

SMFA Targeting Film 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 feature film targeting plan of action.

First off, this is a gargantuan task. But we're gonna make it so it's not just do-able, it's fun! Well, okay, it'll be "fun" if you love research like I do. And if you're not a research junkie, that's okay; I'll still try to make this look a little more pleasant and of course worth the time.

Let's be clear: This *will* take time. You're going to start majoring in the storytellers with whom you most want to jam. And why wouldn't you want to put a ton of time and energy into learning about these people you're hoping to share screen time with? This is your future peer group. Invest in understanding them. Because, in the end, you're hoping they'll invest in YOU by giving you a shot on their set, right? Why not start the process with an investment of time, energy, and attention to detail, right now?

As we all know, <http://imdbpro.com> is a fantastic resource for information about projects in production and even in pre-production sometimes. But often, the details that make a big difference for actors (like, oh, "this project is now casting," for example) isn't available 'til after the cast is announced and calltimes are being given out. Dang! Too late!

Luckily, our favorite go-to <http://castingabout.com/smfa> lists projects before they're casting, and that'll get you the scoop that'll help when it comes to being aware of the timing for getting into the room. You can keep an eye on <https://showfax.com> for sides going up, you can self-tape, you can hustle to get in front of the casting team in non-traditional ways, of course. And if you have a "hell yes" agent, you're in great shape for being pitched to get into the room. All of this is great!

But let's talk about laying the groundwork for getting your shot way before it's like sorority rush up in the casting office. It's easy to decide to push in front of a casting director when casting is announced. That's when *everyone* is doing it. The ninja move is to already be in the world of the casting director whom you know is likely to cast a film you'll want to be a part of someday, and already being atop her list when she's thinking about best actors to bring in.

Where TV casting is a breeze (we know the tone of the show just from watching a previous episode, we know the look and vibe of co-stars and guest-stars week to week, we know who's on the casting team by checking CastingAbout, we know which members of that team may do networking events or workshops, and we can set up Google Alerts to learn about even more ways to connect), film casting is a little tougher to do. Unless it's a franchise or an adaptation from a book, we may not have a clue what a film is about, what its tone is, what types of actors will be needed, not to mention who will be hired to cast it and how we may intersect with them before casting begins.

For updates to this doc, free quarterly SMFA Tune-Up calls, convos with the #SMFAninjas, and other support, visit smfa4.com.

Bonnie Gillespie

Ah, not so fast on that last bit! People in this business are loyal. If you have a specific director with whom you know you want to work, a quick check of IMDb-Pro and CastingAbout will give you an overview of the people with whom this director likes to jam. Obviously, sometimes studios or exec producers may override a director's preference, but by and large, irrespective of tier, you can track patterns within a director's history and learn whose casting eye he respects the most.

So, let's say you know you want to be a part of a JJ Abrams film. You don't know what his next film will be (heck, he's got 27 projects listed as "in development" at IMDb-Pro today), but by taking a look at his history (opening each project in its own tab in your web browser), you can map out the likelihood that April Webster will be casting for him, whether it's a feature film or a television series). Has he employed other casting directors? Can you track patterns on which types of projects go with whom? Once you know whom a director trusts to do the prescreening of actors that will populate his or her films, it gets easier.

Now you're not waiting to see a breakdown come out for the next feature film you're dying to be a part of, but instead working to get in front of the current team in that casting office (information you get from CastingAbout), to build relationships that will pay off when the right project with a role for you gets greenlit.

This is a long-haul process. You're not just attempting to get seen for *one* project at a *certain* time so that you can do *A* role; you're building a relationships with buyers who regularly prescreen for a storyteller with whom you know you want to jam someday (and probably more than once).

Just like with all the other targeting work I recommend, you're going to set up Google Alerts on your target buyers so that this relationship-building process begins in earnest way before that magical breakdown is released. When you read in the trades, in a production newsletter, on another market's film commission's website, that a new project helmed by your dream director has been greenlit or is coming to town, you already know whose casting office needs to be nudged to remember you exist. Of course, you don't *only* reach out at that time, but by being on their radar in general, regularly, and especially before the breakdown goes out, you're more likely better-received when your goods come across the proverbial desk when the breakdown goes live.

Further, with all the homework you're doing in targeting these folks, you're also going back and watching old films directed by your dream director, paying attention to the function of actors in minor roles. You're watching how those actors booking their first roles with this team are being directed and you're using this information to help you work out with the sides you can download for not only the next project from the team but using full scripts out there. (Check out the *SMFA Hot Sheet* on TV Shows Currently Casting for a great list of script resources—some include film scripts as well as television scripts.) If you can find audition footage from previous films your target teams have put together, binge-watch them! You're not trying to parrot anyone else's work; you're learning what it is your target buyers respond to, naturally.

You're building your muscle for being so good at interpreting the *world* of the characters and scenarios that your target director brings to life that you can't possibly be ignored when you get your shot in the room, thanks to all the targeting work you've done.

Make it count. As always, this is a long-haul process and the work you do today could make it far more likely that you're perceived as a bullseye booker when you get your shot in the room for the first time with these prime targets. Sure, you could get in the room without doing all this work, but wouldn't you like to be sure you've controlled everything that you can and truly prepared yourself for success when you do get that first shot?

Treat these folks like pro athletes and become a super fan. Not so you can speak authoritatively about their work and gush like a wannabe, but so that you can master the game, build relationships, and then get in there to show them you're meant to live in their world. It's a longer process for films, but it's just as delicious. Have fun!

Come jam with us in the *SMFA* Facebook group, the private Talkback forum, or the Bonnie Gillespie instructional DOJO to go deeper with this badassery.

Psst! If you find this or any other of these free resources of exceptional value, we'd love a tweet, a photo of you with your copy of *SMFA* for our awesome gallery, or even a nice review at Amazon!