

# *Demo & Marketing Magic for Voice Actors*

*Proven Techniques for Succeeding  
in the Business of Voice-over*

*by Lenny Abshire*



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*Demo & Marketing Magic  
for Voice Actors  
Proven Techniques for Business Success*

*by  
Penny Abshire*

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## Forward

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*Ring, Ring.* “My hands were trembling; my mouth was as dry as the sand in the Mojave Desert during the heat of August, my head was spinning and I felt as if I were going to say something which I would later regret.” This is how it started, my first opportunity to speak with Penny Abshire. *Ring, Ring.*

This scenario does not draw a pretty picture of my bravery, but I was about to speak with one of the gurus of the voice industry. *Ring, Ring.*

I did not know what to say, I had practiced my opening dialog for several days. Then, she answered the telephone. I believe I sounded like some sort of blithering fool as I rambled on about something mundane. Penny listened and gently prodded me into speaking properly. So began the first conversation with an idol and a mentor.


There is a synergy in our conversations today as Penny, James Alburger, and I talk about the future of the voice business. However, I am still in awe of this petite woman who has the power to move mountains with her voice. Penny is now a mentor and a good friend.

Penny’s book offers a view of the business world of voice-over with an easy to understand, focused, friendly style which will have you believing you have been in a private coaching session. Penny has the experience of being a teacher which helps her bring out the best in students in a fun, conversational, lively way. It does not matter if you are an *old pro* or a beginner who wants to learn about the voice-over business, Penny tells the facts about our industry. Some of the facts of the voice-over genre you really do not want to know (but, you know them anyway) and have always been a quiet little secret, are revealed in her latest book “*Demo & Marketing Magic for Voice Actors*”.

Life is the best teacher. In this book Penny makes it clear that you will know when you are ready to be a voice actor. You will know when you are ready to become a full-time or part-time talent. You will know marketing of your services is a necessary evil and you will know when you are ready to take the first steps or the next steps in your career as a voice actor.

Penny is a superb coach and mentor, she informs and inspires and then she allows the reader to make their own decisions. Take the plunge into the world Penny paints with vivid colors and flair, you will not regret a moment of time spent reading or practicing her ideas.

Frank Frederick, a friend  
and the author of *LoveNotes – Branding and Marketing for Voice Artists*





## Preface

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It is said that “the truth is the truth is the truth” and that there are only so many ways to say the same thing. That’s very much what this book is about. There are a great number of teachers, coaches, voice talent and marketing gurus out there who have graciously shared their knowledge with me over the years.

Special thanks to Cindy Akers, Rob Actis, Dan Balestrero, Bob Bergen, Greg Berger, Sheri Berger, Susan Berkley, Marc Biagi, Lucille Bliss, Chuck Buell, Marc Cashman, Christine Coyle, Norman Flint, Pat Fraley, Frank Frederick, Phil Ganyon, Mel Hall, Harlan Hogan, Hillary Huber, MJ Lallo, Deb Munro, Dan O’Day, Dick Orkin, Rob Paulsen, CW Powers, Jan Rabson, Connie Terwilliger, Marice Tobias, Chris Wagner, Wally Wingert, Cathryn Zaro, and so many more who have shared their wisdom and experience with me over the years.

Also special thanks to all my voice acting students over the years. It is said that the teacher always learns more than the student – and these talented people have taught me *volumes!*

But most of all to my dear friend, teacher and business partner, James Alburger, author of *The Art of Voice Acting*, without whose encouragement I would still be typing wills and trusts in a stuffy law office and hating every minute of it! The day I met Jim I was re-introduced to the magical world of performing that had been absent in my life for a very long time. He inspired me to try new things and to push myself WAY out of my comfort zone - to discover my talent as a voice actor, and most of all, to believe in myself. Now my days are filled with so many creative tasks: copy writing, performing, coaching, directing, and lots and lots of laughter! I’m having the time of my life! For all of this and more, Jim will always have my gratitude, love and admiration.

***When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.***

# A Note About the Links in this E-book

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As you read through this e-book, you'll notice [links](#), colored in blue and underlined. There are two types of links in this book:

1. Links to other locations within this PDF document, and
2. Links to websites on the Internet.

## Internal Links

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One of the advantages of an e-book such as this is that it is possible to actually give you a LOT more information without having to write it all down. Internal links within the book allow you to quickly reference a term or move from one location in the book to another. For example, the link . . .

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. . . will appear under every section heading. Just click on this link and you're whisked off to the table of contents, or to wherever the link will take you. Let's see them do THAT in a printed book! Internal links will take you to the page for that information, but you may need to scroll down if the actual link destination is near the bottom of the page.

## Internet Links

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The links to various Internet websites require that you are in order to open the link. If you're off-line, it won't hurt to click on them – it's simply that one of the following things will happen:

1. Nothing
2. Your Internet browser will open and you'll get an error message
3. Your auto-dialer will attempt to connect you to the Internet and open the web page.
4. If you're on a cable or DSL connection, you're most likely all the time, so clicking on a link will take you directly to the web page.

## Navigating the Links

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No, this isn't about traversing a golf course . . . it's about how to get back to where you were! At the top of your Acrobat Reader view, there is a menu with buttons for navigating through your PDF document. If the navigation buttons aren't visible, simply right-click on the menu bar and check the "navigation" item. The navigation button menu should appear. After clicking on an internal link, click on the ◀ (previous view) button to return to your previous location in the e-book. Close your browser to return from a web link.

⏪ (first page) ◀ (previous page) ▶ (next page) ⏩ (last page) ◀ (previous view) ▶ (next view)

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# Part I

## Marketing your Talent

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**Question:** *How many voice actors does it take to screw in a light bulb?*

**Answer:** *Just 1 – but it takes 100 more sitting around Starbucks drinking coffee and complaining that it could have been them if they'd only gotten a break!*

The old adage, "It's not *what* you know, but *who* you know" has proven to be true more than once. However, it doesn't explain how you get to **know** that *who*.

The question of "how to break into the 'circle'" is one that does come up from time to time. The important thing to remember about voice-over is that this is show business. As with all other areas of show-biz, there is a period of time for "paying dues," making the connections, getting established, mastering the skills, establishing a reputation, and waiting for that big break. Sometimes it comes and sometimes it doesn't.

Actually, there are two "circles": The biggest one is the national talent circle of voice artists who are consistently doing national spots. This "circle" is difficult to break into and breaking in usually means the performer has many years of experience - often in other performing arts as well as VO, is highly directable, has ISDN experience, has a good agent, and has managed to be in the right market and in the right place, knowing the right people at the right time more often than not. Although a certain degree of luck may be a factor, these people are highly dedicated professionals who do whatever it takes to get the job done - and they are often excellent self-marketers.

The smaller "circle" is on the local/regional level. The fact that you are going out on many auditions is a good sign that you are on the right track. Every audition you attend puts you one step closer to "getting the gig". Still, it can take several years to get to a point where you are recognized as a highly competent (not just average) voice talent and for the producers in your area to find a need to hire you. It takes consistent - and creative - marketing, continuous learning on your part, daily practice, and undying patience. Just as the Hollywood movie star who is an overnight success actually goes through many years of struggle to succeed, the same is true of breaking into the "circle" of voice-over. I know of several VO coaches who will tell their students to plan on anywhere from 6 to 15 years of study and marketing before that "lucky break" happens that will make you an overnight success. It takes time. Be patient.

If you are too eager to "break in" you will most likely become frustrated and give up before you have adequately "paid your dues". The most successful people I know in this business would do this work for free! The fact that they get paid is a bonus. Keep that attitude and your likelihood for success will be much greater.

If you get the idea that this business, to a large extent, is all about marketing - you're right. Even if you have an agent and you get sent out on lots of auditions, you can't just sit back and wait for the jobs to come in - because they won't. Show-biz doesn't work that way.

As for getting into the "circle", give yourself time: Time to master your craft - time to develop your marketing plan - and time to get yourself known.

Marketing and advertising have been around since the beginning of time. I'm sure early man didn't have a word for it, but since the world began man has been striving to convince others to think in the same way he does. If he wanted to move the tribe to a new cave, he had to convince the majority that it was the right thing to do. Imagine the guy who invented fire... do you think he might have found it challenging to get others to try it out without them thinking was a living beast who would devour them? In more modern times, imagine the guy who first had the idea of the Internet! Information being sent world-wide over a wireless network? Impossible!

We have vastly better tools today to get the word out about our services and products than we did even 5 years ago. This chapter will cover several tried and true methods to tell the world you are a voice actor. Your telephone is still your best tool; however, first let's talk about the preliminary steps to take before you even consider picking up the receiver.

*"The moment you let avoiding failure become your motivator, you're down the path of inactivity. You can only stumble if you're moving. If you don't have a few failures, you're not taking enough chances. Nobody can be right all the time, and the big companies didn't become big by playing it safe."*

**The President of Coca-Cola**



## Things You Should Consider Before You Begin Marketing

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The following questions and answers will help you tailor your marketing campaign, as well as determine how much time you'll need.

1. **Do I want to do voice work full-time or part-time?** If you want to do voice work full-time, then your marketing efforts will need to be significant. If part-time work is your goal, then marketing can be much less time consuming.
2. **How flexible is my time?** With a flexible schedule, you can be a “fill-in” voice artist, (a performer who substitutes for another if he’s not available for the gig) which is quite attractive to some potential clients. Yet, if your current job is very time consuming and getting away during the day (for auditions or work) is not an option, obtaining part-time work in the voice industry will be more challenging.
3. **Would I prefer to make voice work my sole source of income, or just supplemental?** If this will be your sole source of income, your marketing will have to be substantial.
4. **How much money can I afford to spend on my marketing?** Only you have the answer to this one. You may be in a position to put a large amount of money into your marketing. Or, your financial position may dictate investing only a small amount in the beginning. If you are planning to pursue this as a full-time career, a larger investment will probably be necessary. If your plan is to use voice acting only as a supplement to your current income, you can probably afford to spend a little less on your marketing efforts.
5. **Do I desire the glamour of commercials or is narration work preferable?** Since commercial work is only about 10% of the industry, trying to obtain it can be more challenging – but not impossible. Conversely, narration work is about 80% of the industry, so there’s more of it for you to do. It is the “bread and butter” of voice work. Ultimately, you’ll discover where your strengths lie and you’ll put the bulk of your marketing efforts there.
6. **Should I market only to large markets to get the most work?** Where you live is no longer an issue with the use of the Internet. Your marketing efforts can result in work literally anywhere in the world. When first starting out, you may get more work in smaller markets, but that’s not always the case.
7. **Should I market all of the things I do (i.e. commercials, narrations, character voices, etc.)** Splitting your focus will make it more difficult for you to market effectively. Begin with what you do best. After you’ve done some work and have a client base, then by all means branch out.

*“Keep your mind on the **objective**, not the obstacle.”*

*William Randolph Hearst, publisher, editor and politician*



## Preparing to be a Professional

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When you're first getting started, you probably won't (and shouldn't) have a demo. If you've taken a few classes and read some books, you're on your way to a successful career, but you're not ready to compete in a market full of more experienced voice actors. Producing a demo before you are ready is possibly the worst mistake you could make. This being said, there is, of course, a small percentage of people who have had extensive acting training (and even those who are "naturals") who feel they are ready to produce a demo right away and might be. But they are in the *minority* and I'm writing this book for the *majority*.

In my classes, many people ask me why I talk about marketing before I teach them about demos. Generally speaking, when someone new to voice-over begins taking classes he's looking at about 1-1/2 to 2 years (maybe longer) before he's ready to produce a demo. This will include lots of classes for polishing existing skills and learning new ones. If he knows this when setting his goals, he also knows he has 1-1/2 to 2 years to build a business foundation for his career. During that time, while he's honing his skills at performance, he should also be studying how to become a master marketer. While having a demo is important in this industry, having a good, solid marketing plan for success is critical. If he waits until the day he has his new demo in hand to think about who he's going to send it to, he has wasted a good amount of precious time. By the time his demo is ready – he should have a completed marketing plan already in place.

**Note:** I'll have a *magic answer* for you a bit later about how you can actually get work during your preparation time – even before you have produced your demo.

*"Always bear in mind that your own **resolution** to succeed is more important than any other one thing."*

Abraham Lincoln



## This is a Business

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You're in show business now and the bigger part of "show business" is "business". As an example, let's say you're starting a small business - a pizza parlor. You know you make GREAT pizza but there are still a number of things you're going to need before you start open your doors. You'll need a business plan (both so you can get a small business loan from the bank and so you have an idea what direction you want to take the business), a store-front, ovens, refrigerators, tables and chairs, a cash register; ingredients, napkins, signs, telephones, a name and logo for the place, business cards, employees, uniforms, etc. In short, LOTS of preparation has to be done before you can open for business.

Starting your voice-over business is no different than starting any other kind of business. While you won't need a store-front or ovens, there are still basic equipment and office supplies you'll need to have.

## Setting Up Your Office & Studio

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As with the pizza parlor – you'll need some critical things before you can call yourself a "real" business.

- 1) **A Completed Business Plan:** If the guy who wants to open the pizza parlor needs a loan from the bank, do you know what is the first thing the bank will want? That's right, a Business Plan. The bank will want to know he's done his homework and that he knows exactly what needs to be done to succeed. This, in turn, gives them reason to believe he will be successful and he'll pay off his loan.

