

“Sing, Sing a song”



With thanks to Joe Raposo, who composed the music and wrote the words for this famous song sung by the Carpenters. And no, I haven't completely lost the plot. Well, not quite.

Most singing involves the use of many notes, to form a sound that is pleasant to a listener. Speaking is much the same, and in addition pleasantness is a key contributor to persuasiveness. Although there are no notes, and it's not music, when we speak we do (sometimes make that 'should') go up and down in pitch at various points and for good reasons. That's very like music, so we can use music to help clients understand how to use their voices more effectively when speaking. One key similarity is pitch modulation, which is the use of rises and falls in pitch to denote elements of speech such as emphasis, energy and finality. Pace and volume have other similarities.

We have for the past 9 years been recording and scientifically analysing the voices of many of our key clients, comparing them with a reference of the 100 most relevant good speakers. This includes the measurement of pitch pace and volume. We have gathered these analyses together to bring you the first results into the characteristics of average voice.

The biggest sub-group of our voices are male and British, but there is a statistically significant level of women, and non Brits in our database. So we have set about finding some trends among the people we get to work with, as well as trying to work how big a difference we've made.

We measure up to 8 parameters. For this article, we will use a set of 175 analyses done, as these are the most detailed of those that we have in our archives.

The caveat here is to admit that there is a degree of self-selection. Not because these people have poor voices, they don't. Instead many are excellent, although they

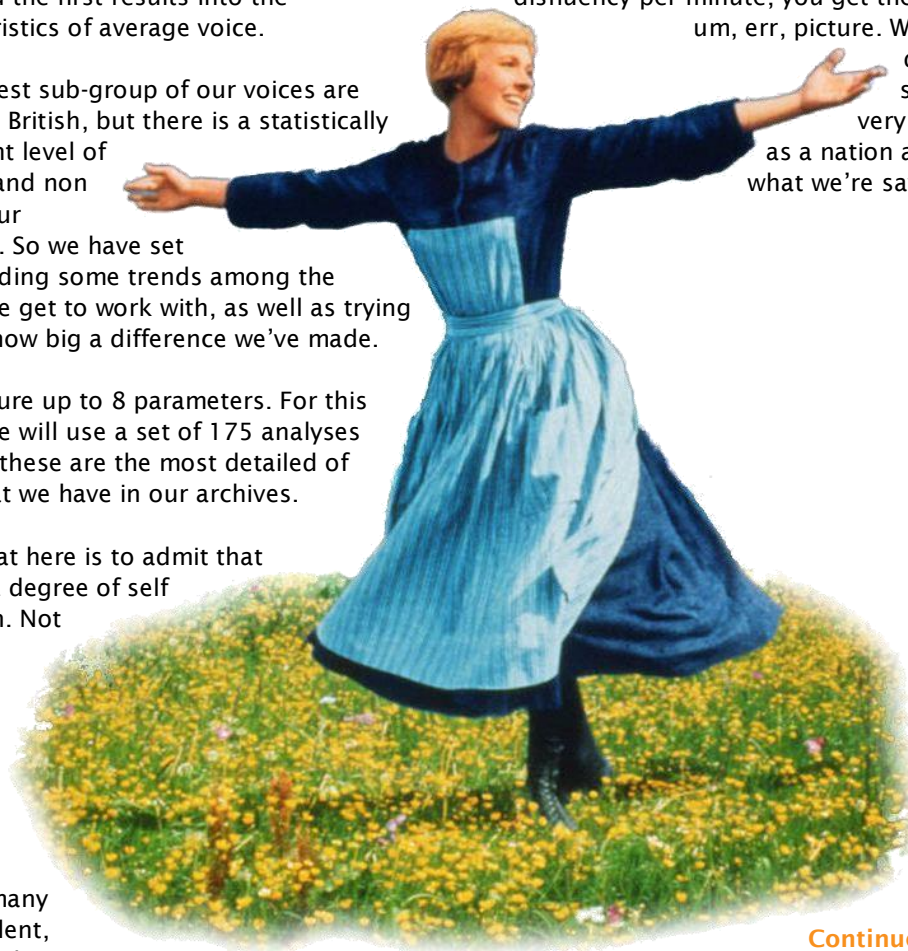
have chosen to have their voices analysed. And that shows they are interested in how they sound, and are curious to know if they can improve. If so, how?

So, what does the average voice sound like on these 8 parameters?

Well, you won't be pleased. On average, the British speaker only achieves about 81% of the score they should get on Pitch Modulation (PM), which is the amount of up and down in pitch as we speak. So we're more than a bit monotonous. Pitch Range (PR) scores a little better at 86%, so we don't exactly do the Sound of Music when we speak.

Fluency (FL) is the measure of absence or presence of umms and errs and the like we score only 85%. This may seem OK, but when I tell you that we allow up to 6 disfluencies per minute within the 100% score, and that each 1-2 percent lost equates to one disfluency per minute, you get the, the, um, err, picture. We

don't seem very sure as a nation about what we're saying!



Ewan Pearson

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Our Articulation (AR), Speech Rate (SR) and Loudness Range (LR) are OK at 94-95%, and for Pitch Height (PH) we are bang on thereference level. Finally on volume (VO) we are if anything a bit LOUD, at 103% on average.

In summary, we’re rather boring, very uncertain and just a bit loud.

Now I know that may not come as a surprise to some of you, but it’s good to know it’s not just your opinion, but scientific measurement.

So what can you do if you are Mr/Ms “Voxus Medios” and want to become “Maximus Vocalis”? Are you born with or without a Stephen Fry / Moira Stewart voice, or is there anything can you do anything to improve? Well, there’s good news from the research here, because the answer is (and you’ll need a Barack Obama voice here), “Yes you can”

You see, our analysis also measures the improvement people can make in their

voices with coaching, practice and (James Bond female accomplice voice here please) a “positive mental attitude”. She also mentions “mutual bodily warmth”, but we’re British, so maybe we can skip that bit. Stiff Upper Lip anyone?

Our average client went from the low figures shown above to about 100% on all the measures. The good news is they still sounded the same person, just a better version of that person: Modulation improved to the point where they sounded interesting to listen to, the disfluency had all but disappeared, and the other measures moved to or stayed around the reference level. Even volume moderated a little towards the better levels.

In summary, interesting, confident and agreeably loud.

Get that right, and persuasiveness will shoot right up.