

You Have the Power!

DVRs Give You Complete Control Over Your TV

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November 2003

Whether you have a satellite dish or digital cable, it can be pretty overwhelming to figure out what to watch with so many choices available. We're all so busy with long workdays, kids' activities and crammed social schedules that it's almost too hard to find time to just relax in front of the tube. And when you do manage to carve out an hour or two for TV, the shows you really want to watch aren't on when it's convenient for you to see them. Wouldn't it be great if you could hire someone to find the shows you like and record them for you? Well, now you actually can. That "someone" is the convenience of a digital video recorder or DVR.

We've all had our frustrating moments dealing with the clunky, complex programming of a VCR. Half the time you never actually tape the shows you want to watch. You hit the "play" button and you get one of three things: static, a blue screen or an hour of C-SPAN. Or, even worse, your video cassette is barely capable of recording a measly three hours and you want to record a whole week of programs. What a disappointment.

Using a DVR, it's almost impossible to make a mistake because the programming menu is much more user friendly. And, depending on the make and model you purchase, you can record from 35 to 320 hours of programming. Want to record every episode of "Friends" for the entire season? Your DVR can do that. Want to find every NASCAR race or every San Diego State football game on TV? No problem. DVRs are so advanced that you can browse up to the minute program

listings, searching by title, genre, actor or even keyword.

In fact, your DVR is so smart it can even anticipate what it thinks you'll want to watch. Basically, this fabulous machine gives you the power to watch whatever you want, whenever you want. And with your busy life, this makes watching TV a no-brainer.

So, how exactly, does DVR technology work? A digital video recorder uses a hard drive rather than a video cassette to record programs from your TV. And it's very easy to set up. You plug the DVR into your cable box or satellite box, connect the DVR to your TV set and connect a phone line to your DVR. Each night, usually when you're asleep, the DVR will "call" a source computer to get the latest programming information to keep you updated on all your favorite shows.

The top two DVRs right now are TiVo and ReplayTV. TiVo offers several models but we'll profile something in between the starter version (35 hours) and the top of the line (320 hours). The TiVo Series 2 80 hour model offers 80 hours of recording capability and retails for \$299. There is also a \$12.95 per month program listing charge, or you can pay \$250 for the life of the unit.

TiVo offers special features like Season Pass that allow you to record every episode of your favorite series for an entire season. It even skips reruns. Another feature is Wish List a service that searches on the criteria you program in. For

example, it'll find every cooking show or every movie starring Meg Ryan. And parents, you're in complete control with the Smart Recording feature that allows you to block certain shows from your kids. Best of all, you can pause, re-start and replay live TV!

Sonicblue's Replay TV 5508 is ideal for those who speak geek. It has an 80-hour recording capacity and retails for \$499. There is a \$9.95 per month program listing fee or, like with TiVo, you can pay it all up front for \$250 for the life of the unit. Your family's geek will love that you can connect ReplayTV to a home network via Ethernet so you can actually record a program on one unit in your living room and watch it later in your bedroom.

You can even program your ReplayTV from the Internet or transfer digital photos from your computer to your DVR for a really cool slide show right on your TV. Like TiVo, ReplayTV offers the ability to record an entire season of one show, pause, replay and restart live TV and allows you to search and choose programming based on specific criteria.

Both TiVo and Replay TV offer several models to choose from, depending on your particular needs. And DVR technology is constantly changing so you can probably expect the prices to come down within the next year or so. One day, in the not so distant future, DVRs will be in every home just like VCRs. For more information on TiVo and ReplayTV visit them online at www.tivo.com and www.replaytv.com.