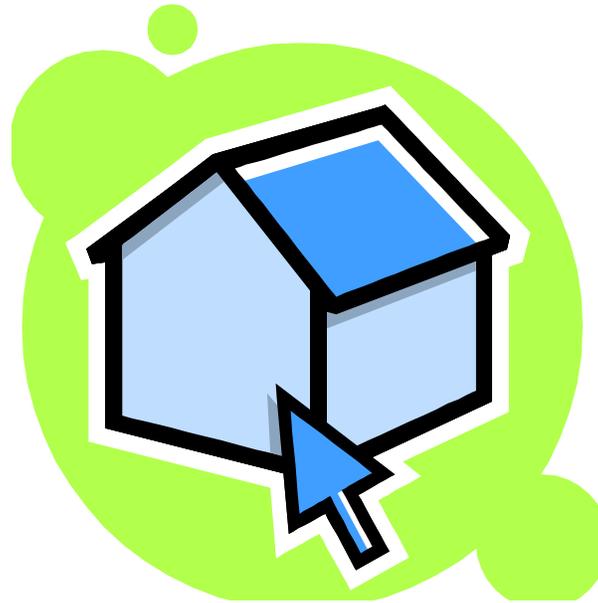


# REAL ESTATE VIDEOS AND VOICE-OVERS



a White Paper for Videographers & Realtors

*by*

**Paul Strikwerda** © 2010

## INDEX

Page	
2.	INTERNET & VIDEO
3.	THE BAR HAS BEEN RAISED
4.	SALES PSYCHOLOGY PLAYING YOUR CARDS RIGHT
5.	PERSONAL PREFERENCE
6.	THE CINEPLEX EXPERIENCE WHAT TO AVOID
7.	VIDEOGRAPHERS & NARRATION REAL ESTATE AGENTS
8.	THE PROFESSIONAL ADVANTAGE
9.	TEN WAYS TO SPOT A VOICE-OVER AMATEUR
11.	THE FLIPSIDE: HOW TO SPOT A VO-PRO RIGHT ON THE MONEY
12.	Factors that influence the voice-over rate Payment Discount
13.	VOICE-OVER RATES EDITING WHERE TO FIND VOICE-OVER TALENT ON-LINE CASTING
14.	NARRATION: DO IT YOURSELF EQUIPMENT
15.	MICROPHONES POP-FILTER PREAMP
16.	SOUND BOOTH SHOPPING
17.	CLOSING WORDS ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*"Narration works," says a realtor from Minnesota. "People are listening and more importantly, they are buying!"*

*"I'm from the 'show me don't tell me' school of film," writes a filmmaker from Texas. "If you want to point out something, typing in some simple text will do the trick."*

A videographer from Florida disagrees: *"People remember 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see but 70% of what they see and hear!"*

## INTRODUCTION

When it comes to real estate videos, will the old slide show still do the trick, or do you have to pull out all the stops in order to be heard in today's market? Are captions sufficient, or do you need a voice-over? What are the benefits of narration? Should you hire a professional voice or can you do it yourself? Where do you find a good narrator and what does he or she charge? And if you want to go for it yourself, what kind of equipment do you minimally need?

If you've ever asked yourself these questions, this White Paper is for **you!**



## INTERNET & VIDEO

In the past decade, house hunting has become much more efficient. According to a recent National Association of Realtors study, over 90% of recent home buyers in the U.S. used the internet in their house search.

Here's what Fred Light ([www.fredlight.com](http://www.fredlight.com)), a filmmaker from New Hampshire, had to say:

*"Last week I shot a house for an agent. She told me that she has received THREE buyer leads from old videos that she had done over the past year or two... from YouTube. They called on that listing which they found searching the web. She sees that as one of the major benefits of doing video."*

*"These days, it's not unusual to see a search engine like Google pull up a YouTube video in its top 10 results," says Linda Girard, co-founder of online marketing consulting firm Pure Visibility in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She continues:*

*"The best way to maximize this trend is by uploading your video to various sites and attach good, searchable terms to the clips in order to get those high rankings."*

In other words: if you want your listing to be found fast and by many, video is the way to go. Search engines love it. House Hunters expect it.

