



Picture Courtesy of Kemper© Amplification

Kemper Guitar Amplification

A Kemper Mini?

Case study by Jens Mayer

December 2020

About this case study



This study is my own personal project. I am a certified UX Designer and a guitarist, Kemper user and fan.

While doing research for this study, some people accused me of having an agenda, working for the competition, spying etc..

So I'd like to take this opportunity to make it clear: **I don't have an agenda and this case study is for my design portfolio.**

To be 100% transparent: I am a Zoom Creator and endorser for Furch Guitars but I don't work for those companies.

However, I admit that I would love to work with a guitar amplifier company as a UX/product designer! So obviously, I did choose this as study for my portfolio because this is the music/tech environment I want to work in.

Second reason for this study:

I think that there is a gap in the market and a customer need for a smaller Kemper amplifier! (If you are too impatient you can jump to page 13 to see my mockup of a Kemper Mini)

Introduction

Kemper amplification has been a leading innovator in guitar amplification for over a decade now. When the first Kemper Profiler came out in 2011, it was an absolute revolution.

To explain it in simple words for the non-musicians:

The Kemper amplifier can take a digital snapshot of an existing amplifier and recreate the sound of that amplifier so that you can not hear the difference between the „original“ amp tone and the „Kemper“ tone. Think of it as making an image of your Mac or Windows installation with imaging software. It is identical with the original.

Today, the Kemper is one of the most popular guitar amplifier in the world.



The challenge

To show what could be Kemper Amplification's answer to the rising demand and availability of very small flagship digital guitar amplifiers in the market.

The process

My process was to first take a look at the main competitors of Kemper amplification in this market segment, then do user research with a survey and analyze the data.

The goal

A new smaller sized improved Kemper Amplifier that adds nicely to the existing Kemper portfolio and replies to customer's needs and opportunities in the market.

Problem Statement

Customers are looking for a small sized Kemper amplifier that they can take anywhere easily.

We can see that there is a high demand for this type of small size flagship product by looking at the smaller sized amplifiers Kemper's competitors are offering.

The challenge

As of today, Kemper has 3 main competitors when it comes to flagship digital guitar amplifiers for live stage usage. They are using a different technology, but do also deliver a high quality signal.

The main competitors are:

- Line 6 (Line 6 Helix, HX Stomp)
- Fractal Audio (FM3, Axe FX3 rack unit, we'll ignore the AX8 as it has been discontinued)
- Neural DSP Quad Cortex

I'd like to point out that the Neural DSP Quad Cortex is just entering the market, but I am pretty sure it is going to be one of Kemper's main competitors.

One of the reasons being it's impressive features that include a function similar to Kemper's "amp profiling" process.

Let's also leave out the rack units of these amplifiers for this study. Of course they can also be used on stage, but they are not all-in-1-digital-amplifiers as they require an additional foot pedal.

So let's see the dimensions of current flagship digital all-in-1 units:

The challenge

Line 6 Helix
55.8x30x8.5



Line 6 HX Stomp
17.8x12.6x6.6



Fractal Audio FM3
28.1x23.6x10.3



Neural DSP Quad Cortex
29x19x4.9



Kemper Profiler Stage
47x26x8.5



(Dimensions in cm)

As you can see, all Kemper competitors do offer a very small pocket size unit of their amplifier: a unit in a size that you can easily take with you everywhere and that fits in any guitar gig bag. With increasing costs for transportation and less and less money to be made in the music industry, size has become an important issue.

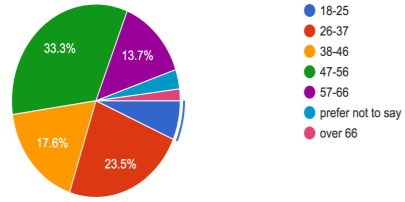
The approach

User research – survey

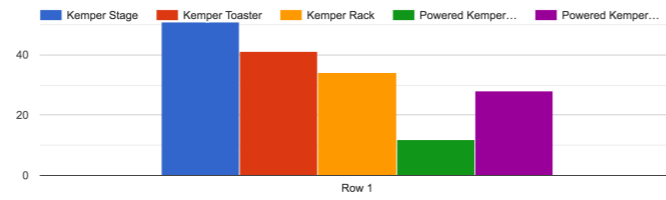
I conducted a survey amongst Kemper users. I wanted to find out about what they think about their Kemper guitar amplifier, and what they would like to see in the future. 153 people participated in my survey.

