

By Sarah Kuhn
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Most aspiring actors can dutifully recite the basic tenets of a good headshot: must look like you, must be current, must capture a bit of who you are as an actor. But as electronic submissions and online casting become more prevalent, a simple, solid headshot may not be enough. Actors these days are adding more looks to their arsenals: specific shots that conjure certain characters or suggest particular personas.

"Everything is now really electronic submissions," says manager Tina Truman of talent representatives Truman Gold Co. "When casting offices are looking at these little tiny electronic submissions, if they're just looking at a nice, perfect headshot and the role is a caveman, it's hard to quickly look and say, 'Oh, that guy could be a caveman.' [Your picture] needs the essence of, 'Oh, I can see that that actor can portray that character.'"

Rebecca Norris, an actor who also worked in casting for several years, notes that a lot of actors make the mistake of assuming a headshot is simply a pretty picture. "You're trying to show casting directors and directors and producers how you should be cast," she says. "Especially nowadays, people are definitely getting more and more specific. It's so important to know that and to portray that through your headshot."

And because many actors upload their headshots to the Web these days, it's not as financially unreasonable as it once was to have several shots available. "Now you can have anywhere from five to 10 shots for theatrical or for commercial without it being an unbearable burden trying to print those up," says actor Lisa K. Wyatt, who has a recurring role on "The Office" and who will appear in the upcoming film "The Box." "I think because so many submissions are done electronically, it really matters far more what you have up on Breakdown Services and on LA Casting than what pictures you have printed up."

SUGGEST IT, DON'T SCREAM IT

If you're looking to add more-specific shots to your portfolio, keep in mind that this doesn't negate the need for a good, basic picture. "I like for my actors to have the one nice all-around wonderful headshot but then to give me some choices to work with when a specific role asks for something beyond an ordinary look," says Truman.

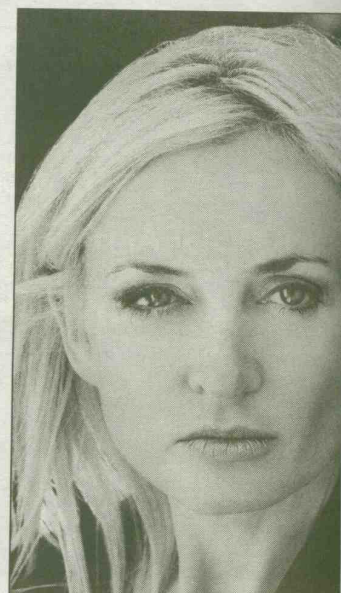
Specific shots are all about suggesting a look, so err on the side of subtlety. "If you send a picture that has you in, like, a fireman costume, it looks ridiculous," says Norris. "But I think you can suggest that you're the fire chief by wearing an oxford shirt and a black tie and black pants. You can suggest that authority without having to have, like, the hat and the badge and the whole thing. I think it's getting the essence of that person. You don't want to make it so specific that the casting director's like, 'Oh, this person can only play a cop, and that's it.'"

In other words, consider what you're conveying with hair, makeup, and wardrobe. You can imply a certain look without being too obvious, and that look shouldn't be so specific that it only works for one character. Norris, for instance, took a "nurse/medical professional" shot with soft, natural hair and a simple blue V-neck T-shirt. She changed into an off-the-shoulder turquoise shirt for a "fun, urban

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SPOTLIGHT ON HEADSHOTS AND M

ALAN HEITZ



Rebecca Norris

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girlfriend” shot, then wore the shirt a different way and added a scarf for a “hippie/yoga”—type picture.

“Approach it the same way that you’re approaching auditioning for theatrical, because it’s suggestion,” advises Wyatt. “I think the second that it ceases to look like clothing and starts to look like costume, you’re in trouble, because it’s almost like you’re insulting the casting director’s imagination. Like, ‘Really? You need a stethoscope or I can’t possibly see you as a doctor?’”

For example, Truman notes a demand for “cougar”—type roles at the moment, but that doesn’t mean snapping a shot of a client done up as a full-on Vegas showgirl. “A woman in her 40s might have a nice, perfect headshot, but it might not say, ‘I’m a cougar,’” she says. “If this additional headshot that you have says, ‘I’m a cougar,’ that’s going to get noticed by a casting director. I think it’s more about bigger hair and a little more makeup and a low-cut top.”

Another subtle element is the background or environment. “If you shoot the actor on the streets of New York, it has a very urban vibe, whereas if you shoot them in the park with trees behind them, it’s a very friendly and softer vibe,” says photographer Chris Macke. “If you shoot them inside with bright backgrounds, it lends itself more towards an Old Navy kind of commercial feel. So that, right off the bat, changes everything. And you can shoot all those different locations in the same shirt. Just by being in

those different environments, it affects the tone and the feel of the picture.”

But don’t get so hung up on your clothing and background options that you forget about another important element of conveying a certain look: Your acting in the photo must capture whatever essence you’re aiming for. “You can suggest the attitude of the nurse or the lawyer or the cop with expression and eyes,” says agent Orion Barnes of Rogers Orion Talent Agency, “especially since online headshots usually crop out below the shoulders anyway. You see a hint of color below the neck, and that’s about it. The wary O.R. nurse can be read in the eyes and in the face.” Adds Truman, “Think of that character, and have a look on your face that’s appropriate for that type of role. It’s really acting. You have to act in your headshot.”

Norris tried to do a few different essences for each look or wardrobe change in her most recent shoot. “I did, like, ‘competent nurse,’” she says. “I was trying to imagine a show like ‘Hawthorne,’ or that new one, ‘Three Rivers’—trying to give that feeling of confidence. And then I also did sort of ‘naive nurse’—like the girl who’s the new intern and she doesn’t really know what’s going on. I think it’s so important to understand your type and then to understand what kind of type. Like, if you’re a mom, what kind of young mom are you? Are you Midwestern mom, super wholesome? Or are you Beverly Hills mom? It’s important to

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Thumbnails—those miniature counterparts. Except same way? Many agents a full-size headshot, but others bel

Like a regular headshot, a thumbnail agent with the Clear Talent Co adds, where a dozen or more thumbnail frontal shot of the face. No profile

Casting director Dan Cowan, Angeles, echoes that view. It’s in says. “What you see in the picture thumbnail and questioning what a smile, or too much makeup, I that as tiny as thumbnails are, th

L.A. photographer Blake Gardner beautiful or expressive, that minimalist says, so you don’t need the kind of see the subject’s body, and the side the actor. A thumbnail, he adds,

Actor Jessica Gardner (no relation in Los Angeles, fully agrees. Still as an opportunity for a little creative each presenting a slightly different shots,” she says. “So when ‘Sou I look all perfectly put together, pulled back.”

But that’s not a license to over scrubs wearing a stethoscope. T In that way, it’s just like the stan

You’re a great a