

my Soho day #3

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sound & vision

*A famous actor here, a battered Argentine rugby player there,
and advertising clients queuing round the block... All in a day's work for Soho's audio maestros*

I founded GCRS in 1994 – last year, we celebrated 20 years in audio post-production. We started off with three recording studios and a transfer bay. We launched as an all-digital facility in 2004, something no one else had done at that point. Now we have eight studios, all with voiceover booths and control rooms. We have 30 employees, and my working day can start at 7.30am and not finish until 11pm.

Our client base is advertising agencies and production companies, so our predominant work is sound for commercials. But we have two other streams that we are very, very good at: ADR (additional dialogue recording) and mixing movie trailers.

There is no "order of business" to my day. You have your cup of tea, and you log on to the computer and you look at your emails. And I look at our bookings portal to see what's happened, and what's happening, with the sessions. Everything's so last-minute these days; you might have a client booking into a studio with an hour's notice. So I need to see how much work is confirmed.

These days there's a lot of indecision in our industry. Our clients are under a huge amount of pressure because their clients don't want to make decisions – because they have less money to spend. And there are lots of people who don't want to take responsibility for spending any money, in case it goes wrong. So what you end up with is much shorter lead times to deliver a job, for everyone.

My bookings team schedule time for clients, discuss budgets with them, work out how best to do a job and manage things with the agency. So they have a huge responsibility these days.

Our clients are the agencies, so we rarely work directly with the brands – although we are working with Dyson on a job just now, so that's "in-house" and also not in-house. But the period of time we spend on a job can be maybe a month, or even longer. We've just done a Fila campaign, and that lasted several months. My team brand-designed a whole set of commercials, and a Christmas campaign. And that's worldwide, so there are so many different cuts and versions needed.



"At the end of the day what gives me satisfaction is happy staff and happy clients"

ABOVE Humphrey in one of Grand Central's new Loft studios. Photography: Will Pryce, Dave Salomon

We record voice, we create sound design and occasionally we'll record somebody – we sometimes get beatboxes in... But I've just turned down a music job because I didn't think we were the right place to do it. They wanted to record a violinist, which was fine in principle. But then I listened to the track they wanted to put the violin over: they needed to re-record the vocals and the piano on the track because it was far too "live" to be used. So I suggested that if they were going to do that, they might as well go and do the whole thing in a music studio because we're too expensive for that.

I don't walk around and go into the studios – someone's booked those. That's their time and space. It'd be like walking into someone else's hotel room. And I can trust that my interns are all on top of their jobs. They know what they've got to do. The sound designers here are top drawer; they're at the peak of their game. They have a raft of different skill sets as well, so you manage the type of jobs you give people to do, depending on their expertise. Clients will often request to work with particular people, too.

We've just launched two new studios upstairs:

The Lofts, which will hopefully increase our turnover by around 80 per cent. We have lots of clients coming through the doors who've never worked in those new spaces, so I'll go up and talk to them.

If I can just quote our press release (don't roll please): "In addition to taking these steps to reaffirm GC's commitment to investing in Soho as the UK's creative hub, this year has also seen GC celebrating 21 years at the forefront of audio creativity with the Summer of Sound series of events that is now rolling into the Autumn of Aural. This includes in-studio talks, workshops and screenings, all designed to spark excitement and inspiration in sound."

At the end of the day what gives me satisfaction is happy staff and happy clients, and pulling something out of the bag. For example, during the Rugby World Cup, at about 6.45pm one evening, we had a phone call from Brazil. Could we record an Argentine rugby player who was only free at 11pm that same night, for a Nike campaign for South America?

And we could, and we did. That meant everybody rushing around and pulling out all the stops. Then last week that agency called again. Could we record the same player but go to his hotel and do it? Again, we just dropped everything and did it. And getting the ambience right in a hotel room is not easy. There are DVDs being bought in, and what have you.

We're not a 24-hour facility, but if a client wants to work later or at weekends, we'll do that. Being in Soho means we're well located for actors coming in – our files trailer and ADR work means we do get quite a lot of very famous people in here. We had Eddie Redmayne in the week before last, doing some work on *The Danish Girl*. We recently worked on *Sky 1's You, Me and the Apocalypse*, and I hoped we'd get Rob Lowe in – but all his ADR was done via ISDN from America. D'rat.

And we had Monica Bellucci in, doing some James Bond/Spectre-related stuff. I would tell you what it was, but I'd have to kill you. Here at GCRS we're brilliant at what we do, and we're diverse.

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