
The Modern Voiceoverist's Guide to the Online Universe & Other Stories

A Series Of Articles And Writings
By Mahmoud Taji



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the most Gracious,
the most Merciful.

This eBook is dedicated to God first
and foremost. Then to my Parents,
Wife, Daughter, and Sisters. May we be
together... always.

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Introduction

First off let me start by saying that this eBook is completely free and should under no circumstances be purchased for any fee be it minimal or otherwise.

This book is a collection of articles, interviews and commentary written and put together by Arabic Voiceover talent and blogger Mahmoud Al-Taji and the core of this book is taken from articles that were featured on his blog Taji's Voice Emporium.

Within these pages I give advice targeting voiceover actors who wish to expand their online presence and possibly become semi-professional or full fledged full time Voiceover Professionals.

Please be aware that I am a practicing muslim and as such much of my views and references are to my faith and to how I deal with tackling certain sketchy issues while keeping true to my belief system.

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Your *Guide* to This Guide

This book has been compiled to provide a logical and accessible guide to the Modern Voiceover Artist (Voiceoverist) who is interested in pursuing a career in Voiceover work online.

Each one of the articles presented in the guide is there for a specific reason and for those of you who are first time readers of my work I suggest that you read the articles in the order I have provided them.

The articles are broken down into the following sections:

1. *Logistical Planning*
2. *Ethics*
3. *Online Presence & Branding*
4. *Life Lessons From The Collective*
5. *Payment Policies & Practices*
6. *Service Improvement*
7. *Finding International Work*

These seven segments are the core of how I suggest you approach starting or setting up your voiceover business. This system has worked for me and I've seen it being utilized by other people in the business in something similar to the order presented here.

For some of my long-time readers much of the material in this book is nothing new but I have included some changes to articles that I have found to contain some outdated information. Some articles are exactly the way they were originally published on Taji's Voice Emporium but others have been tweaked.

Of course I cannot guarantee that if you follow this guide that you will somehow become a definite success or that you will even be able to make money from voiceovers. Also this book is not targeted to just the American crowd. In fact this book distinctly takes a more international perspective to setting up your own Voiceover business than one based in North America.

It used to be that for you to get into the voiceover business it was a long and laborious process where you would have to go to several auditions at different studios every day. Some voiceoverists still make their living that way. Some have split their efforts between the physical audition process and the online audition process.

Others yet market themselves and keep away from Online Voiceover Market sites that provide a casting and listing service. A casting service is one where the site sends out casting calls to its members on specific jobs that match their credentials. A listing service is basically where the voice seeker can search a database of voices and choose the voice they believe best suits their needs.

In fact that is how I rejoined the Voiceover industry... through a free membership on one of the Voiceover Market sites. I had pretty much gone dormant for a few years and was making a living only using my capacity for creative design, writing and marketing. Once the opportunity presented itself I grabbed on to it with my teeth and was able to relaunch my VO career and expand into several other directions including my blog <http://www.voiceemporium.com> and I even started my own online voiceover directory The Voiceover Pavilion <http://www.vopavilion.com>.

As one of my favorite authors, Stephen King, would say: " Only God gets it right the first time around." so this eBook will contain mistakes and will probably get outdated in a few years. The industry has matured dramatically due to its attachment to technological advances.

No longer is there a need to record one's voiceovers in a studio with equipment that costs thousands and thousands of dollars. No longer do you HAVE to have a sound engineer to punch in and edit your takes. Things have become simpler while getting infinitely more complex. The smaller and more sophisticated the equipment becomes, the cheaper it is to make, the easier it is for the regular joe to purchase and learn to operate.

The life and lifestyle of the modern voiceoverist has changed and evolved partially due to technology becoming cheaper, the world becoming smaller and competition becoming fiercer.

This guide is my attempt at drawing the outline of steps you must take to start your own voiceover business (if you so choose) and to correct any steps that you might have unwittingly taken and that might cause you problems in the future.

There are those that are far more learned than myself and there are those whose experience would bury mine in a rubble of accomplishments and accolades, but they aren't writing this book. I am.

So my book.. my rules and as such my suggestions. That is not to say that I was not helped and guided while on my way and this is only the first edition of this book. I am planning to refine and revisit it often and by so doing keep it relatively modern.

This ebook has very little pictures and diagrams and this was by choice. I wanted you to sit and read and think without distraction. A lot of people have taken the time to read the first draft and give me advice and to them I am grateful.

But enough of my blabbering... onwards toward the guide. *MT*

Fail To Plan, Plan To Fail

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Apparently this is a New Business Mantra that is pretty popular... I only heard of it a year or so ago when discussing one of my friend's idea for a new business. My friend Izzy (he helped me layout this book) is a very ambitious kind of guy... He is one of the only people that I know that has been able to sustain a successful freelance business and remain self employed. Some months are great and some months are lean... and in the lean months he tends to try to find some way to supplement the money and maximize his profit.

The Hierarchy

He reads a lot of books on opening a small business and developing a successful marketing strategy. My marketing know-how is a little more seat of my pants oriented. As a graphic designer I used to design what I was told to design... as an Art Director I was briefed by an account manager and then I would come up with a visual representation of what the creative director wanted and then I would make a quick mock up and then give the graphic designer the low down on what I needed.

Eventually I reached the level of Creative Director... so now I was sitting with clients hearing them talk. I've had engaging discussions with some of the best marketing minds in the pharmaceutical industry in the middle east... And if you don't think that's impressive... think about it this way... these people don't sell consumer products like chocolate or cheese... they sell pharmaceuticals that have a very short marketing cycle and they are marketed aggressively.

In the consumer world you generally make a brochure once every 1 to 2 years... in the pharmaceutical advertising field we make a new brochure almost every 4 to 6 months... think about that... at minimum pharmaceuticals are marketed twice as aggressively as fast food or chocolate... the only difference is that the consumer only sees a small part of that ... you see the danglers in the pharmacy or outside the store... you might see a billboard or get a flier... the bulk of the

advertising is targeted to the doctors since they are the ones that write the prescriptions.

So my marketing knowledge was more or less gained by my practical experience. When I read marketing blogs, articles or books... I find reflections of the lessons I was taught during one job or another written as a point or in a list.

Fail To Plan

One of the interesting things about a website like LinkedIn is that it puts you in contact with all kinds of people... from the Voice over artist who holds down two jobs (like myself) to people who run their own full time production companies. From the newbie to the veteran professional.

Several things start becoming clear when you frequent the user forums and groups.

1. *Not everyone might be as capable as you are.*
2. *You might not be as capable as others.*
3. *You really have to dig for those gems of truth that might be beneficial to you.*

When I designed my voice over website www.mahmoudtaji.com I made a conscious decision not to go after fully english speaking jobs outside of Egypt. In egypt there arent that many good english VOs so I can stand a chance at being in the competition. In Egypt there are tons of Arabic speaking voice over specialists. What makes me unique is that I am a native speaker of both English and Arabic. So as a voiceoverist I decided that, to the world, I will supply the need for Arabic voiceover... What I failed to plan was that I beefed up my arabic demos so much that my English one was amateurish in comparison. A voice over veteran (JS Gilbert) contacted me one day and pointed out that although the English demo showed that I didn't have an accent (I do.. its a bit of rounded O from toronto and now that I think about it a bit of a non western speech

pattern... but I digress) the demo wasn't really that good ... so if I wanted to land English speaking voice over jobs in Egypt... I was doing a heck of a bad job at representing myself with that demo. So now I had to make a conscious effort to plan my national marketing strategy (as opposed to my international one which I am happy with).

Rethink, Re-plan, Reembark

So shortly after that epiphany I went and dug up any good English voice over recordings I might have made ... then went hunting for some scripts (and found a few good ones thanks to Edge Studio's free Scripts) and then I took the time to re-record them. I usually do 2 or 3 takes of each one ... this time I did 5 of each so I can pick and choose from the best takes.

I decided to use my old MXL USB microphone to get a nice beefy sound... and then I went wild with recording.... You've already heard the fast speaking voice over that I posted on my website a while back... I knew I wanted it to be in the demo but I knew that I didn't want that to be the focus.. I wanted to show range... I also wanted to show sound engineering finesse. I actually don't like going to studios (that's like a doctor who faints at the sight of blood right?!) but I don't like studios... I remember how grueling it was to dub a couple of cartoon series and honestly after at least 500 or so clocked hours in studio booths ... I think I've had more than enough. I prefer recording at home. I will go to a studio when the need arises... but it doesn't mean I don't hate it.

So I wanted to show my Egyptian clients that I can do my own sound engineering and send them a wicked good voice file and not have to meet with them.

I hate meetings. I think work related Meetings are the single biggest waste of time ever. I don't mind brainstorm sessions. I'm a veteran brainstormer, I work very well sounding my ideas off others and helping them sound their ideas off me. That's where I excel. Business meetings

that dragon and on... I can do without those... and I often take advantage of the whole “Artiste” persona that is attached to Creative personnel in advertising companies to excuse myself early out of those things.

Some clients are cool with giving me direction over the phone and sending someone with the money for the invoice... some like to be there... if its a big job... I'll bite my tongue and do it in the studio (not at the same time)... if its something tiny... I'll just suggest someone else do the job and go back to my routine... hey .. everyone has their idiosyncrasies ... not liking studios is mine.

So I recorded 3 other English voice scripts... and went audio hunting for the music beds... I eventually found the perfect music beds for each one and mixed them in... For the piece that I chose to be the first in my demo... I had to actually mix in two different pieces of music and make it seem like it was made that way... I was pushing for a range of emotions in the different demo showcases and I figured happy cheerful then snarky, authoritative then serious and sombre... then blow them away.

You can find this English voice demo I am talking about on the front page of my website www.mahmoudtaji.com (the one labeled English demo) as well as in the sidebar of the blog. I've had a few industry pros take a listen and overall it seems to have met with approval.

Plan To Fail

When you take too long to spot a mistake... or when you decide that tweaking your demo or your image isn't worth the time... then you are basically *planning to fail*. I've had years of experience mixing my own songs together for my band and for the radio... so I can mix my own demo... if you don't have that experience ... find yourself a good studio or sound engineer... or talented audiophile to help you put your vocal portfolio together.

You need to sell your skills with the power of your demo... when I

was a graphic designer I had a portfolio that I lugged around to potential employers. I would open up each piece and show it to them and give them a verbal rationale for why I chose and designed the piece the way I did. As I got older and gained more experience I had to adapt to the new way of doing things... No longer did I have to carry a portfolio bag... I could send the portfolio via email in pdf format or I can lug my laptop with me to the next job interview or point the client to my portfolio website.

There are practices that are tried and true in the voice over industry and are still being applied. You can still send your CD demo reel to clients. You can still make followup phone calls and unsolicited visits. That has worked for decades ... but it seems the times we are in are different... and casting agents are more interested in expanding their casting rosters and thankfully the internet is perfect for that.

