

## Qsonix Q100

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*Music server provides flexible playlist selection.*

It was many years ago that I decided to stop working and do something enjoyable for a living. I'd heard it rumored that one could make a living playing with one's favorite toys, and I have discovered that to be true in the world of audio. Every once in a while, a product comes along and reminds me that my vocation is truly fun. I recently spent some time with the Qsonix Q100 music server, and not only enjoyed the experience, but also discovered a powerful professional tool in the process.

Not just a toy, the Qsonix Q100 is a music management and playback system that provides management of literally thousands of songs in any environment that requires it. The product's marketing might lead you to conclude that it's intended for high-end home theater applications. Indeed, that is its primary intention.



Nevertheless, it is eminently useful anywhere you would want a continuous stream of music of your choosing. One application that immediately comes to mind is a restaurant, where you might want musical selections to set the mood for customers. The Q100 would be useful in any venue where such a music stream is needed.

And let's say you want to change the overall flavor of the music at some point in the evening, shifting from the dinner crowd to something a little more up-tempo for the crowd that arrives later. The Q100 also provides you with the ability to create playlists that fit the bill perfectly for any given moment. Thus, any restaurant, office building, or other public facility where music is desirable could benefit from this product.

### HARDWARE

The system consists of two parts: the Q100 unit, which comes in a gorgeous burnished black case of some substance, and a touchscreen controller. They're connected with a VGA video cable and an RS-232 control cable.

The Q100 is the heart and soul of the system, containing the central processor and the hard disk music storage. It features both analog and digital outputs — by using both, you can simultaneously send two discrete music streams to two different zones. The Q100 also connects to your computer network, and can access the Internet for information. When music is imported into the system via the built-in CD drive, the Internet connection can download album cover art, track information, and other details.

### MUSIC STORAGE

The Q100 is available with either 160GB or 400GB of internal storage, and you have a choice of three different levels of quality in terms of data compression. The highest-quality mode is "lossless," followed by "high quality" (320kbps), and then "compressed" (192kbps).

With the 160GB option, the system can store approximately 500 CDs in lossless mode, 1,500 CDs in high quality mode, and 3,000 CDs in compressed mode. With the 400GB option, approximately 1,200 CDs can be stored in lossless mode, 3,500 in high-quality mode, and a whopping 7,500 CDs in compressed mode. The lossless mode is virtually indistinguishable by all but seasoned audio professionals from full-bandwidth 16-bit/44.1kHz audio. The high-quality mode is, as advertised, very solid, and even the compressed mode is not going to grate the average listener. Nowadays, a substantial part of the world is more than happy with 128kbps-quality files, so this compression is not going to offend anyone.

### USER INTERFACE

The user interface comes in the form of the touchscreen, which can be wall-mounted in a location that is convenient to the system's users. It sports essentially the same features you'd find on any other VGA monitor, including buttons for adjustment of the monitor for maximum quality. Initially, I had a little difficulty getting accustomed to the touchscreen, but before long, I had a good grasp of how to drag objects around and easily navigate the interface.

The user interface of the Q100 is intended to be very user-friendly, and it is. There are wizards for the initial setup of the system, and for importing music via the CD drive. The system is easy to initially configure and get up and running, and once it is, anyone can walk up and easily put together playlists, or find albums or singles for playback.

## SEARCH FUNCTIONS

The main display shows the number of albums from each artist that have been loaded into the system. On the left side of the interface screen, you can display a list of albums arranged by title, artist, or genre. At the bottom of the screen is the "alpha-sorter bar," which enables you to quickly navigate album titles alphabetically. Similarly, you can navigate alphabetically in "artist" mode, as well. "Genre" can be navigated the same way. I was able to quickly and easily find music for any mood by using the genre navigation mode.

The Q100 stores an image of each album's cover, which allows you to sort through the albums visually. This was very satisfying for me — reminiscent of pawing through a CD or vinyl LP collection. A "view all" mode shows all albums, sorted by either artist name or album name, and displaying the cover, as well. Via scrollbars, it was easy for me to zoom around finding the music I wanted to include in a playlist. Another way of searching is the "view search" mode, enabling you to type in a keyword to find a particular piece of music.

## OTHER FEATURES

Another neat thing I liked about the Q100 was the "fast preview" feature. By double-tapping any track in an album browser, the music currently playing fades, and several seconds of the preview track are played.

You can store as many playlists as you'd like. Again, this is powerful in a commercial setting, because you could set up, for instance, "Late Afternoon Soft Music" or "Early Evening Dinner Rush" or "Lobby Holiday Selections," and quickly dial up a playlist that is appropriate for the moment.

Another powerful feature I liked was the two-zone output. By using the Q100's analog and digital outputs both, I was able to provide two discrete audio streams, each with their own set of controls. This is nice for home use — say, with "80s New Wave" playing inside the house, and "Caribbean Beach Music" playing poolside. In a commercial environment, you could send "Soft Rock Favorites" to a building's elevators and "New Age" to the lobby.

Because you can import any audio you want, repeated announcements could be streamed as well. In a grocery store, for instance, the week's specials could be recorded and streamed on occasion throughout the day. The ability to build playlists would allow you to determine the frequency of the announcements easily.

The Qsonix Q100 is a powerful and useful music server that not only simplifies the process of providing high-quality streams of pre-selected music, but it is also a true joy to use. For any such application you may have, I strongly recommend the Q100.

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## PRODUCT SUMMARY

**Company:** Qsonix [www.qsonix.com](http://www.qsonix.com)

**Product:** Q100

**Pros:** Powerful and eminently enjoyable to use.

**Cons:** Touchscreen takes a little getting used to.

**Application:** Residential or commercial settings where pre-selected music streams are needed.

**Price:** \$5,495 (160GB); \$6,295 (400GB)

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## SPECIFICATIONS

**Dynamic Range:** 106dB (A-weighted)

**Signal-to-Noise Ratio:** 107dB (typical, A-weighted)

**THD:** 0.00235% (-92.6dB)

**Maximum Line Output Level:** +2.1dBV (1.276 Vrms)

**Frequency Response:** @44kHz +/-0.6dB: 22Hz-20kHz; @48kHz +/-3.0dB: 22Hz-80kHz

**Crosstalk:** -118.9dB

**Chassis dimensions:** 17"×14"×4" (2RU)

**Chassis weight:** 21lbs.

**Touchscreen controller dimensions:** 17"×16"×6.7"

**Touchscreen controller weight:** 12lbs.

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