



THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE 2016

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



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DESIGNED FOR THE HEAVY TRAVELING ARTIST



DJ-BACKPACK



DJ-BACKPACK XL



DJ-BACKPACK XXL



HEADPHONE-BAG PRO



DJ-TROLLEY



CARRY-ON TROLLEY

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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 with advertising and in other ways.

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? iPad?).

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](#), one of the biggest DJ tech websites in the world, in conjunction with [Magma Bags](#), 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.

Digital DJ Tips is the biggest DJ school in the world, with 13 online DJ/production video courses and over 12,000 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
December 2015

WHAT'S NEW IN 2016

TECHNOLOGY MARCHES ON, AND 2015 HAS SEEN LOTS OF exciting developments in the worlds of digital DJing and electronic music production, characterised by the companies with the biggest ambitions (and R&D budgets) leaping ahead. Pioneer DJ has probably made the biggest strides in 2015, launching a whole new software platform (Rekordbox DJ) to compete with Traktor, Serato and Virtual DJ. Of course, as the company is also a dominant hardware producer, that also meant lots of new Rekordbox DJ-friendly hardware, too.

THE HUGE INMUSIC GROUP (IT HAS BRANDS SUCH as Numark, Denon DJ, Akai Pro and M-Audio in its roster) has been relatively quiet this year, although we have seen the release of the mighty Numark NS7III DJ controller for Serato DJ, that comes with built-in screens. Meanwhile Native Instruments - with its Stems file format, that lets DJs mix with four parts of a song rather than just the finished track - has literally added something very new and exciting to the mix. To help support the new format, the company has released two more controllers with onboard screens following on from last year's Kontrol S8, including the consumer-friendly and popular Traktor Kontrol S5.

The DJ/producer market is definitely maturing and consolidating, with the aforementioned Denon DJ now

part of inMusic, respected name Vestax disappearing, and smaller brands such as Reloop (strong here in Europe) and Gemini choosing to specialise a bit more rather than go head-to-head with the bigger names. So of those two, Reloop is concentrating more on traditional gear such as mixers, turntables, CD players and so on (that said, we love their Beatpad 2 iPad DJ controller), while Gemini has brought two noteworthy products to market in 2015, the cute entry-level Slate controllers, and the good value MDJ1000 USB/networkable CD players.

A COMBINATION OF SEEMINGLY EVERY DJ wanting to be a DJ/producer (and why not? It's the road to gigging all over the world and playing those big festivals...) and the realisation that producing music isn't actually that hard to get started in, has led to a huge increase in interest in making music, something reflected in the strong sales of our [Music Production For DJs course](#) this year, the first music production course from Digital DJ Tips. So while we've traditionally seen our audience using three major pieces of software (Serato DJ, Traktor, and Virtual DJ), now there's not only the aforementioned Rekordbox DJ right in there, but production heavyweights Ableton Live and FL Studio, too. It's keeping our editorial team busy enough covering everything!

Another trend this year has been towards streaming music (Apple Music, Spotify, Beatport etc), and it was only a matter of time before this consumer trend took hold in DJing. Virtual DJ has had a version of this for a while, and djay 2 on the iPad now has Spotify built in (if you're interested in iPad DJing, we published a book this year called [How To DJ On Your iPad & iPhone](#)). But the biggest news is that Serato has paired up with a new company called Pulselocker to offer a robust and reliable streaming service right inside Serato DJ software, the holy grail being that it can let you keep offline copies of the music you want, so you don't need to actually be online when you're DJing. While this is a first in any DJ software, expect this to be in all the main players sooner rather than later.



ON-BOARD SCREENS ARE NOW APPEARING ON CONTROLLERS, ALLOWING THE DJ TO TUCK HIS OR HER LAPTOP AWAY AND BE MORE ENGAGED WITH THE AUDIENCE.

TAKING A STEP BACK FROM ALL THESE CHANGES

and developments, though, I want to return to the company who we opened this update with, Pioneer DJ. Their news is potentially the biggest thing to happen this year, namely the launch of Rekordbox DJ as a true piece of DJ software (for those of you new to this game, Rekordbox used to be software to just prepare your music on, a bit like "iTunes for DJs").

