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Mark Edward Soper



Home Theater



Online Media



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# Unleashing Microsoft Windows Vista Media Center

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# Introduction

One of the most significant, yet least used, features in Windows Vista Home Premium and Ultimate editions, is, ironically, so massive that it once required its own version of Windows XP. That feature is, of course, Windows Media Center (WMC).

WMC enables your PC to be the hub of your digital entertainment experience, and thanks to Windows Vista, you need not sacrifice basic Windows capabilities to enjoy the convergence of TV, movies, music, photography, and video. And to make it even more enjoyable, WMC is just as much at home in a media room with a big-screen HDTV as it is on your desktop. WMC enables you to sit back, relax with your favorite snacks and beverages, and surf your home media resources the same way you surf TV channels.

## IN THIS INTRODUCTION

- Maximizing the Potential of Windows Vista's Multimedia Control Center
- How This Book Is Organized

## Maximizing the Potential of Windows Vista's Multimedia Control Center

Despite its capabilities, though, WMC is often overlooked by users looking to get more enjoyment and more usefulness out of Windows Vista. This book's Job 1 is to make sure you, the reader, understand what WMC can do, how it makes your life easier and more fun, and, not least, how you can build upon WMC to customize your digital media experience.

As you'll discover by reading this book, you can use portions of WMC without adding any special hardware to a typical PC. But, if you want to maximize what it can do, you'll also discover how to customize your existing system's hardware, which software components to add, and how to use other parts of Windows Vista to make WMC even more powerful and enjoyable.

As you read this book, you're sure to discover, just as I have, that WMC's simple interface conceals a very powerful, yet user-friendly, media hub. Helping you unleash that power is what this book is all about.

## How This Book Is Organized

This book contains 16 chapters and two appendixes, covering every aspect of WMC from "What is WMC?" in Chapter 1 to "How do I solve problems with WMC?" in Chapter 16. Let's take a closer look at what you'll find between the covers of this book.

Part I, "Getting Started with Windows Vista Media Center," includes the following chapters:

Chapter 1, "Introducing Windows Vista Media Center," helps you understand the role that WMC plays in the Windows Vista experience, its Windows XP ancestors, and the WMC interface. It's the perfect way to introduce yourself to WMC, or as we often refer to it in these pages, WMC.

Chapter 2, "Equipping Your PC for Media Center," shows you the hardware that different components of WMC need to use. Whether you're building a PC from the ground up, remodeling an existing PC for use with WMC, or preparing to buy a computer for use with WMC, it's a must-read chapter.

Chapter 3, "Setting Up Windows Media Center," gives you a front-row seat as we set up a typical PC for use with WMC. From adjusting your picture to setting up your TV tuner, you'll understand the process from start to finish.

Once WMC is configured, it's time to enjoy it. That's what Part II, "Enjoying Media with WMC," is all about:

Chapter 4, "Viewing and Recording Live TV," shows you how to watch broadcast, cable, and Internet TV, how to deal with standard, digital, and HDTV, and how to record TV shows and series so you can enjoy them on your own schedule.

Chapter 5, "Watching and Recording Movies," shows you how to find out when your favorite movies will be broadcast on TV and how to enjoy your favorite films whether they're on TV, on DVD, or on your hard disk.

Chapter 6, "Importing and Playing Audio," guides you through the process of ripping your CD library to disk, creating playlists, enjoying Internet radio, and synchronizing the contents of a portable media player so you can take your music with you when you leave WMC.

Chapter 7, "Importing and Viewing Photos," helps you grab your photos from your digital camera, organize them, view them, fix common problems, and create impromptu slide shows with music.

WMC isn't just for enjoying media. You can also use it to explore the worlds of sports, news, gaming, and even use it to create your own media, as you'll discover in Part III, "Beyond the Basics of WMC," which includes:

Chapter 8, "Enjoying Sports with Windows Media Center," shows you how to enjoy the riches of sports news, TV, games, and fantasy sports from the comfort of your easy chair and media room.

Chapter 9, "Playing Games and Enjoying Online Content," helps you play the same family-friendly games included with Windows Vista from the comfort of the WMC interface, shows you how to turn WMC into a hardcore gaming launcher, and introduces you to third-party features that enable you to enjoy even more digital music, video, news, and other media without leaving the WMC interface.

Chapter 10, "Creating CDs and DVDs," is your step-by-step guide to creating CDs and DVDs of your favorite music, video, and photos right from the WMC interface.

WMC is powerful all by itself, but your home network makes it even more powerful, as you learn in Part IV, "Adding Windows Vista Media Center to Your Home Network," which includes:

Chapter 11, “Adding and Using Media Center Extenders,” introduces you to a hidden side of your Xbox 360: the ability to access your PC’s WMC interface via your home network. You’ll also learn about other types of Media Center Extenders and how to improve their performance.

Chapter 12, “Connecting with Windows Home Server and Other PCs,” helps you use WMC to enjoy media resources on PCs everywhere on your home network, including Microsoft’s new Windows Home Server. You’ll also learn how to fine-tune your home network for better performance, discover the best choices for Internet service, and learn how to tell when your router is slowing down your network.

Part V, “Enhancing Windows Vista Media Center,” helps you learn to make Windows Vista Media Center more powerful by using it in conjunction with other Windows Vista components and third-party applications, and it helps you manage the most common issues you might encounter.

Chapter 13, “Using Windows Media Player with Windows Media Center,” shows you how Windows Media Player works with WMC, how to configure its audio-ripping feature so you get the music quality and format you prefer, how to easily create playlists and rate audio, how to edit track and album information, and how to add visualizations so you can enjoy the full capabilities of your digital music collection within WMC.

Chapter 14, “Creating Photo and Video Content for Media Center,” helps you explore how to import video, use Windows Live Photo Gallery to make your picture library more WMC-friendly, how to use Windows Movie Maker to shrink the size of your TV recordings, create custom videos, and create DVD slide shows you can enjoy in WMC and elsewhere.

Chapter 15, “Extending Media Center with Third-Party Apps,” shows you an exciting world of programs you can use to customize WMC, make its built-in features more powerful, and add new features and capabilities. We’ve tracked down the software, so you can choose from a wealth of options to make WMC the media center you’ve always dreamed of.

Chapter 16, “Troubleshooting Media Center,” provides expert advice on dealing with the most common problems you might run into and helps you protect your digital media collection.

This book also includes two appendices designed to help readers with specific questions:

Appendix A, “Using Windows Anytime Upgrade to Get WMC Features and More,” is a must-read if you have a version of Windows Vista that doesn’t include WMC (such as Windows Vista Basic or Business), or if you want to move up from Windows Vista Home Premium to the ultimate (Windows Vista Ultimate). This appendix helps you understand the process of using Windows Anytime Upgrade to move up to a better version of Windows Vista.

Appendix B, “Moving from Windows XP Media Center Editions to Windows Vista Media Center,” helps users running PCs with Windows XP Media Center Edition to make the move to Windows Vista.

## Watching and Recording Movies

**W**indows Media Center (WMC) can bring the magic of movies to your PC, whether you use it to watch or record movies on TV or to enjoy films from your DVD collection. By adding third-party software, you can also enjoy Blu-Ray discs in WMC.

### How to Find Your Favorite Movies *Your Way*

WMC makes it very easy to find the films you want to watch live or record for future enjoyment. Choose your favorite method from the TV + Movies menu (Figure 5.1):

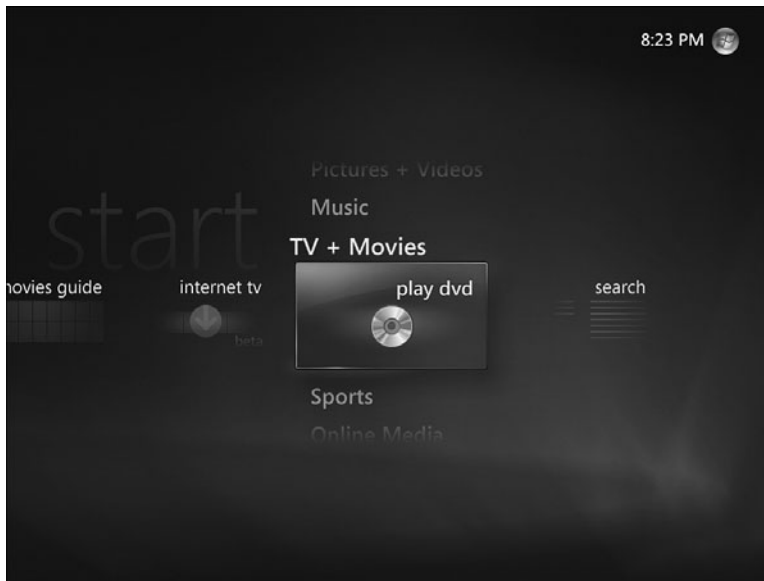
- To find movies by viewing time, genres, or top ratings, use the Movies Guide menu.
- To find movies by title, keyword, category, actor, or director, use the Search tool.
- To play movies on DVD, use the Play DVD menu.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- How to Find Your Favorite Movies *Your Way*
- Introducing the Movies Guide
- Watching a Movie from the On Now Menu
- Using the On Next Menu
- Using the Genres Menu
- Using the Top-Rated Menu
- Using the Search Tool
- Recording Movies
- Watching Recorded Movies
- Watching a DVD Movie
- Creating a DVD Library with My Movies 2
- Watching Blu-Ray Movies in WMC



Later in this chapter, I'll also show you how to add a plug-in that enables WMC to play movies you've stored on your hard disk and how to get support for Blu-Ray movies. However you like your movies (live, recorded, on DVD, on hard disk, or Blu-Ray), WMC has the best seats in the house ready for you.