The survey

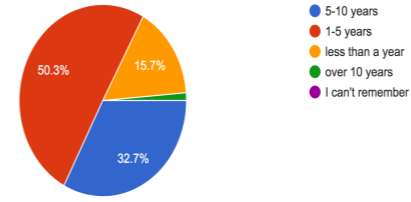
How old are you?
153 responses



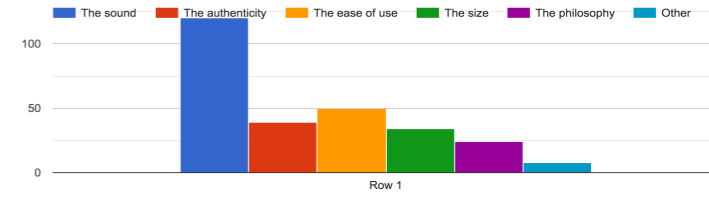
Which Kemper model do you play?



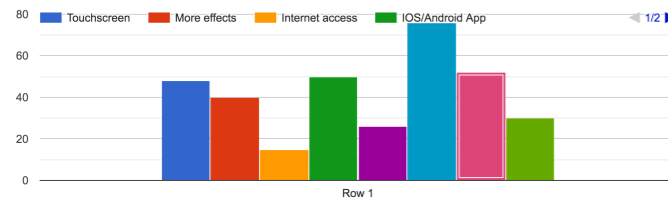
How long have you been playing Kemper Amps?
153 responses



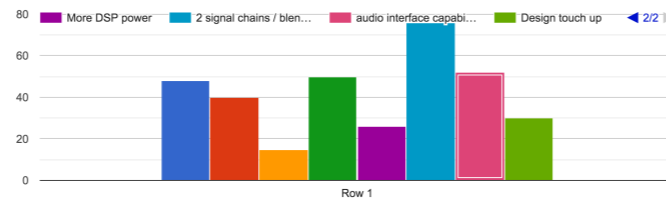
What do you like most about the Kemper?



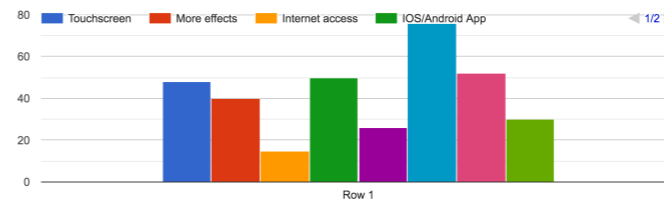
Which improvements or new features would you like to see in a new Kemper?



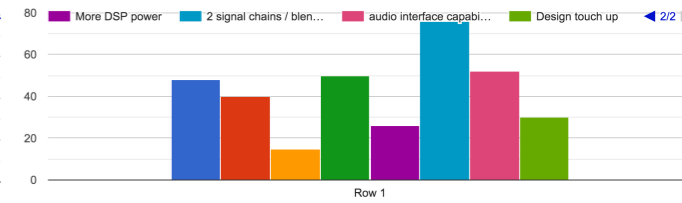
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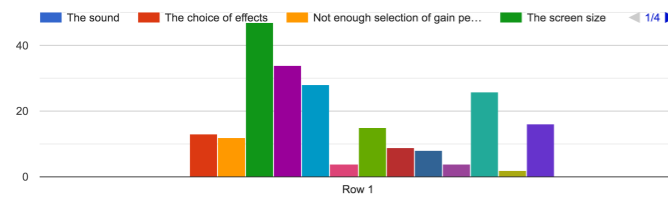
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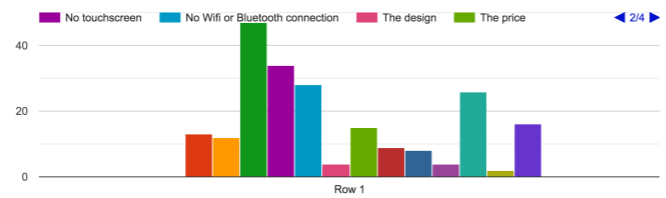
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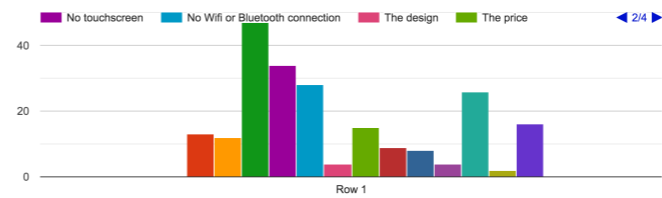
What do you dislike most about the Kemper?



