

Chapter 1

An Overview of Voice Acting: Just the Basics

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding who a voice actor is
 - ▶ Creating a demo
 - ▶ Figuring your way through the maze of auditions
 - ▶ Making a go in your home studio
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Voice acting is an amazing way to put to use something you already have — your voice. Voice acting well is about knowing how to best use your voice and interpretive skills to deliver a well-crafted message. More than just mere talk, voice acting is the art of taking the written word and skillfully translating it into a persuasive spoken word message that encourages a listening audience to not only hear what you're saying, but also to act on it in some way. Voice acting is designed to educate, inform, or entertain.

This chapter serves as your catapult into this book and the world of voice acting. No matter if you're brand new and don't know anything about voice acting, you've dabbled a little bit in it and decided you want to pursue it more as a career, or you've worked in the voice acting field for several years and you want to take your abilities to the next level, this chapter can help you start your journey.

Being a Voice Actor: More Than You May Expect

Some people think that voice acting is simply getting paid to talk. In a way, that's true, although there is so much more to it! When you start as a voice actor, you need to remember that your voice is the instrument that helps achieve the script writer's goal, whether you're voicing a character in an animated film, reading for a company telephony script, or narrating an

audiobook. You also need to take good care of your voice, which is your instrument that you literally take with you wherever you go. In the following sections, we explain your role in the creative process of voice acting and how this knowledge can help you to do your best as a voice actor.

Knowing what it really means

Being a voice actor isn't just about sounding pretty. Being a voice actor isn't just about the sound of your voice. Your voice is merely an instrument used to communicate effectively and breathe life into a story. Chapter 2 explains more about what voice acting is, shows what it takes to be a voice actor, and gives you a good idea of where your voice fits in.

Getting your voice ready

Preparing and taking care of your voice are essential keys to voice acting because you rely heavily on your voice to work. Anyone who comes from a background that includes public speaking, whether in public settings or professional settings, has an appreciation for the voice and how greatly it contributes to their ability to communicate successfully.

Preparing your voice includes everything from warming up to ensuring you don't abuse it by yelling, screaming, or smoking. Chapter 3 gives you the essentials for how you can take care of your voice, use your voice properly, and train it so you're ready for voice acting.

Figuring out your role as voice actor

As a voice actor, you play a unique role in a production. Those roles include the following:

- ✓ Real person
- ✓ Narrator
- ✓ Announcer
- ✓ Spokesperson
- ✓ Instructor

These different roles help get the message to the listener, and each has its own characteristics. In Chapter 4, we discuss these roles in greater depth and explain how you can engage your intended audience with each one.

Digging into the script

The script reveals the author's intent and contains a wealth of details that can help you to create interesting and unique characters. By reading the script, you can discover a lot about the characters you'll be voicing or portraying. When you read, you need to think like a detective and look for clues that will aid you in developing characters and creating unique voices for them.

Being able to differentiate characters as well as being able to create a solid character that you know like the back of your hand is essential. As a voice actor, your job is to bring characters and scripts to life. The more information you have, the more believable your reads and the greater your performance. In Chapter 5, you can figure out how to examine a script and find the clues to create characters based upon your findings.

Starting your own business

If you're going to take voice acting seriously, you need to approach it as a business. We mean that you need to invest properly in your business to make quality recordings, which means that you get some training as a voice actor and you also can produce quality work with a home recording studio. When you're working with clients, quoting the appropriate rates is also something you need to do to remain competitive. Even if you're just looking to do voice acting as a hobby, remember that you're entering into an arena of professional voice actors who have been working for years and make their living recording voice-overs.

We give you ideas for how to set up your business, manage your customers, and build a team of advisors, such as an agent if you want one, in Chapter 16. We discuss how you can market your business in Chapter 9. The other chapters in Part IV serve as a primer for running your own business — information you'll be grateful for when the time comes.

Making a Demo

A *demo* is to a voice actor as a portfolio is to an artist. Your demo shows people what you can do with your voice and is a tool used for marketing yourself. Most people start with a commercial demo to showcase their ability to read for commercials you would hear on television or radio. You can use demos as promotion vehicles on your website or to accompany your profile on a voice acting marketplace website. You can also send them to talent agents or clients you want to introduce yourself to.

