



The “How Do I Get Into Voiceovers” conversation is a long one, because it’s really a commitment to continuing education. Even voice actors who are at the very top of the game (those voicing network promos, movie trailers, documentaries, national commercials), work regularly with coaches, attend workshops, and constantly learn from one another. So I’ll give you the lowdown on voiceovers in a nutshell, but whatever I tell you here will not be enough. Questions arise at every step of the voice artist’s journey, and the only way to learn is to study the craft, pay attention to trends, and ask questions continually.

A few weeks ago, I had dinner in LA with one of the top voices in the industry, a guy who’s heard daily on network television and movie trailers. I asked him how he responds when an aspiring voice artist contacts him for advice. He said, “I tell them it’ll take from two to ten years, depending on where they’re starting and where they want to end up.” I agreed, and thought that was pretty accurate.

Having a good voice is great, but it’s only part of the equation, and not the most important part. Listen to the voices doing national commercials. For the most part, they are not “great voices.” They’re great *interpreters*; they have a unique point of view. Knowing how to *use* your voice to convey a perspective is the thing that wins jobs, and it’s what you’ll spend the rest of your life pursuing.

Getting into the VO business is more challenging now than ever. The industry is wildly competitive and getting more so every day. There are lots of reasons for this: the changing landscape of radio and TV has thousands of talented announcers looking for work, technology has made it easier and cheaper to do voice work from home, celebrities who once thought that VO would jeopardize their careers are now voicing national commercials and documentaries (and of course animated films), and there's a blitz of books and websites out now, telling you how easy it is to "Make a Gajillion Dollars With Your Voice." A lot of work that was once the exclusive province of talent agents has migrated online, so marketing yourself is harder than ever. There's also not as much local work as there used to be, and the local work that does exist doesn't pay as much as it used to. So you need to begin your journey understanding all of this.

In addition to creating and marketing their demos and knowing what to do once they actually book a job, voice artists today must also know how to run a small business. Even artists with national agents are responsible for their own careers. In the beginning you'll be handling your own invoicing, billing, bookkeeping, negotiation and contract renewal, plus studio management and maintenance.

Voice artists must now act as their own recording engineers as well. You need to know how to record, edit and send your voice tracks to clients, in whatever format they prefer. Most agents won't sign you if you don't have a home studio, because all of your auditions will be done from home and much of the actual work as well. When you hear a voice on network television, on a movie trailer, narrating your favorite documentary or telling you what's "coming up next" on the local news, there's a good chance that voice is coming from a studio in the announcer's home.

Here's the scoop:

Before you even *think* about putting a demo together, get some coaching. Particularly if you're coming to voiceovers from radio, a good VO coach is a must to help you make the adjustment. A promo sounds dif-

ferent -and is formatically different- than a documentary, trailer or commercial. A coach can help you identify why this is, what trends are affecting the industry, and how your performance must change for each project.

Marice Tobias, Dave Walsh and Mary Lynn Wissner are top notch coaches who've worked with almost every voice you hear on national television, and those names should be on your radar for the future. David Lyerly has coached tons of great talent but is now taking a break from full time coaching to run the VO Department of a major gaming company. Other voiceover coaches to check out are Pat Fraley, Jodi Gottlieb, Thom Pinto, and Dave Fennoy. Joe Cipriano hosts promo workshops in his beautiful studio in LA. Most of these coaches produce talent demos as well.

Meanwhile, do your research. What does a demo sound like? How long should it be? Listen to the demos on the rosters of national agencies like Atlas Talent, CESD, DPN and SBV. Check out regional agencies like In Both Ears www.inbotheears.com out of Portland, Oregon or The Umberger Agency in Atlanta. (<http://www.umbergeragency.com>)

When you're ready to do your demos, you'll need to spend the money to do them right, at a professional recording studio or with a demo producer. Your coach is the logical choice to produce your demo. Eric Romanowski (<http://earblowingaudio.com>) and Chuck Duran (<http://www.demosthatrock.com>) are incredibly talented producers who've created demos for some of the top names in the industry.

Now---your home studio and website.

