

Tivo, ReplayTV Agree to Time Limits for PPV Movies

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Digital video recorder pioneers TiVo and ReplayTV, which is now owned by Digital Networks North America, have agreed to use DRM software that can limit the length of time their users can keep pay-per-view (PPV) movies that are stored on future versions of their boxes. The companies made a deal with the movie studios to use Macrovision DRM software in models starting next spring. ReplayTV president Bernie Sepaniak told the San Jose Mercury News that it could be years before the media companies begin using the new capabilities.

DVR users can currently keep recorded movies as long as they want. When DVR storage capacity was limited to 20-40 hours, the problem wasn't as bad as it is now, with storage capacities upwards of 100- 200 hours and increasing rapidly.

The copy protection feature will also be put on so-called digital media PCs, such as those that run Windows Media Center and on home media servers that store content on a home network for later playback.

Max Ochoa, TiVo associate general counsel, said that the units would prominently display a warning on the TV that a rented flick would only be available for a specific time period.

Macrovision said the changes should not otherwise change the way consumers use their TiVos or ReplayTVs. Users should still be able to record and keep other content for an unlimited time.

DVRs have caused studios to be reluctant to release films to cable pay-per-view services simultaneously with their release on DVD. Premium cable networks such as "Sex and the City" producer HBO don't want to make all episodes of a series available on an anytime basis.

There are various time schemes that could be implemented, such as seven days from download or 24 hours after viewing begins. Movielink, the online music service that several studios own, lets subscribers download a movie and keep it on their computers for up to 30 days before watching it. Once watched, it's deleted from their computer within 24 hours although the rental can be renewed for another 30 days - for a fee, of course - but it saves downloading a second time.

Sepaniak also said that ReplayTVs already have a more rudimentary version of Macrovision's copy protection. Based on a signal from the content owner, the ReplayTV user is able to make a copy or is prevented from doing so.