

EyeTV- Turn your Mac into a TV

I have an ancient TV set, well not as ancient as B and W circa 1973 but close. I can't watch digital TV, HD or the latest offerings from Freeview. I would have needed to purchase a flat screen TV and a freeview device, at a cost of more than \$1500+. An EyeTV costs around \$270. So I figure that is a savings to me \$1200+. Enough to buy an iPhone outright.

I bought the EyeTV hybrid so I could watch clear, crisp *eyetv hybrid* HD quality TV on my computer screen without purchasing an expensive LCD or plasma screen. And it can do that. I can now watch new channels like TVNZ 6 and 7, Sports Extra and Parliament, the usual suspects, 1,2,3 C4 and Maori TV and listen to FM radio (National radio and concert programmes only) and easily record from these as well. Prime TV and CTV are watchable on the analogue side on this hybrid device.



The Hybrid is a bus-powered device that can tune analogue and digital channels and connects to other devices such as sky decoders and satellite and cable boxes. There are other options such as Diversity or the 250 I could have bought instead. Diversity is a digital tuner that comes with two antennas and a greater range of recording options but lacks abilities to link with external devices and cannot see analogue channels. The EyeTV 250 is an analogue tuner, however, unlike the Hybrid and Diversity, it uses hardware encoding on the device, which makes it a good option for less powerful Macs such as a G4 running with 10.4. The older Macs will struggle with HD content from the Hybrid or Diversity. The 250 costs about 25 per cent more than the Hybrid, however, Toast is packaged with it to burn your files to DVD. The more RAM you have on any Mac, the better, as no more than half the total RAM will be used as buffer.

The Elgato website (listed at the end of the article) provides an interactive comparison chart for the different devices to help you find the best one for your needs.

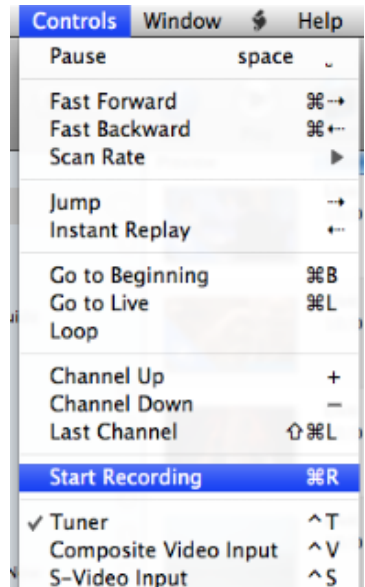
Setting up

Setting up is easy but can be time consuming. The main part is a 2 inch long device that looks a bit like a chubby memory stick. Plug this in a USB 2.0 port and plug one end of the coaxial cable into its bottom end and the other end into a UHF aerial. The little aerial sometimes works but a large indoor aerial works better. Better still is an aerial on the roof.

Install the software and open the program. Use the setup assistant to setup such features as progressive scanning. An exhaustive scan through 600+ analogue and digital frequencies to discover all the channels

available takes a while so set it going and make a cuppa. Save these frequencies as sets, which means next time you take your computer and TV stick to that seaside bach you only need to choose the set rather than do some time-consuming tuning. If you know their exact frequency channels can be added manually but otherwise options for finetuning channels are limited. Often you have to go through this process of autotuning the whole lot again.

Recording videos can be a frustrating experience, fumbling with videotapes and trying to figure out which buttons to push and when on a standard recorder. EyeTV makes this process a breeze on a computer. Just go to the Controls menu and choose Start Recording and when ready to stop access the same menu. Play these recordings as they are in EyeTV or export to a number of other formats eg: iPod, iTunes and other options. If you have multiple networked Macs in the house install the software on them all and share the files in the archive or watch slightly delayed live broadcasts.



When EPG or electronic programming guides are fully implemented in New Zealand recording will be even easier with the ability to schedule recordings based on time or keyword. This does not have to be the programme name; you could tell it to watch for movies featuring Brad Pitt and then record those automatically. There is a way to get access to programme lists by downloading a script from a New Zealand website but you need to repeatedly match the channel with the right number and choose xmltv on the pop up menus. With the ability to use Applescript, you might also be able to automate the burning of that movie to a DVD.

