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The Jingle Market

Many ask just what is the jingle market and who sings what commercial and how were they chosen? The answer is simple. The jingle market is made up of jingle houses or jingle production companies working at competing for the upcoming jingle in the commercial that has been secured by an advertising agency to which there are many, but a few heavy hitters like J. Walter Thompson and Leo Burnett, to name a few. Advertising begins with the client, like McDonalds, whose in-house marketing department contacts their contact at Leo Burnett to begin looking at some different advertising campaigns. Larger firms, both ad agencies and represented companies alike want to hear a number of jingles with the same words already reviewed and chosen to air on the given campaign. There are usually a host of jingle houses then that are contacted with pre-approved jingle lyric and the jingle houses then go to town writing their version of the particular jingle with one being chosen out of the “cattle call.” There are a number of different ways that the final commercial will air; nationally, regionally and locally with different pay ranges for each with a commercial usually airing for a term of 13 weeks with renewals when warranted. This is the basics to how a jingle or commercial is formed. Let’s begin to look at who sings commercials and why.

Why Sing Jingles?

Jingle singers are in a world of their own and then there is a group of a few who have had the tenacity to remain in the market singing commercials for many years. After all, that’s not an easy task as the advertising agencies and jingle houses are always on the look out for fresh new talented singers with a unique component in their vocal style and ability. But there is one hitch here. Many have remained in the inner circle of singers for so many years because one, they are that good and two, the jingle houses don’t like taking unnecessary chances securing jingle work when they have a proven roster of jingle singers in their rolodex. Many jingle houses are contacted hours before a deadline is given by the ad agency and therefore their finished product can not be left up to the unknown, but on individuals who can

deliver right then and there – And for those with that reputation, the income is lucrative with over six figures a year being earned. And that’s why most sing jingles, besides the love of singing. So that leads us to our next question then, of who can sing jingles?

Who Can Sing Jingles?

Virtually anyone can sing jingles with some exceptions already alluded to. To be a jingle singer you need the obvious, talent. But along with talent one needs a number of qualities; *Uniqueness* – that ability to stand out “Hey I know that voice,” *Blending* – you need to blend well, and not everyone naturally does, if you are a background vocal singer singing a group sing, *Speed* - there are too many talented singers out there to waste much time “getting into the groove,” and *Attitude* - there are too many great singers out there who are so gracious and fun to work with and who just deliver the sound. These are a few of the areas needed if you are to be a jingle singer and remain in the market with any resolve. Not everyone has all of these qualities from the get go, but many can learn and get there. There’s nothing wrong with singing in the shower, the car on the way to work, etc. We suggest testing your abilities singing some commercials without any tracks, either on an old fashioned cassette recorder, into your PC, etc to hear what you sound like in general. Singing commercials and singing pop music are two different animals. Jingles are up in your face with every word counting and being understood. There is no lazy diction involved. This is a great place to start developing your jingle singing abilities.

What Do Music Production Houses Look For?

We’ve answered most of this inquiry in the first few opening questions, but the idea that uniqueness, a go get it attitude and consistency are the key words here and must be accomplished. You make money, when the jingle house makes money, when the advertising company makes money, when McDonalds makes money. It’s that simple. It’s a business and that’s how you need to address your jingle singing, as a business. This is not the artsy fartsy world, but a business where you make money and a living singing commercials because you are literally on the money, with a great attitude, and deliver each and every time when you sing. That’s what music houses are looking for and they get it virtually every time. And that’s why when you enter the jingle world with a fantastic sounding jingle reel,

hopefully composed by ReelMusician.com, you will have the opportunity to break into the market and be the next vocal talent in their arsenal of talent and be added into their rolodex data base.

What Is The Difference Between Union And Non-Union?

There is a big difference between union and non-union with pluses and minuses to each. While many enjoy a healthy living singing commercials in the union, this percentage has likely dropped as companies continue to look for ways to cut their budgets. A commercial written and composed and sung via the union is significantly much more expensive than with a non-union singer and jingle company, and that's why more and more of the jingle work has gone to areas like Tennessee, and other states that are right to work states. There's no doubt about it that L.A., Chicago, New York, Atlanta and Dallas continue to be the workhorse of the commercial industry, but as already stated, more and more work is going elsewhere in an attempt to keep costs down. As a union singer, it's often difficult to balance between the demands of your union contract, which specifically states no non-union work except for charities etc., and making a little extra side money singing, even if it's not necessarily the union big bucks. You will eventually most likely want to look into membership with AFTRA, but look at the fine print and the realities with membership, before joining. Be aware of all the fine print if you go union to know where you stand on ancillary side work.

