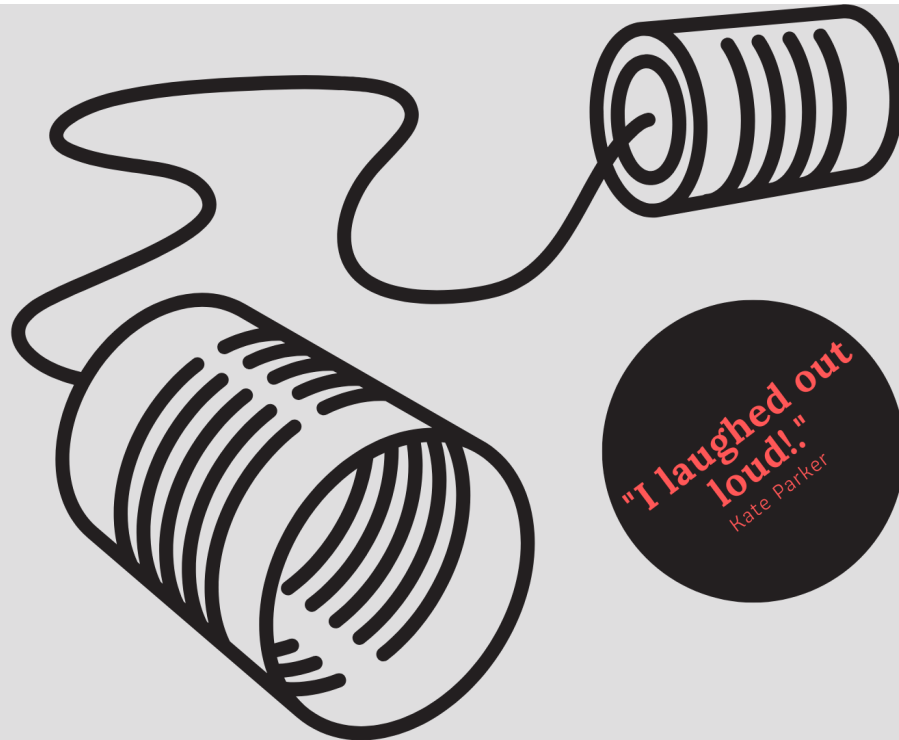


MAKE MONEY FROM VOICEOVERS

THE ALTERNATIVE GUIDE

JONATHAN SLATTER





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Introduction

Anyone can be a voiceover. It's easy, and if I can, anyone can. So, if you want to become a voiceover, don't delay, don't think about it, just remember - it's only reading aloud for money (usually).

This book will guide you through the process of becoming a successful voiceover. It covers finding your voiceover voice, setting up your voiceover studio, marketing your voice, how to nail your first session, how to breathe, dealing with difficult producers, how to say words you can't pronounce, why you don't need an agent, why A.I doesn't really matter, how to keep your neighbours quiet, what to wear and why you sometimes need two duvets.

As you turn the pages, you'll learn all the tricks of the voice trade from someone who has been a professional voice for over 30 years and who has read over 2 million characters of on-hold messages.

Chapter 1

Finding your voice



I know you'll be keen to start building your studio and recording your unique voice, but patience please...those exciting moments are just around the corner. First I need to help you 'find your voice'. Please do not skip this step.

Remember, everyone has a voice. So sit down, keep your back straight, concentrate on your posture, connect your feet to the floor, breathe in, close your eyes, slowly breathe out...and then say the following mantra, as quietly but also as proudly as you can:

I am a professional voiceover. Yes I am

If at this point you are struggling for breath - take a short one and say it a bit louder this time:

I am a professional voice over. Yes - I am.

Remember to pause after the word 'Yes'. Repeat this process 14 times, increasing in volume and drama each time, until you begin to sound as though you are addressing an hysterical crowd at a 1930s political rally. Try to smile as you speak at all times, and for now try to avoid jerky arm movements (remember, voice acting is covered in Chapter 8).

