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OpenELEC Starter

Create your very own media center with OpenELEC on a PC
or Raspberry Pi

Mikkel Viager

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Instant OpenELEC Starter

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First published: May 2013

Production Reference: 1170513

Published by Packt Publishing Ltd.

Livery Place

35 Livery Street

Birmingham B3 2PB, UK.

ISBN 978-1-78328-045-2

www.packtpub.com

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Mikkel Viager graduated in 2013 with a Master of Science degree in Electrical Engineering, focusing on Automation and Robot Technology, from the Technical University of Denmark. During his studies, he had been conveying several advanced technical subjects, and was employed as Teaching Assistant in a course on Industrial and embedded automation.

Mikkel has a well-founded knowledge of a wide variety of subjects related to computer systems, which he uses in his work on development of industrial robots and improvements of technologies in general.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their understanding and encouragement during the process of writing this book. Without their support, it would not have been the same.

Especially, I would like to thank Jakob Mahler Hansen for his help with reviewing the contents of this book, which has benefited from his constructive input.

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Jakob Mahler Hansen completed a Master's degree within Electrical Engineering, with focus on Automation and Robot Technology, from the Technical University of Denmark. As part of his studies, he spent a semester at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

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Chapter 1. Instant OpenELEC Starter

Welcome to *Instant OpenELEC Starter*. This book has been especially created to provide you with all the information that you need to get started with your own media center based on OpenELEC. You will be guided through the installation process step-by-step, learn how to add your media library for indexing, get started with personalization to make OpenELEC match your preferences, and learn about useful features, making your experience with OpenELEC even better.

This document contains the following sections:

So, what is OpenELEC? finds out what OpenELEC actually is, what you can do with it, and why it's so great.

Installation shows how to download and install OpenELEC with minimum fuss, and then sets it up so that you can use it as soon as possible; either on a PC or Raspberry Pi.

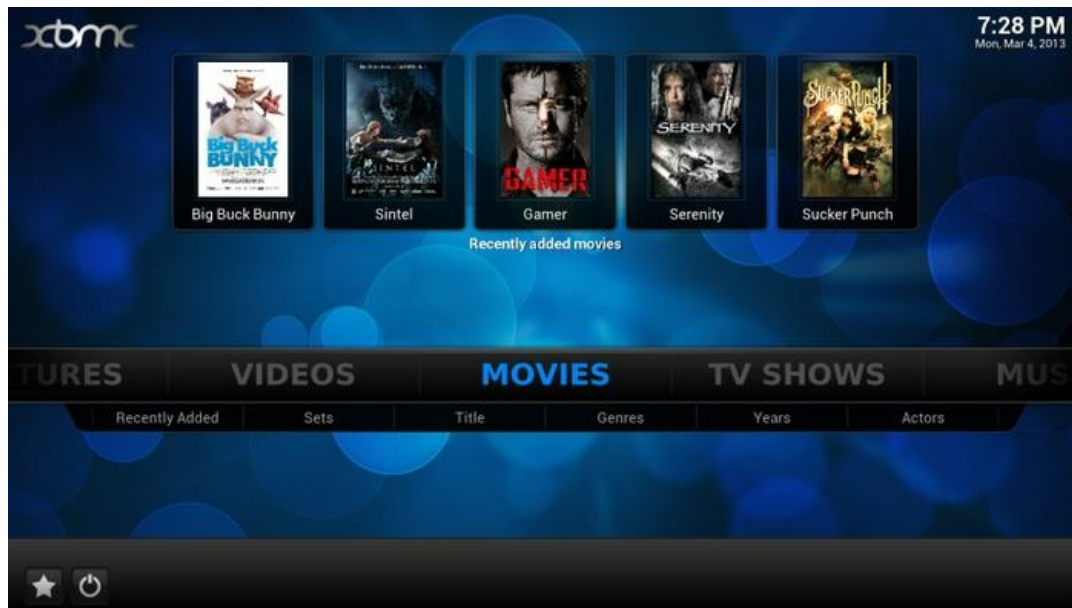
Quick start – Managing XBMC shows how to perform the core tasks in XBMC; for example, managing your media library and watching a movie.

Top 10 features you need to know about teaches how to perform tasks with the most useful features of XBMC. By the end of this section, you will be able to enhance your media center with add-ons, customize your interface with skins, control your media center remotely, link movies to TV shows, and manage access with multiple user profiles.

People and places you should get to know provides you with many useful links to the project page and forums, as well as a number of helpful articles, tutorials, blogs, and the Twitter feeds of OpenELEC and XBMC super contributors. Every open source project is centered around a community.

So, what is OpenELEC?

Open Embedded Linux Entertainment Center (OpenELEC) is an open source embedded operating system developed specifically for the purpose of running complete and easy-to-use media center solutions on a wide variety of hardware.



Built around the great open source media player and organizer, **XBMC**, OpenELEC is optimized to deliver a smooth, intuitive, and efficient user experience. It is developed with the goal of making the task of setting up and maintaining a **Home Theater PC (HTPC)** easy and straightforward for all users, regardless of their technical skills. This makes OpenELEC the obvious choice for anyone looking to enhance their home media experience with a fully functional media center.

The OpenELEC project is open source, so anyone can download and use the operating system completely free of charge. This is a great enticement to get started with setting up a media center of your own, capable of providing many hours of digital entertainment for yourself and your friends and family to enjoy.

Media center features

Once installed and configured, OpenELEC incorporates XBMC to provide a wide variety of advanced features in a streamlined and straightforward interface. The following are the media types that can be indexed and/or browsed:

- Movies
- TV shows
- Music
- Pictures

The experience of browsing indexed media is enhanced by automatic inclusion of media information and relevant images available from online databases. This provides easy access to ratings, resumes, artwork, and trailers, because everything is incorporated directly in the interface.

Hardware requirements

Because OpenELEC is very versatile in hardware compatibility, you will most likely be able to turn "that old PC, which has just been lying around" into a fully functional media center, just by installing OpenELEC on it. This approach is great for a fun hobby project, giving you the opportunity to experiment with OpenELEC at no cost. Alternatively, you can get brand new PCs small enough to fit behind a TV, making them the obvious choice for HTPC use. With a very small footprint and compatibility with small atom- or fusion-based platforms, this is where OpenELEC shows its full potential as a lightweight embedded operating system.

Installation

In four easy steps, you can install OpenELEC on either a PC or Raspberry Pi. The installation procedure is not the same for these platforms, which is why you will find two separate installation sections in this book.

Installation on a PC

This section contains the instructions for installing OpenELEC on a PC. If you want to read about installation on a Raspberry Pi, you should jump ahead to the next section named *Installation on a Raspberry Pi*.

Follow these four steps to be guided through the process of installing OpenELEC on a PC.

Step 1 – What do you need?

Before you are ready to install OpenELEC on your PC, you will need to check that you have all of the required elements, listed as follows:

- A PC with a storage drive (2 GB or larger) to become the platform for your new media center
- A blank USB drive (256 MB or larger) to use as install media
- A secondary computer (running Windows) for creating the install media
- An Internet connection for downloading OpenELEC

Step 2 – Downloading OpenELEC for PC installation

The easiest way to download OpenELEC for PC installation is as a compressed package from <http://openelec.tv/get-openelec>.

Notice that there are many different builds from which to choose. It is important that you choose the best matching build for your platform specifically.

You will need to find a build whose description best matches your hardware. The brief descriptions are very explanatory, and will help you choose the right build.

Tip

How to choose the correct build

If none of the three ION, Fusion, or Intel builds are a perfect match, you should go with the Generic Builds. If your PC contains very old hardware, you may have to use the Generic OSS Builds, but only as a second option if you have already tried the Generic Build, and it doesn't work.

Once you have chosen a build, you should download the version of it named as **stable**.

The downloaded file is a compressed package in a format with the extension `.tar.bz2`, which you will need to extract. If you already have an archive manager installed, capable of handling `.tar.bz2` files, unpack the archive.

If you need a good archive manager for this task, you can get 7-zip, which can be downloaded for free at <http://7-zip.org>.

After launching 7-zip, you can use it to browse to the compressed `.tar.bz2` folder and open it. In this, you may be presented with a similarly named file ending with just `.tar`. Simply open that in 7-zip as well; so you will end up having a basic folder to drag-and-drop to somewhere on your computer.

