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THE MOSSBERG SOLUTION

By KATHERINE BOEHRET

**From the PC to the TV**
**Device Captures
 Certain Video Files
 To View on the Tube**

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With video content making up a huge chunk of the online world nowadays, wouldn't it make sense to have a one-step way to transfer videos from a PC to a TV, just as easily as moving files from one computer to another?



SanDisk's Sansa TakeTV plugs into a PC to load videos, then into your TV to watch the videos.

Imagine a special device that not only plugged into your PC so you could drag and drop video files onto it, but also then hooked up to your TV to play back those videos. Rather than watching TV shows or movies on your laptop, you'd be doing so while comfortably relaxing on the couch, no high-tech networking required.

SanDisk Corp.'s Sansa TakeTV (www.take.tv¹) attempts to do just that, but is more complicated than it should be. This device, essentially a 4½-inch USB thumb drive with attachable accessories, costs \$100 or \$150 for four or eight gigabytes, respectively. By itself, it moves videos from a Mac or Windows PC to a TV, but only certain types of files are transferable.

Since TakeTV won't work with videos downloaded from other online services, such as **Apple** Inc.'s iTunes Store, SanDisk created its own service, called


Fanfare (www.fanfare.com²), to work with TakeTV. Users plug TakeTV into a PC, download a movie or TV episode from Fanfare, unplug the device and attach it to a TV to watch the videos. Fanfare is still in its beta, or testing, stage and doesn't currently offer much content. Its big-name networks include Showtime and CBS, but only certain episodes of some shows, like "Dexter," "Survivor" and "CSI Miami," are available.

SanDisk's TakeTV and Fanfare are just getting started, and because of that have plenty of restrictions. On the upside, Fanfare is a visually attractive program -- a real change for a company best known for selling flash storage. And the quality of the video playback was impressive. But for now, this device-and-service combination is frustratingly green.

Fanfare works only on Windows right now, and downloaded videos can't be played back on the PC. Because of its current beta status, fees for movies and episodes of TV shows are being waived for a limited time. Content providers will eventually charge \$1.99 per episode or nothing if they choose to use an ad-supported model.

SanDisk plans to keep improving Fanfare's content, now limited to a total of 90 episodes from shows on

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six networks. But playing videos on a TV can be frustrating, lacking simple features like a visible progress bar when you're rewinding or fast-forwarding. And if you need to stop a video halfway through watching it and happen to power off the TakeTV, your place is lost.

TakeTV gets points for its clever design. Its USB part tucks into a sleek holder that disguises the whole thing as a slender rectangle for porting around. On its own, the holder operates as a remote for controlling TakeTV when it's connected to your TV. A separate television connector plugs into the TV using red, yellow, and white composite cables or just an S-video cable. This TV connector must also plug into a power outlet.

Not everyone will like the way TakeTV looks hooked up to a television, as its connector uses long, unsightly composite cables.

I started off slow, first just dragging and dropping video files from my computer into TakeTV. At first, I accidentally moved MP4 files, which aren't compatible with TakeTV. Some types of video files that would transfer: DivX, XviD and MPEG-4 (AVI, MPG and MPEG files fall under this last category). Here's the problem: Most people don't know what format their videos are in, so finding the correct formats could be a real hassle.

One file I transferred was a short video of a trip to California. Its footage looked startlingly crisp and clear when played back on a standard definition television. SanDisk says videos will play in DVD quality, and I thought this was an accurate assessment.

Using the Fanfare service was rather straightforward. Upon plugging your TakeTV in for the first time, you'll be prompted to download the Fanfare client, and to use the client you'll need to register, creating a user name and password.

The Fanfare program is colorful and animated. It shows the available networks (CBS, Showtime, Smithsonian, The Weather Channel, Jaman and TV Guide) in a vertical list. Network names and titles of show episodes glow as you move your mouse over them; still shots from each movie or show illustrate just what you'll be getting, including previews of certain videos.

With my TakeTV plugged into a PC at work, I selected a plus icon to download the pilot episode of Showtime's twisted series, "Dexter." This 53-minute episode took 30 minutes to download. I downloaded a 17-minute film called "Countdown," which took just short of 20 minutes to download. But I couldn't watch these videos until I was in front of my TV at home due to Fanfare's no-PC-playback policy.

Once TakeTV was plugged into my TV, I chose videos from a list; a pre-created folder called "Fanfare Downloads" automatically holds everything you download from the service.

I was using the \$100 four-gigabyte TakeTV, which SanDisk estimates will hold about five hours of video; the \$150 eight-gigabyte should hold up to 10 hours. A useful illustration of my device's capacity showed in Fanfare to indicate how much space was taken (mine was 46% full when I wrote this).

SanDisk knows it has a lot of improving to do, especially if it wants to challenge successful services like Apple's iTunes. As is, TakeTV has the right idea, but forces users to jump through too many hoops. It plans to make Fanfare usable on Macs sometime in the future, and hopes to enable video playback on PCs before the end of the year. For now, it's best to hold off on getting excited about this device or its service.

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URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB119317840417068995.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

- (1) <http://www.take.tv>
- (2) <http://www.fanfare.com>
- (3) <mailto:mossbergsolution@wsj.com>

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