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How to Choose a Sound Card

Are you baffled by the different types of sound cards on the market? I mean, do you really need 5.1 channel surround sound? Or wavetable synthesis and EAX support? Or are you looking for a simple, basic sound card? Some PCs even come with sound cards built-in.

This article will help you with your decision by elaborating on the different factors to consider when buying that new sound card. Armed with this information, you'll be able to make better purchase decisions.



Some sound cards available in the market

What Are Your Needs?

First thing to consider here is your intended usage of the sound card. If all you want is basic sound support and not spectacular 3D surround sound, I'd say go buy a cheap, simple card or even rely on your motherboard's on-board sound. If you want great surround sound and better speaker connectivity options, then you'll want to consider a dedicated sound card.

What's Your Budget?

As always, cost is an important issue to consider. A basic, no-frills sound card these days costs about \$10, while the latest heavy-duty sound card with surround sound support can cost about \$250. If you only need simple sound support, don't waste money buying a high-end product with features you don't need.

Surround Sound

A critical factor to consider is to take a look at what sound standards your sound card supports. Most high-end sound cards in the market today have EAX and 5.1 surround sound support. You can connect up to five speakers to these cards to enjoy a surreal, 3D audio effects. Some cards even starting to provide 7.1 surround sound

support.

Special Needs

Do you have any special needs that you need to cater for? For example, if you're into professional, multi-track music recording, you'll want to get a proper multi-channel sound card. If you're into things like MIDI, you'll want a card that supports provides good MIDI support.

Is Your Computer Good Enough?

If you want to take advantage of the latest features in the new sound cards out there, you'll usually need to ensure you have a powerful CPU to go along with it. No point having the latest super-duper audio card if you're installing it into an old Pentium 3 computer.

Bundled Software

It's also useful to look at what software comes with the sound card package. Cards like the Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy are wonderful because they throw in great music and audio software. This will save you money, especially if the software you've always wanted is found in the package.

Conclusion

To sum up, sound cards are an essential component in computers today - they're your gateway to experiencing true multimedia. Make sure you consider your audio needs and do some homework before buying that sound card. If you don't need certain high-end features like multi-track recording support, or hard-disk recording, then go for a lower-end card.

The logo for Systemax Premium PCs, featuring the word "Systemax" in a bold, sans-serif font with a red underline, followed by "Premium PCs" in a smaller font.The text "Build-To-Order." in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a red rectangular background.

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