

THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE

2018



The ultimate guide to
picking the right digital DJ
gear while avoiding all the
common pitfalls



DIGITAL DJ TIPS
GEAR. TECHNIQUES. SUCCESS.

NOTICE OF RIGHTS

© 2018 Digital DJ Tips. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

This edition: January 2018

NOTICE OF LIABILITY

The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information herein. However, the information contained in this book is sold without warranty, either express or implied. Neither the author and Digital DJ Tips, nor its dealers or distributors, will be held liable for any damages caused either directly or indirectly by the instructions contained in this book, or by the software or hardware products described herein.

THANKS

We'd like to thank all the hardware and software manufacturers who have helped us with assets for this guide, and a special thanks to those who support Digital DJ Tips in other ways too.

CONTENTS

5 A WORD FROM THE EDITOR	22 TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE	37 FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS
7 WHAT'S NEW IN 2018	23 THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR	40 TOP FIVE PRODUCTION GEAR FOR DJS
9 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	26 REKORDBOX DJ SOFTWARE	42 FOUR OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS
10 THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2018	27 FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ	44 THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID
15 WHY YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER	29 VIRTUAL DJ SOFTWARE	46 THREE OF THE BEST ALL-IN-ONE CONTROLLERS
17 WHY SOFTWARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE	30 THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ	48 FIVE TIPS FOR BUYING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CONTROLLER
18 SERATO DJ SOFTWARE	32 OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: TWO TO TRY	50 SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS
19 FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO	34 FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MEDIA PLAYERS	54 FINALLY...



THE DJ TEST

Take The DJ Test

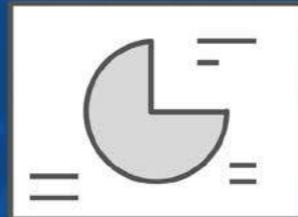
Discover Your DJ Score - How Well Will You Do?

1.



TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO
ANSWER YES/NO QUESTIONS

2.



FIND OUT IMMEDIATELY
HOW YOU'VE SCORED

3.



GET YOUR FREE PERSONALISED
IMPROVEMENT REPORT PDF &
COACHING VIDEOS

CLICK TO TAKE THE TEST NOW

www.thedjtest.com →

Powered by
 DIGITAL DJ TIPS

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



DJ CONTROLLERS HAVE REVOLUTIONISED

the world of DJing. These clever little boxes control two or more virtual “decks”, and allow you to mix between those sources. They usually connect to a laptop computer that runs DJ software and also holds the library of music being played.

Nearly always nowadays, DJ controllers also contain the audio circuitry needed for you to DJ properly - as a minimum, this means a headphones output (for you to prepare your music “in private”) and a master output (for your audience’s speakers).

Put the software on your laptop, connect the controller, plug in some speakers and headphones, and you’ve got a powerful DJing system that can do things DJs just 10 years ago would have struggled to even imagine. And as the DJ controller market has matured, the units have become more powerful, more stable and cheaper.

This is great, but one thing that can’t be said about DJing since digital is that it’s got simpler. Digital DJing has, alongside all the advantages it brings, made things somewhat tricky for the newcomer.

TO START WITH THERE ARE MANY DOZENS of DJ controllers to choose from. And there are lots of different flavours of DJ software. As if that weren’t confusing enough, many controllers work with more than one type of software. Then there’s the computer platform (Mac? PC? iOS?).

Once you start seriously considering making a



purchase, especially if you're coming to digital having used analogue gear in the past, you're also going to start seeing alternatives to all-in-one DJ controllers on sale - and no doubt you're going to wonder whether you wouldn't be best going for one of those systems instead.

For instance, there are traditional record decks and mixers, which can be coupled with special vinyl and interfaces to make digital vinyl systems (DVS). There are "modular" systems, where you build up your perfect DJ set-up from lots of smaller devices that plug together. There are systems that have the ability to play music from CDs or USB devices as well as your laptop or iDevice.

And then there's another question: "Do I really need a DJ controller at all?" Many DJs (including myself) started their digital journey just from a laptop running DJ software. Nowadays, with some excellent iPad, iPhone and Android software that uses the touchscreen for control, ultra-minimal DJing from just a computing device with no additional hardware is a possibility. Should it be your route too?

THAT'S WHAT THIS GUIDE EXISTS TO HELP

you with. If you're just starting out down the digital DJ route, and you're considering buying your first DJ set-up, this guide is here to help you find your answers to all of these questions, and to put you in a much stronger position to buy wisely.

Brought to you by [Digital DJ Tips](#), the biggest DJ school in the world, it draws on our many years of experience helping new DJs take their first steps, and so we are pretty sure you'll find it useful in answering lots of the questions you're no doubt asking yourself, and to help you clear some of the confusion around buying digital DJing gear.

We're extremely excited about how digital has changed DJing. It's brought the ability to DJ to the hands of practically any music fan who is motivated to learn. No longer do you need to invest many thousands in bulky equipment that's hard to move around and difficult to master; nowadays, you can spend a fraction of what

it cost to get yourself set up 10 or 15 years ago, and using easy-to-learn software, get yourself at least good enough to play your first "public" show in a fraction of the time it used to take.

NOW, OF COURSE, THERE'S A WORLD OF difference between mastering all the tools that digital offers to you and actually becoming a good DJ! The effort that goes into doing that - developing the ability to read a crowd properly, learning to sensitively move from one track to the next, complementing rather than upsetting the flow of the music, developing deep musical knowledge - is a lifetime's work, as it always has been.

Brought to you by Digital DJ Tips, it draws on our many years of experience helping new DJs take their first steps, with 16 online DJ/production video courses and over 17,000 students, so if you want to learn the skills, you're in the right place - just go to [DigitalDJTips.com/courses](#) and start today! However, you're going to need some gear... and that's what this guide is all about.

The beauty of digital is that it lets anyone have a go. Who's to say you might not be the next big DJ superstar? There's only one way to find out...

Happy digital DJing!

- Phil Morse
Digital DJ Tips Founder
January 2018

WHAT'S NEW IN 2018

POSSIBLY THE BIGGEST NEWS OF THE YEAR IS DENON DJ'S ASSAULT

on the DJ booth in the form of its sublime Prime Series set-up. Consisting of the SC5000 Prime media player and the X1800 Prime mixer, Denon DJ turned a lot of heads when it released these units, and with good reason: they're absolute beasts that marry the power and dependability of professional club DJ gear with the performance functions and innovations found in DJ controllers. They bring the best of both digital DJ worlds into one system that's designed for touring and club installations, and on paper they are better specified in every way compared to Pioneer DJ's CDJ-2000NXS2 and DJM-900NXS2, the combination of which is the current professional DJ standard.

IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THEY WILL BE ABLE TO UNSEAT PIONEER

DJ as the new club kings, though Denon DJ is the most likely competitor to do so. It'll be difficult as us DJs are a picky bunch, but the company's been making all the right moves so far: towards the end of 2017, Denon DJ announced that its SC5000 Prime media players would be able to read USB drives with music prepared via Pioneer DJ's Rekordbox software. That's the great thing about two big companies duking it out - it's us DJs who ultimately benefit in the end.

ON THE DJ CONTROLLER FRONT, PIONEER DJ RELEASED ITS XDJ-RX2

in late 2017, adding a touchscreen and more performance pads to its popular XDJ-RX all-in-one system. Reloop put out its first Virtual DJ 8 touchscreen controller in the form of the Reloop Touch, which can display up to four virtual decks onscreen for less laptop gazing. Numark also released its anticipated NS6II controller for Serato DJ, as well as its diminutive DJ2GO2 that's also made for Serato DJ.

LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE CONTINUE TO BECOME EVEN MORE POWERFUL

thanks to the cloud and artificial intelligence, and Algoriddim's djay Pro 2 leads the way here. djay Pro 2 combines AI and machine learning to create a variety of automixing possibilities, which can be helpful to mobile DJs who might program music for non-dancing parts of an event such as cocktail registrations. Spotify integration also means that you've got access to over 30 million songs from its catalogue for truly "infinite playlists" that can have you blurring genre boundaries and jumping decades. Another laptop DJ app that has streaming baked in is Virtual DJ 8, which lets you subscribe to and stream from three different types of content libraries: music, video, and karaoke.



**WILL THE DENON DJ PRIME SERIES TAKE OVER
DJ BOOTHS IN THE COMING MONTHS? WE'LL
JUST HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE...**

THOUGH IT'S NOW THE MOST POPULAR WAY FOR THE MASSES to consume music, streaming for DJs took a hit last year when Pulselocker announced that it was discontinuing its subscription service. This was a blow to the "streaming DJ library" scenario, but we still believe that music streaming becoming the norm for DJs will happen sooner or later.

THINGS WERE A BIT QUIET IN THE TRAKTOR AND SERATO CAMPS last year, and that could change soon because the "Big Three" of digital DJ software is currently being shaken up by newcomer Rekordbox DJ, which has made great strides in improving stability and tacking on features. Pioneer DJ just released Rekordbox 5.0 last year, and it's one of the slickest looking pieces of DJ software out there.

ANOTHER ONGOING DEVELOPMENT IN DIGITAL DJING IS LIVE VIDEO streaming. Though this isn't necessarily new, as niche sites like Chew.TV and Twitch have been doing it for years now, Facebook has been instrumental in pushing live streamed DJ sets to a greater, mainstream audience. Bedroom DJs the world over can now have a global audience with nothing more than their DJ gear, a webcam and quality tunes. Expect to see more developments in the live streaming space this year, along with greater accessibility for next-gen digital performance platforms including virtual reality thanks to apps like Vinyl Reality which let you spin with a VR headset and two handheld controllers.

CUTTING EDGE ELECTRONIC MUSIC CONTINUES TO BE MADE ON computers, whether that's in home studios or in project facilities, though we're seeing more "hybrid" set-ups that involve computer software for recording and mixing (usually in the form of a digital audio workstation like Ableton Live, FL Studio and Logic) and hardware for generating sounds and processing them (eg synthesisers, outboard effects, Midi controllers, modular synths). A DJ/producer set-up like this gives you the best of both digital and analogue worlds, which provides room for creativity and flexibility, even for those with more modest budgets.

OTHER DJ/PRODUCER RELEASES INCLUDE PIONEER DJ'S DJS-1000 performance sequencer and sampler, which takes the company's Toraiz SP-16 device and reimagines it into a form factor and layout that is similar to a CDJ media

player. Serato also released its Serato Sample plugin, which lets DJ/producers lift passages and sounds from existing tracks for sampling and remixing purposes.

