

An Acting Career Course by Bob Fraser

HEADSHOT SECRETS REVEALED

HOW TO GET A GREAT
HEADSHOT – THAT GETS
YOU CALLED IN

OPEN

Headshot Secrets Revealed

by

Bob Fraser

**Bob Fraser Productions Press
Burbank, California**



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Published by
Bob Fraser Productions
3727 W. Magnolia Boulevard • Burbank, California 91505

Design and Layout
Laura Leifield

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Dedication

Naturally, I dedicate this volume to my wonderful family. My wife Bev, who has stood with me for lo these many years... my daughters Beth & Katie who make me proud on a daily basis... and my son Scott who forces us all to smile. Without my family, my small career achievements would have very little meaning to me.

I'd also like to mention that most everything I know, I learned from other people. In my 40-some years in show business there have been scores of actors, writers, directors, producers, and other "above the line" people who've taught me and advised me. There have also been hundreds of crew folks who've given me good information and amazing support as I've plied my various trades. Thanks to all.

Let's not leave out the photographers. As a group, professional photographers are some of the most dedicated and skilled pros in the business. I hope, that like me, you are fortunate enough to work with the good ones.

And to you... Dear Actor - it is your talent, tenacity, bravery and dreams that make our wonderful show business possible.

Bob Fraser
Burbank, California
August 2006



Course Overview

The Head Part

The Shot Part



Opening Remarks

When I first suggested the idea of a course about headshots, the first question I got from an actor was, “A whole course about headshots? Why?”

Two reasons.

Your headshot is the first and most important tool in your professional actor’s tool-kit. (In this course I will only be speaking about your *acting business* – not the art or the craft.)

Your headshot is the key that opens many doors in this business (or industry, if you prefer). Without a “*working*” headshot, forward progress in your career ranges from very difficult to almost impossible... especially in the beginning.

Second, and possibly more importantly, in trying to hand out solid advice to actors, I have searched for helpful information on this critical tool myself – and been surprised at the lack of it.

Unfortunately, what I discovered is – there isn’t a lot of good advice to be found about how to actually accomplish a good headshot. And





The Practice Part

The Photographer Part

The Shoot Part

The Choosing Part

what is out there is sketchy, repetitive and generally given out as a 'Do' or a 'Don't' - with very little in the way of explanation behind the 'rules.'

The problem seems to be that most of this so-called "*information*" has been handed down from actor to actor - and it has ended up in acting books, then been repeated by teachers, casting directors and photographers - and now reproduced all over the internet. Like the old children's game, "Whisper Down The Lane," the message has gotten garbled - and, frankly, too many details have been left out.

"Wear a solid color" is not the sort of information that will help you to achieve a great headshot.

Much of the advice you can find is offered up in this 'shorthand' sort of way. The reasons behind certain methods, strategies and tactics are nowhere to be found. And so, in the typical manner of human beings (in all pursuits), we start to make up our own reasons for these 'rules.'

This is the pathway to disaster.

Even worse, in my search for reliable, usable, real-world information, I discovered - almost immediately - that there is **a lot of very bad advice** out there - advice that can send you down the wrong path entirely.

The bottom line is this: Without reasoned explanations, history or context, it seems to me that it would be very difficult for any actor to tell the difference between useful, reliable, good advice ... and very bad advice.





○ **The**
○ **Fixing**
○ **Part**

○ **The**
○ **Printing**
○ **& Mailing**
○ **Part**

○ **The**
○ **Internet**
○ **Part**

Since your headshot is so important to your forward progress, I think the subject deserves to be thoroughly explored, explained and de-mystified. Thus, this course.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment to thank the hundreds of actors who generously submitted their headshots for this project. Those submissions are much appreciated and although there was no way to use everyone's photo, I do want you to know that I thank each of you for your help.

Those actors whose pictures *are* included deserve a nice “hand” for doing their part to help other actors understand the process. Although I will introduce you to each actor whose headshot is in this volume – as we go along – here's a list of those kind and helpful actors (in order of appearance, naturally): **Gianpiero Cognoli, Phillip Gaffney, Marisa Abbot, Ricarte Rivera, Damara Reilly, Jessica Salisbury, Patrick Jackson, Jonathan Spencer, Beth Shea, Alonzo McMullen, Amanda Lippert, Amy Russ, Kay Foong, Christopher Page, Nikia Kali, J. Shields Upchurch and Kelly McWhirtor.**

READY TO GO? All right. Remember to take your time to get a complete understanding of each element as we go along.

Taking Notes is a good idea. It's easy too. Just get a pad of paper and put it near your computer – then as you click through the pages, just jot down the important bits.

By the way, each of the section titles to the left are “clickable” – when you need to go back to where you left off.





Course Overview

What You Will Find Out Here

What Makes A Great Headshot – The most important feature of a good headshot is that it “works.”

When I say “works,” I mean it gets you called in to the agent, casting director, manager, director or producer – whom you want to meet, impress and convince that you are the actor they want.

A phrase you will hear throughout your career as an actor is, “picture-picked” – which simply means that someone looked at your picture and picked you to come in – for further consideration.

Since the main goal you hope to achieve with your headshot is to get “called in” – you should start this process by getting rid of any notions that a headshot should make you look hunky, hot, or better than you really are... in some way.

A headshot just isn’t about that. At the risk of being repetitive (which I’ll risk often) ... ***it’s about getting you called in.***



“...it’s about getting you called in.”



“This is a skill like any other – a skill that you can learn and master.”

An important distinction (with regard to your headshots) is this:

Your acting headshot is all about... ***marketing.***

The only real uses for an acting headshot are direct mail advertising, web marketing or publicity. Keep these uses in mind as you go to the trouble and expense of getting this critical acting tool accomplished. If your photo doesn't accomplish any of these things – it's useless (no matter how much you, or your mom, might like it).

How to Get Past The Roadblocks – I will also spend some time showing you the traps we all fall into – and how to avoid them – when it comes to getting this basic acting career tool accomplished. The “head” part of getting your pictures taken will help you realize that this is a skill, like any other – a skill that you can learn and master.

Deciding Your Type & Using It To Improve Your Career – We'll take a bit of time to define ‘types’ and how good information can help you to build a useful marketing plan. Also, I'll discuss why it's important to accept the reality of ‘typing’ in our business – and how to take steps to make this reality work to your benefit.

Once you understand how your ‘type’ can be used to market yourself more effectively, I'm confident you'll take the time to do your homework in this area.

I'll do my best to give you a useable blueprint for determining the best and most effective choice for you – specifically.



“..a series of steps you must take ... in order to get results you want.”

How To Prepare ... By Practicing – I will walk you through the steps and procedures that will help you understand (and use) a process that has resulted in great headshots since the beginning of photography itself. Any actor who believes that s/he can do this part without preparation and practice will be very disappointed in the results of that belief.

I'll show you a series of steps you must take in order to get the results you want and need.

The steps are easy to understand – but each one will require you to do some work. This will be work that is not always easy. Mostly, this work will be centered around getting over some issues you may have, regarding what you **think** about getting your picture taken.

If you follow these steps, your improvement is almost guaranteed.

Don't skip this part, whatever you do.

How To Pick Your Photographer – Many actors seem to think that certain photographers possess the 'silver bullet' for headshots ... that all you have to do is find the right photographer and your work is done.

The idea that “they” do all the work – and you get all the results... is just wrong. It's an uninformed belief that can cost you hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars, months or years of anguish, and slow the forward progress of your career – dramatically.



“... waiting for an accident to happen is not a good business strategy.”

Now, while it's true that a professional photographer generally knows precisely when to click the shutter – unless YOU give them something to shoot, it is unlikely that you will achieve that great headshot (the one that “works”) except by happy accident. I think we can reasonably assume that waiting for an accident to happen, is not a very good business strategy.

In fact, it is the actor's responsibility (completely) to know what s/he is looking for in a headshot. And, to make certain s/he communicates that to the photographer.

Which means, in the final analysis... ***YOU will have to do most of the work.***

To accomplish the “working” headshot, you must know precisely what you need. The photographer's job is to help an actor to achieve that specific result. When you hire a photographer, it is his/her business to deliver what you need and want.

It is your job to be ready to do your part in the process.

The Right Headshot Can Super-Charge Your Career – Most actors learn the hard way that a non-specific headshot can be a career stopper. If you don't have a clear (and quite specific) idea of what you are trying to sell to the business, your headshot will not reflect your best (and most saleable) qualities.

I will do my best to show you how to find your “sweet spot” and project your most marketable skills (both as an actor and a human



“... you have almost total control over this part of your acting business.”

being) – by having a headshot that is congruent with your ‘type’ – or what can be more accurately called your *Unique Character Presentation*. (I’ll walk you through this eye-opening process, too.)

In reality, you have almost total control over this part of marketing your business ... your acting business. If you hand that control over to someone else, you will most likely waste many years trying to get your career moving.

That’s why **Choosing The Shot You Will Use** will require you to know what to be looking for. I will explain the most common errors and what it is that actually goes into the making of a great headshot. Plus I will spend some time showing you how to use the “raw material” you get from your photographer, to improve your results – when we take a short trip into the world of **Fixing**.

Printing, Packaging, Mailing and Posting To The Web – Finally, we will concentrate on the steps of getting your headshot reproduced, preparing it for use on the internet and how to package your submission when mailing to casting directors, agents, managers, production companies, commercial producers, theatres, industrial producers, etc. This section will make some of the technical issues easier to deal with – and, hopefully, propel your positive results.

Important: Headshot Secrets Revealed is intended to help you achieve one very specific goal: **A Headshot That WORKS!**

Each element is important, so don’t skim the text, hoping to find a short-cut. As I will remind you (often), there are no short-cuts.



As with most skills you need to accomplish a successful acting career – if you don’t learn how to do it, it won’t get done. And even if you learn how it’s done – if you don’t do it, it won’t get done.

In my 4 plus decades in the biz, I’ve met a lot of actors. When it came time to talk about where their career was, what their frustrations were, how often they were getting booked, etc. – it became clear to me that actors only have career problems for two reasons:

1. **They don’t know what to do.**
2. **They know what to do, but they don’t do it.**

This manual is meant to help you with the first part.

But the second part is totally up to you.

Remember, *a great headshot is a tool you must have* – so doing your own homework is imperative.

You took the first positive step when you got this course.

I urge you to use it.



“... a great headshot is a tool you must have ...”

“What slows too many actors down ... is the ‘figuring it out on my own’ strategy ...”



The HEAD Part

Your Mindset

99% of doing well in the acting profession is your mind-set. What you are thinking about, feeling and reacting to can mean the difference between success and failure. In other words, what's going on in your head is crucial. Your results are intrinsically tied to what you believe - what you think is true.

For instance, if you happen to think the earth is flat ... your chances of becoming a successful airline pilot are practically nil.

Your mind-set is especially critical when it comes to the process of getting a good headshot.

What slows too many actors down, in this process, is the “**figuring it out on my own**” strategy that actors have a tendency to start with - when approaching the *business* part of the business.

However, when you are faced with sitting in front of a camera and just “*being yourself*” - your results can be awful if you go into the process with a belief that the skills required will, somehow, just “*come to you.*”



“Repeating to yourself that it’s ‘a numbers game’ will not make your headshot work.”

Let me assure you at the outset – these skills won’t just “come to you.”

Also it’s important to realize that a lot of the ‘*tips*’ you may be getting from other actors (as well as agents, managers and photographers) are potentially inaccurate. In fact, the main reason that most actors fail to achieve the success they desire – is because they act on incomplete, self-serving, or just plain wrong ‘*information*.’

That is not to say that you **can’t** get good advice from all those named above ... it’s just to point out some observable realities:

- ◇ What works for another actor, may not work for you. (In fact, it’s very unlikely.)
- ◇ A photographer may be more interested in his business than yours. (Never expect other people to be as passionate about your dream as you are.)
- ◇ Agents, casting directors and producers will almost always say something like, “I’ll know it when I see it.” – but this may not be very helpful to understanding (and executing) the steps that result in a great headshot.
- ◇ If your headshot doesn’t “work” – sending out 100’s of them won’t change things. Repeating to yourself that it’s “a numbers game” will not make your headshot work.
- ◇ A non-working headshot can cost you time. Time, unlike



“If you hope to be a professional actor, you must become comfortable with the way you look.”

money, cannot be replaced. Ever. So in order to make the step up to the next level of your career, it’s important to put aside any opinions that don’t help.

- ◇ Never expect other people to do your homework. Not to put too fine a point on it – success just doesn’t work that way.
- ◇ **Very Important:** Your headshot is one of the few things you **can** control in your acting career marketing efforts

Common Barriers

If you are like most people, you probably don’t like getting your picture taken very much. And once you see the final results, there are many emotional responses that can keep you away from achieving good results. **“I just don’t like the way I look,”** is the most common reaction.

You are not alone. My statistic (actually my opinion masquerading as a statistic) would be that 95% of us just don’t like the way we look. It’s a gene thing. It’s bred into us.

As I point out in **You Must Act!** – this is how most of us feel. Those people who are in love with the way they look, are not generally well liked by others. Not to mention that falling in love with a headshot that doesn’t “work” can cost you years of needless struggling.

If you hope to be a professional actor, you must become comfortable



“... no matter what you look like – there are many parts you can play.”

with the way you look. And you must maintain your objectivity when choosing your marketing tools.

Bottom Line? You look like you. That’s it. A headshot works – or it doesn’t. Period.

A common mistake that many actors make – when getting their headshot taken – is trying to get a photograph that makes them look like a star (or at least somebody else). Please believe me, glamorous “star” photos will not sway casting directors or agents. Dramatic lighting will not convince a director or producer to give you a job.

In fact, you will almost never get a job because of your headshot.

You will only get the opportunity to be considered for the job.

Since casting is based on finding someone right for the role – the most effective strategy is to make sure the people viewing your headshot, see you as you really are. That is because if you look ‘right’ to the casting director – and you get called in – you will have moved a step closer to your real goal: Getting cast in a role.

Keep in mind that no matter what you look like – there are many parts you can play. Most stories are about human beings. You are a human being. You qualify. Period. In other words, don’t sweat it.

Here’s the mantra you should keep repeating: **“I look like me. End of story.”**



“Your headshot
will only
– get you the
opportunity to
sell yourself.”

Since the majority of the paying acting jobs these days are captured on film or tape, your face is going to be out there ... no matter what. It's all photography.

So your first bit of homework is to take the time, each day, to repeat the most important and basic mind-set adjustments, until they become second nature to you:

- ◇ **I look like me.**
- ◇ **I must get comfortable with it.**
- ◇ **I must use how I look to my advantage.**

Here are the first few ‘baby steps’ in adjusting your mind-set:

1. Work hard at becoming ‘okay’ with the way you look.
2. Dump the idea that a headshot gets you work. It doesn't. Your headshot will only get you the chance to sell yourself.
3. Maintain your objectivity.
4. Focus on your *REAL* goal: **Getting IN THE DOOR!**

I know that changing your point of view about headshots is not an easy task. But it will be next to impossible to move forward – if you do not achieve this critical mind-set.



“Even a great
photographer
cannot produce
your results
for you.”

Recognizing Bad Advice

The next big step is to become familiar with the sort of bad advice and useless ‘*information*’ you will be exposed to – as you go through the process of getting your headshots.

Let me give you a short tour of the kinds of bad advice I’m talking about. I will try to zero in on the kind of information that will never be helpful to you – and why.

Once you know what to watch out for, you will be well on the way to doing what needs to be done – in order to nail this important acting career tool.

Please Pay Close Attention – *Following this sort of bad advice can cost you money – and result in years of frustration.*

By the way, the following is all advice that I’ve found in books, magazines and on the internet. I won’t source these *paraphrased quotes* – because they are mostly dead wrong in their conclusions and I don’t want to embarrass anyone.

Here’s the first piece of bad advice that you will find almost everywhere.

“*How to find a photographer. Let your wallet or purse pick the photographer for you.*”

This is a seriously flawed strategy.



“If you don’t get a working headshot on the first try – you must try, try again.”

Although budgeting (staying within your ability to pay) is important to getting good results – this generic blather can lead you down a path where you begin to believe some things that will actually slow you down.

For instance, you may come to believe that the more expensive the photographer – the better your results will be. This is just not the case. Even a great photographer cannot produce your results for you.

A horrible outcome of this kind of thinking is this: After you have invested a lot of money (more than you can really afford) in your headshots... if the resulting pictures don’t work (get you called in), you may be reluctant to take one of the most important steps in the success process – which is **‘try, try again.’**

Or you may come to the conclusion that you can get by cheaply, because, after all – you don’t have a lot of money to spend on your headshots.

If your cheap pictures don’t work, you may come to believe that some other element of your acting career is at fault. Or that it’s just the way the business is these days – and if you keep on hoping, things will change. The truth is that you are the one who must change. You are the one who must adjust.

Because: **If your headshot doesn’t work, you must get another one.**



“... you have to get another one, and another one, etc. – until you get a headshot that works!”



Let me repeat that:

If your headshot doesn't work, you must get another one.

One more time:

If your headshot doesn't work, you must get another one.

And, guess what...?

If your second one doesn't work, you have to get another one, and another one, and another one, etc. – **until you get a headshot that WORKS!**

You can argue with this reality, but it won't change your results. If you don't get a working headshot on the first try – you must try, try again.

Here's an another moronic tip:

“... good photographers are a penny a dozen. Some of them are actors trying to make a living while they are waiting to make a living at acting.”

Not only is this bad advice – it is a patently stupid statement on the face of it. People who are good at anything – are not a penny a dozen. This statement is facetious (at best) and may lead the serious actor off in the totally wrong direction (at worst).



“Use a pro.
Period.”

This is the same kind of fallacious thinking that convinces far too many actors that they don't stand a chance in the business – because there are “so-o-o many good actors.”

(Which, by the way, is observably not the case. Good actors stand above the crowd – and we all aspire to that place.)

Generally speaking, actors trying to make a living as photographers – in order to finance their own careers – are probably to be avoided. The same goes for chefs who are moonlighting as photographers. And pizza delivery guy, slash, photographers.

Bottom Line? **Use a pro. Period.**

I will talk about photographers in a later chapter – and why it is important that you should only consider (and employ) a pro.

In the meantime, here's more advice from the annals of failure:

“I have never spent more than \$100 for a headshot session. I personally can't justify blowing more than that – knowing that 95% of my headshots will end up in the city dump. That's correct. Most of your 'business cards' get tossed if you are not selected for the part. Let's face it, what would an agent or casting person want with 1000's of pictures of actors – most of which are unsolicited?”

Well, this advisor got the unsolicited part right. I'll expand on this subject later when we discuss the real purpose of your headshots



“If you don’t catch their ‘eye’ – then your headshot simply does not work.”

– but, for now, let’s discuss all the things that are wrong with this asinine advisory:

Again, **it’s not about the cost.** (The cost of a session with a pro these days, is going to run you – on average – between 150 to 400 dollars ... and *can* range anywhere from 25 bucks, up to the several thousands.

Whether you are looking for an expensive photographer to be a “*one stop solution*” or a cheap waiter/photographer to “*get by*” – if you are depending on unrelated facts (the cost vs. the result you want) to determine how much you should spend – you are essentially ignoring your primary objective:

A Working Headshot.

Also, deciding that the money you are investing in your career is somehow “blowing it” is a point of view guaranteed to result in disaster. It’s a very bad business philosophy which can lead to making a lot of very bad business decisions.

Stating that most headshots end up in the circular file (and then the city dump) smacks of the truth, because, well... it is the truth. It’s a fact.

But it’s a fact that has **nothing** to do with you – or your need for a great headshot. And it has **nothing** to do with your real goal – **getting in the door.**



“The people on the receiving end of your mailing do not care how much your headshots cost.”

VERY IMPORTANT: The people on the receiving end of your mailing do not care how much your headshots cost.

How much you spend is your business. Their business is to find someone to play a part – or someone to represent. The expense involved in getting your professional headshot is just not something they think about – at all.

Observable reality? You have about **2 seconds** to “catch the eye” of a casting director – maybe a few more seconds in the case of an agent or manager.

If you fail “catch their eye” “NEXT!”

Of course, in that circumstance, your picture won’t be kept for further consideration – whether it cost you a nickel or a thousand bucks.

I will explain exactly why the “*how much is it?*” discussion takes you in the wrong direction, thinking about the wrong things, and making the wrong choices – a little bit later – but first here’s more nonsensical advice:

“Be wary of those photographers who want to pose you. Real actors don’t pose.”

This is almost criminally bad advice.

Do Not Buy Into This Idea At All.





Any reasonably alert person, watching the stars on the red carpet, can easily *SEE* that real actors pose at every opportunity. You have watched them do it hundreds of times.

That's because those actors (the ones who make it to the red carpet) **know** how this is done.

Stars **know** that no matter who the photographer is (and there are usually hundreds of photographers of varying skills at any red carpet ceremony) – it is **the actors' responsibility** to look like themselves. In every picture.

