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www.applebeam.com

How to Spend Less and Record More!

Recording costs are one of the major expenses for any band or solo artist. With a little insider information you can save money without compromising on quality, in fact sometimes you can even improve the quality of your music by spending less!

Don't believe me? Then this information is definitely for you ..

We have spent over a decade recording and producing thousands of bands, and along the way we've learnt how to create value, without asking the customer for an insane amount of money!

False economy

Many bands will choose to work with less experienced music producers if it's cheaper, but this could end up costing you more than you bargain for.

There's a good chance that you'll walk away with an inferior recording if you go too 'cheap'. Plus, you could end up going back and forth to the studio trying to fix mistakes.

Professional and experienced music producers are much faster at working and more able to 'find' the

sound you want.

At Apple Beam studios, we have had musicians come to us obviously frustrated after they'd wasted 15 or so hours in a 'cheap' studio, only to end up with a dull, unfinished track.

We have been able to take on their project and start from scratch, fixing basic mistakes and creating a more professional finish, usually within a quarter of the time the 'cheap' studio did.

Music production is more than simply pressing record, it's about making a song 'work', making the client feel comfortable, providing input, ideas and energy. In fact the producer needs to be able to 'direct' the whole project and help bring the music to life, which takes a lot of skill to do properly.

You scratch my back

Producers are just as open as anyone else to 'do a deal'. Why not ask for a reduction in price in return for advertising for the studio? Tell the producer that you will mention his studio on your facebook and other social networks if he gives you a reduced rate.

Remember that the studio will be much more interested if you are putting their name in front of musicians who may use their services.

Put your money on the 'mix'

You can save big by spending only where it really counts. Mixing can transform a song. It's one of the steps in the recording process that brings clarity and order to a track.

Good mix engineers will often add ideas to help make a song work, such as correcting arrangement issues, adding an extra sound to balance frequency gaps and

pitch shifting out of tune vocals. This may sound mundane but a professional mix can literally transform a song.

In the pursuit of saving money, you could do the music and vocals in a cheap studio or even at home and get a good engineer to mix the files to add their magic!

Always speak to the mix guy first so he can tell you what you should record and in what format.

You're such a diva

Most singers take forever to record their vocals. That may be because they're diva's! Then again I do see their point. The vocals are the one part of a song that everyone will notice. Most people don't even know what the bass is playing, and never noticed the organ players sensitive touch.

Why not invest in a pretty good microphone and record vocals at home. It's not that difficult and it means you can spend as long as you like nailing your vocal chops. You'll need a proper studio microphone, but there's some pretty decent ones from £150 on the market.

If you do this, make sure you ask your producer how to get the best results from home. I've worked with singers who have done this and the results have been great – and saved them a packet!

Leave the details for now

Have you noticed the way a painter will draw the outline of a picture with rough, broad lines. From there he'll build layer on layer, adding colour and texture, but it's not until the end that he'll worry about details like shading and fine lines.

It's the same for music. When recording it is

important to get the main instruments down and get them sounding right. It can be too easy to start focusing on vocals harmonies, or start playing with a synth sound that sounds cool but these are not important right now. Get the body of the song down and if that needs work, then work on it until it's right, just leave the detail until later.

Preparation is 70%

You won't believe how many sessions I have produced where the singer has not learned their lines, or the bass player is still working on his licks! All this eats up studio time. Recording studios are much more expensive than rehearsal studios so do all your practising in the rehearsal studio!

You may get inspiration and fresh ideas when in the studio, which is fine, but you should have the basics nailed. Make sure you are tight, well rehearsed and on time!

Pace the day

If the bass player has taken ten attempts to nail his part, make him take a break whilst you look at doing something else. He'll come back fresher and probably play better.

Get used to recording

Recording is very different from playing live or playing in a rehearsal room. You have to deal with increased nerves, the new acoustics of the recording room, being watched and scrutinized by the rest of the group and recording your part individually.

Anything you can do to become accustomed to recording will help. Record your rehearsals and practise playing your part while the rest of the group watch.

Test recordings

You'll be amazed at how much you learn from recording your song. You'll notice all kinds of problems that didn't exist before. Sometimes it can pay off to do a one hour test recording of your song to take away and learn from.

Having a song recorded roughly will give you an idea of what you need to work on. Sometimes you may find that the song you thought was a hit just isn't. Whatever you get from your test recording, I guarantee that having one will make your proper full day session run quicker and the results will be twice as good.

Tune to the same tuner

Make sure each band member tunes to the same tuner to avoid any subtle tuning issues. Minute tuning issues in a few instruments can end up sounding clearly out of tune once layered a few times, which means you'll have to back track and re-record all over again – whoops, more wasted studio time.

See the bigger picture

Don't labour over everything in the studio. It can be easy to think that your song is the best song you'll ever write and that you have to spend days in the studio. You're just as likely to write a better song next time and a great song is still a great song even if it's not recorded to perfection.

Musicians can end up spending double what they anticipated simply due to their 'perfectionism'. Try and set a budget and don't allow yourself to stray too far over budget.

Mix on a different day

Fresh ears make all the difference. Ideally you should take regular breaks in your studio session, but of course this all costs money so I would recommend you do the mixing on a different day to the recording.

There is science to this. Human ears get tired and actually process frequency and volume levels very differently the more they are exposed to noise. If you record the song and go straight into mixing you will almost always have to redo the mix the following day. Aside from the fact you won't be hearing the 'true' mix due to tired ears, you'll also be drained of creativity after a long day of recording.