Once completed, you will now have discovered your professional voiceover voice - it's usually the voice you used for takes 3 through to 9 but it can vary.

Either way, from now on you can consider yourself a professional voiceover.

Tip! For some people, take 1 of reciting the mantra is inaudible and pointless, whereas the last take (usually No 14) will probably have you arrested if repeated too often in public places. So remember to think carefully before turning it up to 11. Your new found voice is a powerful tool, use it with caution.

Now you have your new voice, it's essential to practise using it. Take every opportunity to repeat your new mantra in your voiceover voice, but adjust the volume to taste as you would in the recording studio.

For example, on a first date (hushed smooth voice), when being arrested (full volume), at a dinner party (sotto voce) or even when obtaining a new insurance quote over the phone (medium force). However, in this example, once you have delivered your job title to the call centre 'down the line' as we say in voiceover world, the rest of their questions for the quote can be answered in a normal voice.

Remember, some insurance companies may charge more if you state voiceover as your profession. I usually just say delivery person. I still use my voiceover voice though: 'I am a professional delivery person. Yes I am.'

Chapter 2

Voiceover Training



Who says you need voiceover training to become a voiceover? I'll tell you who...voiceover training companies. For goodness sake, voiceovering is just reading aloud for money (usually) and as you have discovered, it's easy. So don't waste your cash.

However, you are welcome to try some of these free voiceover training techniques I have developed over the years. Once completed you can add 'fully trained voiceover' to your email signature and business card.

- Lie on the floor. Slow your breathing down. Think nice thoughts like: hmm I might just have a short nap...
- Just before you start a session, see how long you can hold your breath for.
- Practice whispering as quietly as possible until inaudible, and then continue mouthing words silently until someone asks if you need assistance.
- Try reading a script with your fist in your mouth - or if flexible enough, your foot.
- Sing scales up and down in a manic operatic fashion using the word 'La' and 'Loo', then close your eyes for at least 5 minutes.
- Read a script and at the same time gesture pretentiously with your hand until it stops functioning properly.
- Gargle for 3 uninterrupted minutes

Tips for voice styles

Remember, you need to adapt your voice for the type of script you have been asked to record. So for example, if you're reading an advert for a hardcore computer game, you're probably going to add some attitude and grit to your voice with a pacy, in your face style. Practise this by arguing with a neighbour you really don't like.

Whereas, if you're reading a script for the softest of softest toilet paper, engage your ultra dulcet tones. And if it helps to get into character for this one, consider donning a onesie before pressing record.

If you're recording onhold messages like: 'Sorry to keep you waiting, please continue to hold, your call is very important to us...' you just need to sound calm and hopeful.

As opposed to how you'll really feel, which if you have read as much onhold nonsense as me, is probably the same as the poor victims who will have to listen to it: depressed and just about hanging on to the will to live.

Tip! Voice Acting is covered in Chapter 8.

Chapter 3

Building your voiceover studio



There are three essential pieces of equipment you need to record voiceovers at home. A laptop, an audio interface and a microphone. Oh and a pair of headphones. So that's four. And a duvet. Let's call it five. Actually best get a pop shield too, so final answer - six.

With microphones, remember, the bigger the microphone the better the quality. So buy the biggest one you can afford. If you can't afford a big one, just use your phone interfaced into your laptop with a special phone-to-laptop thingy adapter. A pop shield is pretty much essential and is just a nylon mesh placed between your mouth and the microphone to catch any spit and plosives hitting the microphone with a thud.

When recording voiceovers at home, you need to avoid sounding like you are in an empty, echoey bathroom. So unless you're playing the part of a public toilet attendant, don't be tempted to record in the downstairs loo.