Step 3 – Creating the install media

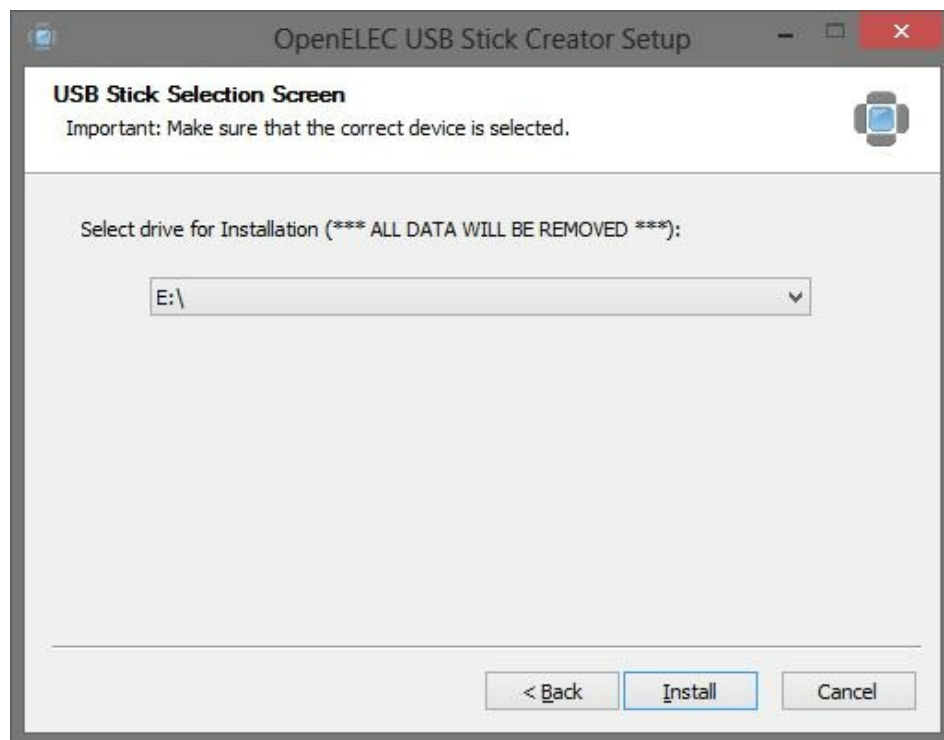
You are now ready to turn your USB drive into an install media for the installation of OpenELEC on a PC.

Make sure that your USB drive contains no important files! Everything on it will be completely erased during this procedure! As the OpenELEC build is downloaded and extracted, you should have a folder containing a collection of files and folders, as follows:

Name	Type	Size
3rdparty	File folder	
licenses	File folder	
sample.conf	File folder	
target	File folder	
CHANGELOG	File	1 KB
create_installstick	File	8 KB
create_installstick	Windows Batch File	5 KB
create_installstick	Application	108 KB
create_virtualimage	File	9 KB
INSTALL	File	5 KB
openelec	ICO File	32 KB
README.md	MD File	4 KB
RELEASE	File	1 KB

Create your install media by performing the following steps:

1. Connect the USB drive to your computer, and wait until it is recognized by Windows.
2. Open the folder containing the extracted OpenELEC build files, and locate the application file named `create_installstick`. Make sure you choose the one with a colored icon, like the one highlighted in the preceding screenshot. Right-click on the file and choose **Run as administrator** to start the creation wizard.
3. Click on **Next** in the first dialog box, and then **Continue** in the second. You should now see a dialog box, similar to the following screenshot:



4. Select your USB drive letter from the drop-down menu. If your USB drive is correctly registered by Windows, it will show up as an option.
5. Once you have double-checked that the drive letter matches your USB drive, click on **Install** and wait for a few minutes while the wizard formats your install media. Then, exit the wizard.
6. Locate the USB drive in your basic file explorer in Windows.
7. Make sure that the USB drive is named **OPENELEC**, as shown in the following screenshot; if your drive is named differently, right-click on it and select **Rename** to correct it:



8. To confirm that the USB drive was properly created, open it and confirm that the content is similar to what is shown in the following screenshot:

Name	Type	Size
CHANGELOG	File	1 KB
INSTALL	File	5 KB
KERNEL	File	4,901 KB
KERNEL.md5	MD5 File	1 KB
openelec	ICO File	32 KB
RELEASE	File	1 KB
syslinux.cfg	CFG File	1 KB
SYSTEM	File	161.816 KB
SYSTEM.md5	MD5 File	1 KB

Congratulations! If your USB drive content looks similar to what is shown in the preceding screenshot, you have successfully created a bootable install media, and you should continue to the next step on installing OpenELEC.

Step 4 – Installing OpenELEC on a PC

With the install media created, you are ready to begin installing OpenELEC on what will become your HTPC. Verify that your HTPC is ready for the installation procedure by going through the following list before turning it on to start the installation:

- Make sure that only one storage device is attached to your HTPC. This will be the main drive of the system, containing the embedded operating system.
- Make sure that the storage device contains no files you want to keep. Everything on the storage device will be deleted during the installation!
- Remove all CDs or DVDs from any optical drives of the HTPC.
- Connect a monitor and a keyboard to the HTPC.
- Plug in the USB install media into an empty USB port of the HTPC.

You are now ready to turn on the HTPC and begin the installation.

If your HTPC is already configured to boot from a USB drive, you will automatically see the OpenELEC installer after start-up. If so, you are in luck and can skip configuring your BIOS.

If your HTPC ignores the USB install media and boots into whatever old operating system is on the storage device, you will need to configure your BIOS to boot from the USB drive. The details for doing this vary for each system and cannot be described in complete detail here.

However, the following points should give a good overview of the procedure:

1. Turn your HTPC off and on again.
2. Be ready to press the hotkey for entering the BIOS setup. This is usually shown in the very first image displayed while booting up your HTPC. Once this image is displayed, be quick and press the hotkey until you see the BIOS setup screen (usually, one of these hotkeys: *F1*, *F2*, *F10* or *DEL*).
3. Look for a menu element in the BIOS menu named something similar to **Boot Devices** or **Hard Disk Boot Priority**.
4. Rearrange the available devices to boot from **USB drive** first, followed by **Hard drive** as the secondary boot device.
5. Choose **Save and exit**.

Tip

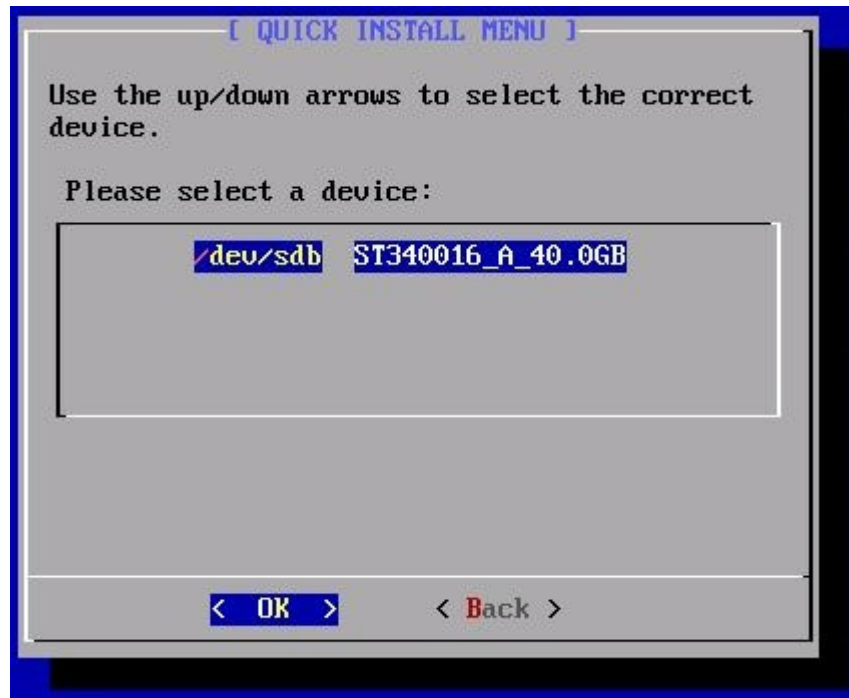
If you cannot get your HTPC to boot from the USB, it may be too old to support USB booting or you haven't configured the BIOS correctly. You should look up your HTPC or motherboard model online to find more information about your specific system.

