


The New York Times

Technology

May 29, 2003

[Home](#) - [Site Index](#) - [Site Search/Archive](#) - [Help](#)Go to Another Section Welcome, furdx - [Member Center](#) - [Log Out](#)Search: SEARCH
SPONSORED BY [NYTimes.com](#) > [Technology](#) > [Circuits](#)

STATE OF THE ART

For TiVo and Replay, New Reach

By DAVID POGUE

WHY hasn't the digital video recorder become the must-have, smash-hit, world-changing appliance of the digital age? For DVR cult members, "Why have only a million people bought these machines?" is as mind-bending a mystery as "What's the meaning of life?" and "What's the deal with Dick Clark?"

If you're among the 6.3 billion stubborn holdouts, here's the deal with DVR's. They're like videocassette recorders, except that they record shows onto a hard drive instead of tapes. You look over a two-week TV listings grid and press a Record button on the remote for each show that you want "taped." Another press sets the machine to record every episode of that series automatically.

Over time, the DVR builds a list of captured shows, ready to begin playback in whatever eccentric time slots your schedule affords. You'll never know or care when they were originally broadcast or on what channel; you're just grateful that there's always something good on. Because a DVR can also jump forward 30 seconds at a time during playback or pause a live broadcast, its net effect is to free you from the slavery of the commercials, the filler and the rigid scheduling of live TV.



Stuart Goldenberg

ARTICLE TOOLS

-  [E-Mail This Article](#)
-  [Printer-Friendly Format](#)
-  [Most E-Mailed Articles](#)
-  [Reprints](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY SPRINT
[E-mail this article to your PCS Phone](#)

NEWSLETTERS

[Subscribe to Circuits](#)



Sign up to receive a free weekly Circuits newsletter by e-mail, with technology news and tips and exclusive commentary by David Pogue, the State of the Art columnist.

READERS' OPINIONS

- [Forum: Join a Discussion on David Pogue's Columns](#)

TIMES NEWS TRACKER

Topics Alerts
[Television](#)
[Computers and the Internet](#)
[Recordings \(Audio\)](#)
[Recording Equipment](#)

Advertisement

One of the leading theories concerning the DVR's modest sales is that you can't describe the concept in a tidy sentence or two, as you've just discovered.

In that respect, the situation is about to get a lot worse. Thanks to a new fee-based software upgrade from [TiVo](#) and newly enhanced free options on ReplayTV, these boxes don't just hook up to your TV; they also connect to your home computer network and the Internet. The resulting explosion of new features is clever, convenient and addicting - but won't make the DVR concept any easier to describe. (Replay models numbered 4000 and higher, and TiVo Series2, offer these features.)

So what's in it for you? If you're lucky enough to own two or more recorders, you can now watch any show on any recorder. In other words, if the downstairs TiVo taped "The West Wing," you can watch it on your bedroom TiVo. ReplayTV has long offered that feature, but a 5.0 software update beamed automatically this week to Replay owners also allows you to direct your upstairs Replay to record something while you're seated at the downstairs one (because the downstairs one is full or already recording, for example). The network spares you the colossal inconvenience of walking through the house.

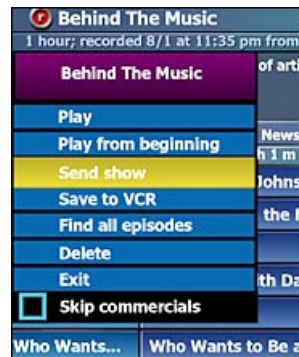
This is only the first example of huge design-philosophy differences between TiVo and ReplayTV. When you "stream" a show between ReplayTV boxes, the playback begins immediately, but the actual recording never leaves the original box. (The 5.0 software update, alas, does nothing to eliminate the unresponsive stuttering that results when you try to fast-forward through a show from across the network.)

With TiVo's new networking feature, you must wait several minutes as the show is copied onto the second unit, where it will remain as a duplicate. You lose instant gratification, but gain the freedom to offload recordings from one TiVo to another when the first one's hard drive is getting full.

If you have a cable modem or digital subscriber line, you gain another perk: your DVR can make its daily call to the mother ship that way (to download the TV listings), instead of tying up a conventional phone line for five minutes in the middle of the night. (This is another traditional Replay feature that TiVo has just added.)



[Enlarge This Image](#)



Calling up a menu, a ReplayTV user can stream a show from one ReplayTV box to another.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



A new TiVo option grabs photos and music from folders on a PC for enjoyment on the TV.

NYT Store



U.S. vs. Microsoft: The Inside Story of the Landmark Case
Price: **\$24.95.**

[Learn More.](#)

Real Estate

Spotlight on...



[San Francisco](#)
Pacific Heights, Cow

Hollow, more...



[Hamptons](#)
Homes
Montauk, Easthampton,

more...

[Search Other Areas](#)

Better yet, that broadband connection lets you program your DVR from anywhere, using the Web. This idea is intended, no doubt, to solve a uniquely new-millennium crisis: what to do when you're on a trip and someone tells you about a great program scheduled for tomorrow night. (It's equally handy, though, when you're sitting right there at home, because you can use your keyboard to type in a show's name instead of using the DVR's remote to click letters on the screen.)

