

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

March 2006

“The one thing about intellectuals is it proves you can be absolutely brilliant—and still have no idea what’s going on.”
-Woody Allen, in “Annie Hall”

The Finer Points of Promotion

The purpose of repeated mailings is to develop **name recognition** and to **generate a momentum** with your career. There are essentially **two** distinctly different types of mailings you need to continually send out as a professional talent:

- 1) To the talent agents
- 2) And to the Advertising people who are most likely to hire you as a voiceover (i.e. producers & copywriters).

If you stop promoting, then you simply need to start again and make it your aim to keep the ball in play for an extended period of time. Promotion is a form of auditioning and like auditioning requires tenacity and I know you have that. You wouldn't be reading this right now if you didn't. You would have given up even considering this as an option a long time ago if that were the case.

At **Sound Advice** we've created a Marketing Plan to pursue and secure agents both locally and from regions other than your own to increase the frequency of your auditions and the likelihood of booking jobs. Your weekly promotional mailings need to continue until:

- a) you get the sort of representation that is landing you steady auditions... and, then,
- b) you're landing steady work.

This requires perseverance on your part, after all this is your small business as a working talent. You'll never know for sure whether this works or not if you don't apply yourself whole-heartedly.

Here at **Sound Advice**, we suggest you continually promote yourself to your local talent agents once a week for a good 6-8 weeks. And a solid 5-6 weeks when promoting yourself solely for voiceover to the agents out-of-state. This process is laid out in detail in “**The Sound Advice Encyclopedia of Voice-over**” in the ‘How to Get an Agent’ section. We've even dictated the short notes *to the agents* for you. There are enough included to avoid sounding stale or over-used, so mix it up.

Even if you feel you have done this already. If you've done this process in the past and it has not yet evoked a response you'd hoped, you need to come in and sit down with us so we can go over exactly what you did and didn't do. Something's amiss and we want to see you succeed. We're here to help. So just give us a call.

Now, you honestly don't have to have representation from a single talent agent in order to start promoting your demo to anyone who might be inclined to hire you for voiceover.

Our (Ad Agency) Mailing Lists are always available and updated with great frequency. One set, consisting of 300-400 contacts comes with most demo packages Sound Advice delivers. This form of promotion could account for the extremely high success rate of the average Sound Advice client. That said, here's a common confusion you may have had and can avoid altogether:

I am getting together my Agency mailing and have a question about the postcard. I am assuming I should add a note to the postcard. On the first card, should I say something like "I am currently reproducing my demo and will be sending it out shortly. In the meantime, you can check out MP3 files at (my web address) www.pamtierneyvo.com"? And then on the card after the CD goes out, say something like "Hope you received my demo. I have ISDN available and am ready to work with you"? I don't really like the second one so I am open to suggestions. Thanks! -Pam

I'm assuming Pam is talking about an AD Agency mailing rather than a Talent Agency mailing.

Again, the goal with these mailings is to **create name recognition** and to **establish you as a brand**, pure and simple. Your promotional mailings to Advertising Agencies contacts is as follows: **1st week** = postcard, skip a week, **3rd week** = demo, skip a week, **5th week** = postcard. It's a slow 'drip, drip, drip'.

Be sure to highlight your web address on the back of your postcard, but there is *no need for a note*, per se... the promo piece is self-explanatory, so keep it clean and simple.

Too much verbiage about too many different things can bog down the true message, which is: *you are approachable, professional, distinctive and available to work!*

Also, there's no need to 'hope' whether they received your demo. Rest assured, *they did*. It's redundant and trite to ask. (No offense. It just is.)

You have to imagine what sort of effect you are actually creating with the recipient of your promo. Most voiceover demos are just dreadful from stem to stern. And their graphics are often even worse. And then the talent goes about promoting these odd objects to Ad Creatives who absolutely live and breathe the very best production standards and the highest aesthetics available. It's the world they live in. And anything below par gets tossed out immediately.

