

Soundings

The Newsletter of Sound Strategies

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<http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

More topical comment on sound from Sound Strategies and its associates.

[Turn it down!](#) – Is it the music or the quality of the sound reproduction that offends?

[Oscar 'keeping score'](#) – the Oscars change the rules for music awards

[Why is sound the Cinderella of the Internet?](#) – Guest comment from Andrew Peggie

[Links](#)

Turn it down!

How many times have you been driven away from a bar or restaurant because you thought the music was too loud? But is it in fact the volume at which the music is being played, or does the fault lie in part with the quality of the equipment which is being used.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to the [Meyer Sound Laboratories](#) in Berkeley, CA. In the same way that Rolls Royce equates to high standards of quality in the automotive industry so does the name Meyer set the marker for audio products. John and Helen Meyer have been running the business since 1979 and have been preferred suppliers globally for clients ranging from the Cirque du Soleil to Luciano Pavarotti. In 2008 they will supply all the sound equipment for the opening and closing ceremonies in Beijing. Not only do they equip large scale extravaganzas but their compact range of speakers are ideally suited to more modest environments.

My purpose in being there was to carry out a review for the large scale implementation of speaker systems across a number of venues by one of our clients and during the course of the visit I was given the opportunity to listen to a range of music played in their custom built sound studio. The needs of the client dictated that the music had to fulfil a secondary role to other activities. It came as a major surprise to find that even when standing close to one of the speakers it was still possible to carry on a conversation almost irrespective of the dynamic (perceived volume) at which the music was being played.

This makes a powerful case when assessing content for considering the means by which the end user experiences it.

At its extreme I have found speakers hidden under the guest seating in restaurants for the sake of tidiness. Very much an all-over sensory experience for those sitting on them! While for others the constant low-level burbling of indistinct sounds is little more than an annoyance. Judging too from a straw poll we carried out recently with customers at some of the more popular high street retailers it is hard to see how a justifiable business case can be made for such aggressive and hostile audio environments. And there was a certain degree of irony to a recent event I attended dedicated especially to sound, held in one of London's landmark buildings, where the quality of the PA reproduction conveyed more an acoustic sense of London's Waterloo railway station than a finely tuned aural space.

So before we start to critique the music and sounds around us, should we not first consider the platform from which we hear them? There is a very real danger that the equipment will work against the message and in this light it will be interesting to hear the quality of playback from an initiative launched

by the beleaguered [UK Post Office](#) recently where in an attempt to stimulate business they are proposing to enable their customers to integrate small sound chips within their letters. I recall receiving similar devices in past Christmas Cards that sounded like small trapped wasps, but perhaps more about this in the December edition of *Soundings!*

Michael Spencer
Managing Director

Blog comments to <http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

Oscar 'keeping score'

A recent feature in [Billboard Magazine](#) comments on the announcement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences that the rules are to change in the way music tracks are marketed to Oscar voters. It would appear that the music industry is considered to be bypassing the way in which members are meant to evaluate the music by targeting them with separate CDs and audio tracks separate from visual and narrative context of the film. A Fox Music representative commented "I wish I could tell you that everybody could watch a film and understand the musical component without hearing the music separately to evaluate it. It's a very specific skill". Is this not like saying forget the mayonnaise, just think of the quality of the olive oil.

Watch out for later articles in *Soundings* where we will look at the importance of taking an informed approach to the matching of sound with image.

Blog comments to <http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

Why is sound the Cinderella of the Internet?

The internet has been the medium for the development of a whole new model for selling music. Whether for good or bad will depend on where you stand in relation to the traditional commercial market – by common acceptance driven by the tension between global and indie record companies.

Yet music on the web itself seems to be languishing in the virtual equivalent of the middle ages in terms of how it – and audio in general – is used. With Web 2.0 (and allegedly Web 3.0 approaching at tsunami speed), why is it that audio elements are still at the starting gate, when visual and textual content is constantly evolving in ever more animated combinations?

Sound Strategies has begun to listen seriously to web audio. Is it effective? How does it work? Who uses it, and why? What is its purpose? Is website audio the [Cinderella](#) element, prevented from going to the ball by its 'ugly sisters' – Words and Pictures – as FT columnist and website effectiveness consultant David Bowen believes? In real life, this is like putting 5 dollars-worth of audio speaker in a 500 dollar TV set?

Of course, a large percentage of what we hear on the web is subsumed within a video which may or may not be integral to the website itself. Video soundtracks are pretty well universal, but when the video has a specific function within the site, has the audio creation been approached with that aim in mind?

And what about sound as core recognition, navigation or communications tool of the webpage? Is there any evidence that web designers (and their commissioners) are aware of how sound works – what it can communicate and what it can't? Has anyone done the science (or the psychology) to discover what – if any – difference web audio makes? Are there any audio/music trained web designers out there?

I suspect that nothing like the same levels of experience, artistry, imagination and technical innovation are being devoted to music and sound in web design as are being lavished on visuals, graphics, animations and website architecture. But we need to find out for sure.

It's possible the reason why many users hate audio on websites is not because of the idea, but because almost all of what they hear is either ineffective, of poor musical quality or targeted at a notionally adolescent audience. Yet it would be fair to say that when one has experienced a site using sound sensitively, other soundless sites appear rather arid. [David Bowen comments on some examples here.](#)

So Sound Strategies is aiming to discover the answers to some of the above questions, by embarking on an extensive examination of the use of music and sound on websites – and hoping to establish some baseline protocols for generating effective web audio. Who knows, maybe we'll manage to drag web sound out of the virtual middle ages.

Do you have web audio pet hates – or even inspiring examples? Please let us know and send us the links. If you run a corporate website and want to know more about this research, send an email to info@sound-strategies.co.uk listing your contact details.

Andrew Peggie
Sound Strategies Advisory Board

Andrew Peggie is a highly respected educationalist and composer. His book 'Musicians Go to School' was influential in changing arts educational policy within the UK Arts Council. One of his more recent musical offerings was a piece especially commissioned for 4 industrial sirens and the QE2.

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Our Expertise

Sound Strategies team members regularly appear on conference platforms worldwide and contribute articles on which we are asked to contribute, has helped form Sound Strategies' unique approach to the use of sound in o

Appearances include:

International Association of Business Communicators (Barcelona) 2008

Sustainability Beyond Compliance in Chemicals (Barcelona) 2007

Internet Advertising Bureau Awards (London) 2007

ESOMAR Innovation Conference (Miami). 2006

Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival (Cannes) 2006

If you would like to discuss how we can help your organization to take ownership of your brand sound, please contact

Links connected with this Newsletter

Meyer Sound Laboratories

<http://www.meyersound.com/>

Billboard

http://login.vnuemedia.com/bbbiz/login/login_subscribe.jsp?id=HkzkwiNFFSENWCNfh6yWslz6Xpz5LMmcfghELU

British postal service tries to stimulate business with sensory appeal – International Herald Tribune

http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/11/11/technology/ad12.php?WT.mc_id=rssfrontpage

Sound, the Cinderella of 'multimedia' – FT.com

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/dedabc52-d3e5-11db-8889-000b5df10621.html>

Other Interesting links

Elias Arts

www.eliasarts.com

Open Ear Music

www.openearmusic.net

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