Difference Between A Music Production Company And The Ad Agency?

We've already mentioned that the jingle house is contacted by the ad agency if and when a commercial is under way. While many equate the two businesses, they're light years apart in many respects. While the jingle house may try to incorporate an ad agency element into their operations, the ad agency is still the ad agency and the jingle house is still writing jingles for the ad agencies. While not a totally excepted practice, you might try and approach the ad agency in addition to the jingle houses, in an attempt to influence the jingle company the ad agency picks hoping that the creative director will take a liking to your reel and request your vocal be included in the next commercial campaign under way. You will have to do some research into the names of the creative directors. More on that later.

Should I Utilize a Vocal Coach?

Yes. You should definitely employ a vocal coach - a few comments here. Find a proven, well established vocal coach in the industry. Find out who the key singers are in your area singing commercials, who their vocal coaches are and contact those particular coaches. You don't want your vocal coach from high school, you want a professional in the business who has contacts and who can incidentally mention to a seasoned jingle singer client of theirs, of your fantastic abilities. A good coach can properly teach you how to sing wrong right. You read correctly, how to sing wrong right. Let's face it, when you're singing a commercial with 100% attitude and style and with a gritty edgy sound, it's difficult to sing "properly," at least in the purest, classical sense. It doesn't matter what anyone says, that's the reality, and you can burn your voice out quickly without the proper training – Get A Good Coach!

What Is The Difference In recording A Song As To Recording A Jingle?

This is where most singers are misinformed. They believe, with good intention, because they can sing a pop song with great style and delivery, that they will be able to superimpose those abilities into singing jingles. Most can't. Singing jingles is a specialty. Proper diction and flexibility are key. Most pop singers are a little lax in diction and can get away with it singing in the pop arena, but not in the jingle market. You wonder if companies advertising their products on radio or TV care if you can understand the words to their products in their commercials – you better believe it. Jingle houses and ad agencies alike are fanatical about hearing lyrics properly and that's what makes jingle singing a whole new level to singing in general. It's one thing to sing a song with slack diction, and it's a totally different arena singing a commercial in the same style and edge with every word having to count without the jingle sounding forced. This is the main difference between singing songs and jingles. Each word counts.

The Demo – What Should It Consist Of Musically?

Your demo is your ticket. A poor demo equals no ticket to where you want to go. After one considers just how many demos are being solicited to jingle houses, it becomes apparent just how "on the money," your reel needs to be. It can not be just a "demo," it has to stand out in order for the phone number on the jacket label to be called. Your demo should consist of 5 – 7

jingles when starting out, with various styles and range. When putting together your demo, ask yourself, “Is this different from what the other reels sound like. After all, you will be called because of a unique element in your voice and reel that stands out from everything else they have either heard or singers they currently are using. So try and utilize jingles because they are helping to make your voice sound unique, not because you necessarily like the spot. While this section would seem like it needs to be long and drawn out, it isn’t. It’s a simple strategy that you must employ. 5 -7 jingles that are uniquely different from anything else the jingle houses have heard, with emphasis on incredible sounding production, no matter the style being played, with your voice being spring boarded off the jingle bed of sound. There is no other trick here – Great sounding unique jingle demos!

How Long Can I Realistically Make My Demo Reel?

As stated, when starting out keep your reel to 5 -7 jingles, not because you can’t make it any longer, it’s because most individuals trying to break into the market have limited funds to make a jingle reel, and because most jingle houses have limited time to listen. But if you have incredible sounding jingle demos that are either great sounding demos or have actually aired and you are trying to secure more session work, than by all means include them on the reel. You might employ the help of a music production house or known engineer with a good ear and have them melt your jingles artistically together to shorten the overall length. Even with great sounding jingles that have aired, try to keep your reel length down to 6 – 7 minutes.

