

Tomorrow's Technology Today



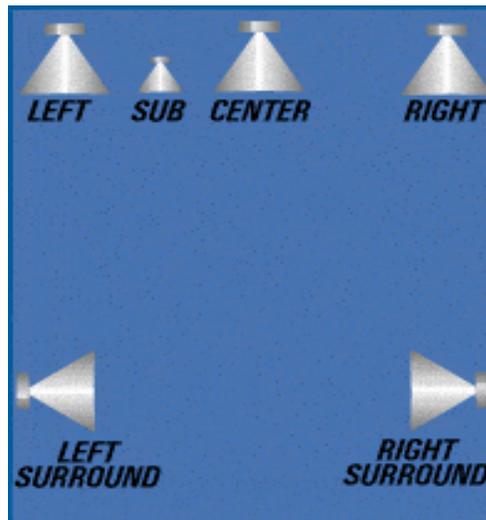
Low Voltage Electronic Specialist

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Surround Sound Formats

The principal format for digital discrete surround is the "5.1 channel" system. The 5.1 name stands for five channels (see **Figure 1** below) (**in front**: left, right and center, and **behind**: left surround and right surround) of full-bandwidth audio (20 Hz to 20 kHz), plus a **sixth channel**, which will at times contain additional bass information to maximize the impact of scenes such as explosions, etc. This channel has only a narrow frequency response (3 Hz to 120 Hz), thus it is sometimes referred to as the ".1" channel. When added together, the system is sometimes referred to as having "5.1" channels.



Presently, digital 5.1 sound format is most prevalent in **movie theaters** and in **home entertainment** systems. In the movies, there are three main formats - Dolby Stereo Digital (DSD) by Dolby, DTS System by Digital Theater Systems, and Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS) by Sony. These three formats are currently used in about 4,000 movie theaters. The DTS system is in the largest number of theaters, and Sony's SDDS system is in the fewest. However, the number of SDDS equipped theaters is increasing quite rapidly and could overtake the number of DSD installations in one or two years.

On the home entertainment front, there is only one big name at the moment, and that is Dolby. Here, Dolby's format is known as Dolby Surround Digital. DTS has recently proposed a system for placing 5.1 channels of data-compressed audio on a laserdisc (LD), but at the moment, no DTS demos of their new format using also 384 kb/s is available. All three aforementioned formats have one thing in common and that is they all use data compression. This is the only way to get 5.1 channels of discrete audio (with video) onto laserdisc, HDTV, or the upcoming digital video disc (DVD).

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