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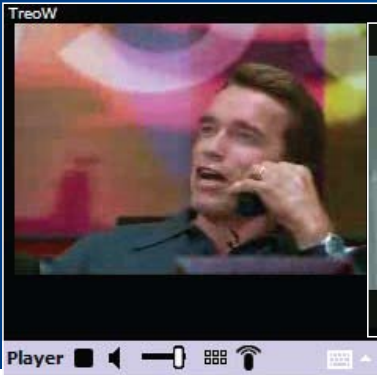
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M A G A Z I N E

SPECIAL REPORT

Entertainment





Slingbox—Watch Your Home TV From Anywhere

by Tim Hillebrand

I've never been as enthusiastic and totally blown away by a product I've reviewed than I am over Slingbox. Slingbox is a little black and red box that connects to your home TV video receiver box (cable, satellite, or DVR), and in conjunction with your Internet router, broadcasts your digital or analog TV signal over the Internet. You must have a broadband Internet connection at home and be able to connect to one when you're traveling in order to run Slingbox. You can then watch any channel available on your home system from anywhere in the world (or elsewhere in your home) using an Internet-connected PC or Windows Mobile device. Best of all, you can also watch programs recorded on your DVR and even control your TV and DVR remotely.



Setting up Slingbox

Three different versions of the Slingbox are available (see sidebar). I tested the Slingbox AV which ships with power adapter, quick start guide, and all the cables necessary for a standard installation. (I had to buy a couple of splitter cables for my particular installation situation.) You also get an installation CD that automatically transfers you to the Internet to download and install the latest version of

SlingPlayer on your PC.

The standard setup process is simple, but I ran into some problems that required a trip to Radio Shack to buy the aforementioned splitter cables, some calls to technical support, and innumerable trips upstairs and down between my Slingbox and router. The biggest challenge in my case was getting my router tweaked so that it would forward the TV signal over the Internet. Another issue was a conflict in IP addresses with a VoIP box in the system. My point is that the more complex your setup is, the more technical assistance you'll need to get things working.

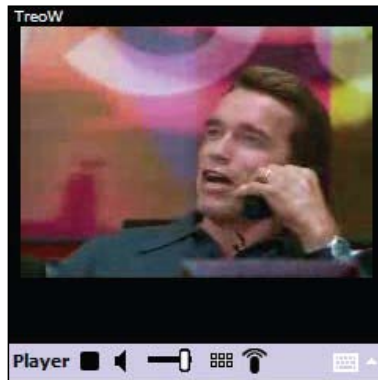


Fig. 1: SlingPlayer Mobile on my Treo 700wx (left). Fig. 2: SlingPlayer Mobile on my i-mate SP5 smartphone in full-screen mode (right).

After some persistence, I had SlingPlayer installed on my desktop and laptop PC and was able to view my home TV on my laptop

anywhere in my house or garden. In fact, the first day of my connection, I took my wife to lunch to celebrate. The restaurant had a Wi-Fi hotspot, and we watched a program we'd recorded the night before from our table. My wife, other patrons, and the staff were more than a little impressed with this.

SlingPlayer Mobile

Next, I downloaded SlingPlayer Mobile and installed it on my Pocket PC and smartphone. You must purchase this software separately for each platform (\$29) but there is a free 30-day trial available. The good news is that everything

is a one-time charge—there are no monthly subscription fees for any of the Slingbox products.

Slingbox uses an innovative technology called SlingStream that optimizes streamed video images. The quality is amazingly good compared to other steaming video I have experienced, but it is not perfect. When you first connect with a mobile device, it takes a few moments for the streamed content to buffer,

Sling Media Products

- Slingbox Pro (\$249.99): Lets you watch all your HD home entertainment (up to four devices) on any PC or mobile device.
- Slingbox AV (\$179.99): Watch your digital cable, satellite, or DVR programming on any PC or mobile device.
- Slingbox Tuner (\$179.99): Watch your basic cable programming on any PC or mobile device.
- SlingPlayer Mobile (Smartphone, Pocket PC, and PalmOS versions; \$29.99 each): Lets you watch your Slingbox shows on one of these devices.
- SlingLink (\$99.99): Allows you to connect your TV to your Internet connection.

These products can be purchased directly from the Sling Media Web site (us.slingmedia.com/page/home).



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SPECIAL REPORT... Entertainment

but after it does, the picture settles down to a steady stream of highly “watchable” TV.

