

EDIT WORKSTATION

# TBC Two-Bay SmartTrac Production Console

by Geoff Poister

**T**BC Consoles designs and manufactures high quality production and post-production consoles and furniture for video/film production facilities, TV and radio stations and network operation centers. Their hallmark is the design of modular components that can be configured in a variety of ways to accommodate everything from small production entities to massive broadcast configurations with multiple monitors and control stations. They have outfitted many of the major television networks with custom-configured consoles and control rooms tailored to their specific needs.

## FEATURES

TBC Consoles' SmartTrac provides an adjustable workspace honed for the needs of television, video, audio or multimedia production. The company has concentrated its design effort into creating an adaptable platform that can be changed over time as the production entity grows or adapts to new technology.

The SmartTrac console is offered as a two-bay version (5-feet wide) or as a three-bay version (7-feet wide). It is constructed with very high grade materials that are designed to last a lifetime. The console countertop has a space age Thermofoil surface available in a variety of designs, including various colors, a contemporary charcoal grey, or several very convincing wood veneers. The surface is extremely durable and is almost impervious to scratching or chipping. Custom tops and finishes are also available.

The "smart" in the SmartTrac name comes from the fact that these consoles, through the integration of a variety of modular components, can be configured for almost any application or operator preference. The two-bay model tested for this review has two above-counter angled rack turrets with 4RU of equipment space each, and can be resized for various rack mounted equipment. These turrets are manufactured of lightweight aluminum, include EIA standard rack rail and are vented to disperse heat. True to the console's adaptable nature, each one can be removed if desired and replaced with either a flat countertop "infill" or a drop down "well" for situations in which the monitor viewing angle needs to be very low. This latter option is useful when there are multiple large displays.

Other modular components include leg-mounted adjustable CPU holders,

task lamps and CRT shelves (should anyone still have one of these).

The "trac" in SmartTrac is based on a rear-mounted aluminum extrusion track which provides a mounting surface for a variety of components including flat panel monitor articulating arms. The arms will hold monitors up to 30-inches (diagonal) and can be positioned anywhere along the track. They can be adjusted for distance, height, swivel and tilt, placing the monitors in any desired position. In addition, speaker stands and a variety of shelving options are available for "trac" mounting.

A unique feature of the SmartTrac console is its height adjustable base, which may be ordered with an electric motor or, for less money, with a manual adjustment. However, the motorized height adjustment has several advantages. Height can be changed with the push of a button, and you can program preset height adjustments for different users. The height is infinitely adjustable within a 25-inch to 51-inch range, which accommodates the needs of multiple console users who might wish to either sit or stand.



The TBC SmartTrac Production console

Importantly, the console also incorporates a generously sized cable enclosure that is integral to the console structure. This provides more than adequate cable management, as well as a defined place to mount power strips and UPS devices. It includes a removable, vented rear door that integrates nicely with the overall design.

In addition, the SmartTrac console may be combined with other "Smart" furniture including client/producer tables, and a variety of rack cabinets (aptly called SmartCarts) to configure a total system.

## IN USE

TBC Consoles' SmartTrac is designed to be simple enough for the average person to assemble within about an hour. It does not require a

wide range of tools. In fact, all of the tools required for assembly are included. All of the bolts are screwed in place with supplied Allen wrenches. (For more advanced, multiple module designs, TBC can send technicians to perform the assembly and installation.)

The SmartTrac is shipped in two boxes—one with all of the hardware and one containing the countertop. Together, they are about the size of a medium refrigerator and must be shipped by truck.

I found that the one-hour assembly time is a bit optimistic, partly due to the diligent packaging. Just unwrapping all of the components took me about 30 minutes.

Assembly is, in fact, quite straightforward. But I recommend taking your time to assemble the unit carefully.

The first thing that impressed me as I began the assembly was the quality of the materials and workmanship. This is clearly a company that takes great pride in all levels of production, from design to manufacturing quality. These units are not designed to become obsolete.

As a result, TBC has made the decision to choose durability over weight reduction. In other words, the console is not light. The countertop is made of dense material and requires two people to put it in place. The two legs are also fairly heavy, as they contain motors, internal chains, and gears for raising and lowering the countertop.

Overall, assembly is not difficult for anyone who has any experience putting together things such as office furniture or bookcases. However, I would recommend assigning two people to perform the assembly. And they should budget several hours to do this. The console is a very stable and durable unit and it is worth doing the assembly job right.

I might add that if the console ever needs to be moved, disassembly is eas-

## FAST FACTS

### Application

Video editing operations

### Key Features

Flexible configuration, adjustable height, and accommodation for computer CPUs and displays

### Price

MSRP is \$2,310 with motorized height control and \$1,635 without

### Contact

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ier and faster than assembly. It's designed to be disassembled and moved if desired.

Once assembled, the SmartTrac is, from an aesthetic perspective, an item of architectural beauty. It integrates visual design and functionality with style and grace. Ergonomically, I found that turret-mounted rack equipment was within easy reach, monitors are easily positioned for perfect viewing and the crescent shape of the countertop makes everything placed on the desktop easy to reach.

The ability to raise or lower the desktop (including all attached units and monitors) by simply pressing a button is a big plus. I was able to sit or stand, and alternate positions to decrease fatigue. Alternating positions provides definite health benefits throughout the course of a long day. And it is 100 percent handicapped accessible.

## SUMMARY

TBC Consoles' SmartTrac product is exquisitely designed to enhance the efficiency of the production workspace. It's made of extremely high quality materials and should last indefinitely. But, it is more than a console. It is a customizable work environment that, with the addition of other modules, can grow and change as surely as everything else in the video/TV production world. Buying a SmartTrac console is like hiring a consultant with years of workspace design experience. That investment eliminates the need to think as hard about configuring the workspace as you do about deciding what equipment to buy.

*Geoff Poister, Ph.D., is a member of the Film and Television faculty at Boston University and a regular contributor to TV Technology.*