

# GET CALLED IN WITHOUT A REEL

INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF BEING CALLED IN BY MAKING  
SOME MINOR TWEAKS TO YOUR SUBMISSIONS PROCESS



**CITY HEADSHOTS**  
IT'S ALL ABOUT EXPRESSION

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## INTRODUCTION



**T**he challenge is real. There are zillions of actors out there all vying for the same small number of roles.

It's common knowledge that not having a reel can hurt your chances of getting into auditions, but what do you do when you don't have a reel and it's just not an option right now?

Are you destined to just do background roles and free student films, having to wait YEARS to get your footage back?

Absolutely not.

In this guide, we'll lay out a few key things you can do to start booking more auditions right away, without having to wait for a professional reel.

It's really not as hard as you might think!

## DEFINE YOUR BRAND



You've heard it over and over again. You need a strong brand.

Well first off, what is a brand, and how do you make it "strong?" And how are you supposed to know what your brand is if you haven't been acting for a long time? Well, fortunately there are a few simple things you can do to get clear on it right now - even if you're just starting out.

### FIND OR REFINER YOUR BRAND

The first step to getting clear on your brand is to ask yourself four simple questions:

1. What types of characters do I most enjoy playing? Villains? Heroes? Sidekicks?
2. How would I define my personality at its most basic level? Funny? Serious? Introverted? Outgoing?
3. Now, thinking about the answers to the above two questions, what current characters on television or in films could you see yourself playing? Come up with at least 5 specific characters.
4. Finally, what qualities do all five of those characters have in common?

Once you figure out what all those characters have in common, try to narrow it down to about 4-5 words.

For instance, we recently did a branding session with an actor and we discovered that his brand was "African American strength, pride, and compassion."

Once you find your brand, ask yourself whether the words you've uncovered really resonate with you. You want to feel a sense of pride in your brand, and feel like it's authentically YOU.

If it feels correct, you can move on to the next section.

## OWN YOUR BRAND & CONNECT IT TO YOUR TYPE

Now that you've found your brand, it's time to connect it to your "type." "What is a 'type?'" you ask?

A type is basically what you look like.

The best way to find your type is to first think about your appearance. Are you young? Old? Thin? Heavyset? Feminine? Masculine? Long haired? Short haired? Scruffy or clean shaven?

All these aspects combine together to give you a look. Looking at yourself in the mirror, come up with a list of 5 different types of people you could imagine yourself playing.

Be honest and think... can I play a cop or detective? Or am I too young for that? Can I play a student? An intern? A delinquent teenager? Or am I older and I could play a grandmother?

After you come up with five ideas of character types you could play, send an email to at least 10 people you know (ideally other actors or teachers, but they don't have to be). Ask them to suggest three different types of characters they could see you playing.

Ask them to be honest and to suggest characters you can play now, not 5 or 10 years from now. And tell them not to be fearful of saying things that might come across as negative, like a "delinquent."

Feel free to give them a couple of examples you wrote down, but tell them to try to come up with them on their own and not to copy yours (unless they ABSOLUTELY agree with one of the ones you wrote down).

When you receive their responses, take a look through all of them. What's the most common character type people wrote?

If 5 or 6 people wrote that they could see you playing an army sergeant, then try it!

## KEEP YOUR BRAND UNTIL IT STOPS WORKING FOR YOU

Now that you know your *type*, you know exactly how the industry probably sees you based on what you look like.

The trick, however, is to combine your *type* with your *brand*.

So for instance, with the recent actor who worked with us on finding his brand, we determined that he most often looks like a cop, so we decided that his final brand would be based around an African American law enforcement agent who is known for his pride, strength, and compassion.

## TARGET YOUR SUBMISSIONS



Once you know your brand and type, it becomes very easy to see why you're probably not booking the right roles.

Take a look back at the last 10 projects you submitted for. Do they fit your brand and type properly?

Chances are they don't.

Well no need to worry! Now that you're clear, things will be much easier for you.

## FIND THE RIGHT PROJECTS

It's time to decide which specific projects you want to focus on.

