I am excited to bring attention to a digital mixer that includes capabilities that I really didn’t anticipate to find in this price range. Roland managed to encapsulate their experience and innovation into a realm that represents a new road with products otherwise reserved for the elite few in the land of live sound.

Furthermore, they knew that entering this product category posed the all-important and often forgotten element of digital transport. Most digital mixers with remote-controlled preamps and a stage rack/digital snake design such as the M-400 are at four times the cost.

One major benefit to the M-400 design is the integration of Roland’s proprietary digital snake system and the ability to place the mic preamps closer to the mics on stage, which is always an audible increase in sonic quality while simplifying future splits. Secondly, for venues that load in their systems for the weekend services, there is the benefit of their CAT5-based, point-to-point REAC (Roland Ethernet Audio Communication) digital snake which makes setting up the remote-controlled mic preamps and the mixer a snap. They have several on-stage/rack interfaces to choose
from. I tested the M-400 with two S-1608 Stage units for a total of 32 in and 16 out on stage. They offer an S-OPT Optical Converter set that allows you to convert their 328 feet-max REAC based Ethernet system to optical for distances of up to 1.2 miles. Roland managed to accomplish packaging the snake and the mixer for the same price as other digital consoles that only have local mic connections and no snake at all.

With so much riding on these CAT5 wires, I tested the sonic quality of the system here in our studio using raw, un-mastered tracks from our sessions. Even though the mixer clocks at 48k-24bit (max), the snake can run at 96k-24bit. As I A/B’d the source with the mixer, I found that the console was completely transparent and had no coloration. It produced accurate, clear transients to any signal that I gave it. Sonically, it was quite impressive.

The console layout and color coded interface was very logical, consistent and intuitive. I especially liked the small footprint, as well as the speed and feel of it as it reacted to commands, selections, and fader changes. The M-400 has a complete input/output patch bay section that stores within scenes and libraries for 48 channels of input through a combination of the REAC inputs and the 8 local mic inputs, and RCA stereo ins. It also stores 18 channels of outputs, which include the local, assignable 8 analog outs, and 2 digital outs, and REAC outputs. Patching was easy. Setup was easy. I was up and running pre-manual in minutes.

The input channel section sported recallable head amps, compression, gates, and EQ, etc. You can only assign gates and compression to a total of 24 of the 48 channels (much like in the analog days). Considering the extras, I think it was a good trade-off. I love the DISP (display) button that is found throughout the console sections. To adjust additional parameters or see what the section is doing, you just hit DISP. It lights up and pulls up the details on the crisp clear screen. This avoids the usual menus and makes getting to something really quick. They also have a “touch select” feature so that the master control select function tracks the fader you are touching automatically.

It has eight DCAs and eight mute groups. This is great for this price range but there are some trade-offs. One is the requirement to hit DISP for accessing the mute group master mutes, which adds a second step to muting a group. Luckily there are eight (soon to be updated to 16 via a shift key) user assignable buttons that allow you to have any mute group masters at your fingertips at all times (as well as most other console functions of your choice). The DCAs, however have an additional access point on the console’s 3rd fader layer button along side 16 aux masters.

Secondly, assigning channels to the DCAs and Mute Groups was a bit strange since it requires that you scroll through the list of channels, aux sends, etc and check all that apply. I’d recommend a revision to utilize the select buttons on the channels while in assign mode, allowing them to be used to quickly confirm, toggle and assign channels to DCAs and Mute Groups (as do most consoles). There are also four very impressive and versatile effects engines with full library capabilities, assignable to your choice of internal or external insert points or aux sends. There is new software about to be released that will also add eight matrices to the console.

There were a few really great surprise features that put me over the edge to select this console for future purchases.

1) The console has an amazing amount of control and filter-ability when it comes to storing or recalling scenes and libraries. This is really important in team settings where we have to mix and match the best of several settings on a channel by channel, by parameter basis. With the exception of writing forward across a selection of scenes, there were all of global variables you’d find with any of the big-dollar consoles.

2) There is a Sonar recording option for $1295 that gives you 40 channels of recording right off of the console via the network port on a standard PC and the Sonar interface. This is a bargain. There is also free remote control software for those that like to roam the room with a wireless tablet or notebook.

3) It accommodates USB user keys for saving preferences plus various levels of access for individuals and applications, making it easy to administrate several uses and levels of security. It also performs basic recording functions.

The M400 V-Mixer should be a strong consideration for most worship venues and will fair well in comparison to many mixers costing much more.

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

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**$11,495**  
Standard V-Mixing System  
(32 Stage Inputs) - 42x26

**$14,795**  
Expanded V-Mixing System  
(48 Stage Inputs) - 58x26