

ACTING IN ON-CAMERA COMMERCIALS

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STUDENT WORKBOOK

AND

INSTRUCTION GUIDE

by
Ruthe Geier-Price

with
Michael Jay Geier



Universal-Publishers
Boca Raton

*Acting in On-Camera Commercials:
Student Workbook and Instruction Guide*

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NOTES:

In order to avoid awkwardness, we have used the generic *he*. It goes without saying, it also means *she*. Further, the term *actor* is used to mean one who acts. It implies no gender, thereby making the term *actress* redundant.

The following link contains instruction information for teachers, photography and essential supplementary materials:

http://www.bookpump.com/upb/files/GeierPrice_Supplemental_Material.zip

Demonstration and copy reading materials are available at:

http://www.bookpump.com/upb/files/GeierPrice_Audio.zip

http://www.bookpump.com/upb/files/GeierPrice_DVD.zip

NOTE: the supplemental materials, audio and video files are from the original college curriculum. They may contain references to the "student workbook" and the "teacher's manual," both of which have been combined in this book. The downloadable materials include *all* of the supplements originally provided, but must be printed out, rather than torn out of the book. Audio and video are provided as MP3 and MP4 files, rather than on actual CDs and DVDs.

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Ruthe Geier-Price

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ruthe Geier-Price

After receiving her Bachelor of Science degree in English Education and her Master of Arts degree in Theater from New York University, Ruthe worked as an actor, director and teacher.

Her career began in live theater at the age of five. Since then, she has appeared in off-Broadway and regional productions and film as well as on television shows such as *Miami Vice* and the *American Playhouse Series*. Her performances have encompassed both classical and contemporary works.

An established director, she worked in summer stock and mounted all productions of the *Essex Conservatory of Music & Drama* where she chaired the theater department. For many years, she directed and produced for the touring company *Plays for Living*, the educational arm of *Family and Children's Services*, originated by Ethel Barrymore.

You have heard Ruthe's voice on radio commercials and television voiceovers. On radio, she performed in dramatic presentations and hosted the talk show *Spotlight On Stars*. On television, she hosted the cable show *Ruthe Geier Presents...*

After training at the *Weist-Baron School of Film & TV*, Ruthe appeared in numerous commercials. She is the recipient of CLIO, EMMY, and ADDY awards for excellence in performance. Her award-winning spot for *The Miami Herald* was shown internationally as a classic on TV on Johnny Carson's *TV Bloopers and Practical Jokes*.

An experienced drama educator, her workshops in *On-Camera Commercials* and *Method Acting* were well-known and popular. WLRN-TV featured her classes in a four-part series sponsored by American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), an industry union now merged with Screen Actors Guild (SAG). She has played a significant role in the

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education of developing actors and wrote this book to enable them in their chosen profession.

Ms. Geier-Price served for many years as Board Member and Vice President of the Florida local of AFTRA, and as Council Member of the Florida local of SAG.

Michael Jay Geier

Michael Jay Geier is an experienced professional author and editor. His book, *How to Diagnose and Fix Everything Electronic*, published by McGraw-Hill, has been a #1 bestseller in Amazon's home repair category. His articles have been published in *IEEE Spectrum*, *Electronic Engineering Times*, *Desktop Engineering*, *73 Amateur Radio Today*, *Radio Fun*, *Boys' Life* and other publications. He has also contributed to and edited a number of authors' published books on a wide range of subjects, including insurance, computer software and the Holocaust.

In addition, Mr. Geier, who holds a music composition degree from Boston Conservatory, is a performing artist who appears on cruise ships and other venues.

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to have known Ruthe Geier-Price for more than twenty years, and feel very honored that she asked me to write the foreword to this text.

As a talent, her auditions have always been professional and innovative, and I have booked her in film, on television and in many commercials.

Much of Florida's local talent was trained in her well-known workshops. I have booked many of her students.

Having cast over four thousand commercials, more than sixty feature films, the first three seasons of *Miami Vice*, and having taught audition workshops myself for many years, I know that nothing is more important to actors than understanding what is expected of them. Having talent is not enough; actors need to learn the craft. They must develop the techniques and skills required for success.

