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2010 Pilot Season – The “NAME” GAME RULES

As Marc Hirschfield recently said in the Hollywood Reporter, “I think this is probably the most competitive pilot season in about eight years” (HR, March 9, 2010). There are fundamentally three reasons for this being one of the most competitive pilot seasons on record:

1. Market Competition I: *Film Stars Flock to Pilots*
2. Market Competition II: *Limited Number of Projects*
3. Market Competition III: *Complications of “Second Positioning” on Pilots*

MARKET COMPETITION I:

TOP LEADING MEN/WOMEN OF FILM – TV DOING 2010 PILOTS

The 2010 Pilot Season has been marked by yet another strong paradigm shift in the industry. Film Stars are coming over to Pilot TV in **droves**. Dustin Hoffman (who hasn't done TV since 1967) is just one of many FILM stars or film's leading men/women who have found their way over to Pilots. [Here is a non-comprehensive list of a few who have:](#)

Dustin Hoffman (Luck)	Dermot Mulroney (Rockford Files)
Jon Voight (Midlands)	Claire Forlani (Episodes)
Forrest Whitaker (Criminal Minds II)	Sam Shepard (Tough Trade)
Beau Bridges (Rockford Files)	Tom Selleck (Reagan's Law)
William Shatner (Shit My Parent's Say)	Nick Nolte (Luck)
Eugene Levy (Hitched)	Virginia Madsen (Scoundrels)
Mary Steenburgen (Southern Discomfort)	Treat Williams (Boston's Finest)
Donnie Wahlberg (Burgess/Green)	Keri Russell (Wilde Kingdom)
Brittany Snow (Kindreds)	Kathy Bates (Kindreds)
Charles Dutton (Uncle Nigel)	Stephen Rea (Chaos)
Brian Keith (Midlands)	Janeane Garofalo (John Wells Untitled)
Scott Caan (Hawaii Five-O)	Rob Morrow (Truth)
Robert Patrick (Edgar Floats)	Jason Biggs (True Love)
Dennis Farina (Luck)	Brian Dennehey (Criminal Minds II)
Adam Arkin (Who Gets the Parents)	Zeljko Ivanek (The Event)
Jason Ritter (The Event)	Ben Chaplin (Kindreds)
Swoosie Kurtz (Mike and Molly)	Carey Elwes (Tough Trade)
Neal McDonough (Scoundrels)	Lea Thompson (Uncle Nigel)
Bill Pullman (Nathan vs. Nurture)	Gary Cole (Uncle Nigel)
Ashley Tisdale (Hellcats)	Damon Wayans (Happy Endings)

That coupled with the sheer volume of NAMED TV actors who also are signing up for Pilots increases the competition even further for non-NAMED actors. Here again is a NON-COMPREHENSIVE listing of established TV leading men/women who have signed on with Pilots:

Micheal Chiklis (No Ordinary Family)	Debra Messing (Wright vs. Wrong)
James Belushi (Defenders)	John Schneider (Back Nine)
Leah Remini (Defenders, Takes a Village)	Jimmy Smits (Wilde Kingdom)
Sarah Chalke (The Freshman)	Kristin Kreuk (Hitched)
Matt LeBlanc (Episodes)	Donald Faison (The Odds)
Blair Underwood (The Event)	Michael Imperioli (Detriot 187)
Jane Kaczmarark (Who Gets the Parents)	Jeri Ryan (Body of Evidence)
Jerry O' Connell (Defenders/Rex is not your...)	Jean Smart (Hawaii Five-O)
Allyssa Milano (Hall Pass)	Skeet Ulrich (Untitled John Wells)
Dylan Walsh (ATF)	Jay Harrington (Nature vs. Nurture)
Ana Ortiz (True Blue)	Tom Cavanaugh (Edgar Floats)
Eric Close (Chaos)	Daniel Dae Kim (Hawaii Five-O)
Poppy Montgomery (True Blue)	Wayne Knight (No Ordinary Family)
Elisha Cuthbert (Happy Endings)	Traylor Howard (Dana Gould Project)
Kellie Giddish (Chase)	Kurtwood Smith (Hitched)
Laura Prepon (Awkward Situations for Men)	Nicolette Sheridan (Ant Hines-Untitled)
Becki Newton (Love Bites)	Katee Sackhoff (Richard Hatem-Untitled)
Will Arnett (Untitled Mitch Hurwitz)	Laurie Metcalf (Strange Brew)
Jere Burns (Strange Brew)	Julie Benz (No Ordinary Family)
Christina Applegate (Hall Pass)	Goran Visnjic (Boston's Finest)
Molly Parker (Quinn-Tuplets)	Tony Hale (Awkward Situations for Men)
Rob Morrow (The Whole Truth)	

As an agency, PTG has seen strong positioning of our actors for Series Regular roles. [We have had 44 actors go out for Series Regulars in these pilots.](#) That is a very strong showing. However, I have spoken with many of my peer agency owners, and we all have had the same experience this pilot season: we have concluded that most of these auditions are what I call 'insurance auditions.' Insurance if the actors who been offered the role do not take the role.

