

Platform Monitors – Which is right for you.

Dale Alexander's input for an article published in Church Production Magazine.

Wedges, headphones or IEMs, which is correct for your church? That is not a simple question to answer, as there are many factors that must be considered concerning this issue. Some of the factors are; how big is your room, what is your worship style, how many musicians and singers do you have, do you have an orchestra, do you have a choir, what are the acoustic characteristics of the worship center, what are the acoustic characteristics of the platform/stage, how large/small is your platform/stage, what is the skill level of the tech crew, are your musicians professionals or amateurs and finally **WHAT IS YOUR BUDGET?**

Another item to consider is where will the monitor mixes originate? Are they all to be mixed from the FOH or do you have a dedicated monitor mixer? In either case, will the musicians have an opportunity to customize their individual monitor mix with either a more-of-me system or a matrix system? Or, do they simply get what they are given?

Let's explore some of the factors and see what works best in a given situation. If you have a small to medium size room, 250 – 1000 seats you will probably have a problem with monitor and instrument amplifier bleed in the FOH mix. If you have a choir that sings with a rhythm section and/or orchestra you will have a problem with the monitors and instrument amplifiers bleeding into the choir microphones, thus further exacerbating the problem. This is a perfect situation for a personal monitor system using headphones or IEMs with either a more-of-me system or a matrix system. With this type of system all of the wedges and instrument amplifiers can be removed from the stage. This will clear up the FOH mix and make the choir microphones more effective. The type of personal monitor system chosen is a function of ministry style, budget and personal preference.

Which personal monitor system is right for your church? A few years ago there weren't many choices as these type of systems were not being used by the touring/concert world. Let's face it, there are few manufacturers that are developing product specifically for the church market. The touring/concert market and the recording studios drive most manufacturers. Since the introduction of IEM systems in the touring/concert world manufacturers have started developing products to be used with IEM systems. Today we have the opportunity to choose from many manufacturers and system types. So as stated earlier the type of personal monitor system you choose becomes a function of ministry style, budget and personal preference. Let's break it down and see what is involved in each of the system types.

The ultimate personal monitor system would be a high quality stereo IEM system with a dedicated mix for and controlled by each singer/musician. This type of system requires that you have a dedicated monitor console of sufficient size to provide 12-24 individual mixes. It also requires that you have the personnel capable of mixing such a

system. This type of system will remove the singer/musician from the acoustic energy on the stage and in the room because of the ear buds filling the ear canal. To compensate for this microphones must be located over the congregation and the stage. These mics must then be mixed into each of the monitor mixes. A matrix system is used by each singer/musician to refine the monitor mix and to make on the fly changes as they are required. As you can see this type of system is very expensive. There are only a handful of churches that can justify the expense of such a system. Typically, this type of system is seen in churches seating 5000 or more.

A step down from the ultimate system will still require a dedicated monitor mixer providing 12-24 mixes (either stereo or mono). But instead of each singer/musician controlling their own mix with a matrix system the monitor mix personnel will adjust each mix. The singer/musician will then have some control with a more-of-me type system where their vocal mic and instrument is looped thru the personal monitor mixer. There are a number of small mixers out there that will perform this function very well.

The next level down would utilize a small monitor mixer located on the stage near the rhythm section musicians. The more individual mixes available the better. Typically, this type of system will provide 6 – 12 mono mixes. The mixes will then be sent to each singer/musician for use with a more-of-me personal monitor mixer.

Finally, the lowest level would be to have a few mixes provided from the FOH console aux sends. Again, these mixes would be used by the singer/musician in a more-of-me system as described earlier.

The next item for consideration in the personal monitor system is whether to use in ear buds, closed cup headphones or open-air (OA) headphones. There are a few factors to consider in your selection. In the touring/concert world IEMs are almost exclusively used because the stage volume levels are usually very high and a CD quality mix can be supplied to the performer. They also have the budget to do anything they want. However, in the church we usually don't have that luxury and have to be "good stewards". In the church we also do not have (or try not to have) the very high stage volume levels therefore IEMs are not required but are still a nice touch provided mix in ambience mics. If your singers and musicians are like a lot of us and thrive on the acoustic energy in the room then open-air headphones are the preferred type of monitor transducer. The quality of sound delivered by the OA headphones is primarily a function of the speaker size and cost. The old adage "you get what you pay for" really applies here. My personal preference in OA headphones usually runs toward the offerings by Sennheiser but there are several other good quality OA headphones out there.