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WELCOME!

Hi and thanks for purchasing my **Voice Over Career Basics** ebook.

I began my career in 1985 when I moved to Los Angeles and found that every acting coach I went to said I should do voice overs. I had no idea what that was, but after some investigation, I jumped in whole-heartedly. Wear a ball cap and t-shirt to work? Sign me up!

Of course, I didn't realize the amount of hard work that goes into controlling one's voice. Years of study and practice instilled a respect in me for voice acting that grows stronger every year... Yes, and the money doesn't hurt, either.

For many years, while trying to get my foot in the door of on-camera acting (film & TV), voice overs provided the financial cushion to help me pursue my dream. For many of you who want to start a home studio voice over career, your 9 to 5 job will provide the cushion you need as you accrue clients.

Though my on-camera career is humming along nicely, I still rely on both my union voice over career in L.A. and my home voice over studio to make ends meet in between film & TV jobs.

So why spill the details of how to get into this highly competitive business? Because people like you keep asking me to!

After 20 years in the business, 6 of them on the internet, I realized that I couldn't fit all that I had to say about this business into every phone call I received from aspiring VO talent. So, I decided to put it down onto paper (or binary code) and allow the whole world access to it. The fee you paid, while nominal, will help support my other non-profit endeavors and it is greatly appreciated. So, on with the guide!

IT ALL STARTS WITH YOUR VOICE

If you have ever been told that you have a great voice, then you may have thought of making use of that great voice in a professional way - as a singer, announcer or as a voice over talent. Voice over, or adding your voice to advertisements and recorded messages, can be a very lucrative field for a trained talent.

In the commercial world all kinds of voices are needed: low voices, whiny voices, gravelly voices, flat voices and even average voices. So, even if you don't have a classic "good voice" you can enter the field if you have determination.

First, explore your instrument. Not just your voice, but your whole being. Do this by taking an acting and/or improvisation class at your local college/learning annex/community center. Stay with it for 3 months. Aside from freeing yourself up, you'll probably meet some fun people.



3 Months of Acting/Improvisation _____

Why acting classes? You need to know how to create the characters who "speak" in a commercial. Just taking an animation class won't do it. You need to start the process organically. It's not about the voice, just yet, it's about the intention behind the voice that gives the voice a shape.

After you've opened yourself up for three months in an acting class, it's time to move into specifics with a voice over class.

This is where I'll begin to speak to two types of people: Those who want to move to L.A., New York, Atlanta, Chicago, or San Francisco and pursue a union voice over career, and those who want to create an internet voice over career right there in Smalltown, USA. For simplicity sake, we'll refer to them as Red state and Blue state...

Actually, I think **CITY** (union) and **COUNTRY** (non-union/internet) might be better. ☺



Voice Over class _____

CITY:

This part should be very easy for you. Just do a search for "Voice Over Class" and "your city" with Google. Of course, there may be classes offered at your local universities and performing arts centers. Ask around for good word-of-mouth about them. Then sign-up with the best and attend! (Avoid classes that end with you paying another \$1000 for a demo reel).

In L.A., the best resource is <http://www.voiceoverresourceguide.com> It lists all the studios as well as all the classes in L.A. At the top for classes are <http://www.voicecaster.com> and <http://www.kalmenson.com>. In addition, read some books on the subject. (See the next page).

COUNTRY:

Here's where you will find some challenges. Try your local college/learning annex/community centers to see if one is offered. Also ask your acting teacher if they know of any coaches who do voice over coaching. It may even be your own acting teacher! You might have to drive a bit to the next big town to find a class or coach. But, it's imperative to get some formal training. Just reading a book won't do it for you.

You need a "director" in the beginning to help you become aware of where your technique is weak or failing. By all means, read books, too! They will give you great insight into the mechanics. But, it all comes down to those sound vibrations and how they land on the listener's ear.

In addition to your voice over class, start practicing at home. Listen to any and every commercial on the TV and radio. Mimic them. Pick up magazines and read the ad copy aloud as though it were a commercial. Get so used to your voice that silence sounds wrong.

Most people want to skip this whole part and get right to the money making part. Believe me, if you skip this part, no one will want to pay you for what you'll be offering. Ego and confidence are not a substitute for talent and technique.

