



An invitation from the ACTRA Toronto Voice Committee
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TUESDAY
APRIL 28TH
1:00 PM

Penguin
Random
House

WEBINAR

Connect with Ahab – Penguin Random House's online performer database

ACTRA Toronto members and industry partners are invited to a free webinar on Ahab – Penguin Random House Audio's online performer database for audiobook narrators. The publisher is hosting this webinar specifically for ACTRA Toronto audiobook narrators and talent agents, thanks to outreach work done by the Audiobook Subcommittee of the ACTRA Toronto Voice Committee.

During this difficult time, Penguin Random House Audio has been working very closely with the acting community in the US to continue to keep actors working in this time of crisis. Our internal casting platform, Ahab, has been an important way for our team to connect actors with audiobook decision makers at Penguin Random House, and in the future, with other content creators in the voice over industry.

The platform will re-launch on May 4th and offer actors a variety of new features such as Auditions, Offers from Content Creators, and Samples for additional voiceover categories.

Our colleagues at Penguin Random House Canada are already actively using Ahab to find and hire talent, and we are excited to share how the platform can be a useful tool for ACTRA members and their agents. We will be offering insights into how actors can maximize their profile, navigate the new platform, and get hired.

This informational webinar is free for ACTRA members.

Tuesday, Apr 28, 2020 1:00 PM

1 hour | (UTC-04:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)



JULIE WILSON is an Award-Winning Senior Executive Producer and Senior Manager of Digital Production Platforms at Penguin Random House Audio. She has produced over a thousand audiobooks for adults and kids, including several graphic novel adaptations and is the co-creator of www.Ahab.us, PRH Audio's online narrator database and casting platform.



DAN ZITT is Senior Vice President of Content Production for Penguin Random House Audio US, the creator of Ahab.us and currently leads a bi-coastal production team that produces more than 1,600 audiobooks a year. Twenty of his recordings have been nominated for Grammy Awards, with former President Bill Clinton's autobiography, *My Life*, Carrie Fisher's *The Princess Diarist*, and Michele Obama's memoir *Becoming* all winning the award for Best Spoken Word Album.

DAN ZITT:

So, first thing, I want to thank ACTRA Toronto for helping us to set this up. We have been working with them for a while about doing something up in Canada related to audiobooks and the marketplace for this... and it is growing. And thanks to our colleagues at Penguin Random House Audio Canada for being on board with us.

The other thing I wanted to mention is I hope that everyone is safe and healthy. I know it's a difficult time for everyone right now... being quarantined and staying home, both here and in Canada.

The silver lining for us with actors is... I know a lot of actors are at home and have not been able to be on stage and do the things that help them make money. And we think it's really important for you all to know that audiobooks are still being recorded and produced and we will be doing that through all of the Covid pandemic. So, I think it's important that we keep actors working in the US and in Canada and around the world. In the acting community we spent a lot of time with our colleagues in Canada and in the US talking about these very things.

So, hopefully the audiobook market will continue to grow in Canada, but we are still

recording as you can see in this presentation a lot of audiobooks in the US and around the world. That's just one part of this. But seeing how Ahab works will illustrate some functionalities that can help us all connect in this time.

During this presentation, Julie Wilson and another of our producers, Molly, will be collecting questions through the Chat feature and Q&A functions on your screen.

So, Jules, why don't you jump into the presentation.

JULIE:

Thanks. At the end of our presentation we're going to try to answer as many questions as we can.

I just wanted to mention that Dan now oversees 14 producers. We have just brought on board two new producers. And Molly Lo Re is one of them.

And Molly is going to be managing our whole Q&A section and she helped us put this all together. So, she is on here too.

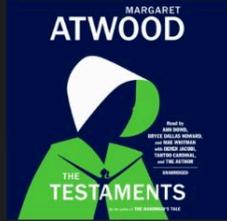
So, let's get this presentation up and running.

**What makes
a great audiobook,
or a great narrator?**

How do you define “the perfect voice”?

What is our job as publishers and producers of audio work?

The right casting can add substantial visibility to the publication, thus growing appreciation for the format



DAN (responding to the first PowerPoint Slide in the presentation):

So, “Audiobooks” and generally how, in the US, they have grown over time and why that is important to the Canadian marketplace.

I always like to start presentations with, “What makes a great audiobook?” and “What makes a great narrator?” and “How do you define the perfect voice?”

And you know if I brought this question to my 14 producers in-house around the world that work with Penguin Random House and other companies, I think that you would probably get 14 different answers from the producers.

The way we would define what a great audiobook is or what a great narrator is...

I always think that this would be a common theme:

A great story, authentically told, by someone who can tell a compelling story.

And I think that’s one thing we can always agree on with the actual audiobook productions that we do.

What our job as publishers and producers of audiobook work – We have 14 producers at Penguin Random House – one of the largest production teams in the world.

And I have always said that the producer’s job is to be the liaison between the author’s voice and what they hear in their head, and what we actually record in the studio.

So, our producers work very closely with talent and our authors to make sure that what that author hears in their head is actually being recorded on audio. And if you can actually marry those two things together you can really raise the profile of the audiobook format. And we have seen that widely in the US over the last twenty years.

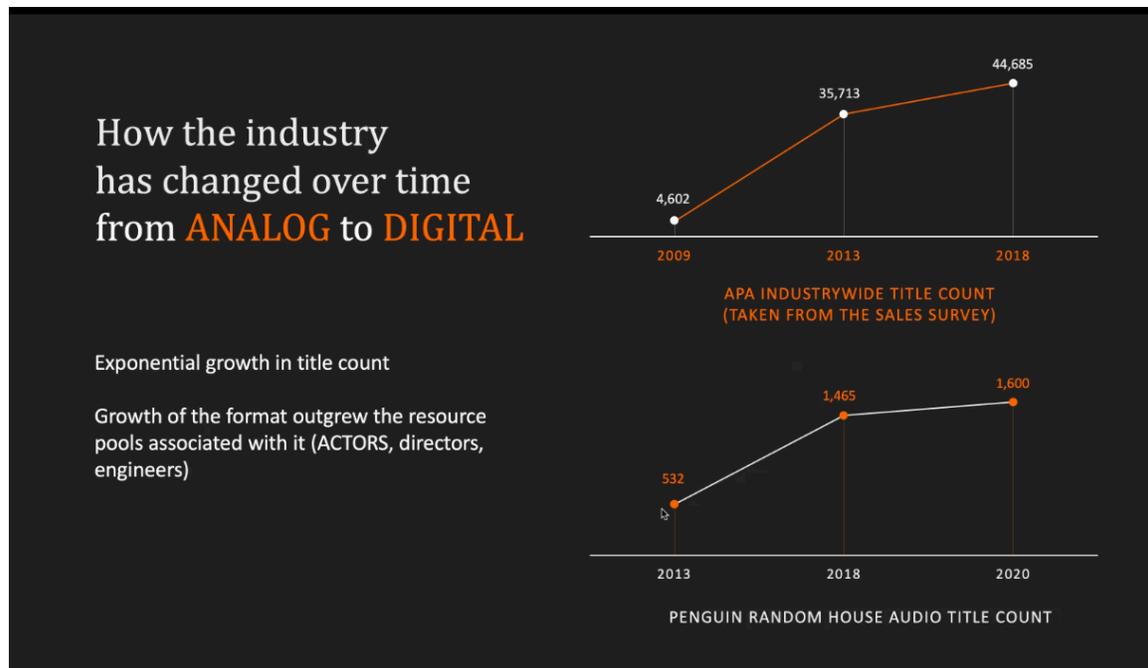
And I have put a few examples of that on this slide.

