

THE NO BS Voice Over Guide:-

(last updated 1.16.23)

By Barron Bass (The Voice Over Baron)



[My comprehensive equipment list](#)

My website: thevoiceoverbaron.com

If this has given you value, message me on FB or IG @bbassny and let me know -
or you can even throw me a tip ;-)

[@ Paypal](#)
[@ CashApp](#)
[@ Venmo](#)

Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[Intro!](#)

[Who Am I? And, why should you](#)

[listen to me?](#)

[The Steps](#)

[On Equipment](#)

[Resources](#)

[Questions](#)

- [- This is a lot. So even though you're gonna sum it up at the end of these questions, real rap: what is the simple secret to my success as an actor / voice over artist?](#)
 - [- How do you feel about pay to play sites?](#)
 - [- How do you feel about social media??](#)
 - [- Ok. So, how do you feel about Fiverr??](#)
 - [- What about AI?](#)
 - [- Ok. Back to getting work... you're saying agents are the key, huh?](#)
 - [- Are home studios necessary now?](#)
 - [- You mentioned Source Connect: What is that?](#)
 - [- Oh, wait... I have to self record now?](#)
 - [- When is my sound "good enough" \(recording wise\)?](#)
 - [- Wait, slow down bro. What is a self record and how do I do it? \(mp3 audition\)](#)
 - [- When is my sound "competitive enough" \(performance wise\)?](#)
 - [- How do I get an agent?](#)
 - [- What's working with an agent like?](#)
 - [- Well jeez. How the heck do I get work \(with agent and otherwise\)?!?!?](#)
 - [- What makes a good demo?](#)
 - [- Where do I find voice over copy?](#)
 - [- Is it possible to make a full-time income in voice over?](#)
 - [- You need to know this, union vs non-union... What's the deal?](#)
 - [- Casting directors... whatsup with that?](#)
 - [- Well, these odds seem insurmountable. Um, is this even worth it bro....?](#)
 - [- Best pieces of life saving advice?](#)
 - [- Wow. That was a lot, and now my head is spinning. What's the short version?](#)
-

This doc is a work in progress, but I needed to make it, considering lots of folks ask me questions about VO. This doc isn't fancy on purpose, because if you wanted fancy, you could have bought a book lol. You should DM me if you think there is something I am missing or if you have addtl' questions. I'm going to keep adding to it as I see fit.

Info is just that: info. Nothing more, nothing less: that's why I'm giving it away.
Lots of folks have blogs and podcasts (I talk about some of them later) - but here's my take on the blah blah and hoopty doo.

Apologies if there are typos, I made it with the fire of 1000s suns and treated my keyboard like a flaming hot potato in the Sudanese sun. Now that I have your attention...

Intro!

You should NOT read this once and never refer to it again. Refer to it often, and keep referring to it - I've jam packed 10+ years of information into this guide, and I'm scratching the surface.

--

A lot of people ask me about getting started in voice over. There's a lot of books and info and all the classes you could ever spend your money on. I wrote this to save you time - but if you're looking for shortcuts, consider this a shortcut. And then stop looking for more shortcuts!!!!!!!

Voice over is competitive. It can be highly rewarding, but it can also be harrowing. You audition for a lot - and win a little, especially when you're starting. You have to find what works and refine it as you go.

If you are looking to make a quick buck after reading this, good luck to you. People can smell your desperation for money in a millisecond. It just doesn't work.

More than anything, you have to have a **PASSION** for voice over. For example, you can't expect your love of \$\$\$ to carry you through reading a book for 4 hours at a time! If you think that's crap, do whatever you want, but trust me, it's the realest advice you'll hear.

It's the same "thing" that allows a songwriter to work on a song for years, just to get it right (I've done that too).

Let me also say this: you can make as little \$ as you want, or as much as you want in voice over. If you are looking to do this part time, you can. If you are looking to do VO full-time, despite what people told me for years, guess what? You can. *There is no secret hack* - you have to build the career you want. When I started putting in a full-time effort, I started working full-time.

You might *think* you know what a full-time effort looks like, but let me tell you, its borderline obsessive. This goes for turning any creative passion into a profession.... It can be a lonely, relentless endeavor. **But things like this guide, and the wealth of other information out there, is concrete proof that you are not alone. Remember that.**

Now, If you are LUCKY to make money from A CREATIVE PROFESSION, don't play yourself. There are lots of people who don't. Cut the entitlement!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Who Am I? And, why should you

listen to me?

I was just a kid who wanted to be a performer because that's what my dad, stepdad, sister, and big brother did, on a pretty big level. But I was also great in school, so why would I even bother with a pipe dream...



On the Globe stage, what feels like forever ago (but only a proper decade, i'm not *that* old, y'all)

If you asked me when I was 6, I wanted to be Usher, an astronaut, a comic book artist, and a scientist. I loved cartoons, and when my younger brother was born when I was 8, he gave me a stage to make funny voices and whatnot.

In my preteen years, I joined all the choirs (on my own, not because of my parents) and spent most of my days in church. I wanted to be around the best musicians and figure out how to get over stage fright (still not sure if I did yet).

My stage fright gave birth to learning music production. I was a nerd and I loved computers, so this was natural. I could be in my room AND be a one man band?! The rest was history. My brother introduced me to Fruityloops and my desire to create turned into weird (possibly) video game esque hip-hop-n-r-n-b-ish scoring music (It took entering some competitions later on to realize I didn't know how to produce a song to save my life, even though the fundamentals were there).

I got a taste of "real" acting not too long after this, and it was bliss. And then, I did several handfuls of musicals (**a lot** of them), spawning the thought "hey, maybe I could do Broadway," but it wasn't a dream of mine per se. I just liked performing. And the community aspect of the theater.



15 yrs old in Seussical as Cat In The Hat. Don't tell people, I have a rep to uphold ;-)

(There's a good chance you're not an actor (and that's fine), so I'll detail some of this vividly enough for you to understand even if you're not a performer.)

I went to a conservatory to study theatre (acting, specifically), which had Shakespeare baked into it. I didn't know I liked Shakespeare until I got to London and grappled with whether or not I cared about Shakespeare. Performing on the Globe stage will change your mind rather quickly. They don't mess around out there, bro.

When I graduated, I worked as an actor almost immediately. I can't say it paid well because most of it didn't pay at all! A voice over gig here and there showed me I would have to be in it for the long haul. I auditioned for things that have come to pass and become larger than life, and have gotten close what seems like every time... usually to be met with rejection after rejection.

I was like every other kid - I thought I would enter audition rooms and sweep 80% of them away because I was just "so ahhhhhmazing" and nice and all this. The fact was, I was still a 22 year old kid who didn't watch episodic tv, had no clue about the business, and definitely had no clue about how to audition for Broadway (since I went to an acting for the theatre focused program). I knew nothing!!!!

Don't even get me started on the serving and catering jobs. Great way to learn customer service, terrible way to expend your energy in a world full of options. Of course, many actors take jobs in food service because it allows you to audition during the day. *In 2021, you can kiss that old school notion goodbye* - it's becoming harder to find a food service gig that works in your favor as an aspiring performer, and now, they wanna tax you to high heaven...

Not only that, you deal with nasty bosses, guests, co-workers, bad attitudes, warped egos, drunk people, people who don't know they're racist (mostly because they're drunk), people who are drunk, blah blah blah. I swear, I *rrrrrrreally* just wanted to make my money and go home - it could all be that simple, but of course, it never is.

Look, I also met *lots* of wonderful people during this time, so it's not all city sewers, slop, and tears. I'm fine, I made it through. Jesus wept, and I'm still a robust fellow.

But, you know, I was out in these streets doing Bruce Wayne thing. I didn't *really* like being at these places. Taking showers at the gym. Sleeping at Metro North stations. Running around. I even bought high yellow running shoes. I hardly partied or anything like that. I thought this was what I had to do, *because this is what I was told I should be doing if I wanted to make it.*

I'll tell you one thing - the resistance will help you grow thick skin and endurance, for sure. Thanks, food service.

In the beginning of my professional career, I went into a lot of auditions and was a footnote to the footnote. I would sometimes be bone tired from working until 3 AM the night before. There were casting directors who didn't even look up. I did work some, like I said, but you REALLY remember the near misses, or even better, the complete fails.

Don't feel bad for me though, because I still acted in films, networked, made music, became a way better music producer, played drums, collaborated with up and coming artists, became friends with people who are now well on their way, built a catalog of music, performed on large stages, almost got a record deal, became a better music producer, started a video production company, made and lost life changing money, loved and lost, bought a car and sold it, sacrificed going out, worked hard in non-productive and productive ways, and learned a LOT along the way.

One of the magical things that happened was: *voice over never went away.*

I started my professional acting journey around 2012 when I graduated, and one of the benefits of conservatory was getting an agent. Actually, I had a cheat code, because my former teacher became my agent AND one of my former classmates became an agent. I was incredibly lucky. They allowed me to audition and fail, and explore, and ask questions, and do most of these things without a demo or any real knowledge of the business.

It was my love of performing, using my voice, music, cartoons, music production, audio engineering, learning, and the internet, that eventually started cobbling itself into a career around 2015.

I sporadically started booking more. Had some great opportunities come and go, and by 2018, I had heard “no” so much that I figured out how to stop being so precious, and just let it rip. The art of not giving a (professional) flying f23593295 will do wonders for you. (key word, professional)

I also tried a “real job” around this time (in influencer marketing), and while it taught me invaluable skills, I eventually figured out I couldn’t settle for this kind of thing. I felt this in my bones and worked hard to audition better, which probably got me laid off.

Fast forward to today, my resume will punch a sheet of paper in the proverbial face. My career, ever growing, has been exploding like tartar sauce on hot day, and has varied. I haven’t had to stick to a “niche” per say. Yes, I have my “sound”, but I’ve done everything, from commercials, to videogames, animation, documentaries, promos, and more. I can’t believe it.

Some days my head is spinning from all the hats I get to wear. And the gratitude I have that there are hats! I KEEP FINDING NEW HATS.



Hosting, performing, organizing a Black History Month event at Reebok Union Square with the great [Napoleon Da Legend](#). Talk about wearing many hats... I also used resources from my marketing job to get folks there that night. Phew

This work is beautiful because it keeps evolving. I can attribute a big part of my success to being adaptable. What was true 10 years ago isn't all the way true now, and the same will go for 10 years from now!

So, look: I promise you I didn't know a damn thing about voice over when I started, just like you. I just asked a lot of questions, and stayed frustrated enough to ask more. I'm still asking questions and annoying people.

Furthermore, you can ACTUALLY do this work until you drop. You can go away if you need to, and come back. For as long as you can talk into a mic, it'll be here, not caring what you look like, or who you are dating, just waiting for you.

I'm not sure when one "arrives" in voice over because I don't feel I'm anywhere near there yet, but I do hope *you* remember *this moment* years later when you're voicing your dream project and making the big bucks!

I'm still a [stage and screen actor](#) btw, and look forward to acting outside of my booth, someday. LOL

The Steps

I love voice over.

I've been a lifelong learner about the voice, read lots of autobiographies about people who understand the voice, and I am always working on my craft. It is not lost to me that there are crazy talented people out here, who can create a character on a dime, and deserve all the accolades, and as result, should be paid more. But the beauty is, with some hard work, your time to shine will come. I've seen it happen, even for myself.