Think about projects you've submitted for in the past and ones that you will submit for now. Which specific projects should you **NO LONGER** submit for? Write down a list and get clear on the ones you should avoid.

*Remember - the more you avoid the wrong projects, the more time and focus you'll have to give to the RIGHT projects.*

Next, let's focus on the right projects.

Based on your brand and type, which roles and projects should you be submitting for? Come up with a list of 3-5 primary types of characters you want to start focusing on.

Now that you're clear, the next time you see opportunities for these projects on Actor's Access or other online submissions sites, submit for them right away.

## CONNECT WITH THE CASTING DIRECTORS FOR THOSE PROJECTS

Now that you're clear on the types of projects you want to audition for, it's time to do a little research online.

If you really want to start booking work more consistently without a reel, you'll need to form relationships with casting directors who are working on those types of projects.

Search online for who is casting, and then use Google to find out if those casting directors are holding any seminars or events in the near future where you might be able to meet them in person through a *Pay to Play* audition class.

Legitimate *Pay to Play* classes are a great opportunity for you to network with people in the industry.

Assuming your acting and auditioning technique is up to par, you'll be able to attend these classes for a small fee, and then when the class ends, you can ask the casting director if they are open to you keeping in touch with them.

Ask them how they prefer to be contacted - email or postcards?

They'll tell you the best method, and then you can set a reminder for yourself so you remember to follow up with them occasionally.

*Note: If a casting director tells you they don't want you to stay in touch, don't worry. Occasionally this happens, so just move on to someone else.*

## KEEP IN TOUCH

To make it easier to remember to stay in touch with all the casting directors and other industry people you'll meet through your career, we want to introduce you to a great (and FREE) tool:

[www.followupthen.com](http://www.followupthen.com)

*This is not a sales pitch - we are in no way affiliated with them and we don't get commission if you upgrade to their paid plans.*

FollowUpThen is an automatic system that works when you BCC certain email addresses like [2days@followupthen.com](mailto:2days@followupthen.com) or [3weeks@followupthen.com](mailto:3weeks@followupthen.com). Or even [6months@followupthen.com](mailto:6months@followupthen.com).

You basically just get an email back from FollowUpThen on the date you pick saying, "It's time to follow up." And it contains the original message and who it was sent to.

It's the perfect tool for remembering to keep in touch with casting directors and other industry people you meet because you can essentially send an email to them saying, "It was great meeting you at the casting class last week, I learned a lot." And then you'll BCC [every3months@followupthen.com](mailto:every3months@followupthen.com) and get a reminder email every three months to follow up with them.

It's a VERY simple way to keep organized for people who hate complex technology systems like Project Management Software (Asana, etc.) or CRM Software (Hubspot, etc.).

[Send a blank email right now to 2days@followupthen.com](#). They'll email you back very simple instructions on how to set up a free account where you'll get up to 50 followup reminders per month.

And then we highly [recommend sending another email to every2days@followupthen.com](#) that says the following:

"Don't forget to use FollowUpThen!"

This way it keeps reminding you to use it until you manually cancel the reminder.

## USE A PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOT



Your headshot is your primary marketing tool and it's absolutely crucial to have a professional one if you want to increase your chances of being called in.

### IT MUST BE PROFESSIONAL

A professional headshot is vital. If your headshot was just taken by a friend with a good camera, it's extremely easy to tell - especially if they're not an experienced headshot photographer.

Using a friend for your headshot might be more affordable, but in the long term it will be much more costly because of all the opportunities for paid acting gigs that WON'T come your way.

Here are a few key elements that go into a professional headshot:

For the overall look, you generally want a blurred-background, outdoor-style shot or a white background. Stay away from flat, colored backdrops or standing next to walls if possible, as they can be distracting.

The more intense the character, the darker the background or more intense it should look. A white background can work, but typically an outdoor shot is best for an intense character.

If you're going for a business or lawyer type of look, a silvery blurred out backdrop, with grays, whites, and blacks, typically works well.

If you're going for an edgy intense character, you can blur out bricks or a chain link fence. Browns and grays, and maybe even some blue tones can work well for you.

Make sure to stay away from a flat black or dark gray backdrop, as they can swallow you up and won't provide enough interest for a headshot.

