

Frequently Asked Questions

Please click on the links below to bring you to the FAQ you want to read.

1. What exactly is a voiceover? And for that matter, what's a voiceover demo?

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

A voiceover demo is a professional representation of the work you do best. A demo consists of edits – pieces of *well-produced* commercial voiceover (if the demo is geared to entice commercial producers and writers).

There are basically four separate demos for different types of voiceover work: Commercial, Corporate Narration (a.k.a. Industrial), Promo and Animation. There are different requirements for each because they are geared specifically to the needs of the producers in each of these dramatically different avenues of the industry.

The object of the demo is to take the guesswork out of the equation for each potential 'talent buyer' (the person most likely to hire you as a voiceover).

Most producers, no matter the genre of voiceover they are looking to cast, consistently want you to sound conversational and pleasant. In other words, they want you to sound like yourself while enticing the listener to continue to listen.

Every spot on your demo should have energy and imagery and it should flow well from one spot to the next. The demo should consist of actual well-produced national or strong regional TV and radio commercials (spots) or at least *sound like it*. The cuts should be quick and clean and be the best of the best stuff you can do.

The whole demo (if it's a commercial, promo or animation demo) should run about a minute (1:00) to a minute ten seconds (1:10) – TOPS! Corporate Narration tend to run a little longer; a minute ten seconds (1:10) to a minute forty seconds (1:40) at the high end.

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.)

2. How much does a demo cost?

Not to be vague or add to your confusion in any way...but this is the single hardest question to answer regarding this subject. Because it depends on a terrific number of factors and variables: How much training do you need, how much promotion will you be doing, how up-to-date are you regarding this field, do you have an agent or agents who are booking you now but want you to raise your game, how many demos should you have produced (e.g. Commercial, Narrative, Promo, Animation)--and that's just scratching the surface.

If you surf the Net or solely rely on 'word of mouth,' you're likely to hear anything from \$300 to upwards of \$10,000 per track... so we understand how confusing this can be--especially at first blush. Yet, the rate will vary dramatically depending on whether you have an existing demo that simply needs tweaking, or whether you're at the onset of your career and interested in investing in a vehicle that will afford you a stable lifelong career in this business.

Bottom line: it's essential you do the groundwork correctly from the onset rather than throw together a 'makeshift' demo, and then backtrack in an attempt to save or clean up your professional reputation. The fact is you need reliable, experienced industry professionals who understand you and this business. A team of dedicated individuals who have produced better than 3500 demos to date, trained more than 10,000 people and have a remarkable success rate--for any business. That's what we do. That's **SOUND ADVICE**.

3. I'm a Pro. Why do I have to take your 'Orientation' first?

Even if you have been working or training in this business for quite some time, we've found so many talent are often operating off of outdated or 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 today.

At **SOUND ADVICE** we set the industry standard. 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. In addition, our sister company, **Big House Casting & Audio**, continues to keep us busy with casting and production from all over the country. So we're confident the information we impart to you is the trends we are foreseeing and experiencing currently from our unique vantage point as industry professionals.

This is a very isolated field for the voiceover talent--you're a freelancer, so it's just as important for the more seasoned or even well-established talent to begin services at **SOUND ADVICE** with our Orientation. By doing so, we can better tailor our services to your needs and get you fully up-to-date on the current trends and state of the industry and how they relate to you and your career goals.

Typically, we recommend scheduling you for a one-on-one coaching session following the **Orientation**. Our coaching sessions utilize our own copyrighted process that has forwarded the careers of thousands of successful talent. These sessions are recorded to CD for your future reference. Coaching allows us to determine your skill level as well as your ability to self-direct and take direction.

The **Orientation** is NOT a two-hour description of what it is WE do or how we produce demos or what have you. This is not about US. It's about YOU and where you fit into this business. The objective is to focus who you are and where you're most likely to get the greatest return on your initial investment into your career.

Additionally, if and when we do offer to produce your demo, it's only AFTER we are confident you will follow through and deliver your very best. Our name is on that demo as well. If we produce your demo, then we will include your web page on our site(s), which is the most effective form of promotion you could have. We must be able to stand behind you and confidently recommend you to potential clients.

So, all our **SOUND ADVICE** voiceovers, regardless of skill level, are required to sit down with us for the **Orientation**, one-on-one, to ensure you have a complete overview of this business and to make certain we're on the same page. The object is to give you the most immediate updates the industry requires you to know. No one offers as thorough or detailed a service as this PRIOR to production of that very critical tool: the voiceover demo. Instead, nearly every other demo production "service" will be more than happy to take your money and run.

At **SOUND ADVICE**, we handle the individual talent. And that starts with the **SOUND ADVICE Orientation**.

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

We'll tell you if you're not applying yourself, or what you *should* be doing or *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 you. (We're in this for the long haul, and expect you are too.)

