

How to choose appropriate equipment to suit your needs and budget.

- 1.) Needs Survey - The first thing that you need to do is to look at your needs and attempt to determine what you really need as opposed to what you would like to have. A good approach to this is to first make a "wish list", grouped by the location and/or function (i.e. Studio, Control Room, Edit #1, Remote Equipment, Dubbing, etc.) of the types (not brands or models yet) of equipment that you want to use to fill in these areas. A computer spreadsheet program is an excellent way to do this. If you have existing equipment your next step is to slot in that equipment that you think that you will continue to use. Next go back through the list and start filling in, as much as possible, the actual brands and models of equipment that you would like to get and fill in the list prices for these pieces of equipment. If you are unsure of a type or brand to use then simply fill in a "best guess" (estimate high!) of the cost of this type of equipment.
- 2.) Once you have gone through the whole list add up all the list prices and then subtract 15%. This represents the approximate price reduction that you will get when you put the equipment out for bid. Sometimes you may get as much as 20%(or more) but you can't count on this. In most cases the number you come up with at this point will be much too high. Now comes the difficult part!
- 3.) At this point you go back and begin juggling the equipment and quality to get what you need. This is the point that calls for the most time, patience and imagination. As you go back and forth through the list you begin losing functions or downgrading your desires. This is difficult because you frequently find that you have to let go of something that you really want in order to get other things that you truly need. One of the important things to do at this point is to keep track (on a separate list) of what you can let go of now that you can purchase a year or so down the line (i.e. what can you live, for a while, without). Also if your bid price comes in lower than you expect you will have on hand a list of what you might add back in now.
- 4.) Once you have gotten past this point you should have a list of equipment that will fill your needs, you should also come out of this with a secondary list

and a future wish list. These last two lists are important because they represent the basis of your future growth plan. Because these secondary lists were generated at the same time as your primary list they should represent a unified picture of what you are aiming towards in your situation.

- 5.) Now that you have your equipment list figured out you will need to re-sort it into a "bid list". This means that instead of being grouped by location and/or function the list needs to be reformatted to a simple list. Typically this list is grouped by broad Video/Audio/Computer/Lighting/etc. categories and then sorted within these categories by manufacturer (with your current equipment, if any, removed from the list). At this time you will also be deciding what categories will go to your video vendors and what categories might go to separate specialty vendors like "Studio Lighting" or "Computer Equipment."
- 6.) The last stage before bid is to separate out, from the list, those items that you will purchase separately from the main equipment bid. These might be items such as "wire and connectors", consumer grade cassette decks and/or CD players, installation supplies, etc.

The following areas are intended to help you ask the questions you need to ask while you are developing the purchase list

- 1.) What to look for when selecting equipment.
 - Good brands
 - 1 or 3 chips - what to aim for and why
 - Cameras vs. Camcorders
 - TBC's - Full-frame?
 - Decks - use, function and fallback
 - Patch panels/routing systems - why they are a good idea
 - Monitors - where black & white appropriate and/or good enough
 - Screen size - how big is big enough/how big is too big
 - Specs - what they mean (and don't mean)
 - Computers vs. dedicated CG's

- Expect to make some mistakes and to overlook some things.
- 2.) What to watch out for when selecting equipment.
 - Will the two things you don't like drive you crazy?
 - Are the things you like enough to justify the purchase?
 - What bells and whistles do you need - they can be a liability.
 - 3.) How to bid and who to bid to.
 - What vendors seem to be good and which don't
 - How to word the bid
 - Box houses vs. "full-service" vendors
 - Splitting up your bid - why you do or don't want to
 - 4.) Be sure to add these things to your bid...
 - Appropriate service manuals
 - Specialty cables
 - Rackmount kits
 - 5.) What to buy separately from the bid...
 - Wire, Cable, Connectors
 - "Consumer" CD Players, Cassette Decks, FM Tuners
 - Power Strips, Tools, etc.
 - 6.) Where you can save \$\$\$.
 - Custom rack consoles
 - Why a vendor is not necessarily an expert - or your friend
 - Engineer selection vs. self-selection
 - Engineer/self selection vs. vendor selection
 - Engineer/self installation vs. vendor installation
 - Service contracts - do you really need them?
 - Wire, Cable, Connectors
 - Making your own cables vs. buying pre-made

- Used equipment - when is it a bargain?
- 7.) The importance of consistency.
- Consistent brands on same types of equipment - e.g. Mixing boards
 - Training and service issues
- 8.) Consumer vs. Industrial vs. Professional vs. Broadcast
- Why consumer grade is usually not good enough & why it can be
- 9.) Mixed use
- Stretching you \$ by choosing equipment with more than one use - why this is and is not usually a good idea.
- 10.) Formats – How many do you want/need to support
- DVCam
 - DVCPPro
 - MiniDV & DV
 - Digital-S
 - 3/4"-SP
 - 3/4"
 - Hi-8
 - S-VHS
 - VHS
 - 8mm
- 11.) Mixed Formats
- MiniDV -> SVHS
 - Hi-8 -> 3/4"
 - S-VHS -> 3/4"
 - Hi-8 -> S-VHS
- 12.) Things people will mess with :
- Thermostats

- Computer defaults
- Wiring
- "Private" files

13.) Equipment

- User-friendly vs. high capability - aiming for both
- Computer systems & compatibility
- Mac & PC intercommunications
- Video equipment interfacing with computer equipment
- Video authoring on "web" applications