

RADIO (MIC) DAZE

RECORDIST GREGG KITA
UNTANGLES MULTIPLE AUDIO
STREAMS IN THE REAL WORLD.

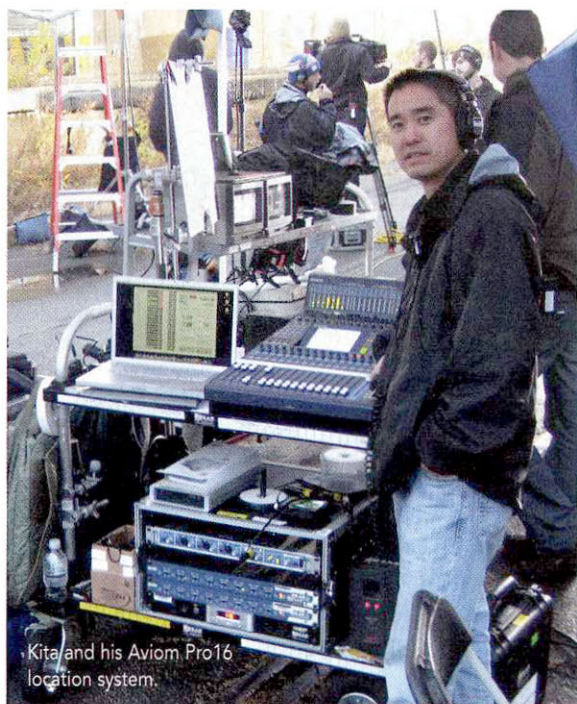
BY TY FORD

Imagine the RF tango of up to 80 channels of wireless audio, frequently operating simultaneously. Gregg Kita handles the audio for RGEAR (www.rgearworldwide.com), which supports the audio and video equipment and crew for many reality TV shows. "I've been at it for 14 years, reality shows for 12 years, starting with Los Angeles-based *LAPD*, *Junkyard Wars* and *FEAR*," he says. "In January of 2002, things started to get crazy with the first season of *The Bachelor*. We were micing 30 cast members and covering the shots with a dozen cameras, a sound mixer on every camera, plant mics and a multi-track recorder to record everything as a backup. We were rolling 24/7 for several weeks at a time, normally shooting in one large house, typically a mansion, but we also went on location."

In addition to wireless on the cast, Kita has two-channel wireless rigs from the mixers to the cameras and wireless IFBs for the producers so they can keep up with the simultaneously unfolding stories. "We use mostly Sennheiser gear from the talent to the mixers: SK 5212 transmitters with MKE Platinum lavs, EK 3241 receivers in the bags and racks of EM 3532 receivers for the multi-track backup recording," he says "We're also using Lectrosanics UM400 transmitters and UCR411 receivers to get from mixers to the cameras."

Kita says that even with as many wireless products and tools as they are running, trial-and-error frequency coordination using the scanners in the Sennheiser and Lectrosanics receivers has been successful. "Usually our biggest challenge is getting range," he reports. "We're frequently shooting in a huge mansion and everyone's mic is on." Kita uses up to eight Shure wideband active log periodic antennae to grab the wireless signals and a Professional Sound Corp. MultiMax! antenna splitter/combiner to route the reception from the eight antennae to the 30-some receivers and plant mics for backup audio recording. "We try to find a central location for that gear and then position the antennae as needed."

The ISO backup audio is typically recorded from the central wireless receiver rack to a MacBook Pro running Gallery's Metacorder software, creating time-stamped polywave files, targeting external FireWire dives. Although Metacorder can record at up to a 192 kHz sample rate, Kita says he normally uses 48 kHz, 16-bit. "Everyone's been happy with that. We could go to 24-bit, but as it is, we're



recording as much as 80GB of audio per day with 30 shoot days per show. That's a lot of storage."

Kita uses a Pixell AutoPatch cross-point switcher and Aviom Pro16 series rack-mounted gear to traffic the many audio channels. "The Aviom Pro16 Series consists of different modules: preamps, input modules, output modules, mixers, system bridges, distribution modules, even an A-Net card for my small-format Yamaha DM1000 mixer. CAT-6 is lighter and cheaper than copper cable. When we go into a new location for a new show, we'll buy CAT-6 cable and cut custom lengths. Some houses we shoot in have prewired CAT-6, and we use that when we can."

Once its in the CAT-6 environment, Kita says he runs to an Aviom distribution or output model that feeds the multi-track recorder or to the audio-follow-video router. "That way, for example, each story can have it's own keypad or mixer with different channels on that mixer. The story departments are following the side action that the director is not paying attention to. With Aviom, we can give them everything the director has and pretty much anything else more easily."

The larger Aviom Pro64 handles 128 channels on one CAT-6 cable. It also offers more routing options and different audio format options. "Post wanted AES for their HD record decks and I wanted a return to my Yamaha DM1000. The Pro64 does that and it also has cross-point switching software."

The Aviom gear is a good example of "unsung hero" equipment. It's not flashy, but it provides solid functionality and allows good decisions to be made during production. That sort of elegance doesn't draw attention to itself or the audio that runs through it, but it has a solid, positive impact on production values and content. **DV**

Ty Ford has been writing about audio for over 20 years. Visit him at tyford.com.