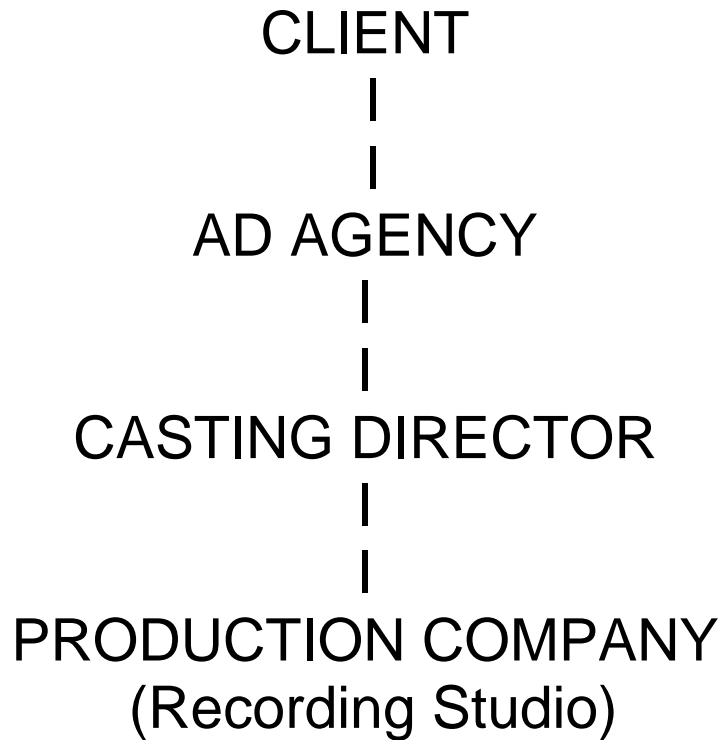


# SOURCES OF BUSINESS/AUDITIONS



TALENT (You)-----TALENT AGENT(S)  
MANAGER  
ATTORNEY  
ACCOUNTANT  
COACH/TEACHER  
PUBLICIST

## **Three P's for Priority in Selection of Jobs**

**PAY  
POTENTIAL  
PRACTICE**

**Keep in mind: You are NOT a “professional”  
by definition, unless you get paid for your  
work.**

**As Charley says to Willy Loman in “Death of  
a Salesman”:  
“What kind of a job is a job without pay?”**

## **EXCERPT FROM MY BOOK: *VOICE OVER LEGAL***

*Reprinted courtesy of Robert J. Sciglimpaglia, Jr. and voiceoverextra.com.*

### ***Advice From My Agents***

I am often asked by talent, “What is the best way to obtain an agent?” Before I give my opinion about that, I ask them a question in return – “Are you ready for an agent?” One thing that needs to be stated right up front is that with the resources available today, one does not need an agent to build a successful voice over business. I treat my relationships with my agents like I treat my marriage of 23 years.

### ***Trust is Key***

There is a whole lot of trust between my agents and me, and there is a definite relationship there where I am just not waiting by my phone for my agents to call me. I also give back to my agents by making sure I am, first of all, available when they call, and that I respond immediately by going to the audition they worked hard to get me, or send the recording promptly. I also make sure I practice every day, take classes, market myself, keep my demos and marketing materials up to date, and so on, so that when I *do* get the call from them, I am ready to put my best foot forward to compete for the job. Anything less is not living up to what my agents expect of me.

### ***Be Prepared to Work Hard***

Another misconception I hear often from inexperienced talent about agents is that they believe that if they get an agent to agree to represent them, then they “have it made,” and they can just take it easy now, sit by the phone and wait for the jobs to roll in. This could not be further from the truth. Once you get an agent to agree to represent you, life as you knew it is over, and the *REAL* work begins. Agents do not get you *jobs* – they get you *auditions*. You need to be in a position to compete for those jobs, or you are not ready for an agent. An agent won’t be able to help your career, and you won’t be able to contribute to an agent’s income.

Bottom line is, if you are not in a position to respond *immediately* to your agent (for instance, if other obligations get in the way of being able to do that, like a job, or family, or whatever), then you are not ready for an agent, and an agent will not be able to help you.

