

THE DIGITAL DJ GEAR BUYER'S GUIDE

2021



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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CONTENTS

CONTENTS		
5	A WORD FROM THE EDITOR	36 THREE OF THE BEST STANDALONE SYSTEMS
7	THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN DJING	38 THREE OF THE BEST DJ MEDIA PLAYERS
9	HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	40 FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS
10	THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2021	43 FIVE OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS
15	WHY YOU'LL PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER	45 THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID
17	WHY SOFTWARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARDWARE	47 TOP 5 TURNTABLES FOR DJS
18	SERATO DJ SOFTWARE	49 FIVE TIPS FOR BUYING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CONTROLLER
19	FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR SERATO	51 SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS
22	TRAKTOR DJ SOFTWARE	34 THREE OF THE BEST DJ LAPTOPS
23	THREE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR TRAKTOR	40 FIVE OF THE BEST DJ MIXERS
25	REKORDBOX DJ SOFTWARE	43 FIVE OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS
26	FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR REKORDBOX DJ	45 THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID
28	VIRTUAL DJ SOFTWARE	47 TOP 5 TURNTABLES FOR DJS
29	FIVE OF THE BEST CONTROLLERS FOR VIRTUAL DJ	49 FIVE TIPS FOR BUYING AND SETTING UP YOUR FIRST CONTROLLER
32	OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: TWO TO TRY	51 SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS
34	THREE OF THE BEST DJ LAPTOPS	55 FINALLY...

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



MODERN DIGITAL DJ GEAR HAS

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, sometimes also giving access to music on a streaming service.

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 15 years ago would have struggled to even imagine. And as the DJ controller market has matured, the units have become more powerful, more stable and cheaper.

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

TO START WITH THERE ARE MANY DOZENS

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



Once you start seriously considering making a purchase, especially if you're coming to digital having used analogue gear in the past, you're also going to start seeing alternatives to 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. Both Denon DJ and Pioneer DJ have capable "all in one" or "standalone" DJ systems that don't require a laptop at all, for instance.

Then 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. And then there's another question: "Do I really need to buy DJ hardware at all?" Fun fact: When I started digital DJing (2004) there were no good controllers, and I ended up doing it just from a laptop with an awesome sound card. But nowadays there are several apps that let you DJ from your tablet or even your phone, that pack in the most powerful DJ features and even things like video DJing - incredible really, and you'd certainly be forgiven for thinking, "Maybe I could DJ using just a device like this?"

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

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

We're extremely excited about how digital has changed DJing. It's brought the ability to DJ to the hands of practically any music fan who is motivated to learn.

No longer do you need to invest many thousands in bulky equipment that's hard to move around and difficult to master; nowadays, you can spend a fraction of what it cost to get yourself set up 10 or 15 years ago, and using easy-to-learn 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 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.

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 26,000 students since 2010 - so if you want to learn the skills, you're in the right place - just go to [DigitalDJTips.com/courses](#) and start today! However, you're going to need some gear... and that's what this guide is all about.

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

Happy digital DJing!

- Phil Morse
Digital DJ Tips Founder
January 2021

THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN DJING

SOMETIMES, A YEAR SEEMS LIKE AN AWFUL LONG TIME. LAST

January I wrote the summary of the past 12 months for the 2020 edition of this guide, and COVID-19 was something that was happening “somewhere else”. No longer!

Worldwide, DJing has been affected profoundly by the closing of venues, with working DJs having to take drastic steps nobody could have predicted just to make ends meet. Among “hobby” DJs though, if anything we have seen a resurgence of interest in the art - almost certainly due to the “learn something in lockdown!” mentality.

One of the biggest things to come out of lockdown for DJs is livestreaming. Livestreaming DJ sets was always a “thing”, but it has come of age this year - as a DJ school, we even launched a course on how to do it. It has proven to be a great way for DJs to “get gigs” and from the very biggest DJs right down to new hobby DJs, it seems everyone is livestreaming.

Mixcloud, the platform for DJs to legally share their mixes, surprised everyone by launching Mixcloud Live, which is a place for DJs to legally livestream their sets - just as well, because this year saw “copyright crackdowns” on practically every other platform as livestreaming exploded.

Talking of gear, the logistical difficulties caused by COVID-19’s rapid worldwide spread do not seem to have stopped the DJ manufacturers launching new kit, and the most exciting developments have been in the growth of truly powerful “standalone” DJ gear - the type that doesn’t require you to have a laptop to DJ with.

Denon DJ continued its push to dominate the category, launching the Prime 2 and Prime GO all-in-one DJ units (the latter, a small, battery powered device proving a particular hit) and updating its pro-end gear. Pioneer DJ for its part launched the CDJ-3000, a much-needed update to the ageing CDJ-2000NXS2. What’s important about the CDJ-3000s is that they have computers inside them, just like the Denon DJ units - and so now Pioneer DJ has made that technical leap, we fully expect the company to launch more affordable all-in-one DJ gear soon, to compete directly with Denon DJ’s Prime range.



THE PIONEER DJ CDJ-3000 IS THAT COMPANY’S MUCH-AWAITED UPDATE TO ITS FLAGSHIP DJ MEDIA PLAYER, RELEASED IN 2020.