Some books on the subject:

[There's Money Where Your Mouth Is: An Insider's Guide to a Career in Voice-Overs](#) -- by Elaine A. Clark

[Secrets of Voice-Over Success : Top Voice-Over Actors Reveal How They Did It](#) -- by Joan Baker

[The Art of Voice Acting: 2nd Edition](#) -- by James Alburger

[The Page You Made: *Word of Mouth*](#) --by Susan Blu, Molly Ann Mullin

[Work in Voiceover Acting](#): written by a Casting Director

FINDING YOUR RANGE AND NICHE

Once you've gotten a handle on your voice, you need to know what your range is and, by association, what your market is.

Are you the classy BMW voice, the GenX hamburger guy, the Don Pardo game show host? You could be all three and more. Knowing all that you can do will help you promote yourself with confidence and direction.

Start with your normal speaking voice. What does your coach say? Are you the "everyman" voice? The "hip, edgy" voice? The "natural announcer" voice? Whichever comes the easiest may be your bread and butter. Foster it. What you and your coach decide will become the centerpiece of your promotion.

But don't stop there! Now start stretching your voice. Try accents, character voices – both broad and subtle (this is where the acting classes come in handy). Anything you can do with your voice may be called upon for any one of the different voice over market niches out there!

Here are the main areas you might find work:

1. Radio/television commercials
2. Promos/trailers
3. Business narration
4. Cartoons
5. IVR/voice mail greetings
6. Web audio

If you're **COUNTRY** you probably won't get much cartoon work and if you're **CITY** you probably won't get much IVR/voice mail greetings work. But ALL of these areas may require ANY TYPE of voice style! So, the broader your range, the broader your work potential.

This is an important step. It is here that you determine your whole approach to your career, whether it be **CITY** or **COUNTRY**.

For example, you have a gravelly, low voice that's warm. You might sell yourself as the "Your Bourbon Straight-Up voice". Or you have a super-sweet female voice you would be "The Voice of a Princess", etc.



Determine Your Style and Range _____

It also helps to know what celebrities you sound like. See what kinds of commercials they perform voice over on. Listen closely, Alec Baldwin, Keifer Sutherland, Stockard Channing, Susan Sarandon – they all do voice overs.

You may want to specialize. For **CITY** folks, you can find an animation class (<http://povonline.com/cols/COL101.htm>) or a promos class. **COUNTRY** folk will have to do a bit of self-teaching here. Read Terri Apple's [Making Money in Voice Overs](#).

Start collecting copy (scripts) that fit your style. Even within your style there are sub-styles. Cover them all. Also look for copy that best shows your other "stretch" voices. This all will lead up to making your demo reel.

The business starts with your demo reel...

THE DEMO REEL

Here is where it gets complicated and potentially expensive. If you're going the **CITY** route, you'll want to ask around as to where to get your demo done. Where do other voice over actors go for theirs? How does their demo sound? And, of course, what's the cost? If it sounds too expensive, that's what it is. In L.A. (and New York soon), I recommend using <http://www.voiceoverresourceguide.com> to find a demo reel studio.

For **CITY** folk, the demo is primarily used to get an agent. That's about it, as most clients/jobs/gigs will come from auditions you'll do at the agency or local casting facility.

For **COUNTRY** folk, your demo(s) will continually be your selling tool on your website. You will probably want to have one for each of the markets I wrote about previously. And getting your reel done will be hard at first. In some geographical areas, there won't be anybody who can edit them for you, let alone offer good direction. But that's where your career will differ from **CITY** folk. I'll talk more about this in a moment.

Let's start with the basics for both **CITY** and **COUNTRY** folk.

1. Your demo shouldn't be longer than a minute. Yes, a minute! Others will say 2 minutes, but no one listens that long unless you have SO MANY DIFFERENT voices.
2. Each clip on your reel should be no more than 15 seconds, probably less.
3. Each clip should show something NEW about your voice.
4. The clips should get shorter the longer the reel goes so the pace quickens.
5. Your demo should only contain things appropriate for that market! i.e. Commercials for a commercial demo, cartoon voices for a cartoon demo, narration for a narration demo.