Watch stars with fans. Or anytime they're in public.

Stars who don't 'pose' for photos are about as numerous as fat ballet dancers and hip ventriloquists. Sure there are some, but not many.

Why? Because the actors who make it to the red carpet know that photos of them will be distributed all over the world. Professional actors learn how to pose – or they soon find themselves adorning the cover of *The National Inquirer* under the title, "Red Carpet Disasters."

There is one useful part in this last advice – in the negative: If you are new to the process of posing, it's probably a good idea to let a professional photographer help you. They are pros and usually have a good idea of how to capture what it is you're looking to achieve.



“– it is the actors' responsibility to look like themselves. In every picture.”

“Headshots
are 95% hard
work and 5%
photography.”

Of course, this help from your photographer will only be useful if you’ve done your homework and are able to tell the photographer **exactly what you hope to accomplish** in your photo session. (We’ll get to that part, too.)

And yet more bad advice:

“It is the responsibility of the photographer to snap the actor when the actor is concentrated on something specific that will make a dynamic headshot.”

Again, this advisor insists that it’s the photographer’s responsibility to get a good headshot for you. To be blunt, that’s just bass-ackwards.

Let me abuse a famous Thomas Edison quote:

“Headshots are 95% hard work and 5% photography.”

As we proceed, you will learn how to do the things that are **your** responsibility – and let your photographer concentrate on his or her duties.

Now, on to some common – totally wrong – tips:

“What should you wear? That depends on the final purpose of the headshot session. There are commercial headshots and theatrical headshots. The commercial headshot will show the actor like you see them in commercials. Warm, friendly, perfect white teeth, well groomed, well dressed, ready to sell soap.





You may want to bring several changes of clothing so that you can present different types you feel you can represent, for example; construction worker, doctor, bartender, athlete, etc.”

No. No. And No. Your capabilities are not conveyed by a ‘costume’ – but by the content of your headshot. Facial expression, eyes, angle of head, intensity, intelligence, warmth, sauciness, awareness, innocence, etc. – these are the kinds of things that you can control – the things that determine your brand – the things that sell you to the business.

“Costumes” are a perfect way to look like an amateur. Is that what you want?

How anyone can look “ready to sell soap” is beyond me.

This dreadful advice reminds me of a famous theatre story:

J.M. Barrie was a playwright and author, best known for *Peter Pan*. Once, while directing a play he’d written, Barrie was approached by one of the actors playing a rather minor character. The part was very small, with almost no lines. However, the young actor – anxious to give the part exactly the right interpretation – begged for Barrie’s advice.

“I’m glad you’ve asked me,” said Barrie, “I should like you to convey, when you are acting it, that the man you are playing has a brother in Shropshire... who drinks port.”



“Costumes
....a perfect
way to look
like an
amateur”

“... if you are looking ‘at’ the lens, you are focusing in the wrong place...”

Barrie was being sarcastic, but he points us toward a great lesson: There is just no way to communicate, “*I can sell soap*” or “*I’m the best actor you’ve ever seen,*” or “*I have a brother in Shropshire who drinks port,*” in a photograph – or while standing silently on stage.

Those who try will be sorely disappointed in their results.

This next bit of “*intelligence*” – apparently comes to us from the wonderful land of Oz:

“The best way to achieve being “you” is concentrate on something specific while you are looking at the lens: A friend, a pet, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a sunset at the beach, etc.

“If you have difficulty concentrating on something that is not there (method actors don’t have this problem) – you can multiply two large numbers in your head. If you really try to come up with an answer, you will be snapped in a state of concentration and the real you automatically comes through. This might sound strange, but it works.”

It not only sounds strange, this tripe is disastrously off base.

First, there are no facts (or proof offered) to support the loony idea that method actors don’t have issues to deal with – and problems in the process – when they are in front of a camera.

Second, if you are looking “at” the lens, you are focusing in the wrong place – I’ll show you what I mean a little later.





Gianpiero Cognoli's headshot (Thanks Gianpiero.) is a traditional black and white, but it's exemplary. See how he's making contact with you? This photo says "something is going on." I can't see the acting. Can you?

Third, if you are thinking about your dog, your squeeze or a pretty sunset – well, if that's what you're thinking about, good luck having any control over the outcome of your photo session.

As to the final suggestion; the writers of the TV show *Friends* used this "multiplying big numbers" idea to illustrate Joey Tribiani's "method" of acting.

It was (and is) a joke.

What You Should Be Concentrating On:

- ◇ Making contact with the viewer of the picture.
- ◇ Conveying the spirit that is you.
- ◇ And ... doing it well enough that the "wheels" don't show.

Later, we will do some exercises and rehearsals – so that you can get better at this part of the process. (Remember: Practice anything and you'll get better at it.)

Now let's look at a hideously wrong-headed idea:

"How to choose a good headshot: Submit the contact sheets (or proof sheets as they are sometimes called) to various agents to get a response. That way, an agent can look at the whole roll at once. Then the agent will choose which shot is best."



“...professional talent reps aren’t interested in doing your homework for you...”

The person handing out this balloon juice is not from the planet Hollywood – or any other professional circumstance I’ve ever seen or heard about.

Assuming that all, most, or even *any* agents have some special knowledge about what’s going to work for your headshot, is an amazingly unfounded assumption.

Over the years, I’ve known hundreds of agents and managers personally, and I can tell you with great authority that professional talent reps aren’t interested in doing your homework for you.

Their only interest is representing (selling) the services of a brand name business. The bigger the brand, the bigger their paycheck.

Frankly, a professional talent representative expects the actor to do the work required to build their own businesses – in fact, an agent or manager will probably only become interested in you – after your business is off the ground and on its way to becoming “*a going concern.*”

Real agents and real managers, in the real world of show business, have neither the time, nor the inclination, to sit around looking at unsolicited proof sheets in hopes of finding the next **Brad Pitt** or **Julia Roberts**.

They just don’t do it.

By the way, **Brad Pitt** is not just a pretty face – he’s very talented.



“... no one else
is likely to
do the hard
work part
– for you.”

And he looked exactly like **Brad Pitt** during the several years he spent doing extra work, driving a limo and dressing up like a chicken to pay the bills. And **Julia Roberts** looked like **Julia Roberts** when she was told that she was too ungainly for show biz.

Look, **no one else** is likely to do the hard work part of becoming a professional actor – for you.

If you don't already have a headshot to attract the interest of a good salesperson (an agent or manager), you will not accomplish that by submitting a couple of dozen little one-inch photographs to them. Show Biz just doesn't operate that way.

I might add that if you **do** submit a proof sheet, the agents' assistants will laugh at you, the agents themselves will consider you a rank amateur, and you will be wasting postage stamps, envelopes, time and money.

Same deal with managers. The great ones may be able to help you with your choices, but most managers don't really come to the table with those skills. They consider the choice of a headshot to be the actor's responsibility. Not that they won't give you an informed opinion if you are already a client – they will.

But until you are signed with an agent or manager, this *proof sheet* idea is useless badinage. (Look it up.)

Needless to say, sending a proof sheet to a casting director is dumb to the tenth power.



Listen Closely: Any advice that assures you that agents, casting directors, managers, producers, directors or other actors are going to take a personal interest in your career and “help” you – is advice you must dismiss with prejudice.

That silly idea does not represent the way things work in the real world of Show Biz. Sure, some people may offer you guidance – but believe me, if you take their advice, don’t expect them to assume any responsibility for your results.

The worst result of this *proof sheet* advice is this: If you believe it – **if you buy into the assumption that people will go out of their way to help you – you may be setting yourself up to be scammed.**

There are many unscrupulous people out there who call themselves agents, managers, and career consultants. Unfortunately our industry attracts many con artists, whose only goal is to get their hands on your money by any means possible. If you act like an amateur, they will see you coming and pounce.

Their number one con game is to send you to “*their photographer*” – where you will quickly be relieved of large amounts of cash – with almost no chance of good results.

Actors are taken in by this con game because they’ve been told (and believe) it’s all about the photographer – and of course, they know they have to have headshots anyway, so... “*what’s the difference?*”



“...there are some rascals out there, just waiting to take you to the cleaners.”

The difference is this: If you don't know what you're doing when you sit for a photo, there is very little chance you will get a headshot that will do you any good – no matter how much you spend – or which photographer snaps the shutter.

In other words, **you** must have a handle on doing your part of the process before spending a dime to get pictures taken. If you don't, you'll waste a lot of money – and worse, a lot of time.

Believe me, if you are lackadaisical about this part, there are some rascals out there, just waiting to take you to the cleaners.

The main business of scammers and con artists is to sell you stuff you don't need, which won't help, that will cost you both time and money.

These *fakirs* and *bunko artists* are usually so far removed from professional show business – that you might as well go to your local Radio Shack employee for acting career advice.

It's worth mentioning again that other people are not intrinsically interested in your career.

I do understand that looking for help in choosing your headshot seems logical – but the results of depending on other people's opinions is often a careless abandonment of your own responsibility.

And, topping off our bad advice hit parade...



“Actors who are waiting for ... someone else to define and validate their product, are in for a long wait and a world of hurt.”

“... an agent who shows an interest in you – will decide for you ... what type you are.”

This bit of “information” is tragically wrong.

Actors who are waiting for (or looking for) someone else to define and validate their product, are in for a long wait and a world of hurt.

If you don’t know, or don’t care to discover, what type you are – and if you are willing to turn the job of deciding that over to someone else – you might as well go ahead and add 5 to 7 years of struggling and frustration to your career plan, right now.

If you don’t decide **precisely** what it is you are trying to do (**and you are the one who will have to live with the decision**), then expect to experience some pain, while others dither around – or worse ... guess.

Someone else (who cannot possibly be fully informed with regard to your dream) will almost certainly gravitate toward the most cliché and banal type – based on your “look.”

This kind of “*career management*” doesn’t deserve the name – and can hurt you for a long time. For some actors, it hurts their career forever.

You had better be prepared to make the tough decisions, or you are going to find that your acting business isn’t succeeding.



*“While it’s fine
... to ask for
other people’s
opinions ...
eventually, you
are going to
have to decide
and choose
yourself.”*

While it’s fine (and sometimes prudent) to ask for other people’s opinions – it is just an unalterable fact that, eventually, you are going to have to decide and choose yourself.

Twas ever thus.

There is also the plain fact that getting an agent or manager interested in the first place, is probably going to require that you already have a working headshot.

That erroneous advice is classic cart-before-the-horse thinking. *“I’ll get an agent and she’ll tell me what kind of actor I am.”*

I guarantee the person handing out that dreadful “tip” – has not gotten anywhere near the top of the acting business.

I will go into this typing discussion in the next section – and clear up some commonly held misconceptions about this crucial decision in your business plan – but for now, let me repeat myself yet again... someone else is NOT going to make this happen FOR you.

I’ve only touched on the most egregious examples of the bad advice out there – believe me there’s lots more. I will mention other lousy tips as we go along – just be aware that everything you read or hear will not always be helpful – or based in any kind of reality.

Most of the nonsense being disseminated about accomplishing a professional acting career is supposition, erroneous conclusion or just plain guessing.



Bad advice can lead you down the wrong road – a road takes you nowhere near your destination.

This Is YOUR Business

You are going to be the one who ultimately decides which headshots will be out there – representing you to the business. This is a crucial mindset – that you would be well advised to lock into your thinking right now:

If you are not up for this part of your business, you can expect to lose a lot of work to actors who are willing to ‘bite the bullet’ and make their own decisions.

There is just no way around this part. **You WILL have to decide.**

You must know this: **Your Headshot Is Your Responsibility.**

This is your business and if you turn the decisions over to someone else – you may be in for a great deal of pain and frustration. It’s a sad strategy that does not work.

One result of this useless tactic is an agent or manager deciding to sell you as ... oh ... let’s say a bimbo. If you don’t want to play bimbos – but, because you’re being marketed that way, it’s the only kind of part you ever get a shot at – even a little financial success can be disappointing.

Women are often sent sideways in their career because someone,



“... it’s extremely important to have a complete vision of your own success to start with.”

without any clue about the actors’ actual goals, decides that they are ‘hotties’ or “housewives” and sends them off to get glamour shots or so-called commercial shots.

Men can suffer the same fate if they are typed by an agent who sees the possibility of making some easy money from a generic choice like ‘gang-banger’ or ‘boy-toy.’ These kinds of decisions can relegate an actor to a fate worse than unemployment.

That’s why it’s extremely important to have a complete vision of your own success to start with.

In other words, if you can’t, won’t or don’t do this part, your dream may be killed by a kind of *success* that isn’t consistent or congruent with **your** real goals.

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT From Your Acting Career?

Without your full participation in the decision of how you are marketed, your results will ultimately rest in the hands of others.

This is NOT a good plan for an artist – or a business-person.

Don’t think that you can escape the necessity of determining what sort of actor you are – and what sort of career you want to achieve.

As I said, you will have to decide things – if you want your career to fulfill your expectations and dreams.



“... in reality,
each individual
actor brings
a unique set
of skills to the
job.”

Which leads us into the whole subject of “typing” and what you can do to affect the way you are marketing your acting business.

What Type Am I?

Over the years, there has developed an unwritten system in show business called “*typing*.” What typing generally means is that casting directors, agents, managers, directors, etc. will think of you as a generic type such as: Leading Man, Leading Woman, Ingénue, Juvenile, Character Man, Character Woman, etc.

In fact, most of the actors’ directories (Academy Players Directory, Spotlight, etc.) are divided up into just these categories.

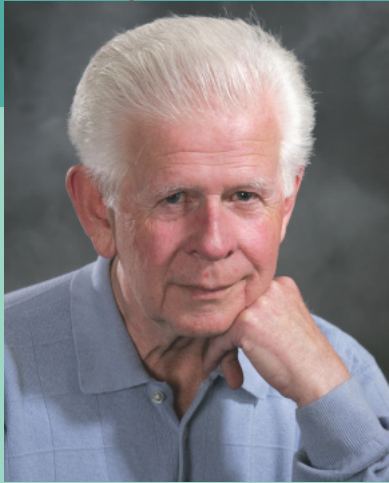
Typing is accepted wisdom in our business.

Actors will often argue against the idea of typing, insisting that they can play ‘anything’ – to no avail. Agents believe in it, casting directors use it on a daily basis, and producers send out their descriptions of characters based on it. To paraphrase a famous remark of the nineties – **“*typing happens.*”**

I have a different approach to this common issue: I think that, in reality, each individual actor brings a unique set of skills to the job.

So, I’m going to take some time to help you ‘re-frame’ this generic typing idea into a more specific and useful tool that you can use – to make better decisions about all your marketing efforts.





Phillip Gaffney (Thanks Phillip.) has a pretty good headshot. But, **“Meet the next Tom Cruise.”** would be a bad marketing ploy for him. If this headshot was properly submitted, a casting director looking for a desk clerk, a chef, or an executive – would take a second look.

“To succeed, a business must state its unique value to the world.”

It’s a tool I call:

Unique Character Presentation (or) UCP

I recently attended an actor’s marketing seminar where actors, casting directors, mentors, acting group leaders and various other interested parties, gathered to talk about actors “selling” themselves to the industry.

When it came my turn to speak, I pointed out that one of the basic premises of all marketing (a fancy word for selling) is the USP. This stands for *Unique Selling Proposition*.

Almost all businesses have a USP. For instance, Avis *“Tries Harder,”* or Pepsi *“Hits the Spot,”* Domino’s *“Delivers in 30 Minutes or Your Pizza is Free.”*

As you can see each of these short “propositions” sets one company apart from its competitors in some way. This is a very important part of marketing and building any sort of business.

When it comes to developing a Unique Selling Proposition, it’s very important to pay particular attention to that word *“unique.”* It means that your product must be differentiated from other, similar, products.

To succeed, a business must state its unique value to the world.

Your acting business is no different.





Marisa Abbot has a very good headshot. (Thanks Marisa.) But what is Marisa's "type?"

The reason it's hard to say is because few of us fall neatly into one of a half dozen generic categories.

She might be **The Sage**. Don't know what that is? Keep reading, then come back and see if you agree.

The first question I got from the audience of actors was, "how?"

How does an individual actor create her/his own USP?

In my opinion, the best place to start is to beat the casting directors to the punch – **decide on your type yourself.**

Once you understand the basic types of characters and how they are sold – then it is just a matter of finding the one that fits you best. By the way, in my opinion, the real types are NOT Leading Man, Juvenile, Character Woman, etc.

The following is a list of what I think the real types are – and the components used to sell them. I call my approach to 'typing' – your **Unique Character Presentation**. My hope is that these definitions will help you begin to develop your own effective marketing plan.

I'll name a few examples of actors who have used each **UCP** (type), in building their careers – in order to give you an idea how individual performers can remain unique and quite different from each other – even while using the same **UCP**.

You'll notice there's nothing in these definitions about how you look, how old you are, or anything about your physicality, ethnicity or sex.

Those things are just much too general to be used in formulating a good product description and marketing plan.



There is one story-generic type listed, because it encompasses a dramatic necessity – THE HERO. But the rest of these ‘types’ can play any character; villain, buddy, girlfriend, comic relief, functionary, etc.

It is well worth your time to figure out your **UCP**, as this is the best way to differentiate yourself from all other actors in your category (generic type) and to begin to establish the brand known as YOU. So, without further ado, here are the basic types to choose from:

NOTE: I will try to illustrate each **UCP** definition using a few different actors ... who are very much unlike each other. This is to show you that vastly different looking actors – who may (and probably will) be in different generic “type” categories – can still succeed in their business using the same general UCP as a starting point for developing their business plan.

THE INNOCENT – This is the type of person whose goal and core desire is happiness, who fears being punished for doing something wrong. This person’s strategy is to do things the “right” way.

This approach requires faith and optimism – so THE INNOCENT is expected to reflect goodness, morality, simplicity, nostalgia – the child. A child-like openness is at the core of this character.

Marketing this image generally requires a romantic, traditional approach. Or in some cases mystical, saintly or dreamy. Some actors who have used this basic UCP are: **David Schwimmer, Ruth Gordon, Gary Cooper and Doris Day.**



*The Innocent
... goal and
core desire is
happiness – to
do things the
right way.*

The Regular Guy (Gal)

- goals and main desires belonging and connecting...

The Explorer

... wants to experience a better, more authentic, more fulfilling life.

THE REGULAR GUY (GAL) – This is a person whose goals and main desires are belonging and connecting with others. The strategy is to have a “common touch,” be a “down to earth” person, with solid virtues.

This type is known for realism, empathy and lack of pretense. This is the good old boy, the girl next door, the working stiff, the solid citizen, the trusty neighbor, the regular Joe, etc.

Selling this image requires differentiating yourself from elitist, powerful people and stressing an everyday functionality. For instance; **Ray Romano, Sandra Bullock, Harrison Ford, and Mary McCormack.**

THE EXPLORER – This kind of character wants to experience a better, more authentic, more fulfilling life. Conformity and the feeling of being trapped are what THE EXPLORER is avoiding.

The strategy is seeking new things, escaping from the everyday, establishing autonomy, fulfilling ambition and being true to one’s inner life.

Promoting an image like this is done with individuality and differentiation. ‘New and exciting’ are words to keep in mind. This is the seeker, the wanderer, the pilgrim, the pioneering spirit. Here are some examples: **Ellen DeGeneres, Johnny Depp, Hilary Swank, and Christian Bale**



The Sage ... to use intelligence and analysis to find the truth and understand the world.

The Hero – The main goal and desire is to prove one's worth through courage.

THE SAGE – This is the type of person whose goals and desires are to use intelligence and analysis to find the truth of things and thereby, understand the world.

Not wanting to be duped, misled or ignored, THE SAGE uses information, knowledge and self-reflection to reach the goal of knowing the truth.

Selling THE SAGE is mostly a matter of projecting expertise, a philosophy, good planning, solidity, a professional image. This person is often the mentor, the teacher or the guru. These actors are exemplar: **Leonard Nimoy, Dame Judy Dench, Morgan Freeman, and Janeane Garofalo.** (*Go back and look at Marisa's headshot*)

THE HERO – This type is a constant, in the telling of stories, THE HERO is the person who believes to their core that where there's a will, there's a way.

The main goal and desire is to prove one's worth through courage. The strategy here is strength and competence. From the superhero to the team player – the warrior to the wily winner – the daring to the fearless – this person wants to improve the world through a mastery over fear.

Selling this image is complicated, as several other types can play this role. But straightforwardness is a mainstay. Capable – no reluctance to go into the unknown – someone we can depend on. For instance; **Sylvester Stallone, Sally Field, Ben Affleck, and Jennifer Garner.**



*The Outlaw ...
wants change
... through
revenge,
revolution or
recalcitrance*

*The Magician
... make
dreams come
true through
fundamental
laws of the
universe...*

THE OUTLAW – This type wants to change what doesn't work for himself (or herself) – generally through revenge, revolution or recalcitrance.

