

# sound advice

## the most complete voice-over demo service

December 2006

"I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely". -Charles Dickens

*"Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you... to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old... Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world... stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death... Then you can keep Christmas! But you can never keep it alone". -Henry van Dyke*

### **Not Reinventing the Wheel**

Never one to mince words, I'm getting right to it, attempting to answer the one question no self-respecting North American shopper dares ask that under-whelmed, over-pierced Best Buy clerk: "What's the difference between Plasma screen, LCD and my dad's old Zenith? And what does HD and HDTV have to do with it?"

This kid has been asked this question so many times since Halloween, that his disinterested expression will change only after Christine, the checkout girl, sends him a text message that she *is* his Secret Santa and she'd love to meet him at one of the mall Starbucks for a Half Venti Caramel Macchiato, Half Eggnog Latte. Trust me, it doesn't fully register to this fellow that you're even standing in front of him. And, for what it's worth, he may or may not know the answer to your question. If he does, chances are *it will die with him* before ever imparting such wisdom to you. State secrets should be so protected.

Ah, the holidays! Ah, shopping. Ah well. Confused? What does this have to do with voiceover and acting and the business of working in this field? Well, I'll tell ya, friend: media is moving forward, with or without you. Moving at the speed of sound.

The melding of media into a single source, especially broadcast media from the telly to your computer and even to and from your cell phone, has most certainly arrived. It does you no good to resist. It's best just to embrace it like a great wave about to overtake you.

(Exhale here. "I, for one, welcome our new media overlords.")

Currently most stations that broadcast in High Definition, are simultaneously broadcasting in standard definition as well to accommodate your Dad's cherished Zenith. But this will not be the case in a few short years—by 2009.

Compared to your standard old *tellie*, High Definition TV (HDTV) broadcast is at *least* double the resolution (sharpness). Colors generally appear much more realistic, and the clarity is like looking through a window. In many ways, the difference between HDTV compared to standard definition TV is like comparing DVD to VHS... only HDTV is way, way better. WAY better. Way.

By now, you may be wondering: *Can you view standard definition TV on an HDTV set?* Sure, but the thing really goes to town when you have both an HD signal and an HDTV working in tandem. Okay, so to take advantage of all this, you'll have to buy a new HDTV set in order to receive an HD signal. In fact, the FCC has mandated that by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, *all* new TVs (HDTV or otherwise) *must* include an HD tuner. We're assuming here, of course, if you're buying an HDTV you already subscribe to digital cable or satellite. As you may have noticed, your Comcast cable box currently receives HDTV channels. Some HDTVs don't require an additional 'box' to receive these channels. They have this capability built-in—this is what's known as "digital cable ready".

Now, the two most popular screens (aka 'displays') that HDTVs come in are LCD and plasma. The typical LCD flat screens are more economical; plasma screens look slightly better, but cost a great deal more. In fact, plasma screens, while nearly double the cost of LCDs, are far more temperamental when it comes to the brightness of the room they are placed in. The image on the

plasma screen might just wash out completely and that defeats the whole purpose, now doesn't it?

When it comes to performance on-screen, many actors claim, "HD shows every flaw. I hate it." Ah, but *pour quoi?* It's just another excuse to resist the inevitable. If HD shows everything—reality can't be too far behind, right? Instead I say, "Hooray! Bring it on." I want flaws and all to be admired—not in a fractured way, but rather an authentic, natural way, you know? HD could see to that. I rule nothing out. This is the future we're talking about here after all.

Again, the entire broadcast industry (including Internet) is headed in this direction.

We're not reinventing the wheel here...just giving it a new spin—albeit a somewhat *bent* one from where I'm sitting.

For more info on this year's hottest gift, check out CNET's Home Theater Resource Center:

<http://bestbuy-cnet.com.com>.

### **Good Question**

Q. Hey Kate, I was wondering if you had any scoop on [Voices.com](http://Voices.com)? It looks to be quite similar to [Voice123.com](http://Voice123.com), but I'm wary of shelling out the \$200 or so for membership without some sort of feedback from my friends at Sound Advice.

BTW, joining [Voice123.com](http://Voice123.com) has been great—they may not have the best quality jobs, but I usually get 5-10 auditions per day, which if for nothing else, really makes me feel like I'm in the game and working my chops while I'm sending out my mass mailings and pursuing representation.

