

January 16, 2003

Tomorrow's TiVos

By DAVID POGUE

Atending the Consumer Electronics Show, as I did last week, is an exhausting proposition. Sane people fill the days with meetings and dinners; extremists like me actually walk to all 2,200 booths. My feet may never recover.

As I wrote in [today's paper](#), there was plenty to see, touch and look forward to. But for me, a highlight was visiting the TiVo exhibit for a preview of the company's plans. (If you don't own a TiVo and never will, the rest of this e-column may not hold much interest for you; sorry about that. But hey-whaddya want for free?)

A TiVo, of course, is a digital video recorder (DVR), something like a VCR with a hard drive instead of tapes. It not only records any show you ask for, it can also pause or rewind live television, skip the ads, and so on. It's a life-changer.

In April, TiVo will beam a 4.0 software upgrade to all TiVo Series 2 owners. The new features fall into two categories: free enhancements, and paid enhancements. (Whether or not owners of the older Series 1 machines will get any of these features is still under discussion.)

Freebies: You'll gain the ability to sort the list of recorded shows by either date or alphabetically. You'll also be able to clump shows into folders—all episodes of "Friends," for example—to keep your list manageable. Your existing remote will gain the ability to jump to the top or bottom of the list.

You have a home network, you'll be able to eliminate the box's phone-jack requirement. The TiVo can make its calls to the mother ship (to download the TV guide) via cable modem or D.S.L.

But if you pay a one-time \$100 fee, you get some of the juiciest features of all. For starters, you'll be able to program your TiVo from a Web site—a great perk for anyone who occasionally leaves the house. Owners of TiVo's rival, ReplayTV, already enjoy this feature, but they must remember to program the Web site a day in advance of the broadcast. If you have a broadband Internet connection, the TiVo will be able to check for your Web instructions as often as every 15 minutes.

The \$100 Home Media option will also let you watch shows on one TiVo that were recorded by a different TiVo in the house. (The other TiVos in your house show up in the Now Playing list with their own icons.)

Once your TiVo is networked (by Ethernet cable or Wi-Fi wireless), the Home Media option will also let you play music or photos from your Mac or PC right on the TV. That's a big improvement over the ReplayTV system, which doesn't play music at all, and for showing pictures requires you to copy the picture files to the Replay itself before you can show them. With TiVo's system, they remain on the computer. You don't sacrifice any hard drive space to these files, as you do on the Replay. (Of course, the Replay has its own perks, like the feature that skips over 80% of the recorded ads during playback.)

I learned three other tidbits of interest to TiVo freaks. First, Toshiba's upcoming SD-H500 is a beautiful TiVo unit with a DVD player built in—a handy space saver. Second, TiVo's HDTV model will be available in about a year; it's up and running in prototype form. Finally, TiVo expects to break even next quarter, and to become profitable for 2003—welcome news if you've ever worried that if the company went under, you'd be saddled with a dead box.

P.S. The big-ticket Christmas gift at the Pogue household this year was a 145-hour TiVo upgrade, basically a formatted hard drive I bought at www.weaknees.com. (You can buy these drives in various capacities there; my 145-hour replacement drive cost \$230, including tax and shipping. Guess it tells you something about the Pogue household if the big-ticket gift was a hard drive. But I digress.)

The kit comes with two special wrenches and instructions, which are posted at the Weaknees Web site so you can gauge the installation difficulty before you order. Installing this new, bigger hard drive isn't as simple as putting a Pop-Tart into a toaster, but it's not as hard as taking apart a car engine, either. You open the TiVo case (the hardest part), unplug two cables, unscrew the drive from its mount, and then reverse the procedure with the new drive. The whole operation took 30 minutes.

And now—oh, mama, what a difference. 145 hours of recording time changes everything. Now we record everything at high quality, let a collection of movies sit there until we have time to watch them, and so on. Nerd heaven!

[Feedback Forum](#)

Which do you prefer: TiVo or ReplayTV? What features would you like to see added? Post your feedback in the forum linked above, where David Pogue (and the rest of the world) can read and respond!

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