

Buffalo CloudStation Duo 2TB

Sluggish performance and limited features drop this NAS down the rankings

» **PRICE** 2TB, £193 (£232 inc VAT)
 » **SUPPLIER** www.morecomputers.com

As the name suggests, Buffalo's CloudStation Duo aims to provide you with access to your data anytime and anywhere.

Point your browser at cloudstation.pogoplug.com, and a walkthrough leads you through the installation process. Once the device is registered, there's no fiddling with router settings; it's possible to access the Buffalo's web interface from any internet-connected device with a browser.

The front-end itself is easy to navigate. By default, it presents a list of the shared folders on the CloudStation, while the Jukebox, Gallery and Cinema tabs provide quick access to media. File format support is limited – some of our music and video files wouldn't play – and while the CloudStation can transcode compatible video files into streaming-friendly formats, it took more than an hour for one ten-minute video.

Both sharing and uploading files is hassle-free, however. It's possible to send files to the Buffalo from any email account, and

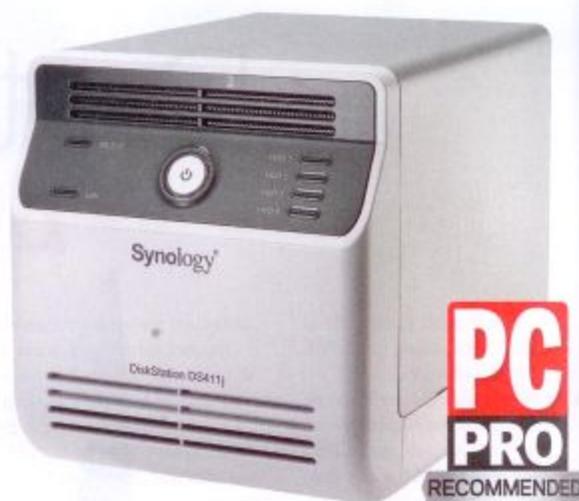
right-clicking files or folders in the web front-end allows a download link to be sent via email or posted to Facebook. The bundled 5GB of cloud storage capacity is welcome, and both the Android and iOS apps work well, making it possible to offload files to the Buffalo.

The two 1TB drives clip in and out without the need for a screw-on caddy, and can be configured as a mirrored RAID1 array or left as two separate drives. A single USB port at the rear permits automated backup to an external drive.

Performance isn't great, however. Reading files from the CloudStation peaked at 29.3MB/sec, while writing large files to the drive returned a sluggish 21.9MB/sec. During our small-file test, write speeds crashed to a disappointing 0.5MB/sec.

While it's the slowest NAS on test here, the CloudStation's major appeal is its ease of use. But with other devices offering far better performance and many more features, it simply isn't good value for money.

OVERALL ★★☆☆☆
PERFORMANCE ★★☆☆☆
FEATURES & DESIGN ★★☆☆☆
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★☆☆☆



Synology DS411j

An affordable four-bay NAS, with strong performance and an excellent array of features

Compared with Qnap's professional-looking TS-412, Synology's entry-level four-bay NAS looks rather basic. Don't be deceived, however, since the Synology's chunky white and silver chassis conceals a highly capable device.

Filling the DS411j's four bays isn't quite as elegant a process as it could be. It requires the removal of four thumbscrews at the rear, at which point the backplate folds down to reveal four plastic caddies and twin 70mm fans. That done, either 2.5in or 3.5in drives can be screwed into the supplied caddies and slotted home.

Software installation is hassle-free. Synology's Assistant locates the drive on the network and runs through a setup wizard, which uploads the firmware to the device. There's no need to mull over which variant of RAID to employ – Synology's Hybrid RAID intelligently adapts the configuration to the number and capacity of disks in use.

Once up and running, the DS411j's DSM 3.2 operating system looks like a slick desktop UI, and offers genuine multitasking. Icons of regularly used features can be dragged onto the DSM desktop, and a search function locates features and related help items in a flash.

» **PRICE** Diskless, £208 (£250 inc VAT)
 » **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com

Then there are the mobile apps. Synology's DS File, DS Audio and DS Photo+ apps are available for both Android and iOS, and provide local and remote access to media files and the DS411j's file structure. The DS Audio app is excellent since it takes advantage of the DS411j's ability to transcode tricky file types into something even fussy Apple devices can handle.

Performance places the DS411j right up there with the best on test. Large-file read speeds reach 77MB/sec, and writing large files hits a reasonable 40.5MB/sec. The DS411j's modest processor zips through small files, too, with 6MB/sec read speeds and 9.3MB/sec write speeds.

Compared with Qnap's TS-412, it would be easy to discount the DS411j. That would be a mistake, however, as it more than compensates with fine performance, a slick interface and a broad range of features.

OVERALL ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★