

Voice of Siri and GPS girl Karen Jacobsen gives life directions



Karen Jacobsen is the common voice of Siri in Australia on 400 million Apple devices, GPS units and elevators. Picture: Jane Dempster



The voice of Siri and GPS systems in Australia wants you to get your life back on track. Karen Jacobsen, who apart from residing on millions of iPhones and GPS brands Garmin, Navman and TomTom, utters the word “recalculating” should you not follow the prescribed route.

[See the full video interview with Karen Jacobsen here.](#)

She’s now offering you a new direction on a professional and life level in *Recalculate: Directions for Driving Performance Success* which she recently promoted in Australia. Follow her advice and “you have reached your destination”, she says gleefully in a promotional video for the book.

Jacobsen is a multi-talented person: singer, songwriter, voice-over artist. According to her estimate she is the voice of 400 million smartphones, car GPS systems, lifts and cruise ship audio systems around the world. She’s a motivational speaker and author, an out-there character who’s everywhere. She sang at last year’s Carols by Candlelight in Melbourne, and in June sang the national anthem at the rugby league State of Origin.

The girl from Mackay was an experienced voiceover artist before moving to New York City to follow her music ambitions. But life took an unusual turn. “There was a client looking for a native Australian female voiceover artists living in the northeast of the United States. I went to the audition, I got the job.”

That was in 2002, five years before the iPhone came to market. Jacobsen’s voice originally was destined for the Garmin GPS. About 50 hours of recordings were made to create a voice system based on her speaking voice. She worked in four-hour bursts from 9am to 1pm daily so her voice didn’t exhibit fatigue. She returned to singing and songwriting in the afternoons.



Creating a voice system wasn’t simply a case of recording every consonant and vowel sound. “A very clever team of engineers worked out what I would need to record so that they could capture every combination of syllables possible,” Jacobsen says.

“It meant recording words, phrases, sentences, but the script was developed so they knew they had captured everything.”

Apart from occasional tweaks, the same voice system was used by all the other devices. She didn’t have to re-create a specific system for Siri, which was released nine years after her voice was laid down.

She was inspired into music by Olivia Newton-John. “I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to become a professional singer and move to America. They were my two goals. The professional singer part was so clear, I was working towards that goal from then on.”

At 31 she finally moved to New York. “The voice system part of my life was so unexpected. I thought the only thing I ever would do would be music.”

Jacobsen has registered the name “GPS girl”; her website is thegpsgirl.com, and she isn’t shy about weaving GPS metaphors into her marketing lexicon.



Putting down her voice, her book, her life

Her book is promoted as “44 ways to drive your success”. She has an audio book that offers a “road map for your future” designed to “put yourself in the driver’s seat”. She says in life it’s hard to navigate change and get back on track. Last Christmas she released her ninth studio album, entitled *Destination Christmas*.

Despite her voice being everywhere, she still finds it “bizarre” and “surreal” to hear it, and says she’d be living on her own private island if she earned a dollar for every time it was used.

Then there’s notoriety. “I was not sure what to do with the attention that it brought because people were very excited, they’d want to tell me their GPS stories, about the wonderful trips we’d taken together. People were familiar with me as if they already knew me, that I was a part of their family.”

She says her book made the connection between directions in the car and directions in life, and her love of professional and personal development. “I realised the world recalculating could be applied to life.”

She’s now working on a one-woman show, *From Mackay to Manhattan*, a musical retrospective of her life journey.

Despite being a New Yorker, she still visits Australia at least twice yearly; her next visit is in December.



Karen Jacobsen has launched her book, *Recalculate*. Picture: Jane Dempster