

VOICE OVERS:

Where Do I Begin?



VOICE OVERS: WHERE DO I BEGIN?

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WELCOME

Welcome!

I want to personally thank you for your interest in this publication. I've been fortunate to produce voice overs and educate aspiring voice actors for more than 20 years, and it is an experience I continue to sincerely enjoy.

While there are always opportunities to learn something new, I feel that true excitement comes from a decision to choose something to learn about.

As is common with many professions, there's a lot of information out there about the voice over field.

The good news is that most of that information is valuable.

Of course, there will always be information that doesn't exactly satisfy your specific curiosity. Fortunately for you, there are always new learning opportunities.

Unfortunately, there is also information out there that sensationalizes our industry or presents it in an unrealistic manner.

One of my primary goals in developing this publication is to introduce the voice over field in a manner that is realistic. I will share information based on my own experience, but I'll also share information from other professionals, including voice actors, casting professionals, agents, and producers. And I'll incorporate perspective from people who hire voice actors. After all, if you understand the mindset of a potential client, you are much more likely to position yourself for success.

The voice over field is experiencing tremendous growth in opportunity, and the range of accepted voices has expanded dramatically. It is my hope that this eBook will enhance your understanding of this field, provide you with realistic industry knowledge, and help you gain perspective.

And for those considering voice over professionally for supplemental or retirement income or as a second career, I hope the information herein will inspire you to move forward with greater confidence!

Most sincerely,

David Bourgeois
President & Creative Director
Voice Coaches

GETTING STARTED

This publication is entirely dedicated to providing information about the field of voice overs, also referred to as voice acting (and sometimes as VO). We'll talk about what a voice over is, what it's like to be in the studio doing a voice over, and changes in the type of voice that's most desirable. We'll also help you better understand your own voice and where you might best fit into today's voice over field. You'll learn how technology is dramatically changing our field and how to use these changes to your advantage. And we'll highlight areas of growth and provide some helpful steps to get you started.

Before we start talking about what the voice over field is, it's important for anyone new to our field to understand what it isn't! There are a lot of general misconceptions about our field, particularly when it comes to getting started. So, let's begin by getting a few things straight:

AVOID A BREAK IN Getting Started

The phrase "break in" is used so often relating to our field that it approaches ridiculous. There are people who "wish they could break in," motivated folks who are "planning to break in," and, of course, voice over educators who will teach you "the secrets of breaking in." The phrase "break in" is probably used more relating to our field than it is by jewel thieves and bank robbers.

The trouble with the phrase "break in" is that it implies that an individual will somehow get lucky, be randomly discovered, or perhaps cleverly sneak their way into our field without anyone noticing.

The vast majority of professionals in any field – including voice acting – did not randomly "break in." Instead, they learned about the field, developed professional skill, and built success. Could you imagine asking a doctor how to break in to medicine, or an accountant how to break in to bookkeeping? As ridiculous as it sounds, studio owners and producers hear it all the time: "Can you teach me how to break in to voice overs?"

And the real answer is... NO!



***"It never fails!
Whenever I'm at a get-together, business event, or any other place where people find out I'm a voice over artist, I'm asked repeatedly, 'How did you break in to that?' A lot of people don't understand that this is a skill that I took time to develop and that I still expand on today."***

***-Anita, New Jersey
Voice Actor***

Building success begins by understanding the field you are interested in, developing the job knowledge and skills expected of any professional in that field, and creating an effective method to repeatedly position yourself for success. The good news is, making a plan for success is a much easier and infinitely more tangible means to achieving a goal than hoping to somehow break in!

Stay away from any "break in" approach to voice acting or any other professional endeavor. Instead, learn about the field you're interested in, continually develop skill, and create a logical plan for success based on your individual interests and goals. More on that later.

MORE THAN A GREAT VOICE & A DEMO

Getting Started

Like many other professions, voice acting is a business where money changes hands for work performed by a skilled professional. Another common mistake individuals interested in voice acting make is to develop a demo prior to acquiring professional skill. Regardless of your individual voice quality, the ability to consistently perform as a professional will have a significant impact on your continued success in this field. Working with direction, proper microphone technique, vocal preparation, and copy interpretation are just a few areas of responsibility for you as a voice actor.



In the past, those hiring voice actors could almost always count on professional skill and job knowledge from the voice actors they considered. In other words, we used to assume that the individual sending us a demo had the skill to perform at the level represented on that demo.

"I've heard a lot of great voices and some great demos, too, but if a voice talent shows up and can't do the job I just won't hire them again. It makes them look unprofessional -- and worse, it makes me look unprofessional to the client."

***- Marc, Pennsylvania
Voice Over Producer***

Today, it's no longer that easy. Unfortunately, many newcomers rush into producing a demo without developing professional skill and without even determining where their voice best fits into our field. They wrongly imagine that success singularly comes down to having a good voice and a demo.

As is true in virtually any field, it is the ability to do the job in a manner consistent with professional expectations that will provide the best avenue to long-term success and repeat work relationships.

HOME RECORDING HEAVEN?

Getting Started

There is a lot of talk in and around our field about working from home as a professional voice actor. It's true that today, more than ever before, many voice actors do a portion of their work without ever leaving home. Some voice actors even provide their services solely from home. This is largely due to the enormous increase in capability and quality of home recording equipment.

However, there are two notions associated with home-based voice over recording that need clarification.

1. Home Recording is NOT for everyone!

Though advances in technology have made home recording easier, delivering consistent, high-quality professional audio is still not easy. Home recording candidates should be very comfortable with a computer and with basic stereo-type wiring and troubleshooting. Remember, as a home-based voice actor, you are not just responsible for the voice performance; you are also responsible for all of the technical components of recording and editing your audio. And you'll have to get it to the client in the right format, on time.

Despite tremendous advances in software and equipment, things can and do malfunction!

2. Home Recording is NOT an easy way to get work.

Today, home recording has become a viable means for voice actors to become a complete service provider to their clients, develop additional skill, and seek work through various voice over web marketplaces. High-quality web services like Voices.com offer voice actors the opportunity to create an online profile with voice samples. When a client posts a voice over job through this service, voice actors with voices that fit the client's needs are automatically alerted about the job. In most cases, the prospective client will require you to submit a recorded audition, typically consisting of some of the text for that specific job.

Though web services offer you the advantage of exposure to potential clients all over the world, they also present their own set of challenges.

Firstly, competition for job postings can be staggering, with hundreds of voice actors auditioning for the same offers. Because of this, building significant success through



“Sure I’ve auditioned hundreds of times through online services, and there’s no denying that there are some great opportunities out there. But I’d say I’ve gotten the vast majority of my jobs through traditional marketing and networking. For me, nothing beats getting to know my potential clients.”

*-Hope, Michigan
Voice Actor*

web-based services will typically require an enormous commitment to auditioning. The sooner you respond to a job posting, the more likely you are to get a listen; however, there are often just too many applicants for the client to review all of them.

Also, keep in mind that anyone willing to pay can create a profile on these web sites, and the brief nature of online profiles can often make it difficult for potential clients to discern who is a skilled voice actor and who isn’t. Therefore, it can sometimes be difficult to make yourself stand out above the rest.

So there you have it: while web-based voice over work through home recording is definitely an exciting and viable component of the voice acting field, it should not be viewed as an easy road to success, or, for that matter, as the only road to success. While many voice actors do derive work from opportunities that are home-based, others choose to build their success through conventional markets. Ultimately, you’ll decide which approaches will become part of your success plan based on your own goals, interests, and comfort level.

WHAT IS A VOICE OVER?

Answering this question seems like a pretty obvious starting place. After all, it's a lot easier to determine whether or not something is appealing to you if you understand what it is.