BEATSOURCE LINK IS A STREAMING SERVICE DESIGNED SPECIALLY FOR WORKING DJS.



(Incidentally, we also expect to see this standalone tech arriving in cheaper gear in 2021 - it hasn't escaped our attention that the company that owns Denon DJ, inMusic, also owns budget DJ brand Numark. Just saying...)

A big barrier to entry for new DJs is having to build a music collection. Gear companies know that, and music streaming services in DJ software are something the industry has been pushing hard recently, even though this was the year that Spotify withdrew from DJ streaming (it was embedded in Algoriddim's djay software). We saw the "big four" streaming services emerge - [Beatport](#), [Beatsource](#), [TIDAL](#) and [SoundCloud](#) - which are available pretty widely now, not only in DJ software (Serato, Virtual DJ, Rekordbox and more) but also in Denon DJ's standalone gear.

Another exciting development in the past 12 months has been the rise of "stems" DJing, the ability to DJ with drums, music and vocals separated in your tracks. Traktor first came up with the idea, but its implementation from several years ago didn't take off, as it required special music files to use it. But in 2020, both Virtual DJ and Algoriddim (djay) added the ability to DJ like this to their DJ apps, with real-time stems separation happening. The tech isn't perfect yet, but if anyone is old enough to remember when timestretching first arrived for music, neither was that - stems DJing is at the "early timestretching" stage of its journey, and can only get better as computer processing power rises.

Maybe the biggest controversy (in a year where DJing has rightfully taken a distant

second place even in the most ardent fans' lives to more pressing matters) was Pioneer switching its Rekordbox 6 software to a subscription model. Subscription is notoriously hard to get right, and Pioneer didn't - let's hope the company smooths out the way it all works sooner rather than later in 2021.

For many DJs of a certain age and from a certain musical background, this was a sad year because we lost Andrew Weatherall, a DJ and producer who helped break so many moulds in his musical career, not least for his production on Primal Scream's "Screamadelica" album from way back in the halcyon UK rave days of the early 90s. He's missed.

As we look forward to 2021 and hopefully some kind of normality returning to our hobby and our industry, rest assured that my team and I 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
January 2021

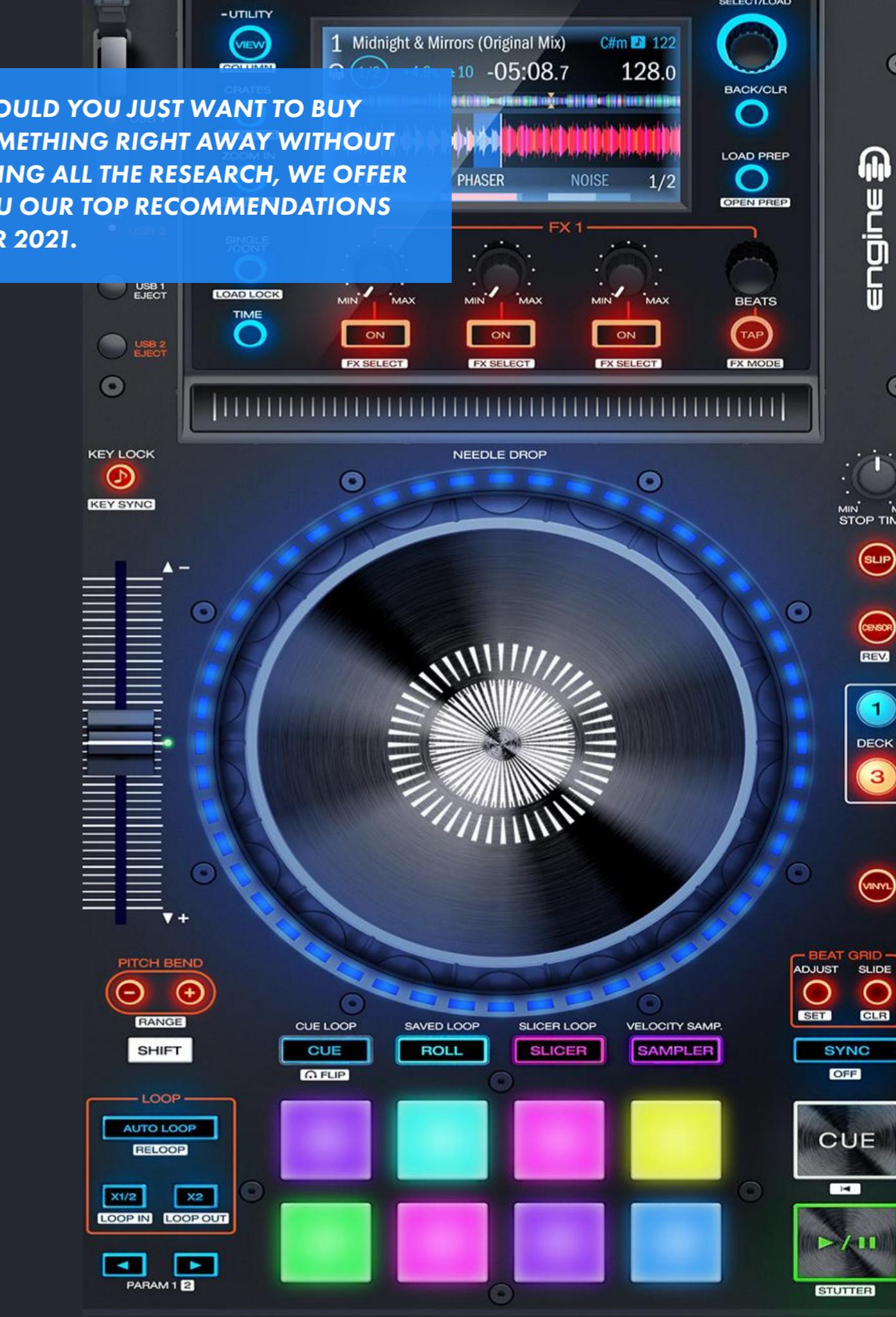
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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 for 2021 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.

