

20 Questions

1. What exactly is a voice-over?

When you hear only the voice on a television commercial, but you don't see the actor who's speaking...that's a voice-over. A radio commercial is a voice-over. Just the narration on any commercial, film, DVD, TV show, animation, Internet, phone prompt, promo, movie trailer, you name it...anytime you only hear the voice of the actor, it's a voice-over.

2. What exactly is a voice-over demo?

A voice-over demo is a professional representation of the work you do best and what you want MORE of. This is how it will read to every professional source that listens to your tracks, so it better be up to the task. They'll figure you feel your demo is the very best you can do. So if it's not... then, that's a problem.

A demo is a handful of well-produced pieces that define your contribution to that specific avenue of the voice-over industry: Commercial, narration, animation, promo or Spanish.

There are basically five separate and distinct demos geared specifically to service five very different areas of voice-over work, which we cover in detail during our one-on-one Orientation.

There are different requirements for each, designed to accommodate the needs of the producers in any given area of voice-over. The object of the demo is to take the guesswork out of the equation in order to make hiring you an easier, more streamlined task.

No matter the genre, most producers are looking to cast talent who sound conversational and honest. In other words, they want you to sound like yourself.

At SOUND ADVICE, we record more than enough material in order to have as much to choose from as possible. Not every spot makes it to the finished product, just the very best of the very best, as it should be.

(To hear for yourself what we're talking about, see our demos page.)

3. How much does a demo cost?

This is the single hardest question to answer regarding the subject of voice-over for the simple reason it depends on so many factors and variables, such as:

Are you a complete novice?

Are you a relatively seasoned talent, but voice-over is a new medium to you?

How much training or career guidance will you need to focus your efforts most effectively?

Do you have an agent yet? Do they specialize in voice-over?

Are you planning on promoting your demo?

How current is your knowledge of the business and what's required of you?

Are you technically inclined and able to record auditions from home? If you're a well-established talent, do you have an effective game plan to raise your game?

How many demos are you planning to tweak or have produced?

All of these and a handful of other specific items we've yet to determine, all factor into what it will take to produce your demos. At SOUND ADVICE we prefer to approach each talent individually and accommodate their needs based on what we'd recommend to glean the greatest return.

You're likely to hear, if you shop around, demos range in cost anywhere from \$300 to upwards of \$10,000 per track, which can only add to your confusion. Rates can vary widely so you have to consider what you're getting for your investment. You need to approach this business as a startup.

That said, not every demo producer or production house will deliver a quality product designed to go the distance, regardless of the rate. You need to assess whether that production source honestly knows what the most current demo demands happen to be, or whether they are delivering a "cookie-cutter" quality demo, with scripts recycled from one demo client to the next, regardless of who you are, and what your professional goals may be.

Put simply, you need to determine what you're getting for your money. You can't buy a career, but you can invest in your career to get the most for your time and money.

Your goal should be to invest in a vehicle you can confidently promote that will afford you a stable lifelong career in this business.

So rather than throwing perfectly good money away creating a temporary or "makeshift" demo, only to later backtrack in an attempt to clean up your professional reputation, you're better off allocating those funds to truly effective coaching or promotion.

The fact is you need reliable, experienced industry professionals who understand you and this business.

At SOUND ADVICE we offer a team of dedicated individuals who have produced better than 5000 demos to date, trained more than 10,000 people and have a remarkable success rate--for any business, because that's what we do. That's SOUND ADVICE.

4. I'm a Pro. I want to stay on top of this business and it's continual changes. What do you suggest I do first?

Even if you have been working and training as a professional for quite some time, we've found so many talent have outdated or flat-out incorrect information. This is an extremely dynamic and kinetic industry and what held true two years ago has changed dramatically and may not be the case in today's market, which is why we recommend we begin our professional relationship with our one-on-one Orientation.

At SOUND ADVICE we have set the industry standard for nearly 20 years. We're on the cutting edge of production and industry demands. We are because we survey the industry continually and effectively from coast to coast. Additionally, our sister company, Big House Casting & Audio, continues to keep us busy with casting and production projects from all over the country. So we're confident the information we're imparting to you is ahead of the curve given our unique vantage point as industry professionals.

Our Orientation is NOT a two-hour description of what it is WE do, or how we produce demos. This is not about US. It's about YOU and where you fit into this business. It's about where this industry is going, it's about your goals and expectations. It's about commitment to excellence and professionalism.

