



[HOME](#) > [TECH AND GEAR](#)

Listeners Eat to the Beat With KJZZ's Soundbite

It's the only known mobile radio broadcast studio in the U.S. that's also a food truck and performance stage

STEVE HARVEY - FEB 18, 2019





Part radio studio, part kitchen, NPR member station KJZZ FM's Soundbite truck may well be unique in the United States. The 40-foot custom vehicle, based in Phoenix, combines a radio broadcast studio and control room, an industrial-grade kitchen and – oh, by the way – a drop-down performance stage.

“The idea for the truck came from a desire for the station to have a larger presence in the community,” explains Scott Morrow, production coordinator for KJZZ(FM) 91.5 MHz, KBAQ(FM) 89.5 MHz/K-BACH, Sun Sounds 89.5 MHz (HD3), KJZZ's youth media center Spot 127 and Soundbite. “The metro area is a big place with a diverse community. One of the folks at the station said, ‘The best bridge between people and cultures is food and music.’ That was the genesis.”

The custom vehicle, built by Apex Specialty Vehicles, a food truck fabricator, provides KJZZ (news by day, jazz and blues at night) and sister station K-BACH (a 24-hour classical music station) with a way to physically engage with the community. “We can go to art festivals or music festivals, put music on the stage and do interviews,” says Morrow.

The kitchen, which occupies the rear third of the truck, is operated by Short Leash, a local restaurateur offering signature hot dogs and doughnuts. The rest of the truck houses a radio studio, with a large picture window that looks out onto the stage, and a control room.

The studio seats three and is equipped with Shure SM7B microphones, Morrow reports. The control room, acoustically isolated from the studio, is outfitted with a Wheatstone digital radio console and seats either a board operator or a host/operator.

“The best part is that we have an internal Ethernet network with a switch and a router,” says Morrow. “We have internet access for reporting, and it also provides a connection for our rack-mounted Comrex unit linking back to the station.”

LIVE AND BROADCAST

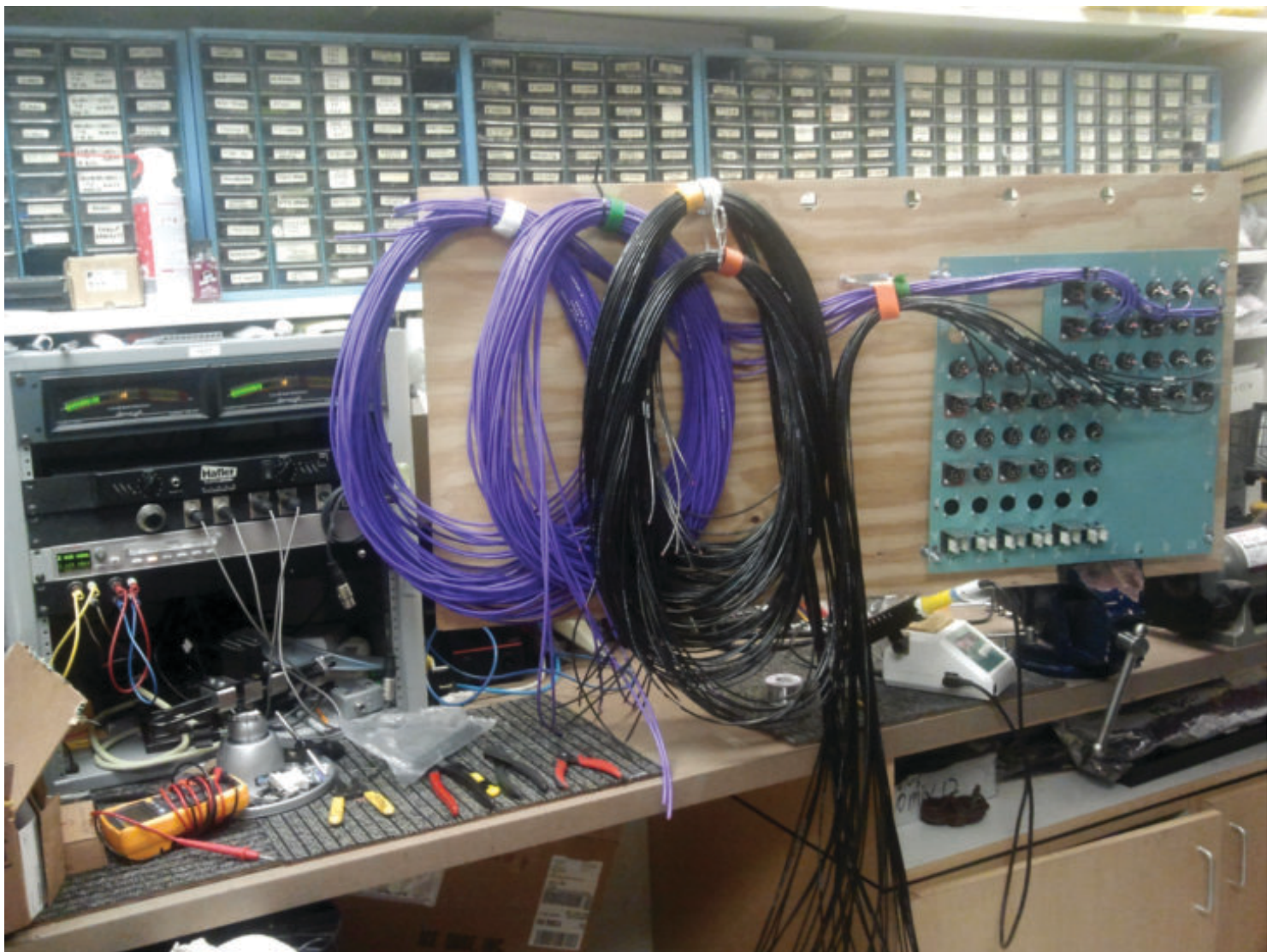
Interviews are typically recorded to a laptop running Adobe Premiere Pro, says Morrow. “It’s very basic; we’re just using it as a bit bucket. We handle editing afterward.”

