

Casting Directors – What They Do and How to Use Them

Barbara Titus is the principal of Titus Casting in San Jose, (408) 985-2290. While the firm was started in 1994, Barbara has been doing casting for many years prior to starting her business.

As a casting director, Barbara has assisted in a wide variety of productions, including feature films, film trailers, television commercials and pilots, industrial videos, infomercials, educational videos, CD-ROM games, events, voice-overs, print media, interactive CDs and music video.

Before casting a production, Barbara believes it is important to first read the script. Her extensive background in teaching acting often gives Barbara a different viewpoint from a director or production company in how parts should be cast. She believes that a casting director can provide maximum effectiveness when they are able to contribute to the casting in a collaborative manner, and in this manner, add textures and dimensions to the film that may not have been fully anticipated.

In doing a casting call, Barbara feels that directors often over-explain to an actor what they want. She notes that actors are emotional creatures, and that a faster way for a director to communicate is to convey the emotion, e.g. excited, angry, that they are looking for. Not doing this results in unnecessarily long casting calls. Barbara also advises, “Avoid having actors do rehearsed monologues. Actors often hide their flaws with them.”

Unlike other casting directors, Barbara does not maintain an elaborate filing system. Rather she relies upon her excellent memory for faces, names and performances. As Barbara put it, “My stock market is keeping track of all the actors in the South Bay.” As much as possible, she tries to see lots of theater productions to

see how well actors perform. But she notes, “I skip seeing Neil Simon plays, its hard for an actor to screw one up!” While Barbara occasionally casts a SAG member, most South Bay productions are non-union.

A casting director is different from a talent agent. Barbara is paid entirely by the production company, whereas a film agent is paid 10 percent by the production company and 10 percent by the actor. Four agents that Barbara enjoys working with are:

- Gail Jones at Talent Plus in San Jose
- Byron Peters at Mitchell Talent Management in San Francisco
- Carrie Myers at Quinn-Tonry in San Francisco
- Kristen Usich at Boom Models and Talent in San Francisco
- Anne Montgomery in Pleasanton

To actors, Barbara advised that head shots better look like themselves, as opposed to a glamour shot with elaborate makeup, hair styling and lighting. As she put it, “if you have wrinkles, are overweight, have wild hair or bad skin, I want to see it!” Furthermore, she stated that she looked for shots of actors where they are relaxed and comfortable with themselves; and that they should avoid being tense around the eyes or faking a smile. Typically an agent’s name and phone number are found on a head shot photo. Barbara suggested adding the actors name and phone number. She noted, “If the production is non-union and low-budget, I won’t consider you unless I already have your name and number.”

Barbara observed that the quality of the South Bay acting pool has improved considerably since 1984, when she first arrived from New York. Having trained extensively back East, Barbara stresses the importance of an actor learning their craft. When looking to cast principal actors, she views film “extra” credits of little value. Instead, Barbara looks for extensive stage experience as being a much better demonstration of their abilities. “I love good acting. The actor who can reach into their

core, and make me laugh, cry or be angry; that's what acting is all about. If you can't get the audience to feel your feelings, you're cheating them, and you should get off the stage."

There are four actors casting hot lines:

- Theatre Bay Area, (415) 957-1557
- Actors Job Hot Line, (800) 511-2238
- Bay Area Casting News, (415) 726-5424
- CastFAX, (415) 331-2371

It is only in recent years that a casting director credit is given after the actors names in the opening credits. While one day, an Academy Award may be given for best casting director, as Barbara put it, "I'm still trying to get regular people to accept the idea of a casting director!"

While film is a different medium than the stage, Barbara believes that both require good training. Acting for film differs in that the actor needs to tone things down from what they would perform on the stage. Also, the actor must keep their emotional life going until the director yells "cut," instead of ending it on their last line.