The objective is to focus who you are, how you're perceived by the industry, and where you're most likely to glean the greatest return on your initial investment into your career: your demo and it's promotion.

Additionally, if and when we do offer to produce your demo, it's only AFTER we are confident you will follow our direction and deliver your very best. Our name is on that demo as well. We must be able to stand behind you and confidently recommend you to our production clients.

So, we prefer to sit down for the one-on-one Orientation, with each of our potential SOUND ADVICE demo production clients, regardless of skill level, to ensure professionally we're on the same page. Besides, it's very likely you might just learn a few things that will prove rather valuable and alter the course of your career...for good!

No one offers a more thorough or detailed service as this, PRIOR to production of that very critical tool: the voice-over demo. (Pre-production is crucial to developing an exceptional demo.) Instead, nearly every other demo production "service" will be more than happy to take your money and run. Yet these places will charge a comparable rate to ours and offer you only two to three hours of actual production.

At SOUND ADVICE, we handle each talent, individually, and that begins with the SOUND ADVICE Orientation.

5. Will you tell me if I can't do this?

We'll tell you if you're not applying yourself. We'll let you know what you should be doing and how to apply yourself in nearly any situation in this field.

We'll even back you up and be there for you many years after we've trained and produced your tracks. (We're in this for the long haul, and expect you are too.)

But...if you're asking: will we tell you whether or not you can join this very exclusive club called "voice-over club"? No, we will not.

NO ONE has the right to tell you whether you can or cannot have a career in this business... or any other business for that matter! It's elitist. And, to be perfectly honest, you don't have to take that form of brow-beating from anyone. Ever.

Granted a great many people are not all that forthcoming with information in this industry, they hold their cards very tight to their chest—you have to wonder what they're so afraid of? Maybe they view you as a threat to their livelihood. To add to this, these individuals may not know as much as you now do after taking our one-on-one Orientation.

Frankly, there's plenty of room in this industry for everyone—provided you're trained and prepared to deliver your best. There's been more than a 700% increase in the amount of voice-over being produced annually than there has been in years past. This is due in part to the rapid expansion of more than 2000 cable stations and mass media on the Internet that has become commonplace.

Besides, no one does what you do.

We only take on clients for training and demo production that we feel will benefit most and that will take our direction and apply themselves. YOU have to be responsible for your career. There's really no getting around that. It's just a fact.

We're more than happy to assist in every way we can—but only if you apply yourself!

6. Why do I need a voice-over demo?

Well, frankly, you can't get voiceover work without one. Much like if you don't have a headshot and resume, you can't secure on-camera work.

You need a demo to get a talent agent, and to promote yourself to copywriters and producers at advertising agencies (known as Ad Creatives) and to anyone else who produces work that requires a voice-over.

You may have a friend or family member who may offer you the occasional opportunity to do a job or two prior to having a demo, but if you hope to continue you'll certainly need one.

The whole idea of having a demo is to take the guesswork out of the casting equation. Once we've listened to your demo we should have a very clear idea of what sort of work you're best suited to deliver and most likely to land, what you sound like (for real) and how you animate the text.

In short, the best definition of a demo is: a professional "demonstration" of what it is you do best and what you want MORE of.

7. Can't I just get a "makeshift" demo to start me off?

This is probably the greatest misconception unschooled or novice talent have with regard to this industry, because a demo is your professional calling card.

The fact is, you cannot secure a proper talent agent, or regular auditions, and therefore steady voice-over work without a professional demo. Pure and simple.

If you promote a half-baked demo – that is precisely how any professional contact will view your level of professionalism. It speaks to your level of commitment. They will figure you feel this is the best representation of the very best of your abilities.

Your audience is chiefly made up of Advertising Creatives, especially for a commercial demo. (Which is a standard for every talent.) These guys can't understand why you would create a less than professional demo. It's considered completely unprofessional to produce anything less.

A demo is auditioning for you in your absence. It is your most vital form of promotion.

Granted, you may be just starting out in this field, regardless you are still held to the very same professional standards as everyone else. There is no beginner, intermediate and advanced job out there. Each job is considered to be as professional as the last (this is certainly the case for each client), whether the job is Union or not. Every client expects you to offer the very best of your abilities--always. This standard begins with your demo.