From a literal standpoint, a voice over is a recording of someone reading or working from memorized material without an accompanying visual image of that person. In other words, you hear the person, but you do not see them.

If you ask the average person what comes to mind when they hear the words "voice over," more often than not the answer is commercials. Commercials are indeed a component of the voice over field. Any time you hear a voice in an advertisement without seeing the person attached to that voice, you are listening to a commercial voice over.

When considering commercial voice overs, it's important to keep in mind that not all commercials are the same. I've run into many aspiring voice actors who say things like "I don't think I would be interested in doing all that hard-sell commercial stuff." What they are failing to realize is that there is a broad range of commercial opportunities, many of which do not demand the typical used-car-salesman type of delivery. For instance, voice overs for public service organizations, socially relevant material, or political content are all examples of commercial voice over work. Similarly, children's products, upcoming community events, and material related to health care all fall under commercial work.

COMMERCIAL VOICE OVER

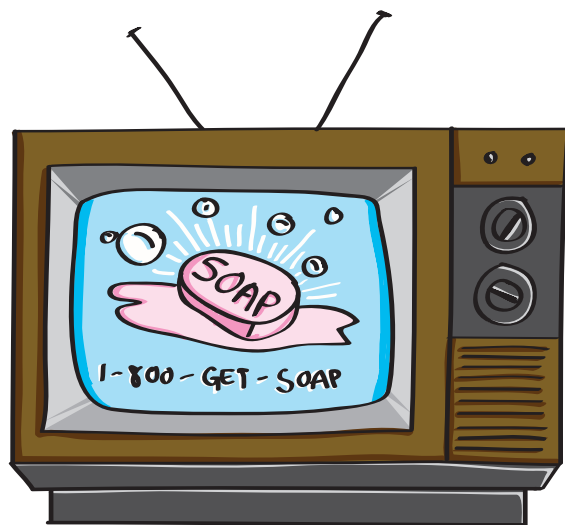
What Is A Voice Over?

Regardless of what a commercial is for, there are three categories, or levels, of commercial voice work.

Local commercials are developed to be played in a single area. Examples would be commercials for local businesses or services that does not have locations outside of the area they are advertising in.

Regional commercials are designed to be played in areas where that advertiser offers their services. Examples could be a car dealer with multiple locations, or a service provider that caters to a particular region, like the southeast.

National commercials are created for companies and organizations that offer their services and products nationwide and beyond.



AN INTERESTING ROADBLOCK

What Is A Voice Over?

“When we meet with a potential client, we begin by determining what would fit their needs based on who they are targeting with their business. Then we create a proposal. In almost every case the potential client asks, ‘How will I get my commercial made?’

Offering complimentary commercial production is a terrific way to close the deal. We offer help with the script, free voice overs, and background music. That’s how we sell advertising.”

*-Rachel, New York
Radio Sales Manager*

While local commercials are potentially the most tangible commercial opportunities for new voice actors, these type of commercials do come with a unique challenge.

Many broadcast facilities, particularly radio stations, provide commercial production and voice over services to their clients at no charge... sort of.

Understand that radio stations derive revenue from selling advertising time or air time. When a radio salesperson is out meeting with local businesses hoping to sell them radio advertising time, they often sweeten the deal by offering commercial production services at no charge.

AN INTERESTING STATISTIC

What Is A Voice Over?

Though commercial voice overs are a component of our field, many newcomers don’t realize that commercial work only makes up about 10% of available voice over opportunities. A common mistake made by many new voice actors is putting a disjointed amount of effort into getting commercial voice over work, instead of focusing significant effort onto the other side of our field, the side that comprises approximately 90% of all voice over work opportunities: narrative voice over.

NARRATIVE VOICE OVER

What Is A Voice Over?

Though there are certainly many sub-categories when it comes to voice over, we will use the term narrative to describe any voice over that does not directly sell or promote a product, organization, or service.

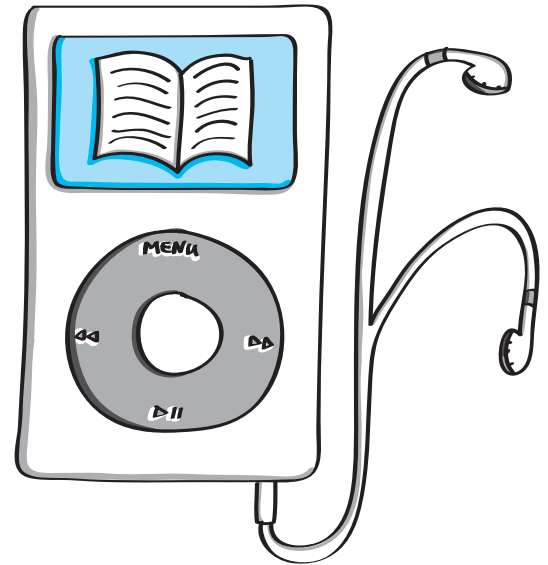
Today, approximately 90% of available voice over work is narrative.

Below we’ll list some examples of non-commercial – or narrative – voice over opportunities. You will probably find that you’ll begin to notice voice overs wherever you go.

AUDIO BOOKS

What Is A Voice Over?

Audio books first originated in the early 1930s with the creation of the “Books for the Adult Blind” Program. By the mid 80s, audio books had exploded in popularity and were raking in hundreds of millions of dollars a year in revenue. Today, the most popular format for audio books is the digital download. As a result, audio books have become even more affordable, portable, and easy to purchase. This means that more of them are being published than ever before, and accordingly, there is more voice over work available in the audio book field than ever.



Most audio books will rely on a single voice actor to provide all of the narration and characters in that book. The narrator might use anything from subtle voice or speech pattern changes to various dialects to differentiate the characters. Non-fiction books tend to use fewer voices, while fiction books tend to

need more creativity as more and more characters are involved.

However, many “characters” can be created through subtle changes in the pitch, tone, speed, rhythm, and volume of your voice, rather than having to perform traditional character voices like you might hear in animation.

Today, as we constantly change the way we consume content, the audio book industry generates more revenue than ever before. Voice acting that was once reserved only for bestsellers has now expanded to every corner of the literary world. And with the explosion of digital media and the resultant lowered cost of production and replication, the industry is expected to continue to grow, creating enormous opportunities for voice actors.

“I’m not what you would call a character voice actor, but when I recently narrated an audiobook I had to come up with a lot of different characterizations, including a 12-year-old girl. Instead of exaggerating and working outside of my voice range, I just softened my voice here and changed my pitch there, and voila! A whole bunch of new voices were born!”

-Kevin, New York Voice Actor

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

What Is A Voice Over?

Training materials make up an enormous part of the narrative field. The majority of work in this area comes from the corporate and business sectors.

Businesses are constantly updating their training materials, creating countless opportunities in this area of voice overs. For example, every time a new piece of software or machinery is implemented, a new training regimen may be required, and that often involves voice overs.

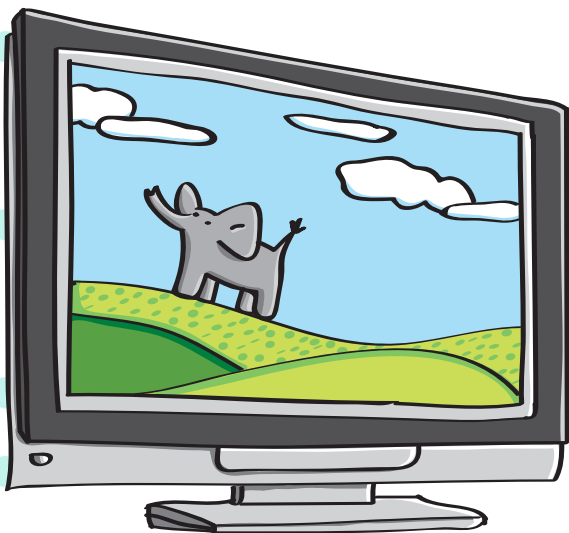
Continued from EDUCATION AND TRAINING

One of the most common ways that voice overs are used in the business world is for training. Projects can range from a seminar on accounting software or a tutorial on how to use a copy machine to a training video on customer service or a presentation for a board meeting. Other typical voice over opportunities in the business world include computer-based training, website narration, and company policy training. And, as technology evolves, opportunities for voice over work in business continue to increase.



