



dear john

# Q A

## What are the skills needed to do successful animation voice-overs?

As noted several times in previous columns, voice-over can certainly be a lucrative and regular source of income for successful performers in this field, but this is precisely why it is also an extremely competitive market and one which is particularly difficult for newcomers to break into. All the more so if they are banking on any kind of overnight success.

Like many other markets, it is also one which the serious aspiring voice-over artist will quickly

realise has many different facets and niche areas underneath the general umbrella title.

One area which has seen particular growth over the past decade has been the area of animation voice-over, whether that is for traditional cartoons or newer fields such as the video games market.

Here are some thoughts from both the animator and the actor's perspective on how best to deliver what is required.

### what the experts say...



#### James Carroll

Along with brother Mark, James Carroll is a director of Evil Twin Artworks, an animation studio which for the past ten years has worked for Granada Television, CITV, Channel 4, Dyson and Sony, and on projects ranging from TV and online games to corporate and music videos, architectural visualisation and visual effects.

"There are a million and one things you can do to create great voice-overs, but the biggest stumbling block I've found is that actors speak a different language to me as an animator. To overcome this, we like to build in as much time as possible from the start of a project for the casting. Finding the right person for the role is half the battle.

"I try to meet the actors as far in advance as possible and talk over the script, and what we want to achieve. As we talk, I write everything down and give them a copy, so they can look through my notes later if they wish. Most actors I've worked with have lots of ideas about how they want to deliver lines, so if you both have different ideas, I'd say try both. Having more options in the edit is always good.

"If possible, film even the earliest read-throughs. From an animation perspective, it's always good to have video references to pick up little nuances and motions from the

actors. The actors can also look back on this content to help them adjust their performance.

"We've always gone for distinct voices. Sometimes I've heard someone talk and asked them to audition on the strength of their voice – if they can deliver the lines well, you're on to a winner.

"Make things as clear as possible, such as what you expect from the actor. I've worked on many disorganised sessions where no one knows what they are doing and it hinders creativity and causes tension. And make sure you have a good chair and fan. Often voice-overs are recorded in small, hot studios and are very uncomfortable, with limited seating – so actors who can still do a good job in these circumstances are very valuable."

#### Posy Brewer

Posy trained at the Oxford School of Drama and has enjoyed a variety of roles in film, television and theatre. She has engaged heavily in the voice-over industry and provides her unique voice to a number of high-profile brands and projects, ranging from commercials, telephone systems and BBC Radio to animation. She is one of the Fisher Price voices and has also worked on the game *Tool Time* for the Nintendo Wii, as well as on other animations. She has her own home studio and also runs Purple Fish Audio, which produces voice clips for other artists, as well as studio hire.

"Firstly, you can't just decide one day to be a voice artist without training. I would recommend going to voice workshops and lots of practice. Always warm up your voice by doing breathing and articulation exercises, and try different voices



and really create a character.

"Sometimes you have to double the amount of energy put in to make it sound believable. You may feel you're exaggerating, but it needs twice the energy put into the voice to create the character well and what they are saying. Do the character preparation. Read the character breakdown clearly and expand on it to give it life. Ask the important questions about your character's circumstances.

"If you don't feel happy with your performance, ask to listen back to the last take. What you think you

sound like when you're speaking is often different to how it comes across when listening back.

"Be prepared for the script changing at the last minute, or on the fly when recording. If you don't know how to pronounce a word, don't be afraid to ask. The client will respect you more for asking than getting it wrong and having to re-record it.

"I recently did a job for Nintendo and had to do three different voices. I got the breakdown and an image of the characters. For one of the characters I was asked to sound like Selma from the Simpsons, which I thought I just couldn't do and was worrying about it for days. I practiced and practiced – I found I really had to create the details about the character and its characteristics to get the voice right.

"In the end, it was changed in the studio and I ended up being asked to do a different voice as the client had changed their mind. You never know, it can all change on the day."

### dear john sums up...

Posy's point that you can't expect to walk into a voice-over career without training could apply to many areas of performance. I would go further and say that unless you are already a major named artist signed to do a voice for the next Disney or Dreamworks production, it would do you no harm to put some time into studying the animation market as well as vocal technique if this is a field you are particularly interested in. The delivery you would use for a traditional animated story might be very different from the approach you would take with a video game character. Nevertheless, just as it comes down to the artistic skill of the animator to bring the characters to life – regardless of how much or how little expensive computer equipment is to hand – it comes down to the skill of the actor to make the voice characterisation equally believable. Putting the ground work in to do that could also help live up your own career in the long term.

John Byrne is an entertainment industry career advisor and the author of several career guides for performers, including *The Right Agent Right Now* ebook, written with Mary Elliott Nelson and available for download from [www.showbusiness-success.com](http://www.showbusiness-success.com). James Carroll may be contacted at [www.eviltwinartworks.com](http://www.eviltwinartworks.com), where you can also find examples from the company's animation portfolio. Posy Brewer can be contacted at [www.posybrewer.com](http://www.posybrewer.com) or the Voiceover Gallery on 020 7987 0951. More details on Purple Fish Audio can be found at [www.purplefishaudio.com](http://www.purplefishaudio.com) or by telephoning 020 3384 3103.