Professional (commercial) songs take days to mix. The engineer slowly chips away at the work, refining and balancing until it's complete. Even with all their years of experience, professional mix engineers still need to work in 'mini sessions' to get the best results. Subjecting yourself to hours of listening to the same piece of music doesn't allow you to benefit from that 'first time listen' experience, which is where most worthwhile decisions come from.

There's another downside to very long recording sessions. Most people will start to 'fiddle' with a track the longer they are in the studio. The problem is that the longer your recording session is, the less likely you are to have a good objective view of your song. If you step away from your song for a day and come back, I guarantee that you'll end up deleting a load of things you added the day before – whoops, money down the drain again!

Personal shout out

I just wanted to jump in and see if you are enjoying this eBook? You've read quite a lot of it so hopefully you do like it! If you know anyone else who might like this eBook, please share it with them by tweeting, or emailing them the download link:

<http://audiorokit.co.uk/pages/how-to-spend-less-and-record-more>

Mini sessions

Try to do mini studio sessions of about three hours each to keep fresh and objective. A couple of three hour sessions will achieve a lot more than one six hour session.

Know thy sound

It's important that you have a sound. A style that you feel comfortable with and that you can say is 'my sound'.

Some musicians like to say that their sound is 'diverse' and that it won't fit into any genre or 'box'. But that would be a nightmare to market. It's good to be in a 'box'.

If I ran a Rock record label for example, I would know where and how to market Rock bands. I'd have relationships with the Rock music media and would understand the culture.

So, why would I want to sign a band that now needs me to market them in a wide range of media, costing ten times the amount and forcing my efforts to be watered down?

Try and find your style and find it BEFORE you start spending money recording your songs. Don't keep on chopping and changing sound as this will eat up your recording budget and leave you with a disjointed album.

Learn the lingo

You may come across some unfamiliar words and

phrases when you work with producers and engineers. Learning the recording lingo will help you communicate your ideas with more accuracy and speed, which saves a lot of time and avoids misunderstandings. Here are some common phrases you should know:

“Channels (or Tracks)” – Each instrument is recorded separately on different channels to give the producer more control. If you want to record another take but do not want to delete the one you just did, you would say, “Can we keep that and record again on a separate channel”.

“Bounce down” – After you have completed your song, you may have thirty or more separate channels of music. If you ask the producer to 'bounce' your song down, you are effectively asking him to turn those individual channels into one single file, which can be transferred to CD or made into an mp3.

“Layering” - If you record the same instrument on top of itself it's called layering. For example, in R&B it is very common to 'layer' the vocals to produce a fuller and thicker sound.

“Lay down” - 'Lay down' just means to record! For example, “lay down the drums”.

“Verse, Bridge, Chorus, Mid 8” - Believe it or not, this is the one that gets most people. It's so important that everyone in the studio uses the same lingo when talking about the song arrangement. Instead of explaining what each name relates to, I thought I'd show you. Take a look at the song lyrics below and at the same time listen to the song on youtube.

“Remember The Time” by Michael Jackson

This is a pretty standard song arrangement and a good template to explain the different sections.

Song Intro

Simple means the start of the song, before any vocals start.

Verse 1

Vocals start and the scene is set.

“Do You Remember, When We Fell In Love, We Were Young, And Innocent Then. Do You Remember, ...

Bridge /Pre-Chorus

This is a slight step away from the verse vocal melody and adds interest as the song builds.

“Do You Remember, Back In The Fall, We'd Be Together, All Day Long, Do You Remember, Us ...

Chorus

This is the main hook.

“Do You Remember The Time, When We Fell In Love, Do You Remember The Time, When We First ...

Verse 2

“Do You Remember, How We Used To Talk, (Ya Know), We'd Stay On The Phone, At Night Till Dawn, Do ...

Bridge /Pre-Chorus 2

“Do You Remember, Back In The Spring, Every Morning Birds Would Sing, Do You Remember, ...

Chorus 2

“Do You Remember The Time, When We Fell In Love, Do You Remember The Time, When We First ...

Middle 8

Called a Middle 8 as typically it's eight bars long and sits about half way through the song. This is a complete new section and acts as a climatic part in the song.

“Those Sweet Memories, Will Always Be Dear To Me

And Girl No Matter What Was Said, I Will Never ...

Chorus till fade

*“Do You Remember The Time, When We Fell In Love,
Do You Remember The Time, When We First ...*

All Nighters

It can be tempting to stay up all night the day before your studio session, practising, worrying and learning lyrics. This is a bad idea. Being tired on the day of your session means you'll lack creativity, be less able to make good judgements and will end up taking longer to get the results you want. Tired musicians spend more time and more money in the studio.

Know when to drop it

If a song isn't working, just drop it. Just because you have spent 16 hours on a song doesn't mean you have to finish it. It doesn't mean you're a quitter, it means you know where to place your efforts.

Some songs drain energy and are no fun to create. The sooner you recognise this, the sooner you can move on to write something better. Don't waste money in the studio because you are too stubborn to walk away from a song that you know is not working.

Mini breaks = bigger bill

Watch the mini breaks whilst in the recording studio as they add up and waste studio time quickly. Get to the studio early so that the producer can make you a coffee and chit chat for 20 minutes on his time, not yours!