The Art of Voice Acting

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The VoiceActing Studios Demo Production Process

I can't speak for other demo producers, but when my partner and I produce a demo through our VoiceActing Academy, we follow a nine-step process:

1. We begin with an in-person or telephone consultation during which we identify the type of demo to be produced, determine the voice actor's primary delivery style, and discuss the development of their marketing plan. The task of finding copy is given to the voice talent. We don't provide scripts, although we will occasionally write original copy or help rewrite ads selected by the voice talent. This can take from a few days to several weeks. We ask for two to three times the number of scripts that will actually be used.
2. About a week before the session we'll have a second consultation where we'll review all copy with talent to sort out the best scripts and eliminate duplicates. The resulting scripts will still number about twice what will end up in the demo. The voice talent rehearses those scripts, but not too much.
3. On the day of the session the first thing we'll do is go through the scripts again, often asking the voice talent to perform a portion of each script. This time, we eliminate more scripts until we have what we believe are the strongest scripts for our client. The rest we'll keep handy in case we need them.
4. Next, we'll record the dry voice tracks for each script. If we determine a script isn't right, we'll drop it and move on to the next. Each script will be recorded numerous times, striving for the "perfect" delivery. The session is handled no differently than any other commercial session. It's just that we're recording about a dozen commercials in a fairly short period of time. The session can take up to two hours or more.
5. As each voice track is recorded, I'm thinking of the production value that will bring each clip to life. Music and sound effects are critical. I actually start thinking about the "sound" of each clip during the pre-session meetings, but it's after the recording where we really get down to business. The music and SFX search can be a time-consuming process because for a powerful demo, each clip needs to have music with the proper energy, mood, and dynamics. It takes a skilled audio producer/engineer to do this quickly and efficiently.
6. When all the individual demo clips are produced and mixed, the next step is to put them into the strongest sequence. We'll always start the demo with what we consider to be the talent's strongest voice. The *money voice*! This is the voice we want the talent buyer to remember. From there, we'll place the clips in a sequence that provides variety, interest, and changes in mood. The idea is to create a sequence that will keep the talent buyer listening. If everything on a demo sounds the same, the buyer will stop listening after a

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few seconds. And we only have about three seconds to grab their attention.

7. The master sequencing will result in the full-length demo. For most demos, a talent agent will want a one-minute cut-down version. So, the next step is to edit a one-minute version from the full-length demo. A second or two over or under is OK.
8. The final step is to burn an audio CD and render both versions of the demo out to MP3 files, which are then emailed to the talent for future use.
9. I'll send my client home with their demo in hand asking them to call me if they hear any problems or if their agent needs something changed. It doesn't happen often, but since demo production can move fairly quickly, it's possible to miss an edit or for a music or sound effect to need adjusting in the mix. And occasionally an agent will request a different sequence.

This process is basically the same regardless of the type of demo we're producing. The amount of time it will take to produce a demo will vary depending on several factors: the type of demo being produced, how quickly the talent is able to get to the best take; how long it takes to find the proper music and SFX; how long it takes to do the postproduction for each clip; and how many changes or re-records are needed. Audio book demos usually take the least amount of time since there is no music or sound effects. Animation and video game demos are the most complex because the require a level of production that can be very time consuming.

I insist that our demo clients sit in on the entire demo production process if at all possible. I want their input at each stage of the production, and I want to know that they are happy with each segment. I also want them available in case I need to record a pick-up or if we discover a clip that just isn't working and we decide to replace it with a different script.

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