

# WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW!

MERIDIAN'S MEDIA CORE APP BRINGS THE SOOLOOS TO THE IPAD

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By Jeff Dorgay



Imagine controlling ten or even twenty *thousand* full-resolution albums from your iPad while basking in the comfort of a cosy couch or listening chair. Meridian's new Media Core App for the renowned Sooloos music server makes it possible. If you've played with a Sooloos at a hi-fi show or a local dealer, you know the effortlessness with which a Sooloos presents a large music collection. And if you are a current Sooloos owner, you've been dreaming about this marriage since the minute you unpacked your iPad.

Sooloos' strengths are its speed and ease by which its touch screen allows users to jump from album to album, and across genres and artists. It simultaneously loads up the music you want to hear at that exact moment, accessing music collections via album covers and you can discover the other albums in a set and by the artist in your collection. It's better than flipping through musty record bins.



The cost of a complete system will be a barrier to entry for some, as the Control 15 core (which is essentially a complete Windows PC with an integral touch screen and Smartlink output and has 500 Gb of internal storage that still requires external backup) has an MSRP of \$8,500. Those with larger music collections need only add the Media Drive 600, which can be configured to contain about 7500 albums with backup.

Still not a budget music server, the iPad/Media Core 200 dramatically lowers the cost of a Sooloos system and can easily grow with your budget and music collection. Along with more storage, sound quality can also be improved with the addition of an MS 600, 818, or 808.3 digital front end. MSRP on the Media Core 200 is \$4,000.

According to Peter Welikoff, Meridian's US Director, the average Sooloos user has just under 3000 CDs—meaning that a single Media Drive 600 should satisfy all but those listeners with giant libraries. For the latter, Sooloos is infinitely scalable. Enno Vandermeer, the man behind Sooloos' architecture, says he's aware of users with 25,000-disc collections reporting their Sooloos' perform flawlessly and without loss of speed.

Mind-bending as the system is, holding everything on the iPad screen is almost otherworldly. In addition to providing album-art navigation, clicking on an album image immediately reveals cover art, track listing, and credits. It also allows you to tag music by mood and genre. A music lover's dream, the app lets you mix your collection at will, and affords instant additions or subtractions should your desires change. And, you are only one click away from having reviews of these albums, courtesy of All Music Guide, at your disposal. A welcome feature on the Control 15, but infinitely more enjoyable

when perusing from listening position. Any time during your listening session, merely tapping the Meridian logo will display the current track playing, a nice touch.



Other favourite Sooloos features are there as well focus and swim functions also allow you to concentrate on a particular artist, mood, or genre, taking random play to another level completely. Want to just listen to 60's blues, old school rap or string quartets? Piece of cake and no other music software allows this amount of control.

Set-up is as easy as installing Angry Birds on an iPad. Upon launch, the app seeks the system core and takes about 30 seconds to load the album covers. (While the Sooloos system still claims optimum performance when hardwired to an Ethernet network, the Media Core App works wirelessly with the iPad, so you will need wireless capability on your home network as well.) Once installed and running, current users will marvel at the integration. Provided you have a strong Wi-Fi signal, the iPad controls the Sooloos system as quickly as the Control 15. However, if you do not have maximum signal, you'll notice a slight lag in page-loading and track selection. This is like going from a manual transmission to an automatic—not objectionable, but not as snappy. Note: Should you be starting from scratch and using a pair of Meridian's excellent powered loudspeakers, you only need the Media Core 200 and the speakers to make a complete system that can all be directly controlled from the iPad.

To faithful owners, the app is overdue. But the Meridian/Sooloos team wanted to be sure it was fully sorted upon release, and it performs without a hitch. When viewing final beta versions at CES this past January, you could still occasionally crash the iPad. I was unable to trip-up this final version.

As a veteran Sooloos owner, I couldn't be more excited about this addition to the system. Sure, you can assemble computer-based music server together for much less than the price of a Sooloos. Yet Sooloos remains without peer when it comes to true plug-and-play solutions that seamlessly take care of backup files. Not to mention that it possesses the industry's most intuitive interface. Bob Stuart makes it clear that the design goal with the iPad was to offer the same level of features and performance as the Control 15 on a portable platform, and it only takes a moment using the app to see that they have indeed.

Bringing this level of functionality to the iPad is beyond brilliant – it sets the gold standard for music servers even higher. Legacy Sooloos owners take note, the Sooloos moniker will be fading away and new music server products will be rolled out under the Meridian nameplate – everything under the hood and on the pad will remain the same.

The app is free now at the Apple App Store, but you will need a Meridian Music Server to take advantage of it