



Plex Media Server is a user-friendly way to store all your movies, shows, and other media in one place—and make it accessible from any device, whether you're at home or on-the-go. If you're looking for a no-headache way to watch your movies anywhere, this is it.

What Is Plex Media Server?

Here's a common situation that all too many people find themselves in. You have media files—music, movies, TV shows, and even photos—but you don't have an easy way to easily access them on your plentiful and varied devices.

Do you copy your Blu-ray rips over to your laptop? What about your phone—do you convert the files so they're smaller and compatible? Do you fling shows to your TV via your desktop and Chromecast? Do you upload all your photos to your iCloud account to send them to your TV via Apple TV? What about your music? What if you're away from home on a business trip and you want to stream your TV shows to your iPad?

Even for serious geeks with a lot of experience managing their media, it's a huge pain to get all your devices talking and accessing the same collection. It doesn't *have* to be that way, though. Plex is a centralized media server system that eliminates virtually every problem you run into while managing a large personal media collection.

The Plex model is simple: you park all your media on a single computer with the Plex server software installed, and then you install Plex on all your other devices. You can install it on Windows, Linux, or Mac computers as well as Android and iOS, video game consoles like Xbox and PlayStation, your Apple TV, and there are even smart TVs that come with Plex built right in. Then, from any of those devices, you can remotely access your entire media library and watch it with no hassle.

The Bering Strait, the ocean passage between Russian and Alaska, is never more than 55 meters deep.



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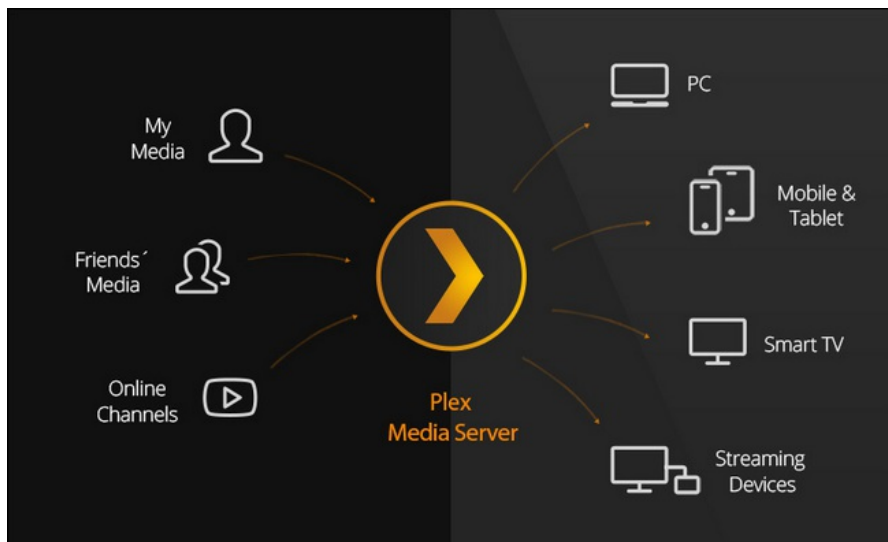
Google is Now Blocking Crapware in Search Results, Ads, and Chrome



How to Use All of Windows 10's Backup and Recovery Tools



How to Stream Videos and Music to the TV In Your Hotel Room



Further, because the Plex model is a server/client one, you don't have to worry about copying files to your various devices and dealing with issues like playback quality, video resolution, and other details. Your Plex server will transcode all your media content on the fly, so that it plays properly on whatever device you're using. Want to watch your TV show in the backyard on your iPhone? No problem. Want to watch it on your laptop at your in-laws' house? Also no problem. Want to hook your new smart TV right into your media collection without any additional hardware? Buy [the right TV](#) and that's no problem either. In short, running Plex is like running your own private and polished streaming service, where you're the one curating the library.

That sounds pretty great, huh? Not only do you get on-demand streaming to all your devices but you get absolutely beautiful metadata and art to go along with it.



The Plex media library as seen from the Apple TV Plex app.

Let's take a closer look at what you need to get started and then jump right into preparing your media collection for Plex, installing Plex, and—everyone's favorite part—accessing your Plex media collection.