The reason Pioneer DJ launching a standalone DJ app is such big news is that it cements the company's place as a, if not the, dominant player in the market. You see, Pioneer DJ already has its gear in most of the world's DJ booths. It also already sells DJ controllers, from the very cheap up to 100% pro quality. Until recently, though, if you wanted to DJ at home you bought a DJ controller. Now, that controller may or may not have been made by Pioneer, but it always used one of the other company's software, i.e. Serato, Traktor or Virtual DJ. Conversely, if you wanted to DJ digitally in clubs, you bought a digital vinyl system (DVS), which is a small box and some "control vinyl" (or control CDs) that you took along with you so you could plug into the club's existing gear - as we know, overwhelmingly made by Pioneer. Again, though, the DVS systems weren't made by Pioneer, instead, the dominant two are Serato and Traktor.



THE TRAKTOR KONTROL S8 USES THE SPACE VACATED BY THE JOGWHEELS TO PUT HANDS-ON CONTROL OF STEMS CENTRESTAGE.

WHAT'S SIGNIFICANT ABOUT PIONEER'S MOVE

into fully fledged software is that that's all changing, fast. Because from £200 entry level DJ controllers up to a £10,000 fully equipped DJ booth, DJs can now do it all on Pioneer hardware and software. Whether you just want to mess around in your bedroom, play parties on a Pioneer controller, play from USB drive in the DJ booth, plug your laptop in to the DJ booth's equipment, even use DVS or DJ with video, you already can (or will very shortly be able to) stick with just one company.

Pioneer DJ's ambitions are obvious - to dominate DJing outside as well as inside the DJ booth. Whether or not it succeeds, and whether or not this proves to be good for DJing as a whole remains to be seen, and some are loathe to buy into a "walled garden", in the same way many people are very wary of Apple, Google etc, but it does of course have great appeal to the sentiment of "I just want to get on with DJing, so make it simple for me".

THAT SAID, OF COURSE, WE THINK ANY

predictions of Pioneer winning game, set and match without a battle are premature, to say the least. Let's put aside for a second the fact that while most of the world's DJ booths do indeed run on Pioneer gear, much of that gear is pre-digital so of very little use in this new Rekordbox-enabled world. As we alluded to above, what tends to happen when one payer starts to dominate in an industry is that the other major players develop strong, well served niches of their own.

We predict Traktor will remain popular for DJ/producers who love parent company Native Instruments' strength in the production game; Serato DJ will continue to serve digital scratch DJs and also non-electronic DJs who love the flexibility and high performance associated with the platform, and Virtual DJ will continue to thrive as a nimble-footed alternative to any and all of the above. But we do think it's fair to predict that more and more DJs will be using more and more similar gear going forward than they have done since the end of the dominance of vinyl and CDs, all those years ago. As always, interesting times.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO BE USED ALONGSIDE the [Digital DJ Controllers and Gear: The Ultimate Buyer's Guide 2016](#) pages on the Digital DJ Tips website. There, you'll find hundreds 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

Should you just want to buy something right away without doing all the research, we offer you our top recommendations for 2016 here too.

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 2016 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 2016

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. And 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”:



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 SL1210s) 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...

Nowadays we are bombarded with weird, wonderful and ever-changing DJ technology... manufacturers refreshing, revamping and relaunching their gear every year...

> "TWO CDJS AND A MIXER"



