

THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE

2022/23



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



DIGITAL DJ TIPS
THE GLOBAL DJ SCHOOL

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THANKS

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Take The DJ Test

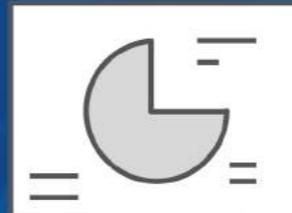
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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



**NUMARK'S MID-RANGE NS4FX CONTROLLER
RELEASED RECENTLY.**

DJING HAS CHANGED SO MUCH THAT people returning to the game after a break may feel it is unrecognisable nowadays. In the past, everyone from beginners to the best-paid DJs in the world used basically the same gear to do basically the same thing. But in the last decade the options available have exploded, making Djing not only more accessible to more people than ever before, but also in many ways more complicated.

With the explosion in ways to DJ has come a big change in how the actual Djing is done, too. New features mean that the possibilities are wider than before, with DJs able to nail the basics in a fraction of the time it used to take, and those with elevated skill and creativity now able to do incredible things with today's gear that could barely have been dreamt of back in the old days.

But whether you're just starting out as a DJ, trying to up your game having dabbled a little, or indeed getting back into the hobby after a break (maybe an extended break...), it can be difficult to know where to start and what choices to make, given this huge range of systems, software and approaches.

Nowadays there are "DJ controllers" - clever boxes that plug into your laptop and let you DJ with software. There are "standalone" or "all in one" DJ systems, that let you DJ with music files saved to USB drives or SD cards. Then there are "digital vinyl" systems (usually shortened to "DVS") where you use traditional



turntables and mixers to control DJ software. Plus, you may have seen DJs playing with just a laptop, or just an iPad, or even a phone, leading you to wonder: "Do I even need specialised hardware at all to DJ nowadays?"

As soon as you start to seriously consider a purchase, you'll find yourself mired in decisions around what software platform to go for and whether you should choose a laptop or a tablet to DJ with, which systems have the features you need, how much it's really going to cost you once you factor in things like software and music subscriptions, and on and on. It's a far cry from the old days when everyone from Carl Cox to your mate Dave used Technics turntables and a simple DJ mixer!

That's what this guide is here to help you with. At Digital DJ Tips, we're the leading DJ school in the world, and we teach DJing in five areas: Gear, Music, Techniques, Performing, and Promoting Yourself. This guide is all about the first area: Gear. If you're just starting out down the digital DJing route - whether you're new to DJing entirely or just new to this way of doing things - this guide will ensure you make the right decisions, hopefully save you time, and just as importantly, help you to avoid expensive mistakes.

It draws on our many years of experience helping 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 excited about how digital has changed DJing. It's brought the ability to DJ within the reach 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 features - 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 big difference between mastering all the tools that digital offers 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.

That's why we've made it our mission to help as many people as possible become great DJs and DJ/producers, through our world-leading training courses. We've trained over 32,000 students since 2010 - so once you have the gear you need and are ready to learn the skills, head to DigitalDJTips.com/courses and browse our training. We work with some of the biggest names in the world, like DJ Jazzy Jeff, James Hype, Laidback Luke, DJ ANGELO and more.

However, you are 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
July 2022

THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN DJING

FOR THIS ISSUE OF THE GEAR GUIDE WE'RE ACTUALLY TALKING

about the last 18 months, as we've moved the publication month to the middle of the year. And a lot has changed since January 2021! Yes, we've started to move out of the COVID-19 shadow, but its effects are still everywhere, and the "perfect storm" caused by the pandemic, plus global supply chain issues generally, have lead to what we've dubbed the Great Gear Shortage, with DJ equipment increasingly and persistently hard to come by, and prices rising.

That said, there have been interesting gear developments of late. Motorised jogwheels have become a flavour of the times, with Rane launching its [Rane One](#) controller for Serato DJ software, and Pioneer DJ countering with its [REVZ](#) device. Both are excellent, and a joy to play on for DJs who prefer the "feel" of vinyl, but love the convenience of a DJ controller. (Now, how about an all-in-one motorised platter system, anyone...?)

Speaking of standalone DJ systems, one of our predictions last time was that we'd see cheaper models appearing, and we were right: Numark has launched the [Mixstream Pro](#), which is a standalone all-in-one DJ system running Engine DJ, the same internal software as much more expensive standalone gear made by the brand Denon DJ. For an outlay of hundreds, not thousands, you can now buy a unit that not only has full standalone capability, but offers music from music streaming providers, and even has built-in speakers and control for DJ lighting! It's a bargain if this is the route you're interested in.

Talking of music streaming, we've seen increasing uptake of subscription services that let you DJ directly from the internet, with SoundCloud Go+, Beatport Streaming, TIDAL and Beatsource Streaming all vying for the attention of DJs (no Spotify or Apple Music, sadly). They make the promise of millions of tunes, right there in your DJ set-up, for a small monthly subscription. While we don't recommend DJing entirely from such services, having one as a backup music source for parties and for music discovery is a great idea.



OUR TUTOR DJ ANGELO DESIGNED THIS FULLY FEATURED YET TINY SERATO DJ CONTROLLER THIS YEAR, THE RELOOP READY.



AIAIAI TEAMED UP WITH RICHIE HAWTIN TO LAUNCH THESE EFFECTIVELY LATENCY-FREE WIRELESS HEADPHONES THIS YEAR.

"Cloud" is becoming more of a thing, too. Engine DJ led the way last year, and you can now even log into your Dropbox from Pioneer DJ's industry-standard [CDJ-3000](#) players, and access all your music over the internet. This new service - Cloud-DirectPlay - also makes your library accessible from any laptop running Pioneer DJ's Rekordbox 6 Pro software, as well as your phone. A good thing for pro DJs on the move, if too expensive for most DJs (it's a pricey subscription).

In the midst of the pandemic, DJs "discovered" livestreaming, and Twitch was the winning platform, even though technically it is still illegal to stream most music on that service at the time of writing! And perhaps surprisingly, livestreaming hasn't gone away really over the past year or so, with thousands of DJs doing it regularly, and many more interested in starting. This is a maturing area, and is now part of the "mix" of what DJs do. We don't think it will die out as gigs return to full strength.

Another trend we've picked up on is wireless tech seeping into DJ and studio set-ups. AIAIAI launched a variant of its [TMA-2 headphones](#) endorsed by Richie Hawtin, which offered effectively latency-free monitoring without a cable. Meanwhile a new name to us, SKAA, now offers wire-free links between DJ gear and speakers. One speaker company, Soundboks, even built SKAA tech into its range, so you can potentially link both your DJ gear to your speakers, and your speakers to each other, without wires. A boon for mobile DJs and outdoor party DJs who don't want to run cables everywhere.

We have to give a special mention to our tutor, DJ ANGELO, who has had a great year. Not only did he design the only really fully featured DJ controller for Serato that can (almost) fit in your pocket (the wonderful [Reloop Ready](#)), but along with his friend JFB, he won the DMC World Team Championships, with an incredible DJ routine. Oh, and there's also the small fact that he launched his [DJ Angelo's Tricks & Transitions](#) course with us, teaching exactly how he comes up with his amazing routines. Well done, Angelo!

And so we look forward. We all pray for peace in Ukraine and indeed anywhere where there is unrest and where people are suffering; we hope as a world we can move forward in a more sustainable, inclusive and sane way; and most of all, we trust that music will continue to unite and heal - and that we can continue to play our part in facilitating that. As we look forward to the second half of 2022 and to 2023, and hopefully some kind of normality returning to our hobby and our industry, rest assured that all of us here at Digital DJ Tips will be here to help you make sense of it all, make the right choices in your DJing, and ultimately to become better DJs and DJ/producers - that's what we're here for, after all!

Phil Morse July 2022

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, standalone systems, modular gear, production stuff, mixers and more in one place, with 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 reviews 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 here too.

Finally, a couple of tips on how to approach choosing a DJ controller or standalone system. Practically all choices nowadays are good enough for you to learn to DJ on. Also, there is no "best" DJ set-up. When buying, it's best to trust your instinct a little; as a DJ, you're going to be using the system you buy a hell of a lot, at least if you want to get good at this game. If you think a piece of DJ gear 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.

