

Which way to record from digital TV?

We help you choose between DVD recorders and hard-disk-based PVRs – and reveal the Best Buys

Recording TV in the digital world is quick, easy and offers a range of tricks and benefits that simply weren't possible with the VCR. DVD recorders and personal video recorders (PVRs) deliver excellent picture and sound quality, and they often feature on-screen electronic programme guides (EPGs), that list a whole week's TV and let you select your recordings at the touch of a button.

Digital recorders put you firmly in control, offering the ability to rewind and pause live TV, skip adverts or start

watching a programme before it's finished recording. They can store a lot of shows – often hundreds of hours – and they include innovations such as 'series linking', which automatically records each episode in a TV series.

The choice between a PVR or a DVD recorder is down to your needs – though if you can't decide, there are also combination models that can record to both DVDs and a built-in hard disk.

DVD recorders store TV shows on removable discs and are ideal if you want to archive or share your recordings

with family and friends. Each DVD can store only two hours of good quality recordings, though.

Combination recorders include hard-disk recording systems that offer the large storage capacities available on PVRs, as well as the ability to archive any shows you wish to keep to DVD. However, they have only one digital tuner, so can record only one show at a time.

It's also worth noting that DVD recorders are generally harder to use – even the best DVD recorders can't match a dedicated PVR for ease of operation.

Recording TV in the digital world is quick, easy and offers a range of tricks and benefits

DVD recorders



which? **BEST BUY**

75% Panasonic DMR-EX768EB-K £225

This combination model delivers great picture and sound quality. The hard disk can record 35 hours of TV in highest quality, and this doubles if you use the next best quality, which is still very good. It is reasonably easy to use, though the EPG is cramped, and you can't record TV direct to DVD using dual-layer discs, but can record directly to single layer discs. When we looked, it was cheapest at Currys.

WORTH KNOWING Make sure you use the eco mode in standby, or it will use a lot of energy.

Available Currys and Comet Hard disk 160GB Analogue tuner No DVD-Ram recording Yes Freeview EPG No



which? **BEST BUY**

75% Sony RDR-HXD890 £225

Picture and sound quality are good on this combination model, and it's relatively easy to use. The 'pause live TV' function works strangely, recording to the hard disk rather than using a traditional memory buffer, which is inconvenient. Its on-screen menus are logical and the display is easy to read. It was cheapest at Currys.

WORTH KNOWING It has a USB input, so you can transfer MP3s or Jpegs to the hard disk from an external device.

Available Currys and Comet Hard disk 160GB Analogue tuner Yes DVD-Ram recording No Freeview EPG Yes



which? **BEST BUY**

73% Sony RDR-HXD995 £243

This combination model is relatively easy to use, and offers good picture and sound quality, though using the HDMI output to produce an 'upscaled' picture when connected to an HDTV doesn't improve picture quality. Like the HXD890 (2), the 'pause live TV' function is strange on this model. When we looked, it was cheapest at John Lewis.

WE LIKE You can add an additional card reader to access Setanta or Top-Up TV pay-TV services.

Available John Lewis, Currys and Comet Hard disk 250GB Analogue tuner Yes DVD-Ram recording No Freeview EPG Yes



Want more? For reviews of more than 50 DVD recorders, see www.which.co.uk/dvdrecorders

DVD RECORDERS		SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE (%)
		PRICE (£)	TYPE	RECORDING TIME (hrs)	PLAYBACK PICTURE	PLAYBACK SOUND	RECORDED PLAYBACK PICTURE	RECORDED PLAYBACK SOUND	RECORDED PLAYBACK PICTURE (Long play)	EASE OF USE	POWER USE	
1	PANASONIC DMR-EX768EB-K	225	C	35	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	75
2	SONY RDR-HXD890	225	C	23	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	75
3	SONY RDR-HXD995	243	C	36	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	73
4	TOSHIBA D-R18DT-K-TB	127	D	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	70
5	LG RHT397H	196	C	43	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	68
6	PANASONIC DMR-EX78EB-K	274	C	55	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
7	TOSHIBA RD-88DT-K-TB	196	C	33	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	68
8	SONY RDR-HXD790	250	C	17	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	63
9	SAMSUNG DVD-SR275M/XEU	127	D	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★★	58
10	SAMSUNG DVD-SH871M/XEU	196	C	33	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★★	56
11	PHILIPS DVDR5520H/05	196	C	23	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	55

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high street or online price as we went to press. Prices for other

models are a guide.

For the latest prices, go to www.whichcompare.co.uk. **Type** D = DVD recorder, C = Combination DVD recorder and PVR. **Recording time** Hard disk recording time in highest quality.

Test performance

Playback picture/sound Picture/sound quality for pre-recorded DVDs.

Recorded playback picture/sound Picture/sound quality for programmes the device has recorded. **Recorded**

playback picture (Long

play) For programmes the device has recorded in long-play mode **Ease of use** How easy the recorder is to set up and use **Power use** How much power the recorder uses in standby and when recording.