Believe me, if we produced your demo, you have a very powerful message already built in to your demo (and your graphics) that is appealing and contemporary. The entire package looks the way you sound! This is why we art direct the way we do. We don't want half-baked graphics sandbagging your hard-won demo.

Think how clean and smart your postcards looked the day you first received them. We want to create that same effect with the client.

And, no, you honestly DON'T have to have an agent already when your first full mailings go out.

Securing representation from the agents is an on-going process. It needs to be done continually until you're truly happy with the agents who are repping you. But don't feel it's necessary to have an agent to *before* promoting yourself to casting agents or ad agency 'Creatives', especially during your first year of promotion. Continue to make yourself known and available to the industry. You *can* secure work before securing "proper" representation.

You will be promoting to BOTH the talent agents AND the Ad Creatives as long as you are pursuing work in this field.

The edict is as follows: When you are just starting out, *you promote like crazy* ...when you are well-established in the industry and working steady, *you promote like crazy* ...when you've hit a slump and don't know what to do next, ***you promote like crazy***. If you expect to work AT ALL in this industry, then promotion is how you will achieve that because it creates *momentum*. Without momentum, you're not even on the game board. Without momentum, there's no point in getting out of bed in the morning.

That said everyone drops the ball now and again. The object is to pick it back up and get the engine started again. While we would certainly hope once you began training with us your momentum revs up and never lets up, but then that's not very realistic, now is it? This ebb and flow, you may discover after you've experienced it a few times over, is generated by YOU alone, *no one else*. You rev it up and cool it down.

Your promotional mailings to Advertising Agencies contacts is as follows: **1st week** = postcard, skip a week, **3rd week** = demo, skip a week, **5th week** = another postcard. It's a slow 'drip, drip, drip'. Be sure to highlight your web address on the back of your postcard, but there is *no need for a note*, per se... the promo piece is self-explanatory, so keep it clean and simple.

Personally, I just want you to *own it* for yourself because this is YOUR career. It's your game.

Now, when you first receive your initial mailing list that (usually) comes with your **Sound Advice** demo package, you will need to

"The Evolution of a Career" by Don Cheadle

1. Get me Don Cheadle!
2. Get me a 'Don Cheadle' type!
3. Get me a *young* Don Cheadle!
4. Who's Don Cheadle?

sit down with our very own **Matt Welton** for an hour while he covers all of this material with you in depth—*one-on-one*. It always helps to hear it first hand so we can better illustrate each step and avoid any confusion. In fact, this is a very vital step we include on our Check Sheet to best clarify *how to effectively promote your demo* and to insure you don't muddy up the message you are sending out with your nice new promo pieces. Promotion should define who you are professionally to other professionals. The object is to keep it simple, specific and direct to generate the very best results.

Our mailing lists generally have a less than 5% margin of error on them (with regard to effective contacts) by the time you receive it. **So, if you sit on your mailing list for a month or more, it will render it completely ineffective.**

Why? Because these contacts move around-- a LOT! Just think of the Ad industry as a giant anthill. No one stays in one place for very long. It's extremely kinetic and continues to move and change. So aim to create a buzz. Generate some momentum and stir it up. You'll feel great about your career

and where you're going with it if you do!

If you need additional help with your mailings, we're here for you—just call or e-mail Matt at matt@bighousecasting.com.

The Most Expensive Place to Smoke

The City Council of Chicago voted to *double* the city tax on a pack of cigarettes beginning March 1st (2006), which means the average cost is nearly \$8 a pack making Chicago the most expensive place in the country to smoke.

Man, am I glad I quit.

Frankly, cost may not be enough incentive for some die-hards to give it up. It could cost \$25 a pack and it still wouldn't matter one speck. They'd still have to feed that ole monkey on their back.

But if *you're* gearing up to quit, here are a few tips I hope will help.

