



Chris Gryffenberg – ZS6COG reviews the Rig Expert Standard digital modes interface available for use with digital modes and general transceiver control. He now shares his experience with you in purchasing and installing the Rig Expert.

Background

In September of 2006 I decided to upgrade the manner in which I conducted the DIGITAL side of things in the shack.

Until recently I too opted to use the soundcard utility of the PC and did so with mixed results. The main benefit of using the Soundcard of the computer is the cost.

This resulted in a kit that I built 25 off and it was received with mixed results by users. The main complaint is that the soundcard of the PC is unavailable to any other application rendering the use of the CD player options and gaming and other uses such as SKYPE etc useless.

Well that just won't do, so I opted for the Rig Expert, onto which I was turned after OM Gavin ZS6GE did a presentation on Digital modes at the East Rand clubhouse.

So what to do?

Upon deciding that this RIG Expert thing is the way to go, I went on the net and Googled Rig Expert. I received about 1.18 million hits after 0.13 seconds [Results 1 - 10 of about 1,180,000 for [Rig Expert](#). (0.13 seconds)]

This in itself scares the living lights out of you... where do you start?

The best place will be <http://www.rigexpert.net> At this website you can buy the rig expert directly from the suppliers. If you have a credit card you can do the transaction online. If like me you are scared of online fraud you can make use Paypal.

This service is relatively cheap and extremely safe. Well I didn't lose any money.

Two pitfalls here can delay payments:

1. If you make use of Paypal, make sure you verify your account with them, the Rig Expert is can work out to more than \$ 200-00 USD and they do not pass more than that if your account is not verified.
2. Make sure of your Postage and Packaging. The P&P to overseas client are more expensive and they will quote you on it. Do not complete your order before confirming the final amount. I waited 2 months longer that I should have because I did not heed the warning.

3.

After a long delay my package arrived, through no fault of anyone but my own I might add.

I must point out that the staff at Rig Expert was very friendly and reacted prompt to all my requests and e-mails.



Photo 1 – The packaging of the Rig Expert is very appealing to the eye. Somehow I just couldn't get it over my heart to rip open the box....

The appearance of the packaging is very appealing and right off the bat you feel that it was worth paying all that money to get a product that does not resemble the feel that it was put together in some bloke's garage.

Bonus points Rig Expert for the packaging.

THE CONTENTS

OK... now that we have the stuff, what is INSIDE.... You know what they say... beauty comes from within... in this case... it is what lies beneath...OK enough with the PUNS...

Upon unpacking the listed content are:

1. The Rig Expert
2. Software CD (Option) You can order the MixW software at an additional \$ 50 US and then you are fully licensed. You know pay your license it's the right thing to do...

Connection Cable to the Radio (Option) this will set you back another \$48 US. Although this cable is made up very neatly the wiring diagram is available online and you could do it cheaper yourself.

Here too Rig expert gets bonus point for proper packaging and supplying quality equipment. Again you feel satisfied with the product you received.



Photo 2 – Contents of the long awaited packet. All the items are of high quality.

INSTALLING IT

R.T.F.M.....Read the flipping manual

All I can say is R.T.F.M. If you attempt to install the Rig Expert on the fly, you are going to come in short.

DO NOT PLUG THE RIG IN BEFORE YOU ARE INSTRUCTED.

Observing this protocol will save you from purchasing another piece of equipment because you could not wait to play with the new toy.

The installation process of the drivers of this device is lengthy and repetitive. You feel tempted to take some kind of shortcut. DON'T.

The manual takes you through it step by step and is available as a PDF on the CD as well. The reason for this lengthy install is mainly due to the wide range of capabilities this piece of equipment has.

The manual also make provision for different operating systems. Here is another bonus point for Rig Expert.

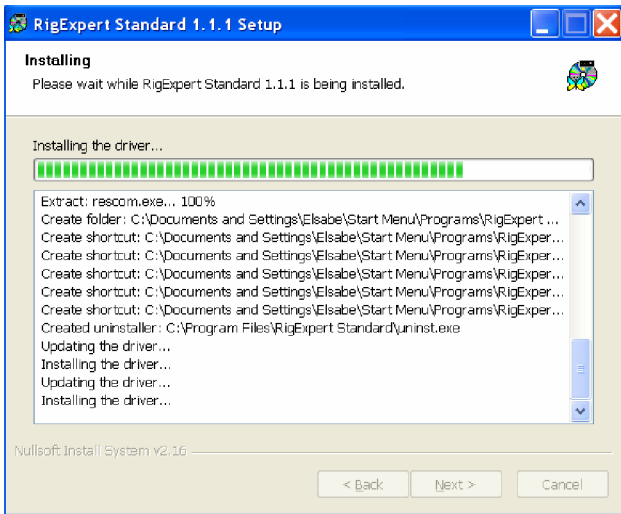


Photo 3 – Multiple drivers are installed by the software.

In essence you not only gain some soundcard interface but a whole lot more.

Firstly you free up you soundcard. The device is USB and can work with the newest software on the market.

It also is a CAT interface which means you can control your rig directly from the PC using either MixW or any other software. I prefer Ham Radio Deluxe I got from Paul ZS6BAQ, which is freeware.

It then installs an additional 4 comports on your PC, not only allocating each of these to the functions ranging from CW and PSK to Rotator interfacing and TNC. It also is a USB to RS232 interface. Now the costs are starting to make more sense. This is not a singular device but rather a DIGITAL STATION in a BOX.



Photo 4 – Hooking this baby up to my FT 897 was a synch... all new installations should be this easy.

The only drawback with plugging in the CAT and DATA cable into the FT897 was that I had to unplug my tuner in the process. I could live with that because the Hy-Gain TH7DXX is tuned spot on. Another case of RTFM in action.

The rear panel of the Rig Expert is equally simple to interpret.



Photo 5 – Looking up the rear...

The rear panel has space for the additional serial port using a DB9 socket, the Transceiver Plug using a DB 25 and the USB socket linking the unit to the PC.

Note the absence of a power plug The unit draws its power from your PC and no additional power outlets are needed. Eish... another bonus point for Rig Expert.

After setting up the Rig Expert I got onto 14 MHz and immediately saw how well this interface works. It is easy to set up, and easy to adjust.

After a few minutes I made several digital contacts getting 599 reports from DM5NF, IK4DRY, OH3GBS, SP2GJI and many more.

I thoroughly enjoyed getting into the functions of the Rig Expert and its operation in conjunction with MixW. The only snag I did pick up is the ability of Swisslog and MixW to co-exist, but that is material for another debate.

In conclusion

Looking and weighing up the costs of the RigExpert and the joy of operating it gives. I give the Rig Expert a positive THUMBS UP despite being expensive.

Any discerning radio operator will indulge in this piece of equipment as it elevates your operating experience from frustration with loads of wires multiple interfaces and other hang ups to pure enjoyment

Here are some of the painful stats

Costs	
Rig Expert Standard.....	\$ 255-00
Pre-wired Cable for your rig.....	\$ 48-00
Registration of MixW Software.....	\$ 50-00
Packaging to SA.....	\$ 28-00
Customs.....	R750-00
Enjoying the bands.....	Priceless

Until next time.

73

De

Chris Gryffenberg

ZS6COG

This review is available online at www.zs6cog.co.za