Score

Ignores price and is based on: Picture and sound quality, both recorded and playback **60%** Ease of use **20%** Features **10%** Power use **10%**

Contacts

Freesat www.freesat.co.uk

Freeview www.freeview.co.uk

Humax 0870 247 8800
www.humaxdigital.co.uk

LG 0870 873 5454; www.lge.co.uk

Panasonic 0870 535 7357
www.panasonic.co.uk

Philips 0845 601 0354; www.philips.co.uk

Sagem 01932 572 900; www.sagem.com

Samsung 0870 7267 864
www.samsung.com/uk

Sharp 08705 274 277; www.sharp.co.uk

Sony 0870 511 1999; www.sony.co.uk

Toshiba 0870 442 4424
www.toshiba.co.uk

TVonics 0870 80 30 551; www.tvonics.com

Wharfedale 0845 458 0011
www.wharfedale.co.uk

DVD recorder or PVR?

Which should you choose?

	DVD RECORDERS	PVRs
Typical recording time	Standalone recorders can only record two hours on a disc at highest quality. Combination models have capacities similar to PVRs.	Have large hard disks that can typically store 100-200 hours of programming.
Ease of use	Generally harder to use. Best Buys typically rate three stars but many score lower.	Generally easy to use. Best Buys are usually rated four stars for ease of use.
Versatile recording	Have only one digital tuner so can record only one programme at a time.	Twin-tuner PVRs can record two programmes and let you watch a recorded show, all at the same time.
Archiving and sharing	Are suitable for archiving programmes you want to keep. Discs can be lent to family and friends if you want to share recordings.	Aren't suitable for long-term archiving – you'll need to transfer recordings to a VCR or DVD for archiving or sharing.
Analogue reception	May have both analogue and digital tuners – good for those who can't receive digital TV.	Have only digital tuners so are no good for those who can't get digital TV.

Personal video recorders

Twin-tuner PVRs allow you to record two TV programmes at once, while simultaneously playing back an earlier recording. Some PVRs can record two programmes while you watch a third show live.

PVRs are only suitable for digital TV viewers. We've tested PVRs for Freeview and the Humax Foxsat-HDR – the first PVR for Freesat. Sky satellite subscribers have the option of the Sky+ and Sky HD PVRs, and Virgin Media cable viewers can sign up for a V+ box.

PVRs have large hard disks that offer lots of storage – the largest model we've tested can record 250 hours of TV, equivalent to two years worth of *Eastenders*

episodes – before its hard disk is full. There's no deterioration in picture and sound quality when you record shows – the quality is the same as if you were watching TV live. PVRs aren't suitable for long-term storage, though, so if you want to archive programmes you can transfer PVR recordings to DVD or VCR.

All PVRs can record and playback digital subtitles, and the Humax Foxsat-HDR is the first PVR available that supports digital audio description – it can record and playback the additional soundtrack of audio commentary provided for those with impaired vision.

To read reviews of all the PVRs we've tested, go to www.which.co.uk/pvrs.



79% Humax Foxsat-HDR £300

The first PVR designed to work with the Freesat satellite TV service, this model can record up to 143 hours of standard definition TV or 35 hours of HD TV. Standard definition and HD recordings can be made at the same time. It has two USB ports that can be used for archiving recordings or you can archive to a DVD recorder or VCR using the Scart output. This model is very easy to set up and use, and the EPG is well laid out. Power consumption is reasonable, and there's a low-standby-power mode. When we looked, it was cheapest at John Lewis and Comet.

WORTH KNOWING This is the first PVR with digital audio description.

Available Comet, John Lewis **Hard drive** 320GB **HD** Yes
Record two channels, watch a third Yes



78% Humax PVR9300T £194

This Humax PVR has a large hard disk that can record up to 200 hours of TV. It is very straightforward to set up and use, though some advanced features are tricky to understand. The EPG is well laid out, but it loses the guide when switched to standby and takes a sluggish 13 minutes to repopulate. The remote control is easy to find your way around, but functions you won't need every day are accessed via small, badly labelled buttons. This model has recently had a software upgrade, which has reduced the fan noise. When we looked, it was cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING It's possible to add a card reader for accessing pay-TV channels from Setanta or Top-Up TV.

Available Argos, Comet, John Lewis **Hard drive** 320GB **HD** No
Record two channels, watch a third Yes



Which? online TV power use

TVs are one of the least energy-efficient appliances in the home. The average 32-inch TV uses around 100 watts, but you can cut that by 20% or more by following the simple tips in our video guide to cutting your TV's power consumption. Go to www.which.co.uk/cuttpoweruse to see Which? technology expert Mike Briggs explain how to make your TV less of a drain on our energy resources.

SONY PLAYTV

A good option for PS3 users

The Sony PlayTV is an add-on box for the Sony PlayStation 3 (PS3) that has two built-in Freeview tuners and turns the PS3 into a PVR.