### ***Taking the Next Step***

Let us assume, however, that you are at the point in your career where you are making good money on your own, and you want to take the next step up to larger (maybe union) jobs, so you would like to get an agent to represent you. What is the best way to do that? Well, I asked two of my agents for their take on what agents can do for talent, and how to get one. Here is what they said.

***Erik Sheppard of Voice Talent Productions***

First is Erik Sheppard of Voice Talent Productions. Erik has been my agent for a couple of years now. Erik has nearly 20 years of professional experience, voicing thousands of high-profile projects across the globe, ranging from corporate presentations to national radio and television campaigns. He is consistently the preferred male voice for many of the most widely recognized corporate, commercial and promotional production companies worldwide. Clients include Verizon Wireless, Kodak, Citibank, HSBC, American Express, eBay, MTV and TV Land.

When not in the booth, Erik is an industry blogger, organizer of the Voiceover Mixer series of networking events, and a voice over coach with Innovative VoiceOver Instruction. He is the owner and head talent agent of Voice Talent Productions, representing an elite roster of voice talent from around the world from their offices in New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Florida. His career and related projects have been profiled in such places as VoiceOverXtra.com, Voices.com, Voice123.com, The Learning Channel, The Voiceover Insider, and countless other blogs and podcasts. If it is happening in the voice over industry, chances are Erik is involved.

***Erik Sheppard – Advice to Aspiring Voice Talent Agents can get you the high-profile, high-paying jobs***

“As the industry stands today the oft-repeated adage that ‘you are your own best agent’ is certainly true. Many talent book most of their projects directly through their own client lists, websites, or through pay-to-play services. The fact remains, though, that talent agents are usually the *only* ones able to give you access to the higher-profile and higher-paying projects. Advertising agencies, production houses, and casting directors appreciate talent already being vetted for them, and enjoy the relationship they have with the representatives who have those talent in their rosters. Without representation your ability to audition for those people is severely limited.”

***Some thoughts on working with more than one agent***

“A full-time, professional talent will normally have quite a few agents across the country or even overseas that work tirelessly for them. While it is difficult for talent to sign in New York or Los Angeles, there are many qualified agencies in other cities who may take on talent solely based on the strength of their demos. Often they receive the same auditions that the bigger companies do and pass them on their respective rosters. Talents who do their homework, submit properly, and have the proper standard demos may be able to establish themselves there, and eventually break into the bigger markets afterward. It takes tenacity, and of course, the right skill level, but it is quite nearly impossible to enjoy a comfortable salary without that exposure.

“Most agencies are exclusive to their city, so it is important to sign with the right people, as you would only be able to work with one per market. This

still allows you to find additional representation elsewhere, so it is in a talent's best interest to find as many agents as they can who are willing to work with them.”

***A professional and respectful partnership pays off for both parties***

“A prospective agent is taking a risk by bringing you into their fold. It is also a time-consuming and expensive process, as they get to know who you are, your abilities, and the nuances of your delivery. Talents who keep in mind the staggering amount of submissions received by agencies, and do their best to stand out from the crowd, are going to get noticed first. While it is an exciting endeavor for talent, for the agents, this is an important business decision. Always remain highly professional and respectful if you would like the same treatment in return. Let your agents know you can be trusted to represent *them* in the best light when dealing with the clients that they have worked so hard to maintain, and you will *greatly* increase your chances of being sent out!”

***Etiquette matters!***

“Your job is in many ways a service industry position. Make your agent, your clients, your manager, your assistant, the director, your colleagues, or anyone else you come into contact with, feel at ease working with you. Make their lives easier by doing your job above and beyond what you have been called on to do. Audition on time with a properly named file, be pliable and accommodating in the booth or from your session at home. Know your business inside and out. Know how to take direction, proper mic technique, and how to shake hands properly. Be trustworthy and thankful. It will be remembered and you will work much, much more.”

