

Who's Looking for Online Talent?

So who is scouting the Net searching for talent? I asked the talent who had been signed from YouTube, and sure enough, a small handful of forward-thinking industry professionals had found this goldmine of talent and kept it on the down-low. From network execs and A&R representatives to high-profile agents and entertainment attorneys, they may have remained under the radar, but they were indeed looking.

One expert who's definitely ahead of the game, Matt Sugarman, entertainment attorney with Weissmann Wolff Bergman Coleman Grodin & Evall LLP, agreed to talk with me about what he looks for in surfing the Net for undiscovered talent.

As for the talent who's hoping to be scouted and discovered, just remember, you can't force it. It has to happen organically. Certainly put yourself out there if you think you've got what it takes. Do something unique and different and better than what is already being done. Then build your subscribers to show us that you're marketable and that you can attract a large audience. If you've truly got the talent, we will find you.

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Q & A

Interview with Matt Sugarman

FL: Do you ever look for new talent on sites like YouTube?

MS: Occasionally, although I did more in the past than I do now.

FL: Please tell me about some of the talent you discovered.

MS: I came across LisaNova (Donovan) and was then introduced to her by another client for whom her boyfriend had worked in the past.

FL: Once you signed Lisa Donovan, how did she go from YouTube celebrity to starring on *MadTV*?

MS: Actually, she had a number of competing offers when I met her that we held off on accepting because they were for little or no money (even though they were enticing offers from big names). After I introduced Lisa to Todd Christopher at Gersh, [casting director] Nicole Garcia at *MadTV* actually approached Lisa and asked her to try out for the show.

FL: Do you think YouTube stars can have longevity in mainstream entertainment, or are they like reality TV stars who only get 15 minutes of fame?

MS: I think it has yet to be seen what their long-term success will be. Just as in any other media, you'll probably end up seeing one or two individuals who do very well and go on to long careers. However, the vast majority will fade away. Usually to make it in TV or movies these people don't just show up and say "I want to be an actor"; they've had years of training. While the freshness of the untrained individual can be refreshing at first, in order to translate to long-term success they need training and time.

I think the biggest problem the Internet creates for these people is that you can go from a zero to a big-shot overnight, and the people who do that then get a false/unrealistic expectation that the rest of their career in Hollywood will happen that same way, but it doesn't. It takes years of growing and honing your talent to be successful over the long run. Big egos with little to back it up can kill a career in Hollywood before it starts. People have to realize that there are 500,000 people in this town looking for an agent and manager, and if you get a good one at a good agency, you're very lucky. But even with all that good representation, things take time to develop and grow.

FL: What are your favorite online video-sharing sites?

MS: Funny or Die and YouTube.

FL: Can you share some success stories where you used an online video site to launch or further a client's career?

MS: We had a client in a comedy troupe in Amsterdam and we had him post his reel on YouTube along with some funny videos that he did with the troupe. We were able to get the client looked at by a casting director from a network show by giving her the link, and based off of that, they had the client fly to the U.S. for an audition, which he killed and got the spot on the show.

FL: What advice can you offer people who want to get started in show business about utilizing sites like YouTube to launch their careers?

MS: It's great as a training ground. To see what grabs people, make as many videos as you can, make them as good as you can, and just keep doing it to gain experience.