What You'll Need

Plex is a really polished product, and once you get it up and running it's about as headache free as it gets. That said, however, the most important thing is to go into the experience with a clear picture of what you need and how all the pieces of your Plex setup work together.

Home Is Where The Server Is

First and foremost, you need a computer that houses all the files and runs Plex Media Server. You can install Plex on Windows, Linux, OS X, and even on dedicated server software like FreeNAS and on NAS hardware like the [Synology](#) system (you can see [all their supported platforms for the Media Server app here](#)). But regardless of what platform you choose, it'll have to be a computer that's always turned on. There's no point in having a comprehensive streaming solution for all your personal media needs if, when you go to access it, the content is offline.

In addition to always being on, you'll want the server computer to have a decent amount of processing power to handle the aforementioned transcoding. The more users you expect to be



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watching at once, the better hardware you want. Plex media server still works on older hardware but it will automatically disable transcoding if the hardware is insufficient, and playback will suffer and stutter on really old or under-powered hardware.

So, you'll want as beefy of a CPU as you can spare. Plex recommend at least an Intel i3 processor (or equivalent) or better with at least 2GB of RAM (RAM isn't particularly important to Plex). You can read over [their hardware recommendations here](#).

Lastly, you'll want a lot of hard drive space—enough to store all the movies, TV shows, music, and photos you have.

If you already have some hardware laying around you aren't using, by all means give it a shot. Worst case scenario, you find that file playback is unsatisfactory. Best case scenario, you find that the old hardware works fine and you avoid purchasing any new gear.

You can check out the available platforms for [the server software here](#).

A Client For Every Device

The server just one half of the Plex system. The other half is the "client" app, or the app you do all the watching from. While you can play the media from the server's web-based control panel, it's like watching Netflix in your web browser—most people prefer to sit down in their living room or watch on their mobile devices. And for that, you need the Plex client to access the server.



You can find a Plex app for just about every platform you can imagine: Android, iOS, Windows Phone, Apple TV, Roku, and more. One thing that has been a source of perennial confusion regarding Plex is whether or not it is free—and a big amount of this confusion hinges on the fact that the mobile apps have an "activation fee".

The Plex media server software has always been free. Most of the client apps have always been free. *Some* of the client apps have a nominal one time activation fee a few dollars (e.g. the iOS Plex client app costs \$4.99).

Plex has two ways of dealing with the paid apps. If you only need one app, you may wish to just activate that single app. The other option is to buy a Plex Pass, which is like a subscription service that gives you both access to all paid apps, plus benefits like syncing to your mobile devices for offline access and cloud-based file storage. If you need many apps across multiple platforms *and* you want the premium features, you might consider the Pass subscription for \$4.99 a month or a \$149.99 lifetime pass.

You can read more about which apps are paid, which are free, and [the differences between a free Plex membership and a premium one here](#). To check platform availability and download a client app for your platform, [check out the Plex downloads page here](#).

Now that we've looked at the general guidelines for selecting a device for your Plex server, and how to get the client software, let's look at the rather important step of organizing your media.

Step One: Consolidate and Organize Your Media

Plex works best if all your media content is well organized and in the same place. To that end, you should have all your media on the same device you're installing the Plex server software—whether it's an old desktop computer, a dedicated storage server in your basement, or a NAS device, all your media should be on it.

Further, you want to organize your media into a clean folder structure that keeps major media types separated and easy for both you and Plex to parse through.

If you've already invested any time in organizing your media, especially if you've used media center software like XBMC/Kodi in the past, then there's a good chance you've already got a perfect (or nearly perfect) folder structure in place.

Here's a simple example of a best-practice directory structure for Plex:

```
/Media/  
  /Movies/  
    /MovieName (Year)/  
      MovieName (Year).ext  
  /Music/  
    /ArtistName - AlbumName/  
      Track# - TrackName.ext  
  /TV Shows/  
    /ShowName/  
      /Season 01/  
        ShowName - s01e01.ext  
  /Photos/  
    /Album Name/  
      Image.ext
```


In the above directory structure, you see that the major media categories are separated into distinct sub-folders (like Movies and TV Shows) and that each media type has a pretty straight forward naming convention. Movies go in folders named after the movie; best practice is to include the year in parentheses to cut down on confusion. Music is organized in a straight forward Artist Name/Album Name format. TV shows are organized by the name, season, and episodes are tagged with both stats with the "sXXeXX" format. Photos are even easier—Plex just reads the album name off the folder and loads up the images inside.