If I was to simplify the steps I'm going to list below, it would be like this:

1. Training (includes training self)/Coaching
2. Demos
3. Home Studio Quality
4. Marketing
5. Branding
6. Customer Service

If you read nothing else, take these things and etch them in your brain, because they are the KEY. Now, we can get more specific:

- **If you have that real passion, or happen to find it, now, you need to work on technique.** This separates the amateurs from the pros. Amateurs rely on inspiration, pros build a PROCESS. Let me be clear: you can forge a process by DOING, watching hours of content, soaking up everything, and learning in every way you can, **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO HAVE A DEGREE OR PAY PEOPLE exorbitant amounts of MONEY.** Especially in the information age, YouTube and Google U are here for you! *But at some point, you should ask someone who is doing it/who did it.*

This doesn't mean don't pay for coaches. Coaches are a worthy investment *once you have an idea of what you're doing* - this is key. People who use coaches book more. We'll talk more about that later.

- **Now find your niche(s).** Or at least think about it - you will constantly be refining what this means to you. Voice over is EVERYWHERE and is probably in places you never thought about, so do some research. Where do you want to spend the most time? For me, I only watched cartoons for a long time and was a musical theater kid, so my niches made immediate sense to me. I naturally fell into cartoons, big characters, sports, etc. What do *you* want and like? Meaning, animation, telephony, commercial, medical, etc. A better example: I've learned that I LOVE to read audiobooks, **BUT the time it takes to record one, and (in the case of many audiobooks) edit it makes me not want to do audiobooks, ever. So I learned this about myself (the hard way)!**
- **Practice, practice, practice.** I've auditioned 5,000-7,000 times in 9+ years. You can pick up a book and cold read it; your cold read skills will take you far. I'll be the first to say I SUCK at cold reading and need preparation in advance, still, to this day. So i'll be taking my own advice, but at least I know myself. You know what Willy Shakes said!
- **If you're not an actor, put this at step one: take an acting class or an improv class, and keep doing it.** Acting is a *lifelong* pursuit. It is a craft that is forever seeking to be perfected. Sure, you can take one acting class and feel like you're ready. But learning to act and then staying sharp is a forever thing. I'm telling you this as someone who has been acting for half his lifetime.

There's a reason why actors/improv actors dominate the commercial and voice over spaces, they know how to create the illusion of spontaneous speech. That's because they've worked on this muscle over and over again, and do it often. Chances are you are not a savant when it comes to reading text like it's spontaneous or conversational. You'll more than likely have a mic placed in front of you and sound like a frozen sack of bologna (don't be mad, it happens to all of us).

Think about people like Kevin Hart, Will Smith, Jim Carrey, or anyone from SNL. Even Morgan Freeman or James Earl Jones. They are masters of reading copy and bringing it to life, because they do it every day. That's why they get the big bucks - you forget that they are often memorizing or reading something from a teleprompter.

- **Now, coaching!** Can you believe it took me 7 years to get a coach? Not that I didn't try before - but I tried, got discouraged, and finally did it some time ago based on someone's recommendation. Don't just coach with one person, because everyone has good tidbits, you'll hear a lot of the same stuff, but will pick up EXCELLENT golden nuggets from each person. ALL THE BEST PEOPLE IN ANY BUSINESS GET OUTSIDE FEEDBACK - don't think you are an exception. Even Lebron James has a coach. Especially in the times of COVID, coaching is cheaper than it's ever been. All the casting directors are accepting submissions, and are running contests.

Google these people and tell them I referred you:

Marla Kirban Studio (RIP Marla, but the current coaches are amazing - learned from her)

Adam Murphy (working actor and comedian for 20+ years)

Lori Alan (working, top VO actor, amazing coach)

Dave Fennoy (top VO actor, and coach)

Diakeim Lyles (working commercial/voice over casting director & friend)

Other folks: Everett Oliver (voice director, mostly animation & VG), Cliff Zellman (automotive voice over), Tremayne Mosley (Commercial & Promo), Donovan Corneetz (Commercial & Promo)

That list is wayyy small. There are TONS of these people out there. Technically, you want someone who has worked or who IS working currently, someone who is in tune with the trends. Different coaches specialize in different niches, so make sure you do your research. Some of these people have storied careers, don't be a dimbus: ask targeted questions. It's good for you, and it saves both of you time.

Singing lessons, vocal lessons, movement training, martial arts, stage combat, public speaking, and anything related to the body, mind, breath, muscle memory, and spontaneous creation will help. You may think this is weird, but think about watching a person like Robin Williams perform: he was ALWAYS using his body, even in voice performances.

The voice is directly related to the body, there's no question about it. Take it to the gym!

- **Now, you need DEMOS** - they can run anywhere from \$500 - \$3000. The work that goes into a demo takes great care... I would say Google some demo producers, but also you can message me about this. Your demo is your calling card in VO - it will either make or break you. Make sure your first impression to people is on point and showcases your ability. Starting with a commercial demo, and then expanding to your other niches is a good way to go.

Demos should not be longer than 2 minutes - if you have the audio editing skills, go listen to some demos you love and model yours after theirs.

- **This is important to note:** I will NEVER tell anyone DIY approaches are bad - this is how monetizable skills are developed and careers are born. Today's naturally talented tinkerers often become tomorrow's leaders.

That being said, if you have audio editing skills and have listened to several demos, don't assume you know how to create a competitive demo. Please do not take this lightly. You may think you know what a competitive demo sounds like, trust me, you probably don't (which is why you most likely would pay someone to help you after acting classes, training, and more training). This is important.

Demo producers specifically know what is competitive because... they listen to tons of talent. They know what you're up against and with some dialogue can help you figure out how to enter the market. It should also be noted that all audio engineers are NOT demo producers - if they've never produced a VO demo, you need to find someone else.

In my opinion, IF you're going to make your own demo, you have to learn how to be really good at discerning your strengths and being critical of your weaknesses. This is particularly hard because our work is subjective - there is no right or wrong in acting, and the "right" is usually based on feeling. As young actors, we are trained to pretty much think everything isn't good enough, until it is, and you just *know*. For example, everyone can listen to Looney Tunes and say Mel Blanc always did excellent work.

You'll develop this discernment over time, hopefully, if you continue to be honest (with yourself and others), open, and teachable.

So yes, you don't know what you don't know and it's ok, but this is why you hire people along the way (like how a business hires consultants). There are minute details in a 1-2 mins voice over demo that sets apart the good, from the great, from the excellent. The anatomy of a great VO demo could probably be a whole different e-book.... I wouldn't encourage you to pay 2k up front for the first demo, but maybe after some years and real world experience, you can go for the big one.

- **This goes without saying: listen to commercials (really, any and all voice over) critically.** Voiceover is everywhere, you have to immerse yourself in order to key in to techniques/style. No more watching content, or TV, or YouTube mindlessly; watch the commercials! Figure out what works, what you like, don't like, explain why, or why not, all of that.
- **HOME STUDIO SETUP: Think about the quality of your sound.** I'm also a music producer, so I think about this obsessively. Your quality is directly tied to people's

perception of your professionalism... don't put yourself in the amateur bucket because of equipment that could be easily purchased and learned.

This is not complicated - ask around one what people are using to improve sound quality and find videos on YouTube. If your noise floor is low (no background noise), and you are heard clearly, then you are probably good to go.

Aaaaaand then-

- **There's marketing!!!!** Lord Jesus: We just opened up a whole new can of worms. But let's make this simple:

Marketing for an actor = being good at your craft. Shout this from the rooftops. Also, Denzel said it, so hear it in his voice.

*I hear a lot of actors saying they HATE marketing: **we have to change this mindset**. If you are in a show, are you going to tell NOBODY that you are in it? People literally get cast because of the crowd they will draw. To me, it makes sense that a YouTuber might get a chance to be in a film because **THEY UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF BUILDING AN AUDIENCE**. **Don't play yourself**: build your audience, and tell them what you're up to. Social media marketing, email marketing, and text msg marketing are hella valuable. Find a free podcast or YouTube... now back to the stuff -*

So, let's say, when you think of yourself, you say "I'm working on being great, but I'm not there yet". Sheesh, I'm not even great yet - BUT: **I practice in public!!! I don't expect you to be as carefree and open as me; this is a part of my personality. BE YOU**. Don't be a person that has social media and NEVER tells anyone that you are doing something. Social media is one of the greatest tools for exposure, but it is not the only one - YouTube, Twitter (which has a big vo community), podcasts, IG get ppl to see your personality and drive. Heck, less and less people are doing snail mail now. Might be time to invest in some old fashioned flyers and business cards, sis.

^ this is a simple way to look at marketing - for more ideas, DM me.

I'm going to add marketing books to the resource list at some point. I worked at a social media marketing agency for about a year and a half, and it really opened up my perspective...

Active marketing is exactly what it sounds like: an ACTIVE, all the time job. How are you going to get creative to stand out????

Think like a casting director or a brand. What are you suited to sell? What does the ideal take sound like? Learn how to format an mp3 audition - **up to 50% of mp3s get trashed because of poor quality or lack of following instructions. Don't be this person..... *smacks forehead**

**I've since updated the [questions](#) to show you how to format an mp3 audition.*

On Equipment

[My comprehensive equipment list](#) - It's here again, so you can't say I didn't tell you.

I've been investing in my equipment gradually over the years; it's multipurpose for me. I've since made my money back, but like I said, I REALLY LOVE THIS. I have good years and bad years. To give you an idea, here's a rough estimate off the top of my head on what I've invested in my biz:

\$400 Senheiser MKH416 Mic
\$650 (Neumann) TLM 103 Mic
\$1000 random equipment (mixers, mics, cables, external HDs)
\$500 in tutorials, books, etc.
\$1000 Discrete 4 Preamp
\$250 MOTU Track 16 Preamp
\$250 Apogee mic plus (portable)
\$280 Apogee One (portable)
\$50 Blue Mic (portable)
\$900 Desktop
\$500 Upgrades to desktop
\$900 Laptop
\$60 Webcam
\$2000 in plugins (lots of free, thanks to friends)
\$400 in soundproofing
\$2000 in coaching
\$800 in monitor speakers
\$650 for Source Connect
About \$100 a month in subscriptions (envato, adobe, splice, etc.)

- **I should count the tens of thousands spent on college - it is directly related to my training & entrance into the industry. I reiterate, this isn't necessary for everyone, but it's given ME some advantages. Know thyself!**
- *At this point, I should say that I sell my equipment when I am no longer using it, in order to upgrade. I've also given stuff away. I also count my video production equipment in my VO business, because it allows me to create content where I can use my voice over skills. I'm not going to list the cost of that right now, because I don't feel like crying.*

- I actively worked on my credit so I could borrow \$ for my business. I do not recommend this for everyone: it hasn't always worked out in my favor, so consider the risk and make a plan if this is your route (especially now, considering the credit industry is in shambles, due to COVID)
- At some point in time, just to give you an idea of the potential, VO replaced my income one year (early in my career) in a windfall of happy accidents. I think back on that time and know I had no idea what I was doing. The smartest thing to do is re-invest in your business, and maybe, get a financial advisor. (can't help you there, find a guy, please)
BIG MAJOR KEY: pay your taxes or find someone to help!

That financial advisor will really help you put things in perspective and figure out how to run a viable business. If I could go back, this would be my first step!!!

Man, I've definitely spent more money than I needed to over the years. Most of it paid off, I think, but here's my advice: get what you need, and nothing more. We always think we need more, or something else, or something better - this is human. This is bad for business... So let me tell you what you need.

