

HEARD ABOUT

John Broomhall talks to Radical Entertainment about the sound of Prototype 2

Prototype 2
Developer/Publisher: Radical Entertainment
Platforms: PC, PS3, Xbox 360
www.prototypegame.com

ROB BRIDGETT is a respected game audio practitioner. Widely known for a thoughtful approach to his craft, he has strived to take the 'best of the best' practice from film sound to inform his triple-A video games productions.

As well as facilitating some interesting movie/game liaisons – most notably collaborating with film sound design guru Randy Thom in his *Scarface* project – and writing on the subject in his book *From The Shadows Of Film Sound*, he is an active evangelist for the holy grail of audio post-production time in games and actively promotes the cause of good mixing via his website gameaudiomix.com. He's just emerged from the end of his second *Prototype* production. However, *Develop* first took Bridgett back to *Prototype 2*'s commencement to ask about his initial approach to an important sequel.

"Approaching a sequel means the tone is usually already firmly established," explains Bridgett. "As co-audio directors on the project, Scott Morgan and I felt it was important not to stray from the successes of the first game but to build on the already established franchise strengths, whilst also looking for new and interesting developments for sound within the context of the new design.

"So we identified the continued need for believable, yet over-the-top detail and impact in the physics and collision sound systems – fundamental to player's experience of the destruction and chaos they create. And the emotionally-charged score was also critical in delivering a feeling of ultimate power fantasy again. But a central difference for *Prototype 2* was narrative design being given centre stage. Dynamic mixing systems, and dialogue handling pipelines that allowed voice and story to feature more prominently would be vital – not only in scripted cut-scenes and linear missions, but also during more emergent chaotic missions."

RADIO DAYS

Dialogue radio processing and handling was a big deal for the sound team working on *Prototype*, so how did they handle the process?

"VST batching was built-into our pipeline to handle the huge amounts of content, as well as ensure localised content was identically processed," he states. "By designing, storing, applying and processing effects chains inside our dialogue database tool, we were able to quickly and effectively manage over 85,000 dialogue wave files – some 17,000 files per language. Our investment in dialogue handling tools proved an enormous advantage."

The Radical sound staff also serve as champions of the need for time for the audio team to mix and tweak at the end of a project, so the concluding section of *Prototype 2*'s audio design was a vital time.

"Post-production planning and thinking is built-into the DNA of our audio department," insists Bridgett. "All roads lead to the final mix,



which is an established milestone production date we call 'sound beta'; this changes our approach to pre-mixing and quality control of content throughout the production.

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Rob Bridgett, Radical

Using a single voice director and producer was a cornerstone of the approach, allowing all voice production to be passed through a single studio, adhering to solid levelling and dynamic range, as well as enabling total consistency in direction for each character.

DROPPING IN

"This meant that the edited assets dropped directly into the game engine and cut-scenes, and directly into the mix without any further mastering, limiting or attenuation."

Bridgett and his team also applied this 'horizontal' approach to music by having Scott create all the content in-house, with consistent templates and sessions.

"He could drop music into the game and iterate immediately," he reveals.

"Consequently, much of the need for deep re-mixing and re-mastering was eliminated. Sound design elements were similarly given ownership horizontally – one person owning weapons and UI sounds across the whole game, while the other owned ambience, physics, collisions et al.

"Having the sound beta is one of the only ways we are able to spend time mixing our games at the end of production. This time is specifically set aside for allowing ourselves to be really picky about the final balance in a controlled, relaxed environment. The final mixes we do at Radical happen in our in-house, purpose built mix stage – usually over the final three weeks of the project.

"The process is broken down into three stages; getting overall output levels correct, playing through the entire game tweaking faders in real-time, or alternatively making adjustment notes to address specific sounds and voice files offline, and finally checking various mix configurations, mix-downs and supported output formats across the consoles."



The recording facility used for *Prototype 2* (main image), where Rob Bridgett (above) strived to meet the quality of the film industry's audio



John Broomhall is an independent audio director, consultant and content provider.
E: develop@johnbroomhall.co.uk
www.johnbroomhall.co.uk