

INSANELY GREAT!

Blackburn College

Creating the perfect live room

Blackburn College's music and media departments work with clients like MTV, Tate Liverpool and the Saatchi Gallery to record interviews, live sets from upcoming bands and more. When a flood damaged their existing analogue system, we helped them develop a state of the art digital audio and video setup that gave students the opportunity to experience a professional production workflow.

Saying goodbye to analogue

The talented students at Blackburn College have a setup that's fairly unusual in education - their music department's live room also doubles as a TV studio, meaning they can film and record bands' live sets at the same time. The idea is to give students as much high-level practical experience as possible. However, as Production Lecturer Andrew Piper explained, "the setup we had before was just a collection of old and borrowed kit, and it was getting a bit long in the tooth."

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Jamie Holman, **Level Three Foundation Art And Design Media Programme Leader, Lecturer in Media Production, Blackburn College.**

"Working in the studio was definitely de-skilling us week by week," said Level 3 Foundation Art and Design Media Programme leader Jamie Holman. "A lot of the practice we were passing on [to students] was no longer industry standard." When their media department was damaged by a flood, staff at the college saw it as the perfect opportunity to make the move to a digital setup and give students the chance to work with state of the art equipment. Together, the two departments came up with a wishlist of kit and capabilities and got in touch with Jigsaw24 to find out what was possible with their budget.



Working with...



In a nutshell...

Who are Blackburn College?

Blackburn College and University Centre have been providing a wide range of courses for over 120 years, and were one of the first colleges in the country to be rated 'Outstanding' across the board by Ofsted. They currently have over 15,000 students.

What did they need?

Blackburn needed a state of the art live room where they could record footage for the likes of Channel 4, MTV and Saatchi & Saatchi. High quality results were a must, but the setup also needed to allow music and media students to take on different roles during lessons.

How did Jigsaw24 help?

We set the college up with professional quality cameras, dollies and vision mixing equipment for shoots and an Avid C24 mixing desk with Pro Tools for their audio sessions, giving them access to industry standard hardware and software.

What were the benefits?

- Revitalised staff.
- Students learn a more industry standard skill set and can produce a higher quality of work.



Creating a professional level studio

"The clients we work with have quite high demands for technical output," explained Jamie, "so it placed massive impact on the spec we were looking for. We really wanted something as close to broadcast [standard] as possible. Also, we were specifically looking for a setup that would allow students to perform roles."

Jigsaw24 consultants Rob Williams and Lewis Brown worked with Blackburn's music and media staff to finalise a list of equipment that would allow students and bands alike to make the most of the space. We set them up with JVC GY-HD251E cameras, as they were easy to use but still packed in Genlock, Timecode, a wide range of inputs and outputs and the kind of image quality the college's clients required. To emulate a professional setup as closely as possible, the college opted for pedestals rather than tripods, and included remote lens controls and Fujinon focus kits for each camera.

The college also upgraded its vision mixing system, but couldn't include a separate monitor for each camera feed due to space and budget restrictions. We built them a custom solution which allowed the college to split one monitor into four, and send a camera feed to each via a Corioview multiviewer.

In order to recreate a professional production

environment as closely as possible, Blackburn chose to run Pro Tools with an Avid C24 control surface. As well as including excellent audio for picture tools that made it easier to integrate music and media content, this would allow the students to get valuable experience on a professional level piece of kit. "The Pro Tools kit has been a real revelation," said Jamie. "Using it alongside the three cameras has allowed us to reach a level of professionalism we couldn't achieve with the old analogue system. Even taken in isolation, Pro Tools is helping us train students up for a range of outcomes."

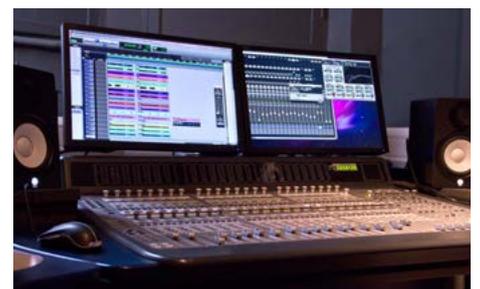
"When we work with outside clients, Pro Tools means we can offer them a higher end product," agreed Andrew. "That helps us maintain a level of kudos, which then feeds back into the students' work and gives them a sense of realism and accomplishment."

Getting everything up and running

GNM's Once all the equipment had been chosen, Jigsaw24's engineers went up to the college to lay cables, configure Macs and get the whole system up and running. "I was nervous [about the installation]," said Jamie. "There was a lot of new equipment and I was worried about the staff having to be retrained, the timescale, how quickly we'd be able to implement the new technology

“Because we're a college, it's important to us that the investment we made is reinforced with really good after service, and we definitely get that with Jigsaw24.”

Jamie Holman, **Level Three Foundation Art And Design Media Programme Leader, Lecturer in Media Production, Blackburn College.**



into the curriculum, but actually it was absolutely painless. The training Jigsaw24 provided was bespoke, and really, really useful. We were up and running literally two days after the install."

Although there were a few of the post-installation teething problems that come with any installation of this size, our team were able to address any issues quickly, and Blackburn's transition from analogue to digital was incredibly smooth.

☀️ Adding value for students and staff

"The best thing the new system has done is revitalise the staff," said Jamie. "It's been good for our entire production team, and it's exciting because the quality of what the students are producing now is phenomenal." However, the new system has also helped the college attract more students. "Students have high expectations of FE providers, but we surpass them. Other colleges in the region can't compete with us, and it's had a massive impact on our recruitment, we've got more students than we've ever had."

Going digital has also had some great practical benefits for students. "Now multiple students can work on the same file and compare results, which is obviously a lot more difficult and expensive with analogue kit," said Andrew. "It gives them hands-on experience rather than watching demos, so they learn more quickly, and the peer assessment side of things, I think, is invaluable. They quickly realise they can learn off each other and not just us."

The students are now editing their audio in Pro Tools and their video footage using Adobe's Creative Suite toolset, all on a mixture of iMacs and 8-core Mac Pros. Again, this is giving them valuable experience using professional-level tools on a platform that's popular across the creative industries.



☀️ Looking forward

The college's media department are now planning to bring other elements of their setup to professional standard, and are currently looking into developing their lighting setup. They're also due to move to a new campus, where they plan to expand their studio to accommodate more students.

"It's inexpensive in terms of the longevity we get out of [the equipment] and the range of activities you can embed with students," said Jamie. "For us, the TV studio is a really good investment. The whole range of outcomes goes way beyond just making college TV."

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Video gallery

To view the video visit the URL:
<http://bit.ly/1bmp5Ys>