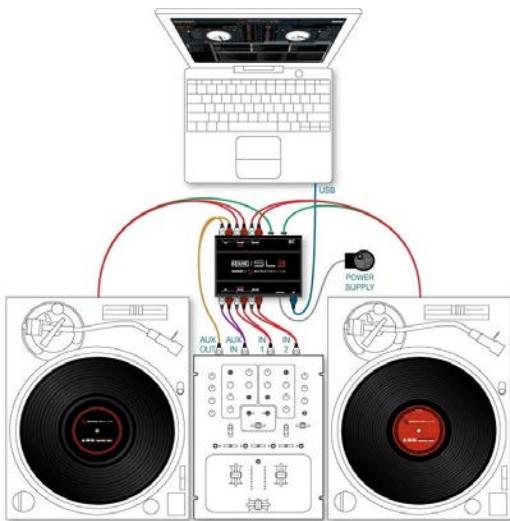
A "CDJ" IS A CD PLAYER DESIGNED FOR DJS, WHERE once you've slid the CD in, a platter lets you control it as if it were a record. Indeed, some early CDJs even had "real vinyl" on them, a tradition carried on recently by Denon DJ with its SC3900 model. Most, though, are "fixed platter", which means the 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 they 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

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

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 the last year or two, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller. The dominant brand is Pioneer, and the most modern Pioneer CDJs (and XDs, the company's "non CD" version of this 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 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.

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

> DIGITAL VINYL SYSTEMS (DVS)

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. 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".



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.

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.

> MODULAR DJ SYSTEMS

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.

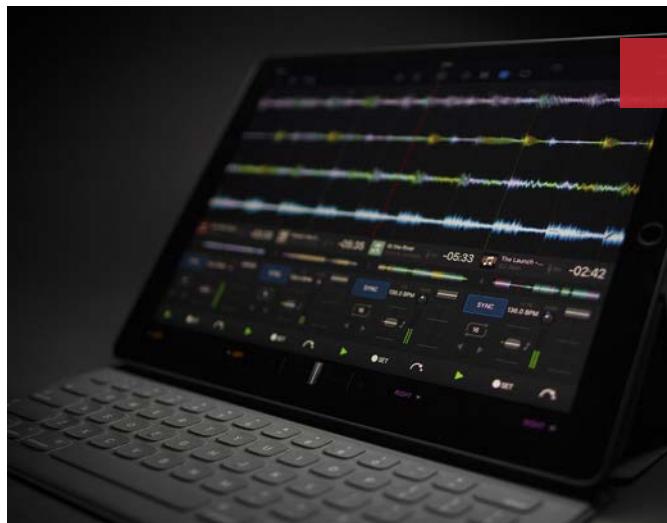
> LAPTOP-ONLY DJ SYSTEMS

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.

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

> IOS / ANDROID APPS

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 really new to this: last year'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...

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



> 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 this year with the release of the Pioneer XDJ-RX, a system that for the first time packs a laptop-rivalling screen that shows waveforms and library information: for us, this is the first such system that actually feels close to laptop/controller DJing, just without the laptop.

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 so many manufacturers are rushing out controllers that work with iOS 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 digital is, 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).

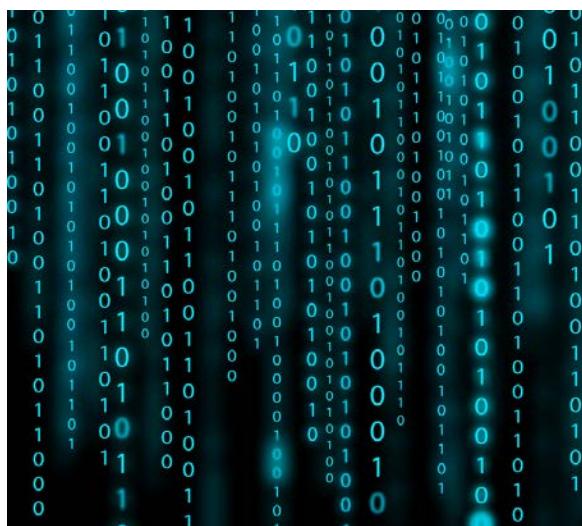
Even when you have club management that's happy for you to bring a DJ controller to play from (at least, in theory), there's the issue of finding the space to set up. That's why some DJs often settle on more minimal, modular systems; having maybe a single slimline controller and a laptop is more likely 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

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.



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 2016" 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!

CHOOSING YOUR SET-UP



> TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE

COMPLEX AND CAPABLE, TRAKTOR IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR DJ PROGRAMS AMONG THE READERS OF DIGITAL DJ TIPS

NOW UP TO TRAKTOR PRO 2.1.10 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). Recently, 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.

