Sherwood WD-1

UPnP Network AV Adapter with Wifi-Direct, Soft AP Hotspot and Direct AV - a multi-functional device that bridges the gap between UPnP and direct network connections

Introduction

The Sherwood WD-1 is unique and unlike any other device I have used before. Let me try and explain what it does. First: when connected via ethernet, it can be a standalone wifi-accesspoint. Second: it can directly access photos, movies and music stored on your i-Device or Android device using Wiink. Third: it can function as a regular UPnP DMR (endzone/render unit). Fourth, it can function as an internet radio access point. To make it even more confusing: it can be used with the supplied IR remote control as well as with a free Android or i-Device app. Confused yet? I know I was.
Review sample kindly supplied by Sherwood America

Retail price 129,99 euro

UPnP

I would assume that most readers by now will know what UPnP is. Put shortly it is standardised communication between so-labelled devices that enables easy to use functionality for AV playback over ethernet or wifi. All UPnP devices and apps talk to each other by default which makes it a very practical standard. The WD-1 is no different, and actually works fine as a Media Renderer except that because it can do so many different tasks, you first have to select the Media Server mode either via onscreen menu and IR remote or via the Android or i-Device app. The first method is straightforward yet requires the TV to be on. The second mode seems easier until you realise that the app won't talk to the WD-1 unless it is connected not via regular wifi but via Wifi-Direct or Hotspot. To assess the WD-1's merits, I used a variety of iPad apps: Linn's Kinsky, PlugPlayer, Synology DS Audio and some other apps.

Sound via UPnP

Playing music is very easy. Just start your favourite UPnP app, select your source (Synology NAS in my case) and your destination (WD-1) and select the file to be played directly from a directory or filtered by a set of rules such as artist, album, date added etc. File compatibility is not exceptional: WAV, MP3, WMA and AC3 are the sound formats the WD-1 can play. No FLAC nor AIFF, which means that most of my collection cannot be played. But when used with either of the compatible formats, when connected to my Synology NAS, the WD-1 actually sounds pretty good using the HDMI output into my Yamaha DSP-Z7 surround amp. From memory I'd say that its sound easily trumps that of Logitech's Squeezebox that I tested some time ago. It is remarkably solid in the bass, smooth in treble and never sounds shouty. While playing music, the TV conveniently shows album art, track, artist and an optional seekbar.

Pictures via UPnP

File compatibility for pictures isn't extended but will suffice for most users (myself included): JPG, PNG, GIF, BMP. Viewing photos is just as easy as playing music. All photos look crisp and operation is straightforward and there really isn't anything to nag about except maybe that the loading times for large images could be a little shorter.

Video via UPnP

File compatibility for this section is substandard. The WD-1 does do full frame full HD (1920x1080) but only supports H264 contained as .mov, .mlv, .mp4 and .avi. In practice it will play most of my files though because most of them are .mkv. However, the UPnP device I used for this section (PlugPlayer) doesn't offer language selection which means in my case that many of the movies and series play in German. But that's not the WD-1's fault of course. This is normally irrelevant because video playback is usually easier to operate via the main TV using the renderer's remote control. But because the WD-a will only allow operation either via Direct Wifi/Hotspot and an i-Device or Android device or as a passive Media Server, there is no alternative to using UPnP with the aforementioned limitation. Also, when using the WD-1 as a hotspot (which works well in itself), for some reason, none of my devices are visible in PlugPlayer. Another restriction is the WD-1's incompatibility with DTS. Videofiles using that format will play without sound. Image quality isn't bad, but also not very good. When set to auto detect the WD-1 will auto select the correct format based on the source. Compared to the WDTV-Live set to the same mode, the WD-1 has more video stutter and is also less detailed. Oh, and there is support for seeking (ffwd and rew) within a track

Radio

The WD-1 offers a whole range of radio channels but navigation is slow and because there's no search function by letter, you end up just flipping pages, searching for your channel of choice. There is a breakdown on category but it doesn't work very fluidly. When it plays however, the sound is pretty good, at least on par with other streaming radio devices I have used.

App control and Hotspot

For the iPad you need to enable Soft AP Hotspot in the WD-1's setup settings. For Android that would be Wifi-Direct. When this is done, the WD-1 can be found in the iPad's wifi settings. Connecting is as simple as with any normal wifi access point. The wifi signal then works as usual, except that none of my devices, be it sources or destinations, are invisible when using Hotspot. Normal internet browsing, email fetching etc however isn't hampered. It only seems to affect UPnP operations. As mentioned before, operation of the WD-1 itself via the iPad app works well, but only when using Soft AP Hotspot. The WD-1 cannot be controlled by an app when using normal wifi. The app basically doubles as a big remote control and mimics most of the IR remote's buttons. What's easy about it is the possibility to enable the Media Server function, which in turn readies the WD-1 for receiving UPnP material without having to switch on the TV. This is helpful when using the WD-1 as a music player. But when you consequently cannot find the NAS or even the WD-1, I guess this functionality really isn't of much use, other than enabling a second wifi zone.

Direct AV

This is potentially the WD-1's most interesting feature: directly displaying your photos, movies and music that is stored on the i-device or Android device. I don't have Android devices so are bound to the iPhone or iPad. For Direct AV to work, you need to use Soft AP Hotspot. The WD-1 was selected in wifi settings of the iPad, the Sherwood App was started and it it the WD-1 was selected and all seemed to be communicating just fine.

I tried my utmost to get the Direct AV function to work but for some reason the app wouldn't let me access my material. I followed the manual to the letter but even though the Direct AV function seemed to display the right menus, no material was found. Ultimately I contacted the manufacturer. It turns out that for Direct AV to work, you need to make some settings in iTunes: connect the iPad, go to the iPad tab, click the Apps tab, scroll down and select the Sherwood app from the list and add the files you want to be able to use with Direct AV.

Although this method works, in my view it negates its funtionality because the whole idea of Direct wifi in my view is to be able to directly access the material that is stored on the i-Device. First having to load up material in the aforementioned method is way too elaborate, and still it doesn't enable you to access photos from the Camera Roll, unless you had saved them on a computer and reloaded them using the method described above.

Conclusion

The WD-1 has a lot of potential and it is an interesting device, even if you use only some of its functionality. But in my view it is in need of a firmware revision. Who knows, a firmware update might well be in the making already. Such is the comfort of the modern connected world. As it is right now, it works well as a UPnP renderer (endzone), if you want to flip photos (directly from the i-Device or Android device using your favourite UPnP app and any UPnP source you like) on the big screen but it in my opinion it works at its best as an endzone for music playback, its only limitations being no support for hi-res, FLAC and AIFF.