HOW TO EARN MONEY FROM HOME AS A
voice-over artist

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Chapter 1

The Voice Over Market

The Benefits of Online Voice Work

Take a moment to think about just how prevalent vocal work is in the contemporary media, and the extremely high demand for voice overs in the entertainment industry.

When you get up in the morning and turn on the TV, you are sure to see television advertisements. On the Internet, banner ads have a voice actor pitching a product to you. When you drive to work, you hear someone's voice during radio commercials, and another voice reads the name of the radio station.

When you get to the office, you might be asked to watch a training video that someone has voiced. Or perhaps you have to call another office and navigate through their automated phone menu, which, again, someone has voiced.

Later, your boss asks you to take a business trip next week, and you will get on the plane and hear a safety recording that someone has voiced. Then you will get in a taxi cab, and the driver has a talking GPS which will direct him to your destination, and he has had a choice of several voices, each with a different accent.

In your spare time, you browse and download web content and media, such as podcasts and audiobooks. Your children watch animated movies and play video games, with each and every character performed by a different voice actor. The size of the voice over market is astounding, and job searching online provides you with various industry contacts and websites that you can visit and sign up for.

Beginning to do voice overs online does not work miracles. It does not immediately provide you with the invaluable personal connections that voice over veterans with years of experience in the industry would have. But even the traditional job market would not necessarily provide those privileges. Online voice over sites provide an excellent value for your time and money--in this sense, they give you an easy "in", a foot in the door, to help you break into the voice over industry.

The key is patience: if you follow a few steps closely, and if you spend your time building your voice over skills, and once you know where people of your experience level can market themselves to potential clients, it is certain that you will benefit from doing voice overs, because the barrier to entry is so low.

Obstacles of Online Voice Work

Nevertheless, when you visit the sites suggested in this book (see chapter 3) to search for work, you will be competing with many people in precisely the same situation as yourself. You will be competing for jobs against artists with the same level of experience--competing against people willing to work on small jobs at low rates until a big opportunity arrives.

Yet the voice over industry is somewhat more accessible to newcomers than other performance markets. We would all love to be cast as Superman or Harry Potter, but it is virtually impossible for you or I to gain a starring role in a blockbuster movie, as famous Hollywood actors are cast in the lead roles, and any famous actor will remain famous for years and continue taking star roles.

But in the voice over market, things happen more quickly. You get to work on smaller projects instead of big blockbusters. In advertising and online content, things quite often go viral suddenly and unexpectedly, and you may find out that you have voiced a short but successful clip of audio. And you just happened to be in that viral clip because you did so many of them! So online voice over work is about creating multiple streams of income and attracting as many opportunities as you can, rather than just working for high rates.

Online Jobs vs. The Traditional Voice Over Market

Some critics say that, by making your voice over search seem simple, online voice over job sites downplay the amount of effort that a budding voice over artist should invest in their career. These web startups are allegedly overhyped, they say, and pay relatively little money for your valuable time and work.

Particularly harsh critics will suggest that rather than taking several "bit part" voice over gigs, real financial success comes from more traditional methods. A traditional job seeker would tell you that you should spend your time making up a resume and a portfolio, or a demo reel of your past work--that you should be making persistent phone calls to potential clients, and continuing to apply to high-paying jobs despite the rejections you get. The rationale of the traditional job seeker is that, if you do a traditional job search, you can find higher-paying voice over gigs.

Admittedly, it is true that proponents of the online market often overlook the traditional market. But traditional methods do not guarantee you success or money, either. Critics who favour the traditional approach usually overlook the fact that quite a lot of time that you spend in a traditional job search is not typically compensated.

If you are not working online, you have to conform to industry and union standards, doing what everyone has agreed on, even if it is not the most efficient way of doing things for you personally. Traditionally, you may have had to travel to a recording studio owned by your employer, who demands that you work with exactly the set of equipment that he or she has chosen. Traditionally, you would do auditions that take more time than is strictly necessary, simply because the production company has a standard audition procedure.

So the main advantage of doing voice overs online in this respect is that, even though you will begin working for relatively low pay, your time will not be wasted at all. You can find voice overs at a few suggested sites which will take seconds to apply to, and in hours you can begin recording. It takes a trivial amount of time to actually do a number of these easily manageable voice overs.

