

SDRZone 2014



2014 is off and rolling and if you did not catch the 2013 wrap up on my blog here at the Zone, you might find it of interest. I'd love to hear your feedback on what I may have missed!

This year has started off with some updates to the Zone which have hopefully made it more stable. I am hoping we will generate much more participation this year. The Zone in December saw over 6000 unique visitors drop by and over 25000 total visits from those 6000.

What is the SDRZone?

It's a place where new users and more experienced users meet, exchange views, educate and explore ideas. Isn't that worth getting engaged?

I have to tell you that I have changed directions a little here in how I will manage policy, its going to be one where the bashers and squasher of ideas and learning are pushed away. If your ego proceeds your common sense and ignorance of the bigger picture of broadening horizons on SDRs, then you need not apply or frequent the Zone. Don't be afraid of asking and answering questions, just do so with respect of others, the fact that some of us are newer and don't need to be belittled to learn and you'll be just fine!

Speaking of squashing ideas, I find myself struggling sometimes as both the newbie and the possible naysayer. It was a tuff year in 2013 and I would say that what I perhaps learned of the greatest importance is that the truth is an entity in motion.

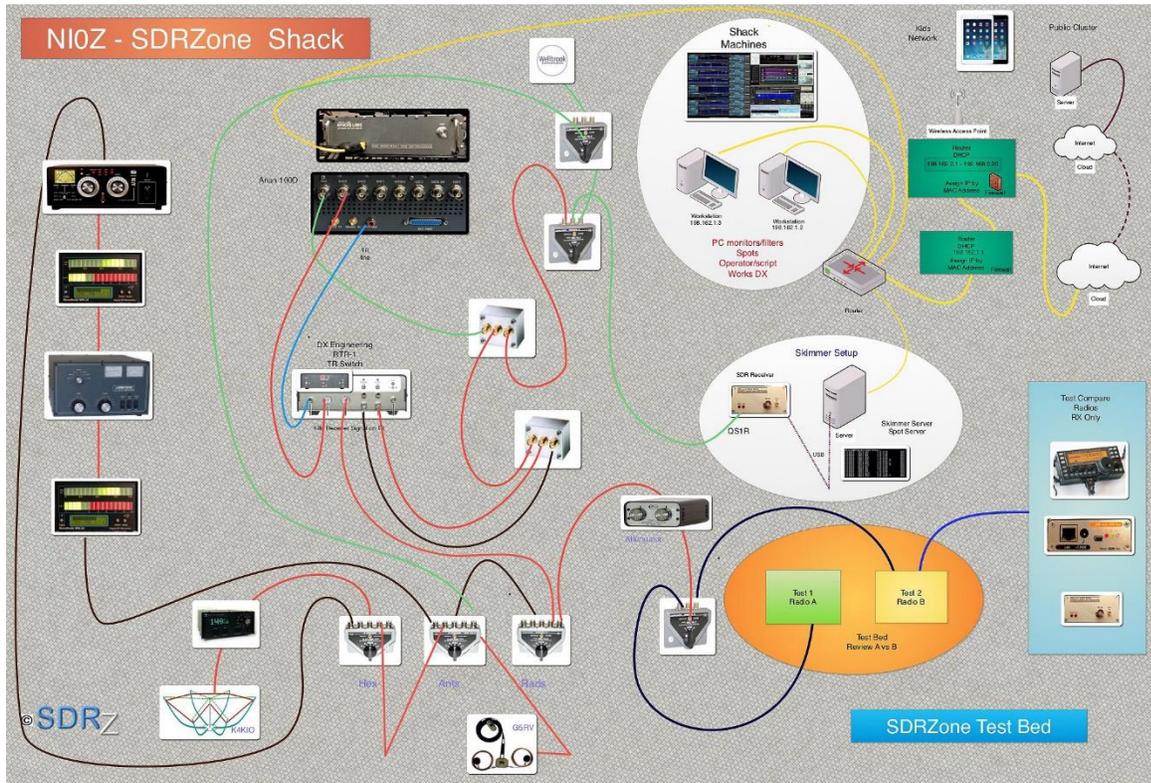
I vacillate at times where SDR's are mostly hype or where they are the best thing currently going in Ham Radio. I have realized the truth cycles around both. What do I mean? Well, let's take performance for example. There was the belief that SDR's were going to be the end all in performance and suddenly storm the top of the receiver charts. What we really learned is that we don't even know how to really evaluate them and quantify their performance against analog receivers. IE, we don't know hype from reality! Where exactly is the truth in that?

As recently as this week I was high again on the idea of a Flex and a mere day later slowed down again on buying one until we know the truth about SDR performance. Look, as far as SDR's go, I believe Flex is on the right path. They have thought out their software architecture very nicely! As far as performance goes, I can't help thinking that with the notion of costs set aside and performance being most important if we are still not another generation of ADC's away.

I also can't help but wonder if even more thought has to go into engineering an SDR Radio. What do I mean? Well, for example, do we need temperature stability with ADC's? To really top the charts, do we need 18-24 bit ADC's and which would make the most sense? What bit depth will it no longer be relevant? Do we need better RF Control to prevent issues with PC's and other devices?

In my estimation we have a ways to go. Am I nay saying or am I merely pointing out real concerns? Comment and tell me if I am off base, I'll listen, admit I am wrong and learn from the experience.

This year I hope to make some ground on the Joe Ham review of SDR's. By that I mean the ability to actually create videos and reviews that can show whether one SDR meaningfully impacts the operator experience verses another. The first steps have been taken towards that goal by reorganizing the equipment in the Zone Shack. Here is the diagram of how its wired up now!



I need to work on the audio portion of wiring things next! Make no mistake, I have a lot to learn and I am going to make mistakes along the way. With the audio I hope to wire the sound to where SDR 1 and SDR 2 each pump audio to the left and right channels so you can hear SDRs compared in real time in videos and recordings.

With attenuation I hope to show when one SDR stops receiving the signal as I weaken it, verses another. No, this likely won't show the fact that one rig is amplifying while another is not, but, we can set both rigs to their best settings so overall you know what you are getting out of the box without buying additional equipment. We'll pit the review SDRs against the KX3 as a reference for now since it's a top 3 performer still on the charts and I have one.

I hope to add a digital oScope this year as well and have it also help provide meaningful test results that can be visualized and used as well. I have a lot to relearn from decades ago and my days as a communications equipment repairman, so, no, it wont be easy because getting older is a bummer!

Beyond that, I just can't say. Maybe we will watch the truth about SDR's change as they evolve. For those of you that use SDR's as panadaptors, in my estimation, nobody should be laughing at you or dismissing you as an SDR user. Looking at what facts are available today, one might be actually realizing the best of what is available by joining together a knobbed top receiver and a top SDR to form their system. Time will tell when and if this changes.

I'll continue hopefully with the help of others to keep track of what's going on in the world of Open Source SDR Software Development. We'll follow the commercial offerings as well as private offerings.

Of course, the hope as well is to be able to test lots of new SDRs. That is less in my control as I rely on others to send me units so I can review them, make videos, ect.

I hope this gives you a taste of the year to come and if you can help lobby for SDR's from Flex or other hams to be leant to me, I and hopefully others will be grateful for your help.

And if you see a basher or squasher here, let me know and we'll see what can be done! No, we are not avoiding the truth, the goal is to allow the truth to be told and bashers and squashers sometimes prevent that from occurring.

73!

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