The quality decreases as you expand the size of the screen, which was not an option on the first Windows Mobile device I tested—the Treo 700wx. Palm calls this device a “smartphone,” but it’s based on the Windows Mobile 5 Pocket PC Phone Edition software. The image was reasonable on the Treo (Fig. 1), but it only displays in the upper two-thirds of its 240 x 240 pixel screen, and you cannot change it to full-screen viewing mode.

I also installed SlingPlayer Mobile on my i-mate SP5 smartphone, and my viewing experience was much better on its 240 x 320 pixel screen. I should also note that I used a Wi-Fi connection on the SP5 as opposed to a dial-up connection on the Treo. Accordingly, the faster connection seemed to improve the smoothness of image streaming. Also, I could expand to a full-screen view on the SP5 (Fig. 2), which I could not do on the Treo.

Regrettably, every time you change channels, move to a new recorded program, or fast forward through a commercial, the program goes through the optimization process, and it takes a few seconds to settle down to a smooth, viewable picture again.

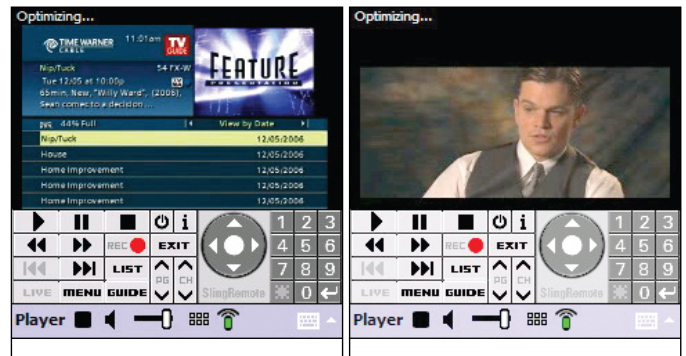
There are a few Slingbox limitations that you should be aware of. First, you cannot be linked to more than one remote device at a time (unless you have a second Slingbox connected to your system). Second, you cannot watch different channels on your remote device and TV. So, if your son is watching Comedy Central on the main TV and you want to watch the History Channel on your laptop or Pocket PC, you’re out of luck.

New things coming from Sling Media

I met with Blake Krikorian, the CEO and founder of Sling Media, at last year’s Consumer Electronics Show. Krikorian and Sling Media announced some interesting new products that are coming soon. They will release Clip + Sling, which will enable users to capture snippets from a TV show to share with friends. CBS is joining forces with Sling Media to form a YouTube-type community using this product.

Sling Media also announced a new product called SlingCatcher. It will incorporate a program called SlingProjector, which will allow users to display Web content onto a TV screen without the need of a computer. SlingCatcher will also incorporate SlingPlayer for TV, which will allow users to deliver content to another SlingPlayer-enabled remote device without being connected to a PC. Krikorian further announced that SlingPlayer and Slingbox have been enhanced and optimized to work seamlessly with the new Microsoft Vista operating system and will take advantage of its powerful video features.

Sling Media even managed to score an Emmy on the last night of CES 2007 at the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences



The SlingPlayer Mobile control panel as it appears on a Treo 700wx (left). The panel with a DVR recording playing (right).

award ceremonies. They received the Technology & Engineering Emmy for outstanding achievement in advanced media technology for the creation of non-traditional programs or platforms. It’s a well-deserved award to an innovative company.

Delighted with Slingbox

I am delighted with the functionality Slingbox affords on my various mobile devices, and I cannot recommend it to you with more enthusiasm. For more information or to purchase the various products, visit the Sling Media Web site (slingmedia.com).

Pros:

- Slingbox allows you to stream live or recorded TV from your home TV/DVR remotely anywhere in the world over an Internet connection.
- You can control your TV/DVR remotely to create new recordings or delete old ones.
- The picture and streaming are of surprisingly good quality, even on low resolution screens via a dial-up connection.
- There are no monthly fees.
- It works on all WM 5/6 devices and Palm OS Treos.

Cons:

- Full-screen mode does not work on all handheld devices.
- You can only view one channel at a time.
- You cannot view programming on more than one device at a time.
- When you are in the controlling mode and are changing channels or fast-forwarding through recorded content, it takes a few moments for the picture to return to normal. ■

Portable Musician's Friend

Making music with a Windows Mobile device

by Mike Riley

Musicians know the joys and challenges of living on the road from show to show. Unless they are successful enough to afford an entourage of roadies and semi-trucks to cart their equipment to their next destination, musicians prefer to travel as light as possible. This not only reduces their load but also makes set up and tear down much easier.