Finally, this year we've added a new section highlighting some of the production software and hardware we've been using and teaching with. Music production is a great extra thing for DJs to dabble in, and having released new production courses with James Hype and Laidback Luke recently, we wanted to share some of the products we use and recommend. So whether your ultimate aim is to be a great DJ or a great DJ/producer, read on - there's lots for you here!



THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2022

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" (a single DJ unit that plugs into a laptop) are the most popular way to digital DJ today, with more than half of our audience and students here at Digital DJ Tips using a DJ controller and a laptop to DJ with, they're not the only choice - far from it. While this guide contains lots of this type of DJ controller - again, we're talking about single boxes with two "decks" and a mixer, plus audio circuitry and a way to connect a computer of some kind - you do need to be sure that this is the right route for you in the first place.

So let's start by looking at all the other types of DJ system you'll come across out there...



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

"TWO DECKS AND A MIXER"

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

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 twenty-something 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 DJ CD player...

"TWO DJ MEDIA PLAYERS AND A MIXER"

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

A "CDJ" is a traditional 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.

Back in the day, the first media players gave vinyl DJs their first opportunity to shout "it's not real DJing!" (something some of them have 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 - although nowadays most DJs put their music on USB drives or SD cards instead of using CDs (and modern units don't even have CD slots, just like modern laptops don't have DVD drive slots).

Today's media players are becoming more and more complex, too. Nowadays, they have most of the functions and features associated with laptop DJing - even the "sync" button so hated by some vinyl DJs. In recent years, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller, only with the computer effectively built-in. Currently the dominant brand in clubs is Pioneer DJ with its [CDJ-3000](#) (and the previous incarnation, the [CDJ-2000NXS2](#)), though Denon DJ has issued a strong challenge by way of its [SC6000 Prime](#) and [SC6000M Prime](#) media players.

As well as working "standalone", all of these players can also be used as "controller decks", capable of controlling DJ software, too. This means you can often plug your laptop straight into them and play from software just like you can when you plug your laptop into smaller, more consumer-focused DJ controllers, giving you the best of both worlds.



A MODERN PIONEER CDJ SET-UP. CDJ DJING HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THE FIRST UNITS APPEARED OVER 20 YEARS AGO.

DIGITAL VINYL SYSTEMS (DVS)

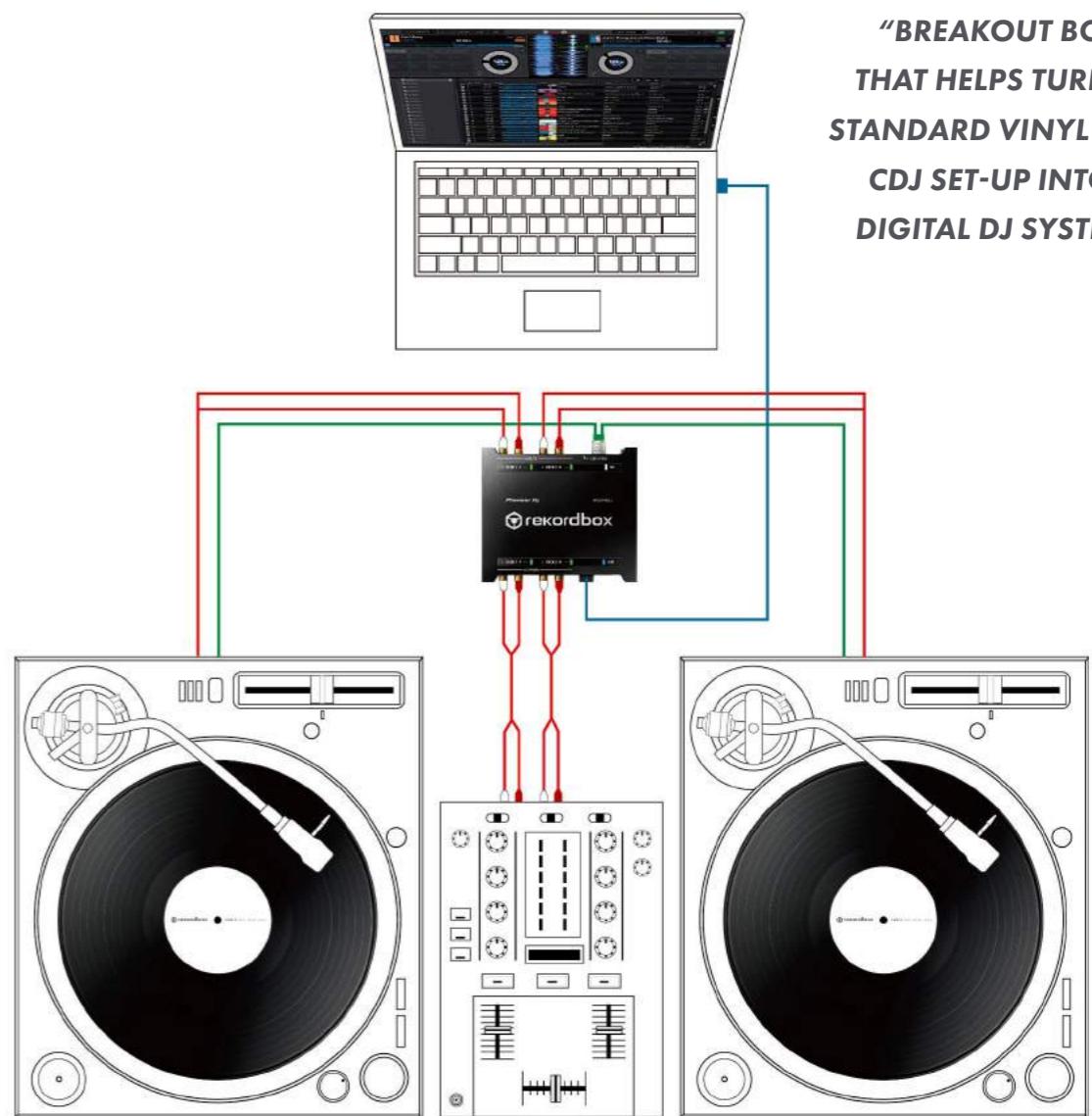
A DVS SYSTEM CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A WAY OF "ADAPTING"

either of the above set-ups to turn them into laptop DJ systems. In that respect, a DVS can be seen as a "half-way house", bridging the old, analogue way 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 if you accidentally listen to it). You then either attach a special box, often referred to as a "breakout box", in-between your record decks/CD players and mixer, or just use a DVS-enabled mixer. Plug your laptop in, and your DJ software 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 "normal" DJ gear, but you also get to use 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 get all the advantages of digital nonetheless). It can feel more natural to DJs coming to digital having used analogue in the past. And because many clubs still don't have the kind of modern, digital-friendly media player set-up described above, but most do have at least some kind of DJ CD players and mixer, DVS is a failsafe 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 popular. Disadvantages? Tricky to set up (although the wireless "Phase" system makes it easier), 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,
SOMETIMES CALLED A
"BREAKOUT BOX"
THAT HELPS TURN A
STANDARD VINYL OR
CDJ SET-UP INTO A
DIGITAL DJ SYSTEM.



STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS

THIS TYPE OF GEAR, SOMETIMES ALSO CALLED 'ALL-IN-ONE', LOOKS SIMILAR

that the majority of digital DJs use, but with the vital difference that you don't need to use a laptop to DJ with them. With standalone all-in-one systems, you don't only get the two "decks" and a "mixer" like with a controller, but you also get a built-in dedicated "computer" and screen. The idea is that you add your music (via a USB drive or SD card, usually) and then you can do most of the same things you can do with DJ controllers. That means you get waveforms, beatgrids, sync, musical key features, search, hot cues and so on.

Pioneer DJ led the way with its XDJ-RX (now up to the [XDJ-RX3](#), a hugely popular device), but Engine DJ is currently the tech leader here, with its Denon DJ and Numark models having superior technology, for smoother operation and better features. It's important to note that for best operation you do still need to use a laptop to prepare and output your music to a USB drive to use with these systems. Standalone all-in-ones like these are a serious alternative to using a DJ controller and laptop - although the most cutting-edge features will almost always come to laptop systems way before reaching hardware systems such as these. For instance, none of these systems has a built-in sampler, something all laptop DJ software has.



