



## Group test: NAS drives



Cloud computing is the big buzzword right now – but a plain old NAS drive is a faster and cheaper option, and can be shared with everyone on your office network, explains **Cliff Joseph**

# NAS drives

Network attached storage (NAS) might seem a bit old-fashioned now that everyone's talking about cloud computing – and celebrating the arrival of Apple's iCloud service. But while iCloud's ability to sync emails and other information across multiple devices will appeal to both home and business users, its storage and backup features are more limited and primarily aimed at home users.

You can store all your iTunes Store-bought music and apps on iCloud for free, but you only get another 5GB of free storage for backing up other important files. You can upgrade your personal iCloud to 50GB for £70 per year, but that's not a lot for a professional photographer who needs to store hundreds of high-resolution photos, or a small business user who wants to use music and videos in their presentations.

The other disadvantage of cloud computing is that it can take hours – even days – to back up even relatively modest amounts of data, which is far from ideal for business users who want to quickly back up everything at the end of the day. You wouldn't want to use iCloud, or any other cloud computing service, to do a Time Machine backup of your Mac's entire hard drive.

That's where a good old-fashioned NAS drive can come in handy. Hard disk storage is very cheap these days – a 1TB NAS drive typically costs well under £150, and will be fast enough to handle your Time Machine backups with no problem. A NAS drive can also be shared with other people on your office network, and will allow them to back up their own files too.

A good NAS drive will provide other features too, such as the ability to create shares –

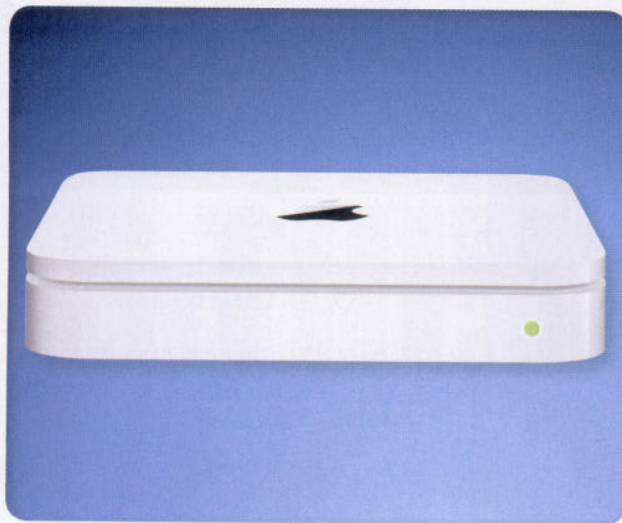
special folders that allow you to share files with colleagues – or stream music and video files across the network. Some NAS drives also provide a really useful personal cloud option that enables you to access your files from any location that has internet access.

Mac users need to take care when selecting a NAS drive, though. Most of these network attached storage devices should work with Macs, but you'll find that some of them are more Mac-friendly than others.

Not all NAS drives include setup software for Macs, while others don't work with Apple's Time Machine backup software. The NAS drives we test here cover a wide range of prices and features and will appeal to many different types of users, so read on to find out which NAS drive is the right one for your needs.







**All in good time** The Time Capsule provides fast backups and works automatically with Time Machine on multiple Macs in your office

## Apple Time Capsule

Apple updated the Time Capsule recently, increasing its storage capacity up to 3TB, while also cutting the price. It also enhanced the Time Capsule's wireless capabilities, giving it dual-band Wireless N networking as well.

However, it's fairly pricey, at £249 for the 2TB model, and £399 for the 3TB model that we tested here. Still, the Time Capsule is a lot more than just a simple NAS drive. It can also be used as a wireless router to set up a WiFi network in your office, or perhaps to extend an existing wireless network into another areas. It has three additional Ethernet ports for wired connections, and a USB port that can be used to share a printer or to plug in additional storage devices. It even allows you to set up a 'guest' network in order to allow temporary access for people who might be visiting your office.

The one thing it doesn't do is to act as a modem for cable or ADSL internet connections, which means that you still need to connect it to an existing modem or router that you use for internet access. If you have a wireless network already set up, then the Time Capsule's expensive wireless features might simply seem unnecessary.

The Time Capsule does work very well as a straightforward NAS drive, though. Its great strength – as you'd expect from Apple – is its ease of use. The Time Capsule can work with Time Machine on multiple Macs, so all you have to do is connect it to your network and just allow Time Machine to automatically do a complete system backup for every Mac in your office. It's also extremely fast, with wired connections providing backup speeds of 22.7MBps. Wireless backup is much slower though, coming in at around 7.5MBps, which again makes us question the usefulness of the Time Capsule's WiFi features.