With these demanding requirements, the compact portability and computing power present in today's Windows Mobile devices can make personal and business communication easier between band mates, business partners, friends, family, and fans. But besides the obvious use of voice, e-mail, and Web browsing transactions, what other helpful uses can the Windows Mobile portable powerhouse provide to performing artists?

Tuning your instrument

Anyone in a working band knows that the first task after setting up is tuning up. While some of the more expensive guitars have built-in tuners to facilitate this process, they are often inaccurate and sometimes inflexible. Having a mobile tuner that can conform to the needs of multiple pitch ranges and personal preferences is ideal. Fortunately for the Windows Mobile musician, several graphical tuning applications exist that literally blow away the more expensive competition. These software-based tuners leverage the power of the CPU, display resolution, input microphone, and output speaker to deliver a substantially more effective and faster tuning experience. And because it's mobile, it can be passed between band members to tweak their own instruments.

Since instrument tuning applications are one of the most obvious solutions for musicians, they are also the most plentiful. Freeware tone generators, those that play a single note or major/minor chord combinations, are plentiful. However, because these applications lack an internal feedback mechanism, they fail to "close the loop," leaving it up to an individual's ear and their own interpretation of tonal accuracy. It's considerably more difficult to program a tuner that captures, interprets, and meaningfully displays tonal measurements. Fortunately, several solutions are available, with single to multi-instrument capabilities.

4Pockets (4pockets.com) is one of the most prolific vendors in the mobile audio application space. They offer several low to high-end products that make instrument tuning a breeze. Their

Chromatic Guitar Tuner (\$19.95; see Fig. 1) is specifically designed for guitarists seeking an easy lock on standard tunings. It is a no frills, easy-to-use application that uses a VU meter metaphor to visually assist the player. Auto Tuner (\$29.95; see Fig. 2) expands upon the basic capabilities of Guitar Tuner, adding audio range support beyond the 5 fixed tuning styles and 6 transposition steps. As such, any tonal instrument can be tuned using Auto Tuner.

On the high end of things, 4Pockets also offers the amazing PocketRTA Pro (\$44.95; see Fig. 3)—a mobile sound engineer's dream application. This program raises the bar for tuning applications by displaying a real-time spectrograph of incoming audio, allowing the user to visualize this data in six different display modes: linear, logarithmic narrow band, octave (including 1/3rd and 1/6th), sample, SPL, and Spectrogram displays with ANSI A and C weighting curves. This means that the audio waveforms generated in a sound can be studied from many different angles to understand and master it.

Besides tuning instruments, PocketRTA can be used to measure a room's acoustic ambience, troubleshoot and mitigate tonal imbalances in audio equipment, and help identify and eliminate unwanted hiss in electric amplifiers. It can even identify notes and help musicians transcribe difficult musical passages by breaking down the sonic analysis and building it back up by matching the generated waveform representations.

In my own review of these three products, I found the Chromatic Guitar Tuner too limited for my needs. Even though I was using it strictly for guitar tuning, it simply felt too constraining and fixed on rigid performance parameters. I gravitated toward the AutoTuner the most because it allowed me to tune a variety of instruments and had a clean, easy-to-use interface. In addition, the real-time graphical display at the bottom of the screen (Fig. 2) sped up the process of tuning an instrument; it worked as easily and accurately on my guitar and piano as it did on my daughter's viola.

PocketRTA was by far the most capable solution, but its busy interface made it less user friendly. However, for sophisticated audio anal-

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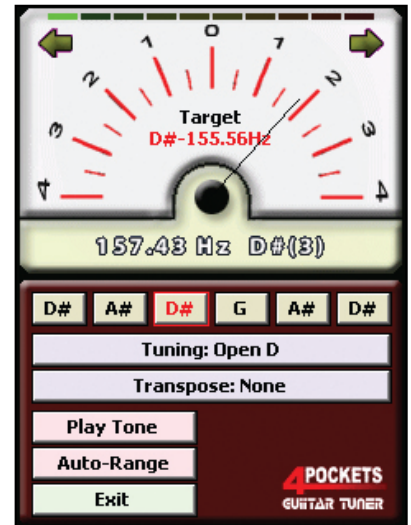


Fig. 1: The 4Pockets Chromatic Guitar Tuner is minimal but adequate for the job.

