

# sound advice

## the most complete voice-over demo service

March 2005

"If your heart is dealing with what you did...you ain't dealing with what you're doing."

--Dave Shropshire, voiceover extraordinaire

### **What's It Worth To You?**

Since this Newsletter is dedicated primarily to getting paid as a talent it makes sense to begin with the talent agent and their role in your career. To begin, there's a distinct difference between a manager and a talent agent. Ultimately, the primary function of the talent agent is to negotiate your rate and secure a reasonable contract. Where as a manager, guides and grooms your career.

The agent is the liaison between you and the work and allows you accessibility to auditions you'd never have access to on your own. And for this service a Union-franchised agent receives 10% of the earnings they have negotiated for you while a Non-union agent usually receives a 20% commission. A talent manager, on the other hand, would be paid to advise you how to accomplish your professional goals by recommending specific coaches and classes, what to wear for auditions and interviews, and they arrange auditions and bookings until you secure representation from a talent agent. The manager also determines how and to whom to promote your materials. Managers usually receive 10, 15, 20 or even as much as 25% of your earnings. Some are paid a monthly stipend. It varies and is based on the agreement between you. That fee may or may not include handling your promo.

Ideally, eventually a manager would refer you to a talent agent whose expertise aligns with your professional goals. For instance, if you intend to be the next Joan Cusack, your manager would, after 'developing you' for a time, refer you to a talent agent who represents film actors of your type. If the agent concentrates on comedic types like Bernie Mac or George Lopez who do television but are transitioning to film (theatrical) and this is the sort of work you're best suited to play then the idea is the manager will assist you in becoming part of that agent's talent pool.

At Sound Advice, if we produce your voiceover demo, as part of your package we often assist you in attaining your professional goals by acting as 'mini-manager'; referring you to outside training programs, advising you with on-going promotion and, in many instances, by exposing you to your first professional auditions. Of course, our objective is to make you as independent as possible so you can maintain your own career. We simply act as an 'on ramp' toward your career goals.

Traditionally, the Chicago talent industry doesn't embrace the manager concept, even though so many talent require the assistance and guidance that manager's often provide. Chicago talent agents may *try* to do what they can in this respect but given their overwhelming commitments often find themselves unable to be very effective.

Generally, New York and Los Angeles talent regularly employ managers. However, this doesn't mean every manager (or agent for that matter) is effective even with the best talent. Certainly in most areas outside of these two major metropolis' talent agents try their best to assist talent achieve their goals by making suggestions regarding headshots, demos, training and so forth. (Which is why an agent is often confused with a manager.) Don't let this fool you, still the most effective way to secure proper representation from a talent agent is to arrive on their doorstep *fully realized*: thoroughly trained, with professional headshots (if applicable), a well-produced demo, a fair amount of professionalism and with some awareness of your type and career expectations. Expecting a talent agent to mold and groom you is only an added burden on them so the less they are required to 'sculpt you' professionally, the greater your chances of not wasting their time or yours.

A talent agent's responsibilities have increased dramatically over the past couple years, especially in voiceover now that nearly *all* voiceover auditions are held at the talent agency due to the bulk of national auditions being cast through voicebank.net. This has required talent agents to become recording engineers, directors and IT guys, in addition to their other very vital responsibilities. These added tasks are skills *seldom* (if ever) innately found in talent agents. As I began this dissertation, talent agents are there to bargain and negotiate your rate of pay. This means they should have a good understanding of the Ad Industry, production demands and are willing to assist producers and casting directors fulfill their talent requirements by maintaining a professional, diverse roster of talent. Agents are expected to work *with* producers and casting people to achieve the best result within the limitations of the budget. A fair amount of diplomacy blended with a good deal of confidence is what's required. They are expected to have far more experience in what jobs

are worth than you do. They are further expected to understand the contractual and legal particulars of the project to better serve the best interest of their clients, namely, YOU, the talent. Agents are expected to understand their market. That takes time and intention. It's key they remain in tune with the current trends. Okay, imagine all this *and* expecting only to get paid when the talent gets paid and even then only a 10% commission. Agents are legally *not* allowed refer talent to any *one* specific vendor for headshots or demos or to receive *any* additional funds from talent or anyone else without breaching their agreement or losing their license. If they do, their agency could even lose their union franchise as well. On the other hand, managers, non-union agents and casting directors are all free agents and not held to union (SAG and AFTRA) requirements or state licensing demands. They are freelance and set their own policies. So, if you wonder whether having an agent is worth it—I have to say, yes. Yes, it is. Particularly if they have a positive reputation and are an active part of the local talent industry and especially if they have a real interest in knowing who you are and what you bring to the table. These people are the liaison between you and the work. Agents allow us to concentrate on the job at hand and leave the contractual dirty work up to them.

Ideally, you'll be multi-listed (registered with a number of agents simultaneously), especially for voiceover, because you will be exposed to a greater number of auditions and therefore more production. The more opportunity, the more work you're likely to secure.

If your demo and headshots are well produced, your professionalism is in tact, and you follow the protocol and procedure in "The Sound Advice Encyclopedia of Voice-over and How To Be a Working Talent" you shouldn't have a problem securing proper representation.