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

1. 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.





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 D2

TRAKTOR'S NEW STEMS MUSIC FORMAT WORKS best when the DJ can "see" the four waveforms that a Stems file is comprised of. Trouble is, Traktor's display on a laptop doesn't show this information. That's why to use Stems properly, you need a special controller with an onboard screen. Owners of the Traktor Kontrol S5 and S8 have two such screens built in, but if you own an older Traktor controller, adding one (or two) Kontrol D2s will give you full control over one or two Stems decks. A Kontrol D2 would also be good to take to DJ booths to add something extra to, say, a DVS performance using Traktor.



5 . 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.



> SERATO DJ SOFTWARE

SERATO DJ IS AN AMALGAMATION OF SERATO'S PREVIOUS SERATO SCRATCH LIVE AND SERATO ITCH SOFTWARE INTO ONE NEW UNIFIED PLATFORM.

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, with considerably fewer options for configuration than Traktor, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided (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 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 Traktor. Extra effects are available as paid-for plugins, as is video capability. Meanwhile, the new

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. Finally, the (forthcoming, at the time of writing) partnership with subscription DJ streaming service Pulselocker will mean a whole new leap for the platform, especially as the technology promises offline DJing with tracks from Pulselocker's library.

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



1. NUMARK NV

NOW UNDER THE WING OF INMUSIC, WHICH ALSO owns Akai Pro and Numark, Denon DJ has released the MC4000, very much a "working DJ's" controller, with great input and output including EQed mics, and full compatibility with Serato DJ, which is in the box in its full version, making this controller excellent value for such a workhorse.

THIS IS A CONTROLLER THAT HAS AN ONBOARD set of screens for showing you various elements of the software. This one is more traditional than the Traktor controller, though, retaining the jogwheels-plus-performance-pads paradigm of the last couple of years. If you like the idea of onboard screens, but would rather have Serato than Traktor (and maybe want to keep jogwheels, too), this is currently a great choice. (An honorary mention to the Numark NS7III here, too, a huge, pricy and heavy Serato DJ controller with motorised jogwheels, with real vinyl attached to them. The NS7III also has built-in screens. One to look at if money's no object and you want a "very close to vinyl" feel.)



2. DENON DJ MC4000

A WONDERFULLY BUILT ALL-METAL CONTROLLER with great jogs and a quality feel about it. The Terminal Mix 8 is great value for what you get, offering four-channel control over Serato and a capable set of controls. Good if you're interested in performance pads and pro build, but aren't worried about built-in screens.



3 . RELOOP TERMINAL MIX 8



THIS IS THE FIRST SERATO DJ CONTROLLER FROM popular French controller brand Hercules, and it stands out from the pack by virtue of its fantastic jogwheels. Heavy, made of metal, and with great LED feedback in their centres (a bit like those on Pioneer CDJs), the jogs dominate the unit's otherwise pretty standard control surface, and are a joy to use. The two-channel controller has other notable features, like "air" control of filters, and on-board bar beat counters, but it's hard to see past those amazing jogwheels. A great value unit.

4 . HERCULES DJ CONTROL JOGVISION

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF SERATO'S RECENT WIDENING of the controller it works with, the bargain Slate 2 from industry stalwarts Gemini is a solid but very lightweight and compact little controller, at a price that will put it in reach of far more people than the other units on this list. The Slate 2 is not surprisingly the two-channel version of this unit, with the Slate 4 offering all four Serato channels for those who want them.



5 . GEMINI SLATE 2



> VIRTUAL DJ SOFTWARE

USED BY MILLIONS, VIRTUAL DJ HAS HAD A COMPLETE REWRITE FOR VERSION 8 WHICH CAME OUT IN 2015, FINALLY.

ANOTHER LONG-STANDER AND CONSISTENTLY in the top download charts on CNET's download.com website, Virtual DJ appeals particularly to mobile, karaoke and video DJs - although it is perfectly club DJ-capable too.