***It pays to put your best foot forward***

“At our agency, as in most, we agree to represent about 1% of the talent who submit to us. Approximately a third are rejected without even being heard, due to not submitting properly. So be sure to check the agency website, and find out the preferred procedure, as many will request a CD package be sent by mail. Talent who submit a professional-looking package, with a carefully worded letter, will often be listened to first. “Many others are quickly rejected, as it is obvious they do not yet have the experience or level of professionalism we need. Be sure you are really ready for this step in your career. Larger agencies, especially those in New York and Los Angeles, are extremely selective about whom they work with, and often take on only those with many years of experience and long client lists. Others may be quite good, but are just too similar in delivery or tone to talent we already have on our roster. A salesman knocking on our door could be selling the best vacuum in the world, but we already have a great vacuum, so are not in the market for another one. This does not take away from the quality of his product. We just aren’t his customer base.”

***Demo do's & don'ts***

“Almost always, your demos are going to be the biggest deciding factor. Most talent have heard that you have about seven seconds to make an impression, but often it is even less. Your first spot has to be exceptionally strong – and indicative of your best work. There is no time for a slow burn, so get the great spots on there early to ensure they will be heard. Your second spot should normally be a departure from the first to show any range you may have. If your third spot is strong as well, then the rest is really gravy. Be sure the audio quality is perfect, and that every demo is professionally produced. Anyone who listens to thousands of demos a year as part of their job description can immediately tell the difference.”

***Be persistent – not annoying***

“Resist the temptation to be an agent stalker. Nobody wants to work with someone who is disrespectful of their time. Multiple phone calls only serve to remind the agent that you may be better suited to telemarketing. Find a reputable agent, follow their submission procedure, send them incredible and professionally produced demos with an impressive and persuasive letter, and then put it out of your mind. Just like in an audition scenario, you probably will not hear back unless they want to take you on. Submit to as many agencies as you wish, and keep track of them too, so you can try again later when you have updated demos or more experience to list. There are many out there, so if you take the time to do things right, and you are ready, chances are you'll find someone willing to roll the dice with you.”

***Ingrid French of Ingrid French Management***

Next is Ingrid French, of Ingrid French Management. Ingrid is based in New York City, and she not only represents me for voice over, she also represents me for my commercial and legitimate on-camera pursuits. Ingrid did an interview a few years ago for [actingcareerstartup.com](http://actingcareerstartup.com), and I have reprinted excerpts of that interview here. I highly recommend anyone wanting answers to many acting or voice over questions go to that site and become familiar with its many resources. Ingrid started out in this business assisting at a talent agency 14 years ago, where she worked on the commercial and the legit sides with both adults and children. About 13 years ago, she went into management and started her own company – Ingrid French Management. She has been doing management ever since, and the reason she started doing that is because she wanted to work with clients in all areas, instead of working at an agency where she worked either on commercial or legit. As a manager, she felt that she could better help shape actors' careers by helping them get projects across the board.

**Questions & Answers with Ingrid French:**  
(courtesy of actingcareerstartup.com)**Q. So what is it that you expect from the actors you work with so that you can make sure you meet your monetary needs?**

**Ingrid French:** My whole business is commission-based. I only make money when my clients are making money; my clients being the actors I work with and represent. My commission is 20% if I book an actor directly on a job, and 10% to me and 10% to the agent if it's booked with an agent. I can meet an actor who is amazingly talented, but there is a whole business side that the actor has to be aware of. That means, for example, that when my office calls him/her for an appointment, they have to show up on time, and do the preparation for whatever the audition or the job is. If it is a commercial audition, there might not be a lot of preparation except for wearing the appropriate attire, to know what role they are going in for, and maybe to prepare for that, when they are in the audition room to be able to take the lines and interpret them in different ways, improvise if called to do so, and take direction. For television and film, the preparation might involve being able to do the preparation of the character and to learn the lines. Going on those kinds of auditions, or on any auditions really, and being well-prepared for those auditions are hopefully what's going to get them work.

That's all certainly a big part of being businesslike and professional, but what's also important is showing up on time, and calling back in a timely manner to our office when we call them for an audition. The people who do those things consistently are the people with whom I'm going to be able to work for the long haul.

