

Escape into a movie on your laptop



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For the last 10 years all computers have come equipped with a CDROM player. We use it to install software and play music on our PCs.

Over the past five years the functionality of those players was enhanced to also be able to first play DVDs and later to write or burn DVDs.

Now almost all new desktops and laptops have CD/DVD burners in them. Before Vista came out, most Windows XP PCs equipped with DVD players had one big problem with them. They could not play DVD movies put out by the major Hollywood movie studios.

This was due to a lawsuit between Hollywood and Microsoft which kept them from imbedding the codec (DVD decoder) software into the default Windows Media Player that comes along with Microsoft Windows XP. I found this out a couple of years ago after rebuilding a computer by reloading Windows XP and the client fussed that he could no longer play movies on his laptop.

The error that he got was "Windows Media Player cannot play the DVD because a compatible DVD decoder is

not installed on your computer." After some research I found out about the result to that lawsuit and had to find something that would fix the problem.

Turns out that most computer vendors like Dell, Gateway and others include a third party DVD player or even embed their own DVD decoder into the Windows

Media Player so it will play regular DVD movies.

Luckily I was able to download the DVD player software from Dell and install it on that laptop to get him going again. If you cannot play movie DVDs on your PC due to the computer maker not included the codec, then there are some other options you can take.

There is a link in the Windows Media Player that will take you to the Microsoft website which has some third party DVD codec plug-ins and some stand alone DVD players. Unfortunately none of them are free. They start at around \$10 for the codec and more for the players.

Another option to play DVDs on XP computers is the free DVD player from AVS4You.com. They offer this free DVD player as a teaser to get you

to their Web site and hopefully sell you some of their other software. I purchased the AVG Video Converter application which allows me to convert video files to different formats.

The AVS DVD Player is basic but it gets the job done by playing the Hollywood DVD movies without having to buy a codec or a full package DVD player.

Hardly anyone watches DVD movies on their desktops since it is much more comfortable and convenient to sit in a nice easy chair or lay back on a sofa and view a DVD with a laptop. Now that more computers sold are laptops compared to desktops, odds are your newest computer is a laptop. Also it is more likely that your new laptop has Windows Vista on it rather than Microsoft XP.

Due to some weird legal and/or marketing agreement, Microsoft only puts the DVD codec within the Windows Media Player on Windows Vista Home Premium and Vista Ultimate. They left it off of Vista Basic and Business since I guess they figured if you bought Vista Basic you are too cheap to own or even rent DVDs and you shouldn't be watching movies at work anyway on the office computer running Vista Business.

One big advantage to watching mov-

ies on the laptop is that it can be your personal theater. I use the ear buds from my iPhone which plugs into the headphone jack of my laptop and work just fine.

The sound is clear and I can easily pull one bud out to hear what my wife is trying to tell me during the movie.

Since the movie's soundtrack is private to me and not disturbing other family members in the room, I can watch and listen to a cool DVD flick like "28 Days" while others are watching some bonnet movie (ie. Pride and Prejudice) they have already seen a dozen times.

After you have a good setup to watch those DVD movies on your laptop with headphones, now all you need is a good supply of features. Since Hollywood sometimes actually puts out some decent movies, after they have exhausted their America-bashing box office flops, both blockbuster.com and netflix.com and deliver them right to your home.

We have been using blockbuster.com for years now after I refused to wait in another line at the local Blockbuster store that never seemed to realize they had four checkout registers that could actually be used rather than only one when there were 10 people waiting in a single line.

My wife and I take turns renting

movies on blockbuster.com and I try not to sneak my choices to the top of the shipping queue. The new ones ship out as soon as the post office picks up the old ones and scans them.

There must be some sort of instant tracking link between the Postal Service and Blockbuster because within three hours of my mailman picking up the returned DVD, I get an e-mail from Blockbuster that they have received it and are shipping the next one in the queue. Now that's cool!

Since the choice of good movies has dried up lately, we have changed out our blockbuster.com unlimited plan at \$20 a month down to the \$7 a month budget agreement that limits us to two movies a month. That should be fine since I doubt Hollywood can produce more than two shows a month worth watching on any screen be it a small laptop or full home theater.

Bottom line: It may take some effort on XP, but try watching a DVD movie on your computer next time you want to escape reality.

Next week's column: Right click.

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