

December 21, 2010

Digital Djing

The term DJ comes from disc jockey – the old term coined for those hip radio personalities who literally jockeyed old vinyl discs onto platters that spun! Imagine that!

Today's DJ's would rather use a digital solution than lug around 100s of vinyl discs into gigs. However, there's something that is unexplainable about the tactile feel of physically altering and mixing music with your hands on a physical record instead of twiddling software knobs with a mouse or track pad.

Therefore, an analog-digital solution was formed. Using 'time-coded' vinyl that acts as a controller, DJ's can now hook up their laptops to their turntables via an external sound card. In this simple but visually complicated setup, the time-coded record sends a signal to the computer indicating the exact point at which the needle is on the record. In turn, the laptop will return the exact millisecond of audio via the soundcard to the mixer.

In short, the vinyl record doesn't contain audio – but rather a time-coded signal that controls the digital audio files (mp3s, etc.) on the laptop. With better technology in digital audio latency, even the best turntablists no longer notice the nanoseconds of delay between their hand-movements and audio response.

Some various software/time-coded vinyl packages ([Vinyl emulation software](#)) that currently exist are:

- [Serato Scratch Live](#)
- [Final Scratch](#)
- [M-Audio Torq](#)
- [Deckadance](#)
- [Ms Pinky](#)
- [Traktor Scratch Pro](#)

There is a lot of slang that has developed around this software. One such term is: [scratchista dominista](#), a term referring to a traditional vinyl DJ who has successfully migrated to digital DJing with ease. A DJ is only referred to with this term if one cannot audibly tell the difference between their vinyl or digital mixing.

In the years to come, vinyl mixing may become a thing of the past – or just inside the studio. It's inconvenient to lug around huge crates of vinyl when you can just as easily store them all on the hard drive – especially when the technique and audio reproduction sounds exactly the same. In the end, if you're a bad DJ with vinyl, you'll be a bad DJ with a digital hybrid solution. So get practicing kids; if you can't scratch, the laptop won't help!