

THE COWBOY WAY—March/April 2003 issue

By Mickey Freiberg

Q: How practical is it to have representation in L.A. and live in New York, West Palm Beach, Nashville, or Washington DC?

The practicality of the location you choose to live in as a writer has more to do with yourself and your own needs than that of any agent or manager. With the help of 5 cent a minute telephone calls and a broadband internet connection, the modern writer could likely be drafted into the first wave of lunar colonization and still have everything at his disposal to keep a good tab on his representation and hit every deadline asked of him. It is because of this that in our modern industry it is not unheard of for an agent to have writing clients he's never met face to face. In fact, after finally meeting some of my clients in person, I've been surprisingly thankful that so many live so far away. It's important to remember that you're a writer, not an actor. If you're good enough with your craft it doesn't matter what you look like or how good your table manners happen to be. This is not to say that there is nothing to be gained from a proximity to the centralized industries of New York or L.A. Certainly every career, even one as isolated as writing, can benefit from the ability to put your finger on the pulse of the Hollywood or East Coast entertainment and publishing communities. Basically you just need to recognize the pros and cons of both possible paths. Some talents benefit greatly from the comfort, personality and support of their local environment. Uprooting all of that and jeopardizing creativity just for the chance to move closer to the business side of things is not in everyone's best interest. Inversely, some writers are naturally drawn to the life and mechanics of the industry itself and are only handicapping themselves by maintaining any kind of distance. Figure out who you are and you'll likely be able to answer this question yourself. Just don't be disappointed if you end up moving closer only to realize rejection letters carry the same weight no matter how far they've been mailed.

Q: Say your script is in an agent's hands, but he said he has not read it yet; you have gone in and tweaked the dialog or description. Is it ok to ask the agent if you can send an updated version, or does this break some protocol?

Let me ask you this: what do you think you could accomplish by sending along an additional disclaimer in an attempt to edit your previous submission? I guess the better question is whether before or, in the midst of a job interview, you would stand up and point out the typo you believe to be glaring at the bottom of your resume. In this latter case the employer has taken his valuable time to sit you down and figure out why he should consider you as a potential employee. If you stand up and apologize for a mistake that has yet to be commented on, you've just given your potential employer three invaluable bits of information: (1) You either didn't take the time to double check yourself before you presented your resume; or you did catch the error then and were simply too lazy to correct it. (2) You have so little confidence in the rest of the content of your resume that you believe one small error is more important than any of the strengths your resume might have otherwise demonstrated. (3) You respect your potential employer so little as to take up more of his time considering your neurotic second-guessing than the interview was likely worth in the first place. This might sound a bit harsh but replace "resume" with "script" in the preceding example and you get a pretty good picture of why you should not contact an agent in order to offer him a newer draft than the ones that's already languishing in his "to be read" pile. You need to understand how many scripts this agent has to go through on a daily basis. You should be happy that he's going to

take the chance to consider your work and decide whether or not you have what it takes to survive in this cutthroat business. You need to respect his valuable time and the fact that a thousand other writer's who aren't bugging him about reading a "newer draft" are waiting to having their scripts read as well. Most of all, you need to avoid sending out scripts that aren't ready to be read.

Q: I have meetings coming up soon with some managers and agents. Do you have any thoughts on such first encounters?

Do your homework. Get on the Internet and talk to as many people as you can that know more than you do about whomever you're going to meet. Find out the sort of clientele they represent; then find out what those clients have done for them in the past. Figure out the most successful projects they've represented; then turn around and take a hard look at the ones that somehow fizzled out. The best thing you can know walking into a meeting with someone you'd like to be represented by (and if your research suggests you don't want to be represented by them, then you shouldn't be in the meeting) is what they've been capable of in the past and what they'll be looking for in the future. Do the homework ... then let them know you've done the homework. This is not to say you should flaunt your newfound knowledge; nor should you use it to kiss up in any way ("Wow, you must have been happy with how much that last one sold for!"). What you should be is prepared to listen to what they're telling you and have the right answers when they ask you the right questions. Any meeting between an agent and potential client is about two things: what can you offer each other and how well will you be able to work together. You have half the meeting taken care of if you can walk into the room and know what this agent is looking for and how you can give it to him. The other half of the meeting depends on how tactfully you can demonstrate the rest of what you've learned. And sorry ... there's just no way to teach tact.