However, if you continually choose to *not* follow our direction then, like most Casting Directors, it's not likely we'll consider you for future projects let alone continue to coach you or produce your demo.

But...will we tell you whether or not you can join this 'very exclusive voiceover club'? No, we won't.

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! That's elitist. And, to be perfectly honest, you don't have to take that form of brow-beating from anyone in this or any business.

Problem is, so many people hold their cards so tight to their chest in this industry and are not all that forthcoming with information--and you have to wonder what they're so afraid of. Maybe you're a threat to their livelihood, eh? (Or that's certainly how they feel.) Then again, they may not know as much as you do after taking a simple two-hour Orientation with us.

Frankly, there's plenty of room for everyone. There's been a better than 700% increase in demand for voiceover in the past five years. Besides, no one does what you do.

Knowledge is power.

Now, that said, we still may or may not work with you. We only take on clients for training and demo production that we feel will benefit most and that will take direction well and apply themselves to the task of expanding their own careers. But we want YOU to be responsible for your fate--because there's really no getting around that. It's just a fact.

We're more than happy to assist in every way we can--provided we have a cordial working relationship.

5. Why do I need a voiceover 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 anyone else who produces work that requires a voiceover.

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 obviously 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'd most likely land, what you sound like (for real) and how you animate the text. In short, the demo is a "demonstration" of what it is you do best in voiceover.

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

This is probably one of the greatest misconceptions unschooled or novice talent have with regard to this industry.

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

If you promote a half-baked demo – that is precisely how any professional contact to whom you forward that product will view your commitment and your level of professionalism.

Why would they take you seriously? Your audience is chiefly made up of Advertising Creatives. These guys can't understand why you would create a less than desirable demo to lead with. It's considered very bad form. You may never get another real good shot at it if you lead with an unprofessional demo. It's auditioning for you when you're not there.

Granted, you may be just starting out, but in the field, you are held to every professional standard on every job you audition or book. These standards adhere to everyone. There is no beginner, intermediate and advanced job out there. Each job is considered to be professional (certainly to each individual client), and should be done to the best of your ability. That begins with your demo.

So, if you create a cheap, thrown-together, single-recording-session demo you will have just thrown away \$400 or \$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.

Don't waste your time. 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.)

7. What do I need to get started in voiceover?

Besides training and 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 voiceover 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 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 do your day job until you're making at least 3 times more than what you're making now to support yourself.)

You'll need progressive, 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 postcards to broadly promote the site.

AND, most of all, you'll need a steady commitment to continue to develop your skills and promote yourself, your demo and your voiceover website.

You get out whatever you put into your career.

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.)

8. Can I get work without a headshot or demo?

In a word: no.

If you expect to work in front of a camera or on stage, you **MUST** have a proper headshot. By the same token, if you intend to do voiceover, you **MUST** have a proper demo. No one can hire you without them.

Far too many would-be talent have a cheap-attack when it comes to their most vital tools: their headshots and their voiceover demo. They spend as little as possible thinking they can get by with 'makeshift' headshots and demos. Ultimately, all they manage to accomplish is racking up lost time and money.

You could be the most talented thing this side of Timbuktu, but the fact remains, it'll die with you if you aren't professional enough to invest in proper headshots and demos that represent you well when you're not there.

Your headshots and demo act as something of an 'audition' prior to the audition. They've got to look and sound like the person who walked in the door (namely YOU). If they are poorly produced or shot, or are not up-to-date and professional enough to function within the parameters of industry standards, then you will:

- Undermine your professional credibility, rather than establish it.
- Risk promoting yourself as someone who clearly doesn't understand the business they intend to work in.
- Add to your own frustration by wasting money and valuable time, as you will only have to re-do them, rather than presenting the proper professional tools in the first place.

In order to produce the best possible demo, getting training before producing your demo is not only advisable, it's highly encouraged. Training is a constant, regardless of experience level, and

should be a ball continually in play for every talent.

(See our **Coaching** page, then give us a call to get scheduled.)

9. Can I do voiceover 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, right? And if you were to spend ten hours a week working your skills and ten hours a week promoting your demo, then that would be part-time and I'm very confident you would be working full time before very long. So, sure, if you dedicate your time in that way, we don't see why not!

If you're only just starting out, positioning and prepping you for the job takes at least ten to fifteen hours a week—much of that on your own. So you tell us. Does that qualify as part-time for you?

If you're currently working as an office temp, for example, and have no prior experience and are diving into voiceover 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 voiceover jobs on a "part-time" basis. And, again, that would be part-time by any other professions' standards.

It takes a great deal of persistence, like any other small startup business.

As hard as that pill may be to swallow, that's realistic.

