

## Be Your Own Publicist

So, you've had a tier-jump. You're building momentum. You're feeling good about where you're headed, as you live your dreams and deal with some of those "quality problems" that you always hoped would come your way. Awesome!

Now what?

Now you either pony up thousands of dollars per month to retain a publicist and hire a media trainer, or you rock the *Self-Management for Actors* way: Do for yourself what you can do for yourself, 'til you're at a point where paying someone to book your print interviews, escort you down the red carpet, or get you seated on the best latenight show sofa—all the while teaching you how to be ninja with your ability to stay on-brand as the interviewer flings random questions your way—is a no-brainer.

How do we do that?

First, think about all the things that you control and that are affordable to manage: social networking profiles, your actor website, your online profile at casting submission sites, your IMDb page, postcards, attending networking events, being *\*engaged\** at the events you can attend, and doing *\*research\** on those events that are out of reach 'til you're at the next tier.

Please, before you go one step further, here, be sure your website looks amazing and on-brand, that your online casting profiles don't have headshots that conflict and talk us out of understanding how to cast you, and that your social networking sites are helping you—not hurting you, or feeling like a huge time-suck—with your career evolution. More on that, in a moment. First, I wanna share with y'all a favorite—and way ninja—move from an actor you'd all recognize, if I were to share her name. ;)

### Create Your Own Press

As I mentioned on the MP3 for this module, one of my favorite ninja moves came from an actor who had done a small recurring role on a very highly critically-acclaimed (but low-rated) show. She knew the show wasn't going to stay on the air, and that meant she'd be looking for another series soon. She also knew that the only way she'd get considered at the next tier was to be sure everyone—even those who had never seen an episode of this brilliant show—knew she was low-risk for similar work.

She created an interview.

Basically, she hired a journalist to write a profile about her, put her on the "cover page" of a magazine that doesn't really exist, and take photos of her being totally on-brand. Then she created a mailing and targeted everyone who needed to know she was thrilled to be a part of this show (that we all knew

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was about to be cancelled) and that she was absolutely smart enough about this business and her position in it to be given the opportunity to at least test at network, the following pilot season.

So, let's reverse-engineer this whole thing.

She started with her targets. Y'all know how to map out and pursue a meaningful list of target buyers thanks to the **SMFA Essentials** module on targeting. Yay, you! Just that simply, she chose NOT to reach out to everyone in casting, but to those who stood the best chance of needing her on a pilot the following season. That cut the number of recipients of this mailing way down. Were she to target agents, she'd be looking a tier above where she's currently signed. There's no point in blanketing the town with even the most gorgeous of marketing materials. Even in tiny markets, not everyone on the buying side needs to know you exist in order for you to make a living as an artist.

What next? She hired a stylist, a photographer, a graphic designer, and a writer. Not cheap, but also nowhere near as expensive as hiring a publicist or media trainer, at this point. She outlined her goals for this piece of advertising—let's be honest, that's exactly what it is—and she talked with the writer to get all the salient points across, succinctly. No spin on the part of the network, the talkshow host, the stringer trying to get a story picked up by the wire services, or some random blogger. Nope. This was all manufactured to align with her brand \*and\* her goals for the following pilot season.

After manufacturing a cover photo for this "magazine," and a three-page "interview" to feature within it, she created a kit to mail out. Using nothing more sophisticated than a three-ring binder sheet-protector sleeve and a piece of clear tape, she put these documents—printed on high-quality bond—into something she could mail without an envelope! The sheet protector went straight through the mail, with a stamp and mailing address label and her return address label all strategically placed after she consulted with the graphic designer on layout. Even if no one were to open the mailing, it was doing its job, because you couldn't MISS the point.

The "cover" was her face and some "WOW! POW! YAY!" type words just like you'd see if any celeb was gracing the cover of the 'zine. Printed on the back of that page was the beginning of the interview, but you'd never see it unless you took the piece of tape off the mailing and pulled everything out to explore more. NOTE: The goal was not to get people to read the whole interview. This was basically a high-priced postcard, to help her buyers perceive her as higher-tier. The second piece of card-stock paper in this mailing was the rest of the "interview." Also two-sided, with the only IMPORTANT stuff on the page that faced in the other outwardly direction, in this clear-sleeve mailer. All the best sales language about \*where she was headed\* after wrapping this amazing show that was so highly critically-acclaimed was on that back page, as well as a few other on-brand photos, just like you'd see in any magazine feature, profiling a famous actor.

But this chick wasn't (yet) famous. She had read for me a few times in my first few years of casting, then she got this show after doing the usual one-line co-star up to one-scene co-star up to first-time

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guest-star on up to this particular recurring guest role on this hot-in-the-industry (but underappreciated in the rest of the world) TV show. So, when I received this mailing, I knew she was telling me, "Look at my tier-jump! Don't you think I'm ready for my series regular, next pilot season?"

