

I've got a NAS

**Gordon Woolf
finds a little black
box from a super-
market is more
useful than he
expected**



The black box next to my modem/router is a NAS and on the right of that is what I used to think of as an external HD, then discovered was a DAS (direct access storage), but now it is attached to the NAS instead of a PC so I suppose that's a NAS too.

I've got a NAS. It wasn't that I went out of my way to get one – in fact, when I mentioned them to the tech at my favourite computer dealer a year or two ago, he could not see the point of having one.

But then I saw one sitting alone on a display unit at an Aldi supermarket and thought somewhat obtusely that if they are now for sale in supermarkets, they must have a use.

Also, it seemed to cost less than the usual price of the hard drive that was inside it. Which helped my decision-making process.

But, I hear you say, “What is a NAS?”

I'll start with a couple of questions: Do you have a home network? And do you sometimes find that the file you want is on the PC that is switched off?

Only late in the process did I discover what NAS stands for, so I'll let you suffer too, and if you already know, perhaps you do not need to read this. A NAS is a little like a server, and that makes one of the points: it is like a server but it is little.

My previously mentioned tech thinks the job can be done by an outdated PC: stick it under a desk, in a corner or even in a cupboard, and leave it “always on” to use that term for what Microsoft and others wanted us all to do with all our PCs until the economy taught us something different.

Old PCs still need hefty transformers and multiple spinning fans, and they will be running a full operating system with all its dangers and its need to update. So, even if it is in a cupboard, you'll either need to plug in a monitor and keyboard

sometimes or get complex with remotely accessing it from one of the PCs you usually use.

A NAS, which I'll now admit means Network Accessed Storage, is small, just a hard drive or two, a small board running a cutdown operating system, usually based on Linux, an ethernet socket to connect to your modem/router, a power input, maybe a couple of USB ports and two or three LEDs. I won't go into the specifics of the one I bought at Aldi for \$129 (some got them from some stores where sales had been slower, for \$99, which is a good price for a 1.5TB Seagate Barracuda green drive, especially after the Thailand floods. It also has a single button which can be set up to copy any folder from that drive to a normal external drive plugged into the front USB port. (You can also plug a printer into the rear USB port which will probably turn your printer into a network printer.

The NAS comes with a setup CD, which I used on one of my PCs, but then for the second one I just accessed the IP address stated in the manual via my browser, entered the default user name and password, and it just worked. I did go into the setup utility later to make some small changes, but it basically worked on being plugged in.

You can also set up this NAS to connect directly to the Internet, even to upload and download remotely to services such as YouTube, Flickr, iTunes (download), Torrent etc and to act as an FTP or web server, which helps explain why the manual runs to 100+ pages. I've done none of those things with my NAS. Yet.

However I did decide to see how it linked to a media server I bought back in 2008, again because I thought it might be useful and because it was cheap (from Zazz). That little silver plastic box has just sat around since then, so I was not expecting much when I connected it to a TV input and plugged in an ethernet cable from my modem-router.

(I had an ethernet cable run through the roof from one end of the house to the other when we recently had to call in an electrician and I had already decided that dragging my laptop from home office to lounge when I wanted to watch something from iView was just a bit too fiddly.)

This time, when I clicked on the TV's input button to get the next input, there was the Zensonic logo circling around the screen. One click and there was a choice of music, photos or videos. The device had found the "nas-server" and found the likely files from that.

Sadly a few of the movie files were not in a format it liked, so I downloaded "Any Video Converter" to my PC and batch converted some. The first conversion I tried was to MPEG2, and that worked. I haven't bothered trying others. Most music formats were fine as was JPEG for photos and all I had to do was organise those in folders on the NAS to just click on the media server's remote for a slide show on the TV. Maybe before long I'll be able to follow the manual's instructions to get music with them.

What I have learned is that if you are going to try a wireless link within the

house, it has to be 'n' standard and my equipment overall is just not up to that, so a network cable proved best. It is also more secure.

I should say that this is not a detailed guide to how to set up a NAS because they will all be slightly different, but they are becoming more readily available and the price is dropping, even allowing for the current hard drive hiccup.

My adventures do show that even old relatively cheap equipment can give the kind of viewing which ads imply need the latest and greatest in TVs. And you'll also have network access for most of your other files, anywhere in the house, and an easy way to achieve backups that are independent of your individual PCs.

The NAS has filled a gap in my computer and entertainment arsenal and as a side effect neither of my PCs are on as often as they used to be, so I expect power usage to drop slightly. We watch less live TV, with more watched via the iViewNapper set of programs and CatchUp TV.

It should also be mentioned that MelbPC has a specific SIG for those interested in multi-media home entertainment which meets at Wadham House, Mt Waverley, on the first Friday of each month at 10am. Check their website at <http://www.melbpc.org> (note the missing 'b') and, if you go along for help, take the manuals, including the user guide for your TV.

Gordon Woolf is the author of several books including *Publish Your Book*, *How to Start and Produce a Magazine* and (jointly) *Success in Store: How to start or buy a retail business, enjoy running it and make money*, which has been reissued in a second edition which is being printed concurrently in both Australia and the USA.

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