

FRONTROW JUNO REVIEW: CLASSROOM AUDIO DONE EASY

Reprinted with permission:

Rob Patin, Talked.tv

January 25, 2014

The Design

The Juno's design allows even the least tech-savvy teacher to quickly set up a classroom audio system. Ideally, it should be placed close to the teacher's desk to allow easy connections to his or her computer, DVD player, and other media devices. FrontRow packs all of the cables you'll need, so it's easy to hook up your devices, flip the switch on the back, and start speaking.

There was obviously a lot of thought put into the Juno's design. A touchscreen interface on the speaker tower allows quick adjustment of some basic features such as volume, microphone naming, and sound tweaking. If the Juno senses that its microphone hasn't been turned on for several minutes, both the tower and microphone will enter standby mode. Besides this being a great way to conserve battery life, you never leave your classroom wondering if you remembered to turn off your audio system. Nice.

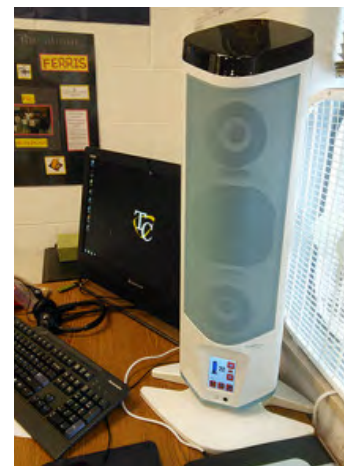
Speaking of the microphone, it is wider and a few grams heavier than the LightSpeed RedMike I have been using in my classroom. I have questioned the design of the wide-style pendant microphones like the one that comes with the Juno, but after using it, I'll concede that the design makes sense. The microphone doesn't shift or flop around as I move around the classroom and conference with students. Another feature that I appreciate is its soft backing which helps prevent sounds from the microphone rubbing against clothing, a problem I often have with the RedMike.

The Software

I'll admit that what initially intrigued me most about the Juno was its optional FrontRow Desktop Software. Besides giving you more control over the quality of the Juno's sound, what is most impressive about the software is that it can be configured to record your classroom instruction. Having embraced a flipped classroom teaching model, I set out to record my instruction at the beginning of the year using a recorder connected to my audio system. Unfortunately, it became too much of a hassle to walk to my cabinet, start the recorder, stop the recorder, transfer the audio file to my computer, edit it, and upload it to my web site. So what makes the Juno different? Hold the power button on the microphone and say, "Begin" and the Juno will start recording your voice. Hold the button again, say "Finish," and the software will automatically save an MP4 to your computer's desktop. You can even set up automatic file naming based on the current time. Pretty slick...but like my students, it doesn't always listen to me.



FrontRow's lesson capture software is easy to use and makes a great companion to the Juno.



The Juno's footprint isn't large, but a wall installation might be best.

Seriously, the software performed as advertised, except for the fact that I often had to repeat myself to get it to recognize my commands. I spoke to a FrontRow representative and was told that it's a matter of changing the cadence in your voice and perhaps tweaking a sensitivity setting in the software. So, while the recording feature is an awesome idea that is so much more convenient than the way I was previously recording lessons, I still need some more time to play with it and work out the kinks.

The Sound

Even with all of the Juno's cool features, what really matters is how it sounds. Considering that my current audio system consists of four speakers attached high on my walls and powered by a 100-watt stereo receiver, I had doubts that a single speaker tower could carry my voice throughout my classroom.

Wow, was I proven wrong.

Immediately, I noticed that my voice sounded louder and crisper than my LightSpeed system. I don't know whether this is a result of the microphone being more sensitive, the speakers actually being matched to the system, or some other acoustical magic, but several of my students thought that my voice projected more clearly.

But what amazed me most was how a single speaker tower could somehow project my voice throughout my entire classroom. [Wikipedia has a good article about speaker line array setups](#) that explains how this works. If you don't have the time to read it, let's just say that what the Juno does with your voice is pretty impressive.



There are a variety of ports on the Juno to connect all of your multimedia devices.

PROS

- The FrontRow Juno is incredibly easy to set up.
- It does a fantastic job of projecting a teacher's voice throughout the classroom.
- It supports software and hardware updates.
- FrontRow's computer software allows teachers to quickly record and share lessons with students.

CONS

- Music playback doesn't sound as "room-filling" as a teacher's voice.
- Sometimes the computer software didn't recognize my voice commands.
- School districts might balk at the cost.

The effect wasn't quite as dramatic when playing music, as it sounded much more directional, i.e. you could easily tell that audio was coming from a speaker in the corner of my room. It should be noted that the Juno can be upgraded with an expansion module that supports adding additional speakers in the classroom. If you were to purchase a Juno, you might also consider mounting it on your wall with a basic flat screen TV mount. Although this isn't necessary, you might get even better audio by raising the speaker slightly above desk level.

Initially, I found myself bouncing back and forth between my audio system and the Juno, but each time I returned to my LightSpeed microphone, a student (or my co-teacher) commented that the other system sounded better. Recently, I have been using the Juno exclusively for instruction and have been relying on my own audio system strictly for multimedia playback.

My Wishlist

Whether I'm in my car, at home, or in my classroom, I often stream music from my tablet to my audio system via Bluetooth. Surprisingly, the Juno does not support Bluetooth streaming and does not offer an expansion module that does so. I suppose one could just buy something like a [Logitech Bluetooth receiver](#) (I own three), but it would be great if this was a feature built in to the Juno.

Verdict

I thoroughly enjoyed my time using the Juno. Even though I have attempted to tweak my LightSpeed audio system, I have been unable to reproduce audio that is of the same quality as the Juno. My system might sound better playing music and movies, but when I speak to my students, the Juno takes the cake. Granted, I built my system from a hodgepodge of parts for around \$350, and the Juno starts at around \$1,200. Maybe it's simply a case of getting what you pay for.

There are several other companies that produce classroom audio systems at similar prices, but the Juno's ease of use, upgradability, and lesson recording software tilt the scale in its favor. If your district is considering a technology purchase that will immediately benefit student learning, you should strongly suggest that it takes a look at buying classroom audio systems. Personally, I would place the Juno high on the list of possible considerations.

FINAL SCORE	EXCELLENT	9
INTERFACE	9.5	
FEATURES		10
PERFORMANCE	8.5	
SUPPORT		10
COST	7	

FrontRow has created an excellent classroom audio system that is easy to set up and sounds great. Although expensive, the price is comparable to classroom audio systems sold by other companies, and its available recording software gives it a decided edge over competitors.



Rob Patin, a Michigan English teacher and self-professed technology geek, has a passion for educational technology. He is a firm believer in the benefits of audio amplification and has been using it in his classroom for a couple years.

Patin feels that technology has reinvigorated his passion for teaching.

He enjoys spending time with his family, photography, video editing, and reading about technology. Please find him at talked.tv or [twitter @talkedtv](https://twitter.com/talkedtv)



Since 1963, FrontRow's extensive acoustic and audiological products and experience have helped teachers bring learning to life. FrontRow systems are designed with a deep understanding of speech intelligibility, childhood development, evolving technology and real-world usability.

FrontRow classroom amplification systems can vastly improve a teacher's clarity so that children in the back of the classroom hear as clearly as those in the front. FrontRow products are practical, cost-efficient solutions for improving instructional quality in more than 60 countries and tens of thousands of classrooms worldwide.

www.gofrontrow.com • [twitter@gofrontrow](https://twitter.com/gofrontrow) • 800.227.0735