

UNITED STATES

Investing in a powerful future

At NAMM 2011, Scott Harmala, vice president of US rental company (and Superbowl PA provider) ATK Audiotek, explained to **Paul Watson** why acquiring a staggering 450 Powersoft K Series amplifiers is not such a big deal...

> What was the thinking behind revamping your amplifier inventory?

"We used to tour, but we don't anymore – all our events are one-offs and the configuration of our amps changes all the time. Because of this, I have been dreaming of a universal approach: a small module of three amps that can basically be utilised for all of our speaker systems. And that makes the revamp a dream for us in terms of logistics in our warehouse, because all we have to worry about is amp channels."

What is it about the Powersoft amps that you like?

"We started looking at the K Series about four years ago – I saw it in an advert and assumed it was one of these inflated specs – how much power? Yeah, right. [Laughs]

"Anyway, we got hold of one and put it on the bench right away; and when we started running it through the numbers, we honestly couldn't believe it. At the time we weren't in the market for investing in amplifiers so it was one of those things that we just noted.

"Some time later, I was still working on this dream of having a universal one-amp package inventory and we started having problems with our existing inventory. It was obviously time to replace it, so I proposed a unified universal approach to my partners. After explaining the magnitude of this investment – and once they had picked themselves up off the floor – they understood the logistical and technical advantages it would give us. We technically made the purchase in March 2009, but we've been using them in the field for around a year now."



Scott Harmala, ATK Audiotek, with a stack of new Powersoft amplifiers

Why did you make such a huge investment?

"Well, I don't think there's going to be any major changes in passive loud-speaker technology for some time, which is the format we stick to, and 10,000W is enough power, so I am safe. Plus, I can't really imagine smaller than one rack space! The K-10 has digital in and analogue in, it's got Ethernet control, and the scalability of imbedded DSP if you want to go that approach.

"The scalable architecture is what really attracted me to it, so I could buy into it slowly and get comfortable with it. We do probably the most technically challenging stuff on the planet and we are not just an end user, we are a partner, which is critical because we will run the stuff through the mill, find the weaknesses, and then find out how easy they are to work with in terms of rectifying the problems."

This year's Superbowl was the first to be completely driven by Powersoft amplifiers; how many of the 450 amps went into the production?

"We used 72 JBL VerTec 4889, so we brought in 48 amplifiers for the PA, another 24 for the subs and then, for the foldback, another 20."

You were responsible for the pre- and post-show events as well as the half-time show; how many people did you have on-site?

"It used to be 45 people on site three-and-a-half weeks out from game day, but now it's two weeks out from the beginning. The maximum staff is about 35 people, with seven mix engineers working in a variety of capacities."

Why stick to a passive solution?

"Passive speakers are inherently more reliable; and because our shows are one-offs and logistically challenging, we have to do a complete overhaul in the way we do signal and power distribution. We have a sizeable investment in that – and I am not really keen to abandon that and build a whole new method.

"Up until recently – and by that I mean Martin's MLA – we have not had any driving incentive to say 'this is clearly a better way'. Time may show me I have jumped the gun and made a horrendous error in estimating where the future of my industry is going, but I think there are still a lot of things that need to be worked out in that technology. I can still do a lot of that wizardry with the passive solution with the amps on the ground, just with the granular approach."

So, the investment's been worthwhile?

"Transducer technology has pretty much been static for the past 50 years. Materials and sciences have got better, so we can have more power, but it's just going to be incremental improvements. I think 10,000W is enough, so my plan is to get 20 years of service life in these amps."

And from a support point of view, you must be pleased that Powersoft's US HQ has relocated to California...?

"Honestly, in the beginning I was nervous about putting all my eggs in one basket with a European company – not that I had a problem with it, but there's nobody here! [Laughs]. Powersoft had an east coast solution that we utilised, but now they're just seven miles from our office, which is perfect."

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