While the above examples cover pretty much 99% of the territory you may find you need a little extra guidance when naming DVD .ISO files or other less common formats. If you need additional help cleaning up your media check out [the Plex guide to media preparation here](#).

A final note on organizing your media for Plex: if you've used or are currently using another media center software (like XBMC), don't worry about your metadata. You can safely run XBMC and Plex completely in parallel with no risk to your metadata, as neither application uses the same metadata files.

Step Two: Install Plex Media Server

The foundation of the setup, beautifully organized media aside, is the Plex Media Server application. For our tutorial today we'll be installing it on a Windows machine but, small nuances aside, the installation process is practically identical across all platforms as the majority of the process is done from within the Plex web-based control panel.



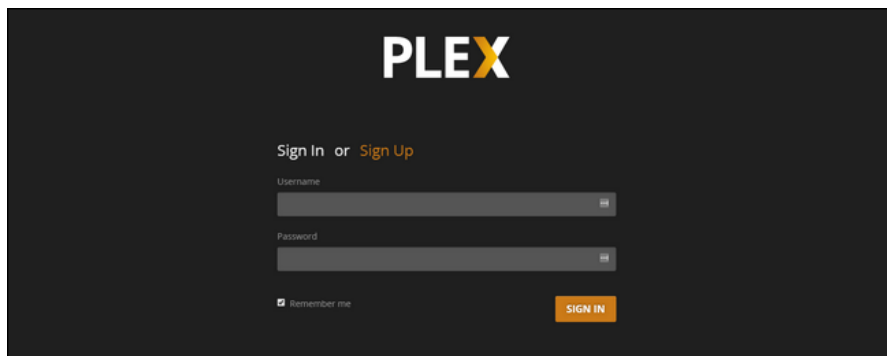
Plex Media Server

To get started, you'll need to download the Plex Media Server. It's a simple download, easy to use, it's awesome, and it's free!

[COMPUTER](#)[NAS](#)

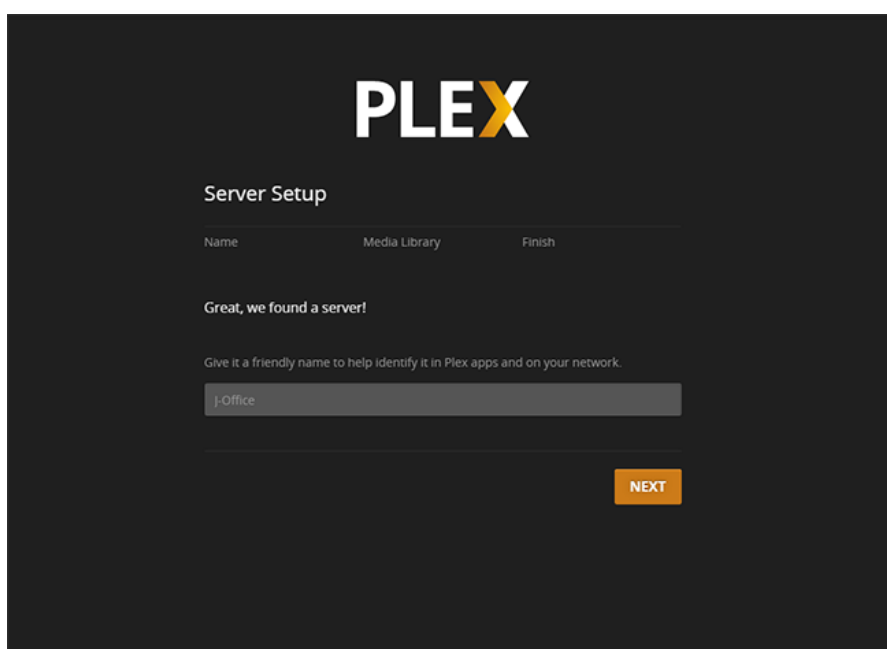
Head over to [the downloads page](#) and grab a copy of Plex Media Server for your platform. Run the installer and relax for a minute. When the installer is complete, Plex will automatically launch, and should load the web control panel for you. If it does not, open your web browser and navigate to `http://127.0.0.1:32400/` on that computer. (Alternatively, you can access it from another computer on your network by replacing the `127.0.0.1` address with the local network IP address of your computer or NAS device).