Some business users may also question the Time Capsule's reliance on Time Machine to control the backup process. Time Machine is fine if you're happy to just accept its automated backups of your entire system, but it may be somewhat limited for some business users who want greater control over scheduling and other aspects of the backup process. Still, for plug-and-play simplicity, it's hard to fault.

**Company:** Apple, [www.apple.com/uk](http://www.apple.com/uk)

**Pros:** Fast, versatile and easy to use; dual-band Wireless N networking; useful connection ports

**Cons:** Expensive; limited control over the backup process

**Price:** 2TB – £249; 3TB – £399

**Star rating:** ★★★★★☆



Macworld Editors' Choice

**Well balanced** With its RAID and remote access options, the rather retro-looking Silver Store is well-suited for business users

## Freecom Silver Store 2-Drive NAS

The Silver Store 2-Drive NAS is so new that it wasn't even listed on Freecom's website as we finished this review, but it's an impressive NAS drive that will particularly appeal to small business users.

The Silver Store is available in 2TB, 4TB, and 6TB versions, but Freecom also sells it as an empty Drive-In kit that allows you to install your own drives if you prefer. The unit has two easily accessible drive bays, and it supports both RAID 0 and RAID 1 for extra performance and security, as well as providing a number of other useful features.

There are two USB ports that can be used to connect additional USB drives for extra storage, and one of those ports supports USB 3.0 – so that you can use the latest high-speed USB 3.0 drives. There's also an option to perform secondary backups by copying data from the Silver Store onto a USB drive – so you have yet another layer of protection for your important files. The Silver Store wasn't the fastest performer in this group, but its speed of 20.4MBps in our backup tests puts it in third place overall, which is still perfectly respectable.

Setting up the drive is fairly straightforward, although the Silver Store doesn't have quite the same plug-and-play simplicity as Apple's Time Capsule. The Silver Store includes a piece of software called Network Storage Assistant, which locates the drive on your network and allows you to easily access the various folders on the drive.

If you need to configure any other settings, the Network Storage Assistant simply switches you over to Safari and opens up the Silver Store's web browser interface.

The browser interface allows you to adjust settings such as user accounts and shared folders, RAID configuration and the Tonido cloud option that provides remote access to your files (there's also a Tonido app for iPhone or iPad). Most of these options are straightforward enough, although Freecom's manual needs to pay more attention to Mac-specific details such as using Time Machine for backups.

While it's not the fastest or cheapest drive in this group, the Silver Store strikes a good balance between versatile features and ease of use, and is an excellent choice for Mac-based small businesses.

**Company:** Freecom, [www.freecom.com](http://www.freecom.com)

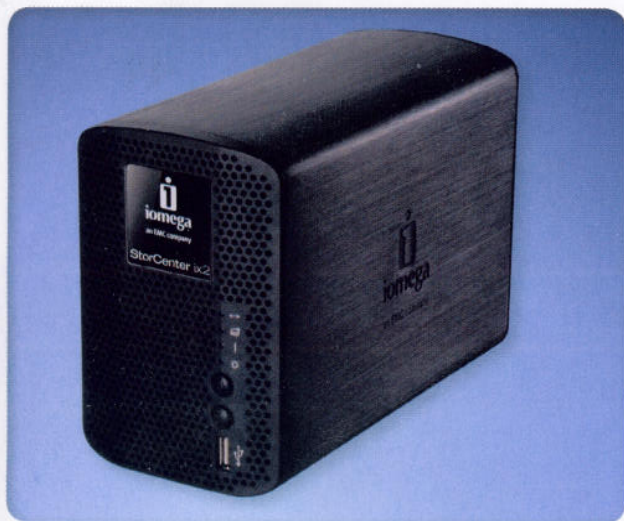
**Pros:** Versatile NAS drive with RAID and remote access features; USB port supports USB 3.0

**Cons:** Expensive; poor documentation

**Price:** 2TB – £279; 4TB – £319; 6TB – £569

**Star rating:** ★★★★★





**Head in the cloud** The StorCenter ix2-200 provides a handy personal cloud option to access files from any internet-connected computer

## Iomega StorCenter ix2-200

**W**hile Apple's Time Capsule is very much a 'plug it in and forget about it' backup device, in contrast, the Iomega StorCenter ix2-200 Cloud Edition is packed with useful features. However, you'll need a fair amount of technical know-how and patience to get to grips with them all – although it's worth the effort.

