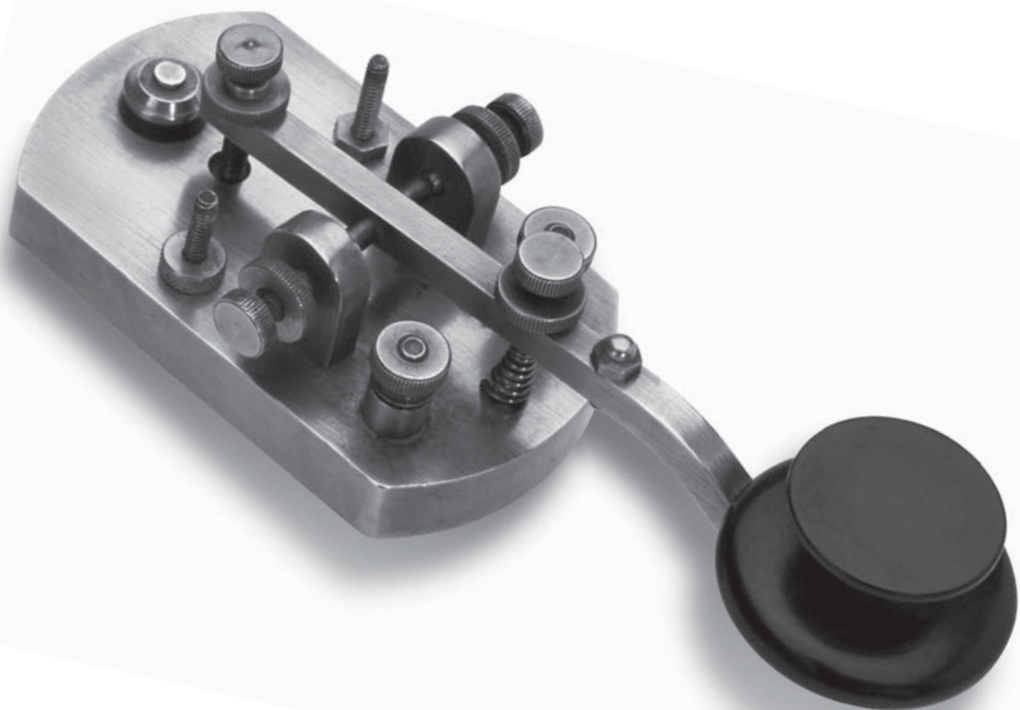


VoIP HACKS™

Tips & Tools for Internet Telephony



O'REILLY®

Theodore Wallingford



HACK

#11

Sound Like Darth Vader While You VoIP

Using Audio Voice Cloak, you can sound like Darth Vader—or like Alvin and the Chipmunks—while you talk online.

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith hit the screens right around the time I first tried this hack. When I filed into the very first midnight screening of the movie at my local cineplex, I was particularly excited by the prospect of again hearing the voice of the galaxy’s most dysfunctional father. There’s just something about James Earl Jones and the flange effect.

After all, who hasn’t looked into a mirror in a private moment and said, “I am your father!” a few times? OK, maybe you’re not as big a Star Wars geek as I am, but if you are a closet Wookiee lover, I’ve got the perfect hack for you to use the next time you chat with fellow fans.



If you think spy movies are cooler than Star Wars movies, you can also use this hack to make yourself sound like one of those disguised-voice phone informants that sound a lot like, well, Darth Vader.

Gold Software’s nifty voice-changing tool, Audio Voice Cloak, lets you tweak your speaking voice, adding pitch shifting, EQ, echo, and other sound effects in real time (Figure 2-2). If you have Windows, you’re in luck (Mac folks, see the sidebar). Download and install AVC from <http://www.goldsoftware.com/downloads5903.html>. Launch it and, after the shareware commercial, you’ll be able to click the All Controls button to reveal all of the sound-altering controls available to you. The program uses the default microphone input, so if you’re using a nonstandard microphone channel for your telephony or online chat, you’ll need to click the Recording Source button and select the right input.

While you tinker with AVC’s settings, you can monitor yourself with the aptly titled Monitor Your Voice button. Beware: you’d better put on a pair of headphones, or you’ll get feedback.

To get the most authentic Vader imitation (short of hiring Ben Burtt, the famed sound effects guru from Lucasfilm), you’ll want a slightly southerly pitch shift (drag the pitch slider down a notch or two) and a flange effect (click the Flange Off button to toggle it on). Finally, click the Center button on the Equalization panel to flatten (or “reset”) the equalizer. Then, monitor your speech to hear how you sound. You should have the familiar, convincing tone of a half-machine Sith lord.



Figure 2-2. Audio Voice Cloak's main interface

Now, fire up your Yahoo! chat client or AIM and surf on over to the closest chat room. Since AVC passes the modified audio through in real time, you can chat live as Darth, or you can raise the pitch shift to sound like a chipmunk. And don't discount the immaturity factor: if you have kids who chat with their buddies online, this could be a lot of fun!

Voice Alterations on a Mac

If you're a Mac user and you want to achieve the same voice alterations that Audio Voice Cloak makes possible for Windows users, you'll need to get your hands on a tool for Mac OS X called Soundflower. This awesome piece of software allows you to pipe audio into—and out of—applications in real time.

The “pipes” carrying the audio are logical OS X sound devices, so you can use them with any audio apps that support Core Audio, the standard sound framework on OS X. You can create a pipe to carry your raw audio into Pro Tools Free or Logic Express, run it through whatever real-time transformations you like, including pitch shift and flange for the Vader effect, and then send it out to your softphone or chat application using another pipe.

For more information on Soundflower, check out <http://www.macupdate.com/info.php/id/14067>.