



Yamaha's London-based Commercial Audio support team (from left): Tree Tordoff, Taku Nishikori, Tim Harrison and Andy Cooper

Dan Goldstein visits Yamaha Commercial Audio's London Support Centre to see how the company is adapting to a digital future beyond mixing consoles

Beyond the desk

Is there such a thing as too much success? In business, perhaps there can be – especially if it means you become known for doing one thing incredibly well, when in fact you would rather be known for doing many different things equally as well.

Take Yamaha's Commercial Audio division, for example. Ever since the business unit came into being with the launch of the PM1D seven years ago, it has

The Centre's soundproof room acts as both a demo facility and a seminar space



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been known for its expertise in the design, manufacture and support of digital mixing consoles. To many in the sound installation community, the name Yamaha is simply synonymous with mixing desks.

Which would be fine, except that – as we all know – the market for big digital consoles is finite, while that for audio DSP in the wider built environment still has enormous unfulfilled potential. Faced with the task of promoting the Yamaha brand to the broader systems integration market, the company has realised that its success with digital desks is as much a

hindrance as it is a help. "This business unit has always been console-driven," concedes Nick Cook, general manager of Yamaha Commercial Audio. "The digital desks are what people know us and trust us for."

Yet the reputation is – for all the right reasons – unjustified. Within a couple of years of the PM1D launch, Yamaha had re-engineered its DSP expertise into the DME32, the first in a series of 'digital mix engine' products aimed at the commercial integration sector. Since then the DME series has continued to evolve, and at this year's PLASA show, Yamaha unveiled a range of three DME Satellite processors, which round out the range by making the company's offering truly scalable and, therefore, suitable for a very wide range of installed applications.

Importantly for the integrator community, the new DME Satellites come in both CobraNet and EtherSound network

versions, Yamaha having signed a licensing agreement with the latter earlier this year. They also feature RS232C/RS422 connectors for remote control by AMX or Crestron touchpanels, and have Ethernet and USB ports as well as 8-in, 4-out GPI interfaces which allow the connection of control switches and indicators. DME Designer software allows installers to get 'inside the box' and tailor each system to the requirements of the project.

It's a far cry from the rock-and-roll world of digital consoles, and Cook recognises that the difference between the

two is more than merely a question of end usage. "People tend to take our desks on the road and they just work – you plug them in and leave them to get on with it," he says. "In the commercial world, you're looking at tendering for a project, designing a system, installing it, maintaining it, then possibly upgrading it over time. If you want to succeed as a manufacturer, you have responsibilities that you just can't walk away from."

It is this need for ongoing, locally based manufacturer assistance that has led to the setting up of Yamaha Commercial Audio's Support Centre in Chiswick, west London. Taku Nishikori, the Centre's manager, explains how it fits into the grander European scheme of things:

"We support our customers as locally as we can, but although we have subsidiaries in France, Germany and so on, there are

which acts as both a demo facility and a seminar space."

Nishikori has a staff of three product specialists: Andy Cooper, Tree Tordoff and Tim Harrison, the former Fuzion systems guru whose main focus is network audio – DSP, amps and speakers. The team is small but, importantly, it operates from the same location as Yamaha's London R&D Centre and, while there is no formal working relationship between the two, there is clearly potential for the Commercial Audio support function to spread its wings.

"Working closely with our European subsidiaries means that we can act as an R&D link between them and Japan," says Cook. "We have regular meetings where we discuss new requirements that have arisen from discussions with our installer base, and we look at these at a corporate level to see which should be given priority in terms of product development."

With PLASA having also witnessed the launch of the NA148-ES AES-to-EtherSound converter, the LS9 compact digital mixer and the Tn Series of high-powered, low-impedance networking amplifiers, it's clear that this R&D process is accelerating. The best is yet to come, and it will probably come quicker than we think. ■■

times when projects come up that are too complex for them to handle, and we can assist with those. We also act as a training resource – educating our dealers about new products and how they are used. We have a fully soundproof room



The new DME Satellite processors offer scalable installed solutions