

SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL EVENTS



The ABC's of GOOD SOUND

How often have you attended an event where the presenter couldn't be heard...or the sound system gave off that high-pitched ringing and squealing sound that made you cover your ears? You can have the most well run event with every detail worked out, but a bad sound system can spoil even your best intentions.

Remember the 3 tips on the following pages and you can count on an awesome sound system.

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GOOD SOUND

Tip 1. Choose the appropriate microphones

There are various types of microphones for different types of people and a good sound engineer will help you and your presenters choose the right one. (There are, however, some presenters who are particular about the type of mic they use...and they'll let you know!) What's your speaker's style and experience using mics? Does he or she like to move around while speaking...is he or she more comfortable holding a mic? Is there a music component of your event or just speech? The answers to these questions will help determine the best microphones for your needs.

WIRELESS VS. WIRED

Many people ask for wireless mics but the fact is that many of them don't actually need them. They have become so visible in the entertainment world that people forget that there are other options. Because they are a bit more costly than your other options, think only about using them when they're necessary.

Do your presenters really need to walk around the stage as they talk or will they be fairly stationary? If they are going to move around a lot and they need their hands free, a hands-free microphone is the way to go. However, if they can hold a mic and know how to use it, a wireless hand held will usually sound better. It is also the better option if you are going to do a question and answer segment from the audience.

If you decide that wireless mics are necessary, be sure your sound provider is using the latest technology. With some recent FCC regulation changes and reallocation of wireless bandwidth to access all new wireless devices in our world, every sound company worth using has had to update their wireless technology within the last year. If your provider is not using the latest technology, there's a great chance of interference from other wireless devices such as PDAs, alarm systems, 2-way radios and the ever-present Blackberry.



When considering the most appropriate microphone for your use, there are generally two types: 1) close-talk mic for presenters who are more proficient and 2) mics with a larger pick-up area for those who may not be as used to public speaking or aren't as adept at using a mic. Regardless of whether a mic is wired or wireless, different mics have different uses and pick-up patterns that allow a presenter's voice to be picked up in different areas around the mic.

HANDS-FREE MICROPHONES

It used to be that lavalieres were the only option in hands-free microphones, but the options have since expanded to over-the-ear mics, head-worn mics, and even mics glued into a performer's hair! A hands-free mic can be wired or wireless.

Does your presenter need their hands free while speaking? The **lavalier** is the traditional style that clips onto your tie, shirt or lapel. It is the most common but not always the best sounding. It poses the challenge of picking up your voice from farther away than the other types and is more prone to that ringing sound call feedback. It also can be a challenge when presenters turn their head from side to side - they are actually talking away from the microphone.

The **ear-worn or head-worn mic** has the great advantage of moving with the presenter's head and will always be in the voice pattern and have excellent pick up. Some presenters are a bit self-conscious about using them, but as we see them more and more on entertainers and sports broadcasters that issue is diminishing. Look closely the next time you're at a Broadway show: you'll see the mic hidden in the actor's hair or hairline. This is not typical in a one-time event but very popular in

musical theatre. While everyone seems to love wireless, lavalieres can present challenges in the live event world.

What we've written here about microphones is generally for speech. When doing sound reinforcement for music at your events, there's a whole lot more that we haven't mentioned here. We'll address that in another article at ERI University. In the meantime, you can call us if you need to learn more about sound systems for musical events.

GOOD SOUND

Tip 2. Place your speakers properly

Just as there are many choices of microphones, there are many types of speakers.

Some are intended for speech, some for music. Regardless of the type of speakers, **it's always critical to have the speaker in front of the mics that are being used to put the sound through the speakers.**

The ringing or squeaky sounds you may have heard at events is caused by the sound that's coming out of the speaker going back to the mics and getting re-amplified over and over again. This sound is called "feedback." Careful placement of the speakers in front of mics and proper tuning of the sound system to the room will help reduce this common problem.

We are aware that this positioning may not always be ideal and that one has to always consider the aesthetics of the room. Although we know where the best place for the speakers are, we also understand there are obstacles that need to be worked around. If placing a speaker in front of a microphone means we're obstructing a video screen or the view of the stage, then we will find a way to place the speaker for optimum sound while not impeding the visual qualities of the event.

For very large events, a second or even third set of speakers may be needed to make sure people in the



back of the room can hear. These are known as delay speakers as they must be electronically delayed to match the sound from the main speakers. If someone suggests that a second set of speakers does not need to be delayed or worse yet, could work from the back of the room pointing toward the stage, walk,...no, RUN away!

The sound engineer operating the sound system is also instrumental in tuning the sound system to the acoustics of the room. The engineer can eliminate the feedback and maximize the volume that's possible for your sound system by carefully boosting and cutting the appropriate frequencies.

GOOD SOUND

Tip 3. Maximize your room's acoustics

Ever wonder why some places are so naturally loud? Or why the presenter can barely be heard? Why some rooms have a great deal of echo? In addition to the right microphones and proper speaker placement, **the design of the room can have a huge effect on the quality of the sound.** Size, layout, orientation, treatment, materials and number of people present are all components that will affect the quality of sound and the ability of your presentation to be heard.

To improve the room's acoustics we often change the qualities and sound of the room by adding carpet or drapery, and by changing the room layout. The harder the surfaces (glass, concrete, tile and steel), the more echo in the room and the more muddy the sound. The softer the surfaces (i.e. carpet, drapery, drywall, and drop ceilings), the better the room is going to sound.

Whatever you do, don't underestimate this important part of your event! Sound glitches can leave you stressed and your guests scurrying for the door.

If you have any other questions about sound for your event that weren't addressed here, just give us a call – we'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.



GOOD SOUND

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