- **A GOOD mic**
- **Some soundproofing**
- **An interface (I don't recommend USB. Its not up to par yet, even though it's come far)**
- **Computer, laptop is good if you don't know where your space will be**
- **A portable solution - mics like the Apogee Mic Plus are pretty good**
- **Learn a DAW, like AUDACITY, GARAGEBAND, PRO TOOLS, etc**
- **Skype/Cellphone/Source Connect/Zoom/ipDTL**
- **All the pros use Source Connect or ipDTL (Google them).** There are jobs you won't know about if you do not use it.... I had to get an ethernet connection hooked up and pay for more bandwidth to use this. Don't pay for this until you have to, but eventually, you will need to get it. Especially in the age of COVID, 100% of my work has been remote - and Zoom doesn't cut it.
- **Also, a lot of the top people ONLY use Pro Tools.** While I am not a Pro Tools expert (I currently use Audacity the most), I've spent 10+ years learning ANY audio software program so I would not have this problem, ever.

Up to you how you want to tackle this piece, good luck.

******* IF YOU SKIPPED ACTING CLASSES / TRAINING / COACHING - NONE OF THIS OTHER STUFF MATTERS. A trained/experienced ear can help you learn how to book jobs; everyone is trying to book jobs. Also, if you get to a job and you can't perform, you CAN and WILL get replaced, it happens. This is why we need coaches. Don't be stubborn,**

and don't skip steps. That's like a gymnast showing up to the Olympics with no training.
Well, there is a place for that, we'll talk about it... *****

Resources

*** [My comprehensive equipment list](#) *** - I'm listing it here yet AGAIN,
so you can stop looking EVERYWHERE. Everything you need is HERE.

* <https://www.getstartedinvo.com/> - a ton of useful info. Start here, created by In Both Ears agency, an awesome agency where my friend, Sam Roberts, is a head agent and an innovator

[Theproaudiosuite.com has a great podcast](#)

* There are tons of OK Facebook groups. I have a few I can recommend: a BIG part of being involved in the VO community is to FIND YOUR COMMUNITY and BE ACTIVE. I can't stress this enough... the more you network, the more you will know. I learn the best stuff by asking fellow VO artists. They are helpful and great.

* I was going to start going to conventions this year, but ya know, virus life. But I think they could be a great networking tool: any online version of this, check it out. With any business, learn who the players are.

* [VO BUZZ WEEKLY](#) has a website, yt channel, **and an app** - they are great to follow and learn from. Chuck Duran (host) also is one of the best demo producers. If you're really about the smoke, go mess with the best.

* If you're going to pay for workshops, CHEAP WORKSHOPS are the way to go - free, even better. If you are SAG, look at the SAG foundation's website. If you are NOT SAG, congrats! Because an increasing amount of the VO work that exists is Non-Union, so it's all good.

Don't pay for random stuff, ask me first! Ripley Grier has a few workshops . **I mentioned the IG lives casting directors are doing - follow them, get engaged (not in a fake way), don't ask dumb ass questions you can Google, become a part of the community....**

You may have seen this: Here's an Amazon List I started for a beginner's home studio setup - home records are the new normal, so start thinking about this!

<http://a.co/j98Shyp>

Questions

Note: I encourage you to keep asking questions - and in fact, if I didn't cover something, please reach out and tell me, so I can add to this.

Is there a “bad” question? **Yes, there is** - if the question is already answered here, or if you haven't done your due diligence by searching for the answer on Google, YouTube, or Facebook, **if the question has been asked 50 times, then it might be bad**. Seeking out info on your own will also help you learn, like trial and error! And I say that with love, like a stern mentor should.

Once you've helped *yourself* as much as possible, that's when it's time to ask for outside help - do everything in *your* power to build *your* career.

- This is a lot. So even though you're gonna sum it up at the end of these questions, real rap: what is the simple secret to my success as an actor / voice over artist?

Here are the tangible things you need:

- A professionally produced demo that impresses folks
- Other demos that are tailored to the genres you want to attack (promo, character, radio imaging, etc)
- An idea of your brand by comparing it to other vo artists you look up to (aka consistent research, aka not fly-by-night wikipedia research but immerse yourself in books, youtube, and content
- Coaching
- Equipment / knowing how to use your equipment (extremely important)
- Wired internet / Source Connect / Zoom / another way to connect (it's not negotiable)
- A voice over centric website or some kind of page/tab that makes sense for voice over clients (this is harder than it seems, the dedicated website is actually easier)
- A consistent marketing strategy
- A strategy to reach out to representation once your marketing package is complete (demos, website, etc). Do NOT reach out to representation before this stuff is undeniably good - if it's just “good enough”, it will probably be ignored.
- Money to go to classes / conventions
- A way to track invoices and money (you need this)

I know a lot of people who quit after 2-5 years and sell their equipment. If you don't want to be one of these people, don't cut corners, ignore the advice of working pros, never seek out community, and create your business unsustainably.

Now for the not-so-tangible stuff:

Plainly put, I've been singularly focused on making a career out of using my voice for most of my life. I've been singularly focused on becoming the kind of voice over artist I want to be for 15+ years, and I was even doing that when I was working on music and challenging myself to become a better performer/songwriter/producer....

When you let anxiety and fear rule you, one of the first things you do is "too much". People do not make leeway in this business because they are trying a little bit of everything and dissipating their energies. You can't build a lasting presence or relationships like this.

I fully understand why most people live out of anxiety and fear, I've done it too - there were never any guarantees that I would figure out how to make a real career out of creative work, but on the flipside, I can immediately recall how miserable and frustrated I when I was working for someone else. I still "work for" my clients, but there is no one giving me a paycheck on a day to day basis - my \$ relies solely on my productivity.

Shifting my mindset to adapt to this way of life has also helped tremendously. When certain months are "light", I am grateful to have paid the bills, have food to eat, be able to buy what I need, and have \$ saved for a random emergency, just from using my voice.

- How do you feel about pay to play sites?

Oh man, here we go. Did you bring the rum, Jean Paul?

A lot of people say if you are starting in 2022 or 2023 that pay-to-play sites *might* be your way in (or, they straight up say, you need to do it, if you are just starting). It's a legitimate way to get auditions, and most people doing a search for "voice over" (your potential buyers) are confronted with one of these marketplaces. And the marketplaces make it easy for them to find voices. It's also a great way for you to practice and see VO copy in real time. *(One should not assume they know what VO copy looks like and how to read it. There is much to learn.)*

But you may or may not know this: many folks in the voice over industry hate the very existence of pay-to-play sites. They hate them because 1. Like Fiverr, they have no basis for how much gigs pay 2. There's thousands of talent on there 3. The sites often take a cut 4. The sites have been known for shady practices (at times).

I find hating on P2P to be a waste of time and energy, considering how efficient those sites are for buyers. We as talent do not dictate the market, it is what it is. You either do it, or you don't, end of story. I've chosen not to do P2P (for now), because I haven't had to. But I'll be making a shift soon

The fact of the matter is technology and data is driving everything to have an internet presence, and voice over is no different. If there is a website that is capturing voice buyers, and paying people legitimately, it behooves you to be there. That's a no brainer. The website will probably

spend a lot of money for SEO and marketing and presence, so all you have to do is show up and optimize your offerings, and use the system to your benefit (i.e. demos, samples, tags (because that's how data sorts itself on search engines, etc)).

In a nutshell, you pay a fee to be a part of these databases and have priority access to auditions. Yes, you can have a free profile in the database, but this is how they reel you in: people who pay the most amount of \$ end up getting auditions sent to them sooner, and therefore, usually have more chances of booking.

Lots of people feel these sites' practices do not favor our industry, the rates that we're used to, and transparency. Some of the sites are said to take up to 20-50% of the fee.

If the goal was to cut out the middleman, 20-50% is preposterous. Why would I pay 20-50% of my fee JUST to be on your database? I better be getting a temple massage, for the headache.

Look: unfortunately and fortunately, the advent of technology comes along and makes major shifts to creative industries. As a result, the talent involved feel it - this is exactly what has happened in voice over.

Software and web engineers knew the advertising industry relied on actors, but the industry needed databases to work faster. Lots of domains were bought up something like 15-20 years ago, and websites like Voices.com and Voice123.com were born.

(Let me add, many of the top talent use Voices.com and Voice123.com - this is good to know, and is proof that no site is 100% good or bad. You have to choose your own strategy.)

Sometimes the people who create these sites care about the talent. Sometimes they don't, and they're in it for a dollar.

You have to use your judgment and trust your gut. I believe in 2021, people's ideas around P2P are shifting because the sites have matured a bit, and everyone (buyers, producers, casting) is listening to both talent and buyers' needs.

If you do a Google search for voice over, many of these sites come up at the top of the list. The membership fees that talent pay often go directly to marketing and making sure they are ranked high in search engines. If you are on the site, this could be a win for SEO. I guess, what I'm trying to really say is, technology, ease, thoughts about the future, and the desire for a one stop shop marketplace is on P2Ps side.

If you think you can make back your investment within a year, I'd say definitely go for it. There are some sites, like Backstage.com, that have a monthly pay option. I personally would come up with a game plan for a month to see if your 20/mo would be worth it. If you make at least \$21 that month, you've already made a profit!

- How do you feel about social media??

I used to work at an influencer marketing agency a few years ago, so I'm not speaking without a bit of expertise here.

There was a time I was really gung ho about all things social media. There was a time when I wanted to audition more (on-camera and voiceover), and I wanted my brand to be associated with being funny. I wanted to show I was versatile so I wouldn't only get auditions for dramatic stuff. I used Instagram to come up with sketches/shenanigans and see where it would take me.

Fast forward to today, I'm auditioning more. I think the work I did served its purpose. So now I'm asking myself, what now? Sure, you can create just to create. But some of the videos I used to do would take me HOURS, with no payoff, or very little help from the algorithm. I'm still asking myself, "what now?".

All in all, my feelings about social media changed with my needs

Social media is a tool like anything else. Regardless of what people/media/your peers tell you, you don't need it. I know a lot of Gen-Z/millennial people and folks who have built a following will tell you otherwise; my thing is, if you manage to build a following, that's a different career and you need to be working on monetizing your followers (and working on getting repped for digital, a different department than VO). I have people who "follow" my voice over work, but they get to see it when I post about it or share. Beyond that, I spend most of my time worrying about auditioning and getting better. You'll have to get used to not being seen all the time, it's just part of it.

I understand the FOMO behind wanting to connect with people all the time, and *maybe* there is value in sharing your progression, journey, and process, but beyond that, I don't personally know a bunch of people who have hit it big in voice over because of their social media presence (I can think of two ppl, and their social followings are supplemental - if you meet someone who tells you otherwise, A. they might be hyperbolizing and B. I'd like to meet them).

Shout out to a former coworker and friend, [Francis Kenneth](#) - he is an streetwear/menswear influencer who really peeled back the veil on what it takes to do that work. He's also a Navy vet, drummer in a (popular, touring) band, creative director at an agency, and somehow, finds time to hire photographers, have a relationship, and make it all look good. His secret is, "I don't sleep".

I don't know about you, I used to pretend I didn't love sleep, but I was lying to myself. I love to sleep now and am more productive when I sleep. I'm also not a Navy vet, servicemen are built differently...

Even with 23.5K followers that he slowly grew over time, FK is constantly working. He is not a voice over artist, but there is an art to what he does and how he does it. I just wanted to paint a picture of what it actually takes to be an "influencer", on top of everything else. It ain't just about pretty pictures, videos, free products, and a check here and there (if that).

A book like this, *for me*, is how I seek to influence people. When people send me messages or ask me questions in person, I can share my influence there. One day, when I am ready, I will seek to amplify it (which is a good thing about social media, it certainly can amplify a message, for better or for worse).

Why don't you work on what you are presenting to the world, before you show it off? Reiterating that there is nothing wrong with documenting a process - but the process is often never glamorous, it's usually tedious and boring to watch.

