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SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Audio Rippers round up

7:46pm Wednesday 11th August 2010

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By Nigel Burton >>

I'VE grown increasingly sick of the bloated media suites bundled with PCs and Macs these days.

Although iTunes has its place, mainly for buying music and synchronising with an iPod, when you just want to rip a CD it represents massive overkill.

Cynics might argue that iTunes or Media Player can do the job without having to buy a purpose-designed ripper, but that's like using a bread-knife for an operation when what you really need is a scalpel.

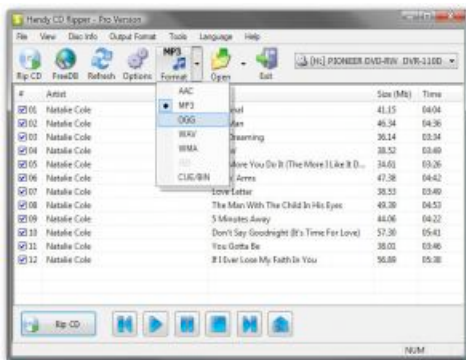
Nigel Burton

And, as Apple has loaded on more and more features, iTunes has grown into something of a resource hog.

As for Windows Media Player, where do I start? I hate the way it renames all my albums without asking, often replacing the track names with nonsense and scattering info all over my hard drive, and its synchronisation with my MP3 player is hit 'n miss.

Recently, I've been testing a trio of programs that promise to get the job done faster and more efficiently than either of the main media suites.

Handy CD Ripper from NetSDK Software has been designed to do one thing - grab music



Handy CD Ripper - does what it says on the tin



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from compact discs and compress as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Your tunes can be extracted into a variety of formats including the ubiquitous MP3, the rather better sounding Ogg Vorbis, and the two formats favoured by Microsoft (wma) and Apple (aac) for excellent compatibility.

One interesting feature is the way Handy CD Ripper can be configured to rip from more than one CD drive. If you have two drives in your system (not unusual in desktops these days) it's possible to use them both and cut your ripping time in half.

The software also rips a CD automatically as soon as it is inserted and the speed at which it extracts your music can be throttled back – giving you a better chance of copying scratched or damaged discs.

There's a basic music player and even a portable version that can be saved to a USB stick for ripping from any PC.

The AVS Audio Converter suite is similar to Handy CD Ripper but this is software geared towards music conversion on a grand scale.

Of course, it can rip your CDs to a PC but it also converts existing files into different formats. All the usual suspects are covered as well as several more esoteric choices such as iPhone ringtones, the high quality lossless codec FLAC and several mobile phone alternatives.

Each codec has basic, medium and high quality settings, although users can set their own custom bit rates as well if they want.

The AVS suite also converts CDs and files into audio-books (including the iPod m4a format) which is a great feature if you enjoy listening to spoken novels.

Finally, if you're a Macintosh owner who is feeling a bit left out – fret no more.

Music Man combines the best bits of both these PC programs in a clever piece of software for the Mac.

The ripper converts to all the major formats and can even rip to MP3 and M4A in one smooth operation. It can also convert non DRM protected music tracks into alternative formats – handy for making MP3 CDs from your AAC iTunes library.

Files can be burned to a CD, DVD or even a USB flash drive. If you ramp up the compression Music Man can even squeeze four hours of music onto a modest 64MB memory stick, although you'd never call the results high fidelity it's perfectly acceptable for radio shows or audio

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books.

The music player is a lightweight alternative to iTunes and can play files from anywhere on your system.

All three programs can edit your MP3 tags and grab track information from the internet.

Cynics might argue that iTunes or Media Player can do the job without having to buy a purpose-designed ripper, but that's like using a bread-knife for an operation when what you really need is a scalpel.

PC users have a couple of excellent freeware alternatives in CDex and Exact Audio Copy but both Handy CD Ripper and AVS Audio Converter offer extra features that makes their modest cost a worthwhile investment.

And, as all three are available as feature-limited free downloads, you can give them a try and make up your own mind.

Prices: Handy CD Ripper \$19.95 from handyripper.com/ AVS Audio Converter \$39 (gives access to the full AVS suite of programs) from avs4you.com/ Music Man \$24.95 from mireth.com

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Prison officer's fears after attack

A PRISON officer who was attacked with a broken bottle fears he may never work again, The Northern Echo can reveal.

'Dubious foreign jollies' cost taxpayer £500,000

LOCAL authorities have come under fire for spending more than £500,000 during the recession on foreign trips to countries throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and South America.



Councils urged to cut the clutter on streets

THE region's councils have been urged to cut street clutter by getting rid of unnecessary signs, railings and advertising hoardings.



Not quite a throne – but still a royal seat

THEY look smart enough for royalty to sit on – and indeed that's precisely what they are.



You can teach an old hog new tricks

FOR most pigs, life can be a little mundane. But one porker has his trotters well and truly under the table and is now living what can only be described as a dog's life.

A mountain to climb to pay for surgical devices

A GROUP of North-East surgeons are taking the unusual step of climbing a mountain in Africa next month to buy sophisticated keyhole surgery equipment for use in their NHS hospital.



Country life brought to city centre

A FREE fun day offering a range of countryside events was held in a North-East city centre yesterday.



Quinn in deadline race to sign Ghana striker

SUNDERLAND chairman Niall Quinn will spend transfer-deadline day desperately trying to push through a club-record deal for Ghana international Asamoah Gyan.

Last-ditch bid to get Conway

MIDDLESBROUGH officials will hold a last-ditch round of talks with their counterparts at Dundee United this morning in an attempt to finally make a breakthrough in their long-running pursuit of Craig Conway.



Barrow 1 Darlington 1

DARLINGTON were denied their first away win of the season against Barrow on a dramatic and highly-charged evening at Holker Street.



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