SHOULD YOU JUST WANT TO BUY SOMETHING RIGHT AWAY WITHOUT DOING ALL THE RESEARCH, WE OFFER YOU OUR TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021.



THE TYPE OF DJ GEAR YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM IN 2021

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 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 - single boxes with two "decks" and a mixer, plus audio circuitry and a way to connect a computer of some kind up - you need to be sure that this is the right route for you in the first place. So let's take a second to look at types of alternative DJing "systems"...

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



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

"TWO DECKS AND A MIXER"

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

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

TODAY'S MEDIA PLAYERS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE

complex. Having made the switch to playing from USB sticks and external drives (no current models from the big manufacturers still use CDs at all), they also have most of the functions and features associated with laptop DJing - even the "sync" button so hated by vinyl DJs (and many media player DJs, actually. "It's not real DJing!" goes the cry...). In recent years, this kind of set-up has become more and more like a type of big, expensive DJ controller. Currently the dominant brand is Pioneer DJ, though Denon DJ has issued a strong challenge by way of its SC5000/6000 Prime and SC5000/6000M Prime media players. Pioneer DJ's CDJ series can also be used as "controller decks", and capable of controlling not only Traktor, Serato and other DJ software, but also, Rekordbox DJ, Pioneer's own DJ software. This means you can often 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 DJ controllers.



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"

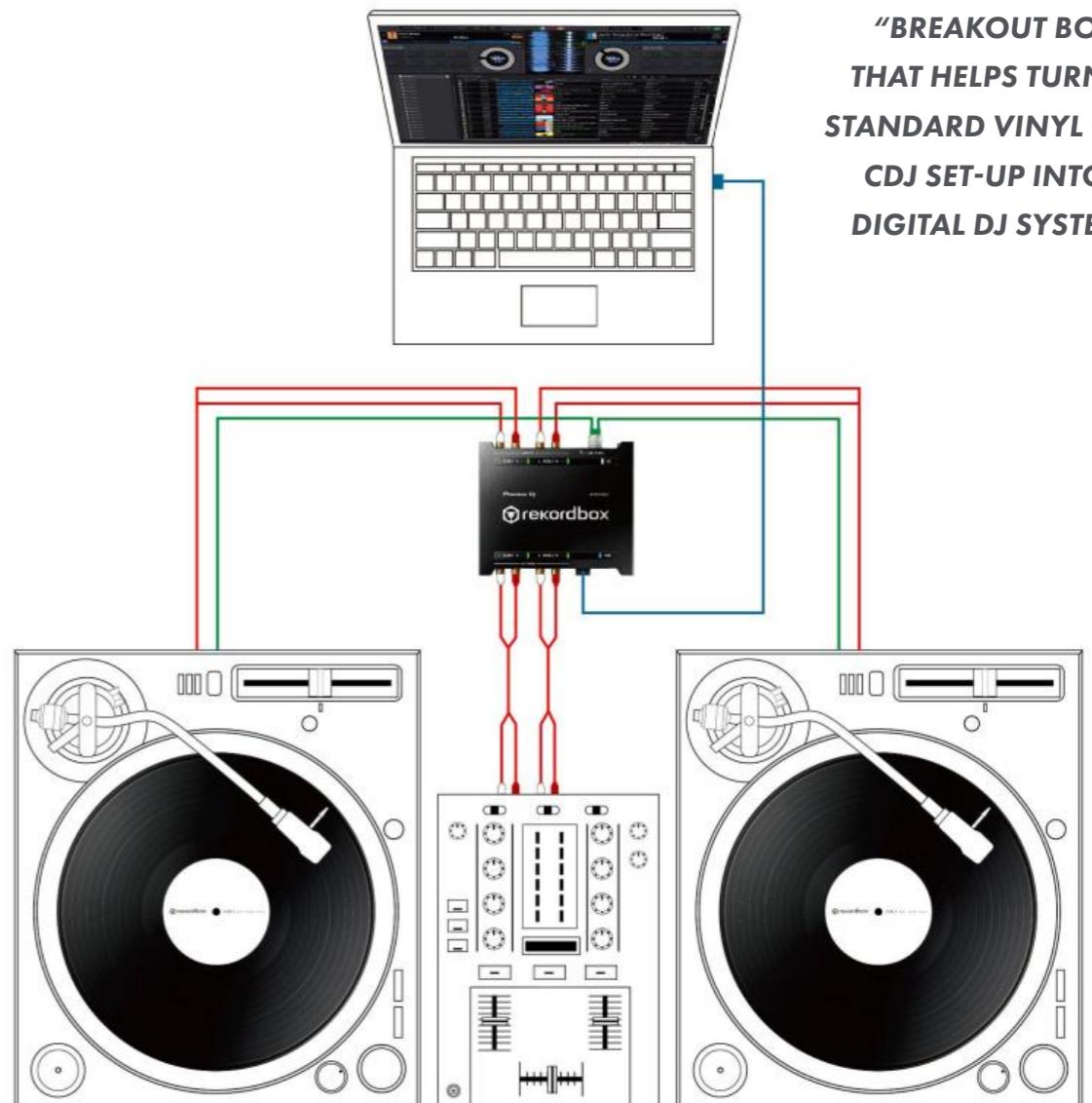
either of the above set-ups to turn them into laptop DJ systems. In that respect, a DVS can be seen as a "half way house", bridging the old, analogue ways and the new digital world.