The business of making commercials is just that: a business. It is not for people who are looking primarily for glamour and romance. Acting in commercials takes dedication, sacrifice and perseverance. Amateurs who are unwilling to invest themselves in training remain just that: amateurs. This field has no room for them. Casting directors have no time to help them develop. We favor those who can follow cues and exercise their craft correctly on the first read.

Some of the interesting and invaluable lessons you will learn from this course include the following:

1. why you do not have to be between 18 and 25 years old and beautiful in order to be successful in this business.
2. how to make contacts.
3. how to deal with copy.
4. how to create characters.
5. things you can practice and perfect at home.
6. how to create a résumé, even if you have never worked in this business.

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7. how to deal with agents, casting directors and clients.
8. what to expect when you go on an audition.

As a casting director, I am your friend. I want you to be good. Know that your work in this business is largely up to you. If you are the right type for my project and you are a skilled professional, your chances of booking jobs are fantastic!

Whether you are just starting out in this work or have been involved for years, you will find, as I have, that this book is filled with indispensable information and training. You will use it throughout your career.

Dee Miller, C.S.A.

PREFACE

How fortunate actors are today! Before the emergence of the television commercial, work for actors was extremely limited. Rare was the performer who actually earned a living through his art. Hence, the term *starving actor*.

Today there is one thing of which you can be certain: no one sneers at work in commercials. What started as an embarrassment to serious theatre actors has become a well-paying, sophisticated performance art.

Most actors happily do this work, thereby supporting themselves while they strive for fame. Some do it as a stepping-stone to work in TV and film, while many choose to do it exclusively as a career. Well-known performers welcome these jobs; those with bankable names who get national spots earn large sums while working what would be considered part-time in any other field.

Knowledge of this craft is considered essential for actors today. It provides them with exposure and the wherewithal to follow their artistic stars.

RGP

1

HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITH TRYING!

The best way to be successful in working in commercials is to be confident of your expertise.

Performing in commercials is a craft. Unlike the art of acting, an art that requires creative ability and many years of study in order to achieve proficiency, it is something you can learn in a relatively short period of time. Performance in commercials requires no great artistic ability, but the wider the range of your knowledge, the better your chances are of getting work.

Audition techniques for the various media differ, and you need to be sure you're using the correct one for each. Training for theatre as well as commercials can help you even more with your goal of being chosen to represent companies advertising products on TV.

Unsuccessful actors frequently say, "It's whom you know, not what you know." Don't believe it. The most a good contact can do for you is get you in the door. If you're no better than the others the clients see, if you have not *turned them on*, you will not get the job.

Although good looks are an asset, it is not always the reason actors win auditions. While beautiful people get to sell cosmetics and cars, there are many products that require quite ordinary-looking people. Some producers are so eager to find *real* people, they go to the streets to look for them! But don't count on that to make a career. Most of the time, these real people are intimidated by the cameras and perform so badly, they wind up on the cutting-room floor.

Untrained people sometimes give good audition performances but, because they don't know exactly what they did or why, they can't repeat it. That's one of the purposes of *call-*

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backs,¹ to see if you can do it again and again with the same quality as you did it the first time.

¹ A second audition.

REVIEW

1. Q: What is the best way to be successful?
A: Know your craft.
2. Q: What will increase your chance of working?
A: Learning the acting techniques of other areas of the media.
3. Q: What is the difference between an art and a craft?
A: An art requires creative ability and takes many years to develop; a craft can be learned in a relatively short time.
4. Q: Are audition techniques the same for each facet of the media?
A: No.
5. Q: How important is theater training?
A: It is helpful but not essential.
6. Q: Why is it important to make contacts?
A: They help create new outlets for your work.
7. Q: True or false: “It’s whom you know, not what you know.”
A: False.
8. Q: Are good looks essential?
A: No.
9. Q: What are producers looking for?
A: Believability.

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CONCEPTION

To get really good at performing in TV commercials, you need to understand the whys and hows of them. They use up a big chunk of the advertising money spent every year and are so important, there are special awards given for excellence in creating and performing in them. Considered an art form, there are even special TV programs showing the best ones.

How are they made? Most advertising agencies have marketing departments where they study clients' problems and create solutions for them. For example, let's say that Little Woofy Doggie Diapers has a problem. Sales are not increasing and, in business, if you're not going forward and upward, you're going backward and downward.

