

CrunchGear

Review: Soundcast OutCast Wireless Speaker

- By Greg Kumparak
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Everyone wants to have parties outside, music thumping under the sun. It just feels classy. Plus you get to show your neighbors how many friends you have. Thing is, most boom boxes turn to breathless junk as soon as they're outside and, between wiring and weather proofing, rigging up a high-quality speaker solution outdoors is a bit past the average consumer. The \$699 [OutCast](#) speaker is [Soundcast](#)'s answer to these problems. Wireless and weather-resistant, it's built to party by the pool.

The Soundcast OutCast had the unfortunate luck of arriving on my door step just days before I flew to Asia for a month. There it sat in my garage, sans melody, waiting longer to be poked and prodded than any gizmo should ever have to. I would have brought it with me if I could, of course, but I don't think Homeland Security would have appreciated me carrying a 60 lb electronics-filled metal cylinder onto a plane.

Now that I've returned, it's time for the OutCast to let its voice be heard. That it does - and it does it well.

The box:



- Soundcast OutCast Wireless Speaker
- Rechargeable NiMH Battery
- iPod/Line-in wireless transmitter
- Power, Composite, and 3.5mm audio cables
- Instruction Guide

Straight out of the box, I was impressed by the build quality of the speaker unit. It's built like a friggin' tank.

As you can see from the picture, they've included a rechargeable battery to free you from wall-warts and extension cables. I couldn't help but laugh when I pulled the battery out of the box - it's huge! You could kill a man

with this battery. That said, I was never once able to fully-drain the battery, outside of the actual battery test session, before my music needs were fulfilled. So its chunk is definitely a plus. Soundcast estimates 10 hours on a full charge, and I got around 8 at a mid/high volume.

Anyone who has bought a lot of audio gear oughtta immediately notice one thing missing: a remote. There were multiple occasions while testing the OutCast where the absence of a remote was noticeable. It's hard to justify getting up to change a song when you're schmoozin' and boozin'.

The Hook up:



Hooking things up couldn't be much simpler. Put the OutCast in one place, and the transmitter in another. Plug in your iPod, or any audio source with a 3.5 mm jack. Press play. Ta-da! My girlfriend (who generally loathes tinkering with new electronics) was girling out to John Mayer within about 5 minutes of unboxing.

The Sound and the Signal:

While I'm no audio engineer, I've ~~wasted~~ spent enough money on audio gear that I've come to know what sounds good and what doesn't. The OutCast sounds really, *really* good.

I flipped through a hodgepodge of genres, and everything sounded incredible. I was able to crank it to a deafeningly loud level without any distortion. Within about 15 seconds at about 70% max volume, neighbors across the street peeked out their

windows to see what was making all the racket. Designed for 360 degree audio without weak spots, it sounded especially good outside. Indoors, confined by big mean walls, it got a bit bass-y at higher volumes.

Soundcast promises a 350-foot range from the 2.4 ghz wireless transmitter. While I didn't bust out a tape measure and test the limits, I never once dropped signal be it I was upstairs, downstairs, outside, or in the garage. In a house with far too many things running on the 2.4 ghz band, I was expecting interference; there was none.

The Looks:

The eye-candy department is one of the few areas where the OutCast falls short. I wouldn't call it ugly, really - it's just bland. Amongst the comments made by wise-cracking peers: "Why do you have an air purifier outside?", and "Hey, sweet [R5-D4](#) replica." Of course, ruggedness and aesthetics don't generally go hand in hand, so that they made it anything but horribly ugly is an accomplishment.

The base of the OutCast features an optional bit of blue lighting, which helps things spiff things up at night.

The End:

At \$699, the OutCast is a bit too rich for those whose outdoor audio needs would be satisfied by taking their [iHome alarm clock](#) outside. For those willing to drop a bit of extra change for audio quality, portability, and durability, this thing hits *hard*. The signal range exceeded my expectations, as did the audio quality. With a basic remote and a bit of visual polish, this thing would be perfect. In the few days I've had it unpacked and on the review floor, it has fueled 2 social gatherings without a hitch. I'm certainly sad to have to send it back.