You can program a TiVo for a recording as late as 15 minutes before the broadcast. And why not? Your TiVo is all online, all the time, so it gets the message quickly.

If you're a Replay owner, you get this feature even if you don't have a broadband connection; it also works on phone-line Replays. Unfortunately, you still have to program it at least 24 hours in advance, even with a broadband connection, which seems a bit silly.

Of all the new TiVo options, the new photo- and music-presentation features are surely the biggest crowd pleasers. Over the network, the TiVo grabs your digital pictures and MP3 music files directly from your Mac or PC and blasts them to your TV screen and speakers.

ReplayTV offers a similar feature, but with a radical difference in approach. On the day you unpack your Replay, a setup screen informs you that if you'll ever want to view photos, you must specify, at that moment, how much of the DVR's hard drive space you want to set aside to hold them - and then forever hold your peace.

Once that's done, you go to your Windows PC (no Macs allowed) and copy your photo files onto the Replay. Only then can you begin viewing your photos on the TV - slowly, at that; you often have to wait several seconds to move from one slide to the next. (Neither Replay nor TiVo accompanies the slide show with music, although there's nothing to stop you from humming quietly to yourself.)

TiVo's approach doesn't sacrifice disk space that could hold TV shows. Furthermore, it eliminates that file-copying business; the TiVo is always ready to display your complete, up-to-date photo collection, organized just as the pictures appear in your Windows folders or your Mac's iPhoto albums.

The same advantages apply to music. The TiVo displays and plays your songs as they're organized in folders on your PC, or in iTunes playlists on the Mac.

ReplayTV, by contrast, doesn't play music at all.

Over all, the TiVo's network features blow away the Replay in convenience, ease of setup, and thoughtful design, but there's a big

"but." Replay's networking features are built in - in fact, they've been built in for two years - and don't cost anything extra. There's even an Ethernet networking jack right on the back panel (although if you have a wireless network, you need an \$80 adapter called an Ethernet bridge).

You gain TiVo's networking features, on the other hand, only if you sign up for what's called the [Home Media](#) Option. Adding this service costs a one-time \$100 for your first TiVo and \$50 for each additional one.

You also have to equip each machine with a U.S.B. network adapter box, which costs \$40 or \$50 for a wired and wireless adapter, respectively. By the time you're finished equipping two TiVo's, you've spent about \$250. That's quite a splurge.

Remember, furthermore, that DVR feature wars are like a never-ending game of leapfrog. TiVo has made the most recent jump, but ReplayTV's designers say they intend to catch up.

In the meantime, each box has virtues that have nothing to do with home networks. Only the TiVo, for example, offers "wish lists" that can record certain shows, or movies with a certain star, whenever they come on, even months or years later.

But only the ReplayTV can automatically skip over blocks of commercials during playback, an irresistible feature even if it works only about 80 percent of the time. The Replay also lets you send shows to friends across a somewhat larger network - the Internet - if they're patient. It takes 12 hours to transmit a one-hour recording (with a broadband connection).

The costs of the TiVo and ReplayTV boxes are about the same: about \$250 for a DVR that holds 40 hours of recordings (at lowest quality), plus a one-time \$250 for the TV-guide service. (Instead of that \$250, you can also pay \$13 per month forever - in June, Replay's rate goes up from \$10 - but that's a sucker's game.)

In return, you get a life-changing machine that shatters the traditional broadcast schedule to suit your own, lets you zip past ads and endless reality-show recaps, and relegates "There's nothing good on" to the phrase bin of history. And now that they hook up to your home computer, DVR's give "network TV" a whole new meaning.



[Expect the World](#) every morning with home delivery of The New York Times newspaper.
Get [The Times](#) from \$2.90 a week



RELATED ARTICLES

- [Software Anoints the PC as an Alternative to TiVo](#) (May 29, 2003)
- [From the Desk of David Pogue: DVR Myths and Facts](#) (May 29, 2003)
- [A New Attempt to Monitor Media Content](#) (May 21, 2003) **\$**
- [TECHNOLOGY: The Son of a 'Jetsons' Creator Works on a Wireless Future](#) (May 21, 2003) **\$**
- [Special \(and Mundane\) Effects of the Movies, on TV](#) (May 12, 2003) **\$**
- [A Respected Face, but Is It News or an Ad?](#) (May 7, 2003) **\$**
- [Cadet Is Accused of Running Sex Club on Government Computer](#) (May 2, 2003) **\$**

Find more results for [Television](#) and [Computers and the Internet](#) .

TOP TECHNOLOGY ARTICLES

- [State of the Art: For TiVo and Replay, New Reach](#)
- [The Pop Life: Apple Finds the Future for Online Music Sales](#)
- [Electronic Order in the Court](#)
- [Video-Game Killing Builds Visual Skills, Researchers Report](#)
- [Sony Previews Many Talents of PlayStation](#)

**Advertiser Links**

[New In Ear earphones](#)
[Order from Shure now](#)