CITY folk will probably only need a Commercial demo and a Narration demo (and Cartoon demo if they do funny voices).

COUNTRY folk should have a demo for each market listed previously.



Get Your Demo Reels *DONE* _____

So, the **CITY** folk have their reel and are ready to find an agent. Go ahead and skip to FINDING AN AGENT.

COUNTRY folk, you have some work cut out for you!

In order to have a home voice over studio business, you are going to have to learn to record yourself, edit your recording and burn CDs and also upload them to the internet. This is something you'll be doing every day.... You might want to read this paragraph again.

In order to have a home voice over studio business, you are going to have to learn to record yourself, edit your recording and burn CDs and also upload them to the internet. This is something you'll be doing every day....

The semi upside of this is that you will get to edit your own demo reels and save money. But, money that you will have already spent on your equipment!

BUILDING YOUR STUDIO

This is where your business comes to life! Here's what you'll need:

1. A closet or sound booth.
2. A microphone.
3. A mixer (optional).
4. A pre-amp (optional).
5. Headphones.
6. A music stand and a microphone stand.
7. A computer optimized for audio recording (processor/RAM).
8. A sound card or ProTools mBox.
9. A software program or ProTools.
10. Monitor Speakers (for accurate sound editing).
11. A website and DSL or Cable Broadband!

All this will require two other people (Helpers): One helper who knows about audio equipment and recording software (your musician friend, most likely, or the Guitar Center employee), and a web designer who can create your site and teach you how to upload audio.

Let's break this down:

A CLOSET OR SOUND BOOTH

When you're starting out, you'll want to watch your money, so a sound booth shouldn't be considered. They usually run about \$1,200 or more.

However, a closet is always easy to convert. You need a space that is away from the plumbing (so you don't record the toilet flush!) but close to your computer. Carpet the walls of the closet so you don't get your voice bouncing around, giving that echo-ey sound to your recordings. You can buy studio insulation, but carpet's much cheaper.

A MICROPHONE

You essentially want a microphone that records voice well. There are many out there. I use an AKG 414 and it cost me \$600 on eBay. If you go to your local music store and let them know what you're doing, they should be able to guide you towards something right for your situation. Then check eBay for better prices!

Ideally, you'd want to find someone who will come out to your house and help you put the whole studio together for a small fee (around \$100) or free (buy them lunch, though).

A MIXER

Someone who knows how to make a good martini... Wait, sorry. I mean a mixer is good for being able to control your mic and headphone volume when you're in the booth. It will also be needed if you decide to add a phone patch (a way to have someone on the phone to hear you record while they offer direction).

(A side note: You may hear about ISDN as a way of recording your voice remotely to some far away studio. The cost of equipment and installation is not worth it at this stage of your career. Wait a bit, as the technology is moving towards voiceover internet protocol [VOIP] which will render ISDN outdated.)

A PREAMP

This juices up your mic and can also warm your voice prior to being recorded, saving some EQ-ing time later. This is something to discuss with your Helper.

HEADPHONES/MUSIC STAND/MICROPHONE STAND

If I have to explain this, you might want to think about another career... ☺

COMPUTER/SOFTWARE

Get a Mac. Any Mac that's a G4 or G5 with 1 gig of RAM. (Yeah, I'm partial to Macs). If you want to go another way (Not Mac?!?) then talk again with your Helper. If you are not good with computers, this could become a stumbling block for you.

If you have a computer, you might be able to use it. Talk with your Helper as to which sound editing application to use. (You'll need some tutoring from them initially). Knowing which program to use will help determine if your computer has enough processing power to handle voice recording.

SOUND CARD/mBOX

Some computers already have a sound card installed. Ones that don't will need one, or you can get an mBox, a sort of external sound card. mBox runs about \$500 and includes the software, ProTools. Again, talk to your Helper.

MONITOR SPEAKERS

Make sure you get some monitors. The main difference between monitors and regular speakers is that they don't pump up/beautify the audio. You want to hear exactly what you sound like, not the best-case scenario. I use Roland Micro monitors. They're inexpensive and accurate. Don't use your internal computer speaker!!!

WEBSITE

And here is the monster! If you don't do web design (as I do), you want to find someone who won't charge an arm and a leg.

