

ADS DVD XPRESS, Ulead MovieFactory 5 make it a pleasure to capture video

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I always wanted to re-record my VHS tapes and place them on DVDs.* Since DVDs are thinner, doing this would save a lot of space. Also it is much easier and quicker, when using DVDs, to find portions of films I might want to see again. To accomplish this tape to DVD task I looked for and found the ADS DVD XPRESS unit. It is claimed by the manufacturer to provide a “fun and easy way to get DVD, SVCD, and VCD video into your Windows PC so you can edit, or archive, your home movies.” The output of the process is a CD or DVD disk, in a chosen compressed form i.e. MPEG-1 for VCD (Video on a CD) or MPEG2 for SVCD (Super Video CD) and DVD (Digital Video Disc).

The same can be said for the creation of Slideshows. Photos can also be handled and edited. This was not tried in what follows, but it is easy to see what was experienced can be extended to such an application.

One thing that attracted me to this product was the price. It was and still is a reasonable \$50. Included with the original hardware there was provided some software:

- CapWiz
- DVD Xpress device drivers
- DVD Movie Factory 3 SE for DVD Xpress This was subsequently replaced by MovieFactory 5.

I was extremely frustrated with the original performance of DVD Movie Factory 3 but I am delighted with the performance of its replacement MovieFactory 5. The new Movie Factory 5 provides means for burning movies, slideshows, and music to CDs and DVDs. In addition one can cut, splice and edit the video files.

The **Minimum System Requirements** for the MovieFactory 5 are now listed:

- Intel® Pentium III 800 MHz, AMD Athlon XP 1800+, 512 MB RAM
This is a significant doubling of the previous 400MHZ requirement.
- Microsoft Windows 2000 SP4, XP SP2 Home Edition/Professional, XP Media Center Edition, XP Professional x64 Edition
- 900 MB hard disk free space for program installation
- DirectX® 9.0c , Windows Media Format 9, Macromedia Flash Player 7 or above
- Windows compatible sound card
- Windows compatible display with 1024 x 768 resolution or above
- Windows compatible AGP or PCI graphics card
- DVD+R/RW or DVD-R/RW Writer

•Requires Intel Pentium 4 HT, 2.8 GHz, AMD Athlon 64 3800+ or higher when capturing and burning from DV/TV Tuner to DVD discs using Direct to Disc

Better results are obtained using this program with a fast processor and lots of RAM and Hard Drive space. While the system requirements for the ADS DVD Xpress and CapWiz are not as stringent as those listed above it is advisable to meet as many of the above requirements as possible.

(Parenthetically I might add here I also tested the hardware and software, presented below, using a computer not meeting any of the above specs. It all still worked but trying to accomplish some things became just a bit more like work.)

In trying to transfer a tape to DVD one's first thoughts should be directed as to how to get the VHS recording from the tape into a file in your computer. This is the function of the hardware unit ADS DVD Xpress. To insure up to the minute results the latest version of CapWiz 3.6.1 was downloaded and used in what follows.

CapWiz is the program providing control for the capture of the video information. It provides means to verify your video connections, video compression format and the target area to store your video files. I was able to load 2 hours of VHS tape into a file without losing capture during the process. Maintaining continuous capture was a tremendous improvement over my previous experience in using this hardware with both a slower system and the previous version of the software.

Previously, my greatest frustration was felt when trying to edit the captured data using MovieFactory 3. After installing the current MovieFactory 5 this frustration changed the complexion of the entire editing job. It truly turned into a real pleasure. The current program is a great improvement over the previous version. It is logically arranged so one may branch easily into a host of various activities. Six choices are immediately available to handle different media and tasks. Each such choice, in itself, opens additional avenues to pursue. Indeed, to pursue an explanation of the available versatility of MovieFactory 5 requires an instruction book. Even those instructions provided could easily be expanded to explain additional features.

Let us pursue the one path I tried as an example ... Video **Disc**. Once this was chosen it, in turn, allows a choice to be made from 5 paths

- New Project
- Open Existing Project
- Straight Capture to Disk
- Burn From Disk Image
- Burn DVD Folders to Disk

Since a data file had been previously "captured" the New Project path was followed and immediate involvement in the editing process could begin. Especially appreciated was the ease with which one could edit right down to a single particular movie picture frame. This is done quickly and easily by using a variety of available controls: a Jog Slider, a

Shuttle Slider, and a Shuttle Wheel. The task being undertaken was to take a VHS tape recorded from a TV broadcast (10 Days that Affected American History). This tape had ads and leaders that were not part of the desired historical material and the task was to exclude these sections and to convert the desired historical portions to a DVD. This required a multi-trim of the original material. Such a multi-trim was done with ease. One could easily mark the material to be retained. In some cases however it was easier to mark the material to be deleted. The program allows this by cleverly reversing the retain/delete material option. The program showed a lot of thought went into its composition. In fact, at this point, the people writing this Ulead MovieFactory 5 program should be complimented for they addressed an engineering weakness found in many projects. They have made a point in providing means for UNDOING steps you might have inadvertently taken. Many paths in this program have such an UNDO feature which can be a time saving blessing. Being able to easily UNDO is really good software engineering.

While the multi-trim feature was easy to accomplish putting all those pieces together to form a single presentation became a bit more difficult to accomplish. Yes, there was an option Join/Separate to ostensibly accomplish this but this was not available in the multi-trim window. Contacting the MovieFactory 5 support group and explaining the situation a couple of times did evolve a satisfactory answer as to how this is done. This answer was not obvious or covered in the instruction manual. It is a weakness in the process and should be remedied for the multi-trim is a very useful and frequently used feature.

There is also featured in MovieFactory 5 an Ad-Zapper which during this test was not used. Supposedly clicking the Ad-Zapper feature extracts the commercials from the media list automatically.

Each of the sections extracted was made into a chapter and labeled with text. The ten chapters presented at the start of a presentation allow one to go to any particular portion of the developed disk. There are a host of options for both the form of the Chapters and the Text. There is also the option of adding music to the disk during this editing process. This was not tried. One can also choose your own chapter backgrounds.

Even the burning process has a great deal of versatility. Of course a preview of the developed menus and material can be made before burning to disk. A choice of how many disk copies is wanted and the configuring of advanced settings, by viewing a screen presenting burning options, can be made. When all selections have been made then all one needs to do is sit back and let the burn process take place which, in this case, resulted in a disk that worked on both my computer and DVD player.

MovieFactory 5 bespeaks of a well thought out program. It directs attention to the areas of concern to those converting tape to disk and makes them easily available in both understanding and executing. Yes, it has some shortcomings but I am sure these will be rectified in future versions. In addition it has provisions for the future, for it can handle the forthcoming HD DVD and Blu-ray. By downloading from Ulead these capabilities

can be incorporated into MovieFactory 5. The software can handle outputs from Camcorders as well.

Unconditionally I was delighted with this program and the user's interface. This is especially so after the trying experience of using earlier versions. The current programs and hardware are easily affordable, do the job of converting tape to DVD and still more.

* This is the second article I am writing to describe my experiences with trying to find a suitable way of converting VHS tapes to DVDs. You won't see the first article because after its completion a later version of the programs being used became available. The difference between what was experienced with the first set of programs and those currently being used is truly like the difference between night and day. The first unpublished article was entitled "TWO LEMONS" Its name and subject matter tried to relate a set of experiences bordering on self-inflicted torture. You can imagine then the delight of finding the new set of programs addressed and overcame the myriad of problems found with the first set.