Educational materials also comprise a significant portion of the field. With the growth in popularity of audio books, an increasing amount of educational material is available in audio form. In addition to textbooks, things like testing materials, scoring procedures, and quizzes & answers are often delivered via voice over. Add in educational components like web-based games and interactive tests, and this part of our field presents enormous opportunity.

When considering any kind of technical or educational voice over work, keep in mind that if you have a specialized background from a current or previous profession related to the topic being voiced, you'll naturally be a more appealing option to the clients casting the work. If you understand the material, you'll be much more likely to deliver it in an informative and engaging manner. Therefore, when determining your skills and strengths as a voice actor, make sure you use any unique technical knowledge you have in other areas to your advantage!



TELEVISION

What Is A Voice Over?

Documentaries, historical material, biographical content, and travel programming are another form of narrative voice over. The amount of voice-over-driven television material produced each year is staggering. While a small portion of this voice over work will go to big-name stars, the vast majority goes to independent voice actors.

Keep in mind that there are other forms of television that require voice overs as well. Reality television may use voice overs to explain tasks and challenges that contestants must complete or win. Talk shows, morning shows, entertainment shows, news magazines, and variety shows regularly utilize voice overs to announce, introduce segments, or convey simple information about what the viewer is seeing.

GAMING

What Is A Voice Over?

One of the first video games to successfully use voice overs was the hit game “Dragon’s Lair” back in the early ‘80s. Since then, a lot has changed!

The home video console industry was largely responsible for the regular introduction of voice overs in video gaming to the general public. One of the most notable early games to feature voice over dialogue was 1993’s “Mortal Kombat,” which became a massive hit franchise.

Role playing video games (known as RPGs) began to utilize full casts and scripts, and voice overs became an integral part of these games. Games like “Final Fantasy VII” were early leaders in this genre. The large cast of characters and enormous number of scene variations brought the use of VO in gaming to a new level, requiring tens of thousands of lines of voice over for a single game!

Today, voice overs are produced in almost every game p, from RPGs and sports games to action platformers and puzzle games. In recent years, games like the “Grand Theft Auto” series have gained notoriety for scripts that contain nearly 70,000 lines of dialogue, taking almost two years to record.

In comparison, the amount of dialogue in a video game is much greater than in an animated movie or TV show. The average Hollywood movie has approximately 2,000 lines of dialogue. The average video game has anywhere from 10,000-50,000 lines of dialogue. Some of the most expansive video games in recent years have reached upwards of 200,000 lines of dialogue. And while that’s certainly not all performed by the same voice actor, most of the voice actors involved record many, many lines.

“Believe it or not, we did an entire session with me in the vocal booth making roaring sounds. And I didn’t have any visuals, so they had to describe to me what was going on: ‘Alright, you’re ripping apart a giant metal worm like a Fed Ex package. Give us that roar.’ I got a lot of stress out that day!”

*-Rick, New York
Voice Actor*

Beyond regular dialogue, voice overs for video games often require vocal sound effects like grunts, screams, yells, and various non-verbal styles of emoting. Some voice actors will spend an entire session in the booth doing nothing but yelling, screaming, and pretending to get hit, shot, or punched.

Not a bad way to blow off some stress!



ANIMATION

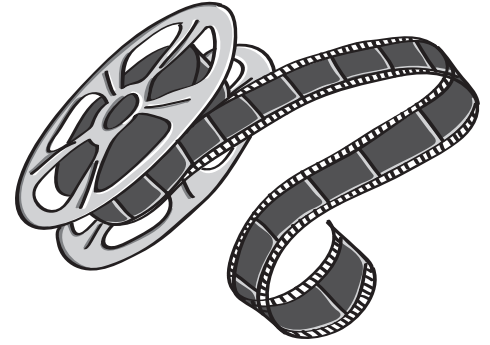
What Is A Voice Over?

Animation is another area that requires an incredible amount of voice over work every year. Regardless of whether it's traditional 2-D hand drawn animation, motion comics, or a CGI-animated project, the need for voice over is the same.

In almost all cases, voice overs are recorded before any animation work begins. This is mostly done so that the animators can match the characters' mouth movements to the actual words being spoken.

Animation voice overs are often a fairly simple process. The voice actors read off of a completed script, and for the most part, ad-libbing is kept to a minimum. On animated movies with well-known talent providing the voices, however, that can vary. Many of the funniest lines in the hit Disney film "Aladdin" were ad-libbed by actor/voice actor Robin Williams.

The average animated half-hour show (22 minutes without commercials) can take anywhere from 1-4 hours per episode for a voice actor to record. Also, not all of the cast will necessarily be recorded together. Most shows tend to record their voice actors one at a time, with occasional exceptions where an entire cast is brought in to read as an ensemble.



PHONE SYSTEMS

What Is A Voice Over?

An oft-overlooked source of ongoing voice over work comes from professional phone systems. Think about how often you call a business and instead of a person, you find yourself listening to a pre-recorded menu of options. This all-too-common recorded greeting is referred to as an auto attendant.

Also common in professional phone systems are on-hold messages, pre-recorded messages either touting a product or service or thanking you for your undying patience while you're on hold waiting for the party you're trying to reach. This can be an effective way for a business to market a message or product to a captive audience.

Both auto attendants and on-hold messaging are a regular source of work for many voice actors. In the case of larger businesses, these voice over jobs can be quite significant. And regardless of the length of the job, the work is almost always ongoing. Any time extensions change, employees join or leave a business, a company or

Continued from PHONE SYSTEMS

department name is changed, there's a holiday, or any other changes are made, the voice actor who recorded the messaging in the first place will typically be brought in to update it in an effort to maintain audio continuity.

Likewise, on-hold messaging is often updated to reflect the latest product, price, or promotion, once again leading to repeat work opportunities for many voice actors.



AUDIO FOR WEB

What Is A Voice Over?

Another well-established and constantly growing sector of the voice over industry is audio content for the web. The pervasiveness of the internet provides endless opportunities. Many web developers are tasked with building web-based training

systems, which can present a large body of voice over work. In addition, many websites include some sort of audio component, and that often involves voice over work. Voice over is also used today to make web sites more accessible to users with impairments such as vision loss.

From animation to tutorials to audio introductions to endorsements and advertisements, the web is a gigantic and ever-growing source of potential work for voice actors. And as we continue to integrate technology into more and more facets of our lives, these possibilities are greater than ever.

FIXED INSTALLATION

What Is A Voice Over?

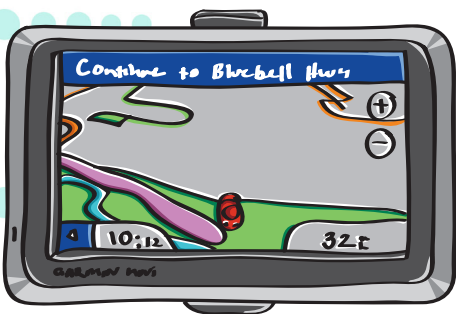
Voice overs are regularly used in fixed installation situations as well. These include voice overs you hear when visiting a specific place. Some examples of this are museums, special attractions, car washes, aquariums, science exhibits, zoos, planetariums, and historical sites.



HARDWARE BASED

What Is A Voice Over?

