

BACKSTAGE

The Truth About Voiceover Casting + Creative Agencies

By Kelley Buttrick



Over the years, award-winning creative Ron Huey has cast thousands of voices for his clients. His work for Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, Wrangler Jeans, NAPA, and others has been awarded by The One Show, Communication Arts, and CLIO, and he's twice been named a Stephen E. Kelly finalist, an award that recognizes the Top 25 Magazine Campaigns of each year. His vast experience spans traditional creative agency models, in-house creative, and self-owned.

In 1997, Ron saw the birth of his own agency, Huey/Paprocki, and two weeks later the birth of his twins. (How's that for pressure?) In 2001, Creativity Magazine named Huey/Paprocki one of their Top 20 Agencies to Watch. Nine years later, Ron merged his company with CSE where he served for five years as SVP, Executive Creative Director working on accounts including Coca-Cola, AGCO, the Atlanta Hawks, Aflac, and AT&T before establishing his current creative consultancy, Huey+Partners.

To help us get a better understanding of what creatives look for in voiceover talent, we turned to Ron to walk us through the VO casting process.

Where do you find voiceover talents?

I usually work through agents but if the budget is tight, we'll use [casting] sites. If budgets and timelines are really tight, I'll sometimes reach out directly to talent I know.

How do you base your voice search on your clients' needs?

It's important that the voice convey the right tone and attitude for the brand. Most voice talent I've worked with have a sweet spot: what they do really well and the type of scripts that come naturally to them.

For instance, we recently worked on a spot for the Arthritis Foundation where we personified the voice of arthritis. I needed a somewhat sarcastic voice and used an improv actor I know who could ad lib a few different ways to go.

When you're working on the creative, do you have a particular voice type in your head or do you go in open-minded?

I usually have a tone and voice character in mind. The important thing is to make sure the client is on board with creative's vision and that needs to be communicated when the concept is sold—not at the time of casting.

Do you look for different characteristics in voices depending on the medium used?

Not particularly. If it's radio and dialogue, sometimes I'll look for talent who have a track record of working well off each other.

How many auditions do you receive per job? Do you listen to all of them?

Depending on the source, I like to have at least 50-100. I believe quality comes through quantity. I always listen to all of them, then make a short list.

How do you start narrowing down your options when sorting through auditions?

The easiest part is eliminating voices—that happens quickly. "No. No. No." You know right away when it's not right. I might set aside or mark one out of every 10 I review.

How do you feel about talent taking liberties with the script during an audition?

I'm usually listening for what I put down on paper; it's written that way on purpose. But when we get in the studio, I like to try different things as long as we have that leeway with the client.

Walk us through your casting process. Are there differences in casting for broadcast and non-broadcast projects?

I try very hard to get down the age specs, tone, and direction for casting. The tough part is that agents often throw the net much wider than the actual specs [and it] becomes a cattle call. I'm not a fan of that.