

PixelMagic HD MediaBox MB100

Play recorded files from a hard disk, or over a home network on your TV

Here at Active Home, we've become accustomed to seeing grey boxes that play recorded files from a hard disk or over a home network on your TV. However, we don't often see one device that will do both.

The PixelMagic MB100 is one such product, albeit with a catch: although it can play files from both an internal hard disk and from any PC located on a network, it doesn't actually come with a hard disk as standard.

So that makes the price tag a bit less attractive because in order to make full use of the MB100, it's going to be necessary to add the price of an IDE hard disk.

The device can take disks of sizes up to 500MB, and a capacious drive should set you back no more than £100. So, it's not an onerous price increase, but something to bear in mind. In a nice touch, a screwdriver is included in the box, so you have all you need to fit the disk, except the disk itself.

It can play HD files and upscale standard-definition video to 720p, 1080i or 1080p

With or without a disk fitted, the MB100 will play audio, video and image files straight off – it can cope with **Mpeg-1, Mpeg-2, Mpeg-4, WMV, DivX, Xvid** and **DVD ISO** files – and that's just the video formats. It can also cope with mp3, **WMA, AAC** and **Wav** files, as well as **Jpeg, BMP, Gif** and **PNG** images.

That's a hefty list, and the MB100 coped with all our test files admirably when **streaming** and playing from the hard drive.

However, more noteworthy is the fact that it can play high-definition files and upscale standard-definition video to either 720p, 1080i or 1080p via **HDMI** to make the most of an **HD-Ready** display.

This is something we haven't often seen in digital media players. Most of them seem to ignore the coming of high definition, despite the fact that, at the moment, the only way to get easy-to-access recorded high-definition content

We say

GOOD POINTS Excellent playback quality; can handle high-definition video; wide variety of formats supported

BAD POINTS No hard disk built in; minor problems with interface

Overall ★★★★★

An extremely versatile media player that can handle almost anything thrown at it

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Website

www.pixelmagicsystems.com

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is through a computer.

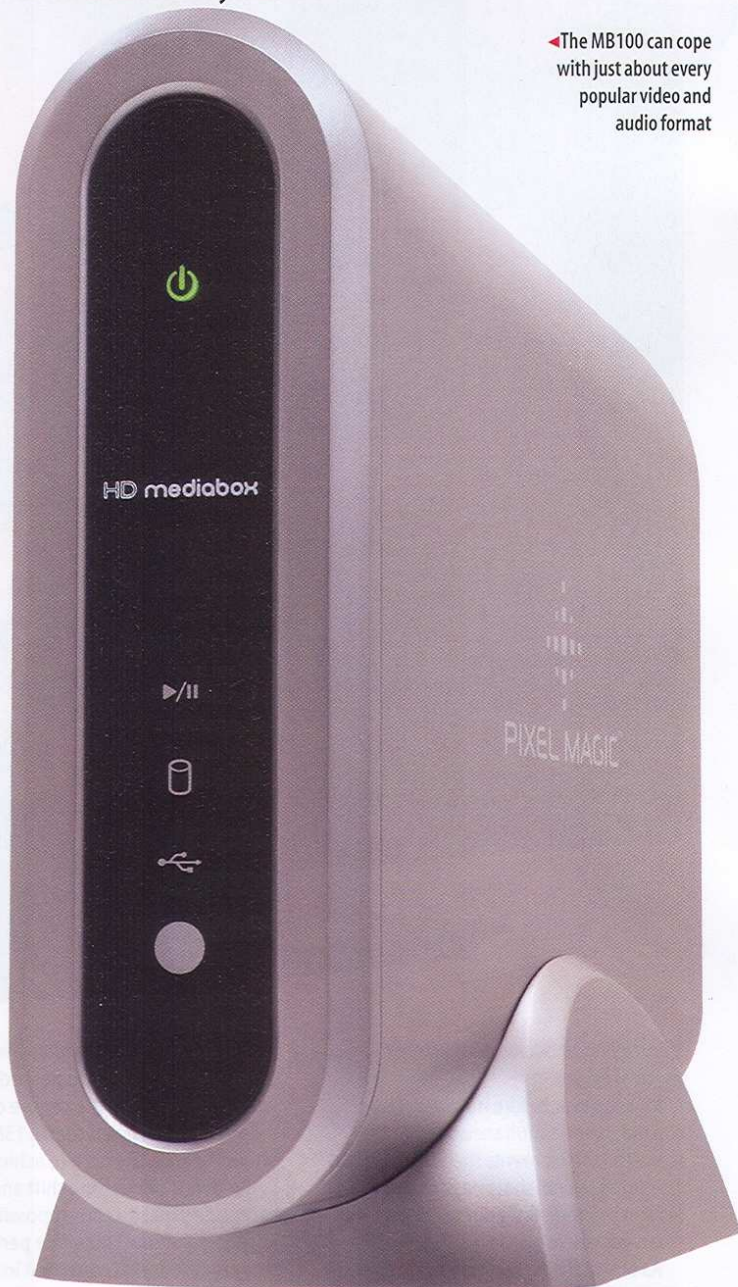
The MB100 includes one **HDMI** port and a **VGA** connector, which can be used to connect the box to a component video input using the supplied adapter. The player also has

a composite output, but we won't trouble ourselves with that any further.

The box looks the part physically, and the user interface is decent, although the on-screen graphics are clearly not high definition. As a result they come out looking a little blocky, but that's really just a minor quibble.

The remote control works well, but we had a few teething troubles with the interface. Because the infrared receiver at the front of the box is directional and has a narrow angle from which it can accept data, it doesn't always pick up button presses, leading to multiple presses to get where you need to go in the menus. PixelMagic suggests using the remote receiver at the back of the unit, which has a wider angle of view, and which does work much better.

We can't fault the playback quality from the MB100; it can show high-definition files in their full



◀ The MB100 can cope with just about every popular video and audio format

glory, and is one of the few devices to do so. A couple of minor problems aside, the main issue will be one of price – £300 is a lot of money for a bare-bones device. That said, the bare-bones device is

still capable of quite a lot, so this is certainly a product that gets our recommendation.

When it comes with a drive as standard, we'll be first in the queue to snap one up.

Tech spec

- USB 2 host and target ● 1 RJ-45 Ethernet port ● HDMI, VGA, S-video, composite, component (via supplied adapter), stereo audio, coaxial digital audio, optical digital audio
- Up to 1080p resolution supported ● Mpeg-1, Mpeg-2, Mpeg-4, WMV9, WMV9-HD, DivX, XviD, DVD files ● Remote control