**FIGURE 5.1**

*Movie-watching selections are found on the right side of the TV + Movies menu.*

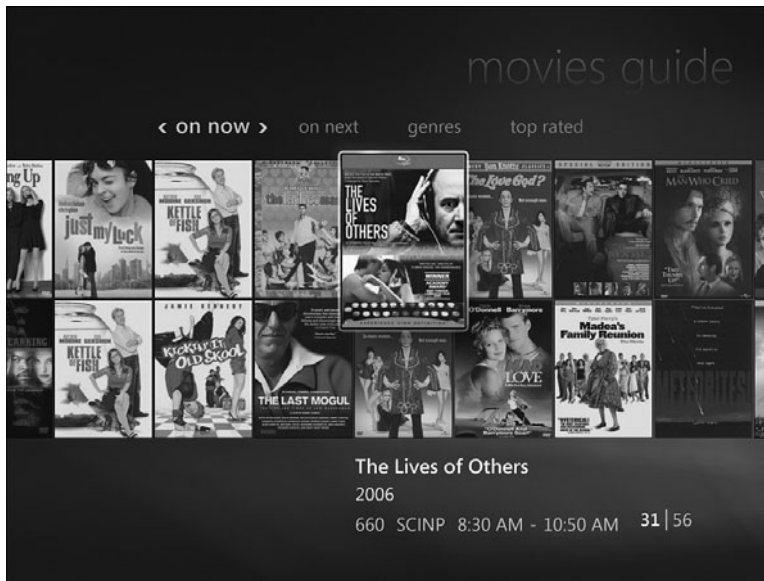
## Introducing the Movies Guide

Unlike the Program Guide you learned about in Chapter 4, “Viewing and Recording Live TV,” the Movies Guide has movies—and nothing but movies. The Movies Guide takes full advantage of today’s widescreen displays to show movie titles by poster or packaging (Figure 5.2). You can find your favorite films in a variety of ways:

**caution** If your cable TV or satellite TV package includes adult-oriented content, keep in mind that these movies will show in the Movies Guide.

To prevent access by users to undesirable movie or TV content, set up a separate account for each user in Windows Vista’s Control Panel and use the Parental Controls feature in Windows Media Center.

- Want to watch a movie right now? Open the On Now menu (also shown in Figure 5.2); it lists films that are currently being broadcast on the movie-oriented TV channels in your program guide.
- Can't find a movie to watch right now? Check out the On Next menu: It lists films that will be broadcast right after the films listed in the On Now menu.

**FIGURE 5.2**

*The Movies Guide's On Now menu.*

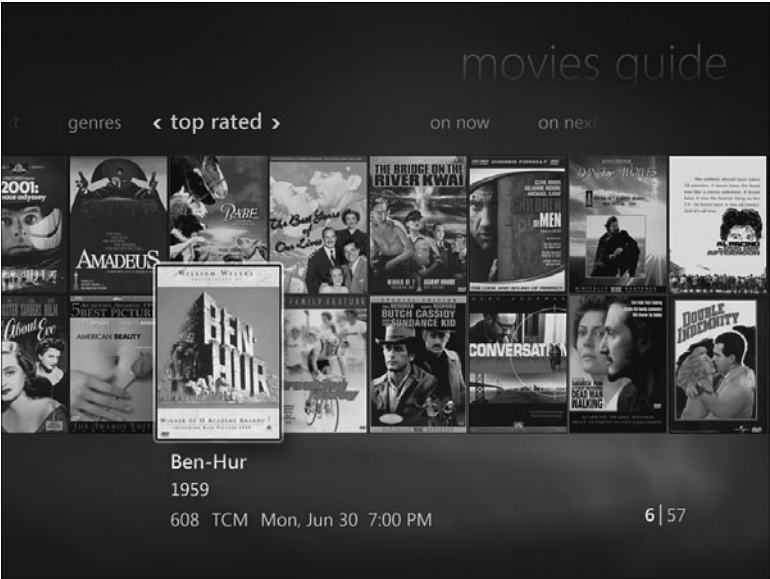
- ➔ To learn how to use Parental Controls in Windows Media Center, see the "Parental Controls" section, Chapter 4, **p. 130**.

If you're more systematic in your movie watching, use one of the following menu options:

- Want to watch a western? Cuddle up with your sweetheart for a romantic evening? Relive history? Dive into the Genres menu (Figure 5.3) to start exploring.
- If you prefer the best in moviemaking, go straight to the Top Rated menu: It lists only three- and four-star movies (Figure 5.4).



**FIGURE 5.3**  
*Some of the genres in the Genres menu.*



**FIGURE 5.4**  
*Selecting a film from the Top Rated menu.*

You can select a film as soon as you open the menu containing the film, but it does take a few moments (or longer) to display poster or package graphics. Some older or independent films might not have a suitable graphic, so only the title is shown.

When you click a film, the title, release date, channel number and name, and broadcast date and time are shown below the thumbnail (refer to Figure 5.4). The numbers at the lower-right corner of the screen indicate the total number of films in the current menu or submenu and the current selection.

**note** The Movies Guide lists only films that are being broadcast now or up to 14 days from now. If you want to plan out your movie viewing in a longer timeframe, visit the websites of your favorite movie channels to see what films will be available later, and then look for them once they fall into the timeframe of the Movies Guide.

**tip** By default, different parts of the Movies Guide use different display options. Most menus use the small thumbnail view, while others use the list view. To change between these views or to switch to the optional large view, right-click a movie listing from any menu and select the view you want.

## Watching a Movie from the On Now Menu

To watch a movie, select it from the On Now menu and click Watch from the Movie Details menu (Figure 5.5).



**FIGURE 5.5**

*Preparing to watch Mutiny on the Bounty.*

The Movie Details menu shown in Figure 5.5 lists the title, star rating, release date, channel, time, a brief synopsis with leading cast members, the director, and classification information (genre, MPAA rating, TV rating, whether the film has closed captioning, running time, and language).

Other options include Cast + More, which displays a scrolling list of cast information, reviews, and similar movies (Figure 5.6), as well as Record, Advanced Record, and Other Showings.

**caution** Although you can record a currently broadcast movie from the Movie Details menu, you've probably missed the beginning of the picture. If you want to record the entire film, check the Other Showings menu, and if the picture will be shown again, select the future showing for recording.



**FIGURE 5.6**

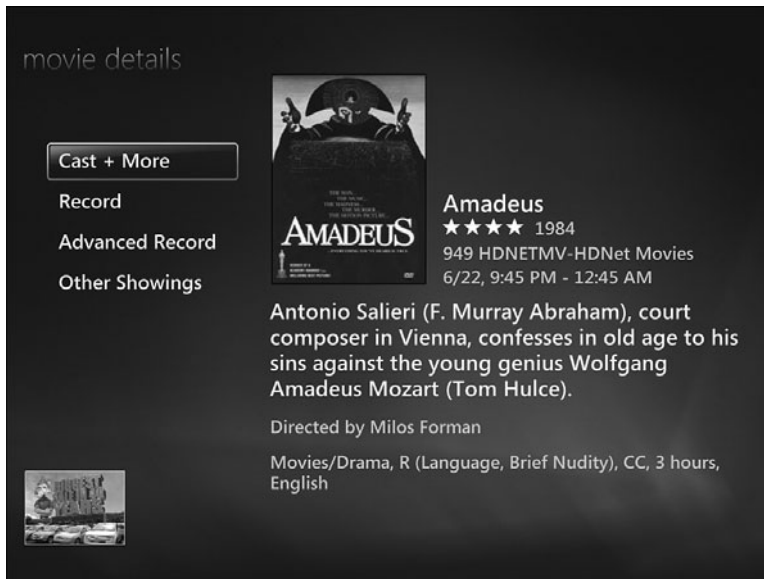
*Use the Cast + More dialog to learn more about a movie.*

Have time for a movie, right now? On Now is the place to go.