Here's how it works. You use special control vinyl or CDs, that instead of containing music, contain computer code (shrill, screechy and very much not music when you accidentally actually do listen to it). You plug a special box, often referred to as an audio interface or "breakout box", in-between your record decks or CD players and your mixer and speakers, and connect this box to your laptop, which runs DJ software. (Nowadays, you increasingly don't even need this box, because many modern DJ mixers have all the circuitry in them needed to do this already.) 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 many of 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 to digital having used analogue in the past. And because the majority of 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 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 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.



MODULAR DJ SYSTEMS

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

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

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. 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.



DJ TECHTOOLS' MIDI FIGHTER TWISTER 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 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.



STANDALONE DJ SYSTEMS

THIS TYPE OF GEAR LOOKS SIMILAR TO THE LAPTOP DJ CONTROLLERS

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 replaced by the XDJ-RX2) plus the cheaper XDJ-RR and bigger XDJ-RZ, but Denon DJ is currently the tech leader here, with its Prime 2, Prime 4 and Prime GO (pictured) 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 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.

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 and Traktor DJ 2 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 more common 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, DJing on iOS has been around longer than on Android: 2015's guide was the first time we included Android software, recommending djay from Algoriddim and Mixvibes Cross for Android. Android recently added multi-channel audio to the platform chalking off another obstacle in the way of it someday soon catching up with iOS when it comes to DJing. After all, there are many more Android devices out there than iOS devices...



DENON DJ'S PRIME GO WAS A STANDOUT STANDALONE SYSTEM THIS YEAR.

WHY YOU'LL NONETHELESS PROBABLY CHOOSE A DJ CONTROLLER

(OR MAYBE A LAPTOP-FREE STANDALONE)



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

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 a standalone system that can work without your laptop too if you want it to, such as the Denon DJ Prime units or Pioneer DJ's XDJ-RZ, for instance.

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. But just so 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 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 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, 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 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 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

LET'S ASSUME YOU'RE GOING DOWN THE

controller route for now, we've already learned that the controller 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.

