



Three Common Mistakes of Do-It-Yourself Audio Recording

As technology changes, more and more event organizers are using volunteers to handle their conference recording functions. Sometimes it works out well, but more often than not, it can lead to disaster. Here are a few of the most common mistakes amateurs make.

First, they don't start the recording. This may sound obvious, but it happens more than you'd think. Many of the new digital recorders require the record button to be pressed twice to start the recording. The first time you press record, it turns on "record-pause" mode. This allows you to set the levels of the recording before you actually start. However, if you don't press record a second time it will act almost the same as if it is recording except for the pause light (and the fact that it isn't recording!). So before you walk away from the recorder, make sure the meter is actually counting the seconds. A volunteer can be overwhelmed by learning this technology and may easily overlook this.

Second, the recording is full of static. This happens when you don't use headphones to check the recording. The meter on the recorder shows levels during the recording, but it isn't the speaker that is being recorded. The recorder is either set up improperly or the output on the mixer is turned off and isn't sending a signal to the recorder. The levels change because there is a slight variation in the power that the recorder is plugged into, or maybe an external mic is on and catches a person coughing every now and then. Everything appears to be working. Sometimes untrained volunteers will check with headphones but don't realize that what they are hearing is coming from the room, not the headphones. This is easiest to catch by getting a good pair of headphones and taking the time to check each recording when it starts.

Third, the recording quality is poor. Have you ever listened to a speaker and heard the sound get fuzzy when he or she talks loud? That is caused by overpowering a piece of equipment. This often happens when an amateur sets up a recording system. For example in your home you have a 120v outlet for your microwave and a 240v outlet for your oven. Just imagine plugging your microwave into the outlet for your oven! Well this is very possible as audio cables can all be used at multiple levels. So you can't just run RCA to RCA or a 1/4" output to a 1/4" input. You have to make sure you run your cables properly, Mic Level out to Mic Level in. The same goes for Line and Aux levels. Running an Aux Level output into a Mic Level input can easily overpower your recording and make the speaker almost impossible to understand. The opposite is true running a Mic Level output to a Line Level input; this can give you a very quiet recording with so much fuzz that it can be difficult to concentrate on what is actually being said.

Novices make many more mistakes, but these are the most common. Whenever I'm asked for my opinion on Do-It-Yourself recording, I strongly recommend hiring a company that will share revenue with the organization, as increasing revenue is the primary reason organizations try to take this in house. Having a professional who knows all about A/V will insure you end up with high quality recordings at the end of your event. It might not be as profitable to the organization, but then again neither is a set of blank recordings.

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