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WD TV Live Hub and WD Photos App Review

by ERIC REAGAN on MAY 24, 2011

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The [WD TV Live Hub](#) is a set top box for your TV that gives you access to streaming content like Netflix and Pandora. Other services like Flickr and Facebook are also accessible through the WD TV Live Hub.

However, where it beats out other streaming devices is with the inclusion of a 1TB hard drive and the ability to share media across devices on your network and remotely with your iOS or Android devices using the WD Photos App.

Admittedly, I don't have much to compare the Live Hub to, other than game consoles and Blu-ray players that offer streaming services. However, Western Digital really wow'ed me with the potential that the Live Hub offers when I saw them at NAB this year. So, I was stoked when the samples arrived last month for a test run.

Generally, when I want to show friends or family new photos or videos that I've been working on, I drag them up to my cluttered office and force them to stand and watch on my monitors. Or, I'll bring a laptop down and show them my work on a 15-inch screen. If I've really been diligent with syncing my media, I'll have it on the iPad - but then I spend more time explaining what an iPad is than I do showing off photos or video.

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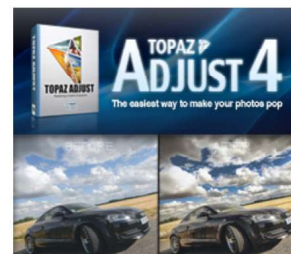


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So, why can't we just watch it on our TV?

Now, we can.

One of the biggest bonuses about the WD TV Live Hub is that I can drag just about any video file onto the Live Hub's server location in my network and it plays on my TV. If it's an HD file, I can watch it in true HD. Finally, it's easy to watch home movies in HD.

If I shoot something on my 5D Mark II (or any other HDSLR for that matter), I can either drop the files or a finished movie into a folder on the Live Hub and then see them in 1080p on a 46-inch screen. You can also stream media from other network locations, but I've found it easy enough to drop them onto the Live Hub's hard drive that I haven't done much streaming at all.



If you run out of drive space on the included 1TB drive, you can add more external drives to the Live Hub via two USB ports. In addition to the USB ports, the Live Hub also has connections for HDMI 1.4, component and composite video, as well as optical audio.

A gigabit ethernet port gives you network connectivity. I don't play very well with wireless connections,

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so I'm using [WD's Livewire Powerline ethernet 4-port adapters](#) to make the connection from my router in the upstairs office to the entertainment center, which is downstairs and on the other end of the house.

A couple of niggling things that I don't like about the WD TV Live Hub...

First, Flickr integration sucks. If you are looking for a box where you can login to your account and have access to the things that you have when you login to Flickr on your computer, keep looking. As it stands now, you can only follow certain searches or tags (you have to search for your own photo stream and save it to keep your own account accessible). You can't see any media that you've made private and it's generally a pain in the butt for heavy Flickr users.

Second, the interface can be rather clunky at times with the remote – especially if you have media placed a few tiers down in folders or if you plan on doing a lot of searching or other typing. However, the Live Hub supports [wireless USB keyboards](#), so if you want to type from the couch if you like to do a lot of YouTube searching or Facebook updates.

Finally, there's no manual in the box. I don't see how this happened with a device like this. While it does a pretty good job of getting you started by just plugging it in, having access to a physical manual will really help ease customers' frustrations . . . especially, when they are trying to figure out how to login to Flickr (which you can't do, of course). It just seems like a no-brainer to me that I shouldn't have to go back and forth from my computer (looking at the PDF manual) to my TV while trying to setup a device at my TV. If you are looking for the manual – [here's a link to it](#).

None of these points are deal killers for me; however, it would be great to see improved Flickr integration in future firmware updates. And, really, a manual is a must for this device.

WD Photos App



I carry an HTC EVO, which I use on occasion for photos and video. For quick little videos of the kids doing something silly or those times where you can't pass up a photo opportunity, the EVO does the job OK.

Recently, Western Digital released its WD Photos App, which allows you to do two very cool things with your iOS or Android device. First, you can remotely access media from certain WD devices (like the Live Hub). Additionally, you can upload media from your iOS or Android device to the WD TV Live Hub (or other compatible WD devices).

I used my EVO to upload several photos and videos to the Live Hub, which I was then able to view on my TV. Of course, 8MP only goes so far in a cell phone; however, the Live Hub is also a network drive, which means I can access the media from any other computer on my home network. Additionally, having the media on the Live Hub means that it's now backed up in the event that I lose my phone or inadvertently erase the media.

The WD Photos App interface is not quite as intuitive as I would like on Android. You can only share media by opening the App and then choosing which photos or videos you want to upload.



I would rather have the ability to use the “share” button in my camera roll to select WD Photos as a sharing option and let it do its thing. Maybe we can hope for a future version, eh?

All in all, the WD Photos App adds an extra layer of connectivity between my home and mobile devices – and I like where it’s going. Hopefully, we’ll see some deeper integration in the future, but it’s certainly nice to be able to send 8MP photos home from anywhere I’ve got cell reception, or have a terabyte of media accessible from my phone.

Conclusion



The WD TV Live Hub was my first exposure to a network set top box for my living room – and it has left an overall positive impression on me. Of course, the Live Hub does a lot of other things with media streaming and online services, but there are a lot of game consoles and Blu-ray players that do those things as well.

Where the Live Hub excels is with media accessibility from other machines on your network. The Live Hub was a total plug-and-play experience from the first time I switched it on.

If you have a lot of photos and video on your computer that you wish you could share more easily in your home, the WD TV Live Hub is a great way to get them on your TV.

The WD TV Live Hub is available from Photography Bay’s trusted retail affiliates at the following links:

- [WD TV Live Hub at B&H Photo](#)
- [WD TV Live Hub at Amazon.com](#)

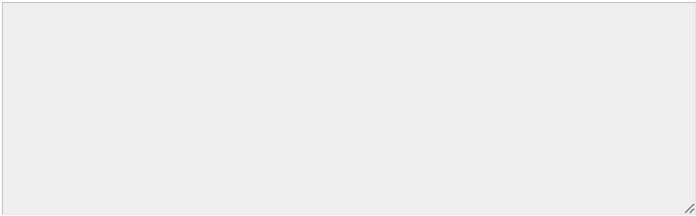
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