

Turn your book into an audiobook with the new Audiobook Creation Exchange, Part One

When **Allen Klein** wanted to breathe new life into one of his out-of-print books he turned to a new service called Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX). Owned by Audible, a division of Amazon.com, and begun last summer, ACX is a clearinghouse that links authors and publishers who own digital rights to books with producers and voiceover artists who might be interested in turning the books into audiobooks.



Allen Klein

After proving to ACX that he owned the digital rights to *TeacherLaughs: A Jollytologist Book*, his 2006 book published by Gramercy, Klein was able to post a query on ACX. The query attracted the attention of Marlin May, a voiceover artist and former teacher willing to produce and record the audiobook and to partner with Klein by splitting the costs and profits. The audiobook version of *TeacherLaughs* was ready for sale in about six weeks. Klein says, "He [May] did a great job and it was a simple process. It was very inexpensive."

The duo had to acquire the rights to music and cover art used in the production of the audiobook. Their total cost was about \$200, which they split, and with one of Klein's first royalty checks from ACX he recouped 60 percent of his initial investment. Now *TeacherLaughs* can be purchased on Audible.com, iTunes and Amazon, instead of languishing in the used book market where it didn't benefit the San Francisco-based author of 17 books.

Klein has sold about 100 audiobooks since September and believes sales will build over time. He is grateful that his book has found a new life. Klein is a savvy guy whose series of books published by Random House sold more than 400,000 copies. Therefore his belief in the promise of audiobooks is noteworthy; perhaps you will want to emulate him, too.

Here's why: According to the most recent data available from the Audio Publishers Association, unit sales were up nearly 10 percent in 2010. The trade group also reported that downloading audiobooks grew 300 percent in the past five years and 150 percent by units sold.

However, demand for digital audiobooks far

exceeds the supply of available quality titles, according to **Matthew Thornton**, senior editor at Audible, the world's largest retailer of audiobooks.

In fact, Audible created ACX to feed the hunger its subscribers have for new audio titles. On average, its subscribers purchase 17 audiobooks a year, and nearly 40 percent of its most avid listeners have told the company that they have trouble locating books they're interested in on audio. That's easy to understand when you realize that just five percent of professionally published, narrative books receive audiobook treatment.

Not all book genres make good audio

While the demand for audiobooks is certainly there, not every book is suitable for audiobook treatment. Books that rely on photographs or illustrations to tell their story would not work well in the format. ACX suggests that travel guidebooks, home and garden, interior design, home organization, children's picture books, cookbooks, diet books, photo and art books, gift books, quirky books, sports books and fitness books are likely to be poor bets.

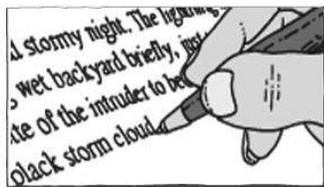
Audible, which currently offers more than 60,000 audiobooks, also keeps track of the genres that work best: they are mysteries, thrillers, science fiction, fantasy, business, romance, literary fiction and history.

In order to post books on ACX at the present time, your book must have been produced by one of the more than 1,800 content providers Audible has vetted. However, according to Thornton, ACX will soon make its services available to self-published authors as well.

The process currently starts with a search for your book using the company's algorithm. If after that search is completed the "this is my book" tab comes up you can proceed.

What happens next? There are several possibilities. For example, it is possible that an independent audio producer will contact you with an offer to buy the audio rights to your book, which it will then produce on its own. It is also possible for an experienced narrator to buy the rights from you or, as in Klein's case, for the narrator and author

How Audiobook Creation Exchange Works



Authors—Get your title up and out there:

- Confirm your rights
- Create your title profile
- Find a Producer
- Make a deal to get your audiobook produced!



Authors as Narrators—Do it yourself—with a little help from us:

- Find your title on ACX
- Record your audiobook
- Send your recording to ACX
- Start promoting your work



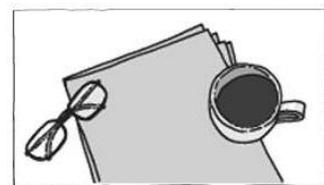
Narrators—Set yourself up to be discovered:

- Create your profile
- Post your samples
- Audition!
- Enter into deals and start recording



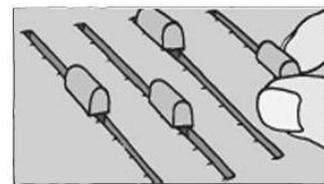
Publishers—Start producing those audiobooks:

- Offer rights or look for rights
- Create title profiles
- Find Producers
- Make a deal and get that audiobook produced!



