

St Edmund's Catholic School

Preparing music students for industry with Apple and Avid

St Edmund's Catholic School are a specialist arts college who combine their A Level Music Technology course with a fully fledged commercial recording studio. Aware that their Pro Tools setup was getting long in the tooth, head of music Ken Peers asked us to help him move to a more mobile Mac setup in order to improve the studio's (and students') location recording capabilities.

Showing students the future of industry

St Edmund's had been relying on the same Apple G5 and Pro Tools HD 2 recording setup for several years and, while Ken was happy with the system's performance, he was concerned about the fact that his ageing system no longer received official support from Apple or Avid, and that no replacement standalone computer with PCIe slots seemed forthcoming.

"We're not just education-focused here, we run a commercial studio, and we can't have kit falling over in a session. We needed to reinvest in a new system so that we could show students the future of the industry as well as where we were coming from."

Ken took the decision to move away from standalone computers and opt for a combination of a MacBook Pro and Thunderbolt Magma 3T chassis, which would allow students to run a full version of Pro Tools HD with virtually no latency from any location. "We like to get out there and record," he said. "We want to show students what they'll be facing if they go out and do this for a living, rather than a lot of educational setups that are purely PCs running Cubase. I'm keen for our pupils to have a working knowledge of the technology they'll find out in the industry, and as far as I'm concerned Pro Tools is the main player."

The MacBook Pro and Magma combination is perfect for this, as it offers the power of a traditional desktop setup but is far easier to move around. ("We do have a standalone computer racked, but it takes two people to lift it!" noted Ken. "Now we can literally grab the MacBook Pro, the chassis, some I/O, throw it in the back of a car and go to record or location.") Back in the studio, their top-of-the-line MacBook Pro has enough power to run Pro Tools and power two 27" screens.

"It gives every appearance of being a Mac Pro setup but it isn't," said Ken. "We've had no problems with the processing power that you get with the modern MacBook Pros. With that and the Magma chassis, we could pull 256 tracks at a time if we wanted to, all off a laptop."



Working with...



ST EDMUND'S COLLEGE
& PREP SCHOOL

In a nutshell...

Who are St Edmunds?

St Edmund's Catholic High School is a specialist college for the arts in Dover, and combines a secondary school, sixth form and full scale commercial recording studio.

What did they need?

The school's Pro Tools setup was getting long in the tooth, and they needed an up to date setup that they could rely on during professional sessions as well as lessons.

How did Jigsaw24 help?

We kitted them out with a new Pro Tools HDX setup based around a MacBook Pro and Thunderbolt Magma 3T chassis, then added plug-ins and control surfaces to ensure everyone could get involved.

What were the benefits?

- Students now have an up to date setup that lets them learn industry applicable skills.
- This laptop-based setup allows them to try their hand at location recording (and head off to professional sessions with a familiar setup).
- The school can offer a more comprehensive service to its commercial customers, gaining additional revenue.



“I’ve been able to phone up Jigsaw24 and they’ve always pointed me in the right direction, and they always come back to me and make sure I’ve solved problems completely. It’s good to get a foot in at the highest level and take risks [like we did with this system], but it’s important to know you can pick up the phone and talk to someone who’ll have a good answer. We know a certain amount here at the sharp end, but we don’t know it all, and it’s nice to have it in the back of your mind that Jigsaw24 are there.”

Ken Peers, **St Edmund’s High School.**

Absolute reliability when there’s no second take

Because of their large live room, the school’s studio has developed a reputation for dealing with large choirs, orchestras and ensembles, and Ken is adamant that only his Mac setup is reliable enough to meet their demands.

He explained, “The Macs are totally reliable. You get very nervous about things like that when you’re recording live audio, because you can only capture it at that moment, there’s no second take. Macs are the only thing I know that can cope with every situation that you throw at them.”

Students seem to agree – Ken’s seen many of them make the move to iPad and MacBook Pro after working with the music department’s iMacs and MacBook Pros, despite the fact that the rest of their subjects use PCs. (“They recognise quality,” is Ken’s assessment.)

It was the same need for reliability that made Ken choose the Pro Tools HDX system over the HD Native system. “We didn’t want to have any issues with latency,” he said. “And it’s nice to have a system that’s totally unstressed when we record 40 or 50 mics at a time.” But he’s also quick to note that “with the Thunderbolt Native system you can do so much. That’s the beauty of Pro Tools, because you learn one set of software and then just move from the LE version, to the Native, then up to HDX [as your budget allows].”

Giving students a setup they’ll enjoy using

Another key element of the setup is the school’s new C24 control surface, which replaced an ageing Pro Control. “We only had the basic model with eight faders, so it’s nice to have 24 and let everyone get involved. And a control surface like that is a nice bit of eye candy – when parents are shown round the studios you can see them take notice, and it impresses the kids, too.”

Also impressive is the simplicity of the entire setup, from using screen zoom on 27” displays instead of showing examples on a projector, to simple file management and plug and play drives. “Working with a Mac is so much easier – it’s uncluttered and you can access everything instantly. We’ve got an iMac up here that students love because it’s dead easy to use and it’s packed with applications they can use straight away.”

Solving problems at the cutting edge

As well as buying all their kit from us (“I was thinking, ‘well I can afford X, Y and Z,’ and then Jigsaw24 had the whole alphabet there for the same price.” said Ken), St Edmund’s use Jigsaw24 for their specialist technical support.

“It was really important to us that you did pre-flighting, because the setup we had here was quite cutting edge, and nobody had put one together before, so it was important that we knew that it worked.” After Jigsaw24’s consultants ran through a few thorough rounds of pre-installation testing, Ken and his team were happy and we went to work installing the kit. We’ve since helped them with any issues they’ve had with their software, hardware or plug-ins.

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For more information about how Apple and Avid can help your music students, get in touch with us on the details below.