

New UK Tax Regulations bode well for Music Studios and Audio Post

In the financial statement delivered on 5th December 2005, Gordon Brown introduced the framework for the new tax incentives for filmmakers. This will replace the current set of incentives that expire in April 2006.

The new incentives are very good for the industry and should stimulate film production in the UK without some potential abuses that the old regulations allowed for. Briefly, through tax rebates, a British qualified film with a budget under £20m can get as much as 25% back on the cost of making the film and 20% back on films with a budget over £20m. But we are not film producers, so the intricacies of the new structure, which are pretty complex, do not affect us directly. We need to see a maximum amount of that film budget spent in our UK facilities on UK talent.

In tandem with the new regulations is a new format which establishes what actually qualifies as a British film. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The Treasury have established a 'Cultural Test' to determine this outcome. This takes the form of a checklist of 32 possible points. To qualify, a film must meet 16 of those points. The points test encompasses three areas -

- Cultural Content - 4 possible points for British content.
- Cultural Hubs - 15 possible points for UK activity.
- Cultural Practitioners - 13 possible points for British or EEA nationals/residents

Within these categories are 7 possible points for music and post, making our facilities ideal for a producer looking for the required 16 points. The incentive for filmmakers to spend their music and audio post budgets in the UK is clear. With these points in the test, it becomes very attractive to take on this work in the UK - with the likes of us! Lets take a common example. If an English language film with a British Director and Producer is shot in one of the popular low cost east European countries with an international cast and crew, it can still qualify as British under the test, if they take on all of

their music and post in the UK. By and large the British Tax Incentives will

more than cover the budget for handling the music and post in this country, which is a significant incentive.

The new regulations apply to films that begin principal photography after the 1st April 2006. With any luck, we should all see a significant up-turn in work from the film sector. It all bodes well for later this year, 2007 and beyond.

For further details of the Cultural Test go to www.culture.gov.uk and follow the links.

For further details from both HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs go to www.treasury.gov.uk & www.hmrc.gov.uk

Report by Dennis Weinrich, Managing Director of Videosonics, Audio Post Company

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Campaign for True Environment Performance

Giles Orford, Focusrite's Marketing Manager, says pro-audio products need to do 'exactly what they say on the tin!'



Over the last 20 years there's been an increased awareness within the food industry, specifically supermarkets, with regard to a true description of contents on packaging. Campaigns have come and gone, bringing about a change in the way manufacturers describe their product. Indeed, in more recent years, activities have turned a further corner, with supermarkets using the amount of information they provide as a marketing hook to bolster their "caring" image. Bringing me to issues closer to home.

Recording studios and project studios alike, rarely make rash purchasing decisions. In deciding between two similar interfaces, such as pre-amps or A-D converters, the often hard-to-find performance figures play an integral role for the clued-up engineer. And here's the problem: You would be fooled if you thought that these performance figures were reliable. It's

not that companies lie, heaven forbid, not in our industry! But the absence of a format to present the information and an organisation to regulate this, means that performance figures often

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misrepresent the true performance of a product. Digital dynamic range figures are a classic example of this, and also where the mistakes could be put down to misunderstanding rather than malice.

Some companies in the pro-recording industry quote figures from datasheets received from the manufacturers of the selected silicon devices. However, once placed in the environment of a

product, with essential circuitry around the chip, performance figures change for the worse, and herein lies the real talent of good product design – to get the most out the chips used. My trusted R'n'D department suggest that this difference can be as much as 12dB dynamic range, with a chip's DAC performance measured at 114dB outside of the box and 102dB inside the box. That difference of 12dB is equivalent to a reduction from 19bits to 17bits; essentially, the studio is being short-changed by two bits! To come back to the food analogy, this would be like a supermarket quoting nutritional value of bread using the figures they're provided from the wheat used, prior to the baking process, which would of course be far off the mark.

So, what to do? We need a campaign. Let's call it the Campaign for True Environment Performance – TEP for short (every good campaign deserves an acronym!) Only those products that boast performance figures provided through the testing of the complete product in a true studio environment, will be allowed to have the TEP stamp of approval. Now all we need to do is convince other manufacturers that this is something to aim for; inform customers that this is something to look for; and have an association help to achieve both of the above. We must fight for Honesty, Truth, Justice, and the Pro-recording way of life!

But whatever should come out of this brief rant, at least bare in mind, when you're told that a product does "exactly what is says on the tin," treat these words with caution – appearances can be deceiving!

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Practising the Black Arts in the 21st Century

Nick Watson, Mastering Engineer at The Town House Studios casts out some industry demons

We're all familiar with the subject of digital technology and its impact on recording studios; such as the increasing difficulty for high-end commercial facilities to compete with computer-based project studios. These changes have influenced the role of the mastering studio, although not necessarily in the same way. There are of course various low-cost alternatives which have sprung up as a direct result of cheaper technology. These range from software plug-ins used to 'maximise' tracks, to dedicated commercial facilities equipped with budget gear and charging accordingly.

However the advantages of great mastering are clearer and more important in today's world of cheap technology than ever before.

It would seem that whilst record companies both large and small will in many cases expect their product to be tracked and mixed at a fraction of the cost of say, twenty years ago, they don't want to skimp on the mastering. And with good reason. In many cases a client might use a particular studio or engineer to get a certain sound. For others, the mastering session is a safety net; a way of ensuring there are no nasty surprises in a recording and a guarantee that everything will go smoothly when the master goes off for duplication.