One is not an actor reading it... but I think it's an important Book – "*Becoming*" by Michelle Obama, which recorded last year. It is just one of those books that is a beautiful beautiful story, and nobody could have told that story besides Mrs. Obama. It is her story and she is one of the best storytellers that you are ever going to hear behind a microphone. It was perfectly cast, in that nobody could have told that story but her. And that really did raise the profile of audiobooks around the world last year.

The "*Beastie Boys*" book, which, if any of you have heard... It is the remaining members of the Beastie Boys reading their story. But there are also 40 musicians and actors and celebrities and media figures who are a part of that recording, and it really did help enhance the audiobook industry last year in terms of people recognizing the format.

And then something that's much more relevant to us in talking to actors is Margaret Atwood's "*The Testaments*."

And this is the perfect example of us working very closely with Margaret Atwood, to cast the right voices for each of the characters in this book, including Ann Dowd and Derek Jacobi, Tantoo Cardinal. And this is one of those books that really does elevate the experience of the listener, when you hear someone who is perfectly cast for the specific roles.



DAN:

So, I don't want to hit you over the head with too many numbers but I think this slide is important for two different reasons. Especially in the Canadian market.

The first is, if you can look at the exponential growth in Title count that publishers have produced over the last 10 years. Ten years ago, we were producing 4600 audiobooks in the US, and in 2018 we almost did 45,000.

And, as I've mentioned, this is important because, although the Canadian marketplace is still kind of in its infancy in terms of the audiobook market, I think as we have seen in the UK and in Germany, in Spain and all around the world, this medium is going to grow in Canada. And the reason I like to bring this up is because... as it will grow, we are going to need more and more actors to narrate books, in Canada and around the world. So, it's really important for you to think about this industry as an industry that is growing significantly. The other thing to show is just how our title count has grown. In the last seven years we've gone from 532 books and now I think that number in 2020 is going to be closer to 1700 audiobooks.

So, as we have been growing as a division at Penguin Random House, one of the challenges we have faced and I think Canada will face the same – I think it is part of the reason we are talking about this – is that our research tools associated with recording audiobooks needed to grow as our audiobook title count did. So, that meant we needed more directors, we needed more engineers, we needed more quality control personnel, editors and recording studios, and most importantly we needed a lot more actors to help support the 1600-plus audiobooks we're going to record.

**Listeners now have
incredibly high standards**

- More multi-voice productions
- Diverse/authentic voices
 - When Stars Are Scattered, There There, The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora
- Languages and dialects
 - Farsi (Darius the Great is Not Okay), Muckleshoot (URS: Sasquatch and the Muckleshoot), more Spanish language audio publishing (Juego de tronos, La chica salvaje, El poder de los hábitos)

The slide features a grid of audiobook covers including: EL PODER DE LOS HÁBITOS, JUEGO DE TRONOS, EL UNICORN RESCUE SOCIETY, THE EPIC FAIL OF ARTURO ZAMORA, DARIUS THE GREAT IS NOT OKAY, THERE THERE, TESTAMENTS, LA CHICA SALVAJE, WHEN STARS ARE SCATTERED, DAISY JONES AND THE SIX, and LINCOLN IN THE BARD.

So, another thing to mention about audiobook listeners... When I started in this industry over 20 years ago, there were a lot of audiobooks being recording in people’s closets, among their clothes. And the recording level, what the actual sound was, was not all that great 25 or 30 years ago. But we had the luxury of growing slowly in the US and the sound quality got better and better. And now we are at the point where the sound quality is at its highest level. It’s really important to think about that in the Canadian market, because you are not going to have the luxury of a growing marketplace using analog tape and building up to what we consider to be really high quality digital recording.

So, that is something to think about.

But the other thing to think about here is, yeah, we are recording 1600 + audiobooks in the US right now, but many of those books are multi-voice productions.

Margaret Atwood’s book had several narrators on it. As you can see from some of these slides, the best example we always give from our catalog is “*Lincoln in the Bardo*,” which we recorded a couple of years ago, which had 166 distinct voices in it. So, that is a lot of work to cast and record.

But we are doing multi-voice cast books. So, although we’re doing 1600+ books, we might be casting three thousand actors in a year, depending how many voices are needed for these books.

Another thing that is really important and a reason why we’re trying to grow our talent pool exponentially along with the title list, is because we are seeing a rise in diverse and authentic voices needed for our authors. Our authors are writing about characters that

are increasingly more diverse, and that is a wonderful thing for the publishing industry. And we really want to cast those roles authentically. So, trying to find and reach a wider net of actors in order to cast books authentically is really important to us.

There is a good example on here – and Julie produced this book – it’s called “*When Stars Are Scattered*,” which is a graphic novel that we adapted into an audio edition from the point of view of a Somalian refugee. And, you know, if we weren’t able to cast a much wider net than we had traditionally been able to do, it would have been a real challenge casting that book. But we are casting increasingly more diverse and authentic voices. So, when we talk about Ahab, we’ll talk a little bit more about that.

And then also, books that have a lot of different languages in them: Farsi, Spanish. And tons of other accents and dialects. It’s really important for us to be authentic when we cast for those things. And increasingly, we’re recording more and more Spanish language titles. So, we are casting several hundred audiobooks in Spanish and will continue to do that. I think that is another growth opportunity in the audiobook industry. As you can see it is just getting bigger and bigger.

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So, now we get closer to what we want to talk about with Ahab.

And how did our team at Penguin Random House cast of our books over the past 20 years?

And these were the traditional ways of casting which got increasingly more challenging for us as the growth of the industry exploded. It was what I would call the “analog” way of casting. And we still do a lot of these things. But as you’ll see when Jules starts to show you what Ahab will look like, we are trying to take a lot of the things and the interactions we have had while we were casting books over the last 20 years and put them into a more digital format, into a digital platform.

So, agent collaboration is very important to us. But we did hustle. Casting audiobooks over the last twenty years has been a lot of phone calls. In person auditions. Word-of-mouth among producers and actors, and other casting professions. Searching online – just shot-in-the-dark. CD demos. For those of you who still know what compact discs are, we got a *lot* of those over the years. Box folders of samples.

And it’s important to know that we haven’t lost a lot of these connections, although we don’t really want you to send us a CD Demo any more. But we certainly are doing all of these things still. We are hoping to push all of these into a more efficient way of working for actors, agents and our producers at Penguin Random House.

So, how did we begin to transition out of this analog way of processing?

Several years ago, I was walking into the office and I saw this kind of giant basket of resumes and CDs and photos of actors – I don't know why a lot of actors send in photos for audiobook jobs, but they do.

And my email box was getting overrun with emails from actors all over the world saying, "How can I work in audiobooks? Here is my demo."

And I was sitting back thinking, "There has got to be an easier way to take all of this information and put it into a place where my producer team can search for it more efficiently, and understand who is out there in the world."

In many ways, I wanted to kind of democratize the casting process. Because there was a wall between, I think, actors and people who were producing audiobooks. There are only so many actors in the world that can actually get right in front of a casting professional and say, "Hey, look at my resume and listen to my samples."

