

CASE STUDY: STUDIO VOODOO

Adventures in DVD-A, Pt. 1

Gary Mraz and Ted Price comprise the award-winning production team known as StudioVoodoo. In this, the first of a multi-part series, they discuss how they've been blazing new trails in DVD-A, SACD, and surround sound markets. Audio pioneers, saddle up and take notes. —Greg Rule

Over the past few years, we have been fortunate to work closely with DTS Entertainment to release our music on DVD-Audio. We've learned a lot from our experiences that also applies to the more easy-to-create DVD-Video discs. In a series of articles, we'll share what we learned — creative and promotional ideas that bands and musicians can use to help their music stand out from the crowd.

Our home entertainment and home computing systems are converging rapidly thanks to the record-setting deployment of DVD by manufacturers as the standard for audio, video, and data storage. It's true that the days of the CD are numbered, as DVD technology has become the center of most home enter-

tainment centers, and is starting to invade the car audio market as well. The increasingly common Universal DVD player serves as a playback device for DVDs and CDs in all formats — including high-fidelity DVD-Audio and SACD — as well as all flavors of CD/DVD-Rs, music CDs, MP3s, and VCDs. For the first time since Betamax, consumers do not have to navigate the complexity of owning different types of playback hardware for video and music entertainment.

This is a good thing for all musicians because image is everything in the post-Napster music business, and content is king. We have to stand out in the crowd, and DVDs offer lots of bang for the buck. It gets even better when you consider the



fact that, using our creativity and the tools we already have, video novices like you and me can actually create interesting DVDs for a minimal cost in our modest little home studios.

If it sounds like we like DVDs, you're right. We *love* them for both creative and business reasons. Musical artists can use DVDs as promotional tools, or as full-blown albums with extra features such as surround sound, alternate/club mixes, live video, still pictures, and text. With a little extra effort, DVDs can include interactive games, hidden "Easter egg" features, and links to the internet. And for you left-brained band members, DVD helps to solve many problems bedeviling the "business" side of the music business, by reducing piracy, restoring lost profit margins, and adding real value to the music product. Think of them as the 21st-century answer to the cool '60s and '70s album covers that included detailed liner notes and free posters in the album jacket.

DVD-A

The new DVD specification that most of the industry has chosen for music is DVD-Audio. DVD-Audio allows for higher resolution audio (up to 24-bit / 192 kHz for stereo and 24/96 multi-channel) than the typical DVD-Video format. The trade-off for this audio-ophile fidelity is that the DVD-A specification leaves less space for video content. The video portion is relative to program length, sample rate, and disc capacity, which usually in the end equates to about 15 minutes of high quality video content. It also allows for a series of still images — a slideshow of up to 20 pictures — during each song. This allows for some nice additional video features, but the emphasis is clearly on the music.

The authoring tools for creating DVD-A are expensive and complex at the moment, but using inexpensive DVD-Video authoring tools, which are commonly available, any DVD-Video project can look and navigate in a similar fashion to a DVD-A, minus the high-resolution MLP audio portion.

So before you go crazy trying to figure out how to pull together a DVD music project that includes hours of video footage and special features, remember that your DVD doesn't need to be all about video; it can offer a lot of other, more accessible, creative possibilities as well.

Lesson 1: The emphasis should be on the music. The wonderful thing about the DVD is that it can hold so much audio information. Use it! Having multiple versions of an album is one thing that a CD could never do. On our DVD-A album, we included *four* different versions of the master recordings: stereo, 6.1 dts-es surround, 5.1 MLP, and binaural stereo. Other possibilities include different foreign language versions, remix styles, or music-minus tracks. Did anybody say karaoke?

Lesson 2: Still images, or slides, are acceptable and very effective visual compliments to music. Slideshows of still images, or tracking over still images (the Ken Burns effect) can create a dramatic visual effect. Photos and other artwork can be



readily captured digitally. Securing the rights for use can be challenge, depending on the situation. On our DVD-As, we found local graphic artists that we liked, and approached them directly to negotiate a limited-use agreement for some of their work in exchange for promotional considerations on the DVD.

Lesson 3: Video production can be dirt-cheap as long as it is interesting. Unless you are living in a cave, you know that current digital video

cameras are of sufficient quality to be acceptable to a mass audience. What matters is the concept. From a marketing perspective, the best use of video is to define a clear identity for the artist. Giving the audience a peek behind the scenes provides them with insight into the personality of the artist and, when done properly, establishes a stronger connection with the music. One of the best examples of cheap, single-camera video segments I've seen is an interview with E from the Eels as he shops at vintage music stores in Hollywood.

Performing artists can use video from live shows as source material. Video can be collected from multiple shows and edited together as one song, or as a live set. The best idea is to always have a camera (or two) running. Importing and editing video from mini-DV is extremely simple and flexible using even the cheapest iMac and free iMovie software.

The easiest solution is to use the least amount of edited, full-motion video and the most amount of still graphics, audio, text and slideshows. Remember Lesson 1: It's about the music. The visuals are provided as extra content that adds value and relevance to the music. Examples of easy-to-acquire non-video visual content include song lyrics and album credits, photos, diaries, art, poetry, audio commentary, and other technical insights and artist information.

Lesson 4: DVDs can be used for other things. The volume of data that the DVD can hold makes it a perfect platform for a multimedia press kit. It has the ability to hold the complete variety of audio and video information commonly requested by booking agents and A&R reps in one easy to mail package.

Also, the low cost of duplication allows bands to include promotional DVDs with their CDs when they are released. Mainstream artists such as Eminem are using promotional DVDs such as *The Eminem Show* to increase sales and combat piracy, while other bands, such as Supreme Beings of Leisure, feature surround sound music videos of their album tracks on a bonus DVD.

DVDs offer musicians a wide variety of creative options for improving what we sell and how we sell it. In the next installment we'll get insights from some well-known artists who are currently using DVDs to promote and sell their music; and, we'll take a look behind the scenes of the upcoming Warped Tour DVD. EQ

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