

Remote Controls For Everyone

How many remote controls have you got? Five or even six? Maybe they are even crowding the coffee off your coffee table! Even if the clutter doesn't drive you mad, the logistics just might! Which remote do you pick up to change the channel or adjust the volume? That depends. Are you using the tuner in your TV or the one in your DVD recorder? Is the sound coming from your TV or via your home cinema amplifier/receiver?

Maybe you have got it all figured out, but how about your wife, your children or your friends? Wouldn't it be great if you could easily control all your components with one remote, even in a dark room? So what's the answer? A "universal" remote control. Yes, all your A/V gear can be controlled with just one universal remote control. However, you're probably already agreeing but still wondering what your available options are and what should you choose for your system? The solution is real easy, so please read on.

Universal Remotes

Universal (sometimes called "multi-brand") remotes come pre-programmed with infrared codes for many popular brands of gear. From a list that comes with the remote, you'll need to look up the numeric codes for your components. Enter the proper codes into the remote, and it will instantly have control over your equipment.

Normally, these remotes can control an assortment of standard A/V components, such as receivers, DVD players, TVs and pay TV boxes. In more expensive models, the multi-brand function may even control

more exotic home cinema gear, such as light dimmers and motorised curtains.

While a Universal remote can typically operate the basic functions of most A/V components, it may not be able to control every function of every piece you own. For example, a remote pre-programmed with the operating code for your receiver can normally turn on the receiver's power, adjust its volume, select the component you want to listen to and tune in a radio station. It may not, however, have control over more specialised features, such as activating DSP (digital sound processing) modes or making tonal adjustments.

Learning remotes

A learning (or "programmable") remote can be set up to operate just about any brand and any item of equipment and accommodate just about any function you want to clone.

Most learning remotes also come pre-programmed for multi-brand use, meaning you enter the proper codes to give them control over your equipments basic functions. However, the learning capability of these remotes also lets you "teach" them how to operate a component's more esoteric commands. (You'll need to have the component's original remote available in order for the new remote to "learn" its functions.)

Better and more expensive components – typically high-end receivers – usually come supplied with a learning remote. However, it often appears that the manufacturer has deliberately gone out of his way to complicate matters as some of these are very demanding when it comes to use and are often not 'operator-friendly'.



PC Programming

Some learning remotes can even be programmed by computer. For certain makes, you can go to the manufacturer's website, and enter some basic information about your components. All the necessary programming is then downloaded to your remote through your computer via a USB cable, greatly simplifying the process.

Macro Functions

Most learning and some multi-brand remotes also feature macros, buttons that you can program to perform an extensive series of commands at the same time. For example, imagine pushing a single button to close the curtains, dim the lights, turn on your amplifier/receiver, select the surround sound mode and get the DVD player going. It is all a possibility as long as you have already loaded the DVD player with a disc!

LCD Remotes

Some of the more advanced universal remotes feature LCD screens that display system information and put even greater control at your fingertips. Many of these LCD screens are also backlit for easy operation when the lights are low. Some LCD remotes have traditional buttons or a combination of some buttons and touch-screen operation whilst others have what we term 'virtual buttons' – everything based on touching on-screen icons and are among the most sophisticated and elite remotes.



A perfect example is the Philips Pronto featured in our Accessories section. It uses a touch-screen LCD to offer the ultimate flexibility in system control. Models like these can display a set of control 'virtual buttons' specific to whatever component you select to operate. Some touch-screen remotes even offer button layouts that can be individually customised – get rid of the buttons you never use and arrange ones you need in any order you like! Some, like the Pronto even have a 'different' screen available for every member of the family, which can be customised to work just the way they want!

Expensive? You might at first think so, but if you've spent more than \$10,000 on your A/V system; and that's pretty easy to do these days, then you will definitely consider this as an essential accessory!

Conclusion

Still confused? Don't be! Our team of enthusiasts – especially the younger ones – have tried every type of remote available and are just bursting to demonstrate their expertise. With some basic instruction, learning remotes are simple to operate and make the home entertainment experience a lot more fun! Possibilities are endless. Stretch your creative imagination to the maximum!

One final thing. Remotes often get dropped, stood upon or even experience other unmentionable nasties. Purchasing a learning remote means that you can store your original factory remote away in case of emergency or any of the above situations. It is easy and relatively cheap to buy a learning or multi-brand remote, but sometimes impossible to obtain an original.

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AudioTrends Showroom

10 Argent Place, Ringwood, VIC 3134

Phone 9874 8233

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