

The Academy of Plumbing 37

Sound & Vision

Part 3

And lo, the gear works a treat and we're rapidly accumulating an unmanageable pile of ripped DVDs, video recordings and live broadcasts from those amusing cheap channels that seem to feature 40 minutes of adverts for every hour's broadcast time. Furthermore, our media files don't exactly look pretty in Front Row, or even the Finder. What shall we do about it? Read on.

GETTING ORGANISED

This is a piece of cake. You'll remember that I decided to store the media on a 1.5TB drive shared on my network by an Apple Airport Extreme. Front Row searches for media in Apple's preset places; consequently it looks for movies in your Home/Movies folder. All we have to do is create aliases in here that point to the folder structure on your media volume and, hey presto, Front Row looks there instead.

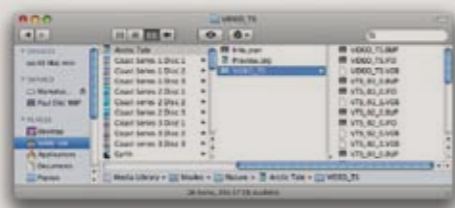
Bear in mind that Front Row expects to find movie files in the Movies folder. If you put mp3's in there it will bleat and fail to play them. Put them into your Music folder, similarly aliased, and it will be happy. Then again, your iTunes Music Library is the best place for these.

Front Row is a very slick and child-friendly user interface but it occasionally gets itself into a tizz and refuses to go beyond the menu screen of a ripped DVD. On my system it also sometimes plays back fast-motion programme rather jerkily.

The Apple DVD Player shows neither of these faults when playing the same material, which I find curious as I'd expect both applications to be little more than user interfaces to the same underlying code libraries that actually do the work. Ah well. Fortunately, DVD Player can be simply invoked by dragging the DVD folder onto its Dock icon.

RIPPING YARN

So what's a DVD folder, then? Nothing more than a folder containing a second folder called VIDEO_TS, which is where DVD players expect to find the DVD's media "assets". It also contains an info file, and you'll notice that this one additionally contains Preview.jpg.



Being just a folder, the Finder displays it with a default folder icon and Front Row shows it with its default movie icon.



Preview.jpg is the key: note the spelling. If you've ripped a DVD and scanned its cover or searched Amazon or Google Images for its cover art, save the image into the DVD folder as Preview.jpg and Front Row will then use that image as the movie's icon. Unfortunately the Finder still shows us a default folder icon. Img2icns to the rescue.

Drag your cover art file onto its window and click on the icns button. The resulting .icns file can then be dragged into the little square in the top-left corner of the DVD folder's Get Info window, and henceforth the Finder will show us a beautiful, scalable icon that looks excellent in everything from List to QuickLook view.

Ripping your DVDs to hard disk is best handled by RipIt. By default, RipIt doesn't save a DVD folder: it saves the DVD into a package instead, with the file extension .dvdmedia. This should be absolutely fabulous because double-clicking it automatically opens DVD Player, as if you'd simply double-clicked on a movie file. Unfortunately the gormless Front Row doesn't know what a .dvdmedia package is and refuses to play. Fortunately, RipIt can be set to save to folders rather than packages in its preferences. Furthermore, .dvdmedia packages can be converted to folders (and vice-versa) by simply removing the .dvdmedia file extension.

