

A Quick Guide to Agents for Lighting & Video Designers

For designers stepping into bigger contracts, transfers and recorded work

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As your career develops, you may find yourself working on productions that go beyond an initial run — touring, transferring, being revived, or increasingly being “captured” for streaming, cinema release or other recorded formats.

At some point, you may also start to hear people talk about designers “having an agent”.

This short guide is simply here to explain what an agent can do in our world, and why some designers find that support helpful — especially as contracts and rights become a bit more complicated.

What is an agent?

A design agent is someone who helps designers with the business side of the job.

They might support you with things like:

- transfers, remounts and future use
- negotiating fees and royalties
- contract wording and billing
- invoicing and payment schedules
- “capture” agreements for streaming or broadcast
- international work and tax considerations

Do I need an agent?

Not necessarily — some designers never have one, and do just fine.

However, as your career expands and the scale of your work grows, it can be worth having someone alongside you to support you with contracts, negotiations, and making sure you’re being offered fair terms.

Don’t feel like you need to rush into choosing an agent. Take your time, and think about curating a relationship that genuinely works for you — someone you can have open conversations with about your work and where you’d like it to go. Remember: the agent works for you, not the other way around.

Commission and Fees

Agents are usually paid through a commission, taken as a percentage of the designer's fee or royalty income. This is often in the region of 10–15%, though arrangements vary.

It's worth understanding early on what the commission covers, when it applies (for example, on royalties or additional use), and how invoicing will be handled. Most agents will invoice production on your behalf, deduct their commission, and then pass the remaining fee on to you.

As with all parts of the relationship, a straightforward conversation at the beginning helps avoid confusion later.

An agent's job is to help secure the best possible deal for you — whether that's around fees, royalties, transfers or “capture” — and it's in their interest to make sure your work is properly valued.

Sometimes it can also be helpful to have a professional buffer between you (the designer) and the producer, particularly when conversations become more complex or commercially sensitive.

There's no single “right time” to have an agent— it really depends on the kind of work you're doing, and what support you feel would be useful.

How do you get an agent?

There isn't one set route, and most agents don't take on designers through open applications. More often, it happens gradually, as your work and career develop.

Designers are more likely to start working with an agent when they:

- have built up a body of professional work
- are stepping into larger commercial contracts
- are entering situations involving royalties, transfers or recorded media
- feel they'd benefit from someone in their corner for negotiations

Why agents matter more now: “capture”, streaming and new markets

Work that used to exist only in the room may now be streamed, broadcast, released in cinemas, archived for future commercial use, or distributed internationally.

In that slightly tricky landscape, an agent can be a really helpful buffer — someone who can handle the more awkward negotiations professionally, while allowing you to keep a good working relationship with the production team.

Final Thought

Having an agent is one form of professional support — not a requirement, and not a marker of success.

Some designers find representation invaluable as work becomes more complex, particularly around royalties, transfers and “capture”, while others prefer to manage these conversations directly throughout their careers.

As with many things in our industry, there are no hard and fast rules, and different Professional Members will have different experiences and opinions — which is part of the richness of working in a creative space.

If you'd like to talk further about agents, representation, or navigating contracts as your work develops, we'd encourage you to reach out informally to a fellow ALPD member, or contact the ALPD office for guidance and signposting.

The most important thing is to feel supported, ask questions, and seek advice when you need it.