Serving up music with Sockso

SOCK BOX

The Sockso music server offers easy listening regardless of your system or location. **BY VINCZE-ÁRON SZABÓ**

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The Sockso personal music server [1] lets users distribute digital tracks over a network. Sockso comes with a server and a neat front end that gives users easy access to audio data. The Sockso server supports popular audio formats such as MP3, OGG Vorbis, and WMA.
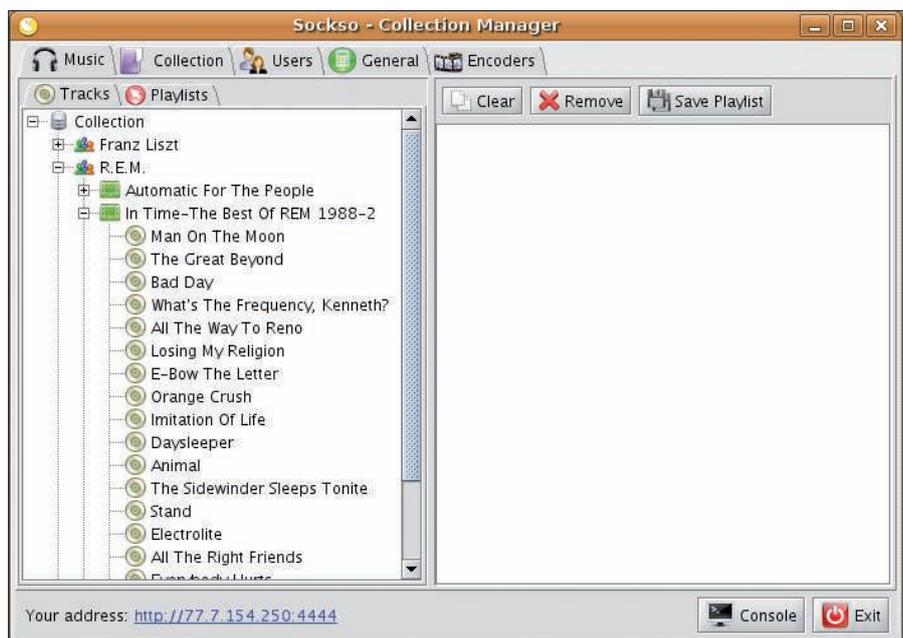
Configuration

It makes sense to run the Sockso server on a separate machine and use a browser to access it. The front end is programmed in Java and will thus run on Linux, Mac, and Windows.

To run Sockso, you need the Sun Java Runtime Engine and a network connection. If you will be serving up tracks to friends on the Internet, your PC needs a fast connection.

Java is included with most Linux distributions today. If your distro doesn't have Java, launch a package manager to load the package. Users with Ubuntu must additionally set the Sun Java version as their preferred version by giving the *sudo update-alternatives --config java* command.

Compressed archives of Sockso are available on the web [2]. Just download and unpack the archive. To launch Sockso on Linux, run the *linux.sh* script.

Typing *chmod +x linux.sh* at the console makes the script executable. You can then launch the server and the front end by typing *./linux.sh*.

Getting Started

Sockso lets you configure and manage tracks through a graphical user interface known as the Collection Manager (Figure 1). The Collection Manager provides five tabs for managing your music: *Music*, *Collection*, *Users*, *General*, and *Encoders*. The first step is to select the music directories you want to share.

To do so, change to the *Collection* tab and click *Add Folder* to pop up the Open dialog. Then browse to the directory you want to share. *Open* changes to the desired folder, telling the software to read the tracks in the directory and any subdirectories below it. This process can take a couple of minutes for larger collections, even if you have fast hardware. To get started, you might prefer to select less densely populated directories and avoid loading too many tracks at the same time.

The tracks you load are shown below *Tracks* in the *Music* tab, and you can use the tracks in this list to compose playlists. To do so, hold down the left mouse button and drag the desired tracks, albums, or artists to the right-hand side of the *Music* tab.

After finishing your selections, press *Save Playlist* and assign an intuitive name to the new entry. Any playlists you save are listed under *Playlists*.

