

Radio World

The Newspaper for Radio Managers and Engineers

REPRINTED FROM AUGUST 1, 2004

WWW.RWONLINE.COM

USER REPORT

Xport Expedites BBC Newsgathering

BBC's Remotes from Los Angeles

Use Telos Codec for Entertainment News

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LOS ANGELES Newsgathering in Los Angeles for the BBC's radio networks is fast-paced and demanding. The Radio Organisation Inc. — a small team of professionals contracted to the BBC — has produced thousands of audio stories on a variety of topics. From natural disasters such as earthquakes and brushfires, to interviews with Tom Cruise and Ben Affleck, there's never a dull day.

Courtroom drama

One of the more recent memorable events was the first time singer Michael Jackson appeared in person to face child endangerment charges in Santa Maria. This was a great opportunity to put through its paces our newly acquired **Telos Systems Zephyr Xport** ISDN and POTS codec for remote broadcasts.

Forget installing an ISDN circuit. Finding hotel accommodation was the first big test. With hundreds of world journalists descending on the tiny California town, this was a media circus like no other — and we knew that broadcasting back to London would be a challenge. The satellite equipment we were using outside of the courtroom couldn't always find a signal due to so many news-gatherers pointing their dishes towards the sky. This is where the Xport got to show its stuff.

Back at the hotel, we managed to file

reports on the Jackson case for BBC Radio 1's "Newsbeat" program, the BBC's new digital station 1Xtra, BBC 5Live's "Up All Night" and "Breakfast

Xport is intended for impromptu remote broadcasts, where an ISDN line cannot be installed in time. It uses a DSP-based architecture that enables the use of an ordinary POTS line for transmission of mono audio to an ISDN-connected Xstream.



Xport can connect to a Zephyr Xstream transceiver over ISDN when equipped with the ISDN option, a daughter board that can be installed for connection with ISDN-only codecs.

Show" and numerous other outlets. We "bridged" the Xport connection through our Los Angeles office using a combination of one ISDN circuit, a Zephyr Xstream ISDN transceiver and our trusty old Zephyr Classic transceiver. After that we were ready for more POTS challenges. Just how far could we go with our funky lozenge-shaped codec?

Xport delivers audio by using a high-fidelity low-bit rate coding method, Coding Technologies' aacPlus, the combination of MPEG Advanced Audio Coding and Spectral Band Replication. aacPlus improves the efficiency of the codec by 30 percent over "plain" AAC, which itself is 30 percent more efficient than MPEG Layer 3.

And when ISDN *is* available, you're ready. When equipped with the available ISDN option, Xport can connect to Zephyr Xstream over ISDN using Fraunhofer Labs' Low-Delay AAC, which offers quality equivalent to MPEG Layer 3 with about 75 percent less delay — great for two-way remotes. The Xport ISDN option is a daughter board that can be installed to Xport for connection with ISDN-only codecs. The user can add this option to the Xport for an additional fee.

For our backstage coverage of the Grammys, we faced a dilemma. Should we install the usual expensive ISDN circuit or chance our luck with a regular phone line? After our Michael Jackson victory we took a leap of faith. We wanted to see how well the Xport would perform with a POTS connection that would last for hours, so we went for the cheaper option. After a few strange looks from a large gathering of ISDN-equipped sound engineers, we were set

up in no time.

The first call to our office Xstream from the Xport produced a 24 kbps connection and excellent audio quality, so we didn't drop the line. Close to six hours later, that same connection hadn't dropped once or altered in any way. We featured entertainers such as Christina Aguilera, Missy Elliot, P. Diddy and Yoko Ono in what sounded like great Layer 3 audio, at a bargain price. We knew the Xport wasn't designed to replace ISDN in the field, but this was a victory for small budgets.

Feeling confident, we then set up a live broadcast from the home of a Hollywood actor. Martin Henderson was starring in the motorcycle flick "Torque," and our colleagues in London wanted a quality live interview. With an 8-hour time difference between the U.K. and L.A., that's a challenge for a drive-time show.

We arrived at Henderson's Hollywood Hills home at 7:30 a.m. He

went back to bed as we set up the Xport on his dining room table. Fifteen minutes later, with strong coffee in hand, Martin was live on BBC Radio 5Live. He asked us if he could do all his interviews in this way. We said yes — as long as he promised not to go back to bed.

Most of the time we don't have the luxury of the three weeks notice needed to install an ISDN circuit. This is, after all, the world of breaking news. That's why our Xport has become an invaluable part of our broadcast kit. While we understand it will not replace ISDN for critical broadcasts — given the time and budget — it has filled an important gap. We love it so much that we shelled out for the custom carry case. Heaven forbid our funky lozenge ever gets scratched.

For more information, including pricing, contact Telos Systems in Cleveland at (216) 241-7225 or visit www.telos-systems.com. 