

Eight Great Ways to Get the Most from Your Zune

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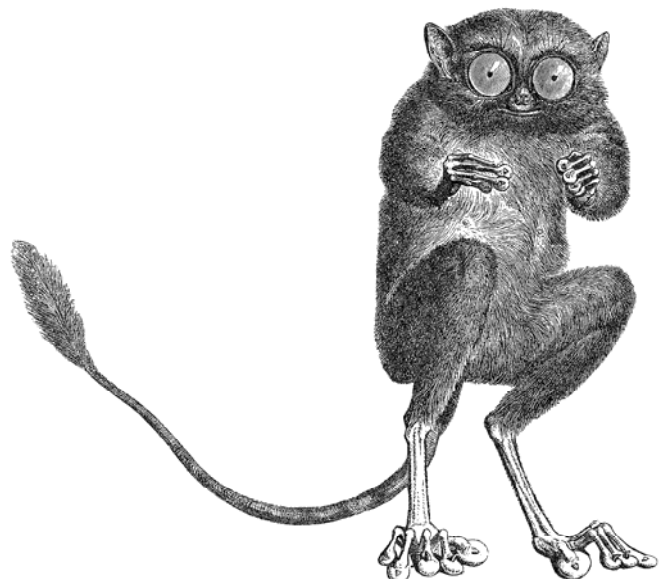
The Zune is Microsoft's new media player. It does music. It does video. It does pictures.

Are you ready to get the most out of your Zune? Do you know the best methods and secrets for managing your media, loading up your player and sharing your data with others? Do you know which accessories are vital—and which are not? Do you know how to hack your Zune and work around Microsoft's built-in limitations to take your Zune to the next level?

In this quick guide you'll learn the down and dirty truth about getting the most from your Zune. No holds barred. No stones unturned.

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Getting the Most from Your Zune

The Zune. It's not just an iPod rip off. It's a media player with real strengths and weaknesses. It offers a new way to listen to music, to watch video and to view pictures. It does things that the iPod does not. It has an FM tuner. It offers an all-you-can-eat music subscription that provides access to a huge commercial music library. It's got menus that go way beyond what an iPod can do. It lets you browse your media in a whole new way. In other words, in and of itself, without comparison to any other portable music device, the Zune is a cool and worthy gadget that creates its own unique listening and viewing experience.

And that is a very good thing.

If you own a Zune and you've bought this shortcut, you've got a treat waiting for you. In the following pages, you're about to learn how to get the very most from your Zune media player. This book will guide you through eight of the most essential ways you can maximize your Zune experience. These ways are:

1. Using the Zune player

Learn how your Zune works and what all those buttons and menus do. You'll discover undocumented secrets, and menus and button combinations along the way.

2. Taking Charge of your Media Library with Zune Software

From smart playlists to the music visualizer to ripping CDs, you'll read how to use Zune Software to manage your media and sync with your Zune.

3. Going Shopping

Find out how the Zune Marketplace works, and how to use the Zune Pass and Microsoft Points to build your music library. You'll also learn how to authorize and de-authorize computers for playback.

4. Loading Up Your Zune

Fill up your Zune with TV shows, movies, songs and pictures. Here's where you'll discover how to rip DVDs, and convert music and video to Zune compatible formats.

5. Sharing Media With Friends

Discover how to use Zune's built-in WiFi to send and receive digital media, and read about the "social" essentials of Zune.

6. Accessorizing Your Zune

Discover accessory secrets. Learn which accessories to buy and which you can skip. You'll find out why you don't need the expensive A/V kit and how you can connect your Zune to your TV without it.

7. Powering Your Zune

Find out how to get the most battery life out of your Zune—and how to provide quick assists to your power supply.

8. Hacking Your Zune

Learn how to do a Zune end-run around Microsoft's defenses. You'll discover how to connect to your Zune as an external USB hard drive and how to transfer data onto and off of your device.

After reading through this book, you'll gain some vital (and frank!) insights about the power and limitations of your Zune. Here is all the information you need to know. No holds barred. No punches pulled. No stones left unturned.

Using the Zune Player

Congratulations. You've been Zuned. You're holding a great new gadget in your hands right now. So what do you need to know to be able to use it?

What's that control pad shown in Figure 1 and how does it work? How do you reset the thing? What's the hold switch for? And what are some good navigation tricks?

In this section, you're about to learn the basic Zune skills you need to navigate Menus, play media and use the on-board settings to achieve the playback you're looking for. Both essential techniques and some more exotic ones follow below.