This person is a misfit, a wild man (or woman) who rebels against the norm. The strategy here is to disrupt, destroy or shock. This starts with uncontrollable kid and goes all the way up to aging hippy and senior activist.

Selling THE OUTLAW is mostly a matter of breaking with convention. Words to keep in mind are radical, outrageous, the “dark side.” Social outcast. Reactionary. Rebellious. Actors who use this UCP include: **Al Pacino, Jennifer Tilly, Gary Oldman, and Toni Collette.**

THE MAGICIAN – This person's goal is to make dreams come true through the use of the fundamental laws of how the universe works. The main strategy is to develop a vision and live by it. Often not part of the crowd.

THE MAGICIAN is always looking for the “win-win” situation. Appears as the visionary, the inventor, shaman, medicine man, or charismatic. Scientists who are ahead of their time.

Selling THE MAGICIAN is accomplished by projecting a transformative nature. Special-ness, spirituality, and a ‘magical’ ability to affect the outcome are the mainstays of this type. Those actors who have been successful using this UCP include; **Lucy Liu, Jon Voight, Anna Paquin, and Phillip Seymour Hoffman.**



*The Lover
... to have
lasting and
meaningful
relationships ...*

*The Jester
... having a
good time
and “kidding”
the world ...*

THE LOVER – People of this type have a goal of enduring relationships through intimacy and experience. The goal of THE LOVER is to have lasting and meaningful relationships with other human beings.

The strategy of THE LOVER is to be passionate, grateful, appreciative and committed – to become emotionally and physically attractive.

This person can be a spouse, a friend, a partner or a team builder.

Selling this image is a matter of being outer directed and able to please others. A comfortable “belonging” – differentiates THE LOVER from other types. Here are some actors who exemplify this UCP: **Robert Redford, Drew Barrymore, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow.**

THE JESTER – With a goal of having a good time and “kidding” the world, THE JESTER plays, makes jokes, and can be the trickster. This person never wants to be boring or to be bored.

Usually this type employs a strategy of puncturing self-importance, creating fun, and living in the moment. THE JESTER employs a variety of strategies to differentiate from the “herd.”

Selling THE JESTER requires a welcoming, trustworthy, friendly approach. Truthful, open to change, easy to know are ideas that important to being this person. Some various examples of this UCP would include; **Adam Sandler, Queen Latifah, Robin Williams, and Cher.**



*The Ruler ...
core desire (is
to) to control
the situation.*

*The Caregiver
... doing things
for others with
compassion
and generosity*

THE RULER – The goal of ‘the boss’ is to create a prosperous family, community or team. Success is a result of this person’s core desire to control the situation.

The strategy for this UCP is to exercise power, leadership, responsibility and authority ... to achieve a greater end. Must have self worth and have a definite ideology, with regard to those that are being led.

Selling THE RULER is contained in the ideas exemplified by confidence, stability and trust. This type differentiates himself/herself from “regular” people through competence, skill and selflessness (at least on the surface). Some examples of THE RULER: **Greer Garson, Sean Connery, Barbara Streisand and Brian Cox**

THE CAREGIVER – This type cares and protects others selflessly. The strategy of THE CAREGIVER is doing things for others with compassion and generosity.

The parent, nurse, doctor, secretary, assistant, partner, policeman, fireman, aid worker, politician, helper and supporter are people that fall into this category.

Selling this image is all about family, team, health, education, helping and selflessness. In order to differentiate you will separate yourself from selfish motives. In this general UCP are: **Frances McDormand, Alan Alda, Catherine O’Hara, and Michael Clark Duncan.**



The Creator
... to express
your own
vision using
creativity
and
imagination

THE CREATOR – This is a person who wants to give form to a vision and to create enduring value. The strategy used here is to develop artistic control, culture, and unusual skills – and to express your own vision using creativity and imagination.

Selling this image requires innovation, self-expression, and artistry. This type will differentiate themselves from unimaginative, banal and usual characters CREATORS include: **Steve Martin, Bette Midler, Jon Favreau, and Katherine Hepburn.**

NOTE: I have *imposed* these definitions on the actors I've used as examples – from my own observation. *They* may not agree with my assessment. You are free to disagree as well – and discover actors who are more fitting.

The point is that this formulation is only a “*starting point*” to establish your own UNIQUE character.

Homework Assignment: Do a picture search on the examples I've used ... a find out whether you can “see” the UCP being sold in the picture. Just go to Google (or other search engine) and enter NAME OF STAR followed by a comma and the word PHOTOS.

How To Use Your UCP

As I'm sure you're beginning to realize, by now, there are *many* character types and even more strategies for projecting the image that sells. Add to that, the ability of actors to combine different **UCP's** – and you have, literally, thousands of choices.



“... align your marketing efforts with your already established tendencies.”

For instance, Harrison Ford could, probably, more accurately be called the REGULAR GUY-HERO, Robin Williams might be the JESTER-CREATOR, Julia Roberts could be defined as the INNOCENT-EXPLORER, and Sarah Jessica Parker is, perhaps, more properly called the LOVER-CAREGIVER.

In fact, one of the transitions every actor makes in his or her career is the expansion of their basic type – to include elements of other types. Which, in turn, extends their staying power.

What you have to do is look at yourself in a dispassionate and objective way – and align your marketing efforts with your already established natural tendencies.

It's Up To You To Choose

Or you can wait for someone else to decide for you – which might take a long time.

In my opinion, it's better to be the CREATOR-HERO in your own career.

So your question is not “*What type am I?*” – as much as it is:

What is MY UCP?

If you take the time and effort to put together your own **UCP** definition, you will be well prepared to go into your next photo session with something very specific to shoot for. This is a good



step toward actually accomplishing what you want – getting called in from your headshot.

As I mentioned earlier, actors do not generally like the entire concept of typing – their training is aimed at giving them a broad set of skills – and most actors picture (and desire) the kind of career that allows them to explore a wide range of characters.

While I empathize with this point of view – because most actors DO have the ability to play a myriad of ‘types’ – the business is what it is ... and it is not going to change just because we don’t like the way it is.

NOW is an excellent time to get over the idea that you can refuse to be typed.

Although it is possible to build a solid business doing vastly different characters, every time out ... thinking that you are one of the very few actors who can accomplish that sort of career, is probably not the best strategy to start with.

Instead, I think you would be well advised to ‘go with the flow’ –but in a specified way.

Beat them to the punch. Take the time to figure out what type you are, naturally – your **UCP** – and then do the work necessary to present yourself in that precise way.

Your results will probably improve.



“go with the flow –but in a specified way.”

“... this is only peripherally about the way you look.”

Once you have become a useable, marketable commodity – perhaps you can ‘stretch’ your **UCP** to include characters that you aren’t obviously ‘right’ for.

By the way, this is only peripherally about the way you look.

Sure **George Clooney** is going to be up for leading man roles and, of course, **Rosie O’Donnell** is going to play the friend or the aunt.

But observable reality is that either of these actors could play other kinds of parts. George could be the best friend. Rosie could be the leading lady.

We see it happen all the time. How else do you explain **Danny DeVito**, who plays leading roles – and **Jim Carrey**, who plays character roles?

Look at their pictures. Carrey is a typically handsome leading man type and DeVito is, well ... short, bald, and paunchy.

(Of course, both play roles inside their generic types as well – because they have managed to become that most important show business commodity – a star.)

At this point you may feel a little confused about how a **UCP** definition is going to help you achieve that great headshot.

So, I’ll use a few real world examples of actors “projecting” a **UCP** in their headshots.



Just know that what you are thinking about (projecting) comes across in your expression, in your body language and in the intensity you are communicating with your eyes. Also your clothing choices, background choices, make-up, hair – all convey information.



Let's look at some examples:

For instance here's a headshot submitted by **Ricarte Rivera**, (Thanks, Ricarte.) which conveys **THE OUTLAW**.

Notice how his expression is direct and unwavering – that his eyes make frank contact with you. Also note his body position: forward and toward you. The choice of clothing adds to the 'dark side' idea. Although Ricarte is not making an attempt to scare you – it seems clear that anything could happen with this guy.



Now let's look at another headshot from Ricarte – which conveys an entirely different **UCP** ...

I think this headshot exemplifies **THE MAGICIAN**.

Notice that Ricarte is looking “under” his eyebrows – that he looks confident and yet mysterious. Also notice that the shirt is open and loose. The beard completes the image. His general expression is putting forth the idea that he doesn't need your approval. He knows what he's doing and the tilt of his head tells us he is comfortable in his choice.



As you can see, two different photographs of the same actor can convey vastly different information. The point is that the old saying, **“a picture is worth a thousand words”** applies to your headshot in a BIG WAY.



NOTE: Your UCP is personal to you, unique. Your MAGICIAN would undoubtedly look different from Ricarte’s.

Here is a terrific headshot from **Damara Reilly**, (Thanks, Damara.) where it is clear that we are looking at **THE REGULAR GAL**.

Her expression is open and welcoming with just a hint of expectation. She’s glad to meet you. Notice that she’s leaning to one side and the shirt is casual. Color is used perfectly in this shot. I love the background color, which emphasizes her red hair – and the hair perfectly “frames” her face. Again, her body language expresses the idea that she’s friendly and open to whatever comes her way.

Let’s have a look at Damara in a different **UCP:**



Now we are meeting **THE RULER**. This woman is in charge. The set of her lips, the severity of the clothing, the direct and penetrating gaze tell us she is used to being in charge – and we are unlikely to argue. Note the head position, the angle of her head stressing the musculature in her neck, how the hair has been “smoothed” and there just a hint of the humor she will depend upon to lead.





Here's Damara again, with yet another **UCP**.

THE EXPLORER. Note the eyes, which are frankly assessing you. She is checking you out and forming an opinion. Maybe she wants to know you ... maybe not. This time around, the shirt is conveying her lack of concern about what others think. She is going her own way. The diamond in the ear is not jewelry in this shot – it's a statement. Also the slightly askew hair is adding to the idea that she doesn't go with the crowd.

A solid headshot.

As you can see, it's possible for an actor to convey entirely different **UCP's** by choosing to use one headshot or another.

Keep in mind is that the photo you submit can make a huge difference in the way you are perceived and – naturally – your results.

If Damara submitted the first or third shot for the part of a powerful lawyer, medical examiner or police detective – her submission likely wouldn't work. But the second shot would probably get her *"in the door"* for those kinds of roles.

Bottom Line? Every element of your headshot should be carefully planned, elegantly executed and presented in the most professional manner possible.

Remember, a great headshot is one that gets you in the door.



“What does
this picture
say?”

“Who is this
person?”

“How would
I cast her?”

GOOD NEWS: With the advent of the internet, and digital photography – it has become much easier for an actor to have a wide selection of headshots to use for different submissions. (We’ll get to that part a bit later as well.)

NOTE: Again, I have *imposed* these **UCP** definitions on these actors’ headshots. It’s unlikely that Ricarte and Damara had anything like those ideas in mind, when they posed.

But this ‘*after the shoot*’ analysis is precisely the process you will be using when you are assessing your own pictures – and deciding things.

“What does this picture say? Who is this person? How would I cast her?”

This is the process you will be using over and over again – until you begin to formulate your own marketing and submission plans, based on what you can see in front of you – and what you want to actually accomplish .

I hope you noticed that I did not label these photos as “commercial” or “theatrical” headshots. That’s because those definitions are far too broad and generic to be of any use to the individual actor.

The idea that a big smile is a commercial shot and that not showing any teeth is a theatrical shot is just silly. The more **specific** you are in your presentation, the better your headshot and the more likely that it will get you in the door.



“If your headshot isn’t “working” (getting you called in) you need another one.”

Let’s Review

- ◇ The professional headshot has only one purpose: It must get you called in – to show off your skills to a casting director, agent, manager, director, producer, etc.
- ◇ Realize that YOUR face is YOUR fortune. Don’t try to look like something you are not. It’s a gigantic waste of time to get glamour shots if there is very little likelihood of being cast in a glamour role. Don’t try to trick the camera – it’s not your job. On the other hand, make sure that you are doing your part all the time.
- ◇ Get comfortable with how you look. You might as well and it saves a lot of mental anguish when it comes to having your picture taken. The best time to adopt this “pro’s” attitude is, today. Being and looking professional should be a life-long concern of yours.
- ◇ If your headshot isn’t “working” (getting you called in) you need another one.
- ◇ Use a professional photographer. Any other choice is likely to have some rather nasty consequences – like wasting time and money. The money part is not easy to deal with – but the time part is lost and gone forever.
- ◇ Never expect your agents, managers, or publicity people to care as much about your “name-brand” as you do.



“... following through on the steps you must take ... is your responsibility.”

- ◇ The ultimate decisions about what is right for your business must be your decisions. Don't turn this over to someone else unless you enjoy being disappointed.
- ◇ Projecting an image, an attitude, a personality, a point of view – are all things that only you can control. Deciding how to advertise your acting business is your choice.
- ◇ Watch the red carpet for a big lesson. Stars on the red carpet are being photographed by hundreds of different photographers of varying skills. In order to “look good” the stars learn to “pose.” Believe me, most professional actors have gone to the trouble to learn these skills.
- ◇ Something must be “going on” in your headshot.
- ◇ Understand that images contain ideas. It is possible to project many moods, attitudes, character traits – likability, sensitivity, sensuality, etc. – and it's your job to align your photos with your marketing plan.
- ◇ Don't underestimate the significance of a ‘type’ being reflected in your headshots. Put your efforts into achieving a photo that accurately reflects the real you.
- ◇ And finally – you must always keep in mind that following through on the steps you must take to achieve your goal is ... ***your responsibility.***



“... your headshot is the ‘key’ to getting in the door.”



The SHOT Part

Defining The Headshot

So what should you be thinking about, working on and doing – when it comes to your headshots?

Let’s get the facts out of the way first:

During your career, you will have a lot of headshots taken.

Why?

First, in the beginning of your career **your headshot is the “key” to getting in the door.** Then, with each step up the ladder, a good headshot will make the difference between getting called in – to show what you can do – and not being considered at all.

VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: You may *not* get a working headshot on your first try.

Secondly, **your headshot must look exactly like you.**



“... the headshot is the basic tool of the professional actor.”

“Your headshot is an unsolicited advertisement...”

Which means you will be well advised to get new headshots every time your appearance changes, in order to always “look like you.”

Third, through the rest of your career as a professional actor you will have to get those pesky publicity shots on a regular basis – as you go from project to project and become a recognizable player.

And still, every picture must look like you.

In other words, **the headshot is a BASIC tool of the professional actor** – and knowing how to handle all aspects of it, is crucial to your eventual success.

Now, you have probably already heard or been told that your headshot is your “calling card” or “business card.” But, I prefer a definition that comes from ‘observable reality.’ (What we can actually see happening in real life.)

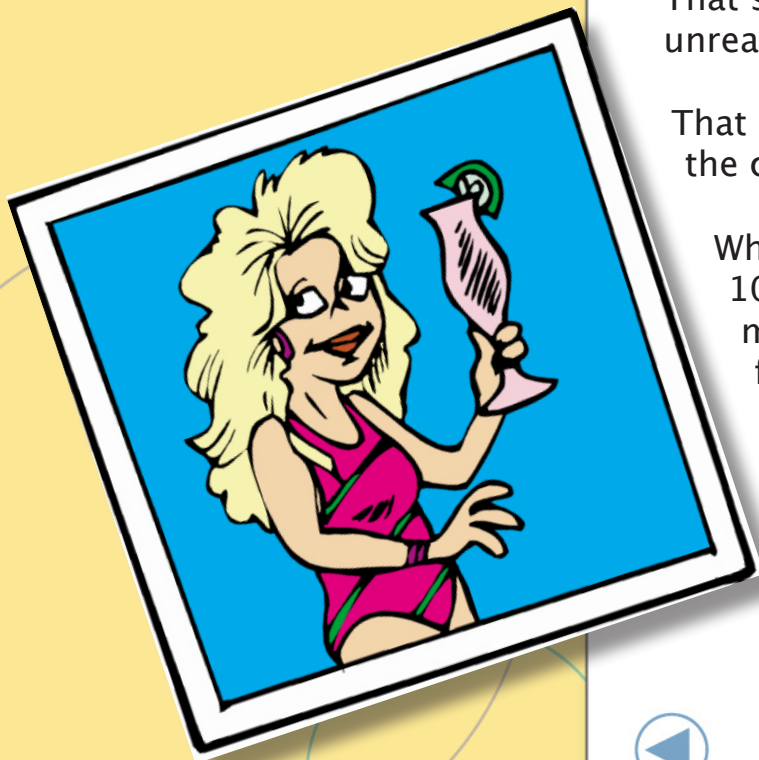
Here is my definition of a headshot – it’s one that I feel will be more helpful. You will be better prepared for the job ahead, if you accept this more accurate description:

Your headshot is an ‘unsolicited advertisement’ for your acting business.

I have watched casting directors going through photographs. I’ve watched agents do it. I’ve had to do it myself, as a director, producer and show-runner – and, take it from me, your submissions to casting directors, agents, managers, producers, directors, and the



“... you only have about 2 seconds to get their attention.”



production companies (to whom you will be sending your headshot and résumé) are seen as **unsolicited advertisements**.

To all of these folks, your headshot is just another piece of paper they get in the mail – that says, **‘Buy me!’**

Your submissions to casting directors, agents, et al, are not very different from the flyers and ads you get in your own mailbox every day. You know the ones I’m talking about – for oil changes, cheap furniture, groceries, closet organizers and return address stickers.

Now ask yourself, what do YOU do with those unsolicited ads?

That’s right, most of them end up in the trash, unnoticed and unread.

That is exactly what happens to most headshots. Rest in peace – in the circular file.

Why? Because the people you’re trying to convince – who get 1000’s of submissions in their mailbox every week – usually make their decisions the same way you do – when you are faced with a stack of ads in your mailbox.

Think about what do you do – don’t you merely glance at each ad and decide – **“trash or consider?”**

Is it personal? Of course not.



“Your headshot must demand that ‘closer look.’”

Given this ‘observable reality,’ it’s easy to understand why – when an casting director, agent, director or producer opens your submission – **you only have about 2 seconds to get their attention.**

2 seconds.

That’s about how long they look at your headshot.

That’s about how long you have to convince them to give YOU a closer look.

If they’ve seen your headshot before (and believe me casting directors are successful based on their ability to remember faces) – then you will have less than a second to catch their eye.

It naturally follows that if getting them to give you a ‘closer look’ is the result you are hoping for – your headshot had better STAND OUT.

Your headshot must demand that ‘closer look.’

If your unsolicited advertisement (headshot and résumé) isn’t up to snuff, you will wait a long time before “getting the call.” This simply means that skimping on time, money or hard work when it comes to accomplishing this critical tool, is a very bad strategy.

Bottom Line? Actors get jobs because they fit the description of the character – AND they are able to deliver, when they are “called in” for a meeting or audition – based on their headshot.



“Casting directors don’t like surprises...”

“... the headshot can convey authority, trust, professionalism, and many other powerful attitudes.”

If, after you’ve been called in from your headshot, you arrive looking nothing at all like the person in the picture – you lose.

Casting directors don’t like surprises of that kind. Agents and managers know that this is the case – and will consider you an amateur if your photo looks like **Meg Ryan** and you waltz in, looking like **Roseanne**.

So... Your Headshot Must Look Just ... Like ... You.

This is the first and most important “rule” about your headshots. Ignore it and you will be in for years of frustration ... and waiting.

7 Critical Elements Of A Great Headshot

Direct Eye Contact – Your eyes contacting the viewer of the headshot can convey authority, professionalism, trust and many other powerful attitudes. Any photo lacking this feature should be taken out of consideration.

A Genuine Smile – If you are smiling in your photo, it must be a genuine smile. This is a smile that includes your whole face. Eyes, mouth, eyebrows, angle of face and (sorry, ladies) laugh lines. A phony smile somehow always stands out – in a bad way.

Compatible Colors – The color of the background and your clothing can convey emotional content. Be sure to adjust those elements to coincide with your basic marketing strategy. So pick colors that compliment your skin tone. (More about color in a later chapter.)



“Go with a style you can maintain and show up with ... every time.”

Regular Hair – Too many actors try for some sort of fancy hair-style, thinking that this will help their efforts. Again, this is a strategy that has many open manholes.

If you spend a huge amount of time at your photo session with hair styling – in order to look like a star – and they call you in on the basis of that ‘look,’ you probably won’t be very successful – especially if you don’t have a professional hair stylist on call, so that you can accomplish that ‘look’ for every audition. If you can’t make your hair look like your picture, before every audition, expect disappointment.

Go with a style you can maintain and show up with ... every time.

Make-up – With the advent of color, make-up is almost mandatory for women – AND men.

BUT... be very careful not to look “made-up” in your photos. Obvious or overtly colorful make-up is something that will narrow your chances with a casting director. They are looking for “real” people and that ‘make-up-y’ look goes against the grain.