Some voiceovers actually spend a lot of money on professional acoustic treatment for a spare room and turn it into a proper recording studio. However in my bedsit, this wasn't possible, not just because there is no spare room, but also because I would need the landlord's permission and I'm behind with the rent. *#awkward*

So instead, to deaden down the room acoustically and reduce the reverberation off the walls, floor and ceiling, I just drape a duvet over

myself, completely covering my whole person. Acoustically, I find the 13.5 tog is a good choice although you may need a lighter tog for long sessions in the summer. It's a balancing act - survival versus acoustic deadening. (Togs range from 1 to 15)

If using the duvet cocoon method, you'll need to learn how to hold the script in one hand and the microphone steady in the other. It takes practice and can be a sweaty, achy and miserable experience, especially if you use a large microphone and are recording a 15000 word e-learning script. But on the upside, if you're severely hungover or just really lazy, it at least means you can work from your bed.

Top tip! For important clients I will sometimes do what is known as 'double duvet'. This is where you add an extra duvet on top of your regular one for extra sound deadening. My survival record at 30 tog is 30 minutes, although it might have been a bit less, I'm not really sure.

Remember, the duvet method may deaden down the reverberation of the room you are recording in, but it will not stop loud noises from the outside getting in and spoiling the recording. So if you have a noisy neighbour, consider moving or just have a quiet word with them using your mantra. Once they understand you are a professional voiceover they will probably be happy to ask your permission before putting a wash on or hoovering. *#respect*

Chapter 4

How to record and edit your voice

There are lots of software packages out there to enable you to record into a computer. I use an excellent application called Audacity, partly because it's easy to learn, but mainly because it's free.

So put on your headphones, dim the lights, press record and in your voiceover voice say - 'Take 1'. Then read your script. When finished, press stop. You have now recorded your voiceover. Make sure to read the manual and learn how to edit your recording and remove any mistakes and unwanted gurgling noises. If you need to record another version remember to start with: 'Take 2'. And so on.

Once finished, export your audio files, then open up your email application and send the files to the client.

Congratulations - job done. *#success*

Chapter 5

Recording your demo voice reel

Most producers will need assurance you really are a professional experienced voiceover before engaging you to perform for money.

Whilst some may take you on your word (and because it says so on your email signature and business card) the majority of producers will actually want to hear your voice before booking you professionally.

This is achieved by assembling an audio reel of your voice reading previous commercials, narrations, on-holds, YouTube videos etc and is often referred to as a reel, showreel or demo.

Don't worry, I know what you are thinking...you haven't recorded anything yet, your career hasn't even started, so how are you expected to show any sort of previous work?

The way round this is simple. You pretend you have voiced lots of adverts, narrations and the like for wellknown brands by using your new home voiceover studio and recording your version of some of your favourite ones from the radio and telly. Or if feeling creative, just make up some new ones.

With your microphone plugged into your Digital Audio Workstation you can record anything - the world is your oyster. But a word of caution; it may be pushing it to include things like the commentary for the King's coronation or a trailer for a new James Bond movie so soon in your career. But then again, He Who Dares...*#Winner*

With that in mind here are my tips for creating your first voiceover showreel:

1. Don't make your showreel too short. Producers and clients want to hear examples of all your repertoire. They will often take their time listening to new voiceover showreels whilst commuting home, or perhaps when

out on a relaxing Sunday morning walk or even in bed just before they go to sleep, so don't be shy of including a long Shakespeare monologue or weighty religious text.

2. Start your showreel by properly introducing yourself and don't forget to include copyright information and to decline permission for any of the recorded material to be used for A.I purposes. Add in your phone number, email, web URL (including https...) your postal address with postcode and National Insurance number.
3. Now just edit a montage of all your best performances and remember to really show your full vocal range - from loud to soft, sad to angry (see Chapter 1) Make sure they know you can whisper very very quietly...and then out of the blue blow their headphones off with your shoutiest loudest voice!
4. Include snippets of all your best impersonations and accents. If you can't really do impersonations or accents - just have a go, it shows that you are willing to turn your hand to anything. Producers like a positive can do attitude.
5. Include at least 2 jokes.
6. And finally drop in a sprinkling of your best non-lexical vocalisations: fighting sounds, sex sounds, yawning sounds, happy sounds, hysterical crying, bark like a puppy and don't forget to slip in your interpretations of confusion and bewilderment. In December decorate your reel with a few Ho Ho Hos.
7. Consider personalising your showreel for individual producers by reading them a poem or short endearing message at the start of the showreel. I have found this to be very effective.
8. At the very end say *thank you for listening to my showreel*. And don't forget to dedicate it to a loved one, family member or your dog (some producers love dogs).

