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IK Multimedia now has a plug-in version of their standalone T-RackS mastering software. HTDM, RTAS, VST, DX, AU, and MAS plug-in formats are supported across MAC OS 9, OS X and Windows 95/98/ME/NT/XP computer platforms.



T-RackS is actually a bundle of four individual mastering tools and the 'whole rack' of all four in a mastering suite. The four processors are: six-band parametric equalizer; a 'tube-based' modeled stereo compressor; three-band stereo limiter; and my favorite, an adjustable soft-clipping output stage.

For those familiar with the original standalone T-RackS, the plug-in version will recognize some significant improvements in this plug-in version. The equalizer now offers full

20Hz-20kHz range with a sweepable mid-range; there is now a side-chain high pass filter in the compressor module; individual limiter band controls and adjustable crossover points for more precise multi-band limiting; and a calibrated limiter and clipper output that guarantees that your mix will never go over -0.05dBfs. (dB before full-scale)

I installed T-RackS VST version in a PC (XP Pro) running Steinberg's WaveLab 4.0 and the HTDM/RTAS version on a MAC running Pro Tools|HD (OS 9.2.2). I also installed the plugs on another XP PC running both Cubase SX and Nuendo 2.0.1. IK Multimedia allows you three additional authorizations on different machines as one of the benefits from joining their on-line users group.



All versions of the modules and suite plug-ins work well--although running all four in the suite uses a good amount of CPU resources in VST. I found the compressors very warm and smooth for mixes and individual tracks. However, on separate tracks, I'd have to crank them a lot to get any action. The Soft Clipping stage is my pick for getting a saturated sound on mixes or separate instrument tracks. I also liked the Chaining feature where you can easily 'reorder' the chain of three of the four processors.

The multi-band limiter is for stressing certain frequencies over others or reducing frequency peaks of individual instrument tracks--it works as advertised! The 'tube' compressor module is probably best suited to vocals and drums and the enhanced parametric is great for any vocal, track or mix. The side chain filter is great for mixes where heavy kick drum and bass can cause excessive pumping. You can use more compression with the filter set to around 150Hz and have less of these artifacts.

I found that the VST plug-ins do not report their latency to the host's Plug-in Delay Compensator. Latency compensation is an inherent feature (over Pro Tools) when mixing inside of Nuendo or Cubase SX. This flaw would preclude me from using these plug-ins on phase-dependent tracks, like drum kits or any other multimiked acoustic instruments. I also found instantiating the mono versions of T-RackS crashed these programs, although in Pro Tools, this didn't happen. Tech support assures me that they are aware of these bugs and are working on them with a fix due out by the time you read this.

Apart from these quirks, the plug-ins sound great and make a worthwhile addition to any multitrack DAW. T-RackS Plug-ins sell for \$399 MSRP. IK Multimedia is at 954-749-3016 or www.ikmultimedia.com.

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