Neyrinck V-Control Pro

It's an app but not as we have known them. This one takes a sensible pro attitude and approach to DAW and plug-in remote control. ANDY DAY

*U*nless you've been living under a rock you will already be aware that Apple has not only created but has also dominated the market in tablet computing with its iPad; in fact the iOS operating system now has in excess of 100 million users worldwide. However, when the iPad first launched everyone referred to it as a 'consumption' device that was not relevant to creation. Since that time the iOS developer community has proved that the iPad is a credible creation tool particularly for activities requiring tactile control via its touch interface. Neyrinck has taken this to a new level with its V-Control Pro app for DAWs.

V-Control Pro is basically a fader controller that can be used with most major DAWs — Pro Tools 7 upwards, Logic 9, Cubase, Digital Performer, FL Studio, Ableton Live, Reaper, Reason, Sonar, Studio One and Tracktion. It uses the multitouch capabilities of the iPad allowing multiple faders to be controlled at the same time, which is a definite improvement over trying to use a mouse on each fader. Another fundamental benefit is the ability to connect to the DAW wirelessly allowing control from anywhere in the studio. Obviously the practice of mixing on a piece of glass has its limitations but one overriding attraction is the potential to control many different applications from one controller with limitless user interface possibilities.
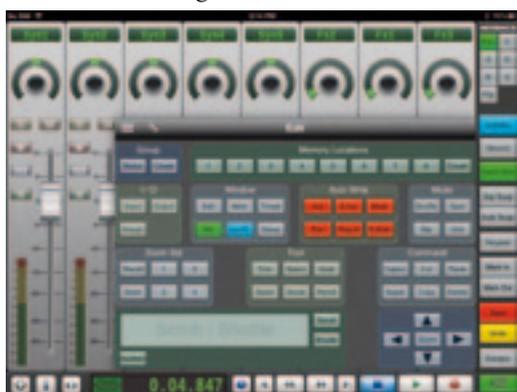
Setting up the app couldn't be easier. You just buy the app from the app store on your iPad, then go to the Neyrinck website and download a small app that runs in the background and acts as the wireless 'driver' for your DAW. The nice thing about the Ney-Fi driver is that it is the same driver for all DAWs so there is no need to launch different versions. Once the Ney-Fi software is installed you just need to run it before starting your DAW and then configure the V-Control Pro in your DAW. Essentially it acts as a Mackie controller, hence the universal support for many leading DAWs. A really helpful support feature for novices is the Neyrinck Youtube channel, which contains videos explaining configuration for all the major DAWs. The use of video is a great help here, compared to trying to wade through a PDF setup procedure.

I set the V-Control Pro up with Pro Tools 9 LE first, which was incredibly easy, compared to fiddling around with a hardware Mackie controller and MIDI interfaces, etc. Just enable the V-Control in the MIDI inputs and choose it as a Mackie controller in the setup peripherals and that's it! The track names all show on the V-Control channel strips and the faders become live. In terms of controllable features you get transport (including record and the online button), 8 faders with audio metering, solo/mute, channel Rec enable, an assignable pan/send rotary controller and a channel insert control to allow plug-in instantiation and control. Individual channel automation mode switches are a really useful addition. On the right hand side there are global controls for edit/mix window switching, input switching for recording, group suspension and automation suspension. In other words all the useful bits from Avid's hardware controllers. There's even a button that gives you a numeric keypad replica with all the Pro Tools shortcut keys marked and an extra application specific edit window with many useful functions. Banking through mixes larger than 8 faders wide is achieved with bank buttons or finger swipes.

All these features are great but how does it actually perform? I must say that I'm very impressed with the responsive control available from this app. Once you get used to touching glass instead of faders it really feels great to work with. They have obviously fine tuned performance of the MIDI/Mackie combo to create a great controller. The Pro Tools functions offered are exactly those that most Pro Tools users need to access from a control surface and in the case of assigning plug-ins the V-Control is much easier to use than other Mackie hardware controllers including the old Digidesign 003 controller.

The best feature by far of V-Control is what Neyrinck calls the V Window; this should make hardware DAW controller manufacturers extremely nervous. The V Window is opened by a single button tap and allows access to any open window on your Mac, which means that any plug-in window you have open will be rendered on your iPad with all the controls editable by your fingers! You can take the V Window full screen on the iPad and even zoom into the plug-in using pinch. This is the ultimate in plug-in control for any DAW as you are interacting directly with the plug-in — anyone who has tried to change EQ settings on a hardware controller will appreciate this feature. Another side benefit of the V Window is that you can select any open window, so you can view any other apps running on your Mac. The V Window is unique and fantastic to use. Again the performance is excellent as it bypasses the antiquated and limited HUI protocol and acts like a remote control screen sharing app within a DAW controller. Brilliant design.

I tried V-Control with Ableton Live and Logic 9 with equally good results. I also was intrigued to see that it works with FCP, so I fired up FCP7. FCP 7 is not known for its audio capabilities but many video projects never make it to an audio DAW so any control is welcome to the average video editor. V-Control has a great interface for FCP. There are faders for 8 audio tracks with solo and mute, but the cool part is direct access to the Function keys F1–16. By default all the standard shortcuts are assigned and you get graphical representations of each function, but FCP allows you to edit your shortcut keys so virtually any function can be assigned. These shortcuts in conjunction with the V Window feature allow excellent control of FCP, even the 3-way colour corrector wheels.

V-Control Pro is US$50, which is expensive for an iOS app but ridiculously cheap compared to a hardware equivalent. It's also cheaper than some of the iOS apps trying to do the same thing but Neyrinck's unique V Window feature and excellent responsive performance are more than enough to justify getting it if you already have an iPad. There's also a free version to let you evaluate before you buy. If you don't have an iPad then here's the perfect excuse to get one especially if you need a DAW controller. ∎

PROS	V Window gives ultimate control for plug-ins; smooth performance; wireless control; well thought out selection of controls; inexpensive.
CONS	You may have to stop playing Angry Birds while using it.

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