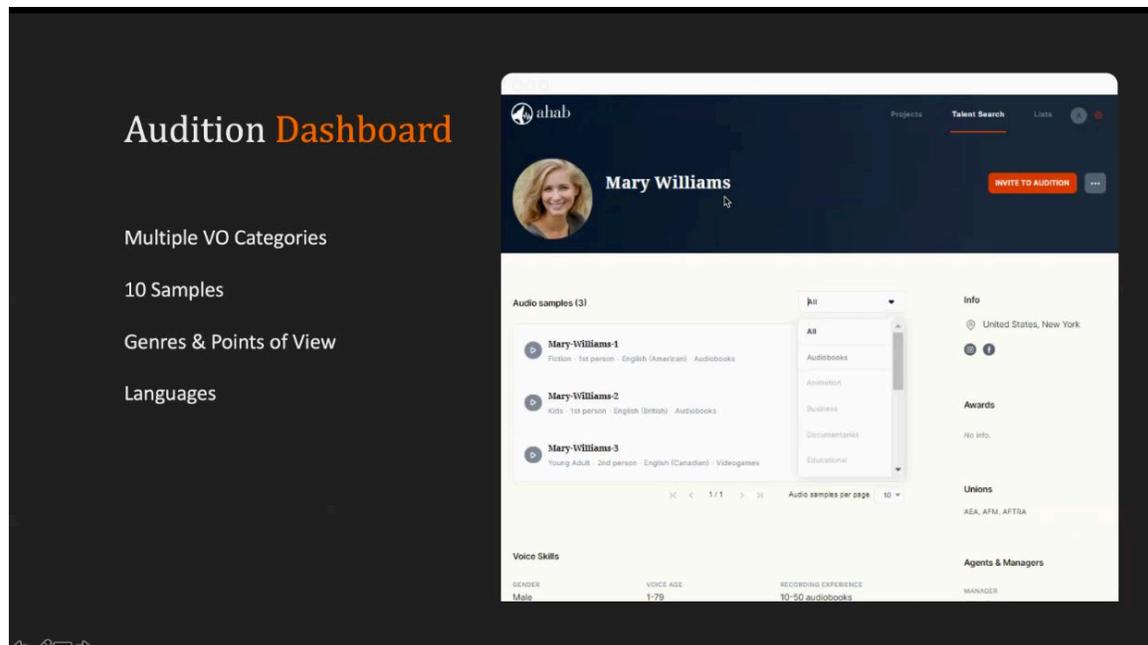
And I wanted to make a way that actors could actually put all of that stuff in one place. And producers can access it more readily.

So, we built the first online database for Penguin Random House in the US: it was called Ahab.us. It helped us increase the discoverability of actors and search-ability for actors, so that we could narrow down our casting choices with fewer numbers of choices while we were out there casting a net. And it just became a lot more efficient for us as producers to be able to search for actors in a specific location, or actors who can do specific dialects, or spoke certain languages.

So, it built us a worldwide network of voices, around the world in over 10 countries... and that is just growing.

It has not only helped and is going to help our US team. But now this tool is being used by Penguin Random House worldwide. So, our colleagues in India and our colleagues in Australia, and our colleagues in the UK, who are all casting books are using this platform. So, it has been a really great development for us.

And now Julie is going to tell you all about where it is going. Because it is no longer a database. We have built it into something that can help us cast even more audiobooks than we are now.



JULIE WILSON:

Hey Guys! So, I will take it from here for a little while.

I did see a question pop up asking what “Ahab” stands for?

Ahab is not an acronym. It is inspired by Captain Ahab and his search for the white whale. So, we could think of it as a producer’s search for the perfect voice.

I don’t know how many of you guys have Ahab profiles yet, or if you are brand-new to platform. I will start by giving you a little snapshot of where we are and where we are going.

Ahab has been essentially our version of a Facebook-meets-LinkedIn for audiobook talent.

If you are an actor, that means that you create a profile and you fill in any number of fields about your various skill sets and talents. That might mean:

- any accents that you can do
- what age ranges you can perform
- what languages you are comfortable with.
- Have you won any awards?
- Have you been recognized in any other way?

And from a producer’s perspective, it has a very catered search tool that allows us to search through all of these fields to find the perfect voice for every book.

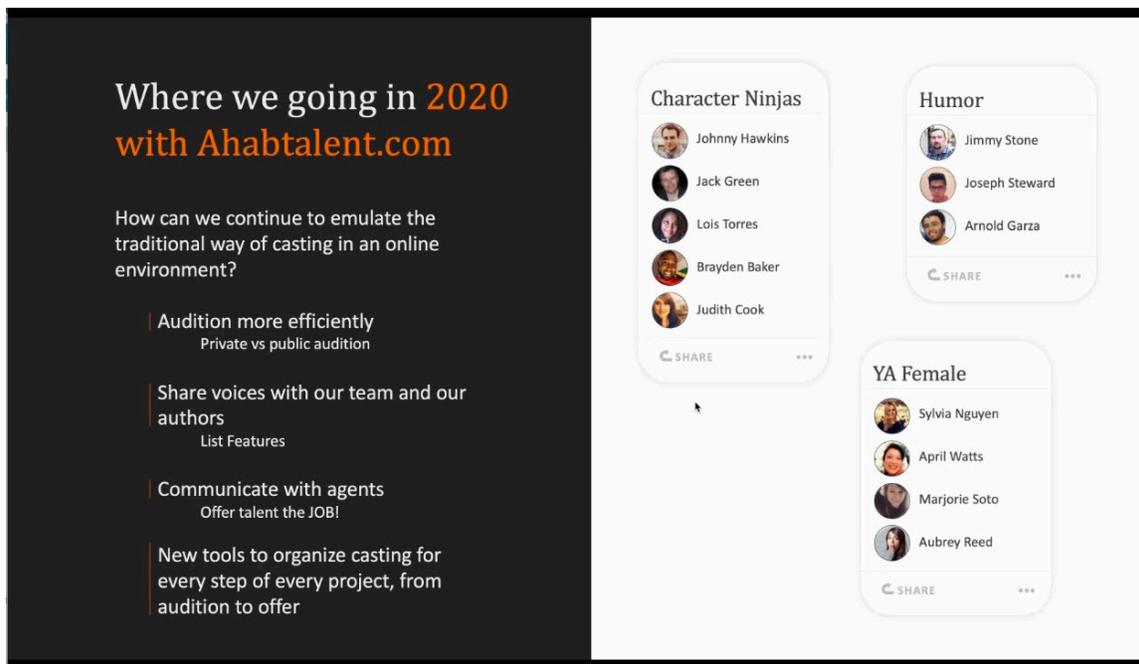
And, like Dan said, our books in the US especially. And from talking to Ann Jansen, our colleague who heads up the audio team in Toronto, I know that their books are also getting more and more diverse. And so, this tool has really, really helped us.

Some ways that I would do casting before all of this came online... I would look at award winners from the previous year. Anyone who has won an *Audie* award, which is our industry’s major award of the year. Or I would go into our competitors’ website and see which actors they were hiring.

But this is a much more catered search tool. It does allow us to cast more efficiently.

And, so far, it has also allowed us to share voices between colleagues.