Hardware-based voice overs come in the form of anything that comes proprietarily in a piece of hardware. Think of GPS units, children's toys, games, handheld electronics, novelty items, promotional gifts, and the like. Whether it's a talking action figure, a handheld video game, or a turn-by-turn directional GPS unit for your car, each of these pieces of hardware can include a voice over component.



ON THE JOB

In professional voice acting, the job process begins with choosing the voice actor or voice actors who will ideally suit the particular project being recorded. This process is referred to as casting.

There are three typical ways that casting takes place:

IN-PERSON AUDITION

On The Job

In major metropolitan markets like New York City or Los Angeles, the voice over casting process can involve performing a live audition. In this situation, demos are pre-screened to determine a group of voices that are close to what the client is looking for. Those candidates are then scheduled to audition in person for the job. In-person audition-based voice over work is traditionally limited to major cities and is most typical when casting large-scale national advertising. For this reason, live auditions comprise a very small component of our field overall.

WEB-BASED AUDITION

On The Job

As I mentioned before, the web presents a constant and ever-expanding resource for voice actors. Those who choose to develop home recording capability often seek work through a variety of paid online VO marketplace services. These services typically allow a voice actor to create a profile with information about themselves and demo samples. When a work opportunity is posted fitting your voice on the site, you are automatically alerted. The next step in most cases is recording an audition of that job's specific material and submitting it electronically to the person posting the job.

"The producer told me I had the job. He provided a phone number in Europe and when I spoke to him he told me I was to arrange time in a studio and I was to choose a second voice actor for another part. Every time I talked to the guy he kept trying to get more and more information from me. I later found out he had told a number of individuals the same thing. Very scary!"

*- John, Massachusetts
Voice Actor*

Though this area of the industry presents viable opportunity, there are some unique potential drawbacks.

First of all, there will typically be an enormous number of people auditioning for the same job. And it is unlikely that a client receiving, let's say, 300 auditions for one job will listen to all of them. As a result, in this case a significant advantage can go to those who audition early. Likewise, in such a large online marketplace with so many eager applicants, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish yourself from others.

Also, keep in mind, it is important to protect your personal information

Continued from WEB-BASED AUDITION

when dealing with any type of web commerce. I recently was contacted by a former student with the great news that he had been awarded a lucrative voice over job through a very reputable online service. From the start it seemed unusual to me because I didn't feel his voice fit the part he had been cast for. After some investigation, it turned out that the individual posting as the client was engaging in fraudulent activity.

All in all, web-based auditions can and are an important component of finding work for many successful voice actors. However, voice acting in the digital age presents its own set of challenges, and in a world where gaining internet exposure is easier than ever before, it becomes increasingly important to distinguish yourself from the pack through skill development and professionalism. And remember, the best results can often come from the balanced application of many different methods; don't rely too heavily on one marketing strategy and forget that there are others! Sometimes there's no substitute for an old-fashioned phone call or a handwritten thank-you note.

TRADITIONAL DEMO

On The Job

Your demo is your resume, and it's crucial you develop a demo that represents you in an authentic manner. Voice acting is an audio-based industry, and when push comes to shove, the only way you can expect potential clients and producers to hire you is if they can hear you first.

Traditionally, demos were on CDs. A voice actor would develop their demo and send physical copies of it to ad agencies, producers, and other outlets for consideration. However, with the growth of the digital age, today demos are usually presented as electronic files. The internet is king!

The convenience of email and web-based communication presents an opportunity for voice actors to promote themselves like never before. However, this ease of communication has also made the digital marketplace a vastly competitive sector. Now, it's up to you to make yourself stand out!

To take full advantage of this opportunity and help you set yourself apart from the rest, there are a few "best practices" for demo sharing I'd like to mention.

First, consider how you're sharing your demo. Instead of sending it as a direct attachment in an email, we recommend first finding a place to host your demo online



and then directing traffic to it. This way, you have more control over your files, and the emails you send don't run the risk of being filtered out because the giant sound file attached makes them look fishy. Also, for the most part, clients will want to be able to stream your demo first before they download. Make sure you can share it in a way that's easy, straightforward, and doesn't require a download before listening.

There are many convenient file-sharing services out there, including sites like Dropbox and Soundcloud. Find one that works for you, drop your demo into its own folder, and share away!

Secondly, you might want to consider making yourself a personal website. It's a great way to keep your demo, personal bio, and contact information all in one place and easily accessible to clients and producers. A personal website doesn't have to be anything fancy; sometimes a simple, clear design does the job best. And remember that in today's day and age, the vast majority of media is consumed on mobile devices. Make sure any online presence you have, be it a website, a social media profile, or a file sharing outlet, is easily accessible via phone or tablet.

Finally, make sure that you have a way to market yourself in person. You never know when you might meet someone who could help you to reach your voice-acting goals. One minute you're striking up a conversation, and all of the sudden you've got a job opportunity on your hands! Make business cards with your website and contact info or a link to your demo for ease of sharing. You might also think about leaving these cards with local ad agencies or businesses.

"The most important elements when considering a personal visual brand as a voice actor? Ensure your name and contact information is clear and included on any correspondence. And if you are developing peripheral assets like thank-you cards or letterheads, try to stick to a simple design that's recognizable and memorable."

***-Kiki, New York
Graphic Designer***

Your goal when presenting your demo is to provide a convenient, straightforward opportunity for potential clients and producers to listen to who you are as a voice actor. No matter what kind of voice you have, let yourself be heard!

"The most important elements when considering a personal visual brand as a voice actor? Ensure your name and contact information is clear and included on any correspondence. And if you are developing peripheral assets like thank-you cards or letterheads, try to stick to a simple design that's recognizable and memorable."
-Kiki, New York Graphic Designer

TODAY'S VOICE

If you can remember voice overs in the '80s or earlier, you no doubt remember hearing announcer voices regularly. As voice over gained in popularity in the '60s and '70s, the field was overwhelmingly male-dominated. And it wasn't the ordinary male voice you'd hear. It was the golden-throated, loud, low-pitched announcer voice that we all became accustomed to. Part of this was because older recording equipment did a better job with lower voices. But the main reason was that presenting an idea with an announcer used to work very well.

That was then...

Today, things have changed. For starters, recording equipment has evolved and can record any voice type accurately.

At the same time, people have become much less receptive to being announced to or told what to do or think. Most people think this is simply because everyone is more skeptical today compared to the "good ol' days." But it turns out there is another reason for this change.

Today, we have an enormous number of options in nearly everything, and people are more aware of options than ever before. You could say that today we live in an option-driven society.

CHOICES, CHOICES

Today's Voice

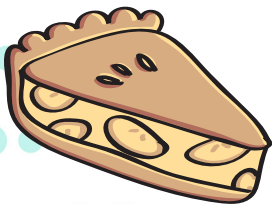
In the early days of voice acting, there were very few choices in products, services, and sources of information. There weren't 20 brands of water, 40 hotels near the airport, 11 different news broadcasts, and 15 different dog leashes. In fact, in many cases there were only one or two choices in almost anything.

And, when a person doesn't have many choices, you'll find that they are much more receptive to being told what to do, or "announced to."

For example, if the desserts pictured are your only choices, I could probably convince you to choose one of the other with an announcer-style voice over that stated something like: "This apple pie is the best money can buy," or "This ice cream is America's favorite."

Announcing a viewpoint can be very effective when options are limited. To be more straightforward: it's easier to make a decision when you have fewer options.

But...



Today we are immersed in options!

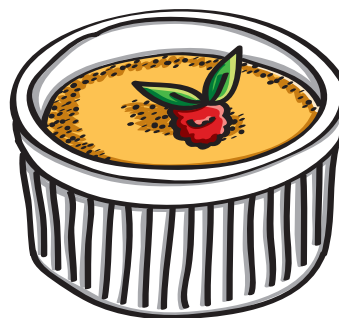
And when it comes to options, there is an interesting human behavior to consider. Up until the very moment you make a decision, all available options are yours!