First off, you have to decide you're going to quit and give yourself a *specific* target date, even if you've done "quit" dozens of times before. Quitting is easy. Staying off the little devils is an entirely different matter.

Make this is a fresh start. If you fall off the wagon, start again and be more diligent. Know you need to be even more strict with yourself than you've been in the past if you ever intend to handle this thing. Otherwise that little internal monologue will continually chatter on about: how light your pack is, whether you have enough ciggies on you or if you need to get another pack, where are you going today, where you can smoke, who will you smoke with, will they bum smokes off you, will you off them ...Get a grip! Honestly, will it ever end?

It will if you decide to confront it and get it behind you once and for all. Sure. But you have to set your parameters. Target out *when* you intend to quit.

Two weeks from today? Fine. Now stick to it! Look at it on the calendar. Now, keep your word to yourself.

Don't overwhelm yourself by telling yourself you'll *never* have another puff again as long as you live. Granted that *is* the goal here, but for crying out loud, don't kill your odds of permanently quitting by depriving yourself with that thought. Why torture yourself?

Quitting smoking is a *time game* and has to be played like one.

For example: **the next time you want a cigarette, make yourself wait 5 minutes.** If you do, that 5 minutes will turn into a half hour. Then tell yourself wait another 5 minutes. An hour will go by.

It helps if you keep physically busy, drink LOADS of water and avoid booze and caffeine.

Whenever you have an urge to smoke, *tell yourself* "**Wait 5 minutes and you won't want one.**"

Make that your mantra. Get as much time between you and that last puff you had—2 days ago, or two weeks ago, or three or six or eight weeks or even ten weeks ago and every time you get an urge to smoke... Stop. *Wait 5 minutes and you won't want one.*

I was smoking 2 packs a day when I quit. I was mid pack when I quit, thought I'd get a jump on my target date and quit 5 days ahead of schedule. That was more than 12 years ago now.

Just know it can be done. You just have to decide. Because, frankly this thing either gets the best of you or you decide to get the better of it. Just decide. Then give yourself 5 minutes.

Cutting down is not quitting. Quitting is quitting.

Just think, for once you won't be playing through a handicap when you're in the booth on your next audition. Your breath will be sweeter, your clothes will smell like YOU rather than a bowling alley or a dirty sock. You'll be able to sit in ANY seat in any restaurant any where and, to top it all off, you won't end up with bronchitis every other month like you've been battling. (Yep, that's been from smoking, Pal, not some freak strain of mega-virus you've been hanging your hat on. Nope. Don't kid yourself.) Besides that you won't be the 'social pariah' you've become at family functions or social gatherings anymore. Imagine that. Funny how something that started out so *social* became the complete opposite. Trust me, lesser folks than you have quit. You can too if you set your mind to it. Just decide... set a target date... and then wait 5 minutes before you light up again and the next thing you know a whole afternoon will have gone by with out a single ciggie dangling from you lips. Halleluia! There is hope. Breathe easy.

Speak the Speak, I pray thee...

This month's terms you need to know:

sides— The scene(s) or pages of script an actor is expected to prepare for an audition or a days work.

specs—Short for '*specifics*'.

The 'specs' are the closest thing to direction you're likely to find on a commercial audition.

The ironic thing about specs is they are often extremely vague.

For example, the 'specs' on a commercial voiceover audition might be:

"A natural-sounding 25-30 year old, 'non-announce-announce' male AVO".

Specs often include pop-culture references, such as:

“The patter (rhythm of the dialogue) in this spot needs to reflect the spontaneity and wit you’d find on the ‘Gilmore Girls’ or possibly even the fast talking, intelligent deliveries on ‘West Wing’.” This is another good reason to continually ‘build your reference base’.

storyboard—The rough drawings of an on-camera commercial, film or animation created to give the talent (and everyone else working on the production) a better idea of how the piece is supposed to appear when it’s fully produced. The storyboard also allows a voice-over to know when they are expected to come in with the images on the screen.