After accepting the user agreement, you'll be prompted to sign into your Plex account. On the off chance that you have an old Plex account from previous experiments with the platform, sign in. Otherwise, click on the "Sign Up" link and sign up for a new account.

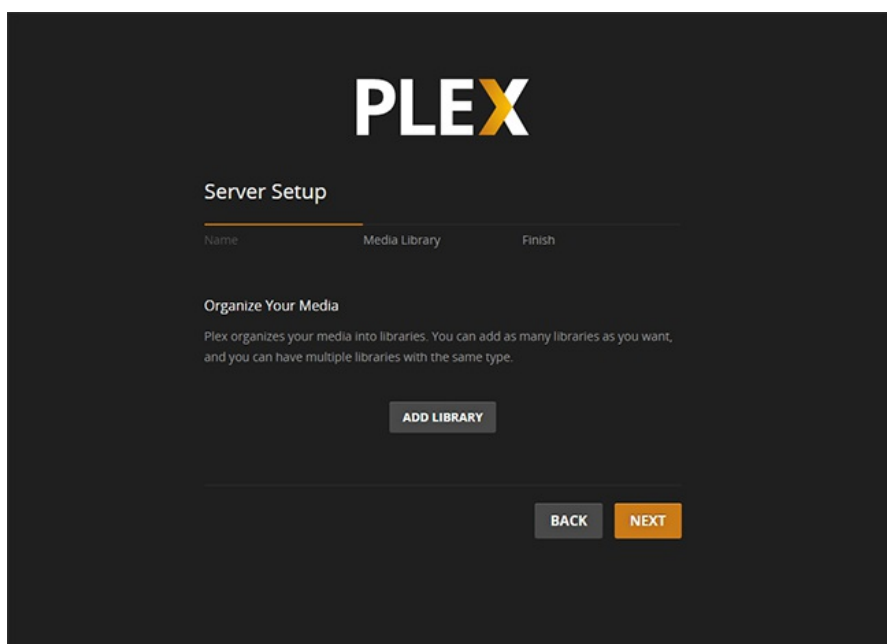


After your first sign in, you'll get a rundown of all the features of the Plex Pass premium service. While we happen to think the premium service is pretty great, let's not get ahead of ourselves—use Plex for awhile to determine if you want to invest in it. Close out the popup window to return to the server setup.

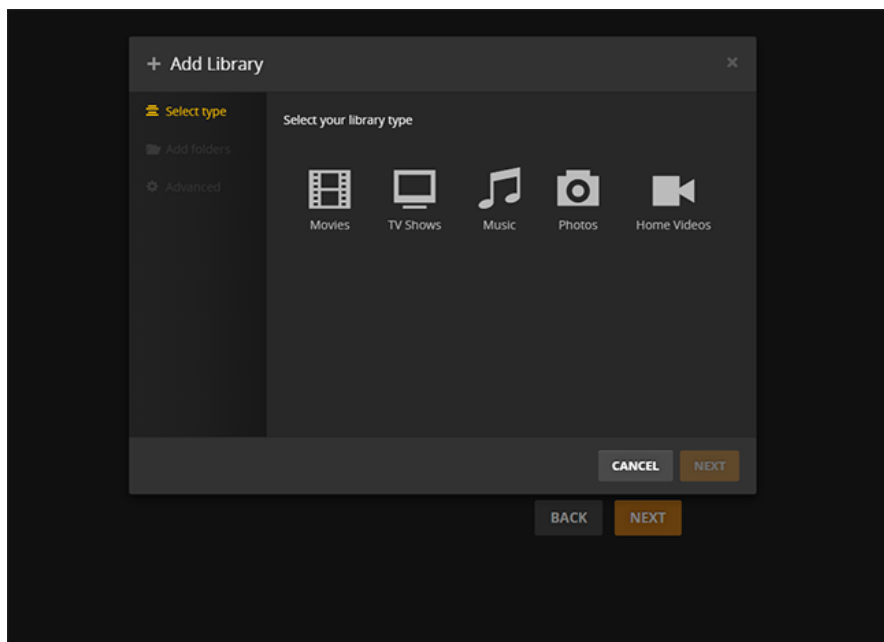
The first step is to name your server. By default, the server is named after the network name of the machine upon which it is installed. You can change the server name to something more exciting than say "Dad Office" or leave it as is.



