

Sandy: Thanks for taking the time out to tell us about the world of voice talents, what they do, and how it all works.

Sid: Yeah, the pleasure's all mine, Sandy.

Sandy: First of all, what is a voice talent? And how do you spend your day?

Sid: A voice talent is a person, man, woman, or child, who records scripts for clients for various purposes. Yeah, anything from a 15-second dog food commercial all the way through to a five or six-hour audiobook, or podcast, or narrative. And how we spend our day, well, most of our time is spent, surprisingly, not in doing the recording, we do that first, but then most of the time is spent editing afterwards.

Sandy: How does one become a voice talent? Tell us about the path you took to arrive at your present career.

Sid: Well, it's a long story. [laughs]. My main career for 30 years was engineer, not much voice work there, but I was after hours an amateur musician, and I got right into PA systems, and audio gear, and all that sort of stuff, became pretty good at following my way around mixing discs and things like that. Then when I got retrenched, I got mixed up with launching a community radio station, and because of my technical knowledge, I finished up becoming the production manager. And I started writing the sponsorship announcements, you know, the commercials, then I started recording a few, and it worked.

Then I took off around Australia in a caravan and became a videographer, produced a DVD series about caravanning. Now we finished that, and I started doing online freelance video editing, as an extension of that. And then as a spinoff from that, I found that I was making more money doing voice-overs, and the rest is history.

Sandy: What's the difference between a voice talent, a voice actor, and doing voice-overs?

Sid: Well, to be honest, I don't think there is a difference. Voice talent, voice actor, voice-- yeah, I think they're all the same thing. But I can say that there are three levels, if you like, three requirements, to be a successful voice talent. And I think that the term voice actor probably nails it. To start with, you have to have the right voice for the project. Now some people might want you to do a used car commercial, so you need a really big, you know, used car salesman-type voice, which I don't have. Or other people might just want a

commercial or corporate narrative or something like that. So different voices are going to satisfy different requirements.

So, okay, that's just step one, having the right voice for the job. Then, step two is you have to be a very fluent reader. So you have to read without sounding like you're reading. And that's where some of these television and radio and newsreaders come in; they're really, really excellent fluent readers. But even that's not enough. The third step is you then have to be able to take on the role of the particular script. You have to be able to act, and that's where this term, voice actor, is very appropriate. So in come, in some cases, if it's a commercial, then you might want to have this, you know, great, big, announcer-type commercial voice. Or on the other hand, they might be looking for a very polished, normal, narrative-sort of voice. Or they might be looking for a chipmunk character in a video game, or something like that. So, [laughs] there's all sorts of acting requirements. But back to the original question, there's really no difference.

Sandy: What do like most about your work? Dislike most?

Sid: Oh. Well, I don't know. I think I just like doing it. Maybe I like the sound of my own voice [laughs], but yeah, nothing in particular. I just enjoy doing it. And dislike, I don't think there's anything, really, I dislike about it at all. Otherwise, I wouldn't do it.

Sandy: Do you work exclusively in-studio, or do you also work on location?

Sid: Yeah, look, mainly in the studio. Ah, but sometimes I get a requirement for doing it outside, on location. And sometimes it's not just my voice I'm recording; I do have a number of other people on the books. Sometimes people might want an American or a Scottish accent or something, which I don't do very well. [laughs] Ah, in which case, I'll either to bring them into the studio or, if that's not convenient, I'll actually go out to them with a small field recorder.

Sandy: What sort of equipment do you use to record your audio? To edit your audio? And what software do you find the best?

Sid: Well, assuming we're talking about in-studio, first, I mean, it's a chain of things. You need a good microphone, you need a good pre-amplifier, and it all goes into a recording device of some sort, either a standalone recorder or a computer. And then, once that's done, then you've got to bring the file up on screen and edit it. Edit out all the mistakes,

the background noises, the mouth noises, the clicks and pops and all that, and to do that, you need software. As per your question, I use Adobe Audition mainly.

And that's just a very sophisticated, non-linear editor, as they call it, where you can bring the recording up as a wave board on the screen and then cut it up into little bits and chop it and change things around, edit out mistakes, and so on. Yeah, Adobe Audition.

Sandy: Do you have a favorite brand of microphone? Headphones?

Sid: Yeah, I do actually. All my microphones, or pretty much all of them, are RØDE.

That's R-O-D-E. They're an Australian brand, and they're just as good as some of the really, really expensive big name microphones and only about a third of the price, so I've got five or six different RØDE microphones that I use for different purposes. This one is the best one, the main studio mic. It's a RØDE NTK valve microphone. Sounds impressive. It just gives a nice, warm tone. As for headphones, I've got half a dozen pairs of headphones of different brands, but I use mainly, for the best ones, AKG, I find works pretty good.

Sandy: What do you find are the best audio formats?

Sid: Look, the most common one is the wave, you know .wav file format. And that's the best because it contains all the original information; it's not compressed in any way. It is lossless as they say. And so it gives you the actual sound that's being recorded into the microphone. However, the downside of that is that it results in fairly large files sometimes, particularly for a, you know, like a five-hour narrative. And so that is why there are other formats like mp3, is the most common one, which is just a way of compressing the audio file so that you still retain most of the original quality. In fact, most of the time you can't even tell the difference, but with a much smaller file size.

Sandy: What are the typical steps you take during the course of audio production from start to finish?