You probably won't need to take out a loan to start your VO business, but the idea of a making a plan is still extremely important. I've designed a Voice Actor's Checklist for Success which is an abbreviated business plan. (Appendix E). If you find the task of preparing a business plan somewhat daunting, consider contacting SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) <http://www.score.org>. For a small fee, a retired executive will walk you through the process. Whether you use the business plan I've created, design one of your own, or get help from someone else, it is a very important step to keeping you on the path to success!

- 2) **Computer and High Speed Internet Service:** A few years ago it wasn't crucial – but it is now. So much of what you do will be recorded and then delivered over the Internet. If you've been fighting making the change (or becoming computer literate) – you need to catch up – and quickly! Take some classes, if necessary.
- 3) **Website:** As with the need for a computer, a personal website is a critical marketing tool. Now, don't freak out! This does not have to be expensive. Since I'm not an expert in this field, I suggest you read three articles by fellow voice actor, Chris Wagner. He's a terrific web designer and has written a very detailed article to help you understand why you need a web presence and exactly how to do it. [Chris' complete article](#) is included later as Appendix A.
- 4) **Client Management Software:** This is how you will keep track of your contacts and/or clients. In the first year you start marketing, you should aim for 300 contacts in your database. (These are the people who you'll contact when your demo is ready). There are several good software programs for this purpose. I use [ACT!](#) by Sage Software which is fairly sophisticated and may be more than you need to begin with. Another is [Pro Talent Performer](#), which is designed specifically for actors. Honestly, Microsoft Outlook isn't bad to start with, but you will eventually want to move beyond that program.
- 5) **Accounting Software:** You **will** have clients, and you **will** want them to pay you, right? Two programs by Intuit, *Quicken* or *Quickbooks*, are excellent software to help you keep track of your accounts receivable. *Quicken* is designed more for home use but *Quickbooks* allows you to design invoices and other documents as well as keep track of expenses for tax purposes. It's a bit pricey, so shop around for the best price or you may even find another program you prefer. OR, you could hire a really good accountant. Whatever you do, be sure to keep excellent records or it will come back to bite you later! There are many great tax saving advantages to running your own business. Speak with someone who knows the tax rules so you can make certain you're keeping track of things correctly.
- 6) **Telephone with headset:** A good telephone (with excellent reception) is a no-brainer – ya' gotta have it. I suggest a headset (or Bluetooth), so that when you are making calls you have your hands free. There are two reasons for this – 1<sup>st</sup>, having your hands free unblocks energy and lets you move naturally while you speak and 2<sup>nd</sup>, if you have to juggle the receiver between your shoulder and ear, chances are the sound of your voice will be affected. Your neck and shoulders could also be pretty sore at the end of the day.
- 7) **Your Home Studio:** My best suggestion for when you are ready to set up your own home studio, or just want advice about microphones and software, is to purchase James Alburger's Home Studio e-book at [www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com). This is the guy with 11 Emmys for sound production and design. He knows his stuff!
- 8) **Cell phone or pager:** When producers are ready to hire voice talent, they are usually way behind schedule and way over budget. They will need to talk to you RIGHT NOW, so be sure you can be reached in at least two ways. Remember, if they can't reach you – they'll simply go to the next actor on their list.
- 9) **Letterhead, envelopes, business cards, etc:** Again, remember this is a business. A company like IBM would never consider sending out correspondence that was handwritten on a sheet of notebook paper! But I get demos from voice actors every day that are packaged this way. I can tell you without hesitation I usually listen only to the

demos that come in packages that look like they came from a pro. One of the best ways to create a professional image is to have a coordinated look in print and on your website. Again, this doesn't require a lot of money. Just put a little time and effort into making it look nice. You can design your own business cards and letterhead on your computer and print them at home. Be sure to use good quality, heavy card stock.

Creating an identity for your business can be fun, but it isn't always an easy process, so get some advice from someone who has designed business "packages" before. The book, *LoveNotes – Branding and Marketing for Voice Artists*, by Frank Frederick, is an excellent resource.

*"Until you **value** yourself, you won't value your time.  
Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it."*

M. Scott Peck, M.D. – author "The Road Less Traveled"



## Continuing Education

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Over and above what you invest in your studio and office setup, there is the cost of continuing education. Any teacher or coach who tries to tell you that one 6 or 8 week course to train you to be a successful voice artist is “all you’ll need”, hasn’t got a clue about what it takes to be successful in this business! Great actors NEVER stop learning. So, when you are planning your voice-over career, the cost (and kind) of classes must be factored in. Even today’s established Hollywood stars still take every single acting class their schedules will allow in order to be better at what they do!



**CAUTION: It’s entirely possible to spend \$20,000 or more a year on classes and workshops and still not get work!!**

You have to be *extremely* selective about the education you receive. While understanding how important it is to increase your knowledge and performing skills is vital, it’s just as important to set up some boundaries about what you will be spending for this training. Because of this, you need to learn how to properly search for the information you need. When you’re considering a class do the following first:

- 1) Interview the coach. Most coaches worth their “salt” will give you a short interview at no charge.

*Have a list of questions prepared. Questions like:*

How long have you been a coach? What is your background?

What will I learn from you? What is your area of expertise?

What is the success rate of your students?

How long is the class? How many sessions are in the class?

What is the time and location of the class?

What is the cost of the class? What is your preferred method of payment?

Is there a payment plan or is the tuition to be paid in full before the class begins?

*Note: These are proper questions for an interview. The question “Do you think I have what it takes to be successful in this business?” is not. It’s an unfair question. No coach can tell what talents and aptitudes you possess after such a brief time with you.*

Ask the coach to outline what will be taught at the class.

Ask to audit a class so you can observe their teaching style and talk with their students.

Ask for a list of several former students you can contact for a reference and call them.

Even though you will learn something from every teacher you train with, please don't take classes without much forethought. Some teachers are better than others. You don't want to waste time and money on a useless class. Your goal should be to find a teacher or coach with whom you are comfortable and one you feel you can trust.

Focus on the classes that will train you in the area which you want to pursue. If you want a career in animation, you'll want to take classes from an animation coach. If commercial work is where you feel your strength lies, then study with someone who specializes in that field. The point is, if animation isn't something you want to do, why spend time and money on a class that focuses only on performance for animation? Perhaps it will be a nice supplement somewhere down the line, but when starting out you should focus on your strengths first, in order to get the best use of your money.

You can find an extensive list of VO coaches in the U.S. and Canada in the RESOURCES link at [www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com).



## Before You Have a Demo

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When you've had some training and you're still getting started, there are ways to market yourself without having a demo. You *can* do work before you have a demo if you are willing to go out there and look for the opportunities. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) **Customized Demos.** *HERE'S THAT MAGIC ANSWER I PROMISED YOU EARLIER.*  
When you've handed someone your business card and you're asked, "Do you have a demo"? Here is a perfectly legitimate answer: *"My demo is in production right now, but if you'd like to e-mail me a script, I would be happy to record a custom demo for you."* Even if you are a year or more away from producing your demo, it's still "in production" – right? If you have recording capabilities, you can e-mail your MP3 audition to him. If not, you can offer to audition over the phone.
- 2) **Answering Machines/Voice Mail.** For some experience, you might consider offering your services to record the answering machine messages (or voice mail) for some local businesses or for your friends. Most people hate to record for their own machines. You might not get paid, but it's a great experience and could lead to possible future work. And here's a tip – make sure you have a memorable message on your own answering machine. Make it either smooth and professional or wacky and fun. You never know who might call. I once got a booking from a gentleman who called my phone number *by mistake* and liked what he heard!
- 3) **Volunteer.** There are reading services at local libraries, college radio stations, reading services for the blind, etc. This gives you great experience and again, it puts you in the right place to make future contacts for paid work.
- 4) **Join Professional Groups.** Producers and ad agencies have professional organizations. Join a local group. You can check them out at <http://www.media-communications.org>. Membership fees vary, but being in the right place, at the right time to meet the right person, is priceless! But be selective. If you are interested in doing promo work, check into PROMAX. The dues are high (about \$425/year) but you get their whole data base of over 2000 members/promo producers. If your love is animation, go to <http://www.animationworld.com>. For audio book work you can find loads of information at <http://audiopub.org>.
- 5) **Online Audition Sites.** Using online listing and/or audition sites is becoming increasingly popular and can generate a lot of work. There is a charge for listing on these sites, but for that price you get a web page and an almost limitless supply of auditions. You can do an audition without having a demo! When your demo(s) are ready, they can be uploaded to your page. Of course, there are pros and cons to online listings, but I've found them to be an excellent way to keep "sharp" by

auditioning every day. It also hones your skills for self-direction. There are other sites that offer free listings, but most will require you to have at least one demo that can be uploaded to their site, or a website they can link to. Visit the resources area of [www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com) for more information on these sites.

- 6) **Business Cards** You can order business cards online at [www.vistaprint.com](http://www.vistaprint.com) for free! Be cautious, however – FREE means they will put their advertising on your card! For just a few dollars, you can have great cards WITHOUT their advertising.

→ **NOTE:** *One word on logos! Stay away from stereotypical logos for voice work (i.e. microphones, headsets, etc.) Why? Because they are over-used. If you are trying to be unique, you don't want the same logo as other voice actors.*

There are many other resources on the Internet for business card printing. Another is Pure Postcards [www.purepostcards.com](http://www.purepostcards.com). You can also print your own business cards on your home computer. Just use a substantial card stock. Your business card may change when you put together your entire imaging package – but for right now, if it's well done, it's perfectly fine.

- 7) **Word of Mouth, (aka Shameless Self Promotion).** Whether you've ever had a voice-over job or not, from this day forward tell everyone you meet that you are a voice actor. The phrase, "I am a voice actor" always seems to pique curiosity. Just have your "elevator speech" ready. An elevator speech (E.S) is that quick intro of what you do that can be delivered in the time it takes for the elevator to get from the lobby to the first floor. My E.S. (after I've told them I'm a voice actor) goes something like this:

***"Using only the sound of my voice, I create a visual image in the mind of my audience which will result in a compelling message about a product or service. I perform for commercial work, corporate narration, phone systems and website audio. I also have my own recording studio and my rates are very reasonable. If you'd like to send me a sample script for your project, I'd be happy to record a custom demo for you. Here's my card. May I have yours"?***

The E.S. isn't meant to be delivered verbatim – it's a formula you can use which will enable you to work your message into any conversation – seamlessly, naturally and most of all - quickly.

- 8) **The Power of a Business Card.** Be certain to have a business card to give them – it's one of your most valuable marketing tools. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. It just needs to have your name, what you do, your website address (if it is completed), your phone number, and your e-mail address. You never know where these simple business cards will end up. I once got a call from a man who had been given my card by a friend. Come to find out, it was a card I gave out at the beginning of my career – years ago!

***"Aim High! There is little virtue in easy victory!"***

*Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to successfully summit Mr. Everest*



## Discovering Your Uniqueness

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You are unique in this world - there's only one YOU! Designing a memorable image or trademark can be one of the most important things you can do for any business. In the voice acting industry, we all do basically the same thing. We use our voices to bring the written word to life. Since producers get lots of demos and marketing materials from "wannabes" every day, it's critical that you find a way to be *unique* - to stand out from the crowd. And the task can be daunting. This is where your imagination and creativity can be your greatest allies. Design with visibility in mind.

Think of some of the best known companies and products out there.

When you hear the product name, *Coca Cola*, three things probably come to the front of your mind: the color red, the logo in white letters, and the company's slogan, "*The Real Thing.*"

**How about McDonalds?** Golden arches and their slogan, "*I'm lovin it!*"

**Nike?** High performance, and the words, "*Just do it!*"

**Allstate Insurance?** A pair of caring hands and the words, "*You're in good hands.*"

A slogan (or brand) can go a long in identifying a product or service and making it memorable. Have you ever wondered why Coca Cola advertises so much? Do you suppose there are many people out there who don't know what Coca Cola is? They advertise to keep their name in the front of the mind of the consumer. Even Coca Cola has competitors. When you are thirsty, the makers of Coca Cola want you to automatically think of "the real thing" as your beverage of choice.

As a voice actor, you want the same thing. When a producer is looking for a voice talent, you want to be in the "front of his mind." Having a catchy slogan (that describes your uniqueness) is just one way to do this.

Have you thought of something that identifies who you are and what you do? There are lots of slogans out there currently being used by voice artists. Some may be catchy but are way over used. "*Man (or Woman) of a Thousand Voices*" is an example. A slogan needs to be more focused and attainable. If asked, could this guy or gal realistically produce 1000 unique voices?

Here are a few examples of excellent branding slogans:

**D.C. Douglas** – *My Voiceover Guy ~ Where Hollywood talent and reasonable voice over rates intersect.*

**Melissa Hoffman** – *Bringing your words to life ~ I'll act in your best interests!*

**Fletcher Kauffman** – *Will embarrass myself vocally for food*

**Jennifer Vaughn** – *The Sound of the Future*

**Mark Kaplowe** – *No Attitude . . . Just Gratitude*

**Bobbin Beam** – *Voice Overs That Work for Business*

**Phil Merrifield** – *The Voice of Choice*

**Jonathan Allen** – *Setting the Microphone on Fire!*

**Penny Abshire** – *A Penny for your \$pots ~ She just makes ¢ents*

**James Alburger** – *Orchestrating your message!*

**Bob Jump** – *The Voice of America*

**VoiceActing.com** – *We make you sound great!*

*Note: See Appendix D for information on Trademarks and Copywriting.*

One of the best examples I've seen lately of using what makes you unique is for one of my students, Curt Byk. Curt's last name is pronounced "Bike". When we were exploring his branding, we came upon the idea of using the visual of a bicycle in his marketing. You can see a wonderful example of how well this works for Curt on his website at [www.curtbyk.com](http://www.curtbyk.com).