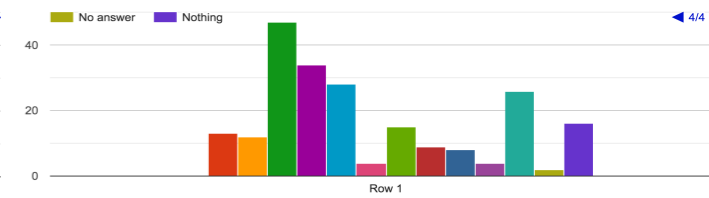
What do you dislike most about the Kemper?



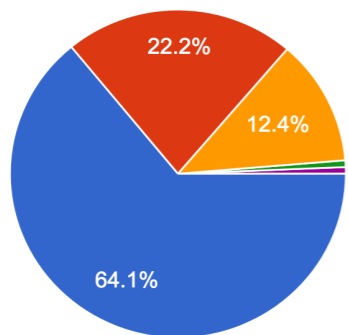
What do you dislike most about the Kemper?



What do you dislike most about the Kemper?

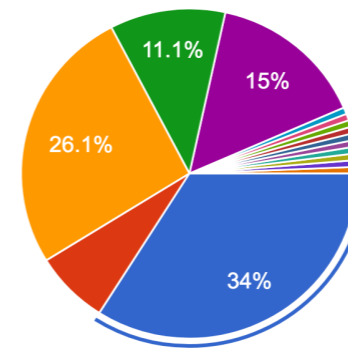


What is your opinion on the size of the Kemper?
153 responses



- The size of the Kemper is just fine.
- A smaller Kemper unit would be great.
- I don't care.
- Bigger the Stage for include a expression Pedal
- Groß genug das ein expression Pedal Platz hat.

Would you support a smaller sized new Kemper model in the future?
153 responses



- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I don't know
- I don't care
- Yes, but only if it is reliable ..
- Well, so many options to introduce an...
- I like the head. I wouldn't buy a unit s...

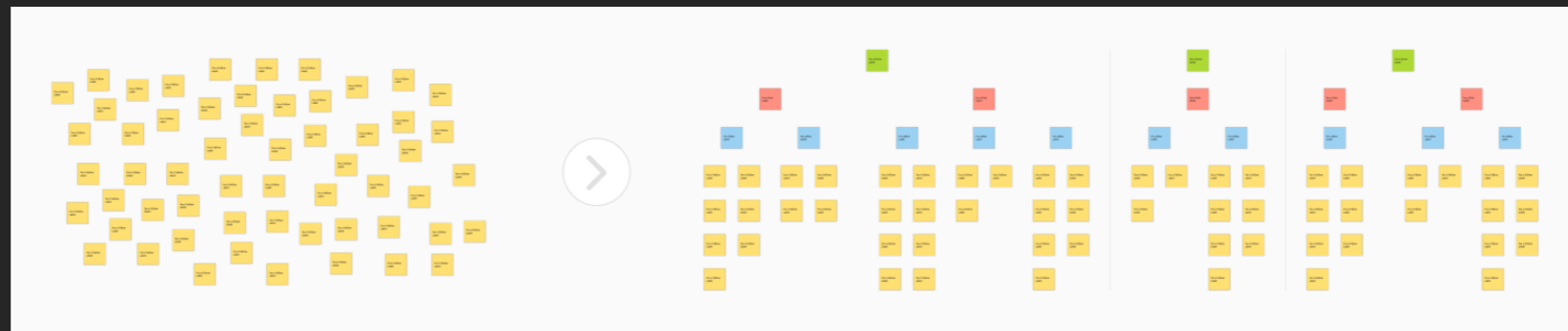
The survey (suite)

The following open questions were also part of the survey:

- Why do you play this particular Kemper model?
- How do you see the Kemper in comparison with Line 6 Helix and HX Stomp?
- How do you see the Kemper in comparison with Fractal Audio's FM3 and Axe FX III?
- How do you see the Kemper in comparison with Neural DSP's Quad Cortex?

