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Subject: Roku

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Mon, 11 Jan 2010 17:13:33 GMT

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I've never really liked streaming video from the internet because it's so blotchy. But with all the communications companies pushing towards IP-everything, there have been some pretty good advances that make it at least tolerable, if not decent. In fact, video quality can be quite good, in some cases, and with the right connection, you can enjoy dropout-free video. That's a big deal to me, because one dropout seems to ruin the show. Picky maybe, but I just hate digital dropouts.

Anyway, I've setup my PC to stream video to the main TV on more than one occasion. Personally, I can wait for the Netflix disk to arrive, but sometimes Melissa can't. When she gets a certain series in her head, she'll watch them back to back and when a season is over, we have withdrawal symptoms on our hands. It's not pretty.

OK, yeah, I'm guilty of that too.

So we've decided to get a Roku box. It's capable of connecting to the WiFi and streaming video out through composite, component or HDMI outputs to a TV. There is even a model available that can pass through HD resolution streams. So this will keep me from having to donate my laptop as a video server. I'll let you know what I think of it, once I've installed and used it for a while.

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Subject: Re: Roku

Posted by [colinhester](#) on Wed, 20 Jan 2010 05:55:07 GMT

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Checking this one out for sure. We've had Netflix for years, and rented just one movie. Keep telling myself I'll be good and send the Power Rangers movie back, but just keep forgettin'.

My kids love On-Demand from Time Warner, this would just ROCK!!!!

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Subject: Re: Roku

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 22 Jan 2010 19:55:35 GMT

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I've had the Roku box long enough now to learn a couple things I'd like to pass on. For one thing, I watched a few minutes of several movies, sort of a preview to get an idea about quality of various videos. I found a few that were HD, and the picture quality was quite good. I was impressed. Most are medium quality, about the same as broadcast but I think the Roku HD

streams are better than the HD video on Cox cable or U-Verse. Then again, I'm sure this is largely dependent on the source quality, not just the connection method. But I will say that the Roku box was more free of anomalies - It really just won't glitch. If it's having problems with the connection, it appears to sort of step back and punt. So no blocky glitchy stuff, and I like that.

I tied up my internet link with multiple downloads to simulate a poor link and I learned that the Roku box tries to take over. It actually shut down the link to one of my wireless computers, making it unable to connect. Pretty selfish little box, but it did keep the video quality good. So then I took the wireless router and placed it very far away, right on the edge of where it would even work. This was a more effective test of how the device deals with a bad connection.

What it did was to start to play a stream at high quality mode (shown as quality level 4, with four dots) and then later kick back to quality level 2. It appears that there are two different streams, a good one and a low-speed one, although I'm not sure that's how they do it. Could be done on the fly too. But when a video comes across in the lower level, you can see a difference in video quality. The biggest thing I noticed is color dithering isn't as good. Instead of getting a nice smooth true color version, some things seemed to be rendered in a low number of colors so you could see some banding. But that's only when the link was almost non-functional. When the connection is good, quality is good. And when the stream is HD, some were really good.

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Subject: Re: Roku - Sound problem in HDMI mode  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 22 Jan 2010 20:20:59 GMT  
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One more thing, better to stand in it's own post, I think. The sound from my little Roku box comes through the HDMI port and it works just fine, but I have had some problems that I'd like to pass on.

When I first got the box, I connected it and it just worked, straight out of the box. I hooked up power, plugged in the supplied HDMI cable to the TV and followed the onscreen dialog to find my wireless connection. No big deal, it hooked up and started doing it's thing. I watched part of a movie and a couple TV shows. That's what I really bought it for, to catch up on some TV series without waiting for the Netflix disks to arrive.

Next day after, I was going to let little Eddie watch a cartoon through the Roku box and there was no sound. The Roku box was slightly warm - I tend to leave solid state devices on 24/7 - so I thought maybe the problem was heat related at first, possibly an infant mortality box, just didn't make it through the first day. I also checked online and found that there are a lot of sound problems reported when using the HDMI port. Of course, HDMI is one of those pseudo-standards, and I've had other stuff not want to connect or be sort of clunky when connected via HDMI. I thought that might be it too. People on the Roku support forum seemed to be all over the map, but it is evident that there have been more than a few reported sound problems using the HDMI port. Some have no sound, others have choppy sound.

