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***Global Pronunciation Best Practices and Processes***

***Objective***

The objective of this document is to describe best practices and processes relating to the definition of pronunciations when submitting a script to voice talent of voiceover firm for the creation of voice prompts.

**Pronunciation of Individual Words and Phrases**

Creating accurate, region-appropriate recordings requires that the Submitter provide accurate pronunciation of words and phrases that could be viewed as ambiguous by the voice talent.

* Voice talents may not be familiar with stylized product names and/or technical terms.
* Voice talents in some parts of the United States may not be familiar with the pronunciation of city names in other parts of the county. For example, the town of Gloucester in Massachusetts is pronounced GLAW ster, which, outside New England, isn’t intuitive.
* Many in-country, non-English voice talents may need to voice elements in English within a native language script, such as company and standardize product names; and the level of English proficiency varies across voice talents.

The communications of these “pronouncers” can take a number of forms:

* **Pronunciation videos on the internet:** Typing “pronunciation of….<chosen word or phrase>” into the search bar of a search engine like Google will oftentimes yield one or more audio clips with accurate pronunciations. If multiple versions are available, check them against each other, as the trickier words and phrases can be misinterpreted and hearing in two voices may aid understanding.

* **Recorded audio files:** Recording a word or phrase yourself, or better yet, from a more knowledgeable colleague is quite helpful. Record a pronouncer as an mp3 or any file format that can easily be read by a computer, and send to the voice talent, voiceover firm, or internal/external script-writer. It need not be in the final production format.
* **Phonetic pronunciations:** These are phonetic representations for words, like one might find in a dictionary. While there are some standards for articulating certain vowel and consonant sounds (for example, the International Phonetic Alphabet or “IPA” for the Latin alphabet), we have found that these pronouncers will be effective if certain general practices and rules are followed:
  + ***Be specific about vowels.*** Some general rules:
    - Distinguish between long and short vowels. for example, long “e” can be represented by “ee”; short “e” can be represented as “eh”.
  + ***Be specific about consonants:***
    - Distinguish between hard and soft consonants, and consonants that can be sounded in different ways, for example
      * C: cigar vs. cash
      * G: giant vs. goose
      * S: excuse (noun) vs. excuse (verb) (s vs. z sound)
  + ***Use “As in” statements:*** Oftentimes is instructive to state what a vowel or consonant sounds like within a specific word other than words or syllables in the word/phrase itself. For example: lorazepam (“a” in “cat”)

* + ***Capitalize the accented syllable(s):*** This is often an overlooked practice. Sometimes the pronouncer is otherwise perfect, but the voice talent can’t pronounce the word unless s/he know where to place the emphasis. For example, xxxx could be voice as “xxxx” or “xxxx”.
  + ***Space between syllables:*** We recommend spaces, rather than dashes, as they aid voice talent readability.
  + **Special characters in pronouncers:** Some pronouncers can contain special characters to denote vowel and consonant sounds, like xx for a short e, and “x” for a long e. They are fine to use, but check two things: 1) does the voice talent understand all the markings, and 2) are the symbols and/or fonts transferable when sending documents from device to device.
  + ***Consistency:*** Where you use a standard such as IPA, or if it’s more home grown, it’s important that the same nomenclature is used consistently to avoid confusion.

**Pronunciation Management**

In addition to individual pronouncers, there are some general principles to follow when managing scripts and pronouncers over time.

* ***Separate out the pronunciation and text:*** When defining prompts, separate the pronouncers from the text to be spoken. In our standard prompt script template (Voice Prompt Template, or “VPT”), each row is represented in a spreadsheet row, with only the text to be spoken in one column, and pronouncers and other instructions in the column next to the referenced text. This allows the voice talent to scan the document first to assess how many pronouncers there are (and where), and to read in an uninterrupted manner.
* **Keep a pronouncer library:** If the prompts for a given system are being voiced are 1) being updated frequently over time, and 2) being voiced in multiple languages and/or by multiple voice talents, then it is helpful to have maintain a document that represents a master list, or library, of pronouncers. This is helpful is the updates are periodic but infrequent; a voice talent may voice dozens of other jobs between your updates and may forget the pronouncers, as might the Submitter.
* ***Verify pronouncers with official sources or experts:*** If the term is a scientific, medical, or technical terms, be sure to validate its pronunciation, with a scientific, medical, or technical expert. Always, many companies have marketing and/or communication standards for speaking company and product names, and those standards may differ among geographies, so checking with a marketing or product manager colleague is highly advisable.
* ***Regional context:*** Often times certain company names, product names, and locations are spoken in English within a non-English script. If this the case, check with a native speaker for how the word should be sounded. Also, sometimes the system owner may want English words spoken with a native accent, so it’s worth asking if this is desired.