Shelley Cryan from Connecticut-based Spartina Studios ([www.spartinastudios.com](http://www.spartinastudios.com)) writes:

*“Because true video most closely simulates actually walking through a property, video gives buyers the best feel for a property prior to their visit. This makes for a more efficient search process, and lets the agent and client concentrate on the properties that best fit a client's needs. Once a client has seen a video of a property, and then asks to see a property, it's more likely the visit will be productive.”*



### THE BAR HAS BEEN RAISED

You've probably watched shows like “House Hunters”, “What do you get for the money”, “My First Place,” etcetera. Thanks to TV stations such as TLC and HGTV, **real estate has become prime time entertainment**. Model-Handymen and other hosts have a huge fan base, and America can't seem to get enough of house-flippers, vacation home hunters and first time buyers. How does this affect *your* business?

Consciously or unconsciously, **viewers are measuring your real estate videos up against standards set by these shows**. When you compare the resources available for these programs to your shoestring budget, it can be quite disheartening. Yet, have you ever watched a block of national commercials that featured one advertisement that was produced locally? And didn't that one stand out like a sore thumb? The lighting was off; the delivery was clumsy and the sound was horrible. It might have been memorable, but for all the wrong reasons.

Even though it has become relatively inexpensive to buy a quality steadicam and shoot home tours in crystal clear HD, even the best camera is useless in the hands of an amateur. That's why it makes perfect sense to go to experts like Fred Light and Shelley Cryan.

Secondly, **you also need to make your footage sound as good as it looks**. That should be fairly easy, right? Not really.

Having watched hundreds of these “home movies” from all over the country, I have noticed that quality audio seems to be one of the big challenges. Why is that? Do filmmakers not care about sound, or don't they know how to bring it up to snuff? Let's start with the first premise: **pictures are primary; sound is secondary**.

## SALES PSYCHOLOGY

If you happen to be from the *'show me, don't tell me'* school of filmmaking, you might be perfectly happy with a moving slide show and some captions. That could work in certain situations, but I believe that a real estate video isn't just about showing people pretty pictures.

One of the definitions of selling is:

“to influence or induce to make a purchase.”

If you're a real estate videographer, you're not just in the business of making mini movies. You're in fact trying to **sell the property**. That's why it's smart business to cater to as many different types of buyers as possible.

As you probably know, some buyers are more *visual*, some are more *touchy-feely* and others are more *auditory*. A fourth group is often described as being more *cerebral*. These four groups have different preferences when it comes to the way information is presented and processed.

The first group prefers to **see** (moving) pictures, the second group needs to "get a **feel** for the atmosphere" and the third group wants to **hear** about a property. The last group tends to be most interested in **features** and **facts**.

Of course this is an over-generalization and there's no right or wrong. All of us use a combination of sensory input when making decisions, but certain people prefer certain senses over others without even realizing it. Don't you have friends who buy shoes purely based on the way they look, even if they're very uncomfortable? Others might pick a pair simply because they were on sale.



### PLAYING YOUR CARDS RIGHT

When it comes to sales, I believe in stacking the deck as much as possible. To bring it back to real estate: one house might be architecturally stunning, but if it's not energy efficient, some buyers will write it off immediately. Other buyers could care less about going green. They want the hot tub, the heated deck, a four car garage and two washers and dryers, Energy Stars are optional.

Recently, a friend of mine toured a house that -on paper- met all her criteria. Even the price was perfect. In the end, she did not buy it. Why? She said she got an "eerie feeling" as she was walking down a hallway...

