

ABA Engineering Academy Continuing Educational Series: "Get it Right at the Source"

Joe Gilder with Home Studio Corner posted a great article the other day entitled "Get it Right at the Source". While his article was aimed at recording engineers, I thought it should be the same for broadcasting as well.

As broadcast engineers we should make every effort to ensure that the source material, (audio and/or video) is the best quality available. With rare exceptions, there is not much we can do downstream to correct bad source material. Don't fall in the mode of "let the processor correct it". As we mentioned in an earlier post, in the digital world bad source material will most often come out the end of the chain even worse.

In audio bad source material can take many forms from hum, buzz, weak, distorted, out of phase, microphone placement, and the list can go on and on. Pre-checking every source before placing in the program chain is essential. I heard a live news feed where the audio from the guest speaker was being picked up by simply placing the microphone in the room, had terrible acoustics. If the venue will not allow additional microphones on the podium, get with the A/V people about a feed from the system. Professional sound operators most often have a "mult-box" for the media. Make sure you ask for a "mike check" before the event begins.

Here is a little personal experience. Several years ago, at a station where I was working, the engineers took over the job of dubbing all the agency spots onto carts. Ask someone over 30 what carts are! We did this to make sure the audio quality was the best it could be. Several times we would reject a spot because the audio was terrible. The sales manager got upset, saying this is one of our best clients and spends a lot of money with us. Our answer was if the agency will clean up their production, we will be happy to use it. After a few phone calls the spots were much better quality.

While I am my soap box, one thing that sounds awful is the audio switching doing a live television newscast. Things like switching microphones on late or worse going to the weather man and his mike is not turned on (or dead battery). Pre-check audio way before switching. I once did a basketball game for CBS Radio. I was told never leave the feed silent, always leave some type of audio (crowd noise) up. Audio switchers in television should always have a way to monitor, off line, every source constantly. Oh!... pay attention to the newscast so you can anticipate what is coming up, so you don't miss a sound cue.

Gain stage all your sources so they come out of the playout switcher at the same level. Don't forget to balance program audio and EAS audio so that alerts will be the same as program audio. Never rely on the station processor to level out sources!

It is paying attention to the little things that make your station look and sound great. The final goal is "What comes out of the speaker (or screen) is the only thing that matters"

Getting it Right at the Source can take your production from a B to A+

These Continuing Educational Series are compiled by the [ABA Engineering Academy](#) with input from various technical articles. Comments and suggestions are welcomed.

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