Besides, most people are giving their talent and work and time away for free, and it's just not something I'm a fan of. People have bills to pay and real responsibilities and lives to tend to - social media's model doesn't support the reality of work and life for most people (in my opinion).

The people who would hire you are regular people, who happen to have social media - but in my experience, I've never been hired by someone for my posts. I'm usually hired because I'm easy to work with. So, for now, I'll keep working on that!

Social and digital media has blown up in a way that was unprecedented - we can talk about it forever. As it relates to voice over, there are anomalies and exceptions to these ideas. For example, if you are an impressionist and can do that really well, you will probably fare well on social media (because you are imitating personalities people are familiar with).

Beyond that, it's up to you. Remember to not shoot yourself in the foot with "non-professional" opinions, off base humor, or divisive topics. This is very important since everyone's shared info is a Google Search away. I can't tell you how many people I've seen talk themselves out of work or piss someone off unknowingly. Sure, free speech is free - if it bothers you to use discretion, get a journal, or a blog with a pseudonym.

- Ok. So, how do you feel about Fiverr??

I'm not sure yet. My feelings on Fiverr are forever shifting. If you look at it from a business standpoint, Fiverr is positioned to win, and the market approves. A lot of people are doing gig work now, and they capitalized off of this even before COVID. COVID just kicked the gig economy into overdrive.

They've captured a great amount of the gig market and are continually growing. When it comes to providing services, you want to be where the party is at, plain and simple.

Read this first, and note that this is one person's opinion, valid or not:

<https://globalvoiceacademy.com/why-i-dont-worry-about-fiverr-anymore/>

But here's the short answer: you can do well on Fiverr, like anywhere else. It is preferred that you learn how to price yourself accordingly. If you and everyone else decides to do VO for \$5, it hurts everyone else's bottom line too. But you can set your own minimum, so it's up to you.

Many agencies won't work with you or will kick you off their roster if you use sites that actively harm fair rates in our industry (like Fiverr - yes, it's true, they do). You COULD wait, get an agent, and get some nice paying gigs - in the words of Lady Gaga, do what you want with your bodaaay!

Now for the long answer:

For the longest, it was felt that Fiverr talent was cheapening the market. What do I mean by this? Think about it this way: when you are the voice for something, you are representing the brand. Let's say you are representing Kraft Foods, which has a history, and has advertising dollars to spend. They were doing ads before they ever knew you existed.

You've been chosen to be the voice for Kraft, which arguably, is as valuable as your physical likeness (on camera), because people know distinct voices when they hear them. So if the company is spending a good amount of \$\$\$ to put together a quality commercial, and the cost of things have gone up because the technology and everything has gotten better, etc., well then you're probably going to be compensated well.

If you are lucky to be SAG-AFTRA aka union (or you are made to join, which costs \$3300), this is where the Union comes in, because if your commercial is broadcast everywhere, everytime this commercial plays, you're supposed to get paid. All these plays add up, and a brand wants the commercial to be played as many times as possible because that's how you get real impressions.

This has changed with social media, because the way we consume content on our phones is not quite the same as TV and Radio - there are tons of channels, and frankly, there is way less centralization when it comes to quantifying how much an ad is worth. I also personally believe an impression on social media is nowhere near as significant as a TV impression. Simply put, social media has not been around long enough to hold the same weight of importance in people's minds (yet).

You can have a great social media campaign, but if you are on TV, people consider THAT to be successful. This is an opinion based on working in social and observing a lot of folks... This doesn't apply to everything, and I didn't even factor in the significance of virality. *But I digress*

You, as the voice of Kraft, if it's a Union job, you would get RESIDUALS, and for a lot of career voiceover ppl, these residuals allow you to make a decent living. When there were less people competing in voice over, there were less people competing for these spots. Now, there is a bigger pool, there are more distribution avenues, and the idea of how much a voice over is worth to a brand is shifting in a big way.

If a company could get a cheaper voiceover, for, let's say \$5, and it's "good enough", they would try to do that. They just cut their costs but like 1000000%!!!! In turn, a lot of people have heard "there is good money in voice over", so they've decided to come on in and charge lower than

their competition to win jobs. They don't know that doing a TV ad for \$100 is preposterous, but now imagine 1,000 people doing this. The quality of the work and the pay and various other things suffer.

My point is, the internet is impossible to guard for quality control. Anyone can "become a voice actor", many are trying, many are charging less, companies have more options, but many are skipping the basics, like technique, and learning how to work with producers, and light editing, etc.

If everyone did Fiverr, and priced their work for less and less, the worth of voice over in commercials would plummet. I've heard some great folks on Fiverr, I've also heard some pretty terrible work, from people who wanted to make a dollar and not respect the craft. Now, if no one respected the craft, the commercial industry as a whole would suffer - but there will always be SOMEONE who respects the craft. These folks will rise to the top and continue to command top dollar.

In my experience, the people who respect the craft always demand top dollar for their efforts. They have taken the time to study what it takes to create a compelling VO for any image or sound, and they will probably beat out the person who is doing it just for money, and \$5 at that. I could say, "You get what you pay for", but because it is a creative business, this doesn't necessarily always align.

This problem is not unique to our industry: photographers, actors, designers, and most freelancers deal with this. I want to be someone who gets paid for being one of the best at what I do, and not "well, he's good enough" ;-)

It is not your client's (brand) job to understand your craft or technique; they just understand who's better by the feeling they get from your read, plain and simple. If you're conveying the message in the way the writer intended or BETTER, you're winning.

Now, if you are someone who is starting out and you need to practice and develop a reel, Fiverr *might* be an awesome tool for you. I'd say this for you to keep in mind: if you get a client on Fiverr and then ask them for more money in the future, the chances are, they probably won't give you much more dough. I heard you can also be penalized for negotiating with clients off the platform.

I hope that didn't tire you out - it's a complicated question.

- What about AI?

**It's the big, artificial boogeyman threatening to take everyone's job away.
OOOOooooOOOOooOOooooOoOo...**

If people can figure out how to replace you cheaply, they will try. That's capitalism - in that regard, wouldn't it be a nice thing to build AI robots to replace humans in sweatshops where folks are paid pennies?

If it makes you feel any better, I know a fair amount of people who make 6 figures doing VO. They are not worried about AI. There is a human connection that happens when people hear a great voice... AI is getting better, but it's not there just yet.

There is no use in worrying - it's here, it's been here, and it's eventually integration into our society is inevitable because of the (rich) people who feel it is the necessary next step of our evolution. These folks are investing trillions of dollars into AI's development, and it will keep on churning. My personal feelings about it mean nothing. I think we will need to learn how to work with AI and keep evolving in our jobs - being a voice over artist 10 years from now will not mean the same thing it means today (just like what it meant 10 years ago was different, as well).

I recently had a big brand hire me for fairly boring instructional work. You know, those videos people watch when they are getting hired, or when the company is implementing new system changes with lots of technical terms and all this. This is actually a great use of AI IMO, because they often have a lot of these e-learning type videos to produce in a short amount of time, and not enough labor or \$ to cover getting it done.

In this case, I was hired because they needed more of a human element to connect to their employees. So for this time, Barron - 1, AI - 0.

There will come a time where the AI engines will get better, and some good use cases exist right now. Textbooks, I think, are a great use for this. Scratch VO (where producers put together demos, but have to pay someone, in place of the real person getting the job), random ADR, even audiobooks are all places that could use AI.

A great audiobook narrator can make a book really memorable. But did you know, for the ~3.2 and growing books that exist, there are only 200-300K audiobooks? It's virtually impossible to catch up to the growing demand and to find the time and money to record all of these things (if that is the goal).

The best argument I heard for why AI will co-exist with real voices is: remember when drum machines became mainstream? *But people still use real drummers too.* So there ya go.

AI is here to stay, and I think there will be many great uses. But you know how humans are: we take a good thing and love to overdo it. I hope it doesn't get to that point, because I DO NOT hope for technology (built by humans) to replace humans and deem their work useless. It's not ethical.

Industries always get disrupted, and it happens. Just keep learning and be adaptable.

- Ok. Back to getting work... you're saying agents are the key, huh?

In the event any of my agents read this, I want y'all to know you are the bomb.

But seriously - a good agent becomes a friend, an ally, and a teammate. You can run ideas by them and feel like you are not in a vacuum. They obviously want you to win auditions and will help you with your gameplan when you aren't clear on stuff. Obviously, you need to do your part, not email them incessantly, and just get good at auditioning, since it is your career. They are not there to baby you.

A manager is a *little* better for a personal touch, and helping to shape your career, but the same rules apply. People want to know you have the work ethic before they decide to invest in you.

Do you need an agent? No. Are good agents awesome? Yes.

(Almost) the only way to get Union work with residuals is to have an agent. The gigs are better, bigger, more exclusive, etc. I say almost because if you have built your business with, lets say, a prominent online presence, people will find you regardless. There's more than one way to scale the mountain.

I have to add, your need for an agent could be geo specific, even though this is mattering less and less because of the Internet. 10 years ago, if you were in NYC trying to do voice over without an agent, you were playing yourself. In that same 10 years to now, I know a handful of folks in the South and Midwest US who built their voice over careers independently (because they had to). I look to them to learn some of their scrappiness in the ever changing VO landscape.

Back to agents...

Here's the other thing people fail to realize: agents and agencies make your life easier.

Legally, they can only take 10-20% (depending on what your agreement is) but usually a good agent has the paymaster figured out. A good agent can also help you negotiate - this is major. I've had gigs where they tried to give me less than I was owed and the agent came back with an offer that was exponentially larger. Of course a good agent would do this for you: the more you get paid, the more they do too.

Now, sometimes people sign with an agency and don't hear from them for weeks or months at a time. This isn't always a sign of a bad partnership - instead, a check in can help or saying hello and asking targeted questions can put you back on their radar.

In general, a representative's job is to pitch you, and vouch for you when someone is trying to underpay you, put new opportunities on your radar, and make sure you get paid on time, amongst many other things. They negotiate for a living, which means they are better at this than you (they just are, since they do not do anything else). You want to get to the point where you are focusing mostly on voice over, and less on everything else. A good rep is beyond worth it!

Having an agent isn't necessarily the end all be all, but yes, big careers are usually accompanied by top notch representation. Either work towards it or put it in the back of your mind!

Let me also say this - when I have made six figures, it was 60% my efforts, and 40% any representation I had.... So, yes, it's a big deal.

- Are home studios necessary now?

A big fat **YES**.

Honestly, you should've thought about it 2 years ago. But don't worry - it's not too late. Just plan to make it happen ASAP.

2020 has been my busiest year in VO and I've done it entirely from home.

COVID made everyone in every industry consider audio and video solutions. So not only did your actor friends think about or actually make the shift to voice over, we're talking business pros, podcasters, content creators, dancers, motivational speakers, musicians, and the list goes on. The competition has increased exponentially this year.

Add to that, if you finally got a basic home studio, but you're still learning how to use it, that can be a headache for engineers etc. Professionals in the industry don't want to waste time setting up tech when they give you a paid gig; they expect you to know what you're doing.

I also highly doubt voice over artists will be booked in studios regularly as they have been before this year. It's a waste of time, money, energy, and resources for all involved. I think some of these studios might even close down since engineers can work from home & there's no need to pay rent...

COVID is still raging anyway, so most people when given a choice will choose to work from home, somewhat indefinitely (we'll see).

To add, just get **Source Connect**. A lot of studios won't work with you if you don't have it. And I said this before, but please consider getting something competitive, and not just USB. I have had engineers tell me how USB can be a headache to eq properly etc. Obviously, there are exceptions AND the tech is getting better every millisecond - but take my advice and give yourself an advantage over thousands of others.

