

So you want to be a professional shoutcaster?

Written by Paul "ReDeYe" Chaloner

Introduction

Whether a casual or professional gamer, it's likely, you have heard a "shoutcast" of a match over the last 6 or 7 years in one form or another. The term shoutcaster comes from the software written by the good chaps at winamp.com and introduced what effectively is Internet Radio as we know it today. A shoutcaster was simply a pseudonym for an Internet Radio DJ or commentator. In more recent times it has come to represent those who specifically call gaming matches and tournaments in a play-by-play nature, but whilst the software is no longer updated (but still widely used), shoutcasters have expanded beyond the limits of the software to bigger and better things such as Live TV productions and gaming dedicated TV shows the world over.

One of the most often asked questions of me is "how do I get into shoutcasting?". I am also asked "how do I get good at it?" and whilst one is reasonably easy to answer, the other will need a little more depth. Before I plough head first into the answers, let me give you a little of my background and my experience as a shoutcaster (or as I prefer these days, Video Game commentator).

Background

I first started shoutcasting in 2002 and purely by accident. I won't bore you with the explicit details, but suffice to say I had never heard of shoutcasting before and had no idea where to start or what to do technically. I was asked by a ClanBase admin to cover an Unreal Tournament CTF match, which didn't seem that hard as it was the game I played at the time at a decent level and I knew all the top players and clans. I managed to get help from a friendly chap called Ginga_Ninja on IRC who set me up properly with the sound card and the software and pointed me in the right direction of a web tutorial. I then borrowed a server to use and off I went, on a brave new journey that I had no idea would end up where it has today.

After a few months of shoutcasting and loving it, CB radio asked if I would like to be part of their little broadcast team and as I was only really covering their leagues and cups anyway, it seemed appropriate. From there, I did many more of the online cups and was then approached by a couple of the bigger casting stations. By now I had started to get a little more serious about it, where as before, it had been a hobby and something I loved doing in the evening and in my spare time. I had reached a level where I was reasonably well known on the UT scene and had a nice following whenever I went on-air. I have to admit though, I still had no vision of me doing this as my full time job or even earning money from it, so the next step didn't seem that obvious to me, but I realised I had quickly outgrown the CB Radio team and wanted to cover a wider range of games and leagues in any case.

In early 2005 I joined iTG thanks to Marcus "djWHEAT" Graham recruiting me as part of their drive to increase their European casting talent. I joined at a time of recent change for the whole team, where they had split away from TSN and what I found was a set of people who were eager to impress, pleased to help me and pass on their own experiences and take me to the next level. I was lucky in

many ways to work with some of the very best in the business and in TossपोT I found not only someone who was learning at the same time as me, but a true friend and a fellow brit in what was a very American dominated industry.

I continued with audio casting when I joined iTG, but quickly got in to video casting at ESWC Finals and at Quakecon, which was a totally different experience from audio commentary for online matches. Firstly, there were cameras and I had no idea how to react on camera or even where to look. I realised I needed help and enrolled in a local college course for a couple of evenings a week, which helped me understand the importance of voice projection, where to look on camera and how to use all of the tools around me in order to present better on the video streams. I was lucky enough to work on many of the top tournaments around the world, but whilst most of our expenses were covered, we rarely returned home with more money than we started with. Things started to change in 2006 when both TossपोT and I started to get other work in the form of voice-overs for commercials and movies and had a chance to work on several segments for TV. We were also given a 6 part series to film for UK TV, which whilst the production was pretty poor, did give us an insight to the workings of TV and allowed us to learn and make mistakes in a very low key environment.

In 2007, I formed a new company, having left iTG in late 2006, which is where I am now. I have also been a presenter of a TV show in Australia as well as commentator for play-by-play and recently of course worked on live national TV for DirecTV and CGS in America and recording some commentary for xleague.tv in the UK. I sat as a pundit on the Draft show for CGS live from the Playboy Mansion and also appeared on a chat show about gaming in the UK. I have also presented a number of events from stage, including the Multiplay I-Series lans which have seen me work with Girls Aloud and many other notables. I have also commentated alongside Chris Kamara and John Desborough during TV shows for Sky One in the UK. I was also used as the presenter of a rock concert in 2006 for Ubisoft.

2007 ended with me leading the commentary team for CGS on live TV across the USA and going out to a combined household figure of 350 million people globally during the World Finals.

It has been an incredible journey from those early days of getting drunk with tequila and flaming the player's on-air from my home office!

Setup

I am not, as my Technical Director will testify, the most gifted of technicians and I will not be dwelling too much on setup in this article. It will come as no shock to you that it is important to use good equipment, but it need not be the very best and most expensive equipment around. A good setup of the software initially is far more important than a mixing desk or expensive microphone or headset. That said; do spend a little time finding a reasonable headset and soundcard. A simple Creative Labs 5.1 soundcard should be sufficient however and you should not have to pay more than £50 for it. Likewise, the headset need not be expensive, but look for one with a decent microphone rather than superb (in-ear) audio quality and try and find one that fits your head and ears as you will be very uncomfortable, very quickly otherwise.

