

# sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

February 2006

“If you don't risk anything you risk even more.” -Erica Jong

“The policy of being too cautious is the greatest risk of all.”

-Jawaharlal Nehru

## **For Love of the Game**

There are really two games that play out during the Super Bowl every year; two forms of truly American entertainment. The first being *football*, this year featured Seattle and Pittsburgh playing in *Detroit* of all places. (What's up with that?) And, secondly, the real 'coo-de-gras' that concerns us die-hards most, are the ever-lovin' **commercials**.

This year the average cost on a single:30 second spot during the Super Bowl ran 2.5 million dollars. And, mind you, that's just the cost of airtime.

Yep. War in Iraq, less than a quarter of 'Katrina' victims in FEMA trailers and... 2.5 mill on a single :30 second spot. Wacky. We've got our priorities straight, eh? That makes this the most *expensive* commercial airtime *of all time*.

Was it worth it? Well, you tell me.

If you blinked and somehow missed the game between beers, you've got another chance to view the commercials at least on-line. Decide for yourself whether they meet your expectations and visit... <http://www.ifilm.com/superbowl>

If nothing else it's a perfect excuse to say, "Hey, Kate, I did my homework by studying a bunch of commercials."

Good for you! I'm proud of you, your mother's proud of you, and all's right with the world. For the record, here's what some of the experts had to say about them: on the Burger King ad ("Whopperettes"), Donny Deutsch of the Big Idea and formerly Deutsch Advertising said, "this was a *parody* of a Super Bowl Ad". Regarding the "Magic Fridge" commercial for Bud, Lisa Saunders, the editor of Advertising Age said, "It was stupid. *Stupid* guys doing stupid things! I hated it." (Okay, well, that's articulate for an editor. I mean, I thought it was a witty ad, but I didn't expect much more than that. I mean it's still a beer commercial, right? Not "Anna Karenina".)

On the Budweiser Clydesdales, Donny Deutsch thought, "It tries too hard."

I thought it waxed traditional. What's wrong with that? But...okay, sure it was a bit lack-luster now that you mention it. (You know something, I'm coming to the conclusion we're a bunch of spoiled brats that can't be entertained—even by ourselves.)

Both Lisa *and* Donny felt the Pepsi (P. Diddy/Jay Mohr) spot was "Dated."

Yet the pair neglected to comment at all on the Dove (Self-Esteem Fund) Ad featuring the 'real' little girls and the Cyndi Lauper song "True Colors", but *I loved it*, aside from the fact there wasn't a voiceover within a mile of it. Other than that, I'm a little confused as to what a "Self Esteem Fund" is—but... I think I *want* one. Sounds like a trust fund for little girls who may want a nose-job or lipo when they grow up. Heck, I'd settle for a facial.

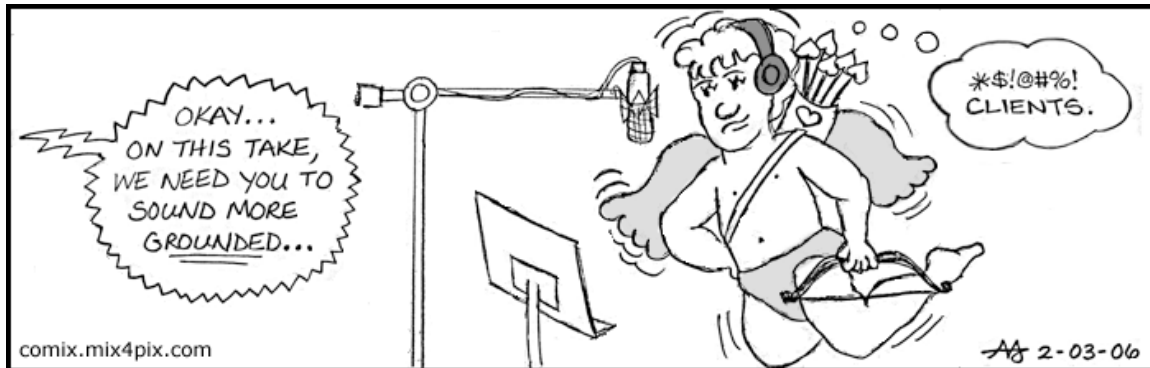
Also, it may be worth mentioning every spot I included in this article, for better or worse *except for the Pepsi ad*, came out of our very own Chicago advertising community.

Still Saunders and Deutsch considered it a 'non-event year' stating, 'considering advertising has been going through such dramatic changes, advertisers really didn't take full advantage of the transition between television and the Internet.'

