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**Marketing Your Voiceover Business Online**

**By Peter Drew**

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**The Voice-Over Revolution**

The Internet is revolutionizing the voice-over business. Today quality remote recording of voiceovers can be done virtually anywhere. With a PC, mic, and Internet connection, almost anyone can set up shop as a voice talent.

A few years ago, a remote session entailed a voice over talent standing in a commercial production house studio, say, in L.A., taking direction over the telephone through a "phone patch" from, say, New York City.

The next innovation in remote recording was the satellite link. It sounds great on either end, but it's very expensive, so it's suited only for sessions with the biggest budgets and most expensive talents.

A few years after the satellite link came the more economical ISDN, which stands for Integrated Services Digital Network. ISDN is a digital hookup via the telephone system. Each location is connected to the other through a piece of hardware called a "codec." An ISDN hookup is preferred by agencies and clients with budgets large enough to accommodate the additional cost of recording an out-of-market voice over artist.

The latest, and, so far, most liberating technology available to voice over talents is the now ubiquitous .mp3 file—the same file type used for swapping songs over the `Net. A voice talent anywhere in the world can set up a home studio and be in business. The talent records the voiceover, with direction via phone patch, if desired by the client, into a PC equipped with simple audio editing software. Next an .mp3 file is created and then sent as an email attachment to the agency and/or client. No expensive satellite or ISDN linkups. No commercial production facility. Simply put: no middleman.

Is this a good thing? Not entirely. The home VO studio explosion can be likened to the desktop publishing frenzy of 15 years ago. Just because you have a powerful printing press in a box on your desk doesn't mean you're automatically going to produce coherent, well-designed publications.

Everyone thought they could buy PageMaker, print some business cards and letterhead, and, voila, an instant living publishing newsletters. Of course, the vast majority of these desktop publishing newbies discovered it takes more than technology to succeed. First and foremost, it takes talent, training, and experience to use the tool, the software, effectively—and most important—profitably.

With that caveat out of the way, and assuming you have the chops to make a go of your home voice-over business, let's look at how the Internet also has revolutionized promotion of voice over talents.

### **Drumming up business**

Before the home studio, voiceover artists had to go to studios to record. Promotion included distributing

your demo on cassette or CD to production houses, ad agencies, talent agents, and casting agents; making phone calls; sending reminder cards with your latest credits; sending thank you gifts to clients at holiday time; and networking with anyone and everyone. Actually, to be successful, you still have to do all of those things, but now you have additional promotional opportunities via the World Wide Web.

So, where to start? First, put up a website. Design it yourself or hire a site designer.

[www.magicInet.com](http://www.magicInet.com) is a new hosting service specializing in helping voice actors and other performers get their website on-line. What should you put on your website? The most important function of your site is to feature your demos. It also should highlight your credits, contact info, and bio. The best way to learn about voice-over website design is to look at voice talent sites. Do a search for keywords, e.g. voiceovers, voice overs, voice over talent, voice over artists, and any other search terms you can think of and see what other talents have done. If you're designing your own site, subscribe to a couple of search engine optimization email newsletters, e.g. WebProNews and SiteProNews. They'll give you lots of helpful design info and help you "optimize" your site, so you get high placement in search engines.

OK. You have your website up and hummin'. Now, be sure to put your website's address on anything and everything you mail to prospective clients: you demos, stationery, business cards, reminder cards, etc. If you still have reams of stationery left, then just include the website address in the letters you type and print. For all those demos, business cards, and reminder cards still sitting on your shelf, buy some labels, print your website address on them, and stick `em on.

### **Caveat Emptor!**

There are plenty of places on the World Wide Web to promote your voice over services, both free and for a fee—BUT BE CAREFUL! Caveat Emptor (Buyer Beware) is the operative phrase. Here are some free places to place a link to your website:

<http://www.voiceartist.com/>, <http://www.radio411.com/addlink.htm>,  
<http://www.starsnsites.com/voice/index.html>, <http://audioworld.com/>

As for paying for to listed with an on-line voice talent site, be sure the site is legitimate. Unfortunately,

like so many other things that start off well, a few bad apples begin turning up. Before you pony up any dough, be sure to speak/write to other talent listed on the site to see if the site has actually gotten them any work. Here are a few legitimate fee-based websites:

[www.mktmania.com](http://www.mktmania.com), [www.voice123.com](http://www.voice123.com), [www.gotvoices.com](http://www.gotvoices.com), [www.1212.com](http://www.1212.com), [www.voicefinder.biz](http://www.voicefinder.biz), [www.voiceoverselect.com](http://www.voiceoverselect.com), [www.interactivevoices.com](http://www.interactivevoices.com), [www.commercialvoices.com](http://www.commercialvoices.com)

In addition to fee-for-inclusion websites, there are fee-for-inclusion CDs, which are distributed to ad agencies, production houses, talent agents, radio and TV stations, etc. Again, CAVEAT EMPTOR! There are scam artists who have discovered that voice-over people can be very eager to promote their services. These scammers offer CD demos that, well, either never get made or sent. They sure take your money, though. So, be careful. Make sure any company you deal with is reputable. Ask for references. If it's a start-up operation, wait until the first CD is sent out and is in circulation for a while. Then call some of the participants and see if they got any work out of it. Here two reputable CD demo services:

<http://www.tmcentury.com/?products/HitDisc/hdemo.htm>, <http://www.vo-usa.com/contact.htm>

If you know of any other reputable CD demo services, then please email me, [pdrew@portone.com](mailto:pdrew@portone.com), and I'll add it to my list and this article.

