

### **Voice Distortion Technology - Voice Distortion in the Court Room.**

Voice Distortion was until a few years ago, something that was enjoyed by TV programme makers attempting to scare us in low budget science fiction TV shows or amusing us with wacky characters on children's TV shows. Voice distortion has now got itself a purpose and a very serious purpose at that, identity protection of vulnerable witnesses in court room trials.

The term "special measures" is used when the prosecution feels that a witness requires extra safeguards when giving their evidence in court. These special measures can be something as simple as giving evidence from behind a curtain, which can relive pressure on a sensitive witness from facing the defendant. More technically sophisticated methods include voice distortion and also facial pixelation, I will be concentrating on voice distortion.

Voice distortion, when setup and used correctly can be a very effective way of disguising a witness's voice from recognition whilst retaining clarity. Effective voice distortion is a relatively simple task.

Take for example, 18 year old gang member giving evidence against a rival gang. His or her legal team ask for special measures to be granted by the judge, in the form of anonymity of the witness. A facility is then put in place where the witness is screened away from the eyes of the public gallery and the defendant. This could be from behind a screen or even a video link from another room in the court building or even a video link from another location entirely.

The witness's voice is then electronically altered so there is no possibility of being identified. Clarity and definition is vital to the voice distortion. There is no point having it in place if nobody can understand what is being said. Likewise it is important that the witness is not made to sound like a small comedy cartoon chipmunk from children's television. It depends on the individual voice as to how it is altered, although a good guide would be to step down the pitch for both male and female voices.

Additional effects tools such as flanging can be sympathetically applied to alter the definition of strong accents or minor speech impediments.

As long as the witness knows that his or her voice is disguised beyond all recognition, they can successfully give their evidence as calmly and relaxed as is possible, in what could be a very intimidating environment, which could be instrumental in securing a conviction.

Voice Distortion has been used in several major trials in the UK where this technology has been successfully deployed and it has been recognised as a valuable tool in bringing undesirables to justice who may have previously relied on the fear and intimidation of a witness to avoid a custodial sentence.