Your HTPC should now boot from the USB drive the next time it is started. This means you are ready to move on with the installation by starting or restarting it and completing the following steps:

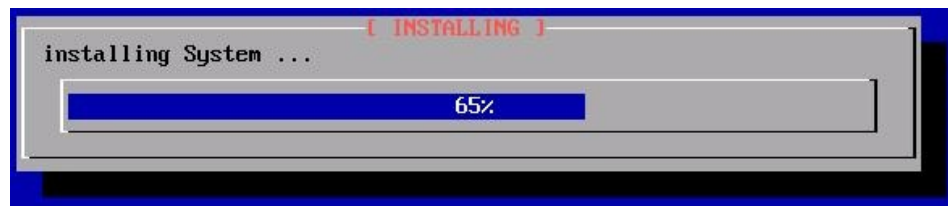
1. Make sure that you are at the main menu of the installer, as shown in the following screenshot:



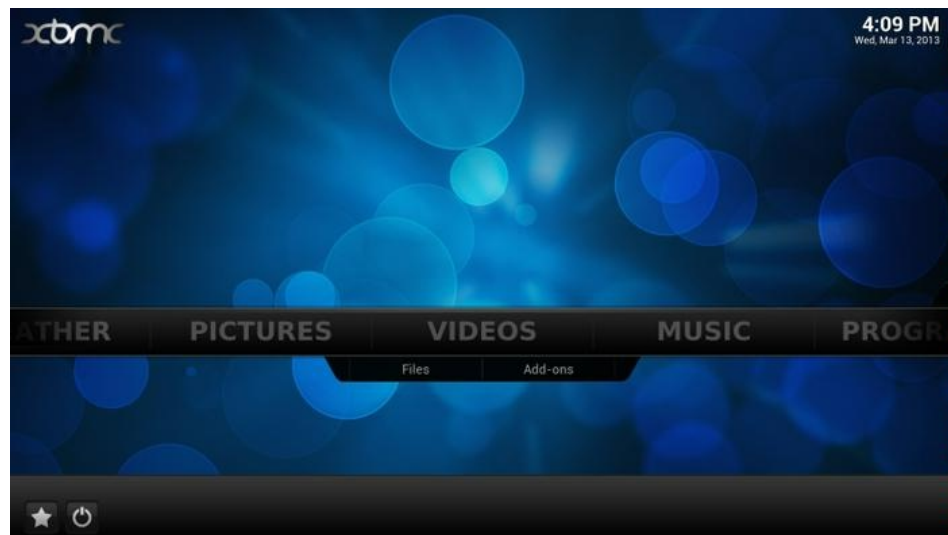
2. You may be presented with a warning about the installer being a beta version. Simply press *Enter* to continue to the main menu if you see this.
3. Make sure that the menu item **1 Quick Install of OpenELEC** is highlighted, and press *Enter* to select it. You should now be presented with a list of storage devices connected to your HTPC, as shown in the following screenshot:



4. Now, highlight the storage device on which to install OpenELEC, and choose **OK**. (In this example, there is only one device from which to choose. If you have correctly removed all the other devices from your system, this should be the same for you. If you have multiple devices from which to choose, it is highly recommended that you exit the installer, shut down the computer, remove all other devices, and then restart the OpenELEC installer. This is to be absolutely sure that nothing happens to important data on any devices other than the one selected).
5. You may be presented with some further choices before the installation starts.
 - If prompted with **Use GPT partitions**, select **No**.
 - If prompted with **Enable SSH server per default**, select **No** (unless you know everything about SSH and want it here as well).
6. Now, OpenELEC will start installing on your HTPC.



7. Once the installation is completed, you will be redirected to the main menu. Select **Reboot**, and remove the USB drive before the HTPC boots into the installer again.
8. If your BIOS is configured correctly, your HTPC should now realize that there is no USB drive from which to boot, and instead boot from the internal storage device with OpenELEC. After a moment, you should see the main screen of a fresh OpenELEC installation, similar to the one shown in the following screenshot:



And that's it

By this point, you should have a working installation of OpenELEC on your HTPC, and you are free to play around and discover more about it.

Skip ahead to the section, *Quick start – Managing XBMC*, to get started with using your new media center.

Installation on Raspberry Pi

This section contains instructions for installing OpenELEC on Raspberry Pi. If you want to read about installation on a PC, you should go back to the previous section named *Installation on a PC*. If you have already installed OpenELEC and want to learn how to use it, skip this section and move on to the next called *Quick start – Managing XBMC*.

Follow these four steps to be guided through the process of installing OpenELEC on a Raspberry Pi.

Step 1 – What do I need?

Before you are ready to install OpenELEC on your Raspberry Pi, you will need to check that you have all of the required elements, listed as follows:

- A Raspberry Pi to become the platform for your new media center
- A blank SD Card (2 GB or larger) on which you will install OpenELEC
- A secondary computer (running Windows) for applying the OpenELEC image to the SD card
- An Internet connection for downloading OpenELEC

Step 2 – Downloading OpenELEC for Raspberry Pi installation

The Raspberry Pi builds, downloadable from the official OpenELEC website, are for installing OpenELEC on an SD card with a Linux PC. If you know your way around Linux, you can choose to do this, but the task can be done just as easily in Windows, as will be explained here.

With this approach, you will apply the complete OpenELEC installation directly to the SD card from an `.img` file. This makes the use of an install media obsolete, as the installation is done directly to the SD card, which will be the permanent storage media for the Raspberry Pi.

You can find the most recent official OpenELEC builds for Raspberry Pi as `.img` files at http://openelec.thestateofme.com/official_images/.

The files are named `OpenELEC-RPi.arm-<version>.img.zip`, where `<version>` is replaced with the build version of the image file. Note the last modified dates, as these, in addition to the build version, can help you locate the newest build.

Download the newest build. It will most likely be the second one from the bottom of the list.

Once downloaded, you should extract the image file from the downloaded ZIP archive before moving on to the next step.

Step 3 – Creating a bootable SD card

Make sure that the physical **Lock** slider on your SD card is not in the lock position, because this will make it impossible to write to it.

Connect the SD card to your computer, and verify that it is registered by Windows.

Note

Make sure that the SD card is empty, as everything on it will be lost!

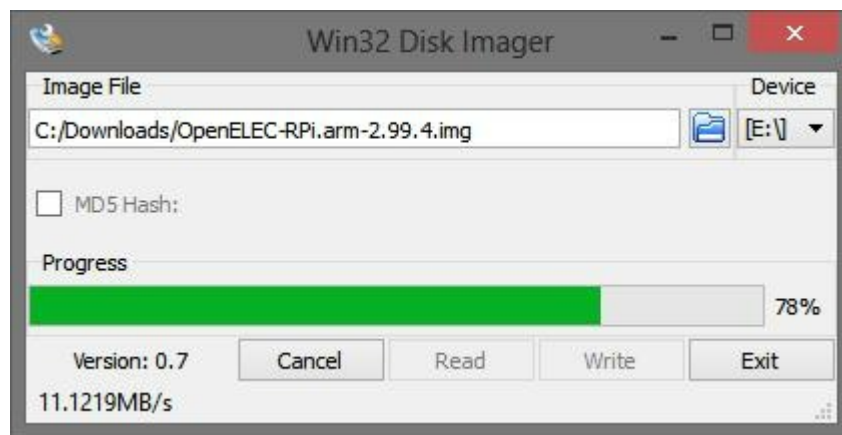
You will need a program for applying the disk image to the SD card. The freely available Win32DiskImager program is well-suited for the job, and is used in this example.

Get it from <http://sourceforge.net/projects/win32diskimager>, and unzip the contents of the downloaded folder.

Launch the program by right-clicking on the file named [Win32DiskImager](#) in the unzipped folder and choosing **Launch as administrator**. Be patient, because the program may take a minute or two to start up.

To apply the disk image to the SD card, you need to complete the following steps:

1. Select your SD card from the **Device** drop-down menu in the top-right corner of the main window in the **Win23 Disk Imager** program.
2. Click on the blue folder icon, right next to where you just selected your device, and browse to the image file you unzipped earlier. Mark it and click on **Open**.
3. You are now ready to apply the image. Click on **Write**, and confirm that you are absolutely sure that you have selected the correct device, which contains no files you want to save.
4. Wait for the process to finish. Click on **OK** when informed that the process was successful, and Exit Win32DiskImager. Your SD card is now ready. During the writing process your window should look something similar to the following screenshot:



Tip

You can use the **Read** function to copy your OpenELEC installation from the SD card to an `.img` file. This is very useful later on, when you have spent a lot of time on configuring and customizing XBMC, and want to back up your settings.

You may notice that Windows now recognizes your SD card with a much lower capacity than before. This is because Windows only registers one of the several new partitions of the SD card, which is as expected.



Step 4 – Launching OpenELEC on Raspberry Pi

Safely remove the SD card from your computer, and prepare your Raspberry Pi by performing the following steps:

1. Unplug the power for Raspberry Pi.
2. Firmly connect the SD card in the corresponding slot on Raspberry Pi.
3. Connect a monitor or TV to Raspberry Pi via HDMI.
4. Turn on the connected monitor or TV and make sure that the correct input source is selected.
5. Connect at least one input device (keyboard, mouse, or remote) to Raspberry Pi via a USB.
6. Optionally, connect the Raspberry Pi to your network via Ethernet.

Now, you can plug in the power and lean back as your new Raspberry Pi media center starts up OpenELEC for the first time.

