

There are reels that get a commercial director work — and reels that never will. For those directors who are ready to invest the time, energy and money necessary to build a more marketable reel, we're here to help.

I'M READY TO INVEST IN MY CAREER AND SHOOT A NEW REEL. I'M GOING TO SPEND A TON OF MONEY ANYWAY. WHY DO I NEED SPOTLAB?

Every director needs 3 things to improve their career. 1) A reel with great spots with smart concepts. 2) A network of people who are fans of their work. 3) Publicity and exposure. It also helps to have a greater understanding of how reps and production companies act as your agent and put directors up for jobs. It's also important to understand your competition. Through our program, members will have access to scripts from agency writers, feedback of your work from industry professionals, a support network of peers, vendor discounts, unique publicity opportunities and, most importantly, the structure of a deadline. A director going through our program will have a greater understanding of how to build a focused and marketable reel, how to stand out among your competition and how to avoid cliché mistakes. Think of SpotLab as a career coach, motivational trainer, production advisor, networking mentor and publicist.

I GET THE SCRIPT HOOKUPS, BUT HOW DOES SPOTLAB GET ME EXPOSURE?

Over the last five years, we have earned a reputation in the advertising industry for turning out great new directors and helping established helmers create new reels. We have a wide fan base all over the country. Our website is closely watched by both ad agencies and production companies. We have a good relationship with the industry press and SpotLab directors are often featured. **During this new round, we will launch our first video podcast or internet series, which will drive a wider audience to our site and the new reels.**

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE VIDEO PODCAST.

We will do a series of 4-6 podcasts throughout the program, featuring the current members and the process they are going through to build a new reel. Our goal is to show entertaining and informative pieces, "behind the scenes" shots, some of our meetings along with interviews with agency producers and creatives in what they look for when watching director's reels. We are not creating a reality show to focus on drama. Instead, our directors will be upheld as examples of those who are "doing it right." If you look smart, we look smart.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VIDEO PODCAST?

No problem. Only directors who want to participate will be included. It is not mandatory for SpotLab directors to be part of the show.

WHAT DOESN'T SPOTLAB DO FOR ME?

We don't pay for your productions. We can't guarantee dps and editors will help you out. We don't promise you'll get signed. We can't guarantee you'll love the scripts we provide. Basically, we don't guarantee anything. But what we will do is get scripts in front of you from great agencies, get you in the room with valuable contacts and provide you with a list of vendors who've offered support. **We promise you brutal honesty from people who know what they're talking about.** We offer you a program with a proven track record of more than half the directors meeting with outstanding success, so if you're ready to step up to the plate, so are we.

THIS SOUNDS GREAT. HOW DO I APPLY?

To apply, you must provide all three components: the application form, a reel and a treatment*.

*** WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN A TREATMENT?**

- Write it as if you're writing a treatment to win the bid for a commercial project. Be as thorough, as descriptive, as clear as you can be on the following points:
- Tell us about your decision to direct spots and why the SpotLab program is right for you.
- Describe the genre you've chosen and why.
- Tell us about what format you'll be shooting.
- Describe where you typically get your scripts.

- Since SpotLab is a collective, describe what you can bring to the program as well as what you want to get from us.
- Your treatment can be as long or short as you'd like, as long as you express yourself fully. We're looking for directors that show the most promising work and are clear and articulate about their goals.

WHAT CITIES DOES GROUP101SPOTS OPERATE IN?

This round we will be operating in Los Angeles only. We may do future rounds of the program in other cities.

IF I LIVE IN ANOTHER CITY, CAN I APPLY FOR YOUR PROGRAM?

Sure, if you're willing to travel to Los Angeles for an interview in early April, then if accepted, travel three more times for meetings in early May, June and July. We have had directors commute to our meetings from as far away as New York and even London.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO JOIN THE GROUP?

The fee to participate in SpotLab is \$3500 and is collected at the first meeting. There is no cost to apply. In addition to the membership fee, each director is also responsible for the costs of shooting his own reel. Film production is expensive. Most directors spend between \$3,000 and \$8,000 per spot, while many spend more.

SpotLab was started to provide scripts, support, community, publicity and exposure for commercial directors who understand that they need to shoot a reel in order to get representation.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE FEE?

Think of SpotLab as a career coach, motivational trainer, production advisor, networking mentor, publicist and event planner. This is not film school. Our directors get the kind of education and contacts that can literally change your career.

Here's where your \$3500 goes:

Exposure to scripts from agency creatives across the country.

The opportunity to network with agency creatives and production company executives.

The website to promote you, your work and to connect you with interested collaborators.

Press and publicity.

