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X-Tempo Pok

You have two limbs you're not using for recording yet—what's up with THAT?



The problem

Recording musicians who work alone have to wear a lot of different hats. As a one-man show, you have all the production and engineering duties in addition to playing your instrument and/or singing. That can get tough.

I'm a guitar player and I like to stand when I record. It's how I play guitar live, how I'm most comfortable, and how I get the best performance. There's one small problem. When I work standing up I find myself constantly leaning over my desk to fiddle with Pro Tools and I constantly have to take my guitar off. Over the course of a session it can really slow things down and break my creative momentum.

A solution?

X-Tempo Designs hopes to solve this problem with the introduction of the Pok. The Pok is a 12" x 7" foot controller that functions as a wireless remote keyboard for your DAW. Constructed from high-impact plastic and available in graphite grey or "moon rock" blue, the POK features two rows of four footswitches in a stair-step configuration. It connects to the host computer using a wireless USB dongle (it's not Bluetooth, in case you were curious) and includes a software editor for programming button functions. The package ships with editor software for Mac OS X, Windows XP and Windows Vista.

Installation

Installation of the Pok is dead simple. Install the batteries in the floor unit, plug the USB receiver into the host computer, and press any button on the Pok while holding it 2" or less from the dongle. That's just to pair up the unit and your computer—after that you can use the Pok from considerable distances. Should the Pok and your computer lose communication (if you unplug the dongle, for example) you may have to repeat this little "getting-to-know-each-other" maneuver.

Installing the Pok editor software allows deep editing of the Pok functions and lets you load and save presets for button functions (useful if you work with multiple DAW programs).

The Pok ships with a Pro Tools configuration, but X-Tempo includes presets for Digital Performer, Cubase, Logic, and Ableton Live. Loading a new preset is as simple as opening the Presets folder and selecting a new layout. The Pok functions as a remote keyboard so there is nothing you need to configure inside your DAW, just plug and play.

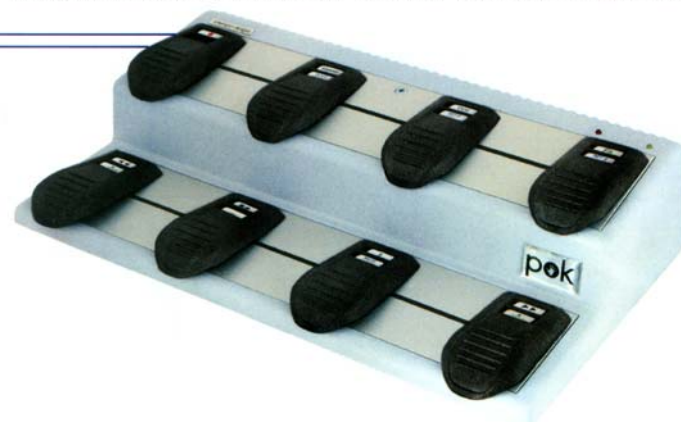
In use

I'm a Pro Tools user, so I was able to dive in and start using the Pok right away. Seven of the switches on the Pok can control up to three functions via a single press, double press, or a function press (for a bare-bones setup the double- and function-presses can be disabled). The eighth switch is used as a function modifier control for the other switches and can control one additional function

more than a few times. Don't get me wrong, you won't be doing any complicated edits with the Pok, but it works very well for navigating your way through the timeline and puts the transport controls at your feet. In other words, everything needed to track while you play or sing.

On my second session with the Pok I decided to dig into the more advanced capabilities that the Pok Editor software provides—with a graphical representation of the Pok with clickable areas under each switch for the single, double, and function press controls.

Editing a control is as simple as double-clicking the name and assigning a new name or key command. Because the Pok works as a wireless keyboard it's not possible to assign functions that don't have a key equivalent in the DAW. However, since most DAWs allow at least limited



via a function-press. In total, the Pok can easily control up to 22 functions—pretty impressive for a foot controller with only eight keys!

There are two small adhesive labels on each switch that indicate the default single- and double-press functions. The markings are easy to read in good lighting, but I found myself straining to see them in dim light. After using the Pok for a few hours most people will memorize the controller's layout, but I do wish there were a better way to identify the controls assigned to each switch. In reality, a scribble strip or any kind of electronic label would be cost prohibitive, so the adhesive labels are probably the best compromise.

Workflow

Integrating the Pok into my workflow was nearly seamless and I made it through an entire guitar-and-vocal session without touching my computer's conventional keyboard

key command customization, this really shouldn't pose a problem for most users.

Lastly, the editor allows you to load and save preset configurations from the host computer. Only one preset can be actively loaded at a time, but changing presets is an easy thing to accomplish using the Load Profile command.

So, then...

You could use the Pok live, too. Consider your needs and decide if the Pok will make your life so much easier that it justifies the (nontrivial) price. There is currently nothing else like it—I think plenty of people are going to get a lot of mileage out of this innovative tool. ☺

Price \$599 (\$479 street)

More from: X-Tempo Designs LLC, P. O. Box 351446, Los Angeles, CA 90035. 323/655-0512, www.x-tempozone.com.