

For starters, the on-screen interface looks slicker and more sophisticated, with easy-to-understand icons that are highlighted when the cursor control moves over them. The resolution has also been improved, and the graphics are excellent.

New features include a so-called video wall, which searches all the media on drives and storage devices linked to the MED400X and displays the poster/cover art in one, consolidated interface that looks like a wall of images. Choosing a file for playback is as simple as clicking an image on the wall.

Software available from the Med8er site allows the necessary info and thumbnail images to be collected from the Internet, and presented in a format compatible with the video wall feature. Parental control can be assigned to individual files, which prevents nosy kids from watching adult material. There's also a watched movie indicator.

A so-called time bar system allows viewers to jump to a specific point on the movie timeline, simply by entering the time point. A time bar is displayed during this function, and shows the time point currently being viewed. A new time point either before or after the point being viewed can be entered.

Like the MED500X, the MED400X offers a full-featured file manager, as well as Shoutcast-based Internet radio, and an image viewer with slide show function.

I ran the MED400X side by side with my reference MED500X, with both units employing the same ISO and MKV files. The files were located on my home network, and on a Samsung 500G portable hard drive. Via the network, both players also had access to my ADSL connection.

Both players were upgraded to the latest version 4 firmware before reviewing began. HDMI was used to link the two players to my Marantz AV receiver, but for video quality appraisal, a direct HDMI connection between the players and my Hitachi full HD plasma was established.

Set-up was seamless and intuitive, with the new firmware making the process even more user-friendly than before. The MED400X saw the network, used DHCP settings to connect to it, and quickly identified all the hard discs on the network containing music and movie files. Streaming audio and video files was

seamless and glitch-free.

Performance between the two units was indistinguishable in every respect. Video quality was superlative, with excellent rendition of MKV files. Of course, the MED400X is compatible with just about any video files, including the universally popular AVI format, but the latter's high compression means that MKVs are by far the more preferable option.

Both MKV and ISO files were rendered with exceptional clarity, detail and colour depth, with no digital noise artefacts, and a compelling sense of realism. Video quality has been a strength of the Mede8er players, and the MED400X is no different.

Sound quality was pretty good, too, although in most applications, the audio will be passed through in the original digital format, and be decoded by the partnering AV receiver or processor.

Out of interest, I set the audio to two-channel downmix and used the stereo analogue audio outputs to play back some lossless WAV and high-res FLAC files, with excellent results. Using the optical SPDIF feed into a Musical Fidelity V-DAC elevated audio performance further.

Talking of music, the MED400X can also operate as a music player, and the new firmware has also heralded a much more user-friendly interface. M3U-compatible playlists are easily compiled, too.

The MED400X is every bit as good as its larger sibling in sheer performance and functionality terms. It brings top-end Mede8er performance within reach of a larger audience, and also recognises that many users will have pre-existing networks with storage, making an on-board hard drive obsolete.

The MED400X runs silently, is extremely user-friendly, and delivers excellent audio and video performance. Besides, its sheer breadth of capability across a wide variety of audio and video formats and codecs is unparalleled.

The more affordable MED400X means that it's now easy and cost-effective to set-up additional AV systems, small or complex, in multiple rooms or spaces served by a wired or wireless network.

In terms of versatility, AV performance, user-friendliness and downright value, the Mede8er MED400X has no rivals.

Deon Schoeman

Vital Stats

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Processor | Realtek RTD1073 |
| Memory | 128 MB DDR2 SRAM = 128 MB SPI Flash |
| Video resolution | Up to 1080p (1920 x 1080) |
| Video formats | AVI / BDMV Light / BDISO Light / MKV / TS / TP / TRP / M2TS / MPG / MP4 / MOV / M4V / VOB / ISO / IFO / DAT / WMV / ASF / RM / RMVB / FLV resolution up to 720p / 1080i / 1080p |
| Video codecs | MPEG-1 / MPEG-2 / MPEG-4 SP / ASP / AVC (H.264) / XviD / DivX / WMV9 (VC-1) / RealVideo 8/9/10 (up to 720p) |
| Music codecs | MP3 / MP2 / OGG Vorbis / PCM / LPCM / AAC / RA / Dolby True HD - DTS MA pass-through on HDMI only / Dolby AC3 downmix and pass-through / DTS downmix and pass-through / FLAC up to 24-bit/ 192 kHz on HDMI only, WAV, WMA Standard |
| Video outputs ... | Composite analogue, HDMI digital |
| Audio outputs | Stereo RCA |
| Digital outputs | HDMI 1.3, Toslink SPDIF |
| Digital inputs | USB 2.0 x 2, SD card reader |
| Network | Ethernet, NAS compatible. NFS Client. Optional Wi-Fi. |

VERDICT

Don't be fooled by the small box – the 400X packs all the punch of the larger MED500X, but minus on-board hard drive ports. Instead, it sources compatible media from home networks, USB flash discs or hard drives, or on-line. Superior value.

PRICE.....R1 398

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WEBSITE www.mede8er.co.za