

The USB microphone market is boiling up nicely. **Jono Buchanan** checks out Audio Technica's latest

Element: Fixed-charge back plate, permanently polarised condenser
Polar pattern: Cardioid
Frequency response: 20Hz-16kHz
Bit depth: 16-bit
Sample rate: 44.1kHz
Output connector: USB
Bundled accessories:
Pivoting stand mount for 5/8"-27 threaded stands, 5/8"-27 to 3/8"-16 threaded adaptor, soft protective pouch, tripod desk stand, 3.1m USB cable

Dimensions:
162mm x 52mm

Weight:
374g

USB microphones have grown steadily in popularity in recent years, with many consumer and professional microphone manufacturers now offering at least one USB model. Providing ease of use via a direct plug-and-play approach, USB microphones neatly circumnavigate the problems of trying to record a decent-quality signal to a computer via a simple solution. Rather than requiring any form of pre-amp or external audio interface, the theory is child's play – just plug in and record. As the market hots up, competition is growing stiffer and the good news is that quality is climbing accordingly.

Audio Technica's existing microphone collection contains the cardioid-pattern studio condenser AT2020 model and,

When USB-connected, the microphone features a bright blue LED but unlike some of its rivals, the AT2020 USB is a strictly 'input' device with no port for headphone monitoring your computer's output via the mic body

There's no doubt that the microphone deserves success in its intended area, that of providing high-quality home recording for podcasters, musicians and for voiceover requirements alike. This market continues to become increasingly competitive, so if you like the idea of a USB microphone for any of these applications, be sure to familiarise yourself with the features and options of Audio Technica's rivals too. However, if 'quality of recorded signal' is your most pressing requirement, the AT2020 USB is right up there. **FM**

Category	Score (Segments)	Max Score (Segments)
BUILD	8	10
VALUE	7	10
EASE OF USE	9	10
VERSATILITY	7	10
RESULTS	8	10

As 'no fuss' as it gets, the AT2020 USB should appeal to podcasters and home musicians alike.