



HHB Flash Mic DRM85

By Chris Wygal

We live in a time when electronics are shrinking in size, while at the same time they are providing unprecedented availability to endless media sources. The Ipod is a prime example of a downsized personal media device that adds functionality to our lives. Fortunately, the broadcast industry has followed suit, because capturing audio is easier today than it was just two years ago. Who would have thought that CD and Minidisc technologies are already facing obsolescence?

HHB has teamed with Sennheiser to place the cart behind the horse so to speak, and economically employ a familiar item from the news gathering industry. At press conferences, print media reporters put flash recorders in front of the interviewee, but a radio news reporter would hardly consider using these types of devices to capture on-air material. But what if HHB was to take the idea and combine a premium Sennheiser hand-held mic and a user-

friendly flash recorder into one unit? It is called the Flash Mic DRM85. It's a news and interview gathering powerhouse the size of a typical wireless hand-held mic. Weighing 13 ounces, the Flash Mic changes the way reporters capture the news and it fits nicely in the palm of your hand.

In the field

On July 2 at an Independence Day concert I took the mic backstage to grab some interviews with producers and talent for a radio segment. Most were confused by my only holding a microphone, but after a brief explanation even the seasoned audiophiles in the group were impressed by the concept and design. In addition to its novel appeal, I found that the Sennheiser omnidirectional microphone capsule captured clear and true sound. As an added bonus, handling noise is suppressed by solid and stable construction.

Windows and Mac recognize the mic as a removable storage device (connected using the supplied USB cable) and dragging and dropping is quick and easy. However, on July 2 I didn't have non-linear editing capabilities. So with some patch cord creativity using the headphone output, the Flash Mic became a playback unit. Of course, the headphone output is traditionally used to monitor recording levels. As far as inputs, the Flash Mic uses the omnidirectional condenser microphone only. There are no auxiliary line or mic inputs.

Sometimes noting a particular spot in interview material comes in handy. The Flash Mic makes this task easy. While recording, tap the record button to create a "marker." When the audio file is opened, using software such as Adobe Audition or Sound Forge V4, a flag is placed on the file making the marked portion easy to locate.

Performance at a glance

- Switchable AGC
- Internal 1GB flash memory
- USB Interface for file transfer
- Up to 10 second pre-record buffer
- Omni-directional Sennheiser mic capsule
- 18.5 hours of recording time
- Nine user templates for settings
- Uses two AA batteries
- Headphone amplifier

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Few people enjoy tough learning curves and lengthy instructions, so when the mic arrived with its thin 40-page booklet explaining features and specifications, it was a breath of fresh air. After leafing through the manual (to find out what the three buttons and jogswitch do), my goal was to insert the batteries and use the Flash Mic until I had to read the enclosed literature. I simply pushed the red record button, and put the mic in front of co-workers and asked them to talk. I used the AGC function to ensure good levels and to see how the processing affected recorded material. To my surprise, the compression and limiting in the mic AGC were transparent. I heard great levels and good sonic response from the soft-spoken and loud-mouths alike. The LCD display



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More features

The Flash Mic is packaged with a Flash Mic Manager CD-ROM application, which is Windows and Mac compatible. The Flash Mic Manager is not necessary for standard operation, but it allows for detailed control and customization of the Flash Mic. For example, Flash Mic Manager allows the user to upload as many as nine presets to the Flash Mic and it comes with an interface

that imports audio to a PC or Mac.

With 1GB of fixed internal memory, the Flash Mic offers six available 16-bit linear PCM or MPEG recording formats ranging from uncompressed 48kHz WAV (three hours of record-

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ing), to compressed 32kHz MP2 (18 hours and 25 minutes of recording). A record lock feature prevents accidental stoppage during recording and levels are manually or the automatically controlled. The mic also features a switchable 100Hz high-pass filter and an internal realtime clock.

The big question concerning the mic dealt with battery life. It takes two AA alkaline or nickel metal hydride rechargeable batteries. I conducted a battery life test with fresh alkaline batteries and it recorded continuously for seven hours. When the battery life begins to

Detail of the operating controls, display and connections.



dwindle, the LCD display and backlight begin to flash. Changing batteries does not erase recorded material, but the batteries must be changed within 60 seconds or the internal clock will reset. The mic does not have an automatic shut-off function.

Having used the latest technology in media storage and transfer, this product is a considerable milestone for HHB and Sennheiser. Reporters, public speakers and anyone looking to capture audio on the fly now have an easy, economical avenue. Not only is the Flash Mic a great idea, it delivers excellent sounding audio with no strings (or wires) attached. 

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Editor's note: Field Reports are an exclusive Radio magazine feature for radio broadcasters. Each report is prepared by well-qualified staff at a radio station, production facility or consulting company.

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