

Dolby Atmos a Game Changer in Home Theater Market

Peter Tribeman of Atlantic Technology says Dolby Atmos is the most exciting audio format to hit the home theater market in a number of years.

By Robert Archer, October 15, 2014 .

Meeting Tribeman at his company's facilities, we discussed Atlantic Tech's new Dolby Atmos speaker modules and the impact of Atmos on the home theater market before hearing the demo. Tribeman, as expected, proved to be wealth of information on the topics of Atmos, speaker design and market trends.

Spending an afternoon with him, he explained how Atmos delivers his "acoustic bubble" of immersion, which the home theater market has been trying to hone for decades he says.

"Atmos produces something that is three-dimensional," he points out. "It's as close to a commercial theater as I've ever heard."

Sitting through a series of Atmos-encoded clips that are a part of a Dolby Atmos demonstration disc, I have to admit that any skepticism I had about the technology quickly evaporated. Best of all is the point that Tribeman makes on the Atmos' rendering engine, which is called Dolby Surround (Dolby Surround is a term Dolby is using once again). He said this technology is so good that it can take soundtracks embedded with other formats to produce Atmos-like soundtracks to add value to existing media libraries. "This is the remarkable hidden gem of the new Dolby technology," he states. "It provides an added dimension to existing soundtracks. That is worth the price of admission."

To prove his point, he popped in the Sandra Bullock movie *Gravity*, which is encoded with DTS HD Master Audio to let me hear for myself how powerful the rendering engine is within the whole Atmos platform. (He used a Marantz A/V receiver in his system.)

Moving on to the topic of his company's 44-DA Atmos modules , he says these speakers can be placed nearly anywhere—aesthetically the modules match the physical dimensions and industrial design of Atlantic Tech's 4400 bookshelf speaker—but they can be used with any loudspeaker. Tribeman recalls that it took about six months of development to come up with the final design for the modules.

He adds that his initial conversations with Dolby date back approximately two years, and once his company received the specs for the speaker, a few design revisions were made, including the use of a coaxial driver array. But Atlantic Tech's close relationship with Dolby enabled his engineers to act quickly to implement these revisions.

Knowing the uncertainty that confronts any new home theater format launch, Tribeman acknowledges there are some risks with Atlantic Tech being one of a handful of Atmos early adopter manufacturers. But as he noted, Atmos is the best audio technology to hit the home

theater market in many years. It could have the same impact as Dolby Digital 5.1 back in the late 1990s.

Shifting gears to take a dealer perspective of Atmos, he says the technology has the potential to offer dealers revenues in the categories of retrofitting existing systems, and the obvious—new system installations. Depending on the scenario and the newness of clients' A/V receivers, dealers can perform firmware updates to recent A/V receivers and add modules like Atlantic Tech's 44-DAs for simple and cost effective state-of-the-art system upgrade. Or they can update clients' A/V receivers or preamplifier/processors and add modules as a complete system upgrades.

Another great thing about Atmos modules like the 44-DAs is that they typically locate on top of the front left/right speakers/and or on top of the rear surrounds. This means they won't take up additional floor space within a home. Alternatively, because of their size, they could be placed on bookshelf near the front speakers or rear speakers.

The only scenario that concerns Tribeman—and I agree with his assessment—is that Atmos will not be effective in home theater systems made up entirely of in-ceiling speakers.

“Atmos won't work acoustically with systems with a complete array of in-ceiling [L,C,R] speakers, but systems can be mixed with in-room and in-ceilings,” he states.

After having this conversation with Tribeman I went home and setup the Onkyo receiver and a pair of Atlantic Tech modules. Based on his recommendations, I placed the modules on top of my Monitor Audio PL-100 speakers, which are my main left/right speakers to form a 5.1.2 system. I also boosted the levels on the modules by about 4dB above the reference of the left and right speakers. He also recommended that I try to move the modules around to see if any moves provide a greater immersiveness.

Before making the visit to Atlantic Tech's office, I was skeptical of Atmos. Within five minutes of hearing the demo, I was convinced it is worthy of the hype. Based on my experience with Atmos and my conversations with Tribeman, I believe dealers and consumers will be convinced that Atmos is as good as its advanced billing.

Now, all we need is some Atmos-encoded Blu-ray discs.