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READY NET GO ... NEWS

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Tip of the Month

If you don't want to purchase hardware, you can still move into the digital age by **streaming full length videos** from a number of **online sites**. Hulu, Netflix, Apple and Amazon (upcoming) all offer the ability to stream videos to your PC or TV.

- **Hulu** is free (requires Flash 9.0 and an Internet connection). Simply visit their website, choose a movie and start watching.
- **Netflix** offers a hardware device, called Roku, which subscribers use to stream live video from the Netflix servers. There are currently 10,000 movie titles available. The device costs \$100 with a monthly subscription fee.
- **Amazon's Unbox** service allows you to rent or buy movies as a download. Most selections are \$4 or less to rent or \$15 to download. In the works is a streaming live video service that will charge for movies on a pay-per-view basis.
- **Apple TV** allows you to rent movies from the iTunes store and watch them on your HDTV (no PC required). The 160GB device retails for \$329. TV shows and movies cost \$2 - \$5. You have 30 days to keep it but once you hit play, you have 24 hours to finish.

Here are the links for more info:

<http://www.hulu.com/>

<http://www.netflix.com/>

<http://www.amazon.com>

<http://www.apple.com/appletv/>

Home Theater PCs

Bringing TV and media into the digital age

VCRs and DVD players were revolutionary when they first came out decades ago. Then came DVRs (Digital Video Recorders) and TiVo's which are now being replaced by Home Theater PCs. If you haven't jumped on the bandwagon yet, don't worry – there's still plenty of time. This newsletter will help demystify new media solutions so you can bring your home into the digital age.

Home Theater PC – What is it?

Have you ever wished you could instantly browse the Internet while watching a show or seeing a commercial? How about listening to or watching the same movie or program throughout the house? Wouldn't it be great to download a movie from the web and watch it on your LCD or plasma TV without having to go to the video store or wait for a movie to show up in your mailbox?

With a Home Theater PC (HTPC) you can do all of these things and so much more.

In basic terms, an HTPC gives you the ability to watch movies on DVD or downloaded from the web, enables you to record television shows and pause, rewind and then fast forward live broadcast television signals, provides a mode for listening to your music collection (CD, mp3, etc.) either through your stereo system or TV speakers, and displays your photos on your TV – essentially it is an **all-in-one media solution**. And if you network your HTPC, you will be able to do all of these things on multiple televisions and stereo system around the house. Aah, the benefits of technology....!

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

1. www.takebackthefilter.org – Do you have a Brita water filter? Don't throw the cartridges away – mail them to this group who will send them to The Clorox Co. urging them to recycle the millions of filters disposed of each year.
2. www.tripadvisor.com – Read reviews of vacation destinations from real people. Want to read about a particular hotel or are you looking for ideas for the best places to stay? This is the site for you.

Parts of a Home Theater PC (HTPC)

Home Theater PCs have all of the components of a typical PC but with some crucial differences. An HTPC has a **robust video card** and **TV tuner card** added for optimal video playback as well as a **substantial hard drive** for storing video and other media and an **aesthetically pleasing case**.

If you have a newer PC sitting idle you could build your own by adding a few key components such as enhanced video and audio cards and a TV tuner or capture card (described below). Just make sure that the PC has the following specs to ensure quality playback. If your PC comes up short, it may be worthwhile to go with a pre-configured system (especially if you want to integrate it with the rest of your stereo/TV equipment).

For a basic HTPC, look for the following components: (call us for high-end feature options)

- Processor** – You don't need a top of the line processor if you purchase a quality capture card (TV tuner) for video encoding. 1GHz or less is sufficient for most applications if you run Windows XP. If you plan on running Windows Media Player 9's HD format or Vista, you'll need a 2GHz or faster processor.
- Hard Drive** – Buy the largest hard drive you can afford; shoot for 500GB or more. A typical full length film is about 6-8GB so a 500GB drive will store about 60 films. If you plan on keeping more than this, plan on buying multiple hard drives or get a 1 Terabyte drive which will store about 125 films.
- RAM** – 1 GB is sufficient; 2+ GB if you are running Vista
- Video Card** – Very important component; make sure your video card has compatible ports with your other components (TV, game console, stereo, etc.). Some video cards have a built-in TV tuner component which helps to keep the case small. Look for a card that has **MPEG decoding** built-in as well as support for **H.264**.
- TV Tuner Card** – Also called a "capture card" – allows you to watch cable or off-air TV signals through your computer and pause/rewind live TV broadcasts (just like TiVo).
- Optical Disk** - A DVD±RW is the best option allowing you to play DVDs and CDs as well as record to DVD media. You may also want a **Blu-ray player** for HD movies.
- Sound card** – If you set up a surround sound system, look for an S/PDIF out either on the sound card or motherboard. Ensure the card is compatible with your stereo receiver and speakers.
- Ports** – Make sure the system has an **HDMI** port which provides both audio and video connectivity. Also look for DVI, component, S-video and Ethernet ports. If your camcorder or other device has a FireWire bus (IEEE 1394), look for one on the HTPC.
- OS** – Windows XP Media Center Edition, Vista Home Premium or Vista Ultimate.
- Remote** – Essential for an HTPC; allows you to control both your TV and PC functions.
- Case** – HTPC cases are generally sleeker than PC cases to mimic traditional stereo equipment. Look for a design that is aesthetically pleasing and complements your décor.

Additional Options

Media Extender (e.g., Xbox 360, MediaGate, Linksys, SageTV) – Hardware device that allows you to access your computer (data) from any TV in the home. If you don't want the HTPC in your living room, set up this device on the network or purchase a component (such as an HDTV, Blu-ray player, etc.) with a media extender built-in.

UPS – Uninterruptible Power Supply - If the lights go out, don't risk losing data on your hard drive. Install a UPS and you won't have to worry about the screen going black halfway through your favorite action film!