

MartinLogan Motion Vision X Soundbar Review

by [Mark Henninger](#) on February 23, 2016

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Compared to a typical TV's speakers, a soundbar is a serious sonic upgrade targeting the nexus of price, performance, aesthetics, and convenience that many consumers crave. Some soundbars are simple, inexpensive devices that exist for the sole purpose of replacing the abysmal built-in audio found in most TVs. Others aim higher and aspire to be the center of attention, be it for movies, TV, or music. Unsurprisingly, higher performance comes at a higher cost.

The MartinLogan Motion Vision X soundbar (\$1700) is undeniably in the second, high-performance category. It is overflowing with features, including DTS Play-Fi wireless audio, 100 watts of total power, four woofers, and folded-ribbon tweeters. This soundbar is explicitly marketed as a premium sound system for playing music as well as a surround system for TV and movies.

If you are picky about audio fidelity yet have no choice but to go with a soundbar due to spousal acceptance, kids, pets, or limited space, then you are likely looking at premium models such as the Motion Vision X. You might even add a nice subwoofer to make it a full-range system. Let's see what this luxury soundbar has to offer.

Features

The Vision X is noticeably better built than soundbars I've reviewed in the past. For one thing, the piano-black, sculpted, rear-ported enclosure is very substantial, weighing in at 20 pounds. The device measures 5" (H) x 40" (W) x 5.8" (D) and supports either wall mounting or placement on a flat surface; a wall-mount bracket is provided in the box.



Closeup view of the Vision X's piano-black, sculpted enclosure.

Connectivity options are audio-only; this is not an HDMI-equipped device. The back panel offers optical, coaxial, and Ethernet digital connections. It also offers dual-band 802.11 g/n Wi-Fi. You'll also find a 3.5 mm [stereoanalog input](#) back there, as well as an input for an IR repeater.



The rear panel on the Vision X.

The soundbar's network connectivity comes in handy because it works with DTS Play-Fi, an open-platform streaming-audio system that supports resolutions up to 24-bit/192 kHz on multiple devices. The cool thing about Play-Fi is that it's brand-agnostic, meaning the Vision X will work with products made by other companies. With Play-Fi, the [soundbar](#) can serve as a stereo system that taps into a vast library of cloud-based content, all at your fingertips.

The performance specs are impressive for a [soundbar](#); frequency response is listed from 43 Hz to 23 kHz (+/-3 dB). Three "Folded Motion Transducers"—aka AMT (air-motion transformer) tweeters—handle highs from 3000 Hz on up. Meanwhile, [four 4"](#) mid/woofers take care of lower frequencies. The Vision X has a [subwoofer](#) output that works with any sub featuring an RCA input, and it also connects wirelessly to any sub using MartinLogan's SWT-2 kit (which I did not test).

Power is provided by seven amplifiers—one per driver—and the system's total output is spec'd at 100 watts (200 watts peak).

This [soundbar](#) includes an extruded-aluminum remote that is simply fantastic. It's rare for me to get excited about a remote control, but in this case it's justified. Offering only the controls you need most often, it defers to the menu for deeper adjustments. It feels good in your hand, and the buttons are solid (not squishy rubber). The Vision X also has an IR-learning function that allows you to program it to respond to other [remotecontrols](#).



The Vision X's remote is just about perfect.

Several listening modes are available, and each offers numerous adjustments for fine-tuning. You can select one of three sound modes—Bass+, Normal, and Night—and tweak bass levels in 2 dB increments. When playing stereo content, you can select one of three modes—Wide (for an expanded stereo image), Voice+ (which creates a virtual center channel), and Normal (no processing). When playing surround content such as PCM, Dolby Digital, and [DTS Digital Surround](#), you can turn simulated surround on or off and boost the surround effect by 6 dB.

A blue alphanumeric LED display is located behind the soundbar's grill. It shines right through the grill cloth, and it's invisible when not in use. You can adjust the display's brightness, set it to adjust automatically based on ambient light levels, and choose whether it turns off a few seconds after changing a setting.

Setup

Every time I set up a [soundbar](#), I'm reminded of one major factor that makes these devices appealing to people who want better sound from a TV: easy installation. Nothing is simpler than placing a [soundbar](#) on a flat surface, and that's how I used it. The only issue I encountered was the 5-inch-tall chassis blocking the bottom of my TV screen, so I used a 2-inch-thick shelf—which I keep handy for exactly that purpose—to give the TV a boost.

