

For music buffs, Zune HD strikes right tune

October 15 2009, By Etan Horowitz



Zune HD

In the two years I've been reviewing gadgets, I've never tested Microsoft's digital music and video player, called the Zune. The device only accounts for a tiny fraction of the market, and it had always struck me as a product that was forever playing catch-up to Apple's iPod.

But the recent release of the newest Zune, the [Zune HD](#), convinced me to finally take it for a spin.

At first glance, the Zune HD looks a lot like Apple's iPod touch. It has a thin rectangular shape with a large touch-screen and very few physical buttons.

It's not as stylish as an iPod touch, it's a little thicker and its screen is a

little smaller (3.3 inches vs. 3.5 inches), but it's still a very attractive device. It's priced somewhat similarly to the touch, as the 16-gigabyte Zune HD costs \$220, and the 32GB costs \$290. The 8GB iPod touch costs \$199, while the 32GB costs \$299.

Like the iPod touch, the Zune HD has a touch-screen, a Web browser and the ability to run apps and download [music](#) through a [Wi-Fi](#) connection. But with the exception of the Zune's touch-screen, which is a little more responsive, the iPod touch blows the Zune out of the water in all of these areas.

The Zune's user interface is slick, but it can be frustrating to perform basic functions such as adjusting the volume. You can use your fingers to zoom in and out of pages on the Zune Web browser, but using it's more like a mobile-phone browser than a computer one.

There's no [e-mail](#) app or YouTube player. You can only download music via Wi-Fi, there's no built-in speaker and the Zune's app store is a joke -- there are only nine apps to choose from, most of which are games. There are tens of thousands of apps for the iPod touch.

The Zune computer software used to load up your player is full of interesting features, but it's overly complex, and you have to keep digging through menus to perform some basic tasks.

One huge annoyance is that when you want to buy an album, TV show or movie, you don't use real money, you use "Microsoft Points," the same kind used to download content on Microsoft's Xbox Live Marketplace. So before you buy anything, you have to buy these points, which aren't available in denominations that match the item prices, meaning you'll frequently have points left over, something that seems like a ploy to get you to forget how much you are spending and buy more stuff.

One nice feature is the ability to wirelessly sync your Zune with your computer when both devices are connected to the same Wi-Fi network, so you don't always need the USB cable.

But the Zune HD does have a few key features that the iPod touch doesn't have -- namely an HD Radio tuner. You also can play HD videos when connected to an HDTV, and there's an innovative music-subscription model that will thrill music lovers.

HD Radio allows a station to use a single frequency to transmit more than one stream of programming at a time. Although HD Radio broadcasts sound really good, it's a technology that hasn't really caught on.

In Orlando, 17 stations broadcast 31 HD radio channels, according to hdradio.com.

These include National Public Radio affiliate WMFE-FM, which broadcasts its regular feed at 90.7 FM and a second, HD-only all classical feed at 90.7-2. Other local stations broadcast HD-only channels that play oldies, gospel, indie rock and other genres. On certain stations you can mark a song you are currently listening to as something you want to buy.

The Zune can play HD videos and TV shows, but only when you buy a dock that costs \$90 and connect it to your TV. The device itself won't play videos in HD.

The biggest reason to buy a Zune HD over an iPod is if you are a big music fan who likes to listen to a lot of new music all the time.

For \$14.99 a month (the first month is free), you can download an unlimited amount of music, and you'll get to keep 10 songs a month, so

you'll have something to show for it you ever cancel your subscription. Not only that, you can stream music from any computer by going to zune.net and logging in to your account.

There are helpful features to recommend new artists or automatically create customized playlists. And if you can't think of anything to download, there are "channels," themed collections of songs that are automatically refreshed.

So though the Zune HD is no match for the [iPod touch](#) as a mini computer and media player, it will no doubt please those who want to get their hands on as much music as possible -- both by listening to the radio and downloading it.

(c) 2009, The Orlando Sentinel (Fla.).

Visit the Sentinel on the World Wide Web at www.orlandosentinel.com/

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Citation: For music buffs, Zune HD strikes right tune (2009, October 15) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-music-buffs-zune-hd-tune.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--