Chapter 2

Recognizing Your Potential

Your Spare Time

Online voice acting is targeted at people who want to, or are able to, work from home. If you are a stay-at-home parent, you can work when your spouse is home, at night, or when your children are out on a playdate or at daycare. If you are a student, you can do voicework during periods of low course workloads, on summer vacation, or on other breaks.

If you are an on-call worker, you can do voice overs in those weeks when you just aren't getting called into work. If you are in between jobs or have been laid off, or if you are retired or semi-retired, then you have plenty of time to spend on voice over work, and you get to do it only when you decide that you want to.

If any of these profiles describe your work situation, then you have the most to gain from online voice over work. In short, voice over jobs are low-risk and high in potential reward, and if you have even the slightest amount of spare time, then that is more than enough time to break into voice over work.

Marketing Yourself

The most vital skill you can develop is this: over time, as you become familiar with the voice over field, you should learn to negotiate with the clients who want to purchase your voice over services (see chapter 3). It is important that you find a way to work less for the money you deserve. This does not come naturally to most people, and you can find online courses (see chapter 5) written by experts in the field who have first-hand experience getting ahead.

You do not have to worry about marketing and negotiation right away, though. Needless to say, as you develop your marketing skills, you will already be earning at least some voice over income that compensates your time.

Practice And Learn

Voice over artists are not required to possess any special skills before they begin working. A willingness to learn is all that you need to have. A major aspect of working online is self-directed learning. You will have the opportunity to pick up voice over skills, and you will find out how to make use of various invaluable tips and techniques from your peers. You will learn how to read scripts quickly and effectively, and you will soon pick up tricks such as speed reading, memorization, and the use of cue cards.

If you practice enough, you can learn how to use your voice for dramatic effect, and how to use your voice for several distinct roles--that is, acting out different characters. Breathing techniques and enunciation are also important to learn.

You should experiment with proper microphone usage, for example, by adjusting the microphone's distance from yourself, and by trying out pop filters, which will catch some of the air that you breathe into the microphone while speaking. Basically, you should work through plenty of exercises and resources (see chapter 5) that help you to practice your performance, and that teach you to act as your own director in your own home studio.

Chapter 3

Finding a Website to Work On

Now that you know a little about the market, it's time to start thinking about where you will search for online voice over jobs, and comparing various sites. Here are a few things to consider.

Payment

Consider how you'll make money. First, glance over the pay rates (if they are visible to non-members) and seek out the highest rates and lowest rates so that you have an idea of how much you might be working for. Does the site itself set rates for particular types of contract? Does the job seeker or job poster set the rates? Is there bidding? Remember that if the site intervenes and ensures fair rates, it hampers your ability to compete by offering the lowest rates for your services. It is ultimately your choice.

Also consider how the site makes money for themselves. Do they charge you a subscription fee, and if so, are there multiple tiers of payment? Do they charge you nothing and get paid through ads? Do they take a commission, or a percentage of what you earn? No one way is better than the others, but you may find some a better fit, depending on how much money you are willing to invest upfront in order to gain access to a more exclusive site.

Finally, look at the payment system. If the site acts as a middleman, do they pay to Paypal, Stripe, or your credit card? If the payment system the site uses is not available in your country, the job site may be useless to you. (This is not an issue if the site connects you directly to clients, and simply serves as a meeting place.)

Age of the Site

First, look at when the site was founded. A voice over site may gain or lose popularity over time. If the site gains popularity, the amount of competition is affected, and it may be overrun with people willing to compete at low rates. A good site will change its system and adapt to this, by offering different levels of membership for professionals and amateurs.

If the site loses popularity, you may be applying for jobs that never materialize, or waiting a long time because jobs are not posted frequently. A good site will solve this problem by making big changes to attract new users, and advertising the revamps.

Features of the Site

Consider how the site works. Have voice over artists had more success posting that they are in search of a job (ie. "looking for work" ads), or is it more effective for you to reply to clients that want voice over artists (ie. "talent wanted" ads)? Neither way is better than the other, but you will want to know where to focus your attention on each site.

If you are working in a niche market--for example, if you work in a particular language--it is beneficial if the site makes it easy to refine a search to your niche. You may not have to output a large range of content, as people are willing to pay higher rates for a rare talent.

