



Finding a Reputable Agent

You can't get a job without an agent, and you can't get an agent without having the job.

This is a common entertainment business adage, but the bottom line is this: If you don't have an agent and you want to take your acting career to the next level, you need representation. There are many auditions for paid work in Oklahoma that do not appear on message boards, newspapers, or e-mail newsletters. These companies often cast through talent agencies.

Please remember that Oklahoma is a much smaller market than Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, or even Dallas, so the task of finding representation is not nearly as daunting. This advice and these scenarios are almost exclusive to Oklahoma.

The Role of an Agent

An agent's primary purpose is to find auditions for you. Additionally, they ensure you get the job by helping you to market yourself effectively.

- ***The Audition Process***
 - First, the producer of a project (be it radio commercials or major feature films) will hire a casting director and supply a list of roles that need to be filled. The casting director will sometimes hold open casting calls, but they also go through talent agents and search through their client list.
 - Once the casting director has selected actors for the audition, the agent will then contact the individual actors. Actors are almost always given a copy of the audition script beforehand and audition for the casting director and possibly the producer and/or director.
 - The producer decides which actors to cast and agents contact the chosen actors with details. They also bill the producers for the actor's work.

- ***Commission: Paying Your Agent***

Agents only receive monetary compensation when you book a job. Their fee will be a previously agreed-upon percentage of the pay you receive. An agent is required to only charge 10% commission for acting jobs covered by one of the unions, either the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) or the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA). If a job is not governed by one of these unions, the agent can legally charge whatever they choose, but it will be set in your contract. Typically, a commission will be 10-20%.

You can have more than one agent. Typically, actors in Oklahoma not only have agents in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, but they are also represented in Dallas and even Kansas City and Little Rock. As long as you are willing to drive there for auditions, you can get represented. All legitimate agents will require that you have only one agent per city.

The actor-agent relationship should be symbiotic. Both 'work' for each other. Actors go to the auditions assigned by the agent, and agents are only paid for the work the actor books. An actor may only be as good as the role they land, but an agent is only as good as the audition they get the actor.

Agency Scams

In some states, prospective talent agents must first obtain a license; they must agree to adhere to certain guidelines to ensure proper behavior and business practices, thus protecting the clients. However, Oklahoma has no such state licensing process for talent agencies. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of any suspicious behaviors, including:

- ***Extraneous charges and fees:*** Agents should not charge you for classes, photo shoots, website services, etc. Legitimate agents make money through commissions for jobs that you book—not up front. You should not be writing your agent a check unless it is for this commission. In addition, they may *refer* you to classes and photographers, but will not ask you to pay for them through their agency.
- ***Overly eager to sign you:*** This can be a red flag, especially if you are just starting your professional career or do not have much experience. The agent may see you as an easy target for an investment scam. A legitimate agent will be truly excited about you if you already have an extensive resume or you fit some ethnic, age range, or physical gal in their talent roster.
- ***Sales pitch:*** When you start contacting agencies, some may sound too good to be true or difficult to sign to. Beware. Illegitimate agencies may build themselves up so that you are eager to do or pay whatever they ask in order to sign with them.
- ***Outrageous claims:*** One agent said their website was one that (and I quote) “Steven Spielberg was using last week to find people for his new movie.” Please. Steven Spielberg has people for that and he would not be trolling the internet for just anyone to be in his next movie.

The main lessons here are: 1.) The only time you are giving your agent money is when you are getting paid yourself, and 2.) If it sounds too good to be true, it just might be. Be wary—this is your future career.

Getting a Meeting with an Agent

You can begin your search for an agent by researching the Oklahoma Film & Music Office crew database, the internet, phonebooks, and by asking other actors for recommendations. Call these agents and tell them you are an actor seeking representation. A legitimate agent will typically ask you a few questions, including:

- ***Do you have any experience in front of the camera? If not, have you taken some sort of on-camera acting class?***
This can be as much as a semester-long college course or even just a one-day workshop—they are trying to determine how much audition experience you have.
- ***Do you have a résumé?***
Your résumé doesn't have to be lengthy. It may only have your contact information, physical attributes, and your on-camera class. You will need to have a current and accurate résumé, though, and the agent usually offer assistance in perfecting it.
- ***Do you have any headshots?***
Good headshots are a requirement for on-camera acting. You do not need to have mass duplicates printed at this point. In fact, legitimate agents will want to offer advice on which you should get printed. They just want to know you have them.

If you answer 'yes' to these questions, the agent may want to meet you in person. Here are some things to keep in mind when you interview with a potential agent:

- ***What to Bring***
 - Current résumé
 - Tape of past experience (You may not have this material, but if you do, and it is representative of your talent, bring it. It allows the agent to evaluate your abilities and sends the message that you can be cast.)
 - Headshots or a contact sheet (thumbnails for the agent to review and to offer input)
 - Dress professionally (not necessarily your Sunday best, but business casual, preferably; to show you take yourself and your career seriously)
 - Be prepared for a cold read. This is not a big deal, though. They are just getting a preliminary evaluation of your talent.
- ***Questions to Ask*** Don't forget that while an agent is interviewing you, you are also interviewing them. They will ask you about yourself, your career goals, past experience, schedule flexibility, etc. You should ask them questions such as:
 - *How many people do you represent that fit my particular 'type'?*
 - *What have been some of the recent jobs your clients have booked through your agency? (Be sure to ask which are booked 'through their agency,' as many may lay claim to accomplishments of actors who booked impressive work through other means.)*
 - *What casting directors do you routinely work with?*

Contracts

If the agent wants to represent you, he/she will present you with a contract to review.

- ***Types of Contract***
 - **Exclusive:** Very rare in Oklahoma, this type of contract requires that you only operate with that particular agent; even if you book a job through other means, the parent agent receives the same commission whether or not they were involved in getting you the audition.
 - **Non-exclusive:** In a non-exclusive contract, you are allowed to have additional representation (for example, different agents in different cities). However, the agent offering the contract will ask that you do not have

more than one agent in the same city. You will only owe that specific agent commission for work booked through auditions they send you to.

- **Duration**
 - Many people feel that once they sign a contract, prison doors close and lock, never allowing them to return to artistic freedom again. This is not the case. Duration depends on the agent, but most contracts are for a year, though some may last up to three.
- **Ending a Contract**
 - Unless you are in an exclusive contract, it can be simple to opt out of your contract before the end date. If you would like to do so, send your agent a letter advising them of that. Be sure to have it in writing. Always have it in writing.
 - In addition, an agent can 'fire' you without actually 'firing' you. They will simply stop calling you for auditions. This typically happens if you are unable to book a single job or behave inappropriately on the set or during an audition. They will allow your contract to expire and you'll never hear from them again.
 - Once the duration of your initial contract has expired, you may think it's time to renegotiate. It's not. Once you sign, you are signed until either you or the agent ends the relationship.

So now you have an agent. Congratulations. You have accomplished what most actors in Oklahoma have not. You have taken the necessary steps to get your career started. Celebrate. You are soon on your way to being a pro.

You have an agent.

Remember...you are always auditioning.