

# sound advice

## the most complete voice-over demo service

September 2005

“Every time we shirk making up our minds or standing up for a cause in which we believe, we weaken our character and our ability to be fearless.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

### Reruns

We first ran the following segment regarding digital patch (ISDN) in December of 2004. It's such a part of our everyday production in voiceover—I felt it important enough to run again now. I've tweaked it slightly to accommodate industry changes we've experienced since then.

### What's the difference between a 'digital patch' and a 'phone patch'?

Both a '**digital patch**' and a '**phone patch**' are recordings done in a studio with the producer/copywriter/client “patched” in from another studio (most likely) in another state. These types of sessions have been around for nearly ten years but have become commonplace in the past few years. They're incredibly useful because they make it far easier for a client to book and direct you on a session no matter where they (or you) may be. You could be in Chicago and the client in New York, or Honolulu, or Texas, or LA or where ever, as long you both have ISDN at your access, you have a session.

A 'digital patch' (a.k.a. ISDN) is the equivalent to being in the *same* studio as the client. In fact, you'd swear they were on the other side of the glass in the control room.

ISDN stands for Integrated Services Digital Network. What that is in plain English is two *digital* phone lines.

In the mid-1990's we thought this is how the world would be getting on the Internet *today*. Certainly if SBC had their way that's precisely how it would have gone because it requires the phone company install these two (rather expensive) designated digital lines. It costs a fair amount to simply maintain these lines as a standard service because they do not fall under 'residential service' but rather 'business'. To add to that these two digital lines demand a long distance, *business* account—on BOTH lines! Cha-ching. The lowest long distance rate I know of (for ISDN) is \$1.20 per minute—and that doesn't even include the engineer's costs.

This is precisely why you should encourage your agent to arrange for the client to initiate the dial up when ever possible. In fact, in most cases, the client will assume the charges of utilizing two studios (the one on their end and the one on yours). If you have a small studio in your home, usually--*ideally*, the client will call you so you don't assume the long distance charges as well.

Suffice it to say, ISDN sessions incur the most costly long-distance service around, even during non-peak. To add to this, for recording purposes, ISDN requires a special “phone” on both ends and to send your audio directly to your clients' hard drive called a '**codec**' to encode and decode the signal.

At **Sound Advice**, we have a high-end codec in our studio because I've been careful to insure we make ourselves as accessible as possible. As it is we average up to two to three 'ISDN' sessions a day and we're only a small 'boutique' recording studio. That's a good indication of the many ISDN sessions the larger studios are actually handling. In fact, better than half and as many as 85% of all recording sessions today are now ISDN (a.k.a. digital patch). It's a great big national pool out there these days, if you make yourself accessible to it, and the “all swim” sign is up and out, so dive in! The water is warm and friendly.

As for '**phone patch**', this is format is known as *analog* and is very much like speaking with someone from your home phone. The highs and lows are pretty much cut off. S's sound fuzzy for the most part. A 't' could be read as a 'd'; a 'b' sounds like a 'v' and so forth. In other words, *the quality is lacking*. A 'phone patch' is most often used to get

approvals from the client (who is back at the office—where they belong). It's also put to use when the ISDN fails and the studio is required to save the day and record the talent anyway and send the recording as digital files to the client later on, some other way. With phone patch, clients will almost always comment on the poor quality of the audio production, even after they've been warned repeatedly of the degree of difficulty involved with this recording option. They are likely to say the music is too loud and the voice is too quiet. And certainly on their end, they would be correct. However, the actual level of the music compared to the voice ratio is usually far more even than it is heard over a phone patch to the client.

Because a 'phone patch' is a cheaper way to go it is also utilized for auditions as well as for Industrial recording sessions to make sure the text is pronounced correctly and to insure the required emphasis and phrasing on the session is correct. This is often due to the fact that the average corporate narration is filled with nomenclature specific to the industry the narration is written to address. For the most part, to you, the talent in the booth, a phone patch sounds like the client is simply on the phone. However, to the client sitting in their office, whether they are next door or thousands of miles away, it sounds like you're holding up a phone to a phone. It's akin to calling the moon in many cases. It's not optimum, but it will certainly do in a pinch depending on what the session is trying to accomplish. 'Phone patch' is nearly always used to get final approvals from clients and to consider the piece finished. You aren't often released from a session until the client okay's the job from a 'phone patch'.

Here are some ISDN (digital patch) facts you should know for future reference:

- Most recording studios charge between \$200-\$350 an hour for a 'digital patch'.
- The average commercial (union or non-union) recording session lasts about a half an hour. Occasionally, they will run for an hour or more, depending on the job and whether the client is present while the session is being recorded. (If the client is present at the session, you can almost always add an hour to the recording session. Clients tend to second-guess even the most experienced, savvy producer or Creative Director—as a rule.)
- If it's a Union job, the client is more likely to pay for the ISDN.
- Whether the client pays for ISDN *always* depends on the budget. If you're making \$300 for the spot and you're paying our studio for the session, you have to discern whether it's worth doing the job. Certainly, this job may lead to more work, but it's sometimes difficult determining whether the benefits outweigh the front-end costs.

