



SUPERYACHT TECHNOLOGY
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Superyacht Technology

Versatile spaces: the ergonomics of multi-use audio



In today's instant world, owners understandably want to use their systems more flexibly, with the time taken to change between different audio setups much faster. Whilst historically it was seen as par for the course if the crew had to take a few hours setting up a new system, times have changed. Now, audio systems on a yacht need to be ready for anything. If the owner's wife wants to work out to surround sound on the aft deck, but changes her mind at the last minute and instead wants gentle background music as she takes tea, audio needs to seamlessly follow suit.

Whilst to a certain degree crew can be used to manually achieve this, more and more yacht managers are realising that this takes up a vast amount of crew time which could be better spent elsewhere. What's more, crew are only human and there are only so many times you can ask them to dramatically change the systems on board in a day. With that in mind, this article will explore exactly how the market is adapting to suit this rising need for audio flexibility.

What's caused the movement?

Until recently, there was not really the option for the yachts to have this flexibility. It was seen as a choice of one or the other; you could either install a background audio system that fits into the boat's aesthetic, or you could have a pro-audio set up involving massive block speakers which needed to be stored somewhere safe and wheeled out each time. Historically there haven't been unified solutions that do both. Owners could have both separately, but this was confusing for crew and involved a lot of chopping and changing. Flexible audio systems are relatively new technology for yachts, and so until recently many didn't realise that such an option existed.

Yacht owners have also not always been aware that you could easily hire talent as live bands and DJs for their yachts. Nowadays, people seem to be using their boats as more of a place to party. On top of this there are more large superyachts than ever, and these tend to be the vessels which host the biggest parties and hire live performers for their events.

The yachting marketplace doesn't move quickly, with many ETOs anxious to see technology proved before investing the owner's money in it. However, with innovative audio systems providers such as California Audio Technology (CAT) now firmly established in the marine market and many case studies proving the success of this approach, technical staff seem to be fully embracing this new flexibility.



Certification

The trend of having musicians perform on board, whether it be a world-famous DJ or band, or simply crew members who have been hired for their musical ability, has led the industry to search for a better way of organising this. Companies who specialise in talent acquisition on superyachts are now considering creating a certification that will make them feel more comfortable sending artists out to yachts. This certification will be given to vessels which have been fitted with a flexible audio system and are therefore capable of easily hosting a live musician.

After all, organising an artist or band to perform on a yacht is fundamentally different to getting them to play a standard commercial venue. Firstly, acquisition companies have the problem of how to get the performers to the yacht's location. However, the main issue is that many yachts are simply not prepared with the correct audio systems, sometimes leading to performance delays which disappoint the owner and mess up performers' busy schedules. That is why at this year's MYS, acquisition business Blue International Talent was in talks with CAT to discuss creating a certification that would demonstrate whether a ship's audio was up to a certain standard. This would mean artists experience an easier time on board, and that having musicians perform is much less of an ordeal for the crew and owner.

Take David Guetta for example. The world-famous DJ recently played a set on board a yacht on which the audio system had been designed by CAT, and as such was fully plug and play. As such, all the artist had to do was plug a cable into the CAT MBX Marine Ultra High Performance two channel speaker system to start playing.

Based on the success of the event, the owner of that yacht has now gone on to host a range of live bands and other DJs, as talent acquisition agencies can trust that this particular vessel has the appropriate speaker setup for the job. The certification proposed by Blue International Talent would open up this opportunity to many more boats, meaning agencies could be more aggressive about booking them musicians. If an owner is chartering then this adds extra value for them, and saves money in the long term as their one flexible audio system means they won't have to buy new systems for different events.



How is it achieved?

The horse power of the system is one huge consideration. Audio has to be designed on the basis that it can hit a certain decibel level at a certain location. It also needs to have the requisite inputs in the appropriate places. To get this right, designers must think: where are the places that a band or DJ might want to set up? This is generally done in conjunction with an integrator, who will take charge of the wiring.

Certain limitations also must be put on the DSP (Digital Signal Processor), which digitally controls the levels of bass and treble. To prevent potential damage/explosion, parts of the system should be limited so that the system can only play so loud, protecting it from musicians who may want to 'turn it up to eleven.' However, this limit should only be on the specific inputs that a live musician would use on board, as limiting other parts of the system may result in music that is too quiet.

Whilst yacht audio used to be set up primarily for background music, the tide is turning and now more owners want the system designed and set up more like a nightclub, with a higher level of possible output for live artist performances. One possible cause for this is that in the past, boats that had pro-systems with high output often had to hire separate barges just to power them. This was an extra expense for owners and required a lot of organisation ahead of the performance. With today's modern flexible solutions, this simply isn't necessary.

The demand and technology equilibrium

Today's owners can have their cake and eat it too. Demand and technology have caught up to each other creating a situation where seemingly anything is possible in terms of audio on yachts. With technology such as that provided by CAT now proven to meet this demand, we expect more and more yachts to refit their audio, with potential certification likely to tempt them further.



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