

Let Your Voice be HEARD!

# THE AUTHOR'S **GUIDE** TO **AUDIO BOOKS**

By Jim Seybert



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# THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE to AUDIO BOOKS

*Let your voice be HEARD!  
Audiobook tips for Authors—Addendum*

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# INTRODUCTION

**S**O YOU'VE WRITTEN the book! Congratulations!

These days you want to be sure your message is available for people to digest in all the ways that is most convenient for them.

For some, that means having a printed book, something they can hold in their hands and read in bed, on the beach, or in bathroom.

For others, that means reading it on their Kindle, iPhone or other e-reader.

But for many, they don't have space to **read** your book. They want to **hear** it. They want to listen to what you've written while riding to work on the train or in the car. They want to benefit from your wisdom while on the treadmill or jogging in the park.

**For more and more people, an audio book is their desired way to receive your message.**

Audiobooks *are* the fastest growing segment of publishing, and the process for creating one is somewhat similar to creating a print book. But there are some marked differences worth noting.

To help you on your journey and answer some basic questions, I've reached out to a friend of mine, Jim Seybert. Jim is an audiobook expert and, as his mother might say, has a "voice made for the airwaves."

I've asked Jim to share his expertise with you in this informative e-book.

DAVID WELDAY

PRESIDENT

HIGHERLIFE PUBLISHING AND MARKETING



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## **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT AUDIOBOOKS?**

The Audio Publishers Association (APA) estimates that audiobook sales in 2016 totaled more than \$2.1 billion, up 18.2 percent over 2015, with a corresponding 33.9-percent increase in units. This is the third consecutive year that audiobook sales have expanded by nearly 20 percent. Twenty-four percent of Americans (more than 67 million people) have completed at least one audiobook in the last year, a 22-percent increase in two years.

If you have a message to get out to the world, this is definitely a market you want to be a part of!

## **WHO'S LISTENING TO THEM?**

The APA 2017 survey indicates a fairly even split between female (52%) and male (48%) listeners. Among frequent audiobook listeners, there are slightly more male (56%) than female (44%) listeners. Age distribution of audiobook listeners mirrors almost exactly the age distribution of the US population. People ranging in age from 18-35 tend to listen more frequently.

Sixty-nine percent of audiobook listeners are Caucasian, 10% African American, 10% Hispanic, and 6% Asian, all of which are within percentage points of the general US population.

Eighty-three percent of audiobook listeners have college degrees or have attended college, compared to the general US population where just 58% have degrees or some college credits. Eighteen percent of audiobook listeners have advanced degrees, compared to 3% in the general population.

## **WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR AUDIOBOOK GENRES?**

Mystery/Thriller/Suspense - 27%  
History/Biographies/Memoir - 15%  
SciFi/Fantasy - 11%  
Self-Help/Spirituality - 10%  
Popular fiction - 10%  
Classics - 6%  
Business - 6%  
Romance - 6%  
YA/Teen - 6%  
Health - 3%

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## **WHERE ARE PEOPLE BUYING AUDIOBOOKS?**

The vast majority are purchased online through handful of outlets. Audible.com (a division of Amazon) is the category killer, with 71% of audiobook listeners holding a subscription. Other outlets include: [Audiobooks.com](#), [Scribd](#), [eStories](#) and others. Audiobooks are also available on iTunes and on the websites of various retail stores like Barnes & Noble.

Some listeners also borrow audiobooks from their local libraries through [hoopla](#). The restaurant chain [Cracker Barrel](#) has a borrowing program where patrons can pickup an audiobook (on CD) at one location and drop it off at another.

## **DOWNLOAD OR CD?**

Twenty-nine percent of all audiobook consumers prefer listening on a smartphone. One-in-four use a computer, one-in-five listen on a tablet device, and 1-in-6 use a CD player. Use of a smartphone as the preferred device grew 7 points between 2015 and 2017 as the use of CD players dropped by 5 points.

## **WHAT'S THE TYPICAL PROCESS OF RECORDING A BOOK?**

An audiobook project will require between 6 and 10 hours of work per finished hour (PFH) of audio. To estimate how long a book will run, divide the total word count by 9,300. So, a 10-hour book will require between 60 and 100 hours to produce.

### **The typical process involves these steps:**

Pre-read/markup - The narrator reads the entire manuscript to 1) Look for unusual words 2) Get a feel for the author's voice 3) Diagram passages that will be difficult to read aloud 4) Catalog all the book's characters and develop unique voices for each of them. This can take as much as 2-3 hours PFH.

Narration - A seasoned narrator will average about 2 hours PFH. Books with a lot of dialog or technical language will take longer. The amount of time the narrator can read aloud varies by their experience and other factors. On average, professional narrators will complete about 2-3 hours of finished audio per day. An estimated 90% of all audiobooks are recorded in the narrator's private (home) studio.

Quality Check - When the narrator finishes recording, the audio files are sent to a Quality Check editor (QC). This individual checks to make sure the narrator read the script correctly, making notes of errors. The QC also listens for anything that would distract the listeners such as mouth clicks, background noise, and stomach growls (it happens!). A QC editor can process an hour of finished audio in 1.5 hours.