So, how do you stack the deck when showcasing a property on video? It's quite simple: **by making sure that your presentation meets all the (hidden) needs of different buyers**: the needs of the visual, the auditory, the touchy-feely types, as well as the more cerebral thinkers.

### **PERSONAL PREFERENCE**

If your presentation is merely visual, you're like a chef who only puts meat on the menu. Vegetarians or sea food fans are out of luck. They won't even bother to come in, no matter how colorful the menu might look.

I can see why most videographers are primarily visual; otherwise they would have become sound engineers, Foley artists or even voice-over professionals. Here's the thing though:

**People, who prefer a certain mode of thinking, often assume that the rest of the world operates on the same basis.**

The *'show me don't tell me'* school of filmmaking is a perfect example. It would work very well, only if every other soul on this planet would primarily think in pictures too.

People tend to like people who are more like themselves. But if you're not so much attuned to other preferred ways of processing information, it's easy to overlook or downplay other people's inclinations, and that's where miscommunication begins:

Realtor: *"Doesn't this staircase look stunning?"*

Buyer: *"I hate the way the steps sound. It creeps me out."*

Realtor: *"Aren't these travertine tiles amazing?"*

Buyer: *"Tiles are too cold on my feet. I prefer a nice soft carpet."*

---

This is not just some kind of amateur psychological word play. Every time there's a communicative mismatch, you lose a bit of the connection with your customer. And if you don't pay close attention, you're likely to highlight things that might appeal to *you* and not necessarily to your home buyer. The secret to selling is listening.

If you feel that it's important to cater to all your customers, you need to learn to speak their language. Literally. If you don't, you're going to miss golden opportunities without having a clue what went wrong.



## THE CINEPLEX EXPERIENCE

There's one last thing I often tell "picture people" when they are downplaying the importance of sound and narration.

In the past few years, the evolution of audio in movie theaters as well as in home theaters has been astonishing. If sound were not that important, why are we spending so much money on HD-quality surround sound systems? People want to immerse themselves in the total experience.

Remember that the same home computer house hunters use to watch your videos, is often used for gaming. If you're into that kind of thing, you know that these games aren't only visually striking, but that the sound will blow you away as well.

Now, I'm not saying that your next home tour should be in Dolby surround sound and have explosive sound effects. What I *am* telling you is that I believe that more and more people are expecting you to deliver the complete package for the eyes *and* for the ears.

### WHAT TO AVOID

Based on the above, some people could conclude that adding some elevator music and a quick voice-over might do the trick. After all, you're giving the auditory folks something to listen to, right? Well... not so fast!

Here's my rule of thumb:

**The quality of your sound & narration must match the quality of your footage.**

Is that a no-brainer? Maybe to you, but apparently, it is news to some of your colleagues. I have seen plenty of house tours that looked great but that sounded absolutely dreadful.

*Are the following scenarios familiar to you?*

- A videographer describing the property as he is walking around and filming
- A real estate agent touring an empty, hollow sounding property, as she's describing every detail
- A mix of narration recorded on location and narration recorded after the fact: sound levels and sound quality are completely off
- A beautiful property with a lifeless, unimaginative narration
- An overexcited, overselling voice actor

## VIDEOGRAPHERS & NARRATION

Working on a very tight budget, I've noticed that a number of filmmakers do it all. They shoot and edit the footage; they write the script and they narrate their own virtual property tours. Is that such a bad thing?

I'll be honest with you. I know people who are brilliant behind the camera, but who are not blessed with a pleasant voice. Why would you want to sing a solo if you haven't had any vocal training?

Secondly, voice-over narration requires a whole lot more than having nice vocal chords. You'll often hear that it is NOT about the voice. It's about what you can *do* with it, and that often takes years of training. Just as you wouldn't want an amateur videographer to shoot your footage, you don't want an unprofessional narrator to bring the end-product down.

Bottom line: **know your strengths**. Stick to what you know best.



