

User Report: Leighton Gives Wheatstone X5 the OI' College Try

Features and performance give processor
more than a passing grade

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CLOUD, Minn. — St. Cloud is ranked as market number 187 by Nielsen. But for those of us at Leighton, it might as well be market #1. This is home to our six stations and the headquarters for Leighton Broadcasting, which owns stations in six other markets in Minnesota and North Dakota.

As a college town, the population of around 70,000 skews mostly on the younger side. There are around 75 stations that can be picked up on the dial here, and competition for listenership can be fierce, especially for our top 40 station KCLD(FM) 104.7.

INSTALLATION

A few years ago, we installed the Wheatstone X3 FM audio processor on KCLD and have been pleased with the performance. KCLD is known to draw a large audience, billed as the most listened-to station in central Minnesota. We regarded the X3 as the best processor on the market at the time, until Wheatstone came out with the X5.

We had heard about some of the new X5 advancements — better highs, in particular — and in July 2019, we decided to take it out for a test drive.

PROCESSING

The unit arrived on a quiet weekday. We know our way around Wheatstone processors, having owned X1s, AM-55s, FM-55s and, of course, the X3. But we immediately saw that the X5 was different. It is probably the company's most complex processor yet, although the UI is surprisingly easy to navigate. Within a half hour, we had the X5 up and running and our settings dialed in for the most part.

Then we started listening. We had heard about the X5's new LimitLESS clipper, that it was an innovative approach to clipping and HF pre-emphasis that lets you turn up the highs while controlling peaks. But we were in no way prepared for the actual difference it can make on-air. Suddenly, the high-end was very transparent, much more transparent than anything in the market. We were listening to a much wider, fuller sound and most incredible, we couldn't detect any additional IM byproducts as a result of processing.

We drove around and listened to it in our homes, cars and everywhere, including the overheads at the gas station.

This thing really kicks it up a notch or two on the dial. Also impressive is the processor's automatic logger feature, which logs every change to the unit, from remote log-ins to audio failover to preset changes. That feature will come in handy for troubleshooting and for dayparted presets, for example.

The X5 exceeded our expectations. The official stamp of approval came when we not only purchased the X5 for our top 40 station in St. Cloud, but also additional X5s for several other stations in this and other markets.

For information, contact Jay Tyler at Wheatstone in North Carolina at 1-252-638-7000 or visit

