

Equipment demonstrates at Space-Net

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Demonstrated during Space-Net's University of York event on the 23rd January were the two versions of BeyerDynamic's Headzone (virtual surround sound headphone monitor system) and several portable audio recorders.

Headzone combines BeyerDynamic's renowned DT770 (or DT880) headphones with a processing module and headtracking device. The processing module accepts a 5.1 input signal and uses binaural environment and ambience modelling to create a headphone output signal. The result is that a 5.1 source can be realistically monitored in a set of standard headphones. The ultrasonic headtracker detects head orientation and the system is capable of maintaining the perceived static position of the virtual loudspeaker sources when the listener turns their head.

Headzone is available in two versions specified for professional and consumers applications. Headzone Pro has both analogue and digital inputs (RCA/Phono analogue sockets and a Firewire port with an ASIO driver). It is also supplied with a software application that allows for the adjustment of virtual speaker positions and synthesised room ambience. The consumer version of Headzone has an SPDIF input and accepts both Dolby and DTS encoded surround sound data streams. The headtracker device is supplied as standard with Headzone Pro and is an option for the consumer version. Headzone can be specified with either the Beyer DT880 (semi open) and DT770 (closed) professional headphones.

Headzone Pro is a practical solution when 5.1 audio needs to be monitored and mixed in environments where it is difficult to setup a full set of loudspeakers, such as a small control room. Headzone Pro has been widely adopted for mixing live DVB-HD sports transmissions, often mixed in a cramped outside broadcast vehicle. Sound engineers report that Headzone is comfortable to use over long periods and it seems listening fatigue is reduced by the headtracking feature. Headzone is also popular for location recording sessions, for example surround sound orchestral recordings for DVD and SACD release. Although the consumer version of Headzone is primarily designed for use with home surround sound systems, it is also been widely adopted by sound and game designers working on desktop computers, often in open plan offices.

Also demonstrated at the Space-Net event were the HHB PortaDrive and the new Sony PCM-D50 stereo recorder. PortaDrive is a battery powered, 8-track location recorder, primarily designed for Film and TV drama production. In addition to providing a maximum recording resolution of 96kHz/24-bit, PortaDrive has comprehensive video, timecode and wordclock synchronising features and generates either SDII or AES31 files, it also captures iXML compliant session metadata. The PCM-D50 is latest professional audio recorder from Sony, the hand-held stereo recorder has built in stereo microphone capsules and a 2GB memory.

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