## REAL ESTATE AGENTS

I know you've seen them: realtors pretending to be the next Ty Pennington or Sandra Rinomato ("Property Virgins"). As you're watching your local ReMax realtor on video, aren't you reminded of how hard it really is, to "act natural" in an unnatural setting?

The other day, I was watching an agent showcase a magnificent 2 million dollar property in Martha's Vineyard. The man might be a member of the President's Club, but on camera, he was the biggest klutz I'd ever seen. As the not-so-steady steadicam was following him around the mansion, all I saw was the back of his neck as he kept on talking about the custom cabinetry and the designer doorknobs.

Don't people realize that most TV hosts have had extensive training and/or are in fact professional actors who are reading a carefully crafted and rehearsed script off a teleprompter? I guess not!

*Here's the real danger:* by allowing an untrained, untalented agent in front of the camera, you are **taking the focus away from the real star of the show: the property**. When I think of this beautiful home in Martha's Vineyard, all that really stood out was this clumsy guy with his doorknob obsession!

And what if buyers don't like the agent they see on YouTube? Do you want them to write a particular property off, just because of poor presentation? The great thing about an off-screen voice-over is that you can't see the face that goes with the voice!

Of course you might argue that some realtors are "naturals" in front of the camera or behind a mic. Have you ever watched HGTV's "House Hunters"? When you catch the show tonight, remember that all agents have been pre-screened.

Pay close attention to their body language. Do they look comfortable or awkward? How do they sound? Does the obligatory "*Now let me show you the bathroom...*" really add anything of significance?



### **THE PROFESSIONAL ADVANTAGE**

People don't buy bricks, basements and bathrooms. People buy a place to raise a family and a home to grow old in; a safe haven from the rest of the world. That's why it's so important to not only relate the facts, but to also **connect with a buyer on a more emotional level.**

In order to make that connection, you need to go beyond pointing out that cold granite counter top or the shiny stainless steel appliances. Text can't do that. What you need is a **sincere, welcoming voice people can trust; a voice that can bring some heart to the home.**

A voice-over professional is trained to make any script sound easy and effortless, but believe me, it's never as simple as it seems. In spite of that, the internet is filled with folks who are posing as voice actors, without any experience or expertise worth mentioning.

These days, anyone with a laptop, a microphone and recording shareware can set up shop and pretend to be a pro. You'll find them on bargain-basement sites like Elance and Odesk.

Don't ever make the mistake of putting a voice-over ad on Craigslist. Before you know it, your email inbox will be overflowing with librarians, retired teachers, burnt-out ministers and bored homemakers who all have been told that they have "such a great voice". Saying that a great voice is all it takes to have success as a voice-over professional, would be the same as thinking that all an actor needs is good looks in order to be on the Hollywood A-list. Somehow, it doesn't quite work that way...

*So, how do you separate the wheat from the chaff?*



## TEN WAYS TO SPOT A VOICE-OVER AMATEUR

I've been in the business for over 25 years, and it usually takes me 2.5 seconds to identify an amateur. I don't even need to hear them read a script. Just tell me how much, or rather, how little they charge. **Cheap rates are the first red flag.** (More on rates on page 11 + 12.)

The second red flag is the **quality of the recording.** These days, most talents will record in their home studio. It's cheaper and more convenient, but the quality can definitely suffer. Here are a few common problems.

The volume might be too low, or certain words might be too loud and distorted (that's called 'clipping'). You might also hear cars passing by or a dog barking in the background. That should tell you that the recording was not made in a dedicated, soundproofed space. Building a sound booth can set you back thousands of dollars. Beginners usually don't have that much to invest. If you happen to hear hissing, it's normally the result of cheap gear or turning up volume settings too high. A hum on the recording is typically caused by a ground loop. It occurs when there is more than one ground connection path between two pieces of equipment. Pros know that. Amateurs have no idea and don't know how to fix it.