**Q. How many clients (actors) do you work with?**

**Ingrid:** I have clients that I sign and work exclusively with, and others that I freelance with. I have approximately 70 signed clients and about 150 that I freelance with. I usually freelance to begin, and the intent is to sign the actor eventually, but every actor and every situation is different.

**Q. Signing a client means then that the actor then can work only exclusively with you. Correct?**

**Ingrid:** Yes that's correct. It may also be that after freelancing for a little while, that maybe I need a little more time to evaluate whether or not to sign the actor. Maybe the actor has other representation that he/she is working with, and maybe they're not ready to sign exclusively with me yet, so we continue to freelance as long as there are no conflicts with auditions and so forth with the other managers or agents that the actor is working with.

Or still another situation could be that the actor is only interested in being sent out in one specific area. So if an actor is only auditioning for commercials or for theatre or for voice over for example, then it doesn't make sense for me to sign them to work with me exclusively as my contract will state that they can be sent out for television, film, theatre, voice-over, commercial print and everything. So if we're talking about someone who is interested in only one area, then I will most

likely continue to freelance with him or her.

**Q. What is it that you expect of an actor when you call them in for an interview?**

**Ingrid:** Usually the first time I meet with an actor it is just a sit-down, face-to-face meeting. It's a chance for me to find out a little bit about them personally and also what their background is, such as where they trained, what experience they have, who they know in terms of casting directors or what connections they might have in the industry. Something else I want to see in that first meeting is what kind of personality they have and if we "click." There are so many actors and agents and managers out there. I'm on the phone with the actors I work with so many times each day, and they stop by my office, so they have to be people who I'm excited about talking to and having stop by. For me, that personal connection is really as important as everything else.

***When to Join a Union***

Should you join the union, and if so, when should you join? On the SAG website, it states that only 5% of its members earn more than \$5,000 per year. So, in my opinion, you need to determine where you want to go with your career before deciding whether it is worth it to join the unions. For instance, are you a voice actor who wants to work out of home, never wants to step foot in New York City or Los Angeles, and never want to do cartoon voices, etc.? If your answer to this is "Yes," then you may never have to join the union.

By contrast, do you wish to do cartoon voices, appear as a regular on a TV series, or record big-name fiction audiobooks? If you answer "Yes" to these, then you want to work toward joining the union. However, another consideration, in my opinion, is to join the union for the right reason, and when you are ready.

***Join for the Right Reasons***

For instance, many voice actors tell me they joined AFTRA so they could get an agent. In my opinion, this is not a good reason to join the union. As you hopefully can see from the chapter on agents, it's not about your union status. It's about your talent, and why an agent will work with you.

I also hear actors tell me they joined SAG because they got their three vouchers working background. They decided to join so that they could make a few more bucks working background gigs. In my opinion, that is where they just destined their careers to go. I say this because working background does not prepare you for competing for principal acting jobs. In order for those actors to earn money in the business, they have to keep working background.

***Join When You HAVE TO***

In addition, union jobs are mostly done in major markets like New York City, Los Angeles or Chicago. So, if you are *not* working in those areas, then you probably should not think about joining the union.

A piece of advice that my manager Ingrid French gave me when I started working

with her three years ago was *not* to join a union until I had to. I know what she means now, because when I was hired for my second AFTRA gig, a featured role on *PAN AM*, I had to join. My first AFTRA job was a few years ago, when I was hired for a principal role on the Maury Povich show. After I have been in AFTRA for a year, I will be eligible to join SAG.

If you were wondering if I made a wise decision to join AFTRA, I do not regret joining at all as it put me in the 5% class (that is, those actors who make more than \$5,000 per year). I narrated three AFTRA audiobooks, and my agents began sending me union auditions almost daily. Things moved forward. I believe, however, that this happened because of following Ingrid's advice. Not only did I not join until I had to, I also prepared myself for joining by working very hard daily, taking lessons and classes, and submitting myself for all kinds of jobs, which I auditioned for on almost a daily basis. Because I did that, I was ready to compete against "the big boys and girls," meaning those who have been working union jobs for a long time.

