

recording junkie

Plan Your Studio Time

Studio time is a precious commodity. It is very important if you want to get the most out of your recordings to be prepared before you go into the studio. Here are a few things to consider before you book studio time, and before you start tracking.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!

I have seen it many times. A band will walk into a studio and expect to track down a song with the same energy and vitality they get from their live performance. While this works for some bands, it does not work for the majority. The reason it does work for a few is directly tied to how prepared and rehearsed the band already is. If a band has been playing a song for years daily, they will have a much easier time than a band that comes in with new material. Although this seems like common sense, I have seen many bands come in with new songs they haven't even worked out completely. This is the worst possible situation for the band and for the producer/engineer. The band will likely not get a complete song recorded, or at least not a very good version of it. The producer will have not gotten a good product to hand over to the band. The band will still be out the studio fee, and will come away with very little of use.

The best practice is to bring material that has been in the band's repertoire for a while, and practice that material heavily for several weeks before the studio session.

Practice with a click track/metronome. Most studios use click tracks. There are very few drummers that can keep perfect time and if the recording is not in good time it can make editing more difficult.

PREPARE YOUR INSTRUMENTS

Old guitar strings, old drum heads, vocalists that don't take care of their voices all produce bad recordings. Make sure the instruments have new strings, heads etc. A good method is to replace these items on your instruments the day before the session and then have a practice session of 1 or 2 hours to break them in. This way the strings and heads will hold their pitch properly, but still retain the brilliant higher frequency energy that makes the recording sizzle. Lackluster equipment makes for lackluster recordings.

Make sure instruments are in tune before every recording. If the musician forgets to tune the instrument the first time, it can be very difficult to get a matching sound in future recordings if the intonation can not be recreated. So make sure tuning is checked regularly.

The vocalist should lay off of smoking, soft drinks, milk, and anything else that will their vocal dexterity. Drink plenty of water. Tea with lemon helps if the singer is suffering from a dry/sore throat. Vocal exercises can help to extend the vocalists range prior to the session, as well as help with pitch control after the singer has stepped into the studio.

In the studio the band's instrument setup may vary slightly from the live setup. Consider where microphones may be placed and be prepared to play around them or to adjust instrument setup to allow for them. Kick drums need to leave access for a mic by either removing the resonant head, or by having a res head with an access port for the microphone. Brass players should get accustomed to playing into a microphone, especially if they are used to moving around while playing. Bass and Guitar players are advised to get used to not playing so much through effects. It is usually preferable to track without too many effects in the chain and add effects in mixing. It is much easier to add effects where needed. It is impossible to remove them if that is what is originally recorded. Drum kits will have a TON of mics. Be prepared to play with cymbals slightly higher so that tom mics can be put in place.

MAKE A LIST

It is a good idea to make a list of things you would like to accomplish in order of importance. There is almost never "extra" time in the studio. Make a list in order of importance of what needs to be done. There is no point spending 2 hours trying to get the perfect keyboard intro if the session is only 4 hours and the most important task is to get a basic demo of your 4 piece band.