I have pitched to at least 50 CDs this pilot season who all said something along the lines of 'yes, this client might be right-on for the role, but the studios/networks are saying STAR NAMES ONLY, and we have an offer out.' This goes for both my 'named' and heavy 'working actors.' And for the rest, unfortunately, the days of developmental and semi-working actors getting a shot at a series regular or recurring role on a pilot are long gone (please see below in market competition II).

MARKET COMPETITION II: THE CONTINUED DECREASE OF PILOT WORK

Unfortunately, the days of shooting hundreds of pilots are long gone. This paradigm shift occurred due to the WGA strike which allowed studios/networks to restructure how they do business in developing and producing new shows. Shooting a pilot is a very expensive proposition, and now the number of pilots are limited to those which have a great chance of getting a green light or have already been green lit for the fall season. In short,

last year there were 69 pilots and this year 83 (including pilot presentations). This year the market will probably end up at around 65-70 real pilots shot.

SIDENOTE: Furthermore, the WGA strike also allowed the studios/networks/cablers to provide for pilots year round instead of the primary pilot season as we had all come to know and expect. The good news is more pilots to come throughout the year;. The bad news is that the exclusivity provisions are no longer in place so named actors can do multiple pilots a year if they so choose, instead of being limited to one during traditional pilot season and thereby opening up roles for other non-named actors. In short, more competition with Top Named actors!

Doing the Math: So, if you calculate that there are 70 pilots being shot this year, with an average series regular cast of 5-7 (some shows are going to as low as 4 series regulars to save costs), we are talking between 350 and 440 'job openings' in Hollywood this pilot season for top roles. Above, I have already listed 85 roles taken, and that was far from an exhaustive list. To complicate things even more, many strong series recurers and established TV actors with heavy credits from TV shows are vying for the 250-300 roles that are left. For example, everyone formerly on ER has found a pilot. Finally, what I am hearing from CDs is that even named actors and VERY STRONG working actors are doing Guest Stars on these pilots. So again, the days of a developmental or semi-working actor finding a spot on a Pilot is highly unlikely.

MARKET COMPETITION III: SECOND OPTION POSITIONING

To make matters worse, some actors with current shows are doing pilots as second position. For example, Allyssa Milano, who is currently on Romantically Challenged, has signed on for Hall Pass as a second option. Kyle Bornheimer, also on Romantically Challenged, has signed on for the Bays/Thomas Project. Rob Morrow, of Numbers fame, is currently second positioning on "the Whole Truth." The entire lead cast of Better off Ted also was confronted with this opportunity. The show, not performing highly in the ratings, found each one of these actors being offered and accepting second options on pilots.

While this has gone on for years in Hollywood, the rise of competition for named actors/actors currently on TV has led many Casting Directors of Pilots to aggressively pursue currently employed actors. Also a few actors such as Jerry O'Connell have been able to do two pilots as exclusivity provisions did not apply. Again, this just shows that there is a strong demand for named actors/actors on TV, and the networks and studios want established names to push for advertising money up front.

SIDENOTE: Do not forget, the Up-Fronts, while again having gone through a paradigm shift of their own, are still an imperative positioning place for networks. And network executives obviously feel that TOP NAMED actors will allow them to secure as much Up Front advertising dollars as possible. We are talking billions of advertising dollars committed at these Up-Fronts and it seems as though NAMED actors are what is selling that 'Up-Front' dollar right now.

Final Thoughts from James J. Jones*

I send this pilot report to my clients in order for them to fully understand the business nature of this – the 2010 Pilot Season. While the trickle down nature of this pilot season (top named stars getting series regulars, top working actors getting series recurers/guest star, guest stars doing co-stars, etc) is fairly bleak for developmental and semi-working actors, it is not permanent. The prospects for scripted television on both

cable and networks, as well as the increase in new media and feature film production bode very well for the actor. **For my developmental and semi-working actors**, please be realistic about your expectations and focus on your craft and getting me the marketing materials I need to do my job. **For my 'named' and heavy working actors**, please understand the level of competition, and be patient... breakthroughs are undoubtedly coming for what should be a vibrant 2010. In short, hang on – work your craft – and stay positive! Good things will happen!

**James J. Jones is the owner of The Premier Talent Group. PTG is a SAG-Franchised Talent Agency offering representation for commercial and theatrical actors. This report was written on March 21, 2010. ©*