Unlike most of its rivals (Freecom's Silver Store excepted), the StorCenter ix2-200 can be used as a simple RAID system, as it comes with two separate hard disks (we tested the 4TB version with two 2TB drives) and gives you the option of using either RAID 0 or RAID 1 for extra performance or security. It's compatible with Time Machine, so you can sit back and allow Time Machine to handle your backup chores, but its browser-based interface also allows you to configure it for use with online backup services such as Amazon's S3, which is very much aimed at the corporate market.

There's also a personal cloud option that allows you to access your files from any computer connected to the internet. That's certainly a handy option, although you should remember that all your files remain on the StorCenter itself, rather than in the cloud.

You can set up individual user accounts and folders for other people on your network, and there's also an option to set up groups in order to quickly configure access privileges for several people at a time. You can even set up special folders that will automatically upload photos and videos to FaceBook, YouTube or Flickr for you.

The downside to all these incredibly useful features is an occasionally head-scratching level of complexity. Simple options such as turning on the Time Machine option had us flicking through the 100-page manual looking for help, and you'll need a real IT guru to cope with some of the denser technical jargon.

The complexity of the StorCenter ix2-200 may deter the kind of people who simply want a plug-and-play backup drive for their office network, but it will certainly appeal to business users who have the know-how to fully utilise it. And, at just under £300 for a whopping 4TB of storage, it's also very good value for money.

**Company:** Iomega, [www.iomega.com](http://www.iomega.com)

**Pros:** High-capacity; competitive price; Time Machine and Amazon S3 compatible; impressive range of features

**Cons:** Complex to configure; dense, technical documentation

**Price:** 2TB – £219; 4TB – £299; 6TB – £549

**Star rating:** ★★★★★



**Out of the Box** LaCie's CloudBox provides extra protection with its handy ability to back up all your files in the cloud as well in the Box

## LaCie CloudBox

**E**ven though it only offers 100GB of storage and isn't compatible with Time Machine, the LaCie's CloudBox could still be a useful backup option for some small business users.

Initially, the CloudBox seems vastly overpriced, as that modest 100GB hard disk costs a wallet-troubling £179. However, this price also includes an additional 100GB of online cloud storage that's available for a year. You can also use the bundled Intego backup software to schedule backups onto the CloudBox in your office whenever you want. The CloudBox will then also upload your files into the cloud once a day, ensuring that you've got a second backup available if the original CloudBox becomes damaged or is stolen.

Installing the CloudBox is quite easy, as it provides a dashboard-style interface that you can view in Safari. This allows you to configure various settings, such as the time of day for the online backup, or to create personal folders for other users on your network.

Unfortunately, the Intego backup software is a bit more complicated, as it requires you to create a backup script in a manner that reminds us of Apple's Automator program. You also need a separate program to restore your files if anything goes wrong with the CloudBox.

Backing up data onto the CloudBox itself via Ethernet is a bit sluggish at around 10MBps, but that's not a major problem given the drive's modest capacity. The subsequent backup into the cloud will also be a lot slower, and will depend on the speed of your broadband connection. You probably won't want to back up your Mac's entire system onto the CloudBox, but it could be handy to have that double backup available for important work files.

The cloud storage subscription provided with the CloudBox lasts for a year, so you'll need to renew it at the end of the first year if you want to carry on using it. However, it costs only £89 per year to renew your subscription, whereas Apple's iCloud costs £70 per year for just 50GB. The bundled software could be a little easier to use, but having that additional level of cloud backup could be a life-saver for business users in the event of an accident or theft in your office.

**Company:** LaCie, [www.lacie.com/uk](http://www.lacie.com/uk)

**Pros:** Includes both hard disk and online storage

**Cons:** A 100GB hard disk is quite small, especially considering the price; complicated backup software

**Price:** £179

**Star rating:** ★★★☆☆





**Bargain backups** Verbatim's Gigabit NAS is one of the cheapest NAS drives available, but it's best for those with some technical know-how

## Verbatim Gigabit NAS

**A**t just over £100 for 1TB of storage, Verbatim's Gigabit NAS drive is easily the most affordable product in this group. However, while it does work with Macs, it's not quite as instantly Mac-friendly as most of its other rivals on test.