- ➔ To learn more about using Recording, Advanced Recording, and Other Showings to record a movie, see “Recording Movies,” this chapter, **p. 147**.
- ➔ To learn how to record movies listed as “Not in Guide” when they are broadcast, select “Recording Movies Not Listed in the Guide,” this chapter, **p. 148**.

## Using the On Next Menu

The On Next menu lists the next film in the rotation on your TV provider's movie channels. When you select a movie from the On Next menu, the options offered on the Movie Details menu (Figure 5.7) are similar to those listed for movies on the On Now menu, except that the Watch option is missing.



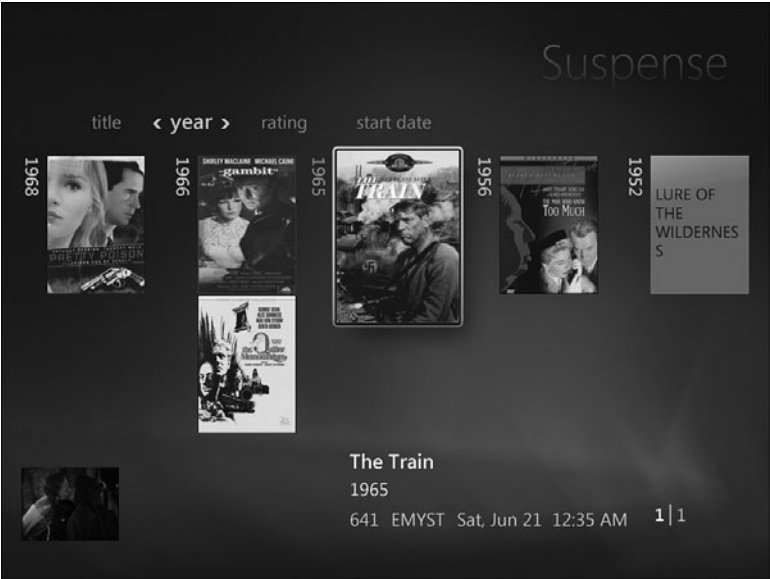
**FIGURE 5.7**

*Movie Details for a movie selected from the On Next menu.*

The On Next menu provides you with a convenient way to see what's next. However, if your movie tastes are more specific, there are better ways to use the Movies Guide to find what you prefer, such as the Genres and Top-Rated menus.

## Using the Genres Menu

The Genres menu gives you a way to drill down through the movies in the Movies Guide by their genre to find your favorite. Choose your favorite type of film from the 18 genres listed, and you can then select by title, year, rating, or start date (see Figure 5.8).

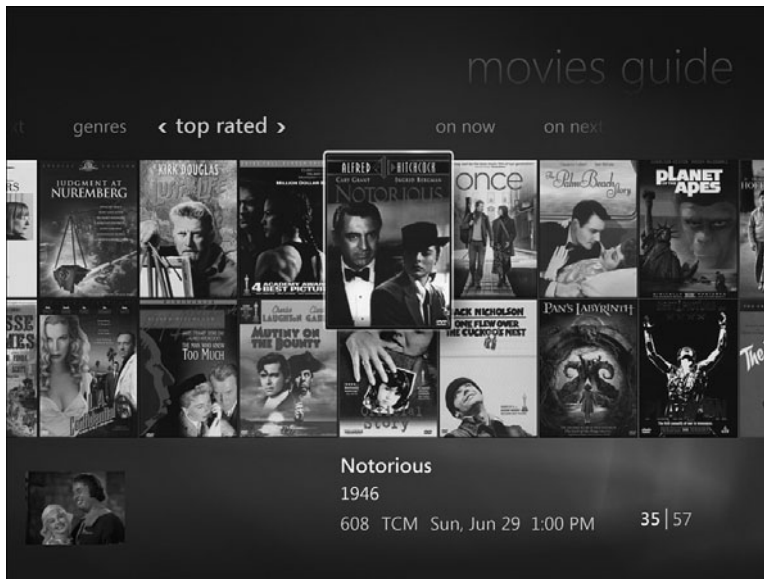


**FIGURE 5.8**  
*You can navigate the Genres menu by year, rating, and start date.*

When you select by start date, today’s films are listed first.

## Using the Top-Rated Menu

There are plenty of one-star horrors and two-star mediocrities cluttering up the movie channels at any given time. If you prefer to watch only the best, open the Top Rated menu and choose from only four-star (listed first) and three-star movies in the current guide listings (Figure 5.9).

**FIGURE 5.9**

*Prefer the classics? Use the Top Rated menu to find your favorites—fast.*

## Using the Search Tool

The Movies Guide is the perfect way to browse for movies, but if you're looking for a particular title, a particular actor, or a particular director, you'll spend a lot of time scrolling through listings. Save yourself time and frustration by leaving the Movies Guide and going to the Search tool.

You can search by Title, Keyword, Categories, Movie Actor, or Movie Director.

Select the search and then enter the search term(s) using either your remote control or a keyboard. To save time, names that match the letters entered show up in the middle of the screen (Figure 5.10).

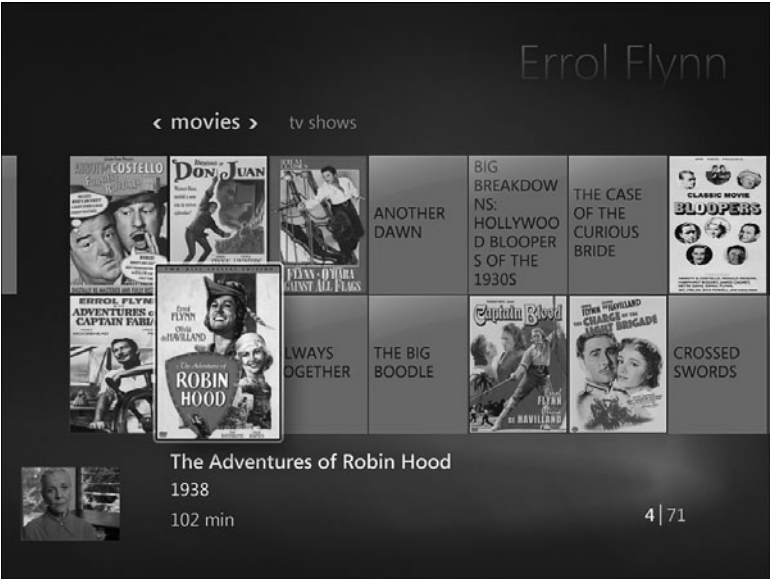
**tip** You can search for actor or director by first or last name.

When you see a match, highlight it, and click OK on your remote to see matching movies or TV shows (Figure 5.11).





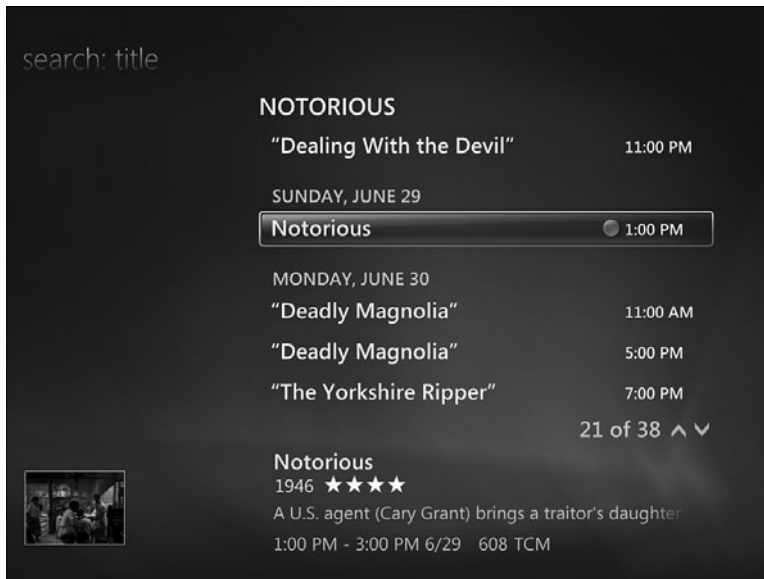
**FIGURE 5.10**  
*Searching for classic movie swashbuckler Errol Flynn.*



**FIGURE 5.11**  
*Using Search to track down movies featuring Errol Flynn.*

Keep in mind that searching by title can be tricky in a couple of ways. Although only one actor or actress can use a particular name (others with the same given name must use a different stage or onscreen name), there are no restrictions on movie or TV show titles. Search for a title like *Notorious*, for example, and you might see the title listed with “More” instead of a broadcast date. “More” indicates that there are multiple TV show episodes and/or movies with the same title. Click More to display the episodes or movies to choose from (Figure 5.12). Make sure you select the show or movie you want.

