

sound advice

the most complete voice-over demo service

November 2006

“Vote here...and vote often.” –Some Well-known (Anonymous) Chicago Politician

“If you have a talent, use it in every which way possible. Don't hoard it. Don't dole it out like a miser. Spend it lavishly like a millionaire intent on going broke.”

–Brendan Francis

Ain't Technology Sump'thin'?

Hi Kate,

I just got my first international voiceover project. I worked with an Italian director on a little animation project. We communicated via skype.com. It was so...cool. I actually will record my work (in my) home studio tonight. I will upload the information to his ftp server. The key was that I auditioned over Skype. There were no long distance phone charges and he will pay via PayPal. How cool is that? You never know how websites can help you with marketing, but in this case, it really paid off. -Kimberley Reid

For those of you scratching your heads right now...the word is 'Skype'. Skype is a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) software application that allows you to essentially make long-distance (even international!) phone calls, using your computer and existing Internet connection, *for free*. You can learn more about it at www.skype.com. Using this software, Kimberley, who resides in Texas, was able to audition and book an animation job for a happy, little director in Italy.

VoIP (pronounced just like it's spelled) is also the technology used in Source-Connect—the software that is poised to replace ISDN in the not-too-distant future (see www.source-elements.com). VoIP is used most often to replace your old phone line by utilizing your cable line instead, omitting the need (and the charges) for regular local and long distance phone service. If you watch any television at all you'll notice Vonage and Comcast Digital Voice are competing for your VoIP dollars right now. But using Skype—for FREE? Gives one pause, now doesn't it? ☺

What Makes a Web Page Great

If you surf the Web with any frequency, you will find some websites are easier to navigate than others, some have greater eye appeal, and so on. Well, there's a right way and a wrong way to do everything, and your website is no different. Ideally, you're considering creating a web page of your very own, so allow me to be so bold as to pass on a few pearls of wisdom.

- One of (nearly) everything: *One* contact number. *One* email address. *One* click to play your demo (instead of click here, then here, then here—nope, you lost me and nearly everyone else). *One* format, please—and that's MP3 (not RealAudio, not Windows Media). And, seems silly to say it, but only *one* medium represented on your website: voiceover ONLY! NO headshots! I've yet to meet a single soul who's gotten booked from having their headshot posted on their website. Search the Internet yourself; you can access a number of high-profile talent agency websites (via voicebank.net). You'll quickly discover that few talent agencies include headshots on their sites. In fact, the very top talent agencies in the country (known as A-list agencies), such as ICM, CAA, William Morris and CESD, *only include voiceover demos, not headshots*, no matter how great their talent roster might be. Granted, a couple agencies in Chicago still do, but I don't condone it. I WISH Chicago was the Mecca for on-camera work—sadly, it's not. We excel in commercial voiceover above and beyond every place else, so let's amp up our assets, shall we?

- Your site should never have an 'Intro' sound playing (e.g. "Hi, I'm Izzy Gorrum. Welcome to my wonderland of VO"). It should never randomly play music or SFX as you mouse over icons with your cursor (God forbid.) These are considered bad form universally on the Internet, so avoid them. The ONLY things that should play on your site are your voiceover demos, and ONLY when you specifically **click** on them.

- Your web address (domain name) should never be a non sequitur from your name, such as www.bigdogwoof.com or some other such thing. This defeats the purpose of making your name known and familiar. Why make it even harder to find or get to know you?

- Your promotional postcards should complement your site (and vice versa), and absolutely MUST include your web address (e.g. www.katemcclanaghan.com) to make your demos available from your site. By doing so, your postcards won't only create 'name recognition' (which they most certainly will), but they will be the equivalent to sending out an actual demo, if not better.

- Once you secure representation with talent agents listed on voicebank.net, contact Voicebank to set up a 'Premium Page'. For a small fee, you will have a red star drawing attention to your name anywhere you are listed on voicebank.net. (Producers have no idea who puts the red star there. They think it must be because you're an especially strong and favored voice talent.) Doing so your name becomes a link directly to your voiceover (ONLY) web page where your demo(s) may be heard in one quick click! It's a fabulous added feature Voicebank offers and well worth the cost. So, by all means go for it!

- Be sure to respond to any inquiries you may get IMMEDIATELY. If it takes you two to three days to respond, you will most certainly lose the job. They won't call you twice if they can't track you down initially.

