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JOURNAL

WHAT'S NEXT?

An M&E industry that's learned to adapt and excel after a year like no other, for one

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20.02

HELPING BUILD THE ABCA TALENT REGISTRY

By **Ingrid Mahlberg**,
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SDI Media

The COVID crisis rapidly shut down the dubbing industry in March and April, with many productions in the midst of the dubbing process, and many more just scheduled to begin.

Content creators, distributors and localization vendors all scrambled to respond, with everyone asking the same questions. Could recording continue during the crisis? Would the talent be capable and willing to work from home? How would the acoustic quality compare to in-studio recordings? How did workflows need to change? What were the security concerns?

David Lee, chairman of Iyuno Media Group, reached out to SDI Media CEO Mark Howorth with a suggestion: rather than every customer and vendor attacking these challenges independently, maybe it made more sense to attack them collaboratively as an industry. Iyuno and SDI are among the largest dubbing providers, but just two of dozens and dozens of localization providers worldwide ... a larger effort would be needed to make collaboration truly applicable to the whole dubbing business.

Enter Guy Finley and MESA. Guy has a demonstrated track record of bringing together media interest groups to focus on problems that cut across parts of our industry. He quickly realized that business continuity was just such an issue, not only for the current COVID-19 situation but for future waves of business disruption. Thus the Audio Business Continuity Association (ABCA) was born, with MESA's guidance.

The nonprofit industry association establishes a collaborative community of artists and companies who offer professional audio services to content creators worldwide. It puts the localization industry on the same page with infrastructure, planning



and training, to help everyone involved plan ahead for future industry-wide disruptions.

ABCA has four workgroups: Workflow Best Practices, Technical Recommendations, Security and Talent. Each of these has its own challenges, but the Talent workgroup is the one I myself am focused on. Without the creative pool of voice actors, vocalists, directors, adaptors and engineers, there is no dubbing.

REVAMPING TOOLS FOR REMOTE DUBBING

When the crisis hit, the industry had relatively little understanding of who had the capabilities to record remotely, and who was willing to do so. SDI Media was able to help with its unique smartphone app offering for a talent registry, produb - launched in 2018 and currently available for download on iOS and Google Play — is the dubbing industry's first Talent Registry app focused on growing the talent base, with live access to language productions scheduled in-studio.

In March 2020, produb was adapted to track talent with remote recording capabilities. Voice actors posted samples of recordings made remotely in addition to in-studio recordings, alongside details of the kit they are using, so SDI Media could ensure base quality standards were met.

Signing up to produb is simple: download the app, upload skills, experience and voice samples, match these to the needs of new productions, and you have a dubbing team. The process ensures quality and consistency of data and security, with both GDPR adherence and protection for pre-release films and series.

Each potential member of the produb community goes through a registration process to become a verified community member and are closely vetted by produb community managers who verify qualifications and experience. Voice samples uploaded to the app by talent are QC'd by audio experts, then held securely in SDI's web-based database. Only then do talent gain full access to the list of available projects, filtered to be specific to their qualifications and availability.

The benefits to freelance talent (more opportunities to work), the dubbing studios (smooth recruitment and booking processes) and their clients (wider range of talent to suit their latest production) are substantial, building a solid, reliable and growing database of talent, all vetted as qualified to work either in the recording studios or at home should the need arise.

BUILDING UP THE TALENT POOL

In just two years, produb has grown into a substantial talent database, available in Poland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and more, with planned rollouts for the rest of Europe, Asia and the Americas.

IN JUST SIX EXCEPTIONAL MONTHS, remote recording has become essential to the localization business continuity process. As an industry we are already much more knowledgeable about remote workflows, technical solutions, and security.

There are more than 9,000 profiles, over 6,000 users and 600 projects currently listed, and growing daily. In addition to expanding the talent database to include the ability to record remotely, SDI Media has created a version of the app geared toward directors, and another for the content producers themselves.

produb•Director gives creatives exclusive insights, to enable them to match voices perfectly. They get detailed information about community members, listen to voice samples, check the talent availability matches production schedules and are generally able to manage productions in a much more streamlined and efficient manner. produb•Client enables clients to monitor progress on job applications for their projects, promote new productions and engage with the talent. Visibility to project scheduling helps clients to plan attendance at recordings and give feedback to the studio.

Another COVID-related adaptation is that produb•Client is updated weekly with heat maps listing the status of each dubbing studio via local government guidelines for safe working environments. This is especially helpful as countries deal with second-wave lockdowns.

In just six exceptional months, remote recording has become essential to the localization business continuity process. As an industry we are already much more knowledgeable about remote workflows, technical solutions, and security. However, we still need to enhance our talent base so that when disruptions occur, there are adequate resources to keep the localization process moving. SDI Media's suite of applications can play an important role here and will help the ABCA achieve its goals of minimizing the disruption to localization when a crisis like COVID occurs. ■



Before joining SDI Media in 2018, Ingrid Mahlberg was creative director at The Walt Disney Co. She held creative responsibility for the German localization of theatrical and broadcast productions, games and consumer products. This included casting, choice of creative teams, creative and operational guidance. She has been pivotal in building SDI Media's produb, and is a key player in the ABCA Talent Registry Workgroup.
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