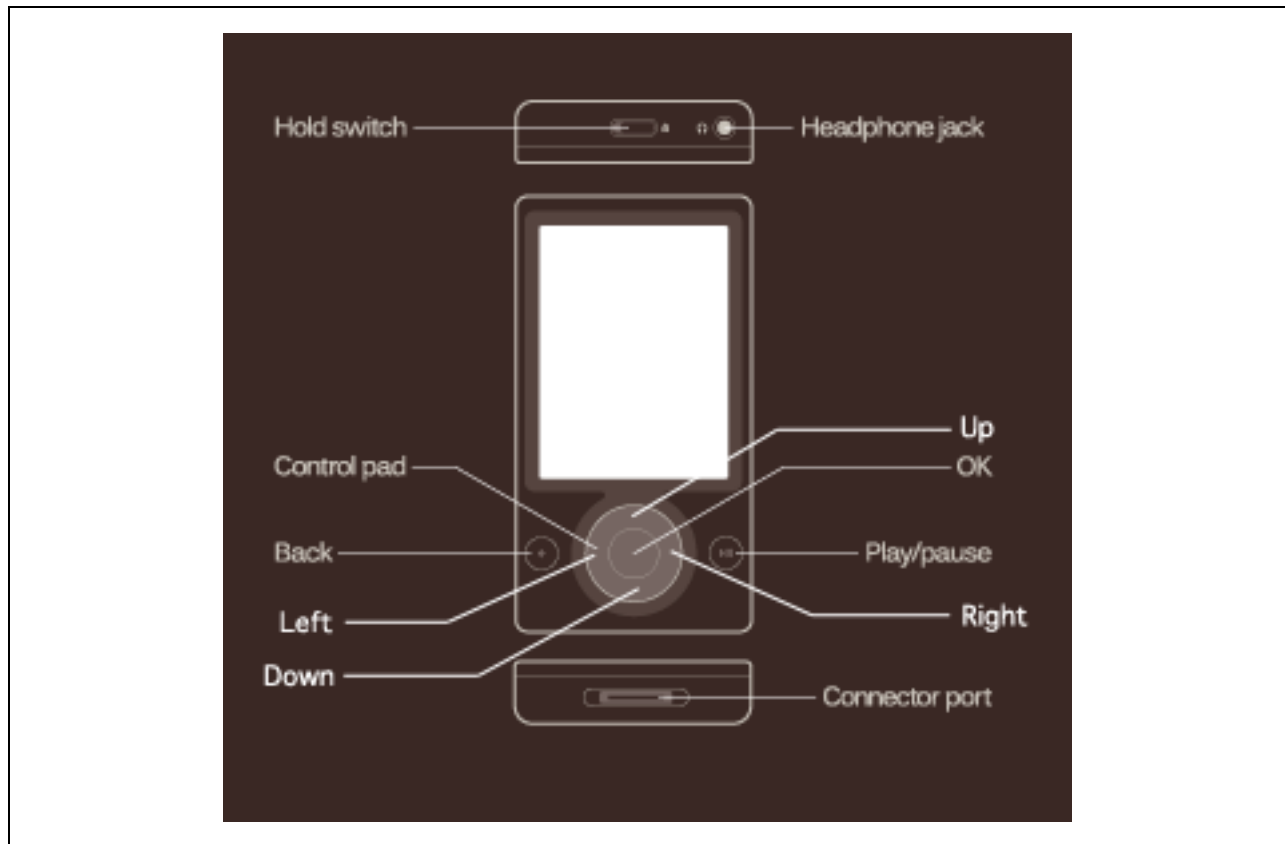


Figure 1. The Zune, its buttons, ports, switches and jack.

Meet the Interface

The Zune. It has one screen, one connector port, seven buttons, a headphone jack, and a hold switch. It doesn't sound like a lot at first, but with just these few items, you can completely control your Zune. Here's a quick feature rundown.

Screen

The Zune has a bright, easy-to-see 240×320 pixel display that can be used in both portrait and landscape mode.

Connector port

The opening at the bottom of your Zune lets you connect your player to a computer. You can do this in two ways. You can use the sync cable that shipped with your player or you can buy a Zune dock and connect directly to the dock. Connecting either way allows your Zune to recharge and to synchronize the player's contents with your computer.

Headphone jack

Use the headphone jack to connect your earphones (or external speakers) so you can listen to your music, or an A/V cable so you can watch your Zune on TV.

Control pad (Left, Right, Up and Down buttons)

The control pad provides directional buttons. These buttons help you navigate through your menus and access other Zune functions. The control pad is *not* a scroll wheel. The Zune is *not* the iPod. The control pad provides a round connected interface to four click-to-activate buttons at the top, bottom, left and right ends of the pad.