Agents—Start producing and selling your clients' audiobooks:

- Search for your clients' books
- Post your titles
- Find Producers
- Make a deal and get that audiobook produced!



Studio Pros—Get out there, get noticed, get to work:

- Post your profile
- Show off your samples
- Find jobs
- Enter into deals and start recording!

or rights holder to cut their own deal on the venture. Some narrators will work for a flat fee.

Selecting a narrator

When you submit your query to ACX you will be asked some important questions. Do you want a narrator, and if so, what kind of voice would you like that person to have? What kind of accent? Should it be a man or woman? How old? You are also asked to provide a Title Profile—a compelling description of the project and a sample for

narrators to audition from. If you like, you can opt to find your own narrator by listening to those who have registered on the site.

You can also use ACX's exchange if you want to record your book yourself. The company provides instructions for doing so at <http://tinyurl.com/7xjrztg> (see Authors as Narrators).

In an email interview,

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Thornton says, “We encourage authors to narrate their own work. Authors know their characters, their stories and their subjects, and their words better than anyone else. Narrating is a creative way for an author to express his thoughts to listeners; just like writing them down on paper is a way to express thoughts to readers. That said, it is difficult work and not for everyone.”

Although Klein is a professional speaker he had a new book coming out and decided he didn't have the time to learn his way around a studio. When experienced narrator May offered to take on the job, Klein was glad to let him do so. Under ACX's auspices, May recorded a sample, which Klein approved, and as the project moved along he received regular installments of the recorded book for his approval.

“My time is limited. To give it to someone to do a great professional job, it was worth giving them half the royalties,” Klein says. Some people might be tempted to do the recording themselves to cut expenses, but Klein thinks that's only a good idea for people with trained voices.

Sonya Bateman, whose novel *Master of None* was published by Pocket Books in 2010, is currently working to produce an audiobook. Hooking up with ACX was her agent's idea as was retaining the digital rights to the book when Pocket put it under contract.



Sonya Bateman

Bateman says in an email interview, “She's the one who found out about ACX and got everything rolling. So it was super easy for me—I just had to say ‘yes, I like this guy’ or ‘no, not what I want’ when I got sample reads.”

For her writing sample, Bateman posted the first chapter in her book, something many authors may be tempted to do. But as the auditions started rolling in, she realized that the sample chapter she provided did not have a lot of dialogue and featured just one of the two main characters. Bateman quickly found a narrator she liked, but when she asked him to do a reading for the second character—a djinn or genie with attitude—his first take was off the mark.

“Good thing I asked about it, because he did the voice like Apu [the Kwik-E-Mart owner] from *The*

Simpsons, with a super-strong, extra-hokey Indian accent. Yuck. Not what I wanted,” Bateman says. With some direction from her, the voice artist nailed the character. Bateman's takeaway from her experience is: make sure your sample chapter is representative of the book's main characters.

Karen Glick, a psychologist who moonlights as a voice actress through her Bella Luna Voice Co., recorded an audio version of *Northanger Abbey* for a small Canadian publisher. She believes she was selected because she had the right sound for Jane Austen books. It didn't hurt that she is also a big Austen fan. In Glick's view, a voice artist should like the type of literature they are recording because they will be spending a lot of time with each book they record. Glick gets work through Voices.com, a website that links voice artists with people seeking their services.

Another option is to use professionals you already know. That's what bestselling thriller author **M.J. Rose** did, selecting **Phil Gigante**, whom she had worked with before, to serve as one of the narrators for her three books (*The Halo Effect*, *The Delilah Complex* and *In Session*). Under their partnership agreement Gigante helped her find the other narrators and engineered and recorded the books.



M.J. Rose

Contact info

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Voices: www.voices.com 

Note: Part Two of this article, in the March issue of BMU, will offer advice on creating audio CDs and tips for creating audiobooks using ACX.