

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

April 2006

“The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year.”

-Mark Twain

The Ever-Important Audition

You've recently produced or updated your demo and it represents the work you're best suited to land. You've updated your graphics to establish your name (your brand) more effectively in the marketplace. You've promoted yourself *consistently* (at least once a month) to the agents and managed to secure some representation who are steadily auditioning you (five times or more a week). In addition to that you're promoting your demo web page with postcards to the producers in your local market as well as *consistently* promoting yourself to producers in targeted markets *outside your own region*. Very well done!

So... why aren't you landing anything?

If your tenacity and consistency is intact on all these fronts, then I suggest you take a good look at *the quality of your auditions*.

Certainly, *how* they are recorded is important. If they're recorded on something that's only a notch above a 'boom-box', you most certainly have to raise the stakes—absolutely, no doubt about it.

But *even more importantly*, you have to address each audition as if you were going for the Gold at Torino. If you aren't and you've become complacent or somewhat flat or robotic in your auditions (which can easily happen *especially* if you are doing a great deal of them at home), it's time you step up your skills and show those auditioning you what you're *really* made of.

Obviously mastering your audition is of utmost importance because you can't land the work without it.

In fact, it's impossible to put this or any other aspect of your voiceover business on auto-pilot. So please snuff that urge to do so. I realize every small business owner has the fantasy to someday operate with every aspect of their business on auto-pilot. It's a goal, certainly, that allows us to put order in but frankly, it's something of a fool's mission to set every aspect of

To succeed in any business you have the *intention*, interest and will to confront what others won't. Including the *quality of your audition!* Aside from your demo or your performance on the job itself, **your audition is your product in this business.** Therefore, it's your responsibility to continually produce an effective product.

your business on the shelf as if it were 'done', no room for improvement or change—that would be foolish if you honestly intend to be successful.

To succeed in any business you have the *intention*, interest and will to confront what others won't. Including the *quality of your audition!* Aside from your demo or your performance on the job itself, **your audition is your product in this business.** Therefore, it's your responsibility to continually produce an effective product.

In order to do so, you have to continually and consistently flex your audition muscle or you will deliver a less than effective, half-baked product. That can close out future business faster than anything.

This is precisely why, at **Sound Advice**, we never cease imparting what pearls we can regarding your performance and how you can up the stakes and increase your rate of bookings. If that's your intention then you should be working your audition muscle beyond your warm-up and cold reading every month in the workshop or every other month with one-on-one coachings.

The truth is, most people, regardless of their skill level, are ineffective at auditioning. Which is why if you amp up your intention to performance energy each time you audition, you're more likely to book it or at least leave a lasting impression with those you've auditioned for and they'd be more likely to request you next time provided they remember your name from repeated promotions. Then again, we all go through slumps or changes that alter what we bring to the table, and therefore our audition suffers. If this is what you're experiencing, it can be very difficult to see the forest through the trees.

Not to harp, but okay —tough, I'm harping... *it's your job* as a professional to maintain a steady regimen of vocal warm ups and cold reading a minimum of 4-5 hours a week. This is what's required and not only from the novice voice talent—this is required of EVERY voiceover, if you intend to be sharp at a moment's notice. In fact, the *more* successful you become, the more you're expected to be on top of your game, so studying the medium (as it's expanded upon in the "*How To Learn What You*

Do Best Commercially" Section of "**The Sound Advice Encyclopedia of Voiceover**") and staying on top of your performance skills only becomes a greater priority—not *less*.

If you're ready to play I suggest signing up for our in-studio workshop (Podcast for the world to hear—and they are listening, my friend—I get e-mails *from all over!*) and scheduling a few one-on-one coaching sessions couldn't hurt either.

We're at your access... *but you have to do your homework*. Otherwise your career will begin and end at our front door. And we can't have that! We want you working and representing us in the best light possible!

The Next BIG Thing

Nothing remains the same for very long, especially where technology is concerned. And, as you may well know, in this esoteric industry called 'voice-over', an ISDN connection allows us to record a talent in a studio in one location, while the director/producer/client are in a recording studio in an entirely different location miles away.

