

## So you want to be a photographic model?

I'm a professional commercial photographer who hires models regularly, and until recently I also ran my own small agency, so I know about the business.

My reason for both running my own agency AND booking models from other agencies is simple - there are not enough models available and so I need to have several different sources where I can find the models I need. This may surprise you, because you may have thought that there are too many models and not enough work for them all!

This article deals with all types of photographic modelling. Most of the people who want to be models are looking for fashion or catalogue work and most of them are young and female. Don't be put off if you have to read through a lot about types of models and modelling that doesn't seem to apply to you, ALL the information contained here will be useful and I want you to read every word of it. Sooner or later you will get to a bit that is 100% relevant.

You may decide, after reading this, that modelling is not for you. If so that's fine.

### Where shall we start?

Let me tell you about a typical, fairly successful model who was here just before I started writing this article.

She is 19 years old, she has a lovely face, a very good body, a very nice personality and no tattoos or piercings. I've photographed her many, many times for all sorts of products ranging from work wear to beds to fashion.

This time it was lingerie. She arrived, as always, exactly on time and changed into the bras & knickers we had for her, and we got on with the shoot. She was booked for 4 hours but the job was done in less than 3, so she made a bit of extra profit on her time. The client also gave her all the clothing, worth I suppose around £700. She was happy, I was happy and the client was happy! The following day I sent her a CD of all the shots, as I always do, so she gained a few more pics for her portfolio.

This girl is a full-time professional model and she has been modelling for 3 years. I like working with her because she's good, the clients choose her partly because of her lovely face and partly because she has outstanding photos.

If all this seems like a dream job, let me tell you right now that this model is doing OK but she is a long way from being in the top league - she is a long, long way from being a supermodel.

**Having said that, she *is* in the top 2%.** I say that because 98 out of every hundred wannabe models never make it onto the books of a reputable agency, never get any modelling work and simply don't have what it takes to be a model. That is 98% of the people who think that they want to be models, whose friends and family think that they look great. 98% of the people who try, fail completely.

### So why do they fail?

Well, some of them just don't have what it takes to be a successful model. They don't have the looks, or they don't have the personality, or they aren't prepared to make themselves available at short notice, or they think that the world owes them a living and that all they need to do is to sit on their backsides and wait to be 'discovered' or they aren't prepared to invest any time or money into making their dreams come true.

Some of them - many of them in fact are just complete timewasters.

Many of them though are genuinely trying to do something with their lives, they just don't know where to start. And so they start by looking at local newspaper small ads or ads in the Yellow Pages, and they fall into the greedy hands of the con artists, thieves and

perverts that exist in every business but who are drawn to the modelling industry because it's so easy to find new people to exploit!

### **How can you get started in modelling?**

Well, there are many different types of modelling and some of them require different approaches, but let's assume for a moment that you are interested in being either a catalogue or a fashion model. We'll talk about other types of modelling later.

There is an organisation called the **Association of Model Agencies** (AMA). Their members are governed by rules of conduct that should ensure that you are treated fairly, and in accordance with the DTI (Department of Trade & Industry) guidelines for best practice in the modelling industry.

If you can get onto the books of one of their members then you have a very good chance of success! They are listed at the end of this tutorial.

Unfortunately, it isn't easy to register with members of this organisation. The reason for this is that everyone else wants to be on their books too, they get many thousands of applications and they accept very few of them. They are also likely to have criteria that you simply don't match, for example height, weight, size and age.

If you want to try your luck with A.M.A. members, all you need to do is to send them a snapshot of your face (don't bother with a professional photo) and your personal details.

If they are interested they will contact you and ask you to attend an interview. If they accept you they may offer you a contract. They will then arrange for you to be photographed by their photographer (or by a photographer they deal with) and they will either pay for the photography or they will pay for it initially and then deduct the cost from your earnings (find out which and if you are going to end up paying for it, find out how much it is going to cost you) They will then send you on 'look-sees' - auditions for modelling work. They will also provide you with all the training you need. None of this will have cost you a penny upfront, like all reputable agencies they make all their money by deducting their commission from your modelling earnings.

Try it. Ring them up. All of them! And keep ringing them until one of them accepts you or it becomes obvious that none of them are interested in you.

The next stage is to approach agencies who are not A.M.A. members but who might be perfectly respectable too. These agencies don't generally get the really exotic work and so they don't get the high-flying supermodels either, but they operate in a very similar way to A.M.A. members and you should be safe with them. There are hundreds of these agencies and you can find lists of them very easily on the Internet.

The smaller genuine agencies will probably do less to promote you than the industry leaders, and although they won't ask you to pay them any fees they may ask you to provide them with two essentials, photographs and model cards. They may only ask you for model cards but that's much the same thing because you'll need the photos for the model cards. Model cards are a simple double-side printed card, around A5 size, with 4 of 5 photos of you, your vital statistics and your contact details. The agency will be able to give you the names of printers who can produce them for you and they will probably cost you around £100 for the first 1,000.

Why do you have to pay for the model cards and photos? Well, there are 2 reasons for this. Firstly, a small agency won't be making as much commission from you as a larger agency would and really can't afford to subsidise you and secondly, there are an awful lot of timewasters around. A good way of weeding out timewasters is by making them put their hands in their pockets to prove that they are serious about modelling. At the same time, although they are making you spend your money, none of it is going into their own pockets so you know that they are a genuine agency and not a scam merchant. If,

however, the agency suggests that you should use their own photographer you should walk away, it is probably a scam.

Although most of the smaller model agencies will insist that you provide model cards, I do know of one small agency that asks for them but doesn't actually insist - but any models who do not supply cards simply will not get any work (except, if they're very lucky, short-notice emergency cover) and the reason for this is that if there are no photographs the clients will simply not know that the model even exists.

Things are different with the top model agencies, where model cards are less important because models are sent on 'look-sees' or castings, where the clients (or their advertising agencies or photographers) will actually meet them.

So far so good, but these smaller agencies aren't easy to get into either and you will probably have to contact a lot of them before anyone accepts you. Some of them are specialists - they only accept people of a certain height, weight, size or age, or only accept children, or only accept people who live in certain areas. If you don't meet their criteria just cross them off your list, but if you do meet their criteria don't take no for an answer, "No" today may turn into "Yes" next week, and anyway some of them may tell you that they're not interested at first just to get rid of timewasters.

