

WHY THIS DVD WON'T PLAY IN MY MACHINE ?

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By Darren Robinson

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They're supposed to play EVERYTHING! The salesman and the catalogue promised you that THIS machine can handle DVD's, CD's, MP3's, JPG's VCD, CD-R's, etc etc etc.

But that DVD movie you bought on the internet from overseas absolutely refuses to play. With or without an accompanying error message on the TV screen , you wonder whether you have just wasted good money.

But who to blame ? Maybe the disc itself was faulty ? Perhaps the salesman lied about what the machine could do ?

None of the above ! The disc is not faulty and the salesman didn't lie, though I guarantee he didn't give you the full story.

There are 2 compatibility issues to consider with DVD discs that you obtain from overseas. Both conditions need to be satisfied for the disc to play !

REGIONS

The first is REGIONS (or zones).

Your DVD manual will tell you what region your machine is. Many machines also have a region logo at the back.

If your DVD player is multi-zone, congratulations, it will play all discs from all countries. Multi-zone is also known as "region zero".

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However, if your machine is region locked, it can ONLY play discs with that particular region code. If the regions don't match, the disc won't play. The most common locked regions are region 1 (USA), region 2 (UK– Europe) and region 4 (Australia). I should emphasise here that this issue only applies to foreign discs. The retailers in your country will only sell DVD's in your local region designation.

There is an important exception to this rule – some DVD discs are released as "region zero" or "region-free" or "all-regions".

These DVD's will play fine in any region-locked machine.

BYPASSING THE REGION LOCKING

About half of all locked DVD players can be permanently unlocked via the remote control. It depends on the brand and model. But don't go searching for the magic button because it's not there – the models that can be unlocked require a unique special sequence of key-presses to be entered.

The code-sequences are one of those ridiculous pretend secrets that consumers are not meant to be aware of – but if you ask the salesman, or the local company distributor, or find the right website, the information can be obtained in a short amount of time.

This is because at the DVD factory the machines earmarked for various countries are basically the same, except for the electrical plug and a few software settings such as the region code eg the machines destined for Australia are software locked to 4, the machines destined for the USA are software locked to region 1. By discovering and entering the special sequence, you are basically emulating what they do at the factory and altering the region coding. So a person in the USA who has just bought a region 4 disc from Australia can alter the region coding on their player to region 4, or more conveniently, region zero, which means all-regions are accepted. Once made, the change is written to the machine's long-term memory and does not need to be re-entered even if the player is switched off.

PAL-NTSC

The SECOND compatibility issue with DVD's is the TV signal.

The DVD player generates a signal and send it to your TV set.

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PAL and NTSC are 2 types of TV signal.

Japan and the USA use NTSC signals.

The PAL system is used by Australia, the UK and Europe. These signals were decided upon by governments 50 years ago.

Practically all PAL and NTSC DVD's will play fine throughout Australia, UK and Europe. This is because the DVD's and TV sets sold throughout these countries are dual PAL and NTSC compatible.

THE PAL–NTSC issue is really only an issue for USA and Canada customers.

Certain brands of TV set and DVD players within the USA do not handle PAL signals at all, while others handle it badly (eg black and white image).

Many USA customers will successfully play a PAL disc just fine, but a significant minority will not. For example, USA customers with a Sony TV set or a Panasonic DVD player are unlikely to be successful.

Check your manuals for both your TV set and DVD player to confirm they mention PAL. If you don't have the manual, check the onscreen menus.

If your player or TV set are locked to NTSC only, they cannot be changed to PAL.

There is a school of thought that suggests all DVD players should be able to read both PAL and NTSC media, simply because the data as written on the disc comprises "1"s and "0"s, that is, digital data. The theory goes that a DVD player is basically a computer , therefore it can read both PAL and NTSC datasets. While this is true up to a point, a DVD player also needs to convert digital input into analog output to ensure compatibility with most television sets. The problem arises when the factory has not included the capability (eg a modulator) to generate and send an NTSC signal from a PAL disc to a non–digital TV set. The DVD player may be smart enough to know it does not have the capability to generate a signal, therefore does not attempt to play the disc.

WHAT KIND OF MACHINE WILL PLAY FOREIGN DISCS ?

Ironically, the cheaper the DVD player, the more likely it is to be both dual PAL–NTSC compatible AND multi–region out of the box. This is because the lesser–known and smaller manufacturers from countries

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like China do not have "political" or financial allegiances to the major American movie studios which "encourage" the region restrictions.

This results in the bizarre situation where you can buy a Chinese-made \$40 DVD player which will not only play all foreign DVD's, but has just as many functions and capabilities as a \$300 big brand machine. Of course, the big-brand machines have better warranty support and superior build-quality and components, so I'm certainly not saying their price is unreasonable, just be aware that paying out top dollar for a machine does not necessarily mean it can play foreign discs.

OTHER DEVICES

A quick word on other DVD playing devices – Playstations and X-Boxes generally will not play foreign discs and have limited capabilities. Some earlier models won't play dual layer discs, also known as DVD-9, even from the correct region.

Interestingly it is not commonly known that the PAL-NTSC issue does not apply at all to computers. This is because your monitor is not a television set and your video card sends digital signals, not PAL or NTSC signals.

However be aware that your computer's DVD player is probably locked to your local region. Many models will allow you to play 5 discs of varying regions without complaint, but will then LOCK PERMANENTLY to the region of the last disc ! There is software available to bypass or even hack the DVD-player's internal software, though Hollywood (via the MPAA) has made legal challenges against certain DVD manipulation programs .

So next time you find a DVD on the internet that isn't available in your own country, be sure to check the specifications of your DVD player and TV set before sending away those hard-earned dollars.

Written by Darren Robinson, webmaster of
moviesearch.com.au

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Is a DVD VCR recorder right for you?

By Kenny Hemphill

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A DVD VCR recorder may, at first sight, seem like an ugly combo of old technology with new. However, there are many advantages to be had from a DVD VCR recorder, also known as DVD VHS recorder or DVD VCR combo recorder.

The first and most obvious advantage is that it provides an easy way to copy your old VHS tapes to DVD and thus preserve them for much longer than they would last on a VHS tape. Just stick the tap and blank DVD into the machine, press a button and, bingo, you're ropey old VHS tapes can be consigned to the trash, to be replaced by a shiny, new DVD disc.

Saving space is another advantage of having a DVD VCR recorder. Many people like to keep hold of old VHS tapes for all sorts of reasons, but having a DVD recorder and a VCR takes up space, plug sockets, and adds to the jungle of wires behind the TV.

However, it's not all good news. A DVD VCR recorder has one distinct disadvantage over having two separate units and its one that affects every area where technology combines multiple functions into one device. Put simply, if your VCR breaks, you've lost your DVD recorder to. And vice versa. Whereas, if you had separate VHS and DVD machines, when one breaks and you need to send it off to be repaired, you still have the other.

If this potential problem doesn't put you off, and you decide a DVD VHS recorder is right for you, there are a number of things you should look out for. If possible go for a device which records to DVD-RAM as well as DVD-R or DVD+R. This allows you to timeshift your DVD recording, meaning you can watch the start of a program while still recording the end of it, or pause and rewind live TV. Timeshifting is incredibly useful and will change the way you watch TV.

You should also look for a device which plays back DVDs using progressive scan. This means that rather than splitting each frame into two fields and displaying each one alternately, the entire frame is shown on screen at the same time. This improves the quality of the picture when watching DVD players.

If you have lots of VHS tapes that you want to carry on watching or want to record to DVD, it's possible

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that a DVD VCR recorder could be right for you.

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Kenny Hemphill is the editor and publisher of



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