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Ten O'Clock Tech

Listening To Digital Audio Through FM Stereo

Amy Wu, 07.18.03, 8:00 AM ET

NEW YORK - **Engineered Audio**, a tiny St. Louis-based company, made a dramatic first entry into the digital audio world when it launched the Aurius on July 1. The device is about the size of a deck of cards and allows users to listen to digital audio played from a computer on any radio or FM receiver. You no longer need to be in the same room to listen to MP3s from your computer.

"The Auri, what?" asked Mike Paxton, an analyst at In-Stat/MDR Group. When Paxton checked the device out on the company's Web site, there was a long pause.

"Hmm, interesting; it looks like a modem. No, I guess I've never seen quite this concept. It's certainly different," Paxton said.

It has also perplexed industry observers who say they haven't seen another product that does the same trick the same way. For now, Wi-Fi is the only alternative.

Inventor Marshall Strouse admits he is an audio junkie. The former **Motorola** (nyse: [MOT](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) software engineer, who launched the four-person company in 2002, wanted to let people listen to their music anywhere they go, so he turned to a device most people have: a radio.

Here's how it works: the gadget's USB audio interface connects with either an **Apple Computer** (nasdaq: [AAPL](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) Macintosh or PC, and comes with an FM transmitter. A USB cable connects the Aurius to the computer. Users choose the station with the clearest frequency, and the tunes play wherever there is a radio, Walkman, or any other type of receiver.

It has a separate stereo line-out jack for powered speakers. A mute control quiets the FM transmitter, and allows for output frequencies from 88.1 MHz to 107.9 MHz. It works best within a 30- to 50-foot radius.

For now the company is selling the product exclusively through its site for



The Aurius.

Courtesy Engineered Audio

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\$54.99, and plans to ship the Aurius in late summer when the company launches its e-commerce store.

Some industry observers said that even if the Aurius is an undefined creature, Strouse is onto something.

"It's a new way of allowing people the capability of taking advantage of MP3 files stored on the computer, and I do believe there's a market for it, people have this whole library on their computer and they want to listen to it in another room," said Connie Wong, an analyst at Semico Research in Phoenix, Ariz. According to Semico Research, the MP3 portable player market will see an annual compound growth rate of 30.4% between 2002 and 2007.

Engineered Audio is already working on an updated Aurius that comes with a remote control. In addition to the Aurius, Engineered Audio has launched RemoteRemote, a radio-frequency remote control for the iPod. In early autumn, the company plans to roll out an updated version of the RemoteRemote for the next generation of iPods.

The company has been approached from retailers from the U.S., Europe, Japan, Australia and France, and expects that the Aurius will hit retail stores such as **Circuit City** (nyse: [CC](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) and CompUSA come fall.

Nevertheless, the product has its share of skeptics too who wonder how well the product will sell.

"A lot of online Internet connected audio products, which are capable of moving the audio portion signal across the house, haven't really caught on yet," In-Stat/MDR's Mike Paxton said. "It's not to say they aren't coming, but they might be a little bit ahead of the power curve."

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