

ACTING IN TV COMMERCIALS

"Actors must be able to project a complete three-dimensional character in thirty seconds or less," observes Debra Glass, an experienced producer and director of TV commercials. "An actor must be creative with whatever material is given to him or her. Sometimes the script may not make sense to them, or may seem silly. But the opinion of an actor is not needed or desired at an audition. What directors want to see, is an actor who can fulfill the requirements of the script in a unique and exciting way. Actors must also remember that there may be many takes, and they must be able to do a scene with the same amount of freshness and spontaneity on the fiftieth take as they did on the first," she advises.

A producer and director of independent video projects with more than ten years of TV production experience, Debra Glass has directed over sixty-five local and regional TV commercials. Debra is also an actress who has appeared in numerous community plays and local television shows for the last twenty years. A graduate of Kutztown University, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Telecommunications, Debra holds many unique perspectives on acting and television commercial work. "Auditions can be a daunting and difficult experience for everyone. However, it is the director and producer's job to find those people that can make a script come alive. Sometimes the characters in a script are widely drawn and can be played by many different types, and sometimes the script is extremely specific about the characters needed. When I cast a TV commercial I'm looking for what's appropriate by type, age, and performance ability, and if I find someone that meets those requirements and they offer a unique spark, I'm thrilled," Debra explains.

Debra stresses the need for actors to create characters and project their characters clearly and creatively in the thirty seconds that TV commercials provide. It is essential for actors to think of TV commercials as mini-plays. Like a play, the actor has to have an objective, a motivation, and a purpose for his playing. An actor has to tap into the same fundamental principles for creating a character in a play: Who am I? What do I want? In addition to these basic acting questions, the actor has to project her personality effectively and effortlessly. Since television is a medium of personality, an actor has to learn to use the core of his natural charisma and personality as well in the realm of commercials.

Acting in television commercials allows an actor to create a character using vivid and specific choices. TV commercials generally have a beginning, middle, and an end, much like a play. Goals and motivations must be played with the same creative insight as developing a character in a play. However, in this case, the "play" is a mini-play of thirty seconds. It's absolutely essential then for actors to create specific characters immediately, and to exhibit their motivations as soon as possible. It *is* possible for an actor to project a character in the thirty seconds of the commercial, but it requires authentic acting skills and abilities. Every glance and gesture that an actor makes in a TV commercial has an impact, and so it is important for the actor to have clear intentions and objectives. Every glance and gesture should build the character effectively so that the audience understands the character in the commercial immediately. "An actor needs to express as full a character as possible even if they appear on the screen for ten seconds," Debra observes.

Actors have to be fully engaged in the moment, and TV commercials are really snapshots of "moments" in life. The ultimate purpose of TV commercials is, of course, to sell something to the consumer in a creative and engaging way. And so, to succeed in this acting specialty, you must immediately create a believable character, and project this character in an amusing, witty, charming, and imaginative manner.

Acting in TV commercials, can help actors to hone their acting and vocal skills. Articulation and vocal fluency are essential for an actor performing in a commercial, since many times an actor will serve as a spokesperson for a product. Credibility is the key, if the audience is to truly believe the actor embraces and endorses the particular product.

Theatre work - acting in plays - is great training for acting in TV commercials. However, there are classes for TV commercial acting offered in many cities. The Weist-Barron School of Television Acting in New York is one of the finest commercial schools of its kind. Weist-Barron offers TV commercials and workshops for all aspects of this form of acting work. And, Weist-Barron has several satellite schools scattered throughout the country. An actor aspiring to succeed in TV commercials should study theatre and complement his training with commercial classes from a reputable school or workshop.

Nonunion TV commercials pay a flat rate to the actor as opposed to the lucrative residuals received from a union TV commercial. The rates can range

from \$250 and up for a local or regional TV commercial. Acting in TV commercials can give an actor excellent exposure, since even in a mid-size city, the metropolitan area can encompass a million or more people. And, casting directors can see an actor's work in a successful regional TV commercial. Therefore, acting in TV commercials offers exposure, experience, and economic opportunity for an actor.

Further benefits from acting in TV commercials include the creative opportunity to hone improvisational skills. Many times, actors don't have dialogue in commercials, and they have to perform or mime actions. Versatility and adaptability are important assets for actors working in commercials, and they must take direction well.

Generally, a TV commercial can be shot in a few hours to a single day. Actors generally receive their scripts a few days in advance. It is imperative that an actor has the lines of the script fully memorized before the actual shoot. At the rehearsal, the director will go over the interpretation of the commercial copy, and direct the actor to the appropriate physical and vocal actions - the "business" of the TV commercial. Since film and TV is a director's medium, it's essential that the actor take careful direction from the producer or director in charge. However, it's important for an actor to bring some creative choices to the TV commercial.

Getting cast in a TV commercial can occur in several ways. The agent representing an actor can submit the headshot and resume to a casting director, client, or ad agency that then hires the actor on the strength of her "type" and photo-resume. An actor can also be called in by a casting director to audition for the commercial, along with dozens of other actors who fall into the appropriate "type" or category for the commercial. Actors can also submit their headshots and resumes to local directors of cable TV stations or directors of video production companies. Acting in TV commercials should be an adjunct to acting in plays, and provides valuable experience and exposure for actors.