

WHY DOES (GOOD) AUDIO OFTEN GO UNNOTICED?

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Allocating a budget for the audio portion of an AV production, specifying an adequate sound system and sourcing good sound technicians may often be overlooked in the corporate events sector, says audio engineer, Aston Fearon.

Many times it's only after a bad experience that audio is given the thought it deserves and when things are going well the sound technician may often go overlooked and taken for granted. Why is it that the better the sound is in a production the more sound goes unnoticed?

Especially for speech reinforcement, good sound is often subtle. If the level in the room is too low, nobody can hear it and strain their ears in vain trying to do so. If it is too loud, delegates in the room will be wincing with discomfort. Good sound sounds natural, often like there is no sound system or engineer actually present and in this case; what is being spoken on a large stage in front of 1000 people sounds very much like what is spoken in a small boardroom of 10- clear, natural and even.

Poor sound often has a lot of distractions which make the message of the speaker unclear or even inaudible. These include distortion, noise, electrical hum, RF interference and feedback to name a few. A sound technician actually needs quite a bit of knowledge and skill to remove these distractions from the audio that he is delivering- but the thing about a distraction is that we only notice it when it is present.

During the rig, the sound engineer might be making all kinds of noise as he induces feedback and often pushes things louder than he needs to in order to tune the sound system so it sounds smooth and intelligible. When it comes to the event itself though a good sound technician often makes his work look effortless. A production company not used to hiring a specialist sound technician may even question the seeming ease at which the sound technician gets through the day- in turn thinking of cutting back on the practise of using a dedicated sound technician. This of course is counterproductive.

By and large my experience is that many end clients and production companies do know the benefits of good professional audio. Many also know the cost of poorly delivered audio- from painful experience. In educating others about good sound how can we communicate its' benefits? Many good things go unnoticed and without a song and dance. Think about water for instance, most of us are blessed enough to get it on tap, it has massive health benefits and actually we couldn't live without it- but if my water supply were polluted for some reason I would definitely know about it. Maybe we need to think about good audio in the events sector in a similar vein: it is pretty much essential to the message on stage being delivered.