

The Actors Voice

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The Delicate Art of Self-Promotion

I've written before about [Self-Promotion](#), [Rookie Orientation](#), and [Publicists](#), but never have I really gotten into detail about "The Delicate Art of Self-Promotion." And believe me, it is delicate. You--as a consumer of others' self-promotional tactics--have certainly felt your skin crawl when one of those over-promotey blowhards blasts your inbox, your Facebook, your Twitter stream, with yet another "opportunity" to see their crappy short film online. Well, add to all of that promotion a bunch of postcards in the snail mail, emails sent to every email address we've ever had, and now even insipid text-to-landline spam blasts of shows, screenings, and showcases... and then you may come close to understanding how CDs feel, receiving such contact.

There are *sooo* many ways to self-promote BADLY. And, luckily, there are some pretty cool ways to self-promote WELL. I'm gonna lead you through some tips that hopefully will get you on the path to promoting in all of the good ways. As with most things actor-related, though, if you're concerned you're going to annoy someone with your self-promotional efforts, you're probably already going to err on the side of caution, of respect, of very mild self-promo action. Yay! Unfortunately, it's the folks with very little sense of "other awareness" who will not consider (or care) that there is a line they can (and do) easily cross in self-promotion. And it's those same folks who will skim this week's column with a quick, "Oh, I don't need to read that. I rock at self-promotion."

Yes. You do rock. But not necessarily at GOOD self-promotion. And that is why your email address is attached to a mail filter that sends you straight to the spam bin... every single time.

Understanding Your Audience

As with all opportunities to put your goodies out there, the self-promotional-related opportunity comes with loads of potential research, which hopefully [you're no longer afraid to do!](#) Who's your audience? Are you doing mailers to all casting directors in Los Angeles? (Oh, if so, please consider targeting your mailing to the top dozen or so who are most likely to cast

your type in current or future projects.) Are you sending email to everyone in your address book? (Please don't. Instead, do one, nice, big email--using BCC for the love of god--to your contacts inviting them to "opt in" to your mailing list. Use some handy management software to do your contact management. And then send updates to folks who really want to receive them. I use a [Yahoo Group to update interested parties on all things Cricket Feet](#). Which reminds me... I haven't sent an update in months. Eep. So, I'm not so good at the mailing list self-promotional efforts either. Doctor, heal thyself. Okay. I promise. I'll get to work on my mailing list if you will too!)

Are you using [social networking](#) sites as your publicist? Hoo, boy! If you are, I beg you to read Chris Brogan's excellent article called "[Pirate Moves: Promoting Without Being That Guy](#)." He provides a lovely list of ten tips on building relationships in social networking environments *before* getting into the whole self-promotional thing. I love it. I especially love the picnic analogy Brogan explains, as taught to him by Yahoo's Conn Fishburn. I wrote about a similar "vibe" in online communities (specifically message boards) here in a post called "[Message Board Culture and Etiquette](#)."

The bottom line in all of the links provided in the above paragraph is this: Know your audience. Know your peer group. Know your readers, your listeners, your followers, your fans, your friends, your contacts... whatever! KNOW the receivers of the message or you risk alienating them through your lack of care in communicating with them.

How To Get To Know Your Audience

Ask us who we are! Ask what we'd like to know. I got a great email from a reader this past week and he commented on last week's column, asked a follow-up question, shared a link to a candidate for "Self-Produced Clip of the Week," and then closed with something like, "Hey, I do occasional promotional blasts when I'm gonna be on TV and would like to add this email address to my list. Don't worry, I always use BCC. ;) Would that sort of contact be okay with you?" Okay? Wow! Since you asked so nicely, I'm gonna say that kind of contact would be flippin' badass! Yay! And yes! Knock yourself out. Can't wait to see what's next for you.

On the other end of the spectrum, of course, is the guy who collected every email address for everyone in the industry he could find, then sent us all an email promoting his latest film. Without using BCC. So now we all have the pleasure of knowing he can't be bothered with protecting our contact information as well as knowing he's not personalizing any sort of contact. Not targeting specific people within the industry (basically, he's slinging spaghetti at the wall and hoping something sticks, somewhere. The [stench of desperation](#) is strong, here). Not inviting people to learn more about his work, not offering us a way to opt OUT if we're not interested in receiving these updates. All sorts of rude, self-centered, lack-of-attention-to-detail, uncaring-about-the-recipient type behavior that certainly doesn't vault an otherwise talented actor to the top of our lists for casting.

This is--to use Chris Brogan's example--the guy that walks up to the picnic with a bullhorn and starts shouting about his crap. In my message board analogy, it's the guy who walks into the cocktail party wearing a sandwich board and ringing a bell, standing in the foyer yelling about his products.

Point is, if you do a little audience *research* before pulling the self-promotional trigger, you're going to find your message is *welcomed* rather than seen as a total turnoff.

How To Read the Signs

If you're posting on [Twitter](#), you have a very simple way of learning what's too much self-promo and what's too little. You'll over-share and lose followers. You'll under-share and fans will reach out to ask *when* you're going to talk about the upcoming event you've not yet mentioned. I do a [photo essay on the 12th](#) of every month. Each 13th, I have lost a half-dozen followers who aren't interested in photo essays and have gained a dozen who are. Every time I post about a film I'm casting, I get more followers. When I neglect to post about a certain week's column, if it was a HIT with readers, suddenly I have post from my followers thanking me for a great one. I then immediately post to ALL of my followers a link to that week's column, thanking the folks who already posted reactions to it.