What you need to get started:

Winamp 2.91 http://www.zophar.net/winamp/files/winamp291_full.exe

Shoutcast Plugin 1.9.7 <http://www.shoutcast.com/downloads/sc1-9-7/shoutcast-1-9-7-windows.exe>

Creative Labs 5.1 soundcard

Headset with Microphone (Sennheiser PC166 is fine)

As basic as it gets, that's all you need to get set up to shoutcast in audio over the internet, however, you will need a server to broadcast to. Shoutcast works on a relay system, that is to say, if you tried to host the server on your own PC, after a few people joined it, you would quickly run out of bandwidth (unless you have a ridiculously high upload speed in excess of 10mb). So what shoutcast does is send the data from your broadcast to a server and from there, relays it out to the people wanting to tune in. There are a few server providers around, but most charge for the bandwidth use and trust me, bandwidth can be quickly eaten up with a shoutcast server. If you can, hunt around for an existing station and ask them to borrow a server. Most are friendly and helpful and will be only to glad to have someone on-air for them. Try a few of the medium skilled clans as they often have servers they can loan out to budding shoutcasters or dj's. ClanBase is also a great place to start, providing you are covering one of their tournaments of course.

If you have trouble setting up the software, you can check out this simple, but effective little guide from spOrky which details exactly how to get going with the plugin <http://www.spOrky-n00b.co.uk/localcast.htm> . There is also a tutorial on how to setup and use the software at errorfm, which you may also find useful. (<http://www.errorfm.com/djfaq.htm>)

There are many other plugins and even dedicated software that you can use, but for now, this will allow you to get on air, relatively easy and without huge expense and it's the best way to try it all out before you get serious and spend that hard earned cash.

What different types of "shoutcaster" are there?

Before you get going, lets take a quick look at the levels of shoutcasters out there now and the levels you will need to move through in order to get to TV one day (if indeed that is your ambition). This is not a hard and fast set of levels and some people skip some, some spend longer than others in certain areas, but ultimately, this is the kind of level system we have at QuadV to help our own casters improve and grow. Each has important elements which ultimately all add to the experience of commentating on a wide variety of games and on different media.

It is also important to remember that there are many levels within levels, that is to say, although you can shoutcast from home on your own and with a borrowed server, in the end, you will want to be part of a broadcasting team that does this professionally or at least has servers to save you the cost.

Likewise, it might not always be enough to be a "commentator" when you start working on TV. You may find that you need to have worked as a MC, Announcer or had stage time as a presenter. Again, all of these roles add to your experience and gain you credibility and a profile which helps as you go through the levels.

Shoutcast from home: Online Radio Commentary

Shoutcast for a broadcaster: Online Radio Commentary, but for a dedicated broadcaster.

Online Video Cast: Online matches covered on broadband internet.

Event Video Cast: From small to large scale, on camera tournament events.

Post produced TV: TV of any kind, national, cable or satellite but not live.

Live TV: Live produced TV Shows on national TV stations, aired live.

To truly make a worthwhile living from being a “shoutcaster” it may be that you will need to perform a wide variety of functions in order to get work in addition to normal commentary. Whilst this article is concentrating on the play-by-play nature of the role, it’s important to at least understand what the other roles are, even if we won’t go in to too much depth about them for now.

Play-by-play commentary

Announcer (literally announcing results or matches at an event)

Presenter (presenting programs, shows or stage action)

Voice-Over artist (Adverts, radio commercials, movies, documentaries etc)

Expert/Analysis (This would be “on the sofa” comments for shows)

There are a number of other smaller functions that you can also perform depending on your experience and understanding of gaming in general.

Shoutcast from Home : The first shoutcast

So you have your software and hardware set up nicely, its time to find a match to commentate on. First of all, stick to what you know and find a match from the game you play and know best. Ideally pick a low key match and not one from the upper echelons of the tournaments such as EuroCup matches or Nations Cups. That way, you won’t be berated for making mistakes or given a hard time if someone doesn’t like your voice first time out. You should also find the clans friendly and receptive to the idea of you covering their game as its unlikely they have had the pleasure or honour in the past and who doesn’t want to be on radio or TV? :D

Make sure when you decide which match you are going to cover, that you collect as much information as possible about the tournament, its structure, who’s doing well and who’s not and also ensure that you know the two teams well enough to describe them in one sentence. Check on their history, their previous results, the team’s website and of course all of the players. Go and chat to the clan leaders before the match (preferably a few hours before) and get a few questions ready for a short interview with them on the match ahead. This will all help you if the game falls a bit flat and you are left wondering what to talk about. Remember, preparation is the key to a great shoutcast regardless of the match outcome. If you get a one sided game and it’s a blow-out, that’s

when your preparation becomes important to maintain the interest in the program. On a great game, it's likely you won't need 80% of your preparation, but don't get in to the bad habit of thinking "I won't need it", because one day you seriously will.