## Present Yourself as a Professional

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After you've come up with a slogan and tag line (which you will use on every, single bit of advertising you do), it's time to think about your marketing *package*. And it's much more than the just cover of your demo CD or your business card.

Your marketing package should first demonstrate continuity by looking as though everything was designed together – all the same type font, the same colors, and the same graphics. You may ask why this is important since it's just your voice the client will be interested in. There are many schools of thought on marketing and packaging. To some in our business, continuity isn't a big consideration; however, speaking from a producer's point of view, I believe it's essential. As I mentioned earlier, if I get a package from a voice actor that shows very little thought or preparation as to how he is presenting himself, I'm not likely to listen.

**Your marketing package is your resume.** Most of you have probably sent a written resume out at some point in your life. Did you send it on a piece of lined notebook paper and was it handwritten? Was it folded in quarters and stuffed into a too-small envelope? No? I didn't think so. You made sure it was typed on nice paper, and well written in order to showcase your experience and strengths. You wanted it to be *visually* appealing so your perspective employer would take some time to read it. Why then would your marketing package be anything less? Do you suppose a highly paid, national voice talent would ever send out a demo CD with no label on it? No, because they know better! If I get an impressive presentation of an actor's desire to be hired (which is shown by the professional way he put together his package), you bet I'll listen – and right away! I would never hire him based solely on his marketing package, but it would get me to listen. First impressions are critical because in this business (and all parts of life) there's no such thing as a second impression.

Even though you want your unique personality to show through, dotting your "i's" with little hearts or stars and using pinking shears on the edges of the paper may fall short of the professional image you should be projecting.

Let me be clear that I am NOT suggesting you need to spend thousands of dollars to design your package. The most important thing is to give your marketing materials serious and imaginative thought. One of the best ways to create a professional image is to have a coordinated look in print and your logo. You may use a special graphic design, a clever application of some clip art, or simply a unique font style. You can consult with a graphic designer to establish your look and/logo – however, it's not mandatory – and can be quite expensive. With the large numbers of graphics available on the Internet today, you can simply choose one – work up your "look" and (if you have a very good printer) print your materials at home. Whatever you do, it needs to be clean, clearly legible and professionally presented.

When you begin to design your demo/marketing package here are several things you'll need to consider.

**1) Demo Packaging.** Since you want to present your CD demo in a professional manner so talent buyers will listen to it, it's important they be able to find your demo quickly when they are searching for the perfect voice. For those producers who still use audio CD demos, **only the standard jewel case will provide easy storage and access to your demo.** The thin-style jewel case is not recommended as it has no spine, edge, or labeling, and it will disappear when placed on a shelf with other demos. One other thing to remember about your jewel case is that your name on the spine should be large enough to read clearly. Remember if it's on a shelf, the producer needs to find you quickly. The clamshell case and paper and cardboard sleeves provide no space for anything other than the CD, and are not recommended.

The standard CD jewel case has two areas that can hold labeling and gives you the best possible presentation of your demo. The label for the front clear door of the jewel case is called an *insert*. The label for the back of the jewel case (which has folded portions for the two edge labels) is called a *tray card*. If you want to do this yourself at home, there are lots of computer software programs out there that include templates for printing both the insert and tray card and the round label for the CD as well. You can find these programs at most office supply stores and many computer retailers, or download the free Avery label software from [www.averylabels.com](http://www.averylabels.com).

**2) Tray Cards.** Think of your demo case, the insert and the tray card, as just one more way to market. Yes, you'll want a nice cover for the case and a nice label for the CD, however consider using both the back cover and the insert to further educate the talent buyer about yourself and what you can do for them. While I don't suggest having a look that is cluttered with text about *everything* you offer, I also don't believe in wasting space. Consider getting a couple of testimonials for the back of the CD. It's been my experience that when someone looks at a CD, they generally look at the front first, then the back cover and then the inside. If you want to make a memorable impact, put something on the back cover that compels them to want more. Testimonials are a great way to let them see exactly why others work with you and why they should hire you! On the inside (the back of the front insert) is another space that's rarely used to its potential. Why leave it blank when you could include a short welcome letter or a bio – or maybe a list of clients you've worked with? If you have several demos on the same CD, this is a great place to list them. If a producer only wants to hear your commercial demo, he doesn't have to wonder where it is.

**3) Stationery/Envelopes/Shipping Labels.** Once again, this doesn't have to be done by a professional printer. You can do it at home, but I would suggest that you purchase some nice paper stock to use for your printing. Shipping labels can be purchased in quantity and then printed on your computer.

**4) Shipping Envelopes.** If you are sending out CDs to prospective clients and/or agents, you'll need packaging that will protect your product. Most office supply stores have small padded envelopes that work well for a CD in a jewel case. You can also purchase cardboard shipping boxes. They are a bit more expensive, however, and will cost more to mail. I like them because they look more professional when they come through the mail.

**5) Note Cards/Thank you notes.** Thank-you notes are a frequently overlooked, yet very important, business practice. A brief note of thanks is often all it takes to leave a good feeling with a producer or client and to make you memorable. These little notes should be part of your marketing package and can easily be prepared in advance (and mailed as you leave your session). They will help generate positive memories of your work, and provide a gentle reminder that you're available for future work.

**6) \*Mailing and CD Labels.** If you do your own printing, there are many types of paper stock for letterheads, postcards, and business cards. You can even purchase sheets of preformatted business cards, mailing labels, and CD labels and tray cards, ready to be loaded into your printer. However, be aware that business cards printed on perforated paper tend to present a less-than-professional image.

Avery is considered by many to be the standard for blank, pre-formatted labels. Their website, [www.averylabels.com](http://www.averylabels.com), has a free version of the Avery label printing software that allows for designing and printing on most of their label designs. You can find comparable labels for almost every Avery label design at Label Blank, [www.labelblankcorporation.com](http://www.labelblankcorporation.com).

*\*TIP: If you're printing your own CD labels, you should know that you can save a lot of money by purchasing a box of 100 sheets of Label Blank or Avery labels, rather than the smaller packages of 25 sheets that you'll find at most stationary and computer stores.*

**7) Postcards/Update Packages** – Postcards sent to clients, or potential clients, on a regular basis are a great marketing tool! If you make them clever, eye-catching and to-the-point, your clients will enjoy receiving them and will remember you for them. They'll start to expect to see something from you quarterly, or even monthly. Design with HIGH VISABILITY in mind! For VoiceActing.com, we decided to send all of our updates on bright red, shiny card stock. It's true that red and yellow are our company colors (so using red made sense), but the other reason we went with red is because it stands apart from the other pieces of mail a producer receives. Red also indicates urgency and importance.

Before I go on to the next section on website marketing, I'd like to share one of my marketing packages with you. This is an example of a quarterly mailing to my current (and potential) client list. The text is printed on heavy card stock and sized to fit the size of a jewel case.



## A Penny for Your \$pots!

Here's a shiny new **Penny** to remind you that I provide quality voice-overs **that won't break your bank** while being flexible enough to **turn on a dime!**

Tired of working with voice talent that doesn't give a **plug nickel** about the quality of your project recordings? Then it's time for a **change!** Hire a voice over pro that makes **cents!** If you want the biggest **bang for your buck** – give me a try! You don't have to **flip a quarter** to find high quality voice talent, call me today to make an investment that you'll **appreciate!** My recent projects include:

Chosen as "**The Voice of**" Providence Health Systems and Edwards Medical - voicing all radio, television & Internet advertising for the hospital.

**Telephone messaging systems:** College Loan Corp., AlphaB2b Marketing, Carl Zeiss Surgical, San Diego National Bank, New York City Credit Union, Harte Hanks Marketing, *Curves* for Women, national campaign.

**Radio/TV Commercials:** Poway Road of Cars, IKEA Furniture, Poseidon Restaurants, Poway Road of Cars, Peoples Chevrolet, Grand Prix Car Wash, Carolina Homes & Interiors, Lloyds Plumbing, Heating & Air, Equity 1 Lenders, United Furniture Warehouse, Lifestyle Expo, Fish Talk Network.

**Medical narrations:** Science Media; Lathian Systems; Cryogen, Inc., Magnifi Group, Edwards Medical, Providence Health Systems & RAW Productions.

**Industrials:** Anza Borrego Desert State Park Visitor's Center video tour, California State Distance Learning Center, KPBS Learning Center, State of California Attorney General's Office, Bowling Proprietors Association of America.

**E-learning programs:** Apollo Interactive, WinSquared, Inc., Avery Copier Labels, Savemyretirement.com.

### Penny Abshire

Studio: (858) 484-0220 Cell: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

[penny@pennyabshire.com](mailto:penny@pennyabshire.com)

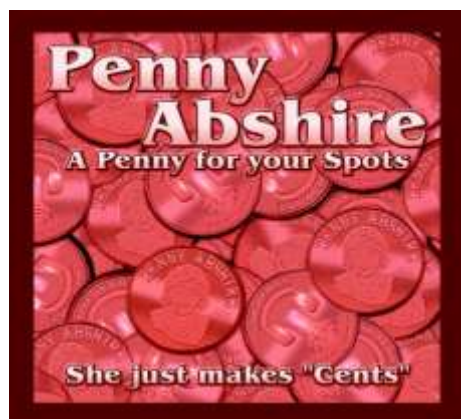
Hear my demos at: [www.PennyAbshire.com](http://www.PennyAbshire.com)

Included with this marketing piece is my business card. I have chosen to use an over-sized (3") metal Lincoln penny with my contact information printed on the reverse side. It's shiny and it's heavy! And because it's heavy, it's not likely to get "tossed." Instead it will stay on that producer's desk serving as a paperweight or a coaster. One day, when he's searching for voice talent, he's likely to see it there and just might call me for his project. It's certainly been successful so far!

I send this promo along with my business card and my latest demo in a CD sized, white cardboard box. The shipping label also has a graphic that continues the money theme. When my clients see the CD box, they know it's from me – due largely to the visual of the money.

*Note: When I go to a session, I also bring along a dozen or so foiled wrapped chocolate pennies for the producer, director and engineer. They are a real "hit" with these folks and make me quite memorable.*

Check out my website at [www.pennyabshire.com](http://www.pennyabshire.com) to see how my theme is continued there. This is what my jewel case and CD label templates look like. [Jamie Rice](#), a very talented graphic designer and student of mine put these together. (They are actually copper-colored and may appear that way – depending on your monitor). Notice my picture on the front of the penny and a microphone and headset on the reverse.



Another excellent example of a well put-together marketing package is that of Pamela Chollet. You'll notice that all her materials (letterhead, envelopes, labels, business cards, CD Insert and CD label) all have a consistent theme – a bird with a microphone. She's done a great job on presenting herself with a very professional looking package.



**8) Websites** – I have my own website, [www.pennyabshire.com](http://www.pennyabshire.com), but I am not a website guru. In today's highly technological and Internet savvy world, if you aren't using this tool to its fullest capacity, you'll be left behind in the dust!

Since I am not a website specialist, my good friend (and website designer *extraordinaire*), Chris Wagner, has given me permission to reprint several articles he wrote for our Art of Voice Acting Newsletter. These can be found in Appendix A.

**“Excellence** is a habit. You are what you do repeatedly.”

Shaquille O' Neal, NBA star



## Picture Perfect?

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I believe that one of the best things about voice acting is that your physical appearance and age are far less important than your ability to act. It's one of the only professions that has no age limit. What you look like or your age has NO bearing on whether or not you can produce the work. Unless you also plan to market yourself for on-camera work (as many do), it's usually not the best idea to include a photo of yourself in your marketing materials.

A photograph is going to give the talent buyer a face to go with your voice. It's not uncommon at all for a performer to get stereotyped as a result of a photo. Lots of agents and producers will associate a *face to a name* before they associate a *voice to a name*. Even though it's unintentional, it's human nature to do this when someone sees a photo, and it can cause you some difficulties as a voice actor. For instance, let's say you are a 60-year old woman who can do an absolutely brilliant child's voice. If you put a current photograph on your marketing materials, this is certainly the image from which the talent buyer will form his first impression. It will be a matter of the comparison of a 60-year old woman vs. a 6-year old voice. The same could apply if you are 20 years old and you can do a wonderful senior voice. My suggestion is to you let your voice (and the brilliance of your marketing package) do the selling – not your photograph. When I send out thank you cards following a booking, they include a photograph. I've received a lot of very nice comments – not only for the card, but for the face to put with my voice.





## Targeted Marketing to the Right Prospects Will Save You Lots of \$\$\$

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Ah, the ageless question - How do you find clients? Remember back at the beginning of this chapter when I said you must begin practicing “shameless self-promotion?” Well, that’s the first step. People have to know what you do and it’s up to YOU to tell them. That being said, there are also other very concrete methods to get the word out.

The first thing to do is to decide which VO market you want to concentrate your marketing efforts toward.

This sounds simple, but it’s not always the case. When I first began my career, I thought all I ever wanted to do was TV and radio commercials (especially dialogue commercials). And I have done quite a bit of this type of work. However, as I progressed in my career I found that I was getting hired for more and more industrial narration work – especially medical narration. And the more I did, the more I realized I was pretty good at it. Oh, and when my first paycheck came in and I saw the kind of money a VO artist can make doing narration scripts, I was pretty enthusiastic about doing them in the future! In short, things can change.