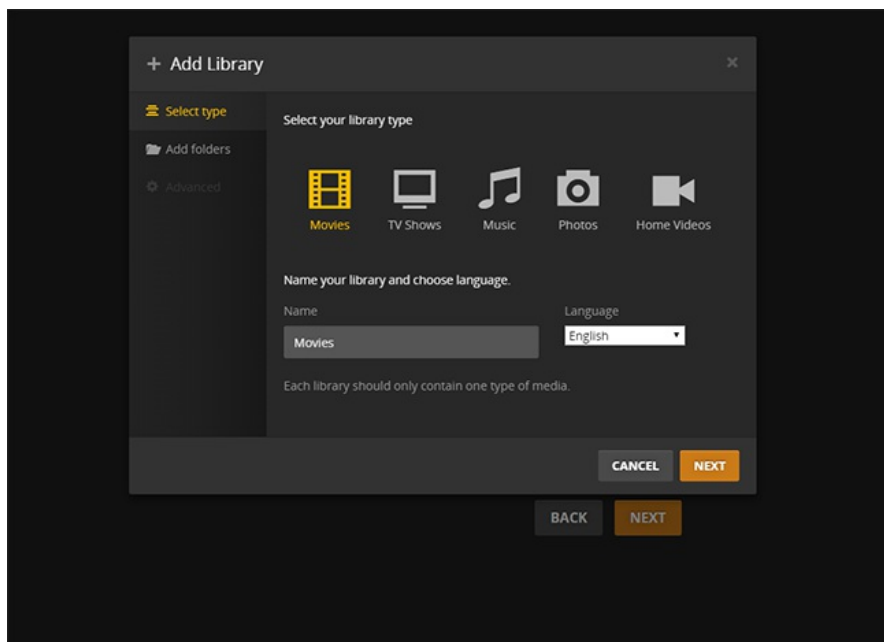
Next, it's time to add media to our library. Select "Add Library".



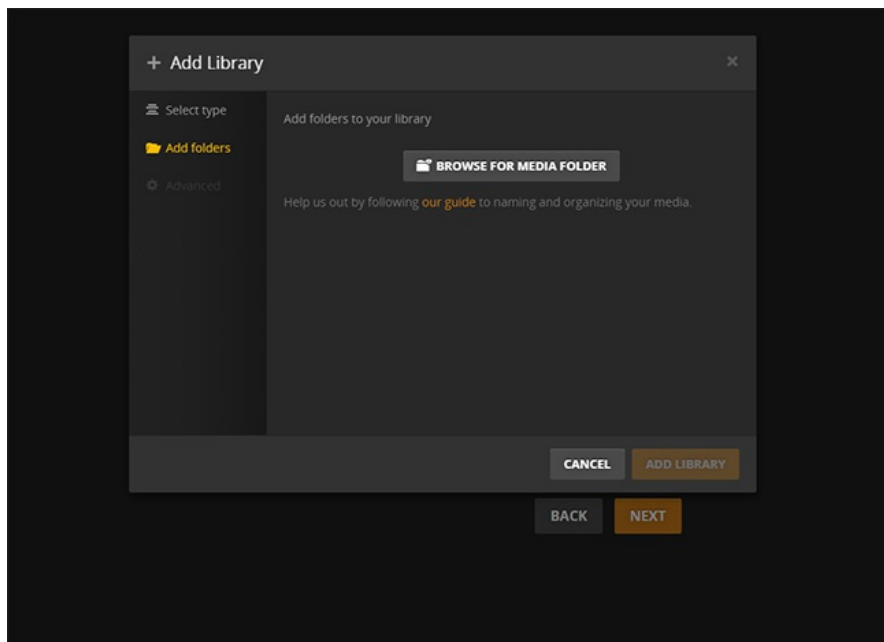
Here you can add many different library types: movies, TV shows, music, photos, and home videos.