I connected the Vision X to my Wi-Fi network so I could use Play-Fi. At first, it

didn't show up on my network, but then I had a revelation—read the instructions! I followed the manual's advice and placed the unit next to my [router](#) while performing the initial connection using WPS, and within a minute the process was complete. The Play-Fi app then prompted me to update the soundbar.

My TV offers an digital-optical output, so I used that to connect it to the soundbar. I also connected a subwoofer—an ELAC S12EQ (\$700, review coming soon). That sub offers on-board EQ, which is beneficial for this application since the soundbar does not feature any sort of EQ or room-correction capability. I tweaked the sub's levels using REW and a UMIK-1 measurement mic, but most people can adjust the level by ear to suit their taste. Note that this soundbar does not require a [subwoofer](#), although it does benefit from one. As the specifications indicate, it's quite competent in the bass department.

Performance

As long as you don't expect miracles, the Vision X offers an elevated listening experience that is notably better than what most [soundbars](#) can muster. Indeed, the primary limitation of the system is the spacing of the drivers as opposed to their quality.

Quick in-room measurements yielded very impressive frequency-response graphs, on par with what I'd expect from good bookshelf speakers. Specifically, from my listening position I measured a frequency response (without a [subwoofer](#)) of 40 Hz to 24 kHz, just like the specs claim.

Bass response was somewhat uneven, which is not a huge surprise, since the location of the soundbar is determined by the TV, not by what would be acoustically optimum. In my room, that put the soundbar about 30 inches forward of the front wall—and, of course, right below the TV screen. The result was overly strong bass at default settings. Once I dialed down the bass level to -6, the bass-response curve flattened out and looked very good. Adding the sub provided an even better measured result—a near-flat response that extended from 25 Hz up past 20 kHz. Using the sub's onboard EQ reduced the effect of room modes responsible for bass peaks and nulls and also improved the system's bass extension.

I cycled through the Vision X's various sound modes and found myself gravitating toward the most neutral settings. For stereo listening, that was the Normal mode; for surround material, it meant using the simulated surround

without the 6 dB boost. I never felt the need to use the Bass+ or Night setting. To my ears, the sound of the system was so accurate that added processing was a distraction, especially for 2-channel music listening.

The [Motion Vision X](#) managed to conjure a surprisingly wide and deep soundfield while playing stereo music in Normal mode, despite being only 40" wide. It's not the same soundfield you'd get from a pair of optimally placed [bookshelf speakers](#), but it's several cuts above what I expect to hear from most [soundbars](#). What's impressive to me is that it does this without using reflected sound or any DSP trickery. Wide mode brings DSP processing into the equation, and the result does sound more expansive, but there's a loss of definition that I felt was too much of a compromise.

DTS Play-Fi was a pleasure to use; I really appreciated the PC app that can stream just about anything to the soundbar, including [iTunes](#) and local files. It's a feature that Google's otherwise fantastic [Chromecast](#) lacks, and one that makes Play-Fi very appealing. I used it to stream a bunch of ripped CDs I keep on my PC, including Coil's Love's Secret Domain, Com Truise albums, Sly & Robbie albums, [classic Peter Gabriel](#), Thievery Corporation, Massive Attack, and a whole bunch of hip-hop including Danny Brown and Dr. Dre. What can I say? It makes music sound great.

Of course, [soundbars](#) have to be adept at reproducing TV, video-game, and movie sound—music is only part of the equation. And yes, the Vision X deftly handled AV sound, whether it was the Super Bowl, an action movie like Spectre or Jurassic World, or an extended session of Grand Theft Auto 5.

Conclusion

I'm not going to lie—for the same money you'd spend on a [MartinLoganMotion Vision X](#) soundbar, you can get a better-performing system that consists of an AVR and speakers. It's just a fact of life. But if speakers and an AVR were the best choice for everyone, [soundbars](#) would not exist.

While \$1700 is a lot for a soundbar, you get what you pay for from MartinLogan. Is it three times better than a \$500 model? Yes. Is it twice as good as any \$800 soundbar I've heard? Yes. High fidelity is what sets the Vision X apart from its competition, and I have never heard another powered soundbar sound so much like a high-quality [speaker system](#).

The Vision X is a great choice for a [modern living](#) room where a full-sized stereo is not an option but high-quality sound is desired.

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