

A Career in Commercials



Something about their looks and demeanor makes you feel at ease. You welcome them into your home and accept their advice as you would from a trusted friend. In 60 seconds or less, they've influenced your opinion, maybe even won your hard-earned dollar...

For thousands of Screen Actors Guild members, the Commercials Contract is their bread and butter. And whether we're talking Wonder Bread or Roman Meal, Land O'Lakes or Country Crock, our members are sought after because they make great products even more appealing.

About half of all domestically shot commercials are produced in the Los Angeles area. The New York market, home base to world-renowned advertising agencies, accounts for another 29 percent of the work. The Regional Branch Division represents the remaining 19 percent, with significant production occurring in such cities as Chicago, Detroit and Miami.

Competition is tight, especially in the smaller markets. Not all projects go SAG.

"Our members in 'right-to-work' states have made a conscious decision to cut themselves out of non-union work," says David Hartley-Margolin, SAG 3rd vice president, who represents the Regional Branch Division as a chair for commercials negotiations. "They deserve a tip of the hat. They deserve a lot of credit for that."

Other obstacles to actors who work commercials include perceptions about age or "type," and the amount of work available based on the economy.

Screen Actor talked to a cross-section of members who have actively worked the contract regarding their experiences. Meet a few of the people who sell you stuff:



KATE VAN DE GOOR, Hollywood

"You have to know what you're doing very quickly," says Kate van de Goor, who has acted in national ads and market-specific spots.

Not every actor likes the pace of commercials, and some are opposed to promoting products, but "if you're comfortable with it, it opens up all kinds of doors for a

performer," she says.

She views commercials as "snapshots of life" that are at their best when treated as high-concept short films.

Van de Goor once was up for a role that involved finding people who could channel various aspects of a famous golfer. Sex, age or walk of life wasn't as important as capturing the essence.

She didn't get that one, but she says she'll never forget preparing for the audition with the help of her brother, who is a golf fanatic.



OLGA MEREDIZ, New York

You know a commercials voice-over actor is good when she's Latina, yet beats out native French actors for a VO gig.

Olga Merediz has that ability.

Even so, she says it's hard to make a living on commercials alone, especially when non-union productions in South America can steal work opportunities from Spanish-

speaking union members in the United States.

She says it's important for actors to be realistic and pursue all types of unionized acting work they can get. Currently, she is on Broadway.

Like many others who do voice work for commercials, Merediz says she's looking into purchasing home studio equipment so she can more easily send herself out for opportunities.



CEDRIC YOUNG, Chicago

It never hurts to look younger when going on auditions. Unless it's an ad for AARP.

"About two years ago I came back from doing a play," says Cedric Young. "I left the gray in my hair for the role. I usually put color in for auditions and shave, but I left my gray in and got cast."

The ad is now running in select markets.

Young says he got a call from a family member who saw it in Mississippi. Because it was a SAG production, he knows a residuals check soon will be in the mail.

Young says he would like to see more opportunities for minorities and men and women older than 40 to be featured in commercials. They represent people who buy a wide plurality of products, so it would only make sense.

"I've actually gone in and asked if they'd consider changing things," he says, adding with a laugh: "Sometimes that gets you in trouble."



BRIAN BEEGLE, Georgia

Brian Beegle set a professional standard for himself when joining SAG in 1997. He won't work off the card.

Beegle says he has been fortunate. He even pitched and landed a Kingsford Charcoal commercial that was shot in his back yard.

Playing off the University of Georgia-University of Tennessee rivalry, the game-day cook-out features plenty of playful trash talk among friends. (Naturally the hamburger buns get ketchup in the shape of Georgia "G"s and the patties get pieces of cheese applied in the shape of Tennessee "T"s...)

Beegle credits the SAG Georgia Branch for always protecting his interests.

"SAG has my back," he says. "When one of my commercials appeared on the Internet, I got a call from Melissa Goodman (Branch executive). They negotiated far beyond what I thought I would be paid."



