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## Audioengine D1 Review

### A Review On:



Audioengine D1  
24-bit digital-to-  
audio converter

**Rated # 8**  
in Sound Cards

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By [WilliamGayde](#)

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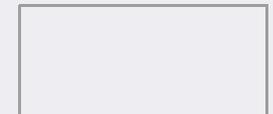
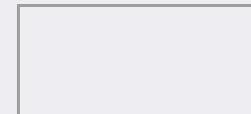
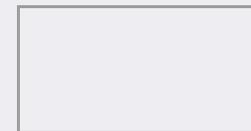
**Pros:** Great sound quality, Included headphone amp, High quality connectors, Multiple I/O options, Compact, USB powered

**Cons:** No 1/4" adapter, No optical cable, Doesn't control Windows volume

The Audioengine D1 DAC hits the sweet spot between price and performance for DACs. There are many cheaper options that don't sound as good, and many more expensive options that sound marginally better. I believe the D1 is the best bang for the buck when it comes to mid range audiophile grade DACs. So many people build great computers, but the video experience is only half of the game. The audio can be just as important and too many people forget that.

Starting with the box we see the main features. The unit uses the industry recognized AK436 chip as the actual DAC. The back shows some more key features as well as a QC tape over a

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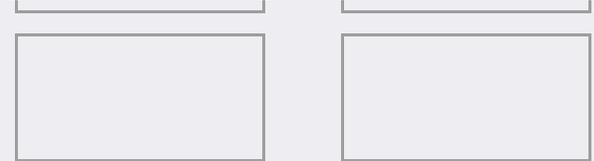
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seam in the box. This proves that the unit has passed inspection. Audioengine clearly takes pride in ensuring their products meet their high expectations.



The top of the box describes what the unit does. I will go into more detail later. The bottom side lists what is included in the box.



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In the box we get a gold plated USB cable, the unit itself, a plush carrying pouch, an Audioengine product catalog, and a manual. The USB cable is extremely high quality and gives a satisfying click. Fancy USB cables won't make a difference in digital audio quality, but a thicker cable will last longer. The plush bag is perfect for taking the D1 on the go.



Now for a general overview of the product. It measures 3.5" x 2.75" x 1". The front volume wheel is very well tuned. You can easily select very precise volume adjustments.



Here we can see the high quality gold plated connectors. The unit features USB in, optical in, RCA out, and 1/8" out.



For anyone who is wondering what a DAC does and whether or not they need one, here is a quick overview before the review.

Your music and any audio on a computer are stored in digital form. It is just 1s and 0s. Your computer then converts that digital information into an analog signal that your headphones or speakers can understand. This built in Digital to Analog Converter (DAC) typically works fine for most people, but it is only there to get the job done as cheaply as possible.

Audiophiles and other audio enthusiasts are looking for something much better. That is where a standalone DAC comes in. It bypasses the built in DAC of a computer which is usually single integrated circuit the size of your thumb nail. External DACs like the D1

feature high quality electronics specifically designed for pristine sound. Think of it like integrated graphics versus a discrete graphics card. Integrated will get the job done, but for any real detail you need a dedicated card.

Now on to the performance results and my thoughts.

### **Usability 5/5**

The D1 is extremely simple to use. Just plug it in and set it as your playback device. It is plug and play, works with Windows or Mac, and requires no drivers or software. The USB cable connects to any open port and offers crystal clear audio. The front volume wheel is very easily accessible and has the perfect amount of resistance. The front also features a power button. I would assume this is to save power. As I mentioned previously the unit has two input options and two output options. This makes the unit compatible with traditional headsets, IEMs, high end speakers, or even a home theater setup. The only thing I would like to have seen would be an optical cable and a 1/8" to 1/4" adapter included in the box. Other than that this unit requires no setup or advanced technical knowledge, and it is compatible with nearly any setup you could have.

### **Performance 5/5**

The performance is the most important feature in any audio product, and the D1 does not disappoint. As with most external DACs, it is far superior to any front panel audio or even the included DAC that some headsets come with. In order to achieve the full benefit of a high quality DAC you need high quality headphones. The best pair of headphones you can buy will still sound bad if they aren't being fed a high quality signal. The same works in the opposite way. You need high quality headphones to hear the difference from a DAC.

The performance was spectacular considering the price. You feel like you are in the recording studio, right next to the main character in a movie, or in the game. No matter how good you think your built in computer audio is, this is better. Going from on board audio to the D1 was a pleasant surprise. Going back was even more eye opening. I couldn't believe that I had been listening to garbage for so long. The D1 brings a fuller bass sound without sounding sloppy. I could make out individual bass notes that I had no idea were there. The mids were solid without getting lost like most consumer audio tends to do. The highs were crisp and clear. Each note had a purpose and wasn't just thrown in.

### **Value 5/5**

The unit sounds great but I don't want to sugar coat things. There are DACs that sound better. There are also many DACs that don't sound as good. The thing is the DACs that

sound better cost much more proportionally. Spending nothing on audio equipment will get you OK sound quality, but there is lots of room for improvement. You can spend \$50 and get something that sounds immensely better. You can spend \$150 to achieve another boost in sound quality. After that there isn't much in the same price range. You can easily spend more on a DAC than your whole computer, TV, refrigerator, microwave, and oven combined, but is it worth all that extra money for small performance increase? To some it is, but to most it isn't. The D1 has the perfect balance of price to performance. Spending more will get you a marginally better audio experience, and spending less will get you a significantly worse experience.

To wrap it all up, I love the D1. I can't believe I wasn't using a DAC before. It is hard to describe how amazing it sounds compared to built in audio. If you have a nice computer and care about audio, you need this product. A fancy graphics card is only half of the solution. Your ears are just as important to your eyes. Don't let them down.

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## Where to Buy It



Audioengine D1 Digital TV Accessories  
at **Crutchfield.com**

**\$169.99**

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