

**ICON turns Suite 16 in Auckland**

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*Stephen Bruel*

**Stephen Bruel caught up with Neil Newcombe, Owner and Chief Recording Engineer with Suite 16 Ltd, a post-production studio based in Auckland, New Zealand, who recently acquired a 16-fader ICON D-Control work surface.**

**SB: Neil, please tell me about yourself.**

**NN:** I started my audio career 38 years ago with the New Zealand television broadcaster TVNZ. My first job was recording location sound for television news, documentaries and drama, which at the time was mostly broadcast as film sound. During this time I was asked to mix my own, and other staff member's sound projects, which led me moving into full-time post-production sound mixing with the broadcaster. I adopted ProTools V1.0 and its later versions in the early 90s replacing our 24 track recorder.

**SB: .. and Suite 16 studio.**

**NN:** About 12 years ago I left TVNZ and set up Suite 16 Ltd, a television sound post- production company. Our facility consists of three rooms which have almost identical setups, for the purpose of interchange ability and workflow.

Each room has a Digidesign HD 2 Accel system consisting of 192 and 888 interfaces, Sync I/O, and running Pro Tools 6.4 on Apple G5 Mac computers. Two of the rooms are primarily sound-edit rooms, and have a Digidesign Control 24 work surface with machine control. All three rooms have identical JBL speakers, with working pictures coming from Sony UYW1800P Beta SP transports.

**SB: Please describe your Digidesign ICON set up and the installation process.**

**NN:** The third main suite has the ICON D-Control work surface in it, and is the main suite for mixing and quality control. External Aphex dynamics and processing hardware are looped through the Digidesign 192 interface. Sony provides a 1250 line resolution TV monitor and a LCD computer monitor.

**Protel's (New Zealand Digidesign Dealer) talented Sales Engineer Rene Bullinga** installed our ICON along with the three new G5s. The ICON D-Control interfaced seamlessly with our existing setup with the help of Digisnakes to connect to the existing plant. Operating levels and monitoring levels were consistent, and the installation was probably the most painless and bug free of any installation I can recall in my career.

**SB: What projects have you done so far?**

**NN:** We currently post-produce about 500 TV shows per year and contribute about twelve broadcast shows a week for a number of external clients across Auckland. Our speciality is popular prime-time TV shows. The other week four of the top 10 rating New Zealand shows were mixed in our facility. Given that overseas shows fill most of the other slots, it was a proud week for us.

There a number of series that I particularly enjoyed working on over the years, such as the Inside New Zealand documentary series, drama presentation Mercy Peak and one-off TV special Murder On The Blade. The popular 'quirky' reality show My House My Castle is in its seventh season, and another favourite of mine.

**SB: What projects are you currently working on?**

**NN:** Projects passing through our facility this week include:

*Shortland Street (South Pacific Pictures) [5 episodes]*  
*Treasure Island (Touchdown Television)*  
*Eat Yourself Whole (Screentime)*  
*Renters (Cream TV)*  
*Best in Show (Jump TV)*  
*Attitude (RSVP)*  
*Rural Delivery (Showdown)*  
*DIY Rescue (Touchdown)*  
*How Normal Are You (Touchdown)*  
*My House My Castle (Touchdown)*  
*SIDS Documentary (Homegrown TV for DNZ)*



**SB: So Neil, how do you approach your work?**

**NN:** The most fundamentally important things in our business are reliability of delivery to the client and quality control. We often work on shows days or sometimes within hours of broadcast. We've become trusted to deliver the goods. I've achieved reliability in the past by ensuring I had two or more identical systems I could swap-out components from in the event of failure. The ICON changes this philosophy to the extent that it's design and build quality gives me full confidence to have it in my prime mixing room without immediate backup other than distributor support.

**SB: How has ICON benefited the way you work and your approach?**

**NN:** Our mixing suite is a busy full-on craftsman's workshop producing constant television entertainment watched by masses of the viewing public, not a boutique operation. My three staff and I needed a robust reliable workhorse that would allow us to incorporate our creative talents for the client's satisfaction. The ICON D-Control work surface provided this.

Our business's competitiveness and our clients' confidence are dependent on the speed and quality of our delivery. Our ICON's appearance and performance gives us that edge, particularly when sound budgets are tight.

**SB: What are your favourite features of the ICON?**

**NN:** The ICON D-Control is an excellent tactile work surface that reminds me of the Neve and Amek desks I used in those historic days of TV production. The ICON's speed of operation and smooth performance are attributes I need, particularly being able to reach for a control to tweak the mix on the fly with no need to look for menus or LCD readouts. There appears to be a control for nearly every commonly used feature of Pro Tools at my fingertips, and there are probably a hundred more as yet unused by me.

There are also several unimplemented features such as separate transport controls, and rollback & play which give me confidence in future development for mixing operations with the ICON.

**SB: Do you have any comments regarding the sound quality of the ICON, as say, compared to working in an analogue environment?**

**NN:** The ICON D-Control's transparent and comprehensive monitoring of multiple external sources and three auxiliary outputs make it excellent for quality control. An ICON, a phase scope, and a pair of quality speakers and you can confidently send your mixes to be tech-checked anywhere in the world.

**SB: If there was one final comment you would like to say about your business, and how the ICON has enhanced it, what would that be?**

**NN:** A client told me that a competitor of ours was telling him he should take his business there and that they might do it cheaper. But he responded that he needed our established quality and reliability and we had a TARDIS. He meant the ICON!