Whilst it should go without saying, be professional whilst you are on-air. I have heard a lot of budding casters do a great job in the past only to let themselves down by swearing ferociously during the game and whilst I am not against the odd swear word used in the right way or place, I generally avoid swearing on-air during a match. Many of my old casts would include a lot of swearing, so you may ask why I would advise against it now and the answer is simple: Do you ever hear a sports commentator swear when covering a sport on TV? Rarely, if ever. It's not big and it's certainly not clever.

Being professional is one thing, but it doesn't mean you can't have fun, it's all about the fun, especially on radio over the internet where regulations are not quite as heavy handed as those for live TV productions, so go ahead, let your hair down and have some fun with the game and the players, but remember to remain respectful of the players and the teams competing, after all, it's an important match to them, even if you don't think so. Likewise, interact with the people tuning in via IRC or other message systems, wherever your listeners are (web cam chat for example). It probably doesn't mean your cast would be bad if you didn't, but it really adds to the value of the commentary when you can include people's names from a chat window and they love nothing more than to hear their name mentioned. Got an opinion on something? Share it with your audience and encourage them to debate it in between the games, it really does help the quality of the cast for everyone, including you. Don't be afraid of being controversial, but avoid being controversial for the sake of it, you will soon get found out as a fraud.

Often you will get critique from people, either during or after the cast and frankly, this is natural. If you don't have the thickest skin and don't take kindly to harsh critique, then this is probably not the job for you, however there are things you can do to avoid or at least lessen the dent to your confidence, especially in the early days. You may find people say things like "oh my god, your crap compared to <insert famous commentators name here>". Comparison is understandable, especially if you cover a game that has had one particular caster attached to it for a long period of time. Think djWHEAT for Quake for example or TospoT in Enemy Territory. They have a huge following and naturally anyone dropping in on their "domain" gets a grilling first time out, regardless if they are actually any good or not. Try to be selective about what you take on board. Read past the fan boy comments (good and bad) and look for those which offer advice from respected community members or other casters. You could even ignore forums and news comments for a while until you are comfortable in the scene you commentate in. You can't run or hide forever, but those early few weeks can be very harsh on you unless you take some form of preventative measure to block some of the rubbish out.

I could spend an age analysing why this occurs, but that's not really important right now to you the budding shoutcaster. All you need to remember is why you started doing this in the first place. Eventually through numerous casts, you will improve and grow to have your own fan base of people who enjoy what you do for them or at the very least respect the time and effort you put in.

Advertising your stream

You shouldn't underestimate the power of IRC when it comes to advertising, but be careful or you will irritate channel owners and after all, it is actually against the rules of Quakenet so make sure you get permission from the channel ops/owner before you spam anything.

It is also important not to use colours or bold (blocked by some channels) but to ensure that it stands out for people to see it. A good mixture of brackets and dashes usually does the trick. Make sure you tell people everything they need to know regards tuning in. That is to say, the league name and round, the caster name (that would be you!), the teams playing and a link to the website or stream if more appropriate.

Beyond live advertising like IRC, you can also use websites and in a number of different ways. For example, QuadV has pages on Steam, Facebook, Ugame and Twitter and will often post news to these social gathering sites advertising our upcoming matches. If you are on your own, you can simply post to your profile or "what are you doing" part of Facebook and it will work just as well.

Don't forget to ask the league you are covering, to make a news post on their site about the coverage too, this should be your primary source of viewers and is essential advertising when you are a solo caster. Make sure you get it posted in some form on the popular community sites that dedicate their news to the type of game you are covering. Most will be happy to post something, even if you have to post it in the forum, do it, it will help with gaining more viewers and letting more people enjoy what you have to offer.

Obviously as you move to a bigger station a lot of these things will be done for you by a press officer but its good practice to get in to the habit early on and not rely on anyone else.

You can also move on to making or helping create video adverts for upcoming casts, but that's something we usually leave to the techie people unless you are feeling brave!

The golden rule is : You can never advertise enough and all advertising is good!

Finding a Casting Station

As I have already touched upon, the next step is to find your self a casting station. There is no strict time limit that is imposed on you to find one, but the sooner the better if you are serious about making a career or succeeding at this job. A year of covering a specific game is usually enough to give you the basics of online game commentary. For the next step, you need to be around likeminded professionals so that you build on your skills and adapt to new games.

I am often asked "how do I join QuadV?" by those who have shown a little talent. The answer is simple, send in a demo and a short CV showing what you bring and that you are serious about the role to consider joining a broadcaster. You don't have to have TV ambitions to join one either, every broadcast station worth their salt needs a wide range of talent on their books. Some who want to fly to the moon and others who are happy to simply cast once a week and are happy to have a server on which to do so. If you get turned down, ask for advice on what you need to improve on. Video game broadcasters are so few and far between and all of those I am familiar with have good people involved who WILL take the time to talk to you about how to improve.

