

Always ask for a referral...



Another slew of email I've been getting recently is the same old tired, "Unk, how do I get an agent?" The email then goes on to complain that of course they can't get an agent because no agents will talk to them and yada yada yada.

It gives me a fucking headache every time I fucking read it.

Since I've been getting so many of these emails and actually taking the time to answer them, I've decided to simply recreate those emails in a simple post.

Then I'll convert it to a PDF and upload it to the download section. Then from now on, I can refer all email to that document.

Ah... Relief.

So for those of you -- and there are many -- who've received my email about this very same subject...

Nevermind.

I'm just gonna throw all the spaghetti up against the wall... Do with it what you will. Some of you will gobble it right up -- some of you will cringe.

Why?

Because by and large, screenwriters are a shy bunch. They don't want to sell. They want the screenplay to speak for itself and in a perfect world...

You know.

Let me also qualify this by saying that this is how I did it... It worked for me. I believe it can work for you.

- **Query letters... Should you or shouldn't you?**

You should but not very much. LOL. Why? Because every screenwriter in the world is sending a query letter and unless you can really do something exotic to make your query letter stand out from the pack -- fughedaboutit. There are ways to do this of course... I've seen screenwriters go to the trouble of having a really nice movie poster made up about their screenplay as if the movie's already been made. Find some high school or college photoshop expert to create one for you and spend some bucks to have some made to send out as your query.

Let the producer see your idea and they might just want to read your idea.

But back to query letters...

The reason I'm not a huge fan of them is because I've seen literally thousands of them thrown away in front of my eyes.

Oops!

That's right -- without ever being opened.

Does that mean you should never send out a query letter? Of course not but let there be a pecking order to the madness.

Obtain a subscription to the [Hollywood Creative Directory](#) online. Not the book. Get the online subscription. If it's too expensive, find some other screenwriters to split the cost with. You'll all benefit.

Next thing to do is find producers that make or have made movies in the same genre as your screenplay. Work your ass off on a very smart query email. It's gotta be catchy. I always had great success by coming up with a good subject line because that's what they're going to see in their inbox.

Of course it helps if the query email is just as strong... Before you actually send out a query email or letter however, I highly recommend browsing through all the following books and make some notes:

- [WORDS THAT SELL](#)
- [POWER SALES WRITING](#)
- [POWER PHRASES](#)
- [POWER SALES WORDS](#)

Or buy 'em. In fact, these books can even help improve your screenwriting... Nothing like a strong power word or phrase in an action line but I digress...

If you can't get a good email address to make your query, use the telephone -- but before you do that, you need to have your logline and pitch down pat just in case... Might I make another suggestion?

Good.

Pick up this book too:

- [THE SECRETS OF WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING](#)

Once you've been through all the above books, you're ready to put your query email, letter, logline, and pitch together... No, I'm not gonna go through that. I assume you're all great wordsmiths and can pick this stuff up reasonably well. I will say that once you go through these books, I think you'll actually be more excited to start making queries...

Remember... Nobody else is doing this stuff. 99% of all aspiring screenwriters are sending query letters out with self-addressed postage-paid postcards asking the producer to checkmark a box or line.

YAWN.

Practice your word of mouth logline and pitch on a few people that you know are going to give you some straight feedback.

Okay so you're makin' query emails, letters, and telephone calls, right? You're selling your spec with everything you've got and the producer says, "Sure, go ahead and send it to us."

And you do.

Now what?

I used to wait no longer than a month unless it was during the Christmas and New Year season... Then I'd wait a month and a half. If it was an email query, go ahead and send a new email asking if they've

had a chance to read your script yet. If a query letter or telephone query, try calling them back and asking the same thing.

Remember... This is not the time to be shy. Of course you're probably gonna get the old, "We enjoyed your writing but we'll have to pass."

If that's all you hear (or some variation thereof), be sure to ask them if they'd be willing to read another one of your specs. If they really did like your writing, they will say "Yes." If they didn't like your writing, they'll probably say something like, "We're not really looking for new material right now."

No problem.

Ask for a referral. That's right. Hit them up-side the head and ask them for a referral. Producers are normally very nice people. Remember, they want good material. They need good material. You have good material, right?

Right.

Ask for a referral because trust me... Very few -- if any -- spec screenwriters are asking for a referral. Remember, everybody else is busy sending query letters and postcards.

You're asking for a referral.

Such as...

- "Can you recommend a good agent or manager?"
- "Can you recommend a producer who might be interested in my script?"

You're hitting them up-side the head with the first question... Trust me. And, being the very nice people that they are -- they want to help you. So if they really did like your writing, you can probably count on roughly 50% of the producers you were actually able to send your script to give you a bonafide referral to an agent or manager.

If they don't give you a referral, they either:

- a) Didn't read your script or had someone read it and give them coverage
- b) Didn't like your writing

But you'll very likely never know for sure so who gives a shit?

Now if they do give you that referral, you want to immediately follow that referral up with one more very important question...

- "Can I mention your name?"

If the referral wasn't bullshit and like I said 50% of the time it won't be -- they will very likely say, "Sure, go ahead."

The second question is a little trickier...

This question doesn't do nearly as well in getting a referral as the first question does but it is worth asking none the less. If they are really nice people which most producers certainly are, then they very well might know of another producer who's looking for good material. So, if your script does in fact

represent good material, they might just give you a referral to another producer that you can send your script to.

If they do... What question do you ask?

That's right...

- "Can I mention your name?"