You simply must persist.

### **Speak The Speak**

Our monthly installment of keeping you in step with the Industry terminology is as follows:

**check avail**—This is a very good sign *you may* have gotten the job. If an agent calls to "check your availability" for a particular day and time after an audition *you may have* booked the job. Though it's not a confirmed "booking"—*yet*. Until you are officially booked a 'check avail' is a loose version of being 'on hold'. In union terms being 'on hold' means they intend to use you they're just not quite sure where or when and if they release you they must pay you for the session. In non union terms they can release you from being 'on hold' and not be obligated to pay you. A 'check avail' is a far less official and more like a 'near booking' than being put 'on hold' which is a bit more firm. And if you're released from being on 'check avail' they're not obligated to pay you. Which is why you are more likely to hear "You're check avail for insert product/service you auditioned for here for Tuesday March <sup>th</sup> I'll call you back with details." If you don't get the job don't sweat it any number of things may have occurred. While it's true they may have gone with another talent over you and you were the back up guy they may have scrapped the whole project entirely as well. Then again they may not have been able to get other players locations or production elements on the date and time you were available. Or for legal reasons the project may have been indefinitely suspended. Moral of the story: if you're 'released' from a check avail let it go move on. But if you know the director producer or copywriters' name(s) and agency they are with be sure to send them a postcard and demo after a week or so. They must have liked something you did. They're likely to use you on something else in the future if you remain accessible to them.

### **Rate of Pay**

One of our clients, **BJ Tregoning**, recently booked a VO job directly off his web page from a source based in Amsterdam (Inter Voice, the largest voice talent agency in Europe, [www.intervoice.nl](http://www.intervoice.nl)). They told him it was a non-union, six-month 'buy-out' (a flat fee in lieu of residuals). When asked what his rate was he thought for a moment and said, "How about \$100 (U.S.) a month (for six months) and \$200 (U.S.) for the session." "Sounds good." BJ booked our studio and had the client pay (by credit card) to his PayPal account, forgoing the exchange rate from Euros to American in one full swoop. Nice going, BJ! Clever bargaining. (What are you—a producer?!)

When you're asked to give your rate it can quickly become a very confusing roadblock. After all, talent generally have little *if any* experience negotiating rates for themselves. Rates are based on production budgets and project demands and they can vary dramatically from one project to the next, which is another good reason to leave this task to the talent agent.

Certainly if you have joined Voice 123 (on-line) you may find a number of jobs go for \$25 or \$50. Most of these gigs are picked up by the scores of folk who people radio stations nationwide who generally aren't paid *anything* at their local stations for gigs so \$25 is an increase. (Ironically, most of these people dream of breaking into voiceover.)

As the old adage states: don't sweat the small stuff, and—yep, you guessed it, it's ALL small stuff. The goal here is to get as many auditions under your belt as possible and to do the very best job possible with each. Don't kill yourself over a \$25 voiceover you were under bid on. It's likely to be 45 seconds of text the 'producer'/engineer will shoehorn into a :30 second spot.

Bad habits are cultivated in these waters, I will warn you. Such as 'speed reading' and not caring *who* you're talking to. 'Talking to the masses' rather than one single person further dilutes your power. Sounding 'annuncy' or overly 'ready' by emphasizing *every single thing* is commonplace when you're new to the medium or being directed by an over-zealous regional client or local radio production staff. And of course, selling yourself short by accepting the most paltry of rates (like \$25 or \$50 a job) can be commonplace among these ranks. If this is you, you certainly want to keep the clients you have, but know that at some point you have to raise the stakes for yourself. If you find you're booking more of these spots than anything else, you have to put a concerted effort toward keeping your skills sharpened for more national work, while positioning yourself to become accessible to national auditions as well. With a proper demo, training, continual promotion and by securing agents that book national commercials *will* move you up to the next level. But you have to make that your intention. It doesn't occur on its own. It's a risk you have to take. That's what life's about.

Where ever you put your attention—that is where your source of income will be.

### **'Resids'**

Union work pays two ways: first, a 'session fee' for showing up and recording the spot. Secondly you're paid 'residual' pay for its broadcast usage.

You're paid a 'session fee' in case the commercial doesn't ultimately air. This way at least you're paid something for your efforts. (Yes, you could land a really terrific spot, well written, wonderfully produced, big stars and so forth and yet until that spot is broadcast on the telly, you can not count on a penny of the residuals you might hope to earn.)

'Resids' (the slang term for the 'residuals') can be the greatest amount of pay you can earn as a talent, *especially* for commercials. This is why I'm continually advocating talent focus their attention to landing Union commercial work because it can subsidize your entire career. And that, my darling dear, is what we are after here!

To help clarify a few things about residual pay, I'm including an excerpt from SAG's (Screen Actors Guild) fall 2004 magazine. Oddly, they are speaking primarily about television and film so I have added info regarding commercial work. (You can note my input because it's *italicized*.)

