

We are surrounded by sounds. Sounds that tell us what to do, tell us when something is dangerous, when something is working correctly, when it's not.

Much of this sonic information is absorbed subliminally, and taken for granted. In advertising and branding, sound is crucial yet it is nearly always overshadowed by visuals, which tend to hog the limelight. Yet companies are slowly beginning to realise how sound can play a part in building a brand's image, how it can be used to build a subtle, emotive narrative. This is not in terms of jingles or melodies, which have long been recognised as powerful advertising tools, but in the sounds made by products themselves – it is the bong made by an Apple computer as it loads up, which signals the good health of the machine as well as being unmistakably branded, rather than the irritatingly jaunty Intel Pentium Processing tune, which is used merely to aid brand recognition.

"I think that brands and their creative agencies are starting to get more open to the idea that sounds can be created, implemented and executed in a much more intelligent way," says sound designer Andrew Diey. "The direction seems to be much more about how to incorporate a story – sounds that reflect product and its need to interact with the consumer from a functional point of view but also

reflect the brand's attitude."

Diey's output is diverse, with his company, Radium, producing soundtracks for everything from video games to Bentley Motors. When explaining his ideas for how brands can begin using sound design more effectively, he distinguishes between sounds that are used to relay information – feedback sounds – and sounds that are used to evoke atmosphere or emotion. These categories begin to blur when sounds are branded – the noises become distinctly related to a particular product or company, yet still function effectively as tools to give feedback. "What we're trying to do is get away from things pinging and bleeping and add a little bit more subtlety to products," he says. "It could be engineering the tone of a hairdryer so that the actual sound coming out is a pleasant, branded sound. This is the way things are going – everything is branded, everything is the brand experience."

In its recent work for Bentley, Radium was asked to design sounds to be used when the indicators are switched on and when the seatbelt is not secured properly. In creating them, Diey considered the entire brand. "I thought long and hard about what sound world a Bentley car would be like," he explains. "If you had to live in the Bentley world and everything was of the era, it's the 1920s, 1930s. It would all be mechanical, a post-Victorian mechanical world. Electricity was obviously around but clocks

BELOW: Andrew Diey and the sound designers at his company, Radium, are used to going to great lengths to get the perfect sound recording. Previous projects have seen him record the sounds of Challenger II tanks and jump-jet harriers. Recording genuine sounds is very important to Diey – "It's such an important thing to have that real world source material," he says. "It's very similar to photography, where you're catching the light – with sound, you're catching the vibration"

were ticking away, there weren't digital surroundings. I wanted to create the sound world that was part of their world. My father is an antiques dealer and I'd grown up around huge clocks and mechanisms. I thought it would be really nice when you go inside the car to feel you're walking into an antiques shop, because I know from going into my dad's shop that the shop is alive with things ticking away and that antique-y feel."

In creating the sound for the indicators, Diey embarked on a series of elaborate tests, experimenting with sounds from clocks and metronomes, as well as creating sounds using the car itself. "I wanted to include some elements from the car in the recording, so we recorded everything that made a sound in the car. We were in one of these workshops where they had block-mounted engines so we were spinning things and twisting and hitting things." The end sound is rich, incorporating the clock sounds yet also retaining a contemporary feel. "There wasn't really much soul to the original indicator," he says. "I think with sound, there's so much detail, there are so many incredible variables you can get in there. What I wanted to do was soften everything up, make it a bit more relaxed, less full-on."

This level of attention to detail is particularly appropriate for the Bentley brand, which is associated with luxury and wealth. "The Bentley

PPPPPINGGGGG

—BLEEP—

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Andrew Diey wants your world to sound better....

TEXT:
ELIZA WILLIAMS

project was about placing sounds inside a car, so it's got an engineering strand to it, but it's got this whole marketing side to it as well, which is about the brand, the brand's position." continues Diey. "Every aspect of the car is geared towards the clients' experience with the brand, but also their perceptions of themselves. Because the Bentley driver is very much a person who has 'arrived'. Everything has to be luxury. The communication between Bentley as a brand and the driver is a very special sort of communication."

Exploring the sound possibilities of a car is perhaps one of the more straightforward recordings Diey has undertaken, with previous jobs seeing him capturing the sounds of Challenger II tanks and even jump-jet harriers. When questioned on what are the strangest situations he's found himself in when recording, he says simply "all the bodily ones!" and little explanation is required. He sees recording genuine sounds as crucial to good sound design, however. "It's such an important thing to have that real world source material. It's very similar to photography, where you're catching the light – with sound, you're catching the vibration."

Diey's work with feedback sounds is not only about brands. He is a member of an EU-funded research group which is looking into 'sonic interaction design', the use of sound as one of the principal channels to convey information, meaning



and aesthetic or emotional qualities. This does take in the use of the sound in branding but also looks at how sound can be used to make our world more efficient. "One of the reasons why this group exists is that there's quite a lot of information you can get from sound," he says. "The applications are just phenomenal, from the stock market to mining for oil." Diey cites the use of sound in EG scans as an example, explaining that it could be used to help spot anomalies in a reading. "It allows you to find the problems more quickly. It's about efficiency. Especially in the medical world, where you can use sound to give you the most minute feedback."

Some of the sound methods that the group are exploring are unexpected. For example, the military, Diey explains, has already begun using the voices of family members instead of alarm sounds in equipment, because we have become so accustomed to tuning out the sounds that are

ABOVE: Diey's array of sound recording kit: "I'm a big fan of microphones," he says, somewhat unsurprisingly. "They're the tools that you need to get right because you are capturing the world with them"

annoying or intrusive, yet will immediately tune into the voices of those we love. "I think sound is going to play such an important role in the next ten or 20 years," he says. "Not just in entertainment and the alert systems and feedback sounds that are very brash, but in a very subtle way as well."

In our noise-cluttered world, the possibility of a subtler sonic landscape is a relief. However, with the diversity of brands will no doubt come a diversity of branded sounds too, with some likely to prove immensely grating. But before the worrying vision of an even more noise-polluted world sets in, Diey stresses that part of his ambition for our future sound world is that it will, in fact, be quieter. "As a creative, my aspiration is to make the sonic world a much quieter place," he says. "With sounds which are subtler, on-brand and more rewarding." ■

radium-audio.com