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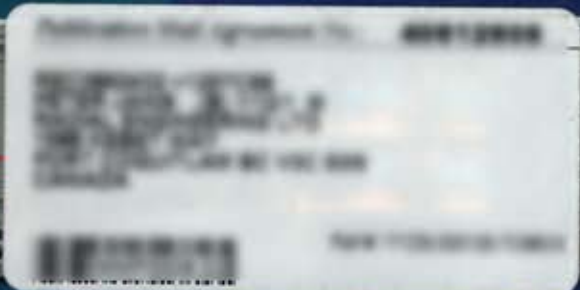
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RADIAL ENGINEERING USB-PRO USB DIRECT BOX



Sometimes I think Radial Engineering (www.radialeng.com) is in the business of inventing cool new gizmos to solve problems you didn't know you had... or that you knew you had but didn't know there was a fix for. Here's another example: Radial's first-ever digital audio product, the USB-Pro (price \$229 street).

Probably the easiest way to describe the USB-Pro is a cross between a USB interface and a direct box. It takes audio signals (up to 24-bit/96 kHz) from your computer via USB and sends them to a mixing console or PA system as low-impedance mic-level signals. If you're using a laptop in conjunction with pro audio gear at a venue or in a large studio and you have a need to get impeccable audio output into your analog system, the USB-Pro will do it for you ruggedly and elegantly, over mic cables up to 300 feet long.

Like most other Radial boxes, the USB-Pro is built to withstand everything



up to and including being run over by a semi. It's built into a wraparound 14-gauge steel chassis that protects its controls from bumps and drops, with a huge non-slip rubber base pad. The controls and jacks are all recessed for protection yet easy to reach. On the input side, you get a USB input port, a headphone minijack for monitoring, a Level pot, a Mono switch; on the output side there are two XLR jacks and a ground lift switch; and hidden in the side of the unit are two transformer-isolation switches to help alleviate ground hum. It's powered from the USB port and has a small green LED to indicate power-on. A class-compliant USB device, it works on Windows and Mac OS X computers immediately without any drivers to install.

In use, the USB-Pro delivers the goods with style. Having two different ways to lift the ground—transformer isolation and/or a conventional pin-1 disconnect on the XLRs—gives you great flexibility in providing a clean signal to audio equipment, and the D/A converter sounds clean and clear. One warning, though: Radial warns that the built-in headphone amplifier is "very powerful", and they're not kidding! Even my old 600 ohm AKG headphones could be driven to screaming levels with no trouble at all, and very low impedance phones go from near-silent to ear-busting with a tiny twist of the Level pot.

As with every other Radial product, the USB-Pro is a device that instantly provides a clean, elegant solution to a specific problem. I can't wait to see what else Radial comes up with for the digital world!