



SLOTHWERKS

The Underground Production Studio

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is this document?

In our Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQ") document we go into detail explaining our services: what we do, what we do not do, and what you can expect from us as a customer. If there are questions you may have that are not included here, please feel free to drop us a line on our contact page and ask them!

I am a previous customer of Peninsular Technologies Conversion Services; what's the deal with SlothWerks?

Sloth is the owner / operator of SlothWerks and also the manager of Peninsular Technologies Conversion Services. SlothWerks had been partnering with Peninsular for many years to offer professional audio and (more recently) film transfer services. When the retail division of Peninsular's Conversion Services department closed on June 1st of 2012, SlothWerks merely re-assumed its equipment and services. In essence, this is a seamless transition and those who worked with Sloth at Peninsular can expect the same top-quality customer service and products at SlothWerks. In general, however, there are several differences: a) our prices are somewhat cheaper, b) we do not offer the same degree of personalization for our standard transfer products, and c) we do not offer the same breadth of video transfer services.

How do you transfer records and cassettes? Do you or can you alter / improve the sound in any way?

Records and tapes are played back in real time into a high-quality TASCAM digital audio converter which can sample up to 24-bits at 96,000 kbits / second. This is overkill in terms of the real world; we tend to digitize to the 16-bit 44,100 kbits/second sampling rate native to audio compact discs. Our equipment has a very low noise ceiling, resulting in your digital transfers being as close to the original copy as possible.

Great care is especially used for our record transfers. We utilize a direct-drive Numark turntable with Stanton needles for playback. We remove as much dust and debris as possible from the physical record prior to playback, thus reducing "pops" and "ticks". Record transfers are always carefully monitored for quality and clarity.

While we tend to trim excess noise and "dead air" from the beginning and ending of our transfers, it is our goal to edit and alter the original recording as little as possible. At your request (or at our recommendation, if we feel it's needed) we can run de-hiss and pop 'n' crackle reductions on your transfers to minimize noise. In the case of damaged or poor sound, we have an array of digital tools at our disposal. Just remember: we can only manipulate what already exists; unfortunately, we cannot create something out of nothing.

Can you tell us how you transfer film?

We use two different methods to transfer film. Both involve a professional quality JVC high-definition DV camera hooked up to our computer. Transferred images are captured in real time, sent directly to the hard drive, and saved as uncompressed DV-AVI files. 8mm and 16mm film both utilize a projector; in the case of the former it is a telecine work station which projects directly into the camera. This work station allows us to see the full width of the film as it passes through the projector aperture, thus allowing us to capture the entirety

of the frame. A frame rate control knob allows us to eliminate any “flickering” effects from differing frame rates.

We take great pride in our film transfers and carefully inspect and clean all reels of film prior to transfer. Due to the setup time per reel, we tend to splice together smaller-sized reels of film; this makes both cleaning and playback much easier on our technicians. We return films back to their original reels upon completion of your project.

Once the digital transfer is complete, we then conduct some basic editing of your footage in the computer, removing film leaders and any unwanted sections of film at your request (unexposed sections, under- or over-exposed scenes, et cetera). Ultimately we bill based on the footage time post-transfer (not including film leaders, of course); our fees include limited editing of your footage to ensure that what you receive is exactly the movies you wished to preserve and in the order you wish to watch them.

Do you provide music or sound of some kind in the background of your film transfers?

We do not provide royalty-free music here at our facility. While people use music from their own personal music library for private slideshows and family videos all the time, the waters become extremely murky as soon as such a project is uploaded onto the internet or shown at a public event. SlothWerks will make decisions on a case-by-case basis whether or not to use a customer’s CD collection or other media for a private video transfer project, as we have no control over what happens to the final product once it leaves our facility.

I’ve never seen a “reel change” fee before; what is it and why do you charge it?

Film transfer work is extremely time-consuming. Our work is 100% “hands-on” and we monitor every second of your film as it is converted to a digital format. Each reel requires three to five minutes of setup time... this is longer than the actual playback time of a 3” reel of 8mm film or a 4” reel of 16mm film. On the other hand, a 7” reel of 8mm film could contain up to 400 feet of film... in other words, eight 3” reels’ worth of footage. There is a huge difference between setting up a single 7” reel of film for transfer (up to 5 minutes of setup time) versus setting up eight individual 3” reels of film (up to 40 minutes total setup time).

