

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

November 2005

"Information about the package is as important as the package itself"

-Frederick W. Smith, Founder and CEO of FedEx

Promotion is EVERYTHING!

In this industry, a professional (or even aspiring) talent is expected to work their skills no less than 8-10 hours and promote themselves no less than 8-10 hours per week. That would be part time for any other profession. Stands to reason the same principles apply here if you expect to see results! Meanwhile many well-meaning professionals continue to impart poor promotional advice by telling you not to direct mail your demos to producers and copywriters.

These individuals often have terrific professional credentials so to hear them doubt the effectiveness of embarking upon a direct mailing campaign is likely to discourage you from doing so. These folks are likely to inform you that mass-producing your demo is a waste of time and money.

In fact, recently one agent, whom I respect greatly, told a client (talent) of ours, "All direct mailing does is create a *presence*. I don't see any use in it." That's a quote.

Well, this is *precisely* why we encourage direct mailing your promo to potential employers. The objective is just that: creates a presence! In fact, that's the whole point. In the past year—year and a half, I've seen literally dozens of national-caliber voice talent lose a bulk of their steady work after their (very prestigious, very well-meaning) talent agents told them, "You're on our house reel and our site. We even have you on voicebank. I honestly don't see the need for you to mass produce your demo or promote yourself. Save your money."

Sadly, after heeding that advice, many if not most of these terrifically talented pros managed to lose nearly *all* their steady work and some, to add insult to injury, even lost their agents—the same folks who advised them to do so. At Sound Advice, we have extensively surveyed scores of commercial producers and copywriters nationwide. What we discovered is: talent who consistently mass promote their demos and postcards work far more than those who don't. And the talent who leave their promotion in the hands of their agents—soon become (or remain) completely anonymous.

If you leave the fate of your career in someone else's hands you will have a *much* tougher time creating and maintaining steady work. The old adage, "Out of sight—out of mind" applies. Additionally, here at Sound Advice we have available to you one of the greatest assets vital to a successful direct mail campaign: **a tried and true mailing list** of receptive, targeted industry contacts.

In fact, at present, we have the most current, most comprehensive mailing list of ad agency contacts in the country you'll find available anywhere. If you approach your small business as a professional talent and you promote your demo and postcards repeatedly to these industry professionals, region by region, no less than three to five times a year you will see results. If you don't—you won't. It's as simple as that.

Okay, so how do you Promote to the Producers again?

Ideally, you're sending each individual contact a postcard the first week, then skipping a week, then sending the same individual a demo, then skipping a week, then another postcard. Drip, drip, drip. Over the course of five weeks each contact receives a postcard or demo every other week. Additionally, your postcard should contain your web address *where your demo can be found in a single click*, your cell phone number and your e-mail address should be included as well but must be small enough to allow you to conceal that information under a return address label (1/2" x 1 3/4"). This way you can replace your contact info with your talent agent information at a later date (i.e. "Available thru Paradigm 212.703.7540").

There are always new crop of producers and copywriters entering the business everyday. Give them something tactile—namely YOUR DEMO and postcard. Make yourself known to them. Yes, it may take three *full mailings* or more to create a real impact, but stay with it. It will be well worth it. If we produced your demo here at **Sound Advice**, you know you have something you can be proud of. Your promo is cutting edge and establishes a real 'brand identity'. Wonderful! Now, get it into the hands of the people most likely to hire you. Otherwise you're leaving your fate in someone else's hands (which is never a good idea) and, as much as your agent may like you—it's really not his or her job to be your publicist or manager. The goal is to require a need to hire a publicist or manager. Until then, stay at it. Beyond keeping your vocal agility up, promotion is the other half of your job. This does get easier with repetition and it certainly gives you something constructive to do between auditions, bookings and working your skills. Keep in mind: the more you promote your demo, the more accessible you'll be to the work, the more you'll make your name known, the more likely you'll see a return on your initial investment. The more likely you will secure steady work in this business and you'll be able to subsidize your true aesthetic: gardening. (Just kidding.)

We Get E-Mails

So, I just sent week one with shiny new headshots to the Chicago (talent) agents. Here's where I went wrong. I wasn't paying attention, and the resumes had Lori's information on them. Yep. Oops.-SMJ

No sweat...Correct your faux pas with next weeks submission and let that one go.

