DIY <small>Do It yourself</small>

Converting VHS tapes to DVD
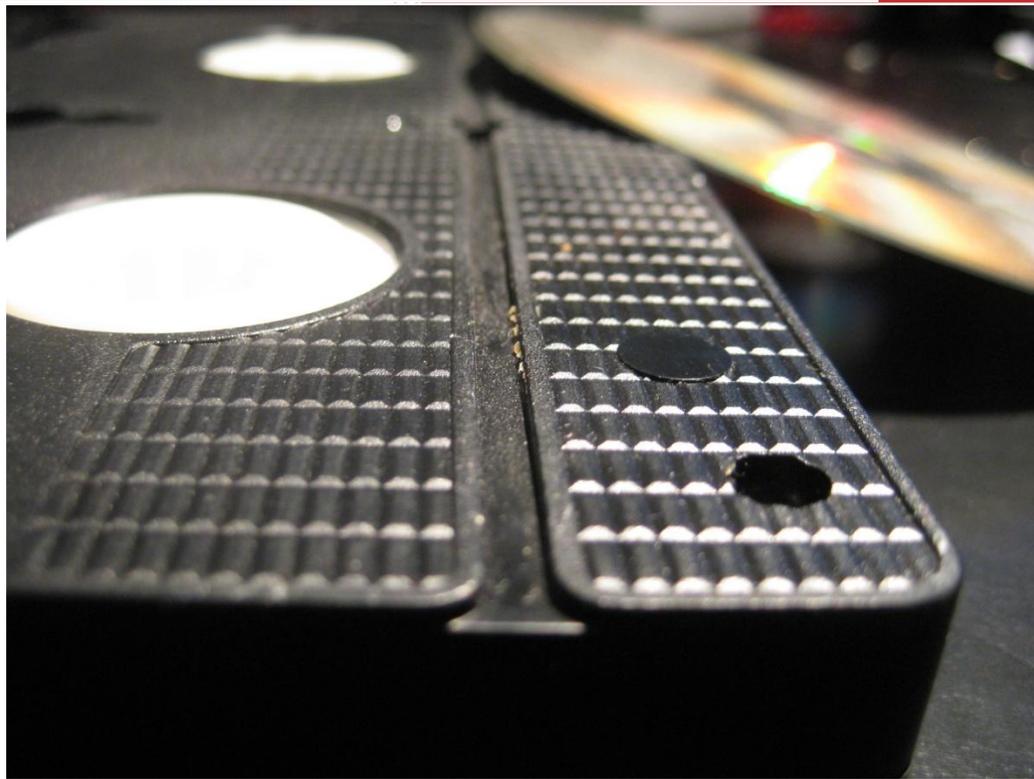
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Sewell Direct

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Contents

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A s technology changes we have the chance to enhance our personal video collection like never before. Converting VHS tapes to DVDs is a simple and rewarding way to preserve your personal history long into the digital era.

Before you get started:

For years, the video standard was VHS. Most of us have saved hundreds of memories, our lives on VHS tapes. Some of our most valued possessions are videos of our children's first moments or a cherished story of yesterday preserved for generations. With DVDs our memories can be preserved and enjoyed in ways never before possible. Converting VHS tapes to DVDs is easier than ever. Anyone can have access to powerful tools that will ensure our memories are saved for generations to come.

Equipment

VCR

USB Video Grabber (Available from SewellDirect.com)

Computer

Editing Software (ArcSoft ShowBiz)

Connections

It might surprise you, but for this project you will not need a TV at all. It is much easier if you disconnect your VCR from your TV/entertainment center and bring it to where you can work comfortably on your computer.

You will connect the USB video grabber to your computer through USB and to the VCR using the red, white and yellow RCA connections (r S-video if your VCR has it).
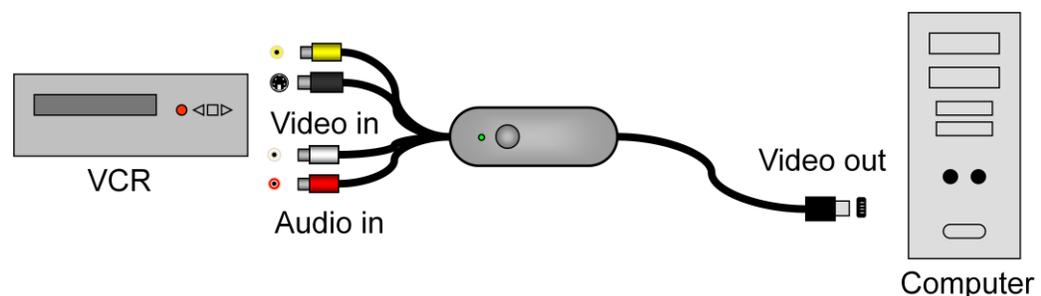