A third indicator is **bad microphone technique.** How can you tell? You'll hear popping plosives like P's, B's and T's. You might also hear harsh and shrill S-sounds (so-called 'sibilance') that tickle your ear drum in an unpleasant way.

Tip-off number four is **lack of vocal technique.** An amateur might take very noticeable breaths. Breathing is such a natural thing; most of us aren't even aware that we're doing it. Being close to a mic enhances every single sound. Pros have practiced the 'silent breath'.

Amateur recordings can also be filled with annoying lip smacks, mouth noises, clicks and crackles. Some of them can be edited out, but **bad edits** are a fifth sign of amateurism.

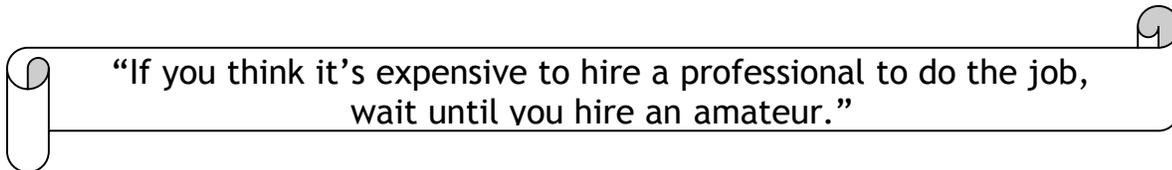
**Sloppy articulation and incorrect pronunciation** come in on number six. Some amateurs are rather lazy speakers, and their delivery will lack clarity, especially when they pick up the tempo. I've also heard beginners over articulate certain words, making them sound unnatural and contrived. A professional narrator will do her homework and will correctly pronounce words such as inaniloquent, rastaquouere or nudistertian.

**Poor or inappropriate delivery** is clue number seven. You don't want your video tour narrated by an overselling wannabe actor, who has watched too many infomercials. Local radio show hosts give themselves away because they have cultivated an "announcer voice". You're listening for a crisp, natural delivery. Not for a news reader.

Number eight: the **inability to interpret a script**. Any text can be read in a million ways. A voice-over professional will always sound like he knows what he's talking about (even if he doesn't). An amateur will sound insecure, lost and untrustworthy.

A professional is flexible and appreciates and incorporates feedback. A pro can be coached. An amateur is **afraid of criticism; is inflexible and needs lots of hand-holding and training**. What you might save in terms of money, you will inevitably lose in valuable time (not to mention the aggravation...).

Expert firefighter Red Adair once said:

A quote by Red Adair is presented in a decorative scroll-like box. The box is white with a black border and rounded corners. It has a small grey circle at the top right corner, resembling a scroll's end, and a small grey circle at the bottom left corner, resembling a scroll's start. The text is centered within the box.

"If you think it's expensive to hire a professional to do the job, wait until you hire an amateur."

Number ten is my favorite. You can always spot an amateur by **the way certain questions are answered**. A few examples:

You: **"What kind of monitors do you have?"**

*Amateur:* "What do you mean? I have an 18 inch flat screen Dell monitor"  
(monitor is another name for loudspeaker)

You: **"How did you stage your gain? Outside or inside the box?"**

*Amateur:* "I don't really perform on stage. Is there something to gain by doing that?"  
(Gain staging means setting the volume levels)

You: **"Newman recently came out with a ribbon shotgun microphone. It's only \$199! Should I buy it?"**

*Amateur:* "Really? I didn't know that! I thought Newman was a Seinfeld character."  
(The correct spelling is Neumann and it is pronounced "Noy-mahn". There is no such thing as a ribbon shotgun microphone, and Neumanns never come that cheap).

