How to record phone interviews for audio programmes with Skype and Total Recorder (Windows)
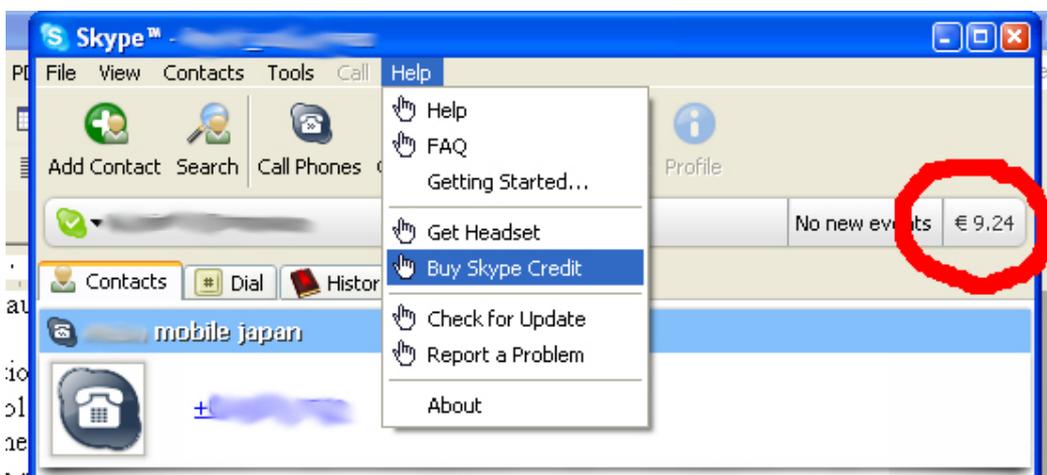
Recording two way phone conversations used to be only possible in a radio studio with decent equipment. Additional technical problems also occurred when calling mobiles. Using internet telephony it is possible to make phone calls and record **both** the **audio in** (i.e. your voice, asking the questions), and the **audio out** (i.e. the responses, what you can hear in your earpiece) very cheaply and with minimal equipment. Note that in theory you could do this on a dialup line, but realistically you need a **broadband** connection so the audio does not get choppy and fractured.

For this you will need:

1. A PC with a sound card that has a microphone/line in jack and a headphones/line out jack. This is standard with most PCs.
2. The latest version of **Skype** (downloadable from **http://www.skype.com**)
3. Total Recorder Professional Edition (version 5.2 or later – downloadable from **http://www.highcriteria.com**)
4. A stereo microphone. Maplins on Jervis Street do a cheap one of these for around 20 euros. It takes one AA battery.
5. A pair of headphones, preferably one where you can listen just through one ear. This is just because you're used to hearing your own voice when you're speaking on the phone, it feels a bit awkward when both your ears are covered and you're having a phone conversation.
6. Access to a credit card or a Paypal account with some credit. This is to buy credit for Skype to make phone calls to landlines or mobiles.
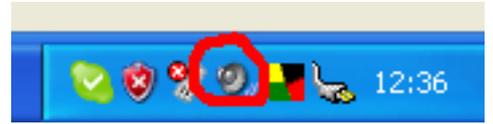
Setup:

1. Download **Skype** and install.
2. Download **Total Recorder Professional Edition** and install.
3. Launch Skype. Buy some Skype Credit with the credit card. In Skype, click **Help -> Buy Skype Credit**. This will bring you to the Skype website where the payment will be processed. Follow the instructions for putting in the credit card details or the Paypal account. It usually takes around 5 minutes for the first time you do it. Here you can see I've got €9.24 in credit on my account, it's circled in red on the right hand side of the Skype window.
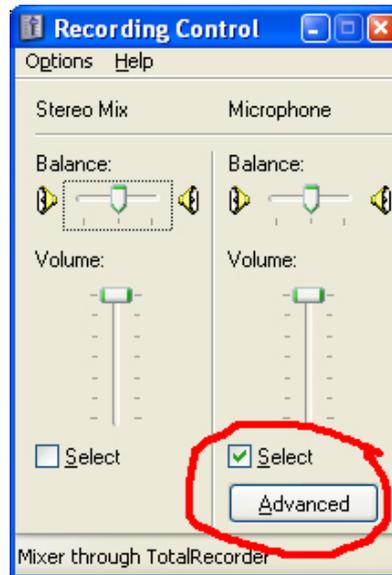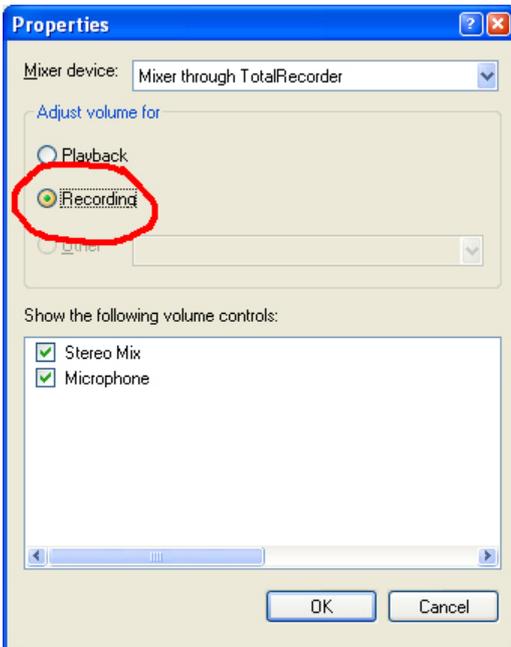
4. Once you've got credit in your account, you can make calls to landlines and mobiles. Plug your headphones into the headphone jack, and plug the stereo microphone into the line in/microphone jack.

