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M-Audio Revolution 7.1



Creative Labs has been losing ground the past several months to money-saving sound cards from Philips and Hercules. Creative still rules the high end of the market with its excellent Audigy 2 cards, but its turf is being challenged. I recently received an excellent 7.1 audio card from M-Audio that should generate a lot of interest among PC audiophiles.

The Revolution 7.1 uses an ICEnsemble digital signal processor and supports DirectX and A3D. The card also processes Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS audio and includes a digital coaxial connector, in addition to the usual inputs (no optical connection, unfortunately). The card is compatible with WinMe/2000/XP and Mac OSes.

The Revolution 7.1's advantages over the Audigy 2 included support for eight channels of audio. The Audigy2 only supports seven (what's that all about?). The Revolution 7.1's signal-to-noise ratio of 107dB edges out the Audigy 2's 106dB ratio. Both cards are capable of playing 24-bit, 192KHz audio, but here's the kicker: The Revolution 7.1 costs less than the Audigy 2.

The 7.1 includes a nice little audio utility that lets you set up the speaker environment and tweak the sound to your liking. It's not as extensive as the utilities included with a Sound Blaster card, but it's not bad. I tried it while listening to some audio tunes, and they sounded fine.

I especially liked how the Revolution 7.1 handled the audio in the test game I played, Serious Sam. The bass really thundered, and every sound was as crisp as a frozen sheet of paper. The audio clarity was truly excellent, and it didn't diminish when I watched "The Matrix" on DVD. This is where the card shines the most. The card's eight channels of aud....



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