THE SMARTPHONE AND TABLET SPACE ALSO SAW SOME developments: Apps like djay Pro and DJ Player Pro continue to stay ahead of the innovation curve while retaining much of the power and features that are inherent in laptop software, and beginner apps like Pioneer DJ's WeDJ keep things simple for those who are just getting into spinning on a smart device.

IT'S TRULY AN AMAZING TIME TO BE A DJ, AND WE EXPECT 2018 TO bring even more clever innovations to keep us busy.



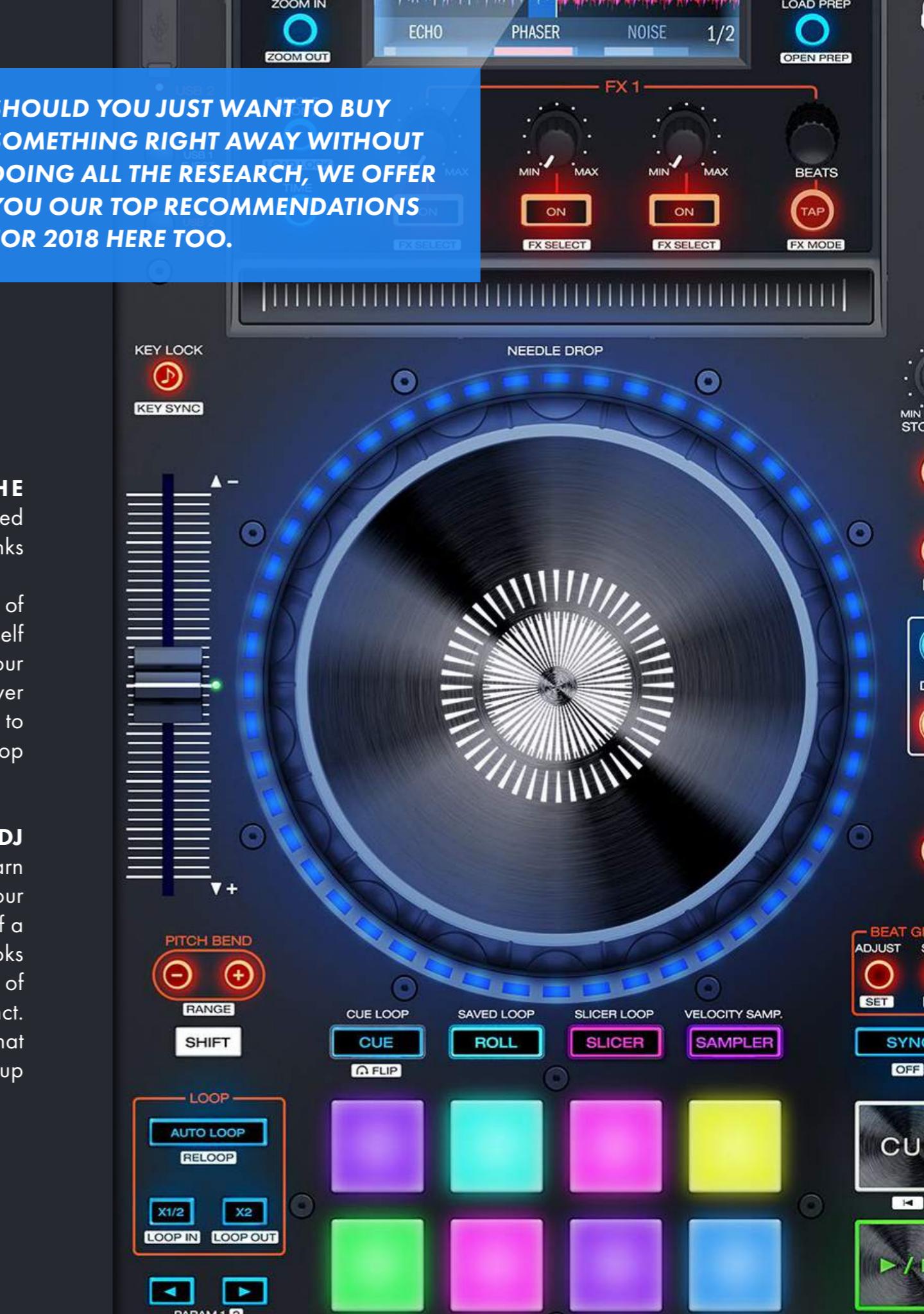
PIONEER DJ'S NEW DJS-1000 IS A PAD-BASED DEVICE THAT WORKS AS A SAMPLER AND SEQUENCER FOR LIVE PERFORMANCES.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO BE USED ALONGSIDE THE [online reviews](#) on the Digital DJ Tips website. There, you'll find lots of recommended controllers, modular gear, production stuff, mixers and more in one guide, with links to our in-depth reviews and videos to help you in your buying decision.

The summaries here in this guide will help you to make sense of the masses of information we provide for you in those reviews. We suggest you immerse yourself in all the information in this guide first, in order to make sure you're aware of your options, and then browse the online guide next, referring back here whenever you find something that you need clarification about. Should you just want to buy something right away without doing all the research, we offer you our top recommendations for 2018 here too.

FINALLY, A COUPLE OF TIPS ON HOW TO APPROACH CHOOSING A DJ controller. Practically all DJ controllers nowadays are good enough for you to learn to DJ on. Also, there is no "best" DJ controller. When buying, it's best to trust your instinct a little; as a DJ, you're going to be using the controller you buy a hell of a lot, at least if you want to get good at this game. If you think a DJ controller looks too small, or too big, or is too heavy or too plasticky, or you don't like the shape of it, or you think it makes you look like you're playing with a toy - act on that instinct. That stuff matters! So choose something that not only gets good reviews, but that you feel you'd be comfortable using. Because remember, hopefully you'll end up using it not only in your bedroom, but in front of other people too.



THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2018

BACK IN THE "OLD DAYS" IT WAS ALL SO simple. You had two turntables, and a "mixer", which was a box that sat between them and made them blend together. That was it. Boy, how it's changed! Nowadays we are bombarded with weird, wonderful and ever-changing DJ technology, each innovation promising to wipe the floor with the last, each manufacturer refreshing, revamping and relaunching its gear every year, shouting loud about the new features as if they're the only thing worth knowing about.

And while DJ controllers are far and away the most popular way to digital DJ today (the vast majority of our audience at Digital DJ Tips uses an all-in-one DJ controller and a laptop to DJ with), they're not the only choice - far from it. While this guide contains lots of what we call all-in-one DJ controllers - single boxes with two "decks" and a mixer, plus audio circuitry and a way to connect a computer of some kind up - you need to be sure that this is the right route for you in the first place. So let's take a second to look at types of alternative DJing "systems":

NOWADAYS WE ARE BOMBARDED WITH WEIRD, WONDERFUL AND EVER-CHANGING DJ TECHNOLOGY... MANUFACTURERS REFRESHING, REVAMPING AND RELAUNCHING THEIR GEAR EVERY YEAR...



A TECHNICS SL1200 TURNTABLE: ONE OF THE ORIGINAL TOOLS OF DJING.

"TWO DECKS AND A MIXER"

THE CLASSIC DJ SET-UP: TWO TURNTABLES (usually Technics) and a DJ mixer (usually a Pioneer DJM-something). I saved for years to be able to afford just such a set-up as a twentysomething DJ. There are still pockets of DJs who use such gear, and there are scenes where it's a badge of honour to perform from real vinyl on a system like this. Trouble is, most music isn't even pressed on vinyl nowadays, it's expensive, these systems are bulky, and to perform in this way is really to ignore any of the changes that have happened in DJing since, well, the CDJ...

"TWO DJ MEDIA PLAYERS AND A MIXER"

A MEDIA PLAYER IS WHAT YOU USE TO "SPIN" YOUR MUSIC.

A CDJ is an example of a media player: it's basically a CD player designed for DJs, where once you've slid the CD in, a platter lets you control it as if it were a record. Indeed, some early CDJs even had "real vinyl" on them. Most, though, are "fixed platter", which means the round bit doesn't actually turn when the music is playing, but nonetheless can be used to control the music when touched.

CDJs were the first time vinyl DJs saw a need to shout "it's not real DJing!" (something they've been doing regularly ever since...), but nonetheless CDJs caught on really quickly, and are still dominant in much of the world as the standard way to DJ. As it's easy to burn your own CDs from music bought online, they free up DJs from having to buy physical vinyl, meaning all the advantages of digital music discovery are brought to the table.

TODAY'S CDJS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE COMPLEX,

being able to play from USB sticks and drives as well as playing audio CDs, and Pioneer's latest models even have the "sync" button so hated by vinyl DJs (and many CDJ DJs, actually. "It's not real DJing!" goes the cry...). In recent years, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller. Currently the dominant brand is Pioneer DJ, though Denon DJ has issued a strong challenge last year by way of its SC5000 Prime media player. Most modern Pioneer CDJs (and XDJJs, the company's "non CD" version of a type of device) are less "media players", and more "controller decks", with fantastic screens giving much the same feedback as laptop screens, and capable of controlling not only Traktor, Serato and other DJ software by third party companies, but also, Rekordbox DJ, Pioneer's own DJ software. This means you can plug your laptop straight into a DJ booth-style Pioneer set-up and play from software just like you can when you plug your laptop into smaller, more consumer-focused all-in-one DJ controllers.



A MODERN PIONEER CDJ SET-UP. CDJ DJING HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE FIRST UNITS APPEARED 15 YEARS BACK.

