**Voiceover Narration: The Key to a Successful Project**

*How to write narration for, find and work with voice actors*

Voiceover narration can be the key to a successful training program, eLearning course or any other arena in which it is used. However, you need to be able to write effective learning tools with the narrator in mind, while understanding the richness that the right voice can bring to the material. It is also important to know what you can expect from a voice actor, what qualities to look for, how to find them, and what you can expect to pay for professional voice acting services.

More and more, Training & Development professionals are utilizing a broader variety of technologies and approaches to engage learners. A new medium pops up almost daily. A good voice actor can make or break any of these productions.

**Identifying a Need for Training.** A need for training may become apparent from several sources: another department asks for it, you may have a regular feedback loop to identify needs across the organization, or you may do certain things on a regular basis. Keep the voice actor in mind as you determine which approach and medium to use.

**Consider your objective.** Your approach may be dictated by what you need to accomplish. For example, if you need a video to welcome new employees, you might want a clip of the CEO saying ‘hello’ with him/her painting a vision of the organization’s values, followed by a video tour of your facility with voiceover narration.

You may want to create new knowledge (cognitive), develop feelings and emotions (affective) or enhance physical or manual skills (psychomotor). Whether you need to inform, persuade, or remind will influence both your medium and your choice of voice actor.

As you refine your objectives, keep in mind the kind of voice that will best accomplish them. Are you looking to build enthusiasm? Command authority? Change attitudes? Express empathy? Or just impart knowledge in an interesting manner?

**Profile your audience.** Who your listener *IS* will influence what type of voice actor you want to communicate with them. Profile your audience in as detailed a fashion as possible. Whether they are young/old, executive/factory worker, a new buyer/loyal consumer, accent/geographic area/language, and race/ethnicity or other demographic characteristics should influence your choices. You may choose to match your voice actor to your audience if that is indicated. You want the learner to empathize with the voice actor.

**Write an engaging script with a narrator in mind.** Engagement is a hot topic in training circles and the right voice actor can go a long way towards bringing employees into the process of learning. Is this a serious, formal program? Then, you want someone who can speak with authority and command interest in the subject. An older actor would better serve your needs for credibility and trust. On the other hand, if it is more casual, you might want a voice that is more fun who can handle a light-hearted approach with ease. A younger voice might bring energy to the read. Where the listener will be when engaging in the training is another consideration. The voiceover artist may need to grab their attention on-the-go.

**What to expect of a voice actor.** Most professional voice artists work remotely these days, with broadcast quality sound studios in their homes. Voice actors can give you a finished product in the form of an Mp3 or WAV file unless you have editing capabilities yourself. They usually will work with your schedule and give you a quick turnaround time. Their narration demo should give you a cursory idea of how they will sound in your project and give you an idea of the range of their voices. Or you can get a quick listen to many demos on casting platforms (called pay-to-play sites) that we will discuss shortly.

You may wish to provide them with a script to use and have them audition. Ask for more than one take. They may come up with an approach that you hadn’t considered that will enhance the material. Pay attention to their tone of voice, pacing and suitability to your project and brand. Studies have determined that 38% of a message comes from one’s tone of voice.

**What to look for in a voice actor.** It is nice if they have experience with similar projects to yours, in similar industries. Sometimes it is helpful, if not necessary, for the voice actor to have a background in your subject matter, such as knowing how to pronounce medical terminology. It is a plus if they have had voice acting training or coaching with reputable voiceover experts. What qualities do you want the voice actor to convey: warmth, command respect, funny, seriousness, knowledgeable, parental, caring and so on. Get details about their home sound booth. What kind of equipment do they have? Have they eliminated background noise? Nearly 60% of recent survey respondents said audio quality was the most important consideration when hiring a voice actor. Vocal performance (43%) and cost (35%) followed behind to round out an informative top three. Voices.com Survey of 2023 Trends

You want the voice actor to connect with your audiences. It is the voice actor’s job, using your script, to provide exposition, or further meaning, to your visuals. If this is a long-term project where you will use the same actors over and over, keep in mind what kind of voice that you want representing your company.

**Where to find professional voice actors:**

You have many avenues to use in locating just the right talent. Voice actors can be found around the world, with casting services providing them in a variety of languages and cultures. Voiceover agents can bring you a selection of voice actors to meet your needs that makes the process easy. Online casting sites are often fast and cheap, allowing you to listen to many demos at once. Freelancing sites, such as Upwork and Freelancer, have voice actors, but also thousands of other services, so they may be too broad. You could put out a casting call on social media that will bring you many applicants who will audition with your script. Audio & video production houses have rosters of voice actors who have been prescreened. Or, you could find a voice actor directly by Googling ‘voice actor’ or ‘voiceover.’ Most actors are independent contractors with websites that can tell you about them. You may want to build your own roster of talent from many sources, including emails from prospective voice talent.

**What will a voice actor cost?** Your budget may determine where you look, with sometimes less expensive, less experienced voice actors available on casting and freelance sites. Some are SAG/AFTRA union members can command high payments. Non-union rates are most often found in the GVAA Rate Card. (link) Or, you can work directly with the talent to determine what is fair. Rates vary by the audience (internal, external, limited, broad), length of time you will use their voice, and reach of the medium.

**Working with a voice actor**

Remember that the voice actor is there to bring your vision to life. You can work with them directly, or through an agent or other source. Be sure to give them clear written instructions about who your audience is, the setting for the learning experience and how you want the topic communicated. You may want them to do 2-3 takes, to give you an idea of different approaches to the subject. Be open to letting them suggest improvements to your script in enunciation, voice style and more.

They will usually make revisions for no charge. If you make major changes to the script, they will charge you for their time.

If you want to be more involved, you could do a directed recording session, where you advise the voice actor in the approach you want, inflection, and so on as they are performing. You can take this further and direct the actor remotely, while recording it at your facility with Source Connect or other recording software.

You may decide that this actor should be the ‘voice of your brand’ and build a long-term relationship with him/her.

**In conclusion** Training managers put a lot of time, money and energy into designing creative, interesting programs for a variety of audiences. Voiceover narration plays an important role in the success of those programs by adding authenticity that makes the content believable and enhancing learning retention by holding their interest. Time invested in finding and building a relationship with the voice you need, is time well spent.