While many folks imagine that people are more skeptical today, I really believe that a lot of what appears to be skepticism is actually reluctant decision-making. Instead of acting decisively, we ponder.

Decision-making has become more challenging because of increased options. If you only have a couple of options, making a choice and eliminating one of those options is easy. But when you have numerous options, making a choice and eliminating all of the other options is much more challenging.

For voice actors, the ability to convey sincerity, believability, and genuineness has taken the place of announcing in almost all cases. Today, we regularly look for a voice actor who will be the most believable to the audience we are targeting. Today, you convince the listener with your voice.

In the example on the previous page, the voice actor could just announce which is best and chances are I would go along. But today, with numerous options like the artwork on the right illustrates, that voice actor will need to be believable, sincere, and convincing to make me go along with their choice and forget about all those other wonderful options!



THE VOICE THAT SPEAKS TO YOU

Today's Voice

"I'm in my late 30s, but I sound like I'm 11 years old. Every time somebody calls my home, they ask if they can speak to my mom. While I get called in to do a lot of character-type voice work, I don't think I'm on the list when it comes to serious stuff like political ads or public service announcements. For me, a lot of my success has come down to understanding my voice."

**-Sherri, Virginia
Voice Actor**

The interesting thing about this is that different people are convinced by different voices. Things like age, where you live, ethnicity, and other demographics play a significant role in determining the types of voice that will best communicate to you. This has created an enormous broadening of desirable voice types.

Today our field is very niche-oriented. We cast to very specifically communicate to an audience, and we make casting decisions based on that audience.

As a great example, my dad, who is in his 70s, was commenting the other day about how bad a commercial he had heard was. He said that, "The guy speaking in the commercial (the voice actor) spoke too fast and was hard to understand." When I asked my dad what the commercial was for, he replied, "a snowboard park."

Since then, I've heard the commercial in question. I've got to say, it's great! The thing is, it certainly doesn't believably or sincerely communicate anything to my dad, and that's because he is not in the group they are targeting. Keep that in mind when you hear a voice over that you don't care for. While there is indeed a lot of "bad" out there, you'll sometimes realize that the voice over in question simply isn't targeted at you.

Today – more than ever before – it is essential for you to determine your specific areas of strength and interest and focus on those areas when developing skill, creating demos, and seeking work.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR VOICE

The increasing importance of conveying information genuinely and with sincerity has altered the manner in which people approach the voice over field. Instead of throwing your voice at every kind of work available, today's voice actor knows the incredible value of understanding his or her individual voice strengths.

By understanding your strengths, you begin to zero in on where your voice might best fit into our field, and at the same time you begin to eliminate time wasted pursuing voice work that you may, in all likelihood, not be appropriate for anyway.

VOICE AGE RANGE

Understanding Your Voice

Call it discriminatory, or unfair, or any other name you have handy, but age does play a role when it comes to casting a voice. However, it may not be quite what you expect. Instead of making casting decisions based on how old you are, you will be chosen based on how old you sound. Examples might be a health care narrative where we want someone who sounds like they are in their 50s, a nightclub piece where we want a voice actor sounding 20-ish, or a parenting piece where we want someone who sounds 30-something.

People typically respond best to voices of people who they feel are like themselves. Because of this, in work where the voice actor is directly addressing the listener, voice age range is often a consideration during casting. In other cases, voice age range is important because the voice actor is playing the part of a specific character, like a parent, child, or grandparent.

What many newcomers to our field don't realize is that it's often mature voices that have the advantage. For example, the typical voice of a 19 or 20-year-old will often sound believable playing parts limited to a couple of years older or younger than their actual age. In other words, they can offer a voice age range of five or six years.

On the other hand, a typical 50-to-60-year-old voice actor who has taken care of their voice can often play a voice age range of 20 to 30 years. It becomes much more difficult to pin down actual age when listening to a mature voice. This in turn opens up a broader spectrum of potential work for individuals who are older.

Perhaps one of the greatest positives of professional voice acting is anonymity. Everything comes down to how you sound, making our field very appealing to more mature voices as well as younger people.

As a tip, to preserve this anonymity, avoid using photos on any material related to marketing yourself as a voice actor. The fact that you physically don't match a client's vision for the voice they want could cost you a job opportunity.



VOICE FUNCTION

Understanding Your Voice

Another consideration in understanding your voice related to the technical aspects of how your voice functions.

In an effort to better understand the voices of my students, I collaborated with our speech language pathologist, training team, and computer programmers to develop a computer-assisted speech and voice evaluation. Since 2007, we've used this software and process on a daily basis as a tool for determining specific baseline voice qualities and strengths, and as an indicator of potential speech problems. In all, we examine 15 specific areas of the voice during the evaluation process.

To offer some perspective, examining traits like hyper or hyponasality can begin to indicate some of the work a voice actor might be well-suited for. For example, if a voice actor demonstrates signs of hypernasality, it can be an initial indication of strength performing more opinionated material, or material that conveys humor or sarcasm.

Examination of other voice traits can indicate potential problems. Issues like improper or atypical phonetic placement or poor functional breath support may suggest that an individual should not pursue our field.

While there are an enormous number of parameters that impact overall voice quality, understanding your voice is an important step in determining where your voice fits into the professional voice over field.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR WORK

When it comes to work for voice actors, conveying every possible work opportunity would be difficult. Instead, I want to break things down into categories. This will also provide insight into how much our field has grown in recent years.

Before that, however, I want to offer some insight into how the field often works from the perspective of those doing the hiring. After all, if you can begin to understand how those who are looking for voice actors think, you will have an advantage in positioning yourself for success.

Simply put, many professionals who are in a position to regularly cast voice actors are often very habitual in their behavior. In other words, they hire the same voice actors over and over and over again. If you've listened to voice overs in a smaller city or suburban area, you no doubt are accustomed to hearing many of the same voices repeatedly. Without question, this behavior has discouraged potential newcomers.

Working around this tendency first requires an understanding of its rationale. While many people imagine it is some sort of exclusivity that exists in our field, the repeated tendency to reuse the same voice actors can really be explained much more simply.

We go back to the same people because they are people we know or are familiar with.



GETTING A REPUTATION

Where To Look For Work

Think about it: if I cast you to perform a voice-over, in addition to your reputation, my reputation is also on the line. If you don't show up or show up late, that's not just your fault, it's my fault... and it's my problem! If you don't have good microphone skill or ability to take direction, that's also my fault. Even your inability to properly bill for the services you provide can fall on someone like me.

Understand that voice acting is more than just a good voice and demo: it's the skill and job knowledge to provide your service as a true professional. And the fact that many newcomers to our field don't understand this perpetuates our cautious behavior when it comes to hiring voice actors we're unfamiliar with. Unfortunately, far too many newcomers to this tremendous field make the mistake of not developing skill and job knowledge prior to developing a demo.

Now before you become discouraged about the habitual nature of the field, there is a very significant silver lining. You see, if you understand going into this field that people like me often make the easy decision when it comes to hiring – and believe me, we do – you now have a much clearer path to building success.

Your goal: make it easy for me to hire you!