So, if you create a cheap, thrown-together, single-recording-session demo you will have just thrown away \$850 or even \$3000 or whatever you happened to spend on it. Because if the spots on your demo don't sound like actual, well-produced national television spots, spots you'd most likely land – you will not be considered for work of any caliber and therefore not "land work first" before investing in a proper demo as you had originally intended.

The fact is you can't land real work with a poor example of what it is you do best.

(See our Services page to get on the right track.)

8. What do I need to get started in voice-over?

Besides objective training, some sense of what it is you do best, and what your job as a professional entails, you'll need a well-produced demo that best represents you professionally.

You need at least one talent agent, who specializes in voice-over and who has a good idea of what it is you bring to the table, and, most importantly, who is willing to bring you in regularly for auditions.

You'll need a flexible work schedule that allows you the freedom to head to auditions and bookings between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, like most businesses. (That said, we suggest you maintain your day job until you're making at least 3 times more than what you're making now to support yourself.)

You'll need contemporary, well-designed graphics that are smart enough to draw the interest of industry professionals to listen to you and your demos.

You'll need a single-page website devoted solely to your voiceover work where your demos can be heard, and you'll need postcards to broadly promote the site.

Promotion never goes away.

You get out of your career whatever you put into it.

At SOUND ADVICE, we offer a single source for training, production and promotion to give you the greatest advantage in achieving your goals. We are the finger on the pulse.

(See our Services page.)

9. Can I do voice-over part-time?

Our stock answer for years to this question has been, "Sure, if you're Martin Sheen."

Or if you happen to know a producer who has enough work to keep you so busy they want your voice on absolutely everything they do and they do nothing but national spots for a variety of major market products or services.

The fact is part-time is 20 hours a week. And if you were to dedicate ten hours a week to working your skills and another ten hours a week to promoting your demos, then that

would be part-time in this field. At that rate, I'm very confident you would be working full time before long.

So, please do so—dedicate yourself to working on your career for no less than 20 hours a week. Or part time, if you will.

If you're only just starting out, positioning and prepping yourself for the job it takes to be a working talent requires at the very least ten to 20 hours a week—much of that on your own. This is how you become a professional. It takes commitment.

If you're currently working as an office temp, for example, and have no prior experience and are diving into voice-over completely cold, but you harbor a steadfast dedication, some good basic instincts and an appealing personality—then it could very well take you a few dedicated years of professional training and persistent promoting to get to the point where you're actually booking voice-over jobs on a "part-time" basis. And, again, that would be part-time by any other professions' standards.

Becoming a steady working talent takes a great deal of persistence, just like any other small startup business, as hard as that pill may be to swallow. That's realistic.

At SOUND ADVICE, we don't sugarcoat it. We give it to you straight.

Our goal is to assist you in becoming a well-trained, successful freelance talent. And we've had a great deal of experience accomplishing just that.

For more valuable information on the business of acting that you won't find anywhere else, check out The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voice-over & the Business of Being a Working Talent.

Or just give us a call at 773.772.9539 (Chicago) or 323.464.0990 (Los Angeles).

10. Is it realistic to consider my acting career as a 'startup' or 'small business'?

Not only is it realistic—at SOUND ADVICE we absolutely insist on it.

While you're expected to be comfortable and skilled enough to simply 'play' during the session, every other aspect of this business demands you approach it as a proper profession.

Our intention is to give you the greatest opportunity to study this field by giving you step-by-step training and specific advice when it comes to establishing yourself as freelance working talent. If you follow the process we lay out for you here in terms of preparation, performance, production and promotion, and you persist... we're confident you'll succeed in becoming a consummate professional.

If you'd like more great advice on becoming a working actor, we suggest you order a copy of The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voice-over & the Business of Being a Working Talent and sign up for a One-on-One Orientation.

(See Services.)

11. Do I have to have acting experience to pursue voice-over?

No, you don't. Stage work or Improvisation is not the high water mark for whether you will book work in film, TV or voice-over. There are scores of successful stars that can back me up on that.

Would it help? Absolutely, because it allows you to use your imagination, develop a character, tell a story and establish a viewpoint other than your own. All of these attributes are vital to performing in any medium.

Then again, I've known scads of "talent" who've made the claim, "I've been in more than 100 productions!" yet their instincts and basic observational skills are completely misguided.

At SOUND ADVICE, we are intent on thoroughly training you to become the most-valuable professional voice talent you can be regardless of your experience level. Like anything worthwhile, it's a process.

