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## iPod Docks Step Up As Market Ramps Up

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By *Joseph Palenchar* -- TWICE, 1/21/2008 7:17:00 AM

New York – Heartened by the continuing surge in demand for iPod-docking speaker systems and standalone docks, suppliers are stepping up the performance of their models and adding new features, including home-network technology and two-way remotes that display an iPod's metadata.

New products unveiled in recent weeks include a model with separate subwoofer from **ezGear**, a \$1,995 Bel Canto dock that upconverts iPod-stored music to 7.1-channel surround, a DLO speaker system with a two-way RF remote and color screen, and a DLO dock that upscales iPod-stored video to 720p and 1080i.

At logear, HomePlug technology is putting an appearance in an iPod dock that transmits music over powerlines to up to four remote transmitter/receivers plugged into stereo systems.

The suppliers see growing potential for step-up devices in a market that grew 44.5 percent in 2007 factory-level sales to \$867 million and will grow another 27.7 percent in 2008 to breach the \$1 billion mark at \$1.11 billion, according to CEA's latest 2007 estimate and 2008 forecast. The statistics include dedicated MP3-player (or iPod) speaker systems and docking clock radios but exclude HTiBs and shelf systems sold with embedded or standalone docks.

In units, **CEA** estimates 2007 sales rose 39 percent to 6.11 million, and the association forecasts the growth rate will accelerate to 45 percent in 2008 to boost unit volume to 8.86 million

CEA's statistics also show average factory unit pricing rising to \$142 in 2007 from the previous year's \$136, but the association forecasts an average decline in unit prices to \$125 in 2008.

Some of the products that will account for this year's growth include models from among the following companies:

**Bel Canto:DLO:** The Minneapolis supplier of high-end audio launched a \$1,995-suggested iPod dock that incorporates digital signal processing to upconvert compressed audio to 96kHz/24-bit quality and deliver it in up to 7.1 channels of surround sound. The 8.5x3.5x12-inch device features solid-steel chassis, dock on top, and a complement of audio outputs, all delivering 96/24 quality. The outputs consist of two-channel and 7.1-channel RCA analog outputs, SP/DIF and Toslink digital outputs, and headphone output. It also features composite-, S- and component-video outputs.

**DLO:** The company plans second-quarter shipment of the \$199 iBoom JukeBox, a one-piece tabletop system available with two-way RF remote control. The remote features a large color screen that permits song selection by title, artist and album and displays cover art. The semicircular system features 1-inch tweeters and 3-inch woofers, and it's compatible with all dockable iPods, the company said.

Also due in the second quarter: the \$249 HomeDock HD, which lacks speakers but upscales iPod-stored video to 1080i or 720p for display via HDMI output to a connected HDTV. It also displays a navigation menu on a connected TV. Other features include S-video output, optical digital audio output, and RF remote that lacks a display.

**ezGear:** The Murray, Utah-based company is stepping up its iPod speaker-system lineup with its first sound bar-style speaker system, which is packaged with a separate

subwoofer and is due in March at a price to be announced.

The piano-black XL90 is a 2.1-channel system features AM/FM radio, embedded dock, two-way speakers, and internal 2x15-watt amplifier supplemented by the powered subwoofer's 35-watt amp. Inputs allow for connection to CD players and TVs. The included remote controls an iPod interface and bass and treble controls.

It works with all iPods, including the iPod Touch, the Classic, iPod nano, and iPhone in normal mode or airplane mode, said president Charlie Bernstein.

Online and brick-and-mortar distribution is planned, with distributors D&H, Douglas Stewart, and DBL Distributing picking it up, he said. <N> Datavision in New York and Fry's also plan to offer it later this year, he said.

**logear:** The Powerline Audio System features a speaker-less iPod dock that uses HomePlug 1.0 powerline-network technology to send iPod-stored music up to 990 feet throughout the house to receiver/adapters, which in turn connect to legacy stereo systems.

The dock also features 3.5mm input jack and pair of RCA stereo inputs to connect up to two additional audio sources, but the dock transmits only one source at a time to up to four adapters at a time. If multiple docking stations are installed, however, users can stream multiple sources simultaneously to different adapters over a home's powerlines.

Consumers can use a supplied remote from remote rooms to control an iPod's play, pause, and track up/down functions, select playlists, and change audio inputs. The remote lacks a display.

The price of a sender/receiver pair is a suggested \$329, with additional receivers at a suggested \$149.

The docking stations are touch- and iPhone-compatible and lack video outputs.

**XtremeMac:** The Luna X2 clock radio and Tango X2 2.1 speaker system will be available in a few weeks at \$119 and \$149, respectively.

Unlike its predecessor, the Tango X2 adds AM/FM radio, and it's 30 percent smaller. It features built-in subwoofer, blue LED display invisible until activated, black-and-chrome chassis with dock on top, and rear line-in jack.

The Luna X2 clock radio also features AM/FM, dock on top, line-in jack, and black-and-chrome chassis. It features dual alarms set to wake users up to the iPod, radio or buzzer with adjustable volume ramp-up times. A variable brightness control can be turned off and automatically set to turn back on when the alarm sounds.

Both models lack video outputs but are iPod touch-compatible and play back iPhone-stored music when users manually put the phone into airplane mode, the company said.

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