

AC-T-140 How to Produce an Audiobook

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0:00:10.2 S1: Hi everyone, thank you so much for being with me today. I'm Becky Parker Geist, I'm the CEO of Pro Audio Voices, where we help bring stories to life in audio book form, and

0:00:22.4 S2: Today we're going to talk about the overall audio book recording, the production process, and this is really for those who are just trying to get a feel of the overview.

0:00:35.3 S1: How does it work? We're not going to dive into all the rabbit holes that are available to us in the audio book production world, but we are going to cover a fair amount of territory, and we're going to give you again, an overview of what this terrain is like in the audio book world, what's involved? So, just as a preface, I want to say with the ongoing double-digit growth in the audio book market and with audio book sales, it really does make sense to get your book into audio format, and that can be really challenging because... Yes, audio-book production tends to be fairly expensive, it's a very time-consuming, labor-intensive process to do it well, and

0:01:25.6 S2: So a big part of our conversation at pro audio voices with our clients is how do we take that audio book production process and leverage it in your marketing to help you really take advantage of the great asset that you're creating.

0:01:45.5 S1: So with all of that, let's dive into the overall audio book process.

0:01:53.7 S2: So first of all, there are, I would call them about four segments of the process overall that we're going to talk about.

0:02:03.1 S1: The

0:02:03.3 S2: First is actually the one that I think of as the place where the pot of gold hides. It is also a place or the aspect of production that most audio book producers and most authors overlook, they just don't even recognize it as an opportunity, and

0:02:30.2 S1: So I want to put some extra effort and extra attention on this first aspect of the process. And that is pre-production, pre-production is really the planning out, it's the getting ready of everything before you do any recording at all.

0:02:50.6 S2: We're always going to assume that we're starting with a finished manuscript. But

0:02:56.1 S1: From that point on, there are many things that need to happen. Let's talk first about the casting process, because casting that decision about who is going to narrate really can make or break your audio book, so let's dive into that just a little bit.

0:03:16.4 S2: Many authors have the idea, come into the process thinking, Oh, I have to be the narrator, or they may come into it saying, I want to be the narrator, or not, we also have those who recognize right at the front end that really... They don't want to be narrating, they want to have a professional handle that, but let's talk through some of the considerations that happen in that decision-making process about whether the book should be narrated by the author or by a professional... So first of all, I always ask this question if someone, if an author says that they do want to narrate their own... First of all, we want to look at what your goals are overall for the whole project, for your publishing works, what's your big picture, because that should... And it does, and it

really should factor into the overall production and especially the pre-production process, when you know what it is that you want to achieve, you can much more easily figure out how to implement calls to action, make sure that content is in there, that should be in that sort of thing, we need to know what the big picture is.

0:04:41.6 S1: So coming back to that question of who is going to narrate the book, sometimes we'll hear that authors want to save money and feel like if they do it themselves, that will save them money, so let me just briefly address that. Sometimes that's true, but it's not always. Here's why when you're narrating your own... And it's not something that you've developed skills for, because it is a whole other skill set that takes training and expertise and time and development.

0:05:18.3 S2: If you're doing this for the first time and you're narrating, it's going to take an editor a lot longer to work with the audio that you've created... So you're adding cost on the post-production side when you wouldn't have that additional expense if you are paying a professional narrator.

0:05:45.1 S1: Now, that's not always going to completely be offset, so you may still come out ahead, but it's something to consider, if that's the case, you may also want to be considering, is your audio book going to be the best that it can be if you narrate it? The reason I say that is because it's very easy for audio book listeners to get turned off to a particular book just because of the narrator. Your narrator can make or break your audio book, so you want to make sure that you've got the right voice for your book, you might be the right voice or you might not... Another question or consideration is the idea of narrating your own book, something that you dread, or something that you're excited about, If you're dreading it, I'll tell you right now, please don't record your own book, if it's something you're excited about, then it might be a good fit for you, and there's a whole process that you want to go into that we're not going to dive into in this episode, but that we do talk about in other episodes of our podcast, and that we're always happy to talk to authors about.

