

Television Production Team Reaches Peak Performance with Flexible Intercoms

Clear-Com's Eclipse-PiCo digital matrix and Encore partyline intercom systems along with Optocore™ interfaces fulfilled the Punk'd production team's strategic imperatives to attain a faster intercom setup, added flexibility, and higher productivity.



Behind the scenes, Randall Goode, the A2, is getting prepared to wire the talent.

Background

Punk'd, MTV's groundbreaking, hidden camera show, prides itself on leaving its viewers insatiably hungry for more jokes, pulled on the most recognized celebrities. Created by the well-known actor, Ashton Kutcher, and the leading producer, Jason Goldberg, Kutcher and his crew have pranked unsuspecting,

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER: Punk'd (MTV)

- Hidden camera reality television series
- Millions of viewers
- Los Angeles, California

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Enhance intelligibility and operational efficiency
- Simplify technology management and expansion
- Adapt to changing requirements, faster

INTERCOM SOLUTION

- Eclipse-PiCo digital matrix
- Eclipse Configuration Software (ECS)
- 10 V-Series 12-lever key control panels
- MS-704 Encore partyline main station
- RS-603 Encore beltpacks
- 3 V3R-FX-Intercom Optocore interface
- 3 X6R-FX-Intercom Optocore interface
- TW-47 Radio/walkie-talkie interface
- IMF-3 Interface frame

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Effective collaboration in real time
- Increased readiness and significant cost savings
- Improved agility across multiple workspaces

major celebrities including Justin Timberlake, Simon Cowell, and Magic Johnson. The show quickly attracted a substantial fan base and has become a heavy recipient of many Teen Choice Awards, an annual awards show aired on FOX for the year's biggest achievements in television, music and fashion. Even after eight seasons, Punk'd continued to boost solid ratings as a hit reality television series.

The eighth season of the show was followed by a five year hiatus, with the relaunching of Punk'd in its ninth season in 2012. Unlike former episodes, this time around, there were different celebrity hosts each week, such as Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus, with even funnier, attention-grabbing pranks.

Communications played an important role in supporting these production operations by enabling effective collaboration between the actors, camera operators, directors, producers and the technical crew before, during and after the show. In the first season of Punk'd, the productions were simple enough that they only needed two-way radios. Eventually, they acquired a basic partyline intercom system and an older generation of a Clear-Com matrix system as well. As their productions became increasingly sophisticated in the sixth, seventh, and eighth seasons, their communication requirements multiplied and became even more complex. Especially with the relaunching of Punk'd in its ninth season, they wanted a complete upgrade to the latest and most powerful intercom technologies to bolster their growing productions as well as take on new challenges as their needs evolved.

Business Challenges

Enhance intelligibility and operational efficiency

The Punk'd team's demand for a new intercom system was driven by necessity as the sound quality on their existing partyline system was poor and inadequate for their intensive productions. Additionally, crosstalk, which was an inherent part of their intercom, only muddled conversations even more. Crosstalk is a phenomenon in which a signal from one channel creates an undesired effect on another. In this case, the Punk'd actors would overhear the cues that the director was giving to someone else through another channel since the audio rolled over to their own earpieces. This made it confusing for the actors to decipher what information was actually relevant, which brought about missed cues, caused people to follow unintended directions, and ultimately, delayed their workflow.

Simplify technology management and expansion

The Punk'd productions take place in a wide variety of settings, sometimes in a single large venue and at other times, within multiple areas. Either way, they have the tedious and difficult responsibility of manually running long cables with adapters to interconnect the dispersed equipment and intercom systems. Setting up for each production was not only time consuming, but the cables only crowded the limited equipment space even more. Likewise, system expansion required a lot of extra cables and additional setup time. Consequently, their production team spent a huge portion of their day in pre-show preparation, incurring higher production costs and productivity drains.

Adapt to changing requirements, faster

In the fast moving world of reality television production, conditions can change in an instant so speed is critical to success. Not only did the excessive number of cables slow down production setup, but it also hampered their day to day workflow. The cables were cumbersome to manage and had to be patched again whenever audio needed to be routed to a new destination, generating high levels of downtime. Further, the intercoms did not supply the needed flexibility for their shifting work environment, which prevented the staff from achieving production goals easily and rapidly.

The Intercom Solution

Choosing Clear-Com

The Punk'd team turned to Coffey Sound, one of Hollywood's leading sources of audio equipment, a Clear-Com dealer, and Clear-Com Global Rental Group Partner, for intercom systems to achieve their aspiration to create smooth, high-quality productions. Through a trusted, longstanding relationship with Coffey Sound, Punk'd recognized the rental business' proven success in supplying the most innovative intercom solutions for the most prestigious productions in the entertainment industry.