Well, that's all about to change.

We've never really urged you to install ISDN lines (the acronym for Integrated Services Digital Network; also known as a 'digital patch') for your home studio set up because it's so costly to have installed and utilize because it is essentially *two digital phone lines* installed by the phone company. What has made ISDN so vital to our industry is that it has made voice talent available to work in markets across the country. And its frequent use has changed *everything*, expanding opportunities for every branch and style of voiceover imaginable.

In fact, many producers and copywriters prefer to only imagine the voice talent they hire. It gives them a better idea of what the public will experience. They often never meet the voice talent they hire in person, even if they employ them with great frequency.

However, like most things, technologies either improve or lose their usefulness, and digital patch is no different. Advancements in technology have led us to **Source-Connect** as the most likely replacement, which is already being integrated into everyday commercial production.

Source-Connect sends and receives audio via your existing (standard) cable modem or DSL connection, that both parties (the remote voice talent and the connecting recording studio) already use for Internet access. It's a very affordable, very effective alternative to ISDN and really is the next BIG thing!

Due to **Source-Connects'** stability and affordability, it's likely to become the greatest asset available to a professional voiceover because it will allow access to extremely high-end national work directly through your home computer.

There's no 'delay' or echo with Source Connect like there is with ISDN when the client leaves their 'talk-back' * on. ISDN currently costs between \$5500 and \$7000 to have installed and can take up to three months in some cases before it's operable. On the other hand, **Source-Connect** is immediate and runs \$400 for the private individual consumer. (\$1600 for the professional studio, which includes a variety of added bells and whistles, but still *very* affordable—considering the alternative!) No contest. I vote **Source-Connect!** Check the site, www.source-elements.com to see when it's available. Currently you can download a demo of it.

Well, I've said it before, and I'm going to keep saying it, "It's never been a better time to be in this business!" I love it!

News from 'the Front'

A continuous source of related articles, Niké Basurto passed this on to us from 'Reuters'.

(FYI, my comments below are in this same font.)

Newly militant actors union gains first TV deal

By Steve Gorman *Tue Mar 28, 7:15 PM ET*

In its first Hollywood labor deal under a new, more militant leadership, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) on Tuesday reached agreement with producers of cable television cartoons on sharply increased pay for voice performers.

The tentative pact, raising by 20 percent the payments actors earn for reruns of their work on basic-cable animated shows, came after SAG moved a step closer toward a possible showdown with producers over separate residuals paid for live-action cable programs.

In a series of membership caucuses during the past week, SAG's rank and file voted overwhelmingly to authorize union leaders to call a strike in negotiations over the basic cable contract covering such shows as "The Shield," "Monk" and "Nip/Tuck."

Negotiators for the guild and the industry, represented by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, resumed face-to-face talks on Tuesday for the first time in about two weeks.

The strike authorization, which a guild source said was endorsed by more than 90 percent of

those voting, marks the first such move since a strike vote paved the way for a bitter six-month walkout against the advertising industry in 2001. (*It actually occurred in 2000, not 2001, but frankly we felt its repercussions until only recently.*)

The effort to seek a strike authorization in cable TV talks was the latest sign of the tougher bargaining stance asserted by newly installed SAG President Alan Rosenberg and others who gained control of the union last year.

In a statement posted on SAG's Web site, Rosenberg said he hoped "to avoid any work interruption in pursuit of (an) equitable deal."

Rosenberg, a TV actor best known for playing mild-mannered attorneys on "L.A. Law" and "Civil Wars," was elected in September to succeed former child star Melissa Gilbert, who led a comparatively moderate rival faction that swept to power in 2001 after the commercials strike. SAG, the nation's largest actors union, represents roughly 120,000 movie and TV performers ranging from stunt performers and extras to major stars.

The tentative agreement on the contract governing animated basic-cable shows like "Sponge Bob Square Pants" was the first deal negotiated under Rosenberg's leadership.

If approved by the Guild's national board, the new cable animation contract will be retroactive to January 1 and run through June 20, 2008.

