

Researchers' new way of syncing music to video will revolutionise the production of TV ads

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A university of Huddersfield researcher has shown that tiny tweaks to the soundtrack can make TV adverts much more memorable, increasing their commercial impact.

The necessary adjustments are imperceptible to the ear and eye. But Andy Rogers – in the last stages of his PhD project at the University – has proved that there are considerable perceptual improvements if the synchronisation between the music and the visual content of the commercial is altered by just tenths of a second.

Joined by his PhD supervisor, Dr Ian Gibson, Andy has just presented his findings at the International Computer Music Association's 2014 conference, held in Athens. His paper – entitled Transient analysis for music and moving images: considerations for television advertising – was selected from hundreds of submissions. Now, its content will be published in the proceedings of the conference, bringing it widely to the attention of soundtrack composers and music editors.

"The audience at the conference were very interested in the research, and were surprised by the findings because they are counter-intuitive," said Andy.

Syncing for stronger recollection

During his research, he investigated the response of a group of people to the screening of two commercials – for a well-known soft drink and a brand of mineral water. They saw the advertisements – which consisted purely of music and visual imagery – in their original form and then in versions which had the audio-visual alignment of the content displaced to varying degrees.

Memory tests were then conducted and it was discovered which level of displacement resulted in a stronger recollection of the content of the commercial. This was when the soundtrack was displaced so that the music was slightly ahead of the visual content, according to the original "sync points". As a result, the brain was trying to anticipate information, explained Andy, who drew on scientific principles such as "dynamic attending theory" and "neural oscillations" to explain the findings.

"The concept of dynamic attending is widely known, but what is new is that we have done a musical displacement based on changes in frequency rather than loudness," said Andy.

"The findings will be of value in advertising because we have shown that an imperceptible difference has a marked return in memory response," he added.

Some composers have intuitively carried out adjustments in the synchronisation between their music and images. Now, there is a scientific basis for this process and music editors will be able to make digital adjustments in order to improve the response to advertisements.

A real help to commercial composers

Andy Rogers, aged 26 and from North Wales, studied for a BA degree in Popular Music Production at the University of Huddersfield. With the career goal of becoming a film and TV composer himself, he carried out

a prize-winning undergraduate project that investigated the emotional response to the synchronisation of [music](#) and images.

This led to his PhD project, now nearing completion. After this, he seeks to work in the film and TV industry and has already begun to establish himself as a freelance composer.

His supervisor, Dr Gibson, who is a Senior Lecturer in Music Technology, states that Andy's findings might be of real help to commercial composers.

"They could create an advert and find there is something not quite right in terms of audience response," he said.

"When they test it on an audience, they might not get the level of recall that they had anticipated; maybe a similar advert might get a much better response. So they could apply Andy's principles, adjust the soundtrack and elicit a much better memory recall of the product, just by making tiny alterations."

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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