

SERIOUSLY, HOW DO I GET A DAMN MANAGER?

By Jim Cirile

www.coverageink.com

Do you really need to shell out that extra 10%? What can a manager do for you that an agent can't? And are these guys any more accessible than agents? The answers may surprise you.

ADVISORY BOARD		
Richard Arlook The Arlook Group	A.B. Fischer Shuman Co.	Jennie Frisbie Magnet Mgm't
Emile Gladstone ICM	Mike Goldberg New Wave Ent.	Nicole Clemens ICM
Graham Kaye CMG	Julien Thuan UTA	Jake Wagner FilmEngine

Stop! Before you read this article, please read “Seriously, How Do I Get a Damn Agent?” right here on this very site. Go ahead, we’ll wait. (whistling) Ah, you’re back! Okay, so as you no doubt noted, many of our panelists asserted that an effective way to land an agent is to **find a manager first**. So it seems only fair to talk to a panel of managers to get their thoughts on this. Please let them not say the best way to get a manager is to find an agent first...

But first, let’s clear up a couple things. There are important differences between agents and managers. While they’re both involved in the development and selling of scripts, agents tend to lean more heavily towards the selling side, while many managers focus more on development of both the writer’s material and career. Perhaps most importantly, a manager will generally be able to give you a lot more time. Manager A.B. Fischer from Shuman Co. says, “A manager will generate new ideas with you, nurture you and develop your craft through a million drafts of a spec. An agent only has so many minutes in the day to deal with that.” Melinda Manos from Manos Management agrees, “I handle 12-15 clients total; it allows me a lot of time for everyone. I don’t know any agents who have (a list) that size.” Fischer continues, “A lot of agents look to managers (and) say, ‘Your part of the team is to help develop. That’s what I need you for.’” CMG’s Graham Kaye says he is far more involved with his clients as a manager than he ever was as an agent. “When you work at places like (William Morris Endeavor), it is a volume business. They do give you great service, but they have a limited amount of time to spend with you. Do you want them to take a long lunch with you, or do you want them to help pay your mortgage?”

"(Agencies like WME) are a volume business. They have a limited amount of time they can spend with you."

There are also varying levels of managers, from those just starting out with perhaps a handful of industry connections to those who come with more juice thanks to agency or prodco experience. "I'll be bold and say it," says Kaye, "I don't need an agent to represent any of my clients." Kaye feels that his agency background gives him strong relationships with buyers that managers with a different pedigree may not have. "Even studio executives who become managers are limited in their exposure. I know a few people that have gone from being an executive to a manager, and they think that because they have relationships at a couple of studios it's going to be easy for them. But the reality is, they've been working in just one studio. Now they have to build relationships at new studios."

If you're like me, all the above is starting to sound pretty appealing – someone who actually spends time with you, helps develop your script through draft after draft? That's worth ten percent in my book. But as alluded to above, there's one other crucial thing a manager may be able to help with: getting an agent on your team. Those of you who've been querying agents but ignoring managers might as well be trying to attack Fort Knox with a Cheeto. "Let's say it's a new writer," says Fischer, "and I've been developing a spec with him. If I feel that the script is ready, and the marketplace is ready to buy something like this, at that point I would try to get the writer an agent. It's great to have an agent onboard, and the power of an agency to help sell is really important." Manos recently took a similar approach. "We didn't show (a script) to an agent until I'd probably read a dozen drafts." She believes it's very important to team with an agent because they add a whole new level of access and contacts. "I think we achieve success faster. I can keep the heat under an agent just enough to not annoy them so I get the most out of my agents. (Marketing a script) can be done without an agent, but it's pretty tough going out there."

So let's get to the beef in this Dinty Moore. How exactly does one land a manager? Well, wait just a sec—I must pound my drumhead here as usual. Before you do anything, make sure your script is ready! It's a simple fact: most scripts are nowhere ready for submission. Anywhere. Get that feedback from industry friends, analysts or reputable coverage services like www.coverageink.com first, and use that intel to buff your script **before** you knock on any doors. End tirade.

Now that you've done that, you'll be happy to know that all of our panelists feel that managers in general tend to be more accessible than agents. And unlike with most agents, query letters CAN still open doors with some managers. A.B. Fischer gets "a ton of queries, and I read every single one. I don't respond to most of them, but if something catches my eye, I'll absolutely read it. You never know where you're going to find a client." Fischer says that since he's not a staffer at a larger company, he's always looking for exciting new talent to expand his list. "If I find somebody who's never done anything before that I can get behind and develop, that works for me. Agents feel, 'It's hard

enough to get clients who have sold stuff jobs. I just don't have the time to develop somebody from scratch.”

Managers in general tend to be more accessible than agents. Query letters CAN still open doors.

While both Manos and Kaye say their doors are closed, they acknowledge that there are ways in. Manos says, “In general, I don't look at (queries.) The only exception was once I got a query by e-mail, and it was exactly the genre I was looking for. It sounded really interesting in the logline, so I took a look at it. But I do look at almost every referral. Try to get a referral through a peer or lawyer or associate.” Kaye says, “Call the development execs (at CMG.) Don't call *me*. I mean it, too. If one of the young managers here feels that they've found somebody who's very special, I will support them and go through the process of meeting them and finding out if it's somebody we want to be in business with. I've worked hard to get to a certain place where I don't need to sign clients, but younger managers who haven't been in the business as long as I have, that's part of their job.” And, guys, please keep those queries short, snappy and personalized. Manos says, “(I get these) these long-winded, generic e-mail queries—‘Dear Management Company...’ I get ten a day. People tell you their whole plot in an e-mail. That's not going to fly.”

Before you pick up a copy of the *Hollywood Representation Directory* and start querying managers, know well what these guys are looking for—and what they're not. Says Fischer, “I want to see a fresh take on old material. You're gonna be hard-pressed to find a new idea out there. Yes, when I'm reading a query, concept is important. If the idea is stale, I'm not going to request the script. When I'm actually reading something, concept is less important. If they've got chops to write and have an interesting take on the world, we can find that idea that's going to sell.” Manos would like potential clients to be working hard on their craft and not sit around waiting for the phone to ring. “But the other extreme is someone who's out schmoozing, managing their own career. (In that case) there's not really room for a manager.” She also prefers writers that come to her with some momentum, industry interest or connections. “That gives you something to work from,” she says. “Do your research. Find management companies that might be at your level and try to get that referral. Then submit your most marketable, most commercial script.” And whatever you do, don't be this guy: “I had a writer referral call me,” says Manos. “I said, ‘What you've got on the table sounds really interesting, but I'm on deadline right now. Do me a favor—send me an e-mail.’ He proceeded to call me three times in two days—no e-mail—and he left these long-winded, amped-up phone messages. I so can't work with that guy.”

So are they worth the extra 10%? You better believe it. A manager can make all the difference in getting your craft and your script to the level it needs to be; they will invest their time to develop your talent and best of all, when you're ready, they'll help get you an agent and introduce you to the town. Attempt any of this on your own at your own peril! None of this means getting a manager is going to be easy either. They are deluged with queries every day. But ultimately, the cream does rise. Keep working at your craft

and keep persevering, and when you have the goods, eventually someone will take notice. And when a manager comes aboard to help your career, then hold on tight because at long last, things may finally start to happen for you. Good luck!

##

Writer/producer Jim Cirile is the owner of top-rated screenplay analysis & development service www.coverageink.com.