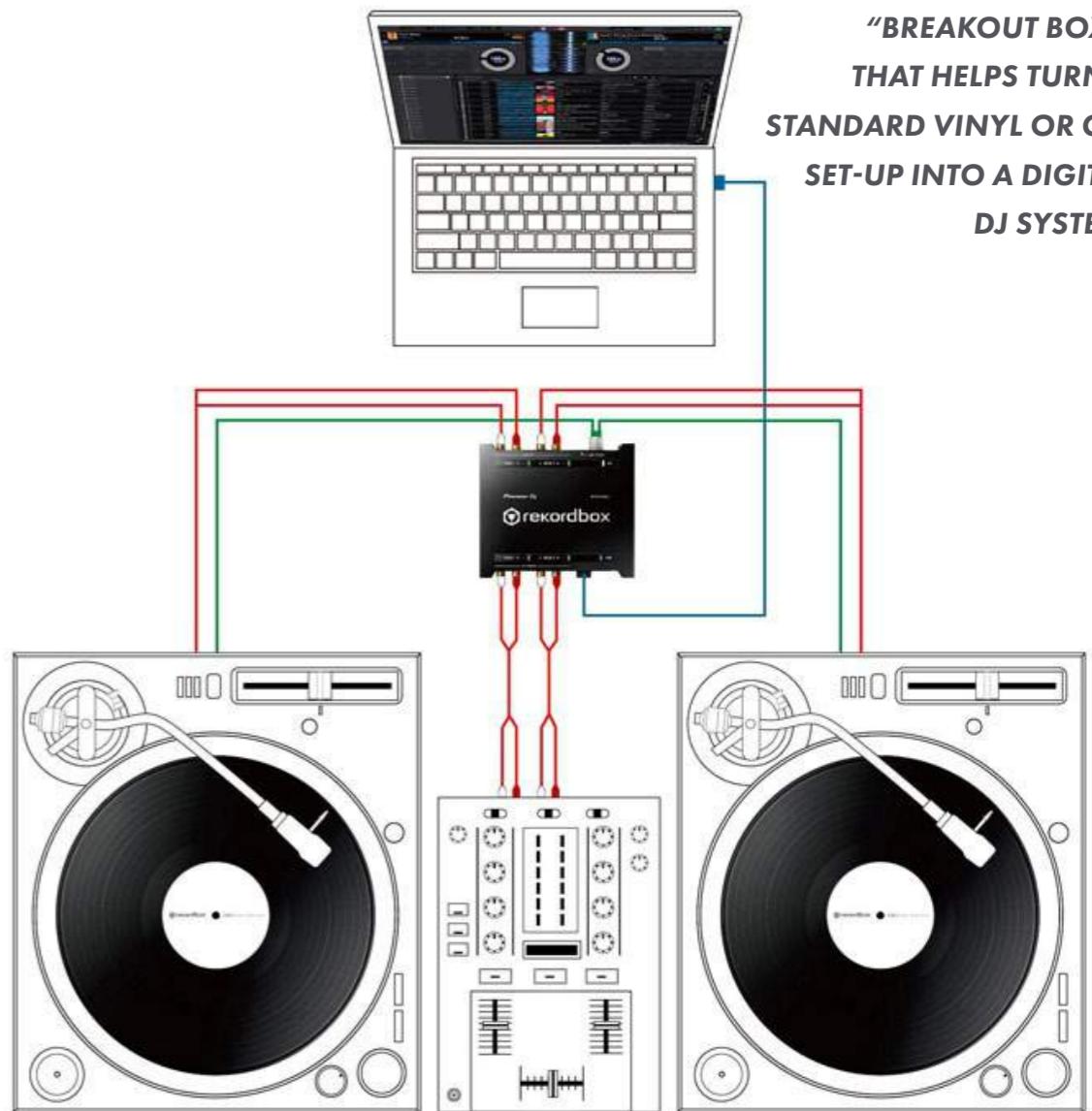
DIGITAL VINYL SYSTEMS (DVS)

A DVS SYSTEM CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A WAY OF "ADAPTING"

either of the above set-ups to turn it into a laptop DJ system. In that respect, it can be seen as a "half way house", bridging the old, analogue ways and the new digital world. Here's how it works. You use special control vinyl or CDs, that instead of containing music, contain computer code (shrill, screechy and very much not music when you accidentally actually do listen to it). You plug a special box, often referred to as an audio interface or "breakout box", in-between your record decks or CD players and your mixer and speakers, and connect this box to your laptop, which runs DJ software. (Nowadays, you increasingly don't even need extra hardware, because many modern DJ mixers have all the circuitry in them needed to do this "out of the box".) The laptop intercepts the computer signal from the control vinyl or CDs, and sends music from your hard drive to the mixer and speakers, following your every manipulation of it on your decks or CDJs. You get to use your usual gear, but you get all the advantages of using DJ software at the same time.

Advantages? Well, you can use your existing gear (or the club's) and still have many of the benefits of using DJ software. It "looks" like "real" DJing (even though you can apply all the tricks of digital nonetheless). It can feel more natural to DJs coming at digital having used analogue in the past. And because the majority of clubs still don't have the kind of modern, digital-friendly CDJ/XDJ set-up described above, but most do have at least some kind of DJ CD players and mixer, DVS is a surefire bet for DJs who can't be sure what they'll find when they turn up to play at any given venue, and for this reason DVS remains immensely popular. Disadvantages? Tricky to set up, and expensive if you have to buy the analogue gear first and then add on a DVS system to make it "digital".

A DVS SYSTEM
COMPRISSES CONTROL
VINYL OR CDS, AND
AN AUDIO INTERFACE,
OFTEN CALLED A
"BREAKOUT BOX",
THAT HELPS TURN A
STANDARD VINYL OR CDJ
SET-UP INTO A DIGITAL
DJ SYSTEM.



MODULAR DJ SYSTEMS

REMEMBER HI-FI SEPARATES, WHERE YOU'D HAVE A TUNER, AN

amplifier, a CD player, a record deck and a tape recorder, instead of just buying one box with the lot in? That's how a modular DJ system is. Just like the original DJ gear ("two decks and a mixer"), a modular digital set-up is where instead of all being in one box, the parts are separate. You get to pick and choose the items that make most sense to you and to your DJing style, dependent on size, weight, functionality and so on.

Do you only need one "deck" and a load of buttons? Then buy a pad controller, a single "deck" controller and maybe a small software mixer. Really interested in triggering samples? Buy a "button" controller designed to unlock that part of your DJ controller. Got a DVS system (see above) but want extra control over parts of your software that your record decks and control vinyl can't give you? Grab a small device that unlocks that stuff for you and wire it in alongside the DVS. Want to use a feature like Traktor's Stems format? Add a Stems-ready deck.

Modular systems let experts "build to measure", but essentially, a digital modular system does what an equivalent all-in-one does (should such an all-in-one exist)... but simply split across more than one box.

AN EXAMPLE OF
A MODULAR DJ
CONTROLLER (THE
TRAKTOR KONTROL
D2), DESIGNED TO DO
A CERTAIN ASPECT OF
WHAT AN ALL-IN-ONE
CONTROLLER CAN DO.



LAPTOP-ONLY DJ SYSTEMS

REALLY, DJ CONTROLLERS ARE JUST AN alternative to using the mouse and keyboard to control your DJ software. Sure, they're a great fun alternative, but most DJ software can also be 100% controlled without anything else plugged into the computer at all. And some DJs do just that.

Whether because they're just starting out and can't afford a DJ controller, or they want to travel light, or they just love the whole minimal thing, for these DJs, a controller is one box too many. I actually started out like this, because in 2005 I couldn't find a Midi controller ("Midi" is the technical word for how digital music devices talk to each other and to computers) that was good enough for my needs, So I hacked and adapted how all the keys of my computer controlled my software... and DJed like that for several years!

If you go down this "laptop only" route you're still going to need some kind of audio device to turn your laptop's one audio output into two (one output for your headphones and one for your speakers) - but nonetheless, this is still just about as minimal as digital DJing gets. Apart from, that is...

DJING ON DJAY PRO FOR IPAD.



IOS/ANDROID APPS

BEING ABLE TO DJ ON YOUR IPAD, ANDROID TABLET OR EVEN

smartphone is now a reality. Not only is it a reality, but it's incredibly addictive and a lot of fun. It's truly amazing what you can do on such devices nowadays, and with Algoriddim's djay app claiming 15 million downloads, and other apps like Traktor DJ also available, tablet and smartphone DJing isn't going away any time soon!

Really this is just a new take on the laptop-only DJ system described previously, and it's actually coming full circle, with a number of DJ controllers now able to work with the iPad and a couple with Android, so you can use your iOS or Android device as a direct replacement for a laptop in such set-ups. Expect this to only get bigger over time. Like with laptop-only systems you might want to consider a compatible audio interface for that all-important separate headphone output here.

By the way, Android is still quite new to this: 2015's guide was the first time we included Android software, recommending djay from Algoriddim and Mixvibes Cross for Android. Android recently added multi-channel audio to the platform chalking off another obstacle in the way of it someday soon catching up with iOS when it comes to DJing. After all, there are many more Android devices out there than iOS devices...

CD/USB/MASS STORAGE "ALL-IN-ONE" SYSTEMS

THIS TYPE OF GEAR LOOKS MUCH MORE LIKE THE ALL-IN-ONE DJ

controllers that the vast majority of digital DJs use, but with a few differences. Such units may have CD slots on the front. They may have USB slots on the top, so you can plug in USB sticks and play music from those too. They may also have standard inputs, so you could plug record decks or CD players into them, as well. And many also work just fine with laptops and DJ software. Some may play nicely with your iPad or iPhone - some may even communicate wirelessly with such devices to grab music from them. But what they all share in common is the ability to be used without a laptop in some way, shape or form should you wish to. This type of all-in-one system definitely came of age with the release of the Pioneer XDJ-RX (now replaced by the XDJ-RX2), a system that for the first time packed a laptop-rivalling screen that shows waveforms and library information; it was joined in 2016 by Denon DJ's accomplished MCX8000. For us, these are the first such systems that actually feel close to laptop/controller DJing, just without the laptop.

**PIONEER DJ'S XDJ-RX2
LETS YOU PLAY MUSIC
FROM USB DEVICES, NO
LAPTOP REQUIRED.**



WHY YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER

(PLUS SOME DRAWBACKS)



WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, YOU'LL PROBABLY WANT A DJ controller (and by that, just to reiterate I mean an "all in one" DJ controller with "decks", "mixer" and "audio interface" built in). Here are the assumptions I'm making about you to make that call on your behalf.

I'm guessing the idea of playing on traditional, simple all-vinyl or CD systems is not of appeal to you - mainly because you're reading a digital DJ guide! I'm also guessing that a very modern, digital friendly, Pioneer DJ booth-style system is an expense that's prohibitive to you. Likewise, while adding a DVS system to a vinyl or CD system to make it digital will give you an awesome club-like set-up, I'm guessing the commitment, complexity and huge ticket price of such a system will rule this option out for you too.

DJing from just a laptop would be tricky (and look rubbish) you're thinking, and probably wouldn't even feel like DJing. You're right. Laptop-only DJing is great as a backup or for those of us who learned on "real gear", so can compensate for its weirdness, but it's no way to start your DJing career. This is also why manufacturers put out controllers that work with iOS and Android devices: The touchscreen is not so hot for truly immersive DJing, even with the best DJ apps.