(There are some **UCP’s** that will be enhanced with make-up – but again, that’s what you have to look like when you walk in the door – so be cautious and acutely aware of the make-up used in your shots.)

Appropriate Wardrobe – What you wear in your headshot conveys information. You can look “hip and trendy,” “business-like,” “artistic,”



“When you send out your headshots... what is the message you’re conveying?”

“middle-class,” “outrageous,” or whatever. Be sure that the clothing you are wearing puts out the message you want to put out.

Remember your **UCP** and put your wardrobe together accordingly. This should always be clothing that you would wear to an audition normally – which pretty much leaves out capes, hats, prom-dresses, tuxedos, suits of armor, ski clothing, butt-floss bikinis, or costumes of any kind.

When you send out your headshots, what is the message you are conveying? Check and double-check every element. Align each element with your overall strategy and **UCP**.

Believe me, if you take the trouble to think this through, to plan your entire ‘campaign’ – and to do your homework – your results will be much more to your liking.

Were you counting? Only six, right? That’s because number seven is an inevitable repetition:

YOUR HEADSHOT MUST LOOK JUST ... LIKE ... YOU.

Catching Their Eye

All right, what can you do to accomplish that first step, the closer look?

The most critical element is this:



Connect With The Viewer.

Connecting to the viewer can be accomplished by paying close attention to this well-known (and often misunderstood) cliché –

“The eyes are the windows to the soul.”

What this really means is that your eyes are the most important element of your communication with others. If your eyes are not focused on the viewer, or they aren’t making direct contact – your headshot will not have the most crucial element: **POP.**

Here is an example of what I’m talking about:



This photo is from **Jessica Salisbury**. (Thanks, Jessica.) It is an example of what happens when the eyes don’t connect – when the eyes don’t dominate – when the eyes don’t communicate.

Yes, the photo is clear, well focused and nicely cropped – it just doesn’t “catch the eye.” Jessica is a pleasant person, no doubt, but there’s nothing in this photo that makes her memorable, unique or even much that says “actor.” This headshot is unlikely to stand out in a crowd.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: Jessica’s eyes are “soft” (not making solid contact with the viewer).

As for projecting a **UCP**, well, what would it be?



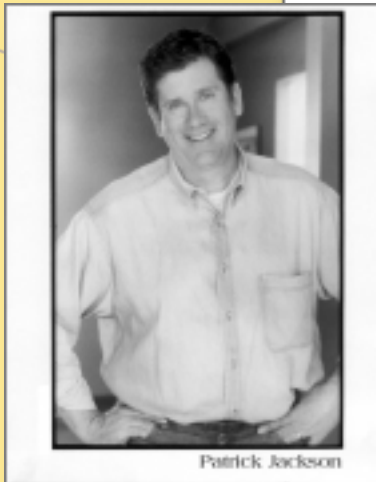
Don't think this is easy. It's just plain old hard work. But the results are worth it. Attitude, projection, your ability to communicate a UCP, these and many other points are all things **you** have control over.



Here's another photo of Jessica that really catches your eye and has a real chance of getting past that **2 second** mark.

Notice how you are drawn into the eyes and the illusion that she is looking right at you. Also note the position of the head and the fact that she is "nailing" you with her expression. There is a lot of attitude in this picture.

An acting headshot has to "*contain*" something. It has a job to do - it won't work just because it's clear and well photographed.



Let's have a look at a man's photo to see a similar issue at play: This is **Patrick Jackson**. (Thanks. Patrick.) In this first photo, you'll see the same problem with the eyes. They just don't grab you. This is a **major** problem in this sort of shot - called a "3/4" or "Cowboy." Also, notice the background elements which make the photo look almost like a snapshot. The baggy, wrinkly shirt doesn't help much.

Now, Patrick looks like a pleasant enough person - maybe A REGULAR GUY, but the shot lacks content. It's not saying anything. This shot would not survive the **2 second** test.





But look at this headshot of Patrick. Now we're talking. He's got the viewer of the picture involved due to his "connection." ***Can you see the difference?*** This photo could work for THE HERO, THE RULER, THE EXPLORER, even THE MAGICIAN.

The darker tone of his jacket helps. The window in the background is soft focused.

Admittedly, this shot could be more "contrast-y" - and to be honest, I cropped this one myself, in my handy dandy Photoshop. (I'll show you how to crop later.)

Why did I crop it?

Well, let's have a look at the original photo Patrick submitted:



This sort of "artsy" format can make a good headshot fail. We'll talk about the importance of cropping a bit later in the book, but this is a great example of form over function. The end result is a decent photograph, but not a very compelling headshot.

As we've discussed, the eyes are the key component. The eyes determine whether a headshot holds our attention past that **2 second** mark.

In this photograph - without cropping - the eyes are secondary; conceding too much to the "layout" of an artistic photograph.



“Your primary goal is to sell someone on the idea of ‘trying’ your acting services”

Remember, ***your real purpose*** here is not to have an impressive photograph (or even one that you, your friends or your family like). Your primary goal is to sell someone on the idea of ‘trying’ your acting services; using an *unsolicited advertisement* that you send through the mail (or submit on the web).

Let me pound this into your head: ***Your Eyes Must Connect!***

So, how do you do this?

Unfortunately there is a lot of misinformation about this aspect of sitting for your photo. (Remember ***“look at the lens?”***)

However, I have a little secret that seems to have helped many actors do a better job of connecting. It’s a technical thing, but it can make a big difference in your results.

I explain it in my course, ***You Must Act!*** this way:

“Here’s a tip that will make every picture you take a little bit better: ***Focus your eyes on the “film.” Don’t focus on the front of the lens – it is often inches in FRONT of the “film.”***”

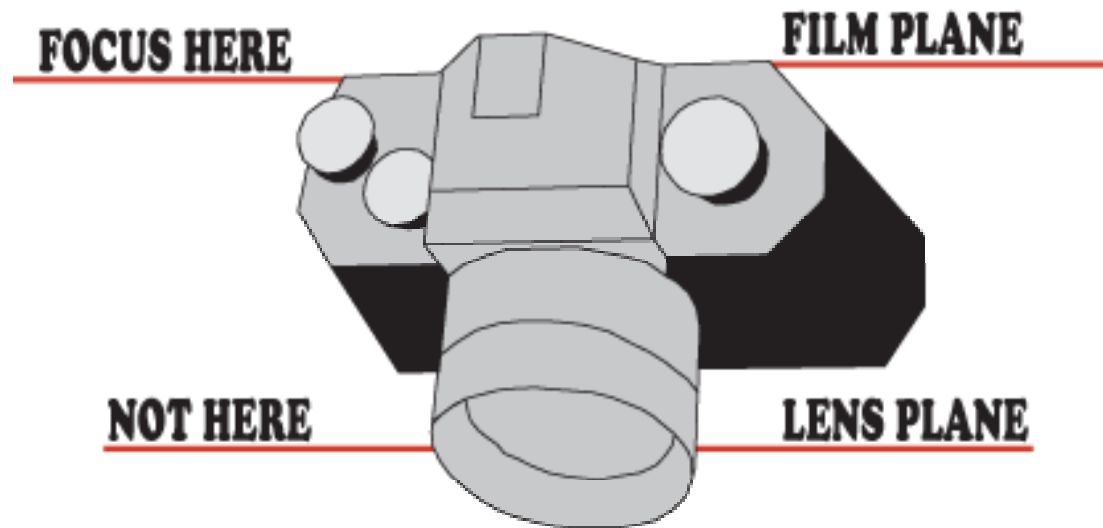
(Even on digital cameras there seems to be a distance between the front of the lens and the place where the image comes into focus.)

In other words, look ***‘into’*** the camera and connect with the film or focal plane. It’s the difference between looking ***at*** someone’s eyes and looking ***into*** someone’s eyes.



Done properly, your eyes seem to be looking directly at the viewer of the picture. This will create an almost magical connection – that works to your benefit.

Here's an illustration of what I'm talking about:



Your 'focus' and the image's focus should come together. I have seen actors gain work with this little hint.

Is this important? You bet. Eye contact with the viewer of the picture is about 95% (another of my "opinion" statistics) of what stops the viewer – to consider the actor – past that **2 second** mark.

Let me show you two different pictures of the same actor, selling



the same UCP and see if you can spot the difference. (Thanks to **Jonathan Spencer** for his generous contribution to our overall understanding of this particular point.)



Can you see the difference in his “contact” with you, the viewer?

See how the eyes seem to be looking directly at you – in the photo on top?

Notice how the eyes are a bit “off” in the bottom shot?

The difference is only a matter of centimeters, but the final results are worlds apart:

It’s also interesting to note how a change in the color of the shirt makes his skin tone and eye color “pop” – even though the background doesn’t change.

(We’ll get into the ‘color’ issue a bit later, as promised.)

However, the most important thing to take notice of, in Jonathan’s pictures, is the difference in **“content.”**

In the first shot, note how he has his head tilted, the beginning of a smile forming, and the spark in the eyes. We’re seeing personality... communication.



- ◆ *Look Like You*
- ◆ *Demand Attention*
- ◆ *Make Eye Contact*
- ◆ *Format For Effect*
- ◆ *Illustrate U.C.P.*
- ◆ *Have “content.”*

LET'S REVIEW

You will get a lot of headshots taken over the course of your career.

Your headshot is an unsolicited advertisement.

In order for a headshot to be effective – it must always:

- Look Like You. Don't try to look like someone you ain't.
- Demand Attention. You have **2 seconds**. Keep them looking.
- Make Eye Contact – With The Viewer
- Be Properly Formatted. Don't go for “art” in your headshot. This is advertising and it has to be carefully designed – if you expect it to do its job.
- Illustrate Your UCP. Show me who you can play. LOVER or MAGICIAN – it's up to you to communicate it.
- Have “content.” Your headshot must contain: Attitude, the essence of you, the right color combos, proper focus of attention, acting, and that certain ‘something’ that keeps me looking ... past the **2 second** mark.





The **PRACTICE** Part

Making Changes

I'm sure you've heard this idea before: If one keeps doing the same thing over and over, expecting to get different results – one is probably several sandwiches short of a picnic... one might want to think about checking into the Rubber Ramada.

If you want to get different (better) results, you have to be willing to adjust your approach to things.

In other words ... you must be willing to CHANGE.

Because a journey to anywhere requires a series of adjustments to be a successful journey. Airline pilots, flying to Rome (or anywhere really), are constantly adjusting their altitude, direction, speed, etc. in order to end up in Rome. It's not just "*set it and forget it.*"

Even walking to the end of your block requires you to adjust. Despite the fact that you generally know the way, you can't walk to the end of your block without looking. There may be a stray tricycle in your path ... or something squishy. You will have to adjust.



“... you
must be
willing to
Change.”

“... you can learn to do this – if you are willing to practice, observe results and try, try again.”

“Step around it – or step in it.” (Adjust.)

The same is true of any pursuit. To become accomplished you will have to make constant adjustments if you are to have any expectation of good results.

The first adjustment that you must make, with regard getting your picture taken, is this: You must believe that you can learn to do this – if you are willing to practice, observe results and try, try again.

Is it worth going to all that trouble? Only if you want your headshots to accomplish a particular thing: **GET YOU CALLED IN!**

I'll assume that you do.

How To Practice For Headshots

It always amazes me how many people seem to think that skills are somehow the result of luck or ‘good genes.’ That’s almost never the case. Most skills are a result of hours, days and years of practice.

The best example of someone who became extraordinarily skilled through practice is **Tiger Woods**. Tiger’s father put a golf club in his hands when he was a toddler. He has been practicing for almost his entire life. The results are plain to see.

Please take the word of an old codger – you will not become good at anything unless you are willing to put in the time, practicing. This



“... you will not become good at anything unless you are willing to put in the time practicing.”

goes for getting your picture taken too.

Remember those actors we've all seen on the red carpet? They got there because they took the time to learn how to be professionals first, and stars second. They learned – and practiced – the skills of posing for the still camera.

Those skills are just part of the job of a professional actor. You are going to have pictures taken of you for the rest of your career. This is an excellent time to get good at it.

With that said, here are two very specific practice regimens that will help you to become proficient at sitting for still photographs:

Mirror Work

One of the reasons that actors are often accused of having a big ego is that they look at themselves in the mirror a lot more often than *'civilians'* do.

Actors must do it. It is an occupational **necessity**.

The only way that an actor can connect a *"look"* with an attitude – and his ability to reproduce it – is to see it with his own eyes. That's what mirror work is all about.

Some believe that mirror work produces 'fakery' – but every pro I've ever worked with (100's of them) does it. Every one.



“... if you don't know the effect you're achieving while you are emoting – you're out there without a map.”

Jim Carrey, who arguably has the most malleable face on the planet, gained his skills by spending hours in front of a mirror. I'm sure he still works the mirror every day.

My advice: Don't avoid doing mirror work just because it “*feels funny*” to begin with, or that other people think it's silly, or your acting teacher thinks it smacks of “*results oriented acting*.”

It's much easier to “*back off*” of an acting choice than it is to “*make it bigger*” without any objective guidance. And, frankly, if you don't know the effect you're achieving while you are emoting – you're out there without a map.

Mirror Work Is A Private Thing – It's okay to be less than pleased with what you see. But it must be done. You should spend some time in front of the mirror, checking out your face and how it expresses things.

If you're thinking “*love*” and your face is saying “*bored*,” then you probably have more mirror work to do.

What you should be looking for – as you ‘work’ the mirror:

1. Does the look on your face match your intention? This is critical.
2. Concentrate on your **UCP** choice. Do you look like what you want to look like? Would you cast this person in the kind of roles you want to play?



“This is a critical skill ... with regard to getting a great headshot.”

3. How do certain colors work with your skin tones and hair? Try different color clothing to check how each ‘works’ with your face and hair.
4. Can you reproduce a “look” without the mirror there to help you?

Remember, practice makes perfect.

If you are thinking one thing and your face is communicating something else, you will have to work at it, to bring the two things into agreement.

When you are in public (or on the stage), you generally won’t have a mirror, so the feeling you have (what you’re thinking) should generate an expression that gives the impression you want to give.

This is a critical skill ... with regard to getting a great headshot. Not to mention when you are actually acting and need to “nail” an emotional response with just a glance.

After you’ve practiced in front of your mirror, it’s time to put your homework to use. The best way to do this is:

Get Your Picture Taken – A LOT

Don’t worry – you don’t have to do this part with a professional photographer – at a cost of hundreds of dollars. In fact, that’s a very bad plan.



“... a low cost way to go about practicing in front of a camera - and learning from the experience ...”

Here's my low cost way to go about practicing in front of a camera - and learning from the experience:

- ◆ Get a few of those throw away cameras, or borrow a digital camera. Also, get a tripod or at the very least a solid surface to prop the camera on. You will want steady, in focus pictures - in order for this practice to be of value to you.
- ◆ Enlist the help of a friend to take pictures of you. This should not be a photographer, just a helper. (This is why a tripod is important. You don't want an amateur taking "hand-held" pictures - most can't manage it.)
- ◆ Don't worry about the background for your first round of practice shots. Taking these pictures outdoors on a partially sunny day is probably the best tactic. If it's very sunny, find a somewhat shaded area. Do your posing so that you do not face into the sun - as that will likely result in squinting.
- ◆ If you are going to pose inside, you will need some extra lights. You're not looking for professional equipment, just enough extra light to make your photos clear and in focus.



- ◇ DO NOT use a flash camera as that is going to result in ‘red-eye’ – and that is something you want to avoid. This practice is mostly about the eyes. Bottom line? Outdoors is probably the easiest.
- ◇ Keep in mind that the important part of your practice sessions is to discover how you will look in your photos – not to accomplish a finished product.
- ◇ DO NOT rush this. Take your time. Try different attitudes. Try different clothing. Try different ‘poses.’
- ◇ This next step is the **most important part**:
- ◇ **Make Notes.** Keep a record of each “take.” Write down what you are trying to do with each click of the shutter. Get a little notebook and keep good notes of your mental process, what you’re trying for in each take, how you felt, etc.
- ◇ The better your notes, the better your results. This is an exercise that is meant to help you capture the look you want and need, by comparing your ‘*internal feelings*’ to the resulting photos.



“... what’s going on in your eyes is the key to getting a great picture.”

- ◆ A few dozen shots should give you a good starting point. But, don’t stop at just one “*session*.” Take lots of pictures. Relax. This is a rehearsal. Play. Enjoy yourself. Keep in mind that this is a very cost effective way of learning these skills.

Now, when you look at these practice shots, you will begin to understand that what’s going on in your eyes is the key to getting a great picture. If you have kept good notes, you will be able to connect a good shot with what you were thinking at the time.

If you don’t care for any of these shots (again, we’re not looking at the quality of the photograph but the attitude that comes across), then your next step is to repeat the ‘practicing’ process.

Believe me, if you do this exercise a few times, you will start to get much better at the ‘posing’ part and you will be able to reproduce your **UCP** – the image that you want to send out to the industry.

Whatever you do, don’t spend a lot of money on a professional photographer before you “*get a handle*” on doing your part.

Here are **the main things you are trying to accomplish** with these ‘practice’ pictures:

- ◆ Connecting To The Viewer
- ◆ Correct Physical Attitude – To Your UCP



“... it will pay off big time, when you are sitting for a professional photographer.”

- ◇ Correct Facial Expression – To Your UCP
- ◇ Clothing choices
- ◇ Color compatibility

This way of practicing for your photo session will only cost you a few bucks, and a few hours of your time.

But this practice will pay off, big time, when you are sitting for a professional photographer – where each click of the shutter will probably be costing you some serious money.

A good way to make sure that this exercise is valuable is to “trade” with another actor. You take their practice shots and they take yours.

VERY IMPORTANT: Don’t skip the taking notes part, as this is the key to achieving better results.

I know that this is a lot like having to do homework when you’d rather be doing something else.

But ask yourself: “How much do I want to have a professional acting career?”

If the answer is you want it very badly, then I hope you do your homework.



Let's Review

Get in front of a mirror and work on bringing your facial expression into agreement with your “inner workings.”

Practice getting your picture taken. Do it as much as you can stand.

Align your “posing and acting” with your UCP.

Trade with another actor. They take your practice shots and you take theirs.

Be sure to take good notes. Good notes are essential to getting a handle on how your internal feelings and thoughts are being expressed externally.

Keep working at learning the “job” of posing for stills. This is a crucial skill for the professional actor.

Don't limit your practice to one session. This may take a while.

It's your job to be comfortable in front of the camera. If you are not comfortable – whose fault is that?

CHANGE... It's a good thing.





The PHOTOGRAPHER Part

Choosing Your Headshot Photographer

The person you are looking for, to help you accomplish your headshots, is someone who is already making a living as a photographer. This person is usually called (not coincidentally), a Professional Photographer.

Using a professional is an important distinction for several reasons, not the least of which is that a pro is likely to be a businessperson – and you can expect to be treated as a good customer, if things don't go the way you expect.

Believe me, if you get a set of really awful pictures from a friend – acting like a photographer – he or she may not be too eager (or even able) to make things right. Then what will you do?

Bottom Line? Go with a pro, and you have some likelihood of dealing with a sincere businessperson, who cares about his or her reputation, and in whose best interest it is to supply good customer service.

Go with an amateur and you will get what you pay for.



“Go with an amateur and you will get what you pay for.”

“..your headshot
is your MOST
IMPORTANT
marketing tool”

Most of the photographers who specialize in headshot photography take out ads in your local trade paper (if you're in LA, NY, Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Sydney, Mumbai, Toronto, Buenos Aires, or any other good sized production center) – and there is hardly a town so small that it doesn't boast a professional photographer or two (who are usually generalists, but are preferable – even if they don't specialize in this particular niche of photography).

In other words, if you live in a smaller market, where there aren't any photographers with experience doing headshots – you should still go to a professional photographer.

However... in order to get what you want from your local, general practice photographer, bring along examples of the type of picture you are looking for. You can print out headshots you find on the internet – to give your photographer an idea of what you want. It's always a good idea to **show** rather than tell.

Remember, your headshot is your most important marketing tool, so you must clearly communicate to your photographer precisely what you want.

Looking At Formats

Although there are several *standard* formats in the business, you will find slight variations from market to market. Be sure to find out what's considered the norm in your area. In the meantime, here's a list of the most common formats and how they are used:



“The standard size for this photo is 8 inches by 10 inches.”

Although there are many uses for your photos and many different sizes that may find their way onto zed cards, postcards, business cards, etc. – the most important photo is what we have been calling your “headshot.” The standard size for this photo is 8 inches by 10 inches. Thus: “eight by ten.” (At least in the USA – other countries may have a different standard and, if so, THAT is the size you will want to use.)

Headshot – This is just what it sounds like. A photo of your entire head. From above the top of your hair – to below your chin.

Make sure that the photographer you choose to work with, understands the concept of “entire head.” Many photographers like to take “artsy” photos, or extreme close-ups... and they may not change their “style” for you. This is not a good result from your point of view.



