IMERGING MARKET

■ The latest software updates for the MS1 and XiVASafe hard disk storage system bring many enhancements to Imerge's flagship product
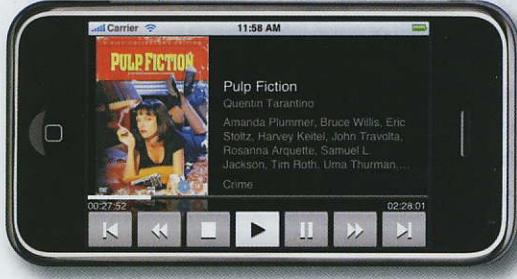
Essential Install takes an in-depth look at recent developments and up-dates from server specialist Imerge.

A few months into its renewed partnership with Armour Home, Imerge has announced a hatful of enhancements for its flagship MediaServer MS1 and XiVASafe hard disk storage system. Available to existing MS1 users via online updates, Imerge says this 'Day 3' release delivers significantly enhanced functionality, including a control interface for Apple iPhone/iPod Touch. Designed by experienced coders at RowSeven, (www.rowseven.com), the App is available from Apple's App Store at £17.99. Features delivered by the App include full on-screen control of the MS1's GUI, gesture control support of the onscreen GUI, full album and movie artwork support, now playing screen in tilt view, drill down options for more control and info functions and a useful left handed mode.

Also new for the MS1 and XiVASafe hard disk system is 'Digital Safe' data backup. With RAID 6 redundancy and enterprise grade reliability and robustness, Imerge says nothing comes close to XiVASafe when it comes to ensuring that the client's content stays safe. As well as entertainment content, the client can also load important personal documentation onto the system to

■ Features on the Imerge App for iPhone and iPod Touch include full on-screen control of the MS1's GUI, gesture control support and full album and movie artwork support

provide a higher level of security than is available on domestic PCs or back-up drives. To make this happen, a smart partition is created on the XiVASafe storage components, enabling a simple 'network share' that is accessible to everyone on the home network. The new software package also delivers full parental control restricting access to material in every zone required. Imerge also says unprecedented metadata editing tools for the HD GUI are now available. All aspects relating to each piece of media – track details, movie credits, plot synopses, can be edited or replaced. In addition, the import folder allows for cover art to be uploaded, so movie buffs can create their own cover art. Imerge has also recently added a partnership with GD3 Data, in addition to its ongoing relationship with the Gracenote and AMG databases, to increase its ability to deliver triple-layer cover art and metadata.

MUSIC DOWNLOAD

On top of all of this Charlie Mertz, business development manager for Imerge, talking exclusively to *EI*, revealed that next year will also see a big leap in on-line music capability for the MS1. The deal that Imerge has with 7Digital (which also supplies music to Blackberry and Spotify and has just sold half its shares to HMV) will provide users with eight million tracks to download from a brand new 3D Xiva branded GUI. 7Digital keeps a 'sky locker' of everything purchased so users have a back up. Tracks are downloaded at 320kbps (higher than iTunes) and the system will also be able to suggest similar tracks/artists to users.

So loads of progress is coming from Imerge, but what about Blu-ray/HD? Well, from December, via a downloadable software update, the unit will also support native 1080p, which means it is possible to store and playback Blu-ray discs at full definition, in addition to up-sampling from DVD.

Imerge's internal drive remains a DVD-ROM, so instead of using the integral drive to do the ripping, installers need to use a PC that's equipped with a Blu-ray drive and then transfer to the Imerge system. However, Imerge feels the future of HD lies elsewhere. Again speaking exclusively to *EI*, Cameron Wade, CEO of Imerge, says: "There is a very clear future for Imerge with HD formats, and online is the future. Of course, it's a matter of time and rollout of higher capacity bandwidths, but the future is closer than you think.

"That said, we are not ignoring the Blu-ray take up; in fact, we are embracing it. Thanks to the architecture of the Imerge MediaServer MS1 and XiVASafe storage components, major updates are possible to our system, and native HD playback is the next update on the list. Cameron adds: "The MS1 and XiVASafe are more than capable of dealing with the high bit rates and delivering the desired experience, but Blu-ray content is much larger in size than most are used to, and it will surprise many to learn that 1TB of hard disk space will archive an average of 25 movies only!"

Cameron concludes: "The so-called Blu-ray standard is constantly changing, differing codecs for different studios an example, ultimately causing confusion. We're constantly pushing for the greatest customer experience, and as I mentioned, our download strategy is sound; but for those that want Blu-ray on their MS1 system, we're happy to accommodate."

Summing up the company's feelings on the Day 3 updates, Charlie Mertz says: "Launched in its initial specification a year ago, the MediaServer MS1 is designed from the ground up to be the most advanced home entertainment server on the planet. The facility for end-users to upgrade their system as new technologies emerge is a critical part of its architecture, and downloadable software updates enable us to keep the MS1 at the pinnacle of this highly competitive, high-tech product sector.

"The 'Imerge Experience' is all about unparalleled performance, functionality and simplicity, and as our flagship server component, the MS1 is the ultimate embodiment of our core values – a 'statement product' in the truest sense of the term. Thanks to these latest updates and the perpetual excellence of our R&D team, the MS1 continues to deliver an incomparable home entertainment experience."

PLUG AND PLAY

Whilst Imerge has clearly been looking to the future with its flagship system, it has also given thought to a different part of the market and introduced the XiVA musicm8. The product is described as a powerful, affordable 'rip, store and stream' hard-disk server component with 'plug and play' simplicity. Aimed squarely at those customers who want a very simple approach in terms of music storage and streaming, the product is designed to partner systems such as Sonos, Logitech Squeezebox and Linn DS. Essentially, it is a hard-disk storage device that automatically rips CDs (without the aid of a PC), stores the resulting audio data and communicates over a home network with playback devices to create an easy to use digital jukebox.

The musicm8 has a terabyte of storage on board and can store audio in a variety of file types, including uncompressed WAV, FLAC and MP3, photos and video content are also catered for. Other features include the ability to stream to a Nintendo Wii, Xbox or PS3 and users can also get to the files stored on the system from anywhere there is Internet access. The unit is compatible with Apple Mac OS; Windows Vista and XP; Linux and is DLNA Compliant. Imerge says the three key elements in the product are simplicity, affordability, performance and while the company admits it is not the first to market with this type of concept, it believes it is the most complete networked 'plug and play' solution yet devised.

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Armour Home +44 (0)1279 501 111 (distributor MS1 and XiVASafe hard disk storage system); Computers Unlimited +44 (0)208 3585 858 (distributor for XiVA musicm8)

■ Imerge says unprecedented metadata editing tools to its HD GUI are now available

■ The musicm8 is Imerge's take on the 'plug and play' storage and stream market