So your portfolio is on your website not on a CD... before CDs you had tapes. The face of the voice over industry is changing ... the days of the casting agent as we know them are nearly done... With the internet the client usually comes straight to the talent forgoing the casting process... doing their own casting... Yes there are ups and downs with that. They could easily hire the wrong person... But ultimately what concerns you is that there are certain rules that need to be followed... this is of course until these rules need to change and evolve:

1. *Decide on whether you really want to invest time and money in being a Voice Over Artist*
2. *Get some training*
3. *Get your demo reel done professionally*
4. *Build a website (or get one built for you) to showcase yourself and your skills*
5. *Find the best way to sell your skills via your website*
6. *Do some free work if necessary to get your first practical job experience*

7. *Get some client testimonials if you can*
8. *Get some Social Networking done.*
9. *Check out your local businesses and radio stations and see if they are interested in working with you... amateur radio is great experience if you know how to get into it.*
10. *Keep up with the VO industry... word of mouth is everything in this industry.*
11. *If you find that your strategies aren't working... change them.. do some more studying... consult with other professionals.*
12. *Rinse and repeat.* **MT**

Words Of Power

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What I wanted to bring to your attention right now is a focus on the amount of power we, as voiceoverists, wield. In 1839 Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote: *"The Pen is Mightier Than The Sword"*

And what are these scripts that we read as voice over talent except words written down using a digital pen on a bed of letters and keys.

Why is it that when we get casting direction we get told to be Authoritative or Warm, or Convincing.

I believe that this is because, in our day and age, the Voice has become even mightier than the pen. For though the pen writes eloquently the voice expresses itself infinitely more.

Why is a Podcast so much more entertaining than an article written?

Is it because we are lazy and don't wish to tire our eyes? Or is it because as human beings, we make connections with each syllable from the caster? With each inflection, with every emotion that seeps through the words that flow out of them, we relate.

Accountability

I believe in accountability. I believe that what we say should be a reflection of what we are willing to be accountable for. Just like a lawyer who defends a murderer... and knows he is a murderer and yet still gets him acquitted. It could be because he wants to show off how good he is, or how convincing he is, Or get a big fat Paycheck.

There is a saying attributed to Samuel Johnson (but it is not confirmed as his originally) that states:

"The Road to Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions"

This goes against Islamic doctrine since according to the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

"Actions are judged by intentions and everyone will be judged

according to his intention. So whoever emigrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger *صلي الله عليه وسلم*, his hijrah will be reckoned as done for Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him). But whoever emigrates for worldly reasons or to marry a woman, his hijra will be reckoned accordingly..”

Hijrah : Emigration

Allah: God in Arabic

So ... what does that mean? It means that you are accountable for your intent while doing this action. If I am preaching Goodness to you and then go and commit evil behind your back ... then that only makes me a hypocrite and makes my word less meaningful. In fact it is the same in the Western judicial system, if one kills a person accidentally (without the intention to kill) then it is manslaughter. Murder is committed when there is an intent to kill before and during the occurrence of the act

Hypocrites

So if we take any and every voice over job that comes our way... does that make us Hypocrites... promoters of things we do not believe in. Is that all that we stand for? Making money?

I don't believe that we wish to be labeled as hypocrites. I believe that we are people who God has given the gift of oration. A gift as mighty as the pen and in turn mightier than the sword.

We are the voices of authority that convince people and teach and command. We are the persuaders, the negotiators the promoters.

Responsibility

It is funny that such profound words of wisdom were propagated via a comic book character.

“With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility”

I don't know who wrote those words for Spiderman... Stan Lee... or anyone of the other writers at Marvel. But the words ring true to me in almost everything I do. If I am given the responsibility of being the

voice of authority.

Then I should treat this great power with great responsibility. If you doubt what I say and don't believe that the power of the voice is so profound. Then read up on the War Of The Worlds panic that occurred in 1938 and was instigated by famous writer, director and in this case Voiceoverist Orson Wells.

Maybe its not my place to talk about ethics... to each his own... but as a voice among many other voices I can't help but think that being a voice over talent means much more than just an mp3 sound file that someone puts on a documentary or an advert.

These are words of power. **MT**



Author's Epilogue

It's been a while since I wrote this article and there is something I wish to point out. Although the pen is mightier than the sword metaphorically it also is the basis of the words that make us orators. I do not wish to rob writers of their thunder and make it seem like as speakers we are more important than the words we are saying.

Rather I am trying to say that the medium of the spoken word in our day and age is far more powerful and influential than just the printed word. Words are constantly being manipulated by politicians and Public Relations departments of major corporations and we still swallow it up and cheer.

As voiceover professionals it is our duty to uphold some kind of ethical boundary between what is acceptable to work on and what isn't. Think about the message you are sending forth and ask yourself if you wish your child to remember this recording as the last known thing their parent recorded.

As a person starting out in this field I need you to always keep this in mind and never let desperation cloud your judgment.

If You Build It, They Will Come

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You have a great voice that sounds like molten Cocoa extract with fluffy white cream ear soothing mellowness topped with caramel flecks of ecstasy. You've been in front of the mic and people have told you you can make a bunch of green backs with that larynx of yours. You're in the business... you might or might not have an agent and you're determined to start hauling in that moola that everyone said you'd be making.

You've taken a look online and found a few sites that your peers call voice casting sites (Voice123.com, Voices.com, Bodalgo.com & VOplanet.com) you can feature yourself on their website and get casting agents to come listen to your vocal genius for a price.

There is no doubt that those sites do provide a place for you to post your demos online but ultimately the best way to give yourself an identity different to the hundred thousand other Voice Over artists out there is to build your own website.

Now what I will be dealing with in this chapter is not just the different hosting companies out there but I will also be discussing how you go about getting yourself a website.

First off lets break down the process itself and explain the different aspects of it.

What is a Domain

The domain name refers to the name of the website that you wish to represent you. So, if your name is (for example) Jonathan Smith you might want to name your website www.jonsmith.com. Obviously the name Jon smith is not the most unique name in the world so it's very

likely that the domain name has already been taken. It's been about 15 years now since the internet superhighway went global so these days you have to be a bit creative in choosing your URL (uniform resource locator).

In the voiceover business I've seen many people with unique enough names to get their own name's domain name ... but there are those that have decided to go with something else like ... www.thevoiceguy.com or www.voiceover1.com or something similar to that ... the problem I have with that is that it does not reinforce the brand ... and your name here is the brand. If you want to use a nickname that is still better to me than www.thebestvoiceoverguyintheuniverseandmuchbetterthantheotherguyyouwerethinkingofhiring.com

Also... keep it simple... short... don't use dashes or funky characters.... that will ultimately only confuse your potential client.

On a technical note it is important to understand that your domain is a separate entity from your hosting ... you can retain a domain name once your hosting contract is finished and move it to a different service... which brings me to the other point ...

What is Hosting

Hosting is the space where your website is located. This is where the physical Hard-disk and computer with your digital information resides in the world. This hosting service also includes the bandwidth that your website uses (if someone comes to your website and browses through it they are using part of their bandwidth and part of your allocated bandwidth (Internet speed) and you get charged for that if it goes beyond a certain limit) the hosting service also includes the email address creation service (some will let you open up to 1200 to 12,000 email addresses) and the hosting service will allow you to have an FTP service so you can possibly upload your work to your website and just send your client a link for them to click and download the finished work.

Hosting services are very important as they determine how easily you can post media files on your website as well as cgi or javascript applets (if you know what these are then thats fine if not ... it wont hurt you).

What is Webdesign

This includes two parts... the front end (what the website looks like) and the back end (what you want your website to be able to do ... like for example if you dont want to advertise your email (so that you dont get spam or unsolicited emails) then you can set up a cgi script that allows the user to fill out a form which automatically gets emailed to you.) some web developers are able to set up a service whereby you can give your clients a Username and password to access their ftp section on your website so they can download the work. Finding a good web developer is important and nothing to skimp out on.

Corporate Identity

By that I mean your image... you as a VO artist are a one-person money generating machine... in effect you don't really need anyone else (other than an agent and a sound engineer if the need arises) and you are in a way the Corporation (single proprietary) you need an image... you need to look good ... to be represented... if that means a logo then get yourself a logo. A logo will determine what your business card looks like ... will be an important part of your website identity might be an identifying marker that an agent or client might remember when looking to hire someone for that next big (or small) VO job.

I have several brands myself. One for each of my businesses. I've worked for years as a graphic designer so working out what branding direction I need to take only cost me time and effort.



The Arabic calligraphy used in my logo was made by a professional calligrapher about a decade ago. I digitized it and converted it to a format that can be used for print and the web. Since I am an Arabic voiceover talent it would make sense that my logo would be in arabic.



For my blog I wanted to use something radically different than my personal VO business logo. This had to combine both elements of being dynamic and of looking professionally made.



Last on the list is my Voiceover Pavilion Directory Project and this also had to look brightly, engaging and representative of the name.

As you can see color plays a big role in making these logos look appealing and in the case of my personal vo business logo ... the lack of color is what achieves is.

Work with your designer to decide what colors you want to represent you... I know a few of our female VO talents might want to be represented with a somewhat Martha Stewart like Pastel pallet... and honestly there is nothing wrong with that... as long as visually it kind of represents who you are... if you have a raucous husky sexy voice and you associate it with the pastel pallet... that only indicates a miss match which could reflect to your client that you are not exactly professional enough to understand what works best in representing yourself.

The opinions I have conveyed in this article come from years of experience as a Designer and Creative Director in the advertising business. I suggest that you constantly re-evaluate the way you look and at least annually try to improve or revamp that image the best suit your needs. *MT*

ALL THE LOGOS DISPLAYED IN THIS ARTICLE BELONG TO THEIR RESPECTIVE OWNERS. (SAFARI TO APPLE, INTERNET EXPLORER TO MICROSOFT, FIREFOX TO THE MOZILLA FOUNDATION AND OPERA TO THE FOLKS WHO OWN OPERA)

Flash vs. SEO

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This article might seem a little technical... but the theory and issues behind it are pretty straight forward. It was inspired by my current Casting Site Directory project and this problem has caused me numerous issues while compiling the directory.

The Voice Artists Portal

One of the most important marketing tools for the Modern Voiceover artist in our day and age is a well designed and informative website. This is your portal on the interweb and a means for the whole online universe to be able to access information about you the way you want to be seen and heard.

I won't waste your time with what you should have on your website... you know what should go there and you've seen it on other sites . What I want to talk to you is why some of the websites being put up are getting almost no search engine generated hits.

In a word Flash.

Bit Of Modern History

MACROMEDIA FLASH

Flash at one point in time was Macromedia's Cash Cow... and made Adobe... the Graphics and Multimedia Giant, look bad since it was not the one to come up with that technology... what did they do? They went and bought out the competition ... paid billions of dollars and made Flash their cash cow (more recently flash is in the center of a contraversial feud between Apple & Adobe ... but that's neither here nor there).

I know this because I went through the heartbreak of watching Adobe do that to Macromedia (the underdog) and as a Art Director at the time... this meant there was nobody on the market anymore to challenge Adobe. To this day I don't know why an anti-trust lawsuit isn't

brought against them. I mean who else is there? Corel?

Adobe has done this before with Cool Edit Pro... they went and bought it out from Syntrillium and made it Adobe Audition. But to their credit they have constantly improved and upgraded the functionality of Audition and to this day I use it to record my VOs... but that doesn't change how I feel about them.

I don't like Adobe.... almost as much as I dislike Apple and sometimes Microsoft.

It is an unfortunate situation for me since for some reason I almost always root for the Underdog...