Sid: Well, okay. Well, first of all, if I've got a script, then I check the script for mistakes because quite often a lot of these people are not first English-- not first language-- Oh, let's start again. [laughs] Secondly, [laughs] I'm getting old-- timer. English isn't their first language. Or they're just not very good at English grammar, so the first thing I do is check that out to make sure it's going to read properly, and I'll correct it if necessary with their approval. Then I'll print out the script, take it into the studio, set it up on the stand, and get

the microphone all set up and the headphones, and record it. Then it gets plugged back into the computer, and edit it in the manner that's required-- usually, most people require what's called a dry recording with no processing or boosting up the bass or anything like that. They just want the mistakes edited out and any noise edited out. And then I send off the file, so, yeah, there you go.

Sandy: What do you like most about your voice? Is there anything you'd change about it?

Sid: [laughs] You know, I wish I had a different voice [laughs] because on some of these freelancing platforms, the more professional ones, there are some very, very good voices there that I'm competing against, and I just don't have this really fabulous voice that some of these guys have. I've got the skills in terms of reading, and acting, and delivering, but, yeah, so what would I change about it? Well, I would just have a much deeper, much more pleasant, chocolaty sort of a voice. I can't do it, can I?

Sandy: Do you ever get compliments on your amazing voice?

Sid: [laughs] Refer previous question. Amazing, yeah, look, I have had people-- yeah, 'cause the DVDs that we do about caravanning, I actually present and direct them myself. And yes, I have had a number of people say, "Look, I just love the sound of your voice." And that-- that's really great when you get that sort of a compliment. I've had one or two people come up to me and say, "I hate your voice." [laughs]

Sandy: Have you ever done an audiobook? If not, is there one that you'd like to do?

Sid: Audiobook, it's funny you should ask that. Yes, I've done a couple of other clients, but did you know that I'm also a published author? Yeah, I've written a novel, a kids novel actually. It's called *The Lightening Transfer*, and I sell it online, hardcover and as an e-book. And now I'm actually almost finished recording the audiobook version. And so, yes, once I get that out there, I'll be very happy, happy chappy.

Sandy: What was the best experience you've had as a voice talent? Have you ever had any not-so-good experiences?

Sid: Oh, that's a bit like, "What's the favorite spot in Australia you've been to?" I really can't answer that kind of question. My best experience-- well, look, okay, I love good experiences where people say, "Yeah, fantastic," and they give me really good feedback on the freelancing side. I haven't really had any really bad ones apart from people doing a

run around refusing to pay because they're crooks [laughs], but no I'm going to duck that question I think.

Sandy: Are there any legal pitfalls you have to watch out for during the course of your work like copyright issues or liability?

Sid: Yeah, I sometimes get people-- and usually it's because I'm also a video editor. A lot of jobs get posted where they want people to reproduce a video that's already out there. And they wanted to do things like remove the watermark or rerecord it in your own voice. Maybe change a few of the words. In other words, there's a lot of plagiarism out there. And even though it's probably their responsibility and not mine, I watch out for that sort of thing, and I just refuse to do any work where it's obviously copying someone else's material. Yeah, do have to be careful.

Sandy: How does your work intersect with social media, like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook et cetera?

Sid: Twitter, look, I have nothing to do with Twitter but a lot of the videos and voice-overs for videos because it usually it involves video of people who have YouTube accounts and Facebook pages and things like that and they want a nice little video to go on out and they need a voice-over for it. And so, yeah, quite-quite a lot of that sort of stuff.

Sandy: Name some people whose voices impress you and why?

Sid: [laughs] Gandalf, what's his name, also, yeah, I forget, sir somebody, but, yeah, he's got a beautiful voice and I believe he does voice-overs for a-for a fairly large fee. And then some of the TV and radio announcers around the place like where I am in WY, the local Channel 7 announcer, Noel Brunning. He's just got a beautiful voice and a very good reader. Uh, yeah and there's a few females around, but I'm not going to try and reel anymore off. There's a whole lot of people out there whose voices impress me and I wish I had voices like them.

Sandy: For people that know little about your line of work, who were some of the pioneers, the Steve Jobs and Bill Gates of the voice talent industry?

Sid: I don't know I suppose old radio names like Lloyd Lawson come to mind, but to be honest, I'm not really that aware of how it all started. So I'm going to give you a very short answer to that question. That's it, nothing more to say.

Sandy: If you were to do the voice for a car alarm and had total liberty to do it the way you wanted, what would you say?

Sid: Oh, that's a question I can't answer because one of the things, you know that I do before I do a voice-over, I sort of look at the script and sometimes I get involved with writing it. And all that sort of thing takes a lot of time. And for me to write a 30-second script would probably take me 30 minutes. Mucking around, changing this, there's a lot of wordsmithing in writing a script. Whether it's a car alarm or dog food, you have to try and get the most information, the maximum information across in the fewest or minimum number of words. And that's the whole art of copywriting. So I can't tell you what I'd say. It would take me half an hour to figure it out.

Sandy: How has your work evolved over the years? Where do you see it heading? Any worries that robots could replace you in the near future?

Sid: Well I've given you the history of how it all started and why I met, where I am now so I might repeat that. Where do I see it heading? Look I don't know. It just happened by itself one step after the other. And as for robots, I really don't think they are going to be a serious threat for quite some time. [laughs]

[00:13:33] [END OF AUDIO]