

AUDIOENGINE > HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND ON YOUR DESKTOP

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You simply can't put an amp, power supply, multiple connectors and controls into the same box as a speaker and expect it to sound as good as a component system where they're all tucked away separately like they're supposed to be. After spending some time with **Audioengine's** latest entry into the market, we needed to put that bias aside. The sound quality of the **Audioengine 5+** is not just good it is startlingly good. Paired up with the company's 24-bit digital-to-analog converter (DAC), you get to experience a clean, rich sound that is bound to surprise even the most discerning audiophile.

Even before it's all out of the 31-pound box, it's clear that Audioengine is out to make a good impression, with each speaker and the cable set in its own felt, drawstring bag. This is confirmed by the quality and variety of connectors on the rear of the active (left) speaker. There are two sets of audio input connectors, an eighth-inch stereo mini-jack and a pair of RCA connectors. These are both active, allowing you to connect both a computer or iDevice and a stereo component like a tuner to the speaker's amp simultaneously. There's also a connector that provides USB power. Another pair of RCA connectors provides an unpowered pass-through output, useful for connecting a sub-woofer.

Well Connected

The speaker connectors are of the nice, fat screw-down, banana plug-compatible variety. The power supply for the 150W (total peak) amp is internal so there are no bulky appendages on the power cord. It's a back panel that you would expect to see on a top quality component. The front of the active speaker has a knob to control volume and put the amp in sleep mode, a sensor for the included IR remote control and a white LED power light, which slowly and unobtrusively pulses when the system is sleeping. With a footprint of 7" by 7.75" the speakers assume that you have a fairly generous amount of desk space available.

The cabinets (available in white, black or bamboo) each house a 5" Kevlar woofer and a 20mm domed tweeter. The pair provides a rich sound with sparkling highs



and a clean, rich midrange and lows. Though they do a very good job of smoothing over the deficiencies of compressed audio and provide a most pleasing listening experience from a wide gamut of musical styles and sound sources, they don't add an excessive amount of coloration. The speakers have a remarkably broad dispersion pattern. The sound will fill a room yet each speaker will retain a well-defined point of origin. If you're really looking for a live-performance feel to your sound, it would be well worth considering an Audioengine S8 powered compact (11" cube) down-firing subwoofer (\$349, not evaluated). It's virtually the only stand-alone sub on the market in its class that has a chance of fitting under a computer desk.

Going Digital

We did have the opportunity to test the speakers with **Audioengine's D1 DAC**. The speakers are unquestionably in a class where a high-quality DAC provides a noticeable improvement in several regions of their acoustic range. The minimalist digital to audio conversion circuitry inside a desktop, laptop or handheld can't hold a candle to a dedicated external converter. Though there are few applications that can take full advantage of the D1's 24-bit depth (though Garage Band is one of them) the processing power provided by an outside box makes a substantial difference, particularly with the kinds of percussion instruments (cymbals, bells, and the like) that the D1's 192kHz sampling rate can reproduce clearly. The D1 has a USB input, required for power

and that can be used as a sound source, and an optical TOSLINK input that mates splendidly with a Mac Pro. The front panel has a volume control, headphone out and muting/power button. It is helpful to have this compact box in easy reach because your keyboard and menu bar volume and muting controls no longer function in the digital audio realm. (Controls within an application do, however.)

At \$399-\$449 SRP (depending on the finish) for the speakers and \$169 for the D1, an Audioengine is not exactly the kind of purchase that one would make on an impulse. However, after having had a chance to give them a good workout, I have to rate them as an excellent value, particularly when compared to world-class brands like Bowers & Wilkins and Bang & Olufsen. Even as a self-powered system, their sound compares favorably to any number of unpowered bookshelf speakers near their price range. Audioengine provides a generous 30-day "audition" for nearly all their audio equipment. After listening for myself, I can easily understand the confidence with which they make the offer.

Product	Audioengine 5+ Premium Powered Bookshelf Speakers
Made by	Audioengine <audioengineusa.com>
Price	\$399-\$499 (depending on finish)
Pros	Super-clean, rich sound; Well built with excellent components; Variety of connection options
Cons	Slightly large for some computer desks
Rating	★★★★★
Product	Audioengine D1 Premium 24-bit DAC
Made by	Audioengine <audioengineusa.com>
Price	\$169
System Requirements	USB or optical digital (TOSLINK) input; USB-powered
Pros	Compact; Both USB and optical input; Convenient controls
Cons	None found
Rating	★★★★★