

# DJ to VJ

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**Mobile Beat**  
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## The Future Is Now

An experienced video jock discusses the growth of the visual option for DJs

By Mike "Dr. Frankenstand" Ryan

// **V**ideo Killed the Radio Star," the 1979 song\*

by the British group Buggles featured lyrics about a period of technological change in the 1960s. Today, over four decades later, video is again poised, hopefully not to kill, but certainly to change another kind of star: the mobile DJ. What does the current video revolution mean to the typical mobile entertainer? The following interview focuses on the use of video and features DJ/VJ Eric Sands of Sundance Productions in southern California. Not only is Sands a bar and bat mitzvah specialist, he is a pioneer in the use of video in the mobile arena.

**MB: What's your wide-angle view for the future of video in the mobile DJ industry?**

Sands: The future is now! Video is solidly ingrained into our daily lives (YouTube, CNN's News to Me, America's Funniest Videos, MySpace, to name a few examples). In the '70s we had DJ mixers. In the '80s, we had lighting. In the '90s, we had crowd interaction. The new millennium brought us computer-driven technology. Video is clearly in all of our futures. Hyper-stimulated, bipolar kids who can't sit still today are your clients of tomorrow!

**MB: Speaking of kids, do they now expect to have video at their parties? Do you predict a time**

*when if we don't offer video we will go the way of the Beta Cam?*

Sands: Yes—and I think that time is now! If your clients embrace the power that computer-driven, multi-media production provides at their celebrations, then they may not feel comfortable hiring someone using '80s or '90s technology.

**MB: Are DJs who use video (VJs) becoming true specialists like karaoke jocks (KJs)?**

Sands: I think we're all still on the same boat sailing to the same destination. Our goals are not dissimilar...We are providing entertainment the best way we are individually able to. But, as in the past, some of us are paddling faster, and accordingly, will reap the fruits of future market recognition sooner.

**MB: How fast and to what extent is the use of video developing?**

Sands: Just look at the sales of plasma screens, projectors, home theaters, and high-definition TV. Video has proliferated within the average American lifestyle, everywhere...in our cars, on our phones and computers...even home appliances are starting to incorporate video interfaces. (Microsoft predicts future homes will use more "smart" appliances, including interactive wallpaper being developed by companies such as Phillips to serve as giant displays for pictures from a MySpace page or even video).

**MB: How do you see video, as party entertainment, evolving in the future?**

Sands: I see much more flexible and easier set-up, such as being able to present video in a day-lit room without having to carry 5,000+ lumen projectors or heavy plasma screens. I see more real-time effects, such as brides and grooms being wished well and congratulated via live, off-site simulcast by wedding guests who can't attend the reception. And for the higher-end clients, I see an MC/DJ combo be-

ing replaced by an MC/production manager in constant communication via headsets with a staff who will control stage lighting, video content, sound, and flow of the event—much like at an awards show. *[This is a role that Sands has himself pioneered. -Ed.]*

**MB: Do you see a time when live video interaction at parties will become so popular that clients will outsource it away from the DJ/VJ like some planners do with lighting?**

Sands: I think you always have that risk if you're "out of your envelope"...that is, if you are booking higher-end parties without being able to offer the most efficient solution to meet the client's needs. But that's not necessarily a bad thing...it enables you to stay in your "core" business of what you do best—MC-based entertainment. Same old story, if you can't handle one aspect of a job, sub it out.

**MB: Talking about video production, how and when do you use roving live cameras and/or music videos in your shows?**

Sands: I always have some form of content on the screen, whether it's live camera simulcast, ambient themed visuals, music videos, photo-stills, or a custom DVD effect loop that I create for the client and is in repeat mode for the entire party. This way, there is no "dead-air" on the video screen, and there is always something visual happening. In addition, my video assistant is at the mixing console monitoring and mixing the optimum source for any given time. Often we use chroma-key effects superimposed on top of the live camera feed to make it interesting.