Cheapskate

Anyway (Geez taji what a tangent) back to our chapter... So you decided you want to make your website wicked flashy and interactive and amazing looking which leads you to contact a flash developer and ask them to build your dream website for you.

Here is the main problem with Flash... Search Engines like Google and Yahoo and the up-and-coming Microsoft one Bing! ... they can't read the text embedded inside flash files... and Search engines depend on keywords to tag, target and rank so they can help people find your website amongst the billions of other websites actually out there.

And here is where most of you inexperienced folk go wrong... Instead of paying a little extra to your designer to design (along with the flash version of the site) a basic none super duper interactive HTML version of the same site... you skimp out and blame your frugality at the economy and think that a flash based version is good enough.

IT ISN'T!

But it isn't... because what you just did is SEO suicide... some of the less technically savvy will ask me here. What is SEO? is it a mispronunciation

of the Korean City where they once held the olympics? Is it how a red neck abbreviates See You?

Nay dear reader... it is an abbreviation of the most important thing your website should be designed with:

Search Engine Optimization

If your site has not been properly optimized to be seen by today's search engines... then you've shot yourself in the foot and wasted money to boot (pun intended).

Flash is a great medium for getting your website to look flashy, run animations, present an interactive spectacle the world has never seen before and quite possibly will never see after.

But ... if you don't design the flash as a part of the website instead of AS the website... then you have pretty much missed the point.

The Directory Connection

Directory! Why did this suddenly come up you might ask ... well as you know I have been working quite hard on compiling a directory for all the Voice Over Casting sites on the web that I can possibly find. As of this moment 237 sites. And in the quest for seeking out all these different sites... I've noticed that the casting sites with the worst search engine visibility are the ones that have been fully built in flash.

They look great (well some of them... allot look tacky and quite outdated) but the person who built the site for them (the web/flash developer) did not explain to them that with a fully flash website there is a high possibility that your website will not be seen by search engines. If they are not seen by search engines then they are effectively invisible and hence non-existent.

Google Analytics

If you run a blog or have your own website ... you will probably ... or eventually... register with a free service by Google called Analytics... This service runs a code on your website that monitors how many people have visited your site... what they looked at... and most importantly how they were able to find your website.

It respects user confidentiality so I don't actually know WHO came to my site ... just that they might be visit from America, Canada or anywhere else connected to the internet.

Thus far Taji's Voice Emporium has been visited by people from 85 countries.... If you don't think that's impressive... try naming 85 countries off the top of your head (without using that animaniacs song).

In Fact I decided on buying the domain voiceemporium.com instead of tajisvoiceemporium.com because I noticed that most of the people tended to remember that the blog contained the words voice and emporium in the name so they would go to google and type in Voice Emporium in the search field... so after a score of similar search terms I figured that was the safest bet for my blog's domain name. Ego aside it was a good decision because ultimately it made the URL shorter which is always a good thing.

Get to the Point I'm Busy...

The point is... there are ways to have a flash-y site and still retain SEO. There are articles about the technical aspects of it ... like this one **How To SEO Flash** (google it) but they do need technical knowledge and a good flash developer.

Which brings me to another aspect of flash websites.... they are not easily updateable. You will always have to go and update the flash files through a flash developer... On my website www.mahmoudtaji.com I

am pretty much the developer... I got some basic setup done for me by my friend Nur Ahmed Furlong from South Africa but I had agreed with him from the beginning that I wanted a website content management system that I can edit myself (I have since done another redesign of my personal site and I'm still using the wordpress system for content management).

And funny enough my starting a blog on the buddypress system (the one used by voiceover-casting.com where I first hosted my blog) allowed me to get familiar with Wordpress enough to be able to manage my site easily.

So here is my advice to you folks.... If you decide to build your whole website in flash... get an HTML version of it made as well.

If you want something easily updated by yourself... get a dynamic content management system installed (like wordpress, drupal, Joomla) installed and if you still want flash for a bit of fireworks.... then get your developer to add little bits of it... not build the whole site in it... make little animated banners or page title headers done in it if you like... but don't make it the center of your website's universe. **MT**

Tips for Becoming Self-Employed & Staying That Way

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I've always been one to set goals for myself. When I was younger it was all about becoming a musician. My list kind of looked like this:

1. *find a good band and get into it*
2. *get some good songs written*
3. *play your first gig*
4. *play to a massive crowd*
5. *get on the radio*
6. *get groupies*
7. *get on tv*
8. *get signed*

I was able to achieve all those different goals except the last one... it wasn't the time and it wasn't meant to be. God had better plans for me.

I make lists with regards to everything. Planning for my immigration to Canada, Planning to get married, Planning to get a child.

That's just how I think... I look at a big goal.. then break it down into small mini goals so that I can feel like I'm on the path to getting to my big goal.

My Next Big Goal

I'm 35 now and in my head I should have been self employed for a few years now. The truth is... I am!

I'm an international voiceoverist with clients from all over the globe. But that isn't the purest form of my goal because I'm still very much a creative director at an advertising company here in Cairo, Egypt.

So yes I am self-employed but not full time. Part of it is that it's very hard to let go of a steady income regardless of how underpaid I am. But

the biggest part is that I haven't yet reached a specific landmark in my list of mini goals to take the step toward my ultimate goal of being Self Employed.

The mini goal that I'm stuck on right now cannot be hurried or rushed. It has to do with starting and nurturing relationships with voiceover casting agencies and with voice seekers. The goal in short is to bring in double my income every month for the next year before I can become fully self-employed.

Double My Income

There is a good reason why it's good to live in cairo. It's relatively cheap compared to where you live. I mean for 90 octane gasoline I pay 1.75 egyptian pounds per liter... that is about 35 cents for you americans out there and about 18 p for our british readers.

So the money I make from international clients at international rates translates to a relatively decent living here in cairo.

But for me to be confident and comfortable enough to go full time I need to have a steady VO income. That means that I need to keep stretching my business social base until the stream of work is a little more predictable than sporadic.

Yet even now while I'm waiting for this event horizon I need to plan on what happens after I take the decision to go rogue and become self employed.

Going Rogue

This is not the first time I will be self-employed. Post 911 it was hard to find a job in Canada. A devout Muslim Arab was anathema and many companies, who were already suffering from the post world towers financial crisis, were laying off people so the market was saturated with options for employers. So you didn't really have to be that equal

opportunity. It was ok then to be a little less than PC.

So I went and registered a design company. Sole Proprietorship, and I went online looking for work. Ironically work came to me in the form of American clients and I was able to get by with minimum requirements and when the time came to leave North America I was clean of debt and armed with a new knowledge base on what works and what doesn't.

But that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement. So I occasionally look online for more tips on being Self-Employed and here is what I've found out:

Tips For Becoming Self-Employed

1. WORK A FULL DAY.

If you aren't recording a voiceover job then you should be online networking or emailing someone or doing calls or reconnecting with people you've done work for in the past. This is a job so treat it like one. This might mean that you wake up a little later since you don't have to commute to work but it does mean that you should set some working hours to get the work done. If you are like myself in a timezone that wakes up way earlier than where most of your clients are then you can afford to wake up a little later... but that means you'll be working a little later as well.

2. GET YOURSELF A GOOD INVOICING / ACCOUNT SOFTWARE.

Don't do it by hand... seriously... don't! You are not an accountant ... you are a voiceoverist ... you might have a knack for it but keeping track of invoices and what money is coming from home and who owes you what and when. All of this is a recipe for disaster and loss of funds. Do it right from the beginning ... get yourself a good software.. get yourself familiar with it and start taking the financial aspect of your business as seriously as a heart attack.

3. SAVE UP THE FAT MONTHS FOR THE LEAN MONTHS.

As much as you try you will sometimes have months that just aren't bringing in as much money as they should, and there will be months that are bringing in far more than expected. Be smart and start setting a budget for yourself. Consider it a salary if you will. Your salary includes the house expenses, car expenses, any other expenses that you would usually spend your regular salary on and that's it. Any money that is more than this salary goes into the bank and is forgotten. Block it out of your mind. This way if you don't make enough money to cover your salary next month then you can supplement it with the extra money from the month before.

4. MAKE SURE YOU GET PAID ON TIME AND IN FULL.

As a supplier of goods you are pretty important to your client... so pissing you off would not be a smart move from their side. If you and your client have agreed on a payment schedule then there is no reason for any payment to be late. If you have done the work per spec and within the time limits requested then there is no reason why your client should withhold payment from you or not pay in full. One of the articles I read about this suggested: "Make sure that payment terms are established in writing at the onset of any project and that they are printed on the invoice as well."

Anyone who has ever done any freelancing work can probably tell you about at least one client who only partially paid or didn't pay at all. Have policies in place that will prevent people from taking advantage of you and prevent you from getting ripped off. For some jobs, one way to accomplish this can be to require partial payment up front. Also, keep in mind that even the most prudent or assertive person can still get conned. Try not to beat yourself up over it, think about what you can do differently next time to avoid a similar situation, and make sure to use the loss as a tax write-off when March comes around (business

taxes are filed in March, not April). Also, listen to your instincts from the beginning: if you get a sleazy vibe from someone, don't work for them.” Source

5. INVEST IN YOUR BUSINESS.

Another blog article suggests the following:

“Successful businesspeople from all professions stress the importance of investing in your business. They recommend setting aside a certain percentage of your profits (10 percent is a frequent recommendation) for this purpose.

Whether it's updating your Web site, attending educational conferences, refreshing your marketing materials — it is important to sharpen your skills and add tools to your business resources.

On paper, it's an easy concept to grasp. In practice, it can sometimes be difficult to actually write out those checks.

I recommend setting up a separate bank account in which you can regularly deposit a percentage of your business income. Having it already set aside can make it a little easier — psychologically — to spend it for its intended purpose. (Note: I also recommend this model for your quarterly business taxes.)” Source

6. TRY TO LEAVE THE HOUSE AT LEAST ONCE A DAY.

Another article I read about working from home suggested the following:

“Take your dog for a walk – walk to get your lunch – or just walk. Once a week, maybe treat yourself to a lunchtime movie matinee. But make sure you get out of the house – it is probably one of the most important parts to working from home, and the one I admittedly am worst at.

If you commute every day, you would be amazed how much exercise you are getting compared to someone who works from home. I had an on-site contract for 3 months last year on the lower east side, and lost 10 lbs. If you think the 'freshman 15' were bad, try switching to fulltime work-from-home." Source.

I will add to that that because you are the boss of yourself one of two things might happen... you might over work yourself or you might be far too lenient and end up working 2 hr. days thinking that you're doing fine. What this means for both these situations is that you will either work yourself into exhaustion or you will run your business into the ground.

7. PUT SOME PANTS ON

This tip comes from award winning website Lifehacker which often has some great advice about improving your life / lifestyle. the Article is called "Dress for the Office to Increase Telecommuting productivity" ... the writer says:

"When you're dressed for work it sends a message that you're ready to work. A message to who? To yourself, dressing like you're about to go take a power nap or plan some racquetball doesn't send a signal that you're about to get some serious work done. At the financial blog Lazy Man and Money they write:

Wear Pants – I never thought I'd find myself writing about the basic need to wear pants... but I am. It's very tempting to just roll out of bed and get working. For me that's a recipe for failure. For some reason, I subconsciously associate pajamas with "Time to check out stats in my fantasy baseball league."

