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Creative Zen MX MP3 player

Can Creative's media players still compete?

by Paul Lester published on 24 June 2009

The Creative Zen MX is the newest media player from a company that has been rather quiet in recent times, and observant audiophiles will already be pointing out its similarity to the regular Zen.

Perhaps rather sensibly, Creative seems to have focused its efforts on targeting value for money in today's belt-tightening climate rather than opting to introduce anything new, and with a stable platform like the Zen to build on it should be off to a decent start.

In truth, the similarities between the two players don't end with the aesthetics, as much of the operation, media management and playback on offer is also unchanged. It still offers customisable wallpapers, menus, an impressive degree of music control and is particularly adept at managing large collections with intuitive randomise and "DJ" features, an alphabetical search and a range of custom sound environments and equaliser settings.

Where the Zen MX really does shine is in what it offers for the money, since you're also getting a 32-station FM radio, voice recorder, calendar, contacts, task-list, alarm and an SD-card slot for upping the already impressive 8/16GB capacity.

This is really the saving grace of a player that, if anything, is less capable than the standard Zen in that it has omitted generic video format support in favour of a proprietary format that requires you to use the Centrale software to encode all of your clips prior to transfer.

Still, Apple has been getting away with this for years and it's nice to see that the application provided is adept at helping you to store, catalogue and transfer your files with a minimum of fuss.



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The 320 x 240 2.5-inch display does a decent job of recreating video and photo content and we were quite impressed by the speed and reproduction quality available. Though the supplied earphones are predictably mediocre it is possible to get some decent sound out of this thing with a suitable pair of buds.

The range of on-board controls are intuitive enough to offer easy access to relevant menus when enjoying media and particularly when you take storage capacity into account, it's slimline enough to carry a substantial collection of files around comfortably on the move.

Creative's approach to what might initially seem to be an underwhelming entry into the market with the MX is almost refreshing in that it makes no bones about offering a solid, versatile product at a good price point. It's capable of just about everything most rivals can offer and then some, so if value is more important than street-cred this is certainly a player you should place quite high on your list.

VERDICT

The Zen MX may be a little uninspiring in terms of aesthetics, and may well go unnoticed in some corners of the industry, but considering its solid design, versatile media management and impressive performance, this would be a shame. Taking into account the price for a high-capacity player, upgradeable SD-card storage and customisable nature, we'd suggest this to be one of the most practical solutions on the market today.

At a glance

What is it?

MP3 player

Good

Impressive range of media control and customisable features, decent audio and video performance, high storage capacities, SD card slot, excellent value for money

Bad

Only supports proprietary video formats, design a little uninspiring

Verdict

Creative offers a hell of a lot for your money with the Zen MX, despite some minor foibles and a bit of a dated design

Price 99.99 (16GB)

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10