Pickups/Corrections - The QC editor sends a detailed list of necessary corrections to the narrator. Back in the studio, the narrator will listen to his or her initial recording so as to match the pacing, tone, and intensity of the correction to what was previously recorded. The objective is to have the audio flow seamlessly with no discernible difference. Time for this step varies depending on how many errors need to be corrected.

Post-Production/Mastering - Audio quality standards are very high and this part of the process involves many steps to bring the files into compliance with industry standard specifications. Audible will reject files that do not meet its standards, and Audible is one of the most lenient. Depending on the technical quality of the initial recording, this step can take anywhere from 10 to 15 minutes to as long as 1 to 2 hours PFH.

Distribution - When the production process is completed, the files are sent to various distribution houses. (See below for various options.)

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## CAN I NARRATE MY OWN BOOK?

There are good reasons for narrating your own book. Perhaps the most-compelling is the commercial draw of “read by the author” in your marketing. Listeners often feel a connection with authors who narrate their own work.

Here are some things to consider:

Time - How much time do you have? Most experienced narrators can finish one hour of content in about two hours. For those not accustomed to reading aloud for long periods of time, this can expand to 3 or more hours of studio time PFH. Consider, too, that your vocal quality begins to fade after just a few hours of recording. Your 10-hour book could take 30 hours to record, stretched over a couple of weeks.

Performance and technical quality - While there is something to be said for the authenticity of an author-narrated book, audiobook listeners are becoming accustomed to quality performances and will only tolerate slight deviations from the norm. Good diction, inflection, breath control, and overall vocal aesthetics are important. More important than *vocal* quality is the technical quality of the recording. An improperly recorded audiobook can be as distracting as typos and poor page design in a print book.

Expense - Narrators typically charge between \$175 and \$400 PFH, so it might seem that narrating your own book could save you a lot of money. There are other factors to consider: Studio time = \$50-\$250/hour, QC = \$35-\$45/PFH, mastering = \$45-\$75/PFH. Most freelance narrators have their own studios and many either do the other work themselves or job it out as part of their fee. In the long-run, hiring an experienced narrator may actually cost less than doing it yourself.

## HOW DO I FIND A NARRATOR?

Referrals - Talk to other authors. Who have they used?

Audible Creative Exchange (ACX) - As we mentioned before Audible.com is a division of Amazon and the biggest player in audiobook distribution. ACX is the Audible Creative Exchange (acx.com). Authors (referred to as Rights Holders, RH) - can browse through the narration samples of freelance narrators. You can also register as an RH on ACX and post audition requests. Rates range from \$50 to \$400/PFH. Some narrators on ACX are willing to produce books for a share of royalties (RS). In this case, the RH incurs zero upfront expense. Typically, narrators working for RS are less experienced, although some experienced narrators will accept RS work if the book has high sales potential.

Talent curators - There are a handful of services that curate experienced narrators and connect them with authors. Each has its own financial arrangements with the narrators and RHs. Most experienced narrators will list their services on more than one platform. Two of the most widely used are findaway.com and spokenrealms.com.

Production houses - These provide all-inclusive services from finding a narrator to final mastering. Most also act as distributors in the same way a traditional publisher would handle your print book. Included in this category: Blackstone Audio, Brilliance Publishing, Deyan Audio, Bee Audio, Tantor, Recorded Books, Mission Audio. There are also a handful of production houses that handle exclusively Christian titles: christianaudio.com and Oasis Audio.

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## WRITING FOR AUDIO

The narrator's job is to act as a bridge between the author and the listener. The narrator translates the written word to the spoken word; delivering the author's *intent* as accurately as possible. Listeners lack the advantage of seeing the page, so any special fonts, charts or unique design elements must be vocally interpreted.

When producing audiobooks, narrators typically do not include Tables of Contents, acknowledgements, endorsements, footnotes, endnotes, appendices or bibliographies.

Callout boxes are skipped because they usually repeat content that has already been read. Sidebars and highlight sections are often moved to the end of a chapter or otherwise repositioned for better flow. Remember, the listener can't see the page so the narration has to flow in a sensible way.

Charts are handled in two ways: If the chart is merely a visual representation of content that has been read, it's not mentioned. If the chart presents new information not covered by the copy, the narrator will write copy describing the chart or image.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

This guide is meant as a brief introduction to a rapidly growing industry. [ACX.com](http://ACX.com) has an extensive list of FAQs and lots of tips for authors wanting to create audio versions of their print books.

## WHO IS JIM SEYBERT?

Jim Seybert has been involved in publishing since 1994 when he joined The Parable Group as a marketing executive. As an independent consultant, Jim worked on hundreds of successful titles, including the Left Behind series and numerous Bible translations. He has written two books on leadership for Tyndale House and dozens of articles for various periodicals in the publishing and retail industry. He began narrating audiobooks in 2016 and works from a professional studio in his Arroyo Grande, CA home.

JIM SEYBERT

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