### **Groups and forums**

There are a lot of voice over related groups and forums on the Web. Go to Yahoo Groups and type in voice over, voiceovers, voice over talent, voice over artist, etc., and you'll find many groups where you can drop in and learn from others. Participate if you'd like, but remember, anything you post in these chat rooms stays there pretty much for life. If you might regret saying something, then keep your fingers away from the keyboard.

### **Marketing vs. talent**

You may be the greatest voice talent on the planet, but, if no one knows who you are, well, then that's wasted talent. So, get out there and promote and make your business a success.

©Peter Drew

## **Starting Your At-Home Voice-Over Business**

### **By Peter Drew**

Thinking of getting into the voiceover business full time, specifically, opening your own in-house voice-over studio? Good for you! It's a really great way to make a living!

OK. You've got the dream. Now let's see what it takes to make it a reality. First question for you: What

do you think is the most important thing you need to launch your business? A great voice? Surprisingly, a great voice isn't all that important for success. Talent? Well, yeah, you're gonna need some talent, but talent (in most cases) can always be developed through study and practice. Determination? Sure, but simple determination won't make you a success.

### THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

So, what's the most important thing? Get ready. It's called...a plan. Yup. A plan. Not very "show bizzy," huh? No, it isn't, but it's the most important piece of the business start up puzzle, and it applies to every type of start-up, not just voiceovers. Now, before we talk plans, let's talk about the second most important thing you'll need for success—money.

### IT TAKES MONEY TO MAKE MONEY

A lack of capital, seed money, whatever you call it, is the overwhelming reason most business start-ups fail, including those with a plan. You'll need enough money to pay for equipment, marketing materials, office expenses, insurance, utilities, etc., etc., while you're waiting for the checks to come rolling in. Oh, and just to remind you, you'll need money to live on, too. How much money will you need for the business and living expenses? We'll get to that shortly, but first, let's talk about your plan.

### A PLAN BY ANY OTHER NAME

Call it a business plan if you like, but that tends to sound a little intimidating and, frankly, overwhelming. Call it your "plan for success," or "my freedom from oppressive employers plan," you know, something more self-affirming and inspiring. Whatever you call it, your plan should include the following points...

The voice-over services you will sell and to whom you will sell them. You probably have, or will have, a particular strength, e.g. characters, promo/imaging for radio and TV, corporate narration, animation characters, hard sell, etc. Accentuating your strength and marketing it to the appropriate clients can lead to more gigs than just a general scattershot approach to all possible clients.

The revenue needed to stay in business for six months, one year, and beyond. What do you earn now each month? What will you need to maintain your current lifestyle? Whatever the figure, it's the amount you'll need in the bank or coming in from a second full or part-time job for at least the first six months in business, if not a full year. Reason? There's always a delay between the starting date of your voiceover business and when money actually starts coming in.

The amount of capital (seed money) needed to start up and keep the business afloat. This is operating capital you'll use exclusively to fund the business for the first six to twelve months. You'll need enough to keep the business afloat until you break even then start earning money, instead of just paying it out in expenses.

Short-term goals to get your voice-over business up and running. Typical short term goals include: getting your demo(s) done; selecting, ordering, and installing your studio equipment; deciding where in your home to put your studio; deciding how to make your studio decent acoustically and installing the

## Marketing Your Voiceover Business Online

acoustical treatment; designing a logo and stationery, and ordering them; locating contacts to whom you can send your demo(s); setting up your bookkeeping system (QuickBooks is excellent.

); getting health coverage and property insurance to insure your equipment;

deciding if you're going to buy an ISDN unit and installing an ISDN line; ordering marketing materials, like postcards to send to clients.

Long-term goals, including future revenue goals and funding your retirement. How big is your dream? How well do you want to live in retirement? Determining your long-term goals will guide you to the actions needed to attain them. Consult your accountant. If you don't have one, be sure to get one.

That's enough to get you started. There are plenty of books on voice-overs to help you complete your plan. Visit your local bookstore or go on-line.

As you can see, you can start your voice-over business part-time or full-time. With a little planning—and seed money—you'll be on your way. Have fun!

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Peter Drew, a freelance voice-over talent and copywriter/producer with 28 years of experience, is heard on radio and television stations, corporate presentations, web sites, and messages-on-hold across America. To hear samples of his work or to send an email regarding this article, please visit

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Will Online Marketing Work For You?

Develop An Online Marketing Strategy To Maximise All Of Your Marketing Activities

Why Subscribing Too Many Newsletters Can Cost You Money

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The Great Big Book of Internet Marketing

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