Let's start off by adding some movie files. Select "Movies" and then, in the drop down menu that appears, name your movie library and select a language. For most people leaving the default name of "Movies" should suffice. Click "Next".

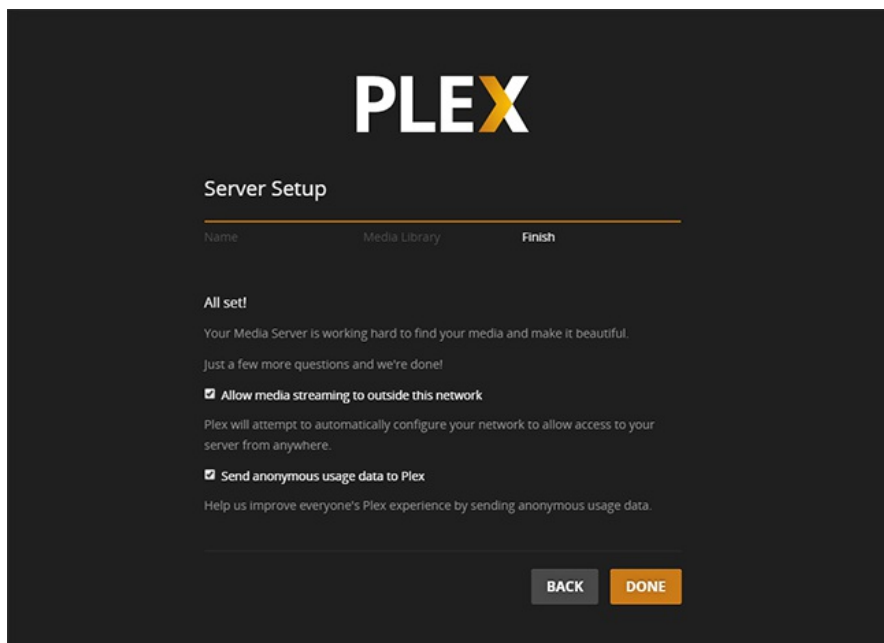


Now it's time to point Plex at the actual files, select "Browse for media folder" and select the folder that houses your movie files. Once you've selected the folder(s), click "Add library" to complete the process.

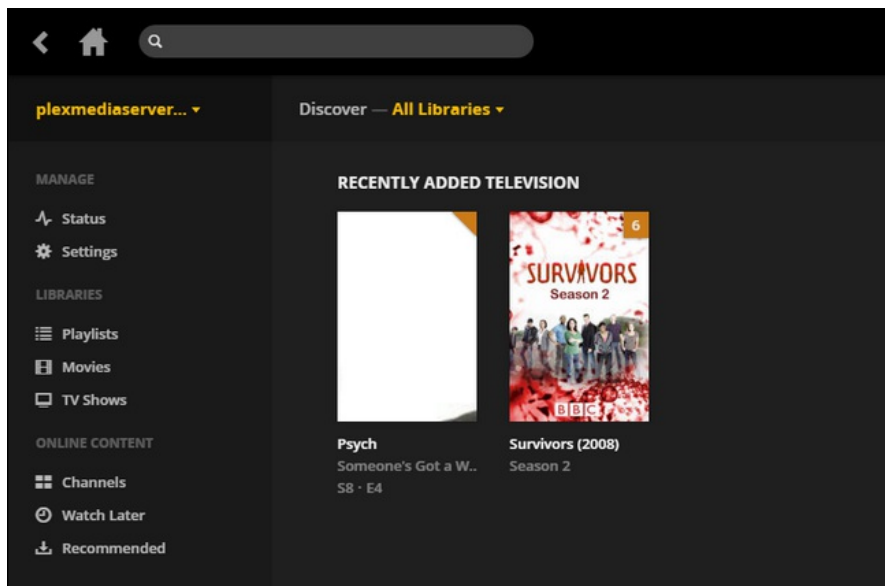


Repeat these steps for TV shows, music, and/or photos. It isn't necessary to populate all the libraries, of course—if you're using Plex solely for TV shows, then go ahead and ignore all the other library entries.