(**note/aside**: If you have a line in jack, you may need to adjust the input level. A microphone does not have as strong a signal as a line in, e.g. from a stereo or radio, so you may have to boost it in order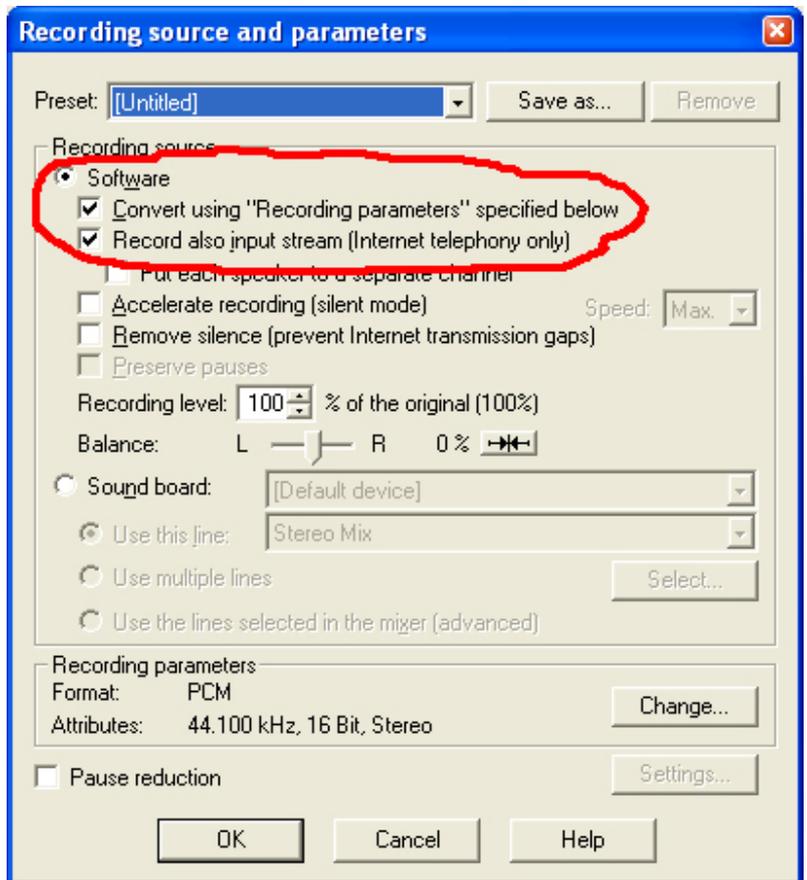 that the other person can hear you talking. You can do this by clicking on **Start -> Programs -> Accessories -> Entertainment -> Volume Control**, or by double clicking on the Volume Control icon in the bottom right hand corner of the Windows display [the system tray], which I've circled in this diagram. This will open up the Volume Control window.
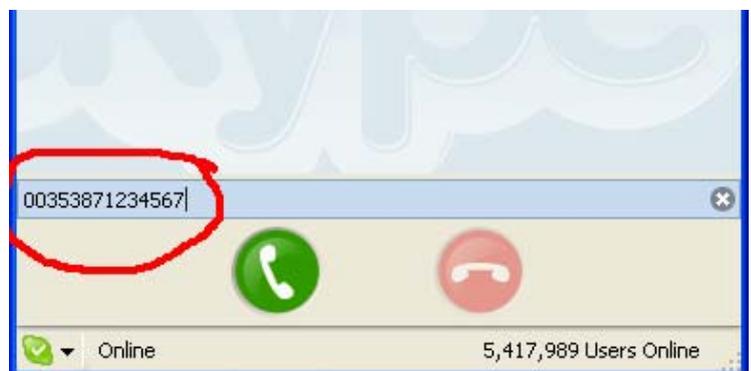
In the Volume Control window, you will need to click on **Options -> Properties**. Then click the options for recording. This will show the recording levels for the line in jack. We're going to select the Microphone option, and then click on the 'Advanced' button. In the advanced option, check the box on 'Microphone Boost' and then click close. This will boost the audio signal for the microphone. See the screenshots below)
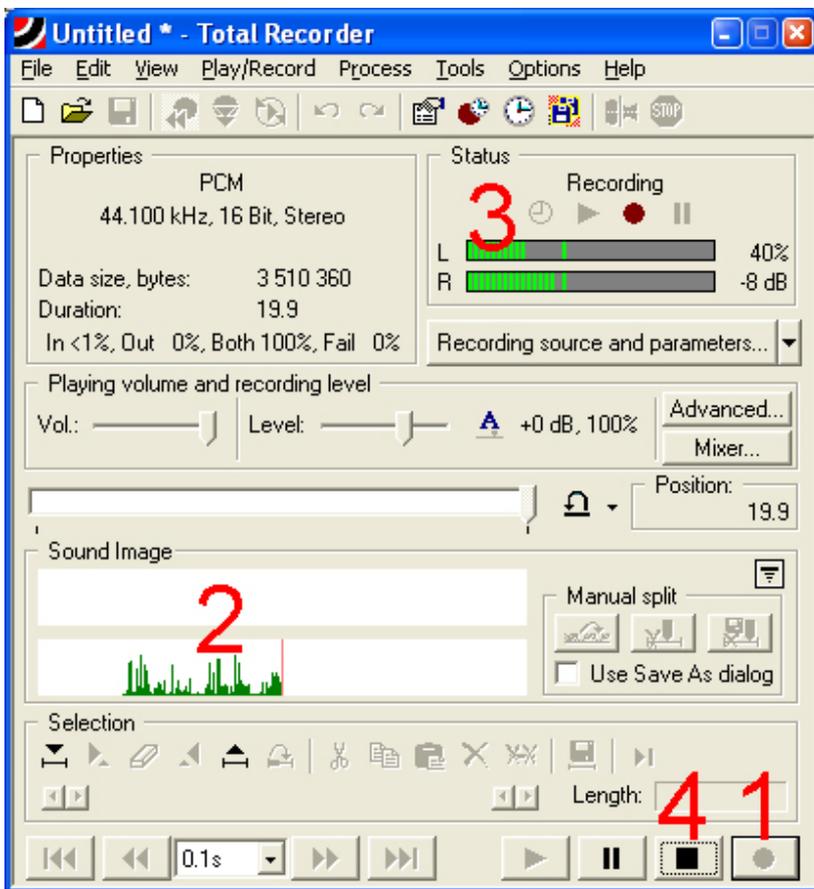
5. Launch Total Recorder Professional. Click Options -> Recording Source and Parameters. In these options, you need to check 'Convert using "Recording parameters" specified below', and also 'Record also input stream (Internet telephony only)' – see the screenshot to the right. In the lower part of the window, you will see the recording parameters option. If you want to change this you can, but I think you should leave it as PCM 44.1 KHz 16-bit stereo. When you have finished recording you will save the audio file as a **.wav** file. You can edit this later on in a sound editor like soundforge or goldwave without having to re-compress the audio again. When you've checked the two boxes, click OK.