Chapter 6

Marketing your voice

Business Cards, Email Signatures and Templates

Now you have your demo showreel recorded, you need one more item. A business card. You cannot be a professional voiceover without one.

Top Tip! Once you have cards printed, give one to everyone you meet. The bus driver, a date, the supermarket checkout person, and don't forget to drop one in all your Christmas cards, or sympathy cards when someone has died. To make it more personal, sign the back with an appropriate message - something along the lines of:

I'm so sorry to hear about Kenneth. If you would like me to read at the funeral, you might like to know I am now a professional voiceover - please see over for booking details. Family rates apply!

Also, when no-one is looking, pin them to notice boards in libraries and clubs and then run.

It's vital your business card and email signature look really professional. Remember, in the design world less is more. Having said that I still like to have my mantra, ***I am a Professional Voiceover***, including the ***Yes I am*** part, splashed across the middle of my business card embossed in gold ink.

If you think people won't believe you are a professional voiceover, consider adding a picture of your face with a microphone next to it. That way there can be no doubt. You could also underline the 'I am a professional voiceover' part.

For your email signature just copy everything from the business card. When choosing an email address, try and make it obvious what you do, but also

how professional you are. For example these would work well but may already be taken:

- amazingvoiceovernow7856@domain...
- voiceoverdemon666@domain...
- inyourfacevoiceovers69@domain...

On the following pages I have shared some super professional email marketing templates which really work. Feel free to copy and adapt them for your own marketing.

Template 1

Dear Sir

I am a professional voiceover and fully trained (in voiceovering).

I have been voiceovering professionally for many years now and am writing to you to see whether you might be interested in my voiceover services.

My voice has been described as: (add your own unique qualities)

- Abrupt
- Interesting
- Unusual
- Shocking
- Unexpected
- Loud

Perhaps some of my unique vocal qualities could be put to use to enhance your company's reputation and then we can all reap the rewards.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest thoughts

Your Name.

Email signature here.

Template 2

Hi Producer

I want to introduce you to my voice. I have been told it's unique.

Why not try me out. You won't regret it, but if you do I'll send you a bar of chocolate.

To prove it, I have attached a picture of your chocolate bar. Enjoy.

I'm available all day (and night) every day (and night).

Warmest thoughts

Me.

PS. Your choccy bar is in the fridge.

Email signature here



Template 3

(follow up if nothing heard to template 2)

Me again,

Just a quick reminder about my unique voice.

Your chocolate bar is still in the fridge ;)

But not for long!

Am ready and waiting under the duvet for your instruction.

Me.

(Professional voiceover) Email signature



Template 4

(follow up if nothing heard to template 3)

Me again,

It's getting very hot in here,

I'm under the duvet ready to record my unique voice for you.

Don't worry though, your chocolate is still being refrigerated.

Me.

(Professional voiceover)

Email signature



Template 5

(follow up if nothing heard to template 4)

Me again,

I was very sad not to receive any reply from you about my unique voice...

So I ate your chocolate bar.

Me.

(Professional voiceover)

Email signature

Chapter 7

The types of voiceover session and going down the line



There are three common types of voiceover session:

1. **Self Record.** As we have already gone through, you self record at home in your studio, in your own time, and send the audio files to the producer or client when finished. This is my preferred way of working, especially when I'm struggling to get up in time for lunch.
2. **Down the line.** You connect your computer to a producer's computer using 'voiceover connecting software' and do what is called a 'down the line' session, where you will be directed by a producer in real time and they will record your voice. If you have difficulty reading, are prone to panic attacks or have noise issues at home, for example if you live under the flight path of an international airport hub, try and avoid this type of session if at all possible.
3. **On Location.** The third type of session is where you leave the comfort of your home and make your way to a proper studio somewhere far away. It's best to only accept this type of engagement when you have finished the book. See Chapter 11 for all the essential tips for voiceovering 'on-location'.