We tailor our training and production to you as an individual. Nothing we do is "cookie-cutter" or "pre-fab"!

(See our Coaching and Services pages to learn more.)

12. To do voice-over I need to be able to do character voices and dialects, right?

Not really. Most of the work available honestly doesn't typically call for you to sound like anyone other than yourself.

In fact, having random character voices and phony accents featured on your demo is considered unprofessional as a whole for the simple reason it sounds amateurish. Maybe one in 30,000 spots are specifically for a French guy or a German guy. Even then, they are more likely to hire someone who actually is French or German or what have you. So, do not waste the time on your demo.

Now, this doesn't mean you should stop playing or creating original characters. It's just that what's the most marketable is you being YOU!

If you happen to speak fluent French, Spanish or German or what have you... then sure, a little of that further in on the demo is totally appropriate depending on the demo you're producing. But never lead with in the first 30-40 seconds unless it's your native tongue for a standard commercial track in English.

C'est si bon!

For examples of what extremely marketable demos should sound like, visit our demos page and hear for yourself.

13. But, I have all these character voices I do. Everyone says I should be making millions. Right?

If you truly have something you can do repeatedly (without hurting yourself and others) ... that is original, then an animation demo is in order.

A commercial demo, however, is what's required of every talent first and foremost and that means more affects than accents!

Commercially you'll be hired for more mainstream work first, due to the fact that it's a bulk of the work. That doesn't mean the straighter stuff lacks wit or is without imagination in any way. It's just that most commercial work doesn't tend to call for out-and-out "cartoon-y" characters, which is precisely why you shouldn't feature these characters unless in a demo geared for animation specifically.

None of this should squelch your character work—these things are not without merit. Just don't limit yourself to continually 'being someone other than yourself'.

The objective of your demo is to define who you are and how you are perceived in a major market.

An animation demo is a specialized thing. It's honestly not for everybody and usually reliant on where you live geographically to glean the greatest return.

Generally, for commercial work and games, if they want a character, they will audition you for it.

As far as impersonations go... as remarkable as they can be—they too are not the first thing you want to open with either, I'm afraid. In fact, if that's all you do the field is rather limited. (You could check out Vegas. I mean, any place that can keep two guys in spangled suits and a bunch of tigers employed for decades at a time can't be all that bad!)

If you're predominantly a character actor it's perfectly appropriate to blend humor and personality-driven material with the straighter, more mainstream commercial deliveries that dominate this work. Pepper gingerly with character affects. Easy does it. It's a balancing act.

14. What does a talent agent do? Do I really need one?

The agent is the primary liaison between you and potential employers (talent buyers/clients/producers). They know what a job is worth and are there to ultimately negotiate your rate as needed. How well your agent serves these folks is by understanding the demands of the production and by representing the talent that best service their productions and projects. This is the most thankless job in the business, yet entirely vital to your bottom line.

15. How do I get a talent agent?

At SOUND ADVICE we have an extensive game plan that has met a great deal of success for every talent who has utilized it. It's mapped out in detail in The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voice-over & the Business of Being a Working Talent.

We cover precisely what an agent's job is so you don't have unrealistic expectations of them and their abilities and so you can focus more directly on your career and succeed. We determine the sort of career you intend to create for yourself. We even suggest ways to secure representation from sources nationwide.

To learn how to get an agent, you must also learn how to keep an agent. This is covered at length during our one-on-one Orientation, through coaching and if we take you on as a demo production client.

(See our Services page.)

We look forward to imparting all of this little-known and extremely useful information to you in person sometime soon!

16. Why do I have to promote my demo? Isn't that my agent's job?

Maybe you're one of those people who repeat this mantra everyday: "I hate promoting myself. I hate it, I hate it, I hate it. Besides, I have no idea how to go about it." (Hmm. Maybe that's why you hate it.)

Maybe you think someone else is supposed to handle all your promotion. If you do, you will abandon your career to be driven to others who have less heart and drive than you do!

Or maybe you consider promoting yourself to be "boastful". Get over it. You're avoiding what needs to be done if you're going to work at all in this business.

I promise you, if you consistently promote yourself and persist at it—you're going to work. You may not start out as the most talented guy in the room but your ability will increase with continually exposing yourself to the auditions and the work until finally you're cornering the market on whatever it is you do best!

