



Powered by Clickability

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)



## Spotlight on Commercials

### Small Screen Casts a Wide Net

*Commercial agent Jenevieve Brewer on the growing opportunities in TV, print, and beyond*

May 29, 2008

**By Simi Horwitz**

"Improv! Improv! Improv!" asserts Jenevieve Brewer, who heads About Face, the commercial and print division of the New York-based talent agency the Carson/Kolker Organization, when asked about the skills a commercial actor needs. "Some commercials have scripts, others may not, but either way the ability to improvise helps an actor enormously. There's a huge demand for comic talent. There's also a demand for ethnically ambiguous actors and those that are not fashion perfect. You can be

short and even overweight."

Brewer recalls a casting call for a cereal commercial seeking a heavy female bodybuilder to play a massage therapist working on tennis great John McEnroe. Incongruous ads with unexpected actors are a trend, she says, resulting in plenty of work for "real" and quirky-looking actors. Age is no barrier either: Brewer cites an actor pushing 80 who recently booked a commercial in part because he had a funny laugh.

That's not to say the conventionally attractive are passé, but opportunities have opened up for many others as well, and not just in TV commercials. Brewer, a Cincinnati native who has led About Face for five years, says the same is true of industrials, though that medium has added requirements. For starters, an actor must be familiar with the teleprompter and able to read from it with ease. In addition, many industrials serve the healthcare industry and feature actors playing physicians, so knowledge of medical lingo helps. "Any actor who wants to do industrials," she says, "I would recommend Pamela Kramer, who gives an industrial intensive monthly. She's with Bradley Baron Casting, and her course is well worth it."

While industrials fall under the jurisdiction of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, print ads do not — and they can be quite lucrative. "You can make [from] \$500 a day all the way up to \$3,500 a day," Brewer says. "Some print ads will pay 25 grand, especially for pharmaceuticals. The nice thing about print ads is that there are no height or weight requirements. In fact, you don't even have to be an actor, though being a good actor always helps, especially if the ad needs someone with certain facial expressions, for example."

What kind of headshots does Brewer like to see? "For actors interested in doing print work, I like to see a comp card showing the actor with different looks," she says. "For television, the nice commercial headshot is fine. All headshots should be in color." Though she generally favors actors who look "approachable" in their pictures, there are no hard and fast rules. It all depends on the project's casting requirements.

Whatever the job, Brewer is proud of her ability to think outside the box. "If I feel a clean-cut actor could play a blue-collar role that's being cast," she says, "I'll send him in, suggesting that he dress down or dress more casually. If he needs to look rough around the edges, I'll suggest he not shave for a couple of days. But I won't send an actor in if he's not right for a part. I don't waste a casting director's time." As a result, she has developed a real rapport with both CDs and actors: "These are relationships based on trust."

#### Business Class

Brewer loves what she does and is more than willing to put in long hours, but she expects actors to respect her time. "This is a business," she says. "I like actors who come on time, not half an hour late or half an hour early. I'm on a schedule, and if we have an appointment at 3 and an actor shows up at 2:30 when I'm eating lunch, I'll tell them to come back at 3." What turns her off are actors "who see that I'm busy and don't wait patiently. Instead they talk incessantly."

Most of Brewer's clients are referred to her by casting directors, though she goes through all her mail regularly. "Send only a headshot and résumé," she emphasizes. "Please don't send me tapes, even if you're coming to me to do voiceovers. If I'm interested, I will ask for them." Previous commercials on a résumé are a plus; so is commercial training, though Brewer's clients have booked work without it. The key is the ability to be natural and relaxed in front of the camera, she says. As for

websites, if she has submitted an actor for a role, a site with clips of his or her work is great: "That way I can tell the casting director to look at the website. I'm not saying the website is the way to go; I'm just saying it's another way to showcase an actor's work."

In addition to national TV spots — her clients' bookings have included ads for Prudential, Applebee's International Inc., Tyson Foods Inc., Time Warner Cable Inc., AB Electrolux, HomeGoods, Commerce Bank, and AIG — Brewer finds that hosting jobs are increasingly drawing actors to the business, a consequence of reality TV's proliferation. "Actors who host have to be comfortable with themselves," she says. "There's a lot of ad-libbing and improvisation that's called for. And they have to have real personalities." Brewer's clients have hosted a program on Si TV, *Storm Chasers* on the Discovery Communications Inc., and other shows.

Gazing into her proverbial crystal ball, Brewer thinks technology will come to play a larger role in the industry — from speeding the interactions among agent, actor, CD, and producer to the increased use of the Internet as a platform for commercials. "I think the way commercials will be made may be different, though I don't know how," she says. "But the acting skills will be the same."

### Links referenced within this article

Jenevieve Brewer


<http://www.backstage.com/bsa/about/Jenevieve+Brewer>

American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

<http://www.backstage.com/bsa/about/American+Federation+of+Television+%26+Radio+Artists>

### Find this article at:

[http://www.backstage.com/bsa/search/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1003809547](http://www.backstage.com/bsa/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003809547)

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 VNU eMedia Inc. All rights reserved.