ED KELLY, Detroit

"The lion's share of the work here in Detroit is automotive, but there is a little bit of everything," says Ed Kelly, SAG National Board representative and voice of Lincoln's "Signature Event" commercials.

Kelly jokingly refers to his voice acting as "slaving over a hot microphone," but says he is blessed to do work he loves.

He started out as an impressionist who cut ad demos. He has prepped for such actors as Dennis Miller and Stephen Colbert.

Contract Language

For those who are new to the Commercials Contract, here are a few terms you might find useful:

Class A earnings are usage payments for airing of commercials during nationally broadcast programs and include primetime programming from the five major networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, Fox and NBC) as well as syndicated use.

Extra is the contractual term for a background actor under the Commercials Contract.

A guarantee is an agreement negotiated with a performer that specifies a minimum payment, typically well in excess of scale and often dependent on the celebrity of the performer.

Holding fees are payments due to a performer for each cycle that an advertiser wishes to use the commercial beyond the 13-week cycle.

Session fees are payments due to a performer for a day's work.

A wild spot is a usage type of commercial airing on local network-affiliated stations. The usage fees are paid based on the number of local markets the commercial airs in.

Source: SAG Research and Economics Department

These days, he also gets a good amount of work based on just being him. With maturity, Kelly says, he has developed a deeper “catch” in his voice that has made him that much more marketable. He says when he hits his senior years, he’ll similarly have to prepare for a natural rise that typically occurs in men’s voices.



KIM BROCKINGTON, New York
For the past 15 years, Kim Brockington says commercials income has helped her remain a professional actor.

She most recently appeared in an Oreos spot featuring the Manning brothers of football and the Williams sisters of tennis. She is among journalists trying to interview them, but never gets a word in.

Brockington says she just learned the campaign will continue, so she’ll get a holding fee to not do any commercials for similar products during that time.

She says any actor serious about longevity has to at least consider commercials. After all, “theater work doesn’t pay a lot and film and television work doesn’t come a lot.”



CHAWON KO, Hollywood
From frat boy to hipster, Chawon Ko has acted in a wide range of commercial roles for such companies as Target, Wendy’s and Chrysler.

“By being in the union, you know what’s happening behind the scenes, and you’re protected,” says Ko.

He recently got to work on a commercial helmed by high-profile film director, and he says that only would have been possible on a SAG shoot.

His philosophy for acting in commercials is the same for living life in general: “Do all you can with the things you have control over, and with things you don’t, let go.”

Editor’s Note: Screen Actor spoke with numerous members regarding working in commercials, not all of whom are featured here. Our sincere thanks go out to them as well for contributing.

Increase Your Odds at Commercial Success

- Make sure your agent has your best possible headshots on file.
- Be on time. But more importantly, if for some reason you have to be late, communicate. Keep your agent apprised of your situation at all times.
- Be in a relaxed, confident mental state when you get in the room.
- Have a genuine appreciation for casting directors and session runners. They aren’t just gatekeepers; they are partners in your success.
- You’re in business with your agent. If you somehow find work on your own, you still must give him or her 10 percent. Consider it a thank you for all of the times your agent gave 100 percent to get you a gig that ultimately went to someone else.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES EFFORTS MAKE SAG AWARDS SEAMLESS



Transforming the Shrine each year takes the hard work of dozens of talented professionals.



The SAG Awards Committee: Chair JoBeth Williams, Vice Chair Daryl Anderson, Shelley Fabares and Paul Napier. Not pictured is Yale Summers.



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

Irrfan Khan, Dev Patel, Freida Pinto and Anil Kapoor of *Slumdog Millionaire* took home statuettes for their performances.

As usual, the SAG Awards looked elegant and effortless this past January 25. The nominees and winners shined at the live simulcast from the Shrine Exposition Center in Los Angeles because of the hard work of dozens of dedicated professionals in multiple disciplines, most of whom return annually to the labor of love.

