

Audio buyers guide: Sublime software and cool concepts



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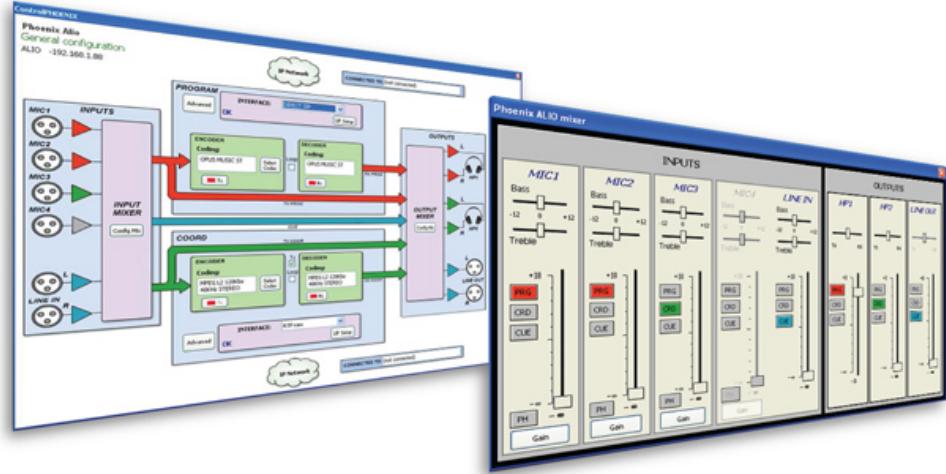
Noise reduction software and a 'smart' concept for delivering audio production are among the developments featured our roundup of useful audio software by David Davies

The productions and solutions included in this latest round-up of useful audio software and tools are a diverse bunch – but what unites them is their ability to smooth and accelerate the daily working lives of broadcast audio personnel. In what are increasingly fast-turnaround production environments, time is surely more of the essence than ever before – which means tools that can ease both routine processes and more creative tasks are highly prized.

This selection presents some of the latest and greatest solutions, although in what has been a highly innovative period for audio technology R&D, it is only the tip of the iceberg...

Control software and user-friendly editing

Newly introduced by AEQ is ControlPhoenix software, which enables powerful control and management of its Phoenix Studio, Phoenix Mercury and Phoenix Venues audio codecs through IP. According to the company, the equipment can either be part of the same local area network as the PC or workstation that controls them, or belong to remote networks. Local equipment is automatically discovered when the application is launched. For the remote units to be controlled, they need to be reachable and then the user has to identify them by their IP address.



Also recently introduced is the AEQ Audioplus advanced automation, management and playout system. A comprehensive set of applications and services designed to provide the necessary tools to carry out any regular task at a radio station, Audioplus provides features including: a broadcast playout system allowing for up to four independent players with intuitive playback controls; remote controlled playout; internal or external object editors; and full integration with AEQ Forum and Capitol digital mixing consoles.

iZotope has a distinguished track-record of developing audio software and plug-ins for mixing, mastering, restoration and more. One of its latest innovations is RX 5 Advanced Audio Editor software, which delivers a wide variety of noise reduction and other techniques to improve audio content. According to the company, RX 5 Audio Editor makes it possible to repair, restore and enhance problematic production audio – from plosives to background noise to inconsistent dialogue levels – and dramatically improve sound quality and clarity.

When building the latest version, the creators of RX took into account the increased speed in turnaround time and the fact that ‘perfect’ audio recording environments are far and few between.

“We focused on creating new features like Module Chain that can process multiple modules at once, and Instant Process, to help broadcasters meet their deadlines,” said Rob D’Amico, director of product management at iZotope. “Additions like De-plosive, Corrective EQ, and Leveler will directly increase the production value of shows that are broadcast every day.”

Plug-in innovation

Summer 2016 brings plenty of fresh innovation at the plug-in level, not least from US-based manufacturer Minnetonka Audio. The company’s SurCode for Dolby E for Adobe Premiere Pro CC allows users to work with Dolby encoded files in the industry’s most popular editing software.



Specifically, the plug-in provides encoding and decoding of Dolby E files directly within Adobe Premiere Pro CC. The iLok protected VST decoder can be instantiated as a real-time confidence monitor, and used for faster than real-time export, says Minnetonka Audio. The encoder is available as a WIBU protected export plug-in in the Adobe Media Encoder export engine. SurCode for Dolby E Encoder and Decoder for Adobe Premiere Pro CC is included at no additional charge in the SurCode for Dolby E Bundle and Master Suite.

As a Dolby-certified product, the decoded and encoded audio files from Dolby E for Adobe Premiere Pro CC are compatible with all Dolby Digital branded software or hardware encoders and decoders.

Nugen Audio, meanwhile, has announced an upgrade of its Halo Upmix plug-in for upmixing stereo audio to surround. Available in Avid AAX, VST and AU formats, Halo Upmix automates the creation of a stereo-to-surround, downmix-compatible upmix with centre-channel management and spatial density controls.