When I first started working from home I'd just wear casual clothing. Right now I'm wearing the same business attire I used to wear when I went into an office every day. My principal reason for doing so is that the clothing, aside from flipping a psychological switch that it's "work time"

makes it hard to do non-work stuff. If I notice something that needs to be done around the house—a constant distraction for people who work from home—I'm less likely to go and do it if I'm wearing business attire than if I were just wearing jeans and a t-shirt.”

Some people have amazing self discipline. Personally I often have to strip down to record because of the stifling Cairo heat but whatever the case may be having some kind of uniform for work can be greatly beneficial.

8. LIMIT YOUR WEB BROWSING

Yes I know many of you are web gurus and most of the time you spend online is for self promotion. But I'm directing this piece of advice to the normal folk like myself who can often get easily distracted by StumbleUpon or Digg or your choice of Social Bookmarking services.

In the above mentioned article by Lazy Man & Money the author suggests making several browsing profiles (in firefox) where one of the profiles doesn't have the urls for your favorite webcomics and flash games and of course the biggest time waster of all ... facebook. (I said that not Lazy Man & Money).

Personally I am a sucker for my daily webcomics and since I live and work from cairo we follow different weekend schedules so the webcomics don't end their week with me... so I get check out my webcomics even during my own weekend... which is a luxury I enjoy if I do say so myself.

9. FIND A MENTOR THEN BE ONE

Find someone who believes in the Pay It Forward Paradigm and then follow it yourself. In the article 59 tips for the Self Employed. A mentor can help you avoid several mistakes because they went through them and have the experience under their belt. What you should do is be wise

enough to accept that their advice and apply it to your fledgling business. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't take a few risks. Risk taking is what separates the Pioneers from the thousands of companies that go by the slogan "For All Your Needs!"

You don't have to invest hours of your life on every social media site and be constantly glued to Twitter... but you should at least know what you want your company to represent and to have the guts to broadcast that.

10. UNDER PROMISE, OVER DELIVER

That pretty much sums the article Kim Somers wrote for TVE a while back. Give yourself some buffer time to deliver work. Don't over promise your client thinking that you have time to deliver. Give the client enough to fit his budget. But deliver work that is outstanding. This way you will always come out on top and a referral is worth its weight in marketing Gold.

I often do this because I am an Arabic VO artist and about 95% of my clients don't understand the language. They request one long file with the number of a line and the spoken scripts afterwords. I find that it is actually less of a headache to separate the files into files where each paragraph is a separate file and there can be no confusion as to what line goes where since it's in the file's name. I do charge more if it goes beyond the complimentary 40 files though. I've had several clients who wanted me to separate a job into 1000 or 2000 files. That would take roughly 3 days not including the recording... and that is time you could be making money.

11. DON'T FEEL GUILTY

Some days you might have to invest time in your business by just taking it easy. Take some time for yourself. Go driving, or ride your Harley or

go watch your children play sports and cheer them on. The whole point of being your own boss is that your time is yours... you can decide how it is spent and as long as you are being responsible about it you can take a few hours off every day or two to spend it with your children or helping your neighbors.

12. ALWAYS REMEMBER WHY YOU WENT INDEPENDENT IN THE FIRST PLACE

On those days where none of your clients want to pay you, your computer keeps malfunctioning, every time you set something down you lose it, you can't find the file you were sure you saved to that folder, you hate Vista, you wish you had a 95- job that gave you a steady cheque... Revisit why you really do love what you do. No rush hour traffic or commute, no having to dress up if you don't feel like it, being creative... If you take a moment and a deep breath you will realize how good you really do have it. Source *MT*



www.voiceemporium.com

Negotiating Vs. Haggling Vs. The Payment Policy

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I wanted to tap into the minds and experience of the VoiceOver collective and ask a question that sometimes bothers me. Is it just me or has working in the voice over industry sometimes made you feel like you are a fishmonger in the local market.

Whether its during a communication between a client or an agent proxy I find that sometimes the haggling can get tiresome and somewhere along the line I decided to get very very stubborn.

I am sure that the Global financial crisis (a gift from the last US president as far as I am concerned) has caused some serious financial belt tightening. The ripple effect from this crisis has devastated thousands of companies and has caused the laying off of possibly millions of people worldwide.

The Net 30 Incident

The concept of Net 30 is pretty simple:

Net 30 is a form of trade credit which specifies that the net amount (the total outstanding on the invoice) is expected to be payment received in full 30 days after the Goods are dispatched by the seller, or 30 days after the Service is completed.

I was introduced to the term a year or so back when I decided to develop my voiceover business from a national to an international endeavor. Before that my only experience with delayed payment is when I worked with several freelancing companies in Toronto (design related) and the policy was that they paid you bi-weekly as long as you faxed in your time-sheet before end of day Friday. Of course in my regular job we get our salaries at the end of the month and that can also be considered net 30 except that its a fixed position and not a freelance job.

The very first international client I worked for was extremely nice and I give them much credit for encouraging me to take further steps toward establishing my VO business online and go global. They were also the first firm to introduce me to net 30.

In all honesty I hated the concept. I much preferred the envelope of cash that one gets after a successful studio recording with production companies locally. The ability to take the cash out and immediately put it in your pocket ... tax free and instantaneous... is really quite gratifying.

As my network of international clients grew... so did my exposure to different payment policies. Needless to say my favorite was the instant payment via Paypal... although the transaction deduction really ticked me off ... at least until I started adding a markup specifically for clients who wanted to pay me via paypal.

Post Financial Apocalypse

One specific client was by far my favorite... because they sent me the most jobs and always paid me the fastest. They always had the highest priority and I would often go above and beyond the call of duty to keep them happy.

But then the crisis hit... and one day I got an email telling me of their revised method of payment. Now instead of instant payment... my choices where Net 60 or go fish.

So I get paid 60 days after the fact. Pretty freaking ridiculous. Their justification was that their clients where paying them late so they would be paying me late. In anycase... the jobs from them decreased and it wasn't much of an issue since my other clients still had a more reasonable payment policy.

The reason I bring it up is that increasingly now... more and more clients are using the global financial crisis as a reason to pay me late. The

translator I work with also told me that many of her clients from Europe are starting to change their payment policy to that effect.

If you ask me... That's just Bull Crap.

Zen and the Art of Haggling

I've never been much of a haggler. I basically go to a shop... look at their prices... if they have something I like I make note of the model ... and go around to similar shops and find the best price deal. But I never go up to the salesperson and tell him that I would buy their product if they gave me a 5, 10 or 15% discount.

My first real brush with haggling was during my Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca... before the Hajj started... I went there a few weeks prior to the Hajj and basically lived in Mecca for a week or so. During that week I observed on several occasions some of the other Pilgrims (I can't really say that without hearing John Wayne in the back of my mind saying it) haggling and successfully bringing down the price of some product in the bazaar on the outskirts of the Holy Sites there.

Within a week I was a pro... and by the time I went back to Egypt... I was a master. In Egypt ... where men generally don't haggle... I was able to do it on several occasions and leave the salesperson dazed with wonder at what just happened.

Of course when a client decides to contact me directly for a voice over job and treats my voice as a commodity (which technically it is) that he can get anywhere else... I used to worry about losing the job to someone else... and end up hating myself for doing a time consuming job for next to nothing.

A year into this ... and something in my head clicked. I've been in the VO business now close to 15 years and if they want to hire someone else to do it.

Fine. Go Ahead.

But I'm not changing my price. After all the financial crisis has hit me just as hard as it can hit you. I've seen a drop in booking, I've seen a rise in equipment cost. I've seen a sudden stretch of my financial liquidity.

Of Course I am well aware that the money is as good as in the bank with the net 30, 45 and 60 policy... but still it does mean I see the return on my work a month or 2 later.

A Foundation For Negotiation.

I've considered dropping all those Net 60 clients. I really have. But its not practical. They are still paying customers and whether I like it or not I did agree when I did that I would accept the Net 45 or Net 60 payment policy.

But I did find a way out.

It's quite simple. With new clients I don't accept anything beyond net 15. In fact It seems that there is an existing work around to the whole Net 30 concept that I wasn't aware of.

It's something along the lines of this:

Net 30 terms are often coupled with a credit for early payment; e.g. the notation "2% 10, net 30" indicates that a 2% discount can be taken by the buyer only if payment is received in full within 10 days of the dispatch of the goods, and that full payment is expected within 30 days. For example, if "\$1000 210/ net 30" is written on a bill, the buyer can take a 2% discount ($\$1000 \times .02 = \20) and make a payment of \$980 within 10 days.

See I didn't know that. I just accepted the financial pitfall that I fell in and sat on the edge of the proverbial lake and lamented myself.

In effect you can accept new clients with net 30 but introduce them to the concept of %15 10, net 30 and make the appropriate markup so that if they do wish to delay the payment they pay more and if they wish to pay sooner you get what you wanted in the first place.

Having said that... I still wouldn't go for new clients with net 30 policies.

In fact I've started to renegotiate my fee with all the companies I used to work with to make up for an increased cost of living... and a delayed payment policy from almost everyone.

And if they don't like it... Well then I'm sure they can go ahead and find someone else that fits their needs and that also has my skills, meets his deadlines and provides excellent customer service. It's a simple matter of knowing your self worth. **MT**



Author's Epilogue

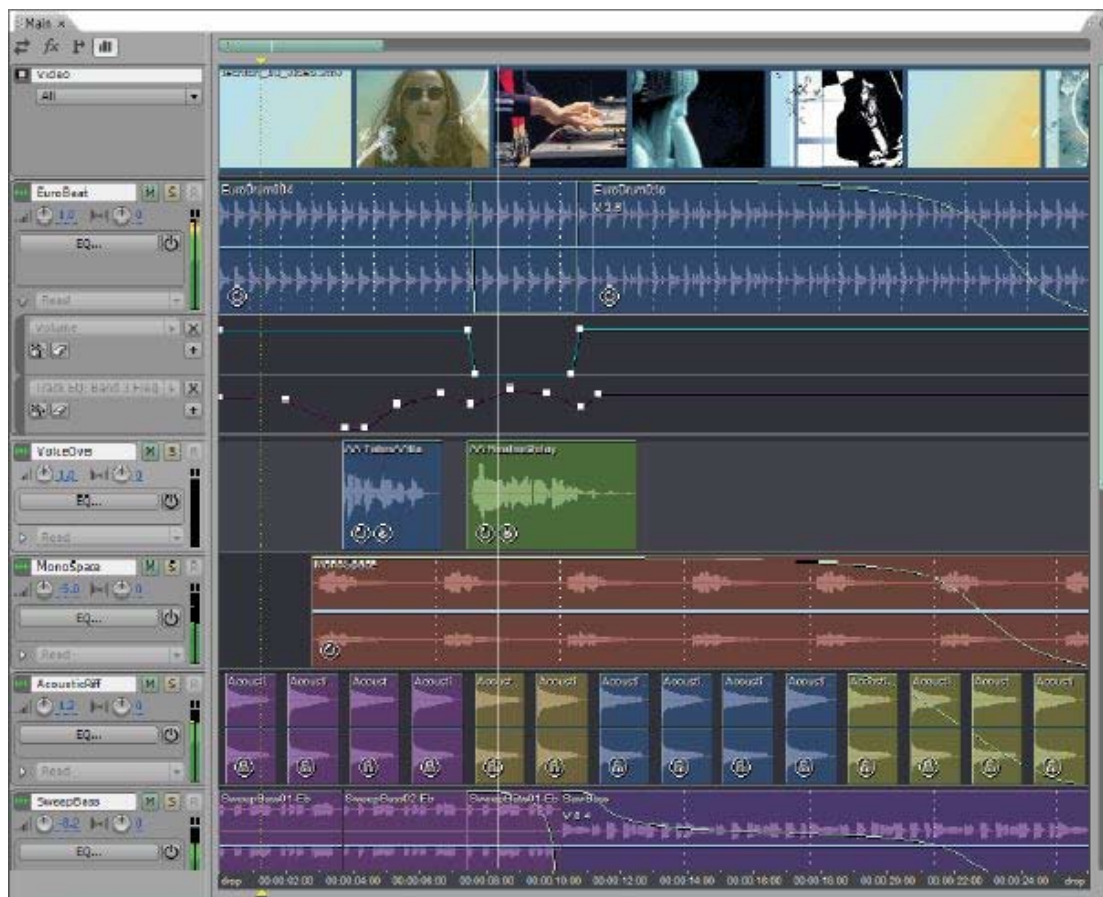
S*ince writing this article I've stuck to my guns regarding payment policies and I've found that as long as the client is coming to me then I can setup the payment terms per my requirements.*

On several occasions I've had to reject some clients because of their 'demands' for delayed payment. My policy is that first time clients pay immediatly or using an escrow service. For the second project with the same client I give them net 15.