The final step of the initial server setup is to allow remote access to your media server and send anonymous data to Plex. Both are checked by default, and we recommend you leave them checked unless you have a pressing reason to uncheck them. Select "Done".



At this point you'll be kicked into the web-based control panel for your Plex server. Depending on how quickly your machine is working, you may see "Updating libraries..." or you may already have content to display like this.



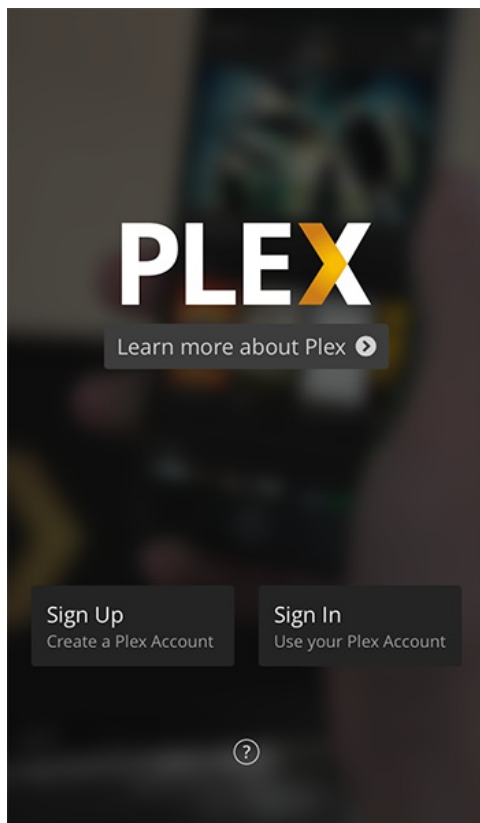
Note, for the first few hours or even for the first day, the “recently added” section isn’t particularly useful as *everything* was recently added to the library. Things will calm down shortly and recently added will become useful again over the coming days.

While you can browse through all your media libraries right from the Plex control panel (and even watch content right in the web browser), it’s more useful for checking in on your library and less useful for actually enjoying your content. Let’s look at how you can access Plex with a remote client.

Step Three: Access Your Plex Media Server from Elsewhere

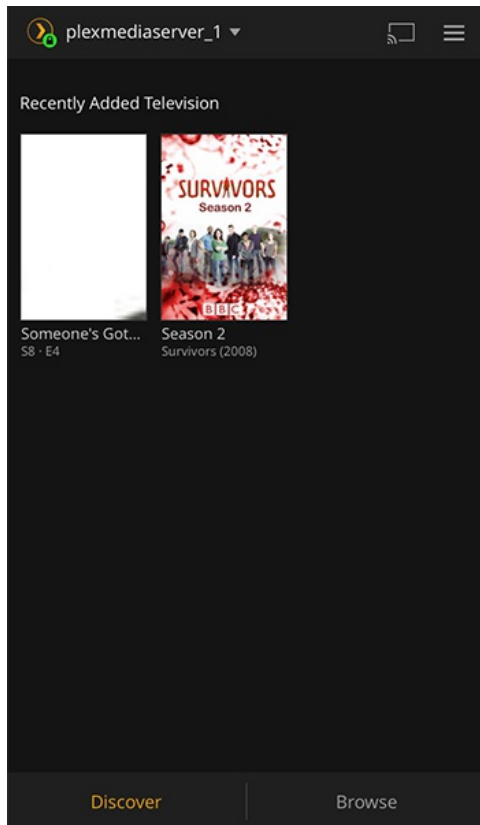
At this point we’ve done *all* the hard work (and it wasn’t even that hard). Once you have the actual Plex media server up and running, it’s totally smooth sailing. How smooth? Because your entire library is stored on one central server, you can easily tap into it from any computer, smartphone, or other device and get the exact same experience—the same media, same meta data, same recently added list, same database tracking what shows you’ve watched and which ones you need to catch up on.

Search for the app in your phone/tablet/TV’s app store, install it, and launch it. Again, we’re using the iOS app, but they’re all essentially interchangeable. Click “Sign In” and use the same credentials you created when you set up your server.

