

audition

equipment review

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Qsonix Q110 Music Server Music Management System

The market for full-sized hard drive-based music managers continues to grow. Many of these products are quite expensive compared to the multimedia PC option; however this route is still not in favour with the custom installation departments of many AV retailers and dedicated custom installers. Why? Because they do not have the same ease of use compared with dedicated audio components and - vitally for installers - tend to involve more service calls which costs a lot of money. The ideal product for both the customer and the AV dealer/installer is one that

has plenty of useful features, is easy to set up and use and is reliable. However, the only downside to a product that has all these good points is that they tend to be expensive. There are about half a dozen big players at the top end of the music management business including brands such as Russound, Elan, Escient, Request and Imerge (whose S3000 we reviewed in *Audio & Video Lifestyle* last year - issue AVL-171). They all have their strengths and most have relatively few weaknesses. Most come with their own basic remote - which vary in their effectiveness, and some do offer their own touch screens, but to get the best out of them many of these media managers are designed to be operated from third party control systems such as Crestron, AMX and others. These are customised to the clients system and can offer plenty of control and ease of use but the final bill for the control system (normally many thousands of dollars) and the programming (around \$150 per hour) can be very expensive. The quality of the final result is then in the hands of the (mostly good) programmers.

California-based newcomer Qsonix is using a different approach. While its products can also be used through an advanced control system most customers will probably opt for the one of the touch screens supplied by Qsonix. These do not require programming at all and are designed from the outset to offer full control, but be very easy to use.

**A music server
with a
difference -
this one's
simple to set
up and use**

By Gavin Womersley

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:
431 x 356 x 102mm (Q110 server)

Weight:
12.5kg (Q110 server)

Price:
\$7,995 (as tested)

Distributor:
Vistra Australia Pty Ltd
PO Box 2199
Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012

Telephone:
(02) 8338 9990

Email:
Via website

Website:
www.vistra.com.au



Up for review this month is Qsonix's Q110 system with 250GB hard drive server and optional 15-inch (38cm) LCD touch screen. This combination presently retails for \$7,995. This is not exactly a small amount of money, but in the world of high quality music managers it is actually good value when you consider the long list of things that the Q110 can do. In fact the list is so long that, just like with the Imerge, it is not possible

to discuss all the Q110's abilities in one standard length review, so here is a brief tour of the highlights.

Firstly, it's solidly built, runs very quiet and is the size of a conventional five-disc carousel CD player.

Connection-wise at the front there are two USB ports and the back panel contains a couple more USBs, four analogue audio outputs and a coax digital output as well as a VGA and control port for the touch screen and a couple of additional ports for external control. Finishing things off is an Ethernet and an IR port. Heading inside, the Q110 can be ordered with hard drives from the 250GB base model up to a huge 1.5 Terabytes (\$10,995 with 15-inch screen). The drives are AV-rated drives designed to be quieter and produce less heat (and thus hopefully a longer life) than standard computer drives.

You can choose three levels of quality for the music stored on the drive; lossless coding (best); and two levels of compression at 320 and 192Kbp/s. With most people having well under 750CDs (which is what the entry-level unit can hold in lossless mode) the entry-level model is a good choice. The Q110 comes standard with the ability to feed four different audio signals at once. This means you could have Bach in the main room and the Beach Boys in the BBQ area, while two other areas had their own music. This may rarely happen in small families but it is nice to know it's possible. To do this with an Imerge of comparable size, by way of example (and without a touch screen), costs considerably more. On the flipside though, if you wanted more

zones than this there is no mention of linking multiple drives thus other systems such as the Imerge may still be your best choice if this is important. Like other modern managers the Q110 is fast. Your CDs are quickly burned onto the hard drive with an hour-long disc taking around three minutes. The Q110 can also burn CDs of your music on its drive for you - so you can use a CD copy in the car, for example. You can of course also easily transfer songs or even whole play lists of music you might have created for a dinner party to an iPod. The Q110 can also quickly import already compressed songs from PCs, gaming consoles etc. and convert them to the formats the Qsonix uses so all of the new material can be stored seamlessly alongside the rest of your music.