Now please keep in mind that the difference between you and I (in most cases) is that I cater to a specific niche of people who want a language (Arabic) that is technically not as widespoken as english. I do record English language VOs on occassion but even those are specialized with accents and with bilingual arabic/english scripts.

I Have This Syncing Feeling

FIRST PUBLISHED JULY 3, 2009 (EDITED MAY 23, 2010)



It's always nice when you get that email or instant message telling you that you got a new job. Sometimes you don't spend too much time in understanding how technical the job might get because you are just so happy the work is coming in.

Very recently the lovely Fernanda (a former employee of from one of my clients) contacted me about an Arabic VO for an industrial video. The job was straight forward... get a script translated (I don't translate but I have a very good translator who I forward the translation work to) and then voice it... and then (and here's the kicker) Sync it with the audio of the English VO in the video.

I don't have a fancy setup... I have a laptop, a couple of condenser USB microphones and a sound booth made from PVC tubing and thick tent material (I can disassemble it in about 5 minutes and put it back

together in 10 minutes... handy when you don't have much space at home). And finally I have Adobe Audition.

I had once stumbled on the fact that Adobe audition could import videos for lip syncing purposes or editing the audio of a video into it. Its as simple as dragging the video from your desktop and dropping it in Audition.

So anyway... Fernanda was under allot of pressure from her boss and client to deliver this video by Thursday (a couple of days after contacting me) and I told her that it was a tight deadline and that if the translator doesn't deliver the work on time (she wasn't used to such tight translation deadlines) I wouldn't be able to deliver on Thursday. Fortunatly for Fernanda the translator delivered the script on time.

I looked everything over... printed the script and started recording.

I Pronounce You Man and Strife

Nothing new there... same process as always... except of course that the video was for a Brazilian company and allot of the names of places and people mentioned were in Portuguese. Also apparently Arabic and Portuguese don't really flow. Just different phonetic subsets and instead of the 1 hour recording 2 hours editing ... I ended up doing 2 hours recording 4 hours editing. The main problem was that I had to deliver the audio synced. So I would import that audio I just recorded and sync it with the English... find out that the pronunciation that I thought I had done a great job with was in fact ... crap.

Go back and rerecord that paragraph... and so on and so forth.

Add to that learning curve for pronouncing Portuguese the fact that I was completely new to the sync features in audition. They aren't that hard to pick up.. but like anything that you do for the first time... and are under allot of pressure to complete... you end up with anomalies.

For example... Arabic sometimes takes less words to describe

something in some instances... and in others takes allot more words. Trust me that is the worst possible thing to find out when you are trying to synchronize one language's audio to another language. Especially when your vo keeps going beyond the other guy's vo.

In one instance I had to go in (the booth) and rerecord a paragraph in a faster pace than all the others... because the guy said what he had to in English in 3 seconds less time that it took in Arabic.

The Learning Curve

I don't want to seem like I'm bragging but usually I have an excellent learning curve with software... I can usually grasp the intricacies of it in less time than other people BUT this also usually involves me looking through the help file if I don't know what I'm doing. Yesterday.. I didn't look through the help file once... which probably added another hour to the editing time and made me deliver the file allot later than I initially estimated.

Thankfully the end of my day in Egypt is not the end of Fernanda's day in Brazil and thankfully she was able to deliver the work on time and meet her deadline.

But I can't get over the fact of how much I have learned in this one experience. I can now with confidence offer my clients a voice over synced perfectly with a video's audio (well depending on the translation really).

But I'll make sure to charge a little extra for it... since it is a sound engineering skill and not every voice over person out there knows how to do it.

A Skill Learned Equals Money Earned

The more you learn and the more services you can provide... the more diverse your skill set is... the more you can earn money utilizing this

newly acquired knowledge.

This is an important reality of our job... that the more diverse you get with some of the periphery aspects of voice over work.. I mean some would consider voice over video syncing a technical job or a job for a AV engineer.

Why? if it took me a few hours to get a solid grasp on it why can't you look through the software you use and see if it will afford you the ability to sync audio with video. Or as in my case... video with audio with audio.

After this experience and the new skills I have aquired I believe I will be updating my website to advertise my new found skill of synchronizing video to audio.

And I'll be charging money for it. *MT*



The Young Man & The Sea: How To Survive in International Waters

FIRST PUBLISHED APRIL 14, 2010 AT SUCHAVOICE.COM (EDITED MAY 23, 2010)

Consider if you will this new world we live in, where communication is close to instantaneous, and one can work for years with someone without ever meeting them. The world is still suffering in the wake of the last financial crisis. A few people have come to the conclusion that if we are to survive the tsunami that passed, we must establish something that will survive the tempest ahead.

This article will contain some references to religion and politics. So if either these subjects offend you... please read on.

What wisdom is this?

As a Muslim (one who follows the religion of Islam) there is a tradition (saying) of the Prophet Muhammad that has always helped ease my worries when it comes to financial woes.

The Prophet said: Do not worry about starving to death. Instead, look to the bird who leaves his nest everyday with nothing and is able to feed itself and its chicks by the will of its Creator.

That saying goes well with the concept of bounty in Islam. Subsistence (rizq) and the wealth that God has, which he will give you, have been predetermined. So, if all the wealth that you will ever collect in your lifetime is predetermined, that means a number of things:

- 1. That the job that you really wanted and got. That was meant for you. No one would have ever gotten it but you because it is your destiny to hold that position.*
- 2. That fact that the wealth you will get is predetermined does not mean that you sit at home and just wait for the money to come knocking at your door. That's not how it works.*

You work and you make money and that money that you made was predetermined to be yours.

- 3. Never forget that there are things more important than money... like family. Work to Live; don't Live To work.*

I mention this tradition as a prelude to this chapter because between the lines and intertwined within the words of this article is the strong belief that your wealth is there if you earn it.

Swimming in International Waters

It takes a long time to build an empire that lasts. That is how I see things. I hope my voiceover business lasts a long time so that I can enjoy working in it for more than just the hours after my day job.

I am not a full-time voiceover actor. I wish I were. I think that this business has the potential to be more than just a great side job, and I am working to build it as a brilliant career to make my empire last.

For those who don't know who I am: My name is Mahmoud Taji. I am an Arabic Language voiceover talent based in Cairo, Egypt. I also run a voiceover business out of my home studio here in the land of the pharaohs, and although some aspects have proven to be challenging, I have been able to successfully forge some fruitful relationships with voiceover casting agencies worldwide.

So what is the secret to swimming in International waters?

Plan Ahead

If you were going on a trip to a foreign country... you'd go online and take a look at reviews of the more famous touristic sites. You'd see what the most economical way to get around is, and what the traditions are in that country... like when in Turkey, don't blow your nose in public!

If, on the other hand, you are planning to do business with a foreign company then you will need to educate yourself in the business traditions of that country. Find out what the norms are when it comes to talking about payment, deadlines, or what the etiquette is during telephone conferences.

As for myself, I've worked in 3 different continents: Africa, North America & The Far East. Each is very different from the other, and in each area I was looked at differently (whether due to my ethnicity or people's perceptions of who I am, etc.).

To run a successful business that caters to an international market, you have to be aware of how to speak to people. I can't teach you how to do that. In my case, I have just absorbed the differences between the different markets and automatically adjusted my speaking tone to the different nationalities. I suggest that you read as much as you can about foreign business markets before even considering contacting them. It could prove to be of great benefit. Respecting their views and traditions will help streamline your business and endear you to these business partners (as well as make you a better human being).

A Lasting Foundation

Once you have decided on a business plan, you need to then decide on how much you need to invest into representing yourself online.

WEBSITE

If potential business partners have a means to get more details on you, then in this day and age the only logical place for them to go is your website.

First impressions are everything. If your website looks like rubbish to them... then you are rubbish. If you are not interested in maintaining your global image by keeping your website updated and enticing ... then

you might as well just forget about catering to the global client.

P2Ps (ONLINE CASTING MARKET PLACES)

That stands for Pay to Plays most of the sites dislike the term but the truth is that this what they are called behind their backs and to their faces. The Online casting marketplace paradigm was initially invented by Voice123.com and then later on canadian outfit Voices.com came on the scene and created some competition (actually the most recent addition to the P2P family of sites is bodalgo.com and if you read on you'll find an interview with their founder in the interviews section of this ebook). These sites list you in their directory and send you job leads daily. For me, the P2Ps leads have never really panned out. What has worked for me though is their brilliant SEO (search engine optimization). Why reinvent the wheel? If they already have a website with great SEO (high visibility on search engines) then you don't have to really waste your time and money trying to match your personal website's SEO to theirs. Don't get me wrong... you need a little of it in there... so for God's sake don't commission an all FLASH website since the SEO for flash is almost nonexistent (read the chapter SEO Vs. Flash).

What I mean is, use the P2P websites as a gateway for clients to come to your personal site. That means that your budget will have to include at least \$500 (\$200 for the preferred membership with Voices.com and \$300 for the standard membership with Voice123.com).

Like I said you might not get that many jobs off the sites... but your profile page on their sites can easily filter some real clients to your personal site... and then to you.

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

Sure, you might want to Tweet about your services and maybe eventually someone will contact you about a job through your Facebook

page or your LinkedIn page. Personally, I use social networking websites to get to know other voiceover talent around the world. I am a strong believer in the "**Pay It Forward**" ethos, and I don't mind helping 20 or 30 people and never hearing from them again. But one of these people will remember you, and one day when you least expect it your Rizq (refer above for what that means) will catch up with you and the person you helped out last year will be asked by a casting agency if they happen to know an Arabic Voiceover actor. They might just remember you.