The setup program supplied on the CD runs on PCs only and the rather jargon-heavy manual hardly mentions Macs at all, so you'll need to know a bit about networking to get the drive set up properly.

Thankfully, the Gigabit NAS does support Apple's Bonjour networking feature, so it's simple enough to locate the drive and configure it using Safari. However, even the drive's Quick Start Wizard tends to throw quite a bit of technical jargon at you, so this isn't really the best option for small business users who may not have trained IT staff to help them out.

Other options, such as those for creating user accounts and shared folders are also a little confusing, and tend to use jargon – such as /mnt/ide1/ – that won't mean much to most Mac users. We were, however, pleased to see that activating the iTunes server option was a simple matter of clicking a button in order to make the drive appear within iTunes.

Unfortunately, backing up files onto the Gigabit NAS is far less straightforward. We couldn't find an option for configuring Time Machine backups in the drive's browser interface or in the manual, and when we contacted Verbatim no one seemed entirely sure whether the drive worked with Time Machine or not. There is a backup program called Nero supplied for PC users but, again, this doesn't run on Macs, so Mac users may simply have to find some alternative backup software.

The Gigabit NAS isn't terribly fast either, as its 14.5MBps speed puts its performance towards the lower end of the range in our backup tests. To be fair, the low price of the Gigabit NAS makes it a good choice for home workers or small businesses on a tight budget. However, it's not the most user-friendly drive in this group – its complexity could easily overwhelm novices – so it will mainly appeal to more experienced users who have the technical know-how required to use it properly.

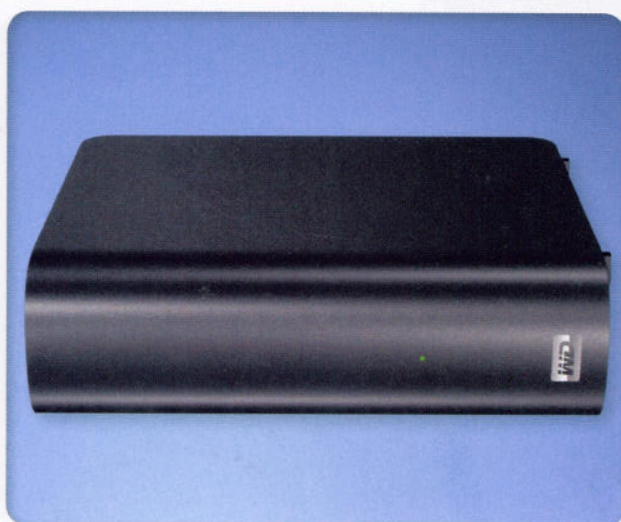
**Company:** Verbatim, [www.verbatim-europe.co.uk](http://www.verbatim-europe.co.uk)

**Pros:** Competitive price; iTunes server option; two USB ports

**Cons:** Poor Mac support and no Mac software provided; complex, jargon-heavy manual

**Price:** 1TB – £105

**Star rating:** ★★☆☆☆



**Going Live** The My Book Live automatically shows up in Time Machine so you can back up over the network without having to do a thing

## Western Digital My Book Live

**A**t first glance, there's nothing particularly special about the My Book Live. It offers similar features to most of its competitors, with a Gigabit Ethernet interface for connecting to your home or office network. It works with Time Machine and acts as an iTunes server, and also supports UPnP networking for streaming music and video to other non-Apple devices. And, like the Iomega StorCenter, it also provides a personal cloud option that allows you to access your files over the internet when you're out and about.

However, where the My Book Live really scores is in its ease of use. Like Apple's Time Capsule it automatically shows up within Time Machine so that you can back up your Mac over the network without having to do a thing. And it combines that ease of use with additional features that Time Capsule lacks. When you install Western Digital's SmartWare software it provides simple advice on how to set up user accounts and shared folders for other people on your network, and also explains how to set up the personal cloud option.

Western Digital also scores brownie points for its two iOS apps – WD Photos lets you browse photos stored on the My Book Live, while WD 2go is a more advanced file viewer that allows you to view Word and Excel documents, as well as stream music and video files.

The My Book Live is a good performer too. Western Digital claims to have used a special high-speed processor to provide extra performance, and the My Book Live did outshine all its rivals during our backup tests with a speed of 28MBps. Our 1TB review unit cost just £139.99, and the 2TB and 3TB models are cheaper than most of their rivals too, so it's good value for money.