It's a lovely, self-correcting-opportunity-filled social networking platform. And all it takes is both being aware of what the audience is asking for and reacting quickly to those requests.

Same goes for non-social-networking-related audiences!

Do you find you get called at certain casting offices after doing a postcard mailing? You get in the office and hear, "Yeah, I remembered you from that workshop (or that pre-read last year or that showcase or whatever) and then your postcard came across right when we were looking for someone like you. It was great timing!" No, it doesn't happen often, but when it does, you've been given a great piece of data about that office and how postcards work for them. Write that down in your master research notebook! It's gold.

When you're at a networking event, how are you at reading people's faces when the conversation turns from preliminary chitchat to your launch into "all about me and the two lines I have in the latest Judd Apatow film"? If you're so deeply locked into your own self-promo bubble that you can't see their eyes glaze over, can't register that they're bored to tears after having initially liked you as a person, or can't notice they're starting to make signals to their wingman to extract them from your company, you're not down with the delicate art of self-promotion.

We've talked before about [how to work the room](#) but what about how to read people? That's all part of the same delicate art. And you're an actor. Hopefully a good one. That should mean you've had some training and you've worked on listening. You've done some improvisation and

can really work the "yes, and..." when playing with others. [Networking is all about "yes, and..."](#) and if you're really *listening* and not just going into your "self-promotional script" because you're so nervous or unaware or ill-prepared to simply discuss it organically, you could be turning off your audience. They'll see you coming at the next party and say, "Oh, crap. Here comes that media whore. Get me out of here."

One of my least favorite media whores emails me at two different email addresses every time he's anywhere. Ever. I have a rule in my mail application to route it all to spam. If he were to contact me, legitimately, using the sending address he uses for these updates, I'd never see it and I don't really care. The updates are non-stop. And there's no opt-out link. (Oh, and I learned a few months ago the potential WRATH of the actor, when I actually had the gall to email and ask to be removed from her non-BCC-using email blast list. She came at me with some of the harshest words hurled using the Internet, ever, insisting that I was NO friend to actors because I couldn't be bothered to email her to say *thank you* for the information, but instead *insulted her* ability to send email correctly. Of course, what I had done was say, exactly, "Please remove me from your mailing list. In the future, you may look into using BCC to protect the email addresses of those to whom you wish to promote yourself. It's a courtesy." Yeah, baby. If *that* is an insult in your world, you need to [toughen up](#), and fast. Anyway, it was clear that I had poked a bees' nest and that was the last time I hit "reply" to request removal from a mailing list run by an actor I don't know. Too risky. Lots of unstable whackadoos out there. I'll just hit "mark as spam" and be done with it.)

Anyway, back to the guy. So, he sends out these emails that I never asked for and doesn't offer a way out. Someone at his "manager's office" (in quotes because this "manager" manages only this one actor, is not on IMDb, and only ever calls to promote this one actor--and on highly inappropriately matched roles, meaning I always know it's going to be a "waste of time" pitch, since this person has never done even the baseline research--i.e.: reading the character breakdown itself--before picking up the phone) calls on every project I cast. And every single status update on this guy's Facebook (and probably his Twitter, but I wouldn't know because I don't follow him) is a congratulatory self-promotional effort. Never anything about his "real life" or life outside the industry or what makes him tick on a personal level. Nada.

Yes, there's a balance required, and I talked about that in [Social Networking and Acting](#) a while back. But even a hint at who this cat is and I'd probably like him better. Basically, at this point, if I saw him at a party, I'd turn away because I'd assume what to expect in person, based on what he has given to me in our online relationship: blatant self-promotion with absolutely no awareness of or concern for my needs as a member of his audience (not to mention as a prospective buyer of his work).

Well, lo and behold, the guy sent me a Facebook message just today, with one simple line. "Would love to audition for you someday."

And y'know what? Now he has a really good shot at that.

This should be very good news for any of you reading who are ready to become *reformed* bullhorn-at-the-picnic self-promoters. We, your audience, are a generally forgiving lot. You can start getting it right, start making better choices, start "bringing wine to the picnic" right now. Go!

Self-Produced Clip of the Week: I received a great email from hyphenate [Nate Barlow](#) for this week's SPCotW. Here's what he said.

I think it's great you're showing actors' self-produced work, so I wanted to forward the following to you. Three actor friends and I came together to make four shorts--one for each of us in which to star, with the others playing supporting roles. We then interconnected them with a backing story to create an anthology feature called *Tales from Beyond*. We were able to land Adam West as the "host" in the interconnecting segments, won a couple film festival awards, and even scored a distribution deal! The feature runs 1 hr., 55 min. [Here is the trailer](#). Thanks again for all you do for the acting community!

Love it! Especially love the idea to start out making shorts, because that way if funding falls out or there is no good way to weave the stories together into a feature after shooting, you still have something to put "out there," and that's really the point, isn't it? Well done, Nate and Co.! Looks *very* intriguing.

Wanna get something on my radar for next week? You've got my email address right at the bottom of this week's Your Turn. Let me hear from you! I look forward to seeing your self-produced work.