## THE FLIPSIDE: HOW TO SPOT A VO-PRO

*A professional voice-over provider:*

- is affordable and doesn't charge bargain-basement rates
- delivers quality recordings:
  - at the right volume
  - with no distortion
  - no background noise
  - no hissing or humming
  - the sound is clean and clear
- has good mic technique
  - plosives are softened and never 'pop'
  - no sharp s-sounds
- has good vocal technique
  - takes 'silent breaths'
  - no lip smacks, mouth noises, clicks and crackles
- makes undetectable edits
- articulates clearly and uses correct pronunciation
- sounds natural (not like an announcer or infomercial host)
- sounds informed and trustworthy
- is open to critique and incorporates feedback fast and without fuss

### **A voice-over professional can also:**

- send you a custom demo at no charge
- send you samples of previous work as well as testimonials
- send you a contract and clear Terms & Conditions
- offer to do a specific number of retakes for free
- offer you different payment options
- give you a reasonable turnaround time
- keep you informed about the progress of the project
- recommend a reputable colleague in case of unavailability



### **RIGHT ON THE MONEY**

You cannot expect a gourmet meal from a fast food restaurant at drive-through prices. Rates are one way a professional separates him- or herself from an amateur. Who determines these rates and based on what?

In the United States there are two unions that handle voice-over performers: SAG and AFTRA. In Canada, voice-over work is handled by ACTRA. In general, fees for union talent are higher, and if budget is a consideration, you're generally better off hiring a non-union talent.

### Factors that influence the voice-over rate:

- Your location: rates in major markets such as New York or Los Angeles are higher
- Dry-read versus edited audio files. You'll pay more for edited, ready-to-use files
- Recording studio versus home studio: if the voice-over provider needs to go into a studio, you're also paying for studio rent and a sound engineer
- Length of the script or word count: some talents charge per word; others per minute or per project
- Payment method: some talents absorb the transfer fee; others will charge extra for services such as PayPal

### Payment

If you haven't established a working relationship yet, it is not unusual for a voice-over provider to ask you to **pay 50% upfront**, and the other half at the time of completion of the project. Once the full amount has been received, the provider will send you the audio files.

### Discount

Most beginners are happy to get a chance to break into the business, and that's why they can be more flexible when it comes to negotiating a rate.

Bear in mind: it's a trade-off between experience and cost. There is a reason why some talents don't need to negotiate. They can afford to stick to their guns because their pipeline is pretty much full. As they say: "If you want to get the job done, go to a busy person."

*The following might entice a voiceover pro to reduce rates:*

- **Ongoing relationship**: just like you, a freelance voice-over appreciates return business. Ask: "What's your discount for repeat customers?"
- **Volume discount**: propose to buy a package of home tour narrations. For example: 10% off five narrations; 15% off for 10 narrations etcetera;
- **Package**: if you're a videographer, team up with a talent and work out an all-in package and offer that to a home owner or realtor;
- **Monthly fee**: some narrators are paid one lump sum for which you can call on their services as much as you want;
- Ask for a discount for **paying in full in advance**;
- Ask the narrator to throw in **free or discounted editing**

## VOICE-OVER RATES

Remember: voice-over providers can set their own fees. Here's an overview of an average per word rate. Prices are in US dollars.

\$0.25 - 0.30 per word for projects with fewer than 2000 words;  
\$0.20 - 0.25 per word for projects up to 4000 words;  
\$0.15 - 0.20 per word for projects up to 10,000 words.

That means that you can expect to pay between \$75 - \$90 for a 300 word script.

Other talents will charge a minimum fee, regardless of the length of the script. Expect to pay anywhere between \$125 and \$250 per hour. The first hour of any session is charged as a full hour's fee - even if the session lasts only a few minutes. Once the first hour has passed, a talent may start billing in 15 or 30 minute increments.



### EDITING

Keep in mind that the above rates are mere indications for **dry-read only**. In most cases, editing the sound files takes longer than recording the actual script, and talents may charge anywhere between \$55 to \$100 per hour for post-production services.

