

The Sweet Sound of Reality



LOS ANGELES, CA—There's little doubt that digital audio technology came along at just the right time for the surge in reality television production. Certainly workflow is streamlined with the ability to record location sound—sometimes around the clock—to hard-disk, but digital audio networking has also played its part, allowing fast and cheap deployment in place of cumbersome copper at both semi-permanent and “run and gun” locales.

Gregg Kita, whose RGear Worldwide provides location sound—and video—services for a variety of reality programming, reports that Aviom's A-Net technology offers an easily deployable solution. With no heavy copper multicore snake to manhandle into place, setting up is a breeze, he says, “I was just in New York for five weeks shooting at different locations every day. I built a cart with my board, output modules and computer for multitrack recording, and we had a rolling rack with our RF receivers and an Aviom input module. We'd roll into a location, power up the RF rack, put a couple of antennas up, and run one Cat-6 to wherever we'd set up the control room. That was sometimes in the same soundstage, or in a different room, depending on the location.”

With a reach of up to 500 feet, the system can handle any location, he says. “Sometimes we'd be on a different floor, and we'd have to go out the emergency exit or out the window to the next floor, which was maybe 200 feet.”

At a more permanent location for shows such as VH1's *Rock of Love with Bret Michaels* or *Flavor of Love*, he continues, “Sometimes we use existing Cat-5 runs already in the house, and sometimes we run our own. It's

expendable cable, so we use it for one show and throw it away.”

Kita typically wires a location using Aviom's Pro16 products, with Shure plant mics—so called because they are planted around the location—which are typically Shure MX391 or Crown PZM-11 boundary models (the PZM-11 mounts in a standard wall plate, resembling a light switch). “We wire bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, everywhere, and we run the plant mics into the Pro16 mic pres. We'll usually put the mic pre somewhere central that we can run the mics to, then we'll run Cat-6 cable from the mic pre down to our control room, which is a garage, let's say.

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We'll then break them out and send them to different locations—to our audio mixing board to record all of the mics, and also to an audio-follows-video router, so that ‘story’ can pull up any mic or picture, and we'll send them to the director's table so they can pot up any mic they want as well.”

He continues, “We do the same thing with our RF mics. We use all Sennheiser—SK5212 transmitters, MKE Platinum lavs and the EM3235 rack receivers. We'll mic up, on average, 16 to 25 people with wireless lavs. We'll set up an RF rack and an antenna system, and we'll put all the RF channels into either a mic pre or input module and run those to the control room as well.

Each will have two or three output modules and go to the mixing board, the router and the director's station.” The digital mixing console is usually a Yamaha DM1000 or DM2000.

It isn't just a one-way signal flow, either: “Sometimes we'll send audio back to the stage, for playback. The Pro16 has an output card, so we can use the expansion slot to send it the other way. Sometimes we feed cameras the same way. It depends how the show is set up.”

Up to 32 tracks are recorded to Gallery's MetaCorder running on a MacBook. “It's meant for field production,” shares Kita. Show producers hope to latch onto a compelling storyline at any time, of course, which means that the recorder is running almost nonstop. “Some shows we record 16 to 20 hours a day. When we're in a house we're

recording 80 gigs a day.” It's an improvement over the old tape-based methods, he says, “Post has been extremely happy with the digital files we've been giving them.”

Kita's company has found quite a niche for itself, also servicing shows such as ABC's *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, VH-1's *Rock of Love* and *I Love New York*, MTV's *Making the Band 4*, TV Land's *She's Got the Look* and Nick at Nite's *Funniest Mom in America*. Current-



Gregg Kita (pictured), whose RGear Worldwide specializes in reality TV location services, uses Aviom A-Net products to streamline audio distribution.

ly, he says, “We're doing a new one for MTV, *Starmaker*, which is like *Rock Star*. We just did *I Love Money*, a VH1 show. We did *G's to Gents* and *Secrets of Magic*. We did another 50 Cent show, in New York. And we do Food Network's *Gida at Home* and *Everyday Italian*, plus *Supernanny* and *It's Me or the Dog*.”

“Typically, we can do four or five at a time,” he says. “It's our specialty.”

—Steve Harvey

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