

## Getting Professional Quality Sound On Your Wedding Video. by Michael O'Flynn

When you first look at what you've filmed on your new camcorder you'll be really pleased with the results, but that initial novelty makes you immune to all the usual faults such as wobbly shots, too much panning and zooming etc. All these visual faults can easily be corrected using better techniques and a tripod or monopod.

Modern camcorder formats such as mini DV and HDV are capable of producing excellent results, especially when you edit the original tapes on one of the latest computer based editing programs to remove all the bad shots and use 'effects' and 'transitions' tastefully to enhance the finished program.

It's not uncommon for these finished programs to end up looking great but the sound quality lets them down. The main reason for this is that the built-in video microphone is usually too far away from the people you're filming. Some editing programs have advanced audio functions to remove unwanted artifacts and enhance the audio, however there is a limit to what these tools can achieve and it's always better to address problems at source and not rely on some 'magic bullet' in Post Production.

At the time of filming, our ears, eyes and brain work together to effectively suppress the reverberation and other unwanted sound sources in the room to allow us to hear what someone is saying, what we hear is different to what a microphone 'hears'.

Although poor sound when accompanied by pictures of the person who's talking helps us to work out what is being said, this isn't any use if cutaway shots are used during the dialogue, also you shouldn't make your audience have to work hard to hear the words. This is where external microphones are needed, the closer a microphone can get to the subject, the quieter other unwanted sounds effectively become.

If, at this stage you don't have any external microphones, then the best advice for getting good quality sound from the built in microphone is to get your camera as close to your sound source as possible i.e. for most group shots the camera should be about 6 feet away and use the wide angle lens, rather than being a long way from the group and zooming in to get the same shot size. If you are taking videography seriously then it's best to wear closed-back headphones so that you only hear what will be on the audio tracks.

Usually camcorders have a built in stereo electret type microphone which can be unplugged from its socket or there are external microphone sockets and some means of switching between them and the built in microphones, also an A/V socket is usually available for plugging in an external audio mixer. It might be necessary to buy a 'stereo plug to two mono sockets' lead so that you can make full use of the two tracks that are available on most camcorders.

So what do you want to video or what have the family press ganged you into filming? Here's one typical event and advice on getting the best sound.

Weddings, Christenings etc

Wandering around with a camcorder during the service is distracting, so prior to the event, arrange to leave the camera on a tripod at the side of the church framed on the couple and the priest. Getting the vows is the most important shot in a wedding video, if you want other shots you'll have to get hold of another camcorder. It's a good idea to keep recording on that camera as well so that you only have to synchronize both shots once in the edit but just use the good sound from the main camera.

If you have a radio microphone arrange for the priest to wear it, since he'll be the one doing most of the talking and the responses of the couple will be picked up on his microphone as he's close to and facing them, the couple's sound won't be as good as the priest's but so long as they are no more than 3 feet away from the microphone it will be usable; in the edit add a bit of bass to the sections where the couple are talking and this will help to match the sound of the priest. Put fresh batteries in the transmitter and receiver, there's no 'take two' in this situation.

If you don't have a radio microphone, plug in a cardioid condenser or electret microphone into one channel of your camcorder positioned on a short stand (about 2-3 feet high) on the floor, close to where the couple will make their vows, pointing up at the couple and priest's heads and frame the shot to just avoid the microphone. Another cardioid microphone plugged into the other channel can be put on the pulpit if the priest delivers some of the service from there.

It's best to set audio levels before the service to 'Auto' or set levels manually and leave about 6dB of headroom to avoid distortion, i.e. your meter levels should just peak before the red section. Tape down cables with 2" wide tape so that no one trips up and causes damage to themselves and the attached camera. Don't forget to set the camera to 'Record' before the bride arrives and make sure you have a tape of sufficient length for the whole service.

At the reception you will have to find out who will be making speeches and arrange to put your microphones on short stands on the table or taller stands on the floor. Two microphones should give good general coverage for the 'top table' where the principal speakers will be; maybe arrange to get someone to position the nearest microphone in front of each speaker. The camera position won't be as limited as in the church but be extra careful with cables.

Camcorder technical issues.

For best quality sound and pictures make sure you record in 'Standard' mode, not 'Long Play' It is best to manually control volume levels (sometimes quite fiddly on domestic camcorders) or accept the potential downside of 'pumping' audio if you elect to use the 'auto' functions. Condenser microphones will need a separate power supply on most camcorders unless they are the semi-professional and professional versions, in which case you'll have to select phantom power to be active on each channel.

For detailed advice on recording different scenarios go to <http://www.recording-microphone.com/video-microphones.htm>

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