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Hands-On Review of the TOA AM-1 Mic System

By Dan Fulmer On July 25, 2014

The TOA AM-1 Mic is a system designed to replace one or more gooseneck or podium mics, which a speaker/presenter must talk towards, or lavalier mics a speaker/presenter must wear. The system is called a Real Time Steering Array Microphone system which detects and tracks sounds and voices up to three meters away in a 180-degree-arc. Basically, the system forms a narrow (50-degree) beam that it listens to, within the 180-degree-arc, based on the voice and sounds in the room and follows that voice through the full 180-degree-arc. This eliminates the need to talk into the microphone or wear a lapel mic on your suit. It's much less cumbersome than the speaker wearing a mic; they are free to roam around the podium and speak more freely, make gestures and turn towards the audience, while still maintaining pickup.

The Basics



The TOA AM-1 Mic System

The kit is primarily made up of two main components; the mic set (AM-1) and the control unit (AM-1C), plus a 24V power supply. The mic is designed to sit on a flat surface and measures 19- wide x 2.3- deep by .78-inches tall, so wide yet slim and unobtrusive; it sits nicely on most podiums. The mic comes with an XLR cable (max 230 ft) and the Control Unit is simple and easy to setup. The mic is powered via the control unit, so only the one XLR cable connection is needed for the mic, eliminating power concerns and issues with lapel mics. The control unit is a typical black box unit size around 3- x 6- x 2-inches and has mic input, AES/EBU and Analog out, all XLR 3P-1. It has a network connection, which adds a lot of power to the system.

Setup is easy; simply place the mic on the podium, run your cabling to hide it, place your controller near your amp/audio system and plug that in. Then power it up. It is pretty much plug-n-play (not a huge fan of that term), but you can make several adjustments once installed. You can use the volume on the controller as well as a +4dBu/-10dBV/-50dBu switch to tune your audio before the amp. The system includes a power light and mute light on the controller and one small LED bar on the MIC shows mute state, next to a touch sensitive plate to manually mute, on the mic itself.

Intuitive

Once the controller is connected to your network, you can use a PC or an iPad to watch the tracking live and make adjustments that are pretty intuitive. The iPad app is free from iTunes and the interface is very simple and intuitive. It shows a radar type 180-degree-arc, then highlights where it is tracking via an orange cone, similar to most radar screen images you've seen. With the iPad we could make several adjustments including tracking distance/range (horizontal angle and distance), sensitivity and speed (tracking speed), gain compensation, on/off, distance adjustment threshold, duration (time monitoring of sound source footprint), disable the Mute switch function on mic, output gain level adjustment and muting the system. You can tune the system in and out of specific ranges which makes masking a close audience a little easier.

Ease of Set-Up

We found this system is actually very easy to setup and use. It can also replace ceiling mics in certain instances, depending on layout. We found that it worked relatively well for our

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