Working with a producer down the line

If you have failed to persuade the producer to let you self-record at home in your own time, read the rest of this chapter carefully before connecting up for a directed remote session.

You will need to set up your computer, remote studio connection software, DAW and audio interface so that you can send your voice to the producer's computer and at the same time hear their voice in your headphones. If the prospect of setting this up sends you into a cold sweat of fear and loathing - you are not alone.

Preparing for your produced session check-list

1. Do your vocal and breathing exercises in good time.
2. Read through your script and circle all the difficult to say words - don't worry, once you start recording, these difficult words will become easy to read as the adrenaline kicks in and the fear of failure takes over.
3. Continue to mark up your script by underlining important words to emphasise and use arrows to guide your intonation. Group phrases with inverted commas. The odd phallic symbol may ease anxiety.
4. Wear stout shoes
5. Choose a quiet shirt or blouse
6. A baseball cap is optional

When working under the duvet, make sure you have the following items close to hand

- Head torch
- The script
- Large 2B pencil
- Rubber Eraser
- Water
- Indigestion tablets
- Large towel
- Tissues
- A fan
- One of your business cards

The Down the Line Session

If using the under the duvet method, make sure you are in your cocoon before the producer connects. Once you are connected, you'll hear the click of the producer's talkback mic and they will probably want to exchange pleasantries and talk you through the script.

Remember, always sound genuinely interested and mark up your script enthusiastically with your 2b pencil, even if you are only drawing random shapes in the margins. If they say something like, 'oh, I'm getting myself back as an echo' just pretend to adjust something. Producers always say this to me and I have no idea why.

Next the producer will want to try a read through so they can adjust audio levels at their end. Go along with this for now. If they ask you to change your level say something like, 'Oh that's odd, it was fine for my previous session with the BBC.' If they insist on you changing levels, and unless you are technically proficient, just pretend to adjust something, or speak louder or softer.

Once all the pre-flight checks are complete, the producer will go into record at their end and instruct you to start reading the script by saying something like: 'OK recording, take 1'. After which you'll hear the click of their talkback mic turning off - and you can start your read.

Alternatively they might say: 'OK we're rolling when you're ready.' This cue is usually said by senior producers who used to work with mechanical tape machines 'back in the day'. Warning, they can be techy and difficult to work with.

Once you have finished your take, don't say anything. Even if you know you made mistakes, keep schtum. Remember, if the producer needs to book another session at a later date to correct missed mistakes, that's another session fee for you. *#Ka-Ching*.

Never give the producer the idea that you're happy to record multiple takes or different versions, otherwise you'll be there all day. Never make the

suggestion to just do another take as a ‘safety.’ Remember, you’re a professional and time is money. Also if working in the ‘under the duvet’ position there’s a real risk you may just pass out.

If the producer says something vague like ‘OK that was great, can we do another take?’ respond in an almost helpful tone with something like, ‘oh, was there something wrong with that take?’ If they have a genuine reason for recording a new take, remain awkwardly silent, and just wait for your cue to start. Be professional, but don’t be a pushover. They will respect you for it.

Unfortunately, some producers like to think they are the professional voiceover in the room. They are not. The more deluded ones sometimes think it’s helpful to read the script to you as if they are talking to a small child and for you to repeat it back like a puzzled parrot.

When faced with this situation just sigh and remain silent while they read to you. When they have finished making a fool of themselves, just explain you haven’t heard anything because the line went down. Once you’ve done this a few times, they will usually give up and let you get on with being the voice artist.

Split Infinitives

Always scan the script for split infinitives. I find producers are super impressed when I point them out. Don’t be shy, remember always to boldly go...where other voices don’t. *#wordorder*

Dealing with hard to say words

If you are having trouble reading a word or phrase and keep tripping up, it’s important to remain calm and professional. You can even make a joke about it by saying something like, ‘gosh, I fluffed’ before picking up and trying again. If you still cannot get past this point in the script, it’s vital to have some tools in your voiceover toolbox to help you.