**note** If a movie or TV show currently listed in the Program Guide is selected, the channel and broadcast time are shown beneath the title and date. If a movie is not currently listed in the Program Guide, the year and running time are listed.



**FIGURE 5.12**

Select the exact TV show episode or movie you want to record when WMC indicates there is more than one episode or movie with a matching title.

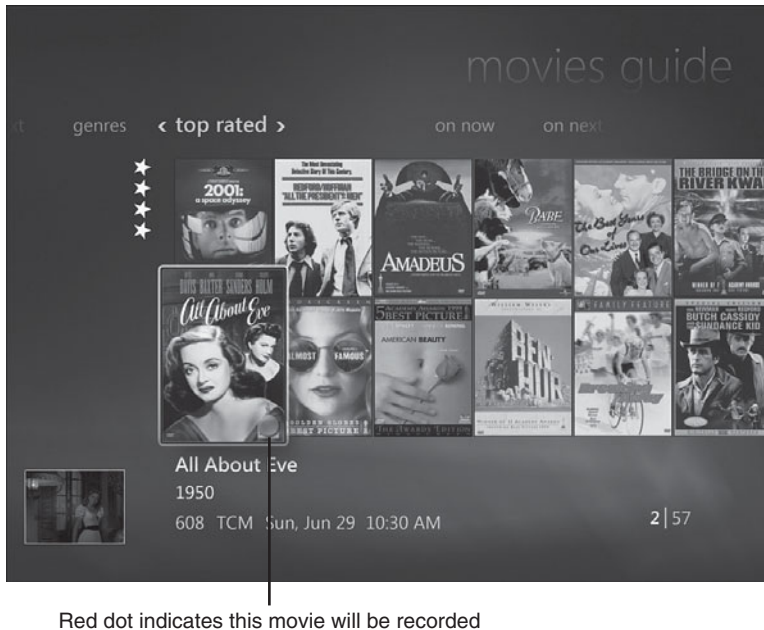
## Recording Movies

You can record movies from the Movies Guide in a variety of ways, which is perfect if you don't have time right now to watch your favorite films but don't want to miss them. You can use the On Later, Genres, and Top Rated menus as the starting points for recording, depending upon where your movie is listed.

## Recording from the Movies Guide

To record a movie from the Movies Guide, select a movie using any of the menus, open the Movie Details menu for the movie, and select Record from the menu.

When you select a movie for recording, its Movie Details listing displays the message, “This program will record,” and the movie listing displays the red dot icon WMC uses to indicate recording (see Figure 5.13).



Red dot indicates this movie will be recorded

**FIGURE 5.13**

*When you select a movie for recording, its Movies Guide listing indicates you’ve selected it for recording.*

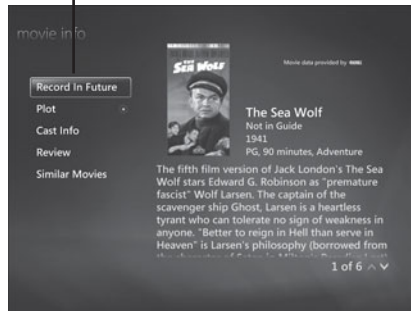
## Recording Movies Not Listed in the Guide

What if you want to record a movie, but it’s not available in the Movies Guide yet? Are you stuck checking the guide every day from now until...whenever? Thankfully, no.

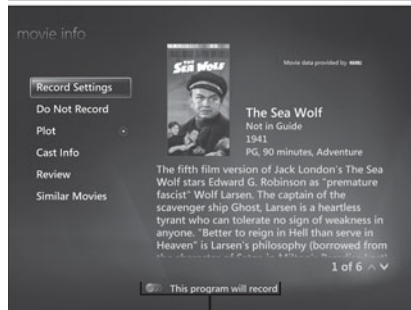
From the Similar Movies menu (refer to Figure 5.6), you can select movies to record, even if they’re not listed in the guide. When you select an unlisted movie to record in the future, the Movie Info dialog lists a Record in Future

option (Figure 5.14 A). Select this option, and the movie will be automatically scheduled for recording the next time it appears in the Movies Guide (Figure 5.14 B), and the Movie Info dialog also reminds you the program will record (Figure 5.14 C).

A. Click here to record this movie the next time it's on



B. This message confirms the future recording



C. Another reminder for the pending recording

**FIGURE 5.14**

Selecting a non-Guide movie for recording (A), confirming the selection (B), and viewing the reminder (C).

You can also select a non-Guide movie from the Movies search shown in Figure 5.11 for future recording. Press the Record button on your WMC remote or right-click the movie and select Record from the menu.

**caution** There's no guarantee of when (or whether) a non-Guide movie you select for recording will appear in the Guide.

## Recording from the Search Tool

The Search tool can be used for very fast selection of movies to record, especially if you know what you're looking for. When you search by title or keyword, highlight the movie you want to record and press the Record button on your remote. If you prefer, you can still open the Movie Details dialog and select Record instead.

Searching by category involves a couple of additional steps: First, you must select Movies and then select the genre you're interested in. Then you can record right from the title listing.

When you search by Movie Star or Director name, highlight the picture you want to record and press the Record button on your remote.

**tip** If you don't use a remote control, right-click the listing and select Record for fast recording.

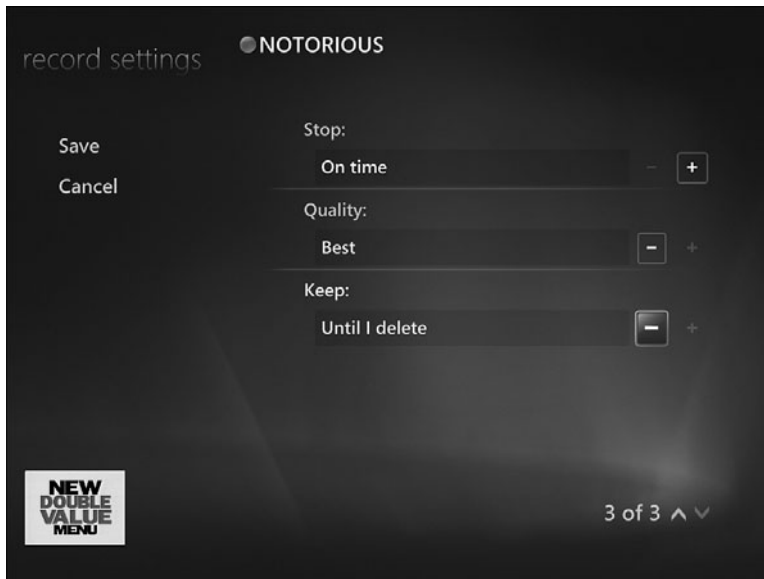
## Customizing Recording Options

The Movie Info dialog lists Record Settings or Advanced Recording as a menu option. Record Settings is displayed after you select the movie to record, while Advanced Recording is displayed for films you haven't yet selected for recording. Select either of these options to open the Record Settings dialog and view (or change) the settings that will be used to record the movie (Figure 5.15).

You can choose from three options in the Record Settings menu: Stop, Quality, and Keep. Here's what I suggest:

- **Stop:** Movies generally start and stop on time (unlike some types of sports events), so you should use the default Stop: On Time setting.
- **Quality:** If you are building a permanent WMC movie library, or if you plan to burn a DVD of your movie before deleting it, use the Quality: Best setting. For movies you are merely watching once, use lower quality settings, depending on how much disk space you want to use and how critical viewing quality is to your enjoyment. Note that if you have digital cable, broadcast TV, or satellite TV service, selecting lower-quality settings has no effect on quality or disk space used.

- **Keep:** If you are building a permanent WMC movie library, select Keep: Until I Delete. With this option, you're in charge of how long the recording stays on your system. If you have plenty of space but don't plan to keep the recording, use the default Until Space Needed setting. Want an incentive to watch your recordings right away? Choose After 1 Week. To automatically delete a movie after you watch it, choose Until I Watch.

**FIGURE 5.15**

*Adjusting recording settings for best quality and “permanent” storage.*

Be sure to save your changes by clicking Save.

- For more information about how much disk space is used by TV/movie recording, see “Crunching the Numbers: TV Recording” in Chapter 2, *Equipping Your PC for Media Center*, p. 29.