WHY AYE, TV

The Elgato EyeTV Sat turned up and works very well. The only fly in the

The Digital Plumber

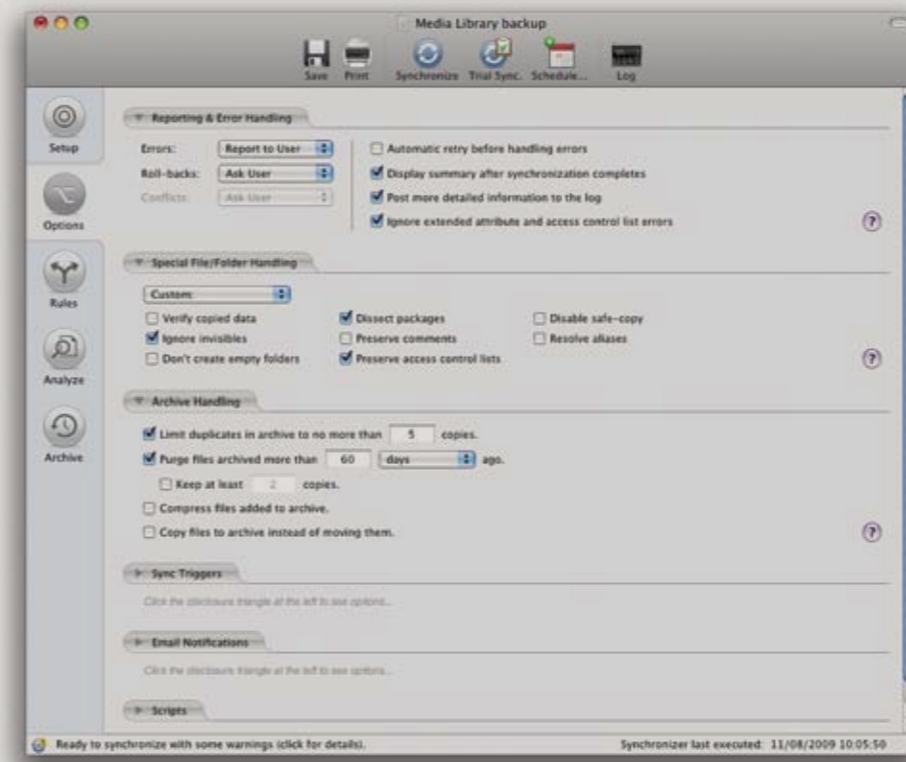
By Paul Ellis

ointment is my discovery that if I put its EyeTV Archive folder (where it keeps its live TV buffer file and stores its recordings) directly onto my Airport Extreme-shared Media Library disk, the Airport Extreme can't quite keep up with the data rate required for recording HDTV, although SD is fine. Never mind; I was prepared for this and a 10m FireWire 800 cable will fix the problem because I'll simply disconnect the Media Library disk from the Airport Extreme and attach it directly to the Mac mini.

EyeTV manages its recordings pretty well, but what if you want to

make them available to Front Row? EyeTV records the interlaced MPEG programme stream from the satellite unchanged and de-interlaces the picture on playback, making it look really good on the LCD telly, but for some reason Front Row (and, therefore, QuickTime) doesn't currently de-interlace on playback. This looks nasty. The answer is to Export from EyeTV as an Apple TV file. The result still isn't quite up to playback of the original from EyeTV but looks good enough from across the room.

EyeTV is a mature and well-thought-out application that does well



everything I can possibly think of concerning TV recording, scheduling, editing and exporting. In all I think the combination of Mac mini, EyeTV Sat and EyeTV software is far better than a dedicated TV recorder box.

BACKUP

Chronosync does the job, as usual. The Media Library disk is always mounted; Chronosync mounts the Media Library Backup volume on its daily schedule, runs the backup and unmounts it again when finished. Remember that I have the Mac mini running its Time Machine backup to a sparsebundle disk image stored on the Media Library? Well, that would be 70Gb or so to update daily if I hadn't told Chronosync to Dissect Packages. A 2-hour+ backup then becomes 5 minutes. In its Options/Archive handling tab, Chronosync is set to ignore invisible items so it's not constantly updating or bleating about Spotlight indexes, Trash it doesn't have access to, changed DS_Store files and other such cruft. It's also set to delete archived files after 60 days so that the backup's _Archived Items folder doesn't become unmanageably big.

There we are, then. Next time, back to the boring hectoring about backup. Or email. Or both.

LINKS

- Img2icns: <http://www.img2icnsapp.com/>
- RipIt: <http://ripitapp.com/>
- Elgato tuners & EyeTV: <http://www.elgato.com/>
- Lindy 10m FireWire 800 cable: <http://tinyurl.com/lu9bg7>

PDFs of this and all my other Image articles are available to download at www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk, each with live weblinks for your browsing pleasure. Go and get 'em.

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