Here’s an excellent example of a headshot from **Jonathan Spencer**. (Thanks again, Jonathan. [Bob’s note: Jonathan has a lot of really good shots to use as examples.])

This REGULAR GUY/ RULER **UCP** couldn’t be better.

(Again, I’ve imposed this definition.)

Notice how every element we’ve discussed is evident in this shot. Entire head in the picture, eye contact, expression conveying intent, clothing congruent with **UCP**, good contrast and background, etc.



Close Headshot – Focusing closely on the face (and just the face).

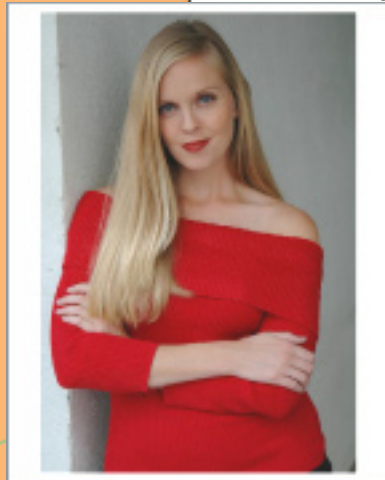


You ***SHOULD NOT*** use this type of photo unless you have a famous face – or are a recognizable actor.

Stars and known character actors can get away with this kind of shot because casting directors, directors and producers already know what they look like – this sort of headshot is just a ‘reminder.’

In the beginning or middle of your career, it is simply a waste of money and time to get this kind of picture for your unsolicited advertisement. You are not trying to get “branded” with your submissions – you’re just trying to get in the door. (Notice how good Cary was at this?)

3/4 Shot (“cowboy”) is a shot that goes from your “gunbelt” to above your “hat”.



The main goal of this sort of shot is to give the casting director a clear idea of what you look like “*in total*.” This kind of shot should make it obvious what your body-type is – your physicality, posture, weight, height, etc.

Here’s an excellent example of a 3/4 shot from **Beth Shea**. (Thanks, Beth.) Again, note the use of color and background – how the bright red makes us aware of Beth’s hair, face and body type.

A very good photo.



“Casting directors prefer to see a 3/4 shot of unknown actors ...”

IMPORTANT: 3/4 is the most highly recommended kind of shot for actors who are not well known by the casting directors.

Casting directors prefer to see a 3/4 shot of unknown actors, because it saves them a lot of wasted time bringing in people who are not “physically right” for the parts they want to cast. A working 3/4 shot should be on the top of your list of “need to gets.”

Here’s some very good advice from a New York casting director:

“Actors who are not represented by agents or managers – who are seeking work or representation, should seriously consider using 3/4 shots.

“If you have a great agent or manager submitting your picture on projects, then your shots can be more of the traditional headshot because casting directors trust your agent or manager when deciding if you should be seen for a role.

“If you are NOT with a great agent or manager, then a 3/4 shot is the way to go. A 3/4 shot is a picture that shows not only your head but also your body, in other words, three quarters of you.

(That’s why it has traditionally been called a “Cowboy” in the movie industry ... from the top of the hat to the gun belt ~ Bob)

“You can be standing, sitting on a stool or any other position that shows you from the head down to your waist – or even a little lower.”



“... you need to have clear, direct, honest pictures that show what you really look like - most of the time.”



More Casting Director advice:

“You must realize – your picture’s job is to impart data about what you look like from a casting perspective. If an agent has room on his client list for a certain type – or a casting director is looking for an actor to play a specific role – in both cases they have an idea of the “look” they are seeking. A floating head tells them very little. More information is better. When we are casting, we are much more likely to call someone in for a role when we feel that they really look like what we are imagining the character to look like.

“... you need to have clear, direct, honest pictures that show what you really look like most of the time “

Full Body is a shot that features every last inch of you. An actor looking for representation or auditions is well advised to consider this sort of photograph **mostly useless**.

This kind of photo is more accurately described as a publicity photo, a glamour photo, or a model’s photo. It usually features a bikini (for women) or shirtless (for men) and it definitely falls into the realm of ‘*modeling*,’ more than acting.

My opinion is this: If you’re just getting started and you’re on a tight budget – you should leave the full–body shot for another time.

If you have no interest in appearing in a swim–suit ... or less – forget it entirely.



“You want and need... (at the very least) One great 3/4 shot ... and ... One great headshot.”

Let's summarize:

What you are looking for are both headshots and 3/4 shots.

My approach would be split up the total number of takes in your shoot - roughly 60/40 (60% headshots and 40% 3/4 shots.)

This is something else you must make sure your photographer understands, in terms of your needs.

You want and need (at the very least): **One great 3/4 shot & One great headshot.**

Interviewing Photographers

If you've done your homework, you already have a pretty good idea of what you want. But, as with all shopping trips, this one is going to take some time - if you want to get exactly what you're looking for.

Remember, you are hiring them. You are the customer. You're shopping.

A good shopping tactic, generally, is to figure out the MOST you can afford to spend and start your shopping trip slightly below that price range ... keeping in mind that you may **not** get what you need on the first try. Plan your headshot budget accordingly.

Many elements that should enter into making a buying decision:



“Is it worth taking the time to interview several photographers?”

Only if you want to get good results sooner ... rather than later.”

- ◇ Is the photographer professional?
- ◇ Does the photographer have a good reputation?
- ◇ Is the photographer knowledgeable about headshots?
- ◇ Can you communicate with him or her?
- ◇ Does s/he seem rushed or stressed?
- ◇ Has s/he done work similar to what you’re looking for?
- ◇ What are his/her policies about control of the images?
- ◇ Can you work out a mutually acceptable schedule?
- ◇ Is the price in a range you can afford?
- ◇ How about personality? Are you comfortable with her/him?

Is it worth taking the time to interview several photographers? Only if you want to get good results sooner... rather than later.

All right, let’s look at each element of what you’re shopping for, so you can be totally prepared to make a good decision. (After all, it’s your hard-earned cash.)



Professional – Pros are usually good at what they do. You can expect most of them to be organized and knowledgeable.

You can also expect that the best ones are going to be more expensive and harder to get a booking with.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A PRO

- ◇ A pro has up-to-date equipment. (These days that probably means digital capability – as well as traditional photographic tools.)
- ◇ He or she will also have a ‘book’ of photos they’ve taken (a portfolio) for you to look through and assess.
- ◇ A pro will be appointment oriented. “*Whenever*” is not a good answer when you’re shopping for someone to help you accomplish your goals.
- ◇ He or she will most likely have a make-up person and hair-dresser “*on call.*” (Usually at an extra cost to you.) In the age of color headshots these two people are extremely important to your outcome. Check with your photographer regarding hair and make-up.
- ◇ A pro will generally have a good selection of backdrops, props, chairs, etc.



“...Are you comfortable with your potential photographer?”

- ◇ A pro will almost certainly have a studio. **NOTE** – some professional photographers work out of their home or apartment and will have a “studio” space instead of a formal studio – this is generally acceptable. But you will have to judge for yourself. If the situation makes you feel uncomfortable ... move on. Also, make sure that there is a private changing area, if you are planning on wardrobe changes.

Personality – What sort of person is your potential photographer? Easy going? Strong and demanding? Sweet? A little distant? All of these attitudes can work for you. It all depends on how you react to the personality of the person taking the pictures. Maybe you need someone to push you a little bit. Or maybe you do your best work in an environment of total acceptance.

This is going to be a gut call. (And you have to make the call, so don't forget – you're still shopping.)

Are you **comfortable** with your potential photographer?

Procedures – Does your photographer have to have the Beatles playing at full blast to get his 'mojo' working? Do you hate the Fab Four? Does your photographer like to work at midnight and you are a morning person?

It's critically important that you understand just how the shoot is going to happen before you make a decision.



“... so don't avoid the hard work of making this decision ... and make your decision based solely on your needs.”

Again, it's about you 'being in a good place' during this procedure – so don't forget to ask these questions – and carefully record the answers. (Write down your impressions.) And ... **decide based on your needs.**

From the standpoint of accomplishing your photo session – with the greatest potential for good results – it is important to understand that it's **your comfort level** that determines the outcome.

A photo shoot should be a time when you are at “the top of your game.” The Pro is someone who works with you – not someone who expects you to adjust to his or her needs. There are hundreds (if not thousands) of competent professional photographers to choose from – so don't avoid the hard work of making this decision ... and make your decision based solely on **your needs.**

Policies – What is the policy of your potential photographers with regard to control of the images? Do they keep them and you must go to them to get prints? Do they provide you with a CD-ROM containing all your photos? Do they keep your photos “on file?” If so, for how long?

Also it's a very good idea to ask them what their policy on 're-takes' is. Do they have one? Do they stand behind their work? How long does it take to get prints from them? Etc.

The Wide World of Digital – It is my observation that today's Pro is aware of the need for actors to have control over their photos.



“Color headshots are fast becoming the standard in the industry.”

Digital files are almost a necessity with the growth of “online” casting and web sites. Most Pros seem to be offering full delivery of your images on CD-ROM (or sometimes, posted on a web site for you to select your choices). But, it’s important to check – as this will undoubtedly have an effect on the amount you will be paying for 8 by 10 prints, reproductions, postcards, web-posting, etc.

DIGITAL NOTE: A lot of the busier headshot photographers have already invested huge amounts of money in digital equipment. Chief among them are printers – in order to deliver excellent “original” prints. Check to see if this is the case with your photographer.

Also don’t forget to inquire as to the number of prints included in the overall fee you’ll be paying. If there is an extra charge for prints, ask to see some examples of the photographer’s prints before committing to that purchase.

Color And/Or Black & White – Color headshots are fast becoming the standard in the industry.

Although this seems less so in NYC, Chicago, and other stage centric cities, the reality is that with digital photography and less costly printing possibilities, color is probably the way to go nowadays.

If you need a b&w shot, ask your photographer to include some b&w “takes” – which is generally not a problem when working digitally. Or ask about the efficacy of taking color shots and converting some to b&w – with software.



NOTE: Converting color shots to black and white can have some unforeseen consequences – if it is not planned for ahead of time.

Getting a black and white headshot from color shots involves “**greyscale**” information and your photographer will be able to help you with this part. So, check with your photographer about clothing choices, make-up, backgrounds, etc. if you want to have some shots converted to black and white.

Be sure to bring up your need for a black and white headshot during the interview, so you will be comfortable in the knowledge that you will be getting what you want.

Back to color.

Next is this serious concern:

Looking Good In Color

The main reason for trying different outfits (different colors) and paying close attention to make-up and hair color is to look good in your headshot, to convey your **UCP**, and to have an appealing photo to submit. (Ask your potential photographer if he or she will be taking “test shots” to get the make-up right and wardrobe colors right.)

If you have the time and money, it’s not a bad idea to consult with a color specialist who can help you choose colors and tonal values that are complimentary to your skin tones and hair color.



“Get a price.
Write it down.
Double check it,
before making
your final
decision.”

I’m sure that a search on the web will give you some basic information about this kind of specialist – so don’t be lazy about doing your homework or spending a little extra money.

Since color consultation is a large subject and beyond the scope of this manual – I urge you to do some research and check with your photographer about color choices, backgrounds, and what works best. (This especially important if you plan on having some of your color shots converted to black and white.)

Past Work – Does your potential photographer have previous work that exemplifies what you are looking for? If they have a portfolio (and the pros definitely will) and there isn’t anything in it similar to what you are looking for – it’s time to move on. If they have work that is similar to what you have in mind, ask how it was accomplished.

What should be uppermost in your mind is; ***Can I get what I’m looking for with this photographer?***

It’s your needs that are important to you. It’s your goal that you are trying to fulfill.

Price – Most of the pros in the photography game have a very clear list of prices and packages.

If your potential photographer is not forthcoming with this information – you are probably shopping at a place you can’t afford. (Caveat Emptor). Get a price. Write it down. Double check it before making your final decision.



The only important thing about the price is the very real possibility that your first attempt will *not* produce a working headshot – and you may have to try again.

This is something you must budget if you expect to accomplish your goals.

For instance, instead of planning for one \$900.00 photographer, consider the tactic of planning for three \$300.00 photographers or, instead of one \$450.00 photographer, three \$150.00 photographers. This is a critical planning decision you must make – especially if you are just getting started.

Remember: You may have to do this more than once in order to get that all-important “working” headshot.

BUDGET FOR HEADSHOTS – or you will suffer needlessly.

Packages – Every photographer will have his or her own “offer.” Some will simply hand you a roll of film and they’re done. Others will provide you will proof sheets, or a CD-ROM along with one or two 8X10 prints.

It’s important to ask for a full range of services and packages when you interview a photographer. If your potential photographer does not have a price sheet, ask questions and write things down.

Now that you know what to look for it’s time for the first steps you should be taking before making a decision about which photographer you are going to hire.



Step One - The Interview

You should meet with and interview at least three photographers. It may take even more to find the one you are looking for - but three is a bare minimum, in my opinion.

There are two upsides to this: First, of course, is having a good choice of options.

Secondly and, in some regards, more importantly - you will start learning the skills of interviewing prospective employee/collaborators. This will be helpful during your career when it comes to interviewing agents, managers, accountants, hair-dressers, coaches, teachers, etc.

When you meet with your potential photographer, the first thing you will want to do is this: Look through his/her portfolio to see if what s/he shoots is what you want - and if the style fits your **UCP**.

A photographer's portfolio reflects what they feel best represents their work and their style. You may see some great headshots, but if they don't coincide with what you have decided you need - move on to the next.

NOTE: In most photographers' portfolios you are likely to see some high profile clients. **Stars**.

DO NOT get star-struck. Remember, just like you will have to do, the stars have had lots of headshots taken in their careers. Some



“If you are pleased by what you see in the portfolio, your interview with the photographer continues.”

of those shots have worked for them – and some have not. You are unlikely to know the difference. Keep in mind that once a face is famous – almost every picture “works.” Don’t let the appearance of familiar actors influence your decision.

Remember, if you’ve done your homework, you are looking for a very specific kind of shot. (Or shots.)

Don’t get side-tracked by a famous face.

CRUCIAL NOTE: As you look through the portfolio, be sure to observe the photographer. Is he defensive? Is she bragging? Does he have an interest in what you’re looking for? Is she apologizing for certain shots?

This is where your powers of observation are going to be tested, so concentrate on your main goal – achieving the result you want and need. If you get a ‘vibe’ that makes you feel uncertain, it’s probably a good idea to move on.

If you are pleased by what you see in the portfolio, your interview with the photographer continues.

GENTLE REMINDER: You want to work with a photographer who makes you feel totally comfortable. If you are not relaxed, secure and comfortable with your photographer, your ability to concentrate during the actual sitting will be severely compromised.

If a photographer causes you to feel uptight, pressured, listless,



“... observe and assess the person you are going to be working with – to produce your most important acting career tool.”

bored, frantic, rushed, etc. – it will show up in any headshots you do with this photographer.

Ask about the type of music they play (if they play music) or if they like to talk a lot, or how much “direction” you can expect from them.

Ask them what a typical shoot is like. How long will it take? Can you stop to rest? How much time is allowed for changes?

And be sure to ask them about themselves – “How did you happen to get into photography?” “Why do you specialize in headshots?” “Who are your favorite actors?”

Again, your goal here is to **observe and assess** the person you are going to be working with – to produce your most important acting career tool.

If you find that you are comfortable with the photographer, move on to explain exactly what you are looking for in a headshot – and what your expectations are for the shoot.

Talk about your **UCP** – how you want the photos to exemplify a certain mood or attitude, the composition, cropping, color choices, lighting, conversion to b&w, etc. (We’ll get to the mechanics in a little bit.)

VERY IMPORTANT: You want a photographer who will collaborate. A good headshot photographer will really listen to what you are



“... who will listen, who will make suggestions and, most of all – who will help you to accomplish your goal.”

saying. S/he will give you feed-back. That’s what you’re looking for: Someone who will listen, who will make suggestions and, most of all, who will help you to accomplish ***your goal***.

You want a sincere businessperson, whose professional goal is to do everything s/he can, to assist you in accomplishing what you are paying for.

Things To Watch Out For

Here are some of the signs that the photographer may not be a good fit for you:

A photographer who insists on doing it “*my way*.”

A photographer who has ‘issues’ with communication – not listening – only interested in their own processes – lackadaisical with regard to your needs.

A bossy sort of person, or someone with a listless energy.

An inability to stay ‘on task’ – poor personal hygiene – dirty or cluttered work-space.

A poor business attitude. Not time oriented. Not service oriented. Vague about prices and offerings.

There are many negatives (no pun intended) that are possible in this relationship. It is key to your success that you find someone



who helps you to feel comfortable, creative and conscious during the shoot.

Like finding someone to date, if you are “over-eager” to get going ... you may have to endure some unforeseen (and usually bad) consequences. Take your time. Use your good judgment.

And, one more time – don’t buy based on price alone.

What You Will Pay

Speaking of price, as I mentioned in the beginning the cost of your session with a photographer can vary greatly. I have seen advertisements that offer package prices below \$100.00 and others where price is no object (in other words, the session will cost you a small fortune).

Whatever you do, don’t pay attention to the following sort of bad advice:

“If you have a few friends who need headshots as well, round them up and try to get a cheaper group rate.”

DO NOT Do This!

Your friends (other actors) can ruin your photo shoot with competing attitudes, different goals, lateness, urgent needs, anxieties, and other forms of mass confusion that can result in no one getting what they want.



“Budget this expenditure in the same way that you budget your rent, your transportation, or your groceries.”

This idea makes it sound like getting your professional headshot is similar to getting your class pictures taken. Don't buy into that idea at all. A group of actors, trooping past the camera, can result in some really awful photos – for everyone.

Getting your headshots is something you **must do on your own** (with the help of your photographer, of course) – and trying to save money with “iffy” tactics, is putting the emphasis on the wrong thing.

Keep foremost in your mind that this isn't about how much it costs – it's about achieving the result you want: **A headshot that gets you called in.**

As a rule of thumb, I would say that a session with a professional headshot photographer will cost in the range of \$150.00 to \$400.00. (With the proviso that it can be much lower or much higher than the average.)

Expect your costs to be higher if a make-up person and/or hair person is involved.

One more time: Do NOT make your decision based strictly on price.

Budget this expenditure in the same way that you budget your rent, your transportation, or your groceries. Spend only what you can reasonably afford (always keeping in mind that your first attempt may not work out and you may have to try again).



Carefully consider what you are getting for your money.

If you are going to get 100 shots, 2 8X10's, and a CD-ROM of your session from one photographer and something less from another – *that* should enter into your final decision. Be sure to **write down** all the benefits of each package.

In the beginning, I would advise you to choose a package you can afford that contains more shots, and more prints – all other things being equal.

Check how many changes you can reasonably expect to accomplish during the shoot. This is critical from the photographer's point of view – because changing outfits can increase the time needed for your session.

NOTE: Clothing should not be your largest concern at this point – as what you are wearing is not *generally* important to the overall usefulness of the headshot. So don't worry about having several “looks,” clothing-wise.

Clothing might be more important if you want and need to accomplish several different **UCP's** – or different types of shots for different types of submissions.

If you are an actor **and** a model – then different “looks” are probably more useful and important.

I will get into the different types of outfits that you will be considering



- when we get the *shoot* part of the process.

Making The Decision

DO NOT make this crucial decision about your headshots during your first meeting with a potential photographer.

Keep in mind that you are **“JUST SHOPPING.”**

If you’ve done the minimum, you now have three photographers to choose from. Make a list of pluses and minuses for each one. Write down your thoughts. Compare prices, packages and products. Compare time availability. Weigh the various other criteria.

Think this through.

Whatever you do, don’t rush the process. This decision is too important to be tossed off, based on price, convenience, or your natural anxiety to get this done as soon as you can.

Take your time.

Once you have decided on a photographer, set up an appointment for two or three weeks in the future - because you have some things to accomplish before you sit down in front of the camera. We’ll talk some more about that when we discuss the shoot part. Again, it’s important that you don’t rush into either choosing a photographer to work with - or rush into a photo session without the proper preparation.



Let's Review

In order to accomplish a working headshot, you should employ a professional headshot photographer.

If you are in a small community, it is still best to use a pro – making sure to show him/her what you want – using headshot samples.

You want your headshots to be in the proper format. 8X10.

You need one headshot and one 3/4 shot – at a minimum.

Your best strategy for finding your photographer is to **shop** for a good one – who meets your needs.

This process will require you to interview several photographers and take notes.

Budget your expenses carefully – with the idea in mind that you may not accomplish what you want on the first try.

Take your time selecting your photographer. Rushing can have bad results.





The SHOOT Part

Preparing Yourself For The Shoot

Here are some important matters you should take care of – **before** going in for your photo shoot:

First and foremost is your general health.

Your appearance is critical. Your appearance is a direct result of your health.

In order to look the best you can for your pictures, it is important to be healthy. This means taking care of yourself.

You should attend to this part of your homework immediately. If you start to follow these steps now – long before your actual shoot – you will have a much better outcome.

