

A Day in the Life of a Sound Designer at a Large Games Development Studio

8.30am to 9.45am

Fix myself a cup of tea and a bowl of cereal in the kitchen and take them to my desk for consumption. I get in half an hour earlier than I “have” to because it avoids the worst of the London rush and gives me time to check my personal e-mails and favourite websites - these tend to be game/sound related because I like to stay up to date. I plan my day and make myself a list of things I need to do.

9.45am to 10.00am

I'm recording a voice actor at 10 so I start up the studio, set up the live room and make sure everything is working properly. The dialogue I'm recording has nothing to do with any of my projects, but I'm helping out a colleague who has two different project deadlines at the end of the week.

10.00am to 11.00am

Dialogue recording. I'm acting primarily as a technician although the person directing the talent, probably the script writer, often requires my input. This is a very short recording session as only a few pickup lines are required, but dialogue recording usually comes in large batches. The biggest project I've worked on had 10,000 lines of in-game dialogue (excluding cutscenes) and this took over a month to record.

11.00am to 12.30pm

I edit the dialogue I've just recorded whilst the session is still fresh in my mind. Editing always takes longer than recording. This is intensive work as you must listen scrupulously to everything to avoid mistakes and select the best takes - taking notes in the recording session is a must. The fewer mistakes made by the talent the faster the editing goes. Dealing with large numbers of files requires excellent organisational skills. Editing is often accompanied by a documentation process to assist the localisation of the dialogue into the different languages that the game is going to be released in.

Lunch

1.30pm to 2.00pm

I need to add the ambient sound effects to a level in one of the games I'm working on. The first thing I do is play through the level a few times and take notes on what sounds I'd like to hear as I play through it. I'm unsure what is happening in this level, so I discuss my ideas with the level's designer to get their thoughts.

2.00pm to 3.00pm

Now that I've played the level a few times I have a good idea of the different spaces that it consists of. I open the level editor and define the different 'sound rooms' - doing this means that a sound placed in one 'sound room' will not be heard in another. How long this takes depends on the complexity of the level, i.e. how many 'rooms' it consists of. This isn't as simple as it could

be as the software is written in-house by our tools programmers and is not as user friendly as a commercial piece of software.

3.00pm to 4.00pm

I start to trawl through our sound effects database for the sounds which I identified whilst playing the level. A Playstation 2 has only 2 MB of sound memory and my budget for ambient sounds in a level is a mere 300 KB, so I select sounds which will convert well to very short loops or spot sound effects. I edit the sounds down to size and use our proprietary interactive sound design software to build up the level's soundscape.

4.00pm to 5.00pm

I open the level editor and place my sounds within the level, associating them with the relevant 'sound room'. I test the game as I go, making adjustments, adding more sounds and getting new ideas as the game world comes to life.

5.00pm to 6.00pm

The level is starting to sound good, but there isn't any music in there yet. I've not been directly involved with the music in this project, but I've developed a good understanding of how music should work in the level so I put in a few temporary floor, event and A.I. triggers so that I can demonstrate my ideas to the audio director and level designer tomorrow.

Career Progression

*After graduating from the University of Edinburgh with a degree in **Music Technology**, Kenneth undertook an MA in Sound Design for the Screen at Bournemouth University. In January 2004 he began working at one of Europe's largest and most successful game development studios.*