

By Timothy R. Collins

# How to Break Into Show Business Law

**Significant hurdles often exist, but they can be overcome by the diligent job seeker**

**A**s a motion picture attorney, I have often been asked, “What is the best way to become an entertainment attorney?” Many young lawyers find that potential employers are looking for attorneys who already have entertainment law experience. But, in a classic chicken-or-egg conundrum, unless the applicant is one of the lucky few who was able to get a job practicing entertainment law straight out of law school, he or she will not have any entertainment law experience. There are myriad ways to enter this field, but some avenues are more efficient and less frustrating than others. Everyone has advice, but the following pointers are among the best.

First, yes, it is who you know. Not surprisingly, the most effective way to gain entry into the entertainment field, whether in-house or at an entertainment boutique firm, is through someone you know who is already practicing in the field. A number of reasons exist for the success stories that arise from this search method. Many entertainment positions are never listed or reported in any periodical or publication; the existence of the position is simply communicated through word of mouth among entertainment lawyers in that specialized field of practice (e.g., music, motion pictures, television, etc.). Therefore, it truly helps to have someone within a particular entertainment field who can alert you to opportunities. Once you are notified of the existence of a position, however, who you know is not all. Some lawyers wait to be called, but you naturally have a better chance of actually obtaining the position if you apply. You will be competing with the others who also heard about the position by word of mouth.

If you learn of the existence of an unlisted position, you will be competing only with those who heard about the position by word of mouth, as opposed to the potentially hundreds of applicants who might respond to an entertainment position listed in a periodical. Obviously, this increases your chances of obtaining the entertainment position. Finally, the person who is referring you to the position may be able to recommend you to the company or firm that is hiring.

Since it pays to know people, network. What do you do if you work for a company or firm with no entertainment attorneys? In addition to asking acquaintances if they have any friends who practice in your area of interest, you can attend one of the entertainment law conferences that are held throughout Los Angeles. UCLA and USC host annual entertainment law conferences that draw many lawyers from studios, entertainment boutique firms, and production companies. The Beverly Hills Bar Association also occasionally sponsors seminars with an entertainment theme. In addition, the Association’s own Intel-

lectual Property and Entertainment Law Section sponsors a comprehensive yearly symposium that covers issues of importance to all practitioners in entertainment or media law, and Association members receive a discount. Before, between, and after the lectures at these seminars (which also offer MCLE credit), many of these lawyers socialize informally. These events provide informal settings in which to meet lawyers in the entertainment field and thus offer a good place to start networking to those who are starting from the ground floor.

Next, remember that you will not get what you want if you do not know what you want. It is a good idea to spend some time talking to your contacts in entertainment law to identify the type of position and the field of practice in which you would be the most interested. Entertainment law includes everything from litigators practicing intellectual property at large firms to in-house attorneys negotiating deals at small production companies. If you have determined that you want to negotiate deals and contracts in a business setting, you still have to decide in what field you wish to practice (film, television, or music, for example) and in what setting (entertainment department of a large firm, boutique firm, or studio). The variety of fields and settings provide for very different experiences, and it is well worth your time to investigate the particular forum that you are considering to ensure that it meets your interest.

Tailor your resume. Once you learn of an entertainment position in your field of interest, it helps your chances of obtaining a job if your resume shows that you either have some experience that is transferable or applicable to that particular entertainment position or have demonstrated an interest in that area in the past.

For example, if you are a litigator who has a measure of copyright law experience and you are now attempting to obtain a position as a transactional attorney negotiating entertainment contracts, the resume should highlight and focus upon your intellectual property experience. If you are a corporate attorney striving for the same position, your resume should focus upon the various types of contracts that you have negotiated, because the transactional experience is



*Timothy R. Collins is assistant general counsel in the motion picture legal department at Warner Bros.*



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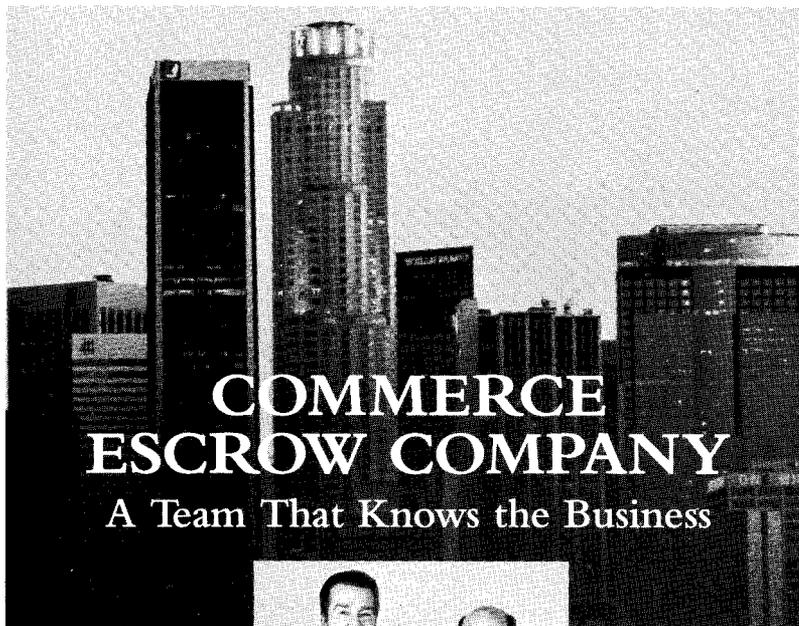
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transferable to other types of contracts. If you do not have much entertainment experience, you can attend university extension classes in the business in which you seek entry and add them to your resume (and those extension courses are also a good place to network).

Have patience. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that a young lawyer trying to get an entertainment job is something akin to trying to become a supermodel or a rock star. However, it can and does happen (the former, not the latter). Unless you are lucky or well connected, you will most likely have to go through numerous interviews before you find an entertainment position at a well-known entertainment company or boutique law firm. Entertainment companies can also be notoriously slow when it comes to making decisions about hiring candidates who have interviewed for positions. If you don't have the patience for any or all of the above, you can try to join the entertainment department of a larger law firm and then transition to an entertainment company or boutique firm later. And don't forget to follow up periodically with personal contacts; one week they may not know of anything available, and two weeks later they may know of three positions that are open. For example, I obtained my position through a check-up call to one of my personal contacts.

### Check the Trades and the Internet

Check job listings. Although the easiest path to an entertainment law position is through a personal contact, it is not the only path. There are, of course, other avenues that can be utilized that are usually more frustrating but on occasion can yield results. Besides asking a headhunter to assist you in a search for a job, you can check the job listings in *Daily Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. These industry publications occasionally list entertainment attorney positions in their employment opportunities sections. You can also check for entertainment positions on the Internet. The Web site at [www.ifcome.com](http://www.ifcome.com) is one of the best known within the industry; it lists positions that are available for entertainment attorneys at entertainment companies as well as law firms. Job listings can also be found at additional sites, including [www.entertainmentcareers.net](http://www.entertainmentcareers.net) and [www.showbizjobs.com](http://www.showbizjobs.com). The problem with these methods is that you will probably be competing with scores of applicants. However, many people do obtain jobs through these sources, so it is worth your time—assuming your last name isn't Disney. ■