

BACKSTAGE

Everything You Need to Know About Dubbing

By Kelley Buttrick



Dubbing has come a long way from my childhood days of watching “Speed Racer,” the first anime cartoon to hit it big in the U.S. Nowadays, many voice actors specialize in dubbing and hone a unique skill set to master the craft.

Jeff Howell, owner of Howell Productions, both casts and directs dubbing projects including international films like “I Am Not An Easy Man,” “Jefe,” “Nothing to Hide,” “Who Would You Take to a Deserted Island,” “A Fortunate Man,” “Unbridled,” and the controversial episodic “Naked Director.”

During his work as an agent, casting director, and voiceover director, Jeff has worked with stellar talent like Marlon Brando, Martin Sheen, Owen Wilson, Sally Kellerman, Leonard Nimoy, and James Earl Jones. He also coaches and teaches. Suffice it to say, he knows VO and what it takes to be a success.

In this interview, Jeff takes us on a deep dive into dubbing.

What is dubbing?

Dubbing is the process of replacing the original dialogue track in a film or TV program with localized dialogue.

How does dubbing differ from ADR?

ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) is used to re-record dialogue by the original or replacement actor to correct or improve the audio quality or content. Unlike dubbing, the dialogue is not being localized into a different language. ADR is typically a necessary step in post-production in order to improve the final mix.

What kind of skill set does a voice actor need to master for dubbing work?

The talent must be a strong actor with great timing skills. When creating a performance, the actor has to have a keen sense of the tone of the scene, the specific attitude of the actor in the scene, have an awareness of the physicality in the scene, and have the ability to balance the artistic side of creating a performance with the actual skill of reading from the scrolling dialogue on the screen.

Do VO talents need to have a dubbing demo?

At this point, there is no need to have a dubbing specific demo. However, actors

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must have a current demo that reflects their natural sounding voice and range.

What is the casting process for a dubbing project?

The casting process can vary depending on the client and the project. Traditionally, I will read the lead actors to picture in order to match the voice with the character image. For minor roles, I will review and submit voice demos. For incidentals, I simply choose the voice.

What will knock a voice actor out of the running for a dubbing casting?

The goal of casting is to find the best voice that appears to sound like it's coming from the image of a particular character. Basically, the voice must fit the face. Therefore, if the actor gives a good read but the voice quality doesn't fit the character, then the voice actor would be out of the running.

How does one get into dubbing work?

Actors should communicate with their agents and let them know that they're interested in being submitted on dubbing projects. They should also contact the various dubbing houses and ask for the casting director or a contact name and email address and then follow up with a brief introductory email with an attached demo.

What do you look for when casting a voice actor for a dubbing project?

I look for great actors from the voiceover, on-camera, and the legit stage actor's worlds.

Please share what happens in a dubbing session.

Since time is always against us, we typically move rather quickly during a dubbing session. Once the actor arrives to the studio, I will typically discuss my expectations of what we'll be recording, and going over any questions regarding the dialogue, character, emotions, and efforts. Then we review the scene where we listen to the original actor and read the subtitles. Once the actor is comfortable with the role, we start recording.

Any dos and don'ts for voice actors looking to break into dubbing?

Be persistent in marketing yourselves to all of the major dubbing companies in Los Angeles and NYC. This part of the business is growing each year and we'll need more and more talent to add to our rosters.