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5 Things a Legitimate Modeling Agency Will Never Ask of You

by Mike Hardcastle for About.com

1. A truly interested agent will never ask you for money.

They will never suggest to you that you need to spend money to make money. If an agent sees real potential in you that is where they will make their money, by taking a reasonable cut of the work that they get for you (usually no more than 15%). Legitimate modeling agencies do not have handling fees, signing fees, agency fees (outside of their cut of work done as noted above) or any other kind of up front before-you-can-be-signed fee.

2. A legitimate modeling agency will never ask you to pay up front for your own test shots or pay to build your own portfolio.

They will invest in you and make their money back when they get you working. They will arrange for your test shots and only expect you to show up at the shoot on time and with a positive attitude. Most agencies have agreements with photographers and make up artists whom they pay to take their test shots and even build a working portfolio for an up-and-coming model. Models do need portfolios but when an agency is really interested in a girl and thinks she can make it as a model they will not ask for any money to help build it.

3. Another thing that models legitimately need but should never be expected to pay for is a comp card.

A comp card is the models equivalent of a business card. It is usually about the size of a 4x6 photograph, has between 3 and 5 shots of a model with different looks and includes a brief bio that includes basic info like eye color, hair color, height, weight, age, and shoe size. Some aspiring models do pay for these themselves but these are girls who are looking to be signed, not models with an offer on the table. An agency that wants to develop and represent you will never ask you to pay for your own comp card or for the pictures necessary to make one. Also, along these same lines a legitimate modeling agency will not ask you to pay to set up a web profile or other online promotion tool.

4. Becoming a model should not cost you any money up front, even for things that sound legit like professional modeling lessons.

This can not be stressed enough. An agency that is truly interested in developing you as a model will not ask you to lay out any money up front. They will be looking to make money off of you in the future and will be willing to make an initial investment in making that happen. Modeling is a business and businesses mean taking risks, a legitimate agency that thinks you can work as a model will take a risk on you. This means that they will never ask you to pay for modeling classes of any kind. They may ask you to take some classes, especially runway or posing classes, but they will never ask you to pay a penny to do so.

5. Finally, but very importantly, no legitimate modeling agency or agent will ask you to take nude or suggestive photographs, no matter how “tasteful” the presentation.

Photographs like this are usually highly artistic and require a certain degree of experience on the part of the model to make them work. Legitimate modeling agencies will not ask an inexperienced model who likely has lots to learn about their best angles and how to pose to take risqué photos. What they may ask is for you to take a picture in a bikini or even lingerie but these shots will be catalogue-looking, soft, somewhat innocent and not overly provocative. If an agent asks you to take a too sexy picture right away walk out the door and don't look back.

Six Things That a Legitimate Modeling Agency Might Ask of You

by Mike Hardcastle
for About.com

1. A modeling agency may have a clause in your contract requiring you to pay back all or a portion of their initial outlay from the money you earn.

This is not common but it is also not unheard of. It is a more common practice in small market agencies than in large market agencies. Small market agencies are usually local without an affiliation with a major agency and the work they get for you will likely be limited to your home town. Since the potential for work in one city is small these agencies will seek to recoupe some or all of their initial expenses in signing a model. A legitimate modeling agency will never ask you to pay for your own start up costs but they may try to get their money back once they start getting work for you.

2. Another seemingly crazy thing a legitimate modeling agency may ask of you is that you do some work for free... at first.

It may seem strange that they ask you to volunteer your time and talents but there is a method to the madness. A legitimate modeling agency may ask you to work for free in order to build your portfolio and gain exposure. This is a cost effective way for modeling agencies to build a models portfolio as well as establish contacts within the industry. New photographers, stylists and designers will often ask an agency for volunteer models to use when building their own working portfolios. It is a win-win situation for all parties; new models get pictures and experience while the photographers, stylists and designers get free labor. Also, agencies get to establish a good working relationship with people who may some day be powerful influences in the industry. A legitimate modeling agency won't ask you to volunteer for long, just enough to build a portfolio and have a bit of runway experience under your belt.

3. When a modeling agency is interested in developing you as a model they will not ask you to pay to build your portfolio or to take classes but this doesn't mean they'll break the bank to get you ready for the fashion world.

When building a portfolio it is normal for an agency to send you on a test shoot and only pay for the photographer, this means you will have to bring your own clothes and do your own hair and make up. Asking you to style your test shoots yourself is a very common practice. Just remember that make up for film and make up for every day life are very different. Photographic make up should be bold and heavy handed. Don't be afraid to ask the photographer for pointers as they will have an

understanding of how the make up will look under the lighting they are setting up. Also, before the shoot talk to the photographer or your agent about clothing and color choices as like make up clothing that looks good in real life may not look as good on film. Bottom line, if you are asked to do your own styling it's normal but don't be afraid to ask for help from the experts.

4. It is totally reasonable for a modeling agency to want you to change your looks to meet their needs.

You've seen it on *America's Next Top Model* and it's not just for dramatic effect on TV, the makeover. Models have to have a 'look' and if yours is rather generic or dated an agent may ask you to under go a makeover. The makeover may be subtle or dramatic, it may be targeted toward your landing a specific job or it may just be a change. The agency may have enough blondes on the roster and want to make you a brunette or vice versa. They may be looking for edgy models or androgynous models and want to make you over to fit that mold. Regardless of what an agency wants to do to your looks asking you to get a makeover is not unusual. Remember, what makes a model stunning in photographs are things like bone structure, facial symmetry, and posing angles. What makes a girl pretty in the real world may not translate to pretty in print or on the runway. Agents are experts at recognizing raw talents but may make you over to fit with the look of the moment. A good model must have a versatile look and that means that they should still look good even when their looks are changed.

5. Along the same lines as the makeover it is also common for a legitimate modeling agency to ask you to lose or gain weight or to tone up your body with exercise.

It is a touchy reality that mainstream models need to be thin, after all models are human clothes hangers, so the fact that a modeling agency may ask you to lose weight or tone up is probably not surprising but what may seem surprising is that an agency could ask you to gain weight. Super-waif models as they have been called may be trendy but even the fashion world has acknowledged that things may have gone too far. In 2006 the fashion industry bureaucrats in Milan, Italy addressed the issue of emaciated models by setting a standard that all runway models must have a body mass index (BMI) of no less than 18 which is half a point lower than the 18.5 considered the healthy minimum. Even though a BMI of 18 is slightly below healthy setting this standard is an important step in the right direction for the fashion industry. If you are very thin or not very toned an agency may push you to get healthy before signing you.

6. If you get signed to a modeling agency you should expect to travel, and some of the destinations may be exotic and far, far away.

Not only is travel a normal part of being a model it is essential. The most successful models travel, it is just a part of the job and if you're not prepared to travel then you won't have much of a modeling career. It is common practice for legitimate modeling agencies to send green models overseas, most often to Asia or Europe, in order to build a portfolio and gain practical experience. If a modeling agency wants to send you away it is a good sign not a bad one. Things a legitimate modeling agency would never ask of you when you travel; to turn over your passport, to go away without parental consent, to pay for your trip OR agree to pay them back for the trip or expenses, or to do hostess work or any work that is not traditional spokesperson, print or runway modeling.

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