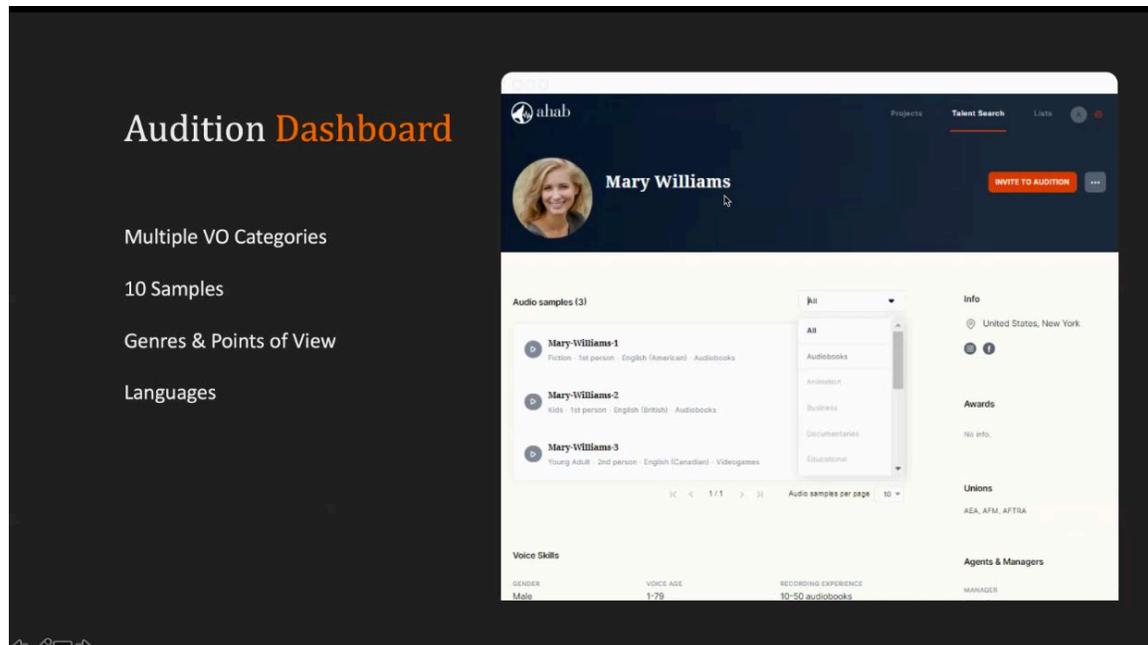
During normal times, when we were in an office together, we were able to have conversations and share ideas and talk about whom to cast for various books. But, using Ahab, we are able to share talent profiles, as well as a share lists of actors.



You will see, on the right-hand side, that these are a few of my lists, or at least the fake lists to demonstrate the types of lists I do have. In this example I have “Character Ninjas.” I really admire actors who can do any number of voices. Some people are really really good at that. So, I have a list of actors titled “Character Ninjas” that I can share with various producers. And those are really useful for me, if I am casting a book written in the third person narrative. Because that might require someone to do any number of character voices and accents. If I have characters of all different ages, it has been a

really useful tool for us, so far. A great organizational tool. But we have some very exciting features that are launching on Monday, May 4.

And just before we get into those things, I do want to let you know, if you have a profile currently, you won't be able to edit your profile until we re-launch on May 4. But, if you are brand-new to the platform, you can go to ahabtalent.com and create a profile in the system. So, you will get a little bit of a sneak peak if you are a new user, to where we are all going with this.



I would like to walk you through two slides. I don't want to overwhelm you with too much information or too many slides, because I find that it can be a little overwhelming until you actually "get your hands dirty" in the platform – and dig in to creating your own profile.

So, for instance, this is an actor's profile. (see slide above)

What you will see here are their audiobook samples.

And now, since we have spent a lot of time talking to actors, to agents and to casting professionals about what their needs are, because our goal has always been to make this into an ecosystem that works well for everyone. We have heard of some platforms in the past that kind of left a bad taste in people's mouth so, we definitely didn't want to do that.

One thing that we decided to do with this iteration of the ahabtalent.com site was to not only allow you to upload 10 clips of audiobook samples – and that can be books that you have recorded previously, or, if you have yet to record an audiobook, then it is

totally fine to record samples in your home studio or even via your smart phone in a very quiet room – and upload those to your profile. So, don't feel that if you haven't worked yet, that that prohibits you from uploading samples to this site. Personally, I listen to a ton of audiobooks as well as produce them, and I always love trying out new narrators. And that's not only important as we need new voices and we need a diverse array of new voices, but also I think it is important creatively to hear different voices out there in the audiobook world.

So, you are able to upload audiobook samples...

But also, we want to know you from a big picture point of view:

- Who are you in voiceover in general?
- What can you do in animation?
- What can you do in videogames?
- What can you do in commercial voiceover?

So, now you will be able to upload samples for any of those categories. And where we are building to for the summer... We are going to be opening up the platform as a subscription service to other publishers and casting professionals.

So, the site will remain completely free for actors, but other casting professionals will be able to cast their books or videogames or animation or anything from the platform.

So, we are really excited to open that.

And as Dan said, since we're doing 1700 audiobooks this year... that is a big chunk of work. So, by opening up the site to more casting professionals we are hoping to open to other kinds of work as well.

Something that is really cool and different from the old site is that you are now able to label your samples with whatever genre it is.

- Is it fiction?
- Is it first-person?
- Are you performing it with an English, American dialect?
- Is that the language that you are using? Or others?
- And you are also able to select the category?

[Technical note... Molly makes a note to attendees about the phone number to call into the meeting with your cell phone number.]

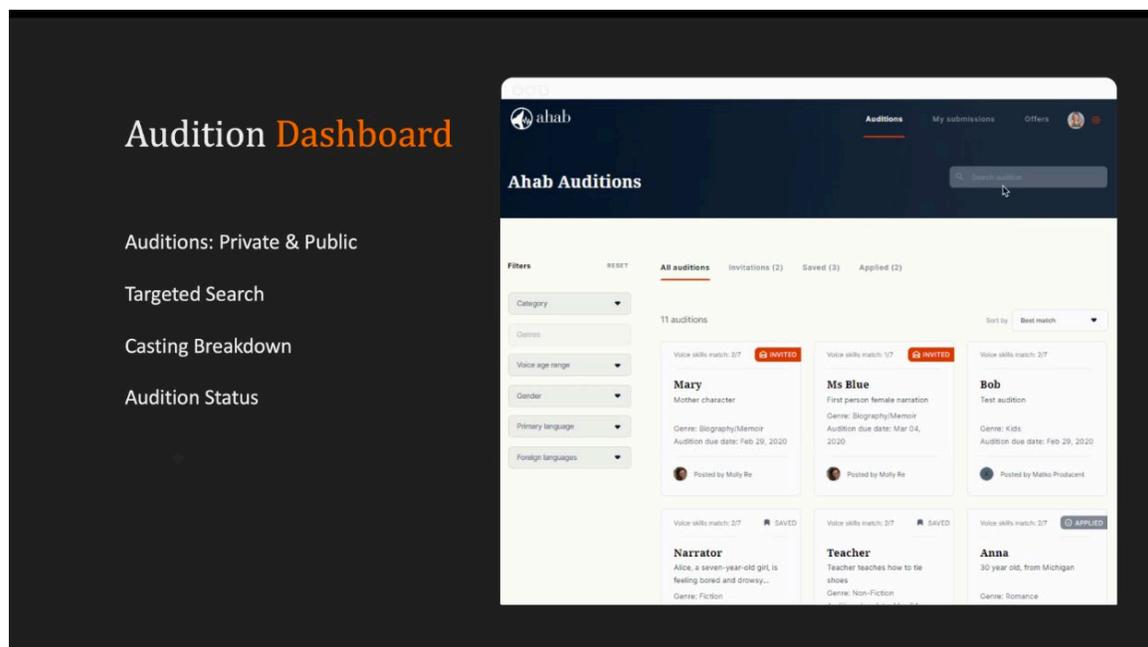
JULIE:

So, what is really cool about these samples as well, is that audiobook producers and casting professionals can now use our search tool to search for specific clips.