When I asked my agent, who handles the accounts payable at Stewart Talent-Chicago, Kim Valkenburg, (formerly the contract negotiator at Leo Burnett), why SAG neglected to include commercial residuals in their article, she stated Hollywood is more concerned with film and TV. Okay, I could see that, but doesn't the commercial actor pay into the P & H (Pension and Health) coffers more than *any other performer* in the Union, I asked? She said, "Yep. By as much as 28%." Uh-huh. Little bit of an oversight on their part. That said...here goes:

### **TV/Theatrical Residuals –Screen Actor Fall**

#### **What are residuals?**

Residuals are compensation paid to performers for use of a (*commercial*), motion picture or television program after its initial use For TV work (*including commercials*), residuals begin once a show (*or spot*) starts airing/re airing or is released to video/DVD pay television broadcast TV or basic cable For film work residuals begin once the movie appears on video/DVD basic cable and free or pay television

#### **What factors are my residuals based on?**

Residuals are based on formulas that take into account such things as: the contract in place during the specific year time spent on the production production type and the market where the product appears (TV video/DVD pay television basic cable) You can learn more about these formulas at [www.sag.org](http://www.sag.org)

#### **Who is entitled to receive residuals?**

All performers hired under or upgraded to a principal performer agreement (*working on a Union production*) whose performance remains in the final product This includes: performers professional singers stunt performers stunt coordinators pilots and dancers

#### **Do background actors (~~Extras~~) receive residuals?**

No background actors do not receive them unless they are upgraded to principal performers

#### **Do I receive residuals for an initial release?**

No Initial compensation covers a project's preliminary release for the market in which it was produced Residuals are due only for re use of a production (except for the rare re release into the theatres)

(*You DO however if it's a commercial production*)

#### **When are residuals due?**

Here's a quick guide:

Made for Television then released to:

Network Prime Time (including UPN and WB) – days after airdate

Non Prime Time days after airdate

Syndication months after airdate

Foreign Free TV No later than days after producer obtains knowledge of the first foreign telecast and never later than six months after that first telecast

Basic Cable Quarterly  
Made for Theatrical then released to:  
Network Prime Time days after the initial broadcast then quarterly  
Free TV Non Network months after initial broadcast then quarterly  
Supplemental Markets months after initial exhibition then quarterly

*(For Commercial work two weeks after the spot initially airs on network and 30 days after airing on cable. It varies from job to job based on the particulars of the product/service and the length the spot is expected to run on air.)*

**How many times can I expect to receive residuals in any of the above markets?**

There's no set answer Payment depends on license agreements the project's commercial viability and when and how often the product airs However as long as the product is generating revenue for the producer the performer is entitled to residuals (based on contract year and under which type the project was produced)

**What is the most important thing I can do to ensure I get my residuals checks properly?**

Keep your address and contact information current

*(Another good reason to continually remain accessible.)*

**In like a Lion...**

Our own **Glenn Haines** is in Chicago for the month of March, so I suggest you get scheduled with him as soon as possible. He books up fast. And no wonder. He can change the course of your career in a single session! (Sound like Superman? Yeah, there's something to that.) Call him and schedule your appointment at (206) 949-9990.

**Get Your Irish Up!**

**Sean Sullivan** himself is playing in an Irish folk band called "One of the Girls" on Sunday, March 13<sup>th</sup> beginning at 6pm at the Heartland Café (7000 N. Glenwood). It's a benefit for BackStage Theatre Company. There is NO charge but BackStage will receive a portion of the proceeds from the total Heartland Café earnings for the evening. They need a lot of people there...so be sure to arrive hungry and ready for some fun! So by all means GO or there'll be hell to pay, you lil' gob-shiot!

**Till next month**

I thought I'd wrap with a few good Irish thoughts and toasts given the feast day of St. Patrick is upon us... and considering I'm the most thorough Paddy I know, at least born and bred on this side of the Atlantic. (It explains a lot, doesn't it?)

"I hope and pray that none may kill me, Nor I kill any, with woundings grim. But if ever any should think to kill me, I pray thee, God, let me kill him." (A rosy thought. Naturally, 'Anonymous' wrote it.)

"May neighbours respect you, trouble neglect you, the angels protect you, and heaven accept you!" (Ideally in that order.)

"May your home always be too small to hold all your friends."

"May you have nicer legs than yours under the table before the new spuds are up." (It's well known many Irishwomen, especially those from the South, have legs the same thickness from thigh to ankle. So I'm not sure what this toast is hoping for exactly. A wife with pegs for legs?)

"May you die in bed at 95, shot by a jealous spouse." (Clearly for the goal-driven Irishman.)

"May you have warm words on a cold evening, a full moon on a dark night, and a smooth road all the way to your door." (One of my favorites.)

"I have known many, and liked not a few, but loved only one and this toast is to you." (All right, what are the odds, but, you have to admit, it's a nice sentiment just the same.)

And lastly, my Grandmother's toast, one Ellen Macatamany Murray...

"Here's to Us! Those like us? Dare no one." Meaning, no one could replace you/us, respectively.

Funny, I always feel the need to explain what I've just said after an Irish quote.

Stay out of trouble and get yourself to church! (It is a feast day after all. That means no meat, just fish!)

Until next month...Slanche!