For ease of transfer, we splice together small reels of film onto larger 7” reels. This is especially useful in the event that an error occurs during transfer (debris in the aperture, computer issues, et cetera). In our world, the “reel change” fee actually covers the labor and materials used to splice together (and later de-construct) small reels of film. In the end, however, we feel this is the best

method of capturing every moment of your memories: every scene is preserved, even in the event of short or missing tape leaders.

Can you repair broken tape / cassette housing? What about tape in poor physical condition?

Physically Damaged Tape: Old tape decks are infamous for “eating” tapes. Sometimes also the leader will snap off of the reel internally upon rewinding, rendering your cassette unplayable. We can temporarily fix these issues for the purposes of transfer, bearing in mind that in the event of actual damage to the tape (crinkling, snapping, et cetera) some portions of your audio and video will be affected and probably lost. However, we will be able to at least recover what’s left, which is better than nothing.

Broken or Damaged Cassette Housing: If your cassette housing was damaged to a point where playback might be dangerous or impossible, please bring to us an additional (blank or no longer needed) cassette in good condition. We have plenty of experience with transferring tape reels from one cassette housing to another; once this is done, your tape will be good as new and ready for digital conversion. In the event that you do not have a spare tape available, we will be more than happy to acquire one for you for a small fee.

Poor or Degraded Signal: Magnetic tape with poor, degraded, or damaged signal will result in a loss of fidelity (ie sharpness of picture or clarity of sound) and “drop-outs” (tics / pops in an audio cassette or lines / specs in the picture of a video cassette). While our equipment is designed to handle poor signal to some degree, these issues will inevitably affect the quality of your transfer. If the signal is very poor, a transfer may not be possible at all.

Mold-Covered or Dirty Tape: Sometimes audio and video cassette tapes can get covered in mold or other debris if stored improperly. We reserve the right to refuse these sorts of tapes as they will damage our equipment. While it is possible to clean magnetic tape, this service is quite expensive. Let us know if you are interested in professionally cleaning your tape; we will be more than happy to refer you to a company who specializes in such services.

What payment methods do you accept? Do I need to pay for my project in advance?

We accept cash, checks (made payable to “SlothWerks”), PayPal, and major credit cards via PayPal. You do not need a PayPal account to pay us using a major credit card on PayPal unless your card or email is tied to an existing account.

We generally ask for payment when you pick up your project unless your project is large enough in scope where we may need to ask for a deposit to get

the ball rolling. We tend to make these sorts of decisions on a case-by-case basis.

I am a not-for-profit / school that needs audio / video expertise but we have a limited budget. Can you help us?

SlothWerks is a proud partner of schools, community programs, and not-for-profit organizations in West Michigan and beyond. We are heavily invested in the local grassroots community and enjoy working with them on a regular basis. Please contact us with your needs and budget and we will make every attempt to assist you with your project.

Why do you charge two different fees for transferring to a digital file and then to transferring that to a disc? Must it be so complicated?

This is less of a “complication” than it is a concerted effort to get away from physical media. Let’s face it: discs are great to watch and keep on the shelf, but we are swiftly moving into a world of streaming, on-demand digital video. When you place your footage onto a disc, it is saved in a very specific format with a very specific structure. While convenient for playback, your transfer on disc can only be in one place at any given moment. Free your memories of these constraints: computers, disc space, and compression codecs are at a point where we can now use video files for virtually anything: editing, uploading to the internet, copying onto an iPod or other device, et cetera. While we are more than happy to create discs for you, please bear in mind that these discs are destined for the same fate as all other media: you’ll wind up transferring them yet again to a new format sometime down the road. If you’re handy with a computer, we recommend digital video files rather than DVD... it’s cheaper and better in the long run.

Why does your website say that you transfer records, audio cassettes, and old film but not videocassettes?

