

APRIL 2011

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Magazine

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ROLAND VR5 A/V Mixer and Recorder

Reviewed by: Kris Rinas

company:	Roland Systems Group
product(s):	VR5 A/V Mixer and Recorder
phone:	(360) 594-4282
web:	www.rolandsystemsgroup.com
list price:	\$4,995.00

This past February I celebrated another year alive on the earth. As I entered my mid thirties I had to stop and remind myself how far A/V production technology has progressed, and how quickly technology has changed. In 1996 I started working at a television station as a cameraman. We shot on SVHS cameras, and Google was just appearing on the scene, poised to change how we use the Internet forever. At that time I never would have imagined broadcasting video over the Internet, or being able to produce video with anything but expensive broadcast-quality gear. This past February, Roland, with the release of its new VR5 A/V mixer and recorder, reminded me I am no longer 20 and living in the nineties.

The ideal application for the Roland VR5 is presentation-style events in SD resolution. This isn't going to be the switcher for your IMAG or broadcast control room where you're dealing with five video cameras and several secondary video sources. This is

for taking one video camera, a secondary video input—such as a feed from a document camera or other composite/S-Video source, and a computer graphics input for doing lower-thirds or other computer media needs—and either recording it for later use or connecting the output to a streaming system. It also provides audio inputs and an audio mixer section for managing your microphones and other audio inputs. With the audio and video handled in one box, this system provides a complete package for managing a simple video production of an event.

As I opened up the box for the first time and pulled the VR5 out of its packaging I was surprised at how small it was—I was expecting something with a bit more bulk. As I looked it over I had to ask myself the question, "What makes the VR5 any better than the old A/V mixer I have sitting on the storage shelf?" The VR5 is similar to my once beloved video mixer in that it is standard def, has three video

inputs, and will do basic keying; outside of the integrated VGA scan converter and built-in touch and LCD monitors, where is the innovation?

The search for the answer was on. I began with something I almost never do—I read the manual. While I could have jumped right in and played, I wanted to know the "why" behind the product, and the manual is usually a good place to start. While most manuals can be, quite honestly, boring, the writers at Roland hit it out of the park on this one. In fact, the manual is so good I could hand it to my grandmother (who is not a techie) and she would understand how to operate the VR5.

Into action

The manual was a good starting point, but it was now time to begin playing with the system.

The VR5's audio controls are functional, with tactile faders for precise control of audio source levels. The faders are complemented by professional XLR and 1-inch jacks, as well as consumer RCA-style audio input connectors. The two mic/line inputs each have individual gain, pan and phantom power providing 48 volts. The audio outputs on the VR5 were not forgotten either—you have your choice of XLR or RCA connectors. The mic/line inputs are not coupled with a video source and are completely independent. Another feature is the ability to have the audio inputs of

the video sources auto-follow the selected video source or operate as independent inputs. When the auto-follow feature is off, you basically have a six-channel audio mixer operating independent of the video mixer. By now I was beginning to see the real difference between my old mixer and the new VR5. My old mixer was beginning to look very outdated. It does not have XLR connectors or most of the professional features I mentioned above.

On to the video features of the unit. The VR5 video system is comprised of five video sources: three composite or S-Video, one VGA, and a dedicated file playback channel. The VR-5 has two types of professional video inputs, locking BNC composite and S-Video. The VGA input, with its integrated scan converter, can be a primary source as well as a downstream keyer, so you can create lower thirds or overlay other key effects on your program


video. The file playback channel allows you to load still images or video files and assign them to the channel making display or playback a simple process—something my old A/V mixer couldn't dream of doing.

The SD card slot has a dual role. Any images or videos you want to display or playback on the VR5 you store on the SD card. When you insert it into the VR5 it will allow you to access the files and load them into the playback channel. The second role of the SD card is for recording. You can record your program output directly to the card and, depending upon the size of the card, record up to four hours of media. And if that isn't enough, the USB connection allows you to connect the VR5 to your computer, and it will be recognized as a webcam. This, along with an active Internet connection, will allow you to broadcast a streaming video service provider such as Ustream

or Livestream,... The new sentence reads, "This, along with an active Internet connection, and a streaming video service provider such as Ustream or Livestream, will allow you to broadcast your content anywhere in the world."

So, what's the verdict?

The VR5 has just sentenced my old A/V mixer to a date with the online auction house. The VR-5 could be the ideal live production tool for smaller churches who want to produce content for their services, record and webstream. For the mid-size to larger churches, the VR-5 could be used as web broadcasting switcher that can take a stereo feed from their main audio console, a video feed from their main room switcher and mix for web broadcasting and/or recording.

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