There is one type of agency that definitely will accept you (even though they will probably tell you that they only accept a small number of applicants). These are the people who will charge you money to join, or charge you for photographs, or for training, or for publicity, or for an 'assessment' or for something else. Walk away - the chances of getting any paid modelling work from these people is somewhere between nil and none! There is a section on modelling scams further down, make sure you read every word of it.

### **Do YOU have what it takes?**

Well, let's go back to the model I mentioned earlier. She has that natural 'girl next door' look. Nice hair, natural colour and in good condition. Her makeup looks natural and she knows what suits her. She looks sweet and innocent. She is slim but not underweight. She looks fit. No tattoos, no piercings and no skin blemishes.

Does that describe you too?

A lot of young girls have tattoos and/or skin piercings. Piercings aren't really a problem because they can be removed, but tattoos are very largely a matter of personal taste and many clients simply don't like them. Photographers don't like them either, because although we can take them out on computer quite frankly we have better things to do with our time and we would rather hire models who are not tattooed.

### **And what about your hair?**

Well, shoulder length or longer is good, because it can be up, or down, or back, all of which produces a very different 'look'. Bleached hair is not necessarily bad, but there are an awful lot of blonde models out there and you might do better with your natural colour. And if your hair isn't natural, it is essential that the natural colour doesn't show at the roots.

And as for **weight**, most people photograph about 2 sizes larger than they actually are, so excess weight can be a real problem for fashion models. Nobody really knows why people photograph larger, but most do. There are some exceptions, such as Marilyn Monroe, who was size 16 but she photographed as a 12.

### **Do you have any other skills?**

Many modelling agencies are agents in other fields as well as modelling so be sure to tell them if you have other skills such as dance, gymnastics or if you hold an Equity card.

And other not so obvious skills are worth mentioning too - if you have good language skills for example this could help with some types of work.

### **What do you have to do to succeed?**

Well, the model I mentioned above is a good example. She is registered with several small agencies. She is a genuinely nice person who is a pleasure to work with. She never talks about her other clients, her private life or how much she is being paid to model (photographers put a bit on top of model fees and get very upset if the model tells the client how much she's getting). She always arrives exactly on time. In short, she is very professional. Because of this, any photographer who she has worked with before is likely to recommend her to clients - and believe me, photographers have a great deal of influence in the choice of model!

But not all decisions are made by the photographer, and when the client makes the choice the model card has a large part to play. This model has truly outstanding photos of herself, taken when she started her modelling career at the age of 16. I don't know how much she paid for her photos but she definitely got a bargain!

And I have another model, very different, who also does extremely well. This one is male, aged late twenties. He has a fairly dark complexion and black hair. His distinctive feature is that his hair is very short, which makes it very easy to 'cut' him out from the background on the computer. Apart from the obvious differences, he is very similar to the female model mentioned above - very reliable, nice person, very professional, very good photos.

And another very successful model is an Asian girl, with beautiful hair that reaches her waist. Again, she has all the right qualities but the reason that she does so well is because there are very few black and Asian models and many clients today want to include at least one non-white model in their product range. Whether this is racist, non-racist or anti-racist is not for me to judge, but it seems to be a fact that models who belong to ethnic minorities are likely to get more fashion work than white people.

### **What happens to all the people who fail?**

Most people, whether they have what it takes to be a model or not, are genuinely nice people who are honest and straightforward. Perhaps because of this, they simply don't realise that there are rogues about in any business, and so they get ripped off.

Unfortunately, would-be models are prime targets for fraudsters. There may be several reasons for this:

Mainly they are young and perhaps a little too trusting.

For many people modelling is a dream, and when a rogue promises to make their dream come true they want to believe it even if logic screams out at them that something is wrong

Reputable model agencies are inundated with applications and can be a bit offhand with people. The thieves are friendly, pleasant and make them feel important.

Reputable model agencies can be difficult to find because many of them don't advertise. The thieves are very easy to find and may advertise in Yellow Pages and/or local papers. Most of the rogues are after your money but some are sexual perverts, who have a constant supply of new victims.

### **So who are these rogues?**

Well, I'm going to tell you how to recognise them but I'm not going to name them. There are 2 reasons for this. Firstly I don't know who all of them are, and there is no point in only warning you about some of them. And secondly, I don't want to get sued!

**Many of the rogues are so-called model agencies.  
Here are some of their scams!**

**Money to go on their books.**

Model agencies are not allowed to charge you money just to go onto their books but some of them do it anyway.... they may manage to stay just within the law by charging you a fee (sometimes a very high one) for publicity - putting your face on their website or in their brochure, their wallchart or whatever. The way that honest agencies usually work is that they will only charge you a percentage of your earnings (usually around 20-25%) and this is perfectly O.K. The dishonest ones aren't interested in finding you any work so there won't be any earnings for you and they won't be getting any commission - and that's why they want you to pay them up front! **How to check** Don't bother to check, just make sure that you don't pay any money up front for any reason!

**Training Courses.**

You don't need an expensive training course to be a model, either you've got it or you haven't! These courses are a complete waste of your money.

**Premium rate 'phone calls.**

It's illegal to make would-be models use a premium rate phone No. (starting with 090) but some agencies try to get round this by making the models use a premium rate No. once they've registered - usually the calls are from the models asking why they haven't been offered any work yet, and they may be kept hanging on the phone for ages, which will bump up the cost! This may or may not be legal but it is certainly dishonest! We know of one so-called 'model agency' which uses all of the above scams! They charged one model we know £116 to join them, then kept sending her 'special offers' on training courses she didn't need. Then they wrote to tell her that she had won a free model portfolio. It was only the photography that was free and her father ended up paying £500 for the prints - the photos were useless anyway and were more like glamour makeover portraits than portfolio shots. When she rang up to complain she had to use their premium rate No., and as they kept her hanging on and on.... that cost her another £45. This 'agency' doesn't seem to try very hard to get work for their models, and because they offer their models' services at well over twice the normal rate they don't get very much work for their models - but they don't need to find work because they scam their models! This particular 'agency' advertises extensively and are believed to defraud many thousands of models a year!

