

**MULTIMEDIA PLAYERS**  
**MEDE8ER MED500X**

# Box of tricks

**M**ultimedia players have become increasingly popular among those seeking a simple, effective way to store, transfer, open and enjoy multimedia files (read movies, music, still images and the like) on one (or more) AV systems in a home.

One of the primary attractions of these players is to centralise all these software assets in a single location. In addition, employing the wired and/or wired networking capabilities many of these players offer, content can be

shared on a network, and made available to more than one playback system.

The Mede8er MED500X is a newcomer to the multimedia player scene – but one that promises to offer a more comprehensive solution than most, while also offering a simple and highly intuitive interface.

The player looks fairly innocuous: a primarily black box with a glossy finish and a compact, horizontal form factor. A row of switchgear at the bottom edge of the fascia provides access to the most important playback functions, although the accompanying remote control handset will be the control interface of choice for most users.

The rear panel provides a comprehensive array of connection options. In analogue terms, these include component and composite video outputs, and a stereo audio output set. Digital outputs include HDMI, Toslink optical and coaxial. There is also a RJ45 Ethernet connector.

The right-hand side panel features an SD card slot, two USB-A host sockets, and a USB-B slave socket. The former accept USB flash drives and other mass storage devices, while the latter allows the Mede8er to be connected to a host PC for file transfer purposes.

As our Vital Stats box indicates, there aren't too many audio and video formats the Mede8er doesn't cope with. It is fully compatible with

1080p HD video, and also with a host of more specialised audio formats, among FLAC and OGG Vorbis.

For home video enthusiasts, the good news is that the Mede8er will also handle most HD camcorder formats, including AVCHD and M2TS. Files are also easily transferred from hard disc or media card-based camcorders to the Mede8er using either the USB sockets, or the SD card slot.

Linking the Mede8er to an AV system is simple enough: first prize is to use a HDMI cable between the player and the system's receiver. This allows both audio and video data streams to be sent to the receiver in the digital domain, without the need for any further cabling.

However, if preferred, the HDMI cable can be used to connect the Mede8er directly to the display device (ideally a Full HD, 1080p-compatible plasma or LCD panel, or LCD projector) in a video only role.

Audio can then be routed to the receiver in the digital domain, using either the coaxial or the Toslink optical digital feed. The Mede8er can be configured to use HDMI for both audio and video streams, or video only, to facilitate both connection scenarios.

The Mede8er can be ordered with internal SATA hard drives of up to 2TB, in which case



## Vital Stats

content is stored directly on the hard drive. That content will typically be downloaded from a host computer by linking the Mede8er to the PC via the USB-B socket, or from USB mass storage devices connected to the Mede8er using the two USB-A slots.

Facilitating this process of storing content on the Mede8er's hard drive is an excellent File Manager function that allows content to be transferred between the various connected media, and also allows access to those media.

Which brings me to the Mede8er's network capability. As suggested by the presence of the RJ45 port, the player is 10/100 Ethernet capable, and can be connected to a Local Area Network. It also has a built-in Samba NAS client, allowing it to operate as a media server.

In practice, this means that the content on the Mede8er's hard drive can be made available to other playback devices on the network, for instance a second and third Mede8er, and the content on the drive played back on the systems those second and third Mede8ers (or other multimedia players) are connected to.

Of course, the MED500X can also be linked to one or more existing NAS network servers, and play back the content located on that server. And if you prefer, an added-cost 802.11n Wi-Fi dongle will allow wireless transfer, which Sanji claims will easily handle DVD ISO and provide very reliable streaming up to 720p MKV.

The Mede8er interface is something to behold. Delivered in crisp, clear, high-resolution graphics, it makes navigating your way through the various set-up, content management and content selection options a simple and easy-to-grasp affair.

Let me also say at this point that the remote control handset is a well designed piece of kit that makes accessing and navigating through the Mede8er's GUI a pleasure. In particular, the 'Return' button is a lifesaver, and greatly improves the system navigation experience.

At switch-on, the Mede8er's opening screen offers the choice of multimedia content, file manager, Internet radio or set-up. In terms of the latter, the process is quick and simple, and you should be up and running in minutes. Network set-up may take a bit longer, especially if you're running dedicated IPs and not DHCP.