Not to lecture you too much – but it is very important to realize that **ALL** the skills you will need to accomplish a professional acting career are critical. Taking care of yourself is one of those skills.



“... All the skills you will need to accomplish a professional acting career are critical.”

BIG NOTE: The dietary, exercise and facial stuff which follows will probably take 3 weeks to a month before results start to “kick in.”

- ◆ Stop eating sugar or at least cut down dramatically. Sugar is closely related to skin issues and the less you take in, the better your skin will look. (Chocolate is out.)
- ◆ On a similar note, it’s important to drink lots of water. Water is the best medicine to ward off skin problems, and promote general vitality.
- ◆ Exercise. If you do a little moderate exercise every day, you will help your general appearance (and you may even drop a few pounds, which is almost always a good thing).
- ◆ Stay away from fatty foods, salty foods, and too much red meat. Again these are things that can have an unwanted effect on your skin tone.
- ◆ Keep your face clean. Use a facial regimen that works for you (since there are so many different approaches to this daily care issue, it’s important that do your own homework – to find out what works best for you.)
- ◆ Brush and floss regularly. Keeping your teeth healthy is a good thing in general, and quite important specifically,



with regard to getting your picture taken. If you have stained teeth, consult with your dentist about whitening formulas.

- ◆ Take care of your hair. This means using a regular regimen of shampoo and conditioner. (Again a personal choice – what works best for you.)

Your mental health is also important, so take the time to relax every day. Also work on your mental attitude with regard to the whole process of getting your picture taken. Remember, with practice and homework – you can do this.

On Being Comfortable

Getting your picture taken is a process you must get used to – if you expect to have good results in your acting career. There is just no way around this part. Here are a few tips, to insure relaxation:

It is generally a bad idea to wear new clothing on a photo shoot.

The reason for this is that a new shirt, blouse, pair of pants or dress can turn out to be uncomfortable on first wearing – and that’s something you don’t want. You want to be as comfortable as you can when you are sitting for photos.

A better choice is to find things in your wardrobe that make you feel great. If you want to use a new piece of clothing, I advise you to “*break it in*” before your shoot.



“... a photo shoot should be the only thing you have scheduled for that day.”

Use a no pressure approach. Book your shoot very carefully. Don't try to squeeze it in during your lunch hour or put it at the end of a long workday. If you have a regular job, try to schedule your shoot for a day off – or a weekend.

In other words, clear your calendar so that you have no external pressures on the day of the shoot. In my opinion a photo shoot should be the only thing you have scheduled for that day. Remember this is *your most important tool*.

NOTE: Your mental state in getting ready for the shoot should be similar to your mental state before performing in a show. This is going to be a “*performance*.” So do all the things you would normally do when preparing for a show – or a film shoot. If you have a routine when working, that's what you should do for your shoot.

Take a friend along. This strategy can be helpful for some actors. If you have a tendency to tense up and feel pressured, a friend can help make the photo shoot experience a little less daunting.

CAUTION: Be sure your friend is someone who is non-judgmental and whose presence relaxes you. (This idea is not for everybody. It's entirely your call.) Also, check with your photographer before inviting someone along. If this idea is part of your plan, you should bring it up with the photographer during the interview part.

Eat lightly on the day of the shoot. If you are “full,” it is likely that you will be less than sparkling when sitting for pictures. Needless to say that imbibing alcoholic beverages is not a good idea, either.



A List Of Things To Bring along:

- ◇ Bottled water. (Avoid sugar drinks, caffeine and milk products – all of which can have unwanted ‘results.’)
- ◇ Your favorite music.
- ◇ A light snack. (Non-juicy fruits and nuts or trail mix are great – but check that there’s nothing stuck on your teeth if you eat during the shoot.)
- ◇ Notes that you’ve taken from your practice sessions and other homework.

Prepare your clothing at least a day before the shoot. Make sure everything is clean, pressed (if necessary) and ready to go before the day of the shoot. (I’d suggest you even take a couple of days to make sure everything you plan to use is “*good to go.*”)

Put everything on hangers and inside a wardrobe bag or some other protective covering. The idea here is to be absolutely sure that everything you wear in the pictures looks fresh and clean.

(Unless you’re going for the grunge look – in which case make sure everything is dirty and wrinkled – and that your ‘tats’ and piercings are visible and looking good.)

Plan your trip to the shoot. Getting behind schedule and having to



“... this is all about being comfortable, relaxed and in a good frame of mind.”

rush is one of those things that will put you in a bad frame of mind – and the photos will show the results of this. Make sure that you know how long it’s going to take to get there early.

And then... **get there early.**

(Check with your photographer to make sure there’s a place to wait. If there’s no place to wait, do some legwork and find a nearby coffee shop or restaurant where you can take a breather – after arriving early.)

Unless you are getting “body” shots (for modeling mostly), **wear comfortable shoes.** For some actors, no shoes at all is a good choice. Again, this is all about being comfortable, relaxed and in a good frame of mind. Everything you can do to accomplish those things will pay dividends – in a better headshot.

Keep your “bring-alongs” to a manageable size. Try not to overload yourself with things you are bringing with you. If this is your first shoot, I would suggest you limit yourself to a few outfits and your comfort needs.

Again, *schlepping* along every outfit in your closet, a box lunch, eight pairs of shoes, a half dozen props and your dachshund – is probably going to cause more stress than it’s worth.

Clothing and Extras

When you’re choosing what to wear in your pictures, pick something





simple, comfortable, and preferably a solid color (high contrast colors are generally to be avoided – with the proviso that certain skin tones can be complimented by brilliant colors). Muted, solid colors are usually best.

Some people look great in red or bright purple – others, not so much. If you’ve done your homework, you will have already tried some things during practice and had this conversation with your photographer... so your choices have already been outlined.

Busy, high contrast patterns should be avoided, since they can be distracting.

This is mostly an issue of what looks best on you and what will work for your needs.

The clothes you choose should be what you would normally wear to an audition.

So... nurse’s uniforms, nun’s habits, waitress outfits, frilly undergarments, evening gowns, wet-suits, chef hats, hard hats, gypsy garb, cowboy hats, dominatrix leathers, bikinis and dressing up like Dracula – are probably not very good choices for your shoot.

Any jewelry you wear should be minimal and you should avoid any type of “extras” that might take focus away from your face.

Necklaces, loopy earrings, nose-rings, shiny barrettes, eyebrow



rings, and the like – should be kept to a bare minimum. If you don't need jewelry to feel “right” – just leave those things at home.

Make-Up

Due to the advent of color headshots, ***make-up is a critical part of your preparation.***

You should spend some serious time discussing this part of your preparation with your photographer before making your final decision.

MEN: There are photographers who manage to get good photos of men without the benefit of make-up – but be sure to check their results when looking through the portfolio. Ask questions and listen carefully – you don't want to spend money for a make-up person if you don't need one.

However, if you do decide to have a make-up person, be sure that you can see some “test” shots of the make-up before committing to a whole session of photos that may end up looking too “made-up.”

Keep in mind that you will probably not be wearing make-up to an audition, so whatever is done at the shoot must come out looking ‘natural’ in the photos.

WOMEN: Some women are blessed with very even and lovely skin tones. But very few women venture out in public without make-up.



“... be sure that you can see some “test” shots of your make-up before committing to a whole session of photos...”

If you are going to arrive at auditions with make-up (a probability) then it's a good idea to have make-up on when getting your photos taken.

The major question here is whether you need a make-up person on your shoot. If you are comfortable doing your own make-up – then doing it for a photo shoot should be no problem. (Be sure to get test shots of your own make-up job, as well.)

If you do choose to hire a make-up person for the shoot, ask for instructions on how to re-create the make-up for everyday use. (Write it down.)

This is very important because, as I'm sure you know by now, if you are called in, you ***must*** show up looking like your picture.

Hair

As I mentioned earlier, be sure to wear your hair in a style that looks good on you – and can be re-created for any audition or meeting you may be called in for.

If you are planning to get a haircut before your shoot, be sure to get it done at least a week ahead of time. Newly cut hair is usually something that will be noticed in a photo (especially true for men) and it's not the “look” you want.

(Of course, if you get your hair cut on a weekly basis, then it's probably okay to go ahead and stay with your regular habit



- because that's what you'll actually look like if you are called in from your headshot.)

As a general tip, I would say that you should avoid changing your hair color before a photo shoot - unless you plan on keeping it that color during the entire "*shelf life*" of your headshots.

Extreme hair colors (purple, green, blue, etc) are probably not going to work to your benefit either.

Wild hair-styles, that involve hours of preparation, are also a very risky proposition in a photo shoot - due to the need to "look like yourself" even when you get that "rush call."

What's In Your Background?

Most photographers have a choice of backgrounds - and you will have discovered what those choices are, when you do your interviews.

Keep in mind that the colors in the background should compliment your skin tone, hair color and clothing choices - so be sure to discuss this part with your photographer ahead of time.

Again, ask if you can see test shots before committing to a certain background for the entire shoot. (Due to the advent of digital, test shots are becoming a more common practice. Photographers who work with film, usually have a Polaroid set-up for test shots.)

If you are shooting outdoors, keep an eye on what will end up in the





background of your photos. If there's a stop sign behind you, it's probably not a good 'message' to be putting out there.

Also keep in mind that trees are green – and if that's a color that makes you look sick, pasty or slightly alien ... “next!”

Most photographers will have an “eye” for this sort of thing, so be sure to listen to their suggestions – before making up your mind about the background.

Acting Like A Pro

Remember, this should be a collaboration between you and your photographer – and you must do your part. Don't worry about being “difficult” – you are the customer in this relationship and if the photographer's a pro, he or she will understand that.

To avoid misunderstandings and bad feelings, a good attitude to take is one where you ask questions and listen to the answers. Keep it light and friendly – but stick to your guns. Remember that you are paying to get a specific result and your photographer is there to help (if you've chosen wisely).

Remain calm and listen carefully at all times and you will have a better chance of communicating effectively and accomplishing what you want. Don't get over-anxious about any of these things – but don't cave in either.

IMPORTANT SIDEBAR: A great headshot has a lot of acting going

“Keep it light
and friendly
... but stick to
your guns.”



on in it. But it has to be fully realized acting.

If you try to skate by with wardrobe, make-up, fancy poses or clever formatting, you'll be sadly disappointed in the outcome of those strategies. Dressing like a plumber or a nurse will not work, either.

No actor gets a job because they have a nice suit, a leather bustier, a baseball hat, or a feather boa.

Those sorts of photos are more correctly identified as publicity photos. Clearly, beginning and mid-career actors don't have a lot of use for publicity photos.

There is one BIG exception to the preceding advice:



EXTRA WORK – If you are in a major production city and you plan to make money as a background artist (extra) then it is often a good idea to have some photos of yourself in any specialty outfits you may own.

For men this would include; tuxedos, business suits, bathing suits, upscale casual, downscale, tennis outfits, cowboy mufti, grease-monkey get ups, police uniforms, military gear, hippy clothing, etc.

For women this might include; nurse's uniforms, swim-suits, evening gowns, business suits, upscale, downscale, casual, fashion, cocktail dresses, etc.



“... all it takes is a Polaroid or snapshot of you in the outfit to satisfy the agencies that book ‘extra work.’”

But remember, these are ‘*limited use*’ pictures.

Often, all it takes is a Polaroid or snapshot of you in the outfit to satisfy the agencies that book ‘extra work.’

So my advice is to try to accomplish these kinds of photos with a friend behind the camera, rather than spending your loot on a pro.

Next, let’s have a look at the various things you need to have under control on the day of your shoot.

On The Day Of The Shoot

Things to remember on the day of your shoot:

- ◇ **Relax.** This is not a ‘make or break’ exercise. You can always try again. If you’ve practiced and done your homework, this day is going to be like a gig. You are ready. So, try not to put pressure on yourself to be “great.” Just go in and do your job. Don’t think about the results. Stay in the moment.
- ◇ **Be Confident.** Again, due to your practice and preparation you are totally ready for this. It’s going to be much better because you were willing to do the work necessary.
- ◇ **Music.** If music is something that helps, don’t forget to bring it along. (Make sure there are facilities for that. No photos with your I-Pod ear buds in your ears.)



- ◇ **Food and water.** Make sure you have these things along. Bring your favorites. Don't depend on the photographer having drinks and snacks. Some do. Most don't.
- ◇ **Changes planned.** Write down a short plan of attack with regard to how you are going to make your changes. If you think this through you are bound to get a better result. You won't be rushed or confused if you know the steps you are going to take – beforehand. It's called *'rehearsing.'*
- ◇ **Time for Make-up and Hair.** This is something you may be taking care of before you leave for the session – be sure to bring along your make-up, hairbrush, comb, etc. for touch ups during the shoot. A mirror is a good idea too. If you are employing a make-up and/or hair person, your appointment is probably set up accordingly.

A list of things to keep in mind when the shutter is clicking:

- ◇ **"Contact" The Viewer.** Don't forget to look "into" the lens. Don't be shy. It'll become second nature to you after a few times, but on this first go-around, keep this critical tip in mind.
- ◇ **Concentrate.** This is your job. Be very careful not to be distracted away from your work.



Attitude,
“look,” and
“pop” are all
things that are
accomplished
by “acting the
part.”

- ◇ **Stay "In The Zone".** Stay relaxed, refreshed, joyful and walking that thin line between fun and work.
- ◇ **Work "With" Your Photographer.** If you've communicated your needs properly, your photographer will be your willing partner in achieving that result. Your behavior during the shoot should be similar to how you would “work” with another actor. Make eye contact with the other actor (in this case, the camera) and remember that you can talk during the process. Banter, by-play, conversation, and just chat will sometimes lead to a photo that looks “captured” as opposed to “staged.”
- ◇ **Don't forget to act.** This is an acting picture. The more acting you can communicate through it, the better. Attitude, “look,” and “pop” are all things that are accomplished by “acting the part.” A general caution: Don't go “over the top” – unless that's the **UCP** you intend to sell. Like good acting, good posing is a skill that is won by practice and rehearsal – as well as experience.

Let's Review

Re-read this chapter.

Write down the bullet points.

Review done.





The CHOOSING Part

Making Choices

Okay! You've survived the shoot. You now have a several dozen pictures of your adorable face in your hand – and you're ready to pick out the one that you will use to submit yourself for work.

But, wait! Oh my gosh! There are so-o-o many to choose from. Which one will be the “winner” that you need so badly? How do you pick which shot to use? Is there no one to help you with this part?

Here's some really *[lousy advice](#)* I found on the web:

“Don't choose your own pictures. Ask fellow actors, your agent if you have one, your friends, anyone... who knows a bit about what they're doing.”

I totally disagree with this ludicrous advice. Anyone except you? If they know a bit? Please. Let's not go into how dumb that idea is.

Look, you know ***exactly*** what it is you are trying to accomplish – and why. No one else in the whole wide world has the knowledge you have at this point.



“No one else in the whole wide world has the knowledge you have at this point.”

“If you are friends with a successful actor who has a lot of experience – it might be worth asking a favor.”

DO NOT ASK ANOTHER ACTOR’S OPINION. Believe me, the great majority of actors are generally clueless about this process and their advice is, by its very nature, skewed. Other actors may have an “agenda” when you ask for their help. Some actors think this is a competition.

This is just not a very good idea at all. (One exception: If you are friends with a successful actor who has a lot of experience – it might be worth asking a favor.)

But again, most actors have a difficult time explaining their own procedures – so take all the advice you get, with a grain of salt.

BE CAREFUL ASKING AN AGENT’S OPINION. Agents are salespeople. Do you think that General Motors consults with sales when they take photos of their newest car style? Many agents will try to help when asked, but it has been my observation that a good agent is not necessarily a good judge of what constitutes a great headshot – for you.

ASKING FRIENDS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA EITHER. If your friends are not in the business (as a casting director, producer or director) – they will usually be completely useless in helping you choose a good headshot.

If you happen to have a friend who is a casting director, producer or director, then by all means, ask for an opinion. **BUT**, don’t go to your professional friend with several dozen photos and expect them to spend the requisite amount of time picking the good ones out. That’s asking too much.



“You must practice becoming the best judge of what will get you where you want to go.”

It’s always been my experience that when you ask too much – you will receive too little.

IMPORTANT: Before asking anyone else to choose, take the time to cut the choices down to a manageable number.

You Have To This Part

You must practice becoming the best judge of what will get you where you want to go. If you are looking for other people to help you, or merely justify your choices – you will be searching for a good long time – sometimes forever.

Most of the time, other people do not care deeply about your dreams.

You DO care deeply, so I urge you to ‘gird your loins’ and do the hard work part.

ALSO IMPORTANT: You will be asking for opinions and ‘testing’ a bit later in the process – but at this point, you have to do the grunt work of winnowing down the choices to a manageable number.

Believe me, you will get much better results when you are seeking opinions, if you do this preliminary choosing.

The best way to start this process is to eliminate any photos that do not meet the basic criteria of a good headshot. (Even I admit that this is a hard part of this process.)



“... looking at yourself, frozen in time, can cause even the bravest and most confident of us to quake and quiver.”

The Elimination Round

As difficult as it is to do mirror work – where you can be rotten all by yourself and forget about it as soon as it happens – looking at yourself, frozen in time, can cause even the bravest and most confident of us to quake and quiver.

You know that other people are going to see the picture you end up using – so the choice is going to be hard. But as with all things you want to accomplish, there are always going to be difficulties to overcome.

Don't worry. You can do it.

BIG WARNING: When you first look at your pictures, try very hard not to get too upset ... or too euphoric. Your judgment is being tested here. None of your pictures are as bad (or good) as they seem on first viewing.

It is almost guaranteed that you will HATE (or LOVE) your pictures – when you first see the results. You will either be disappointed and not a little frustrated, or happy that you came out looking better than you think you look.

BUT your reaction is not likely to be objective – at this point.

Take heart. Almost every human being on the planet has the same kinds of reactions to seeing pictures of themselves.



*“Your mission
– should you
decide to accept
it – is to find
a ‘working’
headshot.”*

In other words, you’re normal. Relax.

Your mission – should you decide to accept it – is to find a “working” headshot.

My advice: Be as calm as you can – and look carefully at each photo. Don’t worry, you will learn how to do this part and it will become second nature to you, very quickly.

All right, now get out your “*observation*” cap and turn your objectivity up to “*high*.”

NOTE: If you have a CD-ROM with your headshots, or your photographer has “posted” them so that you can view them on your computer, great – this will make your job a little easier.

If you have a physical proof sheet (where each photo measures about an inch by an inch and a quarter) – I suggest you invest in a loupe. Loupe is really just a fancy name for a magnifying glass. But a loupe generally has a gizmo that keeps the magnifying glass an exact distance from the photo. You can find loupes at most office supply or stationery stores.

Let’s get started in the process of choosing our great headshot.

NUMBER ONE (With A Bullet) – FOCUS ONLY ON THE EYES. Look very closely at the eyes. Just the eyes.

Look very carefully at each shot.



“Any picture where the eyes are ‘soft’ should be eliminated at this point.”

“Any picture where an ‘extra’ (is the) focal point, should be put aside.”

Any picture where the eyes are “soft” should be eliminated at this point. (“Soft” means not focused on the viewer of the picture. This is a must.) If you’ve really been in the zone during the shoot, most of your shots should have eyes that connect. In any event, put aside any shots that don’t.

NUMBER TWO – Now, go through the pictures that have not been eliminated and look at **THE OVERALL CLARITY OF THE PICTURE**.

Any pictures where parts of your face are out of focus should be eliminated here.

(General exception: If an otherwise great shot has a small focus problem it should still be considered. But – if it’s the eyes that are out of focus, trash it.)

Any picture that has background objects in focus and identifiable should be put aside. (If the object can be cropped out, or easily blurred with photo software, leave the picture in consideration.)

Any picture where jewelry or other “extra” has ended up a focal point should be put aside. Or if there’s something on your lip (or worse, teeth). Or, if your clothing draws focus. If the “issue” can be fixed with cropping, keep the shot in consideration.

NUMBER THREE – Look at each of the pictures that are still in contention and consider **THE GENERAL FACIAL EXPRESSION**.

If you are primarily a dramatic actor, you are looking for mystery,



“... you may want to find different headshots to use for submissions in each ‘category.’”

intensity, intelligence, thoughtfulness, empathy, professionalism, unpredictability, danger, leadership, rebellion, or some other quality (or combination of qualities) that dramatically communicates your **UCP** definition.

A comedic or commercial acting headshot is slightly different. Although any of the above qualities can serve you, your main goal in these genres is to express an openness or a welcoming presence. Friend, pal, easy-going, good-natured, fun to be around; are the kind of words that capture the nature of the commercial and comedic headshot.

(The foregoing were two big generalizations, but if you’ve taken the time to do the groundwork suggested in the **UCP** definition section, then you will fill in the more specific information you are looking for, in your choices.)

If you do both drama and comedy and you have good commercial look, or you want to do any and all of those things – as the opportunities present themselves – then you may want to find different headshots to use for submissions in each “category.”