**Portfolio photos (known in the trade as 'a book').**

Agencies do need to have photos of course, but the dishonest ones will tell you that they should be taken by their own photographer. The photos are usually overpriced and very poor quality. In addition to this they may refuse to let you have any extra prints (or they may charge you a fortune for extra prints) so that you can't take them to other agencies. Some of the more subtle conmen will offer to take the photos 'to help you out' but say that they will be happy to accept suitable photos produced by another professional - but if you actually take them up on that and go to another photographer they will tell you the photos aren't good enough!

**Model assessment**

Here you pay them a fee to be 'assessed' for your suitability as a model. Charging you for this assessment is illegal, so they try to make it legal by taking a couple of snapshots and charging you for the photos instead. How to check. Model assessment is something that all reputable agencies do as a matter of course, and they do it free! Our advice is to avoid anyone who wants to charge you for this.

### **Photographers who run their own agency.**

There are some honest photographers who also run honest model agencies, but unfortunately some photographers start up fake model agencies just to con would-be models into have portfolios produced by them.

On the surface it seems to make sense for photographers to run model agencies but in practice most clients, who are after all professional photographers themselves, are likely to be reluctant to do business with their competitors and may be very wary about letting a model agent who is also a photographer find out about their clients and the work they are doing for them, so it makes sense to make very careful checks into any agency that claims to be a professional photographer. I used to run a model agency myself, mainly because it made good business sense to have as wide a pool of models available to my own business, but because of the problems mentioned above, very little work could be obtained from other photographers.

The owner of one 'agency' has a string of police arrests for fraud and indecent conduct towards models, has various other criminal convictions and has owned a string of Companies which crashed owing money - but he seems to be operating almost within the law and there seems to be nothing that the authorities can do to stop him! How to check. Genuine agencies have a list of genuine clients and will be happy to tell you who they are, so that you can check that the agency does in fact supply models to them (be sure to actually make these checks before making any decisions). The conmen will simply make excuses, usually about confidentiality!

### **Advertising in different areas.**

There's nothing necessarily wrong with advertising for models as such, and nothing wrong with advertising for models who live many miles from the agency that places the adverts - but you should consider the possibility that agencies who advertise outside of their own immediate area may be doing it because they have a bad local reputation. We've heard of one disreputable agency that does this, simply because of the conduct of the photographer - there is less risk of angry fathers or boyfriends calling to visit if they live a long way away!

### **Travelling model recruitment.**

These are people who travel the country holding 'seminars' for would-be models, usually in smart hotels. They advertise in the local papers, get dozens or even hundreds of people along to their 'seminar', pitch a tale of untold fame and fortune, take your money and move on to the next town. **How to check.** Don't bother to check, reputable agencies don't recruit models this way.

### **Someone stops you in the street, a smart shop or whatever.**

...Tells you that you should be a model and are just what they're looking for. This doesn't sound genuine but it might be - several reputable agencies and talent scouts recruit people in this way, we've done it ourselves when we can't find a model for a particular assignment and it could be genuine- but it's more likely to be someone trying to get you into their bed, or to scam you for money.

**How to check.** Don't rely on identification, business cards or whatever, they could be fake. Don't assume that it must be OK if the person who approaches you happens to be the same sex as you. Rely on your common sense and on the presence of a large, male friend. Never go to a hotel room and don't accept anything to drink. Make it clear to the person that you'll be bringing your boyfriend/father with you - no reputable agent or scout will have a problem with that.

### **Passing off.**

This is where a dishonest 'agency' pretends to be someone else. There are a few famous names in modelling - highly respectable and successful agencies known to just

about everyone - and crooks have been known to use the same or a very similar name in order to deceive people. Or they may claim to be a talent scout for the real agency. **How to check.** Look the famous-name agency up in the 'phone book, ring them up and ask them.

### **Model Management**

This seems to be the latest scam, they claim to 'manage' models and to promote them to top agencies, or to be scouts for famous agencies. Perhaps they are trying to get around the Employment Agencies Act, 1973 which is supposed to regulate model agencies. By acting as a management service rather than an agency they may be able to swindle people without falling foul of the regulations that affect agencies.

The popular methods are to advertise in local papers, at Job Centres (how can Job Centres accept such 'job' offers?) and by approaching people in fashionable shops. The scam works well because the 'Scouts' who approach people may themselves be innocent victims who believe that the agency is genuine and because of this they are able to convince the people they approach. They only find out that they have been duping people when their commission cheques bounce! They are themselves then replaced by new victims, after a few weeks the agency closes, reopening immediately under another name but with the same owners. One new 'Model Management Business' is asking for a £35 deposit by credit card which they say will be refunded if you turn up for your 'interview'. If you do turn up you will have to spend all day there and will be pressurised into paying for photos to be taken. A bit like timeshare really....

My standard advice applies to this scam too - DON'T PAY ANYBODY ANYTHING! And anyway, do you really think it's a good idea to give your credit card details to a stranger? I know of one of these 'Model Managers' who hired a studio from a perfectly respectable photographer and produced 'portfolios' for 15 of their victims, all on the same day, at a cost of just under £200 each. Only 1 of their victims had any possible potential as a model and as for the portfolios.... well a good photographer could produce 2 in a full day, certainly not 15.

I don't know whether the portfolio photos were any good because none of the victims seem to have received them!

### **Web-based agencies and listings**

This is where you pay a fee to have either a photo or a webpage on a site. The site may tell you that they get a vast number of 'hits' and that talent scouts and leading agencies as well as photographers are looking for new models and will see your face on their site. Well, maybe they do get a lot of hits - but it's visitors that count and there are always far more hits than visitors. Many of the visitors are just looking for pictures of girls, some of those who are genuinely interested in hiring models may be people who have dubious motives and who would not be accepted by conventional model agencies, and many of the visitors will be too far away from you to be any use - many of them will be in other countries and some will be in other continents!

And anyway, relatively few photographers will book models from a website - these sites, for some reason, seem to attract a lot of unreliable models who are nothing more than timewasters - professional photography is a very expensive business and it's much safer to book models through an agency, because if the model lets the photographer down the agency will almost always be able to find a suitable replacement at short notice. Many of the models who advertise on Internet sites also provide sexual services, so there is a risk that photographers who book them may be expecting more than modelling services.

