

Universal remote cont

NEED TO KNOW

Almost 80 per cent of us have more than four remote controls in our homes. So if you're finding the clutter of grey and black boxes a problem, a universal remote control could be what you need. It typically allows you to control your TV, DVD, VCR, and even your hi-fi all from one unit.

Prices range from £10 or so to well over £150. Cheaper models tend to operate fewer devices than more expensive ones, and the design looks simpler. If you are willing to pay a little extra, you can get a remote with LCD display and advanced features such as macros (see 'Macros', right).

SET-UP

Programming all-in-one remote controls is generally straightforward, though it can be time-consuming. You set up all but two of the remotes on test by entering a code that matches the equipment you want to control from a supplied list. If you have an unusual brand of device to operate, or a very old model, check the packaging or manufacturer's website. If it lists the brand, it should operate your device.

Alternatively, eight models can learn which device you want them to operate. You point your old remote at the universal remote and press each button in turn. This can be time-consuming and your old remote needs to be in working order.



MACROS

Macros allow you to assign a set of instructions to one button. So if you regularly watch shows you recorded the day before, you can assign a button on your remote to turn on the TV and VCR and play your recordings. All our Best Buys have this function.

BEST BUYS

A universal remote control should simplify your life, so the key is to buy one that is easy to use. All our Best Buys stood out from the other models on test because they were simple to operate.

Our top choice is the **One For All (1)**. At £20 from Argos, it was also one of the cheapest models on test and, for the price, it can't be beaten. What marks this model out from the rest is its all-round versatility. It operates six devices – TV, VCR, DVD, satellite, hi-fi and CD player – which is ample for the average user.

The remote is comfy to hold and uncluttered with well-spaced buttons, giving the impression that it was designed with the user in mind. Despite its plain look, it easily handles basic functions – fast-forward, rewind and play on a VCR – and advanced ones, such as the timer on a VCR. It also operates several macros (see above).

The **Innotech Systems (2)**, at £79 from www.voicezapper.co.uk, is a great choice, particularly if you have poor eyesight or problems with grip. Its large, well-spaced buttons respond nicely when pressed. When you push a button on the remote, a voice confirms your selection, but you can switch this off if it annoys you. The remote control also has a voice-activation option, allowing you to control the remote through spoken commands, such as 'TV. Channel one. Volume up' and so on, from anywhere in the room. Our only qualms are that the instruction manual has very small print and is a bit waffly. We found it tedious to set up, too.

The **Home Theatre Master (3)** also deservedly gets Best Buy status. We were particularly impressed with its intuitive set-up instructions.

For example, if you enter a code for a TV, the remote will automatically test it and turn the TV on to let you know it has worked, rather than your having to go through these steps manually. It has a good-sized LCD screen which gives visual prompts so you always know what's happening when you're using it. It's a comfy, well-laid-out model but will set you back £105 from independents. Call 020 8213 2169 for stockists.

Of the non-Best Buys, we were impressed with the Logitech (4), but it's one only for the technically-minded, which is why it's not a Best Buy. You set it up by linking it to your PC with a USB cable and downloading settings from the internet. If you're comfortable with technology, you'll take to setting it up without difficulty, and it's more versatile because, as new products are released, you can download the codes to control them.

2 Innotech

1 One For All

rols



The One For All Kameleon 10

LAYOUT

We liked the simple layout of the buttons on the One For All (1) and this Innotech Systems remote. The button for the device being used is backlit when the remote is on. This is useful if, for example, you are trying to use the VCR and

haven't noticed that the remote is set to operate the TV.

You can also buy remotes with different types of screen. The Home Theatre Master (3) has an LCD screen. The One For All (5), above, has a touch

screen. It lights up only the buttons relevant to the machine that the remote is controlling, such as those for the TV, making it easier to understand. But we found the screen hard to read, especially during the day.

USING THE TABLE

We tested the best-selling remotes priced under £150.

Price

For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay.

Features

Number of devices All the remotes can operate a TV, VCR and DVD except Total Control (7) and One For All (11), which operate only TV, VCR and satellite. Remotes with a learning function (shown as L under 'Set-up') can operate any device that uses a remote control. **Macro** See 'Macros', opposite, for details. **Set-up** C means set-up is by using codes, L means learning from the existing remote and P means set-up using a computer. See 'Need to know', opposite, for details. **Screen** Whether the remote has a screen. LCD

indicates an LCD screen and Touch indicates a touch screen. See 'Layout', above, for details.

Performance

Code coverage Based on the number of codes supplied for popular UK brands and devices. This is not relevant for remotes with a learning function. See 'Features,' left. **Functions** Whether the remote can operate advanced functions on a device, such as Teletext, or programming a VCR, as well as basic functions on a device, such as changing the volume or channel and turning the device on and off.

Ease of use

Set-up How easy the remote is to set up and how easy it is to follow the instruction manual. **Layout** How easy the layout and display of remote control are to use. **Ease of use** How easy it is to use for everyday tasks and for more advanced features, such as macros.

3 Home Theatre Master

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
Performing basic and complex functions 30%
Code coverage 20%
Set-up and ease of use 20%
Display and layout 20%
Features 10%

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●
Best → Worst
■ Best Buy

Remote controls

MODEL

	Price (£)	No. of devices	Macro	Set-up	Screen	Code coverage	Functions	Set-up	Layout	Ease of use	Score (%)
1 One For All 6	20	6	✓	C, L		☆	★	☆	★	★	81
2 Innotech Systems Accenda	79	6	✓	C		○	☆	○	★	☆	69
3 Home Theatre Master MX 500	105	10	✓	C, L	LCD	●	☆	☆	☆	☆	68
4 Logitech Harmony 655	70	15	✓	P	LCD	☆	☆	○	○	○	67
5 One For All Kameleon 10	130	10	✓	C, L	touch	★	★	☆	●	○	66
6 One For All Primeline 4	20	4		C		☆	☆	☆	○	○	63
7 Total Control 3Way	10	3		C		☆	★	☆	☆	☆	63
8 Marantz RC1400	80	12	✓	C, L	LCD	○	★	○	○	☆	61
9 Vivanco Viv.Control 5	20	5		C		☆	★	●	☆	●	60
10 Cambridge Audio M1+	50	8	✓	L	touch	see ^a	★	○	●	●	57
11 One For All Kameleon 3	40	3	✓	C, L	touch	★	☆	○	●	●	57
12 Sony RM-AV2500T	100	12	✓	C, L	touch	○	★	●	○	●	56
13 X10 UR74U	50	5		C, L		☆	☆	●	●	●	47
14 Sony RM-V402T	25	7		C		○	☆	●	●	●	42

^a The learning function lets it operate any device that uses a remote control