Do’s And Don’ts With Your Reel

One of the worst mistakes you can make as a singer trying to break into the jingle market, is to include “so-so” jingle samples in your reel. It has to be snappy that catches the attention of anyone listening to it. Do not include second rate demos. Also, do not make your jingle reel too long, especially if the jingle demo is in question. It’s difficult to go back to the different jingle houses and say, “By the way, I have a much better sounding demo reel now,” after they recall how poor or second rate the first one was. Don’t make that mistake thinking, “Well, it’s better to get something to them,” hoping to get a call on an upcoming commercial. Do include incredible sounding demos, that are knit together musically by a seasoned professional with a crisp, clear picture on the front of the CD of you.

The Presentation – Artwork And Design Layout

As just mentioned, your jingle reel should be on a CD format with a professional picture of you on the front with contact information easily visible. Some put all jingle demos named in order of sequence on the front – make sure that it does not take away from your CD cover layout. Some will put the jingle sequence on the CD itself. We suggest either or both. Make sure you put your name and contact info on the actual CD as well, in case the cover gets lost etc. You should have a short cover letter stating your qualifications, desire to work with this particular jingle house and would appreciate the opportunity to make their upcoming jingle stand out with a fresh new voice sure to catch the attention of the ad agencies. Let them know that you can be in their studio within a few minutes of being called and can work with virtually anyone. You have no attitude except what is required in the jingle and that attitude will be delivered – Guaranteed!

Should I Include A Song?

As stated, a song can be a real addition to your reel provided the following: The song picked out represents an element you would like to magnify, is simply incredible sounding being a real addition to the reel without taking away, and will help secure you session work. Do not include a song if the production is not up to par, or if it just takes time up on the reel. You want the listener to be left wanting to hear more. Some will keep the song demo(s) for a follow up reel when requested by the jingle house or when ample time has gone by and further marketing, (Demo reels) are required to further augment your abilities and desire to work with this jingle house.

What Can I Do To Make My Demo Stand Out From The Rest?

This question is often asked of singers starting out. Let's face it, it's difficult to break into the market and worse yet, know that you've got everything it takes and then some. We suggest that you develop patience, that's not always easy. Then be persistent in your approach to your singing career. Remember that this is a business and you need to approach it like it is a business and not just a singing fantasy. Next, if you do not hear from individuals that you have sent your reel to, try sending them another one after some time has gone by. You might try to email them and ask if there is

anything else they might want to hear you sing on. You might employ some marketing. Your first reel might have a jacket color different from the second and third reels and so forth employing a different slogan on the front like, “The Best Of Spring 2004.” You might consider having a website developed with your jingle samples on it developing credibility with the jingle houses and an additional way for them to get in contact with you. Even with these ideas, as good as they might be, they will not compensate for your tenacity and ability to follow up. Follow up is the key in any business. Luck comes to those who try. So keep trying, sending out demos and making the calls. The payoff will be well worth the effort.

Exactly Who Do I Pitch My Demo Reel To?

You are going to pitch your demo reel to Attn: Creative Director or obviously specific name if you have one. You will be pitching your reel to creative directors at jingle houses and ad agencies. Remember that ad agencies usually deal with the jingle houses and not directly with jingle singers. You will want to be creative in your approach to ad agencies. You will also want to pitch your reel to jingle singers in the business. Go ahead and pitch your demo to song production houses and publishers – maybe you can get on board there singing song demos etc. You might try sending your reel out to large corporations with in-house creative departments that work on industrial music and presentations for their companies.

Can I Submit My Demo Reel Directly To Advertising Agencies?

As just stated, you will want to pitch your reel directly to the ad agency in a creative way. What does that mean? Well, we suggest some demo reel packaging strategies that get you noticed. Bright colors, a slogan that stands out printed on stickers etc. There are a host of ways you can stand out and should. Always remember, in the back of your mind, that ad agencies aren't fond of being solicited from singers and therefore some care should be taken when approaching them. Be persistent, but not obnoxious. Stand out, but look professional at the same time if utilizing creative ways to stand out. Phone conversations are to creative directors at the advertising agency and they change all the time. Like any other business, it's, what have you done lately that counts with these companies. If you have ideas for commercials and you know that your voice lends itself to this particular concept, you might mention this to the creative director without over extending your visit on the phone.

How do I get Noticed?

