

Less Is More

GLENN COLEMAN, FOUNDER,
COLEMAN AUDIO

BY KELLEIGH WELCH

With the company's slogan, "In the end, it's always analog," knowing exactly how every part works is necessary to design and build customized gear. As a 40-plus-year veteran of the audio industry, Coleman Audio's founder and, until this year, the sole employee, Glenn Coleman, has just that knowledge, citing his experiences as a console manufacturer and studio engineer as his reasoning for expanding into his own innovative company.

Coleman started his career in the early 1970s, working in the console department of the Ft. Lauderdale, FL-based company MCI, where he would check input modules, load frames, and test the final specs on consoles before shipping.

"We did everything 'in-house,'" recalls Coleman. "After a few years in the console department, I was moved to customer service, where I was sent all over the world—Paris, London, Australia, Argentina and, of course, New York, L.A. and Nashville—doing installations and commissioning consoles. I saw some of the biggest and best studios when they were still brand-new."

In 1982, Coleman decided to

"Martin Audio was a distributor for Otari tape recorders and Amek recording consoles. I was in the service department doing repairs and setting up new gear. The sales staff found out I could design custom units and would ask me for one-off products to go with the larger sales they would make. Martin had a full machine shop, and we were allowed to use it, so I did, learning a bit more about milling and fabrication of metal enclosures," Coleman explained.

As DAWs started taking over the industry, Martin Audio downsized, eventually having to let Coleman go as his department got smaller and smaller. However, because Coleman continued to provide services through



Glenn Coleman, founder, Coleman Audio

ing going and it seemed like a smooth transition, even though I never had a plan to speak of," he said.

As the company has grown, Coleman said one of the biggest challenges is continuing to design an original product. "You take a chance on an idea, do the R&D, and make a new product hoping it turns out to be something useful that people want to use."

Of course, when he designs a successful product, seeing the end result used in real situations is one of the more enjoyable aspects of the job for Coleman. "I like doing trade shows and talking to end users. Almost all the products I've designed were fit to an end user's specific need somewhere along the line, so talking with end users is important to me," Coleman said. "I always get new ideas from them. Sometimes these ideas are modifications to existing products and sometimes they turn into new products."

All of Coleman Audio's products are built in the US, in Westbury, NY just outside New York City. Up until this past summer, Coleman Audio employed only one person, but since August, Coleman has hired a second employee to help with the business. For sales, Coleman depends on dealers and distributors, as he doesn't do any of the direct sales for his products.

"I make gear that does what it is supposed to do, sounds transparent and doesn't break down," said Coleman. "After that, I do my best to make it look cool in a vintage sort of

way, but the main thing is the way it sounds."

Coleman's latest product is the RED48, which takes the place of a large frame console's mixing buss, communication features and passive control room monitor control. Most of the company's products are used between loudspeakers and sound sources like D/A converters, including surround monitoring applications. The full catalog includes a number of VU meter packages.

Many of Coleman's designs feature passive signal paths. "My design philosophy is simple: Less is More. When you start adding all kinds of electronics to the signal path, they get in the way of the sound. If you have electronics in the signal path, no matter how good those electronics are, you have added a small bit of noise and coloration. It can't be helped. I try to keep the audio signal as close to the original as possible to keep it transparent," said Coleman.

Coleman's biggest markets include broadcasting and sound design for games, but he said he is always looking to expand into other areas. And because the company is so small, he can cater to individual tastes.

"Coleman Audio has always been a service-based company," he said. "I like to think I have the best customer service available. But there are also always new ideas and new products to make the recording engineers' jobs easier, and I'm working on my next one for NAMM right now."

Coleman Audio
colemanaudio.com

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leave MCI to work full-time at Atlantic Recording Studios in New York City, where he repaired and customized projects for the rooms.

"The engineers were always asking for meters in the studio, remote switching for tape decks, or some other gadget for a specific session. We also redesigned all the studios while I was at Atlantic, so I have a good understanding about what makes one recording studio function better than another," said Coleman.

While at Atlantic, Coleman started Coleman Audio as a service-based company, since many studios couldn't afford to have a full-time technical support engineer. Over the years, he continued to grow the company outside of his full-time jobs—leaving Atlantic to work for Martin Audio during that time frame.

Coleman Audio during this time, he took this as an opportunity to focus on his company full time.

"I decided it was time to take a chance on working just for myself," he said. "Most of Martin Audio's sales staff had moved on to other music stores, and a friend called me one day saying he was getting requests for VU meters. He knew I had built custom gear and asked if I would build a pair of stereo VU meters and he would sell them. This was the first time I started out to try and manufacture a product as opposed to building a single custom piece."

Eventually, the service workload for Coleman got smaller as computers began to dominate the industry, requiring Coleman to turn more to the manufacturing side of his business.

"By then, I had the manufactur-