Dos and Don'ts

This is a list of things you should be aware of when using any media server - Ai is not an exemption but has the same sensitivity like other systems (I encountered some details like this many years ago with the ancient Maxedia already...). Most of these details have become so natural to experienced media server operators that they neither think nor speak about it - but for newbies this is the very first lesson to learn and never forget.

- **Do not mix graphic cards.** Sometimes you have computers which have both, a dedicated graphics card as well as the onboard chip, and it is tempting to use the latter e.g. for a simple text screen or the GUI. **DON'T DO THIS.** Mixing graphic outputs is already a challenge for standard windows installations. But for a system which relies on a high-spec graphic unit this certainly begs for problems.
- **Make sure you are using the correct GPU.** In particular when preprogramming on your laptop computer, or when using it for small setups, you may run into a system with a hybrid graphic card. Make sure you are using the dedicated graphic chip. Running Ai on a modern onboard chip may even work but you may run tinto unexpected problems, some videos not running, some effects not working, and then finding the fault takes hours. Hence, always double-check that the correct GPU is used.
- **Make sure the displays are arranged in ascending order from left ro right in Windows display settings and in your GPU's settings.** Internally, the whole width and height of the desktop area is taken and then being split into the various outputs based on their display resolution. This of course works out correctly only if the system knows where each display is located.
- **A full power cycle must be part of your testing routine.** Windows has a habit of shuffling displays when started anew. Hence, when you are happy with your output arrangement, restart windows and see if it's still the same. And in bigger setups don't forget to power-cycle the whole system - that little graphic extender which you forgot to turn on the next morning may cost you hours to find and fix...
- **Adjust display resolution and frequency before starting Ai.** (If you still are uncertain why re-read the previous topic).
- **Do not, never, under no circumstances, change display settings or connect/disconnect a display while your media server is running.** As soon as a display is connected, reset or disconnected Windows rearranges the display outputs. And this will most likely send your server software south.
- **In Ai, start with creating the Screen Fixtures first, and add projectors later.** Strictly this was a more serious issue in earlier versions but still bears some relevance. In order to avoid performance and other problems always start wth creating your screen fixtures, and only after them add the projectors.
- **Use AiM. Use AiM. Use AiM.** Whenever possible use the AiM codec, even for still images and for audio files. In earlier versions the use of MP3s was highly problematic. Nowadays at least they run and can be controlled. But Ai is optimised for using the AiM codec, and adhering to this rule reduces potential confusion and problems.
- **Test. Test. Test.** Not only before your show starts but ideally even before getting into the venue, you have setup and tested your system as close as possible to the original situation: outputs, screens, projectors, even adaptors (e.g. DVI-fiber), contents, timecode sources, control inputs (Artnet, MIDI...). Of course you cannot test and prepare every eventuality. But the more you have tested and prepared in advance, the lesser headache and distress are caused by last-minute changes (which will come anyway).

- **Know how to remote-control your server.** If the server is setup on stage and you control it from FOH via Artnet or even Synergy then have another computer at the ready which is linked to your server with a VNC or some other RDP clone. This gives you a great way to view what's actually going on with your server, lets you quickly change some settings etc.
- **Save often, save regularly.** Saving is very easy - simply double-tab the Ai diamond. Make a habit of doing so frequently while programming, and save particular states of your wokr, e.g. 'all objects mapped', 'all contents imported/tested' separately.

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