Don't make excuses - there are a handful of self taught folks on YouTube who have been building their careers for 10+ years. This is a thing that didn't exist before YouTube - if these people can do it, you can too. I'm not saying "become a YouTuber", but rather "get you some DIY energy" - it is the wave of the future.....

And **don't skimp on your investment if you are serious!** Let me be specific: a \$300 budget setup won't sound as good as a \$3,000 setup. Am I telling you to go blow 3K so you can eek out a career? No way - *that's called a prayer, not business...* consult with people you know, and some you don't, so you can make an informed decision about the best tools for you, with an easy or normal enough learning curve. I would upgrade as you go.

- **You mentioned Source Connect: What is that?**

Before there was Source Connect, there was ISDN. ISDN, simply put, was a dedicated line that most professional studios had - and there was a box, and you'd get a number to dial other people's boxes. This whole ordeal was/is expensive to use and set up, and is still used by many studios, and some top tier VO talent. It has been said that there might be big jobs you won't even hear of if you don't have ISDN.

Enter Source Connect. Source Connect is a high pollutant VOIP service that has been around for like a decade or so. It's a plugin that simplified the whole real-time connection issue between VO Talent, Producer, and whoever else in a session - you can be in several different places and work on a record, without having to wait for an audio file to be sent. The same way Zoom popped up out of "nowhere", Source Connect was originally the best kept secret between studios and high tier talent... the pandemic made it so EVERYONE finally caught on. It was already an "industry standard" tool, but 2020 came and turned up the standardness.

Technically speaking, **Source Connect makes it so your real-time high fidelity audio is transferred to the audio engineer, into their Pro Tools session.** If your home studio (booth, mic, preamp) is broadcast quality, they can cut a commercial in real time.

You can't do this with Skype or Zoom, because the audio signal is converted to a lower quality signal (in order to focus on video AND deliver *good enough* audio).

There are other services studios might ask you for, like **ipDTL** (a similar Chrome browser based VOIP service), but chances are if you have Source Connect, that'll do just fine. ipDTL does have some cool features, though, like being able to mask itself as an ISDN line and connect to other ISDN lines. For this reason, some top tier talent prefer it. Another upside to ipDTL is their "Day Pass" option - it is normally a subscription based service, but you can use it for a day or \$20. If the studio is connecting with you, they send you a link, and it is FREE.

Source Connect is great and usually hassle free - it is either subscription based (at \$35/mo) or you can buy it outright (about \$650). For me, since I use it all the time, I paid for it outright.... I have too many subscriptions I pay for, and didn't want to think about another lifetime expense. The only downside to paying upfront is the support becomes limited - after a year, you have to pay \$25 when you need SC support. Personally, I haven't needed SC support too much, but when I have, they are pretty helpful. Currently, they have an influx of talent at a faster rate than ever before, so I would suggest you try and follow their setup guide, ask friends to help, and figure out setting up your connection on your own.

I'd also highly recommend setting up your connection via ethernet. Wifi connections are often not stable and can lead to dropouts, adding more time to your session and a chance that the perfect take could get ruined. Even one blip can add another 5 minutes to getting the job done. And, there are exceptions to this, but I believe it's easier to get setup on a Mac. For example, if you setup via Wifi but eventually get your ethernet going, Mac & Source Connect usually recognizes this connection right away. With PC, you probably want to wait until you get your ethernet: Source Connect recognizes Wifi and Ethernet (wired connection) as two different things, and will require two different setups.

Aye, aye, aye. It's a lot less complicated than it sounds - I just aim to be thorough and give you a clear lay of the land. *I found all these things out the hard way, and it didn't have to be hard.*

All in all, it's up to the client in the end. Source Connect, ipDTL, Zoom, plain ol' phone, whatever - if your client has a process they prefer, they will tell you what they want to use. If they are new-ish to voice over, you can help steer them in a direction.

- Oh, wait... I have to self record now?

Well duh. I'll take that rum neat, sir/madam - and no, I don't have a problem!

Self record auditions are a good thing. You don't have to run to all the studios and be nice to everyone and get in your car or subway and fight traffic and lalalalala - you can audition for 20 studios in one day!

- When is my sound "good enough" (recording wise)?

Pre 2020, I would have said "Ah don't obsess over this too much" because I had heard of people booking from an MP3 audition they recorded in a hallway at their job (echo, background noise, bad headphone mic and all). When they book you in a studio, it's not a problem.

Now, you MUST have a good sound.

Folks are judging your performance AND your audition audio (even if it is not recorded in your home studio - if recorded on the go, they will probably ask for your home studio sample).

I'm sorry, it's not fair, and it happened pretty much overnight, but a recording setup with too much street noise, too much echo, a quality mic, or anything related isn't going to cut it.

Just think: when folks produce ads, they need the *best audio* they can get to work with. Radio and tv ads get amplified - if there is noise or anything else, it gets amplified too. Sure, you can doctor bad audio, but you can't turn bad audio into good audio. You just can't, and frankly, no one has the time.

They cut ads in real time during your session, so the engineer is already under a lot of pressure to perform. You don't wanna make this person's job harder than it already is.

To add: you don't have to know the science of good sound and sound dampening and the whole nine. There's a handful of people on YouTube who have figured it out for you. Setting up space can be challenging, especially if you never thought about having a home studio. But it's ok - be resourceful, make it as comfy as you can, and work it out!

There are all kinds of tricks and tools you can use to either turn your closet into a booth, or build a booth with PVC pipe (example on the equipment list, or dampen your room with rugs, foam, moving blankets, furniture, etc. No solution is one size fits all, as no two rooms are the same. What works for someone else might be completely different for you.

- **Wait, slow down bro. What is a self record and how do I do it? (mp3 audition)**

Calm down Jiminy Cricket, I got you covered. Let me get some ice for this whiskey first.

Ok, I did it.

Truth be told, there can be a one or two pager alone on the anatomy of a mp3 audition. I'm sure I'm going to repeat things I said in other sections (because this is a later addendum), but this is very important. In the day and age of WFH everything, the mp3 audition is king. Yes, the demo gets you in the doors, marketing will get the word about you around town, the reps will usher you into the bigger doors at the bigger towns, and coaching will get your gun-slinging on par...

But the Mp3 audition is your everyday sauce.

The demo shows what you can do with polish, but can you do 3 takes with variety and nuance, after cold reading? Can you stand out from the 25 to 100 other people who are being considered? Can you convince the copywriters and producers that you can interpret their vision even better than they thought any could??

I can't stress how obsessive you need to be about the Mp3 audition. I already mentioned that you have to label properly (otherwise you don't get submitted), **but here are some DO's & DON'Ts to consider:**

- **Don't submit a video.** It's voice over. Why would you do that --
- **Don't submit an m4a or wav.** M4a is often less compatible across devices and a wav file is usually huge. If you notice, iPhone and iPad's default audio file is m4a. You **MUST** convert it.
- **Follow ALL the directions.** If they say "no slate" DONT SLATE. If they tell you to slate, follow the slate verbatim. If they say nothing, it is generally understood that you could probably slate your name.
- **You can do whatever to prepare for your audition - but *always record only your lines* (this is standard).** The people who sent it to you wrote it, they want to hear you

read only the part you are submitting for... even if it is an audio drama or something longer, please, only your lines. (and be sure to edit to reduce the amount of time in between said lines)

- If you are going to slate, do it with confidence. You are the person for the job.
Depending on genre and vibe, you might want to slate in the “spirit” of what you’re doing - it’s not the audition itself, BUT it can prime someone for the vibe you are bringing to the table. I.e Horror show promo, I’d possibly make it a little “scary”. Use your judgement!
- **Nowadays, if they don’t ask for a slate, I personally don’t slate.** You are usually labeling your name anyway. Why would I need to say my name in that case?? **But as a beginner, I’d recommend you slate so you can get into the practice.** You would be surprised how many people get weird about saying their name with confidence, like being on camera (everyone *thinks* they can do it until the gun is on them).
- **Make sure you follow the labeling down to every dash, verbatim.** There is a reason for this even if you think its dumb. Here’s an example:

Please label: ***M-Ricky Bobby-ATT-Source Connect (NY)***

And then, because we went and drank too much whiskey while reading this (my bad), you labeled:

M - Ricky Bobby - ATT - Source Connect (NY)

I apologize for being a bad influence, but I don’t apologize for your bad labeling shenanigans. What happened?!

As you can see, they asked for no spaces in their labeling instructions. Did you know that when you are sorting a list of files on your computer, sometimes spaces can change the alphabetically hierarchy? This is why labeling verbatim matters. Your casting directors, producers, etc. don’t have time to fix your mistakes....

Sometimes you are lucky, and because they are nice people, they might email you and tell you to fix it ASAP (I’ve had this happen). Don’t count on this - I still punch myself in the face whenever I do stupid mistakes like this.

Follow the labeling down to the lower cases, upper cases, spaces, etc.

- **Nowadays, everyone is moving a mile a minute. Oftentimes, there are so many projects that producers, reps, etc. don’t have time to tell you what your label should be - this is becoming more and more common.** I would say the standard labeling in this case is something like this:

Ricki Bobbey - Gas-X - Source Connect (if you have SC, or ipDTL, if you have that)

Or

Rihki Bahbee - Name Crimes MTV (NY) *(this is for if you do not have a home studio - but you should be working on that, as well as a name change)*

- **The format for mp3 auditions 5 years ago was > slate - two or three takes, while saying take 1 or take 2, etc. before each take.** Saying “take x” is a psychological tool that helps your listener reset their ears to get ready for another read. It's good practice to know this, but over the years, I've omitted bits and pieces of this. For example, I stopped saying “take 1” pretty early... it is generally understood that take 1 will be there. As for the rest of it, use your judgment and follow directions.
- **You are fighting against time. Take the stage, own it, and get off.** What does that mean? It means to find ways to keep your audition as succinct as possible... Cut down unnecessary dead space, cut dead space at the end, etc. From the time your listener (usually a producer) presses the play button, they're looking for a reason to cut it off and move to the next.
- **Because producers are pressed for time and are looking to cut your audition off, some people only audition with one take.** The sentiment is not wrong - people can often make a decision in the first 3-5 seconds, so the rest might seem moot. But consider this: what if you have something you do, with nuance, in the 2nd and 3rd take, that your listener likes better? Most things in life are a numbers game, and if you are selling yourself short by not increasing your chances, you will win less. **If anything, at least have a second take.**
- **When recording an mp3 audition at home, you literally have the time to do it until you get it right.** Now look, you don't want to beat a dead horse: if you are spending an hour on your read, you are killing the spontaneity, and you probably need to drink some more of this whiskey. **Work on spending no more than 10-20 minutes on an audition.**
- I almost forgot! **More and more people are also auditioning your recording space** - they're listening to the audio quality of your audition too! So make sure that home studio is on point. Obviously, if you are out, or on your travel rig, etc. It's ok, try to make it as quiet as possible. Quality also includes getting rid of annoying clicks, pops, making sure there is no distortion, and anything else you might deem annoying - breaths are usually fine.

(breaths inspire thought and let the person listening know you know how to breathe and talk. Don't laugh, because there can be another one pager on the breath and the inspiration. Don't make me take out my little yellow book with the funny breathing exercises!!!!)

- **Above all, try to think like a person who is hiring ppl.** Would you hire you? Do you think your reads stand out? Did the journey of your mp3 make your listener wanna have a drank (of you, of course)?

Whoops. Well, I did say this was going to take one or two pages, and there's more, but I think that's enough to process for now.

- When is my sound "competitive enough" (performance wise)?