## Canceling a Recording

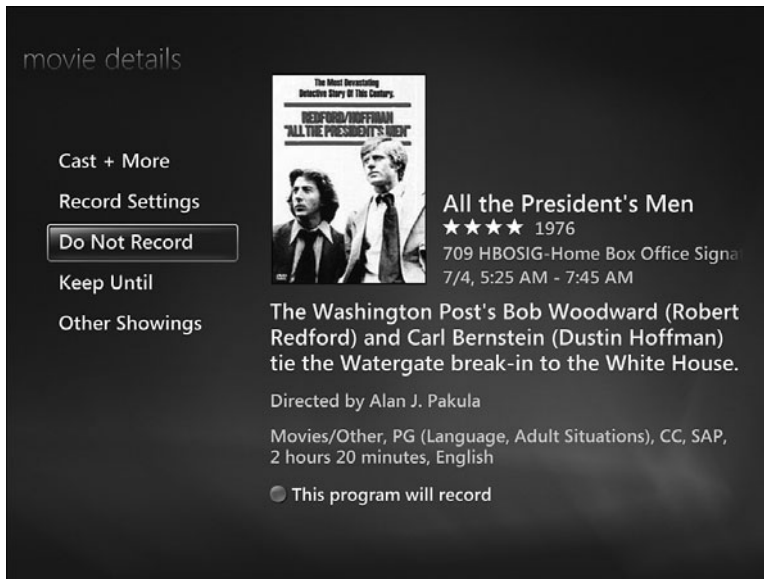
Change your mind about recording a movie? Whether you realize that you selected the wrong movie, want to record a different showing to avoid a recording conflict, or just plain changed your mind, it's easy to cancel a recording.

You can look for films scheduled to be recorded by checking the Movies Guide or searching for the film title. The films that will be recorded show up with a red dot in the listing (refer to Figure 5.12) or have a red dot overlaying the thumbnail (refer to Figure 5.13). If you want to cancel a recording, open the Recorded TV menu, select View Scheduled, and scroll through the listing to the movie you want to drop from the schedule (Figure 5.16).



**FIGURE 5.16**  
*Use the Recorded TV menu to view scheduled recordings, and choose a picture to cancel from the recording schedule.*

After you find the picture, open the Movies Info dialog and select Do Not Record (Figure 5.17). The movie is removed from the schedule.

**FIGURE 5.17**

*Using the Do Not Record option in the Movie Details menu to cancel recording.*

## Watching Recorded Movies

Once you've recorded your first movie, how do you watch it? To find your recorded movies, open the Recorded TV menu. The recordings of your movies are listed alongside TV and sports recordings. To play your movie, select it, and select Play from the Program Info menu (Figure 5.18).

Depending on the aspect ratio used by your movie and your display, you might need to adjust the aspect ratio used for playback.

- For more information about adjusting zoom settings for the best-quality playback, see "Selecting Zoom Settings," this chapter, **p. 156**.



**FIGURE 5.18**

*After selecting a movie from the Recorded TV menu, click Play.*

## Resuming or Restarting Movie Playback

Don't have time to finish your movie? Press Stop on your remote or select Stop with your mouse. When you return to your movie, you will see two new options: Resume and Restart. Select Resume to play the movie where you stopped it and Restart to start it from the beginning (Figure 5.19).

**tip** If you're worried about not being able to finish the movie before it will be deleted, click the Keep Until link, and select the Until I Delete option.

➔ For more information about Keep Until options, see "Recording Defaults," Chapter 4, "Viewing and Recording Live TV," p. 113.

**FIGURE 5.19**

*Preparing to resume playback of a recorded movie.*

## Saying “Goodbye” to Your Recording

You can delete a recording whenever you want. To delete a recording, select Delete from the Program Info menu. The disk space occupied by the recording is freed up, so you have room for new movie recordings.

## Watching a DVD Movie

To watch a DVD movie from within WMC, insert the DVD into your computer’s DVD drive, select the Play DVD option from the Movies + TV menu, and the DVD starts playing immediately.

For more options, press the More Info/Details button on your remote or right-click the screen to display the menu shown in Figure 5.20.

**FIGURE 5.20**

*Opening the More Information menu while playing a DVD.*

## Selecting Zoom Settings

Because we live in a world where movies and TV shows might use any one of several aspect ratios, you might need to tweak the screen settings used for playback to avoid squashed or vertically stretched displays, even if you followed the procedure described in Chapter 3, “Setting Up Windows Media Center,” for configuring your display.

Use the Zoom setting on the DVD playback menu to help match your display and the aspect ratio used by your movie.

To toggle through zoom options, select Zoom from the Info menu and press the OK button on your remote or keep clicking Zoom in the Info menu with your mouse. The options include

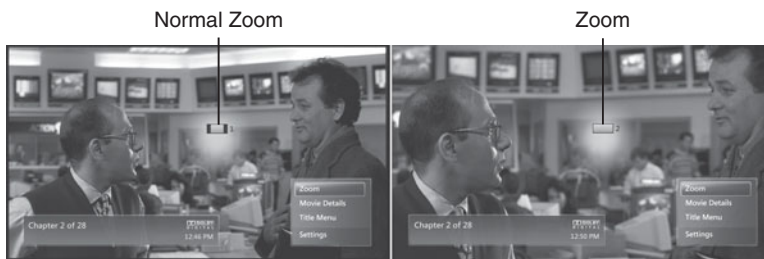
- **Zoom option 1 (Normal):** The movie displays full-screen on displays with the same aspect ratio. Widescreen films will display letterbox black bars on standard displays; standard films will display black bars at the side on widescreen displays.

**note** Your ability to zoom the display is limited by the aspect ratio setting of your display if you're using an HDTV monitor with adjustable aspect ratio. For the best results, configure your HDTV to use Full aspect ratio and then use the Zoom control in Windows Media Center.

- **Zoom option 2 (Zoom):** The movie is zoomed to display full-screen; edges of the image will be cropped.
- **Zoom option 3 (Stretch):** The movie is stretched to fit the screen without cropping, but the image might be distorted horizontally (standard movie) or vertically (widescreen movie).
- **Zoom option 4 (Intelligent Zoom):** The movie is zoomed to display full-screen, but the edges are stretched more than the center.

Which zoom option works the best? That depends on the aspect ratio of your display and of the movie itself. If the movie is in the same aspect ratio as the the display (for example, a widescreen movie on a widescreen HDTV or desktop display, or a classic movie on a standard TV or display), use the default, zoom level 1. However, if the movie and the display don't match, use one of the other zoom options if you want to fill the screen. I prefer to view films at their native aspect ratio and put up with letterbox borders, but if you don't, the Zoom menu is your friend.

Figures 5.21 and 5.22 compare zoom results when viewing a typical 1.85:1 wide-screen comedy (Bill Murray's classic *Groundhog Day*) on a widescreen display.



**FIGURE 5.21**

*Normal Zoom versus Zoom.*

**tip** If you are not able to change the screen display by using the zoom controls shown in Figures 5.21 and 5.22, you probably don't have your display set for the correct resolution. Exit WMC, open the Appearance and Personalization menu in Control Panel, select Adjust Screen Resolution, select the display used by WMC, and use the Resolution slider to select the correct resolution. If the display is a PnP display, you will normally use the highest setting (right-most slider). If this setting doesn't work, experiment with lower resolutions.

You might also need to download and install an updated driver for your graphics card or onboard graphics port. You can use the Update Driver feature in Device Manager, or manually download and install an updated driver. Some graphics card vendors also provide a special menu option that provides options for HDTV and other displays. See your graphics card's or motherboard vendor's website for details.

**FIGURE 5.22**

*Stretch versus Intelligent Zoom.*

## Using Other Menu Options

The Movie Details option doesn't do much: Select it, and you get two choices—play the movie from its current position or restart it. WMC might crash when you use this option, so stay away from it.

You can restart a paused movie by pressing the Play button on your remote or by clicking the Play icon in the mouse menu, and you can restart a film from the beginning by selecting Title Menu and restarting the film from there.

Use the Settings selection to open the Settings menu.

## Creating a DVD Library with My Movies 2

Although you can play your DVDs through WMC, if you want to create a true DVD library, whether you flip discs in and out of your system's DVD drive or copy discs you own to your hard disk, you'll need some third-party software.

One of the most popular choices among WMC users is the My Movies 2 program. Developed by Brian Binnerup, My Movies 2 enables you to more easily manage and enjoy your DVD or Blu-Ray movie collection in WMC. In the following sections, I'll provide some guidance for helping you use My Movies 2. However, for the most up-to-date information, be sure to see the My Movies 2 website at [www.mymovies.dk](http://www.mymovies.dk).