Tip

If your monitor or TV was not set to the correct input source (HDMI) during the start-up, the Raspberry Pi may not produce any output on the screen, and still won't do so until it has been restarted. Simply switch over to the correct input source on the monitor or TV and turn the Raspberry Pi off and on again.

And that's it

By this point, you should have a working installation of OpenELEC on your Raspberry Pi and are free to play around and discover more about it.

Quick start – Managing XBMC

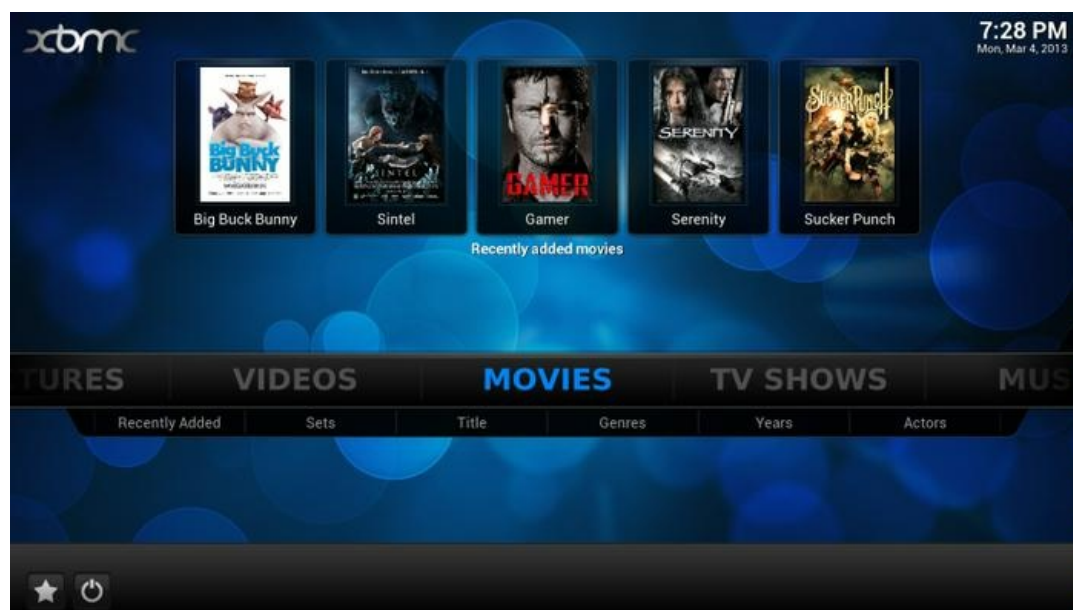
Congratulations on successfully creating your very own media center!

Note

OpenELEC is the operating system on your HTPC. This makes it possible to run XBMC, which provides the visual interface and features that you will now configure.

XBMC can be installed on other operating systems than OpenELEC, but won't run as efficiently on all hardware. The tasks in this section can be completed in XBMC on any operating system.

Now, let's look at how to get started with the interface of XBMC and adding your media to the library. The following screenshot shows the default home screen, which is the first thing you will see when you start up your media center:



The **Recently added** row with artwork will automatically show up after the media files are added, just like the menu items, **MOVIES** and **TV SHOWS**.

The main elements of the home screen are listed as follows:

- **Recently added media:** Middle of the screen (only if media is added)
- **Main menu line:** Middle of the screen, beneath **Recently added media**

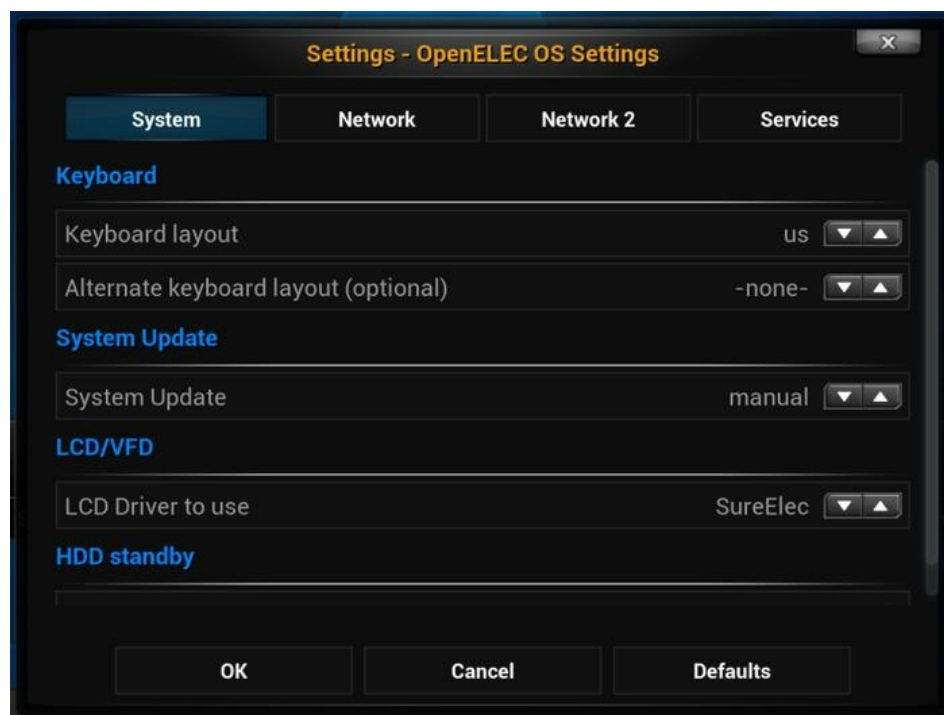
- **Shutdown and favorites buttons:** Lower-left corner of the screen

Navigating the interface can be done with a keyboard, mouse, or a compatible remote. The majority of such peripherals should be supported with a simple plug-and-play USB.

Step 1 – Initial configuration

A good step to start with is an initial configuration of your installation.

1. Use the left and right arrow keys on your keyboard or remote to browse through the items in the main menu. You should notice that the smaller submenu entries change.
2. Navigate to the **SYSTEM** menu item located furthest to the right, and notice that it has a submenu entry named **OpenELEC**. You can go to the submenu by pushing the down arrow once. Press the *Enter* key when the **OpenELEC** submenu entry is highlighted to select it.



3. Here, you can configure the settings of OpenELEC. You will probably want to change **Keyboard layout**, and maybe configure a wireless network connection in the **Network** tab. You can also choose whether OpenELEC should automatically retrieve and install system updates when they are available.

Step 2 – Preparing your media library

XBMC includes a feature to allow automatic identification of your media library content, which will save you a lot of work.

For the automatic indexing to work properly, all media files should be organized in accordance with some basic indexing rules before they are added to the library.

The only way for XBMC to know about the content of your media files are by the names of the files themselves and/or the folders in which they are located.

Several naming schemes are interpretable by the indexing service, allowing some room for variation. If you follow these rules, you should have no problems with indexing.

Naming movie files and folders

Include the following in names of movie files and folders:

- The full movie title
- The year of the movie release

For example, [Sintel](#) (2010).

Both the movie folder and file within should be named like this, unless you know what you are doing, and configure the indexing to match your naming scheme at a later point.

Naming TV show files

Include the following in names of TV show files:

- The full title of the show
- The season and episode number as [SxxExx](#)
- The year of the initial release of the TV show (only strictly necessary if other shows with the same show title exists)

For example, [Firefly](#) 2002 [S01E04](#) - Jaynestown.

If you need to add special episodes of TV shows, these are often named as being in season zero, such as [S00E04](#). You can look up the order for each TV show on <http://thetvdb.com>.

Tip

You can still append your own additional information, such as episode title and movie resolution, to the end of the names, should you desire to do so.

Make sure to divide your movies and TV shows into two separate folders, because this will make it easier to add entire folders with a single content type for indexing.

If your media library is organized in manner a similar to the following example, it should be ready for automatic indexing:



Note that the **Media Library** folder has separate folders for **My Movies** and **My TV Shows**.

Movies are put in separate folders named similar to the file they contain.

TV shows have a main folder containing subfolders for each season containing files. This makes it easy to add new seasons when they are finally released.