Sure enough, this actor booked a small, but memorable, role in the pilot of a series that ran for five years. She was named a series regular by episode six, when her little recurring character had hit so well with the fanbase that there was no question they needed to lock her in, rather than risk losing her the following pilot season, as she would have been able to test elsewhere, had they not committed to her (and therefore vice-versa) right then.

So, let's say she invested a couple o' grand into this particular strategy, once you tally up the pros she hired to help execute it, the printing costs, and the mailing supplies (including postage and address labels). When did that pay off? Before the first commercial break of the pilot episode of the series that would go on to pay her very, very well (and will continue to do so, thanks to residuals).

Did anyone on the receiving end say, "Ooh! Yes! I remember this edition of 'Not a Real Magazine' quarterly?" No. Of course not. It's marketing exactly the same as the material sent out by major corporations. She didn't mock up a cover of *People* magazine. She \*GOT\* interviewed. That she paid to make that happen? Irrelevant. Yes, you could have the same thing happen via a "real" interview, if you're lucky enough to have connected with a journalist from a small paper back home, or an up-and-coming blogger looking to profile up-and-coming actors. But do you have quality control that way? Nope. And at some point in your career, the investment may make all the difference.

Obviously, this actor was already on the rise. She was having as close to "linear success" as is possible in this industry, going from co-star to guest-star to recurring... and then she pounced on the opportunity to get considered for the next tier. Would she have booked the pilot without the mailing? We can't know. As I've said from the very beginning of my time writing for actors: It's not the one thing you do; it's all the things you do.

Therefore, you can't decide that it was \*those\* headshots or \*that\* mailing or \*this\* particular workshop that made all the difference. You have to assume it is always the cumulative effect of all the work you—and your team—are out there doing, daily. Keeping score on the particulars is futile. But if doing something publicist-like at this stage in your career feels right to you, let's be sure you do it right!

## Discover What's Newsworthy

Let's have you start right now. Make a quick list about what career experiences you've had that would be (or could be) considered newsworthy. Maybe that student film you did five years ago didn't turn out great, but did you notice that the director went on to win a Streamy last year? Maybe that low-budget indie from which you never got footage is a black hole in your mind, but hey... didn't the

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Don't think those words are spinable? Think again!), keep this list in the back of your mind as you move forward. You WILL be able to put things on it. :)

## Tread Lightly: Congratulatory Ads in the Trades and Press Releases

Should you put out full-page ads in the trades, congratulating yourself on getting cast in a studio feature film or signing with a fancy agency? You could do that. It's guaranteed exposure (for a LOT of money) with an audience of the biggest power players in this industry. Is that your next target? The top agent at the top agency whose clients are all name actors? The network exec who's looking for his next ten-year top-ten sitcom star? Maybe not yet. Certainly, people at tiers below these folks see the ad too, but this is where the research you've done on your target buyers will help you choose what investment is worth it, at this stage.

How about a press release? A simple three-paragraph notice at <http://prlog.org> could be smart, if well-timed. But before you take a stab at that, make sure you've studied up on what press releases look like (that same link is a great place to poke around; you'll soon learn what's standard and what's not), follow the formula (don't get cute), and be prepared that a placement could lead to a news organization looking to do a story based on your press release. Send that press release around to your hometown paper, along with your bio, press photo (it doesn't have to be the same as your headshot), and some convenient times for a follow-up interview, if they'd like to run a story. And then, keep that story (PDF it, if it ran on the web only) to add to your press kit, going forward.

## What's Really Important

By far, the most important element of *all* this type of work is that everything be ridiculously on-brand and in service of where you're headed. Creating a website, a media kit, a press release, a social networking profile that doesn't show us how to cast you next or that doesn't leave us feeling as though we GET YOU will not help you. On the contrary; it could hurt you.

One of my private coaching clients recently booked a very big film with an Oscar-winning director and she was lamenting how much she *\*hates\** updating her Facebook page (which had something like 1100 fans). "Kill it off. Kill it off immediately," I told her. First of all, *\*anything\** that makes your face tighten up, that quickens your heartrate, that makes your stomach turn because of how much you DON'T enjoy doing it... you must immediately stop doing! It cannot be good for your career to "do social networking" because some of your actor friends swear by it. So what if it works for them? That's their brand, those are their buyers, and if you've done the work to get clear on who you are, what you bullseye as an actor, who the target buyers are of that bullseye, and you're just not clicking with the right audience (or enjoying it even a little bit), *\*having\** a Facebook page isn't helping you.

Far better to have a really fantastic, on-brand website with a comment form or a guestbook for fan posts or a blog you keep updated with news about your latest project, with comments open for

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feedback from visitors. Those types of engagement may be more authentic for you, and that's so important to figure out—early—so that you don't waste time and energy (or worse, make a poor impression upon your targets and future fans) doing something you don't even enjoy.