But if you have a diverse range of abilities, and are good with self-promotion and social climbing, it may be beneficial if the site does not have definable categories. Your biggest asset might be that you can put out more content and become more prominent in the community, becoming a jack-of-all-trades that everyone has heard of.

Finally, consider if you will be working on the site itself rather than with the client directly. Some sites have custom audio software that allows you to connect live with your client. If so, make sure the site supports the media format that you choose to work with, and you may be able to put a portfolio or demo reel on the site just once. If the site is merely a place for clients and artists to meet, you may have to send a custom demo to each client by email, or find some other place to host it, all of which is time consuming.

A Few Sites to Compare

This section discusses a number of popular sites at which you can find voice over work. The information below is summarized from the official sites at the time that this book was published, and is subject to change.

Casting Call Club offers free and paid memberships. The gold plan is relatively inexpensive, because the site is not taking money for profit, only for site upkeep. It is affiliated with Voices.com, but is targeted at beginners and amateurs. Often criticized for hosting low-quality projects and producing low-quality recordings, the site's creator is currently in the process of dividing the site into professional and hobbyist sections. This is probably the best site for the new voice actor.

Bodalgo allows you to apply to voice over jobs, giving you a lot of power. Voice over artists and the client negotiate pay, and the site does not interfere with rates like Voice Realm and Voices.com do. Bodalgo also does not favour first applicants, and later applicants show up at the top of the audition list. Like VoiceRealm, Bodalgo also stresses professional-quality recording, but there is some amateur work as well. It is another good site for beginners.

Voice Realm sets rates based around where the audio will be used, and the number of the words in the script. You can both post your demos and respond to casting notices. Some of the posts will be marked "fast voice casting", meaning that you must respond and submit your work quite quickly. The audio format that you work in is determined by the client buying your services, and the site stresses that you should have a professional-quality home studio rather than just basic equipment.

Voices.com similarly intervenes quite heavily in payment rates, which are based on the duration of the session or the time spent in studio, on the duration for the recording, or on the recording medium (TV, radio, or non-broadcast).

Voice123 operates differently depending on the tier of account you sign up for, and gives a lot of power to the client hiring the voice actor. The free service matches you with job offers if a client decides to invite you. You cannot simply choose to apply to a job. This restricts your opportunities, but saves you time, as you are competing with fewer people.

Voice123 does not take commissions, and is merely a way to connect voice workers and clients, but it does offer more expensive premium accounts that will automatically invite you to auditions, in addition to being hand-picked by clients. It is only with the very expensive platinum account that you are allowed to apply to any job you want.

ACX (Audiobook Creation Exchange) is a site that specializes in audiobook narration. It allows you to get paid at your own rate (per hour of content), or with 50% royalties from the audiobook rights holder, or some combination of the two. It encourages home studio recording, but also provides a service to help you find a professional studio to use. Your audition is in the form a 15-minute sample of the audiobook.

You can also look into related sites. **Edge Studio** does not serve as a job exchange, but provides monologues that you can record for your demo recordings. **The Global Voice Acting Academy** provides a rate guide.

Fiverr and **Upwork** are broader freelancing sites that have multiple voice over opportunities.

Chapter 4

Recording Equipment

Hardware

In order to build a home recording studio, you may need to invest in some equipment, assuming that you do not already have it. You can spend as much or as little money on this as you like.

You do not need much more than a microphone or two, and a pair of headphones, all of which are cheaply available at retail outlets. These are sold even more cheaply at thrift stores or dollar stores. It is possible that your laptop or tablet already has a microphone built into it.

Specialized microphones do exist, but are often beyond the price range of the beginning recorder. A simple analog microphone should do the trick, and rarely costs more than ten dollars. Ideally, you should buy one that will fit into both sizes of audio jack in case you end up recording on different equipment.

If your computer does not have a microphone jack, you can purchase a USB microphone. Also note that your headphone jack may double as a microphone jack, with the computer automatically detecting what is plugged in. In this case you may be able to buy an audio jack splitter and plug both a microphone and headphones into just one jack. Alternately, you can buy wireless Bluetooth headphones, which will not take up the audio jack.