You have to be flexible in your goals. If I had turned down those opportunities to do narration work because, “I only do commercials” I would have been cheating myself out of a lot of work. But that being said, you still have to start somewhere. If your focus changes along the way, (and it might) that’s okay.

Let’s say that you want to concentrate your marketing efforts on narration (sometimes referred to as industrial work.) There are lots of categories here. So let’s break it down even further.

Let’s say you want to do medical narrations. First, ask yourself these 5 questions:

### **1. Who would be your ideal client?**

*Biopharmaceutical companies, research facilities, hospitals, medical associations, medical schools, doctors offices, etc.*

### **2. What are the benefits your ideal client wants and needs from you?**

*Expertise in delivering complex medical terms in a believable and confident manner, availability, reasonable price, etc.*

### **3. What other results do you provide?**

*Background in medical terminology, recording studio, fast turn-around time, etc.*

#### **4. What is the ideal client's biggest challenge?**

*Finding reliable voice talent with the skills to deliver a professional recording quickly for a reasonable price.*

#### **5. How could you help him solve his challenge?**

*Provide your expertise and professionalism to his project, taking one more thing "off the plate" of the producer. You can make his job easier.*

These answers are just examples – you'll come up with your own as they apply to your experience and skills.

After you've identified your potential client, then:

- A. Find your research assistant at the library (or do the research yourself) and have him/her help you locate businesses in your area that might use voice-over talent for medical scripts. These could be biopharmaceutical companies, research facilities, hospitals, medical associations, medical schools, doctors' offices, etc.
- B. After you have your list, CALL each of the contacts. Please don't send out your materials cold (*unsolicited*). If you do, you'll find lots of your marketing efforts will be wasted. You need a name at the very least, and a department. If a prospect doesn't expect to receive something from you, it probably won't get to the right person. Your materials will cost you money –so make sure they don't end up in the trash.

The sample scripts on the next few pages will give you an idea of what to say when you start placing calls. These are only examples and certainly not intended to be read verbatim. Find what works best for you. Simply sound professional and friendly and you'll be well on your way to successfully contacting potential clients.



## What to Say on the Telephone

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### A cold-call to determine if a company has a need for your services

- VOA: Can I ask you a quick question, please? Does your company accept demo CDs from voice artists?
- Prospect: Yes we do.
- VOA: Would you please give me the name and address of the person I should send this to directly? (Ask for the e-mail too, if they'll give it to you.)

**Then confirm the information, say “Thanks” and move on to your next prospect. Business people are busy, just like you are. Respect their time and they'll remember you.**

**Be certain to have a pen and paper handy and write everything down.**

### A typical call to determine who to contact in a company you know uses VO talent

- Agency: Good morning, XYZ Medical Research, may I help you?
- VOA: Yes, can you please tell me who in your company is responsible for hiring voice talent for narration projects?
- Agency: That would be Joe Smith in the audio/video department. He's out of the office at the moment, would you like his voice mail?
- VOA: Yes, please.

*Your recorded message will be just about the same as if you have Joe on the phone and could go something like this:*

- VOA: Good afternoon, Mr. Smith, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a professional voice talent in \_\_\_\_\_ and I specialize in medical narrations. I would appreciate the opportunity to forward my demo to you for consideration in your next project. I can be reached at 800-555-1234 or my cell at 800-555-5678. Thank you for your time.

Of course, if you are actually having a discussion with Joe, you'll be much more conversational and you'll be answering his questions. It's been my experience that you will almost always get voice mail on the first pass, so have a good message ready.

### **Speaking to a first-round decision-maker (If you know they've already heard your demo)**

VOA: Hi this is \_\_\_\_\_. I sent you my voice demo a couple of weeks ago and your secretary tells me you've had a chance to review it. I'm on my way to my next session, *[shows you are busy too]* but if this is a good time, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions, if that's okay.

DM: Sure, I've got a couple of minutes

VOA: (Asks the following questions)

- Are you the person I should be talking to about hiring voice talent? *(If yes)*
- Are you currently working on any projects that will require voice talent?
- Could you tell me a little about them? *[You're getting them talking]*
- When will you be recording?
- How often do you use voice talent on your projects?
- Are there any other voice types like mine that you use on a regular basis?
- Would you consider using my voice in one of your future projects?

DM: You know, you really should be talking to Carol. She listens to all the demos too and we generally let her choose who she wants to use.

VOA: I appreciate that. Can you give me her number?

**Then call Carol and ask her the same questions - but this time you can use the DM's name and say he or she referred you to her. If she thinks you're right for their project, make a note in your database. If she thinks you're *wrong*, still make a note. Remember that a "no" today doesn't necessarily mean a "no" forever! Six months from now, they may LOVE you for another project!**

**→NOTE: It's never appropriate to ask a potential client (regarding your demo) "What did you think of it?" It's simply not a professional question. In fact it screams "inexperienced amateur."**

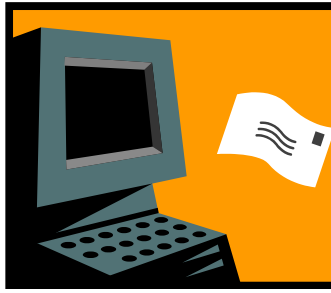
You may have to call a number of times. Persistence will pay off in the end. I'm not suggesting you turn into a "stalker", but keep on top of those messages you've left and follow up on them until you actually get Joe on the phone or he returns your call.

Be prepared to receive more rejections than acceptances and embrace each of them as a learning experience.

*"Success is going from failure to failure without loss of **enthusiasm**."*

Winston Churchill, British statesman, prime minister, and author

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## E-mail Marketing

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### The Right Way vs. the Wrong Way

This is an e-mail I received recently which is representative of e-mails I often get from aspiring voice actors.

*Good morning, Penny! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a freelance voice actor and was just inquiring, if you had any projects you needed help with. I have attached my voice demo. Feel free to e-mail or call me with any questions. My rates are very affordable. Thanks again for your time.*

E-mail marketing can be done very well, but not like this. It's concise and to the point, but this demo submission was unsolicited. When a voice actor calls me first and simply asks me if I am accepting demos (and in what form I would like to receive it), I will say yes. When it arrives I will take the time to listen to it – because I am expecting it. And isn't that what you want me to do? If someone sends me a demo without calling me first, and it comes with an unknown file attachment, I won't be opening it. (*Important note: If a producer is a very busy person, he may have a receptionist who can tell you whether or not he is accepting demos – then she can pass your name on to him so he'll be expecting it.*)

If you choose to send your demos out cold to a number of producers, chances are you may get a few answers. Many people do this because they prefer to “play the numbers” figuring if they send out enough e-mails, odds are they'll get a few bites. But by taking the time to call first, you greatly increase your chances actually being hired.

Why wouldn't you call first? In most cases, it's because you are worried about being rejected. Ask yourself this - If your fear of rejection is that strong, is show business really your best career choice? Rejection is an integral part of the show business game. A better version of the email above would be:

*Good morning, I appreciate your time to speak with me today. As you requested, I've attached my voice demo as an MP3 file. If you feel my voice would be a good match for any of your projects, or if you have any questions, please e-mail or call me. Thanks again for your time.*

*Sincerely,  
{Name, Contact info -including email address, phone and website}*

After a producer has accepted your demo, then you can include him or her on your list for quarterly updates - even if he doesn't hire you for work immediately. If you send things out

“blind”, you’ll never know which demos were actually heard and you’ll end up wasting time and money sending marketing materials to unqualified prospects.

## E-mail Marketing Resources

When you have compiled a list of qualified prospects you will be sending regular updates to, you’ll want to make sure what they receive from you has great impact.

Over the past few years, several new e-mail marketing companies have emerged on the Internet. I am particularly fond of [Constant Contact](#). Another is [High Impact E-Mail](#). Both of these websites provide you with hundreds of wonderfully designed templates to help create marketing e-mails that stand out from the rest. They also make it possible to keep several lists (and categories) for those you’ll be marketing to.

Keep in mind that a producer can receive between 150 and 300 e-mails in a day! If you want to be noticed, your e-mail had better not look exactly like all the rest that come into his inbox. Even Microsoft Outlook or Yahoo or Hotmail (or other email service), now offer ways to “jazz” up an e-mail with colorful backgrounds and interesting fonts. Just keep the look of the e-mail clean and professional.

Because e-mail can be an easier (and certainly less expensive) way to market, there is the temptation to do nothing BUT e-mail. I’d suggest against that course of action. There is something to be said for a producer receiving something he can hold in his hand – or leave on his desk – that makes you even more memorable. *That’s why I send 3 inch copper pennies.*

The following are sample scripts of ways to use your telephone when determining if a company is accepting demos from voice artists. They are not intended to be read verbatim, but rather to be used as a place to start. Your words should be your own and delivered in a conversational, friendly tone.



## Submitting Your Demo to an Agent

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When you have your “killer” demo ready, you may decide you’d like to seek representation by an agent. The recommended methods for sending out your demo to potential agents vary from teacher to teacher and from area to area. Since I’m on the West coast, I’ll tell you how we do it here and also what I’ve learned from coaches in other parts of the country.

**On the West Coast:** It is not recommended that you send out your demo *unsolicited*. Whether it’s to an agent or a potential client, if they aren’t expecting it (or they’re not accepting demos at that time), it will probably either be set aside indefinitely or it will be thrown away. After all the time, effort and money you’ve put into it – that’s the LAST thing you want to happen! It’s pretty easy to save your demo from this fate. CALL first. It’s that simple ~ and it’s common courtesy. I’ve had students tell me that they just want to send out their demos blind and see what happens. They’ll do most anything not to have to talk to someone on the phone and risk rejection. You’re in the wrong business if you think every time you present yourself you’re going to be accepted with open arms. Facing and accepting rejection is an integral part of show business!

**In the Mid-West and East Coast:** VO talent and coaches in these areas tell me that it’s quite common for a voice actor to mass produce their demos and send them out to every production company, agent, casting director and potential client. This is very different from the West coast, but it’s the way things are done there. The best advice I can give you is to contact a VO talent, coach or agent in YOUR area and find out how they want to receive demos.

The following are some examples of what you could say on the telephone when contacting a potential agent.

**A typical cold call  
(to determine if an agent is accepting demos)**

Agency: Good morning, XYZ Talent Agency, may I help you?

VOA: Yes, Can you tell me if your agency is currently accepting new voice demos?

Agency: Yes, we are.

VOA: Can you give me the address and person's name I should sent it to, please?

Agency: Certainly, our address is P.O. 123, Opportunity, New York 20003. Send it to the attention of Matilda Brown.

VOA: That's P.O. 123, Opportunity, New York 20003 - Attention Matilda Brown, correct?

Agency: Yes, that's right.

VOA: Thanks for your help – goodbye.

**OR THIS**

Agency: Good morning, XYZ Talent Agency, may I help you?

VOA: Yes, Can you tell me if your agency is currently accepting new voice demos?

Agency: No, not at this time.

VOA: When would be a good time to check back?

Agency: Probably in about 6 months.

VOA: Thanks for your help – goodbye.

**Both calls are pretty simple. And in both you are anonymous! Also remember, rejection one day can turn into acceptance the next. That's also part of show business.**

## **The follow-up call (just to determine if they've received your demo)**

- VOA: Hi, this is \_\_\_\_\_. I spoke with you last week and sent you a copy of my voice demo. I'm just checking to make sure it arrived and that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the person they gave you) received it.
- Prospect: Yes, it came in yesterday, but I don't think \_\_\_\_\_ has had a chance to listen to it yet.
- VOA: No problem, just wanted to make sure it arrived. When do you think it would be a good time for me to check back?
- Prospect: He's pretty busy, you'd better give him a couple of weeks at least.
- VOA: Great! I'll do that – thanks so much for your help.

**Then make a reminder to call in two weeks from that date and DO IT! Agents are extremely busy – so expect that if they are interested in you, it will probably take some time to get a response. If they aren't – you won't hear at all. That's Showbiz!**

→**Important!** Don't be duped into thinking that if you have an agent you no longer have to market yourself. It is a show business reality that an agent will only really WANT you – when you don't NEED them. This meaning: they will only pursue actors who they know already have a client base – and a proven track record. In short, they want the actors for which they can make a large commission. Don't misunderstand - agents can be terrific people to have on your side – and when it comes to negotiating contracts, they are invaluable. But my point is that if you have any dreams that an agent will be “pounding the pavement” on our behalf (and that all you'll have to do is sit back and count the jobs rolling in) – time to let go of that!

If you have submitted to an agent and you don't hear back or you get a rejection letter – don't give up! They may not be interested in your voice right now – but things can change. It may be they already have enough people in their talent pool with similar voice characteristics to yours. In the next couple of years (when you send them your new and improved demo) you may be exactly what they are looking for. Never give up.

“Every exit is an **entrance** to somewhere else.”

Tom Stoppard, playwright who won an Oscar for *Shakespeare in Love*



## Tips for getting past the gate-keeper

(Call screener)

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She's actually not a bad person, you know. But it's her job to screen calls and to intercept those calls her boss doesn't want to take. I was a gate-keeper for many years working with attorneys and I was pretty good at it. The people who I put through to my boss were the ones who didn't try to fool me – who treated me with respect – who genuinely asked for my help, appreciated it and who acted in a professional manner. A call screener can be your very best friend or your worst enemy . . . it's your choice.

