

SO YOU WANNA BE A VOICE ACTOR...

The two most frequently asked questions of all voice actors are

“How did you become a voice actor?” and “How can I become a voice actor?”

So I thought it might be a good idea to have a page here on the ranger's site to answer those questions.

I have been acting all my life. From school plays to church programs, community theater to drama camp, I got into anything and everything I possibly could. I even minored in Theater in college. About eight years ago, I was working on a video production with a friend who encouraged me to audition for a then small company called ADV Films. It was explained that they dubbed “japanimation” into English and were always looking for actors. I auditioned, got cast, and just kept getting cast. My first role was Vega in a release of Streetfighter II. A few years later I met some people who worked for Funimation in Dallas and before long was working for them as well. Then some opportunities arose in NYC as well as LA. I was very fortunate to get involved in this field while it was still relatively small. In the last years anime has exploded into virtually every medium, and I'm very grateful to be part of it.

For someone seriously wanting to pursue voice acting professionally, the main thing they need to do first is ACT. Get as much experience in acting as you possibly can. Almost every voice actor I know has an extensive background in theater. Some even have degrees in it. Many people think that because they can make funny voices or sound like a well-known character that they should be a voice actor. It's not about making funny voices or imitation. It's about creating a believable and strong character. It's about acting a role through a roller coaster of emotions. Do you need a college degree? No. Are there classes you can take? Specific classes in voice acting are not generally offered in schools. However, you would benefit greatly from classes in acting, theater, voice & diction, etc. Another thing that needs to be pointed out is that voice acting is not as easy as many think. I have received emails that say, “I think I would be a great voice actor, but I could never do live theater. I would be too nervous and self conscious on stage.” If you think stage acting would make you self-conscious, double it for voice acting. People who are good at it only “make” it seem easy. Most voice actors got into the field through a friend who recommended them. There is no question that knowing someone in the business will get you in the door. But it is your skill that will keep you in the room.

The second thing necessary, but equally important, is that you must live in a city that does this kind of work. Primarily those cities are LA, NYC, Houston, Dallas & Vancouver. If the greatest voice actor in the world happens to live in Pikeville, Kentucky, there won't be many opportunities to voice act. I have also known people who have moved to one of these cities with the dream of becoming an anime voice actor. While it is not beyond the realm of possibility, the wise thing would be to have another career that you can work in and support yourself while you try to break in. I feel it's crucial to point out also that I know virtually no one who makes his or her living as a voice actor. Most

all of them have other jobs to supplement and pay the bills. I myself work in music, video and graphic design in addition to my voice work.

Different markets are different as well. Houston and Dallas are different from LA & NYC in that Texas, being a right-to-work state, allows anyone to voice act without being in the union. It's more difficult to get into the LA & NYC markets because many of the shows done there require the cast to be SAG (Screen Actors Guild) members. That's a whole different set of challenges.

Do you need a demo? Again, different markets are different. For instance, Texas studios often hold open auditions for anyone who desires to give voice acting a try. One can call a studio and get their name added to an open audition list. Every few months the directors will get together and call in the top 20 or 30 names on the list for a general audition. However, the truth is that on average only about 4 of every hundred have the skills for this particular type of work. LA & NYC studios work a bit differently. They almost always require a demo tape showcasing your abilities and experience in voice work. A demo tape will often be strategic to getting an agent in those cities, which is valuable in getting work there as well. Make no mistake, a demo is a great thing to have regardless of where you live, but its importance varies from market to market.

So there you have it. I hope that's helpful in some way. For those of you who intend to follow that goal, I wish you the very best of luck!