Tapping into some helpful (and free) resources

Voice Acting For Dummies provides you plenty of great information about voice acting. However if you're itching for even more, you may want to check out one of the following resources. You may be amazed to find out that many more are available if you're willing to explore. Many of these are online communities where you can connect with and share knowledge with other voice actors.

- ✔ **Voice Over Universe:** This social network for voice actors is more affectionately referred to as VU. You can find it at www.voiceoveruniverse.com.
- ✔ **Voice Acting Hub:** The Voice Acting Hub is probably the fastest way to connect with other voice actors on Facebook. Close to 2,000 other people are in the group. The group has no topics or categories, but it has a stream of information that relates to voice acting. You can see updates for upcoming workshops, links to blog posts, polls, and general discussion at www.facebook.com/groups/2364217548.
- ✔ **Voice Acting Alliance:** The Voice Acting Alliance (<http://voiceactingalliance.com>) is an online forum with thousands of message boards on topics such as auditions and casting, completed works, and tutorials. Although the forum seemingly has a focus on animation and video games, it's still a great place to strike up a conversation on any topic. Be sure to check out the frequently asked questions, which can give you a feel for the expected behaviors and other etiquette guidelines.
- ✔ **Yahoo! Voiceover Group:** Probably one of the oldest groups of its kind, the Yahoo! Voiceover Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/voiceovers>) is where people with a shared interest meet, get to know each other, and stay informed. This group gives you instant access to shared message archives, photos and photo albums, group event calendars, member polls, and shared links.
- ✔ **VOX Daily:** VOX Daily (<http://blogs.voices.com/voxdaily>) is the official *Voices.com* blog. VOX Daily keeps you in the loop with informative voice-over articles that encourage community involvement, conversation, and intelligent debate.
- ✔ **Voice Over Times:** Voice Over Times (www.voiceovertimes.com) is an industry news site and blog, providing feature stories, product reviews, tutorials, and opinion articles. Covering voice acting in all aspects, this website can help you find the news and stories that you need to hear now and connect you with media contacts who make your story happen.
- ✔ **Voice-OverXtra:** Voice-OverXtra (www.voiceoverxtra.com) is a news, education, and resource center. Both voice-over newcomers and seasoned pros can learn and share how to succeed in this vibrant industry, 24/7. The site gives you valuable tools, including an industry resource directory, and a comprehensive calendar of training opportunities.
- ✔ **Voice Over Experts:** The Voice Over Experts podcast (www.podcastdirectory.com/podcasts) allows you to hear from some of the top voice-over instructors, authors, and voice acting celebrities from around the world as they share some of their knowledge, available to you free of charge. Each podcast is about 10 to 15 minutes and features a special guest. The special guests are industry experts, often acting instructors, casting directors,

agents, or vocal coaches who share a nugget of wisdom from their experience. You can also directly listen to more than 130 podcast episodes from the website or download them from iTunes.

- ✔ **Voices.com webinars:** Every week, Voices.com offers free webinars that walk you through how to use the website in detail. Sit back, watch, and learn as the presenter navigates through each section of the website. You can watch dozens of previously recorded webinars on www.youtube.com, where you can fast forward, rewind, or pause.
- ✔ **EdgeStudio teleseminars:** EdgeStudio is an education and training facility in New

York City that offers in-person voice-over classes but also opportunities by telephone. Similar to webinars, a *teleseminar* occurs on a specific date and time where dozens if not hundreds of people call in to a conference line to learn about a new technology, service, or the basics of acting and performance. In some cases, you may find a teleseminar easier to join because it's literally just calling a phone number and then punching in an access code when prompted. The downside is that you miss the visuals, but often this is a moot point because you can just focus on the information offered by the expert.

In these sections, we explain what it means to decipher a script, how to know if a role is right for you, and the kinds of demos that you can make. We also discuss musical considerations. Something else you need to look at when recording a demo is whether you should record your own demo at home or you should work with a professional recording studio. We discuss the pros and cons at length in Part II.

Uncovering a script

Sometimes when reading through a script, you really need to be reading between the lines. Reading between the lines means that you can see beyond what's on the page. Your interpretation comprises more than just the text but also feelings and motivations behind what you're recording. Being able to do so is important to give a better read with more substance.