- Location is everything. Where is your site linked? Is it available through a variety of reputable sources? Your web page should **not** be out there all on its own like a note in a bottle floating on the open sea. If it is, you're likely to render your site completely useless. If you're hosted with **Sound Advice**, we'll feature a link to your site from both of our sites, and since our sites get a great deal of traffic, you'll stand a greater chance of getting booked. (People are cast off our site every day, so it pays to stay on top of this! But YOU have to promote it by making it available to those most likely to have a call for the work you do best.)

- Be sure to acknowledge your producer, web designer and graphic artist on your site by including a link to them. Just be sure their info and contact information is *at least* half the size of the smallest item concerning *you* and your voiceover. Subtlety is a virtue, too, you know. ☺

Schumer Sponsors Tax Relief Bill for Artists

September 15, 2006 **By Andrew Salomon**, for Backstage.com
(sent in from Niké Basurto, our most well-read colleague!)

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) is introducing legislation in Congress that would increase the ability of performing artists to deduct business expenses from their taxes, an aide for the senator said Friday.

If the bill passes, it would allow actors earning up to \$30,000 to not only claim the standard deduction, but to write off all of their performance related expenses—such as headshots and transportation to and from auditions (*demos and their production*)—as "adjustments to income," rather than having to write these expenses off as itemized deductions. In 2005, the standard deduction was \$5,000.

Schumer referred to as "out-dated" the current tax-code, which allows itemized deductions only for artists who (earn) less than \$16,000 annually. The bill would also index the caps for inflation, meaning performing artists could take advantage of the "above-the-line deduction and, as a result, receive greater tax benefits,"

according to a news release.

Sen. Schumer's bill is co-sponsored by Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and has received the support of the Screen Actors Guild, Actors' Equity Association, and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the release stated.

"This tax code is so outdated, it's more appropriate for court jesters from the Middle Ages than for today's performing artists," Sen. Schumer stated in the release. "Unless we want our artists to literally starve and our stages to fall silent, it's vital that we give our beloved artists the benefits they need to pursue their passion."

Sen. Feinstein stated in the release, "With the ever-increasing cost of living and growing financial demands on performers, this legislation takes a significant step toward reducing the burden for those who help to keep the arts alive in this country."

As the tax law currently stands, for actors to qualify as performing artists, they must have at least two W2 forms from different employers showing that they earned at least \$200 from each. There was no word in the release whether the minimum requirements for establishing "qualified performing artist" (QPA) status would be raised.

"I'm thrilled that this incredibly important issue has touched the ear of Congress, and hopefully it will be fully supported," said Chuck Sloan, who is an actor, a tax preparer, and who writes the Actors' Taxes column for *Back Stage*. "This is a huge, huge asset for one of the very few occupations that requires the active, aggressive participant to put out the kind of money that one has to put out in order to pursue a career."

I don't know about you, but if I lived in New York, I'd be pushing for this guy to run for Prez, Mayor and Alderman all at once! ;) -kate ☺

These (emails) Just In...

Thought you might be interested. Sat next to a producer for MTV on my flight from Tokyo to LA, who somehow ended up listening to my demos (imagine that). He said they were extremely well produced (and said he has listened to many), and I, of course, let him know that they were produced by **Sound Advice**. He even asked me to send him a few copies of the CDs. -Steve

Unfortunately—this (a rejection email from a top local talent agency) has been my only response to both my ad and agent mailings thus far. I'm feeling a little discouraged... Just wanted to share my misery! Any suggestions for what I should do next? -EB

I know. You're a terrific talent, you have an awesome product...but keep in mind this is really just your first full professional push. In the whole scheme of things, it's still just the beginning. As seasoned as you are and ready to work, you're only just kicking a dent into making yourself known. At least this agency let you know where you stand. Send them a nice little thank you note. You'll try again with them in 3 - 4 months.

What week are you on? (I'll bet it's week 3 or 4. That's when the heebie-jeebies usually set in.) Be sure you're sending something once a week to either the agents, both locally and those in other regions around the country.

Once you've completed your five-week promo blitz to the Ad Agencies *locally*, then it's time to go after a slightly broader market—such as Texas, St Louis, Kansas City, Minne/St. Paul, Milwaukee and Detroit. That would include about 500-600 contacts. You can send just postcards to these contacts—again, *once every other week for five weeks*. That's considered a full mailing by Sound Advice terms (and anyone in marketing or PR). You don't need to have an agent to secure work or promote yourself to the Ad Agencies.