**MB: How available are music videos and are there any legal issues involved in using them?**

Sands: I subscribe to the Promo Only Hot Video series, although I know there are several subscription services out there. I imagine the legal issues are very similar to audio copying,



## DOING RIGHT VIDEO

A FEW TIPS FROM ERIC SANDS...

Do NOT point the video camera directly towards your video screen / plasma...you get a weird looking video feedback.

Do NOT point the video camera at kids while they are slow dancing.

Do NOT use a camera operator who cannot hold his/her hand steady (or, DO use a monopod, if necessary)

Do NOT zoom in and out excessively on the live camera.

DO have two separate people mixing video content and shooting with the live cam.

DO carry a spare projector and bulbs.

DO test all equipment well before start time.

backing up, etc.

**MB: How do you handle PG-rated music videos?**

Sands: We try to keep it clean, relatively speaking. But occasionally, there's some "unexpected" content on the music video. So that's another reason to have immediate access to alternate sources you can transition to quickly.

**MB: What are the critical things DJs should know about video gear performance?**

Sands: Like audio, back-up equipment is necessary. I keep my video mixing console separate from my normal audio system. So at a video show, I actually have two consoles set up side by side. This keeps the show really tight, and serves as instant back up at least for audio, which is more noticeable to a crowd if it should fail. If you are mixing numerous sources (live camera, music video mixing software, ambient visuals, slide show loops, etc.), then each one of those can "fill in" if another one goes bad. But I always carry a spare projector to my gigs, as well as a spare music-only laptop based system in the event of a more catastrophic failure.

**MB: Any tips on video gear? What are the bare necessities to be considered "professional?"**

Sands: I think as a bare minimum, you should have a CORE DUO processor-based computer with a minimum of 256MB of dedicated video RAM driving your music videos, with sufficient ambient background video to fill in when you are playing non-music videos. If you are using DVD players, then make sure you get the type that [can] pause on cue, rather than play on cue.

If you are doing live CAM, then there's really no excuse to be relying on that cheesy-looking, jittery webcam that so many people rely on. Video cameras are getting so dirt cheap; this is the better way to go. I use a wireless

diversity microwave link for our 3-chip camera. This enables us to be anywhere in the room "getting the action" where it's happening, without the constraint of a fat video cable trailing behind the camera man.

**MB: How receptive have you clients been to video as an "up-sell?"**

Sands: It's an option that I really try to encourage for parties of over 125 people, which are most parties. I think that once the client sees how beautifully video can bring the event to an-

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other level, they agree that it's well worth the additional expense.

**MB: How much extra, on average, can a DJ/VJ expect to make by incorporating video?**

Sands: I think it largely depends on the scope of what he or she is doing. If you're only playing

music videos, with no other content, then really we're just talking about setting up a plasma or projector/screen combo above and beyond the usual set up—maybe \$500 to \$1,000 additional, depending on what part of the country you're in. But if you're actually monitoring and mixing numerous sources and applying real-time effects, then that's another level up, and you could get \$1,000 to \$2,000 additional.

If you are producing custom content such as wedding montages and promotional videos for corporate receptions, you can usually get \$50 to \$200 per finished minute, depending on your editing skills.

**MB: By including video are you taking work away from videographers?**

Sands: We really aren't doing the same thing, nor can we. We are presenting video content for the purpose of visual entertainment. Videographers, on the other hand, are in the archiving business. They are recording what is happened for viewing in the future. Any videographer who feels intimidated by this does not understand the big picture.

**MB: How competitive do you think VJing will become?**

Sands: The truth is that currently, the equipment involved in doing a decent video show is a bit complex for many DJs, especially if you are trying to do it computer-based. So I think in the near term, we are establishing who the main players will be. But in the next couple of years, we will have a critical mass of DJs offering this service, creating more competition as more DJs make the technical transition required to do the job competently. **MB**

\*The "Video Killed the Radio Star" music video was the first one to be shown on MTV's premier show, in August 1981. In February 2000 it also became MTV's one-millionth video to be aired.