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**Reprint:** DJ Times Magazine Review of **Visual Discomix (VDMX)** Professional DeeJay SoftwareBy *Dave Gadbois***VDMX DJ Pro Advanced:** VDMX MP3 System: Sharp software, easy control

There's a new kid on the "Pro MP3 player" block, and it's Visual Disco Mix (or VDMX). Even though the Slovenian company has been in the European market since 1994, VDMX ([www.visualdiscomix.com](http://www.visualdiscomix.com)) has recently branched out into the U.S. market. I met their U.S. distributors at this past International DJ Expo and requested a system.

When it arrived, the items included a CD-ROM containing the program, a programmable controller, a USB Multi-output soundcard and a USB dongle. I loaded the software without any problems. I then connected to controller through the USB port and connected the USB dongle to a USB input on the controller itself. This is a great feature, because you don't have to worry about losing the dongle. Another plus is that you can load your program on multiple computers and use the controller as a software key. This feature is only available in the Pro version. The other version uses a software key, and can only be run on one system.

The computer system I am running is an AMD Athalon 1.4 gig with 480 MB of RAM. I have one hard drive, which contains the operating system and programs. I have a second internal hard drive, which contains the MP3 files, and I have a third removable hard drive that contains a backup of my MP3s. The operating system I'm running is Windows, XP Home Service Pack 2. The minimum recommended system would contain a 1.2 MHz processor, 5400 rpm hard drive, 512 Meg of RAM, 16-meg video card, and Windows XP operating system.

After installing the program, I had to configure the sound card and the controller. This was done through an easy-to-navigate setup section. There were a few other choices that could be made in this set up program, which included video settings, sampler settings, folder location for your MP3 files, and other work-related settings. The sound card was USB so it to was an easy setup. If you want to use your own card it must be Direct X-Compatible, as VDMX does not support ASIO.

The next step in this process was to archive my MP3 files. This took a couple of hours to do, but only has to be done once. I had approximately 5,000 songs. There are a few things that the archiving process does. These include calculating the BPM, logging the name of the artists, length of the track, and its location. This information is saved with the file and not into a data folder. This is beneficial if you have a hard drive failure because each track has all of the information needed so that a replacement hard drive can be inserted quickly and you'll be back up and running as fast as you can install the drive. However, there was one time constraint that had to be in the equation.

For a hard drive with about 5,000 songs, it took approximately three-and-a-half minutes to rebuild the archive. So if you had a hard drive failure, and had to replace the hard drive using a removable drive, you could do it very easily in the time it would take to play a normal song off of your CD player. You only have to rebuild the archive and not the archived information. On your MP3 hard drive there was no need for any special folder system. For example, a folder called "Dance Music" containing folders with the names of artists or the names of music styles would easily be recognized by the software. The folder named "dance music" would be the main folder, and the artist folders would be considered the subfolders. This made for easy searching. Buttons on the controller could be programmed to scroll through the main folders then scroll through subfolders, then scroll through songs.

This program also had a number of ways to search for MP3s. This could be done through typing the name of the artist, song title or BPM in the search window using your standard keyboard. Or you could do this with a mouse that had a scroll wheel on it. The scroll wheel would be used to select letters. Then when the letter was correct, you would click the scroll wheel to move on to the next letter in your search thus no need for a keyboard.

**Getting Started:** Let's begin with the software. At first it's a bit complicated, but once you really look at it you will see it has every bit of info you need, not only to play the track, but mix it perfectly. The deck section, where the controls for each player are located, has all the controls (play, cue, pitch, etc) that many other systems have but that is where others stop and VDMX begins. Included in the deck section is an EQ control, output level, waveform, but the best indicator was the beat window. The beat window or beat graph is a visual guide of where the best place to mix in or out of the track. The graph is divided into two

parts. Section 1 is where there is consistent beat activity. Section 2 is where there is little beat activity like a dropout. As the play position marker moves it displays a beat countdown until the next section.

