

# Two streaming media players worth a look

## Netgear, Western Digital both offer a variety of services

If you're looking to bring Internet content into your living room without buying a brand new television, you now have a wide range of low-cost options.

Among the latest are Western Digital's WD TV Live and Netgear's NeoTV Streaming Player. I like both devices. They compare favorably to Apple TV and Roku's line of digital media players. But which one you pick will depend a lot on what you plan to do with it.

Many of the latest televisions allow you to connect them to the Internet. But Neo TV, WD TV Live and other digital set-top boxes are targeted at the large number of TVs already in consumers' homes that either can't be connected to the Net or simply haven't been.

The devices are all fairly similar. They're small — about the size of two packs of playing cards set side by side at most. They're quiet — most don't have a fan. They're typically easy to set up; you only have to plug in two cables and connect them to your network, so in 10 minutes or less, you can have them up and running.

But each device has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Netgear's device is something like a low-cost Roku box, and streams a wide variety of Internet media to your television.

It offers some 140 different "channels" of Internet content, including Netflix, YouTube and Pandora. Since the beginning of the year, Netgear has added

access to Hulu Plus, the popular Internet service that offers complete runs of many network television series; and Best Buy's CinemaNow, which allows users to buy

and rent movies.

The device is one of a handful of digital media players that offers access to Wal-Mart's Vudu service. Vudu, which Roku doesn't offer, is an a la carte video service like CinemaNow, but it offers movies and television shows in 1080p, the highest resolution generally available over the Internet — and the highest that most TVs will display.

I rented the new "Green Lantern" movie from Vudu in full HD through the NeoTV, and it looked stunning.

One great thing about NeoTV is its price — just \$50. While Roku also offers a \$50 box, it doesn't support 1080p.

But NeoTV comes up short in some ways. For example, it doesn't offer a way to connect over your home network to your computer's media library. Nor does it include a USB port that would allow you to plug in a flash drive filled with your content.

You also may find that the Internet services you are most interested in using aren't available on NeoTV. It doesn't offer access to Amazon's video services, for example. Nor does it offer any live sports channels, such as those offered by the NBA or Major League Baseball. And it doesn't connect to Spotify or any other subscription music service.

While NeoTV is focused on streaming, Western Digital WD TV Live offers versatility.

Like Neo TV, WD TV Live allows you to stream movies and other Internet content to

your TV. But you can also use the device to connect to your

local network to play content stored on your computer or on a network-attached hard drive. And it allows you to watch movies or view pictures by simply plugging a flash or hard drive into one of its two USB ports.

WD TV Live has a problem connecting to Mac computers running Lion, the latest version of OS X, so I wasn't able to stream movies or music from my new iMac to my TV using the device. But I was able to watch part of a movie and listen to some music that was stored on a network-attached drive.

To pull up your content, you have to first tell WD TV Live where to look for it — whether on the network or via the USB port. Then you have to navigate through some of the folders on the drive, much like you would on a computer. It works, but it's not elegant.

WD TV Live offers some of the same popular digital channels as Neo TV, including Netflix, YouTube and Hulu Plus. In the past month, WD TV Live also added access to Vudu. Like NeoTV, Western Digital's gadget supports 1080p resolutions. It also allows you to connect to Blockbuster Online and Spotify, something NeoTV doesn't.

But WD TV Live offers fewer than 30 digital channels, far fewer than NeoTV or the Roku box. And there are plenty of notable omissions. It doesn't offer Amazon, for example, nor Fox News or any other major broadcast



news service. You can watch some live college sports programming on it, but you won't find access to any live professional sports.

At \$100, WD TV Live is also twice as expensive as NeoTV. And its remote control has even more buttons than NeoTV's, which already has a lot. It looks like one you'd expect to get with a dumb television, not a smart media player.

That said, both WD TV Live and NeoTV are fine for what they do. They don't offer as many channel choices as Roku's boxes, nor the ease of connecting to content on a Mac as Apple TV. But NeoTV offers a large number of channels at a bargain basement price, and WD TV Live offers you the ability to access content from a variety of locations.

If you want to stream movies from Netflix, rent high-definition movies from Vudu or listen to your Pandora stations, they're both good options.

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### Netgear NeoTV Streaming Player

**Likes:** Inexpensive; offers access to more than 100 Internet content channels; connects to high-definition movie rental site Vudu

**Dislikes:**

Doesn't offer notable channels such as Amazon or access to live sports or subscription music; doesn't allow users to connect with content stored on their computers or home network

**Price:** \$50

**Web:** [www.netgear.com](http://www.netgear.com)

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### Western Digital WD TV Live

**Likes:** Offers access to Vudu and several of the top Internet content sites; allows users to access personal content stored on computers, flash drives and network-attached drives

**Dislikes:** Few total Internet channels and lacks access to news and live professional sports; interface used to connect to personal content is clunky; complex remote

**Price:** \$100

**Web:** [www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)

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