NUMARK'S MIXSTREAM PRO WAS A GROUND-BREAKING STANDALONE SYSTEM RELEASED THIS YEAR.



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, and with apps like Algoriddim's djay Pro AI proving enduringly popular, tablet and smartphone DJing isn't going away any time soon.

Really this is just a tablet/phone take on the laptop-only DJ system described on the next page, and it's actually coming full circle, with a number of DJ controllers now able to work with tablets and phones, so you can use your iOS or Android device as a direct replacement for a laptop in such set-ups. Like with laptop-only systems, you'll need an audio interface for those all-important audio outputs, because of course most tablets and phones don't have headphones sockets at all nowadays.

By the way, DJing with iPads or iPhones is much easier than on Android: There's more choice, and apps tend to be updated more frequently, and with better features. Android's tech is roughly comparable with iOS/iPadOS tech, but the Android ecosystem is more fragmented, making complex audio apps harder for developers to code on that platform.

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. 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. The two set-ups we've described so far are two types of modular set-ups.

Do you only need one "deck" and a load of buttons? Then buy a pad controller, a single "deck" controller or DVS turntable 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 previous page) 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.

Modular systems let experts "build to measure", and can be popular with DJs who want to squeeze their custom set-up into cramped DJ boxes. Essentially, a digital modular system does some or all of what an all-in-one does... but simply split across more than one physical unit.



PIONEER DJ'S DDJ-XP2
IS AN EXAMPLE OF A
MODULAR CONTROLLER
TO LET YOU ADD MORE
PERFORMANCE OPTIONS.

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 all DJ software can also be 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 2004 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 interface to give you two audio outputs (one output for your headphones and one for your speakers) - but nonetheless, this is still just about as minimal as digital DJing gets.

WHY MOST DJS STILL CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER



WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE, YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER (AND BY that, just to reiterate I mean a device with "decks", "mixer" and "audio interface" all in one box, that needs a laptop to function). 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 full nightclub-style system is an expense that's prohibitive to you. Likewise, while adding DVS to a vinyl or CD system to make it digital will give you an awesome set-up, I'm guessing the commitment, complexity and large ticket price of setting up such a system from scratch will rule this option out for you too.

DJing from just a laptop, tablet or phone would be tricky (and look rubbish), you're thinking, and probably wouldn't even feel like DJing. You're right. Likewise, 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 learn the DJing hobby. (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.)



Nowadays, out of all the “alternative” system types we discussed, the one most likely to appeal to you instead of a “normal” DJ controller is an all-in-one standalone system that can work without your laptop too if you want it to, such as the [Denon DJ Prime 4](#) or [Pioneer DJ’s XDJ-RX3](#).

They’re often very appealing to mobile DJs, who enjoy the reliability and convenience of not having to set up a laptop at every gig, for instance - but as they have become more and more powerful, they’ve also become a truly viable alternative for a wider audience too.

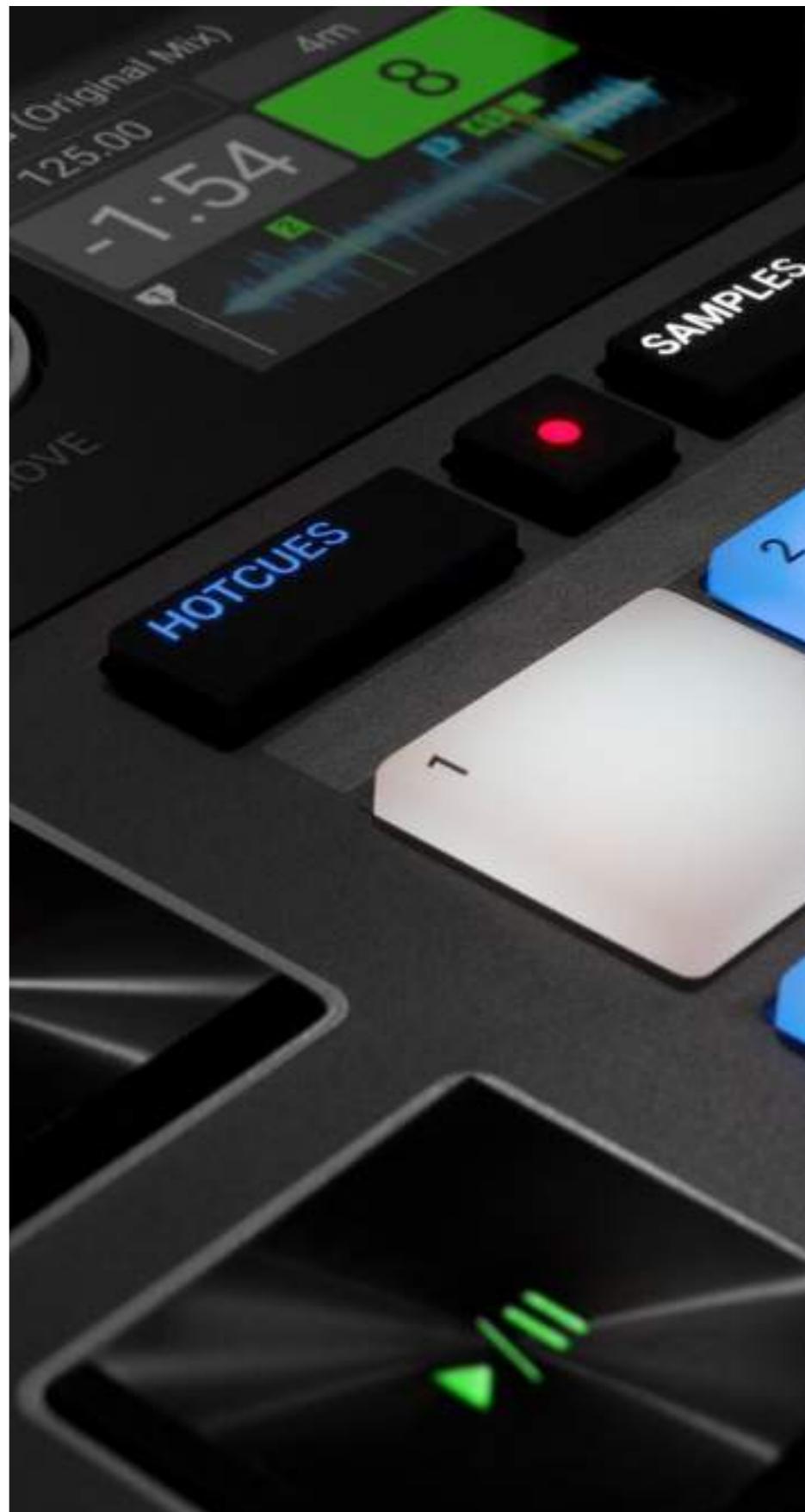
Later on in the guide we round up the best of these - but most people still decide that standard DJ controllers are the way to go, coming back to cost efficiency, portability and choice. So controllers will be the first thing we look at in this guide. However, just to be sure that we go into this with our eyes wide open, let’s look at some of the disadvantages of 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 the venue has provided pro-grade gear to use. (This may explain why there isn’t so much of a stigma attached to using DVS systems in such venues, as such systems utilise the existing gear.)

Even when you have club management that’s happy for you to bring a DJ controller or standalone system to play from (at least, in theory), there’s the issue of finding the space to set up. That’s why certain DJs occasionally 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. 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 any digital system is the chance of 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 short mix on your phone that you can switch in should your system fail and need a reboot for some reason.

But all that said, I bet you still want a DJ controller, or maybe a standalone system - 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

EVEN IF YOU'RE USING "STANDALONE" DJ

system, you'll still need software to prepare your library to work with it. But if you are going down the laptop and DJ controller route, the software pretty much does everything for you. Indeed, apart from giving you an audio interface for separate headphones and speaker outputs, all a controller really contains is a bunch of specialised controls that make your DJ software easier to use. It's the DJ software that actually does all the clever stuff.