Just like you must train and persist at training, you must promote and persist at promoting. Often far beyond what you may have ever imagined necessary. But promotion and marketing get easier and more palatable the more you do it.

But, there is a right and a wrong way to do it. If you already have a demo and you're not promoting it, check out our Marketing page for more details about our incredibly effective, continually updated mailing lists and detailed marketing plan designed to maximize your efforts.

If you're new to voice-over as a medium, check out our Services page. You're going to need a One-on-One Orientation to get started. Call us at 773.772.9539 (Chicago) or 323.464.0990 (Los Angeles) to schedule one.

17. How do you know when you need a new demo?

If you have a professionally produced demo but you haven't landed a proper agent or are working steadily, then... consider the following before completely throwing the baby out with the bath water:

- Take a listen to some of the demos featured on our demos page. Does your demo compare to the level of professional production heard here? If not, you're not even in the ballpark and it's time to upgrade your demo, professionally.
- Do your agents hold their noses when you play your demo for them? Are they a credible source? Do they handle much voice-over?
- Have you sent out repeated promotional mailings to producers and potential clients for at least two years? If not, you have no idea whether the demo works for you or not. (See our Marketing page.)
- Has it been four years or more since you last updated your demo? Depending on your age range and the changes in the market, you may need to tweak an otherwise effective demo.
- Do some of the spots on your demo sound like 'fake' commercials rather than actual national spots?
- Have you landed a few good national television spots that you could add to your current demo?

- Does your demo sound great to you, but your graphics are lackluster? (See our Graphics page.)
- Is your old demo still on cassette and/or runs two minutes (or more)?

Well, then, a bit of SOUND ADVICE: We have the professional skills, the dedication and the technology to make the world right again. We'll talk your ear off if you'll listen with great information you won't find anywhere else.

18. Do I have to be a total “techie” to land work in voice over?

To land work as a professional talent today, whether you're in voice over—or any other industry for that matter—you do have to have some command of technology in order to keep you in step with current professional standards and demands, otherwise you run the risk of your talents dying with you, left completely unattainable, unacknowledged or severely under-utilized. Therefore, if technology is not your forte, you MUST then ally yourself with trusted, reliable options familiar with the specific demands of the acting profession, especially voice over.

At SOUND ADVICE, while we are not web or IT Consultants, we do have precisely what you need, who you can enlist for help. We HIGHLY recommend Website Marketing Partner, RON MARTIN. He can assist you regardless of your location (or his) provided you have a computer and high-speed Internet access.

Could you enlist the tech skills your very talented 15-year-old son or your tech savvy 32-year-old niece? Of course you can. However, they (and therefore YOU) are missing some critical info that will save you a great deal of time, money and a great deal of effort.

Therefore, we suggest you leave it to the professionals.

Check out Website Consultant, Ron Martin for more info and save yourself from the deep, dark 'techno-abyss' once and for all. You sleep better and the professional will comfortably smile upon you.

19. Do I have to have a home recording studio to successfully land steady voice over work? It doesn't hurt! In fact, you open yourself up to a great deal more opportunities nationwide, if not Internationally, as a voice over.

That said if you're not all that tech-savvy to begin with—we suggest you concentrate efforts on being a talent, first and foremost!! Get at least eight months to a year under your belt and then branch out into recording your auditions from home.

Regardless of your background with recording auditions or even actual sessions from home, at SOUND ADVICE we can't recommend ERIK MARTIN of SoundAnswer enough!!

Erik is the PRO's Pro, yet approachable, affordable and experienced enough to understand what you need as you need it. He makes life EASY for every strata of voice over. And that makes it far easier for you to land a greater volume of work from a greater variety of sources! GENIUS!!

Check out more info about Erik and SoundAnswer Home Recording Set-Up and step up your game!

Here's to more work, right away!!

20. Who is Kate McClanaghan?

Kate McClanaghan is the founder, executive producer and proprietor of SOUND ADVICE and its sister companies, Big House Casting & Audio and PinDrop Audiobook Theatre Company. She's a professional producer, casting director, screenwriter and actress. She's been a commercial producer and copywriter for the better part of 25 years, and a voice-over talent since the age of eleven. She's also the author of The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voice-over & the Business of Being a Working Talent, our exclusive guide to successfully navigating this remarkable industry.

For more information on Kate, please read "Guided by Voiceovers," a profile published by Big Idea magazine. Or just ask any of our dedicated, highly-skillful staff. They'll give you an earful.