Although Coffey Sound was very familiar with all of the leading intercom vendors, Clear-Com was the obvious choice to deliver reliable and clear communications

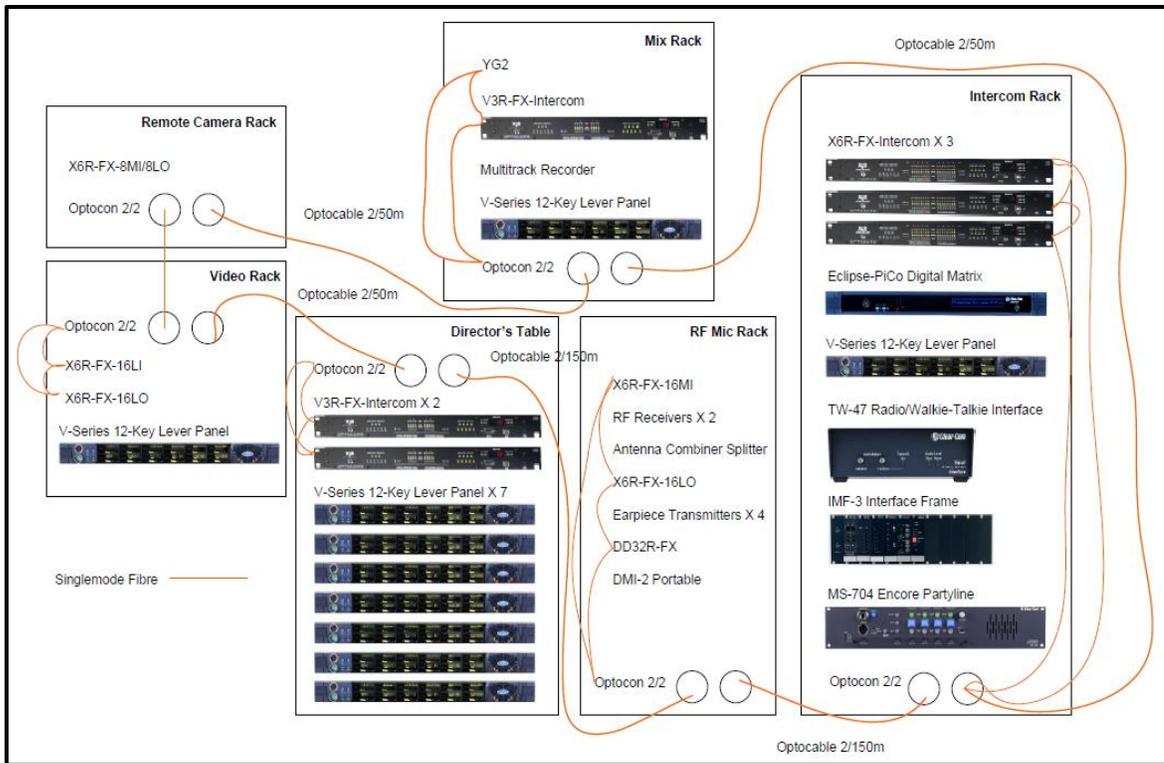
throughout the production venues. Clear-Com had served Punk'd well in the past and it was selected once again because its Eclipse system was the leading digital matrix intercom in the industry and its Optocore solution was the latest in optical fiber network innovation. The flexibility, simplicity and power of the feature-rich Clear-Com systems, coupled with the expert design and integration work of Coffey Sound, helped Punk'd reach its extensive vision. The Clear-Com intercoms provided capability well above industry standards, accelerating workflows while transforming production management and operational effectiveness.

Clear-Com's Eclipse-PiCo digital matrix intercom, V-Series user control panels and Encore partyline along with the Optocore interfaces, V3R-FX-INTERCOM and X6R-FX-INTERCOM, formed a comprehensive communications solution for the Punk'd productions. The Eclipse-PiCo, V-Series panels, and Encore were installed in an intercom rack and paired with three Optocore X6R-FX-INTERCOM devices. Further, V-Series user control panels were also placed in the video rack, director's table, and mix rack alongside three Optocore V3R-FX-INTERCOM interfaces.