I had both symptoms. At first, that day, there was just no sound. Then I rebooted the box a

couple times, messed with cables, stuff like that. At first, nothing, then suddenly I had sound but distorted and "choppy". I noticed the Roku support forum had others with these symptoms. One guy said his magically went away. That sort of made me lean towards the thermal explanation. But then a thought occurred to me, a memory of an earlier HDMI problem connecting my plasma TV in the living room to the BluRay and/or U-Verse box.

When I first bought the TV, it was supplied with a HDMI cable that worked well. But since I had two inputs, I needed another and went to my local Best Buy to pick up a second cable. I wasn't interested in one of those hundred dollar cables with fake gold boots, but I didn't want the el-cheapos either. But doing the Best Buy deal, that's all my choices were - either a hundred bucks or twenty bucks. I bought the cheapo.

Bottom line, the cheapo cable didn't work. Worse than a hard failure, it was intermittent. It would work for a couple hours, maybe a couple days, then just die. No picture, no sound, might as well not even be there. Dead. Sometimes you could reseat the cable and get it to work, sometimes it seemed like putting tension on it one way or the other helped. Sometimes it seemed like nothing would make it work. At first I thought it was a mechanical connection (since placing tension on it one way or the other seemed to work) but later I began to realize that it might be the way the conductors layed inside and, really, no matter what the cause was, at twenty bucks I was losing money by wasting time with it. Best to treplace it and not waste any more time studying it to learn why it failed. Bought another cheapo cable online and it worked like a charm. That first Best Buy cable was just plain bad.

That made me think this may be what's happening in the Roku world, and what may have happened to me. When you buy the Roku box, you can buy a little cable kit for twenty bucks that has component, optical and HDMI cables. Of course, I had to get that to prevent my earlier HDMI cable fiasco, right? Well, I'm wondering if I didn't revisit my HDMI cable problems by buying that cheapo cable kit when I bought the Roku box. Could be that's what is plaguing so many other Roku owners too.

Did I learn my lesson though? Nope. I plugged and unplugged the cable a few times to "reseat" it. Seemed to fix the problem. I could go from choppy sound to good sound just by unplugging and reconnecting the HDMI cable while watching a show. So I think probably that's the problem. For now, I'm OK, the box works good. But if it acts up again, I'm ordering a new HDMI cable.

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Subject: Re: Roku  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 27 Mar 2010 22:25:32 GMT  
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Update:

I've found that when using the HDMI output from the Roku box, it intermittently just "forgets" how to transfer sound. Cycle power and it's fine. But no amount of fiddling or changing settings helps - You just gotta cycle power sometimes. I'm sure they'll update firmware sometime and fix this. Still, I like the box well enough I've ordered a couple more to put on televisions in other parts of

the house.

Another thing I've found is you can get BluRay players with IPTV interfaces built-in, some with wireless, in the \$100-200 price range. So Roku may have a hard time competing with those. The Roku boxes are less expensive, so that may help them keep some of the IPTV market but since a lot of people will be upgrading from DVD to BluRay in the next few years, many of them may buy devices capable of doing the same thing the Roku box does.

If you're thinking of upgrading or replacing a worn-out DVD player, look for those with streaming video capability. It doesn't cost much more and it allows you to stream movies from NetFlix, Blockbuster and a bunch of other sources, provided you have a decent internet connection.

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Subject: Re: Roku  
Posted by [Lyrica](#) on Tue, 01 Jun 2010 06:38:39 GMT  
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Thanks for sharing your experience. I've been considering getting a Roku box for awhile now. It's not as pleasurable for me to sit at my computer to watch Netflix..I always injure my neck somehow.

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Subject: Re: Roku  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sun, 13 Jun 2010 03:02:33 GMT  
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A couple days ago, Roku rolled out a new software update that allows you to peruse the Netflix catalog directly from the device. Prior to this, you had to "check out" videos using some kind of portal, a computer logged into the Netflix website used to select videos and add to the streaming "queue". Only then could you gain access to the videos from the device.

I always hated that, the user experience that required a two step process, an internet portal check-out process followed by inbound queue selection on the device. But it is the norm. Most of these device manufacturers, from streaming content to eBooks, have the two step process in their heads. It sucks. So I applaud Roku for implementing this new feature, the ability to browse the entire catalog from the device.

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Subject: Re: Roku  
Posted by [Clueless](#) on Sat, 06 Nov 2010 17:53:16 GMT  
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I have had my Roku box for over 7 months, and I am extremely happy. I am not too sophisticated on my video/audio choices. I am happy with the huge selection of movies, series and even reality programs. I would recommend it to anybody.

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