It's the DJ software that loads the music from your hard drive into your computer's memory for playback, or grabs the next track from your streaming service. It's the DJ software that monitors what you're doing on the 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 the rest. Think of your DJ controller as a "dumb box" that takes all the glory, and you're not far wrong. Even if you go for a flashy controller with built-in screens and all the rest, it's still the computer that's doing the hard work.

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, especially because it isn't cheap. 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 each software platform 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 your gear: 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 SOFTWARE

SERATO DJ IS A HUGELY POPULAR AND STABLE PLATFORM

for digital DJs. Particularly popular stateside and with its roots in the hip-hop community, it is now used by DJs worldwide and for all types of DJing. It comes in two flavours: Serato DJ Pro and Serato DJ Lite. Serato DJ Lite comes for free with entry-level DJ controllers, but you'll really want to upgrade to Serato DJ Pro if you get serious about your DJing, as Lite has some intentionally annoying restrictions.

Furthermore, many of the features you may want require you to buy a higher level of the Pro software: the “baseline” Serato DJ Pro doesn’t even come with key shifting, for instance. And with prices from \$199 to \$399 (a subscription is also available), it is expensive. Also note that while more expensive DJ controllers tend to unlock Serato DJ Pro rather than Lite, as soon as you unplug the controller your software reverts to a lower version: If you truly want to own it, you still have to buy it.

Serato doesn't make its own hardware, instead partnering tightly with manufacturers, thus guaranteeing a high degree of quality control to ensure great performance. So any Serato-compatible controller will give you a decent DJing experience, meaning you're really looking at what hardware features are important to you when choosing a controller - and factoring in any extra cost of the software itself.

Serato is all about usability and stability, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided than with some other platforms, and developments can be slow. This means that while DJs tend to have fewer “head scratching” moments when learning and using Serato software, it can also feel limited. For instance, while it supports the “big four” music streaming services (Soundcloud Go+, TIDAL, Beatport Streaming and Beatsource Streaming), you can currently only use one at a time.

SIX OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO



PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000SRT

PIONEER DJ'S DDJ-1000SRT IS BASICALLY the Serato version of its hugely popular [DDJ-1000](#) Rekordbox controller, something that was much requested when the latter launched. It doesn't have the most comprehensive control over Serato, but it does have that Pioneer DJ look and feel, straight from the pro DJ booth, making it unique among Serato DJ Controllers. It unlocks the basic full version of Serato DJ Pro.



2

PIONEER DJ DDJ-REV7



NEW FOR 2022, THIS IS PIONEER DJ'S first DJ controller with motorised decks, and is daring in that the layout of those decks reflects the way scratch DJs use turntables (with the tempo controls horizontal and at the top of the unit). It may only be two channels but it's pro through and through, great fun to play on, and any scratch DJ's dream. It unlocks the basic Pro version of the software.



3

ROLAND DJ-707M

ROLAND'S DJ-707M IS ONE OF THE MOST INSANELY POWERFUL

Serato DJ controllers ever made, with a huge array of input, output and standalone features never before seen in such a device. And it's small - designed for space-conscious mobile DJs. Niche, for sure, but a very good controller for its intended audience.



4

NUMARK NS4FX

NEW FOR 2022, THIS UPPER ENTRY-LEVEL CONTROLLER IS one of the few choices of four-channel, mid-priced units out there. As well as those four channels it has a balanced master output alongside its booth output, two mic inputs, and some useful routing features for livestreaming. Only comes with Lite software though, meaning an extra expense if you want to upgrade to Pro (and you will).



RELOOP READY

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A PORTABLE DJ controller that still has most of the power of a full-sized one, this is it. It has full control over Serato's pad features and FX, and its only real limitation software-wise is two-band EQ instead of three-band. Only comes with Lite software though, meaning an extra outlay if you want to upgrade to Pro, as you likely will.

5



6 NUMARK MIXTRACK PLATINUM FX



THE BIGGER BROTHER TO THE MIXTRACK PRO FX, this adds four-deck control and natty in-jog screens, to what is basically the best entry-level Serato DJ controller out there. Build quality is great for the price, and apart from limited FX, it does most of what you'd expect in an entry-level controller. Only comes with Lite software though, meaning that extra cost when you want to upgrade to Serato DJ Pro.



TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE

TRAKTOR HAS RECEIVED A SHOT IN THE ARM THANKS TO THE release of a string of Traktor Pro 3 updates recently. These have brought the addition of Beatport Streaming and Beatsource Streaming, an overhauled audio engine, and new single knob Mixer FX, with the promise of more to come. While these updates haven't brought the features revolution that many were hoping for, they've been enough to rekindle the passion of loyal Traktor fans who had been waiting patiently.

Traktor remains popular among our students here at Digital DJ Tips, especially electronic DJs, for whom it is best suited. It's quite complex (many think over-complex), but the flipside of that complexity is that it is capable and customisable to an extent not shared by other DJ software. And while the parent company, Native Instruments, has endured a wobble or two over recent years, its recent merging with the iZotope audio software company could open the door for interesting new features, not least real-time stems separation (iZotope makes some great such algorithms).

If you decide Traktor is the way to go for you, your choices of controller that are ideal for it are actually quite limited: Native Instruments has 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.

THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR



TRAKTOR KONTROL S4 MK3

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS' THIRD UPDATE TO ITS FLAGSHIP four-channel controller comes with motorised Haptic Drive jogwheels that are smooth, silent and feel fantastic to spin on. It's also got onboard effects and Mixer FX controls, onboard deck displays and a streamlined performance pad section. A worthy update to the venerable Traktor Kontrol S4 line.



2

TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3

THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3 DOESN'T HAVE THE motorised jogs, onboard displays and comprehensive effects section of its bigger brother, but it's still a capable device that has controls for Traktor Pro 3's Mixer FX. It also retains the streamlined performance pads layout. A solid entry-level controller for beginner DJs, and a good backup for gigging pros.



TRAKTOR KONTROL S3

AND THEN WE HAVE THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S3, DESIGNED to sit between the two controllers in spots one and two. While it lacks the comprehensive effects controls of the Kontrol S4, it gets four channels, and an Aux input to make it more useful in pro situations. Whether you go for this will depend on whether you need those features over the S2, and whether you can find the extra money for the S4, which is the better bet over this.





REKORDBOX DJ SOFTWARE

THE NEWEST DJ APP ON THE BLOCK, 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 Pro and Traktor Pro. There are several reasons why this is important.

Firstly, Pioneer DJ gear is by default found in the majority of DJ booths around the world, and its controller range (for other people's software) sells bucketloads, too. Having its own DJ software means the company can offer its own hardware/software solutions, keeping DJs in its own ecosystem.

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, and as those DJs grow into their hobby or career, they can buy more "pro" gear, sticking with the same platform. Therefore 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 DJ software, Rekordbox feels like a cross between Serato and Traktor. It has good FX, four decks, a deep and comprehensive tagging system in the library, a decent sampler and sequencer, and video and DVS control too. Lighting Mode, a built in editor, streaming services, the ability to play lyric video files, and cloud features are some of the new developments in Rekordbox DJ this past year or two. That said, while the version that comes with even the cheapest controllers is much better than the equivalent "beginner" Serato version, all users wanting more "pro" feature will have to pay a subscription - there is no outright purchase option at all.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ



PIONEER DJ DDJ-400

THIS TWO-CHANNEL CONTROLLER TAKES THE CDJ / DJM
club set-up layout and distills it into a portable device for home use and bar gigs. The deck controls and Beat FX layout help new DJs get up to speed with Pioneer DJ's hardware workflow for easier transition when they start gigging at clubs.

PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000

THE DDJ-1000 IS ONE OF PIONEER DJ'S MOST feature-packed controllers, having two full-size CDJ-style jogwheels with full-colour displays onboard for viewing track details, album art and waveforms. It's also got Beat FX onboard taken from the DJM-900NXS2 mixer. One for gigging pros and those who want an experience that's as close to a CDJ / DJM set-up as possible in a controller.



