Scott Pearson, ASCAP

- Composer for 20 years, 100+ network shows
- Teacher at the School of Communication Arts in NC
- Worked with NPR, TLC, Discovery, PBS etc.
- Degrees in Music & Business Communications
  South Kensington Conservatory, UK & NCSU
- Producer of “Pocket Edition” podcast for Educause [ELI]

Seminar Overview  1:30pm / January 30, 2006

- Understand THE POWER OF SOUND using sonic imaging
- Learn how to find and work with quality voiceover talent
- Pick up professional production techniques that matter
- Recognize how sound effects create maximum impact
- Appreciate the effective use of music soundtracks
- Utilize audio imaging and branding concepts to tap into “THE POWER OF SOUND”

Sonic Imaging -

Sonic imaging is your ‘street sign’ on the information superhighway. It gives the audience a quick impression of your program. Your attention to the first minute of your program determines whether your audience will listen, or ignore you.

What exactly is sonic imaging?

It’s a method of uniquely identifying audio programs with a signature sound that differentiates it from all others. It provides a consistent, exclusive signpost which creates and reinforces program branding.
Why is sonic imaging so important?

- Facilitates content organization
- Improves understanding with cues
- Establishes a memorable style
- Enhances credibility and perceived value
- Increases listenership and subscription rates

Almost every radio and television station utilizes sonic imaging, not to mention movie studios, cable networks and syndicated media productions.

Whenever a content provider wants to publish a program to a mass audience, consumer appeal is essential. This is especially important with serialized or subscription based programming.

Muffled, poorly recorded programming tells the audience “This isn’t important” no matter how much impact the message should have had. There is no recovering this lost credibility.

The Vital Imaging Script -

You have less than a minute to convince folks you have something to say …

Writing for brevity and impact -

- Write down specific sentences, carefully crafted to get as much information across in the fewest words possible.
- Give the audience a good reason to listen, find an angle.
- Use present tense active verbs & tangible nouns in scripts.
- Remember to write for the ear. Avoid complex phrases and embrace alliteration, puns and clever wordplay.
- For impact consider hiring an agency, writer or columnist.
The Power of Sound

Voice Talent -

If your project needs impact, you must consider professional voice talent...

Finding the Right Voice -

- Call the pros / Inquire at radio stations & regional recording studios
- Consider television stations, ad agencies and larger video firms
- Search the internet / consider off-site recording over the web
- Approach talent agencies if in a metropolitan area, but be wary
- Seek out actors from theater companies and drama clubs
- Always audition the talent before committing money or time

Recording the Voice Right -

- Phonetically spell out difficult or unfamiliar words in a script
- Remove rings, watches, loose change & jewelry before a session
- Don’t speak directly into the microphone, put it slightly to the side
- Standing is preferable when recording, but use a stool if needed
- Be positive with direction and adjustments, watch the ‘vibe’
- Listen for lip smack & dry mouth, have fresh tap water available
- Use the bass roll-off switch, it looks like this:

Expert Production Techniques -

Ramp up your production to a higher level for big time impact. Here are some simple tips that can make the difference between an amateur attempt and a professional production.

- Acquire a portable audio recording solution and use it
- Go ‘on-location’ and walk through quietly while recording
- Do not handle the microphone often, set it down quietly
- Listen for unusual sounds that will help tell your story
- Talk about your visual impressions, these are your notes
- Unless identifiable, conversations and voices may be used
- Generally, outdoor interviews are risky. If you must, make sure no music, machinery or voices are audible because editing will be a nightmare. Trust me.
The Power of Sound

The Affect of Effects -

Make your story more compelling with the careful use of sound effects...

Acquiring Great Effects -

- Determine how to use sound design before production
- Check the campus radio station or TV production staff before buying sound effects, ask for hard copies
- Beware of sound effects CD’s at the local record store
- Check www.sounddogs.com for specific recordings
- Prepare to haggle when buying sound effect collections

Using Sound Effects -

- Subtle is always better than overkill, keep it low
- Use the absolute minimum to get your point across
- Fake it. Use traffic sounds then say “In this building…”
- Most digital editors have a reverb, learn to use it with SFX
- Complex sounds like crowds, city ambience, sports and weather require layers of intensity to be realistic.
- Stay away from sirens, horns, cell phones and skids
The Power of Sound

Under the Influence of Music -

The right music can define your message just as the wrong composition can destroy it. Do not underestimate the power of music.