Switching between channels is easy via an on screen menu. the supplied remote or the Apple remote. Not so easy is timeshifting, or scrolling back to the beginning of the story to catch something you missed earlier. It also has picture in picture, or the ability to watch one channel at the same time as another and teletext (a kind of old-fashioned information service that predated the world wide web). For the hearing impaired, subtitles are easily accessible.

EyeTV has a basic movie editor built in to remove unwanted content from recordings. It takes a bit of getting used to working with the sliders to remove the adverts and other unwanted content. Not a patch on iMovie but you can always export the footage and edit it elsewhere.

More than a TV

If it just did the above and did it well I would be happy. But it can also do a lot more. You can:

- Share with other macs on a network

- Share content wirelessly with a recent iPod or download it the old-fashioned way in a formats suited to the iPod

- Plug in your video recorder (with the supplied composite cable) and digitise videotapes

- Download from your camcorder

- plug in satellite TV boxes, skyTV decoder boxes and other boxes into the tuner stick, using a composite cable

- plug in an xbox to record the video from games played.

Another paid-for Elgato product (software) called EyeConnect lets you stream your EyeTV video, audio, photos to your stereo or television. But it requires UPnP AV media player. Limited options for such devices do not offer much competition for Apple TV.

I thought that the EyeTV device only worked on Macs. But do a little digging on the internet and locate drivers for WinTV HVR900 and you can then run it in Windows (in Bootcamp or if desperate on that PC in the corner). It came as a surprise to find the WinTV, a Hauppauge product, listed in System Profiler where EyeTV should be. EyeTV, with these extra features and high cost, may be overkill for some users. Pinnacle's tiny nano, a basic TV tuner, sells for less than \$100. Another company offering TV tuners that work with Macs is Miglia. However, nothing matches the flexibility and options in the Hybrid.

SeniorNet Mac

Computer Training Lessons: Two-hour sessions, once a week for four weeks. Course notes are provided. Classes are small with a maximum of six students and two tutors per lesson.

Social Events: Held on the fourth Wednesday of the month.

Newsletter: Supplied every two months.

The **Learning Centre** is situated in the Cranmer Centre Poolhouse, which is accessed from Montreal Street at the Armagh Street corner.

Contact: If you would like to join SeniorNet Mac and are in the 55-plus age group, please contact Tom Mitchell at (03) 338 9837, or email:

t.mitchell@snap.net.nz,

or else leave a message on the club's answerphone at (03) 365 2003.

I must admit that it hasn't been smooth sailing with this device and I am still working through some quality issues. Others may have given up and gone back to the TV set and sofa before now but I want to make it work. It took me some time to realise that the tiny antenna was of limited use. I thought my dual core 2.4ghz computer was too slow until I saw a mac mini connected to an aerial in the ceiling at Magnum Mac giving perfect reception.

I commandeered the rabbits ears from the aging TV set in the living room and used that indoors. More channels were revealed but I still faced some quality issues. Things improved markedly when I stuck it out the window. I still get pixellation and green screens with TV3 and I still get missed frames. It must be the way I am holding my tongue. The device can also get quite hot to touch (it works hard to download all that video) so I now run it from a USB hub.

It is early days yet for watching fullscreen live broadcasts on a computer monitor, so I am hoping the electronic programming aspect improves when Freeview starts promoting TV tuners as a way of accessing Freeview content. I can also improve the viewing quality further by linking to a UHF roof antenna instead of the rabbits ears.

I bought EyeTV because I wanted to get a digital TV with Freeview the cheap way but found that it offers much more than just the ability to watch TV on my computer. My ancient TV sits in the corner unloved and unwatched; it hasn't been switched on in weeks.

If you want more information, manuals and the like can be reached from this website:

<http://www.elgato.com/elgato/int/mainmenu/home.en.html>

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The AUGC Discussion List is for members who wish to discuss club matters.

The HELP list is open to all Mac users who wish to give or receive assistance.

(Contact Peter to join these mailing lists).