

WHY WORK WITH A PRO?

When the Pros Work They Work With Pros. The difference between a professional sounding record and something that sounds like it came out of your phone could be as little as \$50.00.

Since the DAW became the go to method for recording way to many people, articles and magazines are focusing on how to DIY and really are forgetting what makes a professional a professional. If you are a true aspiring engineer please just skip this read. Proceed with the home studio, keep getting the gear, keep recording bands, keep interning and never stop learning, get that studio you always dreamed of. I wish you nothing but luck. We all started at home so it's not all bad but for god's sake take it seriously!! For you other guys please read on.

With the advent of all the low budget recording methods becoming available many people are deciding "Hey I can just make my own album now". Well this will focus on why NOT to make that next album yourself or in a friends bedroom. Now I know there are some great guys out there that do make their albums at home and can engineer circles around me and their albums come out great but they are the exception. They are the guys that have put in work and learned over the years and took this job very seriously. 99% of the guys that attempt to make those albums end up redoing it or just end up with a mediocre album at best. I can't tell you how many CDs I have redone over the years from artist who made that mistake.

We all know there are many positives that can come from having a recording set up at home, The Pre Production value alone is worth more than I could ever say. Getting ideas down on the spur of the moment is priceless. I really don't need to hear about all the great things a home studio brings to the table. In fact I think every artist should have a means to record their ideas and such. Let's face it, not until the home studio went to a computer based platform did people really try and make their CD's at home. Maybe some did but I am speaking about the majority. The ADAT started the trend but the DAW took the idea and ran with it. People used to write and pre produce their songs at home and when it was time to record leave it to the guys that do it for a living every day to make their records.

As an engineer now for over 25 years I really get a little agitated when I get that call every other month from an artist that I have recorded in the past or even a new artist and they say "hey I got a little set up at home now and want to make our CD, how do we do this or what tips can you give us " etc. Here is a tip for you, come back to a professional whether it be me or someone else to make the CD. In the end you will be much happier.

It seems I have been handed more garbage in the past 5 years than ever before. All I hear is "hey can you mix this for us", or "can you master our CD and make it radio ready, we did it ourselves". Well my answer is usually NO I cannot. Why? Because your levels are clipping, your recording or master is mixed with way too much compression, there is no headroom, the tracks are not separated, no filtering was used and all the mids are scooped out. There is an air condition, a dog barking or baby crying in the background among a hundred other things. No I cannot make this sound Radio ready. Remember the old attitude "Garbage in Garbage out?" I sure do.

Now don't get me wrong I hate to turn away work but sometimes the stuff you put out with your name on it can hurt more than it can help the business. I just pass on that stuff and luckily I stay afloat. I am going into my 25th year of business with virtually no advertising. What leaves my studio with our name on it is a direct reflection of us. That should be appreciated by the bands we record. If they sound bad so do we. Sure I am lacking some gear and a half million-dollar console as most smaller studios are but the stuff I do have is great and very high quality gear. Sometimes you have to know when to say No to a project. On another note, please don't

write in and say “you don’t have a big analog console so you aren’t even a real studio”. Please don’t tell me times are changing and just 20 years ago a smaller studio like yours didn’t even exist. I know that already. I know without the advent of the DAW and more cost effective recording mediums I wouldn’t be running a studio myself. This really doesn’t come down to a gear thing so I don’t want to make it sound like that. It comes down to an experience thing.

This business is one of the most undervalued professions I can think of. People think Hey I will buy a DAW and Bam!! I am a recording engineer. I’m going to make and mix a record. I have never heard of a guy buying a wrench and saying “I am now a mechanic” or a guy who buys a light bulb and says, “Now I am an electrician”. Hey I have a hammer now I am a homebuilder. Just like those professions it takes years to develop your craft and turn into a good engineer, mixer, or mastering engineer. No one seems to realize that in today’s world. Does anyone value the guys that have spent years developing their skills and devoted their lives to this field? What happened to the internship and trying to learn the ropes from a real professional? Its called “putting in the work

Now I am not saying for a second that if you want to be an engineer to not get gear and start somewhere, we all had to. I have no issues with that. The bottom line is if you are a music producer, focus on the music and sounds or if you are the rapper focus on improving your skills. In the music world it’s hard enough to do anything and make a living, so try and be the best at what you do. Don’t be the typical “jack of all trades” but an ace of none. How much time can you really be performing and practicing your songs if you are worried about learning proper compression ratios, or learning what frequencies reside where or all the little nuances of your DAW. The ear training for mixing alone takes hundreds of hours. All that time could be refocused on your technique and song writing. I think you will see that while a ton of engineers come from a music background most have decided to not be in a touring group or they say their music is not their number one priority.

