

SageTV Review: Westinghouse W2407 42â?³ HD Monitor

After building a Home Theater PC (HTPC) based on the SageTV PVR software, I decided that a 27" tube TV with an S-Video connection just wasnâ??t up to the task of providing maximum performance and display quality that a SageTV-based HTPC can provide. Thanks to an excellent "Black Friday" deal at Best Buy, I was able to economically add a new W4207 to our home theater setup. Read on for my review of this excellent value in LCD HD monitors, and how it fits into my SageTV setupâ?¦.

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CLARIFICATION
Iâ??d like to start off by clarifying one thing: The Westinghouse W4207 is not a TVâ??it is an HD monitor. This is determined by the fact that the W4207 does not have a built-in tuner. It will not tune analog or digital cable, and it will not tune OTA HD broadcasts. In order to view any content, you must connect it to an external source such as a Cable box, Satellite box, PVR, HTPC, DVD player, or VCR. Depending on your circumstances, this omission could be considered a "pro" because it lowers the overall price, or a "con" because you need an external tuner device. I am using the W4207 in conjunction with an HTPC which handles all video sources, so for me, it is a non-issue. So in this review, Iâ??ll be using the term "TV" and "monitor" interchangeably.

BACKGROUND
I have been researching LCD flat panel TVâ??s for a while, and I originally decided that the Westinghouse LVM-42W2 42" 1080p HD monitor would be my best option. For the price (currently at between $1200 and $1500) this 1080p HD monitor is an excellent choice, and its reviews were very favorable. I was very close to purchasing one, but I wanted to put off the purchase until some pre- or post-Christmas sales surfaced. Unfortunately, the LVM-42W2â??s were recently discontinued by Best Buy, and they are only available (from my location, anyway) via mail order. So, I began investigating other options, and along the way, the W4207 came onto the radar.

I have to admit that I bought the W4207 mostly on faith. The W4207 is a brand new Westinghouse model, and this specific model has no performance or service track record. In fact, I hadnâ??t actually seen one in the store, but I had read a lot about it. I read some excellent comments and reviews over at the AVS Forum, and knowing the reliability of the AVS Forum, I decided to give the W4207 a try. And besides, Best Buy does have a return policyâ?¦.

So I went to Best Buy at 3:00am on Black Friday, and was amazed to see somewhere between 300 and 400 people already waiting in line! This group was a hard-core group of savings warriors with tents, cots, coolers, etc. So I promptly turned around, went home, and went back to sleepâ??This was simply not worth it. At around 9:30am, I decided to stop by Best Buy again to look at other models, assuming that the W4207 was sold out. A guy in the TV department said that they still had 4-5 left, so I immediately bought one. So far, I love it!

Most reviews of the W4207 tend to be very honest. This means that the W4207 is not the perfect HD monitor, but considering its low price point (MSRP is $1499) it is very competitive with other similar models, so its shortcomings tend to be forgivable.

RESOLUTION
One point of note is the fact that the W4207 is a 720p monitor, a potential step down from 1080p monitors. It will handle 420p, 420i, 720p, 720i, and 1080i content, but not 1080p content. But I have to wonder if 1080p displays are currently the Betamax of HD displays. By this, I mean that though 1080p displays are generally superior to 720p displays, they also tend to be more expensive, generally out of the range of many consumers. 720p displays are currently much more affordable while at the same time giving excellent display quality results. And most HD offerings through OTA, cable, and satellite providers are not 1080p broadcasts. Obviously, purists and videophiles will disagree, but for the typical consumer, I believe 720p displays are the current best choice, understanding that this may change in the next few years.

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For me, the choice of 1080p vs. 720p really boiled down to two factors: price and quality. The price was very attractive (especially with the Black Friday specials) so that was a no-brainer. As for the quality, based on what I said above, I decided that 1080p simply was something that I donâ??t need at this time. My HTPC records 2 SD cable sources, so no matter how good the display is, Iâ??m still limited by SD quality. The SageTVâ??s UI is simply stunning being crisp and clear on the W4207, DVDâ??s look excellent, and HD videos look stunning. But considering that 90% of our TV viewing is SD cable, I believe that anything more than 720p is really overkill for us.

SIZE
At 42", the W4207 provides an amazing image from a couch at about 12 feet away. It doesnâ??t overpower the room, image quality looks great from that distance, and I donâ??t feel overwhelmed by its size. Yet it is big enough to make out old Itâ??s a huge step up from our old 27" tube TV look puny.