PIONEER DJ DDJ-800

PIONEER DJ'S DDJ-800 IS ESSENTIALLY THE "CUT DOWN" version of the DDJ-1000, with more traditional jogwheels and two channels on its mixer, and various other things removed when viewed against the DDJ-1000. Smaller and more portable, for some DJs this will be a good compromise, but the price is not far removed from the more capable DDJ-1000, so many DJs will just find the extra cash and go for the bigger brother.

3



4

PIONEER DJ DDJ-200

A BRAVE LITTLE CONTROLLER, AIMED AT THE SUPER-casual end of the market. The DDJ-200 is small, light, simple, and doesn't even have a sound card, instead coming with a mono splitter cable so DJs can use it with headphones and speakers that way. It is also designed for use primarily with phones and tablets, and with Pioneer DJ's own WeDJ app and third party apps. This is the mobile/streaming option - laptop beginner DJs who own their own music files should go for the DDJ-400 instead.

5





VIRTUAL DJ SOFTWARE

VIRTUAL DJ IS A POWERFUL DIGITAL DJ PLATFORM THAT IS popular with professional and mobile DJs because it's easy to use and is packed with plenty of features. 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's programmers just go ahead and ensure their software works fine with as many controllers as possible.

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. Hefty updates in recent years have focused on fresh updates for VJs and those who spin with visuals, as well as bolstering its livestreaming features such as having streaming-specific skins baked in for more engaging

livestreams. Currently, Virtual DJ is the only laptop DJ app that lets you stream from multimedia content libraries that include music, video, and karaoke files. Finally it is one of only two platforms (the other being Algoriddim's djay Pro AI) to offer "stems" DJing. It's also got advanced features 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.

You can 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 for "Virtual DJ Ultimate". If you want access to the streaming catalogues, you'll also need to pay a monthly fee for each that you plan on using.

FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ



1

NUMARK MIXSTREAM PRO

A GREAT ENTRY-LEVEL DJ SYSTEM FOR SMALL PARTIES, DESIGNED

to work without a laptop primarily - but if you want to use Virtual DJ and all the extra features available in the platform you can do so. Indeed, the Virtual DJ's integration is great, making full use of the Mixstream Pro's 7" screen.

2

DENON DJ PRIME 4

ANOTHER UNIT THAT IS ALSO “STANDALONE” IF YOU
wish. But once you plug in a laptop running Virtual DJ, you get an extremely powerful mid-level system, which has proven to be popular with mobile DJs, and which again showcases deep screen integration with Virtual DJ.



3

PIONEER DJ DDJ-REV7

THIS CONTROLLER HAS MOTORISED JOGWHEELS, meaning it is a natural choice for DJs who cut their teeth on vinyl, or who want an all-in-one DJ controller that is particularly good for scratching. The Virtual DJ integration is excellent, with perfect jogwheel mapping making full use of the high-quality turntable feel this controller majors on.

4

PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000



THE TEAM AT VIRTUAL DJ TELLS US THAT THIS IS STILL
the controller that sees the most use with their software, and it is not surprising - it is a classic, that is as much worth buying today as it was when it launched. Pair it with Virtual DJ and you get the best of the power of the Virtual DJ software, and the club layout and controls of the DDJ-1000.

5

PIONEER DJ DDJ-FLX6

THIS BEGINNER CONTROLLER FROM PIONEER DJ nonetheless has full-sized jogwheels, making it appealing to DJs who want the feel of club gear but don't want to pay for pro features. The Virtual DJ integration is "official", and it is really good, giving FLX6 users a viable alternative to the provided Rekordbox software.



OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE (2 TO TRY)

MOST LAPTOP/CONTROLLER DJS USE ONE OF THE PACKAGES MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, BUT THAT'S NOT THE END OF THE STORY.

There are several 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.

Both of the DJ platforms we're about to look at are capable and established, and although they're very different from each other, for their own reasons, both are worth a look. Bear in mind too that while pro DJs tend to stick to a single platform so they can concentrate on other areas of their careers, there's no stipulation at all for hobby DJs to do so. If you're inclined to experiment and try other things, do so! Many DJs have a first platform of choice, and a second - and that's fine.

DJAY PRO AI

EASILY ONE OF THE BEST LOOKING DJ APPS, djay Pro AI for Mac and iOS is also powerful, packing more and more features just under the hood, in much the same way as other Apple-specific software, keeps it simple for users, but has a lot of power once you start digging. It works on Mac and PC laptops, and it packs contemporary features like stems DJing, cloud-syncing of your music library, AI-powered Automix, music streaming, a pad sampler and sequencer, and support for DJ controllers as well as media players and DVS. One subscription covers both iOS and Mac.



2



MIXXX 2.3

MIXXX 2.3 IS A FREE, OPEN SOURCE DJ APP that's got all the basic digital DJ features you'd expect in a piece of modern DJ software. It's got four deck control, support for multiple audio files including lossless FLAC, sampler decks, the ability to create custom FX chains, and the ability to broadcast your mix online. You can even use it with a DVS and Midi gear for hands-on control.

FIVE OF THE BEST STANDALONE SYSTEMS

STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS ARE APPEALING

to DJs who just don't want to take a laptop into the DJ booth with them, or have one hanging around when they're practising at home. Nowadays they're starting to feel as if they've basically got a computer embedded in them - which is because they have! And with touchscreens, smooth graphics, powerful DJ features and built-in music streaming services, they're becoming more appealing than ever.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-RX3

IT'S NOT THE MOST POWERFUL, IT'S NOT THE MOST INNOVATIVE, but it is hugely popular, because for many DJs it has all they will ever need. This Rekordbox-powered two-channel DJ system does the basics very well indeed, is just as at home in the club as in the bedroom, and even works with Serato, Rekordbox and Virtual DJ software too. The best all-rounder.



DENON DJ PRIME 4

IF YOU WANT MORE POWER AND THE MOST cutting-edge features, this Engine DJ-powered unit is the one. With built-in WiFi, access to streaming services for millions of tunes at your fingertips, true four-channel DJing, and even Serato and Virtual DJ support should you want to use it with DJ software, it offers great "bang for your buck". It can even control lights, via its SoundSwitch integration.

2



3

NUMARK MIXSTREAM PRO

ANOTHER ENGINE DJ-POWERED UNIT, THIS GREAT VALUE two-channel DJ system has the same software inside as the Prime 4, giving nearly all the same benefits. Another trick it has up its sleeve is a pair of built-in speakers. You're not going to rock any parties with them, but they're surprisingly good for the size.





4

PIONEER DJ XDJ-XZ

THIS IS THE "PRO" CHOICE, LOOKING AND FEELING TO all the world like a Pioneer pro club set-up. That means full-sized jogwheels, a full-sized mixer, and pro inputs and outputs. All that said, despite being four channel it is limited to two-channel standalone (you can though use all four channels with Rekordbox software), and the newer XDJ-RX3 has a better screen.



DENON DJ PRIME GO

5

A UNIQUE LITTLE DEVICE, THIS PORTABLE METAL BOX HAS a built-in battery, so you can DJ with it wherever you like - we've livestreamed using this unit from lakes, mountains, camping grounds, all over! It runs the Engine DJ OS, so you get WiFi music streaming, lighting control, and all the other cutting edge features of much bigger gear.



THREE OF THE BEST DJ LAPTOPS

YOUR LAPTOP IS THE HEART OF YOUR DIGITAL

DJ system. It's where you download and manage your music library and, if you decide to spin with a laptop in the DJ booth, it's what your DJ software will run on. Whether you end up spinning with media players and thumb drives or DJ controllers and DVS, your laptop will be an integral part of your set-up and it's advisable to get the best one that fits your budget. Things to look out for will be its processor, onboard RAM (nothing lower than 8GB), hard drive space and operating system. Almost all DJ apps are cross-platform these days, so it's up to you to decide whether you want to take the Mac or the Windows route.

1



APPLE M1/M2 MACBOOK AIR

EVEN THE BASE 8GB AIR WITH THE M1 CHIP IS PLENTY FOR RUNNING DJ software, and the latest M2 variant is even better. All DJ software works fine on Arm laptops nowadays, and this laptop is light, slim and has a long battery life. Just make sure you specify an upgrade to the base 256GB SSD to something large enough to hold your music collection, and be aware it only has two Thunderbolt/USB ports.