So, if they only want to see audiobook clips or if they are interested in actors who love working in a specific genre, they can search a profile for that too.

You will see this slide shows a profile on the screen from a producer or a content creator's Point-Of-View, because you will see this big orange button on the right-hand side which is <<INVITE TO AUDITION>>.

So, what I will bring you to in the next screen, is that you will see the whole audition dashboard. So, I can quickly and easily invite you to an audition. Or if I click on these three DOTS, I'm able to share your profile with other content producers, or add you to a LIST, as I spoke about earlier.



As an actor, when you create a profile today, or any time in the future, or if you already have a profile and it's migrated over on May 4th... When you log in, this is what you're going to see. And this is your AUDITION DASHBOARD.

And what is truly exciting about all of this, is that we have never before been able to host auditions online. And streamline that process.

So, what you will see under this first Tab <<ALL AUDITIONS>> is anything that is a public audition or private audition.

What that means is, as a producer, I can either

- Host a **public** audition via the platform, which is open to anybody in the database... anybody whose criteria matches the breakdown or who is interested in applying

OR

- If there are a few key voices – three or five or ten – who I think are really well suited for a role, I can select them **privately** and just invite them to an audition.

And then, in this next tab, <<INVITATIONS>>, that is only going to be your private auditions. For instance, anything that Dan or I or any of the other producers have invited you to privately.

The <<SAVE>> tab, I find this really cool. It kind of reminds me of online shopping – if you see a dress or something that you're kind of interested in but don't want to pull the trigger on quite yet.

If you are on your phone and you find an audition that you really want to apply to but you are in the middle of...I don't know... maybe someday again and we will find ourselves in the middle of a busy traffic area, or in a car going someplace really cool and you find an audition at that moment ... then you can SAVE it till later.

And then once you are back in your home or studio, you can apply to it then.

And <<APPLIED>> is great, as it helps you to keep track of anything that you have already applied to... and wait and see if it has been cast, or if you're still waiting to see if it will be cast. So, you are able to keep track of it there.

And the general **NAVIGATION** bar, you will see that there is a <<SUBMISSIONS>> tab.

And we are really excited about that because that will enable you to track all of your submissions throughout all of time on this site. And you can see which producers you have been submitting to regularly, also the samples you have submitted in the past.

I think that is really cool because on the content creator side we are going to have this whole project management function, where we are able to keep track of auditions and projects. And for you guys, you are going to be able to keep track of all of your auditions.

And, of course <<OFFERS>>.

We are going to be able to make offers directly via the platform. So, you are going to be able to click on that OFFER menu and see anything that you have been offered. And you will also be getting an email simultaneously. So, don't worry. You won't miss any offers, as long as you have signed up for communications. Just make sure to do that.

The last thing that I will tell you ... is that this FILTER section is really neat.

Hopefully as our producers get onto the new version of this site, and we open it up to other content creators and casting professionals, there will be tons and tons and tons of auditions on here.

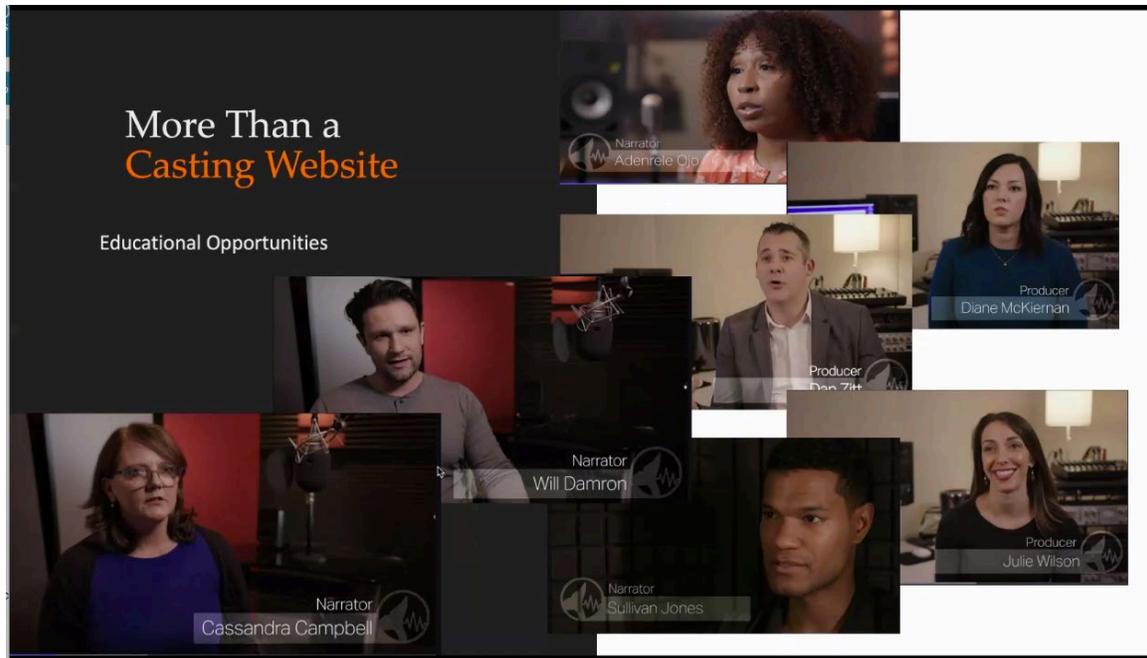
But you might not be best suited for all of them. So, there are two things I can tell you about that. There is this thing called voice skills match. It looks like whoever I am playing at this moment, the one I've pulled as an example as being the actor looking at this audition ... she is only a 2 out of 7, and 2 out of 7 isn't great. It is a way of looking at fields in your profile versus the fields in the audition and saying that you are a really, really good fit for this and that you are a seven out of seven (7/7), as opposed to another project where you might be a one out of seven (1/7)

And therefore, maybe not the best fit for this audition.

And in FILTERS, you are also able to search for the projects that you may be interested in.

For instance, it may be a certain category of voiceover work that you are interested in. Or you might want to do something with a specific foreign language.

So, it will really help you cater your search.



And the last thing that I want to tell you about, that Dan and I are really excited about...

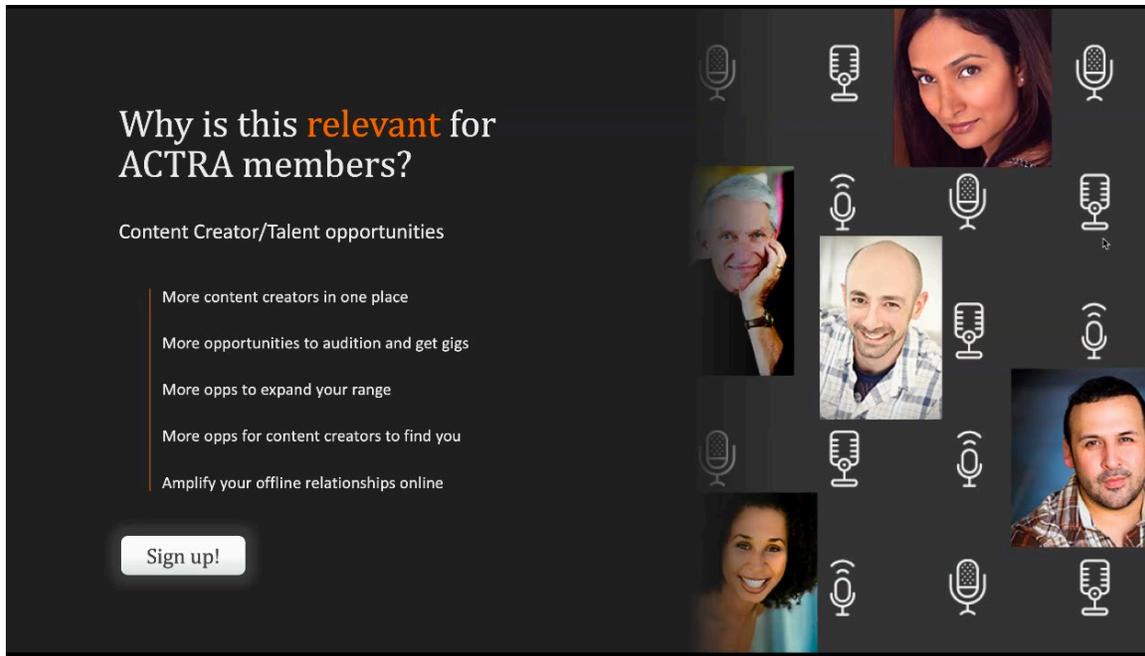
We decided – because we know that the audiobook industry is new to so many people and there is so much work in it happening right now – we wanted to create a RESOURCES section... a free resources section.

