

Show Biz and Your Cat

Does your pet have what it takes to make it big on television? A trainer shares his advice.

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Morris and his kin make it look easy, but the sad truth is that most cats don't have what it takes to make it big in commercials, say the nation's top trainers.

Even if your pet has the right look, it may not have the demeanor or training to perform complicated tricks on cue in front of a large, bustling crew. Cats that do are rare and in great demand.

"It's very difficult for the average pet to break into commercials," confirms John Baldwin, a trainer with Critters of the Cinema, a Los Angeles-based animal talent company. "Just as actors have agents, so do animals in the form of established trainers. That's who casting directors turn to when they need an animal for a commercial or motion picture.

"In most cases, a production company or advertising agency will call us or another established trainer and ask for a selection of pictures, from which they'll choose the animals they want to use. This way they know the animals will be able to do what's needed of them."

Location is also very important. Most big-name trainers are located in New York or Los Angeles, where most commercials are filmed. If you live outside these areas, the chances of commercial success for you and your pet lessen.

"The only time we use private cats is if a production wants a specific breed that we don't have," notes Karen Thomas, who works with Baldwin at Critters of the Cinema. "We then go to our files of private cat owners we know or have been referred to, and call them."

But all is not lost. National television commercials are probably an unrealistic goal, but that doesn't mean you can't have some fun doing local TV ads.

"I would suggest making a short video of your cat especially if it does tricks and sending it, along with still photos and related information, to area advertising agencies," says nationally renowned animal trainer Scott Hart.

"Local companies, such as car dealers and furniture stores, are more likely to use local talent, including animals. It's one way to break into the business."