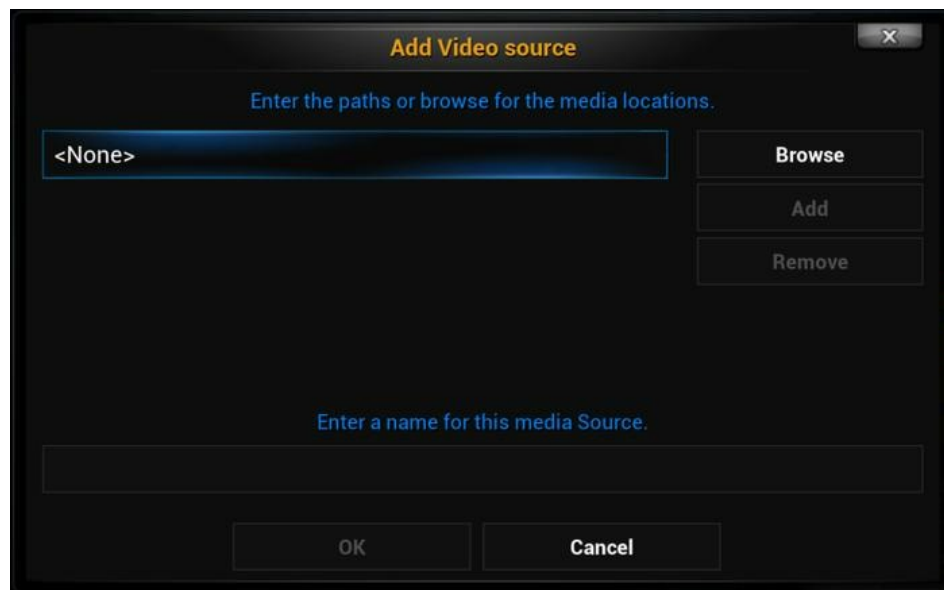
Step 3 – Adding movies for automatic indexing

With the media library ready for indexing, you should make it accessible from your HTPC in one of the many ways supported. You can reach the media library from:

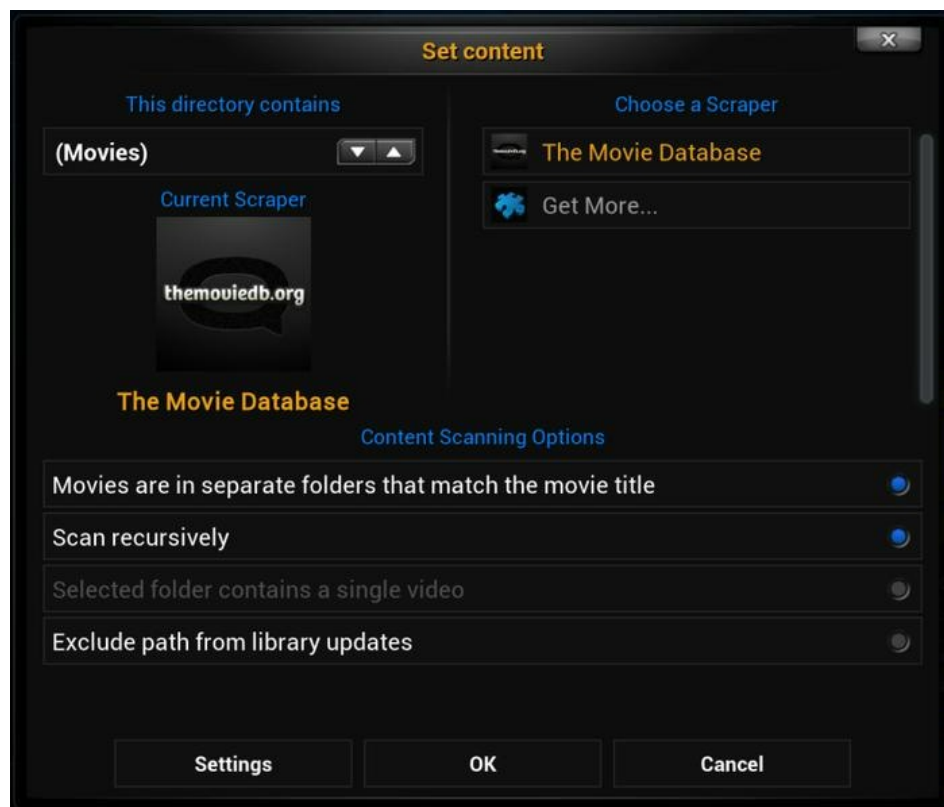
- An internal drive inside your HTPC
- An external drive connected via USB, eSATA, Firewire, and so on
- A network drive on your local network
- A remote network drive via FTP, HTTP, and so on

To add your accessible movies for automatic indexing, perform the following steps:

1. Make sure that your HTPC is connected to the Internet, because this is needed to access the online media databases with artwork and descriptions.
2. Start up your HTPC, navigate to the main menu entry **VIDEOS**, and select the submenu entry **Files**.
3. Select **Add Videos** from the list.



4. The **Add Video** source window is now shown, as shown in the preceding screenshot. By clicking on the **Browse** button on the right, you can navigate to your media library folder:
 1. Find the drive if your media library is on an internal or external drive.
 2. Open **Windows network (SMB)** if your media library is shared on a Windows PC on your local network.
 3. Open **Add network location...** if your media library is shared on another network location, such as FTP and HTTP.
5. Navigate to the library and open your movie folder to see all of the separate movie folders listed, and click on **OK**.
6. You are now back to the **Add Video** source window, where your movie folder path is shown. Click on **OK** at the bottom of the window to add your folder.
7. A new window named **Set content** is now shown. This is where you tell the indexing service what kind of media content is in the folder you just added. Click on the arrows in the upper-left corner of the window to select **(Movies)**:



8. Depending upon how you organized your media library, you probably want to activate the option **Movies are in separate folders that match the movie title**, as shown in the preceding screenshot. If you want movie descriptions to be in another language than English, you can configure this by clicking on **Settings** in the lower-left corner of the window.
9. Click on **OK** when you are done with the configuration.
10. Click on **Yes** when asked if the new location should be indexed now.

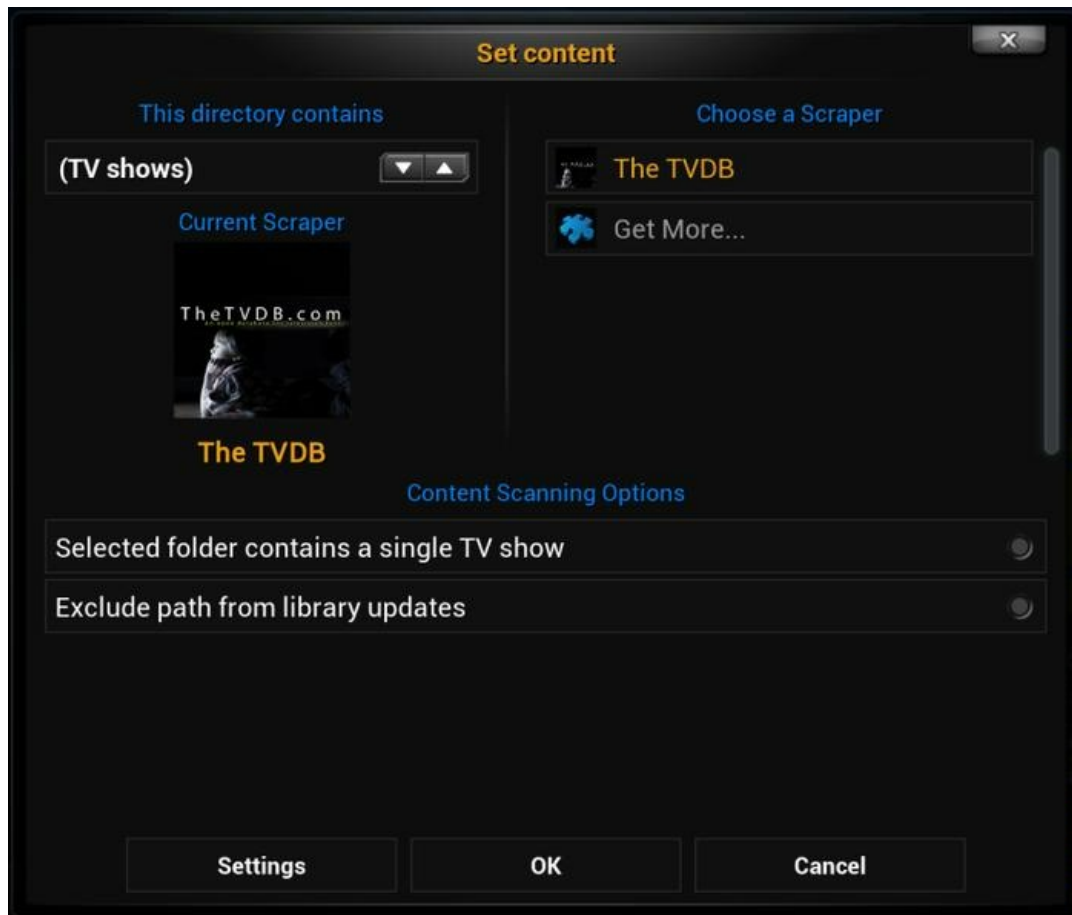
The status of indexing can be seen in the progress bar at the top of the screen. It is highly recommended to let this process finish before adding more folders to the library.

When the indexing is complete, you should find a new menu items named **MOVIES** in the main menu on the home screen.