The button definitions depend on how you're using the Zune. When used in landscape mode, the directions change with the orientation. (Figure 1 shows portrait mode, with the Zune held vertically.) As Figure 2 demonstrates, the Right button ("skip forward"), in portrait mode, physically corresponds to the "Up" button ("volume up") in landscape mode.

As a rule, music plays back in portrait mode; video plays back in landscape mode.

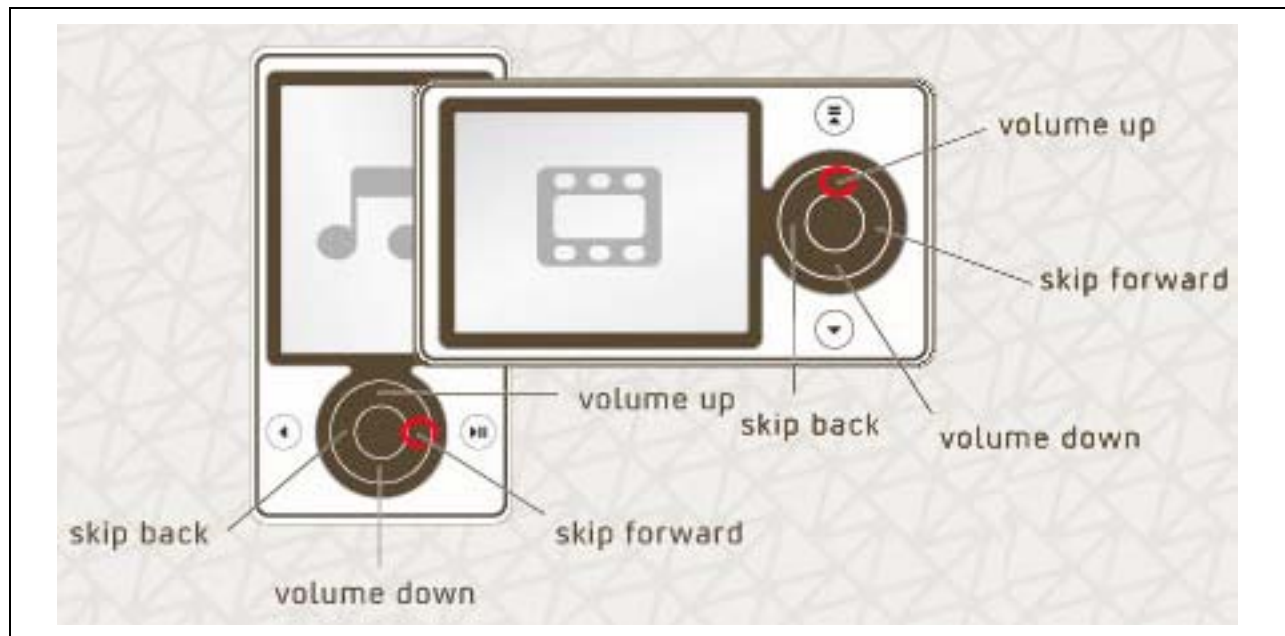


Figure 2. Although the button marked with the red circle is physically the same in both orientations, its function switches between "skip forward"/Right (portrait mode) and "volume up"/Up (landscape mode).

Back button

The Back button lets you navigate back out of menus or (less obviously) toggle between menu and playback modes.

Play/Pause button

The Play/Pause button does exactly what you think it does. It switches between playback mode and pause mode. It also lets you power your unit down, if you hold it for a few seconds—but more about that later.

OK button

The OK button appears in the very center of the Control pad. Use it to select choices or confirm changes.

Hold switch

The hold switch locks up your Zune. When locked, you won't accidentally start playback when someone brushes against your handbag or your pocket on the subway, possibly draining your battery. Or you can lock your Zune to *keep* playing, while ignoring stray button pushes. Either way, when the hold button is set, the Zune ignores buttons. You know Hold is set when you see a bit of reddish/orange bar next to the switch and the switch itself sits closer to the "locked" icon. Hold is off when the red bar is hidden.

Powering Your Zune On and Off

By pressing and holding the play pause button for 3-5 seconds, you can power down the Zune. To power it back on, just press a button or two. Microsoft claims you need to hold the buttons down for another 3–5 seconds, but I just hit OK and my Zune powers right back up. If you hold the Zune to your ear as you do this, you can actually hear the hard drive start up or shut down.

At times, you'll want to use your Zune as it charges, using the sync cable or dock as a power source, but not in connect/synchronize mode (Figure 3). Here's how. Quit out of the Zune software without detaching the sync cable. After a few seconds the Zune exits the "circle-of-dots" connection and returns control directly to you. (Keep in mind that extended use of your Zune could possibly shorten component life, but there's always a balance to be struck when choosing how you use your devices.)