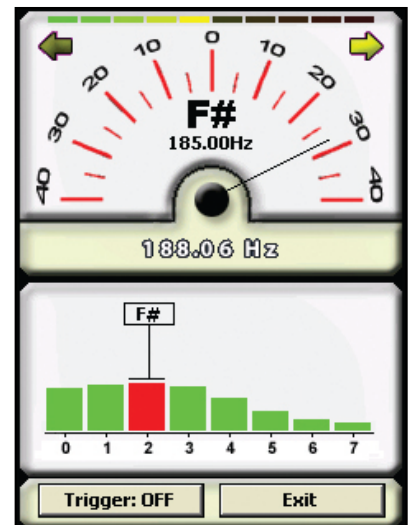


Fig. 2: Auto Tuner is an all-purpose instrument tuner.



Fig. 3: PocketRTA Professional is designed for the mobile sound engineer.



Fig. 4: AudioBox Micro Composer is a functional music sequencer that functions best on faster CPUs.

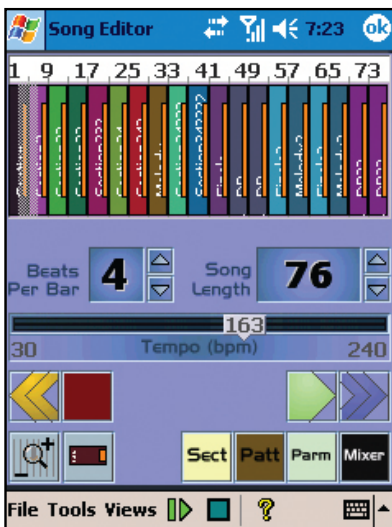


Fig. 5: Griff Pocket Music Studio is an award-winning music composition tool.

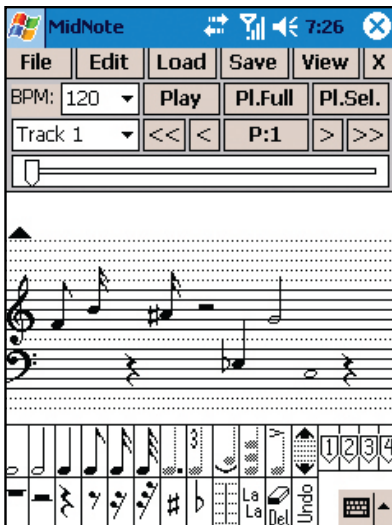


Fig. 6: MidNote shows promise but is crippled by an antiquated runtime engine.

ysis and identification, it's nearly as good as the audio analyzers I've used in high-end audio editors for the Mac and PC. It's a good solution for mobile audio engineers and technically astute musician.

Capturing and editing musical ideas

Some of the best compositions are based on fleeting inspirations that come at odd moments. That's why some musicians keep a small cassette recorder with them at all times—or a Pocket PC. Windows Mobile devices have audio recording capability built into them. The quality isn't fantastic, and the Voice Recorder application is rather basic, but it's enough to capture the new licks and audio hooks you come up with. And unlike laptop PCs, Pocket PCs are ultra portable and instant on, ready to capture these inspirations as they come to you.

In addition to the built-in audio recorder, there are a number of third-party programs that greatly enhance this capability. 4Pockets (4pockets.com) has created AudioBox (\$29.95; see Fig. 4), a "virtual recording studio and sound creation tool." It's essentially a looping audio tool like Sony's ACID for the PC or Apple's Garageband for the OS X platform. The screens are remarkably intuitive, especially when you consider the amount of screen real estate they have to work with. Unfortunately, the program requires a considerable amount of CPU horsepower and RAM to function optimally. Playback of the included "Eurotrash" demo track repeatedly stumbled on my HP iPAQ 6315 with its meager 200 MHz CPU.

Planet Griff (planetgriff.com) offers Griff (£39.99; see Fig. 5), a pocket music studio that includes a loop sequencer, a sampler, a collection of instrument samples and effects, and plug-ins. It won *Smartphone & Pocket PC* magazine's 2006 Best Software award in the Music Composition category, in part due to its extensible nature and performance (it works well even on devices with slower CPUs).