Confidence is key here.

If you know in your heart of hearts you can deliver, and replicate what's on your demo, and you've been coaching, and listening, and you've auditioned a bunch, then you're probably ready.

I started booking more when I believed I could. I'm not kidding - and it feels like this just happened.

I would say this: listen to demos on Google and YouTube and SoundCloud. Because we don't exist in a vacuum, it's really cool to see what people are doing, what styles are popular, who's winning jobs, figuring out the how and why, and analyzing what makes their performance effective. You can usually put a POV (good, bad, etc) together within the first 5 seconds of any demo.

The coach is your winning tool here. They will tell you if your performance is on point, they will give you the keys to cracking the code, & they will help you understand "character" within VO. This idea of acting with the mic being your lens/audience will start to make sense.

Just turn up that CONFIDENCE, yo.

- How do I get an agent?

Google, ImdbPRO, and LinkedIn are your friends! There are so many ways to tackle this, let's talk about a few.

Here's the short answer:

- **Referrals are best. When a person can vouch for your work, character, and work ethic, it goes a long way. The "who you know" is true even for VO, if not more so.**
- **Most working actors have their representatives listed on their imdbPRO, and there are emails. Most of those people have websites, where you can submit.**
- **There are directories you can pay for to get emails/ mailing addresses - formatting an email to get interest is a whole other topic.**
- **Most working professionals are on LinkedIn. The algorithm will lead you to other working pros. I personally wouldn't DM them, but I'd find an email or a link to website submissions.**
- **Snail mail still works, in fact, more than ever now since most people don't want to do it. Think about it this way - sending something tangible that someone can hold in their hand is smart. I would most likely send a postcard with a QR code to my**

website... not sure about CDs, because less and less people have a CD player nowadays.

- Don't try to get a good agent or manager without a demo. This can happen if you are taking a class and you're good.... But in that case, you paid for the class and showed up. Emailing someone cold with a wack demo is a great way to give a bad impression.
- This is a little glimpse into emailing reps - you need to always be thinking, "What value can I bring to this person"? If they have a page with their roster on their website, maybe the value you bring, is you are unlike the other people they currently represent...
- If you are a person who is into social media, and are good at maintaining a presence, everyone is on there (and watching, we talked about this). People care about your digital footprint - in fact, some big companies will use a crawler to pull up your entire internet existence. So use wisely and use to your advantage!

Once you get your coaching and make your demo, It's time to start shopping around. Email is cool, cold calling is better, face to face time is best. Yes, it's harder to score, but we all know all good things ain't easy.

Email and prospecting, as you would in any other business, is essential. But don't forget that agents get thousands of emails a day. Sending an unsolicited email can't hurt, but it could be a waste of time. Referrals are better, in this regard, since they'd be expecting your correspondence.

One On One NYC/LA has the best seminars, workshops, & intensives IMO, with Actors Connection, and Paul Michael's The Network following in 2nd and 3rd. The Actors Green Room may still do this, but with their new online model, I doubt they offer the same services. My agent recently told me about Acting and Voice Studios.

When you do these intensives and seminars, you get a chance to ask questions, perform, AND watch other people perform. Soak it all in. Going to One On One is better than going to school - you're there to learn without the pressure of grades or academic accolades. You've literally invested to be in the ring and show off your stuff. It's assumed that everyone else in the room with you is taking their career seriously, too.

Let's face it, most people won't pay for this service - by doing this, you've separated yourself from the amateurs. You've proven you're willing to go the extra mile - and agents/casting directors (who are there on their time outside of their 9-5) know this.

At the end of these sessions, you get contact info, whether it's a mailing address or an email.

VO casting people and agents tend to do less of these things (as opposed to on-camera and theatre people), so you have to stay updated and try not to miss your opportunity.

With Zoom being the new rahrah in town, I believe there are more opportunities than ever to get an agent. It may not be the same as physical face-to-face, but it's pretty close. Some of the above mentioned services have expanded their offerings to people anywhere in the world and even lowered their costs. Outside of these services, I've even heard of people getting agents via social media!

So many possibilities.

- What's working with an agent like?

Agents are regular people who talk and think fast, lol.

In my experience, agents are hardly ever like what you see in movies, but I've never lived in Hollywood, nor do I plan to, so I could be wrong!

I think working with an agent could be good or *meh*, depending on your personality. I like good people, and want to work with good people, and make money with and for good people, who make sense, and talk about good things, who are considerate. Those are the principles I operate from, but I think most folks in *any* business feel the same.

In the WFH era, you get a deluge of emails some days, and less others. You follow the directions (major key, *you must follow verbatim*) and submit on time (another major key). You'd be surprised how many people disqualify themselves because your agents don't have time to rename your file, or ask you to re-record something.

I'm not supposed to tell you this, but I will anyway: a good agent is patient w/ you and may help you out when you're not on your game 100%. I've mislabeled things, and I've definitely submitted late (i'm working on it, actively). Don't be a floof like me, give yourself the best chance to win.

Oh, I hate that I have to say this, but since it's 2021 and there's something in the water: your agents are people, and they can become friends, but they are business partners first. They do 10% of the work to help build a career, which means you need to fill in that other 90 bro. Your agent is not your therapist and is most certainly not your life coach or planner. If you're not getting work w/ your agent, *I believe* you need to ask yourself why before you ask them.

Treat your agents like good people you like to work with and it will pay off - the business is fast paced and stressful, and they are just people too! Folks will eventually move on, get promoted, do bigger and better things - they won't forget you if you are nice.

- Well jeez. How the heck do I get work (with agent and otherwise)?!?!

To be upfront, most of my work is referral and word of mouth based, meaning the same people hire me over and over, and I've worked long enough to have my name float about. It's a long game, and I'm still working on it.

The rest of this stuff I'm going to talk about works too, but I haven't had to do much of it in 2020.

Ah yes, everyone will tell you this and that is possible, but will often give vague answers about where to find the work. So here's brass tacks:

- 1. Get your performance down (auditioning, delivering in session)**
- 2. Market yourself and advertise**
- 3. Follow Up and Keep track**

I don't think I have to explain #1 considering I've talked about it a bunch. Your skills are king.

Marketing and advertising is essential for any business. You are a service based media business. Who are your buyers? What are they looking for? How do you find them? Between having a website, having a social media presence, writing a blog, having a YouTube, or having a podcast- there are a million ways to show people what you do and get work as a result.

Marketing and advertising work best when you execute a long term strategy. For me, I assess what I'm doing and if it's working every 6 months. In example, if I'm emailing 20 new prospective clients a week for 6 months and I only got one paying gig (even after following up), it's safe to say I need to rethink my moves.

And we already got into it, the good ol' follow up... the follow up is essential because people have split focus. It holds someone accountable to respond to you if they haven't, and separates the people with resolve from the pack. Most folks get discouraged after an initial dismissal. But sometimes people are too busy and miss your email!

Following up and keeping some data about your contacts (new and old) will help to organize you, ground you, and figure out how to run a viable business. You can't lie to yourself when the names and numbers are on a record that you created. You're also holding yourself accountable.

Here's small list of places you can find legit buyers:

- **LinkedIn**
- **Facebook**
- **Twitter**
- **Instagram**
- **Video Agencies**
- **A website with good SEO (they'd find you)**
- **P2P (like Voice123, Voices.com - i prefer these two because their name ranks them high in search engines, and they seem to be legit)**

- What makes a good demo?

A good demo can vary, but technically speaking demos have a format. The first demo is usually a commercial demo. From there, you can test your demo in the market. If it gets you work, you obviously did something right - and if it doesn't, you have to reassess!

After your commercial demo does some work for you, you should start thinking about additional niche based demos. This is important because producers often work in one sector or niche - a TV guy may or may not do radio, a film production company probably doesn't do corporate work, and so on and so forth. If you're looking to do video games or animation, you need a Video Game/Animation/Character demo (these demos can be different or the same, depending on your range). Targeted demos take the guesswork out for your buyers.

Beyond that, your demo should be professionally done - you can Google demo producers and compare some of the top guys in the industry. Why? Because they have an objective ear and listen to voice over day after day. They are fully immersed in what works and what doesn't in regards to your potential buyers. Because VO is highly competitive, you have to give yourself the best chance of winning!

To sum it up, your demo should probably have 5-7 varied spots of things you do extremely well and be no longer than a minute and a half. I've even heard that a minute is better - don't be precious, the VO world moves fast and no one has time... but your professional demo producer will get you in good shape!!!!!!

- Where do I find voice over copy?

When you get an audition, agents will send you the copy and instructions. I've kept 90% of my copy from the past 10 years. I used to print it all out, but now I have a hard drive full of pdfs. Often, you don't share these things because there are NDAs, or the campaign isn't out yet, or it's understood that the opportunity is exclusive and just for you. Once it's out, on a case by case basis, maybe you can use it for other stuff, but I wouldn't share too much.

But alas, copy is everywhere. Remember this: Ad copy is just great storytelling, used to sell a product or a service. That's it.

Now, now, now... that doesn't mean you're a copywriter after reading a book and lifting some weights and going on a retreat to Joshua Tree or whatever.

Copywriters are artists like us, and there are levels to learning ad copy. You have copywriters who freelance, and copywriters who work for companies. They study the craft, study advertising, practice writing, and study some more. They're keyed in to the styles of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. There is a history to the craft and it continues on today.

People craft copy to make you click things on Facebook. That being said, the text of a Facebook ad *could* be ad copy. But there is nuance and all of the things that go into finding the right copy for you.

The right copy for you starts with exploring YOUR sound. If you are an “traditional announcer type”, you wouldn’t be reading copy for a “cool, edgy guy type”. If you are a “bubbly, girl next door type”, you won’t be reading copy for a “sophisticated, sage type” (unless you have both in your wheelhouse - but you have to explore in order to know that).

Sure, you can find, let’s say, 10 pieces of copy for your demo that you *think* you can knock out of the park. But then:

- How do you know you’re knocking it out of the park? You need an outside ear.
- How do you know the brands you are talking about are desirable?
You need an outside ear.
- How do you know you are aligning your “brand” with a top quality sound? You know what I’m gonna say.

The demo is a whole different beast we don’t have time to break down. But it’s a microcosm of my larger point: **there’s so many nuances when it comes to copy that you don’t know about yet.** Or maybe you do, because you’ve worked in production, or marketing, etc.

That being said, if you are creative, you can get inspiration from many places (some of this is repeated in RESOURCES):

- Youtube - you can search archives of commercials all day
- TV
- Radio
- Internet Radio
- Local Radio
- Certain poems
- Certain prose
- Song lyrics
- Movie scripts
- Cartoons - scripts / dialogue
- Edge Studio - check their library
- Google google google
- Find a book on writing ad copy!
- Hire a copywriter on Fiverr
- Even better, hire a copywriter DIRECT (Craigslist)

After reading *thousands* of scripts, *maybe* you can take a crack at it. Or maybe you’re ready today! I don’t have a concrete answer, just be honest with yourself. Learn a little about what makes GREAT ad copy, and then try, is my advice.

- *Is it possible to make a full-time income in voice over?*

Absolutely. Don't take my word for it - [here's a neat survey some folks in a FB group I'm in put together - the data is amazing!](#)

And, if you need to take my word: I do make a comfortable full-time income. (when I vividly remember people telling me I couldn't)

Bragging about money is not useful to you or anyone, and I dislike that part of American culture, but maybe you need to read it to believe it. So there.

I mentioned this at the top, but so many people are too worried about money. You should keep your job while you build your career (gasp), so you can focus on building your craft - you don't want to be in a place where you are worrying about your next check AND getting better. It hinders your progress IMO.