Again, if they really did like your writing and they've given you a bonafide referral, they are not going to mind if you use their name. This is probably where I should mention that I always used their name even if they didn't say I could. LOL.

Hey... You gotta go with your gut. My gut always said, "Use the name."

Timeout for a true story...

I sent a producer a script a few years ago. I was actually able to contact this producer personally via email. He liked my email query and told me to send the script to him which I promptly did.

I waited a month and called him back -- talked to his assistant. The assistant told me they loved the script but had to pass... Now of course, I was talking to this guy's assistant but still, I asked for a referral, "You think Mr. So and So knows any producers that might be looking for a script like mine?"

The question hit her up-side the head and she actually held her hand over the phone (I could tell) and asked said producer if he knew of another producer that might be interested. Said producer wasn't happy (I could tell), so he gave her a name to give me and this particular name was even more well known than said producer's name.

I said, "Thank you very much and does said Producer mind if I use his name?"

I heard laughing as he said, "Tell him to go ahead and use my name."

Of course it turns out that said producer was pulling my leg and hopefully the leg of the producer he referred me to but as it turned out, the referral producer was really nice and is still a friend of mine to this day and is always willing to read anything I write.

The point here is that you just never know with this business... Shit can turn to gold in a heartbeat. The only problem with that is that gold can also turn to shit in a heartbeat too.

But isn't that what makes life so Goddamn fun?

You betchya.

Okay so now you are a bunch of querying screenwriters... Email queries, letters, and telephone calls. You're following up with yet another email or telephone call. You're sending out screenplays and asking for referrals. You're turning right around and sending out more screenplays and asking for more referrals.

You're building up a network of contacts is really what you're doing and you can in fact do this from just about anywhere in the world. I'm not saying that you should not move to Smallywood -- all I'm saying is that you have no more excuses if you can't.

If you're reading this post, you are very likely connected to the Internet somehow... Right? You've heard of Google, right? Well every time you add a name to your list, time to start doing your homework on

that person. Head on over to Google and start googling. Find out as much as you can about that producer. You can find out every movie he or she's made by going over to [IMDB](#) and typing in their name. Scroll through those movies and see if anything sticks out... You might find a lot of the same names on the same movies. Good information to know. In fact, you can often find names of other producers they co-produced with.

See where this is headed?

Google the name of both producers together and see what comes up. You might be surprised at what you find... LOL. I know I have.

You might find that said producer eats at a particular establishment. You might find that said producer drives a particular kind of car. Maybe you can find some interviews they've done. Maybe said producer owns a huge interest in a do it yourself lumber milling machine.

You just never know...

Am I telling you to stalk said producer? Of course not. Googling isn't stalking is it? In other words, you build up a [dossier](#) on this producer. I like to use [Open Office](#) so I can include links to articles or web sites and convert that document to a pdf with a click of the mouse.

As you're performing your research on these producers, certain "things" about them or people they know might pop up make you think this is something really important... If so, set up a [Google Alert](#) about that...

Why do you do all this?

Because. Because you're building a network list and you want to know as much as you can about these people you want to do business with especially if they've read your work. Especially if they've given you a referral.

Because now you're going to use that information to help you get your foot even farther into that door. Once a producer has read your work and or given you a referral, you owe them. You should be sending thank you cards, anniversary cards, birthday cards, etc. If you've been communicating via email, and you found something during your research that you really think said producer would be interested in and you happened to create a Google Alert about that certain something, guess what? Said producer might be very happy to get that information from you.

True stories...

I queried a producer and found out via research on the web that this producer was trying to make a movie and had gone through quite a list of actors to play the lead. This was before Google Alerts but I still read the trades all the time and one day, I found out that a certain actor was dropping out of a movie and quickly emailed said producer the information and preceded the information with a simple, "Thought you might be interested in this..."

Said producer actually called me up on the phone and thanked me personally. Said producer likes to know what I'm working on. Said producer and I have gone out for a few beers.

I once sent a producer a birthday card and this producer called me up and asked me if I wanted to go out and have a drink with him. Turns out I was the only person to remember his birthday. Did I go out and have a drink with him?

You betchya.

I sent a producer a gift basket of fruit one time for being so nice to me... Somehow, my trusty screenwriter business card found its way inside the gift basket. Turns out Mr. Producer's wife decided to become an agent. Guess who she called first after she pulled out the pineapple?

Bottom line? You keep your name in front of your entire network list. No, you do not bombard them with phone calls, cards, letters, and emails...

You use your head.

Think.

Show some class.

Do unto others.

Keep a log of all your querying for every screenplay. Every time you query, make a log entry. Don't query the same producers with the same material. That's why you keep a log. Sounds obvious right? Then why does it happen so often? LOL.

At least half of the queries I've ever done in my life got the attention of the producer and either they or their assistant or secretary contacted me and said to go ahead and send them the script. At least half of those producers always replied back and said they liked the script but it just wasn't something they were interested in but would be happy to read anything else I might have.

That's the response you want.

When you get **that response**, it's at that time, you contact that producer and ask for a referral. Again, most screenwriters are too shy and introverted to ever do something like this so doing it makes you stand out. You want to stand out! You want to come off hungry and wanting to submit something to them that they'd be interested in but you don't want to come off like a stalker.

Now go forth and query.

Unk

EDIT: One last thing about letters... Sure, go ahead and send them "if" you can't get an email and the telephone isn't working because hey... That's all you gots. Don't bother querying agents and managers. They are notorious for tossing queries. Remember Cuba Gooding Jr. in Jerry Maguire i.e., "Show me the money?" Just change that line to, "Query the money."