PICTURE QUALITY
Iâ??m certainly no videophile, so my observations are solely based on my viewing relativesâ??, friendsâ??, and in-store HD setups. I personally think the picture quality is stunning. Viewing a Windows XP screen via a DVI connection is crisp and clear, so running the SageTV PVR software presents a very crisp, clean, smooth User Interface. From 12 feet away, everything is very readable. But SageTVâ??s UI is designed for that. Windows XP navigation such as using Internet Explorer was still a bit small at 12 feet, but increasing the default font size significantly improved things.

I next connected our MOXI HD DVR via component cables, and HD content looked excellent. It wasnâ??t quite as crisp as my HTPC connected via DVI, but it still blows the doors off of SD content.

Which brings me to one down side: like most large-screen TVâ??s, Standard Definition playback is OK, and it all really depends on the source. Raw analog cable running through a SageTV-based HTPC is very watchable. Tweaking capture, decoder, and video driver settings can certainly improve things, but the fact is that when you blow up a small image to a large screen, so youâ??re inevitably going to see some noise, artifacts, etc. SD cable through a digital STB (again, recorded through a SageTV-based HTPC) does look better than raw analog. Probably 90% of our TV viewing consists of SD recordings off of cable, so the trade-off in quality to have everything consolidated through our HTPC is worth it.

Oh, and DVDâ??s look great. Seeing a video image on a huge screen is very nice!

ASPECT RATIOS
The W4207 only has two aspect ration settings: Standard and Full. Standard is a "pass-through" setting such that whatever is fed is displayed in the format fed. Full basically zooms in the image. Depending on your source, (SD, HD, letterboxed, pillerboxed, etc.) the resulting image will vary. It would have been nice if there were more settings, but it turns out that for my use, Iâ??ll most likely always keep this set to Standard and let SageTV handle any aspect ratio adjustments.

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That said, some tinkering may need to be done on your source to get the aspect ratio how you like it. Nothingâ??s worse then watching a letterboxed SD recording that is also pillboxes. Switching to "full" can often make it much better.

COLOR AND BRIGHTNESS
Again, not being a videophile, I can only comment based on simple observation. Colors seem to pop out very nicely. Going through the on-screen adjustments, you can easily manage hue, saturation, brightness, contrast, color temperature, etc. I actually found the default to give very nice results, but by displaying several "color bar" and "test pattern" screens from my connected PC, I was able to adjust things very nicely. Default brightness and backlight intensity were a bit high, so I had to back them down a bit to prevent squinting. Probably my only complaint is that when the lights are out, blacks arenâ??t as black as I would want them to be, but my understanding is that it is typical of LCDâ??s.

INPUTS
Inspired by Neo in The Matrix, I have to say, "Inputsâ?¦lots of inputs!" Thereâ??s VGA, 2 DVI, HDMI, 2 Component, composite, and S-Video. Under most circumstances, you should be pretty covered. I have our HTPC connected through DVI.

One other feature I really like is the "auto-sensing" input feature. When you connect a source, the W4207 automatically switches to that input. It relieves you from having to cycle through the available inputs to find the display you want like many other Westinghouse models. This may annoy some, but I find it to be an excellent addition.

REMOTE
The remote is pretty standard, and though there are a couple buttons that donâ??t do anything, itâ??s pretty intuitive. I really like the fact that the inputs have separate buttons. It makes moving from input to input so easy. Thereâ??s nothing more frustrating than to have to cycle through inputs, especially on

models that have long input switching delays.

One thing missing on the remote that is missing on most is programability. These days, I really canâ??t understand why companies donâ??t include universal or programmable remotes. Iâ??ll probably purchase a Harmony remote to consolidate everything, but until then, the remote sits prominently along side its colleaguesâ?¦.

PROS
Great overall quality (construction and picture)
Excellent value, if bought discounted or not
Colors are vivid and deep
Brightness is excellent, even in lighted rooms
Lots of advanced connections allowing excellent expandability
Remote has a decent feel and buttons are pretty logical

CONS
Limited aspect ratio settings
No advanced picture quality adjustments
No HD tuner (may or may not be a con depending on your needs)
The remote has some unused buttons. Why?
The remote is not programmable

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CONCLUSION
I find the W4207 to be an excellent choice for those seeking great image quality at a reasonable price. The fact that I was able to take advantage of the unusual Black Friday deals certainly helped, but even at its full retail price, I think it is something to definitely consider. Westinghouse has an excellent reputation for quality and customer satisfaction, so Iâ??m hoping that the performance and service record for the W4207 holds true. There are certainly better choices available, specifically when considering feature-for-feature comparisons, but at the price, itâ??s an excellent value.

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