**note** My Movies 2 is free-ware, but to unlock some advanced features, you must accumulate various levels of points. Points can be earned by making financial contributions to My Movies 2's developer, by adding information about DVDs or Blu-Ray discs not in the My Movies database, or by enhancing existing information for a movie. See the website for details.

## Installing My Movies

My Movies 2 comes in two different versions, with separate downloads for 32-bit and 64-bit Vista. You must have the Server/Client edition installed on the system that is used for watching DVDs within WMC. Despite its name, it is installed on both networked and standalone systems. The Client version is installed on other Windows Vista (or XP) systems that connect to the system running Server/Client, enabling you to use remote systems to manage your collection.

The Server/Client edition is about 75MB and downloads as a ZIP file you decompress with Windows Explorer before installing; the Client edition is about 9MB and is a self-extracting .EXE file.

My Movies Server/Client edition includes SQL Server 2005 Express Edition, which is installed automatically during installation. After SQL Server 2005 Express Edition is installed, the installation process for My Movies begins. By default, the program installs to C:\Program Files\MCE\My Movies.

When you install My Movies, it creates a My Movies folder in the Start menu with the following shortcuts:

- Collection Management (run this first)
- Donate for My Movies (the program is free, but donations enable you to unlock advanced features)
- Frequently Asked Questions (a useful resource for learning how the program works)
- My Movies (the main program)
- Uninstall My Movies (the uninstaller)

**tip** If you have one system running WMC, install the Server/Client edition on that computer. If you later add a second system, install the Client edition on the new computer. For details, see <http://www.mymovies.dk/documentation/multizone-connection.aspx>.

**note** For frequently asked questions (FAQs) about using My Movies, see <http://wiki.mymovies.dk/Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.ashx>.

## Getting Started

After you download and install My Movies 2 Server/Client, you must run its Connection Management program from the standard Windows desktop before you can use it within WMC.

Click the splash screen to configure your server. After the server is configured, you can start adding movies to your database, using a variety of methods:

- If you have already copied DVDs to your hard disk, open the File menu and select Folder Content. Point to the folder that contains your DVDs, and My Movies adds them to its database.
- To add movies on your shelf, select Add Titles, and choose By Barcode (you can type in the barcode or scan it in with a webcam), By Disc ID (insert your DVD and click Search), By Title, By Manual Typing (use this feature to add a movie that is not in the My Movies database), or by Upcoming Releases. When you add a movie, you can choose whether to catalog it as Online (stored on your hard disk) or Offline (run from your DVD drive), and you can categorize the movie thus:
  - Owned, For Keeps (the default)
  - Owned, For Sale
  - Owned, For Sale or Trade
  - Pre-Owned
  - Ordered
  - Wished
  - Rented
  - Pre-Rented

My Movies helps you keep track of your favorite films, whether you buy, borrow, or rent them.

When you add a movie, you might be prompted to add updated information from the My Movies 2 webservice. Select this option to get the most up-to-date information about the film.

**note** For additional information about using My Movies, including how to catalog series and box sets, see <http://www.mymovies.dk/documentation/my-movies-2-quickguide.aspx>.

## Blu-Ray and HD-DVD Support

My Movies 2 includes support for these formats when you have a compatible decoder and appropriate hardware installed.

- ➔ To learn more about using Blu-Ray movies in WMC and My Movies 2, see “Watching Blu-Ray Movies in WMC,” this chapter, **p. 162**.

## Adding My Movies to the WMC Interface

To add My Movies to the WMC interface, start WMC after you close the Connection Manager. You will be prompted where to place My Movies. You can add My Movies as an option to the TV + Movies strip or as a separate My Movies strip (the third option, as a menu option in the Program Library, doesn't work in Windows Vista). Select an option (Figure 5.23), and you will be prompted to restart Media Center to apply the change.



**FIGURE 5.23**

*Selecting how to display My Movies in WMC.*

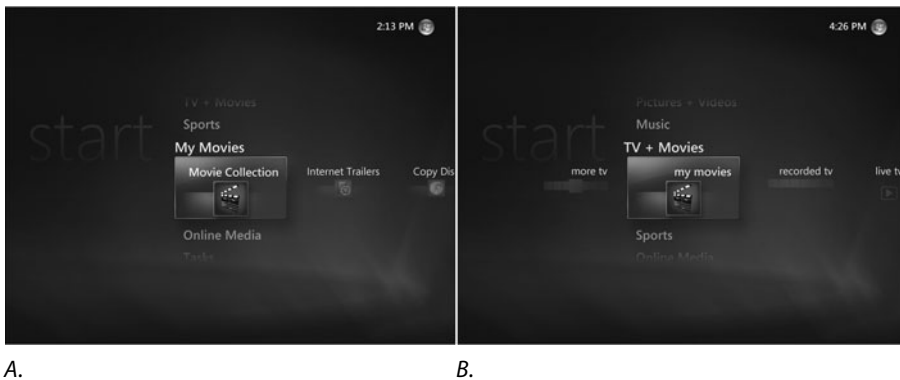
Figure 5.24 illustrates these options.

If you want to change how My Movies is displayed in WMC, follow this procedure:

1. Exit WMC.
2. Restart Collection Management.
3. Open the Configure menu.
4. Select Media Center Interface.
5. On the Interface tab, click the Reset button next to Current Menu Program Interface.



6. Click OK on the confirming dialog.
7. Close the Media Center Interface tab.
8. Close the Collection Management program.
9. Restart WMC.
10. Select the view you prefer when prompted.
11. Click OK on the confirming dialog.
12. Close WMC.
13. Restart WMC.
14. My Movies will be placed in the WMC interface as desired.

**FIGURE 5.24**

*My Movies in its own strip (A) compared to My Movies as a menu item in the TV + Movies strip (B).*

## The Settings Menu

The Settings Menu in My Movie 2's WMC interface provides options for configuring its user interface, the movie list (Views), parental control restrictions (this option requires that WMC's own Parental Controls option be enabled first), DVD playback and copying, and managing your DVD collection.

➔ For more information about using WMC's Parental Controls, see Chapter 4, **p. 85**.

## Watching Blu-Ray Movies in WMC

If you've moved up to Blu-Ray HD movies, you're probably wondering, "OK, how can I enjoy this 1080p goodness in WMC?" The following sections show you exactly what you need.

## Hardware

You'll need the following hardware in order to enjoy Blu-Ray movies with WMC:

- Blu-Ray read-only or Read/Write drive (these also support CD and DVD media)
- HDCP-enabled onboard or discrete graphics card
- HDCP-enabled HDTV or widescreen LCD panel

## Software

You'll need the following software in order to enjoy Blu-Ray movies with WMC:

- Blu-Ray decoder that supports Windows Vista (minimum)
- Blu-Ray decoder that supports WMC (preferred)

Although Microsoft includes DVD decoding in Windows Vista (including Media Center), it does not include Blu-Ray decoding in Windows Vista. You can use a third-party DVD decoder, but if it doesn't include an WMC plug-in, you must exit or minimize WMC to run the decoder. Some Blu-Ray decoders for Windows Vista include

- CyberLink PowerDVD 8 Ultra—[www.cyberlink.com](http://www.cyberlink.com) (about \$100; free trial available). Add WMC support by downloading and installing freeware Cyberlink/VMC plug-in version 1.6 or later (available at <http://ourmediacenter.com/node/9>).
- Blu-Ray/HD-DVD plugin for Nero 7 or Nero 8—[www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com) (about \$30; Nero 8 Ultra [required for use of plug-in] is about \$80–100; free trial available).
- ArcSoft TotalMedia Theatre—[www.arcsoft.com](http://www.arcsoft.com) (about \$90; free trial available). Incorporates WMC plug-in.

**note** My Movies 2 also supports Blu-Ray (as well as HD-DVD) movies if you have a compatible decoder installed. (The developer recommends ArcSoft TotalMedia Theatre.) Contribute or earn 2,500 points, and you can unlock My Movies 2's Blu-Ray and HD-DVD backup feature so you can copy your movies to hard disk for easier access. To learn more about My Movies 2's support for Blu-Ray and HD-DVD movies, go to <http://wiki.mymovies.dk> and search for Blu-Ray.

Which is the best solution for you? In reviewing comments from existing users of these products, the answer seems to be “it depends.” Try the trial versions of the applications and plug-ins to see which ones work the best for you.

➔     To learn more about My Movies 2, see “Creating a DVD Library with My Movies 2,” this chapter, **p. 158**.