Step 4 – Adding TV shows for automatic indexing

Adding TV shows for automatic indexing is very similar to what you just did for movies. Follow the procedure in the previous step once more, but choose to add your folder with TV shows this time. Once presented with the

Set content window, select **(TV shows)**, as shown in the following screenshot:



Choosing language and other configuration settings can be done via **Settings** in the lower-left corner of the window.

Once the indexing is complete, a new main menu item called **TV SHOWS** will be available on the home screen.

Tip

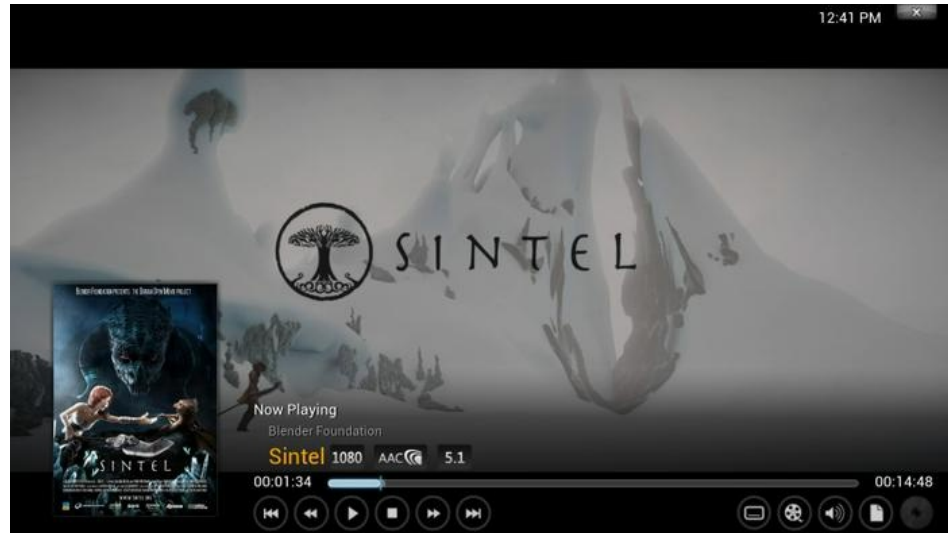
If any TV show episodes or movies are missing from the indexed lists, make sure that you have named the corresponding files and folders properly in your media library.

In **SYSTEM | Videos | Library**, you can set an option to update the library at start-up, which will make it much easier to keep your library updated.

Step 5 – Video playback

Now that you have added media to your library, it is time to start watching some of the content you added.

1. From the main menu, you can either choose **MOVIES** or **TV SHOWS** to see a list of all the indexed media in that category. While navigating through the list, you will be presented with artwork related to the highlighted media content.
2. To start the playback, simply press *Enter* to select the currently highlighted movie:



If you move the mouse, an overlaid menu will appear at the bottom of the screen, which provides buttons to play/pause, stop, and so on. The buttons at the bottom-right corner of the screen will let you change the subtitles and settings for sound and video playback.

This concludes the section on how to add movies and TV shows to your library.

Top 10 features you'll want to know about

As you start to use your new media center, you will realize that there are a wide variety of options available for tailoring it to your specific needs. This section will teach you what you need to know about the main features and capabilities of XBMC.

Customizing the interface

A lot can be done to make the interface of XBMC match your preferences. For now, let's look at how to modify the default skin.

Customizing the default skin

By browsing to **SYSTEM | Appearance | Skin**, you can customize many of aspects of the look and feel of your media center.

If you want to get rid of the scrolling RSS updates at the bottom of the home screen, simply unselect **Show RSS news feeds** in this tab.

To further customize the home screen, select the **Settings** entry. Here, you can change even more visual details of the home window, background, and add-ons.

Tip

If you use your media center only for movies and TV shows, you can clean up the unused **MUSIC** and **PICTURES** main menu entries by choosing to hide them in **Home | Hide Main Menu Buttons**.

Play around with all of the other settings to find out what you like best.

Changing the language

If you want to have all the menus translated to your language, it can be done in **SYSTEM | Appearance | International | Language**.

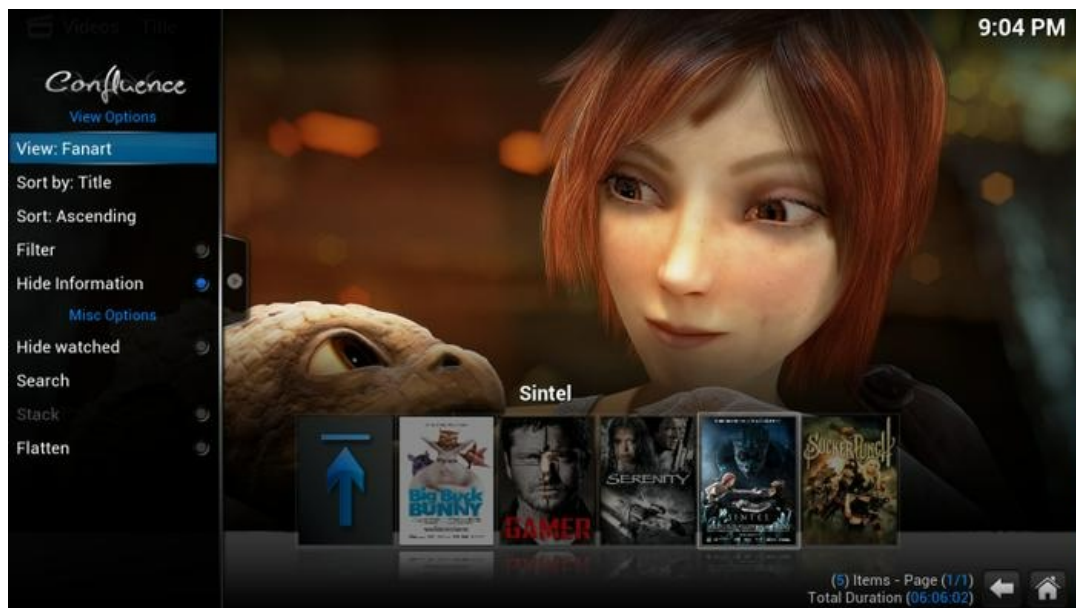
In the same tab, you can set your preferred audio language and preferred subtitle language. This will not guarantee that all media will have these audio and subtitle languages, but they will automatically be chosen if they are available for the content you are watching.

Tip

This tab is also where you select whether to show the current time in 12 or 24 hour formats.

The media library view

The default XBMC theme has many ways to display your media library. You can cycle through these from the side tab in the movie or TV show libraries:



To use the side tab, perform the following steps:

1. From the home screen, open either **MOVIES** or **TV SHOWS** to get to a media library where the side tab is available.
2. Click on the small tab in the middle-left side of the screen to expand the **View Options** menu.
3. Here, you can cycle through all of the available view modes by clicking on **View:** at the top of the list. You can also choose by which criteria your media should be sorted, or search for specific entries.

Tip

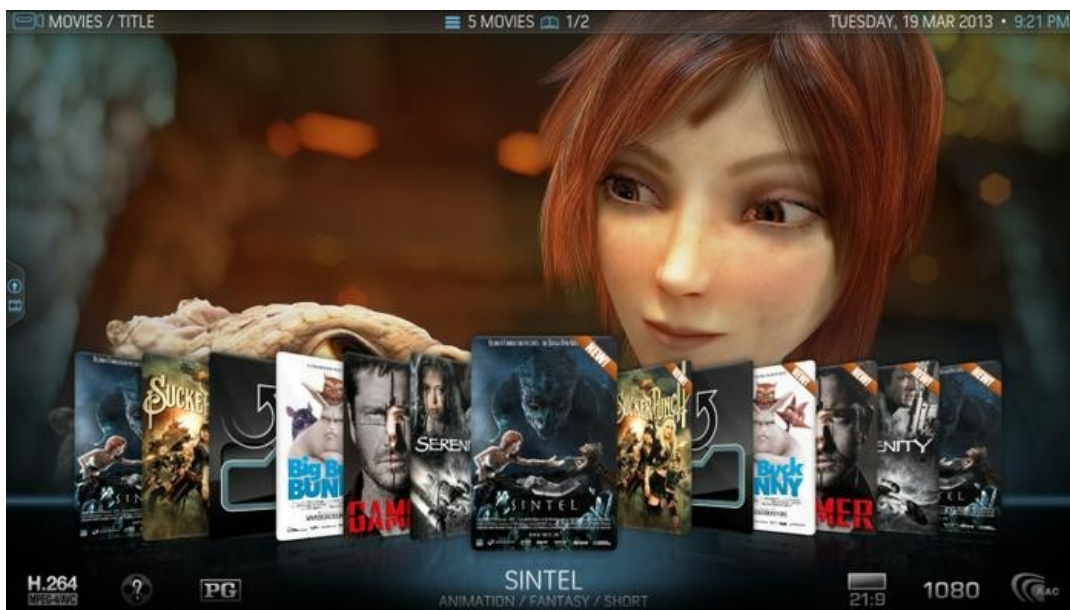
This setting is not shared between movies and TV shows, allowing you to use different view options for the two.