Taji's Voiceover Casting Directory



I did mention that
I'm a big fan of the
"Pay It Forward"

ethic right? Which is why I setup a directory on my blog that has 230+ links to voiceover casting websites worldwide. Not all these companies I listed were interested in adding me to their roster of voiceover talent. They might have already had a resident Arabic voiceover guy that they're quite happy with. That doesn't matter... because the directory is there for everyone. Use it to plan your takeover of the international voiceover market and then when you have done so... pay it forward.

Many Hooks, One Boat

If you take anything out of this article then take this: Be smart. Don't go quit your job and sit at home scratching your head trying to figure out how to "Break Into" the international voiceover market. Instead, understand that you have to first get the ball rolling ... and then when it's time... and the snowball is big enough... hold on for dear life.

Part of being smart is putting out as many hooks into the international

waters as possible. The more hooks, the better. Keep your day job, and keep fishing. Follow up with those who don't mind you following up (refer to what I said about international work ethics). Don't spam anyone with unwanted mail. Be polite and courteous and never... under any circumstances accept ridiculously low rates.

Payment Options

It doesn't matter how good I am at what I do. If clients cannot pay me then there is no point in even contacting them. Thankfully I was smart enough not to close my Paypal account when I left North America, which has allowed me to receive payments and be a far more appealing freelancer than the other Arabic speaking guy who doesn't have a Paypal account set up. Paypal not being available in Egypt is a political decision. Ironically, you can have a Paypal account in Saudi Arabia but not in Egypt. Go figure.

Another thing to keep in mind is currencies. Consider creating a rate card for different countries. If you are able to get in contact with a local voiceover talent (preferably specialized in another language) and asking them what the normal rates are, you can get a better idea of what the accepted norm for voiceover work is. But keep in mind that if you are offering a unique product (an uncommon language, for example), then you can probably keep your rates as is and not sell yourself short.

What Goes Around Comes Around

If you sit and do nothing... nothing will happen. If you go out and do everything... but that everything is not well thought out, then you might have been better off staying at home and not doing anything at all.

The world is your oyster, and being able to work for people thousands of miles away is no longer a problem. The problem now is... what are you going to do about it? *MT*



The Interviews

by

Mahmoud Taji



The Invisible Mythbuster

MAHMOUD TAJI INTERVIEWS ROBERT LEE NARRATOR FOR DISCOVERY CHANNEL'S MYTHBUSTERS



Hello folks, I can't tell you how excited I am to present to you my interview with one of the most recognized Narrators in the Business Today. It's very possible that you are already a fan and you don't know it. If you've ever spent more than a few minutes on the Discovery channel you've probably heard my guest today Mr. Robert Lee Narrator for the Hit Discovery Channel Series “**MythBusters.**”

As you might already know Mr. Lee works out of Sydney Australia and I work out of Cairo, Egypt so we had to co-ordinate this interview

over the interweb over a period of a few weeks. I will be publishing the interview in 2 parts so check your Emporium RSS feed for the latest update of Taji's Voice Emporium:

MAHMOUD TAJI: *First I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to conduct this interview... I'm a huge fan of Mythbusters (it appeals to the male gene in me that likes to blow things up) also as a Voice over artist I appreciate all the subtleties that you put in your work with mythbusters.*

Lets start at the beginning... I read on a mythbusters fan site that you were born in the UK... moved to North America (spent some time in Canada I believe as well as the states) then moved to Australia... Could you give us a little more detail on your early years and what made your parents move to north America... and why you decided to move to Australia?

ROBERT LEE: My family moved from England to Canada when I was just seven years old. I grew up there, did spend some time in the States, but largely a Canadian upbringing. Then moved to Australia in 1974 with my father (who was an Australian) and sister (who's now an author back in Canada – Barbara Phinney). They stayed a year, and went back to Canada, while I stayed on here – there was more opportunity here than I could ever have managed to drum up in Canada, on reflection. I became an Australian citizen in the late 80s. Naturalized. Not by birth and not by voice!

So, I've been here for a while, but my formative years were spent in North America. I like this cultural diversity (if it qualifies as diversity!). But it's something some people have a hard time understanding ... yes, a natural American accent, not bugged on, to use an Australianism. Some people think I have a natural Australian accent and I perform with an American accent. Not so. I certainly can't do Australian accent, unless you're after some comic value. Anyone who tries to put on an Australian accent who comes from somewhere else, is just kidding themselves – it's the hardest accent to imitate convincingly – there are so many nuances

and colloquialisms applied in very subtle ways, to your average American it may be convincing, but an Australian can pick the fake a mile away. Enough on this.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *How were you introduced to the Voice Over industry? and have you worked as anything else?*

ROBERT LEE: I started working in radio in Sydney when I was 16 years old, and I was in awe of the voices around the place. Many of them were leading voice overs in Sydney as well as excellent, experienced radio announcers. But at 2CH I did a couple of ads and got hooked on both radio and voice work. I did demos and used to play them on the reel-to-reels while the announcers were on air! (It was a Beautiful Music station, so they were normally doing other things during music 'sweeps' – like checking the racing guide or reading a novel.) They were good days in radio back then.

I moved to one of the network's regional stations, 2AY Albury, where the manager let me do Wednesday afternoons (so he didn't have to pay me overtime), as I had expressed an interest in doing airwork before I moved. I did commercials soon after. And then moved to drive at 7LA Launceston. We worked with SMC automation gear, and the tech developed a great method of being able to trigger a song at the right spot in pre-records, allowing us to record voice, and keep talking over the intro. Mostly, though, it was announcer-assist mode. But still cutting edge automation (this is 1977!). After that, back to Albury then Bendigo, then left to do tv audio before heading to 2CC Canberra as copywriter. Then to 2DAY FM Sydney as copywriter (the only one!) Then back to Canberra, then to Newcastle, Canberra again!, and then to Sydney.

But during this time, in the early days the youngest or newest announcer had to do much of the carting (commercials, etc.). I'd hear these national voice spots, overseas movie spots, and stuff from the likes of Street Remley Studios in Adelaide. Street was an American ad man

who moved into audio production and one of the greatest radio writers and producers. Occasionally he'd do spots, and I thought, 'well, if he can do them in Australia, why can't I?'

I then bothered the hell out of Ron Scott with demo tapes and phone calls, who ran Australia's first (and only at the time) voice talent agency, RMK. He wouldn't put me on the books, saying there was little call for American accents. He did, however, have Roger Newcombe on his books, who had an American accent – an actor I recall being in a evening soapie called 'The Box'. Eventually, Ron threw a job my way while I was in Newcastle, to do a job in Sydney at Gemini Studios – for Continental Airlines – a post-sync to a TV spot about the shoot-out at the OK Corral. Talk about high pressure! Until then, I'd done all my voicework sitting down and running the panel – alone!. For this one, I had to stand up! And there were three clients, three agency and one engineer. All looking at me.

Sometime after that, Ron put me on the books and I found myself in the company of the most talented bunch of voices in the country. I think this was back around 1983. That was my first national voice job. They came in slow, but regularly after that.

Forgive me for mentioning all these places and people – they all deserve a mention. And if the web behaves anything like any other network (if you've seen "Connected: The Science of Networks – or similar title – you'd know what I'm talking about here), their names shall linger longer in the electronic ether!

In my other job, I'm an e-marketing and web content manager, and have worked in new media since 1994-ish. Firstly, on cd-roms, before the web existed, and then building websites and working on content management systems. Prior to that I worked with the Australian version of the RAB, marketing radio to advertisers and agencies.

I'm always glad I had a career besides voicework, as I'd probably go brain dead if all I did was voicework year-in year-out.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Could you tell us more on how and when you started to work with the discovery channel... I understand Mythbusters wasn't the first time you worked with them?*

ROBERT LEE: To be accurate, I mainly work for producers who put shows together for the likes of Discovery. I remember going along to do a few narration auditions at Beyond when they were in East Chatswood, and never getting anywhere. But I tried to persevere. Eventually I ended up doing a seven ep or so series 'American Spirit' for Beyond, which aired on Discovery. That was in 1997 I think (hazy on the exact year).

I've since done other documentaries for Discovery and others, including Medical Incredible, Doping in Sport, Miracle on Everest: The Lincoln Hall Story, Connected: The Power of Six Degrees (by director Annamaria Talas) and others. I've also done some Mythbusters promos for Discovery.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *This Brings us to Mythbusters.... how did that come about? How has that changed your life?*

ROBERT LEE: Soon after I did quite a few travel and adventure and 'science' documentaries for Beyond, Peter Rees bailed me up one day around the audio suites, and asked if I wanted have a go at the pilots for a new show. But, he warned, the read is to be nothing like I'd been doing. So, he and I worked a bit to get to the area he wanted, we put one ep down, then the other two in the pilot series of three shows. This was Mythbusters, of course. Soon after, he got back to me with the news Discovery wanted a few more eps, and off we went from there. I must say the delivery style has changed over the years. As it should.

As for changing my life? Well, it's changed my professional profile. Usually voiceover artists are anonymous, or mostly – and happily. Doing a show that seems to have caught on does bring a little more than usual focus to the role. But, really, it's still an invisible or comparatively low-profile role and that's fine with me.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do you get to go to Mythbusters show filmings at all? I'm sure you've met the crew Jamie, Adam, Tory, Kari and Grant... are they different to how they are on the show?*

ROBERT LEE: Well, living in Sydney means I don't get to go on location whenever I'm in the neighborhood. I have had the pleasure of spending time with them a year last October when Adam and Jamie were doing 'plane on a treadmill' episode. Everyone I met there was fantastic. It's a small, hard-working crew, well-grounded and talented. This includes, of course, Adam, Jamie and Kari, Grant and Tory. Each of them is an ordinary person doing an extraordinary job. And they're good at. I particularly like the way they apply their tools and experiences to other tasks. Tools they developed for a specific task have proved useful for many other totally different applications. Eg. It takes Jamie, what, an hour, to convert a car into a remote controlled one. Brilliant! How handy would it be if we could all do that?! And I must mention the crew – all of them very cool people.

As for screenings, I'm occasionally invited to Beyond's screenings, but more often than not on the screening days I'm there, I'm more likely to be putting down an ep in the studio.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Now if you don't mind lets talk technical... Dan Tapster the Executive Producer on Mythbusters says "Rob is the consummate professional when it comes to recording. He takes direction extremely well (not that much is needed because of the prep he puts in)," how do you prepare to record the shows. Could you describe the final recording process for us?*

ROBERT LEE: Sure! A few days before the recording session, I receive a fine cut on DVD and a script. This usually has the producer's voice on it for editing purposes. I read the script through, inserting punctuation because generally they're lousy at it. And a comma does make a difference, guys! I'll then watch the fine cut, which is as close to the final product I see before it gets to air. Throughout this process, I'll make

more notes for suggested tweaks, carefully prepared ad-libs, etc. They're very generous in allowing us (producer and me) the opportunity to fiddle with sentences, quips and the like.

I get in the audio booth with Nathan (head of audio at Beyond) or one of his highly trained and diligent staff running the desk. The producer (who usually is the writer of the episode) slides in beside them. And after farting around with levels and telling tall tales about how big it is, we put it down cold. I'll get directions along the way, but we get it down. It's a collaborative effort, making a line sound one way rather than another. Sometimes lines are said that say one thing, but could possibly infer something else. We have fun with the words, too. I recall one episode where the producer included the line, because it was correct and contextually relevant, someone "is playing hide the salami" or similar. However, I'm kept in line by the producer.

