

## ***SMFA* Targeting Commercial Casting Directors**

Please see page 91 (the chapter on **Targeting Buyers**) in the 4th edition of *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business* for detailed instructions on how to make the most out of your commercial targeting plan of action.

So, you've decided that you are, in fact, a "commercial type"—you've watched enough commercials to see that your brand is represented in these short films in which the hero is a product or service—and you've even created a target list of products, services, and brands with which *brand you* could easily align. Right? You've done that.

Now, if you haven't yet watched commercials; logged which ones could easily star YOU; and made a list of brands, products, and services for which you'd happily pitch (and reasonably *could* pitch for, of course), that's your first bit of homework. While you're doing this homework, also note what your type wears, how your type's hair is styled, and with what sort of accent or rhythmic pattern your type speaks, in these spots. All of this data will help you look like a booker, when you're in front of the buyers who consistently populate these target ads.

Now, let's take this another step. We're going to research the buyers for these ads. Yup, just like when we target television's episodic buyers, we're going to use some online tools to beef up our target list for commercials. Here's how.

Start with "the IMDb for commercials," iSpot.tv (start at the <http://ispot.tv/browse> page to dive in by ad category). Here you can spend hours browsing ads for all sorts of brands, products, and services, and usually learn a decent amount of information about how these spots were put together.

Let's walk through an ad currently featured in the communication category at the iSpot.tv site: AT&T's "Professional Women" starring one of those helpful blue-shirt-wearing employees we see all the time lately in commercials. Using iSpot.tv, we learn that the lead actor's name is Milana Vayntrub. Looking at her iSpot profile, we can see several of her recent spots. If you're an actor who could book similar work, this is great data about your bullseye for potential future commercial bookings. That's because, you can bet, there are breakdowns going out for "an actor like the one in those AT&T ads" every day. They can't *get* her. But maybe they can get you, today! (If you're in her type category.)

Also at iSpot.tv, you'll notice that this particular ad was created for AT&T and that the ad agency was BBDO. Its "mood" is categorized as "funny" (ooh... a word for the brand alignment of your commercial bullseye). A quick Google of BBDO AT&T leads to a treasure trove of ads created for AT&T by BBDO (all "funny") and—especially if you're the type of actor who could nail any of the roles you've seen over the years in these spots—this historical data is gold.

Heck, poking around BBDO's website to see other brands for whom they craft ads, we can see a great bunch of ways particular *types* of actors may be a solid fit for getting into these casting rooms.

So, about these casting rooms... once you've decided you're the right fit for these ads, how do you get to that part of the equation? This is where we're relying on the casting directors' ability to self-promote a bit. Luckily, commercial casting directors traditionally have the best websites in the casting community. Their sites include stills from the casting directors' best ads, galleries of brands for which they cast, sometimes even a list of ad agencies with whom they collaborate and directors with whom they jam. So, get down with the websites of top commercial casting directors. Download their resumés. Go back every few months and download their *updated* resumés. Go back in time using <http://archive.org> (the Internet wayback machine) to find old versions of their resumés (again, historical data is empowering stuff).

If you're not finding websites for these buyers using Google or the Internet wayback machine, head over to CastingAbout at <http://castingabout.com/smfa> and sort casting offices using the commercial filter. When you click on any casting office in the master list, the lovely pop-up should include in the top left corner the words "visit official site," to which the casting director's (most likely awesome) website is linked. Boom. Now you're getting ever-closer to your target.

When you see target brands from target ad agencies—and especially if you see the names of the directors of those previous ads included—on a casting director's website, you know you've found a specific casting director to target. It may take a bunch of Googling to find all the various players in any particular campaign, but your research will pay off! Read articles at AdAge and AdWeek. Geek out on pieces written about the technical elements of particular commercials (because you'll rarely find an article about the casting of any particular ad, even though ads do win Emmys for their on-camera talent). Oh, and on that parenthetical bit, note that ads also win Clios and Addys and Peabody Awards. If you really want to go down the rabbit hole, visit the archived lists of awards for ads from each of those organizations (and others) and start building up your show bible on folks whose participation made all that "gold and shiny" stuff possible. These are your targets.

Begin building relationships with these commercial directors. Tweet at them. Let them know you're a fan of their work. NO ONE is doing this, because it *appears* to take so much dang work to find out who these people are! But you, ninja, you'll do the work. Heck, you'll revel in doing the work! And you'll reap the rewards for doing so. Just by letting a commercial director know you like his eye, you're on the radar and he or she gets to say to casting, "Hey, here's an actor I want to see on this next ad I'm directing." The hustling you do, here, could be a shortcut into a casting room you've not been able to penetrate otherwise. So very ninja!

Further brilliance in building up your show bible for the commercial buyers out there involves studying the breakdowns. Seriously, don't discount the data that's coming into your life via breakdowns for projects! When your agent sends you the sides and the breakdown and the

location for a commercial audition, SAVE that info! No, I'm not asking you to become a hoarder. I'm suggesting that when you read a breakdown that is \*sooo\* your bullseye for a brand whose identity you'd love to pitch, save that information! The casting director's information is right there. Maybe even the director's name. Certainly, the ad agency details are findable. And when you SEE the ad on TV or at iSpot.tv later, you'll be able to add *more* details to your show bible alongside the info you saved from the breakdown.

Talk about long-haul badassery! You're building your commercial show bible in a truly ninja way with these tactics. Targeting is *such* a multifaceted aspect of the commercial booking process. And certainly, you don't have to target, ever. You can walk around and hope to bump into the career of your dreams, whether theatrical or commercial or legit stage or voiceover or anything else! That's the cool part of this business: You really *can* just happen into the life of your dreams.

But why leave so much to chance? If you're the type who could really be a huge commercial booker, in addition to getting into classes so that you can nail your audition when you *do* get in the room, how about lining up those targets (brands, ad agencies, directors, casting directors, and of course agents) who can best get you to your next Super Bowl ad? Ah... so simple. Not easy. But simple.

If—as you do all of this research—you begin to note there just aren't enough patterns for you, as a type, showing up in commercials, that's actually great news in terms of where to place your focus today. Some actors are simply NOT commercial types. Think of the money you'll save on trying to get awesome commercial headshots or taking commercial auditioning classes if you decide there's no reason to pursue commercials right now!

Have great tools for your theatrical headshot and of course have great training, then let commercial buyers who really want to do something different find something in your existing tools that helps them tell their story. Then it was their brilliant idea and you didn't make yourself crazy trying to find something "round" when you're clearly "square," to go with the pegs of it all. But—and this is *very* important, here—be sure to do another lap of commercial research every year or so, as styles change, the narratives change, the pitch people change, and you may very well find yourself lining up beautifully with commercial bookings a few years down the line.

Thanks to this **SMFA Hot Sheet**, you know exactly what to do when that time comes, so you won't be slinging spaghetti at the wall and hoping something will stick. You'll target your butt off and make that delicious commercial dough, when the time is right.