

## **28. Professional Training Placement Final Report Department of Music & Sound Recording Product specialist in digital media industry**

Sonic Solutions is a well established, multi-national company that has worked with the DVD medium since its creation and more recently with the new HD formats; Blu-ray Disc (BD) and HD DVD. From encoding to authoring, Sonic provides the tools for the complete workflow in DVD production and is responsible for over 80% of the DVD market worldwide. Sonic is made up of several divisions; the division I have worked for is called the Professional Products Group (PPG), there is also a consumer division named Roxio. Aside from these two groups are several others that deal with more specific markets in the digital media industry.

The PPG headquarters are located in Burbank, California. There are further offices located around the world, one of which is the London office, from which I have been based. The London office is responsible for Sonic's customers from Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), this accounts for about a third of PPG's customers worldwide.

In my first week, I represented Sonic at a tradeshow in Earls Court. This was quite a useful week to start since I was able to sit in on various presentations given by colleagues explaining what Sonic did. The following week, I set about starting to learn how to use some of Sonic's software. I managed to complete a complicated DVD authoring assignment within a few days, something that apparently would usually take at least a week to do. I think my colleagues were quite pleased with my progress since I quickly started to work on the newer HD softwares, that I would later be spending most of my time working with.

During my first six months, I built up a good knowledge of all of Sonic's Professional Products, and by the end of the six months held my first one-on-one training session with a customer to teach them how to use the Blu-ray Disc software. I found these couple of days of training very enjoyable – it was good to be able to work face-to-face with a customer.

With the role of Product Specialist, roughly 70% of my job with Sonic was spent dealing with technical support for our customers. Most of the time support incidents would be answered via Sonic's online support system, however, many customers choose to phone in to ask questions, so I would often speak to customers on the telephone. Since I was responsible for answering all incoming calls, I soon became quite proficient at thinking on my feet and finding answers quickly. I was well aware of the fact that time means money!

Working within a relatively small team meant my place within it was quite significant; just a month and a half into my placement, I found myself alone in the office for four days whilst my colleagues were away. Being trusted to keep EMEA in order this early on was a responsibility I was delighted, and a little surprised to be given. By this time, I was able to handle most situations with the help and security of being able to lease with the US support team should I need to and thus provide better responses to the customers.

In between dealing with support, and any other general things that were going on, I started to prepare all of the equipment Sonic would be shipping to Amsterdam for the IBC tradeshow. This involved going through a list, finding each item, then correctly labelling and safely packing it. If we did not have a particular item then I was responsible for sourcing it and ordering it in. I was meticulous in preparing the shipment since the team would be greatly inconvenienced if anything were to be missing and it would not do Sonic's image at the show any good.

The following week, I was informed that I would be attending the IBC tradeshow, where I would be demonstrating Sonic's products to perspective and current customers within a small team chosen especially for the show. Attending tradeshow is an important marketing tool for Sonic and usually a very good revenue resource. I felt excited and quite privileged to be going to represent Sonic at such an important event having only been with the company for a short time.

For the first two and half months of my placement, I had been living in Guildford and commuting up to London each day. Although manageable, I found the long commute a little tiring and it meant I missed out on various "extra curricular" after work activities, usually held in "The Club, Bar and Dining" located quite conveniently below the office. In light of this, and convenience, I found a lovely flat-share in a great location in London, meaning I could walk through Hyde Park to work – a luxury not many people in London have! Living in London, for me, was a fantastic experience. As I spent more and more time there I discovered just what an interesting and exciting place it is, and unfortunately, quite how expensive it is! Still, with Sonic paying me a fairly generous placement salary, I managed to survive pretty well and take full advantage of being in London.

Pretty soon after moving into my new accommodation, we flew out to Amsterdam a couple of days before the show to start preparing the stand. Luckily my shipment had contained everything as requested and the miles of cables I had labelled all seemed to fit together well. I had also created an auto-install disc that I ran in all of the computers on the stand; this disc installed all of the applications each machine would need. Everyone seemed quite impressed with how swiftly it worked.