So you aren't very likely to get bookings from photographers - what about the talent scouts? Well, maybe - but most of the 'scouts' are likely to be scouting for new victims for their own scam!

And the leading agencies who look at the site? Do you believe that leading agencies, who get hundreds of applications from would-be models, will spend their valuable time looking at endless websites?

I think that it may be unfair of me to describe web-based agencies and listings as a scam - but whether or not they set out to deceive people, in my view most of them are usually a waste of money. A few however ([www.onemodelplace.com](http://www.onemodelplace.com) is probably the best known) have been going for years and are highly effective.

### **How do these scams work?**

They work in a number of different ways. Here are a couple of examples, but there are many other ways of separating you from your money!

#### **The photographer with a fake model agency.**

This guy was a high street portrait and wedding photographer with no experience whatever of modelling. Business was bad and he was desperate for money, so he decided to produce some model portfolios. So far so good, but how was he going to find his customers?

He decided to advertise that he had work for part-time models so he put an advert in the local paper. Something like this:

*Models required immediately for fashion and advertising work. No experience needed as full training will be given. Male/female welcome. No age limits. Phone 000 000000.*

The newspaper was a bit suspicious and they asked whether their readers would have to pay anything. He said that it was completely free and sent them a fax confirming this. They ran the advert and he had over 300 'phone calls! He told everyone who rang that he was running a successful model agency, and that he was swamped with work and desperately needed new models. There was nothing to pay and all they had to do was to join.

He made appointments but warned people that only a lucky few would be chosen.

About 140 people kept their appointments, he told every one of them that they were exactly what he was looking for and that they could expect to get lots of modelling work - (although of course he couldn't actually promise anything) - all they needed to do was to sign on the dotted line and give him their model portfolio, which he would get scanned into the computer so that he could send the pictures to his clients.

No portfolio? Not to worry, I can help you out there. The normal price is £350 but as you've got so much potential I'll do it at cost, which is only £175.

105 people believed him and paid £175 each for a portfolio - that's £18,375!

At that time the model agency didn't exist (and more than 5 years on, it still doesn't). He then produced the model portfolios and put in another ad. This one produced a lower response but he was very happy with the result. As time went on his local reputation became worse and worse and he started advertising much further afield. Eventually he produced a website with a few models on it but he never made any attempt to find work for the people who had trusted him.

His latest scam involves offering a free model portfolio to the winners of 'competitions' and a 'half price' portfolio for the runners up - yes, you've guessed it, if you enter the competition you'll be a 'runner up' and you'll be offered a so-called 'half price' portfolio, with the promise of modelling work if you agree.

This man dupes his victims by personal contact, making them trust him and believe in him. The firm below operates differently and avoids all direct contact with their victims.

#### **The well-known national agency**

They advertise just about everywhere and they also have a very good website. When you ring them up they will send you a very smart information pack, full of half-promises of

success to come. They tell you that you don't need to spend any money on photographs, a couple of snapshots will be fine - Just 'apply' and if you are chosen you will only be asked to pay a small fee for registration.

So you send in your application and a few days later you'll get a letter from them saying that you have been chosen by their selection panel. All you have to do now is to send them a cheque for your registration. If you send them a cheque (and thousands do) you will receive a little 'identity card'. You will also get a 'Model Hotline' telephone number which you are encouraged to use whenever you want to ring them - it is of course a premium rate line.

If you have a suspicious mind you may think that once you have paid them you will never hear from them again, but you will! You will get constant mailshots offering you training courses, portfolio photographs and seminars - all of which are supposed to increase your chances of getting work.

### **How do these scam agencies get away with it?**

Mainly because the victims are isolated from each other and never find out that there are hundreds or even thousands of other victims. So, they pay their money and wait for the work to flood in. And they wait and wait. Any many of them just forget about it and do nothing. Others may ring the agency up to ask what's happening. "Well, there's been some interest in you but no firm bookings yet. I'm sure that something will come up soon" "But didn't you say that you were going to put my picture on your website?"

"And we will, but to keep the clients interested we rotate the models. That way everyone gets a fair chance, but your face can't be on view all the time - one thing that would help you a lot is some really great portfolio shots - you're in luck, because we've got a fantastic new photographer and we'll give you a special discount price...."

After a while, the average would-be model just assumes that she's ugly, or boring, and that the agency is doing its best. She doesn't realise that she's been scammed.

Or maybe she does, but doesn't get around to doing anything about it.

Or maybe she complains to the police, only to be told that it's nothing to do with them.

Or to the DTI (The Department of Trade and Industry, who are supposed to regulate model agencies) but she loses interest by the time their local inspector, who is probably rushed off his feet, gets in touch.

### **Should agencies be licenced?**

As the law stands at the moment there is no need for model agencies to be registered, which means that anybody at all can pretend to be a genuine model agency. And even if an agency is registered the registration will only be with a trade association and it means nothing at all, because the organisations they register with have no official standing and they may have been set up just to give an air of respectability to dodgy 'agencies' - and may even be run by the same people who run the 'agency'!

One well-known 'Trade Association' will give you most of the advice that I've given you here, which makes them sound very respectable - but they give just one piece of extra advice. They will tell you to register with one of their approved agencies. That sounds fine, the only problem is that their 'approved' agencies are agencies that have paid them for their approval, between them most seem to practice all of the scams outlined on this page!

### **How do you tell who's honest and who isn't?**

The answer is simple enough - don't pay anybody anything - the honest agencies are just like any other reputable employment agency - they make their money by earning it and don't need to steal it! The conmen will accept anyone who wants to be a model, but the clever ones will tell you that only a few are good enough - and then when they 'interview' you and tell you that you are 'just what we're looking for' they hope you'll feel flattered and part with your money. Don't pay them anything!

Be especially suspicious of 'agencies' or photographers who have very smart literature or expensive premises - someone has to pay for it, and that someone is you!

You should also be careful about 'agencies' who are a little too eager to help and please you - genuine agencies get a lot of applications from models and they simply don't have time to ring people back or to put themselves out in any way.