Analyzing the survey results:

For analyzing the survey results in general and the open questions in particular, I used a system called **Affinity Mapping**. It basically consists of mapping out all answers, looking for patterns and grouping similar responses together.



Findings:

- Kemper users are very loyal to their brand. Over a third of them are 47 years and older.
- Half of the users have been playing Kemper for 1-5 years.
- Half of the users play the Kemper Stage model, mainly for reasons of portability and convenience.
- What all users love the most about their Kemper is by far the sound.
- What they dislike the most is the screen size, the lack of a touchscreen and wifi/bluetooth functionality.
- Compared to the Line 6 Helix and HX stomp, users find the Kemper's sound by far superior. They give the Line 6 models credit for their UI and effects.
- Compared to the Fractal Audio FM3 and Axe FX3, Kemper users find the Kemper amplifier easier to use and better sounding.
- As the Neural DSP Quad Cortex is still brand new, not a lot of opinions were given, however quite a few users find the Neural DSP's form and concept quite appealing.
- Most demanded improvements/new features were a feature to have 2 parallel signal chains, audio interface capability and an IOS/Android app

Now let's see about the size factor..

The size factor:

Let me remind you that the size factor was the main reason for me to do this case study.

Concerning the size of their Kemper amp, 64,1% of the survey participants said that they were happy with the size of their Kemper amplifier, while 22,2% were in favour of a smaller sized Kemper unit.

When asked whether they would support a smaller Kemper model in the future, 34% of the survey participants said yes, and 26,1% said maybe.

Now you could argue that there is no need for a smaller Kemper, most Kemper users are happy and the size is no big issue, and that according to the survey a touch screen should come first.

But you can also say that a third of all Kemper users support a smaller Kemper amp. And let's keep in mind that this survey was conducted only amongst Kemper users.

It would be interesting to conduct a similar survey amongst all people. Let's just think for instance of guitarists using pedalboards on stage, I am pretty sure that the support for a smaller Kemper unit will be much higher. And let's be reminded of my initial problem statement and the fact that Kemper's main competitors do already offer mini-amplifiers.

So what's my answer?

A Kemper Mini!



Picture Courtesy of Jens Mayer



So here is my prototype of a Kemper Profiler Mini!
Do you like it?

I did a few sketches by hand first, but switched relatively quickly to Sketch for developing the mockup:

- The size is exactly half of the Kemper Profiler Stage: 23.5 x 26x 8.5 cm.
- The functions are the same, at the bottom there are 3 foot switches instead of 6 and the 4th footswitch in the second row can act as tap tempo as well.
- The screen is slightly bigger than on the Kemper Stage.
- Wifi functionality is added with a turn on/off button at the top right:
The idea is to transfer profiles wirelessly through an Android/IOS app to the unit
See the real size of the Kemper Mini in context with competitors here:

Line 6 Helix
55.8x30x8.5



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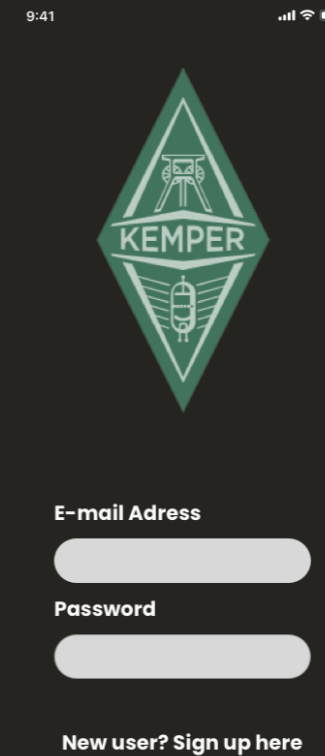
Future improvements

Possible future improvements could include:

- Audio interface function
- Touch screen function
- An app to send profiles to the Kemper and fully control the Kemper
- A possibility to have 2 parallel signal chains
- More effects to select from



(mockup)



App Splash Screen Sketch

If you liked this case study and would like to work with me, please contact me freely, I'd be more than happy to discuss future opportunities with you.

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Thank you!