If you get turned down by one company, try others, there are many out there and they are all at different levels. If you aimed high to start with, try a clan radio station or one of the stations that cover online leagues only. There is a list of known stations at the end of this article and although I wouldn't recommend any in particular they are all worthy of your time and are of varying degrees of establishment and experience. One is bound to suit you, whoever you are. Its also worth remembering that some are location based, so if you live in the USA it might not work out trialling for a European based broadcaster. The same can be said the other way round too, especially due to time zones.

Video Casting Online Matches

When you have done Internet Radio for a while (I did it for 3 years before moving on, but it doesn't need to be that long if you are ready) the next step is to look at Video Streams. If you haven't already done so for audio broadcasts, you really will need to join a station for video streaming such as QuadV, Gotfrag or GGL as the expense of setting up and running video is far more costly than simple audio casting. That said, if you have the technical know how and a few friends with servers, you could do it yourself and whilst I am no technical god, I know enough to know it costs a small fortune and its technically challenging to do it right.

You may recall I mentioned how different commentating on video was when I started, moving from audio only so let's take a brief look at some of the reasons for this.

For starters, the viewers (not listeners now) can see what you can see, which means you don't have to commentate the same way as you did on radio. You can get away with talking about other things on video more so than on radio, just don't miss that amazing frag and talk over the top of it with some useless fill information. You won't need to describe the action nearly so much on video either, where as on radio you would be very descriptive. Here is a simple example of the differences.

Radio: Fred is moving down the long corridor with the red rose flooring and going left into the curtained hallway with the hole in the floor and then takes a shot at his opponent with the rail gun from long range, right across the map where Bob is trying to hide in the shadows of the archway.

Video: Nice shot from Fred there on Bob who was trying to hide in the shadows.

It would seem obvious perhaps, but you really don't need to bring the level of detail you did when casting on radio. In terms of percentages, when covering a match on audio, you would probably spend around 90% of your time talking about what is happening and 10% colouring the match. Colouring is simply adding relevant and factual information to the match commentary (think Andy Gray rather than John Motson). On video however, the ratio moves to around 60% action and 40% colour. Again, for those who watch other sports on TV, you can learn an awful lot from the commentators on how they cope with descriptive action over colour commentary and when its appropriate to use either.

Video Casting from a Tournament Event

This video casting is easy, so what's next. From here on in, things start getting pretty cool, as if they weren't already. Lets face it, if you have come this far, its unlikely you are going to turn back now, so what comes next will either terrify you or thrill you (or if you are like me, both!). Up to now, you will have been confined to the four walls of your bedroom or room at home, whether that be for Radio commentary or video casts, but its time to leave that comfort zone and step in to the world of event broadcasting.

The actual commentary won't be that different to what you are used to from your home video casting; however there are a number of things that do differ. The first one is of course the cameras. Usually, they will now be trained on your face and I well remember my first time on camera as it was about as comfortable as having my nipples blow-torched.

When you attend tournaments in person, you will be expected to go "On Camera" at some point to deliver analysis or your views on the games ahead or just played out. You may even appear in something called PIP (Picture in picture), which although I personally don't like, some broadcasters do put their commentators in PIP during the actual match. If, like I was initially, you aren't comfortable on camera, remember that very few people are and that it's likely anyone put in the same space would feel the same. The next thing to do is get help. Help comes in the form of advice from your peers and fellow broadcasters (who are likely to have felt just like you do when they first started). It also comes in the form of help from reading books on TV production (particularly sports production), biographies of professional sports commentators (I can particularly recommend Murray Walker's biography) and watching plenty of varied sports and listening and watching how the commentators work. You can, fairly inexpensively, enrol in a local college course, either full time or, like I did part time in the evenings for a few weeks. A general media course is enough for most, but you can take it to degree level if you are academically minded. In fact, a number of commentators run media degree's alongside working for a gaming broadcaster and the two help each other.

It might be that you take to it easily and none of the above will apply to you, in which case, great, you are probably a natural born show off and that's pretty cool for the job you just chose!

Style and Technique

You will have developed your own style by now and most of what you do will still apply, but there will be a few things that you may not have been aware of up to this point that suddenly become very important during your commentary, so lets take a look at a few of those now. There is no hard and fast rule about when you learn these and they are equally useful to apply on Radio Commentary too, but they really are very important when you do live video casting from a tournament.

Pacing and Volume

The first of these is something called pacing, which again may seem obvious but rarely do gaming casters use it properly. There are times in the game that require genuine and raw enthusiasm. The trouble is, if you start off too excited, those exciting parts won't seem all that exciting and often people will accuse you of having false excitement or enthusiasm. So the pacing is very critical as to how others listen to you and watch the match. This is true of video and audio casts alike. Try and get a clear and precise level volume voice for the introduction, with enthusiasm, but not speaking quickly. Build the excitement in your voice with the play, although in some games this is harder than

others, but for example in Counter Strike, there are many parts of the round that the players are creeping around trying not to be heard.