2

DELL XPS 13 OLED 2021

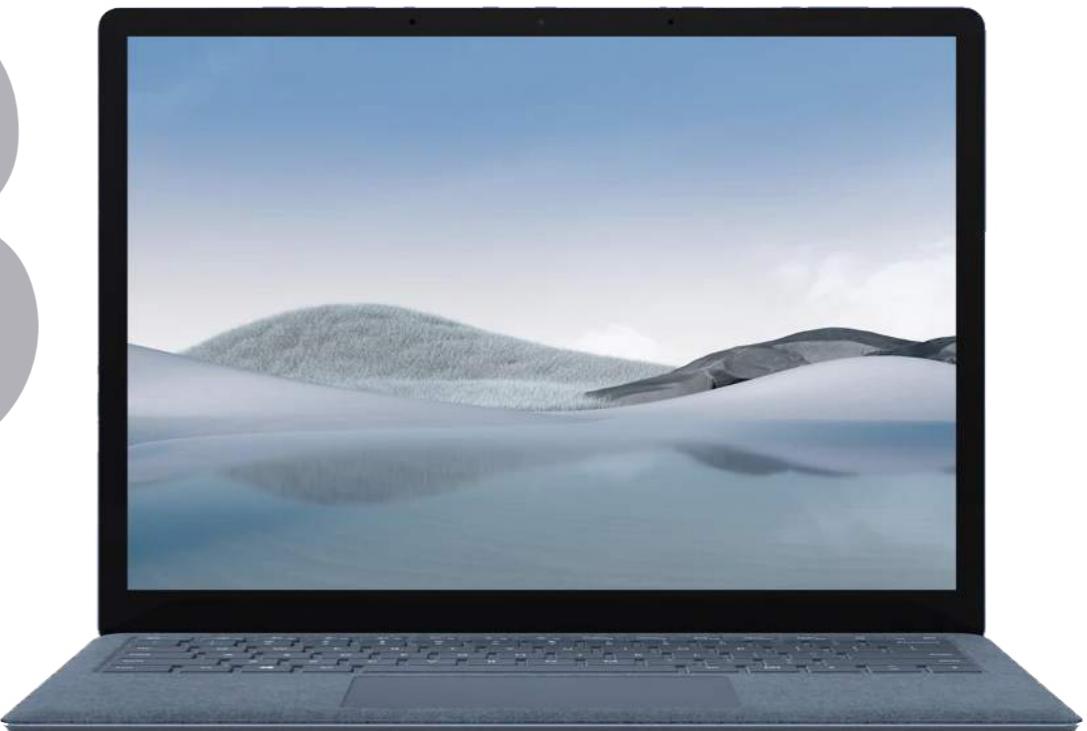
DELL'S POPULAR XPS LINE HAD A REFRESH that brings a new OLED display, an Intel i9 processor and up to 32GB of onboard RAM (although the 8GB base would be fine for DJing). It's a beast of a Windows machine that can handle even the toughest of DJ/producer work, including music production and video - a viable MacBook alternative.

MICROSOFT SURFACE LAPTOP 4

LOADS OF CONFIGURATIONS POSSIBLE

here; we'd advise you to go for an Intel version, and specify at least a 512GB SSD. One novelty is the touchscreen, which we could see creative DJs finding a use for in their performances. Build quality is sturdy too, which is a bonus for the DJ booth.

3



THREE 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, some 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. The CD slot is history on new devices, too!



PIONEER DJ CDJ-3000

PIONEER DJ FINALLY REPLACED ITS AGEING

CDJ-2000NXS2 club-standard CDJ a while back, with the new CDJ-3000. It has a much better screen, a few new features. But the real news is that it is now effectively a computer inside, so we are fully expecting some big feature upgrades from Pioneer DJ, the first of which has already arrived - the ability to access your Dropbox music library via the cloud. Still the club standard.



2

DENON DJ SC6000 PRIME

DENON DJ'S SC6000 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.

3

DENON DJ SC6000M PRIME



THIS DEVICE HAS ALL THE GOOD STUFF FOUND ON the SC6000 Prime including the touchscreen and extensive performance controls, but it replaces the jogwheel with a 7" rotating vinyl platter jog that gives you an authentic turntable feel. One for scratch and battle DJs who want a contemporary media player that feels as close to a turntable as possible.



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.



1

PIONEER DJ DJM-900NXS2

THE FLAGSHIP REPLACEMENT FOR THE DJM-900NXS, THE
DJM-900NXS2 was evolution rather than revolution. That said, some of the changes were 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-3000 players it still represents the industry standard pro DJ system - but one that does come at a considerable premium (and, the mixer is getting really old now).



2

DENON DJ X1850 PRIME

THE DENON DJ X1850 PRIME IS THE COMPANION MIXER to the SC6000 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 SC6000 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.





3

RANE SEVENTY-TWO MKII

RANE'S LATEST FLAGSHIP BATTLE MIXER has a high-resolution screen onboard for viewing Serato DJ's waveforms, performance pads, fader contour controls, and knobs and buttons for Serato's FX. It makes for an impressive set-up when flanked by a pair of Rane Twelve Mark II controllers, but it can be used with turntables and other media players too. One for digital battle DJs who want nothing but the best.





4

PIONEER DJM-S11

THE DJM-S9 MIXER FOR SERATO SCRATCH DJS

was such a hit that it in many ways pushed the art of scratch performing forward - and Pioneer DJ replaced it with not one but two mixers. The “other” one, the DJM-S7, is a modest but worthy update, but this one, the DJM-S11, has a touchscreen to show your Serato settings and allow you to control X/Y FX, that also gives you control over decks 3 and 4 of the software. It’s a worthy successor and our pick of the two.



5

NUMARK SCRATCH

THE NUMARK SCRATCH MIXER HAS A built-in audio interface, also designed to use with Serato as a DVS mixer – although it works fine as a standalone DJ mixer too. Simple, nicely done, and loads of fun, and the quality is there where it counts. Sure it makes compromises, but none of them are dealbreakers, and it opens scratching with Serato up to a whole new sector of the market, as it's by far the cheapest mixer in this line-up.



TWO OF THE BEST IPHONE/ IPAD 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. Apple-compatible apps still dominate in this sector.



DJAY PRO AI

ALGORIDDIM'S DJAY PRO AI FOR IOS SQUEEZES IN A TON OF features, functionality and power into an app made for the iPad and iPhone. It's got stems mixing, four-deck mixing, streaming service integration, and AI automixing built in. You get the ability to mix video in high-resolution 4K, and you get access to the Looper feature that lets you trigger loops and sounds while you spin. It's compatible with the iPad Pro's Smart Keyboard, and if you'd like to spin with actual jogwheels, it works with controllers like the Reloop Buddy and you can now map it to any Midi controller using the Midi Learn feature. The subscription also gets you access to the Mac version.



DJ PLAYER PRO

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 (now dated) Native Instruments Stems format, for DJing with constituent parts of tracks. One for the specialists, then, but worth a look.

TWO OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IPHONE & IPAD

HOOKING PHONE AND TABLETS 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 were a geek with time to spare this was all fine, even fun, but for everyone else? It was fiddly. It still is unfortunately for Android (at least, a lot of the time), but for iOS, it's much simpler, with some great software and easy connection. What's more, you can plug just your phone into a full-sized DJ set-up nowadays and DJ immediately from it - it's more like a USB drive with a screen and waveforms built in!

Mostly we're talking about using Algoriddim's djay Pro AI, although other mobile apps do exist, and some are quite good. Also, both of the controllers we feature here are from German brand Reloop, but any class-compliant DJ controller could potentially work with your phone nowadays. That said, you'd be back to the geeky stuff with trying to get some controllers connected and mapped properly. Go with one of the systems featured here though, and you'll be up and running in no time.



RELOOP MIXON 8 PRO

IF YOU WANT THE MOST "PRO" EXPERIENCE possible DJing with your iPad and Algoriddim's djay Pro AI, right up to using the iPad Pro, the Reloop Mixon 8 Pro is 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 also unlocks Serato DJ Pro, so you have a choice of platforms to use. Also check out the Mixon 4 as an alternative.