Where The Work is...

The primary source on-line to generate auditions, and therefore to secure work, for on-camera actors is **www.actorsaccess.com**. This site is adjacent to www.breakdownexpress.com, which most professional casting sources in the country utilize for film, TV and commercial work. Posting your headshot/resume and on-camera reel (if you have one) on actorsaccess.com allows you audition opportunities you generally might not have exposure to on your own. This is *precisely* why I consider creating your own personal on-camera web site to be counter-productive. You won’t need one if you’re listed with actorsaccess.com. A career web site off on it’s lonesome is not likely to generate *any response whatsoever*. It’s similar to stuffing a note in a bottle and sending it out to sea.

On the other hand, a site geared specifically and ONLY for **voiceover** allows for a variety of opportunities to promote your demo as a voice talent. By *continually* mailing out postcards that include your web address and hosting your site where many other voiceovers can be found, such as with us on the **Sound Advice** site at www.voiceoverdemos.com (but only if we produced your demo), will allow your demo to audition for you when you’re not there. Remember, we want to imagine what you look-like in voiceover, not actually see what you look like. It destroys the illusion. Additionally, your own your single-page voiceover web site allows you to feature your demo on voicebank.net, the primary casting source nationwide for voice work.

What voicebank.net is to voiceover, www.breakdownexpress.com is to film, television and commercial *on-camera* work. The difference is: you sign up to actorsaccess.com in order to be considered for work through breakdownexpress.com; whereas with voicebank.net you must be registered with a talent agent who is *already* subscribing to this service. (You can certainly post your demo on voicebank.net *without an agent* on voicebank, but it’s proven far less effective, so we don’t recommend it.)

Casting directors and producers nationwide are more likely to use **Breakdown Services**, with which Actors Access is affiliated. It’s to the actors’ advantage to sign up if the actor hopes to pursue on-camera work. It’s *free* to post two headshots, a profile and resume. And headshots and resumes can be updated quickly and conveniently at *anytime*—for no additional charge.

Best of all, **Breakdown Services** offers a variety of features that most actors really do need, such as an online video reel, availability to ‘sides’ (sitcom and movie audition scripts), the ability to submit extra headshots to suggest different looks. Each extra is fee-based, but we think well worth it. The video reel is \$50, an extra headshot is \$10, sides are \$1 a page or \$68 for the year. And, according to one agent, even if actors shelled out the dough for the extras, “They’ll probably end up spending less money than they would on getting more pictures.”

It’s important to note, you honestly don’t have to spend a dime on the extras, but it would be well worth your time to promote yourself there and invest less than \$100 to promote your on-camera career.

“Actors are missing the boat on auditions because they aren’t registered (with Actor’s Access),” said one seasoned agent. “Casting directors and producers don’t want to look at pictures, they want it right there (on their computers).”

Visit www.breakdownservices.com or www.actorsaccess.com for more info. And get working... *on-camera*, if that’s one of your career goals.

As for voiceover...in most cases, the agent will have you posted on voicebank.net within hours of agreeing to rep you. If the agent continually calling you in for auditions are listed on voicebank but they have yet to include your demo under their listing on **voicebank** then be sure to ask them to please post your demo. I’m sure it’s a simple oversight. It can be corrected very quickly and easily.

What’s On?

There’s so much great TV airing right now it’s sick. What with **the Oscars** this Sunday hosted by Jon Stewart, the final season of “**The Sopranos**”, the season finale of “**Project Runway**”, HBO’s “**Mrs. Harris**” and the return of “**Dinner for Five**” on IFC, I’m in (sloth) heaven. Lots to study! Speaking of which, *here’s your homework*. This month, be sure to ‘**IMDb**’ (on www.imdb.com): **Mos Def, Rachel Lee Cook, Charlie Kaufman** and **Milos Forman**. Then view at least one thing these guys have done so you’re familiar with who they are. That’s it! See you next month! -k & crew ☺