Audio Recording Field Production Tips

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It may seem obvious, but selection and acoustic control of the location or venue for the shoot is very important to recording high quality audio. Don't overlook environmental noise or lack of sound-proofing of a shooting location.

Your brain does a marvelous job of masking or filtering out unwanted sounds that your ear captures, but when you put on the headphones and listen to playback from your media you will notice, much to your frustration, that many of the noises your senses filtered out, are all too distracting in your audio track.

Exterior Locations

1. Listen for lawnmowers, weed-eaters, etc., and if possible, ask the operators to stop their work or maybe work in a location at a distance from where you are recording until you're finished. Please remember, however, that you are the guest so when asking, don't be demanding or you will quickly wear out your welcome.
2. If you're recording human voices, don't shoot near airports, bus terminals, construction sites, or foundries unless absolutely necessary. If you are covering an activity at one of these kinds of sites, plan to shoot the video only with some of the natural sound (often referred to as ambient or nat. sound) and then arrange to have your interviews at another location where you can control the noise level. You can then use the interview as "voice over" (VO) in editing the piece.
3. Use directional microphones to get more of what you want to hear over what you don't. When you scout the location, and you always should, listen with a critical ear and don't be chatting while you do. Be there at the same time and position where the actual production will take place. There are fewer surprises that way.

Interior Locations

1. Listen for HVAC noises. If the air handler can be turned off, do so. Just remember to turn it back on before leaving. The same goes for major appliances that go through on-off duty cycles. Turn them off and definitely remember to turn them back on. A good tip is to leave car keys in the refrigerator to make sure you don't forget to turn it back on.
2. If the lighting person doesn't do it first, turn off noisy fluorescent fixtures.
3. Make sure all animals are comfortably located away from the scene.
4. Use packing quilts and other absorptive materials to dampen reflected sound in live rooms with hard surfaces.
5. Make sure everyone on the set has turned off all personal electronic devices. Turn them completely off, putting them in "stun" mode can still be heard and it also creates an RF signal that can be picked up by recording equipment.

Micing the Sound Source

The abbreviation for microphone is *mic*, not the guy's name *Mike*. Also, the mic plugs into a *cable*, not a *cord*.

1. The secret to the best sound possible is to get the mic as close as possible to the sound source. This generally means using a video cam with an external mic input. Don't use the on-board mic unless you're just shooting "B" roll footage (establishing shots where you don't need to clearly hear your subjects – talent).
2. Use a proper mic for the job. A lapel or lavaliere mic works best if you don't mind having the mic seen. However, lav mics can be hidden under clothing. Take care to secure the mic so it is not rubbing against cloth.
3. Protect mic from wind noise and even breath noise from talent by using a windscreen on the microphone.
4. If you have access to directional microphones, which are highly focused, you might use these to record the sound out of the frame of the camera shot. This allows you proximity to the sound source without being seen. These shotgun mics can be mounted on a fishpole (you could acquire a professional boompole or use the shaft of a floor mic stand) so as to follow moving talent.
5. Monitor with a meter and/or headphones the level, or volume, of the signal as close to the recording device as possible to avoid distortion (over-modulation) of the recording and any unwanted extraneous noise.

In summary, pay special attention to the environment in which you record sound and get as close as possible to the audio source. Remember audio is 50% of the TV signal. TV without video is *radio*, TV without audio is *surveillance footage.*