Old-school musicians who prefer musical notation rather than waveform representations should go the PDA Musician site (pdamusician.com) and check out MidNote (\$19.90; see Fig. 6). Unfortunately, it requires the now defunct Orbworks PocketC runtime software, which limits it to older, pre-Windows Mobile 5 Pocket PCs. It also cannot edit more than one note per track at a time (in other words, no chord painting); if chords are required, each note must be edited on a separate track, making multi-track notation edits a major pain. MidNote might be useful as a musical notation teaching application, but it's simply too restricted in its current form to recommend to all but the most patient and forgiving of users.

While each of these sequencing products provide playback of pre-sampled audio loops, none provide the kind of WAV file editing capabilities found on feature-rich desktop sound file editors like Adobe Audition or Sony SoundForge. Only

one vendor I was aware of at press time provided such a tool for the Pocket PC.

In addition to their award-winning audio recording and playback, SoundExplorer (\$7), Vito Technology (vitotechnology.com) recently released SoundEditor (\$7). It's a noble attempt to bring audio editing capability to the Windows Mobile platform, but the limited screen size of the Pocket PC and the fact that SoundEditor only supports WAV-formatted files limit its usefulness to musicians.

However, there are some practical uses for SoundEditor. For example, let's say a lengthy jam session was being recorded using SoundExplorer and about 30 minutes into the recording, a priceless freeform movement was captured. It's only a few bars long but something you want to get out to your musician friends as quickly as possible. Using SoundEditor, you can simply open the WAV file, clip the piece of audio history, save out the clip, convert it to an MP3 file using SoundExplorer, attach the MP3 to an e-mail, and send it off. An interesting side note on the two Vito products is the fact that they were the first Windows Mobile applications I'd ever installed that required online activation of the product, locking the license into the hardware ID of my device. While developers certainly have a right to do this, it seemed a bit heavy-handed to me given the relatively low cost of the programs. Additionally, I've found that I end up reinstalling software on Pocket PCs more frequently than on desktop or laptops because of hard resets and power loss. I would really rather not have to go through an online registration process each time I do.

Pocket PCs ideal for tuning, not editing

I used all the products featured in this article for a few weeks and demonstrated them to my professional musician friends. We concluded that, at least in its current form, the Pocket PC is better suited for instrument tuning and sound analysis, but not so good for sequencing and sound editing. Sound engineers will really appreciate 4Pockets' PocketRTA for its advanced WAV analysis, while on-the-go musicians (especially those playing acoustic instruments) will dig the AutoTuner program.

Many of the audio editor programs are tolerable for quickly capturing inspirational ideas, but using them to compose an entire passage is simply too constraining. The problem is with limitations of the device; it's not the fault of the software developers. Anyone who has used even basic consumer grade sequencers and looping programs on a desktop or laptop PC will find the Pocket PC's screen resolution, computing power, and sound quality too limiting. If the real intent of these programs is to capture that musical magic, using a sound recorder like Vito's SoundExplorer should adequately fulfill this need. ■

Listen to Web Radio Wherever You Are!

Mercora M (Social.fm) wireless service and other solutions let you access worldwide Web radio

by Tim Hillebrand



Mercora M gives you access to over 100,000 digital radio channels with over 3 million songs.

It's like having a radio with you all the time, only you get to pick and choose the genres and artists you listen to. Mercora M (now called Social.fm) is a wireless music service with an ambitious goal: to let you access the largest collection of music and artists ever assembled online. The subscription service allows you to access over 100,000 digital radio channels worldwide, with over 3 million songs. You can also access digital music you have stored on your or a friend's PC.

Mercora M is a subscription service with software that installs on your touch screen device or non-touch screen Smartphone (WM 5/6 or 2003 SE), allowing you to access the service through a wireless connection. The software lets you listen to music in near CD quality from all over the world. You can search for the artist, song, or album, and save it as a favorite or put it in your library. (Searching for a specific song is tricky. It has to be playing on Web radio when you do the search or you won't find it. However, if the song is stored on a PC and if you are set up to access the PC, it will find it and play it.)

Once you have found the music you want, you can find similar artists, read artist biographies, and view artist images. You can also use the application to remotely connect to a PC via the Internet and listen to music stored on that computer. Mercora M will also let you chat with friends and make new ones online to discuss your favorite artists. (Note also that you can only add people to your chat list from the desktop version of the program, discussed below.)

