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SWIZZ ARMY CABLE TESTER

Nothing is less glamorous when you don't need it...or more beautiful when something breaks. Yes, I'm talking about test gear, and, unless you're a calibration junkie (like Eddie Ciletti and me), you'll probably never give test gear a second thought. Nonetheless, let's discuss a product that makes your audio life easier.

This quick-test device can save your gig — and maybe even your job

Few things in audio are more frustrating or cost more downtime than bad cables and connections. It seems bands and sound companies always have a bad cable of some sort at every gig. This is usually because many of us toss suspicious cables back into

BY MIKE SOKOL

the wire box and never bother to test anything until the next gig rolls around. That's when the mic lead with the intermittent finds its way into the most important signal path of the show. (Could it be that Murphy's Law was written about live stage work?)

So what to do? First, anytime you get a suspicious cable on a gig, tape over both ends with gaff tape and put it in a special place for later testing. Second, get a tester that's easy enough to use and test those cables *before* the next gig. A cable tester is one of the best investments you'll ever make. Moreover, the first time it saves you from delaying, or even losing, a gig due to system failure, it will more than pay for itself.

What to get? Well, for hard-core wire-nuts, you can use a VOM (Volt Ohm Meter). However, they're difficult to use in the heat of battle and don't check for intermittent connections

very well. For the price of a microphone, you can buy a dedicated cable tester that will allow you to check a pile of cables in less time

than it takes to read one of my long-winded articles.

The best and most comprehensive cable tester I've come across is the Swizz

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Army 6-in-1 Cable Tester from EBTECH. I just love this thing. It's made from cold-rolled steel, which means you can kick it around stage or throw it in your gig case without fear of failure. In addition, it has a cool belt clip that allows me to keep it close for those frantic minutes when everything seems to go wrong. Finally, I think it tests just about every type of cable and situation you're likely to encounter in a studio or on stage.

Here are the basics of the Swizz Army 6-in-1 Cable Tester. An ultra-cool LED is included to show you which pins are wired to what. You get to see continuity, opens, and shorts for each pin. This is especially useful for checking strange adapter cables such as pin-2 to pin-3 hot swappers for English gear. Oh, and since it uses a tones rather than a D.C. voltage, it will pass right through a transformer splitter

and tell you if it's working or not.

The short detector is sensitive enough that it will also show partially shorted cables that have a conductive path between pins 2 or 3 and the shield. This is what often causes Phantom Crackle, where a cable will work perfectly with a passive source, but as soon as you put 48 volts on the line, it starts to crackle. Moisture in the cable end or a conductive plastic shield that's smashed down by the strain relief usually cause Crackle. (Yes, that one took a while to figure out.)

The Test-Tone Generator will put out a 440 Hz or 1 kHz tone at +4 dBu, −10 dBV, or Mic level. This can help ring out a snake with a split in short order or check a mixing console to see if all the input strips are working.

A Phantom Detector looks for D.C. voltage on pins 2 and 3. Now you'll

know if you have power available for that condenser mic or active DI box.

The Grounded Shield Detector looks to see if pin 1 (shield) is tied to the XLR shell. It generally should *not* be tied to the shell for a mic lead. I've found that many times when a DI box can't break a ground loop from a stage amplifier, it's not the DI's fault. It's because there's a mic lead with the shell tied to the shield and the ground currents are passing directly through the metal case of the box. Think about it....

The Intermittent Detector lets you test a cable for intermittent shorts and opens while literally swinging the whole mess around your head. (I often do this, so don't get real close to me while I'm testing cables.) A momentary switch resets an LED. You don't have to stare at the display looking for it to "blink" since the circuit will store the failure. Very cool, indeed!

An Installed Cable Tester lets you check a long cable run without having to loop a cable back to the test position. Just plug in a shorting plug on the remote end, and this tester will show you if you have continuity all the way to the far end.

Since you're wondering, the Swizz Army will check all flavors of connectors such as XLR, 1/4-inch TRS, RCA, 1/8-inch stereo, TT patchbay cables, and MIDI. Furthermore, this thing will run for months on a pair of AA batteries. There's even a cool "blinky" mode where all the LEDs chase like a little disco show. It's just one more way to scare the locals and intimidate guitar players.

What's not to love? I can't think of anything I don't like about this tester. It gets a perfect 10 from me.

Mike Sokol is a musician/engineer/writer with some 30 years experience on both sides of the microphone. He even did a stint designing calibration gear to test components in missile guidance systems. (Yes, it's the absolute truth.)

ROAD Test

MANUFACTURER: Ebtech 185 Detroit Street Cary IL 60013
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APPLICATION: Tests all flavors of audio cables. This one does it all....

SUMMARY: Tests for shorts, opens, and intermittent connections on XLR, 1/4-inch, 1/8-inch, RCA, TT, and MIDI cables. Also includes a tone generator and phantom power detector.

STRENGTHS: Someone used to testing cables while under fire must have designed this, because it does everything logically and quickly.

WEAKNESSES: None.

PRICE: $149.95   **EQ FREE LIT. #:** 102