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Audioengine's mighty midget digital converter/headphone amplifier does the job

Audioengine's mighty midget digital converter/headphone amplifier does the job

The Audioengine D3 may be teensy, but this affordable component can radically upgrade your computer's sound quality!

by **Steve Guttenberg**  @AudiophileMan / February 5, 2014 7:36 AM PST

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Audioengine



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Audioengine is one of those rare companies that gets it right every time. Its **desktop speakers** excel in a very crowded, highly competitive field, and its digital converters are also strong performers.

Audioengine's latest release, the tiny **USB-powered D3 digital converter**, continues that tradition. The aluminum body feels nice and solid, and its digital converter can accept 24-bit/192KHz audio. The headphone amplifier works with low- and high-impedance headphones. Alternatively, you can run a set of powered desktop speakers, such as **Audioengine A2+s** or **A5+s**, directly from the D3's headphone jack.

The D3 was designed to work with **Mac** and PC computers, not phones. Included accessories are limited to a small padded carrying case and a 3.5mm-to-6.3mm headphone plug adaptor. Volume control is handled on your computer.

The very first pair of headphones I plugged into the D3, the **Audeze LCD X**, told me all I needed to know about the little guy's sound in a New York minute. The D3 is refined, dynamic, and highly transparent, and bass prowess is impressive. My old Sennheiser HD 580 headphones were next, and again the D3 didn't miss a beat. To put the D3's accomplishments in perspective I plugged the HD 580 directly into my **Mac Mini**'s headphone jack. Detail and resolution took a hike, dynamic contrasts fell flat, and bass oomph slackened. Once you hear the difference you'll never want to plug headphones directly into a computer again.

I next compared the D3 with **AudioQuest's**

DragonFly USB digital converter/headphone amp. The DragonFly is certainly decent, but the D3 sounds more transparent and effortless. After spending time with the D3, the DragonFly's sound seemed coarser and more opaque.



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I really like the D3, but a better AC-powered and much larger headphone amp such as the \$249

Schiit Asgard 2 is even more detailed, plays louder, and sounds more dynamically alive. It's not really a fair comparison; the D3 is seriously tiny, just 0.5 inch by 1.8 inches by 2.6 inches, so it's very portable, and it includes a digital converter. The Asgard 2 is a lot bigger and doesn't have a converter, it's just an amp. As always, better isn't the first consideration; get the one that best suits your needs. In a few weeks I'll be looking at another Mini-USB converter, the **Cambridge Audio DAC Magic XS**.

The Audioengine D3

Audioengine



The Audioengine D3 sells for \$189 direct from the company's Web site with a 30-day home trial, free ground shipping, and no sales tax. The D3 is also available from Audioengine's authorized dealers, including **Amazon**.

Tags: The Audiophile, Audio

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Steve Guttenberg /





Ex-movie theater projectionist Steve Guttenberg has also worked as a high-end audio salesman, and as a record producer. Steve currently reviews audio products for CNET and works as a freelance writer for Home Theater, Inner Fidelity, Tone Audio, and Stereophile. [See full bio](#)

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