Feedback on your spots as you shoot them.

One on one mentoring.

Vendor discounts and access to creative collaborators.

Being part of this program has its benefits: Out of the 70 directors who've gone through our program, all have greatly improved their reel while 43 of the directors have been signed to a production company. Many have had their work included in the industry trades, including Shoot, 'boards, Creativity and Ad Critic. Many spots have been included in award shows and festivals like AICP, First 'boards Awards, Addys, One Show and Cannes Lions.

Many directors have even gotten their first real jobs through agency hookups provided by our program. Several others have been signed at companies after being introduced to executives at our meetings.

Between vendor discounts and collaborative help and hookups we provide from dps, editors, composers, etc. most people save at least \$10,000 of the typical costs of production and post shooting their reel with us.

WHERE DO THE SCRIPTS COME FROM?

We're glad you asked. Some members are agency creatives who just needed a kick in the pants to shoot. For the others, we're providing this group access to talented copywriters and art directors who are excited to see their ideas brought to life. If you know anyone who's got a great unproduced script, give them our number.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETINGS?

"Does it look great and make sense? Does it work with the brand? Will this spot get me closer to a marketable reel and real work?" These are the tough questions that get asked of all the spots monthly, and allow the members to learn from each other's mistakes and triumphs. Our meetings, held one evening a month, also include guests from ad agencies and commercial production companies who help critique the work.

HOW MANY DIRECTORS DO YOU PICK? HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THEM?

We've typically chosen 12 for each program. The number may vary. As they say, it's all about the reel. Most directors chosen to participate in the program have a background in advertising or television production and submit a short reel of spec spots they've already shot (at least one.) Pick a great concept, shoot it well and let us know you get it.

EACH MEMBER SHOOTS THREE SPOTS IN JUST THREE MONTHS? ARE YOU KIDDING?

Yes, they do. (And no, we're not (kidding). This program is a huge undertaking of time, energy and money and only appropriate for those committed to directing commercials and have the need to build a great reel.

SHOOTING FILM IS EXPENSIVE. WHO PAYS FOR ALL THIS?

No kidding. It is expensive, difficult and not meant to be a hobby. SpotLab directors chosen for the program are those who've done the research and realize the amount of money, time and energy it takes to build a commercial reel. With such a specialized and focused group, the opportunity exists to share the resources and expenses of film production. Plus, we've been fortunate to have wonderful support and discounts from our kind vendor sponsors. One month a spot's budget will be in the thousands, others might be done with a maximum of creativity on a \$10 tape.

CAN I SHOW SHORT FILMS AND MUSIC VIDEOS TO GET IN?

Typically, the answer is "no", although there have been a few exceptions. If you feel you've got a great style that you want to apply to commercial directing, then do it.

If showing music videos or your short films conveys the tone, quality or point of view of the commercials you want to shoot, then let's see 'em.

The best way to convince us that you've got what it takes to shoot a 30 second spot is to go out and shoot one. If you're already shot a spot and it's not the best you can do, shoot another one. You'll want to submit your best work.

DO MEMBERS HAVE TO SHOOT FILM EVERY MONTH?

Since the majority of commercials aired are shot on film, a director hoping to get work will need to shoot on film.

The spots on your reel will be looked at by production companies, reps and ad agencies. They will be judged on many levels including concept, execution and production value. Ideally, you want to hit a home run on every level. For this program, however, every spot doesn't necessarily have to be on 35mm, it just has to make us want to hit 'rewind' again and again. If you want a reel that will get you work, your production value has to compete with the best directors out there. If you don't plan to shoot film for the majority of your spots, SpotLab is probably not a good choice for you.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CAN'T ATTEND A MEETING?

Spotlab directors are encouraged and expected to participate fully. We take it seriously that the group suffers if one person doesn't show up or arrives empty-handed. If you experience a tough month for shooting, turn on a DV camera and shoot a test. You'd be surprised how much everyone still learns from showing these rough sketches on video. If you are unable to attend a scheduled meeting, arrange to have your spot delivered to someone who will be there. If you miss a second meeting, you're out of the group. The fee is not refundable.

IF I JOIN SPOTLAB, DO I HAVE TO BE REPPED BY YOU GUYS?

Occasionally, jobs come to SpotLab directors while they are still in their six month program or before they are signed. We have a production company, Subliminal, that is separate from

SpotLab but is able to support our directors. Subliminal does not actively rep SpotLab directors, but we're often approached by agencies who may be interested in our members. It is a non-exclusive, but mutually beneficial relationship. If a job comes to a member directly through the effort and introductions from SpotLab, we prefer that they use Subliminal for production services.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

If you're still deciding whether to build a reel, we suggest the following:

- Research directors and ad agencies and get intimate with their work
- Pay attention to award winning spots
- Decide what genre you're going to choose and find the most inspirational work being done.