People also think more money is going to solve their problems. I've made \$ in windfalls before, and I can tell you, it doesn't work like that. All these people that tell you mindset is key are telling you the truth. It sounds like fluff, but if you broke down where your money is going, you'd learn some interesting things about yourself and the relationship you've developed with money.

Most of the money I've made has gone back into my business or businesses, and there was/is usually a risk involved.

I think I'm repeating myself now, so, back to the topic.

Going full-time was not easy, and honestly, I'm still figuring it out (meaning, it's an ongoing process).

I apologize in advance for the long roundabout answer on this one: I take people's lives and livelihood seriously. I often say to myself, "My life and well-being are not up for gambling". That's a crazy way to live, and it's directly tied to money whether we like it or not.

If I knew you couldn't make a full time income in VO, I would have told you on the first page. There'd probably be one page. Maybe a bad review on Google Maps.

I told you I'm no expert on running a business, as I've made a lot of mistakes, or rather, I've learned things by trial and error, since I didn't have folks to ask. *I think the main thing to remember about trial and error is, "don't error yourself out of the game".*

What do I mean? Well, being in any creative profession is a calculated risk, considering your job is to audition. In that regard, the only things you have control over is your audition performance and the amount of things you can audition for, which can increase your booking ratio.

While you are working on all the things, money is spent, maybe a loan is taken out, you spend a certain amount on your demo and marketing and classes, and before you know it, you're X thousand dollars in the hole.

It happens. I feel bad for creative folks because I've been there time and time again, feeling as if I missed something along the way, or mad because I didn't sign up to be a small business. I've always just wanted to be an actor and make a living doing it. Yes, I used to get down and even mad at myself. How productive....

I even had a casting director tell me that VO is so saturated that it's only good enough to make a supplemental income. Right before an audition. Bless their hearts lol.

Let's change these mindsets: you ARE a small biz if you decide to become a VO talent.

Taking it further, today, I know this to be true: if you believe you can make a full-time income with your voice, you will. I've asked a ton of freelancers what their secret is over the years and the answer boils down to this: **confidence**. The confidence will have you go forth and execute on your plan like the champ you never knew you were. Big facts.

Here's the main thing that will give you confidence: **knowledge**. You're already increasing your knowledge by reading this. If you got this far, it's likely you're serious about getting started in VO. So in order to increase your knowledge, KEEP reading, KEEP listening, KEEP growing, and NEVER stop asking questions.

Here's a quick, direct example of how this works: Remember I said I didn't sign up to be a small biz? 1. I've purchased and read more books than I can count on business now. 2. I've spent upwards of 15k on courses to help me figure this out. 3. I was lucky to work at the marketing startup that taught me a boatload of organizational skills/productivity tools, and I eventually started applying my work skills to my own business.

My lack of knowledge in regards to business was my greatest weakness in regards to my career. So I attacked it head on. My new knowledge has increased my confidence in what I offer and I've gone on to do bigger and better things as a result.

If that doesn't give you hope, think about this: the Internet is huge right now. It's booming beyond our wildest dreams. Just when we thought it couldn't get bigger and faster and more accessible, it has become even more necessary for business, connections, and more. E-Commerce has skyrocketed in the past 8 months alone, since people are stuck at home, etc. Because business is booming at folks' fingertips, advertising is booming just the same, and advertisers are our direct buyers - so we're in business, mang.

We, voice over artists, serve as the bridge between ideas, products, concepts, companies, philosophies and the people. It's the reason it is a learned skill, or art, or craft - a good voice over will sell itself, and the thing in question. You don't quite know why (as a listener), but you know when you know.

Personally, I think that's worthy of a full-time income. Sounds important to me!

The folks that understand this, understand that we simply need to find our buyers. Yes, the industry has changed - 10 years ago the buyers went to agents/managers and that was the only way to get to them. Now, the world is your oyster.

However you do it - you can build a steady income for yourself. I can't teach you hustle, but now you've got some game!

- You need to know this, union vs non-union... What's the deal?

This is a long conversation and it's actually very complicated. I'm pretty sure I mentioned earlier that a great percentage of voice over work is non-union (the percentage increases every year). This means a small percentage of the work is Union (SAG AFTRA), and there is a relatively large pool of people to compete with for these jobs.

Let's backtrack a little... **non-union work became popular in the early 2000s because of the internet and the fact that anyone could ask people to record a voice over, anywhere.** If you have a computer and a mic, technically, you could get the work done.

Sites like Backstage, Mandy, Voice123, Voices, and later, Fiverr, and Upwork, started being introduced to the game, and with that, because these are not voice over centric websites (but are freelancer websites), there has been less focus on protecting "industry standard rates".

This is important, because how does one make a living in voice over? I could not do what I do full time if I did a bunch of work at \$20 an hour. For some people just starting, maybe this is cool. But this doesn't account for using my expensive equipment, industry standard mics, internet connection, the cost of a connectivity program like Zoom or Source Connect, etc. When you take the costs of running a business into mind, you need to consider non-union work with a grain of salt.

The other thing about non union is it lacks the protection the Union could give you. For example, you don't get residuals from syndication and wide distribution, and if a contract says your voice could be used "in perpetuity" (more common today), it means it can be used indefinitely, until the end of time, anywhere and wherever, after they pay you once. It's a terrible deal, and frankly, is not fair if your likeness is being used for a company's profit.

Another thing to add to this about non-union is the need to constantly read terms and be in tune with contracts and negotiations. I hate to burst your bubble, but I spend quite a bit of time collaborating with my reps to make sure I'm getting paid fairly. Lately, I've been trying my hand at doing the fair share of the negotiating on my own, and then bringing my rep in. Sometimes your agency is bidding for a job, so they don't really have flexibility in regards to what you can get paid, but this is not always the case - *everything is up for negotiation. They might tell you otherwise, but this is a business, and that's true of any and all business.* Use the [GVAA](#) rate

guide as a baseline guide, and ask for what you think you are worth, commensurate with your expertise. Also, it helps to talk to other voice over artists about money - easier to do when you are tapped into a community and people you are comfortable with. Normalize talking about money with people you trust - the more you ask questions, listen, and normalize these conversations, the easier it will be.

Also remember that everything does NOT have to be hardball. Don't forget that sometimes the people on the other end looking to pay you for VO often have no idea about "industry standard rates". Sometimes they have an idea, and are under crazy time constraints. Sometimes they need someone to knock it out of the park after recasting and you might be saving their butt. Use discernment, be firm, but don't forget to be human - this is a part of negotiating, too.

The last sometimes annoying thing about non-union is having to chase your money. Any freelancer in any profession will tell you this is what they hate the most. Often folks will act as if they needed the job done yesterday, then you'll move things around in your schedule, and get it done fast. Afterwards, they might take months to pay you. I've had highly reputable institutions take more than 6 months to pay me. Don't take it personally - people get hired and fired, systems change, paperwork gets lost, these things happen. I know, money IS personal, and being able to pay your rent and bills is the MOST personal... but, this comes with the territory. Make sure you have a way to track your work.

All this being said, I do know voice over artists that do mostly non-union work and still make six-figures. It's all about building a career that works for you.

Personally, I LOVE Union work. It costs \$3200 to join SAG, and technically, once you join the Union, you are not supposed to do non-union work. For voice over artists, this doesn't make the most sense, since once again, a great percentage of the work is non-union. You can make your own decision about this one - it is a funky topic amongst actors and most people do not agree on the points.

In a nutshell, when the internet exploded as a way for people to do work, SAG couldn't have possibly gotten in front of the changes in the industry. Productions chose to not go union because of paperwork, and too many protocols, and sometimes it's just plain easier to pay talent directly. I totally get it from their viewpoint.

Technically speaking, actors can choose to go fi-core (which stands for financial core) in order to do Union and non-union work if they'd like without any ramifications. You get the benefits of being able to do both, but you are then called a "fee paying non-member". Some people do not like actors to do this because it weakens the power and solidarity of the Union (which is understandable).

I am a Union member and will be for time being - this is also because I do on-camera work, and this is the arrangement that works for me. SAG Foundation has some cool discounts, seminars,

and events. Also, the residuals and lack of headache when it comes to being paid correctly and on time has been amazing.

For broadcast, TV, worldwide, and large distribution projects, you REALLY want these projects to be Union. Keep in mind that this is the top of the crop, so you are competing with veterans for these jobs - I had one rep liken it to the lottery. You can't necessarily always depend on these big payouts, but they are nice when they happen. The thing you can worry about the most, is more training and getting better. It's a war of attrition - I've gotten more of these jobs the longer I've stuck around.

Furthermore, I get healthcare from SAG, which is some of the best. You have to make at least \$25,950 with Union jobs in order to qualify for healthcare (and this is every year, unfortunately).

Contracts and union vs non union is a topic we can pontificate on forever. Also, with the slow death of cable and the changing landscape of media, all of this is bound to change consistently. Media is young (about 70 years old) - so it's important to stay tapped in and take note of the changes every 7-10 years.

I've heard a few older VO artists pine on about "the glory days" - that's nice and all, but, does reminiscing help you currently, or in the future?

- Casting directors... whatsup with that?

Have you ever seen a unicorn? Well, if you've seen a casting director the answer is yes. Pun absolutely intended.

In 2020 and beyond, specifically in voice over, if you have seen a casting director in person, it means you aren't quarantining and you're the reason I'm still at home. And you still haven't given me rum, sir/madam. Lol

All jokes aside, these folks are either hard to catch like the one that got away, or your best rich friend.

Everyone is pandering to a casting director - rightfully so, since they are the gatekeepers to your next job. They also handle the tedious organization of auditions so a client can receive a coherent package. They translate whatever hoopla the buyer is asking for, so you can get a spec that informs your best audition. If you do your job well, and they like you, they use unicorn tactics to sway the buyer in your direction.

And then they do this process again and again and again and again... and still manage to give folks their good unicorn time and energy.

I spent however long auditioning for people at studios, in person, and you get maybe 10 minutes max to make an impression. You are in the booth, doing voice over for the shortest amount of

that time. So, it's kinda tough to form relationships with casting directors. They also see/listen to hundreds of people a day.

The key is to always be nice to CDs: you never know when it will pay off.

From 2018 to now, most of my work has been by word of mouth, and most of those people who referred me, you guessed it... were casting directors.

Take classes with them when you can, send them a gift (wine, because they need it), keep them updated on your work whenever you have a chance.

- Well, these odds seem insurmountable. Um, is this even worth it bro....?

Any good thing worth having takes work my friend. And time, and patience.

You can't focus on the money first. Obviously, we would all like to get paid - but what makes you better than the next guy? Have you put in your time? Do you deserve it?

If you want to build a sustainable CAREER, and not just learn how to get paid a cool \$200 here or there, but possibly never work again, then you have to focus on your PRODUCT. In this case, your product is YOU... invest in yourself, soak up knowledge, practice the craft, and the rest will come.

Year three, or five, or eight, or ten, is not the time to quit... you can, but just think about what could have happened if you got on the other side of the wall...



GEICO

\$36,518,868
Est. TV Spend ⓘ

9,709
National Airings ⓘ

[Tag Team Helps With Dessert](#)
Top Campaign ⓘ



TurboTax

\$31,571,732
Est. TV Spend ⓘ

6,558
National Airings ⓘ

[Freeloader](#)
Top Campaign ⓘ



Verizon

\$30,777,134
Est. TV Spend ⓘ

1,366
National Airings ⓘ

[5G, Discovery+ and Disney Bundle: \\$1,000 Off](#)
Top Campaign ⓘ



Progressive

\$30,567,833
Est. TV Spend ⓘ

4,232
National Airings ⓘ

[Dr. Rick: Methods](#)
Top Campaign ⓘ



State Farm

\$28,324,899
Est. TV Spend ⓘ

2,384
National Airings ⓘ

[Barbershop](#)
Top Campaign ⓘ

I took this picture just to show you how much money is spent in advertising. This is in **one week**. Obviously, these are the top advertisers in the USA, and maybe the world, so a voice talent working with these companies is at the top of their game.

