



Hawaii News | Tech View

Column: Como Audio's Solo merges internet radio sources



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My co-writer, Rob Kay, and I have always been big fans of internet radio. Whether it's jazz in Paris, opera in Berlin or the latest BBC World News broadcast, this medium will take you there.

Of course, you can configure your smartphone to do this, but you're not going to get ease of use or sonic quality that you'd get with a dedicated appliance.

The Solo system from Boston-based Como Audio (www.comoaudio.com) is not only the best-sounding internet radio we've ever heard, it merges music from multiple sources such as FM, the internet and Spotify Connect with various platforms such as Bluetooth streaming and Wi-Fi. We streamed it via Bluetooth on an iPhone, and it worked flawlessly. It also will stream to devices such as Alexa or remote speakers such as Amazon Dot.

With Solo you get just about every conceivable source of music (and news) in one, well-engineered box.

The first thing you notice about the radio, in addition to the furniture-grade wood case, is its audio quality. The speaker system is light-years ahead of any other internet radio. The sound is balanced (not too bass-heavy) and powerful enough (30 watts per channel) to blow the doors off any room.

The Solo comes with a remote, but apps are available for IOS and Android. The app is the easiest way to control every function such as presets, station tuning and even tweaking bass, treble or balance.

The back of the radio has a host of ports. There's a USB input that also doubles as a smartphone charger or to play back music from a flash drive. You also can use it for Google's Cast or Amazon's Dot. There's also an optical input to connect audio from a television and vastly improve your TV's sound as well as two auxiliaries.

The system includes a 2.8-inch LCD screen (which doubles as a clock) and provides a visual interface for every function, or to see the art associated with the album that's playing. Should you use Solo as a bedside radio, the LCD is also a front end for an alarm clock with scheduling options, snooze and sleep timer.

Setup is easy. A wizard will get you up and running in no time. Once you program the preset buttons with your station choices, you can switch from a local FM station such as HPR to Spotify to an internet station such as TSF Jazz in Paris. You can even drill down the menu and listen to podcasts such as "Hidden Brain" on NPR.

The only thing missing from the Solo is a dedicated sleep timer control. It's designed to be a sophisticated tabletop radio or a multiroom sound system rather than a humble bedside radio.

Think of this as the Ferrari of internet radios. The good news is that it's less expensive than a Testarosa. It will, however, set you back \$300. Well worth it for the audio joy and solid engineering. (Rob still uses an 18-year-old Tivoli radio designed by Tom DeVesto, founder of Como Audio, and it works great.)

If you don't need a Ferrari, another internet radio option that we liked is the CC WiFi from Fortuna, Calif.-based C.Crane (www.ccrane.com). Priced at \$119, it also utilizes multiple platforms such as Pandora and iHeart along with approximately 16,000 internet stations to source music. The tiny speaker has surprisingly decent quality, but if you need better audio you can connect it to your stereo system (with the line-out option in the back of the box).

It's easy to set up and comes with a remote (with up to 99 presets) and an alarm clock. (Unfortunately, there's no easy-to-use sleep timer on this, either).

Bottom line: If you're a news junkie who craves the *BBC* or *Deutsche Welle*, or you like to catch mainland ballgames, this is a great option.

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