As a general follow up to the question how do I stand out from the rest, we suggest a few more ways to capture the attention of individuals receiving your demo reel. You get noticed by being persistent, professional, talented, knowing your strengths and weaknesses not afraid to acknowledge them, developing key conversation starters to get past the gate keepers, already mentioned, a fantastic sounding demo reel, a great attitude, a willingness to be flexible, a great cover letter with a demo package that stands out, a business plan that allows for ways to creatively follow up with contacts, talking to other established jingle singers in your area willing to listen to your reel and help out if you are not direct competition, engineers and other contacts in the business. Don't be afraid to send your reel to other metropolitan areas heavy into the advertising business. It's usually best to concentrate on your geographic area initially, but if a jingle house or ad agency likes your voice enough, they will fly you in to sing the spot. Getting noticed is all about tenacity and a keep trying attitude – eventually it will pay off.

How do I follow Up?

We've included this question, while being answered to some extent in other areas, because it's one of the most important elements, after your incredibly sounding demo reel, in your dream to becoming a professional jingle singer. There are many books written for business sales/marketing individuals on how to follow up, securing leads etc. We recommend following up initially after a few days to a week, which you have already mentioned in your cover letter that you will do, and verify that the intended person has actually received the reel, initial thoughts, and make sure and state that you can and will deliver if given the opportunity. Try to avoid the "Did you think it was good," you mention instead, I know my voice lends itself to group sings, "I'm a blender," and softer lead parts. I don't have that husky, gritty voice, but I can sure sing and deliver a moving insurance commercial, etc. as heard from my reel with "particular spot." You realize that jingle production houses have been burned many times over by the next "hip" voice, and you will not let them down and neither will they regret giving you a shot at singing one of their upcoming spots. You will say this confidently, but humbly without attitude and let them know, once again, that you can work with virtually anyone and will. Mention to give you a couple

lines over the phone on their next upcoming spot and sing the spot over the phone before they commit to calling you in – That’s being creative and giving them, while not a perfect singing scenario, an idea of what you can do so they don’t get burned.

Can I Send Another Demo?

Yes. Send another demo after you feel that any attention you have received on your initial reel has faded. Some send a reel closely tied into the first one sent so that the fire or enthusiasm has a better shot at developing into real session work by keeping up the initial interest. In the first scenario, you might wait 3 -4 weeks before sending another reel and that’s after verifying that they have actually received and have taken the time to play it. In the second scenario, you might wait just a week and then send off another reel. Some send the exact reel over making sure that they have received it and have heard it and like the fact that their name and package is crossing over someone’s desk for a second time creating an element of name recognition. Some will send their song demo or another complete jingle demo. You will have to judge which method you use being dependent on the individuals and companies involved. When in doubt, go with the second scenario, even if you are sending out your main demo reel.

Misc Tips On Securing Session Work

Search out all individuals that can connect you to jingle producers, seasoned jingle singers and creative directors. Create a contact file or rolodex system of some kind including all contact details and last date contacted with a general sense of last conversation and all other recommended contacts provided by that individual. Follow up accordingly. Have area jingle singers take a listen to your reel with the emphasis on learning from them on strengths and weaknesses they hear in the reel. Keep in mind, that like presenting a resume to 10 different hiring managers, that you can get up to 10 different ways of how you should go about building and maintaining your resume – same thing – But you are looking for a pattern, if any, that suggests any potential changes that need to be made to your reel. Already mentioned, create a website that includes your most recent jingle additions and maintain an email list being sure to email jingle industry personnel of your newest jingles/productions and to give it a listen. Continue to work with your vocal coach. Sometimes it takes awhile to fully develop that “jingle session voice”

and confidence and recognition tend to follow. Try not to over do it when cold-calling and with initial contacts - Care needs to be taken to balance out persistence with “bugging” somebody.

Closing Comments

In closing, take the information contained in this ebook and put it to work as you continue to create your game plan in regards to singing jingles in the jingle business. Just know in advance, that that this will require both effort and talent in order for you to succeed. As we have already discussed, have a well thought out business game plan that allows for some flexibility, but at the same time is consistent with time related goals and an attitude of this is a business and as such, I will treat it like a business. We always like to hear from individuals who are in the business and we hope to hear your success stories as well – so feel free to email us at any time and let us know about your session work and accomplishments.

Good Luck!