

How will the dubbing industry continue during and after the Corona crisis?

by Dr. Till Valentin Völger, Member of the Board

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Currently we are experiencing the effects of the "shutdown" in all areas of social life. This also applies to the film industry, – now and in the foreseeable future – where the continuous development of cultural diversity is seeing a drastic decline. No new productions, which means: no new engagements and no salaries. A way out of this scenario needs to be found.

All this applies without exception also to the dubbing of movie and television productions. In order to protect the voice actors, most dubbing studios terminated their voice recording sessions a couple of weeks ago. The respective studio heads made the decision on their own accord, knowing and accepting the economic risk and loss that this would entail. A decision which calls for due respect for their great sense of responsibility.

Considerations on finding a way out of this situation, i.e. how to resume voice recording, are already in progress for the dubbing industry! Working in a studio which has not adapted to the current situation is a high risk and will not meet the (legal) requirements needed to protect the voice actor's health.

Even with all our efforts in this direction, it is clear to everyone involved that we must on the one hand, ensure health protection for all dubbing professionals, but on the other hand we must not under any circumstances risk a decline in the quality of our work or even perhaps eradication of "dubbing". For such measures would not only be in conflict our own artistic and technical demands, but also entail the danger of perpetuation.

The possibility of eliminating the dubbing process all together is to be feared, if the voice actors lip-synch recordings are transferred to home office without the participation of other professionals (director, sound engineer and cutter). A substantial part of the work simply breaks away. One can not refer to it any longer as a true dubbing production. Apart from the acoustic requirements for a cinema, film or television production (the home living room generally does not offer the same acoustic conditions as a recording studio), the decisive interaction between the individual team members is missing. Without immediate feedback from the team, it is difficult to keep an eye on all artistic aspects and at the same time pay attention to lip sync and linguistic clarity. Without this interaction, there is a great risk that most of our craft will be lost. The result will have little or nothing to do with " dubbing". We are already well aware of the hurtful public criticism of not so well-dubbed movies. Not only for the sake of craftsmanship must we urgently prevent a further step in this direction. We would also risk a major incision in the (economic) relevance of our branch. In other words: under these production conditions we would be sawing off the branch we are sitting on.

For these kinds of recording conditions the term "cloud dubbing" has already established itself. A rather unclear or even misleading term – there is nothing to be said against using a cloud for the time being. A more appropriate term would be "home" or "self-made" dubbing. Regardless of the

terminology however, there should be a consensus: we do not want to bring a movie to the screen, a film to television or to a streaming platform under these conditions. All associations in the industry and most dubbing producers agree on this. Because in addition, by accepting such production conditions, we would only encourage the already existing tendency of "cheaper and faster". Ultimately, this cannot be in our interest - and also not in the interest of the audience/recipients, who will sense the accompanying loss of quality.

And: for voice recording to continue in a professional manner, these kinds of production conditions are not necessary. One Berlin Studio, for example, has already taken extensive measures to ensure that work in the studio can continue while guaranteeing health protection. These include plexiglas walls between the individual protagonists, digital dialogue books and breaks between voice actors calls, therefore ruling out encounters and that surfaces can be disinfected. Other companies are preparing similar measures and are in constant contact with each other. Company doctors and the relevant departments are all involved in the process. Considering colleagues who belong to risk groups and for whom a particularly high level of precautions must be taken is also one of the topics currently under discussion.

Should further restrictions become necessary (in recent weeks we've learned the situation can change on a daily basis), there is also the possibility of so-called "remote dubbing". In this variation, all the necessary people for voice recordings are involved but in different locations. For example, a voice actor can be in the studio, the sound engineer in the control room, while the director and cutter are connected digitally. Of course, a production method like this involves challenges and risks, too – the connection between the dubbers must be sufficient. This in turn requires appropriate hardware and software equipment. Most certainly a financial challenge for many companies. There is also a lack of immediate contact, so this type of production is by no means ideal. Nevertheless, direct contact is possible, so this option can be offered on a transitional basis.

All in all, all ideas are currently being thought through and measures are being discussed on how to go on. And it "must" go on – as soon as possible. Otherwise, not only we voice actors will be facing a financial end, but the entire dubbing industry will. In spite of this, health protection comes first, and this is not up for discussion – at any time.



Dr. Till Valentin Völger

has been working as a voice actor for more than twenty years. He studied law at the Humboldt-University of Berlin and received his doctorate in copyright law. In 2014, Völger became the representative of the Voice Actors in the German Collecting Society for Performing Artists (GVL), from 2015 to 2018 he was Chairman of the Board of the German Dubbing Actors Union (InteressenVerband Synchronschauspieler e.V., IVS). After the merger of IVS and BFFS (Bundesverband Schauspiel e.V – German Actors Guild) he became a member of the BFFS Board. His main responsibility focuses on the interests of the Voice Actors. Völger passed his second state law exam in February 2020.

About the Bundesverband Schauspiel e.V. (BFFS) – German Actors Guild:

BFFS stands for Bühne, Film, Fernsehen, Sprache (theater/ stage, movie, television, voice) Founded in 2006, the BFFS is an Association and Union of more than 3,500 actors. It has become the largest national organisation for actors and the largest professional association of the German film, television and theatre scene. The BFFS represents the professional and trade union interests of actors in Germany. It aims to improve or create the cultural, societal, political, legal, financial and social framework conditions that protect, preserve and promote the unique acting profession. As well as take into account the special living and working situation of the artists who exercise the acting profession.