



Future sound of the web

Insisting on the quality achieved by the biggest movies, **Andrew Diey** is creating a richer online experience for brands through jaw-dropping sound, says *Adam Woods*

Portrait by *Nick Ensing*

For the most part, the only sounds associated with the internet have been a mouse click or a 56K modem screeching into action. However, Andrew Diey and his team of engineers at Radium Audio are working to bring the internet out of the silent age.

In a small studio in Hackney Wick, their mission is to make the online experience richer for brands by adding all sorts of weird and wonderful sounds to their websites.

When you're a sound designer, everything has its potential uses. Pointing to the pipes in the corner of his office, Diey reveals that, with a contact microphone, they are good for creating "some super-otherworldly sounds".

Likewise, the company's website shows Diey recording the mechanism of an antique clock to create the indicator noise for a Bentley Continental GT, and sampling a miked-up jalopy being thrown onto a pile of scrap for an authentic 'impact' sound.

Hollywood, with its absurdly vivid, story-telling sound, is the original home of this kind of 'audio art', and Diey is trying to bring those standards to brands online.

Barely more than two years since it was founded, Radium's client list includes Ferrari, Volkswagen, Reebok, Homebase and Coca-Cola, while among its collaborators are AKQA, Glue London, Razorfish and Dare. Despite this impressive line-up of companies keen to make sound an integral part of the online experience, Diey believes the tipping point is still to come, and draws a parallel to the evolution of motion pictures.

"In Hollywood, they didn't even have music in their films until the 1920s," he says. "They had a guy at the front of the cinema playing a piano."

In the same way, he explains that the internet has until recently made scant use of sound. But in

the past few years, inspired by rising bandwidth and a parallel surge in creative ambition, the web has entered the audio age, and Diey believes what should follow is the kind of high-quality listening experience we have learned to expect from the movies. "If you went to the cinema to watch *Transformers* and all the robots were making the kind of noises monsters made in the films of the 1930s, people would be infuriated," he says. "Sound is an integral part of that experience. People don't just watch – they watch and listen."

Sound and vision

This is the lesson he wants brands to learn, and at least some of them are catching on. Combing through his computer as he talks, Diey fishes out a teaser ad for the Ferrari 149, launched last year. AKQA's images are stylishly minimal – the campaign was a countdown to the car's unveiling – but the audio is a rich, utterly distinctive roar.

It is the sound of a Ferrari engine, recorded in Italy in an anechoic chamber for maximum fidelity. To create the finished track, Diey brought the recordings home and wove in strains of roaring lion and gunshot, so that what the ad features is pure Ferrari, only more so.

"If you can give it that bit of extra oomph to sell the brand, that's what we are here for," he says. "We have just done what Hollywood does, which is to give it that extra layer."

Another recent job, for Homebase, commissioned by Leo Burnett and Academy Films, featured a Jon Brion-esque score performed almost entirely on items bought from the store.

The process of answering a sound-design brief does not differ that much from the one undertaken by any other creative agency: understand the client's needs, find the story within the brand, build up a bank of relevant resources, and go to work on a creative solution. But although Radium's portfolio is impressive,



Radium's Andrew Diey: 'Hollywood

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Reality

2007 to present Founder and creative director, Radium Audio

2002 to 2007 Lead sound designer, Alchemy Audio Lab – creating music and sound for games, radio and TV

persuading agencies and brands that their visuals are incomplete without music and incidental audio of a comparable standard has not been an easy task – and it goes on.

"If we weren't as passionate as we are, we might have given up years ago," says the 35-year-old, whose personal CV includes the sound design for more than 20 console games, as well as a Bafta-nominated TV score. "It's been a real mission for us to get people even to give us an opportunity to share our vision."

Making the connection

The reason he knows it will ultimately work, Diey says, is that sites and ads with high-quality sound simply work better than those without. "We know that dwell time with sound on is a lot longer than with sound off," he says. "Music and sound are among the few ways to get a human connection with people. It's an emotional vehicle."

Virtual reality

A dance music fan, DJ and one-time Stockholm record shop owner, Diey formerly recorded under various names, but no more. "When I tried to make house music, it always came out like sound design."

That's a responsibility Diey takes particularly seriously. He vehemently loathes stock sound effects and has a passion for the power, not just of music, but of clicks, beeps, ambient noises and other audio artefacts, painstakingly applied.

Clicking on a Coke Zero ad created with Glue London, Diey lingers with appreciation over the whooshing sound of a footballer's kick. "We didn't want the kick to go whoosh like a Persil ad," he explains. "When we do our whoosh, it sounds like something in *Transformers*. We are trying to get people to aspire to these values."

Exciting times lie ahead for online audio, Diey believes. The possibilities of mobile, augmented reality and technology such as Microsoft's Surface platform all point to a need for quality sound, even if not every brand knows it yet. ●

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