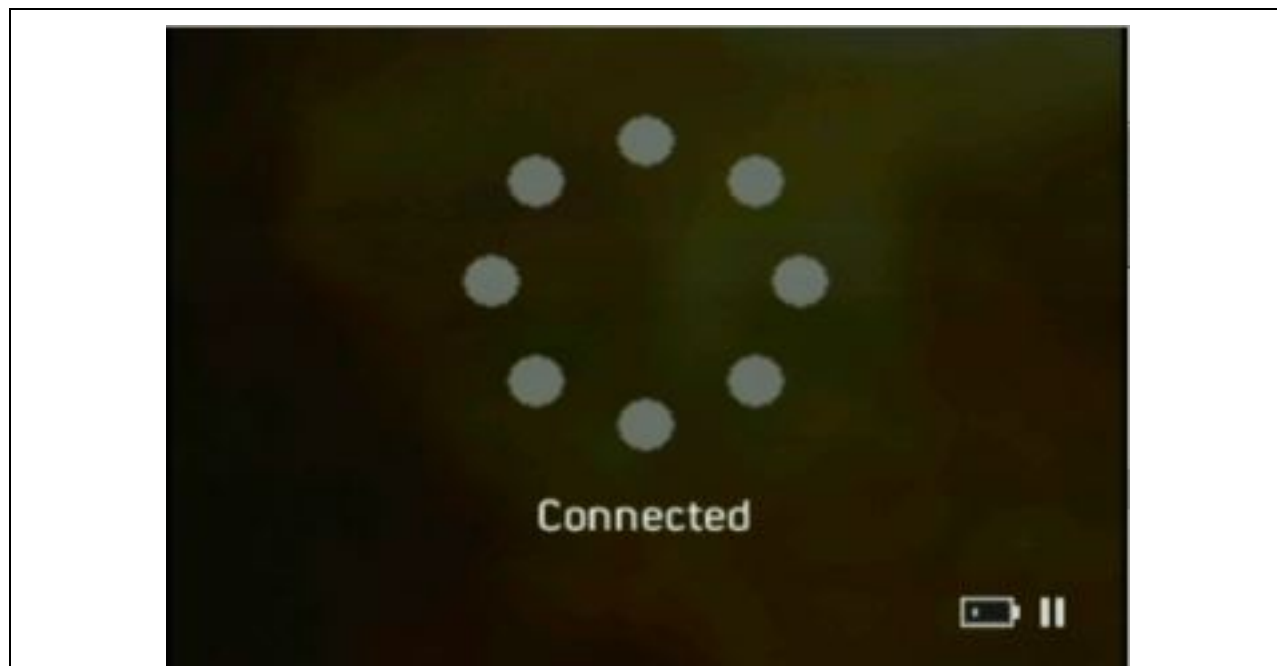


Figure 3. The circle of dots indicates your Zune is either actively syncing or simply connected to your personal computer.

Unfortunately, tethered Zunes have quirks. The “hold the Play/Pause button until the Zune turns off” trick only works on un-tethered and unlocked Zunes. When you’re connected via the sync cable or a dock, you can hold down that Play/Pause button until the cows come home. It’s not going to power down. Sure, your battery won’t take a hit, which is why you probably tethered the Zune in the first place, but your Zune is stuck on “on”. Detach the USB tether, and then hold the play/pause button for a few seconds. Your Zune obligingly powers down.

Tip

To reset your un-tethered Zune, simultaneously press and hold the Back (not Left) and Up buttons for about five seconds. The Zune turns itself completely off and back on again, and the Zune logo displays as the software restarts.

Navigating the Zune Menus

Some Zune menus are pretty obvious and easy to use. Others, not so much. For example, the main menu (also called the “home screen”) is simple and straightforward as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The Zune home screen/main menu does exactly what you expect. Music lets you play songs. Video allows you to watch movies, TV shows and other videos. Pictures shows the images stored on your Zune. Radio provides access to the interactive built-in FM tuner. Community lets you share music and pictures with other Zune owners. Settings let you configure your Zune. Use the Up and Down buttons to choose any of these options and then click OK to select it.

Tip

To return directly to the home screen at any time, press and hold the Back button for 2 seconds. To disable the click sounds associated with your menus, choose **settings**→**sounds** from your home screen and click OK to toggle the click sounds on or off.

The twist

Several Zune menus (**music**, **videos** and **pictures**) use a system called the “twist” to help you select between various subcategories like **albums**, **artists**, **playlists**, and **genres**. The twist refers to the band of categories running across the top of the menu screens. The currently selected category appears in larger, bolded text with angle brackets to either side. Figure 5 shows how to navigate a twist menu.