I developed a technique where by I would almost be whispering when this happened and leaving gaps of dead air and then only commentating louder and faster as the rush to a bomb site occurred or the guns started blazing. Again, there is no rule that says you have to do it this way and you will, over time, find your own unique way of doing it.

Although you will want to increase your vocal level at some points, it's also important to ensure you don't go off the scale or drop down too low. Both are as bad as each other and drive sound technicians mad when you do TV.

Dead Air

Dead air is also very important and I have lost count of how many times I have heard even experienced casters either leave it way too long to speak or, potentially worse, never have a gap in what they say and allow the game to come through itself. Unless you are commentating on a PC conversion of horse racing manager, you will need to understand what dead air is and how to use it. Unfortunately its difficult to give precise information to you about what is a perfect length and what isn't, however as a general rule of thumb, take pauses during commentary if things aren't all that interesting. Don't leave it too long, perhaps just a few seconds each time and don't do it too often. One of the best pieces of advice I had for TV was from legendary sports producer Mike Burks (11 time Emmy award winner for sports production) who told me "A great commentator knows when to shut up and say nothing".

If you get something on screen which is obvious, particularly an emotion showing through from a player or team, let it play out and resist the urge to talk over it. Often capturing the most emotional part of the game requires no words to be said, particularly if the player is on screen and is crying/rejoicing over victory/defeat. Pictures say a thousand words is the obvious phrase that springs to mind. When you have left it to play out, be prepared to come back in with plenty of volume and enthusiasm to keep the thrill of the moment alive for as long as possible for the viewer.

Cameras

Having moved from video casting at home to doing the same thing at a LAN tournament, it's a perfect chance to talk about cameras. At home, its unlikely you will have had a camera on you, just in game ones that you control. When you attend a LAN tournament, the camera will not only be in game and on the players and teams, but more than likely, also on you.

I wont kid you, its an unnerving experience the first time round, but it gets easier and you can even come to enjoy it with practice and more time in front of them. At first, I had no idea where to look for example and whilst many people will tell you to simply stare down the barrel, I prefer to look just beyond the top of the camera. I usually try and find something to fix my eye line with that's not too high above the camera, but never the less not directly down its throat. This way, my eyes, which naturally look half open (and therefore make me look sleepy) are slightly wider to the viewer. It also makes you look more alert and more comfortable (especially if you are feeling nervous). Don't forget to smile either, you are supposed to be enjoying this!

Nerves

Whilst on the subject of nerves, its important to have them, don't be fooled by anyone who says "I don't really get nervous", they more than likely do. I've always felt that the day I stop having the butterflies in my stomach before going on camera, particularly for live broadcasts, that's the day I know I have had enough of the job. The butterflies and therefore the adrenaline help make it more real and exciting and should, if used properly, help you deliver a far better experience to the viewer.

If you are overly nervous there are a few things you can do to help yourself as being too nervous will of course make the presentation or commentary sound like you aren't in control. Remember the viewer is looking at you as the expert and if you stumble over words or sound like you are standing in a fridge, you wont be winning anyone over.

There are several breathing exercises you can use and some relaxation tools too. For example, close your eyes before you go on air, think about the top of your head and feeling floaty, relax the muscles around your head and neck, working slowly do to your shoulders, rotating them and down past your arms, shaking your hands out and slowly thinking about your entire body right down to your toes. Then open your eyes. I found this helps me relax my muscles and makes me feel less nervous. The breathing technique is simple but effective. You simply draw a deep breath and hold it for 5 seconds releasing it slowly. Do this a few times until you can feel your heart rate dropping down and as a result you will feel calmer.

If these examples don't help you, I apologise, I am no expert on this side of things, but you can do what I did and pop down to the local library and ask for a book on relaxation techniques, there is bound to be a few things that will suit you.

The keys to success on any format

Regardless of broadcasting on TV, Video, Audio or any other format past, present or future, there are several things that you can do to ensure a successful cast each and every time. In fact, I have developed my own little mantra that regardless of how big the job is, I use every time. This has come to be known as the "Four P's".

Preparation

As I explained earlier, preparation is the first key to a great cast. It doesn't make the cast great on its own and in fact, it usually wont have any impact on the cast being great at all, its usually how exciting the game itself is that decides how great it was. However, lack of preparation will almost certainly make a great game, a bad cast and a terrible game even worse.

Remember the viewer or listener is relying on you and will often put a lot of faith in you for information on the players, the teams, the backgrounds and the stories around them. They are relying on you to make these virtual characters come to life and for you to humanise what to the outsider, looks like a very non-human sport. To do this, you will have to spend the time required researching the match or tournament ahead. You also have to be 100% sure what you are about to say is 100% correct, again your integrity will be heavily damaged if you say something that simply isn't true. Sure, we all make mistakes, but without preparation, you will make more mistakes and be

taken less seriously and eventually you won't be trusted at all and that's about as bad as it gets as a commentator.

