

# iPod: Your Digital DJ

## How to Party With Your Hi-Tech Gadgets.

by Bob Moffett

A popular consideration among many tech-savvy party people today is the idea of using their iPod or laptop computer to supply their party music entertainment rather than hiring a DJ or band. If you already own one of these items and you've acquired quite a bit of your favorite music then, why not?

It can of course be a perfect and simple solution for many kinds of gatherings. If you're planning a large formal event such as a wedding however, I recommend taking our Digital DJ Quiz to see if you're ready to staff the DJ booth. If you pass the quiz with a winning score then by all-means read on!



Numark  
iPod DJ station

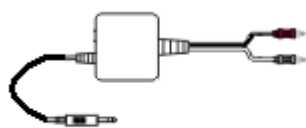
### What you'll need

Both the iPod and computer use an audio output connector called a **stereo sub-mini phone plug**. This same connection where you attach your headphones will become the output connection to whatever sound system you decide to use. To make this connection you will need a stereo **"Y" cable** that divides your sub-mini phone plug into a pair of connectors that will mate with your sound system. The most common types are shown below:

Common Patch Cords	
<p><b>3.5mm-miniphone plug to 2 RCA Male</b></p> <p>Connect to consumer audio systems using RCA inputs marked <b>line</b>, <b>aux</b>, <b>CD</b>, <b>tuner</b>, or <b>tape in</b>.</p>	
	<p><b>3.5mm mini phone to 2 1/4" phone plug</b></p> <p>Connect to an instrument amplifier or professional PA system at inputs marked <b>line</b>, <b>instrument</b>, <b>CD</b>, or <b>tape</b>.</p>

These cables are available in a variety of lengths and we have shown both the male and female versions. Use either depending upon the circumstance of your particular setup.

**One important note about computers** and similar sources: beware of ground loops and Radio Frequency noise (RF noise) generated by these devices. This appears in your audio as a rasping buzz (RF) or a low hum (ground loop). To eliminate this problem a special version of these cables is available that includes an isolation transformer built into the cable. This breaks the electrical connection that lets noise into your sound system while letting the actual music signal pass through.



Cable with built-in  
Noise Canceling Transformer

If you don't get a reasonable sound level after you've connected your device, or the sound is terribly distorted, it is likely due to an **impedance** mis-match. Avoid connecting your device to any sound system inputs marked "phono" or "mic" since your device is likely to overload those inputs. If you have to connect your device to a phono or mic input use an **impedance matching transformer**.

If your audio is clear but simply not loud enough you will need an additional **pre-amplifier** to boost the signal gain before it is fed to the audio system.

## The Next Big Thing

If your event is large or more formal you may be in need of a microphone for announcements. If the audio system you plan to use does not have input for a microphone you'll need to insert one more piece of gear between your device and the sound system. This will be some type of **mic/line mixer**, also known as a **pre-amplifier**. A simple and inexpensive solution is a portable DJ mixer sometimes called a "scratch" mixer because their small size. This will give you not only a mic input but additional inputs for a CD player or other device as well.



New products are now appearing that combine the basic features of a DJ mixer with built-in docking stations for your iPod. These new iPod DJ mixers like the Numark model (pictured: top of page) simplify this whole process by combining everything we've discussed so far into a single unit that you can connect directly to your sound system.

To use one of these all-in-one units simply connect the output directly to your sound system's amplifier, or to any line input (CD, tape, Aux) of your home stereo. You'll be able to segue between two iPods in addition to adding a microphone, with independent volume controls for each.

## Developing Play Lists

The advantage of being your own DJ is that you can inject your own personal flair into the music program. Just remember that the ideal party host **caters** to the needs of their guests. That means you've got to be diligent about selecting music that will be appreciated by everyone on your guest list. Avoid for example, a program that crowds your daughter's sweet sixteen party with all the greatest hits of *Air Supply*. (My apologies to the artists, but even *they* would understand!)

The key to a successful music program does not lie in your ability to anticipate what everyone will respond too. Instead, expect that change will be needed and plan accordingly. Create smaller separate play list "chunks" that you could easily juggle around when changes need to happen. This will make easier to bump-up or postpone that high-energy set, or quickly recall that romantic series you created for just the right moment. If your computer or device allows you to group these play lists for consecutive playback then your job just got even easier.

## Computer DJ Software

If you are already using software such as *iTunes* and *Windows Media Player* you can good results without adding anything more. Programs like *MusicMatch JukeBox* and *WinAmp* also give you some good capabilities. But there are also numerous soft wares designed specifically for DJ use. Many can be downloaded online for free or a nominal cost and will automate your play lists while giving you instant access to changes on the fly. Whatever software you decide to use, be sure to check that your computer meets all of the hardware requirements with regard to processor type and memory. A mis-match could cause your system to "hiccup" or freeze in the middle of your music playback.

Also watch your resource meter while evaluating the products. Software that demands a great deal of your system resources will be more prone to problems should another application be opened while the music is runing.

## Sound Systems



You may need to rent an appropriate PA system if your event is large. Explain to the vendors what it is you are trying to do and most will be happy to see that you'll have everything you need for a successful hook-up. Some will even deliver right to your event site and pickup after completeion.

The size of the system you'll need is something you will want some assistance in selecting. How much power you need should be based on the number of people you expect to play for. You can be in a stadium - but if you're only playing to 30 people a small sound system will do nicely. Figure at least 2-3 watts per person for a conservative adult group, and 4-6 watts for younger groups. For younger audiences that prefer dance and hip-hop styles consider adding a sub-woofer that will enhance the bass portion of the music without straining the main system.

It is better to be somewhat over powered and lower your volume than to be under powered and risk system damage or failure.

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