As long as you have a profile you will be able to view it.

And these are videos from actors and producers all across the industry. Anything from how to prepare for a session, to what to expect in the studio and tips and tricks.

And what not to do.

We thought this was great because it combines a lot of knowledge and the input of many different voices and people. And we're going to put it all in one place so you guys can watch all those videos and really get a sense for what the audiobook industry is.



Finally, I hope it is self-explanatory why this is all relevant to you guys. As Dan mentioned, the Canadian market is starting to grow. I know our Canadian colleagues are doing around a 100 titles right now but, if you're on Ahab, your profile will be visible to all those producers that Dan mentioned earlier, the ones in the US, Canada, UK, Australia, Spain, India, etc...

So, just as this tool has been really useful for us in streamlining our workflow, it has also, I think, been working hand-in-hand and hopefully making it really easy for you guys to be found.

In the past a lot of actors have sent us email updates about which projects they're working on and which skills they've been developing. But the truth is that now you can just keep your profile up to date. And we can see everything you're working on.

If we've worked with you before, we can see any talent and new skills you've acquired. And if you're brand new to us, we can find you right on there.

I always like to say this is an online tool so it is really important to attend all of the workshops and the conferences and the audiobook meet-ups that you can, in order to meet the casting professionals.

I know that Dan just mentioned this in the chat box, but, yes, access to Ahab is completely free for actors.

We did not want to build this on backs actors. It really is first and foremost a primary tool for us to use in casting.

It has been very useful for us. I hope that you guys find it really useful.

We are going to open this up to questions.

But I do want to flash our email addresses on the screen.

As well as the customer service inbox / email

If you have any technical questions then you can forward those over to Ahab support and they'll get right back to you. We'll have a member of our team around to answer those questions every single day. And then our URL is also on the screen.

<https://ahabtalent.com/login>

DAN:

Before we jump into questions, one thing that I did want to reiterate... What Julie said is so true. As we have been building this platform, we have been trying to bring together input from all of the people that we have been talking to and considering all those we have worked with over the years.

I know there are some platforms that are built by engineers who just say that they want to charge actors a thousand dollars per year and maybe they will get work from participating.

As we have been building this platform internally – and before we went into development – we spent a lot of time sitting with the major agents and much smaller agencies in the US. Julie and I spent a lot of time up in Canada, traveling around talking to agents in Canada about their needs, as agents. And we were talking to the acting community about what is important to them... and producers, obviously, because producers are the ones making a lot of these casting choices.

So, as we continue to develop this platform – yes, development does take time, and it is very expensive for us to build, especially because we're not charging actors for this – we are going to continue to encourage dialogue with everyone that is working in this industry, whether they are casting professionals, actors or agents, to try to just continue to make the system work for everyone.

You know, we have never been... we are not a publisher who has ever worked unilaterally and said, "We're not going to work with actors who don't have agents." We work with agents every single day. So, agents will be part of this conversation and will be part of the system. And as they work, their needs will be in the back of our minds as well. Because obviously, it is a major part of the ecosystem we all work in.

JULIE:

And just as some of this is so intuitive to Dan and myself, there may be something, some details that we leave out of the conversation. And if you do have an agent, it is really important that you put their information into the profile you create.

You have the option to click <<CONTACT DIRECTLY>> If you are unrepresented.

Or, if you have an agent who represents your audiobook work, then you can click the box that says <<CONTACT VIA AGENT>>.

And that means all correspondence will go through your agents.

We don't want to get in the middle of your relationships – we want to keep those channels working well. So, it is important for us to continue the support of those.

And then there were two other things that I wanted to mention.

First, your profile is completely word searchable.

And what I really love about that is, for instance, perhaps I am casting a book where someone's knowledge of Shakespeare is really important, or if I want someone who is very well-versed in physics... I can search for any keyword and see what happens. For instance, to see what pulls from your general knowledge field.

So, you have a BIO and a GENERAL KNOWLEDGE field.

And those are fill- in fields where you can write whatever you want.

I highly recommend in the General Knowledge field that you tell us about yourself *outside* of being in the audiobook industry, or beyond VoiceOver or this acting-specific industry. Because, I really like the personal investment that it creates.

For instance, if I'm casting someone and it is a book about Opera, and this person grew up as an Opera singer or their mother was an opera singer, it creates this really nice synergy between the project and the actor and the producer and director.

MOLLY – taking questions:

Dan and Julie, the question is:

“If I don't have an agent or I'm between agents...

Could you describe how the system would work for me as well?

DAN:

If you are between agents and you don't have one listed that is perfectly fine, as long as you tell us to Contact you directly. We will do that. As Julie mentioned, if you have an agent and you want us to go through your agent, there is plenty of room in the new site for you to list every possible agent you work with. Whether it's for theatre or for film/TV or for voice over or whatever. Again, we want you to have as much information on the site as possible. So, that we make the appropriate connection when we work to cast you.

MOLLY:

Can you go over people who have profiles – do you have to wait?

JULIE:

I know the next few days may be a little confusing, but the profiles are essentially frozen at the moment. The reason is that we have to download it all and move it into the new site.

Starting on May 4th, when you log in at ahabtalent.com

You're going to have to

LOG IN

CREATE A NEW PASSWORD

And then you'll have free reign to edit, to UPLOAD to Auditions.

So, May 4th is the key date there.

For anyone who doesn't have a profile yet, you're able to go to ahabtalent.com and create a profile at any time.

All of your data will exist fresh in the new site.

Question from Agent Noelle Jenkinson from AMI:

I wanted to ask you, how can agents denote what people are on their rosters?

Is there a way for agents to access?

JULIE:

So, we are still in the development for the launch of this new site.

We are over a year and a half, but as we said, agents are really important to us, So, for the next iteration of this site that is coming around July, with that, Agents will be able to create profiles and when they log in, they'll be able to see their entire roster of clients who have uploaded profiles to this system.

How that works is that they (actors) have to input your email into their profile and so, that will link it to your account, as their agent.

And you'll also be able to view any of your clients' profiles so you'll be able to see what they have uploaded.

For instance, if you want them to upload something or tweak something – so, you'll have that visibility as well.

UNKNOWN ATTENDEE QUESTION:

Can you speak to, if someone has done voice work but not in audiobooks, what tips and tricks you have to jump into audiobooks as a union member?