Simply be friendly and respect her time. You can do little things too – like remembering her birthday or that she mentioned her son plays soccer or that she's going on vacation. If you are sincere, you'll find she'll always put you through to her boss. Winning over the gate-keeper is a valuable skill to learn. Once she is your friend, you'll be amazed how much easier you will get through to her boss.

As you are developing these skills, you'll come to realize it's really pretty easy to find something nice about the person on the other end of the phone line – that discovering common ground isn't as difficult as you once thought.



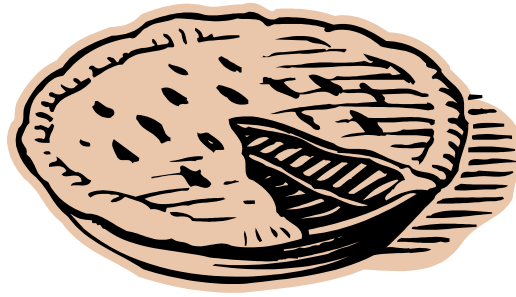
## Discovering & Marketing Your Unique Talent

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Discovering and then marketing your talent can be an exhilarating challenge if you allow it to be. If you let your mind go to that creative place in all of us to discover new and interesting ways to get your name “out there”, you’ll find it can be the most fun you’ve ever had! A great teacher once told me something profound about creative writing. He said, “Penny, just write HOT and edit COLD.” What he meant was to write down *everything* that came into my head, even if I thought it might be a dumb idea at the time – without any editing. Then, when I sat down to re-read my ideas I could edit away! In all these years, it’s never failed that at least one of the ideas I had initially thought was “dumb” (but wrote down anyway) turned out to be one of my best!

During a brain-storming session at a recent 3-Day Intensive AOVA Workshop, I was working with a young man who just couldn’t see there was anything unique about him he felt could be used for marketing his voice over career. After talking for a while, I discovered he had a real love for motorcycles. He also told me his VO goal was to perform for audio books. After only a few minutes we came up with his USP (unique selling proposition). His logo is one of his favorite motorcycles and the slogan that follows his name is *Easy Reader*.

I know from experience there is something unique about each of us. We just have to be willing to look deep enough to find it. So, don’t be shy about finding your uniqueness. No one knows you better than you do!



## The “Bigger Pie” Philosophy

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At VoiceActing, LLC, we prefer to subscribe to "The Bigger Pie" philosophy of the National Speaker's Association. While most people view work opportunities from a position of "lack," or competition, "The Bigger Pie" philosophy states that as more and more people become available for the same work, there is also at least a proportionately similar increase in available work.

The traditional point of view is that as more people enter a work force, the pie gets smaller, with each person receiving a smaller piece of the pie. Why not change your point of view - why not just make the pie bigger?

In the world of voice-over, there are new types of voice work and new opportunities created every day. And, because voice-over talent is usually booked on a very subjective basis, there really isn't any "competition" in the traditional sense. Competition, in a business sense, implies that those vying for the same job have at least similar qualifications and ability.

As a voice actor, your voice is unique to you, and you will be the ideal talent for many jobs that will not be appropriate for other voice talent. Your only real competition is with yourself - to become the most professional and versatile voice talent you can be.

## Part II

# Producing your Voice-Over Demo

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There are so MANY questions about demos . . .

- Why are demos important?
- When will I know I'm ready to record a demo?
- What should be on a demo?
- How do I get an idea of what a good demo sounds like?
- Where do I find copy for my demo?
- Should I produce my own demo?
- What different types of demos are there?
- Where can I hear the demos of others?
- Should I have more than one demo?
- How long should a demo be?
- Where should I go to produce my demo?
- What are the benefits of having a director?
- How much will it cost?

**Yikes!! Let's take just one question at a time!**



## Why Are Demos Important to a Voice Actor?

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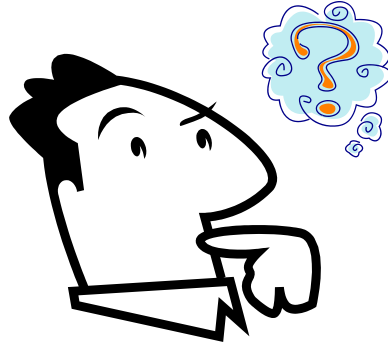
When you're asked "What do you do for a living?" and you reply, "I'm a voice actor", the next logical question from someone in the industry will be "Great, let me have your demo." And it is expected, if you are a professional, that you will have a demo.

The voice-over demo has (for the last 30 or so years) been the voice actor's calling card. Plainly said, your demo is a *fancy-dancy* business card.

But demos are essential in another way. A voice demo serves the same purpose, but takes the place of a written resume. For example, if you were going out for a part in a stage or screen production, you will be asked to present a written history of your experience and skills. A voice artist, on the other hand, is rarely asked for a written "resume" because a producer or agent is only interested in an actor's current capabilities – not his performing history.

A demo is an example of what you can currently do with your voice – not what you have done in the past. It is a representation of your talent.

It's been my experience that producers looking for voice talent are generally less interested in what you have done and much more interested in what you can do for them **right now**.



## When will I know I'm ready to record my demo?

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This is a question I hear from almost every student I have. They want me to tell them when they are ready to compete in the voice-over market. Here are my best answers.

**The short answer:** You'll know.

**The medium answer:** You'll know you're ready to produce your demo after you have the proper training, you've researched and studied other professional voice talent and their demos, you know what the marketplace is looking for and you feel confident you can deliver at that same level.

**The long answer:** You'll know you're ready to produce your demo when you can be handed ANY script which you've not seen before, and, within 2 or 3 takes, you can perform that script at a level comparable to other professional voice-over talent. You'll also know you're ready when you feel confident you can generate enough work from your demo to cover the costs of its production.

**The best answer:** You'll know you're ready to produce your demo when you can stop asking yourself (and others), "*Am I ready to produce my demo?*"

Which takes us back to the **short answer** – You'll know. Even though a teacher or coach can give you their advice – the real decision lies with the performer.



## The Big Question

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At VoiceActing.com, we receive lots of e-mails and calls with questions similar to the following. This is just one of our answers to an often asked question.

**Question:** *I just took a voiceover class. It was ok. We did commercials & cold readings. What I really need to do is get a demo done. I have too many goofy voices that I do to put on a resume. Some just sort of happen. You know, I make them up as I go. Can you do a demo for me?*

**Answer:** If this is the only training you've had, you may not be ready to do your demo. Your demo **MUST** be extremely good if you expect to get representation and be considered professional. Find as many voice artist websites that you can find and listen to as many demos as possible. Most are pretty good, but you will find some demos that sound like the performer is reading. Another good resource for listening to many different demos is [www.voicebank.net](http://www.voicebank.net). Listen critically to other demos and learn what is good and not-so-good about them. Apply what you learn as you prepare for your demo. You'll notice that the best demos have a wide range of attitudes, emotions and variations of the voice. Any character voice must be *absolutely real and believable* - not forced or artificial. If your class only covered "cold readings" and did not cover any acting techniques or training in how to create characters or find the emotional hooks in a script, you may need to find a different class.

Voice acting is unlike other areas of acting. You will never get any work from a resume - that's the job of your demo. Actors need headshots and resumes because the people who hire actors need to know the "look" and performance history. For voice actors, your demo is the demonstration of your talent and abilities. You must be able to duplicate anything you put on your demo. The only time a printed performing history is of any value is as a supplement to a cover letter you would send with a demo. And even then, your credits should not be presented as a resume - more as a list of what you've done designed to give you credibility.

I don't want to discourage you here, but 'just making up voices as you go' doesn't work in voice acting. It's great for expanding your range and experimenting with new voices, but virtually every script you work with as a voice actor will have a character that's already been defined - and the producer usually has an idea of what the voice should sound like. Of course, bringing your ideas to the session is important, but you need to know how to create an appropriate voice for a script - and you **MUST** be able to sustain that voice for an extended period of time. Having a repertoire of voices that you can recall on demand is a *must* for the professional voice actor.

Voice acting is **NOT** about creating lots and lots of voices. It **IS** about creating believable characters, with believable attitudes, in believable situations, telling believable stories. This is

what audiences relate to - not "funny" voices or "announcer" voices. Study acting to learn how to create "real" characters and learn how to place your voice in your body to create a unique sound. For your first demo, focus on providing variety and range using your most comfortable voice. As your skills develop, you can update your demo with new tracks that feature a variety of vocal styles.

*"I don't know the key to **success**,  
but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."*  
Bill Cosby, actor



## What should be on my demo?

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It is true that when we try to please everyone – we end up pleasing no one. Some actors try to be all things to all people by giving examples of everything they do on one demo. This is a dreadful mistake. In today's market, producers are looking for focused demos. If an actor has examples of commercial, narration, characters, audio books and animation all on one :60 demo, there is no focus. Later in this chapter, there's information on different kinds of demos.

As I mentioned earlier, a demo is a voice actor's resume. When deciding what to have on our demo (or which kind of demo to produce), consider this example: If you were applying to a large corporation you probably wouldn't list ALL of your experience on your resume. Would that Fortune 500 Corporation really be interested to know that you were a part-time stock boy at Circuit City when you were in college or that you flipped burgers at McDonald's when you were in high school? No, they'll only want to know what experience and education you have that will make you a valuable employee in their company. So you put only the things at which you excel on your resume – only the things where you shine the brightest and best.

The same is true when deciding what should be on your VO demo. While it's true you'll want to show range, different attitudes, emotions and styles, your demo should showcase you in only the best possible light. Producers want to hear diversification, but to be truly effective your demo must be within your focused core. I'll talk more about the different kinds of demos a little later.

Your demo has to be good enough to get through to a decision maker. It has to be completely professional and completely correct and appropriate for the job they are looking for. **There has to be something about your demo that calls out to them, "That's the guy!"**

When making the decision about what sorts of things to put on your demo – ask yourself these three questions:

- **WHAT IS IT ABOUT MY VOICE, OR MY CHARACTERS, THAT MAKES ME UNIQUE?**

As a voice acting coach, I receive calls almost daily from people who want to break into voice over and particularly from those wanting to get into animation. Invariably, the conversation begins this way:

*"Oh, yeah, I can do a great Porky Pig, Donald Duck, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sean Connery, etc, etc., and I can duplicate all the voices on my favorite video game."*

To be fair and honest with them, my reply has to be, *“That’s great! But you know . . . they already have very good people in Hollywood doing the voices of Porky and Arnold and all the rest. And those voices you can imitate on the video games are already being done by someone else. What have you got that I haven’t heard before – that’s original?”* I’m not trying to be unkind with this statement, because it is true. I want to hear demonstrations of your voice that are uniquely YOURS – whether they are voices for animation or commercial or narration, not a duplication of a voice or character someone else has already done. If I want that voice – I’ll call him!

When preparing for your demo, you need to face a moment of truth – when you put your ego aside and are honest with yourself. Say you’re thinking of including a spot using a sexy, sultry (melted chocolate) voice because you’ve always wanted to do a voice like that. You have to ask yourself two questions when considering it for your demo. First, *“Is this one of my strongest characters (voices), and one I do extremely well?”* If the answer is “no” the second question should be, *“Then why would I want it on my demo?”* If you can’t see yourself ever being hired for your sexy sultry voice, then do not put a sample of that voice on your demo. There are many voice actors out there that do a sexy, sultry (melted chocolate) voice extremely well. So let them! Your demo needs to highlight what YOU do best. Doesn’t that just make sense? You want only the characters and voices on your demo that are most uniquely yours.

### **Simply said:**

If you don't do a strong character for a hard-sell car commercial - *don't put it on your demo*

If you don't do a warm and fuzzy, compassionate character that is truly believable – *it shouldn't be considered for your demo.*

If you don't do a "movie trailer" voice that you can re-create at the drop of a hat – *it doesn't belong on your demo.*

### **• WHAT MAKES ME DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THE PACK?**

The next step to deciding what should be on your demo is to identify your strengths. Producers and agents are listening for something new, fresh, attention-getting and marketable. Developing a delivery style that breaks you away from the listener’s level of expectancy can be a challenge; however, it’s essential in order to discover your signature voice. Although you may have a good idea of your signature voice, you will be far better off to have an experienced producer direct you into the subtlety and nuances of that voice.

Your demo must hit them, grab their attention and keep it! Remember that producers are busy people and in this age of “instant” information, you may have only 10 to 15 seconds to impress them. It only makes sense that you will want your best and brightest voices at the beginning of your demo.

As I mentioned in the marketing section, there are four steps to effective communication (see Appendix B) and the first step is to *Interrupt*. This simply means that you must get their attention immediately – get them thinking about your demo instead of what they are going to have for lunch that day! If you don’t achieve that “interrupt” with something truly outstanding at the beginning of your demo, there’s a good chance they may stop listening to your demo and go on to the next one in the stack.

Perhaps the talent that makes you stand out is your ability to change the pitch of your voice and create some interesting characters. These could be sounds like tiny or small; high nasal; de-nasaled (stuffy nose sound); mushy, or bright & cheery – usually accompanied by a smile; friendly; breathy; throaty; raspy; or big and booming. Maybe you do a very believable child’s voice. If so, and you can work it into the context of a commercial – then definitely put in on your commercial demo. If not, then save it for a character demo.