The Shrine complex is a Los Angeles landmark built in 1920 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style with Moorish detailing. It is grandiose and beautiful on the outside, but the inner space of the Shrine's Exposition Center, with its 34,000-square-foot wooden floor, paint-trimmed overhangs and bare columns, has to be redefined for each event. Just to create a neutral backdrop from which the show's designers can begin their transformation takes some 15,000 square feet of black drape to cover the showroom walls and block sunlight. Another 11,800 square feet of black carpet is used to cover the showroom floor and seating risers.

The SAG Awards' focus on actors inspired the ceremony's production design and décor. At center stage, floating against a twinkling background, a gold-framed silver screen showcased the nominated performances and tributes to the SAG membership that are at the heart of the event. A luminous sunburst radiated from the screen to encompass the entire stage, which is punctuated by art deco references harkening back to the Guild's founding years. The crystal chandeliers chosen to accent the stage lighting were echoed in overhead fixtures throughout the showroom.

"We take something that essentially is a basketball court on the inside and turn it into an elegant setting with dining and a stage appropriate for an honors telecast," says SAG Awards Producer Kathy Connell, who has produced the SAG Awards since its inception. "The show comes together relatively quickly during the final days because we've all gotten to know each other and can speak in shorthand."

While the showroom was being transformed, other members of the team erected a tent in the Shrine's east parking lot. It housed the post-awards gala hosted by *People* magazine and the Entertainment Industry Foundation to honor the charitable endeavors of SAG members. EIF and *People* have thrown the fabulous after-party for the past 13 years while also making a generous donation—this year \$100,000—to support the good works of the SAG Foundation.

This year marked the 11th consecutive year Jeff Margolis Productions produced the SAG Awards in association with Screen Actors Guild Awards, and it was the third year Jeff Margolis himself has served as director. The Awards Committee for Screen Actors Guild—Chair JoBeth Williams, Vice-Chair Daryl Anderson, Shelley Fabares, Paul Napier and Yale Summers—advise at all stages leading up to the production.

In the final days, the hours can stretch well past midnight

for the show's production team, partners and independent contractors, but that comes with the territory.

Together the team creates a simulcast for TNT and TBS that is widely respected by the industry and a staple of awards season viewing. This year's show and its presentation of SAG's annual Life Achievement Award to James Earl Jones received additional support with a tribute on Turner Classic Movies. His recognition also was highlighted via the annual *Screen Actor: SAG Awards Special Issue* and in video captured by the SAG Communications Department for SAG.org and the SAGAwards.org.

Now that this year's production has been "wrapped out," Connell and Awards Coordinating Producer Jon Brockett, start the whole process again. They'll be joined in the summer by key members of their public relations team, and as the year unfolds, more and more members of the award-winning creative team again will lend their talents to the 2010 awards ceremony.

The 16th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards will be simulcast live on Saturday, January 23, 2010, again from the Shrine Exposition Center.

Screen Actors Guild, Screen Actors Guild Awards, The Actor, the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award and all related elements and images are trademarked and copyrighted 2009 Screen Actors Guild Inc. All rights reserved.



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

The *Mad Men* ensemble gathers for their acceptance.



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

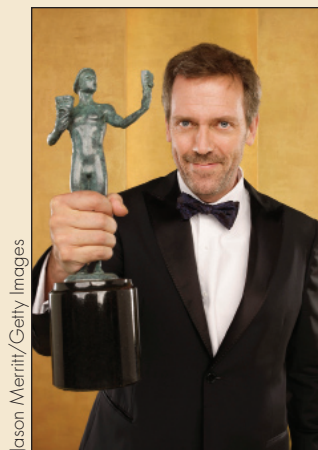
► For a backstage glimpse of how the magic is made, visit SAGAwards.org and click on the video screen at lower right on the home page, or go to SAG.org and click on "SAG TV."