1. Take the large 2B pencil with which you have marked up your script, and try writing out the problem word phonetically. For example, I often struggle with the word ‘courier’. It’s very tricky to say, even for professional voiceovers, so I write it out above the original like this:

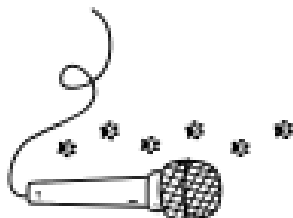
coo - rhee - urgh.

Then I put a thick line through the original word so it’s completely unreadable and record a new take. If this tried and tested method fails for you then it’s time to take out your big rubber eraser and move on to one of the more ‘out there’ techniques which should get you off the hook.

2. Try doing the next take standing on one leg. (If you’re sitting down or only have one leg this trick is less effective) No-one knows why this is helpful and there’s no need to tell the producer what you are doing.
3. Still struggling with that pesky word? Try Tool 3...Turn the script upside down. It sounds crazy, but is often used as it will distract you from the problem word by creating a whole new set of challenges to overcome.
4. As a last resort, Tool 4 involves putting your fist into your mouth as far as you can, and then saying the problem word or phrase very slowly and loudly over and over again until your hand hurts. Then go for a new take. Without the fist, you’ll be so surprised how easy it is to announce, you’ll often nail the script in one. Producers are used to voiceovers fisting themselves during a session, so don’t worry if you sound like you’re having a complete breakdown.

None of these tools work for me, but I’m pretty sure they do for many professionals and they may work for you too. The more ideas you have in your toolbox, the more likely you will find one that works. *#tool*

If you just cannot say the sentence or word and you have run out of tools, suggest that this part of the script is removed or changed. If the producer insists it stays, then remain absolutely silent for at least a minute, ignoring anything they say and after another minute say: ‘Hello can you hear me? Hello?’ and repeat this for a couple of minutes ignoring anything you hear back. Then terminate the connection and take the dog out.



Chapter 8

Voice Acting

Now that we have found your voice, completed some voice training, built your voiceover studio, recorded your showreel and worked with your first producer 'down the line', it's time to look at more challenging voice roles.

If you find it mind numbingly tedious to spend all day under a duvet reading things like: 'thank you for calling, we really value you call, someone will be with you as soon as possible', or are tired of explaining how to erect a family friendly 4 man tent - 'Insert pole B into hole C and secure...next, throw it off a cliff and book a hotel like a normal person...' then why not start auditioning for character voiceover parts - also known as voice acting.

These sorts of roles can be better paid and are much more satisfying. Yes, they will require a certain amount of acting, but don't worry if you have never acted before... because just like voicing, acting is not hard.

In a recent voice acting job I completed for a local hospital radio station advert, I played the part of Harry. Harry, a retired chartered accountant, lives next door to Dave who, sotto voce, likes a drink and has just bought a new lawn mower. The script is in the classic local radio style:

Radio Script

HARRY: RAISING VOICE OVER DEAFENING SOUND OF PETROL LAWN MOWER: Hey Dave, that's a nice looking lawn mower you have there!

DAVE: CONFUSED, SHOUTING BACK: What?!

HARRY: I said that's a nice lawn mower!

DAVE: STILL NONE THE WISER: What?

HARRY: POINTING AT LAWN MOWER: Nice lawn....

SFX: LAWN MOWER ENGINE STOPS ABRUPTLY:

HARRY:EASES OFF SHOUTING ...Mower!

SFX: GARDEN AND BIRDSONG:

HARRY: CLEARs THROAT AND SAYS CALMLY: Nice lawn mower

DAVE: Oh right I couldn't hear you because of the lawn mower. It's a petrol one. Fancy a drink?