If you're going for an approachable, friendly (or softer, innocent) character, something with a little greenery and color, or a flat white or off-white backdrop can work well.

A quick rule of thumb: for theater, vertical shots work best. For film and television, horizontal shots work best. But based on what you are wearing, sometimes one format of shot might work better than another.

## IT MUST BE BRANDED

Your headshot needs to capture the brand you found earlier. If your headshot is too generic and the expression, clothing, backdrop, and lighting don't really match the clearly defined brand you came up with, we recommend redoing your headshot.

Remember that your headshot is the first thing agents and casting directors see when you submit, and they'll determine whether your resume or cover letter are even looked at.

Ensure your headshot captures your essence perfectly and that it looks highly polished and professional or there is no point to taking any further steps in this guide.

If you're looking to shoot a new headshot, we'd love the opportunity to work with you! Check us out at [www.cityheadshots.com](http://www.cityheadshots.com) and set up a shoot today.

## YOU NEED A WELL-WRITTEN COVER LETTER

Your cover letter is one of the easiest ways to separate yourself from the rest of the pack.

Almost every actor submits a headshot and resume, but not every actor submits a well-written cover letter that captures their brand and shows what they're bringing to the table.

Here's a short guide to help ensure your cover-letter catches the casting director's attention:

### IT MUST BE BRANDED

First off, ensure that your cover letter talks a bit about what types of characters you most enjoy playing and why. It's important to remember that casting directors are not just looking for an actor that LOOKS like the role, but they're also looking for an actor who LOVES playing the role.

They know that when you love doing something, you'll do your best work. For this reason, casting directors are rarely going to hire an actor who has a generic brand - they'll think that you're just "eh" about their project.

Show how you're perfect for the project because the character is your exact brand and you're experienced in it and absolutely love playing it.

### IT MUST BE SHORT

A good cover letter should be only 3-5 sentences, broken up into 3 short paragraphs. Any longer and no one will read it.

A wise man named Charles Mingus once said, "Making the simple complex is commonplace. But making the complex simple, awesomely simple - that's creativity."

It's your job to figure out how to condense your cover letter down to about 4 sentences while covering all the key, most important points.

## IT MUST SHOW THE VALUE YOU BRING TO THE TABLE

Casting directors care about the brand you play and that it matches the character they are auditioning for, but they also care about what you'll bring the project outside of your acting ability.

In this sense, we're primarily talking about your attitude and how you interact with other people on projects.

It's beneficial to talk a bit about how you're a positive person, you love working as a team with people, and you always strive to help others feel good about themselves. Showing you're a supportive, positive person can go further than you'd think in bringing you in for an audition.

Why? Because casting directors like to hire team players.

## IT MUST BE PROFESSIONAL

You'd be surprised to see how many actors don't know proper grammar or how to spell correctly.

If you have a friend who's great at English, ask them to double-check your cover letters before they go out because it can go a long way in showing your professionalism.

The more you cross your T's and dot your I's, the more likely casting directors and agents will think you are a true professional.

When you send out an unprofessional cover letter, it shows that you let things fall through the cracks.

## HAVE A STRONG RESUME



Your resume must absolutely be professional and formatted well if you want to be taken seriously by casting directors when you don't have a reel.

### IT MUST BE FORMATTED PROPERLY

Take a look at [this link](#) if you want to see an example of a highly-professional actor resume. We strongly recommend you create a resume like this if you want to be taken seriously by casting directors.

The more low-quality your resume looks, the less experienced you'll appear and casting directors will scrutinize you much more closely if you don't have a reel.

Below are a few key points to keep in mind for an effective actor resume:

1. Include your contact information.
2. Include your website domain name (and if you don't have one yet, we recommend visiting [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) to make a domain because you'll appear more professional).
3. Include the largest and most noteworthy projects you've been in.

4. Include any noteworthy education you have.
5. Include any special skills you have.
6. Make sure to use the words "lead" and "supporting" etc., instead of character names, especially for film/TV roles.
7. Leave out minor things that aren't important and can make it look like you're just trying to fill up space.