Let's do some rough math, in a very rough example:

Geico spent \$36.5M in a week. Let's say they're running 10 big commercials at the time, so $\$36.5M / 10 = 3.65M$. Let's add, the budget for 1 commercial was \$10M, because it's a superbowl ad. Your fee is maybe .5-1% of the budget, so you get 50-100K upfront.

And remember our ad spend is 3.65M for the one commercial in a week - now, I don't know the math SAG does to figure out residuals, but let's just say you receive .25% of that ad spend per week, because they're using your voice.

(Your "percentage" will hardly be this congruent, as airings and reach is measured differently across campaigns, but if you have an ad that is running on TV, digital, radio, with 3-5 different versions, it's going to add up.)

.25% of 3.65M is ~\$9.18K. $9.18K * 26 \text{ weeks} = 238.68K$

If this ad ran for half a year, you've made 288.68 - 338.68K (in our rough example).

This is an anomaly, somewhat unrealistic, and quite frankly, you shouldn't hedge your bets on an example like this. But you CAN make a year or two's salary with ONE commercial campaign.

It can take FOREVER to book something as lucrative as a Super Bowl Ad - but we MUST dream, and we must know the potential of our careers, if we hustle.

The example above doesn't even include the vast opportunities the internet has created - there are hundreds of thousands small businesses creating ads on their own accord, using Facebook and YouTube and LinkedIn to run their ads. Many of them spend THOUSANDS on their own, because it brings in business... which means, many of them need a voice.

Many of them are creating content without voice over - that being said, many of them need a voice, *and they don't even know it*. They are literally underestimating the power of the voice and undermining their own value.

We are familiar with the value of the voice from young. It teaches you an immeasurable amount, and when paired with visual, that value goes up immensely. Humans appreciate voice over, even if they don't actively know it.

This is the power of being a voice over actor.

That being said, I believe this path is worth it. Call it a craft, call it a career, call it whatever you want - people care about the voice, and when it is paired perfectly with images, it's completely worth figuring out the puzzle. Do the math - the opportunity is vast, and is *yours* to seize, whenever you are ready.

- Best pieces of life saving advice?

I had to think about a year for this one, because, really: who am I to have the audacity to tell people what they should and shouldn't be doing? I am a working professional, who works daily at building his career. I'm not famous or anything. Well, the more people asked, the more I figured some things out.

1. **Aim to be a working pro.** This means, if you can do it sometimes, part-time, and eventually full-time, do it. Fame or notoriety, especially today, does not always = income. For example, your favorite dubbing actors may be amazing, and well-known for a show or two, but they hardly are "rich". Sure, voice acting can be lucrative - but you want your skills to be on par when they call you. If you got one lucky big break, and then you had to fight for a second, would you be ready??
2. **Show up, even when you don't feel like it.** I get hired time and time again because I show up. When I show up, I give it my 150%, every time, as long as the respect & good energy is there. You can't always dictate what your producers, directors, or fellow

castmates are giving you, but you have control over how you show up. To add to this - I've recently gained gigs simply because someone else *did not show up*, if you can believe it. This behavior is crazy to me - your producers are often time-crunched with multiple projects and do not have time to deal with no shows. If you don't show up, most of the time, you won't get called back.

Oh, and I've gotten my best gigs when someone was sick. Meaning, the guy who was the voice for 10 years had the flu. Or (insert famous name) was off shooting something (that actually happened).

So, it's that simple. Lots want to do this. Show up and show out.

3. **Be nice to everyone.** Look: before COVID, when I was going to studios to audition for 8 years (and after COVID when studios will slowly start back up), I'd literally travel to the studio, usually for 30 mins to an hour, just to audition for 5-8 minutes at a time. The mp3 audition has taken a lot of the pressure and discomfort out of this process, and allows you to be in the comfort of your home. BUT the reality is - this is a fast paced business. Ideally, you should be able to hit the main intention of your script and interpret in 3 consecutive takes without overthinking.

I said all that to say, the 8 years I was running around getting used to this process in NYC, I honestly felt like I wasn't getting to know anyone. Well, I was wrong. To my surprise, I had been laying down the roots and reputation for what I have going on today. It's nice to know that being nice to people and all the random conversations I've struck up, have led to somewhere. Heck, I am still great friends with some of the people I met in food service years ago (some people in high places). Frankly, it doesn't matter who it is. The intern will one day be an exec. Your former agent will one day move into publishing. Everybody is looking to move up and appreciates working with someone who is nice. I honestly think this is why I get hired 90% of the time... because let's be honest: there are a LOT of talented people out here; there's no rule set in stone that says you are "the guy". So be nice!

4. **Social media....** I could write a dissertation on this. *But mainly, I want to warn you:* it is a wonderful tool when used well. People have built careers with it (I am not one of these people, sorry). However, because we are so used to it, people get lax and forget that "free speech is not completely free"...

What do I mean? Cursing, talking about sensitive politics where people may or may not agree with you, loosely talking about sexuality, addressing so called "haters", playing music that may not be "on brand", NSFW images, drugs, etc.

"Hey man, this is America, I have the right to say what I want, and telling me I can't is wrong, and maybe even oppressive!"

Yea, ok. Tell that to the company who wants to pay you 20k in a year to do a voice over for one commercial. Sure, you're a person, you are entitled to an opinion, and you can live your life as you see fit. But when you sign a contract, quite literally: word is bond.

One of the worst things to do is share details about the job/jobs. If you sign a contract or a non-disclosure agreement, you can get fired. I know, it's nice to share with everyone and revel over success. There WILL be a time for that... but in the meantime, why don't you get a journal or something? People generally overshare, and if you're going to be a professional, this is a habit you will have to get under control...

The other side of social media is making sure your branding is in line with the message you want people to know about you. You can hire experts for this, and pine over it forever (I def have), but this is plain and simple: **how do you see yourself? More importantly, how do you see the you you want to be? MOST importantly, how do others see you?** You will only figure this out by interacting with the market (trial and error). If you aren't getting a response, or if the response isn't what is desired, then you should pivot, pivot, pivot. It's ok to do it! Take ideas from other people. Don't get stuck in a pattern or persona that isn't working, use social media to amplify the IRL you ;-)

- 5. There is no shortcut to doing this.** Sorry! Hate to burst your bubble, but I know a LOTS of people get frustrated about the amount of money one could possibly spend with no return. Don't blame it on the market - the market is here and thriving... if you are losing money, *maybe you aren't ready to spend it*. Or, if you aren't making any money, look to yourself first. Maybe you shouldn't focus on the money first (I'm telling you you shouldn't, yet again).

People reaaaaaally don't like hearing that, but you're better off staying at your day job or using other skills to make \$ while figuring out your artistic career. Focusing on \$ will create anxiety, and will come through in your reads, and will definitely be counterproductive. The you'll be bitter, you'll start hating life, getting annoyed with people, etc. That kind of energy becomes a great big, stinking ball of failure that people can smell from a mile away. Yes, even in an mp3 audition.

Here's the tough talk: What makes you think you can just come along and be considered for a job that currently belongs to someone who has been doing it for 25 years???

If you look at it that way, I'm telling you that THEY definitely want to keep being better than you, and will do so, and continue to train, and crush you, and never recommend you, and still be excellent, just so you will never get the chance at their spot. They will keep their 300 gigs, and maybe throw you one. I've seen this energy firsthand, and have JUST started to make it to the other side. These people are serious about their livelihood - it's not a game!

I'm not like this and will never be because 1. There's too much work to be had and 2. My culture never promoted this way of thinking, it's tiresome. This doc is the proof ;-)

Look, it doesn't always have to take 10 years to build a viable career, but you have to learn/network/grow/figure out/take the time to find the right places to shorten your timeline and give your career a jumpstart. Unfortunately, to date, there is no ONE place to go to get all the voice over jobs and be happy. It just doesn't work that way. There never will be.

I've also mentioned earlier that you DON'T have to be an actor to do this, but I'm telling you without a doubt that my acting skills that I've developed since 14 yrs old give me a leg up over lots of people. I've been reading scripts, copy, screenplays, etc. all my life. This stuff is not rocket science - you can do it, but not if you're lazy. *I could even fall off and get lazy and fall out of favor with my employers! It could happen!*

But it won't. My job beats anything I used to do, and most of what other people do, and I truly have a passion for it (I started this whole doc saying this, btw).

I will spell it out for you - any person who has a career as an artist has probably been **obsessive** about it. I've gained a lot, but I've also sacrificed a lot. There is a way to have a "healthy" obsession, which I've only learned through experience... Are you ready to audition 5,000 times and get no response? Most people would say no, and I don't blame them. Actually, I'd applaud them, because it sounds crazy. You'll either get used to rejection or you won't, and it doesn't make you a lesser person. I'm just curbing your expectations.

- Wow. That was a lot, and now my head is spinning. What's the short version?

If you made it this far, then you really care. Here's what you need to do, in an order that makes sense (obviously, there are lots of variables, and these steps take time):

1. **Soak up free / low cost info** from books, seminars, YT, FB groups, and more. Listen to lots of demos
2. **Get a coach.** A reputable coach from word of mouth. This means don't jump at the first person with a deal - the more you hear a name, the better. Ask people who have done it - lots of people skip this step or skimp on it (don't do that)
3. **Make your demo** - same rules apply to finding a reputable demo producer - this is not a bunch of random MP3s strung together. Think like a pro athlete. Demos in this order - **COMMERCIAL, PROMO, NARRATION, CHARACTER** - if you are not interested in promo or narration, or are more interested in character, skip to character demo after commercial
4. **Keep going to classes**, get tapped into community, get your name around. Keep coaching. When people see you kill it in action, your name will travel.

5. **Get your home setup together** - a proper mic, a proper interface, all the proper tools - ideally treat the room you want to use with sound dampening materials as much as you can. Make your space ready for WORK, make it comfortable.

5b. **Learn how to USE your equipment**, this is key. Learn how to structure an MP3 audition. Learn how to follow labeling instructions to a T. 50% of auditions do not make it bc of poor labeling - this is a stupid reason to be disqualified. Home studios can take forever to perfect, do not underestimate this...

6a. **Submit to agencies, managers, casting directors** - if you've been tapped into community, etc., you should have gotten info about how agencies etc work and how to make a good impression. Agency/management is just ONE strategy - do NOT rely on it.

6b. **Develop your personal marketing plan** - and stick to it. Is it email? Social? Is it pay to play? If you are starting in 2021, you PROBABLY should start with a "pay to play" like voice123.com. Ask people about their experiences. Furthermore, you need a voice over optimized website. You can look at my site to get an idea what I mean.

TheVoiceOverBaron.com)

6c. **Learn how to structure your business** - you will learn as you go and pick up stuff here and there. How do you invoice? What are fair rates? How do I stay in favor with casting directors and reps? Running a VO business is like any other, but there is a lot more negotiating bc not everyone agrees on its value - learn how to protect yourself.

7. **Repeat steps 2-5**. Keep getting better. Make your own content. Keep practicing. Keep taking improv or acting or classes related to the voice. You never know when new skills will come in handy. Keep it fresh, keep loving the process. Remember that repeat business will always pay you the best, so be nice to everyone