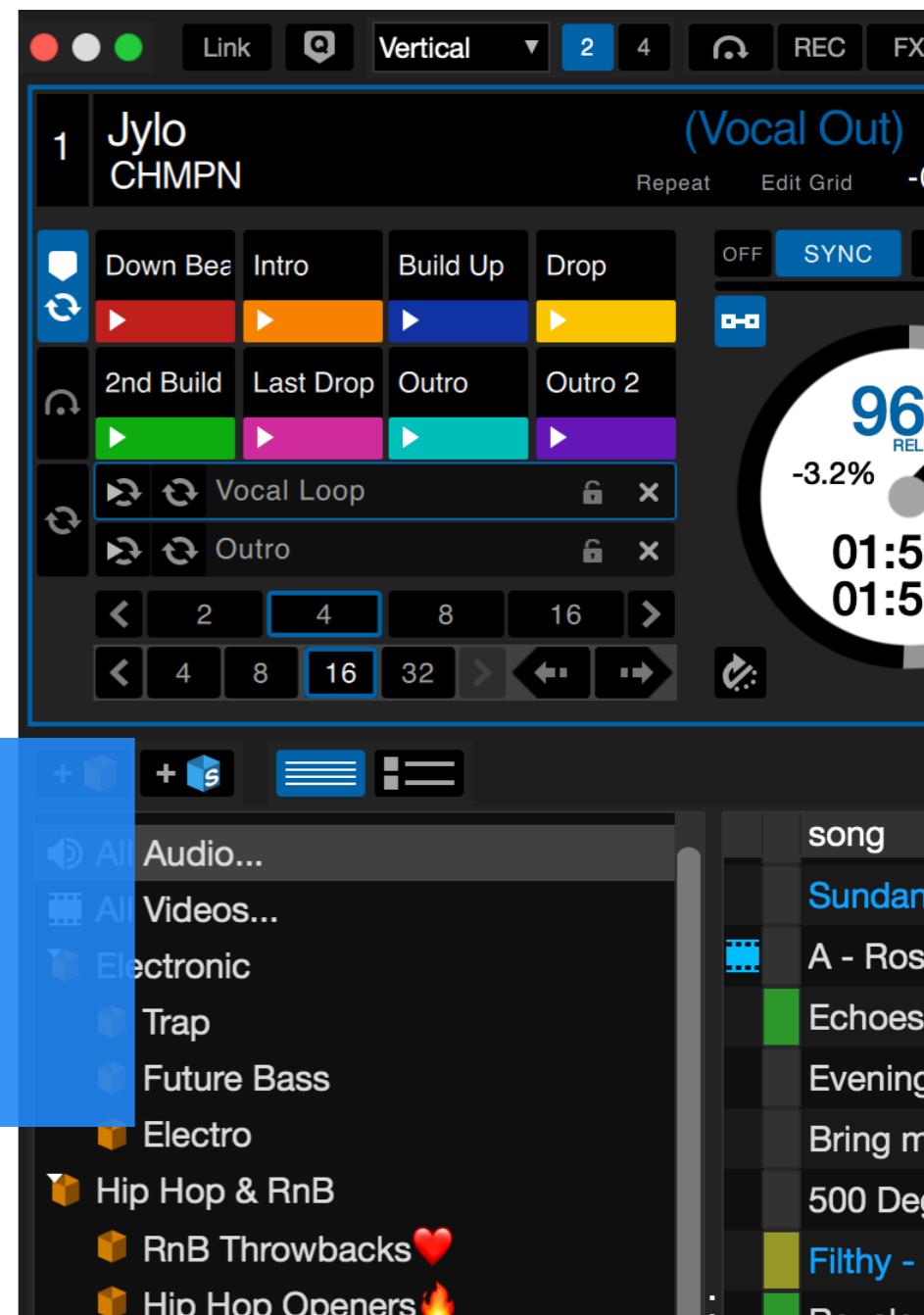
IT'S THE DJ SOFTWARE THAT LOADS THE

music from your hard drive into your computer's memory for playback, or grabs the next track from your streaming service. 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 controller with built-in screens and all the rest, it's 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. That's why before looking at the best controllers for each piece of software, we are going to take a short while to explain a bit about the software itself. If you haven't made up your mind what software platform to go for, this will help you to narrow down your hardware choice considerably. Changing software is much harder than changing hardware: Pick your software for life, even if your DJ controller is "just for Christmas!"

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





SERATO DJ SOFTWARE

SERATO DJ IS A HUGELY POPULAR AND STABLE PLATFORM for digital DJs. A couple of years ago Serato DJ received a nice high-resolution interface refresh, and its two flavours are now known as Serato DJ Pro and Serato DJ Lite. It has four streaming services available too: Beatport Link, Beatsource Link, TIDAL and SoundCloud.

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 what hardware features are important to you when choosing.

The software is all about usability, meaning you're more tied to what Serato's engineers have decided than with some other platforms (a Midi mapper has been added, though). This means that there tend to be fewer

"head scratching" moments when learning and using Serato software. It has a more logical, capable music library system than say, Traktor, and plays more nicely with iTunes/Apple Music (the app, not the streaming service), the software of choice for many DJs when it comes to planning DJ sets.

It also handles non-electronic music better than some of the others. Extra effects are available as paid-for add-ons, as is video mixing capability. Meanwhile, the Serato Flip re-editing expansion 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.

Previously, you couldn't spin with Serato DJ without a licensed controller or audio interface plugged in; that's all changed thanks to the Serato Play expansion that gives you the ability to spin using just your keyboard and trackpad.

FIVE 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 much asked for. It doesn't have comprehensive control over Serato, but it does have the Pioneer DJ look and feel straight out of the pro DJ booth that many Serato DJs have hankered for and comes with the full version of the software. A huge hit.





2

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 and comes with the full version of the software.



3

NUMARK PLATINUM FX

NUMARK LAUNCHED THE PLATINUM FX (AND THE CHEAPER PRO FX) this year, and immediately ruled the entry-level category. They're well built, have good jogwheels, and easy and fun effects control, including scratch DJ-friendly paddles. The Platinum FX is our favourite, as it has useful jogwheel screens and can control four decks. Comes with Serato DJ Lite, so you'll need to factor in the upgrade to Pro.





4

HERCULES INPULSE 500

THE HERCULES INPULSE 500 ALSO CONTROLS THE COMPANY'S own DJUCED software, which is great in its own right. Supplied with Serato DJ Lite (so you'll need to pay for an upgrade at some point if you want more features), it is a decent two-channel controller, with fold-out feet and some clever visual aids to help new DJs learn to beatmix. Not "pro", but good fun.

NUMARK DJ2GO2 TOUCH

5



THE DJ2GO2 TOUCH IS A TRULY TINY DEVICE, that comes with Serato DJ Lite. This latest model, launched in 2020, adds jogwheels that you can actually scratch with - hence "Touch". There's a sound card squeezed into that tiny body, so apart from the obviously limited controls, it has broadly what you'll find in bigger controllers - and yet you can throw it into your holiday bag or even put it in your pocket!



TRAKTOR PRO DJ SOFTWARE

TRAKTOR HAS RECEIVED A SHOT IN THE ARM THANKS TO THE release of a string of Traktor Pro 3 updates in the last couple of years. It brings an overhauled audio engine, new single knob Mixer FX, and hardware in the form of the Traktor Kontrol S4 Mk3, the Traktor Kontrol S2 Mk3, and most recently the Traktor Kontrol S3. While recent updates haven't brought the features revolution that many were hoping for, it's been enough to rekindle the passion of loyal Traktor fans who had been waiting patiently.