Be sure to use THESPOTLAB.COM as a resource. Look under "community" as there are many collaborators there to help you. Subscribe to our mailing list and join us at our Happy Hour networking parties to meet our current and past members and collaborators.

WHY THREE SPOTS IN THREE MONTHS?

You have a goal of creating the best reel you can so you can jumpstart your career. You may have had this goal for years. Action is the key. This focused timeline will change you in ways you can't imagine. Creative people are often gripped in a conflict between completion and perfection. We've found this rigorous schedule will break you loose to get productive, "find your voice" and take you closer to your goal than you've ever been.

Can I shoot more than three spots?

Of course. If you're going to rent a camera package and assemble a crew, you might try to shoot two in a weekend. Many directors have doubled up on their productions. As long as the work doesn't suffer because you're spread thin, we recommend it. Hire a great producer. Preparation is the key.

Do I have to shoot film every month?

We understand the financial difficulty of shooting three spots on film with a full-fledged production. But the bottom line is, if you're going to do this, you're going to have to spend money. There's really no way to sugarcoat it. Your reel is your way in, and as the saying goes, "you've got to spend money to make money." Remember, the people you're competing against are more than likely shooting on 35mm.

Can I show a rough cut?

Absolutely! Think of our meetings as your own "focus group." Many directors go back to their edits after showing their work and getting feedback. Be prepared for criticism and to hear the honest truth about your work. Most spots need fine tuning after a meeting and hearing feedback, so don't worry about showing a spot in rough form. It is rare that a rough cut presented to our group doesn't gain some insights to improve it.

Do I have to shoot every month?

Many directors will shoot two or more spots in a few days to keep their production costs down, then spend extra time on post on the second spot. This is fine. The point is to show one spot a month for three months. Leave room in your schedule for learning, though. One director shot four spots in his first month. Turns out by month two, he had changed his mind about many things and would have done them differently. Be prepared to grow and change as a director during this process.

Keep in mind also that you will be learning not only from your own productions, but you'll benefit from seeing the spots and hearing the feedback on the work of the other directors every month. It's a way to exponentially increase the knowledge you'll take with you long after your three months with us.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

**#1 - Each member will show a spot every month for three months.
Show up — and don't show up empty-handed.**

At the first meeting, you'll know the dates of each of the three meetings. If you need to miss a meeting, your spot for that month needs to be delivered to us before the meeting. We can give you notes later of the feedback your spot received. **If you miss a second meeting, you're out of the group. There are no refunds of your participation fee.**

We repeat – miss showing a spot for one month, you're on probation. Miss two and you're out. You don't need to be there, but your spots need to be.

**#2- Never shoot a script without permission from the writer/art-director.
Safeguard the security and confidentiality of the scripts.**

The most valuable commodity that SpotLab has is our relationships and reputation with ad agency creatives. Every member of the group represents us out in the world. If you shoot a script without permission, it is cause for IMMEDIATE dismissal from the group. Same thing goes if you show or distribute the scripts to non-group members. We take our promise and commitment to the people that submit their scripts to us seriously, and need you to do the same. Members will be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement before seeing any scripts.

#3- Listen.

When your spot is shown in a meeting, you're going to hear feedback from invited guests and your fellow directors. You're going to learn more if you do more listening and less explaining. You don't have to agree with what people are saying, but you're smart to listen to what they have to say.

This is not a forum to explain your whole production story and excuses about your day. Save that for the beers after the meeting or our happy hour parties. Everyone will get more out of the meeting from hearing suggestions from agency creatives, reps and production company execs and less of listening to a director defend his choices and compromises. We invite some of the best creatives in LA, along with people from some of the top production and post production facilities in the industry. These are voices that are worth listening to.

#4- Use our scripts. They're pretty good.

Every script submitted is reviewed by at least one if not two or three agency creative directors. We only keep about 40% of them. Some are killed because they're heavy on CGI, some are killed because they need about 500K to shoot, and some are killed because, well, they suck. We spend the time to get you great scripts. And the more spots we get produced out of database, the more creatives will put back in.

You joined this group to be a director, not a copywriter. Chances are, you can probably write a great script or two. But three? Even our past members, many who were award winning creatives in their own right, found it easier to shoot scripts they didn't create. You don't have to shoot our scripts, but it certainly doesn't hurt.

TELL ME ABOUT THE SCRIPTS.

What if you don't like any of the scripts.