YOUR DEMO

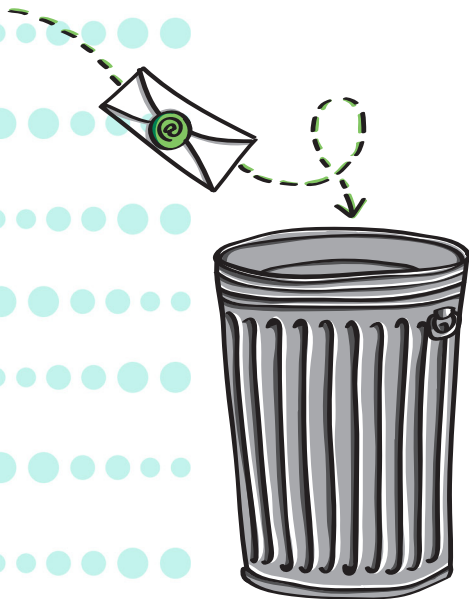
Where To Look For Work

Making it easy for me to hire you begins with letting me know you exist. Try as I might to guess that people are voice actors, I do much better when someone lets me know that they are a voice actor. In our field, that means getting me your demo.

These days, with the pervasiveness of the internet, making yourself accessible to potential clients and producers is easier than ever. However, making yourself stand out in the digital age has become increasingly important.

As I mentioned before, when promoting yourself and your demo via the web, it's best to use file-sharing services instead of sending demo files as email attachments. And again, to organize your efforts and provide the most convenient hiring opportunity for potential clients, making a personal website with your demo, a short biography, and your contact information is a good idea. Having business cards with your contact info and a link to your demo handy are also a great way to spread the word about yourself.

And as always, prompt and professional communication is always key. Remember, the goal here is to make hiring you as easy as possible for me!



THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Where To Look For Work

Begin by sending your demo to organizations and individuals who I would refer to as “the usual suspects.” These are the type of folks who have always hired voice actors. They include recording studios, advertising agencies, public relations firms, publishing companies, and video & film production companies. Though these people are on the receiving end of many demos, it is still important that they know you exist. And when it comes to recording studios, you should understand that many of them are not where you’d think or in the phone book.

Numerous companies and organizations that regularly create training material or media for their clients have an in-house capability to create this material. As a result, you’ll find recording studios of varying size and capability in hospitals, manufacturing

Continued from **DIRECT-TO-CLIENT MARKETING**

facilities, insurance companies, local and state agencies, and many other businesses. Don't forget about these in-house audio/visual departments when you are getting demos out!

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Where To Look For Work

Next, get your demos to companies that represent emerging areas of opportunity. To begin with, web development companies continue to expand in their need for voice acting. Just a decade ago, there was very little audio developed specifically for the web. Over the past few years, however, as much as half of the voice over work I am hired to produce is directly for web sites and e-learning. These emerging areas of growth can offer you the opportunity to build ground-floor relationships that provide continued work.

DIRECT-TO-CLIENT MARKETING

Where To Look For Work

One of the most interesting and potentially advantageous changes in our field over the past few years is the increase in clients finding their own voice actors. For years, clients relied on intermediaries like agents, advertising agencies, and casting professionals to help them find the right voice. Today, more and more, clients are directly involved in selecting the voice actor that they will ultimately use. For you, this means there is value in pursuing potential clients directly. For example, if you discover that a new locally-owned coffee shop has opened near you, stop in, purchase a beverage, something nice, and introduce yourself as a voice actor. Make sure you have a way to share your demo with the person you speak to. Break out the business cards!

"After training to be a voice actor I was at the studio recording my demos. I asked the producer for her top piece of advice when it came to marketing and she told me to talk it up; in other words, tell everyone I knew I was doing this. I was initially skeptical, being that I'm a construction worker by trade, but a couple weeks later I was having lunch with a guy I worked with and I told him that I was pursuing voice overs. To my surprise, he told me his brother's wife ran a large ad agency. Long story short, talking it up make me a lot of money!"

**-Gary, North Carolina
Voice Actor**

And... be prepared! Many people find the voice over field interesting. When you introduce yourself as a voice actor, in many cases people will want to know more about what you do. Be prepared to talk about voice acting and the services you could provide to them. In the case of a coffee shop, the owner might first think of your skill for their commercials. You should always be able to broaden that perspective. While agreeing with the suggestion that you could do commercial work for them, suggest creating "audio continuity" by using your voice for their phone system or for training they may need to create. Another idea is suggesting your voice for their web site or

proposing the idea of a weekly podcast. These are all ideas that can transition a single job into a significant ongoing work relationship.

Pursuing work directly from clients can also serve as a great way to make studio people like me aware of you. For example, I have a long-term client who manufactures luxury mattresses. I have provided voice over casting and production services to him for more than ten years. About a year and a half ago, he called me with a request to produce 20 voice overs for his web site. When I asked him what type of voice he would like me to find, he responded with, "Don't worry, I've already found a voice for this job."

Now truth be told, I am about as comfortable with a mattress maker choosing a voice actor as he might be with me making mattresses. But in this case, he is the client, and the choice is his.

When the day of the recording session came, the client showed up with his chosen voice actor arriving shortly thereafter. From the beginning of the session she was an absolute pro. Her microphone technique was great, she was very creative in her approach to the copy, and she worked with direction very well. On top of that, she was upbeat, engaging, and very easy to work with. Since then, I have hired her for three other jobs that I needed to cast. Why? Because I now know her. Why do I know her? Because she sent her demo to a guy who makes mattresses! Never fail to put yourself in a position to be noticed!

Here are a couple of other suggestions related to finding work from people who did.

TELL EVERYONE!

Where To Look For Work

When it comes to building success in the voice over field, you never know who might know somebody who can help you. And if you keep your aspirations a secret, you never will!

STAND OUT

Where To Look For Work

A somewhat unfortunate component of human nature is that we tend to do what everyone else does. As a voice actor, do things to make yourself unique. Instead of investing time in organizations populated by hundreds of other voice actors, consider investing that time in organizations populated by people who hire or refer voice actors.

"Without a doubt, one of the best moves I made was joining our area's Ad Club. The whole organization is ad agents, studio people, and others in media. What surprised me was that I was one of only three members who were voice over artists. Over the past year I've gotten to know most all of the major players locally. This is great!"

-Heather, New York Voice Actor

SHAKE A HAND

Where To Look For Work

Since professionals in our field often go back to people they are familiar with, never miss a new opportunity to ensure that people remember you.

GIVE IT AWAY

Where To Look For Work

"After I learned that the studio I had approached for work sometimes pursues clients by creating speculative recordings to show that client how great things could sound, I re-contacted the guy at the studio and offered to help out anytime he needed a voice for a spec job. The thing is, if the client likes what they hear, I get the paying gig! On top of that, the guy loves me for helping HIM get work for his studio."

-Jim, Connecticut Voice Actor

While you should never underestimate the value of your time, in some cases, there can be real value in volunteering your voice. In this case, we'll skip over the "volunteering-because-you're-a-good-person sort of stuff." We already assume you know that that's a good reason to volunteer! :) In this case, we're referring to strategic volunteering.

JOG THEIR MEMORY

Where To Look For Work

Regardless of how wonderful your skill set and demo may be, people in every field get busy and lose track of who's who. You should look for any opportunity to remind your contacts that you exist!



"I always suggest to my students that they look for reasons to follow up with the people they've provided demos to. A great resource is the business section of a local paper. If you read about a company winning a big contract, send them a congratulatory note. If a charity appoints a new director, reach out to them. If an ad agency promotes someone, send a card. At the end of any correspondence, remind them that you are a voice actor, and make sure your contact information is included. These subtle reminders can go a long way toward building awareness of you as a professional resource."

-Warren, New York Voice Actor & Producer



INDUSTRY PROS AND CONS

Like anything else, there are aspects of the professional voice acting field that appeal to some but not to others. To people working in our field, the pros have clearly prevailed. However, to newcomers, this is not always the case.