TRAKTOR STILL IS A POPULAR DJ PROGRAM AMONG THE readers of Digital DJ Tips. 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 any other DJ software. The company endured a considerable "wobble" in 2019 with large-scale redundancies and a big question mark over the brand's future, but the ship has been steered, and at least for now, everyone is cautiously optimistic that the worst has passed. Development continues on the next generation Traktor DJ software that the

company says will eventually supersede Traktor Pro, but for now, Traktor Pro continues to soldier on and get the required love from Native Instruments to remain an option for DJs.

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: 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.

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.



3

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 STILL FOUND IN DJ BOOTHS ALL 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, Pioneer DJ can stay with them. All the work done by DJs on their music while they were DJing with a controller (cue points, comments, analysis etc) is not lost in the "switch" to digital CDJ / DJ booth DJing - something none of the other platforms can offer.

AS A PIECE OF SOFTWARE, IT FEELS LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN Serato and Traktor. It has good FX, four decks, 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 and the ability to play lyric video files are some of the new developments in Rekordbox DJ this past year or two, and at the rate Pioneer DJ adds new features and ships updates (ie very fast), this is definitely one to watch although the new subscription modes for Rekordbox 6 is dividing people.

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-FLX6

IF YOU WANT A MID-PRICED, FOUR-CHANNEL controller for Rekordbox, this is it. Think of it as a DDJ-400 with two extra channels. It's the same build quality, aimed really at the type of DJ who is outgrowing the DDJ-400. It has some gimmicks: Merge FX is the most successful of the two, giving you "one knob instant build ups" (don't overuse it!), and "Jog Cutter" is a pseudo-scratch feature that's frankly best forgotten.

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) to offer "stems" DJing. It's also got MORE advanced features that other apps in this list don't have such as cloud-based track recommendations, in-app editors that let you work with your music at a deeper level, and even a special Sandbox mode that lets you "audition" how a mix sounds before you actually execute the transition during a performance.

IF YOU CHOOSE VIRTUAL DJ, IT'S WORTH CHECKING OUT HOW much a licence for your DJ controller costs - Virtual DJ has different prices depending on what gear you'd like to use it with, ranging from US\$49 to US\$199. You can also choose to subscribe to it at US\$19/month, which lets you use it with all compatible hardware, or pay a one-time US\$299 fee 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



RELOOP TOUCH

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



2 NUMARK NS6II

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



PIONEER DJ DDJ-1000

WHILE VIRTUAL DJ WORKS WITH PRETTY much any DJ controllers out there, we've included this one as an example because it's one of the most popular DJ controllers right now, and because it demonstrates how well Virtual DJ's engineers get third-party units working with their software, something evident by the implementation of the DDJ-1000's jogwheel screens here.

4

DENON DJ PRIME 4

DENON DJ'S PRIME 4 IS A FULLY STANDALONE DJ system, but Virtual DJ works perfectly with it too, making full use of its big touchscreen - an engineering feat in itself, frankly. A great alternative for DJs who want to use the Prime 4 to access some of Virtual DJ's unique features.



5 HERCULES DJCONTROL INPULSE 300

THIS TWO-CHANNEL CONTROLLER LOOKS MORE mature and "serious" compared to Hercules' quirker designs, but it's still got a raft of features aimed at beginner and casual DJs like the Beatmatch Guide and Intelligent Music Assistant that make it approachable.



OTHER LAPTOP DJ SOFTWARE: TWO TO TRY

MOST LAPTOP/CONTROLLER DJS USE ONE

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

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

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

DJAY PRO 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.



?



MIXXX 2

MIXXX 2 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.

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 MACBOOK PRO 16

We're not currently recommending the M1 MacBook for DJ use, so top of our pick is the creme de la creme of Apple's laptop line, boasting an eight-core Intel i9 processor, 16GB of RAM and a whopping 1TB of space. That's enough power for DJing, producing and even editing video.



2

DELL XPS

DELL'S POPULAR XPS LINE GOT A refresh this past year that brings a new OLED display, an Intel i9 processor and up to 32GB of onboard RAM. A beast of a Windows machine that can handle even the toughest of DJ/producer work, including music production and video (from US\$1099)

XMG DJ 15

TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF PRO DJS, this lightweight audio laptop features a wide array of standard connectors, eliminating the need to purchase adapters or hubs. It's tested with most DJ hardware, has low latency, and great support "by DJs, for DJs". Only available in Europe.

3



THREE OF THE BEST STANDALONE SYSTEMS

SO IF YOU'VE BEEN PAYING ATTENTION, you'll have figured out that standalone systems are on the up. Nowadays the best of these systems feel very much like using a DJ controller with software, and also packs most of the same features. It can feel liberating DJing on a unit like this if you've been using a laptop to DJ from for a while - and you may just like it! We think that for mainstream adoption, the next year or two will be the tipping point - but if you're ready to plunge now, here are our best three recommendations.



DENON DJ PRIME 4

Denon DJ's Prime 4 standalone DJ system has been a revelation. With a powerful CPU built in, it has taken what this type of DJ set-up can do to a whole new level. It can analyse music fast "on the fly" for key, beatgrids and so on, it has the ability to stream over WiFi, it has pretty much all of the performance functions of a decent controller, it has four genuine standalone "decks", can work with a built-in hard drive, works with Serato if you do want to use a laptop - the list goes on. The current cream of the crop in this category.