But the two sides remained at odds over terms of residuals -- in this case payments earned for reruns -- under a separate accord covering nearly 20 live-action series on basic cable.

Shows such as "The Sopranos" and "Huff" are not affected because they are produced for pay-cable channels like HBO and Showtime.

Producers have offered SAG residual increases amounting to 14 percent for live-action cable shows, but the union has demanded higher gains, arguing that the basic cable industry as a whole has seen its revenues rise by 500 percent since residual payments for cable were last adjusted 16 years ago.

Industry executives argue that much of that growth has come from sports channels such as ESPN and reality shows, rather than live-action series covered under the contract.

We can only hope this 'squeaky-wheel' theory pays off for us all. It should be noted that cable pays about a third less the residuals you could expect from network television (ABC, NBC and CBS). So, keep your fingers crossed!

Term of the Month

Here's a term newly added to our 'Encyclopedia'. And to be sure, it's *not* for everyone, but it wouldn't hurt for you to know what agents are referring to should they ask, "Do you have an 'ear prompter'?"

ear prompter—Traditionally this has been an ear piece that looks like a hearing aid and a *micro-cassette recorder*. Additionally, a wireless ear prompter would include a *'transmitter loop'* as well, that 'radios the recording' (from the player/recorder) for playback directly into your earpiece. The 'loop' sends the digital signal to the earpiece the talent has concealed in his/her ear. There are no wires to the prompter that need to be concealed in the actor's hair or clothing when using a wireless loop. (Thus, the name 'wireless'.)

The earpiece, which is separate from the recorder/player, is actually fitted by any hearing aid professional to ensure the reliability of fit and the ability to conceal the device with very little effort. Performing in an industrial with an ear prompter requires you record the script into the prompter and listen to yourself while repeating every word in the same inflected manner that you spoke the words. It may take years to develop a casual, comfortable style that appears relaxed and honest. (Frankly, I consider those who do this well are on the order of magicians. It's no small feat.)

Needless to say, the degree of difficulty is rather steep for this specialized skill, but if the work you have the most access to and you are best suited to land is *spokesperson-narration*, where you're in front of a camera defining the finer points of a particular business (also known as an 'industrial', "point-of-purchase" or 'non-broadcast'), for example, then you may want to consider investing the time, money and effort to develop your skills in this facet of the talent trade.

The primary degree of difficulty may first appear to be simply utilizing an ear prompter with ease, which is very true. But beyond mastering its use on the job with any proficiency, even after you've recorded everything with painstaking detail, it's VERY likely the script will require changes...*at the shoot*.

To add to this, it's vital your timing is correct with the other talent you may be working with and incorporating any other specific demands the script may require.

When changes occur, which you can count on for every booking, all the talent involved will be required to *re-record* all the material they have prepared in advanced on their prompters, which could easily be 20 pages or more, and do so quickly **AND ACCURATELY** in some corner on a busy set.

You wanted excitement—you got it.

Thankfully advances in technology have made this process *far* simpler.

Until only recently a *majority* of on-camera Corporate Industrial talent have relied solely on *micro-cassette recorders* for their prompters. A device that breaks down so easily, it's strongly encouraged you have a spare on hand, holds at most 90 minutes of audio and, key to its usage, lacks the quality of sound necessary for maximum accuracy of delivery when you need it most. This device is now completely

obsolete for any other purpose beyond an ear-prompter and is not all that reliable given the options technology currently affords us.

It's important to note that any decent portable digital recorder, including the ever popular *iPod*, can support the 'ear piece' ear prompter, even if it's wireless. The wireless earpiece 'loop' attaches to the recorder using a headphone plug, which is standard issue 1/8" plug.

Additionally, a digital prompter, rather than the micro-cassette, is dramatically easier to edit at the session provided you have notated each page and even each subheading within each page, before hand. It even makes the timing far easier to maintain or change on the fly, if needed.

The fact that you will no longer require TWO prompters, due to the durability of today's digital prompters actually justifies their cost. Micro-cassette prompters generally run about \$170 per and, naturally due to technological advances, are becoming harder and harder to find.