Anyone who tries any of the tricks mentioned above is probably trying to rob you, but you should remember that the conmen who get our industry a bad name are very good at looking and sounding genuine. You should be especially cautious of over-friendly salesman types who flatter you and tell you that "Although I can't promise anything of course, I think you'll do really well". These people may also claim to supply top models to top clients and to magazines such as Vogue, and they may have pictures of top models on their walls. Just ask yourself why they are so interested in representing you - a new and totally unknown model! Generally, small agencies don't have top models and the top agencies that do have them will only take on a very small number of newcomers.

A very small number of people may complain if they've been ripped off, so you may want to check with the agencies they complain to.... You could try the police, Trading Standards, Citizens Advice and the Department of Trade & Industry. There may be a bit of luck involved because some of these organisations may not be as efficient or as helpful as you might expect. Don't expect them to actually give you any information, they are not allowed to do that, just explain the situation to them and ask them whether they have ever heard of the agency. Listen carefully to the answer, listen to any pauses and hesitation. You can be pretty sure that if they have heard of them they have received complaints!

### **Should you assume that everyone who asks for money up front is dishonest?**

No, because there can be two sides to every story and it's possible that some perfectly respectable modelling agencies feel that they need to charge people money up front to protect themselves from the large number of timewasters who approach model agencies, get free photos taken and then decide that they don't want to be a model after all, who fail to turn up for their appointments and generally take advantage of people who are trying to help them. I know of 4 A.M.A. members who charge money up front for child models.

Only you can decide whether you should pay to be a model, all we are trying to do here is to point out that not all agencies will charge you and that most of those who do so are likely to be dishonest.

### **Who can you complain to if you've been ripped off?**

Model Agencies act as Employment Agencies and as such are required by law to operate in accordance with the provisions of The Employment Agencies Act. The regulatory authority is The Department of Trade & Industry and you can complain by going on to their website, <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/agency/complaint.htm>. The rip-off merchants rely on the fact that most people don't bother to complain, but you should complain - the authorities can't take action unless you do! We've heard of an agency in South Yorkshire that has just been closed down, but it took 5 years of complaints of rip-offs, fraud and indecent assaults before a victim had the courage to give evidence in Court, and we've heard of another, against which there have been a very large number of similar complaints but not one of the victims has yet signed a statement! Please complain, and follow the complaint through, if you have had a similar experience.

**There are 2 possible reasons for complaint** - If you have been ripped off for money you can complain either to Trading Standards or to the DTI or both. In theory you can also complain to the police, but unfortunately they normally take the view that this is a civil and not a criminal matter and they just aren't interested - perhaps they would take a

different view if a member of their own family was swindled or if they knew just how many people are being cheated every day!

And if you have suffered from misconduct (usually by a photographer) you should complain to both the police and the DTI. Again, there seems to be an element of pot luck as far as the police are concerned. It's difficult to blame them, they must get heartily sick about all the people who complain but who then drop their complaint.

TV consumer programmes such as 'Watchdog' also take an interest in model agencies. They did a report recently on a very large agency that has a bad reputation. You could ring them up and ask them about it - unfortunately they have now removed the page on their website that identified this agency. You can however look on their website, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/business/features/easymoney/modelling\\_agencies.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/business/features/easymoney/modelling_agencies.shtml) for their advice on modelling. Please note that we are including this link only for your convenience. You must draw your own conclusions.

### **There's one born every minute....**

There was one would-be model who got ripped off by 3 separate rogue agencies. Then she came to see me and I told her the honest truth - she simply didn't have what it takes to be a model and no reputable agency would take her on. She then said that she had an appointment to see another agency. I happen to know all about this agency and warned her, very clearly, that it was totally fraudulent and that the man who runs it is a criminal who has a large number of convictions.

Incredible though it seems, she rang me a couple of weeks later to say that she had kept her appointment, that the agency had taken her on, she had paid the man nearly £200 for a model portfolio and he had then indecently assaulted her! I told her to go to the police, but she said that she wasn't prepared to go to Court to give evidence - and did I know of any other agencies she could try? A bit like 'X factor' where all the experts tell someone that they have absolutely no talent and should forget about it and they then say that they will practice a bit more and come back next year!

Right - is that clear? Do you now know how to avoid the sharks? Of course you do, but you need to use common sense as well as to know what to guard against! There will be new scams, new ways of separating you from your money (or your clothes) and you just have to remember that reputable agencies won't charge you a penny and won't try to exploit you in any other way.

So now you know that you need to be very careful with agencies, model managers and photographers, but you will need a photographer before you can get started, so how do you choose one?

Well, for a start there are a lot of perfectly honest photographers who think that they know how to produce a model portfolio but they really don't have a clue.

For your photos to get you into a decent agency, and to then get you work from their clients, they need to look as if they've come out of a fashion magazine. And only a specialist photographer, who shoots fashion regularly, can do that!

### **What should you get when you have your portfolio done?**

Well, the ideal is a proper portfolio (or 'book') but a 'proper' portfolio is photos or press cuttings from your previous jobs. The pictures will show you in a variety of clothing, with various products, taken by a number of different photographers in different locations - it will show your range, your versatility and the different looks that you can achieve. This is the ideal, and once you have completed a few modelling assignments the pictures from your photoshoots will replace most or all of the portfolio photos that you already have.

You should avoid the many 'Portfolio Specialists' who make a very good living by producing 'sausage factory' portfolios that are totally useless. They'll take a few shots of

you in standard (and downright ridiculous) poses against a standard studio background and you will be in and out of there in about 20 minutes flat. You'll end up with 12 or 18 prints (nowhere enough to send to a number of agencies) and it will cost you about the same as the good professionals charge. These portfolios are totally useless!

### **And if you can't afford to go to a professional?**

Well, there's something called TFP (or time for prints) and it will cost you nothing at all. You will need to find a photographer who is willing to do this, s/he will photograph you and in return will give you a few prints. The difficulty with this arrangement is that the photographer may be doing it for experience, in which case you may not get very good photos out of it.

Some of the TFP people are good though, they may be highly skilled photographers who are able and prepared to do a proper job in return for your time and cooperation. I provide TFP myself, very occasionally - the model ends up with a complete professional portfolio and in return spends a whole day here being photographed with a range of products. The photos will eventually be used in our client's brochures, so it's a win-win situation for everyone.

I have also written detailed tutorials on both portrait and glamour photography, and I provided a TFP portfolio for the models used in them so that I could get some shots showing how to light and pose people.