0:07:04.3 S2: So then the next thing is, do you have any experience with recording

0:07:10.1 S1: If you don't, and unless you feel really excited and passionate about recording and getting started in that world, then most likely, I would advise that you not try to take it on. There are a lot of challenging things about the process, you know, like making sure that you maintain a consistent relationship with your microphone, so that you have a consistent sound, making sure that you know what audio setting is, what your settings should be on your audio interface, understanding how to maintain that energy, that consistency of spontaneity and excitement throughout hours of audio recording, and again, consistency also from one recording session to another, to make sure that your audio book is really going to be the best that it can be. Another thing that comes up is, and this is fairly frequent, when an author feels like, Oh, it has to be me, is that they feel like nobody else could possibly tell the story with the same energy, the same understanding, that same depth that the author could... Now, for those who really don't understand acting and what that is about, it's not just about memorizing words and think about the great films are a great theater that you've seen where the actor really embodies that character, that is what's happening or should be happening with great narrators that is what's happening.

0:08:57.7 S1: Because they are actors. And so what we do is we're really letting the story get into us, and also we are getting into the story, so there is a kind of a true synergy and energy kind of merging between person and story that does happen. We actually have a great episode on the podcast talking about that with Joshua Townsend. And I strongly encourage you to listen to that. It's

a really fun interview. And then another reason why sometimes authors want to record their own is if they are speakers or want to become speakers and want to have more speaking gigs, that can sometimes be a reason to... Because they want to get more speaking engagements. That they want to have their voice be front and center with their audio book.

0:09:58.0 S2: That's a good reason to want to narrate your own... It doesn't require that you do.

0:10:04.9 S1: Let's say, for example, you've got a non-fiction book and maybe you have some kind of coaching program or something that you would really ideally big picture like to be selling.

0:10:15.8 S2: If

0:10:16.0 S1: But let's say also that you don't have a lot of extra time that you can devote to the many hours that it takes to record an audio book in a situation like this, maybe you want to record an introduction, our note from the author or whatever section is appropriate from the book, so that your voice is present, your energy is present, but you don't necessarily need to do the entire audio book, so

0:10:52.6 S2: These are some questions that come up as to whether the author should narrate, and there are ways to help you if you're on the fence about that. There are ways to help you make that decision, you know, having you read a sample, having a professional narrator read that same sample so that you can actually listen to the difference and start to get a feel for that, and then... So now sort of setting that trunk aside, even though there's so many more rabbit holes we could go into in that topic alone, let's talk about the professional narrator casting process.

0:11:34.4 S1: Each audio book company production company is going to have their own version of this, some will just send you to a large bank of samples of audio and ask you to pick somebody out. I think that that is not helpful to an author casting, like just like narrating is another set of skills that is developed, and so knowing what you're listening for and how to listen for it, knowing what the qualities are, it's not just, Oh, that person has a nice voice... From my perspective, most people have nice voices, the question is, is it... Are they good at the story telling, are they good at conveying your content in a way that makes sense, that is engaging, that keeps the listeners tuned in.

0:12:36.8 S2: That's the kind of voice we're listening for, for any given project. There are narrators that are terrific at fiction and not so great at non-fiction

0:12:46.7 S1: Or great at some kinds of non-fiction if the content is a real fit for them and not so great in others.

0:12:54.7 S2: So it really is a case by case consideration and casting process. The

0:13:01.8 S1: Best way for you to really hear what a narrator can do with your material is to have the narrator read some of your text as a part of their audition, trying to gauge the casting or make a casting decision based on... Somebody reading something else is really challenging and especially challenging for those who are not... Have not developed those skills, so typically, you want to be able to hear the narrator narrate a piece of your text so that you can have some comparison, and they should all read the same piece of text, so you have a segment from your book that is selected as the audition text, and then the idea is really to have a casting specialist or director or associate who will

help narrow down the number of auditions, so that you have a professional listening to those and giving you some guidance in terms of which may be the best... For your project.

0:14:22.7 S2: Now, this can also be really facilitated by having a casting director at the front end, as we do it, pro-audio voices, where the casting director will first meet with the author and

0:14:35.5 S1: Really draw out what are the qualities we're listening for, what is the range that we're looking for in terms of different kinds of vocal qualities, and all of these can be really helpful, both in terms of the casting call that goes out, so that the actors know what it is that we're after, but then also when those auditions come in, what... That casting director should be listening for... So again, your narrator can make or break your audio books and make sure that the casting process is a significant... Know that it's an important decision and treat it as such. Okay, now let's move on to some other aspects of pre-production that is predominantly... So we mostly have the casting part and then we have the manuscript preparation... With manuscript preparation, what are we paying attention to? What's involved in that process? Well, one thing, I'll give you a list of things that we can include as some of the things that we're looking for, and with some of these, they're going to be more prevalent in non-fiction titles, but many of these will be in both fiction and non-fiction and sometimes in children as well.