Well, they've got a point there, 'cuz the general public hasn't hesitated one bit when it comes to integrating these two media. After all, you're probably watching these commercials on-line right now. Right? Exactly.

Frankly, these two industry vets feel it hasn't been a good advertising year since Apple introduced the first Macintosh computer ala George Orwell during the Super Bowl in 1984.

Well, I don't know about you but I've counted one or two pretty remarkable commercials since then. Guess they're just jaded like *good* little 'Creatives', the darling dears. There's always next year!



### **Expanding your Performance Vocabulary**

In keeping with last year's term of the month... here's this month's installment!

**safety-** A 'safety' is the take (or takes) recorded or shot as 'back-up' to the favored delivery (or *deliveries*) the director feels are the best. So, once a few takes have been shot/recorded, it's customary to get a couple takes as 'safeties', in the event a plane was flying over, the talent had a tiny hiccup or gurgle that wasn't initially detected, or any number of possible unwanted flaws that may have crept into equation and slipped below the radar.

These takes are captured for 'safe' keeping, thus the term 'safety'.

### **What 'Working Your Chops' Really Means**

If you haven't already, make it your *edict* this year to *work part-time* as a professional talent. It's still early in the game yet. The year is young.

If you consider part-time for *any* line of work is 18-20 hours then it stands to reason pursuing work *as a talent* should require you eventually commit 18-20 hours a week keeping your skills sharp and thoroughly promoting yourself if you expect to work. This is a gradual thing but you do have to put the time in. No one expects you to drop whatever it is you're doing and run away to join the circus. We want you to be realistic about this. So, it doesn't hurt to mention starting any small business requires, at the very least, 20 hours a week to initially get off the ground.

That may be a given and could be considered the absolute bare minimum of effort you need to put in at the start of any new endeavor.

Additionally, it's important you set targets if you hope to accomplish anything.

To begin, make it your goal to spend at least 20 minutes to a half an hour, 4-5 times a week, doing your vocal warm-ups to keep your articulation on-point. Then spend another half hour, 4-5 times a week, working your cold-reading skills. (*Ideally* this should be done in front of a mirror where you can focus your delivery. In other words, get the read off the page and into the mirror. Off the page and into the mirror.)

Okay, you're half way to fulfilling your *part-time* commitment—just keep going! It only takes 2 weeks to create a habit out of anything. Now you need to spend another 8-10 hours a week promoting yourself.

Promotion is a two-fold process: first, you have

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to promote yourself through repeated mailings to the talent agents until you're truly satisfied with the representation you have and, secondly, by promoting yourself with multiple mailings to producers and casting sources to make yourself known and available to those most likely to hire you.

If you don't have a competitive demo and postcards or proper headshots and a resume to promote just yet, then the time allotted to promotion can be concentrated into coaching and in-studio workshops while you're in the process of creating those all-important promotional tools. You can't work without headshots (if you intend to pursue on-camera work) or a truly competitive voiceover demo.

Make it your aim to gradually build up to 18-20 hours a week sharpening your performance skills and promoting yourself. Beyond that the goal is to maintain a constant and steady diet of it. If you do, I'm confident you will experience some real progress within six months to a year. That's a rather rapid return on any start-up business.

On the other hand, if you don't put in that kind of time, it will take you considerably longer to establish yourself.

Additionally, if the *only* time you work your skills is when you are here at **Sound Advice** then your career will begin and end at our front door. That will only result in frustration

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on both our parts, which is counter-productive.

So, be sure to *do your job*. It's not impossible. Just take a few baby steps to begin.

Do your homework, **continue to keep your skills agile**. That's *precisely* what I mean when I say, "Work your chops!" This is why performance is considered a *discipline*. It's important to understand that this business may not appear all that random or subjective if you know what is needed and wanted of you and you're committed to doing your job to the best of your abilities. There's always something you can be doing to forward your career.

Here at **Sound Advice**, we're happy to give you the keys to

the kingdom—just try not to lose them in the couch.

### **Generating a Momentum**

e-mail: Hey Kate! How the heck are ya? Things are pretty groovy here. I'm auditioning my hynie off! I have also booked 4 projects already this year! I also had an audition for (my newly registered talent agency) last week. I should hear from them in the next couple weeks. All thanks to you and the wonderful people that work with you on every level! Okay enough gushing! Take care. —Nike

Hey, my pal...I am so happy to hear things are going so well and your career's moving forward as planned. Phew! You never know, y'know?