Shock mounts and microphone stands hold the microphone and prevent vibrations and shaking, which can interfere with the recording. Wall padding and other sound absorbers will cancel out ambient noise.

As you learn more over the course of your voice work and practice, you may choose to invest in top-of-the line studio equipment and additional hardware that will make your work more desirable to your clients. As you become an expert in voice over work, you can spend more money on advanced equipment, and you will know how to take full advantage of the hardware.

Software

Audio editing software is necessary, and does not need to cost hundreds of dollars. Sound recording programs are available for free and are easy to use, and as you gain experience you may choose to spend money on more advanced software.

There are various common features that you should know about. Track splitting is a useful feature if you are recording a long session, such as an audiobook that you need to split into chapters. You are usually able to add labels, which can be exported into the metadata (title, author, track number) when the audio is finalized. Basic sound generators can create clicks, buzzes, tones, hums, and white noise, which are useful if you are recording online content that needs distinct divisions for the user but cannot be separated into tracks. And there are various transformation tools, which often simply involve clicking and dragging the audio waveform to adjust duration and loudness.

Here a few programs you might use.

Highly recommended is **Audacity**, which is free, and is a fairly simple but powerful program that is easy to learn. It may run slowly on some computers or crash when opening large files, and exporting to particular formats such as MP3 takes some extra set-up. But there are plenty of effects and filters that you can apply to your audio to clean it up, and it can recover your work in case of a crash. It also has extensive support and documentation from its users, and you can ask questions online if you have trouble.

Ardour 4 is a digital audio workstation, more powerful than Audacity, with a highly customizable interface and lots of downloadable plugins. It's available to buy cheaply on a name-your-price model starting at one dollar. **Adobe Audition** and **Reaper** are more expensive audio workstations, comparable to Ardour in terms of features.

Sound Recorder is a bare-bones program included with Windows, and is good for tiny jobs with few expectations.

You only need basic computers skills to begin recording. Often you can simply plug in a microphone and click record. A more in-depth guide will teach you the general features and countless possibilities of recording software--not just how to record your voice but how to add to it, by embedding music and adding sound effects and transformations. Make sure that the software you purchase is well-documented so that you know its specifics and idiosyncrasies.

For tablets, there are several options, with none dominating the market. RecApp, Recorder Plus HD, and Voice recorder by Audioholic are very full-featured and have an interface similar to Audacity. All are compatible with iOS.

Dictaphone and Audio Note Book Free are more similar to the Sound Recorder included in Windows. Recapp, Voice Record Plus HD, Recordings, and Voice Recorder (Free), and Recorder HQ have some variation on these features.

Chapter 5

Further Learning

Apart from the vast amount of free information online, to train yourself more extensively or to develop a practice routine, you may choose to purchase access to a more in-depth guide or course that serves a training or educational purpose. Since online voicework is a relatively new industry, many guides or courses will not be available through mainstream booksellers or Amazon, and may only be available for purchase from the company that produces the product.

Compare Guides And Courses

Here are a few guides for you to consider:

VO Genesis, an ebook focusing on voicework methods and industry in-roads
The Definite Guide to Voice Over Success, a training guide published by Voices.com (see chapter 4)
The Voiceworx Announcer's Voice-Over Workbook, an ebook and print book providing instruction, sample scripts, and exercises
The Best Book on Getting A Voice-Over Job, a guide to finding jobs, understanding the industry, and practicing your skills
Edge Studio -- a voice over acting class
Voice Over 101 -- another voice over acting class
Voice Over Resource Guide -- a free guide that mainly provides industry contact lists

Afterword

Over the past five chapters, we covered the voice over market, and examined how the online voice over market compares to the traditional voice over market. We also looked at what a potential voice over artist should have, both in terms of skills and equipment. The sites and online resources that have been listed in this book are only the tip of the iceberg--the Internet is always changing, so be sure to keep searching for new opportunities. Be sure to build your skills and routinely practice the trade.

Take your time, and you will find voiceover work rewarding. Start small, think big, and pursue your dreams. Invest your time and a little money until you hit a big break. Compare sites and products thoroughly before you invest in them.

Hopefully this guide will have informed you and enabled you to take the first few steps into the voice over market. Take as many opportunities as you can, but only after carefully considering whether they are legitimate or not. Good luck and happy job hunting!