PlayTV's appeal lies in its wireless capabilities and remote-viewing features. Armed with a Sony PSP handheld games console, it's possible to access PlayTV and control it over the internet. Recordings can also be set up remotely.

If you already own a PS3 and are considering a PVR for recording digital TV, the PlayTV add-on is a cost-effective choice – at £60, it'll save you more than £120 on the average Best Buy price.

To read our full review of PlayTV, go to www.which.co.uk/playtv.



MEMBER BENEFIT

Which? members can make great savings with Hughes Direct

Hughes Direct is giving Which? members some exclusive discounts, offering the Best Buy PVR Humax PVR9300T for £164 and Best Buy DVD recorders, the Panasonic DMR-EX768EB-K and Sony RDR-HXD890 for £194 each (plus £5 for delivery). Offers are subject to stock availability



and prices are valid until 30 April 2009. To find out more details about this offer and other member-only discounts from Hughes Direct, log on to www.hughesdirect.co.uk/which

or call 01473 321883. All goods are guaranteed to be a minimum of 10% below high-street prices published in Which? product reports. If you find the same product cheaper elsewhere (including delivery) within seven days of purchase, Hughes Direct promises to refund 110% of the difference.



75% Humax PVR9150T £127



The PVR9150T has a 160GB hard disk, which means it can record up to 100 hours of television. It's very easy to set up and use, though it's difficult to understand some of the advanced features. The EPG is well laid out and easy to find your way around, as is the decent-sized remote control. Like the PVR9300T, however, less common functions are accessed via small, poorly labelled buttons located under a flap. The instruction manual is well laid out and the on-screen menus are intuitive and easy to navigate. It was cheapest at Comet.

WE LIKE It has a low-standby-power mode which reduces power consumption to 1.9 watts.

Available Argos, Comet **Hard drive** 160GB **HD** No
Record two channels, watch a third Yes



74% TVonics DTR-Z250 £176

Like the DTR-Z500 (5), this model is very small, but its hard disk is smaller – at 250GB, it records around 125 hours of television. Its twin tuners allow you to record one live programme while watching another, or to record two programmes at once while playing back a third you've recorded previously. The EPG is well laid out and allows you to view programme schedules up to seven days in advance. The guide is lost when the PVR is switched to standby, but it repopulates in only four minutes when switched back on. When we looked, it was cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING This is the same as the TVonics DTR-Z500, but with smaller hard disk.

Available Currys, John Lewis **Hard drive** 250GB **HD** No
Record two channels, watch a third No



74% TVonics DTR-Z500 £194

This TVonics PVR may be small – about the size of a paperback book – but it has a massive 500GB hard disk that can record around 250 hours of television. However, you can't add a card reader for accessing pay-TV channels from Setanta or Top-Up TV. It's a reasonably easy PVR to set up and use, with a versatile and well-presented EPG and straightforward recording and playback. The remote control is sensibly laid out, with useful 'Timer' and 'Library' buttons. Digital subtitles can be recorded and turned on/off as required but audio description is not supported. It was cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING This PVR has the largest hard disk we've seen to date.

Available Currys, John Lewis **Hard drive** 500GB **HD** No
Record two channels, watch a third No

PVRs have hard disks that offer lots of storage – the largest model we've tested can record 250 hours of TV

PVRs		SPECIFICATION						WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE (%)
		PRICE (£)	MAX RECORDING (HOURS)	SERIES LINK	DIGITAL SERVICE	PLAYBACK WHILE RECORDING	VIEW TV WHILE RECORDING	FEATURES	POWER USE	EASE OF USE	
1	HUMAX Foxsat-HDR	300	SD: 143 HD: 35	Yes	Freesat	Yes	Yes	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	79
2	HUMAX PVR-9300T	194	200	Yes	Freeview	Yes	Yes	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	78
3	HUMAX PVR-9150T	127	100	Yes	Freeview	Yes	Yes	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	75
4	TVONICS DTR-Z250	176	125	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	74
5	TVONICS DTR-Z500	194	250	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	74
6	SHARP TU-R252H	166	120	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	60
7	SHARP TU-R162H	90	80	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	59
8	DIGIHOME DTR160	90	80	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★	★★★★	53
9	SONY PlayTV	60	Depends on PS3 capacity	No	Freeview	No	No	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	53
10	WHARFEDALE TU-500DTR	180	240	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★	★★★★	50
11	SAGEM DTR67250T	107	120	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★★★	★★	46
12	SAGEM DTR64160T	100	80	Yes	Freeview	Yes	No	★★★★	★★★★	★★	45

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price See p71. **Max recording** SD = standard definition, HD = high

definition. Series link

Records an entire series with the touch of a button.

Digital service Whether the PVR receives Freeview or Freesat. **Playback while recording** Whether

you can record two programmes at the same time while watching a third previously recorded programme. **View TV while recording** Whether you can record two

programmes and watch a third live channel at the same time.

Test performance

Features Versatility and features of each box.

Power use Energy efficiency of the PVR.

Score

Features **30%**
Ease of use **60%**
Power use **10%**