# Index

## Numerics

---

2.4GHz frequency band,  
interference from, 332

2.4GHz wireless  
keyboard/mouse, 36

5GHz signaling in Wireless-N  
networks, 331

16:9 format, cropping photos  
for, 415-416

32-bit operating systems, 21-22

64-bit operating systems, 21-22

802.11 wireless networks.  
See wireless networking  
connections

## A

---

About WMC, displaying, 82

AC3Filter codec, 436

Accedo Broadband Funspot, 460

access code (parental controls),  
changing, 135-136

access restrictions. See parental  
controls

activating TV Program Guide, 62

Add Extender task, 321

add-on programs. See utilities

adding  
movies to My Movies 2  
software, 159-160

to queue (of music), 176  
recording time, 240

**Adding Media dialog**, 325

**Adjust Color tool**, 414

**Adjust Detail tool**, 416

**Adjust Exposure tool**, 411-413

**advanced recording options**,  
setting, 237-239

**Advanced TV Ratings  
dialog**, 133

**album art**, adding, 387-389

**Album Artists view (Music  
Library)**, 172

**Album Info dialog**, 387

**album tracks**  
editing information about,  
173-174  
selecting, 171-173

**albums**  
burning to CD, 291-292  
editing information about, 175  
rating, 386  
viewing pictures by, 213

**Albums view (Music Library)**,  
171, 174-175

**All Products menu  
(HSN Live)**, 262

**Animal Planet**, 273

**antennas**  
connector types for, 359  
for FM radio, 181  
positioning for ATSC  
channels, 102

AntennaWeb website, 102

AOL Music on Demand, 267-268

AOL Pictures, 268-270

AOL screen name, obtaining, 265

AOL for Windows Media Center, 265-266

applications. *See* utilities

arcade games. *See* EMUCenter; games

ArcSoft TotalMedia Theatre decoder, 163

Artists view (Music Library), 171

aspect ratios  
of displays, 65  
zoom settings for DVD movies, 156-158

assembly cables, 318

ATI TV Wonder Digital Cable Tuner, 41

ATSC (broadcast digital TV)  
channel signal strength, checking, 102-103  
converter boxes for, 99-100  
troubleshooting, 490-491  
tuners, NTSC TV tuners versus, 39-42  
viewing, hardware requirements for, 87-88

audio. *See also* music  
adding to slide shows, 420-421  
codecs, troubleshooting, 495-496  
for MCEs, troubleshooting, 335  
overlaying with narration in slide shows, 426-427  
surround sound, hardware for, 45-47  
troubleshooting, 494-495  
utilities, 451-453

audio CDs. *See also* music CDs  
burning multiple CDs, 307  
data CDs versus, 290-291

audio connections for assembly cables, 318

audio jacks, color coding system, 495

audio ripping. *See* ripping music CDs

Australian Media Center Community website, 468

Auto Adjust tool, 409

auto playlists, 293. *See also* playlists  
creating, 381-382  
list of, 179-180

autologon, enabling, 14

Automatic TV Signal Setup dialog, 91

AutoMovie slide shows  
audio  
adding, 420-421  
overlaying with narration, 426-427  
creating, 417-420  
narration, recording, 424-427  
saving, 420  
Timeline view, 422-424  
title, adding/editing, 421-422  
transitions, editing, 422-423

AutoPlay menu, 197-198

## B

**backups**  
before starting Windows  
Anytime Upgrade, 501  
of photos, 208, 408  
with Windows Vista  
Transfer Wizard, 507

**Balanced power plan, changing settings, 471-472**

**basic cable TV**  
troubleshooting, 485-486  
viewing, hardware requirements for, 86

**batteries, replacing in wireless keyboard/mouse, 36**

**Belarc Advisor, 28**

**Big Screen Contacts 2, 461**

**Big Screen Headlines 2, 462**

**Big Screen Photos 2, 453-454**

**Big Screen Weather 2, 462**

**bit rates**  
in music compression, 30  
for ripped audio, 377-379

**black-and-white photos, converting color photos to, 415**

**blank picture thumbnails, troubleshooting, 217**

**blank screen, preventing, 484**

**Blocked Program dialog, 134**

**blocking access. *See* parental controls**

**Blu-Ray movies**  
supported in My Movies 2 software, 160, 163  
watching, 162-164

**Blu-Ray/HD-DVD plugin for Nero decoder, 163**

**Bluetooth wireless keyboard/mouse, 36**

**blurry photos, editing, 416**

**box scores. *See* scores (sports)**

**brightness (display), adjusting, 68-69**

**broadband connections**  
cable Internet connections versus DSL connections, 355-356  
connection speed, 260

**broadcast digital TV (ATSC)**  
channel signal strength, checking, 102-103

converter boxes for,  
99-100  
troubleshooting, 490-491  
tuners, NTSC TV tuners  
versus, 39-42  
viewing, hardware  
requirements for, 87-88

**broadcast TV**  
troubleshooting, 489-491  
viewing, hardware  
requirements for, 86

**burning**  
data CDs/DVDs, 305  
dual-layer DVDs, 245-246  
mixed-content CDs/DVDs,  
305-306  
music CDs, 289-295  
slide shows to DVD,  
302-304  
tips for, 307  
troubleshooting, 307-311  
TV recordings to DVD,  
295-300, 432-433

**business-related utilities,**  
461-464

## C

**cable Internet connections,**  
DSL connections versus,  
355-356

**cable TV**  
basic cable  
    *hardware requirements*  
    *for viewing, 86*  
    *troubleshooting, 485-486*  
configuring TV signal,  
93-97  
Digital Cable Tuner  
(DCT), configuring TV  
signal, 97-100  
digital cable TV,  
    hardware requirements  
    for viewing, 88-91  
HD cable TV, hardware  
    requirements for  
    viewing, 91  
set-top boxes,  
    troubleshooting, 486-490

**CableCARD, 98-99**

**cables**  
MCE to TV connections,  
318-319  
upgrading Xbox 360  
video support, 328

**cache size for TVTonic,**  
adjusting, 279-280

**cameras. See digital**  
**cameras**

**canceled**  
scheduled recordings,  
151-153  
series recordings, 127

**card readers, selecting, 48**

**CAS Latency (CL)**  
timings, 27

**Categories list (Program**  
**Guide), 107**

**categories of Internet TV,**  
129

**categorizing movies in**  
**My Movies 2 software,**  
159-160

**"CD/DVD Full" error**  
**message, 311**

**CDs. See audio CDs; data**  
**CDs; mixed-content CDs;**  
**music CDs**

**centering (display),**  
adjusting, 67

**CF (Compact Flash)**  
memory cards, 48

**channel changing,**  
troubleshooting, 95

**channel listings in**  
**Program Guide, editing,**  
107-109

**channels**  
on TVTonic, 278-279  
wireless network  
    channels, changing, 331  
for wireless routers,  
363-365

**CL (CAS Latency) timings, 27**

**clean installs, upgrades**  
versus, 507-508

**Clear QAM, 90-91**

**clipShow, 440-441**

**clock speeds, 21**

**coaxial SPDIF output, 45-47**

**codecs**  
explained, 436  
troubleshooting, 495-496

**collections, viewing**  
pictures by, 213

**color balance (display),**  
adjusting, 70-71

**color coding system for**  
**audio jacks, 495**

**color photos, converting to**  
**black-and-white, 415**

**Color Temperature tool, 414**

**colors, switching to Vista**  
**Basic Color Scheme,**  
477-478

**Compact Flash (CF)**  
memory cards, 48

**comparing**  
original and edited  
    photos, 410  
    Windows Vista edition  
    features, 500

**component cables, 318**

**Composers view (Music**  
**Library), 171**

**compression for music, 30**

**configuration error**  
**messages, troubleshooting**  
**MCEs, 333-334**

**configuring. See also setup**  
**of Windows Media Center**  
audio ripping in WMP,  
376-380  
converter boxes for NTSC  
TV tuners, 99-100  
custom TV recordings,  
127-129  
EMUCenter, 255-258  
media sharing  
    on Linux, 351  
    on MacOS X, 350  
    on Windows Home  
    Server, 351-355