0:16:05.1 S1: So the first is visuals, any kind of visual images, charts, graphs, maps, whatever, how are we going to handle it, and how are we going to handle each one, and that may involve crafting an invitation to your website, it might be omitting it because it's already well described in the narrative, it might be writing a narrative to describe it, all kinds of possibilities, but just know that if you have visuals in your book, part of your pre-production process is to figure out how they're going to be handled. Another is exercises, meditations, is that anything that you may want your listener to do or that you're suggesting that they do in the moment, you want to make sure you know how those are going to be handled, and those can be really excellent opportunities. That was one of the places where the goal is, in terms of audio book production.

0:17:08.6 S2: Making sure that you have an about the author.

0:17:11.7 S1: I highly recommend that you include the About the Author and have that narrated and include your website as a part of it. Make it easy for your listeners to find you and continue to engage with you to learn about your next book when it comes out. Acknowledgements. You want them read, do you want to omit them, lots of questions about that, or... And also placement, if they're in the front, moving to the back, things like that, bonus material, do you have a sneak preview to another book, do you want to have part of an author interview included? These can be really great ways to really build that connection with your audience, and then some of the really more fine detail of things like what format do you want your narrator to use for things like years... Do you want it 2021 or 2021? These... You just want consistency. And if you have a preference, you just want to let your narrator know what it is. Also, punctuation can sometimes be questioned, things like slashes, do you want it to Mom, Dad, do you want... Mom or dad. Mom and or dad. It's like, how do you want that treated, things like that.

0:18:35.9 S1: And there are other punctuation issues that can sometimes raise a question, foot notes, end notes, resources, glossaries, lots of things that need to have... Before you start recording, you want to make sure you know how they're going to be handled...

0:18:54.4 S2: Let's take a short break, we'll be right

0:18:56.0 S1: Back.

0:18:59.8 S2: Okay, so another thing that we want to do in pre-production is if you're going to have multiple voices for your audio book, then this is something that you're going to be figuring out in pre-production, mapping out your script so that your narrators know exactly who's reading what, and you don't end up with a lot of extra cost and expense because there was duplication, two people read the same thing, or things like that, or just a lot of confusion that can also take a lot more time in post-production.

0:19:36.6 S1: And then music and... Or sound effects, those depending on the project, you may want to include those, you may not, but you want to think those through in the pre-production process. Once you've gotten through all of that, then we can move on to audio book production, you figured out all the things that you need to know before you start the recording, and so in the recording process, the production process, we're doing that recording, then they're going to have an audio engineer, who's going to be in listening and making sure that there are no extraneous sounds, that all the words are said correctly, that they're pronounced correctly, that the sounds are within a range that technically will pass the audio book standards, things like that. And then there is another step in that process, there will be that review by the author, and any corrections that need to be made, whether it's before or after you review, those corrections will be recorded for those that need that recording, re-recording and then inserted into the audio, so we have a nice clean audio, when all the files are approved, then you're going to move into mastering, and that is where you're basically taking those audio files and making sure that throughout that they are meeting the audio book standards.

0:21:19.3 S1: They have to be within a certain range, and some other technical specifications that you as the author don't need to really keep track of, that the audio engineer definitely does.

0:21:34.0 S2: Alright, once you've gotten through having all of your files approved, you've got opening and closing credits that are done correctly, and you have a retail sample that is very typically the first part of the book. And just so you know, some audio book retailers will automatically use the first part of the book, whether you give them a different retail sample or not, that's

0:22:02.2 S1: Up to them, but you need to provide a retail sample, as a part of the process. And

0:22:09.7 S2: There will be much gathering of metadata, which is really important that includes a cover image, that's two specifications for audio books, and will also involve a lot of other metadata such as your book description, your genres and things like that.

0:22:27.6 S1: The same or very similar information to what you would be providing as you're publishing your book, and then we talk a little bit about audio book, so the submissions process and distribution... What do you need to know about that? Well.