If you still need a little shot in the arm, give us a call.

This is a process. It may not feel like anyone is paying attention, but I'm absolutely certain *they are*. You just need to persist just a little further. It can take as many as 3 full rounds of promo before you see the sort of response you'd hope for, so hold tight. I think the world of you! -kate

Thanks so much for your kind and prompt shot in the arm!!!! You and your studio are fantastic at what you do, both the process and the product! (Just finished week 4 out 5 for the ad guys, and week 5 out of 8 consecutive for the local talent agents.) -EB

(Check out www.evabreneman.com and hear for yourself what an awesome talent this gal really is!)

Did 2 TV 60 sec spots for state senate candidate (Dem, Aurora) Linda Holmes. Went great. Producers were happy, I felt good and well-trained for the gig. Fit it to the video right there. Very fun. – BMW

Man, I love hearing from you guys! Always happy to hear you're doing well. I'm so proud of every one of you. We're here if you should need a hand. ☺

SAG Board Approves Dues Increase Initiative

October 23, 2006 **By Lauren Horwitch** for BackStage.com

The Screen Actors Guild's national board of directors passed an initiative to increase members' dues backed by National President Alan Rosenberg during the union's biannual plenary meeting Saturday and Sunday at the Renaissance Hotel in Hollywood. SAG's exhaustive, year-long search for a new National Executive Director and Chief Negotiator also ended Sunday with the board's unanimous appointment of Doug Allen, former assistant executive director of the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), to that post left vacant by Greg Hessinger.

According to SAG officials, 98 percent of the board voted to approve the dues increase, which would be the first dues hike since 1999 and the second in 19 years. If approved by SAG voters in January, members' annual dues would increase to \$116 per year from \$100; the initiation fee would rise to \$2,211 from \$1,474.

Union execs and elected leaders have said an increase is necessary to support several new initiatives at the Guild, including the expansion of the residuals department, and the creation of two new departments dedicated to organizing and technology, respectively. In a joint statement, Rosenberg and Secretary-Treasurer Connie Stevens said additional funds will certainly be needed to prepare for the negotiations of two major contracts in 2008. "Our biggest responsibility as caretakers of this great union is making sure it remains healthy," they stated. "This increase will put us in the best possible position heading into the [TV/theatrical and Commercials contract](#) negotiations of 2008 by financing research and building up reserves, thrusting the Guild into a prosperous new era."

Under the proposed increase, actors earning less than \$200,000 annually would continue to pay 1.85% of earnings, and those making \$200,001 to \$500,000 would continue to pay 0.5% of earnings above \$200,000. Actors earning between \$500,001 to \$1 million would now pay 0.25% on that level of earnings. The guild would raise its earnings cap on income subject to dues to \$1 million, from the current \$500,000.

Ballots will be mailed after the first of the year.

SAG's board took care of two other items of expected business over the weekend. They voted to allocate \$50,000 toward the Film and Television Action Committee's (FTAC) legal campaign against Canadian production tax incentives, believed to be causing rampant runaway production.

90 percent of the board also voted to join the AFL-CIO Industry Coordinating Committee (ICC), a caucus of 10 other arts, entertainment, and media unions - including Actors' Equity Association and The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists -- that collaborate on issues and strategy. Some SAG members already object to their union's affiliation with the national labor organization, which reportedly costs hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. Former SAG National President Melissa Gilbert currently serves on AFL-CIO's Executive Council.

National board member Steve Fried was also re-elected as SAG's 3rd national VP by the union's regional branches. ☺

Thank your lucky stars...

I've always felt November was a terrific month, partly because my favorite holiday is this month. Thanksgiving is food and friends and family. It's warm and sweet and makes me smile. I'm so lucky to have such a wonderful crew behind me, and such terrific clients to work with. The fact that I get to *play* every day in a business I love, in a space I adore—makes it even more wonderful. Ah, but I'm gushing. What can I say? I love you guys! Thanks for making every day count. Enjoy the season.

In the meantime, rest up. Make yourself a turkey sandwich, watch a football game and play Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant" just one more time. 'Cuz the holidays are right around the corner. Till then... -kate and crew ☺