

Friday, February 11. 2005

### TiVo ToGo Annoyances

I put in my request weeks ago to get onto the priority list to get the new TivoToGo-enabled software on my Tivos. It finally arrived a couple of days ago. I wanted to write something up on it as soon as possible, but unfortunately it has taken me 3 days to get anywhere with it, and I still don't have a DVD with my shows on it. There were a number of problems.

The Tivo needed a reboot before it would work and since it was in the middle of recording something I didn't want to reboot it. That meant I couldn't do it the first night.

After a reboot the Tivo Desktop software was able to connect to my Tivo. Unfortunately it takes close to an infinite amount of time to transfer stuff. I have 7 episodes of "24" recorded at best quality I want to put on a DVD. That translates to about 15G of data I needed to transfer. I have a USB wired adapter plugged into a WRT54G and then an 802.11g connection to another WRT54G sitting next to a Windows box. This combination got me a transfer rate of about 1G/hour which means transferring my 7 episodes took over 15 hours.

Ok, a day later all the episodes came across. I grabbed the trial copy of Sonic MyDVD Studio 6.1 which is what Tivo suggests we use to create our dvds. I had configured my TiVo Desktop to stick my shows on E:\tivo since I didn't have room on my C drive. Unfortunately there is no provision in MyDVD to change the directory it looks for tv shows in. You can browse to the files and add them manually, but then you don't get the same ui screen that shows which shows are available. A quick register hack fixed that, but you can't expect Joe User to hack his registry for something this simple.

The MyDVD UI for adding shows is horrible. It doesn't show the episode information at all, so I had my list of 7 episodes all titled "24" with no clue as to which was which. So you are probably better off browsing to them and adding them manually than using the button designed for this.

MyDVD has absolutely no TiVo integration. I am sure that I read at some point that the dvds you create would have a Tivo-like navigation menu. No such thing exists in MyDVD. There isn't even a TiVo theme for the top DVD menu. They could at least have added a JPG with a TiVo logo or something. Nothing.

When I finally did start the burn process MyDVD told me it was building the menus. I had read it was slow, so I went to bed. 7 hours later it was still building the menus. So I left it another 12 hours. No progress. The thing isn't hung. There is a cancel button that works fine and asks me if I am sure I want to cancel since cancelling could take a "long" time!

So as far as I can tell burning a DVD simply isn't working for me. Who knows what the problem may be. Conflict with something else that is installed perhaps? This is Windows, you can never really be sure why something doesn't work. Unfortunately the OSX TiVo Desktop 2.0 is not available yet so I can't do this on my Powerbook yet. At this point it looks like my only real option is to work around MyDVD and use something like this hack to convert the .tivo files to mpeg2. In the long run that's probably much more useful anyway. The .tivo files have a playback password on them you have to remember which seems to me to be DRM run amok. Not that I have a VCR, but if I did, it wouldn't have a password option. This is no different.

Another annoying thing is that the recorded shows have a thin strip of white on black noise at the top. Looks to be too organized to be noise actually. Closed captioning data or something? Guess I may need to edit the stream to cut that out and also to snip out the commercials so I can fit more on a dvd.

I'll update this if I ever get my shows onto a dvd that works. At this point I am having a hard time disagreeing with the TiVo Deathwatch. I'll probably be looking for an alternative soon.

Update: Ok, I finally managed to burn a working DVD from the MyDVD software. After a ctrl-alt-del to kill off the running process that had been going for almost 24 hours, I restarted it, reloaded the project and it actually worked. Still took a couple of hours to sit and chew on the 2 .tivo files I had fed it, but the final DVD works. It still has the noise at the top which is distracting, but the quality is ok. So all in all, out of the 8 hours of "24" which was supposed to be my test case, eliminating the hung MyDVD and other delays and extrapolating from the 3 hours I have managed to burn so far, it will

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end up taking somewhere between 20 and 24 hours to create the 3 DVDs assuming I am right there at each user-interaction point ready to click or switch dvds and assuming no hung processes or crashes. I think the upper range my patience will tolerate is 8 hours to burn 8 hours of content. For it to be something I would use often it would need to be at least 3x or 4x, as in 15-20 minutes for every hour of content.

By the way, don't get me wrong, I love my TiVo. I have played a little bit with alternatives, and for the core functionality of scheduling and recording shows nothing I have seen beats it. But the alternatives are catching up and my expectations are high.

Posted by Rasmus in Audio/Video at 14:32

Why don't you use MythTV? I thought about getting Tivo or some other PVR a while ago, but don't like the monthly fees, closed box, limitations (DRM possibly), and future uncertainty.

Anonymous on Feb 11 2005, 22:55

I had a look at MythTV about a year ago and really didn't have the time it would have required. Nor did I have a nice quiet little PC to use for it. These \$70 TiVo boxes are very nice hook up and forget boxes that are extremely easy to use and for the most part do everything better than MythTV. It's also not like they will suddenly stop working if TiVo goes under. If you look around you will find significant TiVo communities in countries where TiVo doesn't offer service.

But yes, TiVo isn't exactly trailblazing anymore and whether it is MythTV or something else that replaces it, perhaps a revitalized TiVo (?), I can see switching at some point.

Anonymous on Feb 12 2005, 00:28

> If you look around you will find significant TiVo communities in countries where TiVo doesn't offer service.

People can use Tivo without a subscription?

