



by Ryan Hoyle

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The New Paradigm In Music Production: Collaborating From A Distance

Over the last 10 years or so, I have had the privilege of playing drums on hundreds of tracks for clients around the globe, and now that this way of collaborating is not just a possibility, but a necessary privilege for most, I would like to share a few of the things I have learned about the art of making music from a distance. Whether it be down the street or literally across the world, there are a few things to consider when making music and doing business from afar. While I reference tracking drums specifically, the basic process works for any instrumental part you're enlisted to track.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The single most important aspect to long-distance collaborating is communication. When I get a new lead on a potential client, I immediately respond with an e-mail asking for the best time to schedule a phone call. Music is a personal thing and I feel that it is very important to reach out and establish a first impression based on personal interaction.

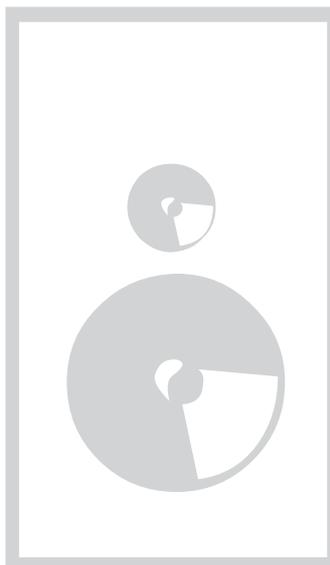
TRACKING DAY

When the day arrives that I begin tracking, I have already made sure ahead of time that the client will be near a computer and accessible by phone for most of that day. After downloading their files, creating a session, and making a chart, I will call the client by phone (or Skype) to discuss the game plan for that song.

I try to keep it simple by asking broad questions like, "If you could hire any drummer for this song, who would it be?" Questions like this tend to be easy for songwriters and will give me just the kind of information I need to discern what they are looking for. As soon as I finish that introductory call, I will begin to create click/percussion beds to play over (based on the feels we discussed),

a set-up of which drums and cymbals I will play, and I will immediately take the heart of the song (second chorus, bridge, solo, breakdown) and roughly track about 16-20 bars or so.

As soon as I bounce this first draft down, I will text the client, and as soon as they are able to listen to it, we will speak on the phone once again. This time, I will first and foremost focus on



the drum sounds themselves. I want to know that they are happy with the sound of my kit in the context of their track before I invest any time in capturing a solid performance. As soon as we sign off on sounds, I move to more specific questions, like intros ("Where do I come in?"), outros ("Is it a short ending?"), bass drum patterns, hi hat/ride cymbal placements, fill lengths, dynamics, and so on. As soon as I have these topics covered and hopefully have garnered a little bit of excitement from the client, I then arm myself for battle and go in for final takes.

NAILING IT

Now I'll begin the process of rehearsing the song enough to create only keeper takes in my playlists (or "virtual tracks"). This way, when I am compiling a drum rack (if necessary), I am only working with the best of how I performed that day instead of trying to wade through 20 takes of mediocre performances. Rehearsal is the key.

Now that I have rehearsed the song enough to be able to get through it without crashing, I will try to anticipate which areas of the song may be up for debate. Then, I will deliberately play these sections very differently in each take to ensure that once I have exhausted myself (and my drumheads), I will have enough options to prevent having to go in and redo the entire track. This way, when the client says, "I love the track, BUT the fill going into the second chorus bothers me," I can say "no problem" and comp in another fill.

RANDOM TIPS

When working with international clients, I have found Skype to be the most affordable way to communicate. For payment, I recommend asking if the client's bank offers free online bill payments. This way, you are getting a bank cheque, which is more reliable than money orders, personal cheques, and PayPal; furthermore, there are no fees (PayPal charges a percentage).

When transferring files, I would highly recommend using YouSendIt.com. It's the fastest and most reliable way that I have found to deliver large session files. When requesting what kind of files to work with, I have found that MP3s are unreliable and contain latency and undesirable artifacts that can affect the timing of the performance. When tracking, I have found that it is best to only process with plug-ins instead of printing these effects to tape, so to speak. Most mixers will want the raw files.