When making a demo, the scripts you choose are very important. You need to reflect both your vocal abilities and the roles you're willing to take on as a voice actor. You'll know if a script is right for you based upon whether or not you personally agree with its content. A coach or demo producer can help you if you want a second opinion. These professionals tend to have their ears on the pulse of what's trending in demos and will have a good grasp of the sort of material you should have on your demo to be competitive and stand out. Chapter 7 addresses finding scripts for your voice-over demo suitable to your voice and the work you want to do.

Hitting record

Stepping up to the microphone with the knowledge that a recording is in progress can be exciting! There's nothing quite like hearing your own voice played back to you.



Before you record your demo, you need to make sure you're ready before you hit the record button. During the recording process, you also need to consider these points to ensure your demo sounds professional and can get you work:

- ✓ You use the right music or sound effects.
- ✓ Your voice is warmed up and hydrated.
- ✓ You're well-rehearsed.

Chapter 8 gives you perspective about recording your own demo (DIY style) or going into a professional recording studio.

Finding Your Way through Audition Land

The audition process can be nerve-racking because you're showcasing prospective customers what your abilities and skills are. You want to stand out so you inevitably get hired. In today's voice acting world, auditions happen more and more in the virtual world, although sometimes you still do need to audition in person. The following sections give an overview to why the audition process is important and what you need to know to audition.

Touting yourself

The way you present yourself for opportunities is very important. Whether the audition is in person or online, putting your best voice forward is something you should aspire to for each and every audition.



To make a good first impression when voice acting, consider our suggestions:

- ✓ Only audition for roles you are able to do.
- ✓ Follow instructions.
- ✓ Greet the director or client warmly.
- ✓ Send in your best read.

Check out Chapter 11 for how you can stand out in your auditions.

Knowing how to audition

No matter whether you're auditioning online or in person, clients expect proper etiquette, which means you know how to do the following before your audition:

- ✓ Warm up your voice.
- ✓ Prepare your read.
- ✓ Follow directions.
- ✓ Be able to interpret copy.

Being able to navigate the audition waters, both online and in person, can serve you well. Chapter 12 explains how to audition online, which often requires you to record a custom sample of the client's script, prepare a quote, and submit a proposal. Chapter 13 walks you through some auditioning basics for real-person auditions.

Working in Your Home Studio

As the Internet becomes more and more a part of the business world, being a professional voice actor means that you can work with clients from your own home recording studio. Building a studio doesn't mean you have to take out a building permit and add on an extra room to your house. An in-home studio can be an affordable endeavor depending on what equipment you buy. If you're treating voice acting as a business, you'll be able to justify the cost of investing in some quality equipment to get you on your way.

These sections run you through the basics of what to include in your home recording studio, and how to record, edit, and mix your audio. Knowing how to record on your own is critical to being a successful voice actor in today's virtual age.

Identifying what you need

Your home recording studio needs to have the basic equipment to record a professional-sounding demo. Contrary to popular opinion, it doesn't have to cost a fortune to build a respectable home recording studio. It doesn't need to resemble a first-class audio production environment in New York or Los Angeles.



Your home studio does need the following equipment so your recordings don't sound amateur:

- ✓ Computer
- ✓ An external microphone
- ✓ Good quality microphone cable
- ✓ Pop filter

Chapter 17 runs you through everything you need to know about building a home recording studio, how much money you should budget, and the equipment you need, both hardware and software, to start.

Recording, editing, and mixing

When you record your voice, you may find that you make some mistakes here and there, leave too much space between words, or need to cough and clear your throat. The wonderful thing about digital audio is that you don't have to rerecord the entire read. You can edit rather painlessly by placing your cursor to select the area you want to remove and voilà! You can polish your recording in a matter of seconds.



Knowing how to record your voice, edit, and mix a recording is standard so far as professional voice actors go. Skills such as editing and mixing can turn a slightly marred take into a keeper, so you'll want to master how to edit because it can save you time having to rerecord every time you make a mistake or need to pause. You can find what you need about the basics of audio recording in Chapter 18. We cover more advanced topics, such as editing and mixing, in Chapter 19.

Getting your product to clients

After you record your voice, edit, and mix it, you want to make sure your prospective clients get their hands on it. You want to make sure you format the files and deliver them the way your client wants. Chapter 21 explains how to prepare and deliver the finished audio files.