

Column by Renzo van Riemsdijk (Masterenzo):

The Pro-Fi cable versus a Hi-Fi cable

“An audio cable made for professional use costs less and is better constructed than a consumer cable.”

Well, now that is quite a bold statement. Okay, allow me to explain.

In the land of high fidelity (Hi-Fi) a cable is a subject of almost mythical proportions. Like I mentioned in my previous column, many of the Hi-Fi cables on the market are equipped with heavy duty RCA connectors on top of the cable being treated with cryogenic technology (yes, here we go again). To go even further a Hi-Fi cable has triple shielding: it's protected against (1) earth radiation, (2) inductive magnetic fields and (3) the neighbour yelling at his teenage son, who non-deliberately broke in the house of the neighbours last night while being stoned as a kite. A typical case of a door too far.

In short: your precious Hi-Fi cable is worth every penny. You've paid a vast amount of money for it, so it'd better be good!

Isn't it wonderful how smart marketing actually works and how this mechanism settles in our brains.

A professional cable lacks the cryogenic treatment and it also has no triple shielding. This type of shielding is unnecessary for this type of cable. A cable for professional use is balanced.

I'm not very familiar with the exact technique behind balanced cables (Wikipedia must know how this works exactly) but a balanced cable has three instead of two conductors (+ [hot], - [cold] and ground).

This construction automatically protects the cable from exterior influences (radiation). A balanced cable is also capable of driving a signal over longer distances (more than five meters).

As the icing on the cake a balanced cable is equipped with my personal favourite when it comes to connectors: instead of using wimpy RCA connectors this balanced studio cable uses **XLR plugs**.

XLR plugs are sturdy and as an extra advantage they actually *click* when they are connected.

(A jack plug is also available as a balanced connector: the TRS plug. TRS stands for Tip, Ring, Sleeve; these are the three points where the plug makes a connection. This wonky plug is not my favourite. It's suitable as a headphone connector but as a professional (mastering) studio connector it really lacks the sturdiness of XLR plugs.

But which cable is better? The expensive consumer Hi-Fi cable, with the inclusion of shielding and gold plated terminals or the relatively simple studio cable, equipped with non-gold-plated XLR plugs.

That's a very good question. An answer is not easy to give. Both cables serve their purpose. A studio cable has to meet other requirements than a consumer cable.

But wait a minute, in your last column you mentioned that a cable has to do two things: play some good music and stay put.

The consumer cable and the studio cable both deliver on these crucial points, each in his or her own way. Uncle Garth, who just spent over 100 euros on an interlink cable (an interlink connects two Hi-Fi components together), couldn't be more happy playing his 180 grams vinyl of "Dark Side Of The Moon" on his vintage Thorens TD-125 MKII with an Ortofon elliptic diamond stylus...

Renzo

Renzo (Masterenzo) is a Rotterdam based Dutch mastering engineer. He has worked for Gery Mendes (GMB), The Legendary Orchestra Of Love and Phil Bee's Freedom. More info about mastering and about Masterenzo can be found on his [website](#).