Also, never confuse "likes" with authentic engagement—comments, sign-ups on your mailing list, building a fanbase of buyers (as evidenced by repeat requests for you to come into their space and show them your work). The latter is far more valuable than a high number of followers who never connect with you. It's the **QUALITY** of the connection that makes a difference in your career, long-haul. If you are \*going to\* have a social networking profile (and, again, you're not required to do so), be sure to use it meaningfully. If you have a blog or news area on your website, keep it updated and follow-up with people who comment. It may seem small, now, but these actions will add to your eventual worldwide fanbase exponentially. Make the investment or just don't do it at all. (Reminder: It's **TOTALLY** fine \*not\* to do social networking. Let yourself off the hook if you're feeling bad about not loving your actor fan page!)

## Get Invited and Go

One of the bizarrely more important elements to the "actor on the rise" formula is the "being out there" of it all. Networking. Going to parties. Hitting red carpet events. Getting invited to gifting suites. Being photographed on the red carpet in front of a step-and-repeat. Having your photos up at Getty Images or on Wire Image or coursing through IMDb-Pro... these things all make a difference, when you're at the right tier to take advantage of them.

Start making a daily visit to the sites that feature red carpet photos and browse through all the people whose names you don't yet know. Better yet, go through the archives of these websites and check out actors whose names you know today, but whose names you didn't know a year ago, because they're **THAT** new. Of course, looking at their IMDb profile, you know they're not new. Not by a longshot. But they're new to this tier, and that's usually not by accident. They probably "did the scene" a bit. If you're in a minor market, that means attending the film festivals that come to your town or to towns nearby. It means hitting premieres or any industry events that come close to where you live. Go to those opening nights of plays at the bigger theatres. Take advantage of being seen at any event that is industry-like anywhere nearby. It will help cement your reputation as one of the folks \*in\* the industry, even in a non-industry town.

For those in Los Angeles, piece of cake! You are able to attend something daily, in Hollywood. Of course, that adds its own wrinkle, because you have option overload, with this, and you have to be ninja about the events you choose to attend. Run everything through the brand filter. Which events reinforce your brand and which ones make people scratch their heads about what you're trying to communicate, by being there?

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Again, pore through those photo banks and start making a list of what \*feels\* like a YOU event. Read through the PR calendars of events to determine WHAT is going on out there, and whether you need an invitation to attend. Here are a few starting points:

<http://newscalendar.com>

<http://gettyimages.com/editorialimages/archival/calendar>

<http://wireimage.com>

<http://redcarpetcloset.tv>

If you'd like to hire a publicist for the short-term, several folks in PR do à la carte offerings that are way more affordable than keeping a publicist on retainer. If you're frugal but smart about it, you could hire someone for a few weeks, hit the circuit, get a little media training, and then "yes, and..." all of that to do it yourself when you cannot afford having the extra person on your team. No, I'm not saying you'll be able to get yourself into ALL of the events that a well-connected publicist can get you into (remember, from the MP3, I talked about how the R in PR stands for relations, which means, we're trading on relationships, here, and publicists have more relationships than probably anyone else in this business), but you can get started. And at certain tiers, that's more than enough to make a little jump!

## On the Red Carpet

So, you've mapped out which events might be right for BRAND YOU. You've worked your own relationships to get invited to at least one event that you're excited about. You've studied wardrobe choices and accessories and hairstyles and poses that have made waves in previous incarnations of events like this, thanks to the archives of those red carpet galleries. You know what to wear if you want to fly under the radar. You know what to wear if you want to really make a splash. You've spent hours on YouTube watching junket and red carpet footage to get very clear on how reporters and interviewers operate, what questions they're asking of anyone who gets in front of them, and what makes the interviewee look smart and castable vs. nervous and non-pro. You've majored in Bravo's *Watch What Happens Live* as well as the more traditional latenight and daytime talkshows to see the difference between stars who are media trained and those who let the interviewer drive the interview.

You've fired up your own webcam and interviewed yourself, played back the footage, watched for your own ticks and UHMS and other bad on-camera behavior... and you've continued to shoot yourself to improve with every take. You know how to deliver a soundbite. You know how to brandprov. You know how to charm the interviewer (if that's on-brand of you to do). And you know how to answer the questions the interviewer should've asked, using the sometimes less wonderful questions as jumping off points. How do you know how to do this? You've WATCHED the masters. Just like athletes study game tapes and run plays that the greats ran before them, your work of watching all those vids and eps and junkets, followed by the on-camera crash course you're giving yourself, will absolutely have you more ready than you may believe.