Some people ask why we recommend using the words "lead" and "supporting" instead of character names, and the reason is simple: casting directors don't know every single project out there and won't spend the time to go look them up, so avoid using character names!

Another important thing to remember is that you should NEVER send out .doc format resumes. ALWAYS send out a PDF file because .doc files reformat on different computers, meaning your one-page resume might show up as two pages somewhere else.

Doc formats can also sometimes contain viruses, so casting directors are always somewhat leery when opening them. If you're not sure how to make PDF files, you can just Google it (different articles exist for different computer operating systems like Mac vs Windows).

## IT MUST HAVE AT LEAST SOME REAL PROJECTS OR TRAINING

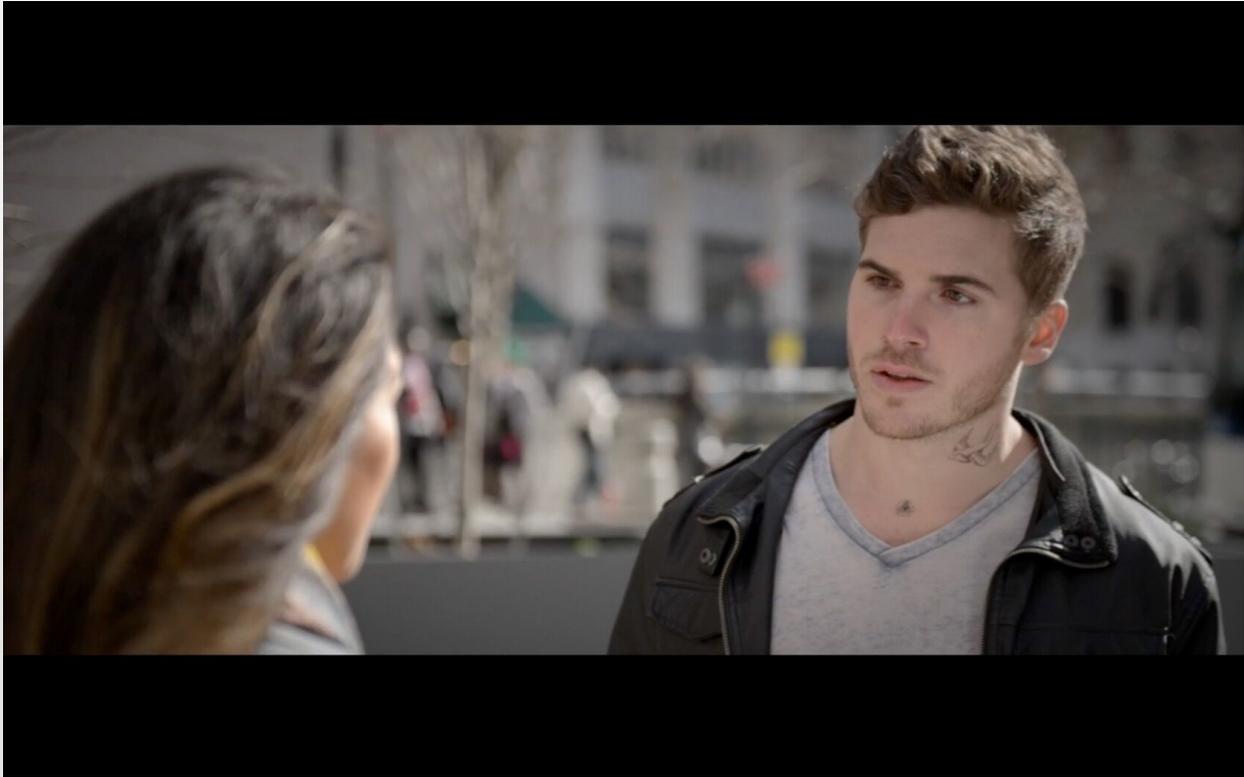
What do you do if you have no experience and your resume is tiny? Well, as they say - if you build it they will come. You gotta start acting for free to build your resume! Apply to casting calls for student films and ultra-low budget productions to start getting credits.