LEFT: Kate Winslet humbly accepts her supporting actress honor.



Kevin Mazur/WireImage/TNT

Never short on enthusiasm, the *30 Rock* ensemble celebrates wins in multiple categories.



Jason Merritt/Getty Images

LEFT: Hugh Laurie holds The Actor high after winning for his title role in *House*.



Kevin Mazur/WireImage/TNT

RIGHT: Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt respond to fans. Both were SAG Awards nominees.



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

The late Heath Ledger was honored for his supporting work as The Joker in *The Dark Knight*.



SAG NATIONAL PRESIDENT ADDRESSES AWARDS AUDIENCE

One of the important contributors to the success of the SAG Awards each year is the Guild's national president, who does a flurry of press in association with the event and delivers a speech on behalf of the union. The following is Alan Rosenberg's speech from this year's ceremony:

Good evening. I'm pleased to tell you that a global audience is joining us tonight. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our celebration—especially to our nation's 800,000 men and women in uniform watching at bases here and throughout the world.

SAG National President Alan Rosenberg gives annual remarks.

So, on behalf of Screen Actors Guild, I'd like to extend special appreciation to our fellow guilds—and to their members whose talent not only helps bring screen characters to life, but also enables actors to tell the stories we love to tell.

Special thanks to the Writers Guild of America, whose members create the blueprints on which we build; to the Directors Guild of America, whose members guide and encourage us to do our best; and for the important contributions of the American Federation of Musicians, AFTRA, IATSE and Teamsters.

SAG is proud to be a union, and we look forward to the day when all workers have the free choice to join a union.

There is nothing so inspiring as an actor in full command of the screen—and we've been dazzled this year by extraordinary work in film and television. Congratulations to all our nominees. Your performances have established an outstanding benchmark of excellence.

You're an inspiration to us all. Have a wonderful evening.

This evening of honor and recognition represents an enormous collaborative effort by



LEFT: SAG Manager of Policy and Planning Jenn Heater, L.A. City Council President Eric Garcetti, L.A. City Council Member Wendy Greuel, California State Assemblymember Anthony Portantino, SAG Deputy National Executive Director Pamm Fair, SAG 1st Vice President Anne-Marie Johnson and SAG's Sacramento lobbyist Tim Lynch



LEFT: President and Group Publisher Paul Caine of Time Inc. Style & Entertainment Group; actor Kyle MacLachlan of *Desperate Housewives*; President and Chief Executive Officer Lisa Paulsen of Entertainment Industry Foundation; managing editor Larry Hackett of *People* magazine



RIGHT: President and Chief Executive Officer Lisa C. Paulsen of the Entertainment Industry Foundation, Motion Picture & Television Fund Foundation CEO Ken Scherer and SAG Deputy National Executive Director Pamm Fair



THE FOLLOWING WERE HONORED IN 2009 FOR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES DURING 2008:

MOTION PICTURES

For Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role (Sean Penn, *Milk*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role (Meryl Streep, *Doubt*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role (Heath Ledger, *The Dark Knight*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role (Kate Winslet, *The Reader*)

For Outstanding Performance by the Cast of a Theatrical Motion Picture (*Slumdog Millionaire*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Stunt Ensemble in a Motion Picture (*The Dark Knight*)

TELEVISION OR CABLE PROGRAMS

For Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Movie or Miniseries (Paul Giamatti, *John Adams*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Television Movie or Miniseries (Laura Linney, *John Adams*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Drama Series (Hugh Laurie, *House*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series (Sally Field, *Brothers & Sisters*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Comedy Series (Alec Baldwin, *30 Rock*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Comedy Series (Tina Fey, *30 Rock*)

For Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series (*Mad Men*)

For Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series (*30 Rock*)

For Outstanding Performance by a Stunt Ensemble in a Television Series (*Heroes*)