PHOTOGRAPHY AGENCIES
what to consider before signing with an agent or art representative

WHAT ARE PHOTOGRAPHY AGENCIES?

Whether it makes sense for you to seek agency representation has a lot to do with your personality. If you don’t like to relinquish control of any function related to your photography, an agency may not make sense. However, if you’re the kind of photographer who wants to be absorbed in the creative side of your job, an agency can enhance the quality of your business success.

Photography agencies serve a variety of functions: they bring in clients, manage contracts, and advertise their artists so in the end you do less of the self promotional legwork freelancing can entail. If you want to break in to new fields and establish yourself there, agencies can give you access to a large client list. Before you consider signing with an agent, do your research, and weigh the pros and cons.

Pros:

• **Spend less time promoting:** Constantly sending out cold emails, follow-up emails, or postcards can be time consuming and expensive. For a small commission, agencies promote artists to their contacts so the artist can focus on their photography.

• **Billing, pricing and collection is taken care of:** No more managing contracts and chasing down your clients for payment. Agencies will handle the billing and pricing for you. Although agents take care of price negotiations directly with the client, you should still negotiate your fee with your agent whenever possible.

• **Access new markets:** Certain markets rarely venture to hire freelance photographers. Many agencies have established relationships with clients in these markets, and can give you access to certain types of work. If you want to be working in a field like fashion or advertising, make sure the agency you sign with already works within that field.

• **Larger clients:** Large clients in competitive industries often feel more comfortable finding photographers through agencies because it serves as quality assurance.

• **Leverage for negotiations:** Agencies promise security for a client, and because of that they can often charge higher rates than an individual freelancer.

Cons:

• **Fee:** Agents can charge you anywhere from 10-30% commission on each individual job. Some agents also insist on handling clients that you may bring in on your own.

• **“Dirty work”:** If you’re not willing to do a few lowbrow jobs your agent gives you, you may develop a bad relationship with them and cost yourself future jobs.

• **Artistic disagreement:** Sometimes agents represent what they consider to be the most commercial pieces in your portfolio rather than what you think is your best work. They may disagree with your own personal artistic vision.

• **Job rate:** If your agents are slow to bring in jobs, the commission can be a much more harmful drain on your income.
THINGS TO DO BEFORE SIGNING WITH AN AGENT

Investigate:
Thoroughly research different agencies to weigh your options. Be sure you are okay doing the kind of work they are involved with (publishing, advertising, etc.). If you’re considering being represented, ask the agency as many questions as you can before signing on.

Contract agreements:
When agreeing to contracts, be sure to look over them very carefully and have a clear understanding of the terms you are agreeing to. Note the length of time you are committing to as well as how to break/end the contract if need be.

Negotiate commission:
Be prepared to give up 15%-30% per job, but recognize that agents can bring in higher paying jobs. This may be worth the commission, but if you find that your agent is slow to bring work, weigh the pros and cons.

Ask how:
Ask agents about their techniques for getting artists work. Do they rely on printed publicity? Are they proactive? Don’t hesitate to ask all these questions before agreeing to be represented.

Consider cost:
Agents sometimes charge their artists (on top of commission) a percentage of the costs of advertising. Make sure you understand how much this may cost you, and if you can afford it. Do they want cash up front or will they take it from fees owed to you?

Discuss your other jobs:
Some agents want to have sole representation of you, and if you have clients you’ve worked with before being represented, they’ll want to handle those too. Are you prepared to hand them over? Discuss this thoroughly with the agent before agreeing to be represented.

Keep clear communication:
Most agents require frequent updates on the progress of your work so they can continue to update the client. Are you able to give frequent and honest status updates to your agent?

What about your portfolio?
Often times, commercial art is what sells, which may not be the artist’s favorite work. Some agents will sell you on portfolio pieces you may not like the best. Are you prepared to hand over that creative control?

Leaving:
If you leave the agency, what will happen to your client list? Do they require that you give notice well in advance? It is important to know these things before signing anything.

WANT TO START FINDING AN AGENT?

TheAgentList.com is a good place to find agencies or representatives that look for a specific type of photographer. You can filter by location, genre, agents, or even specific artists.