Mostly though, TFP helps the photographer more than the model. A lot of new models seem to go the rounds of photographers who supply TFP and end up with an enormous number of photos, many of which are useless! My advice, if you're short of money, is to go to a few agencies to find out whether or not someone thinks you can make it. If the answer is 'Yes' then save up your money, if the answer is 'No' save your money instead.

### **A few things you need to know when you have your portfolio produced**

1. Makeover. Don't have a makeover done. It may make you look good and feel good but it will stop you getting work. Photographers need to see you both as you are and as you can be, and a makeover will hide the real you.
2. Makeup. As you know, you can change your whole look with the help of makeup, so take it with you when you go to your photoshoot. Some shots should be with light makeup, some with heavier makeup and some with none at all.
3. Stubble (yes, this bit is just for men!) Don't shave for a day or so before the shoot and take your razor with you. This will help the photographer to get different looks out of you.
4. Clothes. You need as wide a range of different types of clothes as possible, they will alter your look completely.
5. Toys. If the model is a young child, take his/her favourite toys along too.

### **Now that you have your photos, it's time to find an agency....**

If an agency is interested in taking you on they will ask to see your portfolio shots (known in the trade as 'Your Book'. Send them 3 or 4, showing you with totally different looks. Don't send the whole set, you may not get them back. Once you have been accepted and have agreed terms, send them a complete set. Some will want them as prints, but most will be happier if they are on disk.

### **Types of modelling:**

#### **Catwalk**

This is modelling clothes at fashion shows, and it's a very specialised field. In theory the minimum height requirement is 5'7" for women and 6'0" for men but in reality they are usually looking for people who are much taller than this.

#### **High fashion**

This what most models are looking for, but it is hard to get. High fashion is modelling designer clothes and cosmetics. To get this type of work you need to have outstanding looks, a first-class agency and a lot of experience.

### **Catalogue.**

This is the nitty gritty of modelling and usually involves modelling clothes and accessories for chain stores, mail order catalogues and so on. This type of modelling is open to just about everyone, regardless of size, age or race. The days of size 8 18-year old models modelling clothes for size 18 60-year olds have, thankfully, long gone!

### **Lingerie.**

This is really catalogue modelling and I only mention it separately because, unlike other catalogue modelling, size is very important. For some reason, nearly all of the underwear photographed is size 10. More specifically, the bra size is 34B - so if you're not 34B there will be very little lingerie work available to you. For some strange reason, size-specific products are not unusual. Wedding dresses, for example, nearly always fit size 12 models!

### **Glamour.**

Glamour has a bad name because it is often a euphemism for porn, but glamour is really where the model is photographed for his or her looks and there is no product as such. Some glamour photography is fully-clothed. If someone wants to book you for glamour photography find out in advance exactly what you will be expected to do and get it in writing. There are specialised agencies for glamour modelling - send me an email if you want details

### **Amateur.**

Some amateur photographers book models for perfectly legitimate reasons, e.g. to improve their photography skills. Generally speaking, if you are interested in this type of modelling it is safer to approach camera clubs than to deal with individuals.

### **Figure.**

This is 'fine art' nude photography, which does not have a sexual content and where the (usually amateur) photographer wants to depict the human form in an artistic way.

### **Promotion.**

This usually involves working on exhibition stands and similar, being pleasant to visitors and making the stand look more attractive! It is not really modelling as such but models are often used because they have attractive looks and a good personality.

### **Men's magazine.**

This is pornography, or something very close to it.

### **Video.**

As above.

### **Continental:**

Similar to men's magazine, but more so, usually includes the use of sex toys.

### **Your safety.**

Nothing in life is completely safe, but I have never heard of any problems encountered by models who have been photographed by genuine commercial photographers. You should bear in mind though that not all of the people who claim to be commercial photographers are genuine - photography provides sexual predators with an unparalleled opportunity to meet new victims and some people may set up a 'business' to take advantage of this, in much the same way that perverts who prey on children may try to get jobs in children's homes. Glamour and amateur photographers could have their own agenda and sensible precautions are essential!

Make it clear from the outset that your father or brother will be going with you. No reputable photographer will object to this. Always make sure that you know where the photography will take place and that you have a landline 'phone number there, not just a mobile. Arrange with a parent or friend (parents are usually more reliable) that you will ring them both when you arrive and leave and will ring them at prearranged times, such

as once per hour on the hour. You will probably get absorbed in the modelling work and may forget to ring, so make it clear to this person that s/he must ring you if you don't ring in as arranged. Have a prearranged codeword for emergency use. If you use the prearranged code word your friend/parent must 'phone the police immediately and tell them exactly where you are and that you need immediate assistance. Personally I have only ever heard of one situation in which a model had to get help - the contact was her mother, who rang the police immediately. Apparently there was some confusion because the police said that she had told them that her daughter was a police officer - anyway, whatever was said, the police arrived in less than 1 minute! **Of course, none of this will be any help to you unless your contact is 100% reliable.**

Don't be paranoid about your personal safety, just take sensible precautions so that you don't need to worry!

### **How much will you earn?**

Your agency will set the fees and will deduct a percentage for their own costs and profit. If you are advertising your modelling services directly (not through an agency) I suggest the following rates, which can be increased when you have gained experience.

Fashion modelling: £25 per hour, minimum booking period of 2 hours, ½ day £70, full day £120.

Glamour modelling (clothed) as above

Glamour modelling (underwear or bikini) £35 per hour, ½ day £100, full day £150

Glamour modelling (topless) £40 per hour, ½ day £120

Glamour modelling (nude) £50 per hour, ½ day £150

Figure modelling (nude) £40 per hour, ½ day £120.

Advertising/editorial photography for leading magazines pays from £1000-£7000 per day for good models - the figures above are for 'unknown' models. 'Supermodels' (who are about as rare as premier division football players) earn far more.

### **Travelling and other expenses**

If working through an agency they will have their own rates for this, if booking work other than through an agency I suggest that up to 1 hour of travelling (in total) is not charged for, outside of this you may be able to charge half of your normal hourly rate. Transport costs, if charged at all, are charged at actual cost. If working into the evening you should be able to claim taxi fares home, public transport for travelling to the job. This is all a bit vague, because there are no 'rules' as such.