To access music stored on a PC, the desktop version of the program—IMRadio—must be installed. The PC version also lets you become an online DJ and share your music with listeners all around the world. You can Web-cast music that you have ripped from CDs or downloaded from another network—as long as you legally own it. Note that the Windows Mobile and PC versions behave a bit differently. For example, IMRadio will continue playing songs while the Windows Mobile version stops after each song has played, forcing you to restart it to play another selection.

Minor kinks; get an unlimited data plan

This innovative service is a wonderful way to listen to your favorite tunes and discover new ones. Remember that you are not downloading music files but listening to music that is streamed live over the Internet. It works remarkably well over a phone connection, but I did experience some buffering gaps, especially when using a slow phone network connection. I tried it in my car while driving, and the reception was so intermittent that it was virtually worthless. Friends tell me that it works much better with EVDO and other broadband connections. I found that it worked more satisfactorily with almost no buffering issues when connected through Wi-Fi. Finally, you should have an unlimited data plan if you plan on using this service via a phone connection.

Navigation on the mobile version of the program was a bit problematic. At first, I couldn't figure out how to back up in menus or hop from one area to another without exiting the program and starting over. However, I accidentally discovered that you can do this using the navigation button. This brings up the fact that the current version of the program lacks a decent Help feature to clarify these things. (Mercora has said that they will include one in the near future.)

The search function is embedded inside a non-related sub-menu and needs to be accessible from the main menu. Note also that I rarely scored a hit when searching for a song or artist on the mobile version of the program, but had great success doing the same on the desktop version. (I don't know why there would be a difference.) It seems to me that, if you are looking for a specific album or song, it's better to use the mobile version in conjunction with the desktop version to find them on a PC.

I had better luck with Mercora M's Music Station selection mode, but I had to cruise through the entire list to find the genre I wanted. Then, when I selected a station, it would only play one song at a time—you had to press Stop and then Play to listen to the next song. They should at least give the mobile user the option of continuous streaming.

Free two-week trail

Despite these minor issues, Mercora M is a pioneering approach that deserves your consideration. A free two-week trial allows you to test Mercora's functionality without risk. If you decide to subscribe to the service, the cost is reasonable: a one-time charge of \$19.95. You can sign up for the free trial or the full service and download the software from the Mercora Web site (mercora.com/m). As mentioned, it is available for both devices running Windows Mobile 2003 Second Edition or later versions of the OS. The desktop PC component supports Internet Explorer 6 and beyond, plus Firefox 1.03 and above. (You must download the ActiveX and the Mercora Music Search plug-ins for Firefox.)

Resco Radio: Streaming radio without a subscription

If you want to listen to Internet radio without signing up for a subscription service, you should take a look at the winner of the audio category of our Best Software Awards 2007. Resco Radio lets any Web-connected Windows Mobile device access Internet radio stations. It comes with scads of pre-programmed stations in a variety of genres; if you can't find your favorite, you can add it. Resco Radio even lets you record Internet radio music in MP3 format and play it back at a later time using Windows Media Player Mobile. You can record the song that's currently playing or use the built-in scheduler to record a particular time period. The program is "skinnable" and features 10 user-programmable buttons for quick access to the stations of your choice.

Resco Radio is available on both touch screen and non-touch screen devices and is priced at \$19.95. You can purchase it or download the free trial version directly from the developer (resco.net).

Recording Web radio on your PC

What if you don't have an unlimited data plan or your device isn't phone-enabled? The solution is to pre-record your favorite Web radio music and transfer it to your device. MAGIX Web Radio Recorder 2 is the world heavyweight champ Web radio application for the PC. It not only allows you to listen to Web radio, it lets you record multiple Internet stations simultaneously and save it in MP3, WMA, and a variety of other formats. You can then transfer these audio files to your Windows Mobile device and listen to them at your leisure using Media Player Mobile or a third-party media player. You could even use Mercora M to listen to these Web radio recordings stored on your PC. It also allows you to archive and burn recordings on CD or DVD. Out of the box, it comes with over 3000 available Internet stations organized by genre, and you can add to these if necessary.

This program comes with the Magix Podcast Maker, which allows you to create your own podcasts in a flash with sound tracks, voice over, and other powerful features. It even automatically distributes your podcasts in worldwide directories and generates RSS feeds on provided free Web space. This versatile application costs \$29.99 and is available on the Magix Web site (magix.com).

