

Ask the Techie

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What is Source Connect and is it a perfect substitute for ISDN?

As voice-over actors become more active in the business and network with others, they begin to hear about the use of technologies such as ISDN and Source Connect in home studios. The advantages of Source Connect are lower costs to install and operate, ability to travel, and accessibility in areas without ISDN. This makes Source Connect a compelling option indeed. But what often isn't made clear is whether or not Source Connect can be used as a substitute for ISDN. If you are scratching your head about ISDN, look back at last month's *Voice-Over Insider* Ask the Techie column about that very subject and enlighten yourself.

Source Connect, created by the company Source Elements, is a technology that allows you to connect your studio to any other studio in the world via the Internet. Your audio feeds directly into the computer as you speak in real-time: Otherwise known as "streaming." Many of you are familiar with Skype and its ability to make voice connections over the Internet. Think of it as Skype for recording studios and you'll be most of the way there. What sets it apart from Skype is the amazing sound quality and tight integration with recording applications such as Pro Tools, Audition, Logic, and many others.

Like Skype, users on each end of the connection must run Source Connect. Source Connect can't connect to an ISDN codec directly, as the Internet Protocol (IP) is completely incompatible with ISDN data connections. This is because ISDN makes a direct connection to the other end like dialing a telephone. With ISDN the IP data flows through many networks and switches before it reaches the other end. For this reason it has taken a long time for reliable ISDN-like audio connections to become a reality in the IP world. You may notice that when using Skype sometimes the audio quality is better than other times due to the fact that Skype changes the quality based on the quality of the connection. This would be a real problem for studios since they depend on a high fidelity recording. Source Connect maintains the consistent quality necessary for a voice actor to stream audio from their home studio to the client studio.

Setting up Source Connect is not very difficult, especially compared to ISDN which requires a telephone technician to come into your home. However, you may really appreciate the extra support of an experienced technician who can guide you through a few of the finer points of installation to save you time and frustration. My company, *EIDorado Recording Services*, makes it as easy as possible for you by providing custom step-by-step instructions and well as phone support to get you running quickly.

Here is a brief run-down of the process:

1. Purchase an iLok USB key and create an iLok account (*see below for description of iLok*)
2. Purchase the Source Connect license and create a Source Elements account
3. Download and install the Source Connect plug-in software
4. If you don't have a recording software on their compatibility list, download and install Source Elements desktop
5. Synchronize your iLok with your iLok account and download the Source Connect license to your iLok
6. Configure your network for Source Connect (optional)
7. Run your recording software or Source Elements Desktop
8. Configure SE Desktop to work with your audio interface
9. Log into your Source Connect account and test your connection with your support representative, the "Echo" server, or a friendly studio

iLok is a system used by manufacturers to secure the software licenses of many different applications. There are two parts in the system: One is the iLok.com account, Two is the iLok USB key (sometimes called a dongle). You must have both in order to use Source Connect. An iLok usually costs under \$50 and is available at most major music store chains as well as online from iLok.com and online dealers. The two work in tandem; the iLok.com account manages the licenses you own and the iLok USB key connects the license to the software. The true advantage of this system is you can use Source Connect on any computer you wish. Install it on your home studio computer and your laptop, and just move the iLok from one to the other when you travel.

Now that you know what Source Connect is and what it does, the questions remains: Do I need it? As many have heard me say in the past, based on personal experience I am not a firm believer of the famous phrase from *Field of Dreams*, "If we build it they will come." There will come a time when a client or a new job prospect requires that you have Source Connect or ISDN to work on their project. However, ISDN is still the 800 pound gorilla in many parts of the voice-over industry, especially Promo, Trailer, and Imaging. If you are vying for work in these areas, you will most certainly be required to support ISDN. While Source Connect's stronghold in those areas is building as ISDN becomes less accessible to more people, many major production houses are slow to try something new.

Thanks to companies like Outofhear.com, you can make the ISDN connection with your Source Connect studio! Outofhear.com provides a service called a "bridge" connecting your Source Connect signal to their ISDN signal. If you have Source Connect and a client comes along that requires ISDN connectivity, you can tell them your are ISDN compatible if you use a bridging service. This technique allows voice actors who normally can't leave their ISDN connected studio for fear of missing work to travel! Anyplace you can get a solid broadband connection with 300kbps up and down bandwidth as well as a quiet space you can work. Next month we'll outline the equipment you'll need to travel with in order to continue Source Connect sessions on the road.

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For more information about Source Connect and to purchase, please see <http://vostudiotech.com/software>.