

MARKETING

# What's Driving the Model Casting Boom

A wider variety of people are becoming models today, and brands need more models in order to create an endless amount of assets. But this surge has brought increased competition along with it.



There's a surge in demand for models from all sorts of backgrounds. (Getty Images)

By **MELISSA MAGSAYSAY**

31 August 2022

**BoF PROFESSIONAL**

## KEY INSIGHTS

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- Models today no longer have to conform to the traditional restrictions on the jobs, opening up the profession to people of a variety of sizes, heights and backgrounds.
- In turn, brands are seeking to cast a greater number of models in order to meet the demand for a wide variety of assets, from print campaigns to social media ads.

- The increase in opportunities has led to more competition and at times, diluted rates.
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Nearly a decade ago, when plus-size model Ryn Higgins was in the early days of her career, she would pray to be called for a casting while working as a nanny. Fast forward to today, she submits an average of three self tape auditions to casting agents daily and darts around town to fittings for clients who are looking to add plus sizes to their range.

Higgins' career has benefitted from a casting boom for models, with more opportunities opening up to a much wider swath of people.

In a direct response to consumer demand for increased diversity, today's models are more representative of society, no matter if they're fronting a large-scale campaign or appearing in an Instagram ad. The need for greater representation has challenged the definition of who can be a model, with fashion's historically tall and thin measurements now sharing the spotlight with fuller figures and shorter heights, as well as a wider variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. **Individuality, a compelling backstory or passion for advocacy** hold just as much weight as so-called "perfect" proportions or razor-sharp cheekbones.

The casting boom is largely fuelled by the fact that brands are churning out assets at a faster pace than ever before, thanks to the need for a constant stream of a variety of digital ads and social media content. But the implications of this swell in demand are potentially less positive for a model's income. More models mean that competition has climbed, with some models willing to take lower rates or absorb travel costs in order to get in front of a brand. Brands, as well, are stretching budgets to hire models not just for ad campaigns, but also e-commerce, influencer and social media content.

"I think it's harder to be a model these days, in terms of being able to achieve the same level of income as those in the past." Says Daniel Thomas Jones, co-founder and director of London-based modelling agency Chapter Management. "That's not taking away the achievements from models and agents in the past, I just think that with all the social media influencers, street casting, and the more prolific use of musicians and actors, the standard model is up against a wider pool of competition."

## More Castings, More Assets

Brands today are looking to create imagery that is designed to target specific demographics and can capture attention online, meaning it often has a limited shelf life. That in turn increases the volume of assets needed and the number of models that must be cast in order to meet the demand.

"This need for assets is insatiable," says Ben Sealey, the founder and CEO of Cast Partner, a casting agency with offices in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Mexico City and Mumbai. "And the lifespan of an asset could be as short as a day as far as digital is concerned, at least. So, there is huge growth, a lot of direct-to-consumer stuff that we do, and it shows no signs of letting up."

Sealey added that Cast Partner has seen a business benefit of the increased demand for models. booking

It's not just the amount of assets brands are looking for that's grown, also what each asset entails. Sealey points to the more-inclusive beauty industry as an example, noting that a brand today launching a new foundation would include 50 shades where they once had 10.

"We're booking 50 women to match every single skin tone," he said. "In the old days, that brand would pay a few models. They are now paying 50." He adds that the casting boom is most significant in the mid-tier market with companies like Gap, Banana Republic, Nike, Adidas and Walmart generating a massive amount of work.

A more virtual-heavy casting process has also opened up opportunities geographically. Lizzy Weinraub, Cast Partner's senior vice president, west coast, points a campaign the agency cast for lingerie brand ThirdLove, where they were seeking women to represent 80 different bra sizes. "We were finding people from all over the place and they were sending in self tapes, women talking about the trials and tribulations of buying bras. It was really interesting to watch the casting as a whole."

## Budgets Stretched

There's more opportunity for a wider variety of people to become models, but also more competition. To mitigate this, some models are covering their own travel expenses in order to get in front of a client.

"If we can get a model in the door and the brand is able to sell off the model, we can increase the rate based on the model's performance and their sales after a period of time," said Sydney Garrison, an agent at Los Angeles-based Scout Models. "Clients generally don't want to see talent over their budget. I always present the opportunity and let the model choose. Work begets work."

"Money has had to go a lot further," added Jones. "Budgets that brands used to have for advertising campaigns have now been cut to add in social activations and appearance fees."

Jones said that the primary reason for the decrease in model rates is the rise of street casting — which sees models cast not via traditional agency routes, but rather by finding "real people" on social media. Not only will street-cast models often work for a lower pay day, they also can be based anywhere, widening the area where brands are looking.

"It's super, super competitive in every market." Says Garrison, "Now that casting agents and producers are able to go on social media and pluck people from everywhere, some models are willing to fly themselves in for a local rate. The work is there, but the model's rates can be diluted because of people willing to take a lower rate."

According to Sealey, rates for models who are street cast ranges from \$1500 to \$5000, which includes the shoot and usage rights. For those cast for their expertise outside of modelling — **someone with another job that offers cachet and influence, like a CEO or chef** — a job can command up to \$25,000 and up for a shoot and usage rights.

“The bottom hasn’t gotten lower and I don’t think the top has gotten much higher.” Says Weinraub about model rates over the last decade. “But there’s a lot more work and it’s covering more people, models plus real people, plus the specialty people that we are finding that speak well to a brand’s overall goals and character.”

For those that have built a career in the industry, today’s stakes offer benefits and disadvantages.

“I certainly have benefited from a more inclusive world,” said Higgins. “But I had to hold on to a side hustle much longer than I wanted with the growing marketplace. Brands will always pour money (in some form or another) into marketing and that will always be up for grabs.”

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