That's not to say that the My Book Live is perfect. There are no USB ports, so you can't plug in another USB drive to add more storage, and it lacks the RAID capabilities of the Iomega and Freecom drives, so if you need those specific features then you may prefer to pay a bit more for one of the other drives on test this month. However, if you simply want a fast and versatile NAS drive that's affordable and easy to use, then the My Book Live is hard to beat.

**Company:** Western Digital, [store.westerndigital.com](http://store.westerndigital.com)

**Pros:** A fast, affordable and easy-to-use network drive; useful companion iOS apps; works with Time Machine and acts as an iTunes server

**Cons:** No WiFi, RAID, or USB ports

**Price:** 1TB – £139.99

**Star rating:** ★★★★★





“Freecom’s new Silver Store 2-Drive NAS strikes the right balance between versatile features and ease of use”

## Macworld’s buying advice

If you’re on a really tight budget then Verbatim’s Gigabit NAS drive is certainly the most affordable product in this group. Unfortunately, it’s not particularly Mac-friendly, so you’ll need to know a fair bit about networking technology in order to get the drive set up properly.

At the other end of the spectrum is Apple’s own Time Capsule, which is so easy to use that you can just plug it in and forget all about it. The Time Capsule also provides good performance for backing up on an Ethernet network, and there’s its additional wireless capabilities – which are unmatched by any other drive in this group.

However, those wireless capabilities might seem like an expensive luxury for many business users – especially since wireless backup is actually quite slow – and the Time Capsule’s simplicity starts to look like a disadvantage when it comes

to configuring additional options, such as user accounts and shared folders that aren’t directly supported by Apple’s Time Machine backup software.

Western Digital’s My Book Live is one of the few drives that can match the Time Capsule’s ease of use. It’s also cheaper and faster than the Time Capsule, and provides easy-to-understand options for setting up user accounts and shared folders, as well as more advanced features, such as its personal cloud option. It’s even got the iPhone and iPad covered with its WD Photos and WD 2go apps. This ease of use makes the My Book Live ideal for small business users who want a plug-and-play NAS drive that isn’t as expensive as the Time Capsule. However, the My Book Live does lack some other features that business users might require. It lacks USB ports for plugging in

additional external drives, and its single drive means that there are no RAID options available.

The Omega StorCenter provides all those features and more, and is very attractively priced. However, its browser interface is quite complex and not very user-friendly, so this is another drive that requires a fair amount of technical know-how from its users.

In the end it’s Freecom’s new Silver Store 2-Drive NAS that strikes the best balance between versatile features and ease of use. It’s not the cheapest drive in this group, but it provides advanced features such as RAID backup and a personal cloud option, while still being simple enough for non-experts to use. It’s that combination of versatility and ease of use that makes the Freecom Silver Store our Editor’s Choice for a business-oriented NAS drive. **MW**

### How they shape up

Macworld Editors’ Choice

| Product                  | Apple Time Capsule                                | Freecom Silver Store 2-Drive NAS                            | Omega StorCenter ix2-200 Cloud Edition                      | LaCie CloudBox            | Verbatim Gigabit NAS                   | Western Digital My Book Live       |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Price                    | £399  | £279  | £299  | £179                      | £105                                   | £139.99                            |
| Capacity (as reviewed)   | 3TB   | 2TB   | 4TB   | 100GB                     | 1TB                                    | 1TB                                |
| Connectivity             | 3x Gigabit Ethernet, dual-band Wireless N, 1x USB | 1x Gigabit Ethernet, 1x USB 2.0, 1x USB 3.0                 | 1x Gigabit Ethernet, 3x USB                                 | 1x Gigabit Ethernet       | 1x Gigabit Ethernet, 2x USB            | 1x Gigabit Ethernet                |
| Time Machine compatible  | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   | No                        | No                                     | Yes                                |
| Backup software included | N/A   | No  | N/A   | Intego Backup Manager Pro | No                                     | N/A                                |
| Other                    | Wireless router                                   | RAID 0/1, iTunes Server, UPnP, Personal Cloud remote access | RAID 0/1, iTunes Server, UPnP, Personal Cloud remote access | 100GB cloud storage*      | iTunes Server, UPnP, BitTorrent client | UPnP, Personal Cloud remote access |
| Star rating              | ★★★★☆   | ★★★★★   | ★★★★★   | ★★★☆☆                     | ★★★☆☆                                  | ★★★★★                              |

\*Free for one year, then £89 per year