Actually, out of all the "alternative" system types we discussed, the one most likely to appeal to you instead of a "normal" DJ controller is the type of controller

that can work without your laptop too if you want it to, by using USBs, CDs and even music stored wirelessly on iDevices etc.

They're often very appealing to mobile DJs, who find them easier when it comes to playing requests from CDs or USB sticks, or who want to combine an existing analogue music collection with laptop DJing (as it's easy to switch between the two mid-set).

LATER ON IN THE GUIDE WE ROUND UP the best of these for this reason - but I think you'll still most likely decide that standard DJ controllers are the way to go, coming back to cost efficiency, portability, reliability and just thinking that controllers are, well, cool (I agree completely). But just so we go into this with our eyes wide open, let's look at some of the disadvantages to using DJ controllers.

Depending on where you are in the world, you may find there is considerable resistance to using DJ controllers in your local venues. While in some parts of the world DJs are literally given a table to set up their own gear on (so you can bring what you want), often bars, lounges and clubs have gear they've invested heavily in, and rightly or wrongly the managers of such venues can't understand why "these new DJs" are insisting on bringing small, cheap-looking plastic boxes to DJ on when they have provided pro-grade gear to use (this is why DVS systems certainly have a

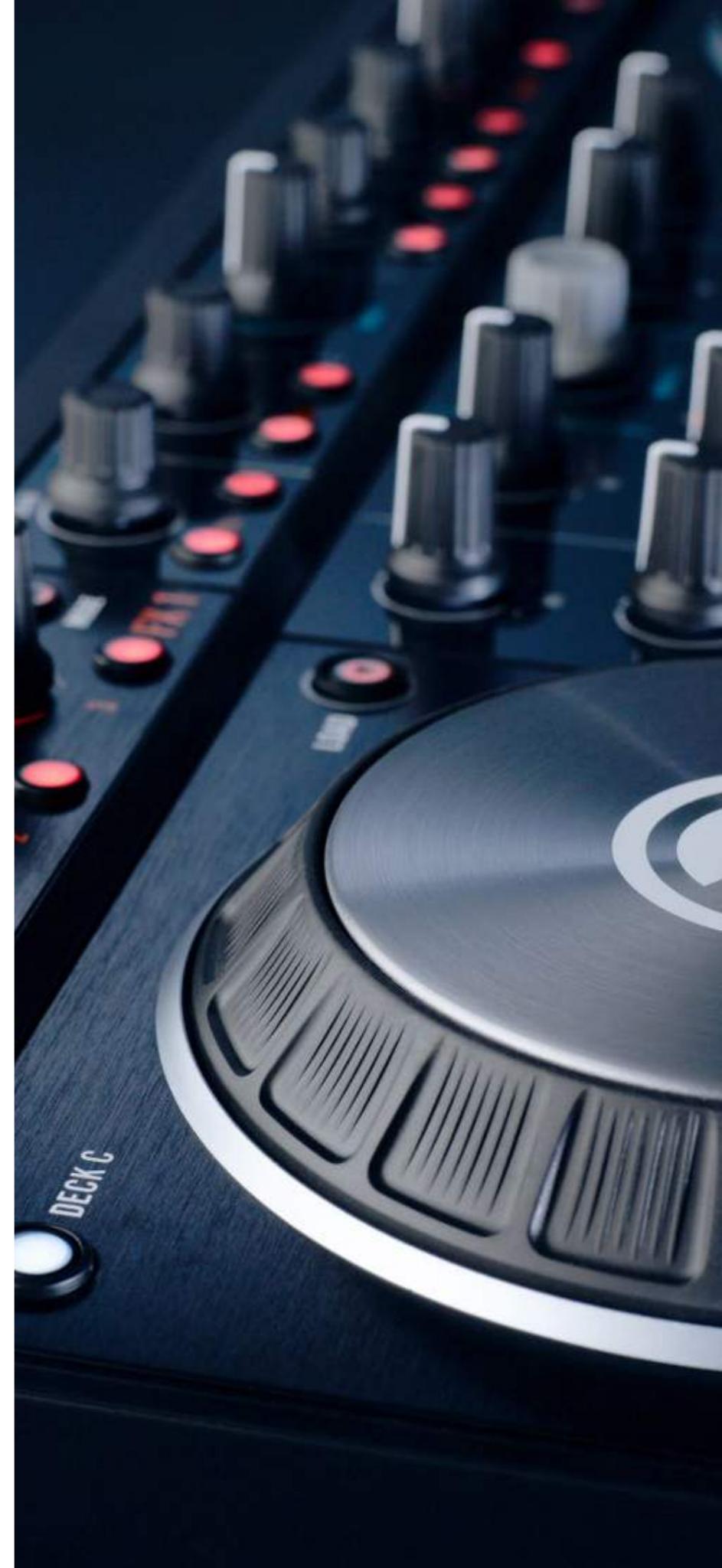
niche; there isn't anywhere near as much of a stigma attached to using DVS in such venues as there is DJ controllers).

Even when you have club management that's happy for you to bring a DJ controller to play from (at least, in theory), there's the issue of finding the space to set up. That's why some DJs often settle on more minimal, modular systems; having maybe a single slimline controller and a laptop is more likely to be tolerated in cramped DJ booths than a big all-in-one, and as long as you're comfortable with using such gear - and many experienced DJs are - this can be a great alternative. (Often, DJs combine this with some kind of DVS control for a truly powerful digital set-up, that still uses the club's gear too.)

ANOTHER DISADVANTAGE OF DIGITAL

systems is the chance of a laptop crash or failure, as this means curtains for the music; this is why digital DJs should always have a backup plan in place, even if it's just a small CD wallet or a mix on your iPod that you can switch in should your laptop fail and need a reboot for some reason.

But all that said, I bet you still want a DJ controller, yeah? I don't blame you. So now that we're definitely all on the same page, let's start to make sense of what's out there.



WHY SOFTWARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE

WE'VE ALREADY LEARNED THAT THE hardware is only really there to do some clever stuff with the audio, and to give you cool, purpose-made controls that make your DJ software easier to use. It's the DJ software that actually does all the clever bits.

IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT LOADS THE music from your hard drive into your computer's memory for playback. It's the DJ software that monitors what you're doing on the so-called "transport" controls (play, pause, forward, back, speed and so on) to manipulate the music. It's the DJ software that watches your every move on the mixing controls, not only the volumes but all other controls and then alters the audio to your exact instructions. It's the DJ software that gives you two decks, or four decks, or a load of clever samples, or all the amazing effects like echo and filter and all the rest. Think of your DJ controller as a dumb box that takes all the glory, and you're not going to go far wrong. Even if you go for a "flavour of 2018" controller with built-in screens, it's the computer that's feeding them the info.

SO IN ORDER FOR YOU TO BE ABLE TO choose a DJ controller wisely, you're going to need to understand DJ software, and the choices that are out there for you. That's why before looking at the best controllers for each piece of software, we are going to take a short while to explain a bit about the software itself. If you haven't made up your mind what software platform to go for, this will help you to narrow down your hardware choice considerably. Changing software is much harder than changing hardware: Pick your software for life, even if your DJ controller is just for Christmas!

IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT WATCHES YOUR EVERY MOVE ON THE MIXING CONTROLS, NOT ONLY THE VOLUMES BUT ALL THE OTHER CONTROLS AND THEN ALTERS THE AUDIO TO YOUR EXACT INSTRUCTIONS.





SERATO DJ IS HUGELY POPULAR, AND IS A CAPABLE AND STABLE

platform. Serato doesn't make its own hardware, instead partnering tightly with manufacturers, thus guaranteeing the required amount of quality control over the hardware to ensure great performance. Accordingly, there is simply no such thing as poor jogwheel performance on any Serato-compatible controllers; they all work as tightly as each other, which is to say they are all excellent. So to an extent, any Serato-compatible controller will give you a decent DJing experience, meaning you're really looking at features when choosing.

The software is all about usability, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided than with some platforms (a Midi editor was added recently, though). This means, though, that there tend to be fewer "head scratching" moments when learning and using Serato software. It has a more logical, capable music library system than say, Traktor, and plays more nicely with iTunes, the software of choice for many DJs when it comes to planning DJ sets. It also handles non-electronic music better than all the others. Extra effects

are available as paid-for plugins, as is video capability. Meanwhile, the Flip re-editing plug-in allows fast, intuitive and genuinely useful re-editing of tunes - on the fly, if desired - that can be saved and recalled for future playback. Great fun for attention-challenged DJs who want to make basic but meaningful changes to "finished" recorded music.

ONE THING TO NOTE ABOUT SERATO DJ IS THAT IT DOESN'T

work without a licensed controller or audio interface plugged in; without that, you're switched to "offline" mode, where you can prepare your music but can't actually DJ. This means there's no "laptop only" option here as with most DJ software - and also, there's no way you can download a computer-only version or trial to "try before you buy". It's also worth remembering that many cheaper Serato-compatible controllers come with "Serato DJ Intro", a cut down version of the software. You'll definitely want to upgrade to the full version, not least because it's the only easy way to properly digitally record your sets.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO



DENON DJ MCX8000

WITH TWO BUILT-IN HIGH QUALITY SCREENS, A FULL standalone four-channel mixer, hardware filters and FX, Denon DJ's pro build quality, proper microphone channels and deep, full Serato integration, the MCX8000 is a highly accomplished DJ controller. Furthermore, it has USB sockets so it's possible to play tracks directly without the need for a laptop, and as long as they're analysed with Denon DJ's own Engine software, those tracks have sync, waveforms and so on. Icing on the cake? Full import of track data from Serato DJ to Engine, so in effect you have a simple, convenient USB backup solution built in to this unit.





2

ROLAND DJ-808

AN INNOVATIVE SERATO DJ CONTROLLER, the Roland DJ-808 has a standalone mixer, built-in drum sequencing, a vocal processor, AIRA ports to connect with Roland synths and electronic gadgets, and a Roland TR-S drum machine built in. In other words, it's a four-channel mixer, DJ controller, and musical instrument rolled into one. Roland is clearly hoping it'll gain the same kind of iconic status of its drum machines, and as long as you understand what you're buying and how you think you're going to get the most from it, the DJ-808 is an exciting choice.