Now at version 8.1 after what seemed like an age of a wait, the software has been rewritten from the ground up, with a "sandbox" mode allowing you to "jump ahead" in your mix to see what a particular transition might sound like, a totally redesigned sampler, and dockable elements, among other big changes. It has a whole host of editors built in, too: a simple sample editor, a basic video editor, a "track cleaner" (for quick re-edits, censoring swear

words etc), a "points of interest" editor, even an automix editor to create precise mix in and out points.

VIRTUAL DJ TRULY DOES WORK WITH ALMOST anything out there, and the company also boasts that its software will work just fine with digital vinyl systems... anybody's digital vinyl systems! Just get some timecode CDs or vinyl and some way of getting the signal to Virtual DJ and it works, and well too (we've tested it). However, the controllers we've highlighted here are taken from the relatively few that officially have Virtual DJ 8 "in the box" at the time of writing, and have manufacturer endorsement of the implementation.

THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ

THIS AFFORDABLE PIONEER CONTROLLER WAS the company's first to officially have Virtual DJ 8 LE in the box. It is a distinct improvement looks-wise over the previous WeGO2, with a sleek brushed aluminium top plate and more discrete control buttons around the improved jogwheels, giving it a more "grown up" feel. Despite being unashamedly a "consumer" device, it is a perfectly capable entry-level controller.

1. PIONEER WEGO3



2. HERCULES DJ CONSOLE RMX 2



THIS HUGE, EXPENSIVE CONTROLLER WAS designed for Serato DJ, but it has been confirmed at the time of writing that Virtual DJ 8 Pro is going to be shipping in the box too, from now on. We didn't include it in the Serato listings (we feel the DDJ-SX does the job almost as well at half the price, practically), but we're including it here because having Virtual DJ 8 Pro supplied with basically the most "luxury" DJ controller on the market is a massive coup for the platform.

THIS IS AN UNDERRATED LITTLE CONTROLLER. Metal built, it has two external inputs for CDs etc, and has better audio than the much-loved RMX model it replaces. It also has decent-performing jogwheels, accurate pitch controls and (basic) performance pads, necessarily limited by the unit's relatively small size. That size (along with the included carry bag) does make it highly portable though, yet it is still rugged and professional.

3. PIONEER DDJ-SZ





> REKORDBOX DJ SOFTWARE

THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK, BUT MAYBE the future number one platform, Rekordbox DJ is a development by Pioneer of its existing Rekordbox platform, turning Rekordbox from a DJ library/music preparation tool into a fully fledged DJ program, just like Traktor, Serato and Virtual DJ. There are several reasons why this is important.

FIRSTLY, PIONEER 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 solution (indeed, at the time of writing, two such controllers have been released - the DDJ-RX and the DDJ-RZ, which we cover on the next page).

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 equipment. That's because it IS Rekordbox - Rekordbox DJ is simply a paid-for extension of that (free)

software. This is actually a crucial selling point, because it means Pioneer can bundle Rekordbox DJ with DJ controllers of its own manufacture (and we are going to guess that a budget range is on its way...) to "hook" beginners in to its ecosystem, and as those DJs grow into their hobby or career, Pioneer 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'S STILL A BIT ROUGH around the edges, albeit reasonably accomplished for a v1, feeling like a cross between Serato and Traktor. It has good FX four decks, an amazing tagging system in the library, a decent sampler, and video and DVS either arrived or imminent. And, as well as the "dedicated" Rekordbox DJ controllers on the next page, it also works with most modern existing Pioneer controllers, too. In short, this is definitely one to watch...

THE FIRST TWO DEDICATED PIONEER REKORDBOX DJ CONTROLLERS

1. PIONEER 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 DDJ-SX.



2. PIONEER 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.

OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: THREE 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-drive mapping site over at another DJing site, [DjTechTools](#), 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.



1. DJAY PRO FOR MAC & IPAD

ALGORIDDIM'S DJAY APP FOR MAC GOT A HUGE rewrite and re-release as djay Pro since the last edition of this guide, and just as we went to press, Algoriddim released a version of djay Pro for iPad too, optimised - maybe not surprisingly - for the iPad Pro. With four decks and a host of features pro DJs expect, this is a rapidly maturing and very smooth Apple-esque platform, and one of the best looking pieces of DJ software out there to boot.