Casting directors and agents rarely take on inexperienced actors because the risk is too great, so prepare to spend about a year acting for free before your resume starts looking better and you start getting paid work.

Now there is one caveat to this: Many casting directors do take training into account. If you have a lot of training at conservatories, you might be able to get called in, especially if you have some footage of yourself performing.

And that brings us to our final recommendation:

## SHOOT YOUR OWN FOOTAGE



If you don't have any professional footage of yourself, you can shoot something unprofessional and use it as a placeholder.

Most casting directors and agents will agree that anything is better than nothing, so if it's completely out of your budget right now to shoot a professional scene for your reel and you don't want to wait around for years to get footage back from student directors, you can take matters into your own hands and shoot some footage for your reel.

You'll just want to find a monologue or scene (or write something yourself) and then ask a friend to use your smartphone camera to record it. A simple single-angle shot on you looking off-camera or into the camera can work fine.

Make sure the scene you choose to shoot fits perfectly with your brand. You don't want to do just any monologue - everything should be tailored!

## LIGHT IT PROPERLY

When you shoot something for your reel, one thing that really bugs casting directors is the fact that the footage is lit terribly.

To get better lighting, shoot near a window or underneath some sort of overhang. You want to control the directionality of the light so it's not hitting you from above, but from in front or to the side.

When light comes down from an overhead light or the sky, your eyes will look darker than they are. When light comes from in front or from a lower angle, your eyes will be much brighter and the footage will look more professional.

## RECORD SOUND PROPERLY

Another huge problem most actors have, especially with self-tapes, is when the footage has echoey sound.

If we can't hear you clearly, what's the point?

Make sure that your audio sounds clear by either investing a little money into a lavalier (they sell wired-lav mics for \$50 and up) or by recording somewhere quiet and putting a rug or blanket on the ground so it absorbs echoes.

If you're not sure whether your sound is good, ask a friend to watch the video and see if they can easily tell what you're saying in it.

## ENSURE YOUR BACKGROUND & CLOTHING ARE NOT DISTRACTING

What's behind you is just as important as what you choose to wear in the video. Make sure the background is either a solid-colored wall or something interesting and supportive of the scene.

If you're shooting a scene that's supposed to take place in a bedroom, clean up your bedroom so it's very neat and then shoot there.

If you're shooting a scene that's supposed to take place in a courtroom, chances are you won't have access to that type of space, so just record yourself against a flat wall.

And make sure to wear a solid-colored, darker shirt. Try to avoid pale colors like white or yellow and definitely stay away from logos or strong patterns.

[Click here to learn about what to wear on-camera.](#)

## ASK A FRIEND FOR HELP

Having a friend help you shoot is very important if you want your footage to look more professional.

When you try to shoot yourself, it's probably going to take you way longer. With a friend, they can operate the camera and let you know how it looks, and they can move the camera with you as you move in the scene.

They can also give you feedback on whether your performance looked genuine or if you should do another take. For all these reasons, it's extremely helpful to have someone there to give you that third-person perspective.

## EDIT IT

After you've shot the footage, it's time to edit out the unnecessary stuff at the beginning and end of the clip.

Choose your favorite take and use your smartphone or computer software to clip the beginning and end of the scene.

Make sure when you watch it that it starts right at the slate and ends right when the scene finishes. We don't want to see unnecessary camera movement at the beginning or end as you set up, or hear your friend calling "Cut!"

## UPLOAD IT ONTO ACTOR'S ACCESS

Now that you've got your footage, you can upload it to Actor's Access, and that's it, you're all finished!

## IN SUMMARY

You've now gone further than 99% of actors who don't have a reel.

You've gotten hyper clear on your brand, you've figured out what projects and casting directors to target, and you've put together your basic marketing materials.

You even have some footage of yourself so casting directors and agents can see what you look like on-camera!

Now it's time to start submitting and aiming to land some decent roles.

And then, with the money you earn from those projects, when you're ready, we'd love the opportunity to shoot a super professional scene for your reel.

Check us out at [www.actorscreenershoot.com](http://www.actorscreenershoot.com) to learn more about how we can help you.

We wish you the best of luck and hope to one day  
work with you!

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