

# Understanding agents

## Michael D. Finch hopefully clears away some of the myths of the dreaded Agent

### Why do you need one?

So why should a budding LD want or even need an agent? After all it's only a matter of checking a laptop's calendar for availability and saying "yes", isn't it? Oh, if only life were that simple! Producers and general managers like to issue long, finite (and 'interesting'...) contracts of engagement these days. If you miss that crucial paragraph you could be signing away your rights, ad infinitum, not to mention the right to re-negotiate your fee and royalty payments if the show transfers or turns into a movie.

Don't get me wrong; I am not saying that everyone is a Shylock. On the contrary, I am just saying that in any business, you should always protect your own interest – that is why contracts are issued. It is therefore the right of the client to question, refer and challenge paragraphs in that document. Do you, the exceptionally busy and over-worked LD, want to be bothered with all of that paperwork? Or would you rather an agent did that for you, referring back with the salient points? Yes, exactly. So, agents are actually quite a useful thing to have after all! Creatives need to stay creative, and agents just need to sort it out.

### Client / agent relationship

An agency should support its client base as much as possible, not just in the role on an agent negotiator, but also as a shoulder of support, encouragement and enthusiasm. There's more to life than money, but I sure know how many hours people 'donate' to our beloved arts



industry and also how badly sometimes creatives are paid. Through careful progressive negotiation, I am able to continue to make an in-road to those highly-guarded production budgets and carve off larger slices for my clients. Royalties are all very well and good, but audiences are fickle things – the minute they no longer want to see something, the show is sent to the scene dock in the sky, and that's it, no more royalty.

From this you can appreciate that as far as an agent's management is concerned, the client/agent relationship is very much a close, personal symbiotic process. We look at new clients as a complement to our professionalism and not because it is just another name on the website. After so long in the profession an agent knows whether you are going to work well together or not. It is very much an initial personality choice. Faith and trust are the keystones to success and therefore form the basis of any client partnership.

### Agents should use the LD Rider

I think it is important to emphasise the need to use the ALD Rider as at least a basic foundation to your employ. I was just signing off my contract template with my legal team as the ALD version appeared in *Focus*. I was humbled to see that both mine and the ALD's riders

were saying the same sort of things and I can honestly say that I amended mine further to incorporate certain aspects of the ALD Rider.

A few European producers have refused to entertain such a rider. Others in America and elsewhere have been very receptive and grateful of such a comprehensive document.

I always insist it goes with a covering letter and explain why it is being sent, and that it must be seen as a basis for discussion in an assistive, not a resistive, fashion.

### It's not all in the hands of an agent

My clients are their own Public Relations and marketing service. No good – no work. Their future is in their own hands and they know this only too well. The facilities offered by the ALD website for members' portfolios are an excellent benefit to them and a valuable resource for their future employers. Naturally my agency has a web site and clients are listed there too, but I also think that it is a waste of time duplicating excellent pages, so mostly it is a conduit of traffic management for visitors to view clients' portfolios on relevant sites elsewhere.

In conclusion, one outstanding question may be: "Are you anything like the Jeremy rent agent character in *Little Britain*?" Although I did write the theme tune to our logo, no other similarity can be drawn! #

### Michael D. Finch

After thirteen years of theatre management, various freelance work and a period as hire manager for Sparks Theatrical Hire, Michael D. Finch took the bold decision to open his own business. Now, as MD of The LUXF@tor Group, one part of the business is to act as an agent predominantly to creatives such as lighting, video, sound and set designers.

[www.luxfactor.co.uk](http://www.luxfactor.co.uk)