2

RELOOP BUDDY



THIS NEAT LITTLE CONTROLLER FOR ALGORIDDIM'S DJAY

Pro AI is the opposite end of the spectrum from the Mixon 8 Pro, being tiny and lightweight. Still, it also has a slot for your iPad or iPhone (up to 11") , and has most of the controls you'd expect on bigger units. It's not the cheapest for what it is, but for true portability with an iPad, this is the one to go for.



TOP FIVE TURNTABLES FOR DJS

WHETHER TO USE IN A DVS SYSTEM, TO LEARN TO SCRATCH “how it’s always been done”, to rip vinyl, or even for true old-school “vinyl only” DJing, turntables aren’t going away. Sure they’re still niche, and sure they won’t be a purchase for most DJs - but they’re definitely still a “thing”. Here are our favourites.

1



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP1240XP

A PROPER HEAVYWEIGHT TURNTABLE AND GREAT VALUE FOR
money at the “pro” end - built for use anywhere, and also optimised for scratch DJs and the “90 degree” layout they prefer, thanks to its second start/stop button.

2



PIONEER DJ PLX-1000

THE PIONEER DJ PLX-1000 DOES NOTHING NEW, BUT THEN
again, what most DJs want from a turntable is an experience close to the venerable old Technics SL-1200 - and this is it just subtly changed for the modern age. A classic updated, and a safe if not particularly cheap choice.

3

RELOOP RP-8000MK2



WE'RE INCLUDING THIS AS IT INNOVATES IN WHAT IS USUALLY
a pretty conservative area of DJ gear. Half performance turntable, half Serato DJ controller, it has built in pads, and an awesome analogue pitch scratch mode that nobody else has.

4

STANTON T.92 MK2 USB

A GREAT VALUE TURNTABLE WITH FUNKY LOOKS AND THAT
has the added advantage of straight-to-laptop ripping via its USB output. Solid, even for use in public (where many cheaper turntables tend to show their weaknesses).



5



TECHNICS SL-1200/1210 MK7

WHAT TURNTABLE LINE-UP COULDN'T INCLUDE TECHNICS?
While the Mk7 version of its 1200/1210 turntable divides people (we think it's lightweight, and prone to bass feedback, for instance), many still sing its praises - and its release in a host of new colours certainly catches the eyes.

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:

1



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). These are all "powered" meaning you don't need separate amplifiers. Oh, and *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.

2



THE PIONEER DJ HDJ-CUE1 IS OUR CURRENT FAVOURITE HERE AT DIGITAL DJ TIPS BECAUSE IT BLENDS GREAT SOUND WITH COMFORT AND SUPERIOR NOISE ISOLATION.

HEADPHONES

MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPEAKERS, headphones are absolute essentials for any DJ. They need to be able to cover your ears to isolate you from ambient noise, be durable, and be loud. Traditionally, DJs have flocked to the Sennheiser HD-25 II, which we wholeheartedly recommend. Another current favourite at the Digital DJ Tips office is the Pioneer [DJ HDJ-CUE1](#) which are great value, sound fantastic, and can be customised with your own colour of earpads and cable. Coiled cables are preferred by most DJs (you don't trip on them as easily), and detachable cables mean you can replace them if they break.



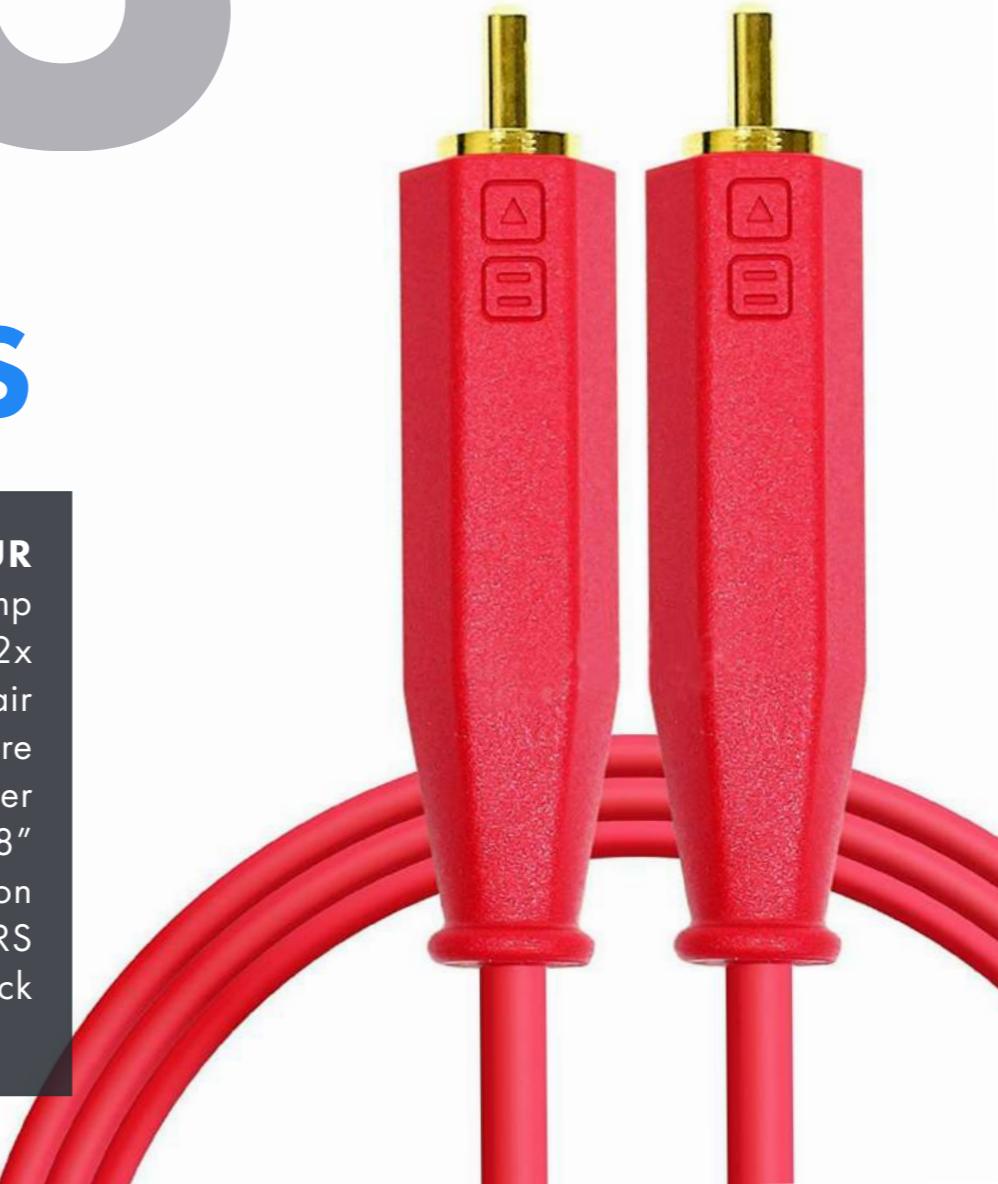
THE MINIMUM YOU'LL NEED IS A CABLE TO GO FROM YOUR CONTROLLER TO YOUR POWERED SPEAKERS OR AMPLIFIER AND SPEAKER. THE USB CABLES FOR THE COMPUTER ALWAYS COME WITH THE CONTROLLERS, THOUGH.



3

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 "2x RCA male to 2x 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. DJ Techtools' Chroma Cables are awesome and durable, plus they come in different colours and lengths. If you're using computer speakers that have an 1/8" TRS socket for an input, you'll need a "2x RCA male to stereo 1/8" TRS male" cable. If your computer speakers are the cheap type with only a headphone jack on them that's meant to be plugged in to a computer headphones socket, you'll need an 1/8" TRS female to 2x 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.





PORTRABLE SPEAKER

WHILE YOUR “STUDIO” OR “MAIN” SPEAKERS WILL BE GREAT FOR practising at home, you’re often going to want to listen to your DJ sets, your streaming service, or even do a bit of DJing with your controller (especially if you choose a small one, or DJ from some iOS software) away from those speakers. Enter your portable speaker. Chances are high you’ll buy a Bluetooth one, which is great, but just make sure it has a Line In so you can plug a cable into it from your DJ set-up when needed; Bluetooth can have a delay on the signal making the gap between what you “do” on your gear and what you hear noticeable, and highly annoying! We love the new-for-2022 [Soundboks Go](#), which is a monster, loud, yet portable speaker with many DJ smarts.