Also, one other question regarding these types of online auditions — what is your take on watermarks? A must have? —Donna

A. Hey, Donna... Well done on continuing to pursue representation while keeping your chops oiled. That's the idea!

Now, I have heard of voices.com—as I recall they had a few issues when it came to their site, or something or another—but they very well may have resolved their problems by now whatever it was. (It was at least 2 years ago.) I can't recall precisely what their problems were although I think it might have had something to do with not getting much work. Even so, I'd give 'em a go... gingerly, of course, and at your own risk. But nothing ventured—nothing gained. Why not?

As for voice123.com, I *do* recommend this site especially when you're just getting out there.

Certainly, not all of the auditions seem all that worthwhile. (What's that old Farmers Almanac adage? "You eat a peck of dirt a year." Okay then, apply that here.) At least the sheer volume of auditions will keep you working your chops and throwing your hat into the ring to get a speedier return on your demo investment, so I see that as worthwhile. That's about \$250 a year if you actually subscribe—and you should if you can. Again, go for it! That's great.

As for the digital watermark: first of all, for those who are scratching their heads—this is a security measure that *can be* applied to your voiceover auditions to render them useless for actual broadcast. The idea is to add a tone, noise or faint music behind your auditions as a means to hinder unscrupulous talent buyers from simply stealing your voiceover auditions for their use without paying you for your services.

Would you put a watermark on every voiceover audition? No. Would you use it for voices.com and voice123.com auditions? *Absolutely*. Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of Middle American radio production pirates? Argh! Curses!

The auditions you create for your average Union-franchised agents, however, don't require a digital watermark. Instead, this is a protective measure for just about anyone else.

Watermarks vary from one to the next, as they are customized per audio file. There are no real standards for them.

So, yes, Donna, I would use them for the more questionable submissions. Better to err on the side of caution rather than wishing you had at a later date.

Good questions. Thanks for asking!

### **How Many Agents Are TOO Many?**

Routinely, we get calls from very frustrated, 'would-be' talent who, when we ask, "How many agents are you with—*locally?*" They reply: "All of them."

Well, if that talent resides in Chicago, for example, then that tells me *no one* knows them

personally *or* professionally. So, no wonder they're frustrated.

Since December and January tend to be two of the very best months to pursue representation from the talent agents, there's no time like the present to amp up another good eight to ten week mailing to agents, near and far, if you don't have a couple of agent who are fielding you auditions with any regularity yet.

I HIGHLY recommend you do your level best to secure three or four additional agents *outside your local market*, such as: IBE (In Both Ears, Portland, OR), Arlene Wilson (Milwaukee), DB Talent (Texas), Moore Creative (Minneapolis, MN) and Atlas or Paradigm (NYC). You can find all of these agents, and a great deal more, along with their contact info on [voicebank.net](http://voicebank.net).

You should continue to pursue representation until you are receiving *at least* 5-10 auditions a week and at least a third of those auditions are for national (union) spots.

That's what will ultimately get you moving up to your next level career-wise.

Until that becomes the norm for you, you need to keep promoting yourself to the talent agents every couple of months. In the meantime, it's perfectly appropriate (*and necessary*) to promote your demo and postcards to producers and copywriters in a variety of markets. You should NEVER wait till you have representation before promoting yourself. Never wait to promote.

That's relinquishing your responsibility of whether you will work or not to someone other than yourself and that's *never* a good idea. This is YOUR career. You need to run as if you owned it—because you do.

Also, it's important to clarify the fact that even if you're a non-union talent, you can be listed with a Union-franchised agent, allowing you access to Union auditions. You can audition and land Union work. However, once you become Union, you can ONLY audition for Union jobs.

Non-union agents will not grant you access to Union jobs, but while you are non-union, it will afford you quite a few opportunities, so don't negate them.

Additionally, if you happen to live in Chicago you want to be registered with at least one of the three Milwaukee talent agents. They're wonderful agents up there and often have access to a market the Chicago agents might not. So don't negate them either.

### **Update from November's Newsletter**

(The following letter was sent in response to the "Ain't Technology Sump'thin?" section of last month's newsletter.)

Dear Kate, We noted that you mentioned Source-Connect in your November Newsletter. It's great to see that our products are gaining recognition in the VO industry, and we're glad to be mentioned on your website. We've had some traffic via your site already.