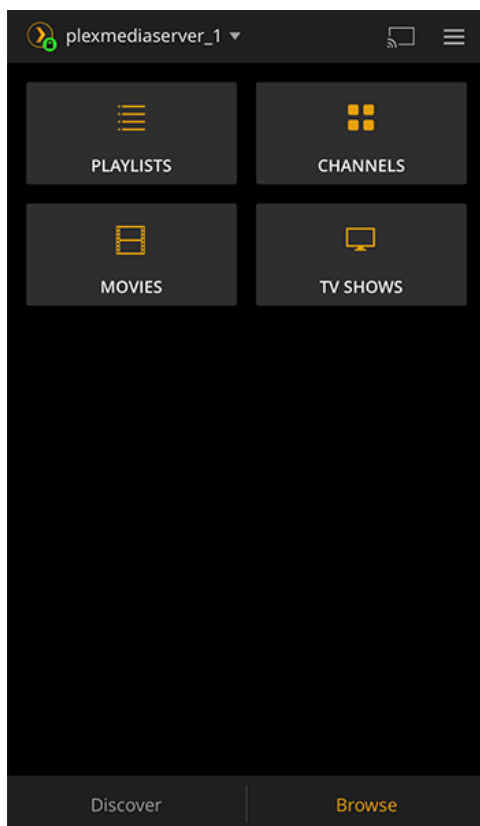


Boom. You are instantly connected to your media collection. Do you see how the screen on our iPhone mirrors, down to the show titles, the screenshot you just saw of the media server control

panel?



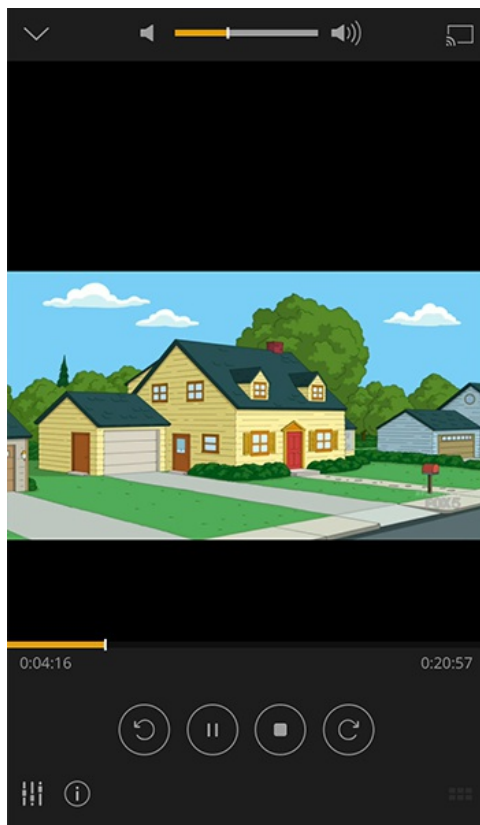
That's Plex's strongest element right there: centralization makes everything run so smoothly. If we tap on the "Browse" button, seen in the lower right corner of the screenshot above, we can then select from our available media. Let's do that and then select "TV shows".



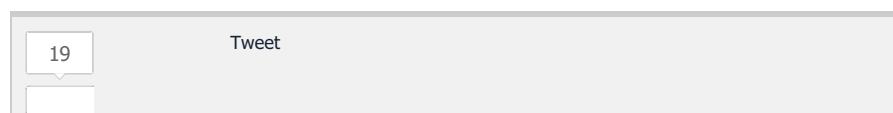
How about some *Family Guy*? Why not, we'll select a season and an episode.



With but a few taps after logging in, we're watching an episode without a hiccup:



And that's all there is to it! If you have local media and a desire to watch that local media anywhere in your house (or even away from home) and on any device, Plex Media Center is an all-in-one solution that makes enjoying your movies, TV shows, and even family photos and videos, an absolute breeze.



Jason Fitzpatrick is a warranty-voiding DIYer who spends his days cracking opening cases and wrestling with code so you don't have to. If it can be modded, optimized, repurposed, or torn apart for fun he's interested (and probably already at the workbench taking it apart). You can follow him on Twitter if you'd like.

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