Best rule of thumb: consider all the facts before committing to any job and to be aware of the perimeters of the project that concern you, the talent, *ahead of time*. Ask your agent! They'll find out for you if you ask.

### **Good Question**

"If I got a booking from an out of state agency, then I would have them get in touch with you? Or do I arrange the studio and get back in touch with them? How does that work? I know if they want to use ISDN then I want them to initiate the call. What else do I need to know so I sound like I know what I'm talking about if I get something." —Nancy Schultz

If you get a booking from an out of state talent agent you will ultimately have to have their studio contact us—so, YES, have them get in touch with BIG HOUSE CASTING & AUDIO to check the availability of our studio, our rate\*, our 'dial up numbers' (our ISDN numbers, because they are TWO digital phone lines) and to insure their codec and ours are compatible. (They will ask, "What sort of 'box' does the studio have?" Answer: CDQ Prima 220, which is compatible with nearly every codec out there.) Now, the *real* question and the greatest confusion to you, no doubt, is: **who** is expected to pay for the session at **Sound Advice/Big House**? As much as we'd like to, we don't do this for free and it certainly isn't cheap to run an ISDN (digital patch) session. First of all, you are correct, Nance, you want to be sure *they* initiate the dial up. This means they will incur the long distance charges on their end. (This is extremely common and of little if any importance, so don't worry about 'losing the job'. They would not have cast you if they were skittish about that.) What you really want to know is whether their budget includes covering studio costs on this end. If not then, you would pay for our studio at a very low, professional rate. What needs

to be done for every out-of-state recording session is you have to determine whether you're getting paid enough to incur those costs. As you know, every job is unique and has different demands. When you land a job, call us immediately—tell the agent you need to find out whether the studio is available and we will help you discern whether you should cover the costs or let the client cover it. The agent will help you determine how that should go as well. \*If the client is paying for the session, the rate is certainly higher than what you would incur but still *extremely competitive*—just not as cheap as we would give it to you, the talent. (I am purposefully not listing either rate here, as I have in the past, due to the fact it confused a few of you and we ultimately lost money on it.) Just get your stuff out there and let your new, out-of-state agents know you have access to ISDN and quality mp3 auditions. As long as you schedule ahead and communicate well with us we can assist you in making some very nice clients both near and far!

### **Mastering a Dialect**

Hey Kate: Since I got that Boeing 'Swedish' accent job, and I've gotten at least 5+ dialect/accents requests PER agency, I want to make it absolutely a lock that I am the go-to-guy for accents. I've pulled them off well so far I think, cause they just keep coming. Russian, Australian, Italian, German, Generic European, British but not really British, Sout Side, what have you...it's quite amusing, surprising because of the number, and just plain fun. I get to exercise a skill that is self taught, so I'd love love, love to go to a dialect coach and do it totally right; so I can be even more comfortable doing it, but with more structure, which is good, which in turn would only add to more confidence. Therefore, any recommendations on a dialect coach? —Erik

Dear, 'Swede'...Okay, here's the deal: I do have a fool-proof way to develop dialects, however, I think your time would be better spent developing your acting, Improv and cold reading skills!

A dialect is required maybe--MAYBE--once in a blue moon. I'm really, really adept at them and, I promise you, they are the exception rather than the norm. You may be auditioning for quite a few of them but chances are great they will cast someone who actually has the dialect they seek or they will settle for a complete bastardized version. (i.e. 'the Lucky Charms' Irish over the Dubliner or Belfast dialect. Capeche'?) If you're still hell-bent: take a two-three minute long monologue from a movie that best exhibits the dialect you intend to master. Write out the monologue phonetically with the pronunciation of most common words and sounds, especially if they seem foreign or odd to you--write them out so they make sense to YOU! (Much like you would with nomenclature used in an Industrial script. Write it out phonetically!) When you type out the monologue put those words in parenthesis until you get it. If you can tell a decent length story with a dialect, you will always be able to recall the dialect by telling the story. You'll recall the placement of sound in your mouth and the general articulation of the dialect. That's how I've always done it. That and by listening to it over and over and over again and, as I've mentioned here repeatedly, by writing out phonetically the most common vowel sounds and such of the specific dialect.

If you aren't all that adept at dialects, relax. It's not for everyone. Simply tell those auditioning you that that's the case and take a pass on the audition. As a casting director, I'd rather you tell me that honestly and not kill yourself over it, rather than wasting your time and mine on something that simply doesn't suit you. Who cares? Focus on what you do well. That's where the work is for you. Concentrate on that.

