

BACKGROUND INFO FOR SINGING WINDOWS PROJECTS

At a time when the convention in the UK seems to be putting art into closed shops, the *Singing Windows* series of installations bucked this trend and worked with open and functioning outlets. Not only that, but rather than simply view the hosting locations as exhibitor hosts, from the outset *Singing Windows* was designed to introduce the novel notion of using sound design to attract custom and also affect not only how each shop felt but also the street outside.

In a similar manner, the use of Feonic technology allowed a discreet presentation of the 'art', so as not to interfere with the shop fronts and their normal displays, as it only required positioning a small audio driver in a corner of the window. However, because the whole window front was then transformed into a loudspeaker, the effect was marked.

The installations were purposefully based on the use of birdsong. This allowed a musical communication without straying into muzak territory! In fact, the idea was that the installations would 'appear' invisible, and wouldn't be calling out to people saying "listen to me: I have been created especially for you". I just wanted to minimally affect the environment in a subtle manner to see what might result. For this reason, the work was never officially advertised, nor was there any sort of grand launch - much to the confusion of the various town councils and sponsors who thought they had got themselves an art project, and wanted to celebrate that fact!

The installation made use of manipulated recordings of birdsong placed at the various locations. The exact sounds used, the timing and overall feel of each installation was worked out in collaboration with the hosting retailer. Where a number of locations were in earshot of each other the audio was synchronised with the effect that the birds appeared to react to each other. The experience of the pedestrian was also considered so that the sound was not repetitive, nor infringing on personal audio space. The fact that the origin of the sound was not obvious enticed passers-by to search for the sound and therefore relate to the area in a different way, raising curiosity, inspiring conversation, and adding a sprinkle of cheer.

Within a month of the installation's running, some of the shop keepers claimed that there was reduced anti-social behaviour on the streets near to where the installations were. This seemed to be confirmed through conversation with the local police force, and so a larger project was devised spread over a number of locations. Chief Inspector Mark Pearson of Margate Task Force, Ellie Ratcliffe (a PhD researcher in environmental psychology at University of Surrey), and Michele Boakes (an independent evaluator) devised an appropriate strategic monitoring framework and thus in this way the project's progress was monitored.

Michelle's evaluation is available on request; however, in a nutshell, it became apparent that a number of positive outcomes resulted from the project. First of all, the general public response was that the installation had changed the atmosphere on the street, the common remark being that the place just felt cheerier. Secondly, it was noted that this had the effect of increasing footfall, not only on the street but in terms of visitors to the shops. Thirdly, many of the shops that hosted the installation reported an increase in public sales. Finally, there was a reported corresponding decrease of 11.5% in on-street anti-social behaviour.