### WHERE TO FIND VOICE-OVER TALENT

That's the 64,000 dollar question, isn't it? Thanks to the Internet, searching for a voice has become a lot easier. In the olden days, producers would go to a talent agency; tell them what kind of voice they were looking for, and a few days later, the agent would come back with a few viable candidates.

You can still go that route and save yourself a lot of time. It does come at a price. Most agents represent Union talent at Union rates (plus commission). The advantage is that you're certain to get a professional voice actor who can turn a project around in a reasonable amount of time. No on-the-job training or hand-holding required. Just some ego-massaging...



### ON-LINE CASTING

A second option is to use an on-line voice casting service. The two major players in the business are [www.voice123.com](http://www.voice123.com) and [www.voices.com](http://www.voices.com). How does it work?

You simply post your project and your budget on their site, and within the hour, you could receive close to a hundred demos. That sounds great, right? Well, here's the downside to that scenario: it will take you quite a while to separate the wheat from the chaff. Practically anyone with a computer, a microphone and a credit card can sign up for these sites and pretend to be a voice-over pro. There's hardly any screening or quality control.

You can also go to these sites and based on your keywords, search for specific voices. Every talent should have a number of demos on their profile page, and once you've found a few voices you like, you can send them a private invitation and ask them to audition for you and bid on your project. Again: the initial selection is going to be time-consuming, but once you've found someone that meets all your criteria, you could start a long-term business relationship.

Of course you can always try your luck on Craigslist, Elance, Odesk and the like. Unlike voices.com or voice123, there usually is no membership fee, and that's why you're more likely to find amateurs on these sites. In my experience, you get what you pay for, and I try to steer people away from these sites. Here are some better options:

[www.voplanet.com](http://www.voplanet.com)  
[www.bodalgo.com](http://www.bodalgo.com)  
[www.voicesoncall.com](http://www.voicesoncall.com)  
[www.voiceoverdirectory.com](http://www.voiceoverdirectory.com)  
[www.voicebank.net](http://www.voicebank.net)  
[www.elearningvoices.com](http://www.elearningvoices.com)



### **NARRATION: DO IT YOURSELF**

Sometimes you simply don't have the time to find a voice-over talent; perhaps it's not in the budget or maybe you just want to do it yourself.

James R. Alburger's "**The Art of Voice Acting**" is considered by many in the business to be the 'voice-over bible'. It is a phenomenal resource and it even comes with a CD.

### **EQUIPMENT**

I'm often asked what voice-over specific gear I would recommend. Before I tell you, I'd like to make clear that I do not and will not receive any compensation from any company for suggesting any of their products. Secondly: I could write an entire book about the pros and cons of brand X or model Y. Instead, I'll keep things very simple.

## MICROPHONES

**Harlan Hogan** ([www.harlanhogan.com](http://www.harlanhogan.com)) is one of the top voice-overs in the business. You might not recognize his name, but you'd recognize his voice. Harlan will forever be associated with phrases such as *"Strong enough for a man..."*; *"You never get a second chance to make a first impression..."* and *"Quaker Life, It's the cereal even Mikey likes..."*

Harlan recently came out with a voice-over microphone that has earned rave reviews. It's the **VO: 1-A** Microphone. Made by MXL ([www.mxlmics.com](http://www.mxlmics.com)), this is the first condenser mic designed for voice-over performers by a voice-over professional. It costs \$199, and if you don't like it, you can return it -no questions asked. In my opinion, you can't go wrong with this mic.

Many voice-over pros like using a **Sennheiser MKH 416** shotgun mic ([www.sennheiserusa.com](http://www.sennheiserusa.com)), and if you're a videographer, you might already have this one in your arsenal. If not, it will set you back about \$1200.

This mic will give you the in-your-face sound some voices are known for. Here's the catch: because it is ultra sensitive, it will pick up anything that's close, so solid mic technique is a must.

