

Nothing makes me feel more like garbage than looking at casting tapes

Written by Greg Mills

Greg Mills can also be read at the [Bastard of Art and Commerce](#) .

I'm working on a project for work -- a series of comedy shorts -- that required the watching of casting tapes.

I hate casting. I hate casting because the miles of mildly okay actors thrown before a cheap video camera in a cheesy, over-bright little room without any preparation. There are 120,000,000 actors in LA, and more are coming everyday and they end up in these abattoirs, reading lines out of context to some imaginary polar bear off camera. They came to the call at 10:00 am, it's 4:00 pm, and everyone in the building is pissed off and sour, the kind of pissed off and sour that can only come from being in a shitty office building somewhere in Hollywood in the late afternoon.

That tape or digital file that makes up to San Francisco not only contains the images of the actors, but also does a too-good job of transmitting the cumulative fail stink that is permeating the audition room.

The schedule is always fucked and four agency sweat-hogs stewing in their own juices in a shabby and dark conference room just want to get through the 25,000 potential "Woman #3"s so they can get back to their desk to write and art direct all the other components of the campaign, which were due at 10:00 that morning. The casting person, eager to please, does a dragnet of Hollywood, packing the casting tape with anyone with two functioning kidneys and one functioning eye.

What happens, sadly, is we the agency scum pass on people in an instant, because they have dumb hair, or were looking to the left, or they remind us of someone we hate (or at least THINK we hate in that fetid haze of blue conference room funk). We want to be done with these hopeful, earnest people. So we cast to type, we cast in shorthand, we cast without consideration for subtle performances or wild-assed improvisation.

Now, that doesn't happen every time. Sometimes the stars align in such a way that it's easy to square the right thing with the prudent thing. We found a bushel full of excellent, excellent people this go around, for example.

But it does happen more that I'd like. And that sucks.

Actors work their asses off.