

Standby Audio: VLC as a Source

Recently I took a call on the support hotline, and the client commented on how happy I sounded on the phone. Which is odd, because I'm neither happy, nor lucky, and I don't go. (a reference for you Seinfeld fans)



(Seinfeld – The Bubble Boy – Season 4 episode 7)

I guess I was in a decent mood, and they noted that their stress response was different from mine, as I sang to myself as I dug through their systems to resolve the problem.

One of the best pieces of advice I got when I got into Broadcast Engineering was “Nothing works one hundred percent of the time, one hundred percent of the time!” Armed with that knowledge, it's was to my benefit to have a plan for when things go wrong (or just when maintenance needs to be done). In an ideal world, you'd have 2 machines in your control room, you have a a primary On-Air computer and a secondary computer with a licensed copy of OnAir. This allows to you throw to your full program schedule if there's an issue with the primary. To make the expense of this machine more palatable, your presenter can use it for show prep and editing calls. I realize not every station has budget for this, but I can't stress enough the importance of standby audio.

Assuming you have a machine wired into your board, download and install don't VLC to it. Then get a one-hour playlist from the program department, if your overnight programming doesn't differ too much from your midday grab the 1am hour. Export the music, IDs and generic promos from that list. Once you've got a folder full of audio assets, Launch VLC and create a playlist based on the 1am hour from your log. Optionally you could, pull audio segments from your logger, provided you have the playlist from that segment for reconciling your logs.

VLC is a free application, that runs on just about anything, and play almost anything. Just last week as a proof-of-concept, a developer successfully installed and ran the latest version (v3.0.23) on a Windows XP workstation. What's nice is that you can set the playlist to loop, so it can run as long as you need it.

One last thing, if you implement this standby audio strategy, document it. Make a checklist or a 'How-To' and post it in your control room, make sure your staff, presenters and on-air talent know about it. AND create a calendar reminder to update the playlist at least annually. An outdated back up is better than no back up, but if your station switched formats three years ago, it's gotten to sound strange.

That's it for this one, see on the next!