Figure 1- Connection Diagram

Test

Once you have connected everything, do a test run. Nothing is more disheartening than getting all the way through the process only to realize that you missed a detail in the beginning. Record a 30 second clip then play it back to test for video quality, audio settings and to get a feel for the process. Make any adjustments as necessary and try again. Once you are satisfied with the basic settings record a few clips of a minute or two and go into the editing software. Make some edits, trim some clips, try some transitions, chapters, captions etc and burn it. Don't spend too much time, but try a few things out.
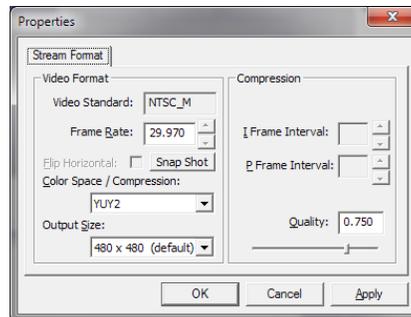
Figure 2 - Video capture options

Adding transitions and video effects can increase the processing time needed to encode the video. Review the look and feel of the video (some of those transitions might not be as great on the TV as you imagine).   Pay attention to the relative size of the completed video.

> *Note: Remember that a standard DVDR is about 4.5 GB, make sure to set the quality settings to match your space and time allotment.*

Recording

Capturing your video to the computer is arguably the most important step. You should have by now confirmed all of your settings and you are ready to record. One approach is to start at the beginning and capture the whole tape in one sitting. While that works, most people find it is easiest to break the video into segments. Smaller clips are easier to manipulate and edit.

Figure 3 - Video Capture

Create clips with the VCR

One temptation is to try to time the video capture software perfectly to the VCR. That really isn't necessary and will be more of a hassle than it is worth. There is no harm in recording a little fuzz before the clip starts or to stop the VCR while the capture adapter runs. In fact plan on it and it will take a lot of the stress out of the process.

> *Note: Remember that you are recording everything that the VCR is outputting, including the VCR onscreen messages. At the beginning and end of any clip the video grabber can pick up the "Play" and "Stop" commands as they show up on the screen. Take that into account and start/stop clips a little outside of what you really want saved. It is easy to trim any excess out in the editing phase.*

Screenshots

One nice added touch when capturing video is the screenshot feature. It will essentially grab the current frame and save it as a still image. It can be great for chapter headings, cover art for the DVD case or even pictures of elusive family members. The picture quality will not be great compared to current camera pictures, but they can come in handy. If you don't get them the first time around, you can always go back later or save one right from the preview pane. Once you get the hang of it, you can grab the images the first time through and save yourself some time.

Editing

Editing is where the real power of making your own DVDs comes in. A simple DVD recorder can digitize your home movies, but importing video into an editing suite can allow you to use your videos in a whole new way.

The basics

- Arranging clips
- Trimming clips
- Still images

Arranging clips

Arranging clips is pretty straight forward. You will want to use the storyboard view; simply drag and drop the clips where you want them. You don't need to worry about any of the timing at this point, just make sure that the storyline of the video flows the way you want it to.
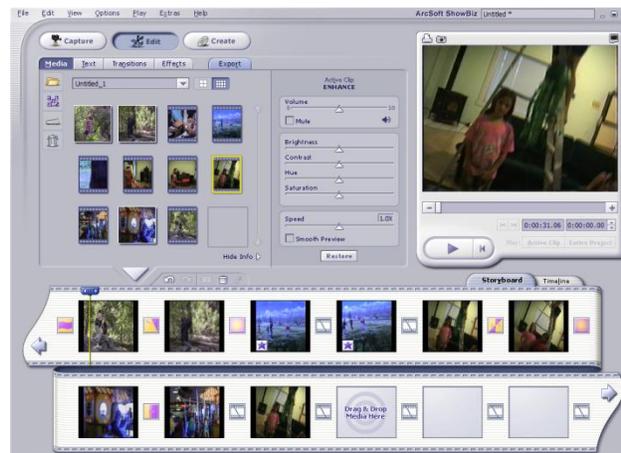