HARRY: Ah bit early for me Dave

DAVE: Oh ok, I got it on interest free credit from Linda's Lawn Mowers

HARRY: Linda's Lawn Mowers?

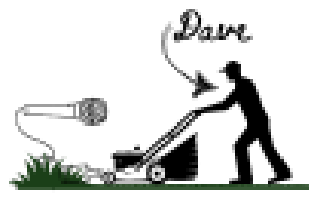
DAVE: Yes. You sure you don't fancy a quick one? (BEAT)RAISING VOICE: Hey Harry where are you off to?

HARRY: SHOUTING FROM DISTANCE: I'm off to Linda's Lawn Mowers

ANNOUNCER: Put your drink down right now and get a new Lawn Mower on interest free credit.....

This is quite an advanced script to start with, but give it a go and remember to just let go of your inhibitions and really get stuck into the characters - it's great fun. Perhaps ask a friend to play opposite you, especially if they happen to have a petrol lawn mower...and booze. Although remember, never mix alcohol with voiceovering. #professional

Once you have played both parts, you can add 'experienced voice actor' to your business card and email signature, and then have a drink.



Chapter 9

Do I need an agent?

No.

Chapter 10

Should I worry about A.I.?

No.

Chapter 11

Location work

If anyone suggests that it might not be a particularly glamorous job to spend hours each day stuck under a duvet in the downstairs loo, recording endless versions of: 'your call is very important to us, someone will be with you soon' ...don't be disheartened.

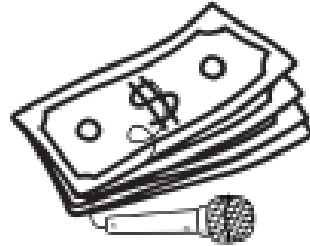
Remember to explain that professional voiceovers also work 'on-location' - and often in some of the most salubrious studios to be found in the heart of London's Soho. Although for me it's more often a squalid damp studio in Swindon accompanied by a strange odour.

However - to crawl out from beneath the duvet and set foot outside into the real world on one's way to a voiceover engagement is not just glamorous, it is liberating!

And so, here are my top tips for working as a professional voiceover when 'on location:'

- *The engagement.* When taking a booking by phone, make sure to thumb noisily through your well worn and crammed to breaking point appointments diary. (a copy of the Radio Times is good for this) Repeatedly suck your teeth whilst agonising over how you might be able to fit them in on their preferred date. Hesitate, but then offer to change or move some pencils you already have for the times they would like.
- On the recording day, always be slightly late. Do not arrive early, it will do you no favours.
- Insist on a copy of the script the day before and study it, practise it over and over but...when you arrive at the studio, pretend not to have seen it. When provided, scan through it nonchalantly with an occasional raised eyebrow (preferably one sided if, like me, you are ambidextrous).
- If offered refreshments, ask for something simple like a vegan sashimi and warm organic nettle tea.

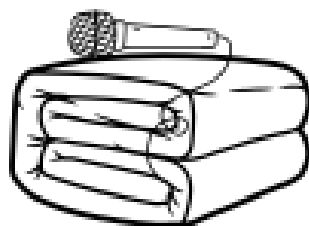
- Once in the booth, everything you have learnt for ‘down the line’ sessions applies. Before you start though, ask if you can be paid in cash before you leave.



Chapter 12

Final thoughts

Thank you for reading my book and congratulations...you are now, like me, a professional voiceover. See you out there on the circuit, or under the duvet. Happy voicing.



Appendix

Equipment List

Essential equipment for professional voiceovering

- Microphone
- Pop Shield
- Headphones
- Audio Interface
- DAW
- Computer
- Remote Studio Connection Software
- Duvet

About the bloke what wrote it

Despite all evidence to the contrary, Jonathan Slatter is a professional voiceover with years of voiceovering experience. Yes he is! He is also a musician who composed the solo piano piece 'Eternity' and likes dogs.

Find out more:

www.jonoslatter.co.uk

www.musicfortelelevision.net

[Pennypaws Dog Rescue](#)

