Checking it Out
musik Speakers by Palo Alto Audio Design

By Dana Puopolo

[September 2011] There are many speaker sets designed for desktop and laptop computers. Dana Puopolo takes a look at one design that uses digital tech and the USB port in an attempt to build a better speaker.

When the pair of musik speakers from Palo Alto Audio Design first arrived, I said to myself: "Oh Boy – yet another pair of small, cheap computer speakers with no bass and no volume." It did not turn out quite that way.

DIGITAL DESIGN

As the name indicates, Palo Alto Audio Design (www.paloaltoaudio.com) is located in the heart of Silicon Valley, California.

Their claim to fame is their "Full Digital Sound" in that the audio is pulled from the computer digitally, amplified by a high-efficiency digital amplifier and remains digital until it hits the speaker drivers.

This also explains how they can operate just on the power from the USB port.

musik speakers from Palo Alto Audio Design

These speakers are nicely styled with a silver front (including the metal grilles) and a white back. They look quite good when they are used beside a MacBook, which I believe is their intended primary market. However, they work just as well with PC computers.

USB CONNECTED SOUND

Hooking up the musik speakers was simple and easy: you just plug the left speaker into a USB port on your computer, then plug the right speaker into the left. The speakers get both sound and power from the USB port.

Windows XP immediately "found" the musik speakers and installed them.

There are three buttons located on the right side of the left speaker: two are for up and down volume (and which also control the master volume slider in XP), and a third that turns the speaker set's bass EQ on and off. A two-color LED behind the grill glows green when the EQ is off and red when it is on.

The volume and bass control are on the side

PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

Okay, now to the question you are all asking: "How do they sound, Dana?"

Better than I expected! The musik speakers have a nice, clear midrange and top end, play fairly loud and have very little of the "'boxiness" that small computer speakers are known for (such as with the JBL Platinum series I normally use on my office computer).

In fact, when my boss tried them out with her computer, she did not want to return them.

Without their EQ the musik speakers have virtually no bass; engaging the EQ gives you a fairly balanced sound down to about 200 Hz or so. These speakers will not "rock the house," nor do they have bass close to what subwoofer computer speaker systems have, but within their limitations they sound quite pleasant – and play loud enough for your office mate or the person in the next cubicle to complain about your volume.

MODEST COST

An online search shows the musik selling online for $59.95 at The Apple Store, including shipping, or $49.95, including shipping, at Amazon.

At this price point there is a lot of competition out there – including a number of 3-piece systems with subwoofers. Whether these speakers will interest you depends on your needs.

If you are looking for speakers for your notebook with a killer look, are easy to set up, travel nicely when packed beside the socks in your suitcase, and offer a real sound improvement over a laptop's built-in speakers then these will fill your needs nicely. If you are looking for room-shaking volume and a lot of bass, look elsewhere.

Techie Stats

- USB-powered full-digital active speaker
- Mini USB 2.0 input
- 2" Square magnetic loudspeaker driver
- 2.0 Channel
- 6.5(H) x 2.88(W) x 3.32(D)
- Weight - Left : 1 lb   Right : 1.05 lb

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Dana Puopolo is the Chief Engineer at WURD in Philadelphia and a long-time audio processing enthusiast. Dana's email is dpuopolo@usa.net

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