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Three Ways to Recession-Proof Your Acting Career by Dallas Travers, CEC

If you've had any exposure to the media these days, I'm sure you've heard that we are in a recession. You may have also heard that the entertainment industry has slowed and that finalized SAG contracts appear to be nowhere in sight.

Many actors step back from self-promotion during a slower economy. Many more quit entirely when uncertainty rules the waves. They believe that they must cut back, conserve, and slow down.

While your competition sits back and waits for brighter days, now is a great time to amp up your marketing efforts and really make an impact. Here are three simple and inexpensive ways you can create a stimulus package for your acting career.

Always Be Marketing

Regardless of how slow the industry may seem, casting directors still exist, agents still go to work, and producers continue to plan their future projects. Your audience is out there and they need to hear from you.

You must be business savvy and consistently self-promote to your target audience. An actor's audience consists of the agents who might represent you, the casting directors who may audition you, and the producers who will ultimately hire you. Consistent marketing is essential, during slower cycles in the business and even in a down economy.

You can successfully self-promote without breaking the bank. For example, create a blog about your career. Blogging is absolutely free and simple to do. Visit a website such as www.blogger.com or www.wordpress.com to create your very own blog.

After your blog is created, update it daily with news, anecdotes, and career successes. Be sure to offer valuable content that readers want to

hear. Then, invite your friends, colleagues, and other industry folk to follow your blog.

By creating a blog, you're not only in consistent communication with the industry, but you are also establishing your own fan base. As your blog grows, so will your popularity. Imagine how impressed a potential agent might feel when she Googles your name and uncovers your insightful blog with hundreds of readers. Blogging daily also allows you to stay connected to your career and offer insight to others.

If you aren't using Facebook as a marketing tool, start now. Facebook, along with Twitter are free and easy ways to keep the communication lines open with the people you may know. Try connecting with the casting directors, agents, and producers you also want to meet. You just might be surprised at how accessible many of them are.

Twitter and Facebook can be incredible networking tools if you use them correctly. These social sites are brilliant free avenues to move your career forward and stay in the mind of your audience. Remember though, that these are business tools, so keep it professional and relevant to your career.

You can save a lot of money by replacing your traditional postcard or headshot mailing with a monthly email instead. An effective and inexpensive way to target your audience is through email newsletters, or e-zines. Several websites such as www.constantcontact.com or www.myemma.com allow you to create attractive and professional email campaigns and manage your contacts easily.

As you collect email addresses for the people you meet, you can include them in your monthly e-zine updates and stay in the forefront of your readers' minds.

Always Be Acting

During a recession, you may not be able to foot the bill for your regular acting class or networking groups. Here are a few free ways you can keep your chops sharp and network with others without spending a dime.

Invite a group of trusted colleagues to your house and host weekly script readings. You can conduct table readings of plays, original work, or audition sides. Not only will you be acting, but you'll be connecting with your peers, feeling active, and improving your skills.

Put yourself on tape. Get in front of a camera, even if it's your own. Sure, if you're up for shooting your own project, go for it. I think that's the best

way to create the career you want. But let's face it. Not every actor wants to be a filmmaker. That's perfectly fine. It doesn't mean that you can't use your camera as a tool.

Try creating your own audition experience. Download sides from Showfax or other industry resources. Give yourself twenty-four hours with the material. Then, record an audition in your living room. Next, watch the footage and give yourself adjustments. You can conduct a call back session the next day and compare the two.

Creating your own auditions is an inexpensive way to not only practice your audition technique, but also to really grasp where your strengths and weaknesses lie. This will naturally improve your confidence by reinforcing your trust in your own instincts.

Diversify Your Income Streams

While on your way to acting success, you may require a second job that offers steady income plus flexibility to accommodate acting gigs. Rather than rely on only one source of income you create multiple streams of income to alleviate stress during a down market.

What skills do you have? Are you highly organized? Do you know how to retouch photos or create brochures? Are you a good writer or proofreader? Are you great with kids or animals? What skills do you currently have that might be of service to others?

Businesses around the world hire freelance writers, designers, data-entry specialists, and other experts to provide freelance services. You can upload your resume on websites such as www.elance.com or www.workfromhome.com and generate extra income providing your expertise on a freelance basis.

Don't rule out old-fashioned bartering in a slow economy. If you can't afford to pay money for a class, a photo shoot, or other service, simply offer an exchange of services. Perhaps your acting coach needs help filing and updating her contact database. You might work out a fair trade with her to stay in class while working a few hours each week. Maybe a photographer you know needs dog-walking help. You might trade your time with his dogs for a photo shoot.

Bartering may not always be an option, but you'll never know until you ask. Don't limit yourself according to the amount of money in your bank account. Think of creative ways you can pay for the things you need through bartering. Check out www.barter.net for bartering options and opportunities in your area.

Most importantly, remember that life occurs in cycles. The economy thrives and then it slows for a while, but it will eventually turn around. Sure, SAG continues to struggle in contract negotiations, but eventually the union will indeed renew its contracts with the AMPTP. Things will turn around. They always do. But will you be ready? Will you continue to market yourself, hone your craft, and cement your status in the business? Will you be ahead of the curve and allow the economy to catch up with you? Or will you sit back in fear and uncertainty until the inevitable economic upswing catches you off guard and quickly passes you by?

*Dallas Travers wrote the groundbreaking book, **The Tao of Show Business: How to Pursue Your Dream Without Losing Your Mind**. She coaches artists & actors around the globe to creatively master their business. If you're ready to jump-start your artistic career, get your FREE Thriving Artist Starter kit now at <http://www.thrivingartistcircle.com>.*