PIONEER DJ XDJ-XZ

PIONEER DJ'S XDJ-XZ HAS A LOT GOING FOR IT. IT IS classic "Pioneer" in look and feel, with full-sized pro jogwheels and an awesome mixer with flagship hardware FX built in. As a standalone controller it is only two channel, so best thought of as being like the XDJ-RX2, its sister controller, but with two extra mixer channels for external devices or software control (it works as a software controller for Rekordbox DJ and Serato too, for when you do want to use it with a laptop).



3

DENON DJ PRIME GO

THE CUTE DENON DJ PRIME GO HAS DEFINED A WHOLE NEW category of standalone DJ all-in-ones - the portable, battery powered unit! It's great fun, feels professional to use, and has led to a spate of livestreamed DJ sets from the tops of cliffs, outdoor pools and balconies, and more! It's been rightfully well received.



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!



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.





2

PIONEER DJ CDJ-3000

PIONEER DJ HAS FINALLY REPLACED ITS AGEING
CDJ-2000NXS2 club-standard CDJ, 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 to bring it closer to the power of Denon's units.



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.



PIONEER DJ DJM-900NXS2

THE FLAGSHIP REPLACEMENT FOR THE DJM-900NXS, THE
DJM-900NXS2 is evolution rather than revolution. That said, some of the changes are pretty big: twin USBs, much improved FX, and the frankly awesome USB FX send/returns are the technological improvements that most jump out. As part of a bigger set-up with a pair of CDJ-3000 players it clearly represents the ultimate Rekordbox DJ system - but one that does come at a considerable premium.





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 - but it is five years old, and this year Pioneer DJ replaced it with the DJM-S11. It has a touchscreen to show your Serato settings and allow you to control X/Y FX, but also to give you control over decks 3 and 4 of the software. The layout has been tidied up too, among many other features - a worthy successor (works with Rekordbox DJ, too).



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.



FIVE OF THE BEST IOS & ANDROID DJ APPS

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

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



DJAY PRO AI (FOR IOS)

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 (IOS ONLY)

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

3



WEDJ IPHONE & ANDROID

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

WeDJ, a two-channel app for iPhone & Android. It's got a simple interface at first blush, but it has plenty of mixing power if and when you want it: you can access hot cues, Pad FX, X-Y pad effects, and even a sampler via menus that you toggle on and off. WeDJ is also compatible with certain Pioneer DJ controllers including the DDJ-200 if you want tactile control while you mix. It works with music streaming services, too.

4



TRAKTOR DJ 2 (IOS)

TRAKTOR DJ 2 IS THE NEXT GENERATION OF TRAKTOR, WHICH

the company says will eventually be available on Mac, PC, Android and iOS. For now, the iOS version has SoundCloud integration, built-in song recommendations and all the essentials - although at the moment this is definitely a stripped-down app compared to "full strength" Traktor Pro.

5



MIXFADER DJ (IOS & ANDROID)

MIXFADER DJ IS THE COMPANION IOS / ANDROID APP TO THE

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

THREE OF THE BEST DJ CONTROLLERS FOR IOS & ANDROID

HOOKING IOS & ANDROID STUFF UP TO DJ CONTROLLERS WAS

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



RELOOP MIXON 4

IF YOU WANT THE MOST "PRO" EXPERIENCE

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





TRAKTOR KONTROL S2 MK3

FOR DJING WITH THE “NEXT GEN” TRAKTOR DJ 2 FOR IOS, the Kontrol S2 Mk3 is a great choice. It has an iOS socket on the back for easy plugging in of your iPad, although there is no built-in stand, so you’ll need to figure out how to prop the iPad up. Its stripped-down feature set complements the minimalist feel of Traktor DJ 2, as well, and together they make up a neat little DJ system.



PIONEER DJ DDJ-200

PIONEER DJ’S ENTRY-LEVEL DDJ-200 CONTROLLER WORKS with both the company’s own WeDJ app on iPhone and Android, and Algoriddim’s djay Pro AI on iPhone and iPad (plus other DJ software including Rekordbox on Mac and Windows). While it doesn’t have a built in sound card, you can still DJ “properly” with it thanks to a mono splitter cable, provided, to give you headphones and speakers outputs. A good way to dabble in DJing, but you’ll want to upgrade if you get serious.



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.



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



NUMARK NTX1000

YOU GET A LOT FOR YOUR MONEY WITH THIS SEMI-PRO turntable, which is from the same stable as the much more expensive Denon DJ VL12 (which we also recommend). This is the cheapest turntable we recommend if you want something that’ll last.

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.



5

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).

TECHNICS SL1200/1210 (MK2/MK7)

WHAT TURNTABLE ROUNDUP COULDN'T INCLUDE TECHNICS?
But the truth is that the new lightweight SL1200/1210Mk7 is a disappointment
in real world use (although very nice for home use), due to feedback issues.
If you can find a pair of the old Mk2s, though, they'll last you a lifetime.