The next part of the main window is the phase window. This window shows the phase of each deck respectively. Why is this important? Well if you are just learning to mix this feature will help get your mixes right on beat when used with the autopilot feature. There are controls for each deck to make the phase even more precise. Also, this window contains the autopilot controls. These features include Adjust BPM / Pitch, which automatically adjusts the BPM and pitch of one deck to the other. Even if the BPM changes on the master deck a bit the slave deck will stay locked. I wish I had this when I used vinyl 20 years ago. The other big autopilot feature is Synch Start. This ensures that the start of the slave deck will be in phase with the master deck and make the mix much smoother. Autopilot can be on or off and each feature can be used or unused.

Three other outstanding features of VDMX are its loop function, sampler and the effects window. The loop window allows you to select loops at these intervals ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, and 32) beats. It also has a button that lets you jump back 16 beats in synch, so if you missed a mix you get a “do over.” I found it to be the easiest and most accurate looper I have ever used. Plus, there was no need to set loop points (start and finish) just engage desired interval and that was it. The sampler window has eight individual slots complete with EQ and effects. All track properties are copied with the sample most importantly the BPM. All eight samples can be played at the same time, depending on the power of your computer.

OK, I have reached my first issue with VDMX—look how far it took me. The only way to load samples is through the decks. So if you want to use vocal drops or sound effects you have to first load it into a deck then into a sample slot. This is not a deal breaker, but just something you need to do before a gig if you want everything ready to go.

Lastly, we have the effects window. VDMX has six of the most-used effects in the DJ world—an auto pan, chopper, echo, flange, turntable switch on/off and a play backwards. It also has EQ kill buttons for hi, mid and low on each deck. The controller for the effects looks like a Korg Kaoss Pad and you click and hold mouse and drag to modify the sound. I thought this was a very cool way to control things and easy to. The last “VDMX-only” feature is the network mixing capability. This allows you to mix with multiple systems connected through a network (LAN) and keep BPM and phase synchronized. Let’s say, for example, you work at a club that has three rooms. With this feature you can set up a server in the office with all of your MP3s and then a slave system in each room which would have access to all of the MP3s on the server.

And now the big finish: I think that one of the greatest features of this program is the ability to use a standard PC keyboard as a controller. This is done through a process called key mapping. So if you are on a tight budget and want to buy this program in stages, a standard keyboard will get you going right out-of-the-box. Then, in the future, if you want to upgrade to a controller you can do it very easily. Most USB controllers will work. The system I received included the Pro version controller. This is the best MP3 player controller I have ever seen. The thing I liked most about this controller is that every button is programmable and that the programming can go four layers deep.

Example: Set up layer one, with all of your CD controls (play, pause, cue, and load). You can then set a second layer, which would include the sample features. A third layer then could be set out to include all of your effects and a fourth layer would then be available to do whatever you wanted to do, so one button can basically have four different functions. If you had no need for effects or a sampler, you could place those features on different layers and have more room for the features that you do use more often. This feature allowed me to set the controller so that it worked best for my personal use. Not only are the buttons programmable, but the size of the buttons can also be changed. Another controller that seemed friendly to this program was the Hercules controller. There were a number of pages in this in the manual that discussed set up and operation of this controller.

**In closing**, I felt I had to really look for things I didn’t like. I spent hours pushing this system and had no problems—at least none that weren’t solved by reading the manual. I, like most of you, am a working DJ and have to rely on a system that performs every time. This is one of the products. I even called the support number just to see how long it would take for them to call me back, and guess what? I talked to a person the first time. I really found no real cons. That’s not to say this product is perfect, then there would be no upgrades. I like upgrades. I guess one thing that might be hard to swallow for those just getting into the MP3 player is the price of the system. The classic version is about \$250, which is very reasonable compared to other products. The Pro version is about \$650. And VDMX USA is offering an introductory package including the pro software, sound card and that awesome controller for \$999. If you break each item’s cost down you will see it is still comparable to other products just with more features.

This product is for all skill levels in both mobile and club applications. This software not only played the tracks consistently, but also allowed me to add my own vibe and flare to the mix by using the above discussed features. If you were to ask me if I would use this program and put my reputation on its reliability. The answer would be yes.

*If you have any questions for Sounding Off, please send them to [djtimes@testa.com](mailto:djtimes@testa.com).*