

Side Chain Compression on Vocal Delay's

An associate recently asked me how the vocal delays in my mixes sounded so clean, clear and not mushy? Was I using a lot of automation to achieve this or what was my trick? I was more than happy to share this technique as I too had the same issue with my vocal delays a few years earlier. Side-Chain Compression (sometimes called New York Compression), an old and very simple technique to do once you understand the basic concept.

The first step in the process is to create an auxiliary track for your vocal delay. Within the main vocal track that you want the delay on, create a send and send it to the delay track. Set the delay tracks fader to Unity Gain (0db). Open your delay plugin and adjust your settings to desired delay flavor and set your dry/wet mix to 100% wet.

If you were to listen to the vocal track with the delay on as it is, you may hear it get mushy during the verses. It will begin to sound better at the end of the verses when there is some space and openness within the lyrical content.

The Remedy? Add a compressor plugin that has a side chain function. Most modern day plugin compressors have this option, usually visible around the top or bottom of plugin. For this demonstration I will be using Logic Pro X and a stock Compressor and delay. **Your DAW may look a little different, but will be able to accomplish same technique. ‘*

Now that I have my compressor added to the delay auxiliary track, I will find the side chain function, click on the drop down menu and select the main vocal track. The compressor will now be controlled by the main vocal track and not the signal coming into the Delay Aux. This information will tell the compressor to keep off until the verse is over / or there is adequate space to allowing the delay through.

On your compressor, make sure to turn off the auto gain function so you can control the output gain to taste. Also adjust the threshold and ratio to taste. *Tip, a higher ration turns your delays down more.. Turn attack down so the delays will be grabbed instantly. Next, play with the release time. I like a quicker release time, because at the end of a phrase compressor turns back up to zero and we hear the boost at the end of the delay phrase.

So there you have it, that's using side-chain compression to control your delays. This is just one use for side chain compression, you could use it control reverbs or any other types of effects. Play around with it and see how you can use it to make your mixes stand out.

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