It could be your sense of rhythm or pacing. Can you speak very quickly? (*Remember the FedEx guy of years ago? He spoke at least a mile a minute and boy, was he unique!*) How about a staccato rhythm (much like William Shatner), a smooth and melodic rhythm like James Earl Jones, or a combination of varying speeds?

Do you do accents and dialects extremely well? And I do mean *extremely* well. If so, these can be used to your advantage when you are discovering your uniqueness. Generally speaking, accents should be on a character demo – unless you can use them in the context of narration or commercials.



**CAUTION: If you aren’t sure how authentic your accents and dialects are – ASK someone who can give you an informed, educated opinion.** If the accent isn’t dead on accurate and if you can’t reproduce (and maintain) it flawlessly at the drop of a hat – do not put it on your demo.

- **IS MY VOICE MORE APPROPRIATE FOR A CERTAIN DEMOGRAPHIC OR AGE GROUP?**

Do you have the voice of a compassionate senior citizen character speaking to an audience concerned about escalating health care cost - or a loud, edgy teenager who is extremely excited about the latest video game or his iPod in your repertoire? How about the “guy next door” who is talking to his neighbor about tax preparation or car repairs – or a mom sharing her opinion with her best friend about the best peanut butter for her family? All these characters are part of a demographic or certain age group. If you have the ability to find a voice for any or all of these groups – you make yourself a very marketable commodity!



## VERY IMPORTANT

**Don’t put anything on your demo that you can’t duplicate.** In other words, if it takes you 24 takes to get to the right delivery during your demo production session, odds are it will probably take that long to get to it again. When you are booked for a session (from that demo spot), you’ll be expected to take it to where it needs to be in 2 or 3 takes. Agents and producers do not appreciate you misrepresenting yourself – and they will remember that you did. It’s not a reputation you want.



- **MUST THE SCRIPTS I USE ON MY DEMO BE SPOTS I'VE ACTUALLY VOICED?**

Absolutely not! Your demo is an example of what you CAN do - not what you HAVE done. Of course, the more work you do, the more material you'll have to draw from and you can certainly use it on subsequent demos. Remember, you want only the things on your demo that highlight you in the best possible way. Just because you got paid for that commercial doesn't mean it was your best work or even that it was a good spot.

- **IS IT ALL RIGHT TO USE SPOTS ON MY DEMO WITH BRAND NAMES?**

There are several schools of thought on this subject. Some demo producers will tell you that if you use national brand names it gives the listener the impression you have done national work and, if you haven't actually done the work, it's a case of misrepresentation. Since your demo is only a sample of what you CAN do and not what you HAVE done, I personally see no problem with using brand names. However, if you feel uneasy using them, it's quite simple to substitute another name for a product in a spot you might really like. For example, if you find a spot that is just perfect for your voice and character and it's for Kellogg's Cornflakes – it's easily changed to *Healthy* Cornflakes or *Crunchable* Cornflakes.

### **DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE:**

During your career, you may be hired by the same companies over and over, but don't repeat a spot on your demo for the same client just because it's a brand name. If you have one spot for AT&T you don't need another on the same demo.



## **How do I get an idea of what a good demo sounds like?**

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Listen, listen, listen to everything you can! One of the best resources for hearing other demos currently on the market is [www.voicebank.net](http://www.voicebank.net). This is a website where agents list their talent so that talent buyers can listen to the demos online. So can you! Just click on "house reels" and listen away.



## Where do I find copy for my demo?

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Copy for your demo is EVERYWHERE! Just turn on the radio or TV, listen and transcribe. Wonderfully written copy is available to be transcribed and used on your demo. It's a perfectly acceptable practice and you don't have to worry about copyright issues. You are using the spot (or a small portion of it) only for demonstration purposes.

Listen to ads on your local radio and TV stations. If you find one you like – that you feel would be a good match for one of your characters or voices - transcribe it.

If you are working with the demo producer, he may also have scripts for you to choose from. But be cautious. If he doesn't keep records of previously produced demos, you are likely to end up with copy that's been used over and over again. It's much better to have fresh copy that producers or agents haven't heard before.

A wonderful source for copy is print ads from magazines. There is some lovely, juicy copy inside those pages. Remember, these are the same talented people who write copy for radio and TV. Use all kinds of magazines! News magazines, travel, women's, men's magazines, cars, health, exercise..... the list is endless. Pick something you're interested in and see what ads appear there. It may be only a word or two, or an emotional charged phrase that piques your creativity for the spot you want to do. Do be aware the copy will generally need to be re-written slightly so that it is more for the "ear" than for the "eye" – so it is more conversational.

You can hire someone to write copy for you or you can write your own copy. If you don't have a background in copywriting, it's very tough to create copy on your own. My suggestion is to use one of your talents at a time – for your demo, your talent is that of a voice artist.

# Are There Different Types of Demos?

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Because voice-over is such a diverse industry, demos are just as varied. When you're starting out, it's NOT necessary to have any more than one demo. Here are some of the most common kinds of demos:

Commercial	Radio and TV – usually :30 or :60, but can sometimes be :15 or :45
Narration	Sometimes called “long form”. The kind of thing you would hear on The Discovery Channel or the History Channel
Industrials	Training programs, Online Learning
Promos	“Coming up next on the Learning Channel. . .”
Trailers	Movies! The coming attraction guy with a big voice. <i>“In a world gone mad...”</i>
Imaging (radio and TV)	“You’re listening to Cool Jazz - 98.1”
Animation	Cartoons and video games – also some web-learning applications
Message-on-Hold	Telephone messaging and IVR (Interactive Voice Response) Systems
Web Learning	Educational programs on the web
Medical Narration	A very specific niche – requiring a great ability to deliver complex medical terminology
Audio Books	Also a specific niche. The demo for audio books is a completely different animal from any other type of demo.



## Should I have more than one demo?

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Are there any on-camera actors reading this? Newscasters? Print models or stage performers? Okay. Do you have a headshot? Do you use the same photograph for all the different parts you may be audition for? You most likely have several different head shots so you can send the one that's appropriate for the part you want. It's the same with the voice demo.

If your strengths for voice-over lie in commercial and narration work, it's quite appropriate for you to have a demo for each. If you are very strong in 3 or 4 different areas, you can have a demo for each. It's not necessary to do everything at once, however. Demo production can be very expensive, so you'll want to start with your commercial demo first.



## What kind of demo should be my first demo?

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It's an industry standard to begin with a commercial demo – even if your specialty is something else. Why? It's because you use all types of characters, attitudes and deliveries when you perform for commercials. So it's an excellent way for a producer to hear what you can do and for an agent to showcase your abilities. It's also a way for them to hear the “real” you.

If you want to do other types of voice-over – animation, narration, audio books, etc., you will need a separate demo for each.



***CAUTION: Don't mix different types of demo copy on the same demo! While I am aware there are differing opinions, my experience on the West coast is that producers or agents DO NOT want you to do this. If it's a commercial demo – then only commercials belong there. If it's a narration demo, the same rule applies.***

***Now – that being said, there's no reason why you can't have several types of demos on the same demo CD. They'll just simply be listed as separate tracks on the same CD. This is so much easier than the “old days” [6 whole years ago] when we all were using cassette tapes!***



## How long should my commercial demo be?

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The industry standard for commercial demos is between 1:00 and 2:00, depending on your market. On the West coast, the preferred length is 1:30. Agents will generally want a 1:00 cut down for their house reels and some around the country are even asking for a :45 cut down. A decade ago, it was common for demos to be between 5:00 and 7:00. A decade before that, it was 10-12 minutes! As attention spans get shorter – so do demos.

## Should I use full spots or just snippets?

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On a commercial demo, you want to give only a flavor of your different voice placements, attitudes and interpretations. It's not necessary (or recommended) that you use full spots. A good demo producer understands this. Even though she may have you record the entire spot, only the best and brightest will end up on your demo.



## What format should I use?

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The current industry standard for VO demos is CD. Six years ago, it was cassette tape. As technology changes so does our industry – and it's evolving every day. We have to be certain to keep up! More and more producers are asking for submissions via MP3 files over the Internet. This way, they can store all their files on their computers and they don't have to be concerned with CD storage.

When you have your demo produced you should ask your producer to give you both a hard copy CD and an MP3 version (which is e-mailed to you).



## Should I produce my own demo?

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We all know that with today's technology, it's possible to have the equivalent of a multi-million dollar studio in your closet. But you will still need talent, skill, and creativity to create a *theatre of the mind*. This is what a demo producer is trained to do for you. If you are producing your own demo, you aren't concentrating on the one thing you do really well – acting! Are you a producer or are you a voice actor? If you want your demo to sound professional – **hire a professional**. How many producers do you think have heard those “homemade” demos? And what you suppose happens to them? According to a good friend in Los Angeles – producers listen to “bad” demos at Christmas parties. Yikes! You certainly don't want your demo to be one of those!

## Who should produce my demo?

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You wouldn't call a plumber to do your electrical work and you wouldn't ask a hairdresser to paint your house. I'll bet you'd want a neurosurgeon instead of an airline pilot if you were facing brain surgery. In short, hire a PROFESSIONAL who produces demos. Not a friend of a friend who has recording equipment in his garage. You'll never regret spending the money to do it right. You will regret doing it the wrong way.



## How do I find a demo producer?

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Others in your voice-over community can generally point you in the right direction. But it's up to you to do the necessary research to determine which producer is right for you. It must be someone who understands how production is going in today's market – someone who understands the trends. He must have experience with music and understand the nuances of production. He needs to understand what kind of sound the producers are currently looking for. The spots you use on your demo need to have a very professional sound.

It's important that you have an example of your money (or signature) voice at the beginning of your demo.

Here are four steps to follow whenever you are considering a producer to determine if he specializes in VO demo production.

- 1) Ask for several references of others for whom he has produced demos - and be sure to talk to them!
- 2) Listen to samples of VO demos he has produced
- 3) You'll want someone who does more than just produce VO demos. You'll want someone who works in the industry and understands it.
- 4) Ask about costs. Is this a package price or are the demo recording, direction and post-production billed separately at an hourly rate? Does he include full production with music and sound effects as part of the demo production?

## What are the benefits of working with a director?

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If you've ever seen the movie, "Ishtar", it should be obvious to you that an actor should NEVER direct himself. Even though Warren Beatty is a gifted actor, he had a hand in directing himself and Dustin Hoffman in that movie and it was a colossal bomb! If you want an unbiased, impartial opinion, you need a director other than yourself. Again – you'll need to decide, am I the actor or the director? Unless you have been doing this for many, many years, it's almost impossible to do both effectively. A good director is worth his weight in gold! Although you may have a good idea of your signature voice, you will be far better off to have an experienced director work with you to discover the uniqueness and nuances of that voice.

After months of preparing and fretting over copy, you're likely to be pretty attached to your choices. However, those choices might not be the best ones for your demo. A good director will be able to dispassionately cut that copy which won't show you in your best light. He will also listen with "fresh ears" and take you in directions you may never have considered. Because he knows what the voice-over industry is looking for, he can use that expertise to be of the most help to you.

**Having an engineer alone is not enough – even in a state of the art, digital studio.**

Ask the same questions of a director that you did of your producer (1-4 above)



## Where Can I Find a Good director?

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If you are having difficulty finding a director in your area, you can try the ad agencies in town to see if anyone there is working freelance. *The disadvantage of working with someone for an ad agency is that they won't know you – that's a definite downside. How are they going to help you if they don't understand your personality?* If it's necessary to hire a freelance director – be certain to meet with him or her BEFORE your demo session and get to know her and (more importantly) let them get to know you.

# What Can I Do to Prepare for my Demo Session?

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Of course, preparation will vary for each voice actor because we each prepare differently. So I'll tell you what I suggest for prep work to those who are coming to our studio to produce a demo.

## Prior to Demo Day:

- Compile at least 40 scripts (possibly more) that you feel would best suit your voice, style and characters.
- Schedule at least 2 prep sessions (prior to your demo production session) with your director, or trusted VO friend, to go over the scripts and start to separate them into three categories:
  1. A Definite Yes
  2. A Maybe (scripts with similar style, attitude, character, etc.)
  3. A Definite No
  4. A No, but possible or for a future demo
- With the help of your director, narrow down your script choices to around 25
- Take about a week or two to rehearse these scripts. **Don't over-rehearse!** Become very familiar with the character and the copy, but you don't want to get to the point of memorizing the scripts which will happen if you rehearse too much. In the long run, your familiarity with the character and story in each script will be far more important than the words themselves.
- Experiment with different voice characteristics, pacing, pitch, etc. for each script until you find the ones that feel the best.
- Keep in mind that during your demo session, you may be directed to a somewhat different delivery, and that's okay. By doing your "homework" you will be starting at a very good place and should be able to adapt to the director's suggestions easily.

## The Big Day:

- Get a good night's sleep the night before. You will need to be alert and refreshed! This is your day to SHINE!
- Be certain you are properly hydrated (as always when you do voice work). Start drinking lots of water at least 24 hours prior to your demo session. Stay away from coffee or dairy products.
- Bring extra water, snacks and possibly lunch with you. Demo days can potentially be pretty long.
- Warm up! Some stretching exercises for your body and voice will help you immensely!
- Be prepared to go through the scripts again with your director to further narrow down the choices.
- Have Fun! That's why we're in this business – right? This is a gigantic step toward attaining your dream of being a working voice actor. Take pride in your accomplishment!



## How Much Will my Commercial Demo Cost?

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As with any other business you might start, there will be costs involved. The cost of a demo will be one of your largest, and most important, expenses. In order to make the best use of your money there are several things to consider before going into the studio for your demo session. First is to consider your budget.

