



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Radio on the Road

Reaching Beyond Traditional Remote Gear



by Mark Shander

[January 2012] The art of broadcasting from anywhere means setting up remote studios and studio equipment as well as codecs, in all manner of locations and situations. Mark Shander continues his discussion by acknowledging the blurring of accepted definitions.

Among other goals, this column will try to help stations evaluate and create “micro-studios,” a phrase brought to my attention by a media colleague who is very well known and respected in the industry.

We are going to take a deep look into the viability and use of current equipment designed to strict specifications (dependable workhorses manufactured to meet performance standards), as well as some inexpensive equipment that can potentially produce similar results with greater general availability and lower cost.

So far, the feedback regarding our first column has been enlightening – and in some cases bordering on controversial.

Frankly, I took a fair amount of heat from some broadcast colleagues over the concept of writing columns that could potentially encourage, and

even empower, the use of consumer equipment for broadcast purposes. Upon much further investigation, I found the reason for this to be two-fold.

YOU WANT TO USE WHAT?

First of all, some broadcasters shared their concern about any discussion regarding lowering the quality of broadcast sound to that produced by consumer grade gear.

It is true that we have reached the point where you can potentially, with good techniques, achieve “broadcast-quality” results consistently with consumer equipment. This lowering of the “barrier to entry” to broadcast quality is something that some journalists and broadcasters alike consider potentially to be a detriment to the industry as a whole – another very controversial topic.

However, the fact is that there now exists a very blurry line between “professional journalism,” broadcasting, and Webcast-originated social programming. This is more than just disturbing to some people. They argue about a possible negative impact to the viability and profitability

of the broadcast business itself. Combined with a similar deterioration in technical standards it could spell the end of broadcasting as we know it.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

If you do not think this impact is a concern from a business perspective, in addition to an engineering one, just take a quick look at the impact mobility media advertising (commercials and ads on mobile wireless devices and phones) and commercial insertion has arguably had on broadcast advertising rates, inventory availability, and annual buys and revenue figures.

Of course, numbers can be looked at different ways, so using them to support this point may be difficult to interpret in a way that is not subjective. Additionally, look how many people there are out there who are not only reporting directly to the Web, but are packaging their own stories independent of broadcast facilities.

There are people “doing their own thing,” and many of those who share programming direct to digital delivery using social media are every bit as talented as those we put on the airwaves. They can create programming with production values indistinguishable from those of a commercial production staff and, in many cases, are reaching a very significant audience as well.

Plus, all this can be done with a staff of as few as one person.

Those of us with Roku or other set-top boxes already are starting to see the impact of alternate digital broadcast delivery methods and monetization: further fragmenting time spent watching TV and the potential revenue that is being spent elsewhere. We will discuss the business and financial impact further in a future column here at *The Broadcasters’ Desktop Resource*.

YOU WANT TO USE WHAT?

The second challenge is from an engineering perspective, rather than operations, production and business. Hardcore concerns like performance, reliability, value and Return on the Investment (ROI) are bantered about here.

Will equipment like inexpensive microphones serve the same purpose as their more expensive broadcast counterparts? Will they stand the test of time? Will they perform as expected long-term or will they start out working well, but then begin to exhibit issues like crackling while wires are moved or having the plug or jack give out.

Yes, you can record a news package with a \$50 consumer condenser mic and it will sound good. But should you? Is it a good business decision?

The short-term impact on the budget is obvious. But what is the long-term impact on budget, the industry from a manufacturing and equipment supplier standpoint, and from the perspective of empowering competition with little or no barrier to entry?

As you can see, all of this is not merely just a business decision, it may well entail political factors, sometimes having many more facets than what appears to be the initial concerns. We will take a look at some of these as we dig deeper in our discussion. Stay tuned!!

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