



Review

D-Link Boxee Box

The chassis is unconventional, but oddly attractive and certainly turned some heads towards our testing area

Technical specs

Operating system	Boxee
Processor	Atom CE4100
Memory	1GB RAM / 1GB ROM
Dimensions	120 x 120 x 120mm
Supported resolution	Up to 1080p
Connectivity	HDMI, S/PDIF, composite audio, Ethernet, 802.11n Wi-Fi, 2x USB 2.0
Expansion	1x SD card slot



MEDIA STREAMER

D-Link Boxee Box £199

The promise of a hardware companion for the popular open source media centre Boxee has interested us since its original announcement. Let's see how the final product stacks up against expectations...

Pros

It's small, original, fully featured and more than capable of playing almost every file type, including popular 1080p containers

Cons

The interface can be slow to respond and Flash support is a little shaky (though improving). It's not as pretty as custom Jukeboxes

If D-Link's Boxee Box is nothing else, it's original. With its unusual chassis design it makes a really bold statement, featuring a sunken, off-centre cube shape that sets it apart from anything in its class. While its unconventional looks could divide a household from an aesthetic standpoint, its performance as an internet TV device, network and local movie player almost certainly won't.

The design might frustrate those with low-profile spaces under their TV set (for which it's a little too tall), but we were certainly taken with it, not least because it's smaller and infinitely cuter than the imagery here credits it.

Connectivity is excellent, if basic, with Ethernet, HDMI, power, optical and analogue audio ports on the back, and two USB ports for storage. On the side of the unit there's also an SD card slot, which is convenient for file swapping and playing

back movies and picture slideshows. It's certainly as easy as any DVD player or set-top box to set up, as the tiny 'Quick Start' guide is keen to impress on you.

The co-operation between Boxee and D-Link on the device itself was a shrewd move. Boxee as a software solution has had ample gestation time and inside the Boxee Box's intriguing shell, the hardware is essentially the same as found in cutting-edge netbooks – it represents the perfect combination of software brilliance and hardware know-how. This being the case, the hardware on board is more than capable of playing back 1080p content at high bitrates and the creation of the Jukebox interface itself – which attempts to prettify your experience by scraping IMDB for box art and movie details for your local or network storage, as well as that from the internet – is remarkably quick to compute in comparison to, say, the Network Media Jukebox as featured on the Popcorn Hour A-210 reviewed elsewhere this issue.

The interface might not be quite as attractive as custom Jukeboxes offered up from something like YAMJ (Yet Another Media Jukebox), but with quick access to literally thousands of internet-served TV shows, movies and clips, the Boxee Box is a joy to use. A quick trip to the File Sources section in Settings allows you to browse your network within seconds and once sources have been added, Boxee will analyse

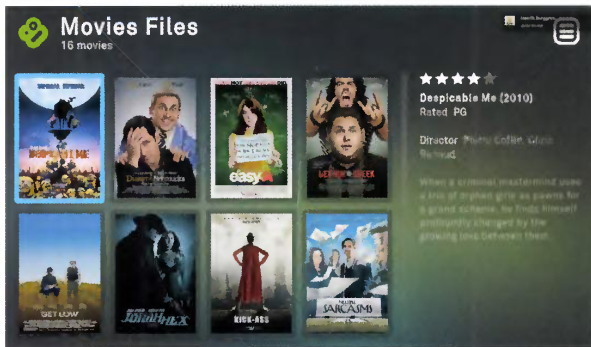
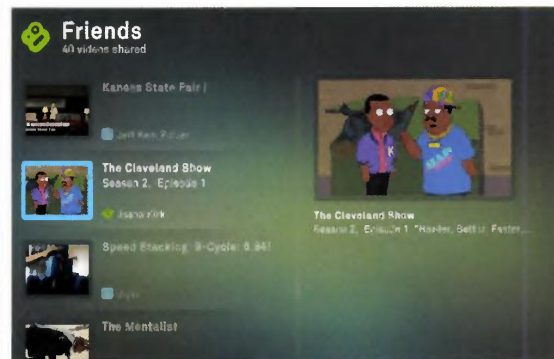
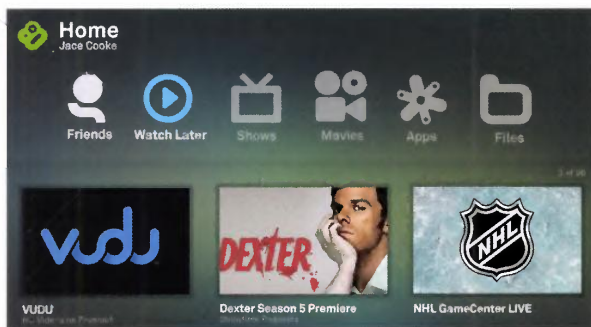
“ Played every file we threw it at – full HD or otherwise ”



D-Link Boxee Box

Media-streaming device

REVIEW



■ One of the few niggles we could level at the Boxee Box was the speed and fluidity of the interface. Since it's constantly scraping the web for content, we can forgive the occasional stutter, but it didn't take long for us to tire of the loading prompt

■ The biggest hiccups we encountered at all were largely Flash-based, in the form of occasional stops and rare blank-screens. Since the development team are pushing ultra-regular updates, though, we're happy to conclude that it's a niggle specific to early adopters and should be rectified by the time you read this



Also consider



Popcorn Hour A-210
£200

While the A-210 doesn't have quite the same level of pure usability, many of the features found on the Boxee Box can be found here. Check out the review on pages 78-79
www.popcornhour.com

Where to buy

www.amazon.co.uk

More information

www.boxee.tv

them by title and scrape the net to find movie details and DVD sleeves. While this process can take a while, users can continue to use the Boxee Box unaffected.

The end results were remarkably good, too, with only a handful of files requiring any action before DVD sleeves and movie information was displayed in the GUI as intended. As any YAMJ user would confirm, having files properly named really helps here, but using just a couple of clicks it was easy to search and find replacement title for the few movies that weren't automatically recognised.

While we initially had our reservations if it would be capable of full 1080p video playback, we're pleased to report that we had no problems. The Boxee Box played every file we threw it at – full HD or otherwise – and in a wide variety of formats, containers and subtitle configurations.

As an internet TV device, it surprised us with the level of free TV and movies it found. Having access to iPlayer and 4OD here in the UK alone makes it worth its weight in gold. This is certainly the first device that demonstrates that internet TV is truly viable today. That said, the UK is still somewhat behind the US in this regard, which makes the advanced networking options of Boxee's software appealing to the determined user – if you're so inclined, you could circumvent certain geographic limitations to get at America's top content.

For us, though, the real star of the show wasn't the streamlined front end, easy networking or the effortless presentation of the best internet TV and movie content – it

was, in fact, the remote control. One the face of it it's a remote that borrows inspiration from the likes of Apple TV (one of the Boxee Box's biggest competitors) in that there are next to no buttons on its front. Flip it over, however, and you're met with a fully featured Qwerty keyboard.

Like any new small-form-factor keyboard, it takes a little getting used to, but once mastered you'll likely find yourself using it for much more than simple username and password operations. Since the interface effortlessly allows you to browse the internet as well as search online and network content, it really does prove useful. Like the chassis, its design is simply exquisite.



Although the interface wasn't as snappy and fast as it could have been, the overall user experience is simply incredible. We were expecting to be disappointed by the amount of available content here in the UK, but were surprised time and again by the quality of content on offer. The Boxee Box is an incredible proposition for media junkies – here's hoping the price drops soon, because at £99 the Apple TV is still a very strong contender for the internet TV crown.

■ Russell Barnes