Figure 4 - Storyboard View

Trimming clips

There are several ways to trim excess footage from your video project. You can trim video from the preview pane or from the storyboard controls. For trimming clips I prefer the Timeline view. I typically use the split function (the little razor blade) just above the timeline view. Make sure that "Active clip" is selected, find the position in your timeline then click on the small razor blade image. It will automatically create two clips. You can delete a segment, rearrange the clips or add transitions.
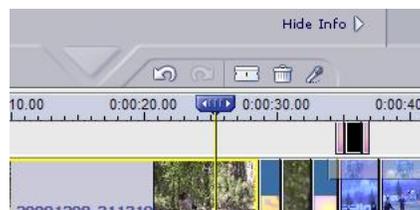

Figure 5 - Storyboard Editing Controls

Still images

You can also add still images to your project. They make great transitions between major sections of the movie. Combined with text or voice-over audio they serve a myriad of purposes. You can import any image from your computer or camera, or use a screenshot that you took from the video. Remember that the still images don't have any audio associated with them. If the silence is a problem, See below on how to add a separate audio track.

Advanced

- Transitions
- Effects
- Titles
- Alternate audio tracks

Transitions

Transitions can add a smooth professional look to a video. They are one of the things that weren't possible outside of professional studios just a few years ago. Most video editing programs now include dozens of different video transitions. Many of them add a whimsical feel to the video. If that is not what you are going for, keep to the more subtle transitions like fades

Effects

Effects are an overlay of the video that can change the way the video looks such as filters like black & white or sepia tones, video frames for picture in picture, banners, cropping etc. Used correctly they can add a strong artistic value to your video, and can be used to mask some amateur videographer mistakes like lighting and framing. Sometimes they jus add some fun to the video.
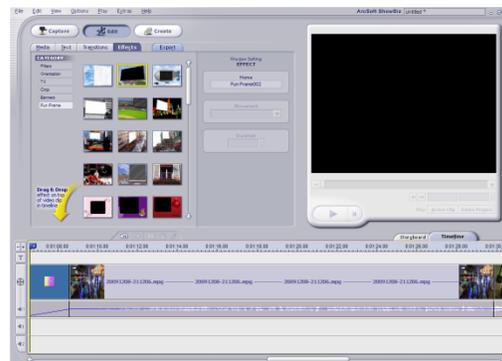

Figure 6 - Effects

Titles

You can add text to your videos between clips or overlaid like captions or titles. Text can enter and exit with a transition. Try adding some end credits to your creation. Overlay the names and ages of the people in the videos, label important dates or places. With some patience, you could even put subtitles to the entire video (a background in stenography might help).

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Alternate audio tracks

ArcSoft ShowBiz will let you add two audio tracks in addition to any audio captured with the video files. Connect a desktop microphone and you can use one track for narration. The second track can be used to import music from your computer or sound clips captured from your USB capture device.

DVD Creation

Chapters

Chapters are key to navigating your finished video. You can select which chapter to start from or you can skip between chapters while watching the movies. The key to chapters is balance. You don't necessarily want every scene to be its own chapter, but you want enough that you can find your way around. One particularly long event like a wedding may have several chapters; other events may only have one. 10 minutes per chapter is a good goal to shoot for, but of course there are a lot of exceptions.

Menu

The DVD Menu is another place where you can either add a nice professional touch to the video, or where you can have some fun. Set the background and startup options for the DVD. You can set the different preview windows to show animated thumbnails, or you can arrange the chapter thumbnails how you would like. Start with a theme, but don't be afraid to customize it with an intro video, custom background or more. You even have the option of setting submenus for out-takes, extra footage or your own flavor of special features.

Figure 7 - DVD Menu Creation

Where to go from here

The best way to learn is to experiment with all of the features. Try things out and get feedback from others. If you get stuck with a problem, or want to know if something is possible, there are several resources available to you.

Resource	Expertise	Availability
ArcSoft support	Software installation and features	Free documentation and email support, fee based phone support
Video capture vendor support	Hardware installation, basic setup	Free email, phone and live chat support
User community	Hardware and software, tips and ideas	Forum support and possibility of direct communication

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