DAN:

You know, this is going to be one of the more interesting parts of the site.

When we started to develop this for audiobook purposes, and as we tried to build it out, we realized, "You know, there are so many great audiobook narrators that don't go into other segments of voice work. And conversely, there are a lot of great Voiceover performers who do other aspects that we haven't even brought to the audiobook world."

So, the first thing I tell people who haven't yet worked in the format (who haven't been in the audiobook world) is to start listening to audiobooks because the work you do in other formats, the things you do... those are going to be far different from what we do in audiobook storytelling.

I mean, look. A lot of it is storytelling. Stylistically, it is different. Quite honestly, the longevity of your recordings is going to be much different. I just recorded four or five 28-hour-plus books, over the last two months.

So, the first thing I would say to do is listen.

As Jules mentioned earlier in the presentation, we are going to have a lot of educational resources... at first from the audiobook side of things, because that is our level of expertise. We hope that you will all log-on and watch some of those videos.

There are a ton of resources for actors, especially in the US, if you are going to the APA - (*Audio Publishers Association*) website, and just reaching out to the acting community of actors who have recorded audiobooks. Most importantly it is ... Listen to Audiobooks.

That is the path that I suggest, listen to audiobooks. Listen to audiobooks read by people who know what they're doing. Usually, you can find that by searching for people who have read many, many audiobooks over the years. But the more you listen, the better you will get.

JULIE:

I will also say, expect it to be different. Audiobook narration is a particular craft in the way that... people who love it really, really love it. And there are people who just don't take to it. You know, it is long form content. So, often people are recording in a booth for three or four or five days a week. Eight hours a day with breaks and with lunch. But it is reading aloud for a living. And to some people that is fantastic. I personally love directing audiobooks. I am also a high-energy person: I like moving around a lot. So, being in a booth for that amount of time can be really difficult for me. And don't be too hard on yourself if you have an adjustment time. If you are used to recording short snippets of VO for videogames or animation or something that is more short form content, that is okay

DAN:

And what every actor says to me over the years is, "I love doing theater and I love doing videogames and all of these other things, but what I love about audiobooks is that I get to play all of the characters."

It is great for actors to get to practice and work on their range while they are recording audiobooks.

JULIE:

And also...

UNKONWN ATTENDEE:

So, to confirm... Ahab is a resource for agents, it is for Ahab ... for the producers to get the client request and then look at what the math would be?

JULIE:

So, we built the system based on our own internal work. Based on how we work internally and how we go out to look for talent. Now, I will say that our relationship with agents is so important, and it's really important to continue to exchange emails with the agents we've known and met with because I love it when agents reach out and say,

these are five actors on my roster that I think would be great to pay attention to at the Ahab URL. Again, it is an online tool and it is really useful for us, but that does not take away from any of these off-line relationships with phone calls and emails that we are having with you directly. For instance, we may reach out to you that we want to make an offer to one of your clients, and we could hear, “Sure, I’ll get you an audition from them but you might also want to listen to this other person.” So, those conversations are happening and continue to be really important to us.

ATTENDEE:

So, in July, though, is it true what will happen is that we will have an analytic, to look and see who has been looked at? Is that the idea of the July rollout?

DAN:

We’re still looking at the MVP version in July.

The whole next step in this process...

The first step was trying to get our actors access to the producers. And obviously, their agents are part of the process, they will be able to manage that. But now that we’re into the phase that is next... we are exploring how do we bridge that gap and manage communications, letting them see what jobs there are? So, we are working towards that. That is our hope for the next iteration site.

One thing I will say is that a lot of companies have stopped similar types of development, but our company really believes in this project and the direction that we’re taking it. Believe me...The first thing is; let’s get all of our actors in this platform and get interaction working with agents and actors. And now we can work on all of the other things. Again, it is important to us and it certainly is in our plans.

JULIE:

And it will not only let you know who in your roster is on our site, but also will let you see their profile and, again, tell them, “oh, will you please update this” or, for instance, “Remember that you can do a Spanish accent.” To have that on there.

I know that it is not you controlling their profile, which is how a lot of other systems work. We built this out of our workflow and how we work internally So, it was more proactive on the producers’ side, with all of that.

Stage mother – SUSAN with child actor:

Asking about children interacting with the site.

JULIE:

At the moment no. Because of laws, there are stipulations for working with minors, but we love working with kids when it is appropriate to the project. You could reach out to us directly if you wish to create an offline relationship ... or to Ahab support as well.

There is a lot less activity for children than adults, but it depends upon producers and publishing houses that work more with kids. It depends upon opening up to other publishing houses.

DAN:

Something to mention. This is a worldwide platform, so the laws of different countries will affect how the entire system works.

In our discussions with agents we reiterate that we are building this slower for a reason, to take into consideration ideas and functionality. That will affect our future iterations as well. Hopefully, it will take off but some elements such as finding safe and appropriate ways to be aware of talent representations for minors could potentially be considered in the long-term plans.

MOLLY:

I want to draw questions out of the chat stream because there are a lot of patient people who have asked questions – some are in the same theme.

Here is one:

“If narrators are going to be uploading samples, what should they be using?”

Any Tips & Tricks?

JULIE:

In addition to what has already been spoken about, I'll add that, unlike some other formats, we prefer specific clips that are from audiobook work and that are about a minute and a half long. (1 ½ minutes)

And the reason for that is that I'm pitching you to other authors and stakeholders, for the audiobook. We want to demonstrate how we are responsive to their material with specific clips in this format.

For instance, I might be working on a recording that would require a German accent and a Spanish accent for certain characters. So, I would want you to have a specific clip that demonstrates a Narrative that has a Spanish or French character or German character. Or I might be working on a kid's book and so I want you to upload a sample that

represents how well you can record Young Adult or Middle-Grade books. So, it is important for this to be specific.

In the new site you will be able to label the file and say if this is a:

- First Person point of view or a Third Person Point of view.
- What genre it is in?

So, being very specific is really important.

DAN:

And I would also say the samples – what I’ve observed in looking at so many profiles lately and in seeing the good and bad. And something that surprises me as a producer is that there is a guy who has read maybe 100 audiobooks, and his only two samples are just character voices of what he did in those books. And what I said earlier is true. We want storytellers. That is really important in the audiobook industry. You know the narrative part which is almost more important than all of the character voices that you work on with the director.

If you love good listens – for fun and as a performance mark – one of the most famous audiobooks produced is *Harry Potter* read by Jim Dale, and it is a book that people still talk about. Everybody always talks about those voices he did. I think he ended up with a world record for the number of voices that he did in those books. But the beauty of those books is really the narrative and the storytelling he did in-between those voices.

I mean, Jim is a master storyteller. You want to show that off when you Post your clips.

JULIE:

And adding onto that, although you’re able to fill in the First- or Third-Person and Genre, I would also say, “Label Your Clips Well.”

Because we’ve also seen really seasoned, wonderful narrators who just name their clips, “Julie 1” “Julie 2” “Julie 3”

And as a producer, that makes it more difficult for me to determine what is in that sample. So, you might want to put in:

FirstPerson_ManyCharacterVoices

Or

SpanishAccent

Or

... whatever it is that you want to demonstrate to us. This is your place to show off skills and really speak to the projects we're working on.

So, please be as specific and clear as possible.

MOLLY:

Julie and Dan, could you speak a little about normal recording practices, both in this time of Covid-19 and in normal times.

- Do we use Home studios?
- Do we stick to professional studios?
- Do you need a home studio to sign-up for an Ahab account?

DAN:

Well you certainly don't need a home studio to sign up for and Ahab account.

