

## **Radio World Magazine**

### **User Report**

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#### **BluePack Plays The Field**

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Baltimore - We've all heard what happens when field reporters use inferior gear. We know how bad a cell phone is for reporting live news, and how dictation recorders compress audio to something your grandparents can eat without their teeth. But, we need field reporting; it keeps us up to date, gets the news out to our listeners and makes us a powerful resource. Remember radio as a resource? Lots of people still do and they turn to us when something happens.

I've been interested in some new live reporting gear for a while but hadn't found the right tools. I first looked at the new JK Audio BluePack units as prototypes at the 2008 NAB show. It appeared to meet many of the needs we have for students who do field reporting around campus and in town events.

#### Expansion Unit

As WLOY has expanded its community presence and sports coverage, we have been seeking options for 'on-the-fly' reporting. We already use the JK Audio RemoteMix Sport for basketball and lacross events, and have carried it to tournaments without failures. All of our studios have JK Audio Innkeeper units for telephone interfaces as well, so my confidence in the product line is pretty high.

The BluePack is a combination of microphone preamp, headphone amp, a mixer, and Bluetooth wireless interface. The small metal case (less than 5" x 4" x 2") includes a long belt clip for easy carrying and the case is slightly curved to make it more comfortable on a hip. Power comes from a 9V battery that should last about 10 hours in the field. It has nice, large dials on the face for control of the microphone, auxiliary and headphone levels, with a clip indicator. LEDs also indicate Bluetooth and power status.

Connections include XLR for the microphone, 1/4" for the headphones and 1/8" for the stereo line output and the auxiliary send input jacks. The auxiliary send allows you to add an additional stereo audio device to the microphone-based interview (or field report) so that you can carry along station IDs, music beds, or additional audio materials prepared in advance. MP3 devices and iPods will make a great companion to this for field reporters.

JK Audio sent over a pre-production unit for us to test and we had great results. WLOY General Manager Tim McGee has some experience with all of the technology at the station and field recording so he was a natural to test the

device. With an EV635A and some headphones and we were ready to test the basics. Tim uses a Nokia 5300 Xpress Music cell phone on Cingular, so we set it in Bluetooth pairing mode and pressed the blue button on the BluePack. His phone and the Pack paired up almost immediately and we were ready to go. I had him call into the station production studio (via a JK Audio Innkeeper 1r unit) on his phone while the Bluetooth connection was hot and we got great audio immediately, dumping straight to ProTools for replay tests. We experienced a bit of handling noise with the EV635A so we switched to the better-damped RE50B, which eliminated the noise.

Obviously you can hear the difference between someone speaking into the microphone built into a cell phone and a professional handheld microphone, but it was considerably cleaner than we expected.

In outdoor operations, studio operations and even with the cell phone 30ft away, the system performed without a hitch, never losing the Bluetooth pairing and only experiencing noise when we kept the phone on the other side of two 52dB steel studio doors!.

The only issue we noted was a high-pitched RF noise in the headphones from the Bluetooth antenna. According to the folks at JK Audio, they have already addressed this issue with a new PCB that was not in my pre-production sample unit. It was not noticeable in the recordings of the audio so it appears to mainly affect the user experience.

Nearly identical results were achieved with a Motorola KRZR phone (Sprint service) as the test device. We made several calls to other people over the system with/without using the BluePack and EV combo; they all noted an audible improvement to the call with the BluePack.

The BluePack allows you to connect an audio recorder for both recording and playback, depending on your needs. If you are doing a live event from the field, an iPod with station IDs and music breaks can give you some breathing room very easily. The auxiliary input has its own level control so you can even dial it in as a music bed.

### Pack and Play

We connected the output jack of the BluePack to a Marantz PMD620 (Thanks to Broadcasters General Store) and did some quick field recordings. The output has great fidelity (it sends your microphone to the left channel and the Bluetooth input to the right) and we quickly made some very airworthy interview clips. A reporter could sit in their car and dial up someone for an interview, record the interview and then play it back during their live report.

We have already made plans to include a BluePack in our sports reporting. It was very easy for the students to understand the value of the unit and various

applications for the station, especially on-campus field reports. One of them suggested using their EVDO phone to pull our Web stream and play it at in-town events instead of a radio. The BluePack runs 17kHz on the Bluetooth headphone connection, we could really be on to a new application here.