

Audiobook Production Process Overview

Written by Davis Sound, LLC, Sept 24, 2019

Davis Sound is an Audible approved audiobook producer with more than 100 audiobooks completed. Davis Sound has the ability to record, edit, and master your audiobook, and has access to a large number of contracted voice actors available for doing the narration. This article is an overview of topics regarding audiobook production and hopes to answer many of the questions authors and publishers may have about the process and benefits. The term "Rights Holder" will be used to identify authors and/or their publishers.

Why produce an audiobook?

- If you are a serious writer who actively markets your books, producing audiobooks will give you the following advantages:
 - o Add a second income stream.
 - o Expand your audience.
 - o If you have multiple books, an audiobook will introduce listeners to your other books.

How to produce an audiobook

- The rights holder should first decide where the audiobook is to be published. Audible and iTunes are the largest publishers but there are download distribution sites. CDs are a small and declining format and have limited use and are not recommended except for specific purposes.
- If going through Audible/iTunes, create an account on the site called ACX.com (stands for Audiobook Creation Exchange) which is part of Audible. This process can be done before the audiobook is started or after it is completed.
- Decide who will narrate the book. See the section on "Who should narrate your audiobook."
- If the decision is to go with a professional voice actor, auditions can be set up to choose which actor would be preferred for the narration. Several audiobooks have been completed that use both male and female narrators.
- Once everything is decided, Davis Sound can begin the audiobook production process.
- The rights holder will have the ability to review all progress as the audiobook is being produced and will have input into narration style, character voices, and many other areas.
- Once completed, the publication-ready audiobook will be turned over to the rights holder in the form of completed audio files. Again, it is the rights holder's responsibility to create the accounts for online distribution.

Who should narrate the audiobook?

- Many authors want to narrate their own audiobook, especially with non-fiction. As a rule, all fiction should be narrated by professional voice actors, unless the author is a professional voice actor. For non-fiction, sometimes it makes sense for the author to do their own narration. Here are some guidelines to help determine when this makes sense.

- For memoirs, autobiographies, teaching, or business people telling their personal story, it can work to have the author narrate their own book providing they have an engaging voice and can work in a studio.
- Production cost will be no different if the author does their own narration since authors are not professional voice actors and in general require more recording studio time to complete the book and require much more editing.
- For most other non-fiction genres, for authors who do not have engaging voices, or for authors who do not want to record their voice, professional voice actors are the best choice.
- Some authors may have an engaging voice but do not do well in a studio environment leading to a lower quality recording.

Two ways to produce an audiobook

- Pay-per-performance (This is what Davis Sound does)
 - Rights holder pays Davis Sound a one-time fee for producing the audiobook.
 - All rights, ownership, and royalties from sales are held by the rights holder. Davis Sound holds no ownership of any audiobook after completion.
 - Pros/Cons: Rights holders who actively engage in sales and marketing and who expect to sell many audiobooks will chose this method because it is the most cost effective. In addition, higher quality narrators will be available since they will have a guaranteed income.
- Royalty work (Davis Sound does not do royalty work)
 - There are no up-front costs from rights holder for audio production.
 - Rights holder shares royalties with narrator. With Audible, rights holder gets 50% and narrator gets 50% of the royalty payments.
 - Pros/Cons: Because there is no cost output to produce an audiobook, this is the preferred method for authors who may not sell a lot of audiobooks. Because narrators make their income from the royalties, this method tends to attract beginning narrators, lower quality narrators, or narrators with lower quality recording capability who are willing to accept unknown and potentially lower payments spread out over time.

Cost of producing an audiobook

- First, determine your word count for the book. All audiobook costs are determined by word count and not by page numbers.
- Divide word count by 9,300 (target pace of words read per hour). This gives the estimated number of finished hours for the audiobook
- Normal cost for full production is \$350 per finished hour, but may vary depending on the narrator(s) used. Examples: Narrators booked through talent agencies are much more expensive, books using two or more narrators increase narration costs, or other types of situations.

Cost example

- A book is 80,000 words
- $80,000 / 9300 = 8.6$ hours for the audiobook
- $8.6 \text{ hours} \times \$350 \text{ per hour} = \$2,580$ for production cost (includes contracted narrator)

Once the audiobook is published, what factors affect the audiobook sales?

- Content of the book itself: A best-selling print book will likely be a best selling audiobook if the narration is good. Likewise, a book that does not sell well will likely have low sales for audiobooks.
- Genre: Some genres are more popular than others. Authors who write in the “hot” genres will sell more audiobooks than authors who write in less popular genres.
- Marketing: Like with any product, more and better marketing will result in better sales. This will be true for authors, publishers, and digital download sites equally.
- Narrator: Choosing a great narrator can really make an audiobook come alive and get a lot more people talking positively about it. Poor narration can be a big distraction to the success of the story.

To get an idea what authors experience with their audiobooks sales, Davis Sound polled several authors who have multiple books published and have had audiobooks released for at least one year. Here are some of their comments.

- Audible often promotes books. So if Audible promotes more than the print/e-books, audiobooks could outsell print/e-book sales. If marketing is done equally on both print/e-book and audiobooks, audiobooks sales can be anywhere from 15% to 100% of print/e-book sales volume.
- Series books tend to sell better than individual books.
- With series, audiobook sales will be higher if all books in the series have been made into audiobooks. If a listener knows that all books will be released in audio, they are more likely to start buying them from the beginning of the series.
- Audiobooks have a longer life than e-books or print books. Audio sales will taper over time for a given title, but the taper is slower and doesn't drop as far as e-book sales.
- All authors polled with multiple books published find audiobooks a great addition to their income stream.
- Audiobooks are not as likely to get caught up in seasonal sales cycles.
- Audiobooks open up new markets from “non-readers” or people who are too busy to read.
- One author “suggested that authors take the idea of investing in audiobooks VERY seriously if they intend to write full time.”

For more detailed explanations of any of these topics, or for more general information on producing your audiobook, contact Davis Sound at 612-968-3384 or by email at business@davissound.net.