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But you have to get out there and TRY IT to be sure. This is why I recommend that you get interviewed in your hometown paper or by a friendly blogger, first. Having a few good experiences that are lower-stakes under your belt will help a great deal, when the nerves are really flying.

It's almost time to hit this event—whether it's the opening of a film you were in, a festival screening of a film you helped produce, previews for a play, the opening of a new facility at your union's local office, an awards show for webseries, or a launch of a celeb's new liquor line—and you need to take all that prep, choose a totally on-brand outfit that PHOTOGRAPHS perfectly (test this out ahead of time), and dive in. Don't stress about the people with mics or cameras—they're most likely looking for the most famous person there—but do smile, welcome them with your eyes, and be ready should you be asked to do a quick interview as you arrive. If that never happens, no stress! Study what's going on, just like you did from home, and take in all the ninja moves the highest-profile folks are using.

Should you end up being interviewed or photographed, use those Google Alerts you've surely set up on yourself by now (You didn't think they were \*just\* for your TARGETING homework, did you?!?) and when a photo or story comes out, send that link to your agent and manager right away. If it's really fantastic, tweet it. Facebook it. Add it to the "press" page at your website. Feature it on your IMDb profile. Save it all as a PDF for your press kit. "Yes, and..." that publicity so that it can have a ripple effect with the buyers, when the time is right.

Is a casting director more likely to call you in because you were photographed at an advance screening of a cool new film? Probably not. But she is more likely to know your name when you're pitched by your team. She's more likely to say, "Fan of your work," when she greets you at your next audition in her office. She'll feel you're lower risk, somehow, because you're in the machine. It's a subtle shift, but it happens. And that you helped make it happen is what's truly ninja, here!

Nervous? Don't be. I mean, it's perfectly natural that you might be, but it's only gonna wane if you get out there and start testing the waters. Remember, you chose this career hoping to get to express your gift at the highest tier possible, so that you could create art and tell stories that would have an effect on as many people as needed to be moved by what it is that you do. Or, maybe you don't have any of that altruistic drive and just wanna be famous. Cool. Get ready for the \*noise\* that comes with this creative career, whatever your WHY might be.

The sooner you can handle this dance with the media, the better you'll be at it, long-term. You'll be a dream client for a publicist, as soon as you can afford one, which will get you to the next tier MUCH faster than they're used to seeing. That's because you used the *Self-Management for Actors* principles to help you get READY for the moment at which you no longer need to do it all yourself. Yay, you!

All right, gorgeous. Please submit your questions for our follow-up MP3 immediately, so we can get you covered before we wrap up this month's interactive module! Send an email to: [ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com](mailto:ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com) with the subject line: **Publicist Question**, so we can easily

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get you in the queue to help out with your questions, before we head into next month's awesome interactive *SMFA* Essentials module. Yay!

I really hope you embrace this month's goodies and that you start building a muscle that—as you move up from tier to tier to tier—you'll really appreciate having. Sure, someday you'll be able to hand off all of this to a team, but 'til then, getting confident that you can navigate some of the scarier non-craft parts of this business will feel really fantastic! Guys, next month's interactive module is all about **Five Actor Foul-Ups**. Yup. You know there's a minefield filled with things you absolutely can't control about how your career goes. But sometimes, you plant more mines for yourself and that's gotta stop! Can't wait to share this one with you. :)

We are ridiculously lucky to have a life in which we get to live our dreams, every day. Being blissed out, confident, and absolutely capable of achieving your every goal along the way is totally do-able. Unless you're SURE it's impossible, folks, every little dream you hear whispering to you is absolutely, totally attainable. The *Self-Management for Actors* principles **work**. Ninja badassery abounds. **Bonnie Gillespie is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs.** She casts SAG-AFTRA indie feature films and series such as the zombie smash hit *BITE ME*, which made the leap from web to TV with **Lionsgate** in 2012. Bonnie is founder and producer of Hollywood Happy Hour, Somebody's Basement, and Get A-Listed. Her weekly column, **The Actors Voice**, runs at Actors Access and her podcast, **The Work**, is available on iTunes. Her books include *Casting Qs: A Collection of Casting Director Interviews*, *Acting Qs: Conversations with Working Actors*, and *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business*, which has been named one of **The Top Ten Best Books on Acting Ever Written** and featured at the Tom Cruise actor resource blog. Bonnie regularly facilitates seminars based on this top-selling book and has traveled internationally—to demystify the casting process and the business side of pursuing an artistic career—as a guest instructor at colleges, universities, actors' unions, and private acting studios. Bonnie has been interviewed on *Good Morning America*, *BBC Breakfast*, ARD-1 Germany, UTV-Ireland, CBC Radio One, BBC Radio 5, E! Online, and in the *LA Times*. To hop on Bonnie's mailing list, please visit [BonnieGillespie.com](http://BonnieGillespie.com).



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