THE SOUNDBOKS
GO IS A MONSTER
BATTERY/BLUETOOTH
SPEAKER

4

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.



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.



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.

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.



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

KIT FOR LIVESTREAMING YOUR DJ SETS



MANY DJS ARE LIVESTREAMING DJ SETS NOWADAYS, AND many more want to. It's not hard to do with the right kit - and you don't need an awful lot of it, either. Here are some outstanding pieces of livesreaming tech that we've been using heavily these last 12 months...



OPEN BROADCASTER SOFTWARE (OBS)

IT'S FREE, IT'S UBIQUITOUS, AND IT WORKS GREAT

- there's little not to like. Get OBS for your Mac or Windows laptop and turn it into an instant live broadcasting studio. You can even run it alongside your DJ software, so you don't have to have a second computer for livestreaming at all.



2

LOGITECH STREAMCAM

THESE LITTLE CAMERAS ARE WEBCAMS ON STEROIDS. THEY can be tripod mounted, are full 1080 resolution (the highest for livestreaming), are really well made, and give great results. Plug one of these into your laptop, and that's your video sorted.

IK MULTIMEDIA IRIG MIC HD2

THIS SMART HANDHELD MICROPHONE PLUGS DIRECTLY INTO your computer so you don't need an audio interface to get your voice into your DJ livestreams. It is ruggedly built, sounds great, and is reasonably priced.



3



4

YAMAHA AG03 AUDIO INTERFACE

IF YOU DO NEED AN AUDIO INTERFACE TO get your music and voice into your computer for livestreaming, our favourite is the oldie-but-goodie Yamaha AG03. It's like a hybrid between a mixer and an audio interface, and is supremely flexible (we also love the bigger AG06).

5

MEVO START

DON'T FANCY USING A LAPTOP TO GO LIVE?

The Mevo Start is a camera that can go live to Twitch, YouTube etc directly, no computer required! It has a stereo audio input to feed your music into, and can easily be mounted on a tripod. Control is via a smartphone app. It's the ultimate in simplicity, and it works great.



MAKING MUSIC ON YOUR LAPTOP

A DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION, OR DAW, IS A PIECE OF SOFTWARE that you run (usually) on your Windows or Mac laptop for making music with. Nowadays you can make complete songs without the need for any additional hardware at all, just on a computer, with one of these packages - and that's exactly what many DJ/producers do.

The software will contain at its heart a timeline where you can lay out multiple tracks of music - be that drums, instruments, vocals, whatever - to construct your song. It'll come with software synthesisers, samples, drums and instruments, effects, a mixer... everything you need to make a track from start to finish.

You may choose to add extra hardware (often, producers like to add "pad" controllers for finger drumming, or a control keyboard to make entering chords and playing melodies into the computer easier), and some musicians like to buy synthesisers and samplers to "jam" on which they can also hook up to the computer, making "hybrid" production set-ups.

But the important thing to know is that the kind of music-making power that once was accessible by very few people and called for dedicated studios to be built in order to even exist, can now happen in your home, and is by comparison ridiculously affordable. DAWs and modern music making hardware have democratised the world of making music, so that if you want to have a go, you can.



FIVE OF THE BEST MUSIC-MAKING PACKAGES



ABLETON LIVE

THIS MAC/WINDOWS PACKAGE IS THE BIG ONE, used by more electronic music producers and DJ/producers than any other by far. It has everything you need, doesn't tie you to any particular workflow, and - as its name suggests - is also a great live music tool. It has some pretty cool "jamming" features too, to help you come up with ideas.

FL STUDIO

FORMERLY "FRUITY LOOPS", THIS IS A MUCH-LOVED
Mac/Windows program, the starting point in music making for so many of today's top producers, and a package that has been at the heart of many hit records. Their scrupulously fair pricing policy and "outsider" status appeals to many, and the package has a lot of loyal proponents.



LOGIC PRO

MAC-ONLY, THIS APPLE PRODUCTION SOFTWARE

comes from a slightly more traditional music making background than the first two in our list, but nowadays it can do an awful lot of what, say, Ableton can do, while retaining the Apple polish that will appeal to Mac fans. You get a lot for your money here, too.





4

SERATO STUDIO

A BIT DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER THREE MENTIONED SO FAR, the Mac/windows Serato Studio is a much more simple tool, designed as a kind of sketchpad or beatbox, with particular appeal to hip hop producers, and to existing Serato users, because it looks and feels similar, and uses the same music library.

GARAGEBAND

5

THIS APPLE-ONLY PACKAGE GETS A MENTION HERE

mainly because it is absolutely free. It's sort of a "Logic Pro Lite", but it is a capable program in its own right. One appealing feature is that its project files are compatible with Logic Pro should you decide to continue working on an idea on Logic at any point in the future.



FIVE PIECES OF MUSIC-MAKING HARDWARE

THERE IS A LOT OF HARDWARE OUT THERE

for making music, but here are five items we've enjoyed this year and find ourselves recommending to our community regularly, a mix of old and new...

1

PUSH 2 ABLETON LIVE CONTROLLER

PUSH IS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ABLETON LIVE, from the makers of that software, that puts everything you need to make music in front of you in one piece of kit. If you like the idea of making music with a computer but value the hands-on feel of an instrument, this could be the only piece of hardware you need.



2

NOVATION FLKEY MIDI KEYBOARDS



THESE ARE THE FIRST EVER MIDI CONTROL KEYBOARDS MADE specifically for the FL Studio DAW, so one of these is a no-brainer if you want a keyboard for that package. That said, the makers also have a more general versions that works with Ableton and Logic (the Launchkey keyboards) - they're basically just a box of keys, so can be mapped to most software.

IK MULTIMEDIA UNO SYNTH PRO SYNTHESISERS

WANT AN ANALOGUE SYNTHESISER FOR ALL THOSE FAT dance basslines and snarling lead sounds? The Uno Synth, which comes in small and large versions, is a supremely capable, genuine analogue synthesiser that shames products many times its price. Usefully, it has onboard effects, too.



3



4

ROLAND SP-404 MKII SAMPLER

THIS PAD-BASED SAMPLER HAS JUST BEEN REISSUED IN A MKII guise, with many improvements over the original, which was itself much loved by lo-fi and hip hop producers. It's a supreme tool for making beats live, with its big pads and its useful long, thin design - it looks great next to DJ gear for a hybrid set-up.

NOVATION CIRCUIT TRACKS GROOVEBOX

5



IF YOU WANT TO MAKE MUSIC AWAY FROM THE computer, this portable, battery-powered groovebox can do it all. It has a four-track drum machine, two synthesisers, a built-in sequencer and mixer, onboard FX, and Midi control over two external instruments, too. For sketching down musical ideas quickly, there's nothing else quite like it.



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 32,000 students in 163 countries having taken our courses? We have over 25 online training courses covering all aspects of DJing, mixing and music production, from beginner to pro. [Check out all our online DJ courses here.](#)

For instance, our popular [The Complete DJ Course](#) is where most DJs start when they're new to DJing, or new to digital DJing having done it a different way in the past. Following our proven five-step DJ training process, it gets you from nowhere to playing confident DJ sets with modern gear and digital music, fast, and is a phenomenal investment in your DJing.

To make sure you're getting the latest DJ news and opinion first, be sure to join [Global DJ Network](#), the private Facebook Group for our Digital DJ Tips community. It's the perfect place to hangout and meet DJ friends, ask for help, get advice, talk DJing, post gear pics and talk about gigs - and it's FREE to join! [Click here to join Global DJ Network.](#)

If you have any questions please either email us at info@digitaldjtips.com, or reach out to us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [YouTube](#) channels.

Take The DJ Test

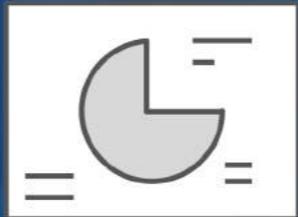
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2.



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HOW YOU'VE SCORED

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