3

PIONEER DJ DDJ-SX2

THE DDJ-SX2 IS THE UPDATE TO THE ORIGINAL DDJ-SX, WHICH was one of the most popular (and biggest) DJ controllers when it came out in 2012. The DDJ-SX2 adds controls for Serato Flip and upgrades the performance pads from plain blue backlights to full RGB. It also has Serato DVS capability baked in so you can spin with timecode vinyl or CDs.





4

NUMARK NVII

THE NUMARK NV WAS THE FIRST SERATO DJ CONTROLLER to have built-in screens, and the NVII tweaks the original NV just a little bit to correct some of the shortcomings of the earlier model when it comes to DJing with just the screens and with your laptop hidden away somewhere. Think of this unit as a consumer controller with screens, rather than a pro device (it's a lightweight build, there are no standalone mixer functions). That said, it offers great value for money.



NUMARK DJ2GO2

5



NUMARK'S TINY DJ2GO2 CONTROLLER IS PROBABLY ONE OF the smallest in the market. You get two small jogwheels, a mixer section with a crossfader, pitch controls and some cue point buttons for spinning wherever, whenever.



NOW UP TO TRAKTOR PRO 2.11.1 AT THE TIME OF WRITING, THIS

PC/Mac software is one of the most popular DJ programs among the readers of Digital DJ Tips. It is made by Native Instruments, a DJ and production software / hardware company that has made a big name for itself in both fields. Traktor is the company's DJ software offering, and comes in two main flavours, Traktor Pro and Traktor Scratch Pro, the difference being that the latter also works with Traktor's proprietary DVS systems as well as DJ controllers.

Traktor is complex (many think over-complex), but the flipside of that complexity is that it is capable and customisable to an extent not shared by any other DJ software. Native Instruments has pioneered the "Remix Decks" idea, which lets the user chop music into constituent parts and then play those parts back, freestyle (for those of you familiar with Ableton loops, it's a similar concept), something that the company has even developed its own hardware to control (the Traktor Kontrol F1, a modular DJ unit, as well as the Kontrol S5 and S8). It's also introduced the Stems music format, letting DJs mix with four "stems" (say vocals, bass, synth and drums) of tracks released in this format. A step sequence

was recently added, bringing Traktor into line with Serato DJ and Rekordbox DJ. As a "grown up" DJ system, fully integrated with custom hardware and backed by a company that's a leader in the field, Traktor is right up there with the best.

IF YOU DECIDE THAT TRAKTOR IS THE WAY TO GO FOR YOU, YOUR choices of controller that are ideal for it are actually quite limited, and getting more so - at least, "out of the box". Native Instruments manufactures its own controllers, and so maybe isn't massively motivated to help other people's controllers work seamlessly with its software. While it is possible to use Traktor with practically any DJ controller (like several DJ software packages), it can be "mapped" to do this, and comes with "mappings" for many popular models), in practice what users tend to find is two things: One, it's harder than they might have wished for to get such pairings to work properly; and, even when they do, the performance is not as good as with Native Instruments' own controller range. Particularly, jogwheel performance suffers with non-Native controllers, which is noticeable if you're a scratch DJ, but also if you're coming to Traktor from vinyl.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR



TRAKTOR KONTROL S5

THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S5 IS ABOUT THE SAME SIZE AS THE Kontrol S4, but with screens and pads rather than jogwheels, just like the Kontrol S8. It doesn't have a standalone mixer function thus lacks the ability to plug in vinyl or CDs. That said, it is the best compromise between price, function and size out of all the current Traktor controllers. For a Traktor DJ who wants to play exclusively using software, and who is interested in Stems and Remix Decks (but who isn't hung up about having jogwheels), it's the natural choice.





2 TRAKTOR KONTROL S8

THE FLAGSHIP TRAKTOR CONTROLLER. IF YOU WANT THE

ultimate hardware for controlling Traktor software, this is it. The built-in screens make it totally modern, and the furore over the lack of jogwheels is a bit of a storm in a teacup; you can use the touchstrips for cueing tunes (just as Novation's Twitch did in the same way), and if you really want something spinning, the Kontrol S8 is Traktor Scratch DVS compatible and a standalone mixer too, so you can add digital or analogue decks / CDJs as you like. It is also good for controlling Traktor's step sequencer.



3 TRAKTOR KONTROL S4 MK2

JUST LIKE THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S8, THE S4 LETS YOU

plug in record decks or CDs (both controllers come with a full version of Traktor enabling digital vinyl - DVS - support), and just like the S8, this is four channel with at least some control over the Remix Decks. A great choice if you don't have the money for the S8, don't see the point of onboard slave screens, and want jogwheels (for all its brilliance, the new flagship Kontrol S8 really isn't the best choice for "manual beatmatching" DJs).



4



TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK2

ONLY INTERESTED IN DJING WITH TWO DECKS WITH

maybe a few samples thrown in? This smaller, lighter take on a Traktor controller from the same stable as the S4 will have you covered. It has two channels, but you still get some control over the Remix Decks for taking it past simply mixing two tunes. Same build quality and jogwheel performance as the S4. Oh, and like the S4 (and unlike the S8), it also works with iOS and Traktor DJ - great value.



TRAKTOR KONTROL D2

TRAKTOR'S FLAGSHIP KONTROL S8 OFFERS THE "FULL"

Traktor experience in one unit, but for DJs who already have a set-up they like (say, a DVS set-up), or who want to control some of the more advanced features of Traktor while using a club's gear for the rest, a Traktor Kontrol D2 is a good choice. It has the pads, and screens, and faders, minus any audio interface or mixer section. Add two and you have the same comprehensive control of Traktor as the Kontrol S8, minus the mixer.

5





THE FASTEST GROWING DJ SOFTWARE OUT THERE, REKORDBOX

DJ is a development by Pioneer DJ of its existing Rekordbox platform, turning Rekordbox from a DJ library/music preparation tool into a fully fledged DJ program, just like Serato DJ and Traktor Pro. There are several reasons why this is important.

FIRSTLY, PIONEER DJ ALREADY CONTROLS MOST OF THE

world's DJ booths, and its controller range (for other people's software) sells bucketloads, too. Now that it has its own software for laptop DJs, the company can for the first time offer its own hardware/software solutions.

Secondly, this software works with the same library system as Rekordbox, the software used by many pro DJs to prepare their music to play on in DJ booths on Pioneer DJ equipment. That's because it IS Rekordbox - Rekordbox DJ is simply an extension of that software. This is actually a crucial selling point, because it means

Pioneer DJ can bundle Rekordbox DJ with DJ controllers of its own manufacture to "hook" beginners in to its ecosystem, and as those DJs grow into their hobby or career, Pioneer DJ can stay with them. All the work done by DJs on their music while they were DJing with a controller (cue points, comments, analysis etc) is not lost in the "switch" to digital CDJ/DJ booth DJing - something none of the other platforms can offer.

AS A PIECE OF SOFTWARE, IT FEELS LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN

Serato and Traktor. It has good FX, four decks, an amazing tagging system in the library, a decent sampler/step sequencer, and video and DVS control too. And, as well as the "dedicated" Rekordbox DJ controllers on the next page, it also works with most modern existing Pioneer controllers. In short, this is definitely one to watch...

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ



PIONEER DJ DDJ-RR

FOR THOSE NOT NEEDING FOUR CHANNEL CONTROL BUT
wanting a professional feeling controller, the DDJ-RR ticks all the boxes. Similar quality in build to Pioneer's more expensive controllers, it is nonetheless more compact and cheaper, because it only offers two channels of control - enough for many DJs. It retains the pro inputs (for turntables/CDJs) and outputs (including booth), so in short, is a choice that won't cost the earth, but won't let you down in pro situations either.

2



PIONEER DJ DDJ-RX

THIS IS THE ONE MOST PEOPLE WILL GO FOR, AND IS BASICALLY
a rebadge of the existing DDJ-SX for Serato DJ, with a couple of trivial changes to make it 100% "right" for Rekordbox DJ software. So you get four channels, standalone mixer capability, great pads, good jogwheels.. everything you'd expect from a pro-quality digital DJ controller, in other words. If you're 100% sold on Pioneer's software, it's the way to go, but do note that if you would like the option of using Serato DJ too, Rekordbox DJ also works just fine with the Pioneer DJ DDJ-SX.

PIONEER DJ DDJ-RB

ENTRY LEVEL BUT STILL WITH EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR
software DJing, the two-channel DDJ-RB has on-mixer filters and gains as well as three-band EQ, eight basic performance pads per deck, decent jogwheels, master VU meters that double up as per-channel meters when cueing, and the familiar Pioneer deck layout found all the way up to its pro gear. As a first controller or a back-up, it's good value and will serve you well.

3



PIONEER DJ DDJ-RZ

IF MONEY AND SPACE ARE NO OBJECT, THIS IS THE CLOSEST
you'll get to the DJ booth in a controller. With full sized Pioneer jogwheels on those decks (that to all intents and purposes are like DJing on top-end CDJs), and true top-end features like a dual sound card so you can switch from one DJ to another by plugging in two laptops for seamless switchovers, the DDJ-RZ really is the Rolls Royce of Pioneer DJ controllers. Again, if you're 100% sold on Pioneer's software, it's the way to go, but if you would like the option of using Serato DJ too, you could choose the DDJ-SZ to keep your options open - Rekordbox DJ will work just as well with that, too.

4

PIONEER DJ DDJ-RZX

THIS IS A TRUE BEAST OF A CONTROLLER, HUGE, HEAVY
and designed squarely for professional mobile DJ use. It makes full use of the video features of Rekordbox thanks to the preview touch screens, but it's also close in feel to the CDJ-2000NXS2 player and DJM mixer series, with the addition of performance pads. It has advanced pro FX with X/Y control via the touch screens, a dedicated mic section, and all the pro outputs you'd expect from a controller designed for public performance.

5





VIRTUAL DJ 8 IS A POWERFUL DIGITAL DJ PLATFORM THAT IS popular with professional and mobile DJs because of its ease of use and feature set geared towards working professionals. Like Serato DJ, Virtual DJ doesn't make its own hardware controllers and audio interfaces, but it's got the largest gear compatibility list out of all the DJ apps in this guide. That includes controllers made by rival manufacturers that have their own DJ software such as Native Instruments and Pioneer DJ.

Virtual DJ is a pacesetter when it comes to adding new features, and it's often one of the first to add digital DJ innovations - for example, at the time of this writing Virtual DJ 8 is the only laptop DJ app that lets you stream from multimedia content libraries that include music, video, and karaoke files. It's also got some advanced features that other apps in this list don't have such as cloud-based track recommendations, in-app editors that let you work with your music at a deeper level, and even a special Sandbox mode that lets you "audition" how a mix sounds before you actually execute the transition during a performance.