### **Will you need to take your clothes off?**

Except for Lingerie fashion, most fashion photography is fully clothed. With lingerie fashion you will not be photographed nude but you must expect to get changed without leaving the set if you are one of several models- there simply isn't time for models to disappear into a changing room to change when a large number of shots are being taken. The normal arrangement is for a female assistant to stand just out of shot and hand out changes of clothes. Nobody there will even glance at your body and most people don't have a problem with this type of modelling, but if you do have a problem with it don't take on a lingerie job! A changing room (or at the very least, a screen) should always be available but the waste of time involved if you insist on using it may be enough to make sure that you never get booked again. This does not apply (in our own studio) where only one model is involved, because the process of getting changed is much quicker - although most of our models don't bother to use the changing facilities.

Most advertising & commercial photography is also fully clothed, but if you look in almost any magazine you could find adverts which do have a nude or partly-nude model there, to catch the eye. These photographs are never explicit and would not be published if

they actually showed anything. There are no clear rules about advertising content, like most things the advertising styles and content change frequently. With every modelling job offered to you, you really must find out exactly what is involved before deciding whether you want the job.

Perhaps I ought to mention that there is absolutely no sexual content in model photography - to me at least, sex is not about nudity, it is about touching and being touched. This simply doesn't happen in professional photography and so the problem does not exist, either for the models or for the photographer.

### **Your responsibilities as a model.**

You are free to accept or reject any modelling job offered to you, but once you have accepted it you **MUST** carry it out. Failure to turn up or failure to arrive on time will mean that you will never work for that photographer or that agency again. We have booked models ourselves who have later cancelled because they have had a better offer or because they have found that they could not get time off their normal work after all. These people **NEVER** get a second chance to work for us and rarely get a second chance to work for their agency - we (and most other photographers) automatically email all model agencies to tell them about a model who has let us down.

If you book your work through an agency the agency is entitled to earn commission on all earnings with that client. The client may try to 'cut out' the agency by trying to book you direct for future work. Don't do it, it is dishonest and will get you dropped by the agency. By all means make an arrangement to come back another day directly with the photographer, but then you must immediately ring the agency and tell them about the arrangement so that they can invoice the photographer.

### **Your appearance**

You will be booked on your appearance, and the decision to book you will have been made from the photographs you have provided. You **MUST** make sure these photos show you as you really look - if you change your hair colour or style, grow or shave off a beard, put on or lose a lot of weight etc you may no longer be what is required for that job! As an example of this, many studio-shot fashion shots are now photographed against a plain background and 'cut out' on computer. This is fairly straightforward for models who have straight hair, but very difficult with 'frizzy' hair and if you turn up with frizzy hair when they expect straight hair then you should expect to be sent home again!

### **Your name**

Many models adopt a professional, or modelling name. The reason for this (apart from separating your private and your modelling life) is that if someone rings up and asks for you by your modelling name you will know immediately that it's a work enquiry.

### **Keeping it legal**

There are legal constraints on what a photographer can or cannot do, as a model you are unlikely to do anything illegal.

A photographer **MUST** obtain a 'model release' signed by the model (or parent if the model is a child) and unless s/he does so the photographs cannot normally be published. A 'standard' model release form is attached to these notes. You **MUST** sign it, but you should make sure that the use of the photographs is limited to purposes you have already agreed.

A photographer cannot photograph a child who is being paid unless s/he has a licence to do so issued by the local authority.

A photographer cannot take 'indecent' photographs of a child (under 18). Nobody knows what is meant by 'indecent' because each case is assessed on its merits by the Courts. Personally I will not photograph any child who is not fully dressed and will not take photographs that can be considered to be sexually provocative, but that is my personal view only.

Parents and legal guardians of children have a legal duty to chaperone them on modelling assignments and (in my view) they have a moral duty to be present at all times. No reputable photographer will ever object to a parent being present at all times - personally I INSIST that the parent is present AT ALL TIMES, for my own protection as well as for that of the child.

Modelling assignments for children must be made with the parent/guardian and not with the model.

Hours of work are restricted for children. Details are available from your local authority and will be written into the licence held by the photographer.

### **And now some answers to the questions you haven't even asked....**

#### **Is there modelling work for people of all ages?**

Most of the modelling work is carried out by people aged from around 16-25, but most of the models are also in this age range and there can be plenty of work for both older and younger people

**Children (aged under 16)** are needed and there are specialised agencies who cater for them (by the way, you don't need professional photos if the child is aged under about 3, a snapshot will do but it must be up to date) However, child protection legislation makes it very difficult for photographers who employ paid child models and so many of them prefer to use their own kids, or their client's kids, or some other kid, where there is either no payment at all or the payment is 'under the counter' and not through an agency.

The most difficult age is girls aged 13-15. Most of them look much older than their age and this stops them getting work because, again due to child protection legislation, most photographers would much rather employ an 18-year old than a younger girl who looks 17. Girls in this age group are one of the prime targets for scam model agencies.

**Models over 30** are in great demand, mainly because they are in short supply! We are constantly experiencing problems finding models in this age group.

**Models over 50** are almost nonexistent! And this is a great pity because the 'Grey Market' is huge.

**Plus Models** are people who are overweight. There is very little work for overweight people but there are very few overweight models, so it tends to balance out fairly well.

**Character models** are people who look... well, they don't look like models. People who are grossly overweight, or who are very heavily tattooed, or who look as if they've escaped from a 1950s gangster movie! There are specialist agencies for these models, such as 'Ugly' (for men) and 'Pretty Ugly' (for women) in London.

**Black models** are greatly in demand, especially in areas in which most people are white. In London however there are plenty of black models.

### **How difficult is it to get started?**

It can be quite difficult - you may have a great 'look', be super-reliable, sensible, fully committed and have a great personality, but the truth is that clients often trust their photographers to make the decisions about which models to book, and the photographers usually like to play safe and to recommend models who they know are suitable for the job.

What this means is that once you are 'in' with a few photographers you can expect to get regular repeat work, but until that happens the work will be very slow.

### **How easy is it to get dropped by a photographer?**

Photographers are business people, and like any business, once they have found a good supplier (in this case a model or a model agency) they will stick with them if they possibly can, but if there are any problems they will use someone else in future.