We don't record to pictures because this just takes too long. We know what we're trying to achieve (after 150 hours of programs) and it comes together, mostly. Lol. I just pity the poor person laying up the tracks because they have to sit and listen to much tripe and silliness along the way. The producer, Nathan and I have that uniquely Australian trait of abusing each other in jest. But the problem for me is the talkback isn't recorded so they never appear to be responsible for the banter – just me!

Each producer has both a writing and producing style, but all in all, we're pretty efficient at the recording and it's great to work with everyone on the team.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do You have a home studio? if so what equipment do you use? Do you work at all through the Internet?*

ROBERT LEE: I do have a very dicey home studio. Rode NT3, voice processor and mixer into the computer. But it's not a pro setup. While it seems everyone and their dog has a home studio in the US, that's not

the case here – or, it's not the case for the majority of voice work done at national or capital city level here. Yes, some voices have a little booth at home and an ISDN connection, but that's for regular tv promo work and the like. Usually put in by the station, I understand. What irritates me is that some clients ask to do stuff at home – meaning they don't have a budget for a studio or are trying to save money – so the voice talent is asked to absorb this cost. I'll bet they're not working for nothing!

I do the vast majority of my work in Sydney studios. And any client who wants a decent production obviously does the same.

I've been on one of the big voice sites and possibly listed elsewhere, but it's usually such a shit fight to get a \$50 gig – if you're lucky. These voiceover aggregators have little interest in supporting decent voiceover fees, and as such I believe they're doing voices a disservice – driving down prices by exploiting the level of competition (supply). Sure, who doesn't like having a go at a new track – at the very least, it's practice! But imagine, one hour after a job gets posted, you see that over 100 voice talents have submitted auditions. It's crazy! The client will never get through them all. This competitive system drives prices down, diminishes the role of voice in production to some extent and possibly leads to mediocrity. Having said that, there are many talented voices doing well at internet-sourced work. And the industry in voiceover training has certainly blossomed, and training is a good thing to do for those trying to get into the industry, so it's okay for some – but not the vast majority, from what I can see.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I read somewhere that you had some difficulty getting work in Australia in the past because of your north American accent.(Although I know you recently did the MTV music awards for Australia) .. have you tried to learn the Aussie accent or is it just not that genuine when you voice it?*

ROBERT LEE: That's not true – that I've had some difficulty getting

work in Australia. I've been very fortunate to have worked consistently for over twenty five years doing local, national and international stuff. But this is the result of agency and media clients, studios and others wanting to use a North American accent for what it brings creatively to an idea or script. And there's been plenty of that opportunity – so much so, that there are quite a few American voices at work in Australia.

At the same time, sure, I'm not in the running for the bulk of voiceover work here, as it rightly doesn't require my speech impediment. But there are overseas ads produced here in Australia – the season reversal, the locations, the talent, production expertise, costs. I've been fortunate enough to have done a few of these, as well as recorded via ISDN to US studios from Sydney commercial studios. So, while I'm not Johnny-on-the-spot for US work, things trickle my way.

As for the Australian accent, certainly, I use the colloquialisms, but just can't manage the accent.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I also read in the Mythbusters wiki that the Discovery channel allows British Voice over artists Robin Banks, Daisy Beaumont and Rufus Hound to voice your part when the show airs in the UK (makes sense that they would need 3 people to try to do what you do) ... is that weird for you since you are originally a Briton? Actually... having said that what do you see yourself as? British, American or Accent impaired Aussie?*

ROBERT LEE: I'll just say this: I was born in England, but that's it. I have no English accent – haven't for 45 years. I don't have an Australian accent. I have an American accent, so my sister says. It's my currency. In a voice sense, I see myself as an American.

As for what voices Discovery use in various parts of the world and why, I can't say. I'm not sure where my version is heard beyond Asia and North America.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do you have any side projects other than Mythbusters? I know you do some work for Carlton Dry and Pimp My Kettle (for MTV Australia) is there anything else that you work on?*

ROBERT LEE: Until recently, I was a sidekick on a community radio show called Nige's Nuthouse. Great fun, a certain freedom never afforded someone in commercial radio. The Carlton Dry and Fantastic Noodles (Pimp My Kettle) are just a couple of very interesting jobs, as they were online-based promotions. Social media, web-based campaigns, etc. are a foray into new, exciting territory for ad agencies – as long as they get it right!

I'm also hoping to collaborate with a writer friend on some comedy ideas.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What casting agency do you work with?*

ROBERT LEE: I'm lucky enough to have EM Voices as my Australian agents. Jonathon, Alex, Jane and Isobel are great. I don't 'belong' to any other casting agency, although, as a marketer in my other job, I'll consider any opportunity that doesn't devalue the work of voice artists.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do you have any hobbies? Interests? I believe you have an active interest in genealogy since you might have tracked down Jamie's possible dad ("I also like wearing my Mythbusters t-shirt. Oh, and I believe Jamie to be Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter's love child.") I gotta tell you I nearly peed my pants laughing at that!*

ROBERT LEE: Yes, well, I don't know who would be more offended... Jamie or Jeff. (I met Jeff years ago in Sydney, so was well aware of him – as I was the Doobie Brothers!). Another example of how your words stay out there in the ether much longer than they should! Always be careful what you say online, kids! By the way, I also like wearing my Molson Canadian t-shirt my brother in law gave me decades ago, too.

And pants. Love wearing pants. Especially to voice jobs. Makes me look just that little more professional. LOL! (note from taji... pants are good!)

MAHMOUD TAJI: *And Finally (and I thank you for your perseverance with me) what do you think of the voice over industry today? What advice do you have for the aspiring VO talent out there and what would you like to say (if anything) in conclusion?*

ROBERT LEE: For up-and-coming voice talent... practice, practice, practice. Read out loud from anything printed, if you can't get scripts. Read press ads in various styles, articles, columns. Know your style and exploit it. But be versatile at the same time. And listen. Emulate, but don't parrot.

I think that's a difference today compared to the past. Most voices I started out with were versatile. They could do many different styles of reads – not just one. Today, there's so much more talent about, clients can find exactly the style they want, rather than getting a good voice artist in and saying 'do it in this style', if you know what I mean. Not that there's anything wrong with either method of casting!

But at the same time, clients want to know that the voiceover is competent enough to be able to get the job done. Style or sound takes you so far, but being a pro means you crack the read and you get out within time. (It's a false economy where a client tries to save money on a voice, only to spend twice as long or more in the studio producing them and then the track.)

It's a tough gig, marketing yourself as a voice. Your best bet is your own site, easy to access demo reels, and good marketing of the site itself in the first instance. And stay away from the crowds – you'll hardly get noticed.

Cheers!

MR. ROBERT LEE I thank you for putting up with me and my incessant questions (as well as my nestled questions that are far more than the 13 that I originally sent you).

Listen to Mr. Lee on the hit TV Show Mythbusters airing now on the Discovery Channel. *MT*



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MAHMOUD TAJI INTERVIEWS SITE FOUNDER ARMIN HIERSTETTER



Today we have a special guest with us. All the way from Munich, Germany Mr. Armin Hierstetter CEO and Founder of Europe's First Voice Over Marketplace Bodalgo.com

Mr. Hierstetter has been quite busy since the launch of Bodalgo.com back in January of 2008 ... This intro was written after I conducted the interview and I have to say Armin reveals quite a few surprises. Stick around this is going to be interesting!

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Hello Armin, First I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. I know you're a busy man so I'll get straight to the interview*

What is your professional background? On your linkedin profile it mentions you were a junior writer, production manager, Publishing director... that's quite a big jump to voice over marketplace entrepreneur.

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: After I finished school in 1990, I started as a junior writer for a computer magazine called "TOS" (a mag for Atari ST computers). Two years later I went to PENTHOUSE magazine (yes THAT Penthouse magazine), followed by some youth magazines. After ten years in publishing I thought that maybe I am not the best editorial person in the world, so I began studying marketing (working at the

same time). After I graduated they got me into the management team of the publishing house where I was Publisher of the youth titles, later Publishing Director of FHM – that was a few months after I did some FHM ad voiceovers.

So, to be honest: I am not traditionally trained as you would expect from a voiceover pro. Later I had many lessons, of course, but in the beginning of my voiceover “career” I just did what I thought was right to do.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *How did you come about the idea of establishing Bodalgo.com*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: It all started when a colleague of mine needed a voice over for an ad for FHM magazine which we published in the company I worked for. There was a very short deadline and not much budget for a voiceover, so I said – more as a joke: “I have a nice voice!” I ended up in studio, the guys liked it, so I did more voiceovers for FHM. Then I thought: Hey, if it's good enough for them, it might be good enough for others as well. But most vo agencies did not even respond to my applications.

Then I found those pay to play sites and thought: Great! Definitely there must be some of those sites in Germany as well. I soon found out – nope, there hadn't been any. That was back in 2005. Two years I had the idea of getting a voiceover platform online, but it was not before September 2007 when I said to myself: “Okay, nobody is doing it until you do it yourself.” Four months (and a lot of headaches) later, bodalgo went public beta.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Bodalgo is an unusual sounding word... What does it mean?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: That's a funny one: When I began coding the

site, at some point I needed something to be where a site logo usually appears. So I was thinking about names. To make sure that I don't infringe other companies rights, I googled every name I came up with. The very first word where Google showed no results was “bodalgo”. It looked nice in the design, so I kept it.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *How many employees do you have?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: Until now, bodalgo is a one-man-show. Still – and I am very happy to be able to say that – bodalgo is rated better than other sites regarding the customer service. It's really great to hear from talents how much they like bodalgo.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What is your history with the voice over industry?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: Actually, there is hardly any. See, When I joined the big V's in 2005, I got a few gig from them (US companies looking for German voices) and for some of those companies I am still working on a regular basis. Over here in Germany, nobody knows me as a voiceover talent, I hardly do jobs here. And – of course – I do not audition for any jobs that are posted at bodalgo as this would look really, really odd.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What kind of growth have you seen in the German voice over market since you started?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: Well, I can not give you exact figures on the market development overall – if you meant that. But I can tell you how bodalgo developed over the last 18 months. There are now more than 1,500 talents on board from all over the world. More than 1,400 jobs have been posted during that time paying the voiceover talents more than a quarter of a million Euro (around 450.000 USD). Still, bodalgo needs to do better than that. I am trying very hard to bring more and more voice seekers to bodalgo.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *So far who is your biggest source of work (which country)?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: Surely enough, German jobs are posted most often, followed by US/UK jobs. It is pretty challenging to get your foot into a market you are not actually living in. But there are lots of great advertising opportunities the web offers, so there ways to make you get heard outside your home base.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *You come from Bavaria. Is that a point of pride that your heritage is tied up with one of the world's most luxurious cars? Do you drive a BMW?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: People say that Bavarians are a grumpy bunch of people and – to a certain point – they are not wrong. But on the other side: Bavaria also stands for “Gemütlichkeit” which kind of translates to snugness/cosiness. Whenever you have the chance, come to the beer fest and you will see pretty fast, what “Gemütlichkeit” means. But: Bavaria has so much more to offer than people in Lederhosen gulping down masses of beer: Bavaria has a fantastic landscape, great lakes and mountains, a healthy industry (if you can name it like this these days) and last but not least: the BMW, sure. And – sure enough – I drive one myself. It's a 1996 Series 5 BMW which my brother gave to me a few years ago. Nice car, no question, just a bit too big to be the ideal city car.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What are the challenges you have faced as a bilingual voice over site? Do you plan on further localizing bodalgo.com to languages like Chinese? Arabic? Russian?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: When bodalgo started January 2008, it was only available in German. Three months later the localization for English went online. It helped a lot that I've worked for a publishing house that was based in England, so I had to report in English all the time . When