### ***What My Agents Have to Say about Unions***

Again, I asked my agents the question about the unions, and here is what they said.

First to answer is ***Erik Sheppard***

#### ***Non-union status is a recent phenomenon***

"Back not too long ago, before voice over was as widespread of a profession as it is today, nearly all professional talent were union. Most would go to their local agent's studio on a daily basis, and read their auditions for the day, and there was not much of a call for lower paid talent.

"Until very recently many agents would not even take talent on if they were non-union, and many talent were looked down upon for not being members. With the proliferation of home recording and direct marketing to seekers by talent, the vast majority are now non-union. This is still a hot button issue for many, and with good cause."

#### ***Benefits of union membership***

"Professional union talent rely on their union standing for their medical coverage, retirement and to protect them in disputes with clients. Non-union talent are not afforded such privileges. Union talent are always paid at least scale, which is fair; non-union talent can charge whatever they wish, and often charge below fair rates in an effort to outbid perceived competition."

#### ***Fi-Core considerations***

"Now many of the biggest clients have now gone non-union either in an attempt to make the transaction easier or to sidestep scale minimums. At the same time many more talent have opted to go Fi-Core (once very

frowned upon) in an effort to essentially have their cake and eat it too. Of course, if everyone went Financial Core there wouldn't be any unions anymore. This has led to a serious conundrum for talent.

“On one hand they want to protect talent rights, enjoy those same rights themselves and ensure fairness in the industry. On the other hand, talent have to eat. Often they aren't even paying into their benefits enough to see any reward from them in the first place, and so they do what they feel must be done to continue working. Why lock themselves out of all the non-union jobs by joining?”

***Industry protections have been undermined***

“Personally I wish it were back the way it used to be. Lowballers and lackluster talent would be weeded out and pros would be able to work in a protected industry, be paid fairly and sleep with the knowledge that the work they did that day did not lessen the strength of the profession. Unfortunately it seems those days have long since passed.”

Next up is **Ingrid French**, again, courtesy of [actingcareerstartup.com](http://actingcareerstartup.com):

**Q. You hear a lot of actors talking about the unions and how important it is for them to get in one, to get their SAG card for example. How important is getting into the unions early in one's acting career, and what is the right time to join, in your opinion?**

**Ingrid:** The goal of any working actor is, yes, to eventually be member of a union, but before you do that you need to build up a r.sum. of acting work. If you are lucky enough to book a union job on your first job and become eligible to join the union and you do join, but have no credits on your r.sum., you set yourself up for being compared to other actors in the union who have many more credits and a lot more acting experience than you do on your r.sum.. That will translate into you having a difficult time getting sent out for auditions for union projects.

**Q. So should it be a priority for a new actor to try and join one of the labor unions for actors as soon as possible after starting an acting career?**

**Ingrid:** My advice is to wait before joining so that you can audition for both union jobs and non-union. You can then join either when you have to because you have worked on a certain number of union projects, or when you have more credits and have really gotten out to audition a lot, so that a lot of casting directors know you and your work.

**Q: But if you want the really good jobs, you have to be in one of the labor unions for actors though. Correct?**

**Ingrid:** The jobs that are non-union might be lower-paying jobs, but at least they allow you the possibility to audition for casting directors, get yourself known to them and also to get experience. Those casting directors are very often the same ones who cast both union and non-union projects, so they are the same people. Also there is a large pool of work out there that you don't want to be cut off from

because you joined the union too soon.

**Q: What exactly do you mean by that?**

**Ingrid:** To clarify that for those who might not know it, if you are a member of the union, you can audition for union projects only. If on the other hand you are not a member of a union, you can audition and be considered for both union and non-union projects. If you are non-union and you audition for a union project and get selected, they will give you a waiver so that you will be able to work that job. Once you get one waiver, you are eligible to join. There is such a thing as joining too early for the reasons we mentioned, but for someone who is interested in doing on-camera commercials for example, half, if not more, of the work is non-union, so if you join too soon, you could be cutting yourself out of a big piece of the opportunities.