FRENCH COMPANY MIXVIBES HAS INDUSTRY form, being also the company originally behind Pioneer's official music library software for DJs, rekordbox. MixVibes PC/Mac DJ software is increasingly capable, having multiple decks, key detection, and really interesting hardware compatibility with top-end Pioneer DJ gear (not surprising seeing the company has a tight business relationship with Pioneer). I know DJs who swear by this software.

2 . MIXVIBES CROSS



3 . 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/recordings - 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.



1. PIONEER XDJ-1000

THE FIRST PLAYER FROM PIONEER TO DITCH THE CD slot entirely, the XDJ-1000 has a colour touchscreen and works with Pioneer's music preparation software, Rekordbox, to allow DJs to play from USB drive but with many of the benefits of controller/laptop set-ups, such as sync and high quality waveforms.



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-100, it retains a CD slot which can play audio or MP3. It lacks a decent screen though, with a small screen that only shows the basic.

2. NUMARK NDX500



3 . PIONEER 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 it drops the CD slot, but makes up for that with thoroughly modern features - again, like the XDJ1000, it has Slip mode, sync, and a great large colour touchscreen. You can even load tunes over WiFi.



4 . RELOOP RMP-4



5 . GEMINI MDJ-1000

UNASHAMEDLY BASED ON PIONEER'S LOOK and feel, the Gemini MDJ-1000 has a large colour screen with full-size waveform, a full-size jogwheel, direct connection together of two or up to four via an existing router for music sharing, and again the ability to be used as a Midi controller. A good value choice.

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. RANE MP2015

WE HAD TO MAKE THIS NUMBER ONE THIS year even though few DJs will actually ever own it, not least due to its price. Nonetheless it was 2015’s most impressive mixer launch by far, and turned a lot of heads on release. Wooden-clad, and with rotary controls harking back to the disco days, internally it is actually completely digital, with an amazing spec.



ONCE A DJ HAS DECIDED THAT INVESTING IN a mixer and media players is a step he or she wants to take, something like this makes a great first mixer. Reasonably priced, it nonetheless has everything you need to DJ from CDs, vinyl, and DVS (it has a built in audio interface to work with Serato, for instance). Plus you get a single bona fide Allen & Heath filter.

2. ALLEN & HEATH XONE:43C



3 . 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 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 2016.

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.

A WORTHY SUCCESSOR TO THE MUCH-LOVED
Launchpad controller that now comes with RGB backlit pads that mimic the colour of the clips you've got within Live, as well as pressure sensitivity, allowing for a greater degree of expression when hitting those pads. If you want to get started performing or DJing with Ableton Live and you've got the budget for it, you can't go wrong with the Launchpad Pro.



1. NOVATION LAUNCHPAD PRO



2. IRIG KEYS

WE HEARTILY RECOMMEND THE IRIG KEYS IF YOU
want to start producing and are looking for a controller for home and gig use. Pair it with your tablet / phone / laptop, and you've got a synth and production environment on the go. It also helps that it's one of the very few portable minikey keyboard controllers that has a three octave keybed, which tends to be the minimum for two-handed piano playing.



THE NEW PUSH CONTROLLER NOW TRULY FEELS like both a studio and stage controller, coming with even better pads than its predecessor, a fantastic new OLED display that shows more than just text, and a lighter chassis with more intuitive layout. If you liked the original Push, you'll love this even more.

3 . PUSH 2 FOR ABLETON LIVE



4 . NOVATION LAUNCH CONTROL XL

THE LAUNCH CONTROL XL IS THE PERFECT companion to your Launchpad controller whether it's the new Launchpad Pro or earlier model, giving you a portable Ableton Live rig with a tiny footprint that fits in your rucksack. For a small cash outlay, you can add physical controls in the form of a traditional mixer-style interface that includes buttons, knobs, and faders, making for a more tactile experience without the need to glance at your laptop.

