

Get Yourself Heard

The world of voiceover work may seem like one anyone could do. After all, we all know how to talk, right? In truth, however, to make it in the voiceover business requires planning, persistence – and talent.

You've heard them. The voice bringing you the 6 o'clock news, selling cars, advertising sales and more. This is the versatile, imaginative world of the voice actor.

Many times, you never see the voiceover talent. Mainly because they're chosen on the sound rather than the visual they bring to the client (advertiser). Sometimes the talent is a famous actor or other well-known voice. Other times, you may not know who it is. And then there are those annoying times when you recognize the voice but just can't put a name to the person.

When we hear those voices on the radio or TV, many of us may think, "I could do that." What we don't realize about the voiceover business, however, is the incredible effort behind the scenes at the studio, before the casting audition, before the video, before the script is written. It's the imagination of the voice talent, the art of taking direction, the ability to go with any script changes and more. It's the many vocal styles it takes to sell a product, such as the hard sell, the soft sell and the conversationalist delivery. And then, there's the marketing, the promoting, the networking that goes on long before the drive to the recording studio

begins. And lastly, the never-ending work of trying to get in as the next new "voice." Or at the very least, having a voice that can bring in a steady income.

Giving a Voice to Dreams

If, however, you think you have the drive – not to mention the talent – to make it in the voiceover business, here are a few tricks and tips to consider when taking the plunge.

Getting started. It all starts with making a demo of your best voiceover work, and by all means, have it professionally produced. *As they say in radio, pack the heavy stuff in first.* In other words, put your best audio in the first 10 seconds. Once you've got your high-quality demo CD in hand, start to market yourself. And market some more. Never underestimate the value of any type of personal marketing campaign. Tell ad agencies and producers what you have to offer. Be prepared to back it up.

Once you've established yourself in a certain style, you can add on other vocal abilities on the demo CD. Can you sing in harmony on the new cat food commercial? In two distinct voice styles? Make a CD, and let potential clients hear it.

BY DONNA REED

Do you do a vocal style that's unique to most in the voiceover business? Can you switch vocal styles at a moment's notice while reading a cartoon script? Make a CD to back it up.

Are you known as a soft-spoken, on-hold voice but feel you have the chops to hard sell a Jeep Cherokee? You guessed it, start having a demo professionally done. You know your talents. Showcase them. Build a Web site – complete with audio, of course. And never be afraid to learn from other voice talent.

Competition. It's fierce, it's tough, it's endless. Competition in the voiceover industry is high. What to do when there are so many people out there providing voiceover talent? Great talent does stand out, but pooling great talent with marketing is definitely to your advantage. Yes, skill counts, but most business today involves advertising, networking and getting the word out about your services. Focus on getting better and better at your craft; focus on what you do best, be it imaging, narration, news promos or characters, and get better at it. Be outstanding in your field. It's true, there are some voiceover artists who



Donna Reed has worked in the voiceover business for more than 15 years. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

are able to do all types of deliveries – and do them extremely well. But they are few and far between. Unless you are outstanding in all areas of delivery, focus mostly on the one area you are really good at.

Price. You've done it, landed your first gig. Now comes the time to talk dollars. You're in this business to make money, so of course you want to negotiate. Before you're put in the position to talk payment for your first job, learn everything you can about negotiating. Analyze the way you negotiate when you want a service. Did you have great success negotiating the last time you had your house painted or hired a moving company? What did you do that helped you get the price you wanted? Remember the tactics you took, because those are the same ones people are going to use with you when trying to broker a deal for your voiceover talent.

Professionalism. Hone your skills as a professional. Probably one of the most important skills a voice talent has to offer any producer, director, talent agent or writer is to take direction well. Time is money in the voiceover business. Being easy to work with, being on time to auditions and getting the job done in a timely manner always score big points. Adopt an attitude of "It's nothing personal, just part of the entertainment business," which is guaranteed to stop you from taking the audition rejections personally. It's better to focus on the next audition. Learning from auditions will make your life, and your voiceover career, much more productive, not to mention less stressful.

Networking. Career success in any field doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and

effort. Finding new ways to reinvent any new vocal abilities is a plus in the creative world of voiceover. Take a class in marketing or advertising. Join a theatre group. Join a few professional organizations in your interest areas. Work with any contacts you've made in your other or current careers, be they broadcasting, corporate work, college, military, anything.

Most all of us understand the basics of networking. Probably one of the smartest and most obvious networking strategies, is the "meet and greet." Most cities have several advertising groups, public relations seminars, Optimist Clubs, etc., that meet regularly. Never go to any of these expecting to leave with a job. Expect to meet people who may not only become friends but who may be able to help you in your field. And perhaps you can help them in their business as well. Initiate conversations at these functions. Find a topic that interests both parties, and bring business cards.

Make a plan before you go to any networking event or company party. Cover a few topics with a few key people who have similar interests. Do your homework before going. Who will be there? Do you know of any ad campaigns in your area? Who are the key casting and production people? But don't discount contacts with different interests from your own. The best part of networking is the range of personalities and job interests that could land you a great contact. A contact that could lead to a phenomenal audition, which could lead to your voiceover career taking off.

If cold calling is a route you'd like to follow, by all means, give it a shot. Some pros in the business make an average of 30 calls

a day and find great success with this formula. If those numbers are overwhelming, try a few cold calls every week, based on a few networking contacts you've made in the advertising or broadcasting field, and then branch out to the corporate sector if you have contacts there. Work yourself into a manageable marketing campaign for yourself. Know what you want to say when you do have a chance to talk about your work and your services.

It's a Wrap

Make a plan, be persistent, commit to being the best, and network/market all the time. Everyone starts somewhere in the voiceover business. Keep in mind that voiceovers, like all areas of the entertainment industry, are entirely subjective. Networking, a heavy dose of the work ethic, drive and talent are the hallmarks of success. But sometimes it's just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Be persistent, and be awesome. Always leave the audition knowing you gave your best performance. Learn new skills, and fine-tune your existing skills. Read, ask questions, and learn from failed auditions as well as successful ones. Search for new marketing ideas and strategies that make you a unique talent. Land the audition – and showcase your talent in the studio.

You may only get one audition, but it may land you a dream voiceover gig – might as well wow them. 🎤

Donna Reed is a freelance voiceover talent specializing in commercials and news promos for more than 15 years. Her children insist they've never heard her say, "Turn that stuff down," but they often hear her yell, "C'mon, how many decibals can this CD go?" She can be reached at donna@spotcomm.com.

For More Information

- www.voiceartist.com
- www.voicebank.net
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- "The Art of Voice Acting: The Craft and Business of Performing for Voice Over," by James R. Alburger, Focal Press, 1998.
- "Word of Mouth: A Guide to Commercial Voice-Over Excellence," by Susan Blu, Pomegranate Press, 1996.