

# Audioengine D1: Expansive Sound, Small Package

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If you've spent a couple of hundred dollars or more on decent headphones, you may have noticed something when plugging them into your average laptop, netbook, or even desktop computer. They can sound vastly different depending on the source, even if the audio file itself, the song, is the same. This can happen because of differences in how computers process and handle digital files, and the best way to get top-notch results is by using a good DAC, or digital-to-audio converter.

The [Audioengine D1 DAC is a premium 24-bit device](#), a lovely piece of kit that allows you to bypass your computer's soundcard or headphone output. Just plug the tiny, pack of cards-sized device in using the included USB cable (or via optical connectivity), and then plug in your desired speakers or headphones. We largely used this as a convenient and fairly portable headphone amp, though small speakers can easily be driven as well- like a pair of our favorites from the company, the [Audioengine A2s](#), [bookshelf models that we reviewed previously and love](#). We burned the D1 in for a dozen or more hours, and then listened over the course of a month to a wide range of sources, files, and genres.

You can connect a TV, Apple TV, DVD/BluRay player or CD player via the optical input, but it's a bit of a hassle. And those devices often drive larger A/V equipment and 5.1 setups. But most computers lack sufficient power and dedicated, separate circuitry, which leads to noise as well as jitter. Better electronics mean better audio, and when we connected a few of our favorite headphones like the [Bowers and Wilkins P3s and P5s](#), or [the Grado SR80is](#), we could immediately discern a difference when using the D1 versus when plugged in directly to the computer. We also tried using bookshelf speakers, and were also impressed- for cheaper models, you probably won't hear much, but if you've got a decent set then you'll certainly notice a few key things.

The primary differences are not the overall construction- those are mostly dependent on the drivers. It won't change your bass levels much, or make your low-bitrate files sound better than they are. Instead, it's the details- the finish if you will- that a DAC can tweak and improve. Highs sound less squeaky or shrill, instruments are more defined and distinct, and everything sounds bigger and broader. It's an instant upgrade to your sound performance, a big boost in soundstaging, opening up what might have been a bit flat or featureless. You won't notice the effect- or at least we didn't- with audiobooks or even some television shows where dialogue is heavy. But anywhere where there are orchestral swells or lots of percussion, trills, or a wide range will be tonally better. Put on a track like Psyche or Like Scope from fairly obscure band Family of the Year (it's on Spotify), and on cheaper systems it can sound muddy and a bit harsh. But through the Audioengine D1, it was mellow, smoother, and an altogether richer experience.

## About the Author

[Greg](#) Greg dreamed up the idea for the Truly Network while living in Hawaii, which began with a single site called TrulyObscure. In 2010, when advertisers and readers were requesting coverage beyond the scope of that site, TrulyNet was launched, reaching a broader audience over a variety of niche sites. Formerly the head technology correspondent for the Des Moines Register at age 16, he has since lived



and worked in five states and two countries, helping a list of organizations and companies that includes the United States Census Bureau, TripAdvisor, Events Photo Group, Berlitz, and Computer Geeks. He also served as the Content Strategy Manager for HearPlanet, a multi-platform app that has reached over a million users and has been featured in the New York Times, Hemispheres Magazine, National Geographic Adventure, Fox Business News, PC Magazine, and even Apple's own iPhone ads. Greg has written as a restaurant critic and feature journalist for a number of national and international publications, including City Weekend Magazine, Red Egg Magazine, the Newton Daily News, Capital Change Magazine, and an arm of China Daily, Beijing Weekend. In addition, he has served as a consulting editor for the Foreign Language Press of Beijing, as well as a writer and editor for the George Washington University Hatchet, the school newspaper of his alma mater. Originally from Iowa, Greg is currently living in the West Village of Manhattan.



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