Web radio in your pocket

The solutions discussed in this article let you access a plethora of Web radio stations in a wide array of genres and listen to your and your friends' music collections as well. You can record your favorite tunes, expand your collection, burn them onto a CD, become an online DJ, and create and distribute podcasts. ■

GET MORE ENTERTAINMENT FROM WINDOWS MOBILE

Play Home Videos and Digital Slideshows on Media Player Mobile

by Dan Hannttula

For this issue, I wanted to find something that power users could do with their Windows Mobile device to make it truly entertaining. Right now, you might carry photos of your family and pets and maybe even your latest exotic vacation, but leave videos of your children at home. Everyone expects more than a typical stack of photos these days, and it would be a shame to keep your most cherished video moments at home. Using two free applications from Microsoft, you can create slideshows and videos that will play on your Windows Mobile device and are sure to impress.

Wallet photos—21st century style

With digital photography vastly outpacing standard film photography in the home, it only makes sense that we move away from paper pictures and display our photos in the digital realm. Using Microsoft Photo Story 3 for Windows (microsoft.com/photostory), you can create a multimedia slideshow (Fig. 1) that will run on your Windows Mobile device. The software is available as a free download from Microsoft and works on computers running the Windows XP operating system.



Fig. 1: With Microsoft Photo Story 3 for Windows, creating an exciting slideshow is as easy as picking your favorite photos and the music you'd like to play in the background.

After you have downloaded and installed Photo Story 3, here's how to create your own photo story for Windows Mobile:

1) Import your photos into Photo Story: Launch Photo Story 3 for Windows, on the first screen (Fig. 1) click the Import Pictures button to select the photos you'd like to use in your photo story. You can drag and drop the pictures in at the bottom of the screen to change order, or perform simple editing tasks like rotating the images and removing red eye.

2) Add captions: On the second screen you can add titles to any photo by selecting the image you wish to caption and typing in a message. You can also add one of several digital effects to the image (to

give it an antique sepia tone color, for example).

3) Narrate your pictures and customize motion: If you have a microphone attached to your computer, you can add a voice narration to the slideshow. You can also choose to customize how the slideshow transitions from one photo to the next.

4) Add background music: You can select any unprotected WMA, MP3, or WAV file to play while your slideshow is displayed. By clicking the Create Music button you can generate your own background music by selecting from 50 styles (like "soundtrack: mysterious cave" or "jazz: boogie") and picking the instruments and tempo for the piece.

5) Save your story: The final screen (Fig. 2) allows you to choose the settings for your saved file. Rather than having to select aspect ratio, bit rate, frames per second, and pixel size, Microsoft has included pre-set selections for saving your file for playback on Windows Mobile devices. *TIP: Smartphones with a higher resolution 320 x 240 pixel screen (Motorola Q, T-Mobile Dash, Cingular 3125, Samsung Black-Jack) should choose the "Save your story for playback on a Pocket PC with Windows Media Player 10 Mobile" option.*



Fig. 2: Microsoft Photo Story 3 for Windows features the ability to create slideshows specifically sized for your Windows Mobile device.

Once you've created your photo story and saved it to your computer hard drive, all you have to do is copy it to your Windows Mobile device. The easiest way to do this is to copy the file to the synchronized documents folder on your PC and, the next time you connect your device,

Dan Hannttula has covered the handheld market for more than a decade, lecturing at PDA conferences, vertical market trade associations and appearing on popular television series like TechTV's Screen Savers show. He created an entire curriculum of Pocket PC training classes for the Moore-Norman Technology Center and has published hundreds of articles including guest pieces for ZDTV, C|NET, Microsoft, Leo Laporte's 2003 Technology Almanac, and other print media and online news sources. His Web site (SemperAptus.com) is designed to promote Internet-connected devices, has become a popular resource for Pocket PC users and gadget lovers alike. In March 2001, he published his first book, the Official Hewlett-Packard Pocket PC Handbook by IDG Books. He can be reached via e-mail at danh@semperaptus.com.



ActiveSync will automatically copy it to your handheld. Alternatively, you can use ActiveSync's Explore feature to copy and paste the file. Finally, if your PC has a card reader, you can copy the file to a storage card and transfer it that way.

