

About Media Servers

Information regarding media servers.

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Choosing a Media Server

“ Choosing to run a home media server can be a fun and educational hobby while also providing a central source to store, control and serve all your media.

Most people want a media server to consolidate all their media content and access that content from one unified source displayed in an attractive menu that is easy to navigate and use. There are a number of excellent free and open source media servers available that do just that as well as paid, proprietary servers and appliances. It just depends on what you are trying to achieve as an end result that should drive you to one or another.

When selecting which media server software to invest your time (and sometimes \$\$) you should do so by asking yourself (and answering) the following questions.

- How do you want to access your media?
 - Do you want to access your media only at home or also away from home?
 - Do you want to share your media with others?
- From what device(s) do you want to access your media?
 - TV?
 - Projector?
 - Smartphone?
 - Computer?
 - Home audio devices?
- What type of media do you want to serve from your media center?
 - Video? For example, a movie library, TV show library, personal videos, etc.
 - Audio? For example, a music library or streaming music service
 - Live TV? For example, cable or over-the-air signals
 - Images? For example, Family photos, hobbyist images, etc.
- Do you want to integrate your media server into a Home Theater?
 - Do you want to automate any processes of your media server? For example, automatically controlling lighting when a movie starts, stops or is paused.
 - Do you want a Cinema-like experience with trailers and/or bumpers before a movie starts?
- What visual or audio requirements will you have for content on your media server?
 - Any format or resolution preferences for your content? such as:
 - SD, HD or 4K for video content
 - MP3 or FLAC for audio content
- How comfortable are you with Computing?
 - Do you like to be "hands on" or do you "just want it to work"?

The answers to these questions will help you decide which media server type, software and hardware will best suit your needs.

The Most Popular Media Servers

The Most Popular Open-Source Media Servers

The most popular open-source media servers are:

- **Plex**
- **Jellyfin**
- **Kodi**
- **Emby**
- **MediaPortal**
- **Universal Media Server**
- **OSMC**

A Feature Comparison

The media server features we will compare are:

- **Server Platforms** - The device type(s) where you can install the media server software. The server platform can also be its own client as with a Home Theater server. The server platforms are *different* than the client platforms.
- **Client Platforms** - The device(s) that can access your media server remotely. In some cases, there is no separate client application. The server software itself must be installed on any device you wish to access your media library. In this case the client platform will be "self".
- **Hardware Transcoding** - This indicates if the media server supports hardware transcoding. Transcoding is a process media servers use to convert a video or audio file into a different format so it can be accessible to a wide range of devices. Software transcoding is CPU intensive so to offload the transcoding process to a dedicated piece of hardware with its own CPU is preferable for best performance.
- **Local Access without Internet** - Some media server software requires you to setup an account with the developer. In some cases, you have to sign-in using your account to

access your media server libraries even if the server is local.

- **Music / Sync** - This indicates if the server supports a music library and/or the ability to download or sync content.
- **Photo / eBooks** - This indicates if the server supports photo libraries and/or an electronic book library.
- **Live TV / DVR** - This indicates if the server integrates Live TV and/or has DVR functionality. Usually via an over-the-air (OTA) or cable peripheral tuner card for the media server or a network OTA/cable appliance such as a **HD Homerun**.

Media Server	Server Platforms	Client Platforms	Hardware Transcoding	Local Access without Internet	Music / Sync	Photo / eBooks	Live TV / DVR	Subscription
Plex	Linux, Windows, Docker, NAS, Nvidia Shield, Western Digital My Passport Wireless Pro, NETGEAR X10 router	Android, IOS, Web, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, Apple TV, Android TV, Chromecast, LG, Samsung, VIDAA, Vizio, and Hisense Smart TVs	Yes ¹	No ²	Yes / Yes	Yes / No	Yes / Yes ¹	Free / Paid
JellyFin	Linux, Windows, MacOS, Docker	Android, IOS, Android TV, Roku, Apple TV, WebOS (LG Smart TVs)	Yes	Yes	Yes / Yes	Yes	Yes	Free
Kodi	Windows, macOS, Linux, Android, iOS, Raspberry Pi	self	No	Yes	Yes / No	Yes / Yes ³	Yes / Yes	Free

Emby	Windows, macOS, Linux, Docker, NAS	PC or mobile browser has full playback capability. <hr/> The following clients are supported with a paid subscription: Windows, Linux, MacOS, IOS, Android, Fire TV, Android TV, Roku, Apple TV, LG and Samsung Smart TVs, Xbox, PS4	Yes ¹	Yes	Yes / Yes ¹	Yes / Yes	Yes ¹ / Yes ₁	Free / Paid
Media Portal	Windows	Self, Android, IOS	Yes ³	Yes	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / Yes	Free
Universal Media Server	Windows, macOS, Linux, Docker	It is able to stream videos, audio and images to any DLNA-capable device	Yes	Yes	Yes / No	Yes / No	No / No	Free

OSMC	Windows, MacOS, Linux, Raspberry Pi, and Vero (OSMC's flagship appliance) OSMC did support Apple TV but it will no longer receive any updates as it has been deprecated.	self	No	Yes	Yes / No	Yes / No	No / No	Free
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¹ A paid subscription is required for this feature

² Local access to your Plex server without Internet is possible by activating the internal DLNA server. This must be done while you have Internet access as it requires you to sign-in to your account to change the configuration. You won't be accessing your Plex server via the standard UI however. You will need to have a DLNA client to do that. Roku has a DLNA app in its app store and there are several available for the PC, such as VLC.

³ Supports this feature if using an add-on or plug-in

Complimentary Applications for Media Servers

Complimentary Applications for Media Servers

There are number of complimentary software packages, applications and tools available for various media servers. Some are designed for content management such as transcoding digital video formats, naming content, managing subtitles and automating content acquisition while others provide statistical information, just to name a few.

You will inevitably find you have a need for some of these applications and tools. I use a number of them and those I use are detailed in the [Content Management](#) book on this site.