The V3R-FX-INTERCOM and X6R-FX-INTERCOM devices interconnected the Clear-Com systems along with all other audio network circuits via fiber and CAT5, permitting centralized management of the distribution network. Moreover, the Optocore interfaces also allowed fast, intelligent routing of network, word clock, data and audio signals over the integrated systems in real-time with the added benefits of dual fiber redundancy, ultra-low latency, and high bandwidth to streamline workflows.



The Clear-Com intercoms and Optocore interfaces used for Punk'd.



Application diagram of Clear-Com's intercom solution.

Providing ample capability without much infrastructure, the powerful 1RU Eclipse-PiCo frame was an ideal fit as the rack space in the production area was limited. Its 36 ports were sufficient to interface with all the two-way radios, cameras, IFBs and more. The Eclipse frame supported the innovative IP-enabled V-Series key-panels, which provided eight shift pages, 10-character high resolution graphic display labels, and listen-again digital memory. These panels were used by the director, executive producer, backup producers, video engineer, hidden camera operator and audio technicians. Since the sets were constantly evolving, the V-Series panel's easy-to-change labeling feature was especially beneficial to the production team. Additionally, the numerous shift pages enabled exclusive communication between many job-specific talk groups and allowed for more key assignments. All the features of the Eclipse platform made it easier for the production team to manage and control their intercom systems, and accomplish more than ever before.

Moreover, the Encore partyline system provided users with unsurpassed two-wire, group communications. The producers and camera crew on the two-way radios and Encore RS-603 belt packs coordinated the production with the director, who also used an Encore belt pack, to give cues to the actors with IFB earpieces.

Business Results

Effective collaboration in real time

By offering high quality audio, Clear-Com enabled the production team to communicate clearly to one another, significantly reducing the time spent on exchanging information and addressing questions. In addition, everything said over the intercom is pertinent information, uninterrupted by cross-talk.

The production team is able to customize communication paths on the Eclipse-PiCo and V-Series panels for specific talk groups, isolating private conversations between the director and camera operators, the

producers and actors, and the video engineer and cameras operators. The convenience of personalized talk paths from the highly flexible Eclipse systems facilitated efficacy for the Punk'd production crew on a level that is well above any of their past experiences.

Increased readiness and significant cost savings

“When using the two-wire partyline intercom, it was taking four to five hours to set up and now it takes one to two hours. It’s really cut down preparation time by fifty percent, lowering the production costs,” says Gary Vahling, Rental Manager at Coffey Sound. “We could now tie all the audio network circuits and the intercom together in two cables. I could have a rack system interconnected with an audio network and the intercom all in one case by just plugging in the fiber optic cables between the racks. It made for a very quick setup time.” The intuitive, plug-and-play design of the Clear-Com and Optocore systems along with the dramatic decrease in the number of cables made intercom



The main intercom rack and mixer rack before integration with the Optocore network.

management remarkably low maintenance. It also cut capital investment in the longer term since they no longer needed to purchase, deploy, and maintain as many cables and adapters.

Improved agility across multiple workspaces

Along with reducing the time and cost associated with intercom deployment, Clear-Com gave Punk'd an oasis of advantages and presented them with exciting new ways to run their top-notch production.

Vahling notes, “With the Eclipse-PiCo, we’ve gained access to a variety of enabling functionalities, which not only increased our production output, but also supported a highly personalized production experience.”



Hidden camera operators on set are adjusting frames and colors.

Clear-Com’s Eclipse intercom systems tailored to the communication demands and high expectations of the production team. The V-Series panels helped Punk'd achieve an immediate acceleration in intercom performance, offering much greater flexibility and functionality. Clear-com’s V-Series panels were a catalyst for change, eliminating excessive patching and permitting users to instantly and effortlessly redirect their audio, rapidly alter their key assignments, and easily readjust labels as their production requirements altered from day-to-day. Evidently, the Clear-Com systems improved their reaction time and ability to deal with issues, delivering information to the point it was needed, when it was needed.

By optimizing the use of Clear-Com's intercom systems, Punk'd has attained technology-led efficiencies and new capabilities that have promoted production excellence. The collaborative solution has simplified the communications infrastructure, given the team more alternatives to manage their productions, and allowed them to keep pace with their fast moving production environment.

About Coffey Sound, a Trew Audio Company

Trew Audio is devoted to the art of location sound recording for film and television. Founded by sound mixer Glen Trew, Trew Audio was designed to fill the widening gap between sound professionals and support services that has grown as film and video production has become less confined to Hollywood and New York. With four locations in Los Angeles, Toronto, Vancouver and Nashville, Trew Audio is a leader in the sales, rental, and service of audio equipment for professional film and video production in markets worldwide. Find out more at www.trewaudio.com



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