

HOW TO FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT

by Deborah Sale-Butler

I've been a professional voice actor for about 30 years and have coached actors in voice, speech, dialects and acting. I'm often disturbed by some of the marketing mistakes that very talented and trained actors make. As voice actors, you have two jobs – to hone your craft and to sell yourself. The first part is pretty obvious. Learn what you want to do, find expert help and practice, practice, practice! Marketing yourself, however, is a trickier task. I'm writing this to address the most common mistakes I see on this site.



First, let's talk about marketing.

Rule of marketing #1 – identify your clients. Who is it, *exactly*, that you are trying to get to hire you? Who are the “mystery clients” who post on this site? They generally fall into four categories:

1 – Small independent production houses making a TV, Radio or Web commercial for another client. They've been given a strict budget and will go for the best voice with the lowest bid. They are experienced and know what your time is worth, so they will usually be reasonable in their requests.

2 – Marketing Communication Directors for larger companies or corporations. In a big corporation, a Marketing Communications Director will produce online content, trade shows and in-house videos, marketing and training. They serve several departments within the company who are their clients. They have a bigger budget, but have internal billing constraints, and must answer to the other departments for approval. Expect more red tape and requests for directed sessions.

3 – Independent clients making their own web commercials or creating phone message systems. These are not professionals, but regular people who have some idea of what they want, but usually are pretty unaware of the process involved or what it is worth. They need more hand-holding and usually need to have more guidelines set (ie: only one set of pickups included for the quoted price. . .). They may also need to be reminded to follow-through on billing etc. They aren't bad clients, just inexperienced.

4) Direct marketing companies and game developers based in other countries. Smart, ambitious, generally broke and may have communication barriers. They are extremely happy to have professional voice talent and although they often have low budgets, they tend to pay right away, as they are working hard and growing their business. Expect some delays in communication as you jump time zones.

So there they are - most of your clients. Yes, there are others, but let's just deal with these for a moment. You need to find a way to address their needs collectively (on your profile page) and individually (in templates you create for job responses).

Rule #2 in marketing: Create a message that targets your client.

YOUR PROFILE PAGE:

Well, we have a bunch of clients. So what should they see when they come to your profile page? What are they ALL looking for – since this is your public face? They want a professional voice-actor. They want to be able to trust that you will do a great job, will not slow down the process and will meet their expectations. Do they want someone experienced? Probably. But, lack of experience doesn't negate the other skills. So, how do you look like a competent, skilled, trustworthy, easy-to-work with professional?

State it simply.

Don't lie about jobs you haven't done and don't talk about jobs that are kind-of related to voiceover ("I read to kids," "I do the PA announcements at ball games", etc.). If you haven't done any jobs, don't list any. But, since this site delivers jobs to your inbox based on a computer algorithm that relies on matching words in your profile and demo tags to the incoming postings – you need to give it something to latch onto. Keep it simple and avoid emotional phrases like "I would love to work on your project" or "I am excited to be a voice actor." Look at this direct, but descriptive language:

"Deborah's smooth, clean voice works well for corporate presentations and documentaries. Her ability to create unique character voices serves her well for cartoons, games and commercials."

If I had not done anything at all, I would be telling the truth about my voice, without lying about my experience or telegraphing how desperate I am for the client to give me a shot.

As you build your page and tag your demos, be sure to use as many synonyms as possible. This actually generates more hits. On my page, for example, in

order to drive my most successful job niche, corporate narration, I include the words “corporate,” “industrial,” “business,” “professional,” “narration” and “instructional” in the body of my profile and in demo tags.

Now, about what NOT to say: please, please, please – DO NOT SAY YOU ARE NEW AT THIS or anything about how much you want to work. Remember that you are trying to build confidence in your clients. Just pretend you have been doing this forever. As the title says, “fake it until you make it.” If you keep it professional, your client will be relaxed and trusting and the whole thing will go much better. People tend to run, screaming from anyone sounding desperate. Just don’t do it.

YOUR PROPOSALS:

Now it’s time to target your *specific* clients.

Use the template function to create a professional sounding response that you can edit.

Here’s the generic one I use:

“Attached is a recording of your demo copy. I can turn your copy around in 24-48 hours for the price quoted below. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Best – Deborah Sale Butler”

It’s short, sweet and to the point. I can always add information like “price includes one round of edits based on my read” or “price is based on a rate of .20/word.”

