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■ **LaCie 5big Network review**

Review

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By Jim Martin, 27 Apr 2009

Rating: ★★★★★

Price as reviewed: £926

Best price: £1374.99

There's no doubt that LaCie makes the coolest looking storage products, but can its boxes measure up for performance, feature and value?

LaCie loves minimalist designs, and the new 5big Network is the sleekest looking NAS we've seen to date. A large silver box with a recessed, glowing blue orb on the front, it bears more than a passing resemblance to HAL 9000's all seeing eye.

Designed for small businesses, the 5big aims to take care of your storage and backup needs. It's available with capacities of 2.5, 5 and 7.5TB, and each one comes with five hot-swappable SATA disks. Out of the box, the disks are configured as a RAID 5, which means it can cope with a single disk failure. You can alternatively choose from a range of other configurations including RAID 5, RAID 6, RAID 10 and RAID 0. However, while the latter provides the best performance and the largest amount of storage, there's no protection should a disk fail. If you choose a RAID mode with a spare disk, this will be used automatically when another disk fails. The replacement disk then becomes the spare.

Build quality is up to LaCie's usual high standard. The aluminium case is sturdy and, even the business end at the rear looks tidy. Each of the five disk trays is lockable and has an LED above it. These can alert you to any problems such as a disk overheating, failing or a corrupt array. Naturally, you can also check the 5big's status via the web-based management interface. Replacing a disk is an extremely easy task: simply unlock the bay with the supplied tool – or a coin – and pull the handle. A spare 1TB disk for the 5TB model on test costs a steep £157 ex. VAT, but the hot-swap nature means you can slide the new disk in and the 5big will set about rebuilding the array (assuming you're not using RAID 0). Rebuild times can be 20 to 30 hours for a RAID 5 with 5TB, but you can use the storage during the rebuild process, though performance will

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inevitably be hit during that time.

There's a single Gigabit Ethernet port for connection to your network, plus three eSATA ports and a USB 2.0 port. The number of eSATA ports mean it's simple to add external drives (up to 2TB each) for more storage or backup purposes, but it's slightly odd not to find any FireWire ports. Backups can be scheduled to run daily, weekly or monthly, but bear in mind that they're not compressed, so you'll need to buy big-capacity disks.

Backups aren't encrypted either, which is a problem for sensitive data as an eSATA drive could be removed and connected to any computer that can read the XFS file system. We found it slightly unsettling that there's no way to eject an external drive through the management interface – LaCie's website merely advises users to check the disk's activity light isn't flickering before unplugging it. To take a snapshot of a connected drive, you simply push the blue orb on the front. We can't see many users wanting this feature, though.

Backup software is provided in the form of Genie for Windows 2000, XP and Vista, and Intego for Mac OS X 10.4 onwards. Only three licences are included, with extras costing £20. The software can backup open files, enable previous versions to be restored and can create entire system backups for disaster recovery. It supports compression, encryption and you can choose full, incremental, differential or mirror backup types. Note that Apple's Time Machine is not supported as this requires a direct-attached HFS+ formatted hard.

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