THE NEW LAUNCHKEY MK2 25-KEY IS A GREAT feeling two-octave keyboard controller for use with Ableton Live, coming with RGB backlit, velocity-sensitive pads that are great for identifying / launching clips and even playing the drums. The full-size keys will appeal to those who are looking for a more standard synth playing experience, and the added knobs, pitch bend, and mod wheel controls allow for greater tweaking and playing expression.



5 . NOVATION LAUNCHKEY MK2 25-KEY

FOUR 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 sector (and potentially the largest) of users about to discover how easy it can be to DJ - and DJ well - on a small, handheld touchscreen device..



1. DJAY 2.5 (IOS/ANDROID)

RECENTLY COMPLETELY REWRITTEN, ALGORIDDIM'S immensely popular djay software retains its easy-on-the-eye beginner appeal, but now also packs its own full-screen waveform view, more reminiscent of a pro Serato digital vinyl system than an eye-candy consumer DJ program. With sampler and single deck view also added, it can make a decent claim to offering something to DJs of all levels. Its killer punch was the addition of Spotify streaming, making it huge fun, especially for beginners. Note that there is now an even more powerful djay Pro version for the iPad and iPad Pro, with four decks, video and more...



2 . 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.

3 . MIXVIBES CROSS DJ (IOS/ANDROID)

THE IOS VERSION OF THIS PROGRAM IS A reasonable port of the original PC/Mac program, and while the Android version is not as sophisticated yet, it's being rapidly developed. Both offer the ability to upload to SoundCloud, although it's a curious addition as SoundCloud is pretty hardcore about removing DJ mixes arbitrarily from its service. Now faces strong competition on Android from djay 2.



4 . DJ PLAYER (IOS ONLY)

ARE YOU NOT IMPRESSED BY GRAPHICS AND pseudo-decks? Maybe DJ Player - the purists' DJ program on iOS - is going to be the one for you. Once you've got over the steeper learning curve, this functional program offers rock-solid performance and lots of pro features including full multi-controller Midi mapping, DVS support (really!), 11 FX per deck, slip mode and exceptional battery life. Also just launched a “Pro” version, with Stems compatibility.

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.

1. 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).



2 . PIONEER DDJ-WEGO3

CONSIDERING THE COMPANY HAS MADE ITS NAME with pro DJ gear, Pioneer has done an excellent job with this small, relatively affordable consumer DJ controller. It's aesthetically more pleasing than the still pretty nice WeGo2 unit, now having a nicer metal-finished faceplate, and like the WeGo2 it has lots of functions distinctively arranged around the lit jogwheels in a circle. As well as Algoriddim's djay 2, it works with Serato and several other programs on PC/Mac as well as iOS.



3 . TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK2

OK, SO APART FROM THE IOS CERTIFICATION and some cosmetic changes this isn't really any different to the original S2 (they haven't added any type of stand for the iDevice, for instance) - but as one of only two controllers that can control Native Instruments' groundbreaking Traktor DJ software, this is big news (the other, by the way is the S4, which is overpowered for the job). The integration is tight, and the overall software/hardware combination completely compelling.

THREE OF THE BEST LAPTOP/USB/CD 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 most people we think this type of system is probably not a good fit. People buy "hybrid" systems (CD / USB / digital etc) often because they can't get over the idea of going "totally digital"... then they find they end 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. Turning to the Pioneer units we mention above, again they are undoubtedly clever, but it's no surprise that even with their tricks, these (and all the units mentioned here) still come with copies of "traditional" DJ software.

It's also no surprise that this list hasn't changed from last year; this isn't a fast-moving sector of the market. However, for those who do want more flash or flexibility than standard controllers, at least you have choices.

1. PIONEER XDJ-RX

STRAIGHT IN AT NUMBER ONE AND OUR favourite of these three "non-laptop" controllers by a long shot, due entirely to its fantastic colour screen. This controller just "feels" like the best of both worlds; namely, it feels like you're playing on Pioneer DJ booth equipment (close enough, anyway), while having all the advantages of laptop DJing, thanks to the huge screen. The way it works, by the way, is that you prepare your music on your laptop using Pioneer's Rekordbox platform, export to USB, and off you go. A groundbreaker, for sure.



