

A Voiceover Primer

Compiled for Tunarelli Clients

1. What is a "Voiceover?"

Well, basically it's anytime a voice is heard without seeing a person's lips moving in sync. There are times when a voiceover person's job is to replace someone else's voice and the audio has to end up back in sync, but mostly a voiceover is defined as being heard and not seen. Radio work would definitely be rated as a voiceover. Voiceovers are used for industrials, radio and TV commercials, program announcements, narrations, cartoons, instructional recordings, multi-media, telephone message services, etc.

2. What is the voice talent's goal and why?

Your job is to read "copy" in a natural, conversational style, without sounding like you have the words written on a piece of paper in front of you, and to do this quickly-without a lot of preparation or direction. In many cases, you are specifically selling a product. In every case, you are communicating a specific message to an audience.

3. Do your homework

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN – Keep the radio on in the car, don't mute the TV during commercials. Become observant and critical of the things you hear. Think about how you would read it.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE – Learn to enjoy the sound of your voice and what you can make it do. Many of our clients unfortunately do not take the opportunity to practice their copy before the recording session. If you are at a real paid gig and they give you the copy beforehand, they will expect you to become familiar with it and be prepared when you come in to record. Studio time is expensive.

4. What the Producer expects...

- a. **PROFESSIONALISM:** Know where you are going and *be on time*. Be friendly and businesslike.
- b. **UNDERSTAND** what you are reading! Don't just read the words-read the meaning. If you were given copy beforehand by the client, the client might expect you to be familiar with it.
- c. Think **REAL PERSON** in every reading you do (unless you are doing Dr. Doom for an animation!) and smile if your reading calls for it: The listener *can* hear that smile.
- d. Learn to **ADD VALUE** to your work by knowing when to embellish the words with reaction sounds, chuckles, etc.
- e. **TAKE DIRECTION:** Listen to the clues the producer will give you as they respond to a particular read. The bottom line is the producer is always right. Be prepared to do it over again and again with slightly different interpretations. Do the job, exchange cards and then leave. Don't hang around chatting: The producer still has work to do after you finish the vocal tracks.

5. Know Your Abilities

The more versatile you are, the more a producer can count on you to deliver.

- a. **Be honest with yourself about your abilities.**
Your demo should reflect a true sample of your talents and you should be able to perform in a studio with the same caliber that you performed on your demo. Don't claim abilities on your demo that you don't possess.
- b. **Practice, practice, practice. LISTEN** to your recordings and let others listen to them. Get professional voiceover talent to critique your voice if you can find them to do this (clients can have a track or medley uploaded to our website for easy review). Take care of your voice. If you have a cold or some other problem that is affecting the way you sound, make sure the producer knows about it before the session.

6. Tools and Techniques

- a. **Produce a high quality recording (both in performance technique and sound quality):**
Use these recordings for a CD/DVD demo or on-line demo showcasing your best abilities.
- b. **Get your demo into the producers hands:** They won't know what you can do if they don't have your demo.
- c. **Remind them that you are there:** Send a notice that your website is up and it's domain address. Thank you notes, periodic updates and make an occasional phone call.
- d. **Do a great job in the studio:** Show versatility, professionalism and warmth. They will remember what a pleasant experience it was to work with you and may re-hire you. Treat every studio gig as if you were being watched by *everyone*.

7. What About the Demo?

Your demo is usually the first way a producer hears what your voice sounds like. In around a minute and a half (or even less) they should be able to gain a clear picture of your range and versatility. A demo should contain actual samples of an actor's BEST and MOST RECENT work. However, many people (beginners and pros alike) will put together a demo that contains some, or possibly all, "faked" spots. Beginners don't have the samples and many pros find that over the years they become type cast in a style and must create new material to keep their demos fresh. Some people have several different demos for different markets. If you have a good range and can do commercials, animation, promos and narrations, you may need four separate demos.

Your Demo Should Be:

- **Interesting** ("ear"-catching)
- **Entertaining**, funny when appropriate
- **Professional** – recorded and mixed well with music, sfx
- **Varied** – in pacing, point-of-view, products, attitude, etc.
- **Honest** – a true representation of your capabilities: Contain only the BEST of what you can do. Make sure that you can really perform all the tricks you demonstrate on your cd.

After the Recording

Market, Market, Market A good agency will do some minimal marketing of their agency's capabilities— not specifically your capabilities—by sending out a House Demo once a year or so to key potential clients. If you are signed with an agent, or included in an agency's files, you will be asked to provide a short audio clip that will be compiled on a CD with the rest of the agency's voice artists. The agent's primary job is to respond to incoming calls for talent and negotiate compensation. They do not make calls on your behalf. You need to be actively involved in your own marketing efforts. You can be the most talented voiceover talent in your neck of the woods, but if no one actually listens to your demo, then you won't be paying your bills off voiceover work. On the other hand, you can be moderately talented and make a living doing voiceovers if the people who sign the checks have your demo in their hands.

Start Dialing The first words out of your mouth, other than a polite hello, should be to ask if the company produces radio or TV spots. If they say no, then thank them and get off the line. If they say yes, then ask for the name of the Creative Director, Producer, or Production Manager. Alternately, you might ask for the name of the person who would most likely listen to voiceover demos. Verify the spelling of the person's name and the correct mailing address. Get an e-mail address if possible for follow up. If you can, try to speak directly to the contact and let them know that you would like to send them a demo. They usually will say sure, go ahead. Think about it: This is a very subjective business—the more options they have, the happier they are!

One of the most effective methods of contacting people is on the telephone. "I hate cold calling!" Yes, don't we all. But take a lesson from Marketing 101: Pre-screen your contacts. This way the people you end up talking to will be the ones interested in your services. You don't want to spend a lot of time or money on people who simply don't need voiceover talent. Depending on the type of demo(s) you have, your cold call list will vary. For the sake of brevity (and we know that web site content should be brief), we'll use a Commercial Demo as our example. Your cold call list would include Advertising Agencies, Radio and TV station production departments and Production Companies that make radio and TV spots. Not all Ad Agencies or Production Companies produce radio and TV spots, so you need to find the groups that would most likely be in a position to actually use your services. A lot of radio and TV stations produce low-end spots that don't pay well, but if you are just getting started and need to test your skills, this may be a good way to break in. Most large cities have local directories that include long lists of Ad Agencies and Audio/Video Production Companies. If you can't find a specific directory of creative types, use the Yellow Pages.

Your Demo is Your Business Card Distribute hard copies to friends, family, coworkers, actors: anyone you would like an opinion from. The more feedback, the better. Your CD demo should be at the ready for a wide variety of marketing and networking. Send it out to your pre-screened contacts. Bring it with you when you attend meetings. Have a couple stuffed under the seat of your car in case you run into someone who needs voice talent. Talk your website up, shmooz, network, pass around business cards with your website address and cell number on it, and mention your voiceover talent every chance you get!