First, determine what you'll want on your site. You'll need to introduce yourself and your style. You'll need your demos on there. You'll want some instructions on how clients can work with you. Check out your competitor's websites. What do you like about theirs, what don't you like. Then, see if there are any website templates that could be customized to fit your needs. Going to a web designer with a template, aside from bumming them out, will save you lots of hours and money.

(Side note here: Make sure your designer makes your site optimized for search engines. Google "SEO" to see the ocean of info on this.)



Build Your Studio _____

Now that you've bought all your equipment, installed it, learned the software and built your website, it's time to edit your own reels!

Yup, you can do it yourself. Listen to all the reels out there. Which ones work for you? Why do they work for you? Implement those techniques with your reels. If you've been practicing your voice over,

taking classes, etc., then you should be fine with creating your own reels. You hear TV and radio ads all the time. Do yours sound like those? It can be that easy.

You'll also want to find some royalty free music to put underneath the spots you created. In all honesty, you can use anything since you're not selling the demos.

Update your demos often as you get real work.

If you're uncertain about how your demo is sounding, get feedback from people you respect. But, take all the input with a grain of salt. It's YOUR demo after all.

But most importantly: Just do it. Most **COUNTRY** folk get stuck right about here. Will you?

FINDING AN AGENT

For **CITY** folk, this is the hardest part. Not that the act is difficult, but the perseverance required is enormous. It may take you several mailings, meetings, etc. to land an agent. The most important thing to remember is "don't give up"!

First, package your CD so that it represents you, your product, what you're selling. Make it catchy. You want to grab their eye so they'll want to pop your CD in the player.

Get the agency list from your local SAG (Screen Actors Guild) or AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) office. Mail that CD with a SHORT intro letter to every V.O. agent out there.

Also, ask your friends whom they are with. See if they'll take your CD into their VO agent. Ask your VO teacher for a referral. Ask your barber! Anybody!

In the interim, send your CD to all the non-union voiceover auditions you find online or in your local trade paper. In L.A. and NY you would check out Backstage and Actors Access.

For **COUNTRY** folk, you'll want to sign up with many agencies in many cities. They'll email you auditions, and you'll email your mp3 back.

I could list agencies here, but they change a bit over time. I suggest Googling "voice over agency". There are also two websites you'll want to sign up with (for a fee). They get the majority of non-union VO auditions. They also have 1000s of voice over artists like you. <http://www.voice123.com> and <http://www.interactivevoices.com>. Avoid websites that will charge to list your site, but not offer daily auditions. For the most part you're throwing your money down the drain.

COUNTRY folk, your biggest challenge now is to get clients. Focus on getting your website seen (pay-per-click with Google and Yahoo) and sending your link to all the local companies in your town. They'll be happy to know they don't have to go far to get a professional voice over for their commercial or in-house narration.

GOOD LUCK!

These are essentially the steps I took to start both my **COUNTRY** and **CITY** careers. There are hundreds of little details to everything I've mentioned. My intent was not to hold your hand through the process, but to give you an overview in a simple, straightforward way. Half of being good at this is the ability to learn on the job. The other half is the preparation (classes, reading, practicing).

There will be those people who will want an ebook to show them an easy way right to the money. Well, there is no easy way. But I've shown you some practical steps to get you into the game. What you do when you get into that arena is up to you. You can take a seat and watch or you can figure out how to get onto the field. It's different for everyone. But, the opportunity is there. It's real.

But, YOU have to take those steps. No ebook will do it for you.

I wish you all the best in your new voice over career!

Below are some more links with a wealth of information.

<http://www.breakdownservices.com/store/books.html> List of VO books
<http://www.voiceacting.com/> James Alburger
<http://www.suchavoices.com/>
<http://www.actorschecklist.com/resources/voice.html>
<http://voiceovercareer.com/> Considering A Career In Voiceover?
<http://www.vo-bb.com/> Another Great Voiceover Message Board!
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue2.1/articles/bevilacqua2.1.html> By Joe Bevilacqua
<http://www.aftra.org/> American Federation Of Television And Radio Artists
http://www.waynejune.com/where_to_start.html Wayne June Article
<http://www.edgestudio.com/careerbuilding.htm>