



# 10 Steps to Starting your Voice Over Business

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a plan for your success





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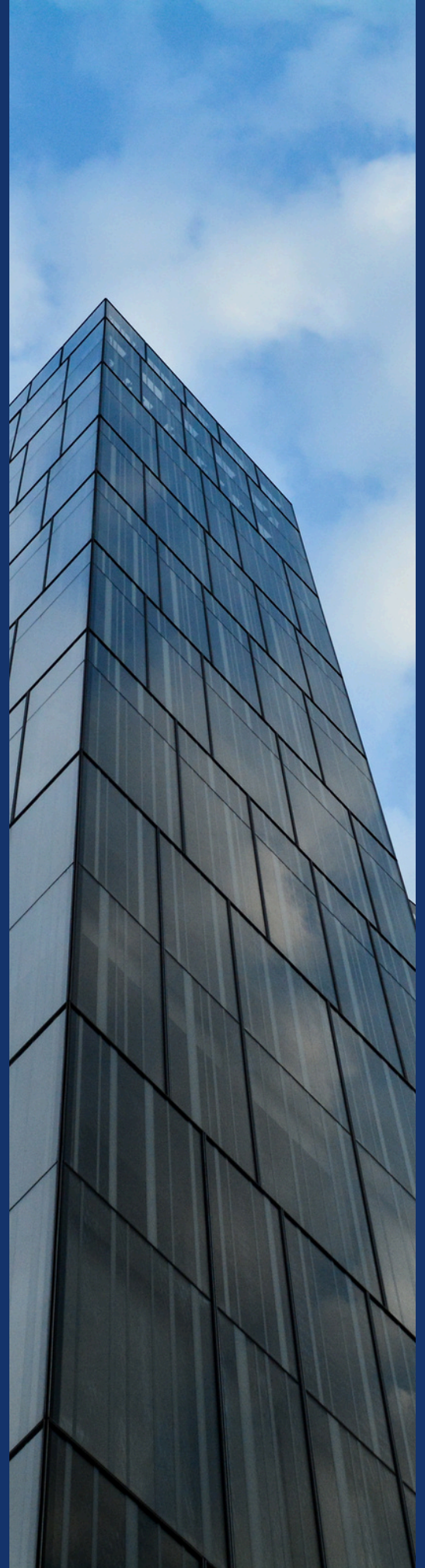
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# First things First

Before you venture into the world of starting any business you should have the tools to create your product or service. For voice over this includes two primary areas which you should master to a level to be competitive:

1. Voice acting & performance skills in your selected genres so you can deliver words with meaning, feeling, and convey the words effectively
2. A treated recording space and equipment capable of accurately capturing your performance at a professional level

The first of these tools comes from taking courses, workshops, group and individual coaching, and lots of practice. The good news is you only need a smart phone or the most basic of equipment to do this. In addition to local physical classes, there are many options online. Training also never ends!

The second of these tools comes in as many varieties as there are questions about them. Blanket or pillow forts, PVC frames, self-built or purchased isolation booths, and purpose-built studio rooms are all viable spaces. You may go from one to another along your journey.

You'll learn about sound "proofing" - keeping unwanted sound out, and sound "treatment" - absorbing sound waves to make the space pleasing to listen to. You may spend a hundred....or several thousand over time to get these just right.

This eBook is NOT going to cover these topics. I'm simply not qualified beyond the level of an enthusiastic fellow student, and I continue to learn myself. However, I have included some links to real experts and some suggestions in the Resources section.





# It Starts with a Vision

You're creative, a freelancer, a performer eager to make your mark on the world. You also need to be an entrepreneur, marketer, sales person, bookkeeper, engineer, collection agency, and a relentless digital hustler.

There can be so much to do that you get overwhelmed and fall into "analysis paralysis". But taking some time to close your eyes and visualise how your business will operate will help guide all the steps to get you there. Don't worry if you don't know how you'll write contracts like a pro, or what systems you'll ultimately use. Rather, focus on things you experienced yourself as a customer that made you feel wonderful about the business you interacted with. Was it all about speedy service, or how well-informed you were on every step of the process? Wouldn't you like to flip that around and be the business your customers love to come to again and again?

Now start to think backwards from the last interaction to the first, and ask yourself what you love about your favourite businesses. What makes for an easy payment experience? How do you like products and services delivered? What business makes their pricing and terms easy to understand? Which brands do you identify with and why? Are you more confident buying from an established company or a ambitious freelancer?

With these ideas storming around in your head you can start to make notes. These will be used in the following sections as you break this grand vision down into more manageable pieces, each one reflecting how you want your business to operate for the benefit of both you and your customers.

# Develop an Identity

The vision you just conjured up and elements which support it are the core of your business identity. You should start to see a pattern and more importantly feel a “vibe” that resonates with you personally, and makes you happy to associate with your business. Consider these the values you can live by and your customers will identify with you.