But what if you’ve already done work in particular areas? Then make templates that reflect that.

I’ve done a ton of on-hold recordings, so I created a template just for that:

“Attached is a recording of your script. I have voiced on-hold messaging for a number of companies, including Proflowers, Shari’s Berries, Red Envelope, Ambassador Coffee, Core Life Sciences, Dunn & Bradstreet, Dr. Mancini, Extracare, Forex, The University of Health Science, Myservicedesk and Provistas.

I can turn your job around in 24-48 hours for the price quoted below.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Best -

Deborah Sale Butler”

FYI – I usually edit down this template to reflect my client’s business. I’ll remove 9 or 10 things and leave examples that best reflect the kind of voice-mail system the job posting describes. By leaving all of the jobs in the template, I don’t have to go back to my resume and search every time.

I have templates for games, corporate narration, instructional narration, commercials, on-hold, medical text, children’s books, direct marketing and language learning. Over 30 yrs., I’ve worked in many fields, so it helps my clients to be aware of what, specifically, I can do for THEM.

What if you haven’t done anything yet? Don’t worry. Except for something like Medical Text, where you might want to mention your nursing training, don’t try to use related fields or experiences, just stick to the simplest, business-like format and you will be fine.

Oh, there’s one more template – a partial read. There are a couple of reasons to do a partial, instead of a full read of someone’s sample copy. Some clients may attempt to use your audition as an actual product. Or, the copy may be very long. In both cases, only record a portion of the copy. You can actually do this ALL of the time, as it is a great marketing tool to provide more than one read of each piece. Why? Because many clients are not going to take the time to imagine how you might read it differently, even if they like the quality of your voice. If you give them 2-3 choices in styles of read, you will increase your impression on them and your chance of booking the gig. Just be sure they are truly 2-3 DIFFERENT reads. For the “partial read” template, I just change a line to read, “attached is a recording of a portion of your script.”

What else?

You want your clients to know who you are, so be sure to sign everything with your name. Be sure any files you upload contain your name in the title (ie: DEBORAH SALE BUTLER_MARCOM).

Then be sure to slate your name on the audition. All that is needed is for you to state your name, pause and then begin your read. Sometimes, if a read has a very specific energy, you have a choice of either slating with that energy or slate separately and then edit it to your piece later to keep yourself focused on acting the copy and not worried about how your name sounds. There is no need to say the name of the product, since the client KNOWS what it is. The only reason to say anything other than your name is if there is more than one character in a spot. Then just say your name, the character’s name, pause and begin. I will also sometimes say how many takes I did, to be sure they listen all the way through. In that case it’s just “Deborah Sale Butler. Two takes.” And I usually slate the take in between (take one, take two, etc.) to give their ear a break.

All of this may sound nit-picky, but it really helps to create a professional impression.

YOUR TOTAL PRESENCE:

No matter what the forum, you are representing yourself to the voice-over community. Lots of people lurk on the “Answers” forum and other voice-over groups. Fellow voice talents are often also producers, writers and directors. If I am given the choice between two voices and one makes professional, insightful, helpful comments and one rants, whines and complains often, which one do you think I’ll hire?

If you are having a hard time, ask for help in a specific area. People will help you and respect you for looking for guidance. Whatever you do, don’t complain publicly about not getting leads or not booking or – well - anything! If you have a technical issue, contact customer support. If you have a legitimate question, ask someone on the site who is doing well, but ask real questions like, “is there anything I can do to generate more leads?” Avoid questions like, “does anyone else feel ripped off at not booking a single job in 2 months?” Pay-for-play sites aren’t for everyone, but if you’re giving it a go, give it your best shot and you will find others ready to jump in and help. If you slag on the site (or others), you may garner sympathy, but not work.

This business is voice – ACTING. In all areas of acting, there is an average 98% unemployment rate. Of the 2% who work, only about 1% make a living at it. That’s the truth. It takes time to build the competence to work steadily as an actor. The one great thing about a site like this is the countless opportunities to audition, develop and grow. In the world of voice-over-agents, you would be thrilled to get 2-3 auditions a week. On a site like this one, you get dozens a day! Use those chances wisely, grow your craft, target your audience and enjoy the ride.