Allow me to impress upon you how frequent this occurs, Stephen. At least you *noticed*. Half the time we get submissions from talent with absolutely no contact information on them AT ALL. I know. Why would we (Sound Advice/Big House Casting & Audio) get headshot submissions from talent requesting representation when we're a Casting Agency and not a Talent agency? Well, because so many talent honestly don't know the difference between *a talent agent and a casting director*. (More on that in next month's Newsletter!)

Promoting to the Talent Agents

The greatest tip to submitting your head shot/resume and/or demo/postcard to the talent agents: WALK in the next three to five weeks of talent agency submissions. Don't plan on seeing an agent or anything--your whole mission is to become familiar with the location, is the receptionist the same each time, where to park/take mass transit, drop off promo and - split. Beyond compiling your promo and notes every week (which I've dictated specifically for you in the book), it takes a little over an hour or so a week to do. The added bonus here is that your materials will end up on top of the stack of talent submissions as if it arrived by messenger--minus the bumps and bruises delivered by the Postal Service! Just aim for Tuesday thru Wed, ideally, if you can. Be consistent and polite--no matter how crabby your recipient may seem. Get in and get out. I've seen more talent generate results by walking in their submissions than ANYTHING else. Pure and simple. Mailing your materials alone takes at least four times longer to get a response.

Be sure to walk in your promo to agents that I have noted for you SPECIFICALLY on the Talent Agency Guide you received from us here at Sound Advice. This way you are less likely to meet aversion and more likely to meet success.

The real challenge comes once you've landed the agent... delivering the goods is key. Make sure your chops are up to the task because these agents will challenge you with an audition and they will put you through the paces.

Remember--you are expected to be a full-realized, professional talent by the time you arrive on their doorstep. They are far too busy and sought-after to be expected to dig and prod and look past your foibles and quirks to discover the REAL YOU! Make their life easier, not harder. You'll be giving yourself and your career a great leg-up if you do.

More E-mails

From: Kimberley Reid

The exciting news is that I got signed with an LA agent for animation work (Osbrink). My auditions have picked up to about 2 per week. I am submitting them via mp3 from my little home studio and it's fun. I now understand the importance of having a home studio because

the sound quality matches well with the agent's studio quality. Also, the ability to treat my audition as if I were in the actual production studio helps me to focus and go over the top right away. I still use my laptop PC microphone for auditions while traveling, but the home studio auditions seem to sound so much better.

I am also enrolled in a basic acting class. Regular acting is very different from voice acting. I actually think that voice acting is harder because I have to use my imagination so much. This class has been fun to help me with understanding how to break down the scene. Your training has proven to be the single most important aspect of my education to date. Take care, K
Well, thanks once again for the good word, Kimberley! You are always so complimentary and address what so many of our talent are experiencing. Wishing you continued success and play! -Kate

This in from the talent Unions

“AFTRA has received a report that a company representing itself as a casting agency for AFTRA covered programs, is asking unsuspecting performers to pay money in advance, that the company alleges will be sent to AFTRA towards payment of the union initiation fee.

THIS IS A SCAM. Performers should note that **no outside company is authorized to accept payment of initiation fee or dues that are payable to AFTRA.** If you are asked to sign a contract with a company that holds itself out as a casting agency, production entity or talent agency, and you are asked to pay the entity any portion of what would otherwise be payable to AFTRA for initiation fee or dues, please contact either the AFTRA National office in New York, or the AFTRA Los Angeles Local immediately. The proper authorities will be notified. Contact Information: In New York: [Megan Capuano](#) (212) 532-0800
In Los Angeles: [Jean Frost](#) (323) 634-8100”

“Show me the meaning of the word...”

What better way to introduce this month's 'defined term' installment than to quote Chrissie Hynde and the Pretenders? This month we have a phrase we've coined here at Sound Advice.

'cinematic shorthand'—This is a Sound Advice term for the 'mental edit' required of a talent to 'economize' her performance, regardless of the medium. It pertains to the 'mental movie' that plays out simultaneously while performing, especially while delivering a take for commercial work, television, film, voice-over or even stage.

Actors generally learn their lines by giving themselves mental cues with either an idea or an image, so when they play through a scene these 'cues' play out as well.

For example the take may play out from the actor's point-of-view like this: I think 'this' then say 'that', walk, walk, walk, think 'this', say 'that', think 'this', say 'that', turn, think, say 'this' and 'this', think 'that', say 'this'. End scene.