Some demo producers charge a producing fee plus studio time, which could range from \$50 to \$300 per hour, plus there could also be additional charges for music licensing, copywriting or materials. Other producers may charge an all inclusive flat rate ranging anywhere from \$1500 to \$5000 or more. There may even be additional consultations or coaching sessions included in the flat rate. The best idea is to get a breakdown of all the services that are included. In the simplest terms – make sure you know exactly what you’re going to get for your demo production dollars BEFORE you book your session.

If you are working with a demo producer who charges by the hour it’s important to be aware of the fact that the more prepared you are, the less time it will take and the less it will cost – another excellent reason to wait until you are “ready” to record and produce your demo. For instance, if it takes you 2 or 3 hours just to record your demo tracks, that’s several hundred dollars just in studio time BEFORE he can start post-production.

I know of a producer in Chicago that charges \$3800 to produce a demo - \$6500 if she produces more than one. The national average for a high quality, high branding, highly-positioned demo is \$2500. The cost of your demo production will definitely depend on where you are in the country. On the West Coast, \$1000 to \$1500 should get you a demo that’s exceptionally well done.



**CAUTION:** *Be cautious of demo producers who put you into “categories.” These types of producers can be identified when they say things like, “Let’s see, you’ll need a soft sell, a hard sell, a car commercial, a romantic read, and something funny. If those aren’t your best characters or styles – they certainly shouldn’t be on your demo!*

***Also beware of any producer that records your tracks and then says, ‘Okay, I’ll put this together and send you a copy in a couple of days’ and scoots you out the door! No, No, No! This is YOUR demo! You should be there to give your input concerning the selection of music, sequencing and what should or should not be cut. While you need to let him do his job – your input is critical.***



## How Often Should I Update my Demo?

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Trends change in this industry and you'll need to change as well. Just get comfortable with the fact you have to start somewhere (with your first demo) and know that you will change it over and over again – usually every year or two.

—→**IMPORTANT:** When you have your finished demo in your hand, DO NOT ask your spouse, relatives or friends what they think of it. Of course, they will tell you it is wonderful! They love you and they want you to feel good. But they have no frame of reference, so it will be an unfair question. Sure, let them listen! You should be proud of what you've accomplished and you'll want to share. However, if you want a real, honest and valuable critique, have a coach, producer or another VO artist listen. They can give you a much more informed opinion. Beware of anyone who tells you only what you want to hear.



## A Final Thought On Demos . . .

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Your demo is always a work in process. The more work you do, the more things you have to add to your newest demo. Know going in that this is your **first** demo –the first in a series if you are planning to do this for a living.

There is a real temptation to get a demo out there too soon. Of course you want to work – and it can be frustrating to have to wait to have a demo to send to prospective clients. However, the worst error a voice actor can make is to produce his demo BEFORE he is ready to compete in the market! Be patient and do it right ~ you'll never regret it.

So remember the short answer and repeat it until you can say it with conviction:

**“I’ll know when I’m ready”**

*Careers, like rockets, don't always take off on schedule. The key is to keep working on the engines.*

**Gary Sinise, Actor**

## Appendix A

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# You, Your Voice Acting Business, and the Web

by Chris Wagner

You've got the talent, now how do they find you? In the distant past a person who started a business normally put up some kind of sign (or shingle) hanging above his door. The shingles were normally small, very to the point, such as a tooth for a dentist or a horse shoe for a blacksmith. Well, that kind of 'hanging your shingle' had gone by the wayside as the primary means of advertising as societies became more mature and advertising became more rich and far reaching

Now fast forward to the information age (if that's what we are still calling it!)... Web sites are now the shingle that businesses are hanging out for their customers to see, locally as well as across the globe. What a powerful tool a web site can be for your voice acting business! It's a place that's always open and available to display your work, provide information on your skills, and allow people to hear your latest demos.

With all that great capability there are still some very huge limitations Not in the technology, but in the implementation of a web site C'mon, admit it, we have all seen websites from companies or individuals that are just plain bad The problem with web sites is very similar to what has been happening in the voice acting world. Equipment and software have come down in price and increased in availability, allowing anyone with a reasonable amount of investment to become a voice actor. Well, not really. They can audition and record and send files, but what's the quality of the audio and delivery? That is the same issue we see with most web sites. Just because you purchase a program to create the web site doesn't mean you would be able to make an interesting and effective web site... that doesn't mean you can't either.

Your web site should be focused, simple, and of course very easy to use. There are a number of ways to get a web site created, or reworked for those of you who may already have a site up and running. In this series I will be covering what you should be considering; the design of your site, hosting the site, what features are really important and which ones aren't, what kind of information should be on the site, and things you can do to get your site some traffic from the search engines.

Creating an effective web site for your voice acting business can be more difficult than creating a great demo... but it can pay off very big if done properly.

**Take a big breath, here is your very first step in setting up your web site!**

*"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet."* William Shakespeare had it down when it comes to flowers, but for web sites it is a completely different matter.

On the web a URL (Universal Resource Locator) is the name of your web site. Choosing a name that is catchy and easy to remember can be tough these days. In the beginning URLs were easy to come by as there weren't that many people using the web. Today with the explosion of the web you may find it hard to get that name that makes the marketing part of your heart sing.

This URL or address is also referred to as your Domain. And if you work things out right you can be the ruler of your own web Domain!

Your domain name not only is the URL to your web site, it also will be part of your e-mail address as well. That's cool to be able to use your e-mail address as a bit of advertising when you send a message to someone, keeps things top of mind!

Here's the fun part, almost like picking out a name for your child... there is a lot of pressure when doing this. I mean you want to give your site a name that makes sense and is easy to remember, reflects you in some way if possible. The shorter the name, the better. Let's see why.

An address of <http://www.youreallyneedmetobeyourvoiceactingtalent.com> just about says it all. It actually says too much. What a pain to type that into a browser, let alone remember it and spell it correctly! Remember when I said it is also a part of your e-mail address? Imagine trying to tell someone over the phone your e-mail address: [JackorJill@youreallyneedmetobeyourvoiceactingtalent.com](mailto:JackorJill@youreallyneedmetobeyourvoiceactingtalent.com) OUCH!

Sure you will most likely be able to get that web name for your site, but why would you? Try for the short and simple route. Your name is always a best bet, such as; <http://www.pennyabshire.com> Sometimes you can't get your name because someone has beaten you to it. The only thing you can do in that situation is to (a) ask the person if you can have the name and bribe them heavily (b) create a name that's almost the same. For myself someone already has <http://www.chriswagner.com>, so I had to go the 'almost the same' route. <http://www.chriswagneronline.com>.

Finding that special place to have your web site call home... Sounds kind of strange, but having a great web site for your voice acting business can be quickly turned into a bad web site if; no one can see or access your site, the web site is soooo slow to load, or your site is redirected to some strange search page that has nothing to do with you.

Having a web site is more than just making the pages. It also is about the hosting company you choose to bring your web site to the masses. There are quite a few of them out there, from the Mom and Pop hosting shops to the big players such as Yahoo, Go Daddy, and others. The costs of hosting your site will vary as well, from 4 dollars a month up to hundreds of dollars per month depending on what tools, space, and options you need from the hosting company to get your web site to work.

The following are some examples of the tools and space you might need for different types of web sties:

#### **Web site, single page with audio demos:**

A basic page such as this doesn't need a large amount of storage space. Most demos in mp3 format are at most 3 megabytes each. If you have 4 or 5 demos that would be around 15 Megs of space required just for the audio. HTML pages are usually rather small, mainly because they are text based, and whatever pictures you have for the site will not take a lot of space either. So for a site like this 100 Megs would be more than enough.

#### **Web site, multiple pages, ability for clients to upload files and audio demos:**

Taking the next step up with a more complex site, having multiple pages doesn't really eat up too much space unless you are planning on having a huge and complex web site for your voice-over business. The only difference here would be the ability for clients to upload files to your web site. This is convenient and more effective than having your client send you a video or audio clip via e-mail. Most e-mail servers have a limit to the size of the attachments, such as 10 megabytes, this limit can be a real pain when trying to get or send large files.

To be able to get large files you should add an FTP service to your hosting package, FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol (pretty creative eh?) With most FTP services you can set up individual user names and passwords for your clients, or have a catch all with one common user name and password. That is completely up to you to decide. A nice feature of FTP is that you can also have a place for your clients to pick up large audio files without clogging up their e-mail.

Suggested space for a web site like this would be at least 2 gigabytes (2,000 megabytes). This allows for you to be able to leave files on the FTP service longer, and only remove them when you need to free up space.

### **ULTRA WEB SITE, multiple pages, FTP service, Blog, Forms, Portal for clients, and demos:**

Well this kind of site needs a little bit more horse power and maintenance as well! Building on the previous sites, you will want more space to handle all of the information you will generate via your own Blog, demos, client filled out forms and such. You are also looking at most likely setting up a database to drive your client portal... makes my head spin just thinking about it. 10 gigs of space would be a good starting point here.

You will also need things such as CGI scripting and PHP. But most likely you will want to spend more of your time auditioning and marketing yourself rather than managing such a complex web site, and figuring out what CGI scripting and PHP are!

So now you kind of have an idea of what you should and shouldn't be signing up for in a hosting service for your web site. Most hosting services will allow you to start off with a simple package and upgrade as your needs require, keeps things simple and flexible.

Here is a neat feature; most of the larger hosting companies will have some kind of basic means to create your web site with their web based tools. These tools normally use a basic set of templates and you just fill in the text, pictures and other items. This method is simple, quick and effective especially if you don't have much experience creating a web site. The downside to this is that your web site will look like a lot of other web sites. But once you get your web site off the ground and are ready to put your personal stamp on it you can contact a web designer to help you out, or just do it yourself.

### **What a great segue... Web designer or do it yourself:**

If you have the time, and some money to plunk down for HTML design tools, and you don't mind learning how... creating your own web design can be a fulfilling, exciting, frustrating, and a time draining experience! A fairly easy software program to get you started is Microsoft's Front Page.

Front Page is very similar in look and feel to Microsoft's other office products. If you know how to use Word, you should be able to pick up on how to use Front Page rather quickly. Most hosting companies support the use of Front Page to easily publish your web site; no need to FTP the files, just click a button and Front Page takes care of it all.

Another software package is Dream Weaver, from Macromedia (now Adobe). Dream Weaver is a professional package that allows you more control over how your web site looks and works. It also is designed to work with flash and other powerful web tools. Most hosting companies also support Dream Weaver, so putting the files on the web site is pretty simple.

Alternatively you could always get an HTML book and use Windows notepad to create your web site manually. I don't suggest this for the technically faint hearted, it just isn't easy.

If none of this sounds like something you want to do, contact a Web Designer. Web Designers have done all the hard work already; they've bought the software, taken the classes, and don't mind sitting in front of their computers for hours and hours making your site look good and work great!

Just like anything else - hiring a plumber, interior decorator, or a voice coach - you need to feel comfortable with the person you hire, they will be bringing your web site to life.

Make sure you know all the costs up front. Does the Web Designer also offer hosting? What kind and quality of hosting? Take a look at some of their other work. Do they use templates or will they come up with a creative 'from scratch' web site for you? Get some references... and I'll say it again, look for someone with whom you feel comfortable.

Now that we've covered domain names, hosting services, space considerations, and do it yourself versus hiring a web designer; it's time to consider the search engines and your content. Content may be the thing that changes the most often on your site and of course you need to choose your content carefully! Let's kick this installment off with search.

## Search Engines

Domain name; check! Hosting service; check! You have your web site address printed on your business cards and use it in your marketing mailings. Pretty effective way to get the audience you've targeted to come and visit your site, listen to your demos, and maybe learn more about you and your experience. But you want your site working for you even when you aren't sending marketing mailings out. What is the best way to do this?

The Matrix...err, the Web is a huge collection of content that can be a real pain to get around. Heck how do you even find what it is you want? Well in the beginning there were some sites that acted like phone directories for web sites, and of course there was word of mouth. Out of that grew the search engine pages; one of the first was Alta Vista. Then of course there was Yahoo, and eventually the 800 pound gorilla Google.

Submit your web site to the search engine and then it goes to work; opening up your web site and reading it. Your site will be 'spidered' and keywords from your site will be placed in the search engine database. So the next time someone goes to the search engine and types in words like "voice-over" or "voice actor", "narration" and such, your site should show up in the results.

The results shown will have your site and maybe thousands of other related web sites. Your competition will be listed right there with you on the page. That's not something you can really get rid of; it's just the nature of the beast. But there are a few things that can be done to improve your chances of being listed higher in the results.

First off, you can place a set of keywords inside your website that the search engine spider looks for; you are basically programming the search engine the way you want.

Here is a brief example of what those keywords look like in HTML:

```
<meta NAME="Description" CONTENT="Chris Wagner, Voice over talent; The Perfect Voice for your Perfect Message">
```

```
<meta NAME="Keywords" CONTENT="Chris Wagner, Chris, Wagner, Voice over, Voice actor, Voice acting, V/O, VO, announcer, voice acting, narration, narrator, presentations, macromedia breeze, breeze, commercial, commercials, spot, spots, personality">
```

```
<meta NAME="IndexType" CONTENT="Talent, Colorado, Voice Actors, Denver, Male, Voice Over">
```

```
<meta NAME="Author" CONTENT="chris@chriswagneronline.com">
```

Ok, so it doesn't look very friendly, but it does the job. This is from my voice acting web site. For those of you familiar with HTML this is placed in the <HEAD> section of your web page. Alright, that's as technical as I want to get...