Our stand was arranged such that there were demonstration areas where we would present to larger groups of people (up to about 20), and then smaller booths where we could demonstrate one-on-one in greater depth. Over the 5 days of the show, I gave several large and small presentations each day. By the end of the week in Amsterdam I was pretty exhausted; not only was the work during the day very draining, but socialising in the evening with the bosses of the company, and on occasion perspective customers, also quite tiring. That said, it was a fantastic week, from which I learnt a lot. Not only had my knowledge of Sonic's products been furthered, but I had become a lot more confident at presenting. I think my social confidence was improved also, since I had to speak to a lot of new people during that week, not only people from Sonic, but punters walking onto the stand during the show also.

Returning to the office I found myself answering more and more support incidents, meaning Matt (the technical support manager for Europe) was able to go away to train customers around Europe and leave me alone to keep things under control. Towards the end of my first six months with Sonic, I held my first two day training session on one of our HD products. I received useful feedback from which I could realise a few things that I needed to work on to be better prepared for my next session. Evidently my boss was pleased with my performance, since a few days into my next six months (just after the Christmas holidays) he asked me whether I would be able to go to Sweden to train a new customer how to use our BD software.

Thanks to being in London, I had bumped into one of my favourite musicians, Tom Baxter, and having chatted a bit, he had asked whether I might like to come and do some work with him and his band. When I returned from Sweden I went to spend a few days working with Tom and the band in preparation for a couple of gigs they were doing. I told Tom about the degree course I was taking so he arranged for me to work with his sound engineer for the two gigs. I was able

to pick up some pretty handy tips and tricks from Andrew Thornton, the engineer; he was a very friendly guy who was eager to pass on as much of his knowledge as I could take!

Upon returning to the office, I was asked whether I could go away to do some more training again, this time to Denmark. A few weeks later, I was off to do the same again in Italy and later still, France. With my increased experience, I was asked to demonstrate our HD software to one of our current SD customers who were potentially looking to upgrade. After the demo, a lovely lunch and heavy business discussion between my boss, the perspective customer and I, we returned to the office where the customer agreed to purchase the \$130,000 worth of software. I found being a part of such a business deal very exciting and satisfying. This had given me a taster into the Sales side of the business, something that I thought I might like to pursue further, later on.

Such an opportunity came sooner than expected when I was asked whether I would be able to represent Sonic at the NAB trade show in Las Vegas. I really enjoyed this show since I had now been at Sonic for almost a year and my knowledge had vastly improved since IBC. One of the highlights for me was being personally asked to stay on with Sonic over the summer by Rolf Hartley, the General Manager for PPG. Having thanked him, I then negotiated a salary increase, which Rolf agreed to and increased further!

Now was the time of year for prospective second year Tonmeisters to come for an interview; I was pleased to be a part of the interview process, dealing directly with the prospective candidates and then sitting in on the interviews, asking questions where appropriate. I learnt a great deal from sitting on the "other side of the table" during these interviews, and feel that when I next have to go for a job interview I will be a lot better prepared now that I have a better understanding of employers' desires.

Richard, my boss, was keen to help me get the most out of my placement, being an ex-Tonmeister himself, and helped me to arrange several visits to post-production houses in London so that I could spend a few days learning more about the industry. These days were very useful as I was able to gain a wider understanding of the industry and jobs within it.

With the demise of the HD DVD format, our focus shifted entirely towards Blu-ray Disc support. As predicted sales saw a boost as many facilities who had previously been "sitting on the fence" waiting for one format to prevail over the other suddenly invested. The increased customer numbers put more demand on the technical support team, as a result, Matt and I began creating a Knowledge Base where detailed answers could be found to common problems. Around this time, Matt was promoted into product management so I was appointed the responsibility of the Knowledge Base. This involved ensuring a high quality was kept for all of the articles and working with the US support team to continue producing further articles.

The extra two months I spent with Sonic seemed to zoom by, I really felt that I had become an integral part of the team, not only in Europe but the entire PPG team. My placement had enabled me to work within many different parts of the company, frequently being in contact with members of the team all over the world. Although my sound recording skills my not have been furthered by taking this placement, I feel my all-round understandings of industry and the real working world have been hugely increased. All in all, it was an absolutely fantastic year for me, full of extremely valuable experiences I will continue to benefit from for the rest of my career. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to work within such a great team, and judging by the (apparently unheard of) Playstation 3 leaving present I received; I think they enjoyed having me be a part of it too!