I'll do my best over the next couple of pages to outline aspects of our field that most people find appealing. I will also reflect on areas of the field that are stumbling blocks for some. To keep things positive, I will lead off with the pros. Think of the next several paragraphs as a list of good reasons to pursue voice acting.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Industry Pros and Cons

Many newcomers to our field imagine that they will perform a great deal of their work at broadcast facilities like radio and television stations. Though a good deal of voice over work is indeed done at places like this, the vast majority of that work does not go to independent professional voice actors like you. It instead goes to people directly employed by that company, most likely professional announcers or people who already work for the station.

As an independent voice actor, you'll do the majority of your work in independent recording and production facilities that cater to corporate and professional clientele. For the most part, studios that cater to this range of clients do their best to make those clients very comfortable. You'll often be in very creative, very comfortable environments, largely free of the typical office-cubicle/giant-fluorescent-light-box/burnt-coffee work environment that many are accustomed to.

And in some cases, as we've discussed, you may do a component of your work from home. Overall, the work environment is typically a positive!

PEOPLE

Industry Pros and Cons

The vast majority of people working in and around our field truly enjoy and appreciate what they do. For many newcomers, the idea of working around people who enjoy and are excited about their work is a very new experience. Compared to an office full of people who watch the clock and complain, it is motivating, positive, and very refreshing. The people in our field are great!



SCHEDULE

Industry Pros and Cons

First, a clarification: if you reside in and plan to pursue voice acting only in a true A-market like New York City or Los Angeles, the pace and schedule can be demanding.

However, if you reside in a smaller city or a suburban or rural location, you will find that a significant number of opportunities you are cast for will offer flexibility in schedule. We are less likely to call a voice actor and say something like, “We have to do this Wednesday at 1pm.” Instead, we generally offer a time range and defer as much as we can to the voice actor’s schedule. For example: “We like your voice for this piece we are working on, and we need to complete the project in the next week; what’s your schedule look like?”

Actually, we end up doing a lot of voice over recording early in the evening, as that’s when many voice actors in our market are available. Now don’t get me wrong, there are certainly jobs where for some reason – like the client wanting to be involved – we must propose a “take it or leave it” date to the voice actor, but in most cases, job schedules are pretty flexible.

This is also true in home-recording-based VO. In this case, you typically have a date when the completed work is due.

If you are interested in voice over as an income, the schedule flexibility is a great positive because it allows you to build significant success in voice acting without sacrificing other things that are important, like family commitments or another job.

BE YOURSELF... OR NOT!

Industry Pros and Cons

In visual fields like television and film, actors are usually recognizable. However, in the voice over field, everything comes down to how you sound. A great positive of the voice over field is anonymity.

People don’t see you... they hear you.

In voice acting, things like age, size, ethnicity, or any number of other physical attributes often disappear. As a voice actor, you can be anything your voice can be. And better yet, no matter how successful you are, you’ll hardly ever be bothered for an autograph!

JOB TITLE

Industry Pros and Cons

I couldn't resist throwing this one in!

I've always recognized that folks in and around our field have great job titles. For example, as an audio director, I am referred to as a Producer. The woman who runs all the fancy equipment in our studio is my Audio Engineer. The person we are doing a voice over for is the Client. If the job is a commercial and there is an advertising agency involved, you may meet that agency's Creative Director. Yes indeed, everyone has a great job title. But they pale in comparison to yours!

In our field, you are singularly referred to as The Talent. Try that on for size and see how you like it! And there's one other thing you should know... in our field, the term "talent" is in no way indicative of you having any talent! In our field, regardless of your ability, if you find yourself doing a voice over, you ARE the talent. Not bad, huh?



WARDROBE

Industry Pros and Cons

In our field, we're listening, not looking! As a result, there is no particular expectation for the way a voice actor should dress. Ours is certainly not a suit and tie or formal dress kind of field. Casual professional attire is almost always the order of the day!

YOU GET PAID (USUALLY)

Industry Pros and Cons

While the parameters that affect pay for voice actors are too enormous to detail easily here, for the most part ours is a paying profession.

Though pay often varies from job to job and by location, CNN tried to sum it up as best they could in an article titled "10 Jobs That Are Cooler Than Yours," published in April of 2009. At that time, they reported that the U. S. average earning for Voice Actors was \$47,000 annually. Since then, the income has risen steadily based on the increased growth of the narrative voice over sector in the digital age.

And keep in mind, this isn't driving a truck across the country, working in an office full of miserable people, flipping burgers, dealing with irate customers, or dressing up every day... it's going in to a great environment with great people and being creative! Again, not bad!

"It's fun, it's creative, and I get a chance to meet new people and use my skills in a way that's unlike anything I'd ever done before! And let's face it, how many people can say that they actually love their job?"

**-Samantha, Florida
Voice Actor**

SUMMING UP Industry Pros and Cons

So as a recap of industry positives, you work in a great environment populated by motivated people where you often control your own schedule, dress casually, get better with age, and have people refer to you as the talent all day... and you get paid to do it!

THE OTHER HAND Industry Pros and Cons

Now that you're on the verge of being convinced that our field is a giant bed of roses, I want to dedicate some effort to clearly pointing out some potential thorns.

Like anything else, everyone reacts differently when presented with potential challenges and stumbling blocks. For some, challenges seems insurmountable. Others see challenges as manageable.

Beyond that, there are those who seem to ignore, disregard, or choose not to be impacted by challenges. Sometimes people like this are referred to as crazy. I often prefer to describe them as successful.

"My first six months was basically making people aware I existed. I sent demos out, joined a local business group, and followed up. Even though I wasn't working yet, I still felt great. I felt more and more like I was getting closer. Now that I work a lot, I realize how important those initial relationships I created really were!"

**-Edwin, Pennsylvania
Voice Actor**

Let's see what you think of the typical challenges presented by our field!

"OK, the first year killed me. A whole lot of nothing! Well, and one paid PSA. But as I began my second year at this, all of the sudden the floodgates opened. The thing that struck me as strange was that the people who were now casting me were the same people who I thought were ignoring me for all that time. I laugh about it now, but I also reflect on how close I came to giving up, and if I had I'd never be doing something I enjoy so much!"

**-Janet, Colorado
Voice Actor**

DON'T QUIT YOUR DAY JOB... YET Industry Pros and Cons

The voice over field is certainly lucrative. It continues to grow, largely fueled by changes in the way we consume information like books and training material.

However, like any small business endeavor, building success as a voice over artist really does come down to building success.

Immediate success in our field is not the norm.

Most professionals in the field will tell you that it took them some time to feel as though they really had a solid foothold. And keep in mind: the inclination to give up along the way is perhaps the leading reason people fail in achieving a goal.

PERHAPS THERE'S A MISUNDERSTANDING

Industry Pros and Cons

"Love it, or at least like it! My advice is like what you do. Enjoying this makes the lean times much easier to survive. I loved the idea of voice overs from the beginning and I think that's what kept me in it. Now I still love it, but I also don't mind getting paid to do it."

*- Lauren, Missouri
Voice Actor*

Another common roadblock for new voice actors is misunderstanding what our field is. As I mentioned earlier, many people make the mistake of viewing our field as something you "break in to," or that people who are successful were somehow "discovered." As I mentioned in the beginning of this publication, the break-in mentality is typically a flawed approach to our field. I also feel that professionals who present our field in that manner run the risk of sending the wrong message to those entering our industry.

In voice over, money changes hands in exchange for a professional service. It is a business. And if you're a voice actor, you own your business. Voice actors are business owners, and the responsibility to develop and maintain work relationships and provide good service is all yours.

Individuals who approach this field as something one needs to break in to are actually in a very challenging predicament... they own a business without realizing they are business owners!

Imagine how that would work out for, let's say, a restaurant. What if the owner of a new restaurant had no idea she had opened a business? Instead of setting goals and creating steps to reach those goals, the restaurant owner would instead just wait around and hope for success. Or worse, she might do what many new voice actors do: try to figure out how to break in to having a successful restaurant.

