

Time-shift your TV



There are now more ways than ever to record HD digital TV. **Dan Gardiner** and **Dominik Krupinski** test 16 TV recording devices, ranging from \$79 to \$1,199.

As more and more devices start to include TV recording capabilities (some digital TVs are even incorporating it), the personal video recorder (PVR) market has become increasingly fragmented. Currently, choosing a TV recorder is really more about picking which features you can live without, rather than those you want.

For this feature we've looked at four types of devices. At the bottom of the price scale are sub-\$100 set-top boxes that can record TV to external USB hard drives. Traditional PVRs (typified by the TiVo) ranging from \$300 to \$700 are the next step up, offering built-in hard drives and twin tuners to record (or record and watch) two programs simultaneously. Also at this price point are combo devices, which combine the capabilities of a twin-tuner PVR with a network media player, allowing you to stream your PC's media files to your TV. PVRs that have both internal hard drives and DVD or Blu-ray playback or writing are generally at the top price point and aim to cater to users who want to combine their DVD/Blu-ray player with their PVR, or more easily back up their TV shows to disc.

Their occasionally some overlap; most of the disc-based units we tested in the roundup also offered some form of media streaming, so it's worth carefully considering how you intend to use your PVR before you buy. Whatever the case, you're bound to find something here that fits your needs.

_ SET-TOP BOXES WITH USB RECORDING

KOGAN FREEVIEW HD DIGITAL SET-TOP BOX

RRP \$79 / CONTACT KOGAN / PHONE 1300 304 292 / WEB www.kogan.com.au

This Freeview-branded unit from Kogan is one of the cheapest ways to get started recording HD digital TV. Like the others in this category, it contains a single HD-capable tuner, along with one front-facing USB port into which you can plug either flash or hard drive USB storage devices. The Kogan has appeal in general use: it's quick to change channels, and supports both FAT and NTFS file systems for USB drives, so there should be no need to mess around reformatting your drives. Its recordings are saved as .ts (MPEG-2 transport stream) files, which are the easiest to deal with and don't require conversion to edit on a PC.



The remote is usable, but a little small, and the EPG is a little myopic, using a multichannel grid layout that only shows 2-hour blocks at a time. We also couldn't find a way to get the small REC logo off the screen while the unit is recording. As a Freeview unit, it'll have DRM shortcomings, too. Still, the

price is hard to argue with, and if you just want something inexpensive and simple, this one has some appealing features.

PC User says: Cheap, supports multiple file systems, but has Freeview DRM limits.

DICK SMITH GH5930

RRP \$99.98 / CONTACT DICK SMITH / PHONE [02] 9642 9100 / WEB www.dse.com.au

Like the Kogan, the GH5930 is a small unit with a comparatively tiny footprint, and they also use the same remote design. This model's interface is attractive and clean. The basic recording features (scheduling manually or from the EPG) are adequately covered and there's a nice, usable eight-day EPG that displays one channel at a time. It's pretty light on advanced features, however, and there's no time-shifting ability for pausing/rewinding live TV. Like the other two units in this category, there's no option to automatically pad recording lengths in case your show runs long. You'll also need to format

your external USB drive as FAT32, as it can't use other file systems. This unit does have parental controls to let you block certain material, though rather than going by Australian ratings (G, PG, M and so on) like many others, it has a number system from 4 to 17, which we presume corresponds to age (the

manual doesn't specify). In testing, this blocked out more programs the lower we went, so it may take some trial and error to get configured properly.

PC User says: Not a bad unit on the whole, but lacks time-shifting capabilities.

