

Sony LF-PK1

TV all over the house and all over the world

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Location Free Player ▲

HDTV is not the only subject that has been dominating the scene; other areas have also enjoyed a boom such as IPTV. And we're not just talking about commercial IPTV; boxes such as the Slingbox that we highlighted in the 09/2007 issue of TELE-satellite or the Sony LF-PK1 that we will be introducing to you here

have migrated from being a niche product to one that is becoming popular with the average user. These boxes link the reception mediums with the Internet and thereby make the location where you watch and listen independent from where the antenna is erected.

since we had plenty of PC's to work with in our test labs and one of those sure enough was still working with Windows XP. But for normal users this could be an inconvenience.

On the front panel of the Sony LF-PK1 are five status LEDs that show its current operational mode as well as the type of network connection in use. Near the bottom is a button to turn the box on and off.

The rear panel is equipped with six RCA jacks (2x composite video in and 2x stereo audio in), an S-Video jack, a VHF/UHF tuner, a network connection, a jack for the external IR Blaster as well as a connection for the 12-volt power supply.

The box can also be used with a WLAN connection although no external antenna can be attached. The necessary software comes on the included CD-ROM plus there's also a short user manual that explains the most important steps of the installation. As expected from Sony, the box is very well manufactured and includes every desired feature.

Everyday Use

After setting up the box and connecting it with a satellite receiver, we quickly assigned it an IP address for the local network and then started the installation of the "Location Free Player", Sony's own player software designed especially for this box. Before the installation could really even get started, an error put a stop to everything: it seems the player is not compatible with Windows Vista.

For us this was no problem

In the meantime, Sony has released an update for the "Location Free Player" so that it can also work with Windows Vista. Unfortunately, this update can only be installed if an older version of the player is already in use. According to the Q&A section on Sony's website, they suggest you make sure that the "Location Free Player" is already installed on your PC before you upgrade it to a Windows Vista machine since the update could not be installed later on.

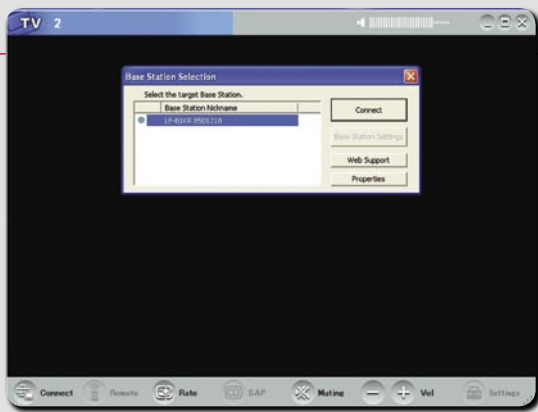
If you already have Windows Vista on your PC, Sony's website doesn't have anything to say about that. Not very customer-friendly, is it?

After we finally got the "Location Free Player" to run on our PC, the next ugly surprise appeared: the software announced that it cannot link itself to this box.

At first we thought it was an error in the player configuration or in our own router in the test lab, but it very quickly became clear that it was a problem with the English version of the "Location Free Player" that we were using. So, instead we installed the Korean version that was included on the same CD and, wouldn't you know it, the software immediately linked with the box and in just a very short time the picture from the satellite receiver could be seen on our monitor.

It would seem that Sony, a company that is also heavily





Making the Connection with the LF-PK1 Box ▲



Virtual Remote Control ▲

involved in the business of international film and television, placed special emphasis on country-specific uses for its box. Supposedly, they want to prevent, for example, viewers in Europe from receiving channels from the USA or Asia and vice-versa. Similar to PayTV, it all seems to be a question of movie and TV rights.

The picture quality even at first glance was exceptionally good with hardly any load on our dedicated line. Even our tests using a 6 Mbit DSL connection turned out positive with the box providing outstanding picture quality. And while using a modest 1.5 Mbit, there was still enough bandwidth available to surf the Internet.

Naturally, things were a little different at the other end, but if a half-decent DSL connection is used, this should also be no problem.

In the next step we wanted to take full control of the equipment. For this purpose, the Sony box comes with a so-called IR blaster that is used to control the attached equipment. The IR diodes of the blaster are simply positioned on the front side near the IR receiver of the box to be controlled and with the help of the virtual remote control in the "Location Free Player", all necessary control commands can be sent via the Internet and then relayed through the IR blaster to the receiver.

We quickly found an appropriate receiver for this test and in just a short time we were able to completely control the PVR box without the use of a remote control and, for example, have a look at its saved recordings. We were

happy to see that the software reacted very quickly enough to various remote control commands so that the box could be operated with hardly any recognizable delays.

An additional feature of the LFPK-1 is the integrated WLAN connection. This makes it possible, for example, to effortlessly route the picture from your PVR box to a laptop in the backyard. Watching your favorite TV series in the great outdoors when the weather is nice can now be done without running any cables and without any great expense.

In our tests the integrated WLAN antenna did a fair job although an external antenna would have been better for extended range. This whole idea would become especially interesting if a Sony PlayStation Portable were available. You could then enjoy wireless video and audio from any desired source on the PlayStation Portable's monitor anywhere in the house. Surprisingly, the reception range was quite good; we had no reception problems even outside of the test lab.

All things considered, we can say that on the one hand the Sony LF-PK1 is the ideal box for anyone who wants access to their receiver and watch their favorite programs while on the road. On the other hand, it is also the perfect tool for users who want to watch their favorite channels on mobile devices such as a laptop or a PlayStation Portable. Thanks to the relatively narrow bandwidth required, the transmitted TV picture can even be received in a hotel with exceptional quality without

putting a strain on the Internet connection.

The box is completely unsuitable for anyone that, for example, wants to use a



IR Blaster

friend in the USA to transmit those local channels to Europe or Asia. It would only be possible if the country-specific version of the "Location Free Player" were used. In such a case, we strongly recommend using alternative systems such as the Slingbox.

Conclusion

The Sony LFPK-1 is an easy to use and simple to install box that provides access to your local TV channels anywhere in the world.

The overall quality of the box is very good; even the included software – the "Location Free Player" – functions properly and is child's play to use.

At the moment Sony doesn't offer any real support for Microsoft's newest operating system Windows Vista despite it already being available for almost a year.

The manufacturer attempted to limit the use of the box to specific regions in that the box and the "Location Free Player" must use the same language.

Overall, the Sony LF-PK1 left us with a two-part impression: outstanding technology along with artificial limits while in practical use.

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