Web Interface

After setting up a playlist, it makes sense to test whether the program is working in your browser. To do so, click on *Your address* at the lower edge of the Collec-

Figure 1: The Collection Manager helps you manage and configure the music server.
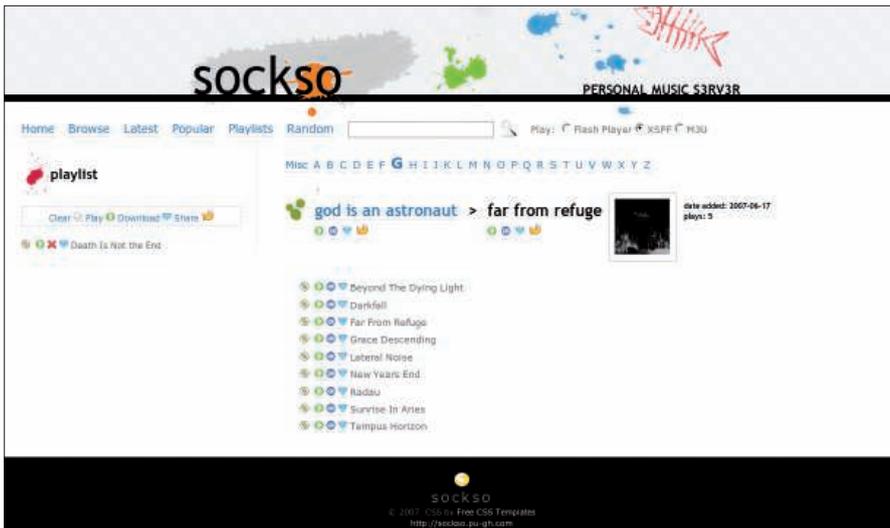
Figure 2: Sockso's browser interface lets you navigate easily to your favorite tracks.

tion Manager window, where you'll see a menu in which you can select *My Computer*. Sockso then launches the web front end in your browser (Figure 2). A menu bar lets you browse your collection for interesting tracks.

Browsing by album cover is a visually appealing function. The software automatically loads image files for your albums off the web and integrates the images with the search function. Unfortunately, the software tries to display large cover images despite the low resolution source material: this typically means blocky graphics.

The program sometimes fails to find album covers. The identification mechanism is not entirely reliable, even for more popular albums. In some cases, Sockso displays the same cover for different albums by the same artist.

Even without covers, you can still play or download tracks. On top of this, Sockso lets you compose and manage your own playlists via the web interface – once you have registered. After authenticating, you will find your playlists below *Playlists*.

Sockso provides two music players for the local machine. One player is integrated with the website, and the other

with a Flash popup (Figure 3). As an alternative, you can use a standalone player assigned to the file suffix.

User Management

The Collection Manager has a separate *Users* tab for user management. The *Require login* checkbox lets you specify whether the system will require users to enter a user account and password. By default, the server supports unrestricted access to your data but allows users to register if they want to do so. To change this behavior, enable the *Disable registering* checkbox to completely disable the registration function.

The Collection Manager *General* tab offers advanced configuration options. The *General* tab lets you modify the *Title* and *Tagline* in the web interface. The changes in this and other fields within the tab are automatically applied by the server. The logging feature lets you export user registration and login activity to a file, in which you can evaluate the information later. Another option lets you give users the ability to upload their own tracks. To do so, check the *Enable uploads* checkbox and define a target directory for file uploads.

Sockso also offers a set of command-line tools for managing the server. To use the tools, first launch the Sockso server in non-GUI mode by entering *./linux.sh -nogui*. Once Sockso is running, you can enter the Sockso commands at the command line. For example, the *coladd* and *coldel* commands let you add tracks or delete tracks from your collection. To do so, just add a path to the command line.

The *collist* command shows you which directory you are currently sharing.

In addition, you can configure Sockso at the command line. *proplist* gives you an overview of configurable parameters. *propset* lets you modify individual options. For example, *propset uploads. enabled yes* enables uploads.

External Access

To give your friends Internet access to your Sockso music collection, you must tell them the URL shown at the bottom of the Configuration Manager window. The URL includes the IP address assigned to your machine when you opened the Internet connection, a colon, and the port number. By default, the Sockso server runs on port 4444.

If your computer is behind a firewall, you'll need to configure the firewall to pass traffic to the Sockso server system. Please note that changing a firewall setting on your DSL router can open up a gaping hole for attackers; make sure you do not disable any existing security set-

Figure 3: Sockso even offers a Flash popup player.

tings. See your firewall documentation for more on securely forwarding traffic to the internal network.

Conclusions

Sockso is an especially good choice for heterogeneous networks because it can play music in almost any browser on a multitude of platforms. Despite the extensive feature set, the Sockso web interface requires very little in the line of configuration. Don't forget you need a license for any music you serve up outside your home network. Failure to respect licensing agreements might get you into trouble with the music industry. ■

Legal Issues

The technical ability to serve music does not give you the legal ability to infringe on copyrights. If you intend to stream music on the Internet, either obtain permission from the copyright owner, or else make sure you only use tracks that are under a free license.

INFO

[1]   Sockso: *http://sockso.pu-gh.com/*

[2]   Sockso download: *http://sockso. pu-gh.com/downloads/ sockso-latest.zip*