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His master's voice!

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His master's voice!

A review of EditorsKeys Portable Vocal Booth Pro

By Kevin Cook



Let me get the price out of the way first on this one - its only £269.99 excluding VAT. I want to mention this right up front as you could easily believe that a product so well thought out, produced and bundled would be beyond a lot of videographer's budgets. Its not - and more to the point, its a cracking piece of kit that everyone of you will find useful.

Before I get on with the details of what's included in the 'Portable Vocal Booth Pro 2' bundle and what its like to install and use, let's look briefly at the company behind it.

Origins

You might think this is an odd product coming from a company calling themselves 'EditorsKeys'. However, they have actually been making stuff other than bespoke keyboards and keyboard shortcut over-stickers for video and audio editing systems for some time. They now have a growing range of recording technology - including microphones, i-Pad recording kits, tele-prompters, headphones and accessories - and they also have a wide range of workshops and training materials on video, audio and music production software.

I guess like many businesses, EditorsKeys have expanded their business to match their portfolio of clients - so the Vocal Booth actually sits very neatly amongst everything else they sell. You should understand that the booth itself will appeal to a much wider audience than just videographers looking to record a VO. In fact you are more likely to find them being used at the heart of music

a recording studio, radio station or any other application where you want to record audio in a flat-sounding environment (uncoloured by reverb and room acoustics) with reduced interference from the surroundings.

The product is actually in its second version now, with the addition of folding side screens to the booth which helps with isolation. Further enhancements include the ability to either use it positioned on desktop or attached to stand for standing height operation.

The Vocal Booth bundle reviewed here included the booth itself, plus the pop-shield, floor stand and their SL300 USB microphone. If you have a suitable mic and pop shield already (which I suspect many of you have) you can save yourself a hundred quid or so. There are also individual prices for the cheaper SL150 mic (£79.99) and pop-shield (£19.99) - plus other recording kit bundles.

Deployment

Once unwrapped you are only minutes away from being ready to record. If the booth is to be mounted on the floor stand its a simple matter of screwing it on - and the stand itself is very much like any other lighting stand with locking legs and single-stage central height adjustment.

For use on a desktop the bundle includes three stubby legs which screw into the booth base and have rubber foam bases to them to help with isolation from the desktop itself.

All that's left to do then is attach the USB connector on the mic to your computer. There's no software to install as its all

included in the mic which will utilise whatever recording software you have installed on your computer. In its simplest form this could be the standard audio recorder in Windows which I tested and it worked perfectly well. Of course you could have a whole lot more control over the output and recording if you used a more sophisticated audio recording package - but its not requisite.

Ready to record

The portability and speed at which it can be deployed is what really impresses me about the Vocal Booth Pro. Unless you have a recording booth permanently set up in your studio, rigging up for a vocal recording (with proper sound proofing and environment control) can be a proper pain. I've tried all sorts in the past - including sticking my head under a quilt (which works well - but looks stupid) and nothing compares to having something purpose-built and ready to go when you need it.

Whilst you can get some

great results from DIY sound-booth set-ups its often just as important to look the part. You are hardly going to impress your client if they come to your studio to record their VO and you suddenly start to smother them with your quilt!

You could just as easily take the Vocal Booth Pro on location to your client's premises and get them to do their piece there - in a reassuring environment. All you'd need is the booth bundle, a laptop and the means to monitor your recording.

The SL300 Mic

There's no doubt in my mind that the core benefit of this package is the self-contained nature of the booth itself, but I also liked the simplicity of the way the SL300 mic self-installed on my computer. If by chance it doesn't work straight away the only instructions is a single paragraph that takes you through selecting the mic as your preferred audio input device to your soundcard. It really is a simple process on a PC - and looks like its just as simple on a Mac too.





The SL300 is a unidirectional, condenser-type microphone with built-in analogue to digital converter. The mic head features dual 34mm internal shock-mounted diaphragms. There are two simple user controls, the first offering on/off of a low-cut filter which knocks out any frequency below 200hz. The second gives you a -10db setting for when you are recording instruments rather than voice. The mic's frequency response is quoted as 20-20kHz with sensitivity at -36dB±2dB.

Cradled in the supplied shock-mount system, the brass die-cast body gives the mic a very solid feel to it. Whilst you need to protect any condenser mic from serious knocks and bangs the SL300 does feel like it will wear well and travel.

Though only an aesthetic, I also liked the little blue light that shines through the mic head when its powered up and active. Apart from impressing those you are recording, it also gives you a visual indicator that the mic is connecting properly to computer. Whilst there are microphones with much higher specifications (and price tags to go with it) the



SL300 does a good job - and the convenience of USB connection and installation is just great. The resultant test recordings that I made were very good - with a wonderful flatness that could be "coloured" to taste or purpose in post production.

I'd also watched and listened to some other examples online - including a selection of musicians who use the Vocal Booth to record both voice and instruments in their home studios. The results are all very impressive for what is a compact and affordable recording system.

Conclusion

There's not a lot to dislike about the Vocal Booth Pro actually. The only thing I can really suggest as an improvement are slightly thicker foam feet on the desktop legs. This would help with isolation - especially with people like me who tend to inadvertently tap on the desk as they speak. Another tiny criticism is that when in desktop configuration the whole thing is a little front heavy and can topple forward - especially if the booth flaps are out fully and the mic is sitting forward on its mounting arm. Two more feet or simply moving the current feet fixing points to the outer edge of the flaps would solve this.

The plus points are plentiful and have already been covered I think - but just to stress the things that impressed me the most are its simplicity, portability, build quality, ease of use and the quality of the final recordings it creates. You can't really want for any more than that can you? ■

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Notes: More details and online ordering is available from www.editorskeys.com

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