

Bringing Them Hollywood

Obtain additional high-end business by giving clients the performance of a world-class recording studio

by Brian Barr

Have you ever visited an elite recording studio when a rock star performed, experienced the enchanting sounds of a jazz singer's hands gently caressing the microphone, or heard the delicacy of a bow as it travels across a Guarneri violin or a Stradivari cello? At Blue Turtle Productions, a top mix studio in Hollywood, California, this is exactly what happens every day. The excitement and energy is intoxicating. By introducing your clients to this awesome experience, you will learn numerous positive lessons from the studio industry that will greatly benefit your business.



The author at Blue Turtle Productions, a professional recording studio.

At Blue Turtle, cranking up the main volume control is similar to dropping the hammer on a finely crafted 600-horsepower Italian super car. The listener can hear the human breath as it enters the reed on a saxophone, and enjoy the subtle differences in all 80 instruments of an orchestra in both stereo or multichannel surround sound recordings. The precise speed of a kick drum may cause you to jump! One can feel the deep bass and roar of the large pipe organ at

St. Mary's Basilica in Krakow, Poland, or the ultra low frequency trembling of the ground minutes before the train appears. The rush and the exhilaration excites all of your senses. Your heartbeat is only outmatched by your adrenaline flow, yet you experience no listening fatigue or ringing ears following such an incredible session.

Compare a studio like this or the Kim Novak post-production theater at Sony Pictures Studios, to watching a movie at your

local theater or in most home theaters. It's like drinking a first growth Bordeaux from a styrofoam cup in your garage versus visiting the cellars at Chateau Latour in the Medoc region of France. That's the difference we should be giving to our luxury clients.

Certainly, these studios have ultra high budgets and demand state-of-the-art performance. When a new studio is commissioned, ten to 20 members are assembled in professional teams to design and build the

project. Well-documented studio protocols (consisting of many years of cumulative experience) ensure that budgets, timelines, and performance specifications are met, and numerous backup systems are always in place. Equally important, these studios are maintained and updated as often as necessary to ensure state of the art reliability, functionality, and performance. This enables the passionate, talented artists and engineers to carefully work in concert to create, develop, and produce the ultimate experience.

Sadly, relative to the ultra high quality studios where they were born, the resulting CDs and DVDs are usually played back on inferior home theaters or in substandard media rooms. Equally frustrating, there are many tradespeople and clients who are completely unaware of the awesome experience a studio provides.

Currently, there is little crossover between the studio and home A/V businesses. Few home systems employ any superior studio protocols, engineering or on-site calibration. These systems are often designed and installed by A/V integration companies whose people have neither visited a studio or recording industry trade show, nor have any formal studio related training and certification. Many do not even know how to operate such systems. The average home A/V integrator would rather discuss equipment and control systems than speak about the positive studio playback experience their clients deserve. Please realize, most clients are no more interested in talking about their control system than they are their HVAC thermostat!

Most high-end clients prefer not to discuss A/V equipment and control systems; they just want it to work and work well. When clients hire uninformed home A/V integrators, they rarely receive the best experience for their money spent. For example, any acoustician, recording engineer, or audio manufacturer knows that room acoustics are as important as the equipment. Yet, some home A/V installers know nothing about acoustics, and rarely subcontract an outside acoustic engineering firm.

Clients and the entire home A/V industry deserve better. Systems costing \$10,000 and up can benefit from using studio protocols

or equipment. The best A/V integrators have learned that employing positive elements of engineering and design from the studio industry yields fantastic results for their clients and business. For example, a knowledgeable installer would know to place analog-to-digital (A/D) convertors, Digital Signal Processors (DSPs), and digital-to-analog (D/A) convertors between the main A/V processor and the amplifiers. These are common practices in the studio world that greatly improve acoustic realism.

While high-end speakers and amplifiers can last for many years, computer-based hardware requires more frequent upgrading. This is why, in a studio, separate components are used, so that the longer lasting, high quality equipment does not need to be replaced as often. By implementing computer-based, separate components into high-end home audio systems, revenue is generated by adding the need for on-site calibration. In addition, recurring revenue is generated from recalibration as the client changes or upgrades the system every two to five years.

At my own company, California Audio Technology (CAT), we have taken projects to very high levels for our most discerning clients. For example, our CAT MBX sys-

tems can employ over fifty subwoofers in one room. These systems can cost anywhere from \$500,000 to \$10 million. To design these ultra high-end systems, we looked to the performance criteria of the studio world. With the exception of a mixing board, Pro Tools, and microphones, there are few differences and numerous commonalities. We have installed them in several different environments—homes, mega yachts, jets and even outdoors. When CAT MBX dealers reward elite clients with the ultimate experience, these dealers are rewarded in kind with profitable business and growth, even in this period of economic downturn.

CAT MBX dealers have clients who have won Grammys, Oscars, professional sports championships, lead the Fortune 500 and topped Forbes' lists. These dealers understand that it is important to share their passion for accurate live and studio music, movie reproduction, and return it in kind with the best A/V installations possible. Think about it: What sense does it make to install a lesser system into the home of a successful recording artist who is used to the performance of a professional studio?

Regardless of the size, scope, or budget of the home A/V system, successful implemen-

THINGS TO CONSIDER

A/V systems costing \$100K+ should address all of the following studio items:

- Design, construction and installation (timelines and budgets)
- On-site calibration protocols
- CAD drawings
- Acoustic, mechanical, structural, and electrical engineering
- Power and grounding systems
- System heat dissipation
- Loudspeaker design*
 - State of the art loudspeaker materials (eg. aluminum, Corian, Avonite)
 - Heat dissipating curvilinear driver cones (eg. constructed from aluminum)
- Loudspeaker signal alignment
- Precise loudspeaker, screen and seating placements
- Subwoofer balancing systems
- A/D convertors
- DSP's
- D/A convertors
- Properly protected fully differential (FD) output stage amplifiers
- Minimum 12-gauge, 6-ninth copper loudspeaker wire
- Ultra high quality balanced XLR cables (6-ninths copper or silver plated 6-ninths copper. Solid silver is best.)

*Note: The most advanced studio and home A/V systems often have custom engineered loudspeakers manufactured precisely for their location and role in the space.