

Home Network Attached Storage Buyers Guide

NASDrives.net Home Network Attached Storage Buyers Guide

Network attached storage (NAS) for the home is all the rage. NAS provides a way to share files, access music and movies and backup your data. To help people interested in a NAS device choose the best network attached storage for them.

What is Network Attached Storage?

Network attached storage devices are small servers dedicated to nothing but file sharing. Instead of having to physically connect a drive to your computer, you can just plug a device into your home network that provides additional storage space. Storage prices are falling and adding 250gb, 500gb or even 1 tb (terabyte) is becoming cheap and easy.

Advantages of NAS

- * It's a simple way to add data storage to all your computers rather than just one.
- * Multiple computers are able to access files anytime and do not rely on a host PC for file sharing.
- * Savings on your electric bill because a power hungry computer or server need not be on 24 hours a day to share files.
- * New media server features allow for centralization of your music and movie library so it can be shared by everyone on your network and even streamed to home audio and video devices.
- * Provides a central place for backup storage.

Explanation of features

USB Print Server - A USB printer can be connected to the NAS device and it can share the printer over the network.

Media Server - The device can stream media to any device on the network capable of receiving it. MP3's or movies can stream to your PC or movies can stream to a media center connected to your TV.

UPnP - Universal Plug and Play. UPnP is a dynamic zero-configuration protocol used for device interconnection. That's quite a mouthful but what it means is that UPnP devices can talk to other UPnP devices without any intervention from you. It just works.

DLNA - Digital Living Network Alliance. DLNA is a certification built on other technologies. DLNA certification insures that certified devices will be able to talk to each other and provide a minimum level of features.

RAID - Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks. RAID, in it's many configurations, sacrifices some disk space for a level of data redundancy. RAID 1, called mirroring, makes an exact duplicate of the primary disk. If the primary disk fails then the secondary "mirrored" disk can take it's place until you buy a replacement. RAID only helps in cases of hardware failure and is not to be mistaken for a backup strategy. If you accidentally delete a file on the primary disk the file is deleted on the mirror as well.

FTP Server - File Transfer Protocol server. Most people will not need this and will use Windows file shares instead. Some security cameras and office scanners have the ability to save to FTP servers and in those cases, and many more, this feature would come in handy.

iTunes compatible - The NAS has the ability to publish it's media files to a computer running iTunes. The computer with iTunes would then be able to play those media files.

USB Ports - External USB storage can be added on to extend the capacity of your NAS. This can insure your NAS is never obsolete! When you run out of space you can buy an inexpensive external USB disk and plug it into your NAS. A few systems will use these for USB printer sharing or as a host for your digital camera.

Gigabit Ethernet - 1 billion bits per second transfer rate. Most wiring done in homes or offices in the last 5 years was gigabit rated but the equipment is still a bit more expensive than 100 megabit so most homes and small offices do not support this. Gigabit will get cheaper home and SOHO use so it's still a good feature to have.

Backup Software Included - A major reason to add NAS to your network is backups. Quite a few drives come with Windows backup software to automate this important but often overlooked task.

Vista Support - Vista removed support for some older Windows file sharing technologies and some NAS drives still rely on it. If you use

Vista in your home or office, make sure the NAS says it's Vista compatible.

Mac support - Native Mac support is spotty so make sure the device is compatible with your Mac and your version of the Mac OS. Macs are able to access Windows shares so this really isn't much of an issue.

Active Directory support - If you're running a Windows Server or Windows Small Business Server in your office then you need this. It allows your existing network users to use the file shares on the NAS without creating new usernames and passwords. Very handy.

Gigabit Jumbo Frames - Geekspeak for faster networking.

File access via web server - This allows you to browse files on the NAS via a web browser. This would be handy if you were trying to access it from a system that did not support Windows files sharing or if you just preferred to access the files that way.

DFS support - Distributed File System. This is another Windows technical term that means that a remote shared folder can be mirrored to the NAS device. This is great for a business with a Windows Server and multiple locations.

Accessible via the Internet - A few companies have setup central servers that act as a middleman between Internet connected users and your NAS. This makes your files accessible by anyone, anywhere. Of course, everything is password protected for security. The possibilities here are endless.