The problem is turned over to the Account Executive at the advertising agency that handles the company's account or, if the company is dissatisfied with its current agency, the account is opened to bids and a new agency is selected.

The Account Executive identifies the problem: not enough dog owners are aware of the product's fine qualities or, a more likely possibility, the product is no different from several others found on the same store shelves. It's time to call in the Creative Director and Copy Group Head and plan a commercial. The idea is submitted to the client before being assigned to a copywriter.

Copywriting is a craft and should be treated with respect. Commercials are carefully constructed so that each word contributes to the intended impact on the viewer. Keep that in mind when you read copy² and don't change any of it!

Once the copy is approved by the client³, a *storyboard*⁴ is created.

² The script

³ Employer

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As all of us are influenced by our life experience so is the artist who draws the storyboard. If, for example, his girlfriend is a brunette about twenty years old, a short, thin girl with a turned-up nose, whom does he draw? A thin, short, twenty-year-old brunette with a turned-up nose! And when the casting director gets it, for whom is he looking? Same girl, same nose. Now you come along, a tall blond forty-year-old with a Grecian nose. Are you out of the running? Not necessarily. If the client really likes what you did, he may change his mind.

The next step is approval of the storyboard by the client and its legal department, after which a *production company*⁵ is selected. Unless the company has a favorite one, the job is put out for bids. This bidding procedure is one of the main reasons commercials are many times produced in one part of the country for showing in another.

Once a production company has been selected, it hires a *casting director*⁶, whose business it is to find the talent that meets with the approval of the client. Unless the company has an in-house one, it puts the job out for bids. Sometimes, the production company has a favorite casting director; sometimes, the job is given to one *agent*⁷ exclusively and the agent conducts the casting. Sometimes, the advertising agency does the casting.

Because there are so many variables regarding the locations of castings, be sure to use only accredited talent agents. Never reply to newspaper ads; these are mostly for porn films or worse and can be dangerous for men as well as for women.

The casting director breaks the spot down by gender, look and age classifications and then calls agents and tells them what he needs. The agents then call the talent registered with them. How do they decide which ones to call? Besides the obvious ones of gender, etc., they send the ones they know and like. More about that later.

⁴ Comic-strip version. See storyboard at http://www.bookpump.com/upb/files/GeierPrice_Supplemental_Material.zip

⁵ Producer of product for film and TV

⁶ Supplier of talent

⁷ Talent representative

Once the auditioning is completed and, usually but not always, taped, the producer and/or director select the talent for the spot⁸. Frequently, having had the good fortune to see several actors who are right for the part, they can't decide, and a *call back*⁹ is held. If no one seems right for the job, another casting is held, sometimes with a different casting director.

⁸ Commercial

⁹ A second audition

REVIEW

1. Q: Why is it important for you to understand why and how commercials are made?
A: Understanding the inner workings of the advertising business gives you insight into your place in the creation of commercials.
2. Q: What is the function of an advertising agency?
A: To create advertising for companies' products and/or services.
3. Q: Why do companies advertise?
A: To maintain a strong business image.
4. Q: What is the process used in producing a commercial?
A: An advertising agency creates the copy and storyboard, hires a production company which selects a casting director who calls agents who call talent.
5. Q: Who has the final "say" in the choice and production of a commercial?
A: The client.
6. Q: Who is the client?
A: The representative of either the product's company or the advertising agency.
7. Q: Is the actor permitted to change the wording of the copy?
A: No.
8. Q: Who writes the copy?
A: Copywriters.
9. Q: What is a storyboard?
A: A comic-strip version of the ad.

10. Q: Does the artist who draws the storyboard have any input regarding the selection of talent?
A: Yes. His drawings influence the casting.
11. Q: How are production companies and casting directors selected?
A: They submit bids for the jobs.
12. Q: Who casts commercials?
A: Casting directors, in-house casting directors, agents and advertising agencies.
13. Q: Why should actors work only through accredited talent agents?
A: Others may have dangerous agendas.
14. Q: What is the real business of a casting director?
A: To provide talent for clients.
15. Q: What is a callback?
A: A second audition.
16. Q: Is new talent called for a callback?
A: Rarely.
17. Q: What happens if the client is not satisfied with the talent shown?
A: Another casting is held.