Currently you can purchase **the iPod Nano**, which can hold a 1GB (240 songs, that's about 16 hours of audio), 2GB (500 songs or more than 33 hours of audio) and 4GB (1,000 songs or about 67 hours of audio) and models start at \$149. That should be more than enough for a job that has 50 pages of text, plus you can carry a library of songs along for your own enjoyment.

It may be important to note that the average battery life is approximately 20 hours. Like everything else dealing with technology, we expect to see that increase steadily as well.

Also, digital prompters have a greater capacity to store hours and hours of recorded material— in some cases they have more than 100 times the storage space of their cassette predecessor.

To record to an iPod you'll need an additional attachment such as a Belkin voice recorder or Griffin iTalk (\$30) because it's not included with the purchase of the device.

So, any 'Spokesperson' talent who may have been relying on this former technology and who has an existing earpiece can easily upgrade to a small digital prompter without changing out their invested earpiece. And their upgraded prompter can hang off their belt, where it can be concealed, just as its micro-cassette counter-part had done.

It's a dream come true for this very specialized segment of the performance industry, provided they don't fall prey to the small business trap of *resisting change*.

(You'd think I was on Apple's payroll. What can I say? I'm incredibly product loyal.)

A Very Good Question

Kate, I saw a lead on voice123 that indicated "ftp" under equipment needed. Maybe I don't really understand FTP. What would they be expecting from the talent? Thanks. —Jill (Fox)

'FTP' stands for 'file transfer protocol'. In other words, if you read it backwards, the phrase would read: *how to transfer a file*. This otherwise 'unused' space on a web site can act like a virtual "filing cabinet", which has been very handy when used for transferring rather cumbersome files that may crash an e-mail program.

Most web sites have the ability to store data 'privately'.

'FTP' is how we transfer audio files as well. So, if you record a spot on your home computer, splice it up (so it's more suitable for usage), post it to your own designated 'ftp site', then e-mail the client a link to this site, they can then download it and use it as an audition or as the finished product.

This form of production (ftp) is commonplace in most recording studios, so your local studio can probably assist you with this, since that's where you'll likely record. Hope this helps clear up a few details!

(Just a reminder: if we host your web page it's *only* for voiceover demos and demos we've produced here at **Sound Advice**. These web pages are not for ftp postings. Just a page hosted on our secure, well-traffic-ed site to help you better promote your voiceover. Producers will e-mail you a link to the studio's ftp site to help you collect the spots you've booked if you arrange it with them at the session. So you really don't need an ftp site—the recording studios do.)

Tools of the Trade

Okay, here's your homework, folks...when you have an audition or a booking for a product you've never heard of or barely know, *I strongly urge you to 'Google it'*! (What's the point of having the Internet at our fingertips, if we don't access it? Go to www.google.com.)

Make a habit of becoming familiar with what the product is, the direction of the current ad campaign and show some *interest in the subject*. It will certainly reflect in your read! If you are interested, you are *interesting*.

And if we're recording your demo here at **Sound Advice**, we expect you to take responsibility for making yourself familiar with not only the script, but *the subject of each script by 'Googling it'* so you know what you're talking about at the session. This is a great way to better familiarize yourself with the product and overall concept. After all, you're *never* selling the product you're selling the *concept*.

Additionally, use www.imdb.com ('imdb' stands for Internet Movie Data Base) when you're given a reference such as "this character should be a cross between **David Morse** and **David Strathairn**", especially if you have no idea who they are referring to! If you do you'll know precisely *the feel those auditioning you are aiming for* and be more prepared to deliver.

In keeping with our now *monthly* installment of search and discovery on www.imdb.com, check out the two actors I just mentioned. (You may just wish you were them! They're pretty remarkable and so are their careers.) Look up actresses, **Lili Taylor** and **Amanda Plumber**, director **Spike Jonze** and screenwriter, **Robin Swicord**.

'Tah for now!'

If you're not subscribed the workshop podcasts, give us a call. In the meantime, Spring is already springing up all over here in Chicago. So from us to you—enjoy the season. - kate & crew~