

AudioEngine D1 24-bit DAC Video Review

<http://www.audioholics.com/reviews/processors/audioengine-d1-dac-video>

June 21, 2012

Summary

- Product Name: **D1 24-bit DAC**
- Manufacturer: **AudioEngine**
- Review Date: **March 27, 2012 07:02**
- MSRP: **\$169**
- First Impression: Pretty Cool



I didn't realize how crappy the preamp was that I was using to feed my [AudioEngine 5+ speakers](#). Now we reviewed those speakers earlier this year and for our listening tests I used various source components, including an iPhone, a Blu-ray player and the stereo outputs of an A/V receiver. But after the review we hooked the speakers back up to my laptop using an external hybrid microphone DAC. That was a mistake. I wondered why the clarity and top end of the A5+'s seemed a bit lacking all of a sudden, when I had previously found them to be pretty darn good.

Then I connected this thing - the D1. This is Audioengine's 24-bit Digital Audio Converter - or DAC. It connects to your Mac or PC via USB (cable included) and acts as an external sound card. And it does it without any special drivers or software installation - which we really loved. It converts your digital music and audio to the analogue signals required by your speakers or amplifier. In our case, we were using the amplified A5+ speakers. Using a device like this is great for a number of reasons. For one, it gives you much better quality than the onboard sound device which is just there to get the job done as inexpensively as possible. Secondly, it gives you more options. Let's go over the physical features and you'll see what I mean.

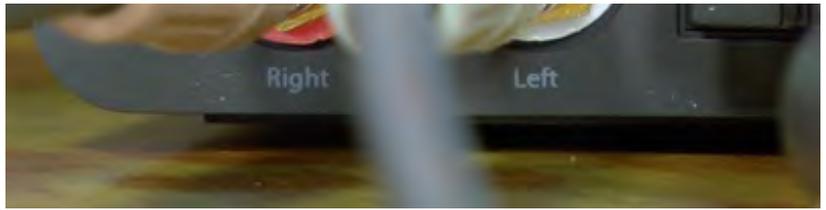
The front is fairly plain, with a single volume knob and a headphone jack for plugging in your phones - which incidentally mutes the rear outputs. This is good, and the way you want a system like this to work. A white LED lets you know the DAC is receiving power from the USB interface. There are no batteries or external power supplies needed.

On the back of the D1 you have a pair of high quality gold-plated RCA outputs as well as a digital optical TOSlink input. That's perfect for getting digital audio from a television or Blu-ray player into your system. Next to the optical input is the USB connection. Now, the thing to note here is that since there is no battery or dedicated AC adapter, if you use the D1 for converting digital audio to your speakers you need to connect the USB port to either a computer or a USB power



supply.

Now, once all the connections were out of the way, what was left was using the D1 and listening to it. Using it was pretty simple. The volume knob is smooth and has a nice heft to it, and the front-located



headphone jack was perfect for allowing me to switch from casual listening to [podcasting mode](#). We loved the auto-mute function where the headphones broke the feed going to the speakers without us having to do anything. The improvement in audio quality was also very noticeable. I mean compared to the sound coming straight off the Mac, both headphones and our desktop speakers sounded clearer and less compressed. The bottom end even tightened up a bit and we heard a more natural decay on things like reverb and cymbal crashes. Overall we'd have to say that if you're going to spend good money on speakers for your home or office and you're driving your system with a PC or Mac, you really don't want to drop the ball and use the internal sound card - at least not for long. Save up the \$169 and consider grabbing the AudioEngine D1. This is one upgrade you're going to be able to immediately hear and appreciate.

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