Once your music is in the Qsonix and assuming it (like the other advanced music managers) is hooked up to the Internet - the machine automatically obtains the album covers and track information via an online database. This helps greatly when browsing your collection. Again, like its contemporaries, music can be browsed via genre, title, artist, cover art and album. You can even search via a keyword tapped onto the screen.

Hard drive reliability is a serious issue for any product that uses them. Remember at some time your hard drive will fail! When this happens and you have not backed up your data - you will lose all the data and all the time and effort spent putting together those music files. In this category the Qsonix is not advanced as some rivals such as the pricey Request which has its own

Technotalk

Product Type:

HDD music server

Storage Capacity:

250GB, 500GB, 1TB, 1.5TB

Connections:

See text

Frequency Response:

22-20kHz ($\pm 0.6\text{dB}$ @ 48kHz)

Signal To Noise Ratio:

107dB

Total Harmonic Distortion:

0.00235% (-92.6dB)

Line Output Level:

+2.1dBV (1.276Vrms)

Crosstalk:

-118.9dB

Screen Size:

15 or 17-inches (38 or 43cm)

Backlight Life:

30,000 hours

Panel Type:

Sealed LCD touch screen

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

“The Qsonix Q110 is one of the easiest music server products to set up. Without referring to any instructions I had it running in a couple of minutes. The touch screen control of this product is so easy to use that even very non-technical people would quickly understand how things work. This is the main outstanding feature of the Q110 system.”

dedicated backup units but the Q110's contents can be dumped to a USB compatible hard drive in an automated process.

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This Q110 had already been loaded with a variety of music and had a number of playlists like 'party tunes' and 'dinner music' already created, but I loaded a CD anyway to check out how smoothly the CD ripping worked. The Q110 was off-line at the time so there was no retrieval of title and cover information. Instead, I just typed in the main details myself, following the prompts provided for each step until I completed the title, date and artist details - along with an auto generated stand-in cover. That is also the approach you take if you are loading a CD with your own compilation of music on board too. One of the features I found very tasteful was 'soft fade'. Instead of a couple of seconds of sudden silence if you are hopping about changing songs there is a gradual ramp down of the music being played and a ramp up in volume as you move to your new selection. Another useful feature was the Q110's ability to hear a couple of seconds preview of a different song to the one playing without stopping play of that first song. Also handy (but not unique) is the ability to track down a particular album or song while your current selection is still playing in the background.

I found the sound quality to be excellent from both analogue and digital outputs. If you have any pre-conceptions that revolve around hard drive sourced music not sounding good, get rid of them. Just like the Imerge, the

Qsonix is a fine audio source. I A-B'd the award winning recording I made of *A Venetian Coronation 1595* onto the hard drive with the original disc in a dedicated CD player and could not tell any difference despite constant switching. The same applied to the other material recorded lossless on the hard drive that I also happened to have in my collection. All such music kept its imaging, transparency and detail preserved intact.

As time passes dedicated music servers are becoming really useful and increasingly easy to use tools that music lovers should not ignore. The Qsonix Q110 is a machine that must be considered if you are after an easy to use, good value music management system that sounds great too. **AVL Ancillary Equipment:** Celestion A Series loudspeakers, Yamaha DVD-S1500 DVD player, Velodyne DD-18 active subwoofer, , Rotel RSP-1068 AV processor, Parasound HCA-2205 multichannel power amp, Audioquest cables

O p i n i o n

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

“The ideal product for both the customer and the AV dealer/installer is one that has plenty of useful features, is easy to set up and use and is reliable.”

- Performance**
★★★★½
- Build Quality**
★★★★★
- Compatibility**
★★★★½
- Value For Money**
★★★★★