I was once told that it would be better to say nothing at all than say something you are not sure about. In other words, say what you have to say with total conviction, even if it ends up being wrong, at least it will be seen as a genuine mistake. There is nothing worse than a commentator saying "I think that's right", it either is or it isn't and if you're not sure, you shouldn't be saying it anyway.

I'm often asked how I prepare for large tournament or TV shows and the simple answer is that it depends hugely on the type, size and length. If you take the North American Finals of the CGS tournament held in Los Angeles in 2007 for example, my preparation started 4 weeks before I flew out and involved learning 60 players' backgrounds as well as the 6 teams they represented and their managers. I spent on average, 2 to 3 hours every day for the first 3 weeks learning about each and every player, collecting small snippets of information that might be useful during the shows, which would air on live national TV across the USA. In the week before the tournament, I ramped up the daily research to around 6 hours a day. I collected as many statistics as possible, their dates of birth, the home towns, what games they had played previously, any success they had outside of CGS, what draft pick they were and spent time ranking the players in each game and the teams overall so I could judge if a team were doing better than expected or worse during the season. I spent time reading every interview conducted with any and all of the players and General Managers, wherever I could find them.

I also had to learn 2 new games, although one was easier than the other. Fortunately, I had played Counter-Strike Source for some years and was comfortable with it. I could say the same for FIFA as an Englishman; if I didn't know how to commentate on football I should be shot. That left PGR3 and DOA4. PGR was relatively easy for me as I am also a motor racing fanatic; it was just a case of doing some research on the cars used and the tracks in play. I learnt the corner names for example on one track and made up corner names on others to give the viewer a reference point of where we were on each track.

I didn't need to spend too long playing PGR3, however the opposite was true of DOA4, which I had to spend many more hours learning than any other game in the tournament. To do this, I played through every character in the game against the computer, experiencing all the moves, all the levels and all of the characters. I also had to play around with costumes and unlocking them so that I wouldn't be thrown out should someone use a new costume I hadn't seen before. I estimate that I spent around 2 to 3 hours a day for several weeks playing the game and learning its intricacies as well as signing up for a DOA community website, which was packed full of knowledgeable people on the game that were only too eager to help me learn more about it. I have found, it's not enough to simply learn how to play the game, but you need to delve in to the community too, it helps tremendously when it comes to commentate on the game.

On another tournament, I had to learn one game, it was a First Person Shooter, something that I am naturally able to pick up and play anyway, however I still spent 6 or 7 hours a day playing the game through its single player and online to learn it all in preparation for the event, but instead of spending weeks playing it, it took just a few days. You will need to learn how to gauge this prep time

on a game you don't know as it will vary greatly depending on your own experiences, genre's and ability to learn.

In short then, by the time I flew to LA I was ready and I was prepared.

There are also some techniques available to you to aid preparation, but not replace it. I will usually have a large binder on my desk whilst commentating on TV, which will contain all the information I have collected on a player, but in a very short format and easy to get to including a photograph so if the player pops up on screen, I can easily identify him or her. I also use my laptop to display my stats, which is usually something I put together on a spreadsheet before the tournament. Make sure you double check your stats with someone else too, as blurting out a stat on air that everyone watching knows is wrong, is going to make you look like an idiot.

The final piece of preparation, particularly true if you are attending a very international event, is to check on pronunciation of player names. If in doubt, ask the player directly. All too often this is overlooked and a commentator says a nickname or real name completely wrong until corrected half way through a show or cast. There is nothing more embarrassing to you or the player concerned. Again it will add weight to the viewer's impression that you have no idea what you are talking about!

Practice

There is a famous gamer who swears by the mantra "Practice, Practice, Practice" and whilst its only one of my "P's", its no less important when it comes to commentating. Practice when and wherever you can, either live or back to friends or family. Work on your pronunciations, work on your phrases and don't be limited to just a few of the same adjectives in explaining the action. Look up words you often use and see if there are alternatives to them and perhaps even do what one of my old colleagues used to do and write them down on a piece of paper and cello tape them to your desk when you cast.

If you really want to succeed and you have the voice and the personality for this kind of job, then practice is probably all you need to get good at it, so stick with it, even if you are being battered by the often overly critical gaming communities.

Passion

Never lose sight of why you wanted to do this job as it's likely you will be passionate about gaming, or even one particular game. Passion is as important in commentating as preparation is. You can spend 2 months preparing for a tournament and know every single thing about someone, including the colour of their dog and their inside leg measurement, but if you aren't passionate about the games or the players or teams or league, then you aren't going to come across that way either. How can you possibly expect to enthuse others about gaming if you aren't enthused yourself?

It is, as I see it, one of the fundamental reasons I commentate and also a responsibility that I feel in my own small way that I can spread the passion of gaming to others outside of it, to enthuse them through my own enthusiasm as it were.

Professionalism

My final P is an obvious one, but probably the least adhered to in gaming broadcasters (save perhaps Koreans). If it's not obvious to start with, let me put it in black and white. In everything you do, in everything you say and in every type of event regardless of size or broadcast format its going out on, you should be professional. That extends from what you say on live TV to what you say on an audio broadcast from your bedroom.