As ridiculous as that example sounds, it happens in our field all too often. And the reality is, failing to recognize our field as a profession and failure to recognize yourself as a business owner can virtually eliminate your chances to build true success.

The good news is that as businesses go, building success in voice acting doesn't require an enormous outlay of time. Because your fundamental method of marketing is getting your demo into the hands and ears of potential clients, pursuing success can be done without compromising other important commitments like family, religious obligations, or work. And, as mentioned a bit earlier, when it comes to doing a voice over, the schedule is often flexible as well.

I'll provide some steps on how to begin in the next chapter.





HOW DO I BEGIN?

Because everyone is unique, your approach to beginning voice acting will be at least partially driven by what your specific interests in the field are and by your individual goals. For those who are casually curious about the field, there are great books. There are also introductory classes that provide an opportunity to gain a better general understanding of the field.

For those who've decided that voice acting is something they want to pursue, my suggestions begin with a basic reminder: voice over is a business, and as a voice actor, you own that business.

By understanding that you are engaging in a professional endeavor instead of something you "get lucky" at or "break in" to, you can apply tried-and-true methods to creating success.

MOTIVATION

How Do I Begin?

First I do want to add that though it doesn't take a great deal of time on a weekly basis to get some demos out and perhaps follow up with a thank-you, there is one issue related to time that does become a problem for many. That issue is the ability to stick with it! For that reason, whenever I meet with someone considering voice acting, I strongly suggest the importance of a secondary motivation. Assuming an individual's primary motivation is making money, a secondary motivation is the thing that compels you to stick with it. Here are a few examples of great secondary motivations that I've heard from professional voice actors and students alike.

"I really think I will enjoy doing voice overs!"

"I know I can do this better than other people I hear!"

"I think this would benefit me in other things I do!"

"I can actually picture myself doing this!"

For people who actually do begin in our field, the risk that they will give up in the first six months is enormous. Every one of the examples above can serve as a valuable asset when it comes to follow-through. For me, it was enjoying what I do. Though it took many years to build success, I always enjoyed working in and around recording and production. Because I truly enjoyed it, I stuck with it!

"The best part about creating a business plan? Checking off the goals I'd made one-by-one as I achieved them. Yes, some took longer than others, but the satisfaction I got every time I accomplished one of the goals I'd make for myself was undeniable!"

*-Geoff, Washington
Voice Actor*

MAKE A PLAN... YOUR PLAN

How Do I Begin?

A good business begins with a good business plan.

Writing a voice acting business plan doesn't have to be complicated. Begin by creating a list of a few goals you want to achieve. Then begin to list steps you can take and resources you can think of that will help you reach your goals. At its most basic, that is a business plan: basic goals and the steps and resources you'll use to achieve them.

Once you've set some goals, examples of steps could include: reading a book, taking a class, or speaking with industry professionals. Examples of resources could be: a friend or relative who works in media, knowledge of a new business opening, or an upcoming community event. Plainly speaking, steps are things you'll use to develop skill and knowledge. Once you have that industry skill and knowledge, your resources are what you will use to build success.

Additionally, the process of setting goals can be very motivating. Transitioning a thought or idea into being part of a real plan is an empowering experience.

LEARN

How Do I Begin?

As I've mentioned repeatedly, being considered a professional voice actor goes well beyond good voice quality and a demo. Building long-term repeat work relationships and earning the respect of potential clients requires professional job knowledge and skill. As a voice actor, your professional responsibilities include good vocal preparation, solid microphone technique, and creative approach to copy, as well as working with descriptive and demonstrative direction.

Whenever I'm asked about demo development by a newcomer, my question for them is inevitably: do you have a skill level that's consistent with professional expectations? The other question is: do you have a clear understanding of your individual voice strengths and how those strengths should be represented on your demo?

Keep in mind, a demo might get you a job, but professional skill can earn you repeat work relationships. And since our field is largely relationship-driven, I suggest a solid foundation in job knowledge and skill.

Also keep in mind that many of the top professionals in our field continue to train and develop skill throughout their careers. My strongest advice is to learn. Develop skill, and develop a solid idea of exactly what your voice does best... your niche. Once you have an understanding of the field and some training, then it's time to make your first demos.

GET THE WORD OUT!

How Do I Begin?

Once you've developed skill and created a demo that represents your individual strengths, you're ready to get the word out. Recognize that a key reason that many people fail to build success at something is that they never let anyone know what it is that they want to build success in. Success in the voice over field requires consistently putting yourself in a position for that success. This begins with letting people know you exist. Try as we might to guess that someone is a voice actor, it's much easier for me to consider someone for a job who lets me know they are a voice actor.

As I discussed earlier, sharing your demo through file sharing services on the internet and creating a personal website to promote yourself and your brand are very effective and easy ways to introduce yourself as a professional. However, while web-based communication has made sharing information easier than ever, it also means that you need to devote extra attention to making yourself stand out in such a vast marketplace. Try to use technology to distinguish yourself from others, and couple it with traditional, boots-on-the-ground self-marketing techniques to give yourself the greatest chance of success.

If you happen to be unusually skilled at marketing, perhaps you could send a handwritten thank-you card to people you meet who you believe could help you reach your goals. I used the description "unusually skilled" in the previous line to be a bit sarcastic, because unfortunately, as simple and obvious as it sounds to send a thank-you, the enormous majority of people in fields like ours fail to do so. And even if they do, they resort to an email, which can be easier to overlook and is more impersonal.




A component of your ultimate success will be differentiating yourself from other voice actors, not just with your voice but also as a professional service provider.

Make yourself stand out!

BE REALISTIC

How Do I Begin?

Despite dramatic fluctuation in the economy in the US, Canada, and abroad, the voice over field continues to grow, particularly the narrative side of the field. One of the things I've heard increasingly from the aspiring voice actors I'm fortunate to work with is that they are pursuing voice acting as a way to "take control of a component of their income." In a sense, they are looking for something they can't be laid off or fired from. I think this is a great and entrepreneurial motivation.



Despite the best motivations in the world, however, it is important that you remain realistic in your approach and expectations of the field in exactly the same way you would when engaging in any other business endeavor.

Today, there is tremendous opportunity in voice acting and our field continues to embrace an increasing range of voices. Know the field, know your voice, develop professional skill, and market yourself consistently and in a manner that will help you stand out as a true professional.

ENJOY THE PROCESS

How Do I Begin?

As I conveyed in the previous chapter, the value of enjoying the process of building success as a voice actor should not be underestimated. In fact, when I think about some of the most successful voice actors I've worked with, the first things that come to mind are traits like how easy they are to work with or how much fun it is to have them in the studio.

The way you feel about something really does come across to the others involved. And in a field driven by creativity, we regularly gravitate toward people who make the work process enjoyable and memorable.

Respect it, plan for it, enjoy it, stick with it... and you can achieve it!

I sincerely thank you for your interest in the voice over field, and on behalf of all of us at Voice Coaches, I wish you the best in all your creative pursuits!

ABOUT VOICE COACHES

Voice Coaches is proud to provide one-on-one voice evaluation, education, demo development, and marketing training to clients across the US, Canada, and abroad. We are dedicated to presenting the voice over field in a manner that is professional and realistic.

Our approach is all-inclusive and anchored by a 15-point speech & voice evaluation process that allows us to learn more about your individual voice strengths while ruling out our speech problems that could inhibit success.

And because our entire process is one-on-one, training and demo production sessions are scheduled in a manner that is convenient to you, including evenings and weekends.

In addition to a tremendous, individualized educational process, our clear, professional policies, full-time administrative, training and production team, award-winning client service, and more than 15 years in voice over education offer our clients the confidence of exceptional service and continued support.

We welcome you to learn more!

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PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS





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