0:22:47.6 S2: This is what's interesting to me is that there are many indie publishing professionals, they are experts in their area of expertise, and the many times they'll post about audio book production and they have experience as an author, but they're not audio book experts, and there can

be some putting out the general information, but often missing some of those red flags that we would like to be waving saying, Hey, okay, if you go down that path, beware about this thing, so we're going to be posting some blog posts about that and get you some more information so that we're giving you those heads-ups about the distribution process, but basically, here is my recommendation, you have a couple of choices, you can go really narrow and focused and just do Audible and iTunes, and they are the largest retailer, but they are not by any means, the only retailer, and I strongly recommend going with broad distribution, using one of the other digital distributors that will get you that broad distribution, such as Authors Republic, and that's who we use. Versus using ACX, which is only Audible and iTunes, you can still get into audible, and I recommend that you do just go in through a different path, and also by having that broad distribution, you're going to be able to reach more people, you're not going to miss out on anything and then there's one other thing, one other piece that I really, really strongly recommend, and

0:24:47.8 S1: That is

0:24:49.7 S2: Also have a platform where you can earn high royalties. I'll tell you where that is, because first of all, I'm going to give a little information first about what's happening in the other Digital distributors and the information that's out there and how it's a little bit deceptive, a little misleading, and so I want to be clear about what's really happening out there. So with ACX, where you get into audible and iTunes only, and in general, in through Audible, regardless of which way you get into their system, they claim to pay 25% for non-exclusive.

0:25:42.4 S1: I do highly recommend, again, that you go that direction and not try to do the exclusive.

0:25:50.3 S2: It might sound like 40% is a much better deal, but

0:25:54.0 S1: 40% of what... Is what you always need to ask. And if you really get into the weeds with their formula, which they're not fully transparent about, you'll discover that it's not nearly as much as you think it ought to be.

0:26:11.6 S2: So I do recommend that you use those other channels as much as you can go through the other distributors, like Authors Republic, and on their website, you will read that it says that They pay 70%, and you should be asking of what... Because you have to read the fine detail to understand that it's not 70% of the retail price of whatever it sells for, which is what we would automatically assume, it's not that, it's 70% of what they receive from the retailers that are purchasing the book, the

0:26:52.5 S1: Retailers take the big chunk, they take the distributors take a smaller chunk, but it leaves you with much less sort of averages out to be about 35% for those... For going through that distributor...

0:27:10.8 S2: Now, I want to call out another platform that is very well known, and that's Findaway voices, Authors Republic also uses as a part of their distribution network, they use the Findaway Voices network, Findaway claims that they pay the highest royalties, and they have a program called Authors Direct. Which is great. I'm glad that they have it. Basically, you're bypassing the retailers and having a way to sell it more direct yourself, they claim to pay 70%. You should be asking of what? Well, it turns out it's

0:27:56.7 S1: 70%. Well, it's not actually 70%, if you read the details, it actually says they're paying 80% of 70%, which anyone who can do math knows is actually 56%. So that's better, and I applaud them for providing that, but it's still not as good as it gets. So what is the platform where you can get the highest royalties and the most control... It's AMPLify.

0:28:29.1 S2: AMPLify is available through Pro Audio Voices. We offer 65% royalties on whatever you choose to sell it for, and that's not a percentage of something else, and there's no percentage of the 65%.

0:28:44.4 S1: It is an actual 65% of the price you sell it for, you can do discount codes and coupons, if as for whatever amounts or percentages you choose, you can do promotional pricing whenever you choose, you have so much control. You also have access to your customers email, so that you can reach out to them. Again, email marketing is the most powerful form of marketing. We hear it again and again from the experts, and one of the big challenges with all the other platforms and distributors is that you don't get any access to any of that information, you are blocked out, it's like, they'll take your content, but then they're going to keep... Most of the benefit from that content, at Pro Audio Voices, we're trying to really regain for our author clients regain the control and the royalties that you deserve.

0:29:53.8 S2: So that covers that territory. So we went through pre-production where the gold is production, distribution and submissions, and the last piece is marketing, here's... I'm going to say two words about marketing, do it, it

0:30:19.3 S1: Takes marketing to be found.

0:30:21.7 S2: And that's true regardless of what book formats you have, whether it's audio books, print books, e-books, it doesn't matter, marketing is essential, and marketing really... It's not so much about trying to convince anybody to buy your book, marketing is about helping your audience who's looking for you to find you

0:30:46.6 S1: Readers and listeners, they want more content that that is suitable for them. They want it, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, whatever they are looking for, that they're hungry for that content that will feed them, and

0:31:05.1 S2: So our job in marketing is to help authors to make it easier for their followers or potential followers, their audience, to find them. So we have covered one more time, pre-production, production, distribution and marketing, those are the four primary aspects of audio books and what you need in the audio book world to succeed. Thanks so much for being with me. We're going to go into more detail, and we do go into much more detail, dive down those rabbit holes on audio book connection podcast behind the scenes with the creative teams. If you have questions that you'd like us to address in the podcast. Reach out to us, go to Pro Audio voices dot com. Our contact information is there. We'd love to hear from you. Have a great day.

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