This train of thought becomes part of the delivery whether the actor is aware of it or not. It occurs largely at the onset of rehearsing the piece, to allow the actor to make sense of the text, action and what she is saying. However, once the actor assimilates much of the intent or concept of the scene into their part in the telling of the overall story can become burdened with extraneous 'indicating' or a choppy uneven delivery rather than a justified, easy, spontaneous performance. This is due in large part to the fact they have left in the 'scaffolding' of their performance when, after a few takes, economy is now required.

As talent we're always trying to establish or continue a specific, yet layered narrative thread throughout the piece we are performing in. Since this 'train of thought' plays out like a movie that needs editing, as the talent goes from one line to the next during the read, we (Sound Advice) refer to this process as 'cinematic shorthand'. The objective is to 'edit' down these thoughts/images to *only what will read* and allow for a far more economic performance or communication. To achieve this directors often ask actors to 'do less' or to 'throw it away'.

A *commercial* example of 'cinematic shorthand' would be this short fictitious McDonald's ad. The on-camera scene depicts a young ambiguous assistant dashing to and fro on a busy city street with files and such under his arm. The voiceover comes in, "You're running around and you need to get lunch—*fast!*" We see our young assistant rub his stomach indicating he's hungry when a light bulb goes on above his head. "So, you drive through McDonald's for a hamburger, fry and a Coke." We see a pristine, glimmering burger, fry and coke turning slowly on a Lazy Susan. "Now..." we see our assistant receive his order in a perfectly tidy white Mickey-Dees bag at the drive-in window, then

we see him post-lunch—a satisfied character, dabbing the corner of his mouth, smiling. “...Isn’t that better?” (The mnemonic plays ‘I’m Lovin’ It’ on a solo electric guitar to indicate youth or rock or something or another.)

Suffice it to say we don’t see the McDonald’s crew making the burger or even the fellow eating the burger. Nope. Just the scenario is established at the top: young guy, working hard. The problem: hunger, the solution: McDonald’s, the result: satisfaction. There you have it. That’s the essence of ‘cinematic shorthand’. Displaying only what matters to further the story.

As talent, we sometimes indulge ourselves these ‘layers of internal monologue’ and that’s fine provided it doesn’t impede or overwhelm the story we’re trying to tell as a whole. If the point suddenly averts solely to the actors’ internal monologue rather than the story at hand, we’ve all missed the boat.

To add to this actors often cling too steadfastly to a single delivery as if it were the only delivery available to them. (At Sound Advice we refer to this as a ‘muscle memory delivery’.) Instead of the performance playing out by rote (‘muscle memory’), the objective of a talent is to continue to discover and play with every take. We’re aiming to deliver options to the production, within the context, of course, and without ‘oversteering the car’ and derailing the point. That’s probably the best kept secret in the business and essence of versatility.

‘Cinematic shorthand’ allows an actor to exercise professional agility because it employs the imagination to remain active with every take while instilling an economy of performance. This is especially helpful in commercial and film work, yet it’s certainly not exclusive to these two mediums solely.

‘Cinematic shorthand’ raises the stakes on your overall performance and ability, which is yet another surprising benefit an actor can glean from mastering commercial work.

There’s a performance discipline here if you scratch the surface a little.

Proving once again, voiceover isn’t the only thing you’ll learn from Sound Advice.

Creating a Comfort Zone

While filming Alfred Hitchcock’s “Shadow of a Doubt”, actor Hume Cronin was directed to simply stand, rather than stand and step back as he had been doing in a reaction shot. On the following take, Cronin inadvertently stepped back once more. Afterward he told Hitchcock, “I’m sorry but I’m so uncomfortable just standing there.”

“All right then,” said Hitchcock, “Let’s take it again and you’ll step back and we’ll have a comfortable actor—as well as one without a head.” Hume Cronin smiled. Hitchcock continued, “The camera lies, you know. And when it does you have to learn to accommodate it.”

Fruits of the Season

This month’s cartoon, supplied by our resident engineer/cartoonist, Maya Kuper, speaks for itself. Happy Halloween and Happy Thanksgiving, one and all!



Cornucopia

The season is fat with change and promise. We wish you the best of it! See you next month. -Kate and crew