Yes I know there are exceptions to the rule. I still make tracks for my artist as well but as a whole my job is an engineer. That is what I focus on and spend countless hours developing. Yes I think my music could be better if I put just as much emphasis on that as I do learning production techniques or mic placement, or just the DAW itself.

Lets delve deeper into why not to DIY. Is your basement really the best place to record? The acoustics alone we could write an entire article on. How well did you refine that room you are tracking in, or the room you are mixing in? Did you analyze it and treat it properly? From a creative standpoint not being fluid on the DAW the stopping, tracking and punching in alone would be enough to stop creativity cold. Do you really like your kids and wife’s coming in while the band is trying to track. How about that dog that keeps barking and the stomping on the ceiling. When professional artist create music most of them like to get in a zone and not have interruptions like the phone going off. Usually this mistake is made one time and then the smart guys demand they go to a studio. The call I usually get from those guys goes something like this “man we tried doing it ourselves but it just didn’t turn out right, we decided to go into a studio this time around”. Smart guys.... but you can be smarter, just skip all of that and save yourself time and money now.

Lets now look at some of the financial issues. Even though cheaper than ever before, you have to spend a few thousand dollars to have even a reasonable recording rig for a home studio. If I were an artist I would ask myself, can this money be better spent? If your music is your life please take that money and get better equipment to perform live. Take some of the cash and buy yourself a decent mic or your DJ something decent. How about some stage clothes. Maybe you should be a buying a PA for better rehearsals. How much merchandise do you have? Maybe you could use more. You have to get your CDs pressed and the artwork finished. What about using the money for that?

Even if you have a nice little budget of say 5 to 10 thousand, do you really think you should get a set up worth that much when you will come out mediocre at best without the years of training. Just take a couple hundred and get that Mbox for pre production as we talked about earlier. I think taking that \$5000 to a pro studio and letting them cut your record will yield much better results in the end. Besides your music is your life right? Why accept mediocrity on your new CD. The \$5k you just spent may cover maybe 2 pieces of gear in a decent studio. Did you really think you were going to get that radio sound quality at home with low dollar converters, pre amps, and mics? Not to mention the many other things as well as the experience of a guy who does it every day. Remember even though the gear matters somewhat you are paying for experience. Ask yourself is your goal to make a living playing music or recording it?

If you are just a hobbyist at home great, have fun but don't bring it to us and say make it radio ready. How serious do you think your sound will be taken by that A&R guy, Club Promoter or Record Exec, etc when you present them a CD that sounds like trash? They have thousands of CD's they go through. Don't you want to stand out with a great recording? Maybe having a great sounding CD will get you the cash you spent at the studio back. Your CD sales will improve, you may get more or better paying shows, or better yet a nice little record deal. Maybe you won't but it can't hurt. The same can even be said about the way you present your CD. Does it look pro, or is it a cd-r with a label. Remember the better you look and sound on your CD, the better you look and sound in real life.

I know everyone has money issues in today's economy but lets face it if you are in a group with 4 or 5 other guys and you cant get a few hundred together from each guy then maybe there are some other issues. Here is a thought, give up those bad habits you have (you know the ones) and invest it in the studio. I know this doesn't apply to everyone, once again I am just making a comment because I see this everyday. Its bad enough the quality of music, musicians and bands that have gone on a downward spiral since the advent of pro tools with the DAW making bands not really even want to play their instruments "hey can you fix that later" but now they want to record their albums as well. Once again focus on your writing or playing not recording. Please don't say music is your life when its not.

It is just so frustrating to me getting these calls asking to make garbage sound like a half million dollar recording. It would be nice to get back to a time when artist were artist and engineers were engineers. Don't be that guy that spends time and money trying to DIY and then realize we just wasted tons of time and cash. I think in the end when it comes down to it and you ask yourself "Can we afford to go to a professional"? The question you need to be asking yourself is "can we afford NOT to".