For live streaming or broadcast, “We can send the audio back over a machine-to-machine 4G wireless connection that operates with multiple SIM cards,” Morrow continues. “On the station side, they can handle the audio however they like — record it, put it on air or put it to a live stream. We do have the ability to livestream directly from the truck, but we haven’t done that yet.”

Soundbite’s live broadcast debut was technically challenging, Morrow reports. “We really bit off a lot,” he laughs. “It was a performance with an 80-piece orchestra. On the day of the

event, we had 11 people working: our engineering department, IT department, on-air staff and some technicians at the station.”

Partner live production specialist Central Sound at Eight, a group associated with PBS broadcaster Channel 8, based at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication in downtown Phoenix, supported Soundbite. “They put up a Decca Tree and were doing multichannel recording and gave us a live stereo mix. The host in the truck had a video feed from the stage and did a live announce for the radio audience.”



Key to the Soundbite truck is its main I/O panel, seen here as it was being wired.

MAIN PANEL

Key to the Soundbite truck is its main I/O panel, seen here as it was being wired.

The external drop-down stage can accommodate a handful of performers. “We carry a small PA of QSC K Series mains and monitors, and we use a rackmount Midas mixer with 32 channels in, 16 out. We also have a complement of Shure SM57 and 58 microphones and Radial DI boxes, plus an assortment of snakes from Whirlwind.”

The bulk of the truck’s gear was purchased from local supplier EAR, he reports. “They’ve been very helpful and are a longtime Phoenix outfit.”

Morrow, who was hired to run the truck, oversaw equipment installation after the vehicle arrived from Apex. “I had a lot of help,” he says. “Our engineering department is small but mighty; they’re very knowledgeable.”

He is especially proud of an I/O panel that he implemented between the inside and exterior of the truck, he says. “I can take audio inside the truck, like an interview, and put it outside on the P.A. Or if there’s music on the stage running through the Midas mixer, we could also make a broadcast or recording mix in the truck and send it to a recorder or back to the station.”

FOOD!

KJZZ’s Soundbite in Phoenix is the only known mobile radio broadcast studio in the United States that’s also a combination food truck and performance stage, able to serve up audio, video, artists and hot dogs with ease.

The cable trough between the onboard console and the studio rack is about 15 feet, Morrow notes. “I’ve been keeping track of every piece of wire in that trough. We have 2,680 feet.”

External displays are positioned to either side of the stage area. “They’re fed by HDMI. Sometimes what we do with the truck is internal, representing the station, and sometimes it goes to events supported by an underwriter, so we can put our own material on the screens or sometimes it’s an underwriter’s material. The audio can also be split off the HDMI signal and put into the truck’s audio system, into the Wheatstone board inside or the Midas outside.”

An event in January that Morrow was prepping for offered an opportunity to drive the screens from a laptop in real time and showcase the truck’s abilities: “It’s a mountain bike relay race, Six Hours in the Papago. We’re going to be displaying live race results on the screens, announcing the race from the stage and serving food from the truck, all at the same time.”

Food and music really are a bridge, says Morrow, who hopes that the Soundbite truck will spark the imagination of other broadcasters. “We’re waiting for someone to do something similar, but as far as we know, there isn’t one yet.”

The truck is also available to rent for private events. “It has attended a couple of corporate events and has been to a couple of weddings, but no one has yet been married on the stage,” he reports. “I’m hoping that’s going to happen someday.”

Comment on this or any story. Email radioworld@futurenet.com.

TAGS · ARIZONA · COMREX · MIDAS · SHURE · WHIRLWIND



RELATED

© 2019 Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All rights reserved. England and Wales company registration number 2008885.