



The Company's Founding

Founding

Dolby Laboratories was founded by Ray Dolby, who started his career in high school, when he went to work part-time for Ampex Corporation in Redwood City, California. While still in college, he joined the small team of Ampex engineers dedicated to inventing the world's first practical video tape recorder, which was introduced in 1956; his focus was the electronics.



Ray Dolby (third from left) in 1956 with the team of Ampex engineers who developed the first practical videotape recorder.

Upon graduation from Stanford University in 1957, Dolby was awarded a Marshall Fellowship to Cambridge University in England. After six years at Cambridge leading to a Ph.D. in physics, Dolby worked in India for two years as a United Nations Adviser to the Central Scientific Instruments Organization. He returned to England in 1965 to found his own company, Dolby Laboratories, Inc. in London. Always a US corporation, the company moved its headquarters to San Francisco in 1976.



346 Clapham Road, London. Corporate headquarters until 1976, and European headquarters until 1992.



731 Sansome Street, San Francisco. Corporate headquarters 1976–1986

The Decision to Manufacture Professional Equipment

Dolby's first development under the aegis of his new company was called Dolby A-type® noise reduction. It was a sophisticated new form of audio compression and expansion that dramatically reduced the background hiss inherent in professional tape recording without discernible side effects on the material being recorded. Among the new concepts incorporated into the system was the treatment of soft signals only, leaving the loud signals that naturally mask noise unprocessed, and dividing the spectrum into multiple bands to prevent the pumping (noise modulation) inherent with conventional wideband compressors.



The first product manufactured by Dolby Laboratories, the A301, provided one channel of A-type noise reduction (1966).

Dolby manufactured his new system himself, and marketed it primarily to record companies. That decision laid the foundation for what today accounts for a large percentage of Dolby Laboratories' worldwide turnover: manufacturing professional audio products in the company's own factories. Its freedom from side effects, more than any other feature, is what differentiated Dolby noise reduction from previous attempts at audio noise reduction, and ultimately earned it a place in virtually every recording and film sound facility in the world.



Monitoring a recording session using A301 units (1967).

While at first glance noise reduction (NR) appears to be an esoteric invention with limited applications, its effects on the audio industry have been profound. The multitrack recording techniques that blossomed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, came about only because of Dolby A-type NR. Without it, the high tape hiss resulting from the combination of narrow tracks and multiple mixdowns would have been intolerable. And when applied to consumer formats and motion picture sound, the results were to be even more far-reaching.



By providing up to 16 channels of noise reduction in one unit, the M Series reduced the cost of A-type for multitrack recording (1972).

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