It's a great time to turn to the Internet, magazines, and even your own collection of photos to pull images that fit this new identify. Don't worry about where you might use them, if at all. But pick items that give you a good feeling within the framework of your business values.

With your values, “vibe”, and image-board in hand you're ready to create you brand. Go and big or small as you like, being aware that the more consistent you are using your brand across all marketing channels helps to connect what people see to your business. So use the same colours, logo, and pictures on your website, social media banners, business cards, merchandise, invoices, etc.

When you're ready to actually build these things, turn to either a professional brand designer, hire a freelancer, or use self-service sites such as Canva, Wix or Square Space, and even Amazon. It depends on how confident you are building it yourself and your available budget. For example, a professional brand designer may understand feelings behind certain colours, create your logo, build your website, and design business cards and letterhead.



# Setup a Legal Entity

Now it's time to get serious and get some outside advice. Speaking to an attorney and an accountant should guide you on what type of legal entity your business should operate under. This will vary based on your location so you need to research the types of business structures available to you.

Each type has pros and cons, from the fairly simple Sole Proprietor / Individual being combined with your personal taxes but minimal protections or an Incorporated / Limited Company with completely separate taxes and filing rules but the most protection. What's right for you may be determined by the combination of all your income sources.



## Sole Proprietor / Individual

Your business and personal income and expenses are generally combined for taxes. You should still have a separate bank account for your business. You would be personally responsible for any business liabilities incurred.



## Limited Liability Company / Partnership

This structure offers the protection of separate liabilities for the business versus your personal finances, but also has more paperwork to create and maintain. You will need to file as a separate company in addition to your personal taxes every year.



## Incorporated / Limited Company

With this structure you have the most formal entity to do business and may be seen as more mature to other businesses. There are more legal filings and separate taxes, and regulated methods to pay yourself. This also brings the most protections against suite or bankruptcy.

# Build your Digital Presence

We live in an on-line world. It's likely when you're looking to buy a product or service your first step is to search the Internet for keywords or a company name. For your potential clients to find you, and more importantly to take you seriously, you need your own digital presence.

The foundation of which is your website. It can be a site with just one page broken into different sections, or a multi-page site highlighting different aspects of you and your company. You'll apply the pieces of your brand to convey an emotion to your visitors and encourage them to reach out.

In addition to your website, social media for a business is a place to share achievements, thoughts, pose questions, and engage with your peers and clients. Always be aware that what you say reflects on you and your business. And to constantly drive your brand you should create banners and use your logo and colours in graphics when you post.

In all places online, make it easy for people to get in touch. Absolutely provide the URL to your website. Have a link to send you an email directly. And offering a phone number for a call or text message may put you ahead if someone needs you RIGHT NOW! You can use a Voice Over IP (VOIP) virtual phone number that has a mobile app or forwards to your actual number to keep your private number private.







# Embrace Direct Marketing

1

Lead Generation

2

Templates &  
Automation

3

Customer Relationship  
Management (CRM)

Lead generation is the life-blood of your sales and marketing. You need to consistently research and find new leads who might need your services, and let them know you exist and can help. Use tools or outsource this to a virtual assistant, so long as you keep farming for new opportunities.

To do this at scale you should have templates for emails, call scripts, and even mental pitches. If you're using email marketing then personalise the body so it's targeted at the individual person you're reaching out to. Then use tools that automate your outreach so it happens even when you're not at your desk.

When your leads express interest and eventually become a client, storing them in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system allows you to continue to nurture the relationship and stay in contact with them. It's true that when you let your past clients know you'll be away from your workplace or have a new demo it pops you to the top of mind and often sparks a new job.

# Other Opportunity Sources

## Pay to Play & Rosters

Pay to Play (P2P) or Online Casting sites provide a marketplace of auditions for a fee. When used carefully and wisely these can be good sources for work. Ensure you receive a return on investment (ROI) to cover the cost.

Independent rosters are also a great avenue to get auditions, and generally free. There is often an application process to vet the potential talent, but then you're visible to buyers and may have a link back to your own website for SEO!



## Agents

Agents work hard to get their talent opportunities. They build relationships with clients and usually have access to bigger and higher-paying projects. In exchange, your agent will take a percentage of the fee as their commission.

You and your agent should be a team, working together to book jobs. Stay in regular communication with your agent and send them updated demos so they have your latest work at hand. And don't be afraid to ask your agent to help with a big opportunity you found yourself. The commission will be well spent if they can help negotiate and secure a juicy deal.