If you choose Virtual DJ 8, it's worth checking out how much a licence for your DJ controller costs - Virtual DJ 8 has different prices depending on what gear you'd like to use it with, ranging from US\$49 to US\$199. You can also choose to subscribe to it at US\$19/month, which lets you use it with all compatible hardware, or pay a one-time US\$299 fee. If you want access to the streaming catalogues, you'll also need to pay a monthly fee for each that you plan on using.



VIRTUAL DJ 8 IS POPULAR WITH PROFESSIONAL AND MOBILE DJS BECAUSE IT'S FEATURE-PACKED AND WORKS WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF DJ CONTROLLERS OUT OF ALL THE DJ APPS IN THIS LIST.

THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ



1

RELOOP TOUCH

THE RELOOP TOUCH IS A NEW FOUR-CHANNEL DJ CONTROLLER for Virtual DJ 8 that comes with a large seven-inch touchscreen capable of displaying up to four virtual decks. That means you can see what you're playing without having to stare at your laptop while you mix. It's got two jogwheels, eight performance pads per deck, three band EQs with filters on each channel, and two Fader FX Unit sections that are comprised of four faders each. The touchscreen can even display video for when you're mixing visuals or video clips, and it can also be used for controlling effects, browsing through your library, and managing playlists.



2 NUMARK NS6II

THE NUMARK NS6II IS A REVAMPED VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL NS6. It comes with two USB sockets for plugging in up to two laptops for back to back sets and switchovers, two high-resolution in-jog displays, and touch-sensitive knobs. The performance pads have switchable modes that give you quick access to hot cues, loop functions, a sampler and a slicer. The NS6II also functions as a standalone mixer for routing DJ media players and turntables without a laptop.

3 DENON DJ MC6000MK2

AIMED MORE AT MOBILE DJS THAN CONTROLLERISTS, the Denon DJ MC6000Mk2 is a highly portable, versatile and well-built four-channel controller. It's got two jogwheels, three-band EQs on each channel as well as FX controls. The addition of a standalone four-channel mixer and two decent mic channels will be the clincher for many working DJs.



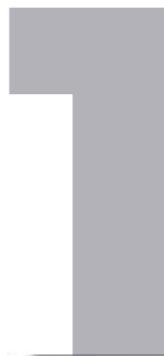
OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: TWO TO TRY

MOST LAPTOP/CONTROLLER DJS USE ONE of the packages above, but they're not the end of the story. There are lots of other DJ software programs out there, and just because they don't have the same user base as the "big boys", doesn't mean that they're not worth a look.

Nearly all DJ controllers are "Midi mappable", meaning you can attach them to your computer, load any of the following pieces of software, and "map" your software to "learn" the knobs and buttons of your existing controller. That way, you could try out any of these programs even if your controller was sold to you for use with something else.

Sure, there's work involved, but there's a great user-driven mapping site over at another DJing site, [DJ TechTools](#), where you can download and share mappings made by others and by you. Even easier, many controllers already work "out of the box" with the programs below, because the program developers have done the mapping for you. The best place to check this out is the manufacturer websites of each of the following DJ programs.

DJAY PRO 2 FOR MAC



EASILY THE BEST LOOKING DJ APP ON THE MAC, DJAY PRO

2 is also powerful, packing more and more features "just under the hood", in much the same way as other Apple-specific software (I'm thinking particularly of Final Cut Pro), "keeps it simple" for users, but has a lot of power once you start digging.



?



MIXED IN KEY FLOW 8 DECK

MIXED IN KEY'S FLOW 8 DECK APP FOR MAC takes a refreshing look at what DJ software should be. Divided into three parts - where you prepare your tunes, DJ with them, and then export the playlists/recording - it's designed to work exclusively with electronic music, relying heavily on auto-beatmatching and user/software defined "segments" of tunes for effortless and tight beatmixing between anything from two to eight decks. With built-in compatibility for the new Stems file format and decent hardware compatibility too, it's a great "second" piece of DJ software for the more adventurous.

FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MEDIA PLAYERS

THIS TYPE OF EQUIPMENT IS DESCENDED FROM STANDALONE

DJ CD players, the type that replaced record decks in DJ booths almost completely back at the turn of the century. As digital DJing took hold, they were first used by laptop DJs via digital vinyl systems (DVS), with special "timecode" CDs and audio interfaces - and indeed, many DJs still DJ like this to this day. However,

DJ media players quickly developed further, adding USB sockets so DJs could bypass the CD slots entirely. Nowadays, the best of them play perfectly with laptops and DJ software via direct connections, and have amazing screens and features, making a pair of them - alongside a digital DJ mixer - effectively a huge (and expensive) DJ controller.



DENON DJ SC5000 PRIME

DENON DJ'S SC5000 PRIME IS A BEAST OF A MEDIA PLAYER, packing loads of power and next-gen features that leave its competition in the dust. It has a touchscreen onboard that has multitouch, and has a unique dual layer feature that lets you play two songs simultaneously from just one unit. It also features eight multifunction trigger pads for expressive hot-cues, loops, slices and roll playback. A serious contender for the professional / club DJ booth crown currently owned by Pioneer DJ's CDJ-2000NXS2 media player - although you'll pay for it!





2

PIONEER DJ CDJ-2000NXS2

THE CURRENT CLUB KING, THIS IS THE PLAYER YOU'LL find in the best DJ booths worldwide. It works with files straight from USB, CDs, Rekordbox analysed files on USB, plus with Rekordbox DJ software, Serato DJ software, and Traktor Pro software. It has a great, large touchscreen display, and an industry standard look, feel and layout - not surprising because it is the industry standard. Like the Denon DJ SC5000, it's prohibitively expensive for home use, though.



NUMARK NDX500

A BUDGET BUT MODERN MEDIA PLAYER, WELL MADE and in a compact form factor, this is a justifiably popular model. Again, you can play from USB direct or plug it into certain DJ software, but unlike the XDJ-1000, it retains a CD slot which can play audio or MP3. It lacks a decent screen though, with a small screen that only show the basics.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-700

THIS IS A SMALL, SHALLOW MEDIA PLAYER, THAT HAS A built-in stand to raise it to standard height. Like the XDJ-1000 (below) it drops the CD slot, but makes up for that with thoroughly modern features - again, like the XDJ-1000, it has Slip mode, sync, and a great large colour touchscreen. You can even load tunes over WiFi.

4



Pioneer Dj

PIONEER DJ XDJ-1000MK2

THIS DIGITAL-ONLY (EG NO CD SLOT) PLAYER BUILDS ON THE original XDJ-1000 by including library browsing features like Track Filter and Track Matching, both of which are inherited from the flagship CDJ-2000NXS2 media player. It sports the same touchscreen as the CDJ-2000NXS2, and comes with support for high resolution FLAC and ALAC lossless music files.

5

Pioneer Dj



Pioneer Dj

FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS

DJ MIXERS WERE TRADITIONALLY THE CENTRE “PART” OF EVERY
DJ set-up, and still are away from the controller world and in practically every DJ booth in the world. Nowadays, mixers can work with digital-friendly media players, resulting in a kind of hybrid “software controller plus hardware mixer”

model - DVS without the timecode, if you like. Mixers offer DJs a versatility not found in even the very best DJ controllers, and are still very much a part of today’s DJ climate.



PIONEER DJ DJM-900NXS2

THE FLAGSHIP REPLACEMENT FOR THE DJM-900NXS, THE
DJM-900NXS2 is evolution rather than revolution. That said, some of the changes are pretty big: twin USBs, much improved FX, and the frankly awesome USB FX send/returns are the technological improvements that most jump out. As part of a bigger set-up with a pair of CDJ-2000NXS2 players it clearly represents the ultimate Rekordbox DJ system - but one that does come at a considerable premium.





DENON DJ X1800 PRIME

THE DENON DJ X1800 PRIME IS THE COMPANION MIXER

to the SC5000 Prime media players, and it's a robust four-channel mixer that's got onboard FX, a 24-bit / 96kHz sound card, and the ability to sync with the SC5000 Prime players for tightly locked tempo-based effects. A solid offering by Denon DJ that's at the heart of the entire Prime set-up.



RELOOP RMX-22I

EVEN IF YOU ARE HAPPY DJING WITH

controllers and laptops, you ought to still own a small mixer, hooking up with friends, adding an extra mic, wiring in an iPad for a backup, etc. The Reloop RMX-22i is a budget mixer that can give you all these things, and that also plays nicely with iOS/Android devices and splitter cables. A modern, fun "home" mixer.





4

PIONEER DJ DJM-S9

RANE WAS ALWAYS THE GO-TO BRAND for Serato scratch mixers, but Pioneer is giving it a run for its money with the gorgeous (and expensive) DJM-S9. A two channel battle mixer, it also has customisable FX buttons and pads, two built-in audio interfaces (for DJ switchovers), and a custom magnetic crossfader with "feeling adjust".



5 NATIVE INSTRUMENTS KONTROL Z2

IF YOU'RE A FAN OF THE WHOLE TRAKTOR ecosystem, and especially if you want to play with Stems and Remix Decks, the Kontrol Z2 would be your mixer choice to keep things in the family. Paired with one or two Kontrol D2s and a pair of turntables, you'd have a good DVS turntablist / controllerist set-up, although frankly, a four-channel version would be preferable.



TOP FIVE PRODUCTION GEAR FOR DJS

FOR MANY DJS TODAY, "DJ/PRODUCER"

is the aspiration, not just "DJ". It's not surprising: DJ/producers who get even just one track into the dance charts can look forward to gigs in other cities and internationally, and from there, who knows? A successful production is like a business card, and it can open doors like nothing else. If your ambitions are beyond a residency in your local club, or running a small DJ business where you live, producing music is pretty much a necessity in 2018.

Luckily, it's also easier than ever to produce. Using software like Ableton Live, and spending some time to learn the basics (our [Music Production For DJs](#) course has helped thousands of DJs get their first tracks made...), it's possible to apply all you've learned as a DJ relatively easily to producing, and make dancefloor-devastating tunes for far less outlay than was the case even five or ten years ago.

And actually, you don't really need any gear at all apart from good headphones/speakers and the laptop you already own to start producing... but the five devices we've listed here will make your music production exploits more fun and easier.

