

How
to
Answer
the Phone

When a
developer
finally calls
or emails
you and
says he's
ready to
put **audio**
into his
game, what
do you do?

1. Say a silent prayer of thanks.

If this is the hundredth such call you've gotten and none has ever panned out, you might be tempted to yell at the guy, telling him how tired you are of the whole abusive business of this supposed "game audio" racket, and extolling gleefully on the fact that there's more security, dignity, and honor in being a serial killer's assistant. Don't. Nothing is forever. You're in a slump, and it will pass. Maybe not in this lifetime, but it *will* pass. Be thankful that the phone rang—maybe this call will be the one that will break your unlucky streak.

On the other hand, if this is the hundredth such call you've gotten this week, and *all* the calls have panned out, and you're as busy as a bug tracker at Microsoft, you might be tempted to not even speak to the guy, because the pressure is on. Do talk to him. And be thankful he called, be grateful for his attention, because being busy is a phase as well, and this, too, shall pass. I *promise*.

2. Do not talk about yourself or what you're capable of doing.

This is not resume time. Until he asks, there is no reason to think that this person is interested in your personal specs, what you can do, what you have done, what you're doing right now, or anything. Don't worry what he thinks of you. He's not even thinking about you. Odds are, he's thinking of *him*. He's interested in doing good work on his project, and he's interested in keeping his job. Maybe his dad is sick. Maybe he wants to get off the phone so he can go on the Internet and find a nice chat room full of old guys pretending to be teenage girls. Your job is to find out how you can help him, and it can't be done if you're talking.

3. Ask about the caller, the company, and the project, and *listen to what's being said*.

The developer will likely go on a long tear about something that's important to him. Stay with him. Resist any temptation to just say "uh-huh" while you answer your email. This is where the tone of the project is set. You're learning not just the details of the game, but also the spirit of the company with whom you'll be dealing.

Here are some things you might hear, and ways you might interpret them.

"Um, I was wondering how much you usually charge to score a game?"

"Um" means he's young. "I was wondering" means he doesn't make business calls often. "Usually" means he's assuming that he's less experienced than you—he's wondering how this kind of thing is done.

This is almost certainly a first-time developer or a musician thinking about going into the games business, and there's probably little or no money involved. My recommendation, though, would be to remain kind and patient. Find out if he's a musician or a developer.

If he's a musician, he'll think you're amazing for having figured it out, and that's one less person in the business you'll have to impress. Maybe he's a drummer. It never hurts to know drummers... they know where the parties are. Have a chat, find out what he's up to. I think Captain Kirk got lonely sometimes, and especially treasured the rare chats he could have with a fellow starship captain. If he's a first-time developer, that's worth exploring, too. The game might be damned exciting.

New developers are likely to be willing to try new audio ideas. If you're new to the business, you can get experience by working with these people. Your first gigs will almost certainly be with this kind of client. If you're an old hand and you don't think you can learn from him or work with him, you're still in a position to help him out and to be kind, which is a wonderful opportunity for both of you.

This is a new developer or a guy who had a friend score his first game and now is hiring outside help for the first time. He's confident, but uses no jargon.

During negotiation, he'll likely say something like, "We usually pay per minute." "We usually" is a very good indicator of a one- or two-game veteran. Anybody with half a brain realizes after three games that "usually" is not a word that associates well with the business practices of game audio.

Usually.

Another indicator of the one- or two-game client is that he hasn't lost his love of gaming. Look for conversational elements such as this:

"You're the leader of the **Quinines**, kind of a new-age enlightened species, really sensitive. Your world is destroyed but you escape [sic] in a huge ship, like, the size of most planets. You land on Oxy 10, where you use these Barflys to gather resources. The Barflys are really cool, they have these huge heads and they walk kind of funny. I'll send you the artwork. Anyway, they're kind of your peons, and you use them to build up your strength until you encounter the hostile Babars. Their civilization is almost exactly like 1930's Earth, but dark."

"We've got an MMORPG, looking at six two-minute loopers, menu music, a few victories, and few defeats. What's your per-minute charge? Or do you charge by the hour, or by the project?"

"How much do you charge to score a game?"

The jargon indicates that you're speaking with an experienced developer—a professional. "We've got" rather than "we're working on" indicates that he's involved in several projects, which means he's part of a bigger company with several games under its belt or maybe even currently in development. At the very least he's not working alone, so he's not *necessarily* a Unabomber-type. (Oh, my God, my spell-checker knows the word "Unabomber.") At best, your doing well on this job could lead to other work. The fact that he's ordering what seems to be "the usual" rather than going into great detail means that he cuts to the chase. Deadlines and cost-effectiveness are going to be high on his list of priorities. He also might be jaded as far as the development process goes. It's likely that the music development process has lost some of its virgin charm as well. This does not by any means indicate that he's uninterested in quality. Often, this kind of pro gets real excited about maximizing the time, quality, and quantity that he can get with his dollar.

Remember "Fast, good, cheap: pick two?" Give him all three and some extras. You *want* this gig.

"We've gotten bids from several other composers and sound designers."

Ah. It's a bidding situation. Super. Cue the next chapter, please.