By this point, you should be down to a manageable number of photos to seriously consider.

SIDEBAR: I’ll bet you’re starting to calm down – now that you’ve begun to actually take the steps necessary to make your own choices. It’s not as hard as you thought it would be, is it? Just stay at the task and things will go better than you expected.



“... don't go looking for help until you've done all your homework first.”

“Eliminate any picture that doesn't really look like you.”

CAUTION: It's still too early to ask anyone else's opinion. Remember, you are the one who knows intimately what you are trying to accomplish – so don't go looking for help until you've done all your homework first.

Believe me, it will be much easier to get a useful, helpful opinion – if you present only two, three or four choices that meet your own criteria.

Also remember that the person whose opinion you will be soliciting may not really care what you do, one way or the other.

Keep in mind that the only important opinion poll is the one where you send your headshots to casting directors, agents and managers and count the number of “call-ins” you get.

Okay, back to choosing:

NUMBER FOUR – (This is the hardest part of the hard part.) **ELIMINATE ANY PICTURE THAT DOESN'T REALLY LOOK LIKE YOU.**

If you have a large nose and the picture doesn't reveal that – out it goes. If your ears stick out and your headshot hides that – next!

This is crucial – and cannot be repeated enough – if you do not look like your picture when you walk through the door – you have lost the audition. 99.5% of the time, the casting director, agent or manager will become UN-interested and frequently, UPSET – if, when you show up, you do not look like your headshot.



Here's the reason: They've managed to pick you out of hundreds and sometimes thousands of headshots. They've worked hard to find precisely the "look" they want for their project or their client list - and they've picked you.

If you bear little resemblance to the photo they have in their hand, they are going to be disappointed - and worse.

So what you should have left, now, are several pictures which have made it through the elimination round.

Okay, you've survived "*the really hard part.*"

Now, go through the photos you have left and put aside your very favorite ones (3-6). The result is a selection of choices that you will be able to use in 'polling' and 'testing.'

Let's Review Choosing

ELIMINATE:

- Any picture that does not look like you.
- Any picture where your eyes do not connect with the viewer.
- Any picture that is not in focus (your face & hair).
- Any picture where your expression is vague or unfocused.



“The first choice for polling is to ask the opinions of people whose job it is to call actors in – based on their headshots.”

- Any picture where a background object, jewelry, clothing or other non-essential element grabs focus.

CONSIDER FOR POLLING AND TESTING:

- Every picture that looks like you.
- Every picture where your eyes “grab” the viewer.
- Every picture that exemplifies your UCP.

‘Trying Out’ Your Choices

Now that you have 3 to 6 shots that generally meet your requirements, you can do some “polling” and testing. Polling is showing someone 3 or 4 headshots and asking for a ranking – best to worst.

The first choice for polling is to ask the opinions of people whose job it is to call actors in – based on their headshots. (Your friends who are casting directors, producers or directors.) Listen carefully. Make notes. Be appreciative. Offer to do a favor in return.

Another kind of polling that may work, is asking a few acquaintances which photo they like the best, or least. Again, listen carefully to the remarks, make notes and don’t forget to say ‘thanks.’

Keep in mind that polling is quite different from testing – you are seeking an opinion. Opinions, by their very nature, can only be used effectively to formulate strategies and tactics – not to set policy.



“... do a completely unbiased ‘strangers’ poll at a mall or shopping center.”

NOTE: I suggest using acquaintances for this exercise because they are unlikely to be swayed in one direction or another by their close personal knowledge of you. Friends and significant others can be swayed by issues not related to the headshot.

An interesting exercise, if you can enlist the help of a friend, is to do a completely unbiased “strangers” poll at a mall or shopping center.

Get a clipboard, tell shoppers that you’re doing a facial recognition poll and ask them what they think certain faces communicate. Mix in some other actors’ pictures – write down what is said about your headshot(s). Use these sorts of questions:

- ◇ “Is this a happy person?” “Or sad?”
- ◇ “Do you think this person tells the truth?”
- ◇ “Is this person a lover, or a fighter?”
- ◇ “What do you think this person is thinking?”
- ◇ “Would you trust this person?” “Why?”

(You may have noticed that these questions are aligned with some of the UCP definitions from earlier.)



“There is really only one way to test your headshot: Send it out to casting directors, directors, agents, managers and producers.”

The reason to ask these kinds of open-ended questions is so that you can get an unbiased opinion – encouraging people to tell you what they “see” when they look at your photo.

This can be one of those times when you exchange favors with a friend by doing the same sort of polling for them.

CAUTION: Polling is not really very scientific and may have some results that can be confusing. But, if you keep in mind the **UCP** you’ve decided on, you may have some responses that either confirm your choices or deny them – and that’s worth considering.

Testing

Testing is another proposition altogether. There is really only one way to test your headshot: Send it out to casting directors, agents, managers, directors and producers.

When you’ve winnowed your choices down to a manageable number, pick the best one (in your own opinion) and get some (not too many) copies made.

Send the copies out to the aforementioned sorts of people. Keep track of how many you send. Then keep a record of how many responses you get.

If you achieve a 3% or better response, then it is fairly likely you have a “working” headshot. (3% response on “unsolicited advertising” is considered good.)



“Keep trying different shots until you find one that tests above the 3% level.”

“You will have to choose. In the end it’s your responsibility.”

This means that you should probably send out 100, to get a good idea. (The math is easier, LOL.)

Let’s say you get 2 responses from 100 mailings. In that case, you might want to continue using the shot – but start *“testing”* another one. If your headshot is always below that 3 to 4% level ... it’s probably a good idea to move on. (Try another headshot.)

Keep trying different shots until you find one that tests above the 3% level. At that point you have a headshot that works and you’ll probably start getting called in on a regular basis. (Assuming that you are doing regular mailings.)

If the cost of mailings is discouraging you, look at it this way – if you send out 100 submissions, it costs about 100 dollars. If you get three 100 dollar jobs, you’ve tripled your money. And most real acting jobs ... pay more.

Let’s Review

You will have to choose. In the end – it’s your responsibility.

Eliminate pictures that won’t work for various reasons. Winnow your “possibles” – down to a small number (3 to 6).

Do opinion polling on choices.

Test by submission. Keep track of responses. Keep testing other shots.





The **FIXING** Part

Snip Snip – Crop Crop

Now it's time to find out how to improve your great headshot by getting rid of stuff in the picture that you don't need.

Most headshots can be vastly improved (in my opinion) with a technique known as *cropping*. What this means is eliminating parts of the photo that detract from the main purpose – which in your case is advertising your acting business to the industry.

Too often, we actors just accept the entire photo and then go about the business of having it reproduced, without thinking through **our** most important goal. This results in what can be called a “usable” headshot – but not necessarily a great one.

When we are assessing our headshots, it's important to keep in mind that we are not looking for a great photograph – we are looking for a great headshot.

In other words, always remember that this is advertising. And not just advertising – but *unsolicited* advertising.



“What is it that you want the Casting Director, Producer or Agent to ‘get’ in that first 2 seconds?”

So the first question that must be answered is this one: What is it that you want the casting director, director, producer or representative to **“get”** in that first 2 seconds of looking at your headshot?

By the way, they are not mind-readers, so you will have to help them along – by doing your part to define yourself, type yourself and establish your **UCP**.

This is critical to understand:

In most cases, your headshot submission is going to be the **only opportunity you will get to be SEEN** – so it’s important to work very hard to offer up the best “you” possible.

In general, this means that the submission must have pop – that the headshot holds them past the **2 second** mark – and that the person in the headshot is exactly who the casting director, agent or producer will see – when you arrive in person.

If you’re getting worried about this cropping thing, relax. With the advent of computers, it is easily within your capability to do this cropping exercise yourself

I will use some of the headshots that were submitted for this book to walk you through a few of the basic ways in which you can improve the headshot you already have – or fix your primary choices from a recent sitting.

Most of these fixes are what I call my **“10 minute fix”** – which simply means I didn’t take a lot of time to do a perfect job.



These examples are mostly just a beginning ... to a job that will probably take you, your printer (and/or your photographer) a little longer to accomplish.

SOFTWARE: I own Adobe's Photoshop software, so that's what I've used for these examples. Photoshop is a rather expensive program, and I don't expect that you will go out and buy it. However there are many free or very cheap programs that can do the same job (at least for our purposes here).

Almost all (Windows & Mac) computers come with some sort of image editing software.

If you're willing to look, there are many shareware programs that will make this an easier job. You can get these from www.download.com or www.tucows.com – and in general they will handle most of the needs you have when it comes to “fixing up” your headshots.

Keep in mind that what you are trying to accomplish is the “*cropped version*” that you want – and the ability to **show** rather than tell, when you go to your photographer or printer with a request to crop the shot.

In other words, this is just a way for you to “*tinker*” with your headshot and then present your “*work-print*” as a guide to the person doing the final printing.

Is it worth it to learn how to do this?

Yes, if you want to maintain some control over your image and the



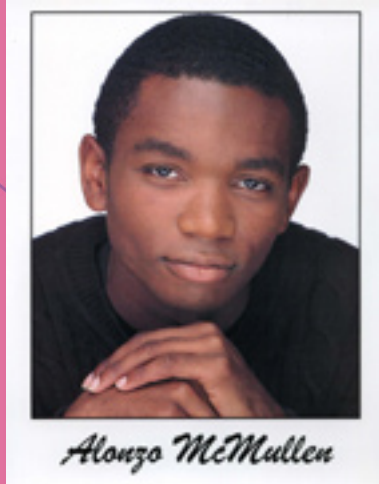
way it is used to submit for work.

Headshot “Rules”

- ◇ Include the entire head (or 3/4 of body) in the shot
- ◇ Leave room to put your name on the front of your headshot.
- ◇ An “up and down” shot is better than a “sideways” shot.
- ◇ Hands in a headshot are generally distracting.
- ◇ Big white borders are usually to be avoided.
- ◇ Photographic tricks (re-touching) are passé.
- ◇ Unusual framing devices detract from the main purpose.
- ◇ Don’t use shots that have jewelry or other accoutrements as the center of attention.
- ◇ Remember what you’re trying to sell to the industry.
- ◇ This is all about you and your face. That’s what the photo should be about ... entirely.



All right, with those “rules” in mind, let’s begin our investigation of cropping by looking at several submissions – and seeing if we can improve the headshots with some judicious “*fixing*.”



Let’s start with this submission from **Alonzo McMullen** (Thanks, Alonzo.)

Alonzo’s headshot is very good. And on first glance, there’s nothing much wrong with it. But there are two “issues” that I think could be addressed to make this photo into a great headshot.

First is the big white border.

In general, there is no need for a border on a headshot.

This format is a hangover from the time when “full bleed” printing was more expensive. (Full bleed simply means that the color goes all the way to the edge of the paper.) That is no longer the case. Technology has advanced and full bleed printing is not a large extra cost. (In some cases it will be no cost at all.)

The other main use of the white space is a place to put your name on the photo. (As I have mentioned, this is a mandatory element. Your name must appear on the front of the photo.)

The other problem is the inclusion of Alonzo’s hands in the picture. In my opinion, his hands detract from the overall effectiveness of this headshot.



Here's my 10 minute fix:



Notice that when the photo is cropped, Alonzo's eyes "take over" the picture.

White lettering (also known as "knock out" printing) adds his important information – without taking anything away from the picture.

The end result makes Alonzo's headshot a strong contender in a lot of different UCP applications. HERO, LOVER, SAGE, etc.

Now let's take a look at a submission from **Amanda Lippert**. (Thanks, Amanda.)



This is an excellent example of how an unfortunate choice of backgrounds can have an unwanted effect. In this case, Amanda's skin tones and clothing choice, against a white background – causes the photo to look "washed out."

The overall tonality of the photo makes it hard to look at for any length of time. It fails the **2 second** test.

With red hair, a better background choice for Amanda would run into the blue-green or muted green shades. This subtle color differentiation in the background would make it more memorable.



Here's my 10-minute fix:



See how the cropping, a change in the background color, and the placement of her name on the headshot results in more “pop” to the overall headshot – and really “nails” Amanda’s look.

Notice how the central focus of the picture is now Amanda’s face. That’s the goal in a headshot.

“Look at my face.”

NOTE: I’m no expert in Photoshop, so my efforts are going to be somewhat amateurish. A pro, however can make this into a great headshot with proper cropping and good color in the background. For instance, a pro could keep the “stray hairs” look, which adds so much to the original photo. A pro’s color correction would, undoubtedly, be much subtler.



Here’s a submission from **Amy Russ**. (Thanks, Amy.)

Right away we notice that Amy breaks some of the “rules” in this shot. The top of her head is out of frame, a part of her hand is in the picture, the background is in focus, large white borders (as it stands this shot requires that you have white borders on either side of the picture when printing it as an 8X10) ... BUT this shot works!

The only things about this headshot that I would fix, would be the aspect ratio, to get rid of the white borders





- and get her name on the front.

So, by cropping to fit the 8x10 paradigm, eliminating the big white borders, and printing her name on the front - I think this is now an **outstanding** headshot.

It's especially important to see how Amy is projecting an attitude, a point of view, a sense of fun - and her acting is "invisible."

Note the great color combinations too. The brown which emphasizes her eyes and the subtle shade of the fabric behind her - that nicely complements her skin tone.

Good job, Amy.



Kay Foong has submitted a good example of a shot where the outdoor background has a very solid color choice for his coloring and clothing - and the background is properly "out of focus." (Thanks, Kay.)

NOTE: When shooting outdoors, make sure your photographer understands the need to keep the background in the background. Most photographers who specialize in headshots are aware of this need - but it doesn't hurt to check before clicking through a hundred shots.

Usually the background can be fixed using photo editing software on the computer, but it's better if this is done "in camera." Doing it that





way saves time in the process of getting your headshots ready for printing.

But, most importantly for our understanding of the cropping issue – let's fix the border situation and see what happens.

Notice the amazing difference in Kay's intensity, when the photo is cropped to eliminate the white borders and resized slightly for an 8x10 format.

Printing his name in white (with a drop shadow) turns a very good headshot into a great headshot.

Are you beginning to see how a little fix can make a big difference? I hope so.



Christopher Page sent this submission. (Thanks, Christopher.) This headshot has several “issues” in my opinion.

First it's not a headshot and it's not really a 3/4 either – it's unlikely to serve the two main headshot **needs** very well.

And again, we see a formatting issue with regard to large white margins.

The biggest problem, however, is that the photo is soft focused, which is almost always a bad strategy.





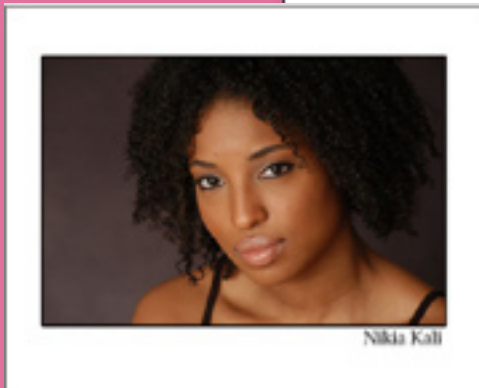
The soft focus of the shot is not helpful in terms of getting across Christopher's actual "presence."

Look what happens when the photo is made sharper, the cropping is tighter (making it a true headshot) and the name is printed on the bottom of the photo.

Notice how Christopher's eye contact seems much stronger and more intense.

Let's assume you were looking for someone to play a mafia lawyer – the first picture would (most likely) be passed over. The second would definitely make it to the next round.

I think the first rendition of the shot is weak, in comparison with this 10 minute "fix." What do you think?



Nikia Kali has submitted an excellent example of one digital photo being re-purposed for both color and b&w submissions. (Thanks, Nikia.)

The main reason that these shots "work" is that Nikia's contact with the viewer is just about perfect.

This is one of the rare cases when a big white border and a sideways orientation works. In this case, it is because the aspect ratio of the picture is perfectly framed.

Cropping this photo in any way would detract from its well-realized





framing. (Aspect ratio is the size of “the screen” – side to side and top to bottom.)

In general, this orientation should be avoided.

However, Nikia’s pictures are the exception to that general rule, because of her great “contact” with the viewer and her almost perfectly framed face.

The main purpose in including these shots from Nikia is to remind you that the “rules” can be broken and your headshot can still work. (Or at least look good – whether this shot “works” or not is something I just don’t know.)

Don’t get caught up in the “rules.” Just know what they are and move forward from there.

Now, here’s an example of how the big white space and an unneeded artistic flourish – can totally negate what you are trying to sell.



J. Shields Upchurch submitted this shot. (Thanks, J. Shields.) It is an excellent example of form over function.

This shot is very artistic. Lots of white space. Very “now.” But J. Shield’s head (***the purpose of his headshot***) is only about 20% of the picture. There is more grass and shirt in this shot, than J. Shields Upchurch.

Also, the black “scrawl” around the shot may ***look*** sort



of interesting, but it adds nothing to my understanding of the actor represented. This sort of “*look*” (which, unfortunately, is very common) is just a very bad strategy.



Here’s my 10 minute fix:

Now we are meeting an actor. Simple. Straightforward. J. Shields Upchurch’s “presence” is felt immediately.

Now I know who I’m looking at.

I’m still upset that the top of his head is cut off – but I think the results of judicious cropping improves this headshot immeasurably. What do you think?

Now here’s a submission by **Kelly McWhertor** (Thanks Kelly.) that exemplifies a real problem.



See the foot sticking out of the back of her head? Sure. How could you miss it? Although this faux pas might stop a casting director in her tracks – it probably won’t be in a good way. I’m pretty sure that foot is not something that adds to Kelly’s overall image – or **UCP**.

Also by including her foot and pants to the left, the headshot looks off-balance. Most importantly, if your headshot looks “wrong” or poorly chosen, that will reflect on how you are perceived. It’s your choice: Pro or wannabe?



Here's my 10 minute fix:



Kelly McWhirter

Now we can see Kelly without the distractions of foot and hip. If a professional were to do this “fix,” I’m sure her headshot could be improved even further.

It’s important to remember that extraneous content in your headshot is not only distracting, it can sometimes have the effect of taking the center of attention away from the main product you are trying to sell – primarily your face and secondarily, your physicality.

Keep in mind your main goal with your headshot: Catch their eye, hold their attention, and ***get in the door.***

Kelly’s photo brings up another important point about posing: It’s not such a hot idea to pose, lying on your stomach. That sort of pose is much more suited to publicity pics – after you’ve made it and everybody knows who you are. Even then, a picture with a foot coming out of the back of your head is probably not a keeper.

Remember, casting directors, agents, directors, managers, etc. are going through photos just like you go through your junk mail. They are glancing, at best – and believe me, they will not be convinced by “artistic poses,” trickery or special effects. Getting “fancy” can have a result that is just the opposite of what you want.

When these folks are going through submissions, they are ***JUST*** looking for ***faces*** – and ***physical types.***



Let's Review

An “iffy” photo can be fixed. The first tool is cropping.

Cropping is something you can do with your computer.

Cropping can remove elements that detract from your main purpose: advertising your acting business.

Avoid leaving the photo “as is” – because in most instances it will result in having to print your headshot with big white borders. Full bleed printing is much more affordable these days and the final print is ***much more effective***.

Your goal is to achieve a ***dynamic*** headshot. One that demands a second look.

Most “issues” can be avoided if you make your specific needs known to the photographer – up front.

Don't think that special effects, fancy borders or trickery are going to be effective. Generally, that's just not the case.

A straight-forward presentation of YOU is what will work.

Take the time to learn some basic “fixing” skills and you will have the power to improve your submission tremendously.



*“... 8x10 print
put together
with your
résumé ...
constitutes
your mailings
to casting
directors,
agents,
managers, etc.
This is your
submission.”*



The PRINTING & MAILING Part

Application Determines Choice

In the beginning (up through the middle) of an acting career, you basically have 3 major uses for your headshots.

The first is the 8x10 print, which you will put together with your résumé – this constitutes the content of your mailings to casting directors, agents, managers, etc. This is your submission.

The second major usage for your pictures is on the internet – at casting sites, your own web presence and to “submit electronically” to casting directors, agents, etc.

Your internet presence will probably feature your main acting headshot and you will add some other “looks” – as time and money permit.

By the way, a website is an excellent place to use production shots – featuring you, of course. One caveat: Make sure your production shots look good before posting them – a bad picture on the internet is a bad idea.



“Professional headshots must have your name printed on the front.”

The third way you will want to use your pictures is for publicity and marketing. This will include shots you might use in programs along with your bio, shots that may be used on business cards, postcards, and other printed forms.

Some actors will also want to try ‘guerilla marketing’ tactics – these might include t-shirts, buttons, key-chains, etc. This sort of idea can get out of hand, so be careful. You don’t want to look desperate. Humor is a good tactic if you decide to try any of these ‘guerilla marketing’ ploys.

Your Name Here

Once you’ve chosen your picture your next step is to decide on how and where your name will appear. (Professional headshots **must** have your name printed on the front.)