Sure, there are others out there swearing and cursing as if its second nature, but I don't see commentators doing that in any sport I watch on TV. It can also be seen as cool too, especially to such a young and highly influenced audience, but it depends on what you want to do with this. If you are out to gain some e-fame and make a small name for yourself, sure, going on an audio cast and swearing at all the players is going to making you look cool to all the 12 year olds, but if you really want to be taken seriously in this business and go on to have a career in it, it probably wont.

Likewise, being professional doesn't mean you can't have fun on air, you really should be having fun or there is little point in doing it in the first place. Shows are a little different too, I am talking about commentating here and when it comes to shows, if you play a sounder up front that explains there is going to be strong language in it, then its probably fine, but just remember, its not big or clever to go on air and swear for the sake of it.

You may also consider this. As an industry, video game broadcasting is very, very small. There are only a handful of full time professional commentators in the western world and even less full time broadcasters. Whilst all of us want it to grow and allow others to become full time salaried commentators, we also need to remember that every one us has a responsibility to help grow the entire industry of competitive gaming. To do that, we need to be as professional as the lack of money will allow us and work together to aid the whole of gaming and gaming broadcasting to grow to the point that we have many more casters on TV and in high production works, not just a few.

Summary

Its hard to sum up shoutcasting without writing an awful lot more, but if you have gotten this far, congratulations on reading a lot of text!

If you have got this far, chances are you either wanted the TL;DR version or you are dedicated to becoming a top shoutcaster. Either way, the same rule applies. Don't do this unless you have time on your hands, consider yourself more passionate than anyone you know about eSport and have a thick skin to bounce back from the initial and inevitable criticism that will come your way when you start.

Take a look around the world, there aren't many of us about and these days even fewer than there used to be. This document, whilst it will scare off a few people, simply aims to help people get going and give them a glimpse of what is possible. After all, I am living proof of it as as many of my colleagues at QuadV and in other stations.

There are plenty of old hands about in this business too, so don't be afraid to approach them and ask for help.

Finally, sometimes, no matter how passionate you are or how knowledgeable about your game, you

may just not have the natural ability which is required to be successful. Sadly, this happens to a lot of people, but don't despair, there are, as this mini-book has explained, many other roles you can perform on a live broadcast.

Good luck shoutcasting soldier, it's a war out there.

© 2008,2009 Paul "ReDeYe" Chaloner

Contributions from QuadV staff including Stuart Saw, Matt Hoeving, Leigh Smith.

www.quadv.com

About the author

A gamer for over 24 years, since the introduction of home gaming in the early 80's including the Spectrum, Commodore and Atari consoles. Through the 90's with Nintendo and Sony and on to PC's. Paul played at a semi professional level competing in all of the major national UK tournaments, winning several tournaments for cash and also won a place in the WCG 2004 UK finals, finishing 7th overall. With his team Revolution in 2005, they won an unprecedented 43 games from 44 match (the other was a draw) and won the UCL Premier League, Clanbase International Ladder and the prestigious Clanbase EuroCup before retiring from playing.

Paul has been a videogame commentator since 2002 and in 2005 went fully professional whilst working for GGL and iTG. He covered numerous major tournaments around the world including World Cyber Games finals (05/06), Electronic Sports World Cup (05/06) and Quakecon (05/06) as well as many other international tournaments in China, Singapore, Australia, North America and all across Europe. In 2007 he moved to set up QuadV. This led to working with blue chip companies such as Intel, Xfire, DirecTV, Sky, Multiplay, Ubisoft, EA and many others helping to provide commentary and presenter services to them.

He has also appeared in many international magazines for gaming in the last 7 years including EDGE, PCZONE, PC Gamer, Chief, Pro Gamer and many others. His TV appearances include work for DirecTV, Sky One, Xleague.TV (Sky), GameplayHD, V-Music Asia, Singapore TV, OnGameNet (Korea), GzTV (Denmark) and many other smaller appearances on national and international news stations. These were all as videogame commentator or gaming personality, including punditry, talk shows and as an expert on the CGS Draft show shot live at the Playboy Mansion.

What others have to say about Paul "ReDeYe" Chaloner

"The worlds best esports commentator and a great ambassador for gaming". Michael O'Dell, CEO Team-Dignitas & GM Birmingham Salvo (World Champions 2008).

"The show proved be a great success thanks to Mr Chaloner's tremendous qualities as a gaming commentator." - Phil Brannelly, Product Manager, Ubisoft.

"He's been a crowd favourite from the start. A true professional, there's nobody we'd rather have, pumping up the crowd..." - Craig Fletcher, Managing Director, Multiplay.