6. Switch your microphone on, connect it into the mic jack of your PC sound card. Connect your headphones also. Go back into Skype. Down near the bottom of the window, there's an option to type in a phone number or a Skype name – see the screenshot below. Dial the number of the person you're interviewing, with the full international access code included, and drop the zero of the area code. You should hear a little dialing noise and then a ringing tone. The call should connect, and you should be able to converse as normal via the mic and headphones. You might want to test it beforehand with a friend.

7. Once you hear the ringing tone (or whenever you want to start recording your interview), go into Total Recorder and press the record button in the bottom right hand corner, marked with number 1 on the screenshot on the next page. When the audio is being recorded, you should be able to see the signal coming through Total Recorder, marked with number 2 and 3. When the interview is finished, click on the stop button, marked number 4. You will now have an Untitled .wav file recording of your conversation. Click File -> Save As, and give your interview a corresponding file name, e.g. CourtReport2507.wav (or whatever you find appropriate), and save it somewhere on your hard drive.

That's it. You now have a .wav file saved on your hard drive which contains your interview with both you speaking and the interviewee responding. You may want to edit this in a sound editor, which I'll leave you to explore elsewhere (I recommend Goldwave as the best digital audio editing tool).

You'll also want to compress your interview down to something like an .mp3 file, which will take up a lot less space when you're uploading to the internet. There are countless mp3 compressors out there for downloading on the internet. I recommend the DBPowerAmp Converter. You can compress a .wav file down to a 56k mp3 and the voices wont be too garbled by the compression, but experiment with the variable bit rates for mp3 and choose your trade off between sound quality and filesize...