Soundtrack Benefits -

- Music aids understanding by quickly setting mood, time & place
- Elegant music choices and correct placement add credibility
- Cues add structure, and help organize a presentation
- A unique soundtrack brands audio and makes it memorable
- Music can manipulate by drawing focus to certain ideas

FIVE SOURCES OF MUSIC

1 PRODUCTION MUSIC LIBRARIES

Buy-Out Library
- Free use, no additional fees
- Variable quality and fidelity
- Limited editing choices
- Generally inexpensive

Stock Music Library
- Fees per use & annually
- High quality recordings
- Large variety & selection
- Moderately priced

FLAVOR 1

FLAVOR 2

2 COMMERCIAL MUSIC PACKAGES

Existing Package
- Non-exclusive branding issues
- Know what you’re getting now
- Limited to package specifications
- Cheap to moderately priced

Commissioned Package
- Unique, targeted branding
- Composer fills specific needs
- Prolonged approval process
- Moderate to expensive pricing

FLAVOR 1

FLAVOR 2
THE POWER OF SOUND

3 HIRING A COMPOSER

Discovering the right composer -

- Get recommendations from larger video production houses
- Inquire at advertising agencies
- Find music publishers in the yellow pages
- Visit better recording studios and music stores
- Call the American Federation of Musicians Local
- ASCAP or BMI message boards on the internet

4 LICENSING POPULAR MUSIC

Getting on the right side of the law -

- The Harry Fox Agency & Barbara Zimmerman Rights Inc.
- Direct publisher inquiry using the ASCAP website
- Explore and utilize the ‘Fair Use Doctrine’
- Take a risk you won’t be discovered…no!

5 PODSAFE MUSIC

Killer tracks are available on the internet… if you’ve got the time to find them!

- Usually have vocals
- Production values vary dramatically
- No alternate mixes, stings or bumpers
- It’s FREE, but you get what you pay for
The Power of Sound

Sonic Imaging -
Here’s the recipe to put it all together!

Script Voiceover
Music Sound Effects

Crafting these ingredients into an imaging package means understanding the function of each element.

Imaging Elements -

The ‘Tease’ - 10 sec. Use an arresting sound bite and a question to prompt an action. Use energetic but unobtrusive music, usually with a pulse. Place at the very beginning or the very end.

The ‘Open’ or Intro - 30 sec. max. Use fast paced music and a brief description of what’s coming up. Employ a professional spokesperson if practical. Mix audio bites, swooshes, sound effects and ear candy to taste.

The ‘Subtitle’ - Some producers consider this the most important cue, it’s immediately after the open. Music should be down tempo from the open, but not too slow. Hosts are introduced and the topic explored briefly, but try to get to a sound bite as quickly as possible.
The Power of Sound

More Imaging Elements -

Transitions - Move the audience from one part of the story to another, related part. Start the music or sound effects under the end of the first part, pull up the volume in between the sections, and then continue under the second part and decrease the volume until you fade out.

Stings - These short splashes of music serve to end a portion of the program. In broadcast television, these usually lead into commercials and they’re called play-offs, in radio they are bumpers.

Promos - Occur at the beginning of a new segment or between commercials in broadcast media. These fifteen second clips usually employ both music and voiceover, but rarely sound effects. In TV these are called play-ons with special versions that utilize unresolved music cues to lure the audience into the show called hangs.

Underscores - Also called beds are instrumental compositions with no lead instrument, only a back beat and accompaniment. In radio slang they’re called move-alongs because they were used under long interviews to add interest.

Loops - Used mainly to stylize specific parts of a program with a repeating motif; these also include drum patterns.
First, write the intro and outro copy for the entire series, including shorts like - “You’re listening to x” or “This is x” as well as episode numbers, copyright and contact information.

Next, audition and select a voice talent, just for the image pieces. When recording, get reads that are slow and fast, laid-back and energetic, serious and friendly.

Third, acquire a collection of music. You will need at the very least...

- A short piece of tease music, and a couple stings.
- A spirited introduction track that reaches a peak about thirty seconds into the song. A variation can be used as a credit/outro piece. Edit if necessary.
- A mid-tempo tune you can talk over for the subtitle.
- A few instrumental cuts to act as underscores.
- A couple unique pieces to accessorize regular features like the mail bag, weather reports, stock market tickers or updates.

Finally, mix the voiceover into the music and add seasoning in the form of sound effects and ear candy. Turn up the music between sentences or leave holes, called donuts, where you’ll put compelling sound bites.

Here you have the elements of a sonic imaging package now it’s up to you to create content that’s worth hearing!
THE POWER OF SOUND