



# AUDIO

SYSTEMS

## Sound Solutions for the Audio Producer

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## Facility Spotlight

# Dayton Hudson's Success Via Diversity and Flexibility

By Pete Tidemann

Dayton Hudson Corporation, based in Minneapolis, produces its own audio and visual presentations for its department store division, utilizing a variety of hardware and software tools. Specialties include creation of music for TV and radio commercials, editing existing music and voiceover tracks for live shows and producing a variety of materials for walk-through exhibits.

Headed up by Mike Gansmoe, Dayton Hudson's audio production department includes three different sections that handle specific production aspects, all ensconced within the company's flagship store located in downtown Minneapolis. While certain musical tracks are recorded out of house,

everything else is done at this location. Gansmoe provides virtually all production aspects — from composing original music to overseeing the division's technical side.

A MIDI production suite enables creation of original music tracks for less-demanding applications. "We have our hands full building these tracks from scratch," Gansmoe notes. "I meet with the creative team and decide what kind of musical elements or sound design is needed. We talk about the general theme, then I typically create a *scratch track* to edit the visuals. After all visual elements and graphics are complete, it's my turn to post score the commercial to completion."



The scene at "Fash Bash," one of the live Dayton Hudson events produced by Gansmoe. (Video projection by AVF of Minneapolis.)

The suite, which also houses an extensive sound effects library, is comprised of a variety of equipment for recording and sequencing. Sequencing is done with a Mac that runs Digital Performer software. This is recorded to a Sony DAT machine, with mixing courtesy of a Yamaha ProMix 01. Musical scoring can be notated on the Mac as well for additional studio tracks to be added by live musicians.

Gansmoe uses a Yamaha P100 MIDI keyboard controller to control several different keyboard modules from Emu, Korg, Roland, and Alesis. "My cornerstone piece of equipment, though, is an Akai CD-3000 sample player with an extensive sample library. This allows me to come up with many of the sounds I need for composition even if we will eventually record the tracks with live musicians," says Gansmoe. Tracks can be edited longer, shorter, faded up or down, with voiceover overlay and/or general changes made easily.

The anchor of the facility is a somewhat crowded yet highly versatile and functional audio production room. Everything is within arm's reach, including a CD resource library. One corner is occupied by a voiceover booth just big enough for two. This pre-built isolation booth, ideal for existing spaces like this one, includes two Audio-Technica 4050 large diaphragm condenser mics for vocal and effects recording.

These tracks are recorded to a 16-track Tascam DA-88 deck with an RC-898 remote controller, with mixing on a Yamaha 02R digital console. "When I have several different elements to put together, the RC-898 remote for the DA-88 puts everything at my fingertips," says Gansmoe. "Meanwhile, the automation and onboard effects of the 02R allow me to sit back and listen to the mix instead of having to worry about manually pushing the faders around.

"In the not-so-distant past, I would have to worry about mixing several different things at once, so it was difficult to concen-

Mike Gansmoe in the Dayton Hudson audio production facility.



trate on getting the mix consistently right. Automation has really helped shorten production time while also simplifying things to a great degree."

Gansmoe listens to mixes with a pair of Yamaha NS10M monitors flanking the 02R. Any format of source material can be accommodated, with material from the in-house MIDI production suite recorded to DAT. A Denon DN2500F CD player can be linked with another similar unit, by remote, for instantaneous access.

The digital editing system is controlled by a Mac running Digidesign ProTools 24 Mix software. This recent addition replaced a Hybrid Arts digital system.

"The Hybrid Arts system served me well for many years, but it was just time to update our editing capabilities, with ProTools a great choice," Gansmoe says. "We couldn't have dreamed of the options it provides only a few years ago. Pro Tools has become an industry standard and I expect it will remain that way for some time to come."

For tracks intended for live shows or walk-through events, everything is mixed down to stereo and recorded simultaneously to DAT and to a Tascam RW-5000 re-writeable CD burner. The DAT can be used for backup and the CDs are used for live shows or walk-throughs. Gansmoe feels that the reliability of the CD format is essential for live events, noting that DAT seems to be more susceptible to operator error.

For tracks created for video, mixdown is done to a SMPTE DAT recorder. In video post production, the tracks are mixed with other sound design elements and then edited in full-motion video with an Avid system. The final step is to lay back the final sound mix to the video master.

Gansmoe is also responsible for audio playback systems that Dayton Hudson frequently employs, generally in an auditorium on the top floor of the department store.

This space regularly hosts fashion shows and other events, including an annual, elaborate Christmas show open to the public. It usually includes several different scenes.

As a result, each scene has its own discrete audio system controlled from one central location. After Gansmoe composes, records, and produces all soundtracks on CD, he then designs each sound system. Multiple loudspeakers are concealed in the set, with source material supplied by multiple CD players mixed through Mackie compact mixers.

A concert sound reinforcement system is also on-hand for larger applications, like store openings, press parties, and other special events. The rig includes Turbosound Flashlight and Floodlight loudspeakers with Crest Audio power and Turbosound speaker processors. Electro-Voice subwoofers provide a thumping low-end, necessary in this MTV age of ever-escalating production values. A 40-channel Mackie console is just the right size for the needs of this application, accompanied by an effects rack with Behringer digital equalizers, Presonus compressors, and Lexicon effects processing.

Dayton Hudson is also branching out into some emerging technologies, such as the ability to provide music tracks online to their stores, to be used to accompany displays. As a result, Gansmoe is in the process of producing these tracks, which can be transmitted via T1 lines for downloading. This will give Dayton Hudson direct control over source material content and quality, while eventually saving on mass mailings used for distribution of these materials. "We can tailor tracks to enhance the moods of different departments, better fitting the demographics of the targeted customer base while enhancing the image of the particular products being featured," he notes.

In the modern age of corporate audio, it seems a rarity for an in-house audio production department to offer the amount of capability as that found at Dayton Hudson. Yet it makes considerable sense, with the same qualified source able to provide all of the pieces of the puzzle — a distinct advantage. A portent of the future, perhaps?

"One thing's for sure," Gansmoe concludes. "This market is wide open for people with multiple talents. The future of our division depends upon my keeping abreast of the technology available in a variety of disciplines, and to remain flexible to new ideas. I feel fortunate that I'm able to use all of my creative and technical abilities in one place. Boring days are a rarity around here." ▲

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