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

PREVIOUSLY 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 "INTRO" software or requires you to pay a subscription to use your software of choice, 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 what is provided, but you're going to want to upgrade to the pro version soon enough. So factor in the cost of doing this: The cheaper the DJ controller, the more likely it is to come with one of these cut-down versions of the software. Getting rarer nowadays.

3

READ THE MANUAL CAREFULLY, ESPECIALLY THE SET- UP INSTRUCTIONS

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

4

DON'T SWEAT YOUR CHOICE!

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

5

GET SOME DJ TRAINING

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

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

SEVEN EXTRAS EVERY CONTROLLER DJ NEEDS

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

SPEAKERS

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

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



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

THE PIONEER DJ HDJ-X10 IS OUR CURRENT FAVOURITE HERE AT DIGITAL DJ TIPS BECAUSE IT BLENDS GREAT SOUND WITH COMFORT AND SUPERIOR NOISE ISOLATION.

2



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, and we hear very good things about the V-Moda Crossfade LP. Our current favourite at the Digital DJ Tips office is the Pioneer DJ HDJ-X10 which sounds fantastic and is comfortable enough to be used for hours on end. 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.

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.

3



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



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 like this little Minirig 3 speaker, as it’s well-built, loud and feature-packed.

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.

4



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



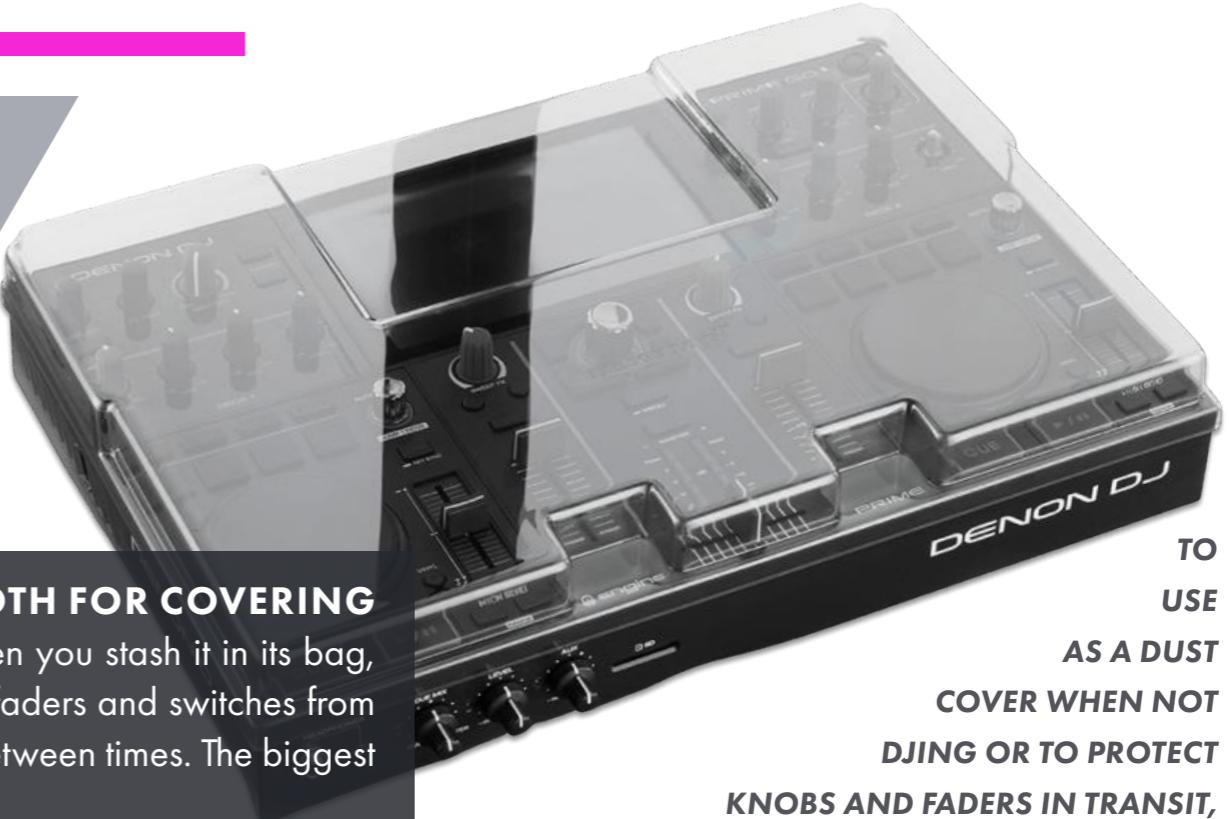
TRANSPARENT PLASTIC COVER

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.



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 26,000 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](#) course has tons of practical advice on choosing a digital DJ controller, and it's also the best way to get a flying start with your new controller. It's sold many thousands of copies and helped countless DJs to get from complete beginner to first gig - fast!

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](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).

Take The DJ Test

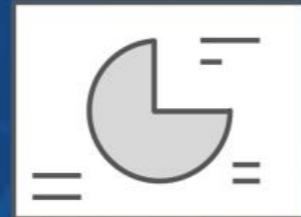
Discover Your DJ Score - How Well Will You Do?

1.



TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO
ANSWER YES/NO QUESTIONS

2.



FIND OUT IMMEDIATELY
HOW YOU'VE SCORED

3.



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