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The Ultimate Guide to Video iPod



Alright, so after all that hype about having a practical way of watching TV and movies while on the go, you have finally gone and bought yourself the new iPod. Now what?

Well, let's see. There are so many options squeezed into one slim, 2.5" LCD screen media center that it's going to take a lot of time going over each one of them. So let's do take it one at a time, shall we? This guide is going to take over all the options you've got and how to convert absolutely anything and everything – DVDs, TiVo video, messy AVIs, muxed MPEGs and more to iPod compatible video – all within OS X. And along the way, we'll teach you a couple of iPod tips and tricks, too!

Handling Those Nasty Scratches

When you take your iPod out of the box, your first order of business should be to protect your investment. You don't want any of those nasty scratches from appearing on your precious media box, do you? It's a complete eye soar and one you can completely avoid.

The good thing about this new iPod is that its design is slightly different from that of the nano, which according to most users scratch easily. The new iPod has better chassis and doubled-layered, probably to protect the LCD monitor. But if you want to make sure that your iPod doesn't show any scratches, most users recommend plastic cases, such as The Invisible Shield. If not, you can always get the white model, instead of the black one.

What Videos Can You Play?

Oh, we'll be discussing how to convert your videos in a wee bit. But first, let us briefly go over the kinds of videos that your new iPod can support. According to Apple's website, the video specifications of the new iPod are the following:

- **H.264 video:** up to 768 Kbps, 320 x 240, 30 frames per sec, Baseline Profile up to Level 1.3 with AAC-LC up to 160 Kbps, 48 Khz, stereo audio in .m4v, .mp4, and .mov file formats.
- **MPEG-4 video:** up to 2.5 mbps, 480 x 480, 30 frames per sec, Simple Profile with AAC-LC up to 160 Kbps, 48 Khz, stereo audio in .m4v, .mp4, and .mov file formats.

For the newbies, this might all sound a little too confusing. What's with all the numbers? Don't worry because chances are you only need to remember a few of those for you to get the most out of your new iPod.

First, let's start with H.264 video. The highest video bitrate with the H.264 codec is 768 kilobits per second. The biggest picture size for your H.264 movie is 320 pixels wide by 240 pixels high, which is incidentally the exact dimension of your iPod's screen. Your iPod can play H.264 video at framerates up to 30 frames per second. Every one of the applications that we'll be using encodes with the Baseline Profile. Your audio needs to be encoded as AAC audio up to 160 Kbps, 48 KHz, and it can be in either stereo or mono. As long as you follow all the guidelines, your movie can even be a QuickTime movie or an MPEG-4 movie file.

The other option you have is the MPEG-4 video, which supports a much higher bitrate than H.264 video – 2500 kilobits per second. Using higher bitrates will also create larger files, which means that you'll have less space for additional songs and movies, but more segments of your favorite movie. The biggest picture size for your MPEG-4 video is 480 pixels wide by 480 pixels high – three times as many pixels than your iPod's screen is capable of displaying. Your iPod will shrink the picture proportionally so that everything fits on the screen. Again, the iPod can play videos up to 30 frames per second and your audio and file format options are the same as H.264 video.

So Which One is Better – H.264 or MPEG-4?

Well, that's a tough question really as each format has their ups and downs. Arguably, H.264 is preferable considering how it offers high quality and a file size that is much smaller compared to MPEG-4. When it comes to picture quality, however, both formats are comparable, especially when encoded at the higher supported video settings.

As for speed of encoding, most people agree that H.264 video takes longer than standard MPEG-4. Take for example a two-hour movie. When you convert that to iPod using H.264 codec, the process could take considerably longer (especially with QuickTime Pro's pokey Export: Movie to iPod video option).

Where to Download Videos for Your iPod

If you're tired ripping movies from your DVD collection or you've used up all your movie files in your computer, then it's probably time for you to look for other sources of iPod compatible videos. Below are some good sites that offer iPod video files that are both free and legal!

- **ChannelFrederator.com** – If you like to watch short animations while taking a breather, this is the place to look in.
- **PodGuide.tv** – It's not called "PodGuide" for nothing.
- **Channel 101** and **Channel 102** – Brilliant downloadable shows are up on offer.
- **The iTunes Music Store's podcast section** – One of the best things about the new iPod is that Apple has bundled it with their updates on iTunes. Now, you can download loads of free videos from the store for your daily dose of iPod-casting.
- **Apple iTunes** – Sometimes you just have to go to the source of the source to find what you're looking for.
- **Archive.org** – This site is great for old videos and movies.

Watch iPod Videos on Your TV

Say what?! Yep, it's true. And for some users who prefer widescreen as opposed to pocket-TV, this is the best thing about the new iPod. Now, outputting your iPod videos to any TV is easy. Just use a special video cable (and it doesn't even be the one sold by Apple), output it through your iPod's headphone jack, and voila! You're a couch potato, baby!

If you're more interested in watching videos on your TV, you may want to go with the MPEG-4 format since it can support the bigger 480 x 480 picture size. When you encode widescreen movies and output them to a TV, the pixel limit is usually 230,400 pixels. So when these larger images are displayed on your TV, you'll get to see all those extra pixels.

Okay So You Can Watch Videos on TV, Big Deal...What About My Other Videos?

When you download video files from the web or file sharing networks, some of these files may not be marked as iPod compatible. Does that mean you can't play them on your iPod? Well, the good news is that it's easy enough to find out.

Tip #1 – Open iTunes

The easiest and less time-consuming way to determine whether a video is iPod-supported or not is to simply open iTunes with your iPod connected. Afterwards, drop the video file directly into your iPod's library. If the video is copied into your iPod, it means it's compatible. If it's not, then your iPod won't be able to play it.

To copy the video to your iPod, just select Manually manage songs and playlists in the iPod tab of your iTunes preferences.

Tip #2 – Add Video to the iTunes Library

The other way of finding out if your video files are iPod compatible is to add your video to your iTunes library. Just right click the video and select Convert Selection to iPod. You will receive an alert from iTunes on your screen, telling you if your video is already compatible. If it's not, your movie will be converted to a compatible H.264 video for you.

We should probably mention that you don't really need to add videos to your iTunes Library in order to add them to your iPod. Just drag and drop videos from the Finder straight onto your iPod in iTunes. Again, make sure you've enabled the manually manage option.

You can also add songs and videos to your iPod's library from any computer that has iTunes. Just make sure that you've enabled the manually manage option in iTunes. If your iPod was originally formatted on a PC, you can add files from both PCs and Macs. However, if you have a Mac-formatted iPod, you'll only be able to add files from other Macs.

Tip #3 – Open the file in QuickTime

Alternatively, you can also find out if your video is iPod compatible if you open the file in QuickTime. Next, Select Window: Show Movie Info. In most cases, your video should be iPod-ready if the format is H.264 or MPEG-4, the audio is ACC, and the size of your video is 320 x 240 (or smaller) for H.264 or 480 x 480 (or smaller) for MPEG-4. Also, look at the data rate and make sure it's not over 900 kbits/sec for H.264 or 2600 kbits/sec for MPEG-4.

In most cases, the bitrate reported by QuickTime would include the video stream and the audio stream (normally 128 kbits/sec) so don't wonder if the video is shown to have a higher bitrate.

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