Making movies mobile-friendly

Now that you've seen how easy it is to create a slideshow, it's time to take the next step. Windows Movie Maker from Microsoft (do a search on "Movie Maker" at microsoft.com) is another free application that will help you create, edit, and save your movies into a format that can be played on your Windows Mobile device. Before you can use Movie Maker, you need to find a way to copy your home movies to your PC. Many computers and video cameras have a FireWire port and, in my experience, this is the easiest way to capture video on your PC. When you connect a camera using a FireWire cable, Windows Movie Maker can control your camera and automatically record the video. For more information, consult your video camera's manual or visit microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/getstarted/default.msp. If your digital camera saves movies on a storage card, you can copy them from the card to a PC equipped with a compatible card reader.

Once you've imported your video into Movie Maker, the real fun begins. Each video clip can be edited, subtitled, and given an audio (music or sound effects) track. There are dozens of special effects and scene-to-scene transitions that you can add to your movie with just a few clicks of the mouse. There's also an "AutoMovie" feature that will do all the hard work for you, instantly creating a movie with a slideshow, highlights reel, music video, sports clips, or old movie-style theme. Either way, Windows Movie Maker gives you as much directorial control over the production as you want, allowing you to go back and rework and revise the video until you're completely satisfied with your movie. The preview window (Fig. 3, upper-right) allows you to see the final cut exactly as it will appear when you save the film.



Fig. 3: Windows Movie Maker allows you to turn your home videos into a full-scale movie, complete with titles, credits, and special effects.

Once you're ready to save the final film, there are a few extra steps you'll need to take in order to make it compatible with your Windows Mobile device:

- 1) Select File > Save Movie File.
- 2) On the Movie Location screen, select My Computer as the save location and click Next.
- 3) On the Saved Movie File screen, enter a name for your movie and select the folder where you'd like to save it.

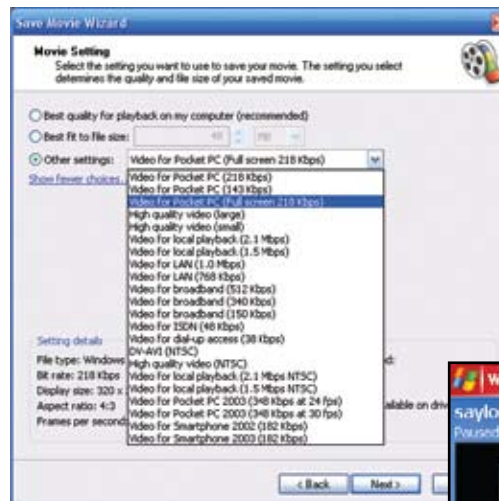


Fig. 4 (left): Windows Movie Maker features a number of different formats to save your video for replay on a Windows Mobile device.

Fig. 5 (right): The completed photo stories and movie maker files will play in Windows Media Player Mobile.



4) On the Movie Setting screen, click the Show more choices hyperlink.

5) Click on the Other settings radio button and then open the drop-down box to the right. The screen should look similar to the one shown in Figure 4.

6) Simply select the format you'd like and save the file. (Note: "Kbps" stands for Kilobits per second and can be best described as the amount of compression being applied to the video. A smaller Kbps value will produce smaller file sizes, but poorer quality video. You should experiment with different values to find the best settings for your movies, while taking into consideration how much space the video will occupy on your handheld's memory.)

After you've saved your movie, copy it to your Windows Mobile device using the same techniques you used to copy over the photo story file. Files created in Microsoft Photo Story 3 for Windows and Windows Movie Maker will play in Windows Media Player Mobile (Fig. 5).

Advanced tips

Once you've created your first photo story, you can import it into Windows Movie Maker. Because they are saved in Windows Media Video (.WMV) format, any photo story can be added into Windows Movie Maker using the "Import video" feature. This is especially helpful if you've put a lot of effort into a photo story and wish to make it part of a larger Movie Maker film. Just make sure that you save the file at a higher bit rate (I suggest using the "Profile for computers 3" or "Profile for computers 4" setting so that you have a high-quality video to start with).

In addition to creating photo stories for Windows Mobile, you can also burn them to a DVD. With a DVD burner on your PC and the Sonic DVD plug-in for Photo Story from Sonic Solutions (estore.sonic.com/enu/photostory/default.asp), you can easily select an option to save to DVD from within the Photo Story 3 application. This makes a wonderful gift for family members that aren't as technologically savvy.

Want to "get more?"

Are you an expert in a particular Pocket PC technology and want to share your knowledge? Have you ever felt like you're not taking full advantage of some feature of your handheld? In either case, send your comments to (danh@semperaptus.com or rich@smartphonemag.com). We will try to make it easier to become a Pocket PC power user. ■