I don't know if Tivo does everything better than MythTV - maybe it has a simpler/easier interface (but just by a bit). MythTV can do so much more - music, weather, web, images, etc. There are quite a few case options - like Coolermaster (and cheaper). I think there are even PSU's and fans that are specifically made to be quiet and used in PVR's. I'm still thinking about building a MythTV box, but fact is there's not a whole heck of a lot on TV I'm interested in recording.

Coolermaster:

<http://www.anandtech.com/printarticle.aspx?i=2320>

Anonymous on Feb 12 2005, 02:08

Yup, for the non-core functionality of TiVo, I agree, the alternatives have it beat by quite a bit. With a 3-year old running around and extremely busy schedules, we watch perhaps 3 hours of tv per week on average. That's not a while lot, so when we do sit down to watch something I don't want to have to "fix" the TV yet again and the few shows we do like need to be there and ready to go. I was very interested in the ToGo service because I travel so much and I am often stuck on planes, in airports or in hotels. I get a lot of reading done on the road, but it would be nice to also have the option to bring some stuff from the TiVo with me.

As far as using the TiVo without the service. Yes, it can be done. I have always subscribed and will continue to do so because it is much easier, but when you don't have the option in places where tivo doesn't provide guide data for and won't even sell you a subscription if you ask them nicely you do what you have to do. Have a look at

[http://minnie.tuhs.org/TiVo/Paper/auug\\_tivo\\_paper.html](http://minnie.tuhs.org/TiVo/Paper/auug_tivo_paper.html)

for a good writeup on the history of hacking the TiVo. Closer to home there is <http://www.tivocanada.com/>

Anonymous on Feb 12 2005, 02:25

You could also use something like tmpgenc to convert from the .tivo files to avis, mpgs, or whatever. I do that to prepare shows to burn to DVDs. You have to select the filetype . at the bottom of the list. I recommend using the wizard to prepare the file format for DVDs. I then use Nero to make a playable DVD from the mpeg files, which shouldn't require another encoding pass. I cut off the handful of black pixels and that random noise at the top at the same time. I also edit out the commercials, which is a little unfriendly, but whatever.

I have also gone directly from .tivo to divx avi so that I can throw a whole bunch of shows onto one data DVD. You can tell tmpgenc to do a batch of files.

Oh yeah, I get about real-time transfer rates over USB and 10/100, so you're not doing much worse.

Anonymous on Feb 15 2005, 17:04

Right, I am sure this stuff can be hand-manipulated into shape. But all this manual intervention is very un-tivo like. If I wanted to fiddle I would buy a nice little Shuttle box and run MythTV or something similar. TiVo's reason for existing is to package this stuff for people who don't have time to fiddle.

Anonymous on Feb 15 2005, 17:24

I read your description of your struggles to create a DVD from a TiVo downloaded file. I can appreciate your frustration. I've been with TiVo since the beginning. I love TiVo. But you gotta stop TiVo at the shoreline. I, too, wanted to create DVD's from TiVo downloads. After a lot of hesitation and research, here's what I did.....and how it turned out. I decided that I wanted to use the DVR approach.....that's a unit that hooks up to your TiVo/TV system, and enables recording of TiVo downloads. I happened to buy a Panasonic E80H, based on internet chatter. It's got an 80g hard-drive, and a DVD burner. Here's how it works: you "save to VCR"

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(you'd think that TiVo would get a little more up-to-date) the TiVo download, recording it onto the Panasonic hard-drive. (You could copy it directly to the DVD burner, but then you'd lose the ability to edit out the commercials, etc.) After editing the commercials, and cleaning up the beginning/ending of the file, you then "dub" the result to the DVD drive. (I found out that "dub" is just another word for "transfer".) After dubbing is finished, you've got a DVD that you can play, copy, whatever. All this sounds simple enough, but I can say that it was one of the most difficult challenges that I've ever experienced. In the end, it was worth it. So go with a DVR. If you decide to do this and get stuck, contact me & maybe I can help you out.

pjblevin

Anonymous on Feb 25 2005, 05:45

Heh, really sounds like MythTV might be easier!

Anonymous on Mar 3 2005, 01:57

Sage TV on a Windows Box with a Hauppauge PVR 350. Life is good.

What ? I want to burn all my recording to a DVD ? Ok. I install a DVD burned into it, and now I'm burning onto DVD right on the appliance ... no 15 hour transfer.

I want to take shows with me on my laptop ? It's my own .avi, so I can do what I want with it.

Want to record on one and playback on another ? Want to network them ? Wi-fi them ? Want to host pictures, music, play into a 5.1 system ?

No prob, and all for a small initial investment with no recurring fee. Myth ain't easy, TIVO ain't good. Go with Sage and you'll love it, guaranteed. I love mine. Best thing I've ever done with a 400 Mhz machine ;)

Anonymous on Aug 30 2005, 15:07

i got the same frustration as u do with sonic's mydvd.....in regards to this " A quick register hack fixed that, but you can't expect Joe User to hack his registry for something this simple." can u tell me how to change the regisrty (where to go) i know how to change things but what string...

thanks

Anonymous on Sep 27 2005, 13:04

Why even bring up MythTV in a Tivo ToGo blog? MythTV does not run on Windows. And as far as Sage TV with a TV tuner, try playing those recorded shows back on your TV set with some easy navigation via a remote control (without added expense of dedicating a wired pc/laptop to the input lines of your tv.

Anonymous on Oct 15 2006, 09:03