PUSH 2

Ableton's own Push 2 controller is still the most premium device you can get for clip launching and music composition using a pad controller. The RGB backlit velocity-sensitive pads and the onboard OLED display make performing intuitive and enjoyable, meaning you spend less time glancing at your computer. Ableton Live 10 makes the Push 2 even more powerful, and remains to be the top-shelf choice for dedicated Live performers.



MASCHINE MK3

Native Instruments' latest Maschine offering has a sleek new look with bigger performance pads, a touch strip, and eight touch-sensitive knobs. The biggest new feature is the onboard audio interface: Maschine MK3 now has a pair of 1/4 line outputs, 1/4 line inputs, Midi In and Out jacks, a 1/4 headphone output, and a Midi input jack for connecting a footswitch. Great for DJ/producers who want a to create music with a groovebox or pad-style controller.



3

UNIVERSAL AUDIO APOLLO TWIN MK2



4

ARTURIA MINILAB MK II



The original Universal Audio Apollo Twin was a hit with bedroom producers and project studio owners because of its compact size, portability, fantastic sound, and access to Universal Audio's entire catalogue of premium hardware-accelerated plugins for digital audio workstations. The Apollo Twin Mk2 builds on its predecessor by improving on its monitoring functions, which is useful for DJ/producers tracking vocals or instruments.

The new MiniLab Mk II takes the best bits of the original and adds in a fresh new look, updated slim-keys, and RGB backlit rubber pads for playing drum parts and triggering samples. It also comes with Arturia's Analog Lab software that ships with great vintage keyboard sounds for your productions.

5

PIONEER DJ DJS-1000



Pioneer DJ's entry into the DJ/producer market is a sampler and sequencer that's meant to be used in live performances. It takes the guts and functionality of its Toraiz SP-16 sampler, and reimagines them into a form factor that's akin to a CDJ-2000NXS2 media player. The result is a grid pad unit that comes in a form factor and layout that's familiar to DJs.

FIVE OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS

TABLET AND SMARTPHONE DJING HOLDS LOTS OF APPEAL FOR A WIDE RANGE OF people. From true “dabblers” (after all, the apps are really cheap - once you own a tablet, of course), to “serious” DJs wanting a second system, to people who simply need something compact that they can use anywhere, as the storage space in tablets has risen along with their capabilities, today’s models can match laptops in all the areas that count.

And with Android software and hardware finally becoming available alongside iOS versions, that’s a whole new (and potentially the largest) sector of users about to discover how easy it can be to DJ - and DJ well - on a small, handheld touchscreen device...



DJAY PRO (IOS & ANDROID)

ALGORIDDIM’S DJAY PRO IS ITS FLAGSHIP IOS DJ SOFTWARE that squeezes in a ton of features, functionality and power into an app made for the iPad. It’s got four deck mixing, Spotify integration, and even the ability mix video in high-resolution 4K. It’s compatible with the iPad Pro’s Smart Keyboard, and if you’d like to spin with actual jogwheels, it also works with a handful of DJ controllers including Reloop’s Beatpad 2 and the Pioneer DJ DDJ-WeGO4.



DJ PLAYER PROFESSIONAL (IOS ONLY)

DJ PLAYER PRO IS A MAVERICK IPAD DJ PROGRAM, MAJORING in the fact that it’s written from the ground up in-house by the software company. They claim that means the best sound quality, best responsiveness, lowest latency, smoothest response, and overall, the most “pro” DJing experience on iOS. It also supports most timecode vinyl formats, for scratching, and the Native Instruments Stems format, for DJing with constituent parts of tracks. One for the specialists, then, but worth a look.

3



WEDJ (IOS ONLY)

PIONEER DJ'S FORAY INTO IOS DJING COMES IN THE FORM OF

WeDJ, a two-channel app for iPhone and iPad. It's got a simple interface at first blush, but it has plenty of mixing power if and when you want it: you can access hot cues, Pad FX, X-Y pad effects, and even a sampler via menus that you toggle on and off. WeDJ is also compatible with Pioneer DJ's DDJ-WeGO3 and DDJ-WeGO4 controllers if you want tactile control while you mix.

4



TRAKTOR DJ (IOS ONLY)

UNENCUMBERED BY A DECADE OF EXPECTATION AND LEGACY

code, Traktor's designers have clearly relished the chance to start with a clean slate on Traktor DJ, a world away from the behemoth that is Traktor Pro. This is smooth, clean and innovative, and utterly addictive. Letting you "touch the waveforms", it also has a rock-solid recommendation engine for picking the perfect next track. While it is intentionally stripped back to basics, it nonetheless lets you DJ in ways you simply can't on laptop software. A winner, only really let down by a lack of development since launch.

5



MIXFADER DJ (IOS & ANDROID)

MIXFADER DJ IS THE COMPANION IOS / ANDROID APP TO THE

Mixfader wireless crossfader. It lets you scratch and spin on your smartphone or tablet connected to the Mixfader via Bluetooth for portability or scratch sessions on the go. The app lets you access thousands of beats and loops for you to scratch over, and you can record your performance within the app. You can even scratch using a timecode vinyl and a turntable connected to your smartphone or tablet.

THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID

HOOKING IOS & ANDROID STUFF UP TO DJ CONTROLLERS WAS

until recently a bit of a Wild West, same way hooking laptops up to DJ controllers was 10 years ago. If you're a geek with time to spare this was all fine, even fun, but for everyone else? You just want it to work, right? So here we've listed five DJ controllers that do just that - work.

To achieve this they all have a couple of crucial things in common. Firstly, they are Apple certified. (This is still mainly an iOS world; only one of these - the

Reloop Beatpad 2 - works with Android natively.) That means they come with a lead to plug them into your iDevice. Pretty basic, but don't take it for granted with all gear sold as "iOS compatible"! Sometimes, you need to jump through hoops just to achieve this. Secondly, they can all charge your iDevice. (Again, don't take this as read with all gear.) Only thing left for you to check is that the controller you're choosing comes with the correct lead (30-pin or Lightning) to fit your age of iDevice.



RELOOP MIXON 4

IF YOU WANT THE MOST "PRO" EXPERIENCE

possible Djing with your iPad, right up to the iPad Pro, the Reloop Mixon 4 has it. Four channel mixer, great jogs and pads, decent pro-quality metal construction, and a built-in iPad stand that works right up to the size of the iPad Pro - it's all here. As a bonus, it comes with Serato DJ in the box, so you have a choice of platforms to use. Highly recommended.





2

RELOOP BEATPAD 2

BUILT TO A HIGH STANDARD IN METAL, with a handy slot for positioning your iPad at the back of it (it is in fact compatible with all iOS devices), and designed to work with Algoriddim's djay 2 software, this is the most "pro" iOS DJ controller yet. Performance-wise, Steve Canueto, our scratch tutor, described the jogwheel control as "outstanding". The Beatpad 2 takes iOS DJing to a new level, and is the only controller here that works with Android, too (again, djay).



PIONEER DJ DDJ-WEGO4

JUST TAKING YOUR FIRST STEPS IN THE WORLD OF DJING?

The DDJ-WeGO4 is compact, good value, and works with a range of software, including Pioneer's own Rekordbox DJ (you need to buy the upgrade), and Pioneer's new WeDJ software for iOS. If you're looking for a DJ controller that keeps your options open and covers the basics, this could be it - although two-band EQ is something you may find constraining after a while.



3



THREE OF THE BEST ALL-IN-ONE CONTROLLERS

"BUT WHAT," I HEAR YOU CRY, "ABOUT those Pioneer controllers that don't need a laptop, or the Numark or Gemini CD all-in-one controllers?" As we said at the start, for many people we think this type of system is not a good fit - but that is changing fast. In the past, people tended to buy "hybrid" systems (CD / USB / digital and so on) because they couldn't get over the idea of going "totally digital"... then they ended up never using the CD section of their gear, as laptop DJing (with the unit in use simply as a software controller) is so much more fun. But systems like the Denon DJ MCX8000 and especially the Pioneer XDJ-RX2 actually represent a modern type of digital DJing: Think of them more as "computer on board" systems. They're pretty close to laptop systems for ease of use and fun nowadays... and so if you really don't like the idea of taking your laptop into the DJ booth, these two choices especially are worth a look.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX2

The Pioneer DJ XDJ-RX2 is for those with club, festival, and touring DJ aspirations because it's as close as possible to a compact CDJ / DJM set-up. It's got two channels with eight performance pads per channel, a seven-inch high-resolution touchscreen, improved browsing controls, onboard Color FX from the DJM-900NXS2 mixer (Dub Echo, Sweep, Filter, and Noise) plus a parameter knob for added tweaking.





DENON DJ MCX8000

THE DENON DJ MCX8000 HAS TWO HIGH-QUALITY SCREENS for waveforms and library browsing, and offers full standalone use, using music analysed on a laptop using Denon DJ's Engine software, via USB. It also has a standalone four-channel mixer, decent mic channels... and full Serato DJ control too, with a licence in the box. In other words, it's an accomplished all-rounder, and is rightfully doing very well.



NUMARK MIXDECK QUAD

A BEAST OF AN ALL-IN-ONE, THIS SEMI-PRO UNIT HAS FOUR CD slots (the only one of our three that does), channels, standalone mixer capability, iPad compatibility (out of the box with Algoriddim's djay 2 software), USB playback, DJ software control, built in DSP effects, lots of inputs and outputs for microphones, booth monitor and so on. It's the modern equivalent of the custom-made DJ coffin consoles of old, and despite being basically a big plastic box is pretty durable, and great value if you need all these features.



FIVE TIPS FOR BUYING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CONTROLLER

HOPEFULLY YOU'RE NOW AT THE STAGE of choosing between two or three models. This is of course where you can spend days, weeks even reading every review online, getting "analysis paralysis" when you could be DJing. Don't let that be you. It's time to choose!

To save you pain, I want you to bear the following "smart buyer" tips in mind. They'll help you choose fast and well, then get going without missing a beat.