If your current job will allow you to pop out of the office for an audition or two a week and you're working your vocal chops all the way to work and all the way home in the car and then taking a class or two a week – then you should be in good shape. If not, and voiceover is your heart's desire, you'll need to find a day job that will cover your bills (in life and in your investment into this new field) till you are up and running full steam as a voice talent.

It's Business 101. 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 Voiceover and 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 a 'startup or 'small business'?

Not only is it realistic – we absolutely insist that you do.

While you are 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 career.

Our intention at **SOUND ADVICE** is to give you the greatest opportunity to study this profession, giving you step-by-step training and 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 the 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 voiceover and the Business of Being a Working Talent*** and sign up for a One-on-One Orientation.

11. Do I have to have stage experience to pursue voiceover, or a career in TV or film?

No, you don't. Stage work is not the high water mark for whether you will book in film, TV or

voiceover. There are scores of successful stars and starlets in Hollywood that can back me up on that.

Does 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 stage "talent" that make the claim, "I've been in more than 100 productions!" while their performance instincts and basic observational skills are completely amiss. This can, and often is, the result of subjective training. These so-called "well-trained" individuals often take any real direction as an insult and everyone loses as a result because far too often the production suffers from lack of focus. This scenario is as common as dirt.

So, stage experience is not actually required, contrary to popular belief, although it certainly couldn't hurt. But goal-driven, objective training and the intention to develop one's skills is forever needed and wanted from every talent who intends to work, no matter the media.

At **SOUND ADVICE**, we are intent on thoroughly training you to become a professional voice talent regardless of experience level. Like anything worthwhile, it's a process. Your needs are specific to you. We address the training and production needs of each talent individually. (See our **Coaching** and **Services** pages to learn more.)

12. To do voiceover I need to be able to do dialects – right?

Not really. Most of the work out there doesn't often call for you to sound like anyone *other than yourself*.

In fact, having accents featured on your demo is considered a big no-no. Here's why: it sounds amateurish because maybe one in 30,000 spots are specifically for a French guy or a German guy or whatever. Even then they are more likely to hire someone who naturally sounds like that anyway. So, do not waste the time on your demo. Once they get to know you for who you are, your agent may ask you if you're proficient at dialects or characters.

Now, on the other hand, if you happen to speak fluent French, or Spanish (preferably not Castilian, sorry, not in America) or German or what have you...then sure, a little of that further in on the demo is totally cool. It should never be what you lead with in the first 30-40 seconds.

C'est, c'est bon!

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!

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

13. But, I have all these 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 sure, reserve a place for a few characters further in on your demo. However, keep in mind you're going to get hired for more mainstream things first, due to the fact that the straighter stuff is a bulk of the work that's out there. That doesn't mean the straighter stuff lacks wit or is without some sort of affectation on your own voice, it's just that most of it doesn't call for out-and-out "cartoon-y" characters, that's all, which is precisely why you shouldn't feature only characters or more characters than realistic reads on your demo.

That said, the upside is: Character actors have a far greater shelf life. They tend to go the distance because they age better than ingenues and can count on a longer career in this business, so they aren't without merit. Just don't limit yourself to continually being someone other than yourself.

Those characters are simply a 'via' (or a bridge) to your own signature voice or vocal persona, and that's what you should really tap into. The objective is to define how you are perceived in a major market and what is your signature sound. It's usually closer to who you are than you might think.

A Character demo is a specialized thing. It's honestly not for everybody. It's a track highlighting original characters and should be considered a secondary track to a commercial demo, if used at

all. Generally, if they want a character, they will audition you for it.

As far as impersonations go...they're 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 incredibly limited. (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.)

On the other hand, if you're predominantly a character actor and you're looking at producing your first demo, then it would be perfectly appropriate to blend humor and personality-driven material with the straighter, more mainstream commercial announce delivery that tends to dominate much of the work. This way you'll be well represented on a broader front, rather than depicting yourself solely as a specialized 'character type.'

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). They know what a job is worth and negotiate your rate with would-be talent buyers (casting directors, commercial producers, commercial copywriters, industrial producers and production business managers). How well your agent serves these clients, by being professional and pleasant, by having the talent that the buyers are interested in and by being flexible when negotiating (within reason), will determine how useful and therefore how successful your agent (and you) will inevitably become.

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 completely mapped out in ***The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voiceover and 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 tailor this game plan to your specific needs and help determine the sort of career you intend to create for yourself. We even suggest ways to secure representation from sources nationwide that has been more effective than ever in the past year.

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 training and when we take you on as a demo production client. (See our **Services** page.) We look forward to imparting this little-known and very useful information to you in person sometime soon! Call us at 773.772.9539 (Chicago) or 323.464.0990 (Los Angeles) to schedule an appointment.