2 . NUMARK MIXDECK QUAD

A BEAST OF AN ALL-IN-ONE, THIS SEMI-PRO unit has four 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.



3 . PIONEER XDJ-R1

A HYBRID-STYLE CONTROLLER THAT CAN PLAY from CDs, off USB and also operate with DJ software like a "normal" DJ controller, the again semi-pro XDJ-R1 has a twist in its tail: iPad control. Wirelessly and using a downloadable app, you can control functions of the unit with your iPhone or iPad, a feature that comes into its own if you've prepared your tunes using Pioneer's rekordbox software before putting them onto USB sticks to use with the unit.

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: With Virtual DJ controllers especially, it can be up to around \$300 (it changes from model to model). Serato is usually just over \$100; Traktor just under. The cheaper the DJ controller, the more likely it is to come with one of these cut-down versions of the software.

3 . DON’T SWEAT YOUR CHOICE!

I KNOW THE PAIN OF CHOOSING ADJ 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 controllers 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...

4 . 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.

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:

1. SPEAKERS



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.

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 M-Audio's AV40s (not the new AV42s, which are inferior). 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.)

2. LAPTOP OR IOS DEVICE



THE MACBOOK PRO 13": AS CLOSE TO A "STANDARD" AS THERE IS FOR LAPTOPS, ALTHOUGH A WINDOWS PC IS FINE, TOO.

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. Beware Yosemite, though: At the time of writing Serato doesn't play nice. 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.

3. 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.



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

4 . 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 an $\frac{1}{8}$ " TRS socket for an input, you'll need a 2 x RCA male to $\frac{1}{8}$ " stereo TRS male cable. If your computer speakers are the cheap type with only an $\frac{1}{8}$ " headphone jack on them that's meant to be plugged in to a computer headphones socket, you'll need an $\frac{1}{8}$ " 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.



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.



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.

5 . 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. Our guide sponsor Magma has a range of stands to suit most purposes, and we are particular fans of the Magma Traveler model.

6 . BAG, CASE OR BACKPACK

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.



7 . 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 Prodecor 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 12,000 students in 50 countries having taken our courses? On the next page, you'll find information about all of our currently available courses at the time of writing.

Also, please feel free to come and ask your question on the [Digital DJ Tips Forum](#), where our community is waiting to help you. You can also email us at info@digitaldjtips.com, or reach out to us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [YouTube](#).

REMEMBER THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU as you read the full reviews and watch the talkthrough videos we make over at Digital DJ Tips. You can access them all via the [Digital DJ Gear: The Ultimate Buyer's Guide 2016](#) part of our website.

Finally, there is tons of practical advice on choosing a digital DJ controller in our [How To Digital DJ Fast](#) course, which is 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 find out about this and all of our DJ courses on our [DJ courses](#) page.

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CTRL CASE XDJ-RX

CTRL CASE DDJ-SB2

CTRL CASE DDJ-SX

CTRL CASE XL

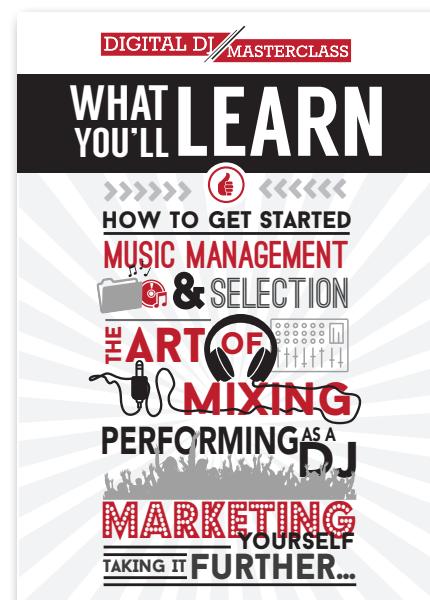
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