

CD Burning Versus Third-Party Tools

Windows Server 2003 provides support for CD burning, but is it good enough?

The CD burning features in Windows XP provide basic support: You can create data CDs by dragging files and folders, or you can create audio CDs by using Windows Media Player. In certain cases, such as inserting a blank CD, it will even open the contents of the CD and prompt you to burn, but that is about it.

Third-party CD burning programs provide additional functionality, such as creating CD images for later use, customizations such as specifying the CD format, and even creating your own bootable CDs.

Ahead Nero Burning ROM

Nero Burning ROM, like most CD burning software provides a number of useful features, including

- Provides for the configuration of a buffer (1MB–80MB) to improve the reliability of the CD burning process. Data to be burned to CD is read into the buffer and then dumped to the CD as needed. By specifying a large buffer, you can eliminate potential buffer under-runs caused by slowdowns in reading the data that could cause the CD burning process to fail and potentially waste the CD media.
- Overburn allows burning more data onto a CD than would ordinarily be possible. It doesn't always work and could potentially damage the CD-R drive, but when it does work, you can store more data on a CD, provided you can still read it later.
- Although you can drag or copy all files from a CD to the CD-R or CD-RW drive in Windows Server 2003, you won't necessarily get all the files, particularly if the CD is a bootable CD. Generally, on bootable CDs, the files necessary to boot from CD aren't visible after the CD is mounted. This means that, although you can copy all the files to the CD burner, the resulting CD copy is not bootable. Nero allows for direct CD-to-CD burning, which captures all the files, including the CD bootable files.

Additionally, with Nero, you can create an image of the CD. You can choose to burn the image, which takes a copy of the CD as in the CD-to-CD copy, but instead of burning it immediately to the CD burner, it copies it to a file you specify. This creates a CD ISO image. You can then later burn exact copies of the CD by burning from the image. Nero provides both the capabilities to burn to and from ISO images.

An additional feature Nero provides is the capability to back up an entire hard drive to CD. The backup can even span multiple CDs, which allows you to back up even the largest hard drives—even though you might need an entire box of CDs to do it!

Roxio CD Creator

Microsoft licensed the CD burning technology in Windows Server 2003 from Roxio, the makers of CD Creator. As such, it's not surprising that CD Creator offers many additional features over and above the built-in CD burning capabilities.

As with the new Compressed Folders feature, the CD Burning feature in Windows Server provides minimal functionality. You can use it to perform basic backups of files to CD or to create simple audio CDs. However, if you want the more advanced functionality of creating bootable CDs or burning to or from ISO images, you still need to get some type of third-party CD burning software. Once again, Microsoft provides just enough of the new technology to whet your appetite and provide an introduction to a whole new world, but not enough for serious use. But then, I suppose that is the point. It's good for Microsoft because it provides useful new features, and it's good for the third-party vendors because they're introducing their technologies to otherwise untapped users.