Using skins

If you want to change the entire theme of the interface, it can be done by changing the default skin to one of the many other skins available:

1. Go to **SYSTEM | Appearance | Skin | Skin**, to select which skin should be used.
2. To download more skins from which to choose, click on **Get more...** in the lower-left corner of the window, and select a skin you would like to try.
3. When the skin is downloaded, it will show up as selectable on the list of installed skins.
4. With each skin comes new view options, add-ons, and customization options, providing even more possibilities for customizing your interface.

As an example of the alternative skin styles, the following image shows the **Showcase** view option of the **Aeon Nox** skin:



Installing XBMC add-ons

Anyone is free to develop add-ons for XBMC, which is why there are a lot of them available to explore. An add-on is a kind of an app for XBMC, adding new or enhanced features or functionalities.

Note

Add-ons are organized in repositories. They can be official or from a third party.

A good place to start is to go through the add-ons in the official repository. Go to **SYSTEM | Add-ons | Get Add-ons | All Add-ons**.

Here, you will find a list of categories containing all of the official XBMC add-ons.

As an example, you can install the **YouTube** add-on from the **Video Add-ons** category, should you want to browse YouTube directly from your HTPC.

Once installed, you can launch the add-on by navigating to it from the home screen. The **VIDEOS** submenu will have an entry named **Add-ons**, where you can find and launch the add-on you just installed.

Tip

You can also add your favorite add-ons directly to the home screen.

Go to **SYSTEM | Appearance | Skin | - Settings | Add-on Shortcuts**.

Here, you can select up to five add-ons to display in submenus of the home screen.

Add-ons added to the home screen are easily accessible and can be launched without having to browse to the submenu, as shown in the following screenshot:



Third-party add-ons

In addition to the add-ons in the official repository, even more can be found in third-party repositories online. To install a third-party repository or add-on, you will need to download it on your PC and move it to a USB drive, which you can then connect to your HTPC for installation.

A good place to start is this list of third-party add-on repositories:

http://wiki.xbmc.org/index.php?title=3rd_party_add-on_repositories

Perform the following steps to make a new repository available in XBMC:

1. Once you find a repository of interest, you should download its ZIP file from the column **Installable ZIP**.
2. Save the ZIP file to your PC and move it to a removable USB drive.
3. Connect the USB drive to your HTPC.
4. On your HTPC, go to **SYSTEM | Add-ons | Install from zip file**.
5. Browse to your USB drive, select the repository zip file, and click on **OK**.
6. The new repository is now visible in **SYSTEM | Add-ons | Get Add-ons**.

Tip

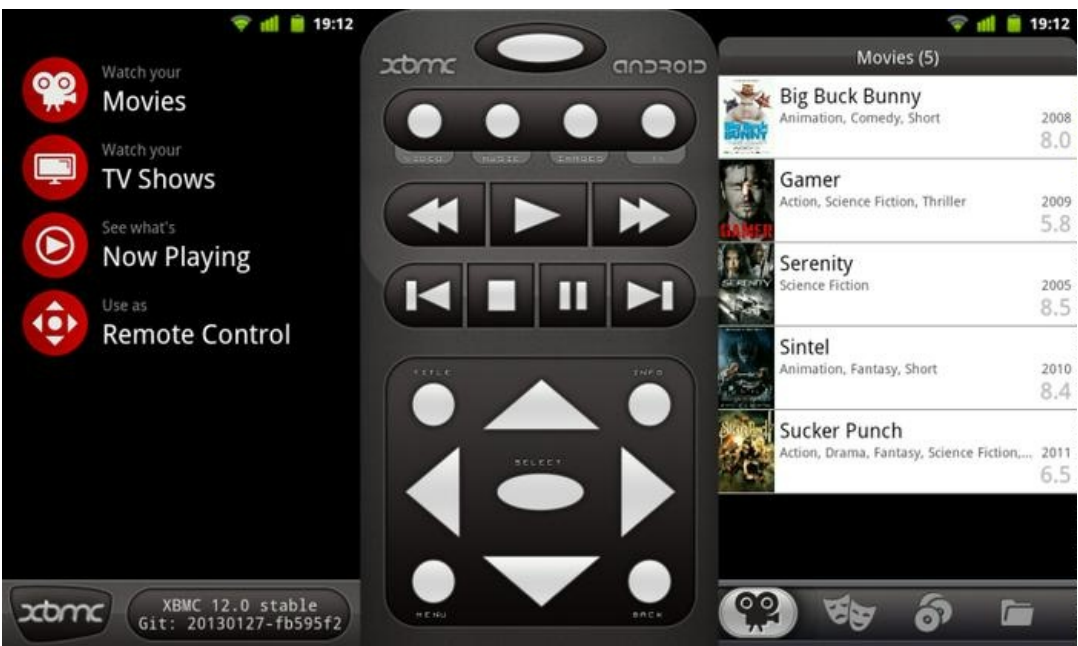
This procedure can also be done to install single add-ons from downloaded `.zip` files. Simply browse to an add-on ZIP file instead of a repository ZIP file.

Using an Android device as a remote control

In order to control your media center from the comfort of your couch, without having to handle a big keyboard, you can control the media center by a remote. Most USB remotes made for use with a HTPC will function with OpenELEC, straight out-of-the-box, with no configuration needed.

You can also choose to use your Android smartphone or another Android device as a remote control. The remote instructions are sent to the HTPC via your local network, so for this to work, you must make sure that your HTPC is connected to the same access point to which the Android device is connected via Wi-Fi.

The Android XBMC remote can function just like a normal remote, and it will even let you browse your digital media library directly on your Android device. Furthermore, if your Android device is a phone, you can configure the app to have incoming text messages pop up on your TV screen, and even pause the movie if you receive a call, while displaying the caller ID and image on the TV:



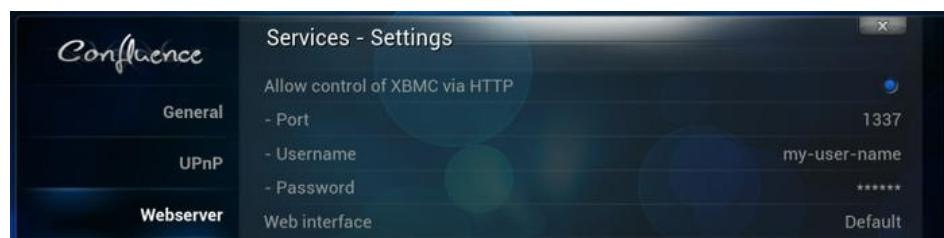
The preceding screenshot shows three examples of the Android remote screens.

Note

This app is still under development, so you may experience some minor stability issues.

You will need to configure your HTPC to allow remote control with the Android app, as follows:

1. In the main menu on the home screen, browse to **SYSTEM | Services | Webserver**.
2. Choose and type in a port number to use for the remote.
3. Click on **Allow control of XBMC via HTTP**.
4. Change the username to something other than the default [xbmc](#).
5. Type in a password. Your settings should now look as follows:



With the HTPC ready, you now need to configure your Android device.

Download the "Official XBMC Remote" app from Google play on your Android device. This app is completely free, just like OpenELEC and XBMC. Search for the exact phrase in Google play store, or scan this QR code to get there directly:



Once the app is installed on your Android device, you can launch it and click on the **Settings** button and select **Settings | Manage XBMC Hosts | Settings-button | Add Host**.

Type in the details from your system webserver configuration, for example, as follows:

- **Name:** `my_OpenELEC_pc`
- **Host or IP:** `OPENELEC` (this should be the hostname or IP address of your HTPC on the local network.)
- **HTTP API port:** `1337`
- **Username:** `my-user-name`
- **Password:** `my-password`

Note

The IP address of your HTPC can be found from in the **System info** subentry, under the **Network** tab, when **SYSTEM** is highlighted on the home screen. You should, however, not use the hostname of your HTPC unless it has a static local IP address.

Once you save the host configuration on your Android device, you can go back to the main screen of the app to see the connection status.

You should now be able to control your media center remotely with the Android device.

Linking movies to TV shows

Some movies may be connected to TV shows, making it obvious to have the movie listed when browsing the TV show, in addition to it showing up on the movie list.

