

The Impossible Dream?

Can a PocketWizard™ MiniTT1 work with a Ray Flash ring light?

By Bruce Philpott

The Ray Flash

The Ray Flash (<http://tinyurl.com/yzejyq5>) is a wonderful product which takes the light from my hot shoe-mounted flash and spreads it in a circle around my lens and pours it out at my subject with hardly any shadows. To me, this makes it great for a camera mounted fill light, but I want shadows to describe the planes of my product or portrait subject, so I want to use an off-camera main light.

I can use the sun as my main light, or better yet, a cloudy sky with some trees blocking a lot of it, so I have just one large area of sky as a natural "softbox" to light my subject. Then I can fill the shadows with my Ray Flash. I'd like to be able to use my PocketWizard™ radio system to trigger an off-camera flash, but the MiniTT1 transmitter raises the flash too high off the camera's hot shoe. The Ray Flash no longer fits over the camera's lens.



The Ray Flash ring light fits over the front of my flash when the flash is attached to the camera's hot shoe. This permits the lens to protrude through the hole in the ring flash. It's a perfect fit.

It's not possible to insert the MiniTT1 transmitter under the flash and still use the Ray Flash. The only way this transmitter will communicate with a remote flash using E TTL (through the lens auto flash metering) is if it's installed in the flash shoe.

PocketWizard™ MiniTT1 and FlexTT5

PocketWizard™'s MiniTT1 and FlexTT5 (<http://tinyurl.com/cxoyzl>) are an amazing radio system which permit me to use through the lens auto flash off camera. I put the transmitter on my camera's hot shoe and a flash on the receiver well away from the camera, and when I take the photo, the light comes from the side of my subject, creating wonderful shadows which describe the planes and shapes of my product or portrait subject.

I can also mount a flash on the MiniTT1 transmitter to act as a fill light. With that flash on the transmitter, I can control the ratio of the two light sources! I can have the off-camera flash put out twice as much light as the on-camera flash, for instance. This enables the main light to cast those beautiful shadows and the on-camera fill light to lighten them as much as I want. The only problem with this setup is

that I don't care for the shadows that the on-camera flash causes. I'd like that fill light to surround the lens, giving almost shadow-less light.

You can't get there from here...

I own both of these great products and found it ironic and enormously frustrating that they were physically incompatible. The Ray Flash is designed to fit specific camera and flash combinations. In my case, I purchased a Ray Flash which was compatible with a Canon 580EX (or 580EXII) mounted on a Canon 5D (or 5D MkII). The distance between the center of the lens and the flash tube is critical, as you can see. If the flash is too tall or too short, or if the camera's hot shoe is too high or not high enough, the Ray Flash won't reach from the flash tube to the center of the lens.

The MiniTT1 transmitter is about an inch and a quarter tall. A quick glance will tell you that it's impossible to put one of these between a flash and a hot shoe and still have the Ray Flash fit from the flash tube to around the lens.

These two devices seemed absolutely made for each other. I reasoned that if I could have shadow-less fill from the Ray Flash and a radio controlled main light and be able to control the light ratio between the two, it would give me practically "studio" lighting. With just my camera/flash/Ray Flash in one hand and a light stand in the other which had a radio controlled (ETTL) flash and a small softbox, I'd be able to position my soft main light anywhere I wanted and have shadow-less fill light from the camera.

I thought about it a lot and realized that I could use an off-camera cord from my camera's hot shoe and mount the MiniTT1 transmitter on the other end of the cord with my flash on the transmitter, but that left me holding the flash and Ray Flash in one hand and the camera in the other. That's worse than simply awkward... how could I move the main light to where I wanted it?

I drew various types of brackets on paper, realizing that I'd have to be really accurate with my measurements and that it would probably be costly to have a local metal worker make a bracket to my specifications. Then, what if one of my measurements was a quarter inch off? I'd have wasted my money and still have two incompatible products.

... or maybe you can! There is a solution!

The answer finally came to me in the form of another product which I already owned! A friend had recommended the Samigon V-H Flip Bracket System Deluxe (<http://tinyurl.com/yf3lcf7>) which didn't work for the project for which I'd originally bought it.

This bracket is intended as a camera flip bracket - you can change camera orientation from horizontal to vertical and back, and your flash will stay over the lens. This feature doesn't work with the Ray Flash, but it's unnecessary when using a ringlight.

By unscrewing the knob designed to hold the flash on the Samigon bracket, and installing it upside down, I found I could mount the flash end of the off-camera cord to the underside of the flash bracket and then mount the MiniTT1 and the flash to the off-camera cord. Then I installed the Ray Flash to the upside down flash, and it worked!

The height of the vertical shaft of the Samigon is variable, so this should work with any camera and flash combination.

Yes, the Samigon Bracket is expensive. I don't know if I'd have purchased it just for this purpose, but I already own it, so it's perfect for this new purpose.

As soon as I made this discovery, I started writing this article so anyone interested could have a very flat, portable fill light with complete control of the light ratio of fill to main light.

(photos on next page)



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On December 29, 2009, LPA Design, the manufacturer of PocketWizard™, requested and was granted permission to use this article to help their customers who want to combine their PocketWizard™ MiniTT1 and the Ray Flash.