Part of the reason that we have been doing this outreach to actors is that we know that there are many actors who have home studios now. And obviously in certain geographical locations, it's really challenging to get into a commercial recording studio to record a book. With Covid-19, hopefully when they start lifting some of the stay-at-home orders and people are able to go out and record in studios again, then we will start to use those in the US and Canada. We have our own facilities in the US and Canada, but in the current climate, we really are trying to work in home studios just to keep everyone safe. So, that's what I would say right now. I don't think that will be forever. But I think in the past... I think the statistics for us... we are producing 1700 books and I think in the last month and a half we have scheduled 150 books in home studios.

We have been forced to do that because of the situation but we will be back in recording studios the moment that we can, provided everything is safe. We'll probably be in home studios for a little bit longer.

JULIE:

And I think what is really great about that ... Dan and I do a lot of talks with actors at conferences... and over the last years Dan and I have met narrators who might be really really talented but they might be more remote from where our studios are located. For instance, we have studios in both New York and Los Angeles, we have 4 in New York and 10 in Los Angeles. And we have been able during this period to discover a lot of new talents that aren't local to either of those locations. And we've been able to use actors who we may not have normally booked for home studio work. So, it has been an exciting time in that way.

MOLLY:

Can you talk about the director piece of this?

What does it look like to work with the director on an audiobook?

And then additionally, are you looking for directors right now?

DAN:

We are definitely hiring directors.

One of the things that Penguin Random House and I certainly believe, and Julie knows this... the foundation of good audiobooks... that having directors as part of that equation is important. I think it's important for a few different reasons. One is because actors shouldn't have to do all of the heavy lifting when it comes to research.

And some of the books... as I mentioned I recorded a few 28-hour-plus books that are history books and it's hard enough for actors to just get themselves prepared physically for sessions like that. It is important for us to have directors who are doing some of that research and taking some of that burden off of actors when they go into studios. I think it's always good to have a second set of ears in studio. So, we are not only recording books with directors when they are open and available but we are also using Zoom to incorporate directors in studios when studios are available AND we are Zoom-ing directors into sessions and people's home studios when they are comfortable with that. It has worked out really well for us thus far. So, we are keeping our model as we are going through the Covid-19 pandemic. I think it's really important for us to keep our quality level high. And I think directors help keep that quality level high.

JULIE:

And what I love about working with directors paired with actors is that I feel like if we want actors to be immersed in the creative process, if we want them to be immersed in the story and characters, we don't want them to have that outside critical eye on their performance... and that is something that the director can help provide. They can help shape the performance. They can catch if the character voices are off, or if you have missed a word. Just like writers, we want them to be in the creative process and yet, writers need an editor... they need somebody looking over their work with a fine tooth comb and making sure they are delivering it in the best way possible. So, we love that ... I've always loved that is our process over here... incorporating directors.

MOLLY:

Will Ahab only be PRH US books?

Will there be Canadian PRH Projects on the site?

If you are in Canada will you only be eligible for projects in Canada?

How does that work?

JULIE:

So, you are eligible for any projects that are on the site. And our Canadian colleagues have been using the site for a while. And I'm going to be doing all-hands WebEx meetings with the site to help them be fully comfortable with the system. That is the plan... that they will be able to have all of their projects on the site and be able to host auditions. Because as much as it makes the whole process easier for PRH US and actors, it also makes it easier for our Canadian colleagues. They are also working with home studio narrators, I believe, during this time when we are not able to work at a commercial studio. So, that is fully the intention.

DAN:

I think the other intent is that as we have added other verticals for talent. So, you'll be able to have... to upload commercial demos, or videogame work...

You'll be able to upload that to Ahab. And our hope is that we will be able to bring other content creators on, So, that they can connect with talent and agents. So, that we can actually help the entire voiceover industry and bring actors more and more work.

JULIE:

It's been really exciting. I've felt a little like an insight consultant as I've been speaking with agents and content creators in other voiceover industries and formats.

We have a few actors who are very seasoned audiobook narrators who also do a lot of videogame and animation work. I play videogames in my free time and I know that Dan does, too. So, it has been fun to dip our toe and see what casting is like in those other areas. We are doing our best with due diligence, to do research and to speak to people who are making casting decisions in these other areas to bring those other areas of work online in the site, in July.

MOLLY:

We're getting a question about MoCap connection and experience on Ahab. Is this something we look at, strongly?

JULIE:

Not for audiobook work, but that is something that we added when we started talking to people who do more videogame work. Again, we love feedback. Even throughout all of this I love to hear these questions, because it makes us think a little more outside the

box or outside the confines of our own conceptions. So, we added that because certain people can do mo-cap [*motion capture*] in addition to other segments of the voiceover industry. They thought it could be useful but for audiobook work, we do not. [*side discussion about mo-cap definition*]

MOLLY:

It is 2pm, so one last question:

If you use a pseudonym for some genres, should you include that on your profile? Should you create a different profile? How does that work?

JULIE:

So, I always like to leave this up to the actor because I know everybody is particular about pseudonyms.

For instance, if you feel comfortable with the producers knowing about your pseudonyms then I would say to put it at the very top of your profile. And your name at top.

In talking to a lot of people with pseudonyms, I have come to believe that it is best to have two separate profiles. Because you were already representing yourself as two separate people creatively. So, for instance, if you have a pseudonym for Romance or Erotica you may want to create a profile just for that. And for the rest of your work you may have another profile.

But I say again... If you are comfortable letting producers or content creators know who you are and that's not a secret, then I would say to put that at the very top of your file.

I understand that some people are worried that they might get judged by their Erotica work or Romance work, and that would be one reason for creating a pseudonym (in addition to points about Branding and Search engines).

Dan and I have both worked in this industry long enough to know how to distinguish between the different genres. So, I wouldn't worry about that, but that is completely up to you.



MOLLY:

I am going to throw the [Ahab support email](#) in the chat because there are tons of questions we have not had the chance to answer.

So, feel free if you want to follow up, that would be a great place to do so.

DAN:

Yeah. I just want to thank Braden and ACTRA for helping us put this together.

It was really something we wanted to do. We're going to continue doing these chats, since Covid hit. Julia and I did a live Instagram session a few weeks ago that was great.

And look, we really want to bridge the gap between the audiobook industry on the publishing side with actors that haven't worked in it before, actors that want to get involved with it.

So, thank you for taking the time to spend an hour with us. And keep the questions coming and keep the feedback coming. If you are logging on to the site and you are having issues with it, we want to know.

If there are things, or features that you think could help improve it, please let us know.

These things take time. We are not Google. We are not Microsoft. This is a like a little start up for us at Penguin Random House audio and so we are working to make it a much bigger thing. Things will take time. But we are going to build the best system for actors and agents and the voiceover community.

So, thanks for your time. I hope everyone stays safe and healthy during this time.

And stay in touch.

JULIE:

And ACTRA asked us if we could record this and So, we are recording this session.

So, if one of your friends missed it or you want to refer back to something we said, or you didn't remember... who knows what... something from this talk, we're going to be sending this file over to ACTRA Toronto and hopefully they can send it out to all of you so that you can refer back as well.

So, thank you guys. I'm really excited to hear from you, and hopefully to see you on

Ahabtalent.com

JULIE:

Bye y'all.

DAN:

Bye, guys.

###

- transcription May 4th Revised, DZ&JW/bw/kp
- Transcript edited. Features of the site described on Tuesday April 28, 2020 but may change and evolve as Ahabtalent.com launches May 4, 2020