Combining several technologies, including frequency and time-domain energy distribution and neural network artificial intelligence, Halo Upmix enables producers to target various upmix goals, including full stable surrounds, exact downmix matching, and/or full dialogue isolation.

The latest version of Halo Upmix adds a new set of algorithms for upmixing from multichannel audio to higher channel counts, including LCR to 5.1, 5.1 to 7.1, and 7.1 to 9.1. The 9.1 option allows the introduction of vertical positioning into the upmix, generating a 7.1.2 (Dolby Atmos) bed track-compatible upmix. This capability provides users with greater flexibility for high-quality archival restoration, content repurposing, post-production, and sound design.

Also on show at IBC2016 will be Nugen Audio's AMB (Audio Management Batch) processor, which is a new solution built on the concept of the Loudness Management Batch (LMB) processor. Through new features such as threaded algorithm processing and multiple processing threads that are addressable for simultaneous parallel handling of files and queues, AMB enables post facilities to speed workflows and reduce delivery times.

“Smart production will become a strategy. It uses a creative mix of technologies to reach high quality production results with increased efficiency”

Smart thinking

For Jünger Audio, the last few months – and indeed its upcoming presence at the IBC trade show – have been dominated by discussion of its Smart Audio concept. According to the company, Smart Audio means investing in simple, reliable and predictable equipment that can automatically deliver audio content while maintaining the high quality that consumers expect. The concept has already been adopted by a number of broadcasters, among them Input Media in London and the ARD Tagesschau television prime time news service in Germany. Alongside intelligent and adaptive processing algorithms, the introduction of Smart Audio allows broadcasters to choose devices that are fully interoperable with others in the broadcast environment and can seamlessly integrate with both playout automation systems and logging and monitoring processes.

"Auto-Level, Auto-Upmix, Auto-EQ, Auto-MIX, Auto-Loudness, Codec System Metadata Management – the intelligent combination of all these Jünger Audio adaptive algorithms will create the solution that delivers Smart Audio, and program loudness will also automatically match – as expected," says Jünger Audio CEO Peter Poers.

At IBC, Jünger Audio will be showing its full range of D*AP products that can deliver a Smart Audio experience because every device already incorporates a collection of these adaptive processing algorithms. They also employ the Ember+ remote protocol that allows seamless integration with an increasingly wide range of compatible equipment.



Jünger Audio's D*AP range includes natural-sounding products for loudness control, audio monitoring, audio conditioning & metadata management, and Dolby decoding, encoding and transcoding. Among them are the D*AP8 MAP Edition surround monitoring audio processor; the D*AP8 Codec Edition processor that provides a viable replacement for any discontinued legacy Dolby hardware processors; the D*AP4 VAP Edition two-channel voice audio processor; and the flagship D*AP8 TAP Edition television audio processor, which ensures consistency of loudness and sonic 'character' across multiple programme sources.

Speaking to TV Technology Europe about the response to Smart Audio since it was introduced earlier this year, Poers remarks: "Since starting our campaign to promote Smart Audio we are noticing an increasing number of 'smart' communication messages and announcements from other companies in our field of business. This indicates that the trend for more sophisticated and efficient production is reaching all areas of media production. In our view, the introduction of smarter, more automated production won't replace creative processes, but it will allow people working in broadcast to focus and concentrate more on the creative elements and processes instead of dealing with standard procedures that are time consuming and require effort during production."

"Smart production will become a strategy. It uses a creative mix of technologies to reach high quality

production results with increased efficiency. It changes the relationship between dedicated production tools and processes. It will unify the production for different media sectors (radio, television and online). It is demanding a global view to production workflows. Smart Audio and the elements that we have introduced so far are a dedicated part of this trend. The introduction of remote production scenarios will definitely benefit from smart production in general and Smart Audio in detail."

Necessary NEXIS

The final featured solution is a major launch from one of the giants of the industry. Introduced at NAB 2016, the Avid NEXIS software-defined storage platform enables fully virtualised storage so media organisations can adjust their storage infrastructure mid-project, without disrupting workflows. Leveraging the power of the Avid MediaCentral Platform, Avid NEXIS delivers media storage flexibility, scalability and control for both Avid-based and third-party workflows.

Thanks to the platform openness of Avid Everywhere, Avid NEXIS works with all top media creation applications, including Media Composer, Pro Tools, Apple Final Cut Pro, Adobe Premiere Pro, Grass Valley EDIUS, and many more.

"In today's hyper-competitive media environment, business models are in constant flux and media workflows need to be as dynamic as consumer demand," said Jeff Rosica, senior vice president, chief sales & marketing officer, Avid. "Software-defined storage is more flexible, adaptable, simple, usable, reliable, and secure – all at a lower cost. Avid NEXIS is the first and only software-defined storage platform that provides media organisations the reliability they need to address today's workflow demands, the scalability for tomorrow, and the technology to take media production further."

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