

Dear Jill

Are comp cards necessary? Can I sign with more than one agency?

Dear Jill,

I am a 27-year-old male model, but I haven't gotten any work yet. I have met with three agents over the last year and all of them said the same thing: they want me to spend money on photos so they can make up comp cards. Is this how it works all over or is it a rip-off? Can I send pictures right to companies and not use the agents? Can I send you some photos and see what you think?

—Dave Kaiser, via e-mail

Dear Dave,

Embarking on a modeling career is like launching a small business, and, yes, there are start-up costs! It's unlikely that the art director from *GQ* is going to grab you in the mall and offer you the next cover or that Bruce Weber is going to yank you out of a half-Nelson at a wrestling camp in Iowa and make you a star (that has happened—Peter Johnson, Bruce's *Chop Suey* muse—but the odds are definitely against it happening again). Likewise, sending your photos directly to *GQ*, or Bruce Weber, or any other client is unadvisable—they just don't have time to sort through amateur photos and deal with individuals rather than agencies. In smaller markets there may be some exceptions to this or once you are established as a model you may acquire some freelance clients. However, for now, you need an agent and you need a business card, i.e. a comp card!

Your first expense will probably be pictures or "testing." This is shooting with a photographer to get pictures for your portfolio—more commonly called your "book"—and sometimes for the photographer's book as well. Occasionally a test may be free of charge, either because the photographer thinks he has found the next Jason Shaw or Gisele or because he is a novice as well. Usually a test will run you \$200 to \$300—sometimes twice that, depending on the caliber of the team you're working with and whether "styling" (a selection of outfits and someone to pin, tuck, and make you look your best) and "grooming" (the term used for hair and makeup for male models) are included, as well as film and processing. You can easily spend \$1,000 on tests to get a range of shots for your book and for your first composite card which your agent will send out to clients. Comp cards, depending how many you print, run about \$1 each (many models use laser comps and print 100 to 200 at a time, so that updates can be made more frequently). You also should continue to test well into your working career. (Seasoned supermodel Lauren Hutton has some great advice on this subject, see page 36).

For an opportunity to be seen by agents all over the globe, enter our model search (see page 90). In this case, amateur snapshots are fine. Clear headshots are best. Once, during college, when I was doing some modeling in Denver, my booker called and asked my roommate if she knew "where Jill got her headshot?"

"I beg your pardon?" she replied, envisioning bullet wounds.

So, in case you don't know, a headshot is a photo which focuses on your head and face. Go get 'em, Kaiser.

—Jill

Dear Jill,

I e-mailed you because I'm sure you of all people would know what you're talking about. I've signed an exclusive with Aria in Chicago, but I have been told that it's an unspoken rule that you are able to multi-list even after you've signed an exclusive. Elite has shown interest in me as well and I am currently represented by some smaller agencies.

Is it pointless to register with more than one big agency, for instance, Elite, Ford, and Aria? Or would it be helpful to spread myself out? I've heard that if someone were to do that in L.A. they'd get totally blackballed...

DamnImFine, via e-mail

Dear DamnImFine,

Damn you are fine if all those agencies want you! But think of them as three (four, five?) guys after you all at the same time. You can try to play all of them at once, but sooner or later they'll probably find out and you'll end up spending your Saturday nights watching TV with only a pint of Haagen Daaz for company. Or, you can try to assess which one has the best reputation and is most enthusiastic about you, and you can nurture a long, loyal relationship.

Generally, models don't multi-list with print agencies in one market. You may, however, have a different agency for commercial work and yet another for runway work, depending on whether your print agency has these divisions in-house. As Elite, Ford, and Aria are all strong agencies in Chicago, you should stick with one. Ask other models at each agency if they are happy with their representation. Are they busy with go-sees, castings, and bookings? Are they seeing/working with major clients? Are they getting paid on time?

You also want to consider the agency's relationships nationally and internationally, if you're considering building your career beyond Chicago. Often novice models don't understand that they will need an agency in each market where they plan to stay and work. Obviously Ford and Elite have an international network of agencies, but just because the branch in Chicago takes you does not mean the branch in New York or Paris will. And you are not obligated to stay within their network either. Aria also will have relationships with agencies in different markets and will help you get set up should you head to a bigger market to build your book.

Regarding contracts, different states have different laws, so contracts are binding in some states and easy to get out of in others. Right-to-work states like Florida have looser regulations, and models in New York City do tend to switch agencies as frequently as Winona Ryder switches boyfriends: the relationship gets stale, one side or the other doesn't meet expectations, or, the grass just looks greener. If you're not working much, the agency shouldn't care much if you leave; if you are working a lot (and getting paid), don't jeopardize your green bank account by declaring yourself *too sexy for your agency!*

—Jill