THIS IS OF COURSE WHERE YOU CAN SPEND DAYS, WEEKS EVEN READING EVERY REVIEW ONLINE, GETTING "ANALYSIS PARALYSIS"

1 BUY A CONTROLLER THAT'S MADE FOR THE SOFTWARE YOU WANT TO USE

Above I spoke about the "Wild West" in iOS and Android DJing until recently. Well not so long back, it was actually like that in laptop DJing: Lots of technically advanced but very user-unfriendly products with scant instruction manuals, convoluted set-up processes, extra drivers and firmware updates needed, patches for different operating systems, and often next to no advice how to get your choice of software working with your choice of controller. Luckily in the last few years manufacturers have wised up, and the best controller/software combinations today are tightly integrated and easy to set up and use. They're the ones we've covered in this guide. Step outside of the manufacturers' intentions for their gear by all means, but if you do, expect extra steps, head-scratching, and mucho late-night forum delving. You have been warned... :)



2 FACTOR IN THE COST OF THE "PRO" VERSION OF THE SOFTWARE

If your hardware of choice comes with "LE", "INTRO" or "lite" software, it is not the full package. Things like various effects, loops, recording, and more will be disabled or absent. The idea is you can get going with such software, but you're going to want to upgrade to the pro version soon enough. So factor in the cost of doing this: The cheaper the DJ controller, the more likely it is to come with one of these cut-down versions of the software.

3

READ THE MANUAL CAREFULLY, ESPECIALLY THE SET- UP INSTRUCTIONS

Even the easiest-to-use DJ controller needs a modicum of setting up. You may need a driver for your PC, you may need to set some audio routing. You'll possibly need to change a few general settings so it all works smoothly. You may need a reboot or two even. But nowadays, instruction manuals are pretty good - if you bother to read them, that is. Judging by our forums and email inbox here, many people don't, and go through hours or days of struggle because of it. Read it, read it again, and read it again if you have to - the answers are in there, and knowing what everything does on your controller is the first step to conquering it.

4

DON'T SWEAT YOUR CHOICE!

I know the pain of choosing a DJ controller. People think things like "if I don't choose right, I won't learn right, I won't get good!", or "the reason my friend is good is that he's got a better controller than me". But just as photographers will tell you a smartphone camera in the right hands is better than a DSLR in the hands of a goon, same with DJ gear. Every single controller in these pages is great for learning on, and every single controller can sound fantastic. Put any of them in the biggest club in the world in the right hands and nobody in the place would ever know it wasn't the club's usual gear being used. Plus here's another truth: There will always be someone looking down on you, whatever you buy! You can't avoid it - it's just the price of progress that vinyl and CD DJs will tell you you're playing with toys. Trust me - you're not. Next...

5

GET SOME DJ TRAINING

We review a lot of gear, and the manual writers, God bless 'em, do a great job of explaining features - but they're not very good at telling you how to use them. Often after 20 pages of what everything does, they may attempt a short "your first mix" section. It usually says something like "get two tunes playing, use the crossfader to move smoothly from one to the next". Great! Off you go...

Seriously, DJing comes easy to some, but most benefit massively from being shown the basics (and the not so basics later on). Best person to show you is someone who has been there and done it; if you have any friends who DJ, time to blag some free lessons from them! Of course, we've got loads of courses too, and our [How To Digital DJ Fast](#) course has helped thousands of absolute beginners master the basics. You can find out about this course and all of our others on our courses page at digitaldjtips.com/courses.

SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS

SO THE SHOPPING CART'S OPEN, YOU'RE in the Amazon store or wherever, and you're ready to hit "buy now". Before you do though, time to think about the other bits and pieces you'll need to finish your set-up. Two pieces of good news here: First, you probably have some of them already, and second, you don't need much. Here's what you've got to have covered:

SPEAKERS

HAVE YOU GOT A HOME CINEMA SYSTEM? HI-FI? 2.1 SYSTEM FOR GAMING?

Loud portable speaker? Yes? As long as you can have that in the room you want to DJ in, you're sorted. Your controller can plug into that. (You'll need a cable, though. Don't use Bluetooth. There's a delay, see? DJs don't like delays.) Still want to buy something? On a budget, go for a loud twin satellites-plus-woofer gaming computer speaker system - the Logitech type stuff. Bit more? I love Pioneer' DJ's DM-40s. More? Look at the Rokit range from KRK (you'll need two, they're sold separately), or Reloop's Wave speaker pairs. These are all "powered" meaning you don't need separate amplifiers. Oh, and don't - don't - use them for parties. You'll blow all of the above if you do, sooner or later. Rent a PA, or use someone else's speakers (I didn't tell you the last bit.)



KRK'S ROKIT RANGE IS A POPULAR CHOICE FOR A HOME DJ STUDIO, BUT DON'T DISCOUNT ANY SPEAKERS YOU ALREADY HAVE - THEY MAY WELL BE UP TO THE JOB.

THE ULTRASONE DJ-1 IS ONE OF OUR FAVOURITE DJ HEADPHONES, WITH A GOOD MIX OF SOUND QUALITY AND DURABILITY.

2



HEADPHONES

I THINK THESE ARE ACTUALLY MORE IMPORTANT THAN speakers. They need to isolate well (so be padded), cover the ears, be durable, and be loud. You are probably going to break them in the first year (everyone does, and it doesn't seem to matter how much you pay for them). The Ultrasone DJ-1 are the best you're ever likely to need - but that's just me and my head shape. Traditionally, DJs have flocked to the Sennheiser HD-25 IIs, and I hear very good things about the V-Moda Crossfade LPs. Coiled cables are preferred by most DJs (you don't trip on them as easily), detachable cables mean you can replace them when they wear out.

CABLES

YOUR CONTROLLER WILL COME WITH A USB CABLE TO CONNECT IT TO YOUR computer, but you'll need cables to connect its audio output to your powered speakers (or amp and speakers). If your speakers have "RCA connectors" (a red and white pair of sockets), a "2 x RCA male to 2 x RCA male cable" will do; it will usually have two wires joined together with a pair of sockets on each end, red and white, for right and left channel. If you're using computer speakers that have a "TRS socket for an input, you'll need a 2 x RCA male to" stereo TRS male cable. If your computer speakers are the cheap type with only an" headphone jack on them that's meant to be plugged in to a computer headphones socket, you'll need an" TRS female to 2 x RCA male lead. Buy one longer than you think you'll need. You can probably nick one from your Dad's old stereo in the garage anyway.



3

THE MINIMUM YOU'LL NEED IS A CABLE TO GO FROM YOUR CONTROLLER TO YOUR POWERED SPEAKERS OR AMPLIFIER AND SPEAKER. THE USB CABLES FOR THE COMPUTER ALWAYS COME WITH THE CONTROLLERS, THOUGH.



LAPTOP OR IOS DEVICE

DUH, OBVS, RIGHT? INDEED, YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE ONE, SO JUST take half an hour to check the minimum/recommended spec on the hardware and software manufacturers' sites of the DJ gear you're considering buying. Done. If you're buying new for this adventure, though, you're going to be asking questions like "PC or Mac?" (answer: it doesn't matter) and "will it be powerful enough?" (answer: almost certainly yes). Here are the tips: Go for Mac if you can afford it and you want what the pros use, go for a well-made PC laptop otherwise. On PC, watch AMD: Intel is a safer choice. Traktor prefers bigger screen resolutions, the rest are fine on any. If you wear glasses, go for a 15" screen, 13" or even 11" is OK if you're young and perfectly sighted. A later iOS device is usually best for DJ software.

STAND

Laptops need raising ideally from

their "sitting position" at the table you'll no doubt be setting your gear up on, so a laptop stand is pretty much an essential, especially if your eyes struggle at all reading your computer screen. We are particular fans of the Magma Traveler model.

**THE MACBOOK
PRO: AS CLOSE TO A
STANDARD AS THERE
IS FOR LAPTOPS,
ALTHOUGH A
WINDOWS PC IS
FINE, TOO.**

4



**A DECENT STAND
WITH MANY POSSIBLE
ADJUSTMENTS IS
DEFINITELY WORTH
INVESTING IN, AND
CAN BE A GODSEND IN
CRAMPED DJ BOOTHS
WHERE YOUR LAPTOP
NEEDS TO BE CAREFULLY
ANGLED TOWARDS YOU.**

6 BAG, CASE OR BACKPACKS

YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO BE CARRYING YOUR DJ GEAR around in a plastic bag, in the box it came in, or even worse, under your arm. And nowadays, you don't have to. All the manufacturers of bags and cases - names like, Magma, UDG and more - now have "budget" no frills cases, with models that go all the way up to all singing, all dancing trolleys, backpacks and even "true" hard cases made of plywood and aluminium. For most, a mid-range backpack or shoulder bag will suffice

A DECENT DJ BAG WILL PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT AND WITH MODELS FROM BASIC (AND CHEAP) UP TO PRO DJ BACKPACKS AND TROLLEYS, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.

TRANSPARENT PLASTIC COVER

THIS TYPE OF SNUGLY FITTING PLASTIC LID IS A GREAT IDEA BOTH FOR COVERING

your controller up at home when you're not using it, and for putting over it when you stash it in its bag, case or backpack to travel with. These polycarbonate cases protect the knobs, faders and switches from accidentally getting bent in transit or worse, as well as keeping the dust out in-between times. The biggest name in the game is Decksaver, although a company called Prodector makes them too.

TO
USE
AS A DUST
COVER WHEN NOT
DJING OR TO PROTECT
KNOBS AND FADERS IN TRANSIT,
A COVER IS A GREAT IDEA.





FINALLY...

DIGITAL DJ TIPS EXISTS TO INFORM, ENTERTAIN AND EDUCATE the modern generation of DJs. Our guides, website and seminars at DJ shows are all designed to help DJs get started in this game, either as a great hobby or to earn a part-time or even a full time income. But did you know we are also the biggest online DJ school in the world, with over 17,000 students in 105 countries having taken our courses?

For instance, our popular How To Digital DJ Fast course has tons of practical advice on choosing a digital DJ controller, and it's also the best way to get a flying start with your new controller. It's sold many thousands of copies and helped countless DJs to get from complete beginner to first gig - fast!

You can email us at info@digitaldjtips.com, or reach out to us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [YouTube](#).



THE DJ TEST

Take The DJ Test

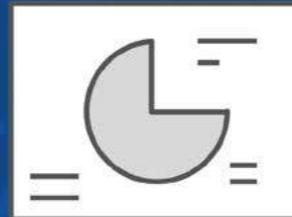
Discover Your DJ Score - How Well Will You Do?

1.



TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO
ANSWER YES/NO QUESTIONS

2.



FIND OUT IMMEDIATELY
HOW YOU'VE SCORED

3.



GET YOUR FREE PERSONALISED
IMPROVEMENT REPORT PDF &
COACHING VIDEOS

CLICK TO TAKE THE TEST NOW

www.thedjtest.com →



Powered by
DIGITAL DJ TIPS