The main issues are reliability and punctuality, but there are other ways that you can lose your customers. For example, we had a girl here (once) who just wouldn't stop talking about her pay rates. I dropped gentle hints at first and when that didn't work I told her to shut up. That didn't stop her either and so when I got the usual follow-up call from her agency to check that everything had gone O.K. I made the strongest comment that I possibly could - "We got some good shots of her but I won't be booking her again" When they asked why I told them, and they dropped her from their books.

Why did her big mouth cause problems? Well, let's say that she was paid £100 for her work. Her agency charged commission of 25%, which means that they charged me £133.33. As a photographer I have to make a profit on every aspect of my service, so I charged her time out at £266 to my clients. My clients were an advertising agency and they charged my services, including the model, to their clients at double the cost. So the model cost the clients £532 - which they were happy about until she told them that she was being paid £100!

And then there are the models who talk about their private lives. This can be a problem too, perhaps because of the generation gap between the model and the clients. Depending on what is said, the client may be shocked and decide that the photographer has recommended a model who they are not happy with. This may not seem to be very important but consider that famous entertainers and sportsmen often lose their very lucrative sponsorship deals for the same type of reason - clients drop them because of the way they live their private lives.

And then there is modelling experience. Everyone has to start somewhere, but the clients expect the model to have some experience. There was one shoot where the model agency had told me, very honestly, that the model the client was interested in had never actually done any modelling work. I asked them to ask her to ring me, which she did. I told her very clearly that it was a simple job and that she would cope perfectly well without experience but that she must not tell anyone that this was her first modelling job. Half way through the shoot my client 'had a word' with me - the model had told him that this was her first job. He was furious! I had to send the model home, book another model and postpone the shoot to another day. All this cost me a lot of money. Needless to say, the model never got another chance!

### **You've mentioned photographers who have criminal convictions - is there any way of finding out about a photographers past?**

Yes and no. No you can't find out because criminal records are not public property. But photographers, just like teachers, nurses and other people who are in positions of trust,

can apply for a certificate that states that they do NOT have a criminal past. You can ask to see this certificate. Unlike teachers and nurses, the scheme is voluntary for photographers and you should not assume that someone is a criminal just because he doesn't have a certificate. And you can't assume that the photographer is respectable even if he does have a certificate, because, as I've said earlier, most people do not complain and even if they do complain the police may decide not to take any action. And if they do take action, the case may still not get to Court.

### **You've mentioned timewasters - what do you mean by this?**

Timewasters are the people who think that they want to be models but who just aren't serious and they waste everyone's time and get models a bad name.

As an example, a small agency we know used to send out application forms if people emailed asking for them. They sent out thousands, at a very high postage cost, but very few were ever returned. To make it cheaper they changed it to a downloadable application form. Again, thousands were downloaded but hardly any were returned. They finally cracked it - now people have to send them a stamped addressed envelope. They get the same number of forms returned but send out far less!

And then there are the people who make an appointment to see them but don't turn up, or who turn up late.

And then there are the people who they take on, but when they ring them with a job offer their mobile is switched off. And there are the people who do answer their phone but when they're offered a job they say "No, I don't want to do modelling no more"!

And then there is the (ex) model who we had booked through a local agency. She rang up the evening before the shoot and said "I can't come tomorrow so I'll come the day after instead". Her agency supplied us with a replacement model, sacked her and sent out the usual email to all other model agencies.

And then there are the emails that I get almost every day, something like "Hi I'm Jenny and I want to be a model please ring me on 077....." Do they really think that I'm going to ring them on their mobiles?

### **Do you need to sign a model release form?**

Yes, if the photos are to be put to any commercial use a model release form is essential. Glamour models often charge extra for this but with all other types of modelling it is part of the deal and there is no extra pay.

Here is a typical model release form. It gives the photographer and the client the rights they need, without taking away the model's rights.

#### **MODEL RELEASE**

Full name of model:

Photographers:  
Commercial Photography, 1A Mill Street, Bradford BD6 3BQ

Client:

Date(s) of photography:

Purpose of photography:  
Catalogue, website, advertising and promotional use

Type of modelling work:  
Clothed fashion and clothing

Model agency:

Fee:

I accept payment of the agreed sum and hereby agree that the client, photographer, model agency and/or any person, firm or company acting on their behalf is entitled to use any photographs taken of me on this date for the purposes described above, and that I will not be entitled to receipt of any further payments in respect of the normal and proper commercial use of these photographs.

I further agree that any or all of these photographs may be manipulated or enhanced by computer. The purpose of the computer enhancement will be limited to changing backgrounds and improving the visual effects of the photography.

Signed

Date

Witnessed by:

### **A warning for parents**

One more thing, I've put this almost at the end because it doesn't belong anywhere else, but I think it's important:

We all know that children are at risk from strangers and that there are some perverted people around who will take advantage of them - just take a look at the letters below, both of which arrived this week!

Hello there! I'm writing a short letter to ask about your modelling, I', a 13 year old girl and really want to be a model! People have said that I could do modelling.  
I'm 5' and 6 1/2 stone. I have blond shoulder length hair and light blue eyes. How can I get my photos taken and where? I have tried modelling so many times and each one costs a lot! I live in ---- and there is not much hope but I can travel because I've been to London before. Please, please get in touch with me with the address above or email= ----- Phone (mobile) ----- So that I know what I need to know. Please take notice, your my only hope!

And this one:

Model agency,  
I'm writing to tell you I am wanting to be a model, and I am wanting a photographer!! I hope I have what you are looking for! I am 14 and 5'3 and size 10 in clothes 34D in bra. I have been wanting to be a model since I was a little girl. I got your advertisement from the internet. I live in -- -- and I am willing to travel to model. If you could just please ring me on ---- or write back. My address: -----  
Love -----

p.s. I really want to be a model and will do anything please give me a chance

I never reply to letters from children, I simply send them back, addressed to "The parents of" because I think that the parents should be aware of the risks their children are taking. As a parent myself I know of the need to balance freedom and independence with supervision and control and have no real solutions to offer, but if either of my daughters had wanted to model I think I would have warned them against contacting people in this way.

Further info: <http://www.safemodelling.org.uk>