen by as many casting directors as possible.

NR: Encouraging actors to keep their self-belief as their rose-tinted specs drop off and the reality of being a jobbing actor hits home is vital. For many, the first few years are about learning to prepare and audition well, and learning that meetings today may not pay off for several years. Casting directors have amazing memories.

Why let a client go and how would you go about this?

PC: Everyone must be given a fair chance with auditions etc, but unfortunately one cannot go on representing people who don't work. If they don't come up trumps within six months or one year, I would most

or to work with a renowned director. Sometimes an unpaid fringe job could be useful to reignite confidence and passion.

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If it's entertainment agents rather than theatre agents you need, try Booktheat.com's new directory

Finding the right agent can be a difficult process especially for acts with highly-specialised skills.

Entertainment-booking site Booktheat.com has recently launched an easy to use find an agent tool that is dedicated to the light entertainment industry.

The map-based directory allows users to search for agents by clicking on a section of the map or selecting from a list of popular locations. Listings provide basic contact information about each agent and, where this has been supplied, details about the agents' areas of expertise. Current members of the Agents' Association also have their membership information listed.

The directory provides listings of agents who specialise in representing singers, dancers, tribute performers, party bands, speciality acts, novelty acts and all the weird and wonderful acts whose specialisations call for agents with dedication to their genre.

Booktheat.com's 'find an agent' search tool is the only agent-finding tool aimed specifically at the light entertainment sector.

Visit www.booktheat.com/find-an-agent.asp