Events Attended

2009 Frag-o-matic 11, Wieze, Belgium.
2009 ESL Pro Series Finals, London, England.
2008 World Cyber Games Grand Final, Cologne, Germany.
2008 Eurokrieg Final, London, UK.
2008 ESL Masters Montreal, Cologne, Germany.
2008 PCGamer Showdown, Coventry, UK.
2008 GamesNight TV Show, Pulse TV, UK.
2008 WCG UK Final, Stoneleigh, UK.
2008 i34/Mfestival, Stoneleigh, UK.
2008 CGS World Final, Los Angeles, USA.
2008 CGS Latin America Finals, Los Angeles, USA.
2008 CGS UK/EU Finals, Los Angeles, USA.
2008 CGS Pan Asian Final, Los Angeles, USA.
2008 CGS NA Season, Los Angeles, USA.
2008 FIWC TV Show (Road to Berlin) Show 3, London, UK.
2008 CGS UK/EU Draft Show, Birmingham, UK.
2008 CGS UK/EU Combine, Birmingham, UK.
2008 Pulse TV (Forza 2, PGR4), London, UK.
2008 FIWC TV Show (Road to Berlin) Show 2, London, UK.
2008 FIWC TV Show (Road to Berlin), London, UK.
2008 Pulse TV (GoW, H3), London, UK.
2008 i33, Newbury, UK.
2008 CGS NA Draft, SXSW, Austin, USA.
2008 CGS NA Combine, Austin, USA.
2008 Xleague (Tekken5 & COD4), SkyTV, UK.
2008 CPL World Finals, London, UK.
2008 GamesNight, London, UK TV.
2007 CGS World Finals, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 CGS World Individuals, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 Xleague.TV UT3, COD2 & GoW shows, London, UK.
2007 i32, Newbury, UK.
2007 Fuse07 Rock concert, London, UK.
2007 Xleague.TV Motorstorm & DOA4, London, UK.
2007 Xleague.TV Halo3 & Warhawk, London, UK.
2007 CGS UK Finals, Sky TV, London, UK.
2007 CGS EU finals, Birmingham, UK.
2007 CGS UK/EU Qualifier, Birmingham, UK.
2007 xleague.TV Gaming Talk Show, London, UK.
2007 Xleague.TV DOA4 & GOW shows (pundit), London, UK.
2007 Xleague.TV DOA4, FIFA & Cod2 Shows, London, UK.
2007 WCG UK Finals, Newbury, UK.
2007 i31, Newbury, UK.
2007 Asus WGT UK, Newbury, UK.
2007 Xleague.TV DOA4 & Forza2 shows, London, UK.
2007 CGS NA Championships, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 CGS Playboy Mansion Draft, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 CGS NA Combine, Fox Studios, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 CGS NAQ, Los Angeles, USA.
2007 CPC2, Enschede, Holland.
2007 i30, Newbury, UK.
2007 shgOpen, Copenhagen, Denmark.
2006 Fuse 2006, Newbury, UK.
2006 i29 Intel Xtreme Championships, Newbury, UK.
2006 World Cyber Games Finals, Monza, Italy.
2006 Netgamez, Utrecht, Holland.
2006 CB EuroCup XIII Lan Finals, Aarhus, Denmark. (GZTV)
2006 i28 Finals, Newbury, UK.
2006 WCG UK Finals, Newbury, UK.
2006 Quakecon 2006, Dallas, USA.
2006 ClanBase EuroCup XIII (Q4, UT, UT2004).
2006 PrizeFight TV, London, UK. (SkyTV)
2006 ESWC Grand Finals, Paris, France.
2006 CovLAN Q4 Tournament, Coventry, UK.
2006 GameZone Finals, Antwerp, Belgium.

2006 i27 Finals, Newbury, UK.
2006 TransAtlantic Showdown, New York, USA.
2006 PCA Grand Final UT99 TDM
2006 CB OC Final UT99 TDM
2006 SK Gaming King of the Hill Q4.
2006 CB EuroCup XII - Q4, CS:S, UT2004.
2006 ESI VIA UK invite, London, UK.
2005 CIG finals, Shanghai, China.
2005 S3/Via Q4 DreamHack tourney, Sweden.
2005 World Cyber Games finals, Singapore.
2005 GGL Digital Life Finals, New York, USA.
2005 GGL Digital Life Qualifiers (europe)
2005 Tek9 CS:S Cup
2005 ESL Autumn Cup UT
2005 CB EuroCup LAN Finals, Almere, Holland.
2005 i25 LAN 2005
2005 QuakeCon X 2005, Dallas, USA.
2005 CB Nations Cup 8 CS:S
2005 GigaLiga GrandSlam 2005
2005 ESWC Finals, Paris, France.
2005 EuroCup UT2004 iCTF & TDM
2005 EuroCup UT iCTF
2005 OpenCup CS:S
2005 ESL Nations Championship
2004 PC Zone Readers Challenge UT2004 CTF
2004 ECTS for Abit Corp.
2004 EuroCup UT2004 iCTF
2004 EuroCup UT iCTF
2004 Nations Cup UT CTF
2004 Nations Cup UT2004 iCTF
2003 EuroCup UT2003 iCTF
2003 Nations Cup UT2003 iCTF