Your home studio setup should allow you to record and send auditions, and you should think about how you're going to upgrade it to do actual sessions. To start, you'll need a good mic, a decent computer, an audio interface or mixer, a some sort of processing, audio software to record, an FTP program for uploading MP3 files too large to email (Dropbox, box.com, WeTransfer are a few), and a VERY QUIET ROOM. A closet,

spare bedroom or booth in the basement is sufficient to start; the most important thing is that you feel comfortable working there.

For information on how to set up a studio, mics, room acoustics and recording techniques, reach out to one of your local studios for guidance. You can also get in touch with George Whittam, at GeorgeTheTech.com. George is the go-to guy for hundreds of home-based voice talent all over the country; he can make recommendations on how to set up your studio.

Your website should allow potential clients to sample your sounds and get in touch with you when they want to hire you. A very simple website is fine. It needs to be clean-looking, easy to navigate and provide your basic contact information. Your demos should be easy to access. It should have a graphic or branding “feel” that will give people a sense of who you are. You can have someone create a site for you or just do it yourself. But you need one.

For additional information on starting out in voiceovers, read Randy Thomas’ book “[Voice for Hire](#).” It’s a great book about the industry and will give you a good sense of what you’re walking into. There’s also a book of essays about the business called “[The Secrets of Voiceover Success](#)” edited by Joan Baker. Check out Dee Bradley Baker’s “I Want to Be a Voice Actor” website. While his focus is animation, it’s got tons of useful info on it <http://iwanttobeavoiceactor.com>. Beau Weaver, a legendary voice artist who’s worked in just about every area of the industry, has some no-bull guidance on his website for those chasing the voiceover dream, at www.spokenword.com.

Do you have an agent? If not, DON’T go looking for one, even a local agent, until you’ve got your materials together. It’s silly to ask an agent to represent you if you aren’t ready to put into their hands the tools they need to promote you. (You wouldn’t apply for a job anywhere else without at least having a resume, right? Your demo and web presence are the equivalent of that.) Be prepared to hear “no” a lot. You may have to represent yourself for a while until you’ve racked up enough work to be at-

tractive to an agent. Regardless of where you are on the VO spectrum, agents aren't interested in you unless they think you're going to actually book work.

It is possible now for voice artists to build thriving careers without having representation in LA or New York. They do it by having agents in multiple markets, starting with a local agent first and then branching out with representation in other markets. There are a couple of challenges to this approach. If you receive the same audition from three different agents, which one gets your submission? In addition, if you aspire to work at the highest levels of the craft, and to ultimately have representation on both coasts, your NY and LA agent most likely will require you to sign an exclusivity agreement, meaning you'll have to give up the regional representation you've built over time.

In recent years, a great deal of work has migrated to online "pay to play" voiceover sites, but using these sites can be problematic. While some talent feel that the only way to access auditions is through a pay to play site, some of these sites are accused of engaging in unethical business practices and skimming money from their own talent. Recently there have been some massive changes in the voiceover terrain involving the merger of two large online talent sites. I will refrain from commenting on that development here, but the watchword here is: do your research.

Please understand. I am not discouraging you from pursuing a career in voiceovers. But you should be aware of what you're getting into. It is wonderful and fun, but it's also isolating, frustrating, complicated, heart-breaking, scary, and the competition has exploded in recent years. I know of no other industry where people with absolutely no experience feel that they should be instantly competitive, and are baffled when they don't land jobs immediately. You will have to work very hard to learn the craft and create your materials, and work even harder to promote yourself. The study required to stay on top of trends in VO is never-ending. You'll be competing against some really talented people who work just as hard as you do, it will require a significant investment of time, energy and money, and there's NO guarantee of any return on your investment.

No one can tell you when you'll start making money with your voice, or if you'll make any money at all. And even if you do start working as a voice actor, there's no guarantee that the work will last. The price that voice talent are forced to make for the gift of doing this work is that all of us, even legendary performers working at the highest levels of the craft, have very insecure careers.

That said, this is the coolest work in the world, and there is nothing like the soaring feeling you get when you land a new voice gig. More importantly, there is nothing better than when you make your client happy. And as competitive as it is, the voiceover community is one of the most supportive you'll find, because we're all learning from one another and "making it up as we go along." It's a wonderful way to make a living...once you actually start making a living at it!

Hope this helps!

