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## Hemphill: Reasons to hit the mute button

Now that 30 million American homes have HDTV, and most of those have surround sound, the TV experience has become well, jarring.

Leaving aside the ability of Padre fans to watch players spit tobacco in glorious up-close color, it is the amplified, driven audio that really enrages. Visual images may cause you to avert your eyes, but audio is quite another thing. There is no way to block out the screaming from reaching your ears.

Why do you think loud audio is used to break down trained individuals that governments want to break? (Remember Panama's Ortega?) I have often asked sales clerks if their "music" is recorded, because if it is live, that woman is screaming for help and needs immediate assistance!

The most important invention of the past 100 years is not the computer, or the Internet, or even Viagra – but the mute button on the TV remote. It is the one device that stands between us and insanity.

Five good reasons to hit the mute button:

Budweiser – "Show Me What You Got, Pretty Baby..." OK, Urban Rap probably works well for the football crowd, and Budweiser is not known for sponsoring Saturday at the Met.

Blackjack ad by Cingular – suitable for successfully breaking an enemy agent before the bomb goes off in five minutes.

Head-On – even the ad agency got the word. (The word was "awful.")

Cadillac and BMW – both produce ads for the "younger generation" that can only be described as "primal scream music." Most of the high-end BMWs and Cadillacs I see are driven by older and much more musically sophisticated people – but I guess the ad agencies employ 20-somethings. Yes, they buy low-end BMWs, but the profit is at the high end.

Not all challenges to sanity are solely audio – a few are the combination of audio and video. I give you Rod Luck and John Coleman on KUSI-TV.

The active corollary to the mute button for use in public spaces – places like grocery stores, restaurants and most importantly, gyms – is the MP3. I don't personally go to the kind of restaurants where one would expect to hear heavy metal and rap, but it seems all restaurants cater to their wait staff and not to the customers. In restaurants where the clientele is over 60, the music is for the under-20 crowd. Even Marie Callender's over the Christmas season was playing something that approximated "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," as interpreted by Sting!

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The answer to this pervasive problem is an MP3 player. I use a 20GB Apple iPod with 2,500 pieces of music.

I have suggested to several gyms, that they play "rap" as loud as possible, and sell silence for \$1 a minute!

Don't think the iPod generation is only the zoned-out under-20 crowd...iPod is the only public protection you have for your sanity.

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