The Mede8er was soon linked to our internal network, and also immediately found the media server. From there, it was a simple matter of using the cursor commands to find the drive and movie I was looking for. Once a movie file has been highlighted, a preview pane opens, and

<b>Processor</b> .....	Realtek RTD1073
<b>Memory</b> .....	128 MB DDR2 SRAM
<b>Video resolution</b> .....	Up to 1080p (1920 x 1080)
<b>Video formats</b> .....	MKV, H264, DVD (VOB/ IFO/ ISO), DIVX, XVID, DAT, AVI, MPEG, HD MPEG-2, TS, HD MPEG-4, SP, ASP, AVC (H.264), MTS, M2ts, WMV9, FLV, VC-1,
<b>Real Networks</b> .....	(RM/RMVB) 8/9/10, up to 720p
<b>Music codecs</b> .....	MP3, MP2, OGG Vorbis, PCM, LPCM, AAC, RA, Dolby Digital pass-through and downmix, DTS pass-through and downmix, FLAC, WAV
<b>Inputs</b> .....	USB 2.0
<b>Video outputs</b> .....	Composite and component video
<b>Audio outputs</b> .....	Stereo RCA
<b>Digital outputs</b> .....	HDMI, Toslink digital, coaxial digital
<b>Digital inputs</b> .....	USB 2.0
<b>Network</b> .....	Ethernet, NAS compatible. Optional Wi-Fi.
<b>Hard drive</b> .....	Up to 2 TB
<b>PRICE</b> .....	R3 088 (with 500 GB Hard Drive)

### VERDICT

Exceptionally user-friendly, thanks to intuitive on-screen interface. Compatible with wide array of audio and video formats. Snappy response times. True 1080p output. Superb all-round performance.

**SUPPLIED BY** Sanji Electronics  
011-266-7500

**WEBSITE** [www.mede8er.c.za](http://www.mede8er.c.za)

starts playing back the relevant content.

I tried ISO, DivX and compressed AVI files during the review, while the test unit also came with samples of a host of other formats, some of which I didn't recognise. What I can say is that the results, by and large, exceeded expectations.

ISO files ripped from DVD looked at least as good as the original, if not better, thanks I suspect to some pretty competent internal video processing. On my big 50-inch 1080p Hitachi, the colours were lifelike and rich, the resolution crisp and finely edged, while movement was rendered with smooth confidence.

The results with DivX movies were pretty

good, if not with as much presence and punch as original-standard ISOs. Having said that, they would pass the muster of most viewers, and their lesser quality was only specifically apparent when compared directly with an ISO version.

AVI playback quality was clearly not in the same league, and heavily dependent on the level of compression introduced. In some cases, the results were simply too soft and grained to be taken seriously, and the colours also appeared muted and lacking in verve.

The review unit's example clips included some HD footage comparable with Blu-ray resolution, and the results were indeed quite astonishing, especially as far as depth and screen presence were concerned. The ability to play back at film-standard frame rates of 24 fps added to the superlative results achieved.

Sound quality was impressive, albeit limited to Dolby Digital, or DTS where relevant. With the Marantz performing the D/A conversion from the Mede8er's pass-through Bitstream, all the latter really had to do was to deliver a competent, clean digital stream, which it appeared to do quite competently.

Talking of sound, the Mede8er includes an Internet radio facility which may be a bit gimmicky for some, but worked better than expected in practice. It allows station searches by genre to save time, while you can store those you like as a favourite. I found some pretty good jazz stations, but sound quality is directly dependent on bandwidth, and the speed of the hosting server.

So, what's not to like about the Mede8er MED500X. Very little, as it turns out. The form factor, ergonomics and general user-friendliness are exemplary, the set-up is quick and painless, and the unit's reaction times to commands both snappy and incisive.

On the performance front, video quality is excellent, indicating particularly adept on-board video processing. The digital audio stream deserves decent off-board D/A conversion, but is certainly delivered with integrity by the MED500X.

Home movie fans will like the Mede8er's compatibility with HD handycam formats, while it already looks good enough to cope with BD-style high-def movies and material.

Does the Mede8er deliver a comprehensive solution for multimedia content storage, access and playback? Yes it does. More importantly, the interface is the best we've come across, while the player's decoding and processing capabilities are top drawer. Yes sir: I'm keeping this box of tricks!

**Deon Schoeman**