### **Coming In Loud & Clear**

Before you jump the gun and place an order with SBC to install ISDN in your house, I must announce a fairy tale come true... You see, once upon a time you had to have an expensive piece of equipment called a 'codec' and two very expensive digital phone lines installed (called 'ISDN' or a 'digital patch') in order to record or be recorded from another studio many miles away. Well, not any more! Sometime last summer I mentioned in one of our trusty Newsletters that these sessions would soon be available to you provided you have cable modem (such as Comcast), an updated computer and a software codec you could tap into off the Internet. They've had it in Britain for over a year now. Well, my friend, that day has arrived for us Yanks! **Source-Connect** allows anyone with high-speed Internet and with Pro-Tools 6.4 or better to utilize the most affordable 'digital patch' session to date! If you're not all that technologically inclined, this technology may seem a bit beyond you right now

but it's very likely to be in your not too distant future because it will only get easier to use. Here's what a few folks have to say about it.

"Finally, the era of true collaboration has begun. The paradigm has changed." **Andy Morris - Buzzy's Studios - Los Angeles**

"Source Connect will definitely cause a revolution amongst ISDN codec users. It's great to finally be able to connect from within Pro Tools to anyone in the world with broadcast quality. This is what we've all been waiting for." **Barnier Geerling - IAM Studios - The Netherlands**

"An amazing plug-in. It'll pay for itself the first time you use it! The audio quality, even with any sample rate conversion, is excellent." **Rail Jon Rogut - California**

"Using this plug-in is like having someone in the booth next to you even though they are in another country. Simple to set up and use, and with great audio quality, this plug is sure to make collaboration easier and cheaper. No expensive encoding/decoding boxes at each end, no ISDN line charges. This is a winner on every front." **Simon Leadley - Trackdown Studios - Sydney, Australia**

Check out [www.source-elements.com](http://www.source-elements.com) for yourself...or [www.audiotx.com](http://www.audiotx.com) for those who are minus the ProTools and, God-forbid, minus the Mac.

Overall, utilizing this technology there's really no need for long distance on TWO digital BUSINESS lines (cha-ching) or the costly per minute fees (they never made anyone happy, except SBC) which makes this nothing shy of a dream come true. (What next? The knight on the white horse?) And, just as importantly, the quality is excellent! Frankly, all I can say is it's about time! The trouble with it is: the guy on the other end needs to subscribe to the same service ([www.source-elements.com](http://www.source-elements.com)) for \$2000 or more or you have to buy the box (codec) from [www.audiotx.com](http://www.audiotx.com) --so, we're right back where we started.

All that aside, this is certainly shades of things to come.

### **What's Up Up North**

In my mad attempt to do my patriotic duty stop to runaway production one American voiceover at a time, I set out to discover just how we might secure voiceover from Canadian productions for a change. To begin, I learned in order to work in Canada you must be born there or establish Canadian citizenship (which apparently takes at least four years) or you must either have a work permit or belong to ACTRA, the Canadian Union. What is ACTRA, you very well may ask... Well...

**ACTRA**—This acronym stands for the Alliance of Canadian Cinema Television and Radio Artist, the Canadian union for professional actors. The Union represents talent in Canada for radio, film, all television work, cable and the Internet.

American production has suffered greatly since Canadian sanctions were implemented in 1998, which allows production for film, television and cable to be produced in Canada at a rate that is 50% less than it would be to produce in the States.

This production exodus to Canada is what is known as "runaway production".

The other thing I learned was, Canadians have sanctions requiring them to employ primarily Canadian talent on Canadian productions. Hmph. Damn Socialists! I'll never eat 'back bacon' again.

### **Do 'Canooks' Get Paid More Than Us?**

In a word, 'no'. No, they don't. The pay is paltry compared to our standards, even for non-union, you'll be happy to learn. Oh, sure you can leave your doors unlocked if you leave home for a month if you live in London, Ontario. But pay on an average voiceover? About half of what SAG scale currently is here in the States. Again, in my quest to reverse the flow of production going north of the border, I asked eight Canadian talent agents from Vancouver to Toronto, "Can American talent realistically book Canadian work?" They were not optimistic. Seems, much like in NYC and LA (and every where EXCEPT Chicago these days), a majority of auditions are held through the almighty Casting Directors and apparently they prefer to have you in front of them, even for voiceover, at least according to the response I received. The exchange rate is currently in our favor by only about 8 cents on the dollar (or 'duller', as our Canadian friends would say), which is not all that great. On top of that, we have far more opportunity right here in the lower forty-eight due in part to the fact that the Canadians have trouble reproducing what is considered to be the quintessential American dialect, the Midland dialect, the sound native to my sweet home, Chicago.

### **Updates**

Well, we've managed to spend the summer updating our studio, including painting and installing a few new computers and such. We're glossy-new and smell like Christmas! Our newly painted studio is something to see. We're very proud of ourselves. (Not that we painted it—trust me, I can't be trusted to paint my own toes.) However, I do suggest you take a workshop or schedule a coaching or booking and see for yourself.

Until next month... Adieu, adieu!

-Kate and crew