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SPR reaches silver with new tech, same staff

by Laura Bracken
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This year marks the 25th anniversary of Montreal's Audio Postproduction SPR, and, according to president Normand Rodrigue, staying on the edge of changing technology, while maintaining a stable staff, has allowed the company to expand. Starting as a two-person operation working on audio for corporate slide shows, SPR is now a one-stop film and television audio shop with a staff of 18, offering everything from sound design to dubbing.



Normand Rodrigue, President and Jean-Pierre Bissonnette, VP

While a high staff turnover is common among audio houses, Rodrigue says that maintaining steady personnel keeps clients coming back.

"Even in low periods we keep our staff on," he says. "The same people have been here forever. They are part of the company and keeping them is key to our success."

SPR's head mixer Jean-Pierre Bissonnette, who has been with the company for more than 15 years and is now a partner, remembers when, in 1982, SPR became one of the first companies in Canada to boast synchronization technology, which facilitated interlocked sound and picture. The advancement, Rodrigue says, "put SPR in the forefront of audio post for video at the time."

Today, keeping up with technology continues to fuel business at the Montreal shop. The HD movement is proving to be an advantage, as high-end doc clients, in anticipation of HDTV proliferation, are increasingly looking to SPR to provide audio in Digital 5.1 surround.

"We were already in the film business, doing soundtracks for features, so it was only a stone's throw away for us to do documentary films in 5.1," says Rodrigue.

For example, SPR is currently working on the second season of *Mayday*, a Canada/France/U.K. docudrama series about plane crashes. Seven or eight staff will spend approximately 20 days on each one-hour episode and will produce 17 different versions of the series for broadcasters, including Discovery Channel Canada, Canal D in France and National Geographic in the U.S. and U.K.

As more and more producers turn to international financing partners to find their budgets, "it gives [SPR] a bit of an edge that we're so used to doing coproductions," says Rodrigue. "There's no doubt that [coproductions] are a key part of our business at this point, and our facilities are set up for international productions in that we can work in PAL or NTSC, and we have a huge FTP site so we can exchange large amounts of information."

SPR recently completed English and Hebrew versions of the feature *Metallic Blues*, a Canada/Germany/Israel coproduction with Montreal's BBR Productions, directed by Dan Verete (*Yellow Asphalt*).

The Audio Postproduction SPR team:



Haut de gauche à droite: Pauline Leroy, Jonathan Doyon, Vivian Savoy, Patrick Knup, Benoît Dame, Pierre Jean, Henry jr Godding, Normand Rodrigue, Laurence Corman.

Centre: Dany Ouellet, Colette Beaudin, Loïc Thériault, Hélène Lauzon, Sophie Tourigny.

Bas: Virginie Simonard, Jean-Pierre Bissonnette, Natacha Marleau, Sylvain Brassard, Martine Beaudoin.