Converting VHS videos to DVDs

(http://reviews.cnet.com/5208-6130-0.html?forumID=7&threadID=32820&messageID=377793)

Question:

With winXP on a fairly new computer, how do I take some of my old family videos on VHS and transfer them on to DVDs and play them. I have a DVD burner, but what other equipment and software are needed in order for a novice to accomplish this?

Answer:

The basic steps to get from VHS to DVD are:

1. Capture the video on your computer.
2. Edit the video.
3. Create the DVD layout.
4. Burn the DVD.

From a hardware point of view, you need a way to connect your VHS VCR to your computer. Video capture devices are available as PCI cards (for desktops), PCMCIA cards (for laptops), and USB cables (for either). All of these come with software for controlling the video capture process and basic video editing. Your DVD burner may have come with beginners' software for creating movie DVDs. Finally, you will need a large hard disk for holding the raw video files during the capture and editing process. A typical DVD can hold almost two hours of video, but this is in a compressed format and takes up about 4.5GB. The same raw video in AVI format may take 30GB. (I'm not sure about the compression ratio, just have a BIG disk handy!)

Here are a few helpful hints on the process.

First, give yourself lots of time. You can't accelerate the capture process. An hour of home video takes an hour to capture. The editing process is going to take a while as well, especially the first few times. The conversion of the video format to DVD video can take much longer than the capture, depending on the speed of your hardware, though you don't have to sit there and watch it. Also, DVD burners are no where near as fast as CD burners.

Second, do a couple of short tests to confirm that the captured video looks and sounds correct. Once common problem with some hardware is that the sound track goes out of sync with the picture. This is due to uncompensated delays in the sound capture part of the process. If you have one of the more advanced video editing programs you will be able to "time shift" the sound track to line it up with the picture even after the capture. The bundled software usually doesn't let you do that.

Third, consider what kind of blank DVD's to get. You will see DVD+R and DVD-R. (Don't even consider the rewritable stuff for movie DVDs. Your DVD player probably won't recognize the disk properly.) Either one will work on new DVD players, but the DVD-R will more likely be compatible with an older player. The media is getting pretty inexpensive, so your best bet is to do a test disk.

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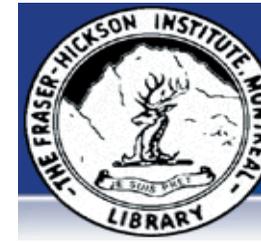- Advanced Computer Cource

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NEW! PhotoShop Tips:
Accurately find highlights and shadow points in your image
The highlights and shadows of your image are important when doing most of your corrections. To easily find these points, choose the Eyedropper tool. Make sure your Info palette is open (Window>Info). Click on one of the small icons on the info palette and a drop-down menu will appear. Choose Total Ink.

Now watch the Info Palette as you drag your cursor across your image. The higher the number, the darker that part of your image is. This should ease the guess-work of finding the true shadow and highlight points when doing corrections.

So are you in the mood for a drive?
(http://news.scotsman.com/scitech.cfm?id=59592005)
MACHINES which respond to their owners' emotions may seem like science fiction fantasy.

But, while the 'living' androids portrayed in the blockbuster film I, Robot may never be built, one Lothians firm has developed an "emotion sensor" which could help cars of the future make better drivers out of us. The computer software - which could soon be used in Toyota cars - can take steps to tackle potential road rage and drowsiness. The system works by monitoring the driver's speech for signs of certain types of behaviour and taking appropriate action. If it detects drowsiness, for instance, through signs such as quiet, flat speech, it can trigger an alarm or bring up another suitable prompt to rouse the driver. Alternatively, if the voice shows signs of stress, it can take steps to calm the driver down, by over-riding the car's air-conditioning or playing soothing music. The company behind the technology, Affective Media, has created a system it believes is as good as humans at detecting emotion. (...) The technology would be added to a car which already has voice-activated controls, such as a navigation system or CD player. Vehicles using it could hit the road within two years. Affective Media chief executive Christian Jones said prototypes were being fitted to trial vehicles and claimed the system could be a life-saver. "Studies show unhappy or angry drivers are more prone to accidents than drivers who are relaxed," he said.

(...) This technology will sample the voice to tell if a person is angry or frustrated and will then act accordingly.

"Creating emotionally responsive machines is an area a lot of different companies have their eye on. As well as Toyota, a number of other car makers have expressed an (...) A spokesman for the AA said that, while the organisation had some reservations, any technology which improved safety on the road was to be welcomed.(...)

Office 2000 Tips & Tricks:
A trick to keep a drawing tool active in Word 2000
When you click a button on Word 2000's Drawing toolbar to create an object, Word ordinarily deactivates the button as soon as you finish drawing. For example, suppose you click the Oval button and draw a circle. When you release the mouse button after drawing, Word deselects the Oval button. To avoid having to reselect a button repeatedly when you need to create a series of the same object, just double-click the button when you select it.

Word will then keep that tool active until you press [Esc] or click another button.

This trick will also work with the drawing tools that appear on the AutoShapes submenus if you turn the submenu into a floating toolbar. When a submenu includes a bar across the top, you can drag it away from its parent menu so that it becomes a separate toolbar. For example, if you click on the AutoShapes button and display the Block Arrows submenu, you can make that submenu a floating toolbar by dragging it by the bar at the top of the submenu. Then, you can double-click any of its buttons to activate a drawing tool as described above.

Hints & Tips (WinXP):
Relocate the Quick Launch toolbar
If you like using the Quick Launch toolbar for storing application, folder, and URL shortcuts, but wish that it didn't take up room on the taskbar, you'll be glad to know that you can easily move the Quick Launch toolbar to any other location on the desktop. To do so, simply position your mouse pointer over the vertical bar on the left edge of the Quick Launch toolbar. When your mouse pointer turns into a double-headed arrow, just drag the Quick Launch toolbar to any location on the desktop. (A little trial-and-error may be in order here if you have to click first to get the double-arrow.) You can anchor the Quick Launch toolbar to the top, left, or right edge of the desktop. Once you have it positioned where you want, you can then right-click on the toolbar and select the Always On Top command (and Auto-Hide) so that you can always access the Quick Launch toolbar just like you can the taskbar.

Advanced Hints & Tips (WinXP)
Troubleshoot NTFS disk problems with Chkdsk's parameters
As you probably know, you can run the Chkdsk.exe utility to see how much disk space is available and if any problems exist with the disk.

You can run Chkdsk.exe on a Windows XP system by right-clicking a drive letter in My Computer and selecting Properties. In the Properties dialog box, select the Tools tab, and click the Check Now button in the Error-checking section. This opens a dialog box with options for automatically fixing file system errors and attempting to recover bad sectors.

However, the command-line version of Chkdsk offers four additional parameters that apply only to NTFS-formatted disks. These parameters can be useful in a number of disk troubleshooting operations.

Here's a closer look at these parameters:

/X--This forces the volume to dismount first. This operation invalidates all open handles to the drive.

/I--This instructs Chkdsk to perform a less vigorous check of index entries, which reduces the amount of time needed to run Chkdsk.

/C--This instructs Chkdsk to skip the checking of cycles within the folder structure, which reduces the amount of time needed to run Chkdsk.

/L[:size]--This allows you to change the size of the log file to the specified size. If you omit the size parameter, /L displays the current size.

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