The Underground Production Studio is, at its heart, a sound studio. After working on film for so many years at Peninsular Technologies (and investing in several thousand dollars’ worth of equipment), we now include 8mm and 16mm film in our transfer products. However, there are many excellent independent companies in West Michigan and beyond who offer videocassette transfer services for multiple formats (VHS, Betamax, Hi-8, Digital-8, et cetera). While we have the ability to convert many of these video formats to digital, this is not the focus of our business. We are very familiar with projects that span multiple media formats; feel free to contact us and we will put together a recommendation as to how to complete your project using the best possible methods and services available.

What do your CD and DVD transfer products look like? Can I have super-fancy packaging and disc labels?

SlothWerks uses unbranded high-quality media for its transfers. DVDs tend to have a white matte surface while our CDs have a silver gloss matte. Your completed discs come with a protective plastic case; the case insert can be personalized with a title of your choice. Our standard pricing does not include disc labels (which we do not recommend due to playback issues in certain types of players). As for the disc architecture itself: your music and video are placed onto the disc without a menu, although index or chapter points are inserted every five to ten minutes for ease of navigation.

At SlothWerks we tend to concentrate on the quality of our transfers rather than on fancy packaging or flashy menu systems. However, some projects may call for something more than just the bare minimum. For our copies of professional recordings, the case insert will include the media title, track listing (if applicable), and any other information / images that may be associated with your original. If your project is of a personal or business nature and you would like to whip up something truly unique and eye-catching (perhaps for a special gift, an anniversary, or a professional presentation) feel free to discuss with us what you're looking for and we will accommodate your needs.

I am extremely concerned about the longevity of my DVD transfers. Do you use archival-quality DVD media?

We certainly can, although our pricing does not include it. Just let us know if you would like to use what are known as "archival-quality" discs and we will provide a quote including the cost of that media versus our standard DVD-R media.

We know from experience that bad or low-grade media can kill a DVD project. We insist on using low-speed, high-grade DVD media manufactured to industry standards. We feel our Verbatim discs meet these requirements with their standard DVD-R media, but Verbatim also offers "archive-quality" discs as well. Let us know which you prefer; you can even provide us with your favorite media or let us know what specific brand you would like to use for your project. We'll be happy to accommodate.

A note about "archival-quality": please remember we are making a concerted effort to go media-less here at SlothWerks. There is a reason for this. Remember the many other media frenzies that, when first offered, promised information storage that would "last a lifetime"? This was the big buzz for both VHS videocassettes and microfiche. Thirty years later we are using expensive, time-consuming processes to transfer that information off of those

formats to a different one. Quite often we even discover that the original media or recording is flawed in some way, resulting in loss of information.

Let's face facts. DVD media is already giving way to the "next big thing". While insisting on quality is important and necessary, one must ask this question: will we be converting the audio and video information off of Digital Video Discs - regardless of whether or not they use a gold reflective surface - in the next few decades? The answer is "more than likely". Can the manufacturers of these "archive-quality" discs absolutely guarantee that the data recorded on them will be safe for fifty, seventy, or one hundred years? No. Will these companies somehow reimburse you for possible loss of information? Obviously not.

I have a huge video / film archive at home and there is no way I can afford your services to transfer it all. Can you teach me how to do it myself?

This all comes down to what exactly you're transferring, how much money you're willing to spend, and how much copious spare time you have. There is definitely a threshold for videotape transfer where it is theoretically cheaper to simply purchase the equipment yourself. Assuming you have a fully functioning tape playback machine and a recently-purchased / powerful computer, your total investment in additional hardware and software for your DIY transfer is probably only a few hundred dollars. However, film transfers are a completely different beast. This process requires specific equipment and it is well worth the investment to have seasoned professionals tackle the transfer for you. Even a \$1,000 film transfer project is dwarfed by the total cost of an even basic telecine transfer work station of decent quality. All of this said, our passion lies in our work, and we would be more than happy to show you first-hand what we do and how we do it.

Will you produce my band's first album for free?

We are always ready and willing to produce and record up-and-coming artists' work for free. However, there are some minor stipulations: 1) the artist loses all creative control over their work, 2) we reserve the right to replace any or all band members with session artists of our choosing, and 3) we will retain all rights and royalties to the resulting sound recording. For some reason we have yet to produce our first band here at our facility, but perhaps one of these days this may come to pass.