## POP-FILTER

The second thing you'll need is a pop-filter; it's a little screen that is placed in front of a microphone. It will do two things:

1. Keep your mic mouth-moisture free
2. Soften plosives than can ruin your recording

One of the best is the **Avantone Pro Shield** (\$34.99, [www.avantelectronics.com](http://www.avantelectronics.com)). The metal oversized mesh is easy to clean and slightly curved. **Stedman** also makes excellent mesh pop filters ([www.stedmancorp.com](http://www.stedmancorp.com)).

## PREAMP

You can't just plug your condenser microphone into a computer and hit the record button. You need to boost your mic's output, in order to bring the volume up to line-level. That's where a preamplifier comes in.

If you already have a mixer, you don't need to invest in a separate preamp, but make sure it supplies phantom power; otherwise your condenser microphone won't work. If you have a dynamic or ribbon mic, you're good to go.

If you're considering a standalone preamplifier, the sky is the limit. I use the CEntrance MicPort Pro (\$149.99, [www.centrance.com](http://www.centrance.com)). It's a mini audio interface that plugs directly into your microphone. On the other side there's a USB cable that plugs into your computer. It has phantom power, a headphone jack and two knobs for setting the record level and the headphone volume. Best of all, it's so small; you can easily take it with you on the road!



## SOUND BOOTH

No matter the quality of your microphone or your preamp, you don't want your neighbor's leaf blower or weed wacker to make a guest appearance on your sound track. You need to make sure that you shut the outside world out.

It's easy to spend thousands of dollars soundproofing your studio space, or you could buy an expensive prefab vocal booth such as a Whisper Room ([www.whisperroom.com](http://www.whisperroom.com)). But if you're not ready to make that type of investment, there is an affordable alternative.

Harlan Hogan ([www.harlanhogan.com](http://www.harlanhogan.com)) is also the inventor of a portable recording booth, the "Porta-Booth Pro". It's a professional, portable sound studio, based on the idea that only your mic needs to be inside a sound booth to shut out unwanted noise. *You* don't have to be.

It's fairly easy to build one yourself, using a cheap Whitmor collapsible cube and high-quality acoustic foam (or you can buy Harlan's new and improved version for \$349).

The book he wrote with Jeffrey P. Fisher, the "**Voice Actor's Guide To Recording At Home ... And On The Road**" is packed with information on how to set up and use a professional-sounding voice-over studio. It also has instructions on how to build your own Porta-Booth.



## SHOPPING

Where can you buy all this great gear? The professionals at pro-audio specialist **Sweetwater** ([www.sweetwater.com](http://www.sweetwater.com)) offer expert advice and unparalleled customer service.

Harlan himself has teamed up with Amazon.com, and you can purchase his signature voice-over microphone and other recommended gear at [www.voiceoveressentials.com](http://www.voiceoveressentials.com).

## CLOSING WORDS

Of course I could have devoted an entire chapter on background music or script writing. When I think of these two in relation to many of the virtual property tours I have watched, one word comes to mind: CLICHÉ. Some of the endless, computer-generated musical loops are so annoying that I can't help but press the mute button.

A majority of scripts are so predictable and packed with realtor jargon... it makes me reach for that same mute button. Use some imagination and creativity.... please. Remember the four types of buyers. The language you use should have something in it for everybody. Stack that deck!

Thankfully, an increasing number of tours are done right, and all the puzzle pieces fit neatly together. How can you tell? As the camera is taking you inside the home, and a reassuring, welcoming voice guides you around the property, you feel an exciting and irresistible urge.

It's that same urge you felt when you were thinking of that new and wonderful vacation destination. Even though you haven't set a single foot in the door; when you think of this house, something special inside tells you that you're already almost.....



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Strikwerda is a Pennsylvania-based voice-over professional with over 25 years of experience. Paul records e-learning programs, commercials, audio books, as well as documentaries and real estate video tours in English, Dutch and German. He works for such clients as The Wharton School, Novartis, Johnson & Johnson, The Discovery Channel, the United Nations and the US Government.