

# The world's most desirable kit

# TEMPTATIONS

WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION



## Naim NDX

Audiophile sound meets streamer tech in this **media player**

### Profile

**Product** £2995 ★★★★★

**Design miracle** Striking a balance between audiophile sound quality with a cutting-edge feature set is no easy task – but Naim has managed it with style

**Tempted?** A full-on media player that delivers sound quality to Naim's traditionally high standards? Anyone would be tempted by that

**T**raditionally, Naim has never liked to be first at anything – and rather than a negative, this strategy has always been something of a point of pride for the company. It likes to wait for the market and technology to settle down before wading in with what invariably turns out to be a well thought-out product.

The company's approach has been a little different when it comes to computer audio and streaming, however. The massive investment in NaimNet – the brand's high-performance multiroom audio systems – has given the company a running start when it comes to such products.

it's a file format usually ignored by most non-Apple products. Connection is swift and the Naim navigates menus and folders with impressive speed.

Provided the network is connected to the internet, the NDX can access internet radio. That opens up a world of music (albeit one usually made up of low-quality streams). But this player makes the best of things and remains listenable even with poor-quality stations.

### Connect your portable, too

Connect an Apple iPod or iPhone to the front panel USB input and the NDX will stream data digitally from the portable, including lossless files. The digital-to-

**The NDX's high-quality internal DAC means that connecting digital sources to one of its three inputs will improve on the performance achieved by all but the priciest digital kit**

We've already reviewed and been impressed by all-in-one system offerings such as the Uniti and UnitiQute. Now it's the turn of the NDX media player.

The term 'media player' sounds vague at best, so what exactly does it do? A media player can draw music from multiple sources. If it's connected to a home network it can stream music files from any UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) server or hard-drive. While a wireless connection is possible, we suggest the robustness of a wired link would make it the network connection of choice.

The NDX will stream most file types up to a resolution of 24-bit/96kHz. It won't, though, handle Apple Lossless;

analogue circuitry in the NDX bears more than a passing relationship to that used on the company's Award-winning standalone DAC, so it's no surprise the sonic results far surpass those possible using the Apple device's internal conversion and analogue circuitry. The NDX's high-quality internal DAC also means that connecting digital sources to one of its three inputs – BNC, RCA and optical – will improve on the performance achieved by all but the priciest of digital equipment.

So, how does the NDX sound? In a word, excellent. It's arguably the best sounding media player we've come across to date. Remember that this



The NDX sounds amazingly fluid with high-res files, uncovering bags of subtle detail

### Living with it

**1 Power play**  
If you plug in your NDX and it doesn't work, make sure you've connected the power supply link plug – it's a chunky plastic cased affair and is needed if an external power supply isn't used.

**2 Tuner surprise**  
You might be happy to know that Naim offers an optional FM/DAB module for £255 if bought at time of purchase. Considering the company's fine record with tuners it's probably well-worth a punt.

**3 Aerial assault**  
If you're using a wired connection to your home network, make sure the antenna for wireless isn't connected. According to Naim it lets noise enter the electronics and degrades the performance.

## Designer's notes

"The DAC works to 40-bit precision, integer upsamples and isolates S/PDIF jitter"



Roy George,  
Technical Director,  
Naim Audio

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION



### What's so clever? The free n-Stream control app

Naim's latest version of the n-Stream control app, available free from the iTunes app store, customises itself depending on whether it's used on the iPod Touch/iPhone or iPad.

Among the improvements over the old, paid-for version (originally launched for the Uniti products) are extended metadata and album art. These allow browsing of the music on your network via cover shots, or searching according to parameters such as performer and conductor – handy for classical music fans – as well as the usual album title, artist, genre and so on.

The app makes full use of the iPad's larger screen to display comprehensive information about the music playing, and can also control Naim's system automation.



The n-Stream app alters its interface on the fly for iPads, iPhones and iPods

#### TECH SPECS

Type Media Client  
Hard Disk No  
Wireless Yes  
Networked Yes  
Zones 1  
Formats WAV, MP3, AAC, FLAC, Ogg Vorbis  
Digital inputs BNC, RCA and optical  
Ethernet Yes  
Digital output BNC  
USB Yes  
Analogue outputs Din and RCA  
Dimensions (hwd) 9x43x32cm

is a relatively new product category and we fully expect performance to improve and prices to drop as time passes.

There's something refreshingly familiar about the NDX's sound. It's fast and tuneful in the manner of Naim's best products. Fed uncompressed files of music as diverse as Cat Stevens' *Father and Son* to Rihanna's *Loud* and Mahler's *Symphony No.2* the Naim invariably delivers an energetic, informative and cohesive sound.

Uniquely among the media players we've heard to date, this product reproduces the nuances of timing

extremely well. It latches on to the rhythm track of something like *Seven Nation Army* from the White Stripes and doesn't let go until it's squeezed the last degree of entertainment from it. Strong dynamics and a top-class sonic stability go hand in hand with this excellent timing, which all keep everything in place even when the music gets demanding.

#### Excellent with high-res material

Switch to higher-resolution recordings such as Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No.5* by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra

Adding an outboard DAC makes sense only if they're at the same quality level as the likes of Naim's own unit or Cyrus's DAC X+ with PSX-R. Either of these will add another £2000 to the bottom line.

Even after hearing the improvements, though, we think the NDX remains an exceptionally fine listen on its own. We certainly wouldn't be inclined to rush into any upgrades if we owned one.

Media players such as this live or die by their ease of operation. The NDX is relatively quick-witted and has a well-thought-out remote handset. Our preferred option, though, is to use the

### System connectivity

The NDX brings system automation to an all-Naim system, allowing the player to control Naim preamps, the Supernait integrated amp, the Naim DAC and the company's CD players.

At its simplest, the NDX will switch the amp to the correct input when one of its sources is selected, and give remote control of the amplifier's volume from the n-Stream app.

If you have a system with non-Naim components but using the RC-5 control set, you can customise the settings to control the major functions of compatible amplifiers and CD players.



Banish the remote controls with a touch of system automation

### Hand in hand with the NDX's excellent sense of timing come strong dynamics and a top-class sonic stability that keeps everything in place even when the music gets demanding

– a 24-bit/96kHz recording – and the increase in subtlety is readily apparent. Dynamic swings are more fluid and low-level information such as the venue's acoustic character is easily heard. Spend this much money on a media player and it's recordings like this that really let you feel their true value.

Like most Naim products, the NDX is easy to upgrade. You can add outboard power supplies and standalone DACs, should you wish. We tried the range-topping 555PS power supply and the NDX's already impressive sound takes a giant stride forward. The NDX/555PS combination sounds massively more authoritative than the NDX alone. The soundstage becomes significantly wider and dynamics take on a far larger scale, while the resolution of subtleties gets even better.

free n-Stream remote app on an iPad or iPod Touch/iPhone (see panel above). It makes operation far slicker.

We're convinced that media players such as the NDX will ultimately replace the CD player for many people. Along with the Bryston BDP-1 and Meridian Control 15, the Naim NDX shows it's a change hi-fi buffs should relish, not fear.

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** A rhythmic, dynamic and entertaining sound; easy to upgrade; quick-witted control system; well specified and easy to use

**AGAINST** Upgrades don't come cheaply; no 24-bit/192kHz compatibility at the moment

**VERDICT** If sound quality is your priority the NDX has to be the high-end media player of choice at this time