In terms of what you get for your money, a high-end studio offers you superior technical and human resources. There is no substitute for a fresh perspective, and a mastering engineer provides just that. An experienced, objective ear combined with accurate monitoring can

make a world of difference, whereas someone close to the project, working in inappropriate surroundings, will nearly always fail to see the wood for the trees.

If a recording has originated from a project studio, then the chances are that the mastering session will be the first point at which the material gets heard on industry standard monitors. This neutral monitoring environment can reveal a multitude of sins which, left uncorrected, could significantly undermine a recording's chances in the market (especially when compounded by the ravages of data compression such as mp3 for download).

Having identified any beneficial adjustments, the professional high-end mastering studio is equipped with a range of both digital and analogue EQ and compression options, giving the engineer the ability to choose the best tool for every sonic nip and tuck. Each of these purpose-built units can cost up to five times the price of a decent PC and will have been installed in such a way as to provide the highest performance with minimal noise and distortion to the signal path. It all adds up. Despite the availability of powerful software at extraordinarily low prices, high-end engineers are voting with their feet to stay in well equipped and acoustically sound studios rather than taking their work 'home' with them.

There are some new tricks in the bag too: In the modern mastering studio, specialised restoration tools traditionally used to clean up vintage recordings are now employed to remove clicks, glitches and dropouts caused by incorrect



clocking, in addition to curing distortion due to digital clipping.

There are further interesting developments in the role of today's mastering engineer. For instance, many clients are now recognising the advantages of combining the portability and total recall of DAW based production with the accuracy of the mastering environment. We are beginning to see producers mastering directly from their DAW at the session, thereby allowing them the luxury of making last minute adjustments to the mix.

As ever, evolving trends in music production continue to present new challenges and the mastering community adapts accordingly. Providing everything from quality control to outright salvage, we'll always have our part to play at that all-important final stage.

Nick Watson has mastered for The Small Faces, Gary Numan, Deep Purple... amongst others. Contact mastering@sanctuarystudios.co.uk Many thanks to Denis at Skye Mastering for the Joe Meek image. Go to www.skyemastering.com

DID YOU KNOW...?

Did you know that UK fire safety legislation is set to undergo radical change in April 2006?

What will this mean to you?

Fire certificates issued under the 1971 Act will no longer be required and, instead, the new Order will impose a general duty to carry out a fire risk assessment. The main points for employers to cover are:

- The safety of your employees and any visitors, including contractors.
- The protection of property and resources from fire and the job security of employees.
- The safety of fire fighters should they have to enter the property.
- The environmental impact of fire.

Another major difference is the requirement to identify the "responsible person" in respect of fire safety at your premises. For full details, visit the the APRS web site or contact the APRS Head Office

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How can the APRS reach out to home music-makers?

Asks Paul Fallon, singer and independent artist

As an indie pop-rock singer songwriter, I have been writing and recording music at home for several years. On a cold January morning, I arrived at my first APRS board meeting at Town House Studios, wondering how (and whether) the APRS was relevant to me.

In recent years Cubase, Logic, Pro Tools and related plug-ins, etc have arrived on the market, largely eliminating the historic gap between home and 'professional' recording studios. The internet has created unprecedented DIY opportunities to distribute and market music. So for many home musicians, it feels as though a golden age has arrived. But during the same period, many of the larger studios have become uneconomic and have been forced to close.

The APRS has responded to this sea-change in the industry by reaching

out to the thousands of music makers recording at home. But how can the APRS make itself more relevant to the home recording industry? The answer lies in the fact that although the technology is now readily available, the expertise, knowledge and industry contacts are as difficult to come by as ever.

At my first APRS board meeting, it was agreed to organise a series of seminars on key subjects including mastering, mixing, recording technologies, studio setup and miking techniques. These seminars represent a rare and welcome opportunity for home-music makers to network with their peers, and learn from more experienced recording professionals. Introducing today's top sound engineers to potential industry leaders of tomorrow.

The APRS has embraced the revolution in the recording industry, and now



aspires to represent the exploding number of home studios as well as the more established larger studios. Bringing these diverse groups together through education, training and networking opportunities is a vital, unique role, which the APRS is ideally placed to fulfil.

Paul is currently looking for musicians to collaborate with, see www.liquid-band.net or email Paul at paul@fallonp.net

member's news

Strongroom purchases Air

Richard Boote, owner and managing director of Strongroom recording studios, announced his purchase of AIR Studios, the world-class recording facilities established and chaired by legendary Beatles producer Sir George Martin, from Chrysalis Group PLC and Pioneer GB Limited. Boote comments "I believe that bringing Strongroom and Air together will not only ensure the survival of two of the greatest recording facilities in Europe, but also enhance the offerings of both studios."

GearBox goes North

GearBox recently opened an office in the North of England to deal with the growing demand from broadcast companies, post-production facilities and creative professionals in the area. GearBox North is located within the VTR North Post-Production facility in Leeds; the operation is modelled on the increasingly successful GearBox Express office the company runs from Goldcrest Post Production in Soho.

National Music Council promotes Filleul

Peter Filleul, APRS' Executive Director, has recently been elected Deputy Chairman of the National Music Council (NMC). He has been on the Executive of the NMC for some years and Peter is a Trustee of the body, a position that reflects very well the regard for the APRS within the industry and the contribution he has made to the NMC.

Pesche goes to Abbey Road

Abbey Road Studios have announced the appointment of mastering engineer Geoff Pesche; who moves from West London's Sanctuary Town House studios to join the team in St John's Wood. Geoff takes a wealth of mastering knowledge and experience to the Post Production department at Abbey Road. He has worked in the studio industry for many years including spells at Utopia, Tape One and Masterpiece.

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