To link a movie to a TV show, you need to perform the following steps:

1. Select **MOVIES** from the main menu.
2. Bring up the context menu by one of these methods:
 1. Right-click on the movie you want to link
 2. Highlight the movie you want to link and press C on your keyboard
 3. Highlight the movie you want to link and press title on your Android remote
3. Choose **Link to TV show**.
4. Select which TV show to link the movie with.

That movie will now be displayed on the same list as the seasons of the linked TV show.

Grouping movies in sets

You may have noticed that, when browsing movies in the library, it is common that sequels are not always listed right after each other.

This is because the naming scheme for most movie titles is not just [the movie 1](#), [the movie 2](#), and so on. If you organize your library by sorting based on the movie title, you will most likely have these sets of related movies spread out instead of clustered together.

To avoid this, you can have related movies grouped in movie sets. Go to **SYSTEM | Video | Library**, and turn on the feature **Group movies in sets**.

Now, you should see only one library entry for movies detected as a set. When selecting the set from the movie list, you will be presented with all the movies in that set, in chronological order.

The weather add-on

XBMC comes with a pre-installed add-on for displaying the current weather on the home screen, and providing a detailed weather forecast when launched.

Before the weather information can be displayed, you will need to configure the add-on by selecting the town in which you want to know the weather.

1. Go to **SYSTEM | Weather | General | - Settings**.
2. Click on **Location 1**, and type in the name of a large town near you.
3. Click on **Done** and select the town from the list.

The weather plugin is now configured to show the weather forecast for the town you selected. When you select the **WEATHER** entry from the main menu on the home screen, you should see something similar to the following screenshot:



You can also choose to have the current weather displayed in the top-left corner of the home screen. Perform the following steps to activate this:

1. Go to **SYSTEM | Appearance | Skin | - Settings | Home window**.
2. Activate the option **Show weather info**, to enable this feature.

Adding and indexing music

In addition to movies and TV shows, XBMC can also index your music library to make it easily accessible.

To have your music indexed by XBMC, perform the following steps:

1. Go to the submenu **Files** in the **MUSIC** tab on the home screen.
2. Select **Add source**.
3. Browse to your music library, and click on **OK** to select the folder.
4. Click on **OK** to add the selected folder to the library.

5. To index the contents of the newly added folder, bring up the context menu, and select **Scan item to library**.

Tip

You can have XBMC scan and update the music library automatically on start-up. Go to **SYSTEM | Music | Library**, and enable **Update library on start-up**.

To browse your music, open the **MUSIC** entry from the main menu on the home screen and enable the **Library mode** setting after opening the tab on the left side.

You can now browse your music library in a manner similar to how you would browse other media.

Adding and viewing pictures

You can browse through collections of pictures directly in XBMC, but as no indexing is available for pictures, the original folder hierarchy of your albums is what will be shown.

To have your pictures available in XBMC, complete the following steps:

1. Open **PICTURES** from the home screen.
2. Select **Add source**.
3. Browse to your picture library and click on **OK** to select the folder.
4. Click on **OK** to add the selected folder to the library.

The new sources you just added will work as a shortcut to viewing your pictures. Click on it to begin browsing the contents of your picture library.

Tip

To start a slideshow of all images in the current folder, open the tab on the left side of the screen and select **Slideshow**.

Adding and using multiple user profiles

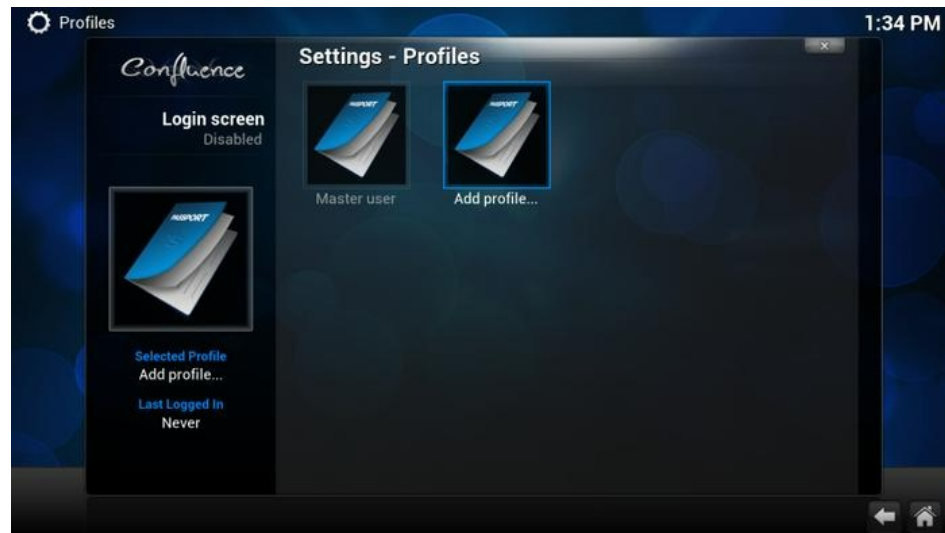
If multiple users are using the same HTPC, it may be desirable to have a unique profile for each user. A profile contains all media and customization settings, including the following:

- Skins and customization preferences
- Media library folders and sources
- Network settings

An example where multiple user profiles would be very useful can be if you want to create a children-friendly list of movies and cartoons, without having to set up two separate HTPC's to avoid inclusion of horror movies in the media library.

Simply create a new user profile and add the content you want to be available for the intended user of that specific profile, as follows:

1. To get started with profile settings, open the **Profiles** submenu of the **SYSTEM** entry on the home screen. You should now see something similar to what is shown in the following screenshot:



2. Here, you will find the user profiles that have been created for your HTPC. Currently, there is only one profile, **Master user**, which is the default one.
3. You can add a new profile by selecting the **Add profile...** entry, and complete the creation procedure. During creation, you are able to choose whether the new profile should inherit media sources from the default profile or have separate media sources. In this way, you can still share libraries between profiles, in case you just want to have separate skins or other settings distinguishing the two profiles.
4. To be able to select which user profile to use when starting the HTPC, enable the **Login** screen in the upper-left corner of the main profile window.

Password protecting profiles and settings

You can lock specific features from individual profiles, if you want to limit the access to system settings, add-on installation, or other parts of your media center.

1. Click on the profile you want to change, and choose **Lock preferences**.
2. If you haven't set a global master password for your HTPC, you will be asked to do so now.
3. Select the features you want to lock, and prevent the user of the selected profile from accessing.
4. If you want to require a password for users to access this profile, choose this in the first entry on the list named **Profile lock**.
5. Click on **OK** to confirm the choices.

Tip

When the global master password is set, you will have to enter it every time you want to access the system and configuration sections of XBMC.

To delete a profile, bring up its contextual menu and choose **Delete**.

People and places you should get to know

If you need help with OpenELEC or XBMC, here are some people and places that will prove invaluable:

Official sites

The following are the places to go for official news and information:

- **Homepage for OpenELEC:** <http://openelec.tv>
- **Homepage for XBMC:** <http://xbmc.org>
- **Wiki for OpenELEC:** <http://wiki.openelec.tv>
- **Wiki for XBMC:** <http://wiki.xbmc.org>
- **Source code for OpenELEC:** <http://github.com/OpenELEC>
- **Source code for XBMC:** <http://github.com/xbmc>

Articles and tutorials

There are a lot of good and interesting articles available on both OpenELEC and XBMC. The ones that follow are a few with which to start:

- A short video from the "lifehacker" blog, providing a good overview of what is possible with a media center running XBMC can be found at <http://youtu.be/T970YM3w1LY>
- An advanced official tutorial on how to add features for watching live TV and recording video with XBMC can be found at <http://wiki.xbmc.org/index.php?title=PVR>

Community

Large communities with interest in OpenELEC and XBMC have accumulated a lot of answers on common questions, which can be found on the official forums:

- **Official forums for OpenELEC:** <http://openelec.tv/forum>
- **Official forums for XBMC:** <http://forum.xbmc.org>
- **Official IRC channel for OpenELEC:** #openelec on chat.freenode.org
- **Official IRC channel for XBMC:** #xbmc on irc.freenode.org
- **Official mailing list for OpenELEC commits:** <http://groups.google.com/group/openelec-commits>

Blogs

A good way to stay updated is by following relevant blogs:

- The lifehacker blog is full of useful tips and tricks for using XBMC at <http://lifehacker.com/xbmc>
- The good folk over at engadget are always fast to provide the latest XBMC news in an easily understandable form at <http://engadget.com/tag/xbmc/>
- Head over to xbmchub for lots of cool tweaks and third-party add-ons at <http://www.xbmc.org/blog/>

Twitter

If you want to be amongst the first to know about the new releases and updates, you can use Twitter to do so:

- Follow OpenELEC on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/#!/OpenELEC>
- Follow XBMC on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/#!/xbmc>
- For more Open Source information, follow Packt at <http://twitter.com/#!/packtopenso>