16. What is the difference between a talent agent and a casting director?

A casting director gets paid to hold auditions and secure the best possible cast for productions that originate from advertising agencies, television producers and film production companies. They are expected to be familiar with performance demands, as well as the demands of producing film, television and commercial work and to have direct access to the wealth of talent.

A talent agent on the other hand, according to SAG (Screen Actors Guild) and AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists), "solicits employment, submits talent for employment and/or negotiates compensation and terms of conditions of employment for the performers." Simply put, the talent agent is the primary liaison between the talent and the work.

Casting (the hiring of talent) is done by the producer(s) or director through the casting director who then contact the talent agent to book the talent for the job.

A talent is expected to arrive on the talent agent's doorstep fully realized professionally, regardless of whether they are union or non-union. Being a fully realized talent has less to do with experience and more to do with preparedness; this means the talent's promotional materials must be up-to-date and they are available via cell phone and email within an hour or less of being contacted by the talent agent.

A talent agent is not a manager. A talent manager, according to the Chicago SAG-AFTRA office, is "an individual who assists the performer in the management of his/her business, and provides career guidance and counseling to the performer." Los Angeles and New York markets utilize talent

managers most. Managers give you general career guidance, choose headshots, tell you what to wear, which classes to take and have a vested interest in focusing the direction of your overall career.

Talent are NEVER encouraged to contact casting directors directly by cold calling or simply "stopping by." If you do, you will have crossed a professional line and will likely be met by very irritated individuals who are likely to have little interest in you in the future as you will have probably interrupted production and clearly don't know the chain of command.

That said, you do need to make yourself known to the casting directors by mailing your headshots/resumes, demos and promo postcards to them rather than relying solely on your talent agents to start or propel your career. The agent gets paid ONLY 10%. It would stand to reason then that you do AT LEAST 90% of the work or more. A talent agent determines what an acting job is worth. They often specialize in one aspect of the business, such as voiceover or film. Once you have an agent to represent you, the casting directors will call you in for auditions through your talent agent.

In major markets, many casting directors offer training to impart their knowledge and industry experience to the talent directly. This is a grand opportunity for talent to discover what's needed and wanted of them from industry professionals who understand both talent, story and production demands. This is your opportunity to be seen and forge relationships with the prominent casting sources. Union-franchised talent agents, on the other hand, are not in the position to career coach or legally receive compensation from talent above and beyond the 10% commission they receive for negotiating your rate of pay from a booking (job).

SOUND ADVICE, has two studios (Los Angeles and Chicago) staffed with seasoned commercial producers, casting directors and professional talent, which allow us to impart our knowledge and experience directly to each individual client we work with through coaching, workshops and full-service demo production-regardless of skill or experience level.

(See our **Services** page for more information.)

17. 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 do that. Or maybe you're too "humble." And it would be "boastful" of you to promote your demo.

Get over it. You're avoiding what needs to be done if you're to work at all.

I promise you, the guys who do get out there and persist at promoting themselves are eventually going to work. And they may not start out as the most talented guy in the room but their ability will increase with every job they land until finally they're cornering the market on whatever it is they do best!

Just like you must train and persist at training, you have to promote and persist at promoting. Promotion and marketing get easier and more palatable the more you do it.

But, if you've tried marketing yourself in the past and have not had much success, there may be a few things you're overlooking. There is a right and a wrong way to do it. If you already have a demo, check out our **Marketing** page for details about our mailing list and detailed marketing plan.

If you're new to the medium of voiceover, 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.

18. How do I know when I need a new demo?

If you have a professionally produced demo but you aren't working steady, 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 voiceover?
- Have you sent out repeated promotional mailings to producers and potential clients for no less than a year? 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 long (or more)?

Well, then, a bit of **SOUND ADVICE**: We have the know-how and the technology to make the world right again. Time to give us a call: 773.772.9539 (Chicago) or 323.464.0990 (Los Angeles). We'll talk your ear off if you'll listen with great information you won't find anywhere else.

19. How do you spell 'voiceover'?

Voice-over (in the dictionary) is hyphenated. However, the world at large manages to spell it one of three ways: 'voice over', with a space; 'voice-over', hyphenated; and 'voiceover', one word to save on classified costs.

We prefer 'voiceover'. Seems more concise somehow.

20. Who is Kate McClanaghan?

Kate McClanaghan is executive producer, senior casting director, and founder of **SOUND ADVICE** and its sister companies, **Big House Casting & Audio** and **PinDrop Audiobook Theatre Company**. She's been a commercial producer and copywriter for the better part of 25 years, a casting director since 1996 and a voiceover talent since the age of 11. She's also the author of **The SOUND ADVICE Encyclopedia of Voiceover & the Business of Being a Working Talent**, our exclusive guide to succeeding in this industry.

For more information on Kate, please read "**Guided by Voiceovers**," a profile published by *Big Idea* magazine.