# Rates, Quotes & Contracts



01

## Industry Rates

- **Your Business, Your Rates:** It's important to set your own rates to create a successful business and support the standards of your peers and the industry. Use the following Rate Guides to influence your decisions.
  - **Global Voice Acting Academy (GVAA):** For US-based rates the GVAA Rate Guide is considered an industry standard and should be a go-to reference as you decide on your own rates.
  - **Gravy for the Brain (GFTB):** Covering many countries including the US, the GFTB Rate Guide has rate ranges and helpful notes on usage across many different genres.
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02

## Quotation for Services

- **Set Expectations:** A clear quotation to your client will outline what you will delivering, at what price, with any discount or tax, and show the total cost. This may be in an email or a formal quotation, which can be produced by most financial software solutions. Typically the first point of negotiation and agreement, your quote should then be honoured or modified and agreed to again if there are changes.
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03

## Contractual Agreements

- **The Business Norm:** Don't fear contracts and don't shy away from them. This can be your contract or a client contract, so long as both parties agree to all the Terms & Conditions. Contracts provide legal protection for both companies and describe how the transaction will be governed.
- **NAVA AI Rider:** With the rise in Artificial Intelligence use it's critical that your contracts include terms which outline what is and is not allowed for the client to do with your likeness, or you should ask for a rider to be added to a client contract.



# Performance & Product Delivery

You've converted your lead into a new client, have an agreed quote and signed contract, and it's finally time to step behind your microphone and perform! This is what all the hard work is for and what you've been training to do.

Your classes and coaches will have prepared you for self-directed or live-directed sessions. Your studio is configured for remote recording into another studio with an engineer, and you're confident in your technical ability to record a local copy in your studio.

But how do you then deliver the recording files to your client in a professional way?

- ✓ Use an electronic file delivery service such as WeTransfer to send your recordings and track when they are downloaded.
- ✓ Share a cloud folder to your client like Dropbox or OneDrive, ensuring they can get to just the files they are paying you for.
- ✓ If small enough you could simply attach the recordings to an email to your client.
- ✓ Or the client may have their own method to receive files and you then follow their directions.

# Manage Your Money

You're now ready to convert your quotation into a matching invoice and send it to your client with payment instructions. This should have also been described in the contract with the payment term, or number of days after the delivery of services or issuance of the invoice that the payment is due. Typical terms are Net 30, 45, or 60 days.

Give forethought into how you want your clients to pay you. You could accept a direct bank transfer, cheques, credit / debit cards, or services such as PayPal. Also consider if you will do business in different currencies, which might be easier for your global clients. If you decide to accept foreign currencies, consider opening local bank accounts to receive payment - called Clearing Accounts - and then regularly transfer the funds into your primary business account.

And don't forget to set aside an amount for taxes into a separate account. A rule of thumb is between 20% - 30% of your revenue, which you should verify with an accountant or tax professional for your business.

## Invoice

Your official bill to the client for your products or services, including company details for you and the client, when invoice is issued and when payment is due, how payment can be made, reference numbers to a client Purchase Order if applicable, and business license or tax numbers.

As with all your correspondence to clients, this should continue your branding and look professional. Even though this is a bill, you want your client to trust you with future work.

## Annual Reports

Companies have requirements to file annual reports. These are dictated by the country and/or local government bodies where your business is registered, and are typically required even if you don't make a profit. It's part of being a legal business entity and shows that you're a serious business to potential clients.

## Payment Methods

If you accept direct bank transfers you need to provide the routing and account numbers. These may be different when in-country versus international transactions. Check your accounts for SWIFT / IBAN numbers for client sending you money from another country.

Also have links or use electronic invoicing to accept credit / debit card payments as a convenient option for your clients. Card merchants charge a small fee to process payments.

## Taxes

Tax fraud and avoidance are serious offences and not something you want for yourself or your business. Ensure you have a plan to track, report, and pay all taxes due to the appropriate authorities on time.

Depending on your country's tax laws, you may also be required to make regular estimated tax payments instead of only a single payment at the end of the tax year.

# Bonus Ideas

If all of that wasn't quite enough, here are some extra ideas to stretch your imagination and let your creativity run wild!



## Events

Attend events hosted by your local Chamber of Commerce or by organisations that might bring companies together who could use your services. Networking can result in unique and fun opportunities.

## Merchandise

Have small hand-out created with your brand logo and contact details for meetings and conferences. Consider branded clothing you can wear that could start a conversation about your business with someone next to you.



## Podcast

Be a guest on a podcast in your industry or that of your target clients. Or start your own podcast and share your passion on global outlets.

## Have Fun!

And the most important advice of all is to enjoy the experience of creating and growing your own Voice Over business. The hard work - and there is plenty - is part of the joy of being in charge. You're working for YOU, and that's the best boss ever!





# Resources

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Since products and services can change quickly, I've listed resources for each chapter online. While I've used or have trust in each one, every business owner has unique needs and personal preferences. You should do your own research and make informed decisions based on your needs and budget.

<https://www.GibsonVO.com/10StepsToVOBusiness/Resources/>



## About the author

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I spent over thirty years in software technology and both big and small business, and have been involved in great successes and dramatic flops. As I prepared to launch my own voice over business I planned and prepared each piece as a department of my future business. When the day arrived, I had a well-oiled machine that continues to be adjusted and improved.

A California native, I now live and work in the United Kingdom serving clients around the world.

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