

Solutions for expanding your Pro Tools setup

While Pro Tools LE goes some of the way towards bringing the HD experience to the project studio, the creative options don't end there... Mike Hillier asks for more.

There's no doubting that Pro Tools LE 8 is a powerful production tool, putting much of the flexibility of a dedicated Pro Tools HD rig within reach of project studio owners. Inevitably, though, there are features from HD that haven't made the transition to LE, which lacks the muscle of Digidesign's TDM processors. Among the 'limitations' of Pro Tools LE is a reduced track count, lack of support for higher sampling rates, no automatic delay compensation and the omission of several tools for sound-to-picture work. Until recently, the only way to gain access to these tools was to hire a few hours in a studio.

The right tools

While an LE system can't match the capabilities of a full HD rig, it is now possible to come much closer thanks to the Music Production Toolkit 2, DV Toolkit 2 and new

Complete Production Toolkit. These bring new plug-ins and tools and unlock additional power in Pro Tools LE, providing you with the tools to perform nearly any function that you could inside a fully spec'ed Pro Tools HD rig using Native processing in Pro Tools LE. There are still advantages to HD systems, but more and more producers are realising that they can take work home from the studio and tweek away to their heart's content in their project studio using the same tools as they use at work.

Not everyone needs all of the tools in the Toolkits, of course, so which Toolkit is most appropriate for you depends largely on the kinds of projects you commonly find yourself working on. Musicians and music producers, for example, will find the Music Production Toolkit 2 far more useful than the DV Toolkit, while professionals working in the field of digital video will find the DV Toolkit 2 almost invaluable.

The Music Production Toolkit

We're huge fans of the Music Production Toolkit 2 and have been since we first got our hands on it. For many users, the expanded track count alone is worth the entry price. While Pro Tools LE 8 brought the basic track count out-of-the box up to 48 channels, the Music Production Toolkit 2 raises this still further to 64 channels, which should be enough for almost any project studio session. However, the jewels of the Music Production Toolkit 2 can be found in the full multitrack edition of Beat Detective and the five new plug-ins bundled with the Toolkit.

Beat Detective is one of Pro Tools' most advanced technologies, delivering outstanding rhythmic analysis and correction tools that can turn drum patterns inside-out, tighten up sloppy playing or be used to appropriate a groove from one track to another. Pro Tools LE users have been given a taste of Beat Detective, but it was restricted in that only one track could be worked on at any one time, which made editing multitrack recorded drums an incredibly difficult task.

The Music Production Toolkit 2 gives Pro Tools LE users access to the full multitrack Beat Detective, which enables you to 'grab' the groove from multiple audio tracks and perform edits in such a way as to ensure that all of the tracks remain in phase (assuming, of course, they were recorded that way in the first place).

The five new plug-ins are Digidesign's own Hybrid synthesizer (designed by the company's AIR Group), TL Space Native Edition (a convolution reverb), Smack!



The Music Production Toolkit 2 provides you with a fantastic selection of tools for creating, editing and mixing music.

(another effect designed by the AIR Group), Eleven LE (guitar amp and cabinet emulation) and the Structure LE sample player. Of these plug-ins, TL Space gets the most use in our studio, providing a huge range of reverb options from rooms and springs to plates (there's also a variety of wild special effect treatments to boot). TL Space nicely rounds off the reverb options already built-in to Pro Tools, balancing out the algorithmic D-Verb and new Spring emulation.

Hybrid is a welcome addition to any studio and complements Pro Tools 8's new Vacuum synth beautifully, providing a more modern approach to sound design than its retro-style sibling. When we reviewed the Music

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The three Toolkits are available now from Digidesign. To use the Music Production Toolkit 2 or DV Toolkit 2 you will need either Pro Tools LE 7.3 (or higher) or Pro Tools M-Powered 7.3 (or higher) and a compatible interface. However, to access all 64 channels in either of these Toolkits you will need Pro Tools LE 8. The Complete Music Production Toolkit requires Pro Tools LE 8.

Music Production Toolkit 2 £288.

DV Toolkit 2 £903

Complete Production Toolkit £1,398

TECHNOLOGY Third-party alternatives If a full Toolkit is overkill, consider alternatives to their individual elements

While expanding your track count does entail investing in one of the Toolkits, there are alternatives to some of their other tools and plug-ins that you might want to consider if the main attractions of the various Toolkits are the plug-ins included in each. For example, there are several convolution reverbs you can use in Pro Tools as alternatives to TL Space. One of our favourites is AltVerb, which comes with one of the biggest accompanying libraries we've seen. Waves IR-1 is another popular choice, as is McDSP's Revolver.

Digidesign's Eleven LE amp simulator follows in the footsteps of other powerful guitar effects processors, including Line 6's Amp Farm (which kick-started the amp-simulation market). Our favourites, though, are IK Multimedia's AmpliTube 2 series and Native Instruments' Guitar Rig 3, which is capable of some very extreme processing. Unlike Eleven LE, both of these plug-ins also include stompbox and rack emulations. If you don't feel you'll need these, Softube's Amp Room has some pretty excellent emulations of three absolutely essential amplifiers.

Structure LE integrates extremely well with Pro Tools, but it doesn't offer anywhere near the complexity and expandability of Native Instruments' Kontakt 3 sampler, which has become the industry standard, defeating some pretty stiff competition in the process.

Finding alternatives for Hybrid and Smack! is a little easier as Pro Tools LE 8 already comes with alternative compressors and synths, including Vacuum and the Bomb Factory BF76, a Urei 1176

emulation. If you're looking for a synth with a similar sound to Hybrid, try some of the other wavetable-based synths, such as Cakewalk's exceptional Rapture or NI's equally impressive Massive. Since it has three modes, Smack! is actually a very versatile compressor, and finding a similar one isn't quite as easy, although there are some very flexible compressors on the market. Softube's FET Compressor is one of the best FET-based models we've seen recently, while IK Multimedia's T-Racks 3 has some excellent models, including a new Opto Compressor and a vintage tube compressor modelled on the Fairchild 670.

Alternatives to

Digidesign's Eleven LE include IK's AmpliTube 2 and NI's Guitar Rig 3.