Another tip is to get links to your web site from other sites. You can do this by linking from your personal home/life page, or getting onto a service like voice123.com which allows you to list your site there. The search engines seem to give a little boost to your site if there are links from other web sites to yours.

I suggest going to the search engines themselves and doing some research on what they suggest is the best way to get a good ranking. Of course you can always have your site come up in the top number of returns by paying the search company. This may seem a little like a scam, but if it gets you on top and gets you more exposure... it's worth every penny.

Believe it or not, having a Blog on your web site can improve your rankings on search engines. But only if you keep your entries related to what your web site is about. If you mix personal Blog entries and work entries you may not reap the benefits of a well run Blog.

You will also want to make sure that your content truly matches what your keywords state the site to be. This also will give you a better chance of listing higher in the search results.

## **Content**

This is where I see the most mistakes on business web pages. Hey I'm not trying to be a critic, but if you're going to put a web site up with a purpose keep the content tied to that purpose.

What should you have on your voice acting web site? I have my opinion about this, which I am about to share with you, however there are as many differing opinions about content as there are web sites out there.

Whether you have one page, or multiple pages, try to keep each page focused using a single theme or thought. Basic marketing here, one page equals one thought. Don't throw everything you have on one page, especially if you have a lot of content. It makes your site difficult to read, follow, and your message may get lost in the 'noise'.

For myself, I tend to click away from a page that is packed with information. I don't have the time to filter through all the information presented to get what I came for. But I am rambling, and you are waiting for the list of things you should have on your site!

To start create a short biography covering your training and experience, similar to a resume but more conversational in nature. Most voice actors have a head shot, if you have one it might be good to put it on your web site. Remember for voice acting they aren't hiring you for your good looks, but your ability to deliver on a script; it isn't mandatory to have a head shot.

Demos, yep, your demos should definitely be listed on your web site. Remember that when people click on the link to hear your demo, it has to be transferred from your web site to their computer. So keep the file small, if you make it an mp3 choose the CD quality of 128k or FM radio quality of 96k. Quality of the demo is important, but if you place it on your web site with the highest quality available (meaning a much larger audio file) they may not wait to hear it and pass you by.

Keep your web site professional, clean and simple. Consider your web site a showcase for you and your impressive talent! Respect those who come to view your showcase, they will appreciate it.

I've touched on the things that you should have on your web site, here's some of the things that you should NOT have on your web site. Remember these are my opinions only, not hard and fast rules that you have to follow. Ultimately it is your web site and you choose what to put on it.

Keep away from using cheesy graphics, especially goofy animated pieces, unless that's part of your persona; then fire away! Don't use more than two kinds of fonts on your site; it makes the web pages look chaotic and not uniform.

Stay away from putting up pictures or slideshows of your (a) Recent vacation to Lompoc (b) Surgery that you or your pet had (c) Children (even though they are the cutest kids in the world!) (d) 'Stuff' not related directly to your voice acting business.

This goes for written content as well. We all have strong political and religious leanings, it is probably best to leave this to your own personal/life web site. But as I've stated before; it's for you to make that call.

The last thing I would suggest keeping off your web site is links to other voice actor's web sites. It's a nice thing to do, promoting your friend's and colleague's voice acting careers, but it winds up diluting your own efforts in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

I could go on and on about web sites but... well... that's all there is for now.

Remember web sites can be great tools or horrid problems! Take your time when you are thinking about making your web site, or even updating your current one. Ask the tough questions of those you choose to work with, from the hosting service to your web designer. They work for you and should have no problem answering your questions.

### **Here are a bunch VO websites for you to check out.**

[www.marybaker.com](http://www.marybaker.com)

[www.jumpinternational.com](http://www.jumpinternational.com)

[www.chriswagneronline.com](http://www.chriswagneronline.com)

[www.onthemarc.com](http://www.onthemarc.com)

[www.melissahoffman.com](http://www.melissahoffman.com)

[www.jennifervaughn.com](http://www.jennifervaughn.com)

[www.bobbergen.com](http://www.bobbergen.com)

[www.micnme.com](http://www.micnme.com)

[www.marcbiaggi.com](http://www.marcbiaggi.com)

[www.wallyontheweb.com](http://www.wallyontheweb.com)

[www.pennyabshire.com](http://www.pennyabshire.com)

[www.chuckbuell.com](http://www.chuckbuell.com)

[www.maxinedunn.com](http://www.maxinedunn.com)

[www.bobbinbeam.com](http://www.bobbinbeam.com)

[www.curtbyk.com](http://www.curtbyk.com)

[www.thevoicetalent.net](http://www.thevoicetalent.net)

## Appendix B

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### The Four Critical Steps For Effective Communication

#### INTERRUPT — Get their attention

It is essential to get the attention of your audience before any communication can begin. For most work the *Interrupt* refers to a statement or question at the beginning of the script that is intended to get the audience to STOP thinking about what they are currently thinking about and START thinking about what it is you are about to say. Using an example of a commercial for a restaurant, a powerful interrupt might be "*I am never going to eat ever again!*" As a listener, wouldn't you be just a little intrigued as to why I'm saying I'll never eat again? Sure you would! And *viola!* Your current thought process has just been interrupted.

As a voice-over talent, part of your job is to discover how your character might speak the first line of the script in a way that will instantly grab the attention of your one-person audience. The challenge is to do this even when the script is poorly written or may not include an interrupt.

#### ENGAGE — Keep them listening

The most effective way to keep someone listening is to tell them a story. Every script contains a story of some sort—even if it's a poorly written script that contains nothing but a list of items. As voice talent your challenge is to discover how your character can tell the story in a way that is captivating, intriguing, and compelling. Generally speaking, one of the best ways to keep the audience listening is to simply have a conversation with them. Most "announcery" or "in-your-face" deliveries (usually referred to as "hard-sell") will tend to *dis-engage* the listener, whereas a one-to-one conversation will tend to *engage* the listener and keep them listening. If properly delivered in an engaging manner, even the telephone directory can be compelling.

#### EDUCATE — Give them the information they need to know

This is the "meat and potatoes" of a script. For a commercial, it's usually the sales message (which may be cleverly woven into the content of the story); for an industrial, it's usually the instructional, training, or marketing content. Regardless of the script, your job as voice talent is to deliver the information "in character," and in a manner consistent with the purpose of the message. To be effective, delivery of the information portion of a script must be consistent with your delivery of the rest of the script. If you have properly *interrupted* and *engaged* the listener, and your character is having a personal conversation with your one-person audience, the informational content will be completely natural and will not be perceived as "selling."

#### OFFER — Give the listener an opportunity to take action

What action do you want the listener to take as a result of speaking to them? (see **Desires** from the A-B-C's?) In commercial copy, the **offer** is often referred to as "the sell," a "tag," or "the call to action," and will frequently be delivered by a different voice talent. "Call 800 123-4567," or "Order today—only \$19.95," or "Go to [www.companywebsite.com](http://www.companywebsite.com)" are all direct forms of the **offer**, but it can also be very subtle or cleverly written to not appear as a direct call to action. As voice talent, your job is to keep the listener engaged through the entire script so that when the time comes to wrap it all up, the **offer** simply appears to be the natural conclusion of your message.

## Appendix C

**Some suggested books on Marketing:**

***Getting Everything You Can Out of All You've Got***

By Jay Abraham

***Beware of the Naked Man Who Offers You His Shirt***

By Harvey Mackay

***The Wizard of Ads***

By Roy Williams

***Marketing for Dummies***

By Alexander Hiam

***Principles of Marketing (11<sup>th</sup> Edition)***

By Philip Kotler & Gary Armstrong

***The Brand Marketing Book***

By Joe Marconi

***Marketing Phrase Book***

By Gail Hamilton

***On Target: The Book on Marketing Plans***

By Tim Berry & Doug Wilson

***Marketing Made Easy***

By Kevin Epstein

***1001 Way to Market Yourself and Your Small Business***

By Lisa Rogak

***1001 Ways to Market Your Services : For People Who Hate to Sell***

By Richard C. Crandall

***101 Ways to Promote Yourself: Tricks of the Trade for Taking Charge of Your Own Success***

By Raleigh Pinskey

***If You're Clueless About Starting Your Own Business***

By Seth Godin

***LoveNotes – Branding and Marketing for Artists***

By Frank Frederick

***Words That Sell***

By Edward Werz and Sally Germain

***Phrases That Sell***

By Richard Bayan

***The Art of Voice Acting***

By James R. Alburger

***Don't Tell Me It Can't Be Done Until I've Already Done It!***

By Faith Popcorn

Additional resources are available at [www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)

## Appendix D

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# USPs, Trademarks and Copywriting

Developing a good USP (unique selling proposition) is often not an easy task. Jay Abraham includes an entire chapter devoted to creating a USP in his book *Getting Everything You Can Out of All You've Got*. I highly recommend his book.

Copyrights, Trademarks and Servicemarks can be a bit tricky to deal with. A Copyright refers to a creative work of original authorship. However, Trademarks and Servicemarks don't apply to a creative work, but rather refer to the use of a phrase, logo or emblem in the course of doing business. The topic can get into some legal gray area, so I won't attempt to give any legal advice here. The US Government Patent and Trademark office has a page explaining what Trademarks and Servicemarks are all about at:

<http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/doc/general/whatis.htm>. To quote from their website:

"A trademark is a word, name, symbol or device which is used in trade with goods to indicate the source of the goods and to distinguish them from the goods of others. A servicemark is the same as a trademark except that it identifies and distinguishes the source of a service rather than a product. The terms "trademark" and "mark" are commonly used to refer to both trademarks and servicemarks.

"Trademark rights may be used to prevent others from using a confusingly similar mark, but not to prevent others from making the same goods or from selling the same goods or services under a clearly different mark. Trademarks which are used in interstate or foreign commerce may be registered with the Patent and Trademark Office. The registration procedure for trademarks and general information concerning trademarks is described in a separate pamphlet entitled 'Basic Facts about Trademarks'."

To trademark (or servicemark) your slogan you would need to show the Patent & Trademark office how your use of the phrase would differentiate your business from other similar businesses. And even with that, you may be declined the servicemark. Generally, trademarks and servicemarks are reserved for brand names that distinguish a specific product or service. A common phrase like "The Man of a Thousand Voices" may not be trademarkable simply because it does not show any specific differentiation. However, if you use a specific font style, or graphic design for the phrase and can show how it differentiates your business from others, it may be. It's a very complex process. The US Government FAQ page will answer many of your questions at <http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/tac/tmfaq.htm#DefineServiceMark>.

# Appendix E

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## Voice Actor's Check List for Success

1. As **Chief Executive Officer**, what is your vision or plan for a career as a voice actor, which is specifically designed to ensure your growth, profitability and financial gain?

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What change(s) must take place to bring this plan to fruition?

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What strategic alliances are you forming to ensure the achievement of the vision or plan of *VOICE ACTOR YOU, INC.?*

With whom are you aligning?

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How will this be beneficial?

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3. As **V.P. of Quality Control**, what are you specifically doing to ensure and/or improve the quality of the service provided by *VOICE ACTOR YOU, INC.?*

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As **Chief Financial Officer**, what plans must be made to accommodate the financial and marketing continuity of *VOICE ACTOR YOU, INC.?*

Current Strategy:

Anticipated Cost:

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- a) Alternative sources of revenue?

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- b) Probability of primary revenue continuation over next 5 years?

Excellent \_\_\_ Very Good \_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_

c) Back-up Strategy:

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4. As **V.P. of Marketing**, what steps are you taking to seek new or additional target markets for your services?

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a) Local Markets?

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b) Other Markets?

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5. As **V.P. of Promotions**, what steps are you taking to complete the following:

a) Seek representation? \_\_\_\_\_

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b) Collect materials and prepare for demo?

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c) Demo production?

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d) Graphic design (logo, U.S.P., business cards, stationery/thank-you cards, etc.)?

Design \_\_\_\_\_

Printing \_\_\_\_\_

7. As **V.P. of Sales**, what is the projected revenue for year end? \$\_\_\_\_\_

a) Is that enough to cover company expenses?      \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

b) What about expected revenue growth for next year?      \$\_\_\_\_\_

8. As **V.P. of Education**, what is the training plan specifically designed to ensure the services offered by *VOICE ACTOR YOU, INC.* are equal to, or exceed, industry standards?

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What is the time line for implementation of the training program?

By \_\_\_\_\_ I will be enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will be enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will be enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_ I will read \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will read \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will read \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_ I will study and/or research \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will study and/or research \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_ I will study and/or research \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

9. As **V.P. of Human Resources**, what will you do to protect the mental, physical and spiritual health of the primary employee (*you*)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

a) Vacation allotment, family leave, and general mental health maintenance?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) Maintaining connection with corporate stockholders? (*family*)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c) Your spiritual health?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. As **Director of Maintenance**, what improvements should be made to improve the visual appearance and physical health of the primary employee (*you*), the product or service?

a) What do you plan to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) When will you get started - specifically?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. As **Chief Benefits Officer**, what financial planning is in place to ensure your future financial security (*i.e. retirement*)?

a) What do you plan to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) When will you get started?

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12. As **Accounting Department Head**, what steps are you taking to maintain accurate invoicing, record keeping and IRS accountability?

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