Regarding your mention of Source-Connect in the same paragraph as Skype, I would like to let you know that Source-Connect is not a VoIP application per-se, as it does not use a codec designed to discard all audio information except for that in the vocal frequency to allow for very low bit rates and low, but comprehensible, quality. Source-Connect is a premium plug-in using the most advanced audio codec available, AAC from Fraunhofer (the inventors of mp3). In addition, because Source-Connect is a dedicated plug-in designed precisely for VO and studios to work together, it is much easier for studios to use, as they don't need to make any external hardware patches. And, the main bonus, is that the audio quality is crystal clear and precise, so subtle verbal inflections are not missed. Again, thanks for your mention of our product.

Kind regards, Rebekah, Director of Technology, Source Elements LLC; Soho office, London <http://www.source-elements.com>

Hi there, Rebekah... Thanks for the clarification regarding Source-Connect and VoIP.

Duly noted! Obviously, we're great fans of Source-Connect and look forward to its rampant success. I'm confident it will enable all of us to work more efficiently and for far less cost. Best... always, Kate

### **Folks We Highly Endorse**

To succeed at anything, you really need to surround yourself with positive, knowledgeable, encouraging people—would you agree? So would I and if you're interested in acting for the stage or camera... allow me to introduce you to the best of the best.

For stage here in Chicago, I really like **the Raven Theatre**. I'm not sure what their class schedule is, but I really like the work they do and their approach to performance. Check out [www.raventheatre.com](http://www.raventheatre.com) for more details.

For commercial on-camera, **The Green Room** with Sean & 'Murph', the two senior casting

directors from O'Connor Casting-Chicago. These guys are down to earth, playful, honest and give you the best they've got. Check out [www.thegreenroomstudio.tv](http://www.thegreenroomstudio.tv)

Of course, there is always **Glenn Haines** in Los Angeles. He is far and away my hands down, all-time favorite for guidance on anything acting. Why? Because he is so spot-on and is able to glean the very best from each and every individual talent he works with—making them more comfortable at being who they really are. (Which is precisely what's required from you, now isn't it?) He occasionally returns to Chicago, but will be in LA through the better part of pilot season (till the end of March). So if you're in LA—don't hesitate to ring him up for a tune up. You can email Glenn at [glennfh@comcast.net](mailto:glennfh@comcast.net)

If it's dialects you need help with... Contact **Eva Breneman** at 773.575.6395,

[elbreneman@yahoo.com](mailto:elbreneman@yahoo.com). She's in Chicago and is just plain awesome—both on and off stage!

For Improvisation in Chicago—be sure to celebrate the release of **Jimmy Carrane** and Liz Allen's "**Improvising Better: A Guide for the Working Improviser**" at the book release party and

reception on Sunday December 10<sup>th</sup>, from 1- 4pm at the *Uptown Writer's Space*,

4802 N. Broadway, Suite 200, above the legendary **Green Mill** on Broadway at Lawrence. Jimmy is also the host of Chicago Public Radio's "**Studio 312**".

If you can't make that event, Jimmy will be speaking and signing books for Local Authors Night on Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> and will be at **the Book Cellar**, 4736-38 N. Lincoln Avenue in Lincoln Square, at 7pm. Hope you can make at least one of these book-signing events, if not purchase the book directly as a gift for your favorite Improviser.

Other Improv training available in the Chicago area is the **ImprovPlayhouse** in Libertyville; call 847.968.4529. Michael Wollner and friends make the commute easy for suburbanians. He's a remarkable guy and terrifically talented as well.

In Los Angeles, there's only one Improv group I can endorse without any reservation whatsoever and that's **the Truly Spontaneous Theatre Company**. Recently, members from this group formed **The Acting Center** in Sherman Oaks, California. This is a terrifically gifted, professional group that really cares whether you succeed. They impart a unique approach to acting, that I'm sure you're gonna love. Call 818.980.5281 for more details.

Catch one of these shows if you can and you'll see how free and clever these folks are—they're exceptional, playful, positive and, believe me, it's contagious!

### **We Wish You The Very Best...**

Well, this year was clearly an exceptional one, even though it sped by so fast it felt like we were holding the tail of a comet. Seems the best never linger, except in our fondest memories—much like each of you! We are so pleased to work with you, you know. We hand pick each of you and consider you so promising and remarkable. I think you see what we see in each other, especially when you participate in the workshop. We wish you all well—not just for the season, but especially in the year to come. Your future looks very bright from where we stand. And we'll stand by you when it arrives, too. But it's yours to make. Make your future full of hope and promise. It's yours to own. We wish you well now... and *always*!

### **Happy Holidays...**

from Priscilla, Colleen, Maya, Jon, Ben, Danny, Kate and, of course, the boss—Lamb Chop.