This is an important decision because when you go to the printer, you’ll want to have a specific idea of where your name is going to be printed. (And in what type style.)

If you choose to get your lithos with a white border, the name will likely appear on the bottom border. However, more and more headshots are being produced without borders so you’ll have to decide on an area of the photo where your name will be visible yet not detract from the headshot itself. (Again, this is most likely going to be toward the bottom, so plan accordingly.)

There are basically two choices with regard to printing your name:



“Because of recent technological advances in both photography and printing, even color lithos are within an actor’s budget.”

Dark print on a light area of the picture or white (knock-out) print on a dark portion of the shot.

Making Copies

There are really only two ways to have your headshot reproduced.

First is a photographic print. Each of your headshots will be an “original” photograph printed on photo paper – from a negative. These will usually be a little more expensive than the second choice: Lithography.

Lithography is a printing process as opposed to a photographic process. It’s used to inexpensively reproduce a large quantity of headshots. These are printed photos. Printing is less expensive, and largely just as effective.

Because of recent technological advances in both photography and printing, even color lithos are within an actor’s budget.

There are different schools of thought on which to use. Photos may look a bit “richer” – but lithos cost less.

Some say the difference in price is worth it, some say it isn’t.

If you are sending a mass mailing out, lithos are fine. If you are sending postcards, lithos are perfect. If you are sending a smaller, more targeted mailing and you are mostly looking for theatre work, then I would recommend photographic prints.



“... lithos (printed photos) are so good these days, that choosing this method is going to work for most actors.”

In general, however, I think lithos (printed photos) are so good these days, that choosing this method is going to work for most actors.

How many pictures will you need?

It depends on a few things. If you live in a smaller city where you won't be going on too many auditions (1 or 2 per month - or so), you'll only need about 25-50 copies of your picture to start out.

If you're in a larger city with lots of work, you might want to get more (around 100-150). If you have an agent, make sure you ask how many he or she will require. You don't want to have too few made - and you also don't want to pay for too many. (Most printing firms will give you a better price per copy when you buy in bulk - but until you know that your photo is "working," I would suggest you order in smaller quantities.

Also, take into consideration how much you might change over the next year.

If you're young and developing, it's likely you'll need new pictures every 6 months, or so. Therefore you won't want to make too many copies.

If you're older and don't expect to be cutting your hair or changing your appearance drastically anytime soon, and your pictures will be useful for a year or more; you may want to get more copies, as the cost of each copy goes down as the number of prints goes up.



“Once you have your own photo printer, you can print and mail headshots to order.”

“Do It Yourself”

One of the best parts of living in the 21st Century is our access to amazing technology. For instance, it is possible now to purchase a photo printer of your own – to make your own prints.

Photo printers that hook up to your computer are coming down in price as every day passes. A decent one can be had for under \$100.00. Once you own your own printer, you can print and mail headshots “to order.”

Of course, having this capability is not just a matter of buying a printer. You must also have the tenacity and patience to learn how to use the software (usually packaged with any printer you will purchase) to produce your prints.

But my take on this is: If I can do it, you probably can too.

The biggest upside to being able to produce your own prints is that you can submit a specific headshot for a specific role. (From your best choices, of course.)

Although the cost of each print will be much higher than your lithos or even photo prints – the ability to customize your submission will probably more than make up for the difference.

So, if you’re adventurous and ready to learn new skills – be sure to look into the possibility of owning your own photo printer.



“You must send your submission to a person. If you send your submission to a company name alone – it probably won’t be opened.”

Mailing Headshots 101

THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF MAILING: *You must send your submission to a person. If you send your submission to a company name alone – it probably won’t get opened.*

The reason for this is simple. These companies are very busy places, filled with people who get dozens (if not hundreds) of pieces of mail a day. If your submission comes in without someone’s name in the address, they toss it aside for later consideration. (Consideration which rarely, if ever, actually happens.) Eventually your submission will probably end up in the trash, unopened.

However, if you address your mailing to a specific person, that specific person will **probably** open it. (We all like to see our name in print. I don’t know why, but it’s a fact.)

Along this line, it is imperative that you spell the name of the person and the name of the company correctly. Misspellings will start you off on the wrong foot.

It’s also very important that your submission looks professional.

If you cannot print neatly, invest some time in making labels with your computer.

I know you can buy labels, but frankly they will never look as good as something that you make yourself with your computer and printer. Most of the labels you can buy are too small. I think a larger label (business card size) printed on your computer printer, looks much



“... it is worth the time and effort to find out how to use your computer and printer to make yourself look more professional.”

more professional (and personal).

This goes for your return address labels as well. (In fact, if you're really creative, you can print a tiny little headshot on your return address label – as well as a little advertising message like, “*Joe Jones is amazing as The Imp, in Devil Times Two.*”

If you don't know how to do these basic “computer-y” things, make it your business to find someone to show you how. Most communities have some sort of class in basic computer skills – look around and do your homework.

Believe me, it is worth the time and effort to find out how to use your computer and printer to make yourself look more professional. It can sometimes make all the difference in whether your submission is even opened.

The foregoing is especially important if you are just starting out and don't have professional representation yet. The more professional your submission looks, the better the odds of getting past that first hurdle.

WARNING: When you send a headshot and resume, you should never put your personal information on it.

Unfortunately, you just do not know who may end up with your headshot in their hands.

Here are 3 pieces of Information you should **never** put on your submissions:



“... 3 pieces of information you should never put on your submission – your home address, your home phone number or your Social Security number.”

- ◆ Your home address
- ◆ Your home phone number
- ◆ Your Social Security number

Get a cell phone for business and put that number on your resume. Many actors have been plagued with crank and harassing phone calls because a headshot got into the wrong hands, so you may want to use a service, a voicemail box with a pager or, as I mentioned, a separate cell phone line.

Also, it's a good idea to go to the expense of getting a post office box. This is the best return address to have. By the way, these kinds of things (along with the cost of your headshots themselves) are generally deductible business expenses.

PROVISO: I'm not a tax guy, so be sure to check with a professional tax advisor before taking any deductions.

If you have an agent or manager, then their address & phone number is what you will use on your submissions. In fact, they'll probably insist on it.

The Cost Of Doing Business

Postage for the standard headshot (9" x12" envelope that weighs more than one ounce) is 57 cents. (All postage rates are as of July



“If you can get your 8 x 10 mailing to weigh in at one ounce or less, it will only cost you 45 cents to mail.”

2005 – they can and probably will – change.)

You can buy 57 cent stamps at the post office and will save quite a bit of money instead of using two 34 cent stamps for each envelope.

Postage for a postcard is 21 cents, but it cannot be larger than 6” x 4 1/2”, so keep that in mind when designing your mailer.

You don’t need to put a return address on your postcard, but if you do, don’t use your home address. Get a PO Box or use your agent’s contact information.

If you can get your 8X10 mailing to weigh in at one ounce or less, it will only cost you 45 cents to mail. The only way I know to do that is using a litho and printing your resume on the back (as opposed to having it on a separate piece of paper and stapling it to the headshot). Most commercial printers will be happy to print your resume on the back of your litho.

There is a ‘do-it-yourself’ method as well.

If you have a computer and printer, you can print your resume on the back of your **lithos** yourself. (*This is probably a bad idea if you are using photographic prints.*) The great thing about this tactic is that you can keep your resume continually updated and it will never separate from your headshot when it’s shoved into a casting director’s file cabinet.

Naturally you’re going to have to learn how to use a word processing program to “format” your resume. And you’re probably going to



“... Casting Directors ... prefer postcards when you are ‘reminding’ them of your existence.”

ruin a couple of lithos as you get used to the printing process.

But you can save some serious money in postage and printing – if you are willing to “do-it-yourself.”

Don’t Forget Postcards

One note I hear constantly from casting directors is how much they prefer postcards when you are “*reminding*” them of your existence.

You should consider postcards over the standard headshot and resume when re-submitting to casting directors. These are very important mailings and should not be discounted.

Postcards are less expensive to make and to mail and they don’t need to be opened. They also have a much higher chance of getting **seen** than the standard manila envelope submission. You can be very creative by using your computer printer to put messages on the back of your postcard.

It’s a good idea to have some “news” on your postcard. Something like “*I just signed with Acme Agency.*” Or “*The film I made last summer is going to be showing at The Podunk Film Festival. Do you want tickets?*” Or even, “*My St. Bernard had puppies and I’ve been busy.*”

The important part here is that if the casting director is interested in you ... you can help your cause by being ‘*short and sweet*’ and



“Part of your ongoing relationship with casting directors is to keep them ‘up to date’ about what you are doing.”

passing along some newsy tidbit about yourself.

It goes without saying that if you have found a good working headshot, that’s the photo you should have on your postcards.

Trying out different looks is fine – if you are still testing.

Constant Contact Mailings

The most effective mailings are what I call, “**Constant Contact Mailings.**” This kind of mailing is sent to casting directors who know you or your work, who have worked with you in the past, who have seen you at a workshop, who have called you in to audition before, or those with whom you have a relationship.

Part of your ongoing relationship with casting directors is to keep them “*up to date*” about what you are doing. If you’re in a show, or you’ve booked a gig, signed with a new agent, starred in a student film, doing a play, going out of town on a job – anything that will remind them that you are still “*out there*” and actively working on your career.

This type of mailing should be done every 6 weeks or so, depending on the relationship you have with the specific casting director.

Generally this should be a postcard mailing. Headshot mailings to casting directors who know you, should not be sent more often than every four or five months.



“...every
Casting
Director with
a project
– receives
literally
thousands of
headshots a
week.”

NOTE: These are arbitrary time frames and should not be adhered to – without some thought on your part.

Some actors send headshots out every month and for them it might work. When I suggest a time frame or an amount of submissions regarding your mailings – I’m speaking in very general terms.

The Mass Mailing Trap

Many actors have been convinced that it’s “a numbers game” and that they must send out a large number of headshots and resumes to every casting director in town – all the time.

I’ve been in the business for a long time, and I can tell you, accurately, that every casting director with a project – receives literally thousands of headshots a week. Standing out in this kind of crowd is difficult at best and impossible at worst. Since each mailing you send out is going to cost you about a dollar – I’d make sure to budget things first.

Currently, there about 600 working casting directors in the Los Angeles market. If you send out a headshot and resume to each one, every month – it will cost you about 7200 bucks a year. Believe me there are better ways to spend your money. (The numbers are only slightly lower in NYC, London, etc.)

NOTE: When you first get your headshots, it’s probably a good idea to do at least one mass mailing – to see what kind of response your new headshot is getting. This is testing – it should be done.



“... if you send out a few hundred headshots and get very little or no response, it’s time to consider using another headshot.”

Never forget, if you send out a few hundred headshots and get very little or no response, it’s time to consider using another headshot.

(This is a process that can also cost you some serious money, but, whatever you do – don’t skimp on the hard work part.)

Here are some things to keep in mind regarding your mailings:

- ◆ Keep records of your submissions.
- ◆ Keep track of your responses.
- ◆ Make changes in your approach.
- ◆ Try again and again.

Remember, you cannot get the part if you don’t get called in to try out for it.

By the way, if you’d like to get an excellent product to help you with the “keeping track” part of your business, I recommend the HoldOn Log and ActorTrack- check out <http://www.HoldOnLog.com>

Standing Out In A Crowd

When you send your headshots to a casting director, I would suggest that you consider how many submissions they get and try to do something to make your package stand out.



“... you must submit for everything you can find that you are ‘right’ for.”

“Make a list of the casting directors who cast people like you and target your mailings...”

One thing that probably works is the envelope with a clear window – which allows the casting director to see you, without opening the envelope. Believe me, if they like what they see – they’ll open your submission – in order to see your resume.

Other possibilities are different colored envelopes or a printed envelope with some sort of catch phrase on it.

Target Mailing – An Every Day Job

Target mailings are those that are sent regarding a particular role in a particular show. If you do target mailing every day (or most days) you will increase your chances of getting that all-important call.

Once you have a detailed **UCP**, and you’ve made certain your headshot and marketing materials reflect this, you must submit for everything you can find that you are “right” for.

Keep in mind that YOU are the product – and you have to market it to the people who want to buy that specific product.

Make a list of the casting directors who cast people like you and target your mailings to them. Your goal is to move casting directors onto the Contact List Mailing by getting in front of them as often as you can.

You also will be working to get “generals” (this is where a casting director calls you in for a general interview), meeting casting directors at workshops, and, of course, getting called in to audition.



“Printing your resume directly on the back of your headshot will save you money in postage – and your resume can never be separated from your headshot.”

Let's Review

You have two choices with regard to printing your headshots: Photo printing or lithography. Lithography is probably the best choice for most actors.

Your professional name must be printed on the front of your headshot.

When mailing a submission, make sure you address it to a person.

Never put your personal information on your submission. Address, home phone or Social Security number.

Printing your resume directly on the back of your headshot will save you money in postage – and your resume can never be separated from your headshot.

Postcards are very effective for “reminder” mailings. Casting directors prefer them.

By learning to use your computer/printer, you can help your cause by “customizing” your submission and printing your own headshots.

Regular mailings are important once you have a working headshot.





The *INTERNET* Part

Your Headshots & The Web

Welcome to the 21st Century. It is my conviction that the web will play an ever increasingly important part in the actor's business life.

In fact, without a web presence now, I think your acting business plan is incomplete and you are missing some important opportunities because of it.

Why?

Most importantly, because your presence on the web allows casting directors, agents, managers and producers to have access to your headshot, reel and contact information 24/7/365.

A web presence is like having a silent salesman promoting your business all the time. Even while you sleep, hold down a "job job" or go to class.

You can save lots of money on postage, envelopes, resumes, cover letters and reproductions



"... your presence on the web allows casting directors, agents, managers and producers to have access to your headshot, reel and contact information 24/7/365."

“It’s just a very good idea to have a billboard on the digital super-

“Do not use a ‘free’ service.”

You can submit your headshot and resume instantly to online casting notices.

On your own website you can post your upcoming performances and keep all your contacts up to date on your latest triumph.

Publicity. Promotion. Presence. Almost everyone in show business is now hooked up to the web. And let’s not forget the public (our audience). At this time there are about a billion and half people on the internet. That’s a lot of potential fans. In fact, even unknown actors are starting to put together fan-sites and driving lots of traffic to them. Being famous helps.

It’s just a very good idea to have a billboard on the digital super-highway.

Don’t worry, it is not expensive.

In fact, having your own website with your own domain name will cost you less than \$100.00 a year. If you look around, it can cost a lot less.

NOTE: Do not use a “free” service. It will be clogged with advertising for things that have nothing to do with you. It’s worth the expense to have your own domain.

(You can buy your own domain name at www.godaddy.com and save some serious bucks if you order the 10-year plan – where your cost will be about 7 bucks a year.)



“The cost of an original design and implementation of your own website will probably be in the same range as your photographer.”

If you don't know how to make a website yourself, there are many people out there who can help you. The cost of an original design and implementation of your own website will probably be in the same range as your photographer. (In other words anywhere from \$75.00 to several hundred.)

Do your homework. Find someone to help you accomplish this. It's important and, who knows, it may actually bring you to the attention of someone who can hire you. At the very worst, it gives you a great “talking point” when meeting with casting directors, agents, etc.

A website is a constant contact and sales page for your acting business.

Believe me, it's a great way to get people to find out more about you. And the best thing about a website is that cyberspace is very elastic and can hold a lot of information.

You can feature pictures from your past productions, your acting reel, audio clips, dozens of photos, your bio, your resume, even your favorite chocolate chip cookie recipe – not to mention the publicity possibilities.

It's much easier to tell your whole story when you can simply hand out a business card that says, [yourprofessionalname.com](#).

It's beyond the scope of this book to discuss all the aspects of your own website, but you should definitely put a website on your list of “things to find out about and accomplish.”



“The most important service this sort of site provides, is getting casting notices and having the ability to submit electronically.”

Casting Sites

As of this writing there are dozens of “casting sites” on the web. Most of these sites offer the actor several services.

The most important service this kind of site provides, is getting casting notices and having the ability to submit electronically.

There are many great benefits to this kind of site:

- ◆ It’s easy to submit
- ◆ It’s instantaneous
- ◆ It’s very cost effective
- ◆ More and more casting directors are using this method

These sites are almost all membership sites. Which means that they will cost you a monthly (or yearly) fee. In researching casting sites, I have found that most of them are quite reasonable in cost.

The most successful casting sites are located in the largest production cities such as Los Angeles, New York, London, Mumbai, Sydney, Toronto, Chicago, etc.

Before jumping in with both feet, however, it’s important to keep in mind that casting is still generally a local process.



“... be careful. Take the time to understand what you are signing up for, before handing over your credit card information.”

It won't do you much good to belong to a casting site in Los Angeles if you are in Keokuk Iowa.

That's because casting directors generally send out their notices a few days ahead of the intended auditions and if you can't make it to the local address in a day or two, don't bother to submit - you'll just irritate a casting director.

Having said that, there are some regional and international casting sites that may have possibilities for your particular needs.

But, be careful. Take the time to ***understand*** what you are signing up for, before handing over your credit card information.

Do your homework.

Check everything out. Ask other actors for their recommendations, experiences, and reactions. As with all things having to do with paying out money, **always practice due diligence.**

That's A Wrap!

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of the course. I hope that you've discovered information and skills that will help you in your quest to become a professional actor. Or, at the very least, learned how to approach this often misunderstood acting career tool.

Before we leave, let's review the main ideas you should have in mind at this point:



“Like most skills you need to advance your acting career – if you don’t take the time to learn how to do it, it won’t get done at all.”

- ◆ Your headshot is **the first and most important tool** in your professional actor’s tool-kit.
- ◆ Your headshot is the key that opens many doors in this business.
- ◆ The most important feature of a good headshot is that it “works.” It gets you called in to the agent, casting director, manager, director or producer – whom you want to meet, impress and convince that you are the actor they want.
- ◆ The only real uses for an acting headshot are direct mail advertising, web marketing or publicity. Keep these uses in mind as you go to the trouble and expense of getting this critical acting tool accomplished.
- ◆ To accomplish the “working” headshot, you must know precisely what you need. The photographer’s job is to help an actor to achieve that specific result.
- ◆ When you hire a photographer, it is his/her business to deliver what you need and want.
- ◆ Like most skills you need to advance your acting career – if you don’t take the time to learn how to do it, it won’t get done at all.



“If your headshot doesn’t work, you must get another one.”

“In order to succeed, a business must state its unique value to the world.”

- ◆ If you hope to be a professional actor, you must become ‘comfortable’ with the way you look. And you must maintain your objectivity when choosing your marketing tools.
- ◆ Keep in mind that no matter what you look like – there are many parts you can play.
- ◆ If your headshot doesn’t work, you must get another one.
- ◆ The people on the receiving end of your mailing do not care how much your headshots cost.
- ◆ What you should be concentrating on is:
 - “Making contact” with the viewer of the picture.
 - Conveying the spirit that is you.
 - Doing it all well enough that the “wheels” don’t show.
- ◆ You are going to be the one who ultimately decides which headshots will be out there ‘representing’ you to the business.
- ◆ In order to succeed, a business must state its unique value to the world.
- ◆ Never forget – YOU are the product.



“Your headshot is an ‘unsolicited advertisement’ for your acting business.”

- ◆ Your headshot is an ‘unsolicited advertisement’ for your acting business.
- ◆ Your headshot must demand that ‘closer look.’
- ◆ The most critical element is this: Connect With The Viewer. Focus your eyes on the “film.” Don’t focus on the front of the lens – it is often inches in FRONT of the “film.
- ◆ You will not become good at anything unless you are willing to put in the practice.
- ◆ Whatever you do, don’t spend a lot of money on a professional photographer before you “get a handle” on doing your part.
- ◆ The person you are looking for, to help you accomplish your headshots, is a Professional Photographer.
- ◆ Shop for your photographer. Interview at least three.
- ◆ Do not make your decision strictly based on price.
- ◆ Budget your expenses carefully – with the idea in mind that you may not accomplish what you want on the first try.
- ◆ Prepare for your shoot as if it were a day of work.



“You must make all the critical decisions. If you don't do this part, expect a long wait to accomplish your dream.”

Much Success

- ◇ Before you ask anyone else's opinion, take the time to cut the choices down to a manageable number.
- ◇ Be sure to test your headshots.
- ◇ You must make all the critical decisions. If you don't do this part, expect a long wait to accomplish your dream.
- ◇ Submit, submit, submit.
- ◇ In the final analysis, **This Is YOUR Business.**

Thank you so much for purchasing **Headshots Secrets Revealed**.

I hope it has improved your understanding of this subject. If you have further questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to drop me an email and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

bobfraser@headshotsecrets.com

Have a wonderful shoot and, as always ...

Much Success, Bob Fraser

PS: If you've found this guide helpful, why not direct your actor friends to my website where they can get their own copy:

<http://www.headshotsecrets.com>