you do that over ten years, you get to know the language pretty well. So – at least that's what I am hoping for – I feel that the translation is up to scratch in most cases – anyone spotting a mistake? Let me know! Regarding other languages: that's not decided yet. If there are new languages to add, Spanish and French would be on top of the list.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Are there any other projects you are working on?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: I just have launched two more sites in the bodalgo universe: bodalgo/copy – a market place for writers and bodalgo/art – a marketplace for designers. Both of them are only available in German for the time being but you can bet that there will be an English version soon.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I understand you have a pretty strict standard for those even getting a free account on Bodalgo.com is this true?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: Not even half of the people signing up with bodalgo make it to the database. Over 50 per cent are rejected due to quality issues. This might sound a bit harsh but it is absolutely necessary. You wouldn't like to be listed next to amateurs with untrained voices and lots of noises in their recordings. Talking about it: Some people don't take rejection very well (although I really try to be as nice as possible with those). There was one guy threatening me he would visit me and beat me up if I don't activate his account. I didn't.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Are you also strict with regards to Client related issues as well?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: An alltime classic is the discussion about price dumping. We do not simply forward the jobs that are posted with bodalgo. If the budget is not sufficient; i.e., too far away off market prices, we contact the voice seeker asking for more money on behalf of the voiceover talents. If they refuse to increase to a suitable level, the

job stays unposted. I am a firm believer that it's better to educate voice seekers to proper rates than to record for every budget no matter how small it is.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *As a Voice Over Casting site owner what advice do you give us regular Voice Over Talent?*

ARMIN HIERSTETTER: What I tell voice talents all the time: Be self confident about your prices. Quote what you need to charge and nothing else. Also take into account that – if you have your own studio – you need to charge for editing as well. Not as much as a studio would do, but keep it in mind! It's important to remember that if voiceover talents want stable prices. *MT*

The Big Purple Guy Speaks To Taji



One of the interviews that I think must be included in this ebook is with one of the most recognized voices in the English speaking world today. You might not necessarily be a big fan yourself but I'm pretty sure that someone in your house was pretty addicted to his voice and in turn his show for a few years.

In fact my 2 year old daughter is watching one of his episodes as I type this. He's done a duet with Dolly Parton and his current job has taken him all around the globe .

INTRODUCTIONS

First I would like to start by thanking Mr. Wendt for taking the time out of his hectic schedule to answer my questions. And Congratulations on your recently getting married and still coming through with the interview questions. As you guys know I live in Cairo, Egypt so its usually difficult to conduct voice interviews over skype because of the difference in time zones so this interview was conducted over email.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *For the sake of my readers who have not done the research I have into your history. How did you first get into the voice over business?*

DEAN WENDT: I first got started way back in college in Illinois. I went to the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana. Started working at the college radio station and then naturally started doing commercials. I used to have a radio station I made in my room growing up and my mom will tell you that I knew what I wanted to do since I was 5. It's true.

The Mysterious Mr. Wendt

MAHMOUD TAJI: *If you are still a little confused as to who Mr. Wendt is... could you please tell my readers what your full time job is these days?*

DEAN WENDT: Sure. I am the voice of Barney the Dinosaur. The purple guy. And I LOVE it!

MAHMOUD TAJI: *How did you get the job? Could you tell us about the auditioning process and the day you got the news?*

DEAN WENDT: Well, I was working at Radio Disney at the time. There were auditions and everyone dj I knew thought they could do a Barney impersonation. You have to understand dj's. There isn't a modest one in the bunch, or at least any I worked with. They would be walking down the hall declaring their imminent departure from radio to be Barney. I thought, well, I can do a pretty good one. I was traveling with Disney a lot at that time so I didn't have any way to go to the audition. I sent a cd in of my best work. And then waited. For a year. Then I was asked to audition again, but again I was out of town. I thought, this is it. I'll never get another chance. They took my cd again and I waited again. It was a couple months later that I got a call to come in and I met with one of the producers of the show. She asked if I would meet up with the music director to record something. I had no idea that he had brought all of his protocols gear, mixers, mics and set up a studio in an apartment. He

lived in Florida but was staying not far from the Barney offices. I met up with him and soon was standing in a closet in this apartment with a microphone and a little tv in front of me. It hit me at the point that I wasn't sure if these people really WERE from Barney! I just believed anything they said! Who would make that up? Anyway, I did what was to be my last audition and then waited ... again! My daughter was sick when I got the call that I got the job, so all I remember thinking was I had to hang up and go take care of her. It sunk in later that night and I have loved it ever since.

The Addictive Element

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I have to say that I am more of a fan by proxy... I think the second word my daughter spoke other than Baba (Dad in Arabic) is Ba'ny... I don't know what it is about the big purple guy but he's(at least in my experience) like heroin to younger children?*

DEAN WENDT: I'll try not to be too corny here, but Barney is love. He is unconditional love. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, or how old you are. Barney accepts everyone. Kids I think look at Barney and see their best friend. I really do think it is as simple as that.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Could you run us through the usual production steps of the Barney & Friends Show at Hit Entertainment?*

DEAN WENDT: Well, it is so glamorous! I sit in a little room with two monitors, one quad split and the other program, and do what I have always done there ... wait! Just like any show, it takes a long time to do. Plus there is added time with the costume. It gets hot in there you can imagine.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What is the recording schedule like at Hit Entertainment... how often are you in the studio?*

DEAN WENDT: I record live every show. People always ask me why we don't record and playback with the actors, but Barney is a very ad lib role. I like to throw things in or change things here and there. Plus, the guy in the suit and I try different things and such. You have to when you get into 9 or more takes!

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What about your co-stars Julie Johnson and Patty Wirtz do you guys ever get to record the sessions together? (this questions depends on Question 5).*

DEAN WENDT: We all record the shows live and every once in awhile we will record the tours together or special events. I love it and I know they do too. It's so much easier acting off of somebody.

Family Man

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I know you're a family man and I can see from your website that your children are a big part of your life. What is their reaction to the fact that their dad is the voice of Barney?*

DEAN WENDT: They think it's cool I worked at Radio Disney! No, I think they love it. Their friends love it, I can tell you that. We've had many tours for their friends up at the set.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do you have any favorite movies or shows from B & F that stick out? I personally like the land of make believe. My wife and I were just as transfixed to the screen as our daughter was.*

DEAN WENDT: There are so many! I do love Land of Make Believe. We shot that all on location at Universal Studios in Orlando. I also like the shows we did when Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato were on. Those kids were so much fun. I always knew they'd make it big. And boy, did they!

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Could you tell me more about the B & F tours and shows abroad... do you travel along on those trips and if so ... where has the road taken you?*

DEAN WENDT: I just record the shows. But usually they send me out to the big cities for interviews. Barney has been all around the world. Tours in Singapore, South America, Dubai, Europe, Korea, etc. All over.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Any funny incidents during the show's production or on the road that you would like to share with my readers and I?*

DEAN WENDT: That's a tough one! I don't know what I can tell you.

The Technical Side Of Things

MAHMOUD TAJI: *What about studio equipment... as someone who's worked on the Radio Disney and must have handled microphones and a few of the recording equipment directly ... are you a studio equipment buff/geek?*

DEAN WENDT: I used to do production for radio stations all across the country. I LOVE doing production. One of my favorite things to do. I used to have all of the outboard stuff but pretty much do everything in my mac now.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *Do you have a home studio of your own? If so what is your setup?*

DEAN WENDT: Very minimal setup. Neuman mic. I use Protools 8 and Logic 8. Final Cut Pro HD. Simple but I am a perfectionist when it comes to the actual sound. It is the production person in me.

Pay To Play...with Barney!

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I see from your personal website that you are a member*

of bodalgo.com a Pay to Play website... do you have experience with any of the others? Voice123, Voices.com VOplanet?

DEAN WENDT: I am a member of VOplanet. I love them and I love Bodalgo. I tried Voices and Voice123 but way over crowded.

MAHMOUD TAJI: *I recently suffered a terrible cold. As someone who's voice is almost a staple of modern day Americana how do you take care of yourself and voice?*

DEAN WENDT: It's tough with kids! I love using the zinc lozenges from GNC. *MT*





The Voiceover Pavilion

DIRECTORY

**The Perfect Tool For Any
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Wants to Be Heard.**

List your:

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- Blog
- Address
- Telephone
- Email
- Twitter
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- Up to 3 Demos

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You can check out more articles and news updates from Mahmoud Taji on his blog '*Taji's Voice Emporium*' by going to the following link:

<http://www.voiceemporium.com>

As a Pay it Forward Scheme Mahmoud Taji has setup Taji's *Voiceover Casting Site Directory* that can be found on his blog:

<http://www.voiceemporium.com/directory>

Enjoy.

I would like to thank my friend Islam Shazley from zukhruff.com for taking the time to help me layout this book and make it look pretty. I would also like to thank voiceoverists Paul Strikwerda, Andy Boyns, Peter O'Connell, Bob Souer & Dave Courvo for helping me with structural ideas and copyediting.



About the author



Mahmoud Taji is a devout Muslim, Son, Brother, Husband, Father and Voiceoverist based in Cairo, Egypt.

Mahmoud currently works as a Creative Director (amongst other things) in an advertising company based in Cairo as well as runs an Arabic Language Voiceover business.

If you are in any way intrigued by the references to the religion of Islam in this ebook.. check out :

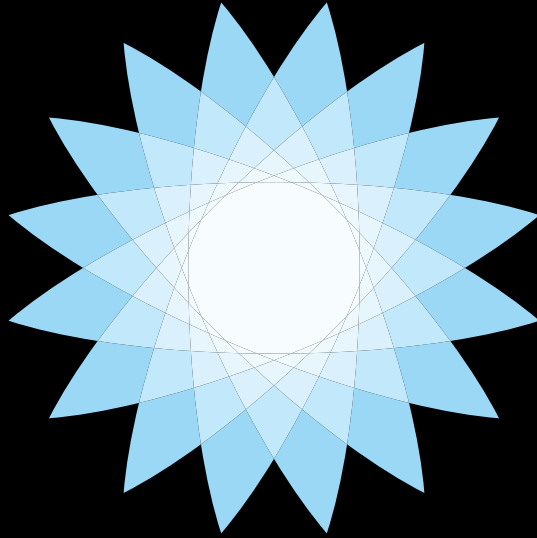
<http://www.voiceemporium.com/about/discover-islam/>

Mahmoud is Palestinian and has been a refugee since birth. He urges you to check out **<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/>**

If you enjoyed reading this book or have any comments or just want to say hi! You can reach Mahmoud via email at:

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This book was layed out by Islam Shazly of:



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