We have a database of roughly 400-500 scripts, submitted from agencies across the country. We've often heard from directors, "I've read all the scripts and I don't like any of them." Welcome to the real world. This is why agencies hire directors; to bring their scripts to life. The magic is in producing something through a collaborative process.

Unlike features, television or short films, commercial directors are bringing to life someone else's vision, and hopefully making it your own. There is little room in advertising for auteurs.

You're here to serve a client and sell a product. Hopefully, you do some imaginative and original filmmaking and win some awards along the way.

What you should look for as you read the scripts is a glimmer, a nugget of an idea — something that clicks and resonates for you. You then call up that copywriter or creative team and start a dialogue. Your goal should be to build your relationships as you shoot your spots. The most successful new directors will have a network of ad agency friends and colleagues who have enjoyed working with them and want to recommend and refer them for real work. There is no other program around that will make this easier for you, so don't waste the opportunity to expand your contacts and open doors.

Also, you don't have to choose from our script database. Feel free to contact other agency creatives and ask for unproduced scripts. You might find it's easier to get them involved when you introduce them to the SpotLab concept.

What to do if it doesn't go smoothly?

Collaboration in the real world is sometimes inspiring, fun and occasionally painful. Keep in mind that the creatives who have submitted scripts own their ideas. Once you've chosen a script, your first step is to call them, ask permission to shoot their script and offer your vision. Listen carefully to their response. Some will want to be involved at every step, some will simply say, "have fun and send me a copy."

If you begin a dialogue with a writer and find out that you are not on the same page and that they are overly protective of their script, you may need to offer to shoot their version and yours. If it becomes too much and you find that you cannot agree, be prepared to thank them for the opportunity and walk away. A director's greatest strength is clear communication with agency copywriters or the creative team, so begin practicing yours now. Be clear at every step.

Who gets to shoot them?

We get new scripts submitted throughout the program. They are made available to the whole group at once. Each director may reserve two scripts at a time on a "first come, first served" basis. If a couple months have gone by and you haven't made any preproduction headway, we ask that you release it back to the group. Occasionally, more than one director will choose the same script. If you feel passionate about a script that someone else has reserved, call them up and see how committed they are to that script. Make your case and work it out amongst yourselves.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETINGS?

Bring your spot on DVD. Lay it off twice, with :5 seconds of black in between.

The DVDs are passed to the front of the room and the first one is popped in the player. There is no "who goes first" drama. The audience watches it twice and the discussion begins. We limit discussion time to 10 minutes or less, so everyone has a chance to get their spot covered and we have time for additional words or a Q&A of our guests.

HOW MANY DIRECTORS DO YOU PICK? HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THEM?

We usually have about 60-80 apply, we'll meet 20 directors in person and choose 12 for the program. Our goal is to assemble those who are furthest along their path to directing spots and demonstrate the most knowledge about the world of advertising and enthusiasm about it as a career choice. We want people who have something to offer to the group, who want to give as much as take, who understand the meaning of the word "collective", a term we use to describe the group.

I'VE HEARD YOU GUYS HAVE STARTED A PRODUCTION COMPANY, WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?

Two of Group101Spot's advisors, Dina Mande-Gould and Steve Gould run Subliminal, a production company. We represent eight directors, including two Group101Spots alumni. The

relationship between Subliminal and SpotLab is separate, but mutually beneficial. Subliminal does not automatically rep SpotLab directors, nor obtain work on their behalf.

However, real directing opportunities may come to our members because of involvement or introductions made by SpotLab. If this happens, we have Subliminal bid and produce jobs for our SpotLab members. Although there is no obligation, we prefer that all jobs coming to unsigned directors because of our introductions be produced through Subliminal.

SO WHAT'S IN FOR YOU GUYS, (THE PEOPLE WHO RUN SPOTLAB)?

That's a question that comes up a lot. And to be frank, it's kind of hard to explain. We originally started because Dina Mande-Gould (the founder) wanted to direct more spots, and Jeff Nicosia (the co-founder and creative advisor) wanted to get a few spots for his copywriter's reel. Steve Gould was dragged into the fray due to his wealth of production knowledge.

Over the last five years our members have helped us create something quite magical. We've had our members win huge awards, seen them sign with world-class production companies, and host screenings viewed by almost 2000 people in total. We aren't getting rich doing this-- in fact your fees basically allow us to break even and buy ourselves a Starbucks or two for the effort. We do it because we love it. And we take it very, very seriously. We hope you will too.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact Dina (dina@group101spots.com) or Jeff (jeffnicosia@yahoo.com)

We look forward to talking to you soon.