I mean, no matter how wonderful the talent, no matter how marvelous the demo and the graphics...Some folks get their demos and then—totally cave in, too tired to take the thing a few more feet over the finish line.

It's my greatest worry because I *can't* do everything for you. My agent thinks I do too much for you guys as it is. Maybe she's right. Most talent never know how close they come to having a full-blown career in this Industry because they give up just this side of seeing real results. And results only come from *momentum*—momentum you have to generate because, let's face it, it's your career, it's important for you to *own it*.

God knows I do what I can for you guys (our Sound Advice clients), but as much as I'd like to hand you a career, that's ultimately up to you. *You* need to rev it up like an engine. Some careers idle faster than others. It falls to whoever is driving, y'know? And how hard they're leaning on the pedal.

Many talent may have this notion that once we begin recording the demo tracks that the world will miraculously stop, the Red Sea will part and Moses will give us a reprieve until we cross safely to the other side. Instead, surprisingly enough, life carries on anyway. Kids still need to be picked up at school, bosses still expect you to make deadlines and changes continue in our lives just the same.

So, if you stop at some point between beginning this (training and production) process and establishing yourself as a steady working talent, I'm here to tell you, the important thing is to make a target when you will begin again. That doesn't occur if left to its own devices. YOU have to do it. You have to make a point to see that through.

At that point, regardless of where you are in your career, you'll need to generate that momentum all over again if you intend to move forward in this business. It takes far less effort than you might imagine. It's simply a matter of focus.

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Wherever you focus your attention that is where you will ultimately see results. If your focus is on your day job *solely*, then that's where you will see results. If it's on being a talent AND your day job, then you will see results from both.

Individuals with less wherewithal than *you* have done it, so you can too. I know this is true because you wouldn't have read this far if you didn't have a vested interest in following through with this commitment to yourself. It wouldn't interest you even that much if that weren't the case. Keep in mind I've been through this a few thousand times... that's right, *thousands*. I do know what I'm talking about.

Okay, I'm rattling on now. Sorry about that. I just wish you (ALL of you) the very best—always. I really do. This is my valentine to you. I'm very proud of you (again, not just Nike'—*which I am*, but I'm speaking to *all* of you here). I'm proud of your accomplishments and I love to hear your experiences. We have a constant quest over here to always deliver a better product and to see you working steady in this field. That's the goal.

So, keep the faith and *make the time* to move forward. Love ya -kate

#### **What the heck is 'IMDb'?**

Could it be some new added feature on your son's iPod? Nope.

Instead, **IMDb** is a remarkable tool to help you build and strengthen your '*reference base*' so you'll have a better idea of what those auditioning / directing you are referring to with regard to the style, concept or tone of the piece. Here at **Sound Advice**, we continuously suggest through our training that the greater your *reference base*, the more likely you will understand what those require of you on a production. Therefore it's vital you continually broaden and strengthen your wealth of knowledge especially with regard to pop-culture, film, television, music and books. Doing so will make you a greater asset to those likely to hire you because you will already understand and identify with the concept. Further, [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) (**the Internet Movie Database**) is a comprehensive database of film and television information featuring the extensive background on actors, directors, screenwriters, producers and more. Such a tome might normally overwhelm the faint of heart if it sat on your bookshelf, instead IMDb is available on the Internet and is *so easy to use* that it's completely addicting. After an hour perusing this thing, you'll end up the local favorite to win the next Trivial Pursuit Championship. IMDb allows you to search *any* industry professional, complete with biographies, filmographies and seads of related trivia.

So, now you really have *no* excuse not knowing the pop-culture references tossed about at yesterday's audition. Ironically, it's even acceptable to look up who, what, where and when *at your auditions and sessions* these days. I mean, let's face it, those auditioning you are using the reference in the first place to get everyone on the same page. Better you know than not know, right? So get on it! And see you next month! -k & crew

This year, as a new **Sound Advice** monthly Newsletter feature, *we challenge you to undertake the following assignment: look up one actor*, this month search **Brian Cox** (the *actor*, not the special effects coordinator), **director**, look up **Arthur Penn and screenwriter, Paul Haggis** on **IMDb**. These are people you should know because they have a real impact on our industry and, more specifically, on your work as a professional. Afterward, be sure to see *at least one* thing each of these guys have done. You might be surprised how beneficial it is to be familiar with their work. What does this have to do with *voiceover*? Film and VO are very parallel. They both require a great deal of imagination and imagery to be effective. So study up and enjoy!