

Brightline i-Series LED Monitor Light

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Maybe this guy is a vet, otherwise it's hard to know why he's videoconferencing with a dog.



DESKTOP VIDEOCONFERENCING is the wave of the present. Until now the big money has been going into specialist videoconferencing (VC) rooms with very large screens that try (sometimes quite successfully) to give the impression that you're talking to someone on the other side of the desk rather than in another city. Such rooms usually have been set up properly, with quality furniture, air conditioning, acoustic treatment, cameras, audio system design and lighting, to make the occupants comfortable and to produce a reasonable quality of conferencing for the executives who have been coerced into giving up the hospitality of the Qantas lounge and the comfort of the Presidential suite to save the planet/shareholder's money.

Meanwhile those of us who use VC everyday to deal with our clients and suppliers, simply used the consumables budget to buy a decent-quality USB webcam from our usual on-line supplier, downloaded a recent version of Skype on to the office computer and got on with the job. Unfortunately the quality of much low-budget VC looked and sounded just that: low budget. As bandwidth becomes available, codecs improve and interconnect standards are actually followed, such impediments as low resolution and low refresh rate video and the vile half-rate GSM audio codec are fading into the past, and we can now actually make out what's going on at the other end.

WHISTLING IN THE DARK

Even though we can see an acceptable-quality video image of the person at the other end of the hook-up, we still can't make out their facial expressions because they're poorly lit by the overhead office lighting or the window behind them. Enter the i-Series videoconference fixtures from Brightline.

Brightline is a video luminaire company which recognised there was a whole lot of lighting for video cameras that had nothing to do with television and corporate video production, so a few years ago they branched into developing unobtrusive videoconference lighting. Their first offerings were some clever fluorescent fixtures for VC rooms, meeting rooms and media conference facilities. The i-Series takes this idea forward several strides by providing LED light sources expressly designed for desktop VC from normal offices.

The i-Series is a stylish and reasonably unobtrusive linear luminaire that sits immediately above a video monitor to illuminate the person sitting in front of the screen. Its dimmable linear array of LED sources, set behind a soft diffuser panel, constitute a softlight with quite gentle shadows, and a useful amount of wrap-around on the person's face. There's certainly little risk that facial features will be obscured, or expressions missed, by other conference participants.

While this clearly constitutes sufficient illumination, as someone who lit their first face for TV broadcast nearly 40 years ago, I have to confess that I dislike the flat, shadowless look of a face lit from directly above the camera (despite its adoption in far too many news studios). I suppose I really have to get over it and accept that VC doesn't have quite the same production values as TV drama.

SELECTING YOUR SHADE OF WHITE

Which brings us to the matters of colour temperature, colour rendering and dimming with LED sources. In a business environment, with its random cocktail of daylight, tungsten and a dozen or so shades of *White* fluoro sources, the '3200K' from the i-Series *Warm White* LEDs renders skin tones quite pleasantly. Even though there is a noticeable, magenta shift as the fixture is dimmed, it's well within the range of acceptability for desktop VC.

The i-Series luminaires come fitted with an egg-crate grid to keep the light from straying too far around the office. In its position above the central screen in my three-monitor setup, the demo i-S/22 produced no nuisance reflections or spill on the other monitors. More importantly, as I sit typing this review wearing my computer glasses (without much anti-glare treatment) and with the fixture at full intensity above the monitor (something that you wouldn't often do in normal office use), the glare is quite tolerable and certainly low enough to be able to read the screen comfortably during a conference session. Being an LED source also means that very little infrared light is produced to make the output hot, although some heat is generated in the body of the fixture from cooling the LED devices.

MONITOR MOUNTED

The fixture is mounted via the standard VESA screw receptacles found on virtually all flat screen monitors. Through a series of slotted holes on the VESA mounting plate system and a cute little gooseneck that links to the head of the luminaire a fair range of positions are achievable. Even so, with all adjustments at maximum height, I was barely able to squeeze my slender Logitech 9000 webcam (like the one in the pictures above) between the demo i-S/22 and my very average-sized Asus 26-inch central monitor. To address this problem a gooseneck extension will soon be available. There is also a weighted-base stand with a long gooseneck available for situations where monitor mounting is not an option, such as using your laptop.

The external power supply units for the i-Series are common, notebook-style switchmode devices that run off any available (100 - 260V) mains supply. The fixture comes with an inline LED dimmer between the PSU and the head of the luminaire. While this adds considerably to the convenience and flexibility of the luminaire, its very short cable tail left the control knob hanging right behind the luminaire in a very uncomfortable-to-reach position. I'm told that this has been commented on by others and that future shipments of i-Series fixtures will be supplied with longer cables, to place the level control in a more accessible position.

The i-Series are an important step in improving the visual quality of the increasingly-widespread practice of desktop videoconferencing. I'm working on a strategy to convince our publisher that it's essential to the prestige of the magazine for me to have an i-Series luminaire for my important videoconferences. ✎

Available in Australia from Herma Technologies: 1300 730 025 or info@herma.com.au www.herma.com.au

PRICING:

i-S/16 (410mm) 15W	\$391 (inc GST)
i-S/22 (570mm) 20W	\$464 (inc GST)
i-S/36 (920mm) 35W	\$609 (inc GST)
i-S/48 (1120mm) 45W	\$754 (inc GST)
i-S/48D (1120mm) 90W	\$1333 (inc GST)