

# Lode It Up!

*EI* met with Andy Oattes, head of sales and Ed Stark, chief executive officer at innovative, high-quality multi-zone music platform Lode to take stock of where the company has come from and where it is headed.



**Andy is enthusiastic about the level of quality the brand delivers and will continue to improve into the future**

Designed and made in the UK, **Lode** has made inroads into the market since launching its concept by having clear goals and creating a system specifically for installers.

Andy explains: "What is crucial as a starting point with our system is that it is a high-quality proposition. Happily, in terms of multi-room music systems, the awareness of the concept in recent years has gone up, but not always the quality. Our system reverses that trend and offers the industry something specifically designed for installers by a team that fully understands the market and the challenges it offers."

Ed adds: "We have created a real custom install product, not a system that is adapted from a platform really created for the retail channel. Our system has the adaptability and level of quality installers need.

"We look at every single detail in creating our software and hardware to make sure it's the best that it can be. Details like making sure our amps output the right voltage to make them suitable to drive at the right level and for the widest possible amount of uses, or designing our hardware for fanless operation to avoid audio interference, all mean installers don't have to worry about reliability and performance, because we already have."

The company also argues that it has adopted a business model well suited to the channel.

Andy says: "Again here we are not trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, our products are not designed to hit a certain price point that's really aimed at retail or other channels, we don't have to cut corners in our design and manufacturing.

"Our products are designed from the ground up to specifically target the CI market and we build in significant amounts of performance headroom to make sure that not only can the system cope easily with anything the world throws at it, we are ready for the future and can adapt to any change in technology or demand that the market delivers.

Ed adds some detail here: "For example, even when the system is at maximum, driving 64 zones of high-quality audio, the system is still only at around 15-20% of its maximum capacity. We can also support all the way up to 32bit 192kHz playback. In short, we have a proper industrial level platform on which to build and deliver performance now and way into the future."

Okay so as we are talking about the future, what detail is there on Lode's plans?

Ed enthuses: "Software is absolutely crucial for the plan moving forward. LodeNet is our own specially created IP based communications system and it means installers can get the audio where they need to without the need for any third-party products such as matrixes. We are talking to other manufacturers currently about integrating LodeNet into their hardware to provide the solid comms abilities the industry needs, so 'powered by LodeNet' could become a feature on other manufacturers' products that installers could look to for quality reassurance."

Andy adds: "We are also looking at introducing new products to widen the amount and type of playback products which can be added into the LodeNet system and be part of an overall Lode package. We look at the concept as audio plumbing; we already have a fantastic backbone with LodeNet, so it's a natural progression to leverage the power of the system and add in more opportunities to add more playback options. We will start with audio baluns so installers can take an audio feed (analogue or digital) and add it to the system with no latency issues."

## Maximum Value

'Value added' is a phrase we use a lot in this sector; installers have to deliver it by adding services and support, not just products and the Lode team are big believers in delivering on this concept too.

Andy explains: "Of course we are happy to talk to dealers when they have a technical challenge or issue, but we go way beyond that type of support. Our range has been created specifically using feedback from the industry. Lots of companies claim to listen, but we really do. It's part of the design and development process and many of the features we carry today are direct results of installers asking for a particular ability.

"Helping to create and design systems is another area we are more than happy to get involved with; basically we get as involved as the installers want. Our aim is to create the most appropriate solution we can, so to us it's just another part of the job."





Ed argues that the company understands installers like no other multi-room brand

Knowing the platform inside and out is crucial, as Ed explains: “We write all our own drivers. Most of our systems are going into projects with an automation system included, so for Crestron, AMX or Control4 we know the drivers are good because we created them and we keep them fully updated and evolving all the time. We continually have a road map of added features informed by our own ideas and with those of our customers.”

“Features like password protection for certain rooms is a good example of feedback based design. For larger houses or marine projects, you don’t want the staff to be able to accidentally turn on the audio in the master cabin, bedroom or nursery when people are asleep, so we have added that function in. Without the password, playback simply won’t begin in those zones. This will be added with our next software update.”

The team explain that there is a real desire within the company for installers to feel part of the project. With installers fully engaged and giving feedback, the performance can only improve.

Andy underlines this ambition: “Ultimately, we understand the landscape of this sector better than any other manufacturer out there; we already know what many of the issues and questions installers face are, so we plan for them before they ever become an issue, but then we also add in feedback direct from installers, making the system even stronger. We also understand the pressures installers work under and protect access to the products and our price points right across the globe.”

## Continued Expansion

Available in 32 counties now, the team see their core markets as residential, commercial (such as hotels) and increasingly the marine world too.

Andy also underlines there is one thing that unites their customers: “We have a big mix of install companies: large, small, new, more established, working across all these

sectors, however, the one thing they have in common is that they want to deliver the very best for the client.”

Marine is an area the company sees big potential for its platform.

Ed says: “Marine projects and the tech that go into them can be incredibly complex. The simplicity of our solution and often the size of our hardware, mean it’s a good fit for this market and we are working to expand our presence here.”

Hotels too present good opportunities where the system’s expandability to 64 zones, coupled to ease of operation, delivers a strong proposition. The kind of basic control often needed in hotel functionality is a phenomenon which the company is spreading.

Andy says: “Simple control is something we are seeing a lot of right across the board. In many instances or zones, all people want is volume up and down and to skip/back on the track. Yes they want some areas where all the metadata and artwork can be enjoyed and we deliver that, but where people just want a simple level of control with a more conventional physical control, we can do that too.”

Also looking to the future, Lode is confident that it can cope with the higher capacities newer formats will deliver. High-quality delivery systems like Master Quality Authenticated (MQA) have already been tested on Tidal. Lode’s headroom means that as soon as there is real movement into higher quality files, the company can provide it. New hardware is also available in the form of the new LA1, offering a single-zone music server and delivery solution. (See this month’s product section.)

It’s hard not to be impressed with the knowledge and confidence that exudes from the Lode team; the company has already gained many fans and looks set to gain more as its platform continues to develop.

More Information: [+44 \(0\)203 327 2990](tel:+442033272990), [www.lodeaudio.com](http://www.lodeaudio.com)