- on Windows Vista, 347-351
    - on Windows XP, 338-347
  - movie/DVD ratings, 134-135
  - Music Library, 166-167
  - Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC), 217-219
  - printer settings, 205
  - Program Guide, 100-103
  - recording quality settings, 120-122
  - set-top box remote control, 94-95
  - TV ratings, 131
  - TV recording settings, 110-115
  - TV signal, 91-93
    - with *Digital Cable Tuner (DCT)*, 97-100
    - with set-top box, 93-97
  - visualizations, 390-391
  - wireless routers, 361-368
  - WMC remote control, 95-97
  - Xbox 360 as MCE, 326-327
- Conflict dialog**, 117-118, 235
- conflicts in recording**, resolving, 235-237
- connection speed for online media**, 260-261
- connections**. *See also* Internet connections
- display connections, 54, 64
  - MCE connections
    - enabling in firewalls, 324
    - to home networks, 319
    - to TVs, 318-319
  - network connections, 55
  - speaker connections
    - troubleshooting, 74
    - types of, 72
- connector types for antennas**, 359
- console games**. *See* EMUCenter; games
- content types, viewing**, 334
- contrast (display)**, adjusting, 69-70
- contrast (in pictures)**, adjusting, 206-207
- Control Panel method (Windows Anytime Upgrade)**, 501
- converted video files, playing in Windows Media Center**, 436-439
- converter boxes for NTSC TV tuners**, 99-100
- converting**
  - color photos to black-and-white, 415
  - MS-DVR files, disadvantages of, 436
- copying**. *See also* ripping
  - mixed-content CDs, 169
  - original photos, 410
- cost of upgrades**, 506
- CPU**. *See* processors
- cropping photos**, 206-207, 415-416
- Crucial System Scanner**, 24
- Crutchfield's Choosing and Installing an Antenna for HDTV website**, 103
- currently playing music tracks, viewing details of**, 170-171
- custom playlists, creating**, 380-381. *See also* playlists
- Custom Setup**
  - Optional Setup in, 57
  - completion of, 76-77
  - Library Setup, 74-76
  - Optimize Display settings, 63-71
  - Speaker settings, 72-74
  - TV settings, 58-62
  - Required Setup in, 56-57
- custom TV recordings, configuring**, 127-129
- customizing movie recording options**, 150-151
- Cyberlink PowerDVD 7 codec**, 436
- CyberLink PowerDVD 8 Ultra decoder**, 163

## D

- data CDs**
  - audio CDs versus, 290-291
  - burning, 305-307
- data DVDs**
  - burning, 305
  - multiple DVDs, 307
  - TV recordings to, 299-300
  - video DVDs versus, 295-296
- date, viewing pictures by**, 212
- date and time settings in digital cameras**, 195-197
- Date Taken view (Gallery mode)**, 403
- Date Taken View (Pictures Library)**, 195-197
- DCT (Digital Cable Tuner)**, configuring TV signal, 97-100
- default application for MPEG-2 videos, setting**, 437-439
- default printer, changing**, 205
- default settings, configuring for TV recordings**, 113-115
- defragmenting hard disk**, 475-477
- deleting**
  - channels in Program Guide, 107-109
  - files from hard disk, 472-475
  - photos, 200, 205-206, 402
  - playlists, 384-385
  - recorded movies, 155
  - recorded TV, 127, 300-302

Denny's Antenna Service website, 103

designing games for WMC, 260

desktop, switching to Vista Basic Color Scheme, 477-478

device drivers. *See* drivers

digital broadcast TV (ATSC)

- channel signal strength, checking, 102-103
- converter boxes for, 99-100
- troubleshooting, 490-491
- tuners, NTSC TV tuners versus, 39-42
- viewing, hardware requirements for, 87-88

Digital Cable Tuner (DCT), configuring TV signal, 97-100

digital cable TV

- hardware options for, 40-42
- viewing, hardware requirements for, 88-91

digital cameras

- date and time settings, 195-197
- importing photos. *See* importing, photos

The Digital Lifestyle website, 468

digital music. *See* music

digital photography, hard disk space requirements, 29

digital photos. *See* photos

digital video interface (DVI), 42

disabling

- screen savers, 54, 484
- Simple File Sharing, 345
- sound effects, 78
- Windows Sidebar, 479-480

Discovery Channel, 273

Discovery Media Center, 273-274

Disk Cleanup, 473

Disk Defragmenter, 475-477

disk management, optimizing, 472-477

disk space requirements, 506  
for DVD slide shows, 304  
for TV recordings, 299

display settings

- optimizing, 477-480
- troubleshooting, 484-485

displays

- aspect ratio, 65
- connections, 54, 64
- LCD, 54
- Optimize Display settings (Optional Setup), 63-71
- picture adjustment controls, locating, 66
- resolution, 65-66, 157
- secondary displays, running WMC on, 11
- selecting, 44-45
- TV as, 54
- types of, 64

distorted HDTV, troubleshooting, 484

DL (dual-layer) DVD media, 308

documentation for utilities, finding, 440

donations for utilities, 440

downloaded ROMs for emulated console games, 254

downloading

- TV Program Guide, 82
- visualizations, 389-390
- WMM 2.6, 417

drive compatibility issues, troubleshooting burning CDs/DVDs, 307

driver updates, 507

drivers

- for graphics cards, updating, 157

updating, 481, 485  
which to use, 54

DRM-free music downloads, 310

DS (Secure Digital) memory cards, 48

DSL Internet connections  
cable connections versus, 355-356  
connection speed, 261

dual TV tuners, 42

dual-layer (DL) DVD media, 245-246, 308

dual-tuner devices, 237

DVD movies

- creating movie library, 158-162
- watching, 155-158

DVD-RAM media, 308

DVD ratings, configuring, 134-135

DVD Settings menu, 82

DVDs

- burning
  - data DVDs*, 305-307
  - dual-layer DVDs*, 245-246
  - mixed-content DVDs*, 305-306
  - slide shows to*, 302-304
  - TV recordings to*, 295-300
- saving TV recordings to, 432-433
- single-layer DVDs, 246

DVI (digital video interface), 42

DVI ports, 43

DVRMSToolbox, 441-442

## E

earning points for My Movies 2 software, 158

Edit Auto Playlist dialog, 382



**Edit Preset dialog**, 183

**Edit Queue menu**, 177-178

**edited photos**, “date taken” information on, 196

## editing

- album information, 175
- album track information, 173-174
- channel listings in Program Guide, 107-109
- DVD slide shows, 304
- genres, 388
- photos, 206-208, 408-416
- playlists, 295, 382-383
- queue (of music), 177-178, 294-295
- titles in slide shows, 421-422
- transitions in slide shows, 422-423

**editions of Windows Vista**, comparing features, 500

**elevated command prompt**, opening, 439

**EMUCenter**, 254-255

- downloaded ROMs for emulated console games, 254
- installing games, 255-258
- playing games, 258-259

**emulated console games**, downloaded ROMs for, 254

## enabling

- autologon, 14
- Guest account on Windows Home Server, 353
- High Performance power plan, 470
- MCE connections in firewalls, 324
- media folder sharing on Windows Vista, 348-349
- parental controls, 130-131
- sharing, 55, 348
- Windows Sidebar, 479

**encryption keys**, generating, 369

**encryption settings** (wireless routers), changing, 366-368

**Enhanced CDs**, copying, 169

**episode list** (scheduled recordings), viewing, 119-120

**erasing**. *See* deleting

**error messages**, troubleshooting burning CDs/DVDs, 309-311

**eSATA hard disks**, 111

**Ethernet networks**, connections to MCEs, 319

**EXE files**, 439

**ExpressCard-based TV tuners**, 37

**Extenders Settings menu**, 82

**external bus speeds**, 21

**external hard disks**, 31-33, 111

**external TV tuners**, internal TV tuners versus, 37-39

# F

**Fair Access policies**, 356

**fantasy sports team players**, viewing statistics on, 248-249

**Fast Ethernet connections**, 369

**FFDShow codec**, 436

**File and Folder Backup feature**, 408

**File and Printer Sharing for Microsoft Networks**, 341-342

**file formats**. *See* formats

**file sharing**. *See* media sharing

**filenames for pictures**, 303

**films**. *See* movies

## filtering

- HSN Live products, 264
- music collections to create playlists, 381-382

## finding

- games
  - with *More Tasks*, 253
  - in *Program Library*, 251-252
- movies, 137-138
  - Genres menu*, 144
  - in *Movies Guide*, 138-141
  - On Next menu*, 143
  - with *Search tool*, 145-146
  - Top Rated menu*, 144-145

**firewalls**, enabling MCE connections, 324

**FireWire 400 hard disks**, 111

**FireWire 800 hard disks**, 111

**FireWire ports**, 47

**firmware upgrades for wireless routers**, 330

**Fix Red-eye tool**, 416

## FM radio

- pausing, 183-184
- recording, 185
- setting presets, 183-184
- tuning in, 181-182

**folder locations**, configuring for TV recordings, 112-113

**Folder view** (Gallery mode), 403

## folders

- local folders, adding, 74-75
- network folders, adding, 76
- of photos, burning to DVD as slide show, 302-304
- sharing, 167

**Folders View** (Pictures Library), 190-192

**formats**  
     for photos, 406  
     for recorded TV, 431-432  
     for ripped audio, 377-379

**Fox Sports**, 262

**freeing hard disk space**, 472-475

**FrontView for Windows MCE**, 456

**full-screen mode (for sports)**, 227

**full-screen views of photos**, 202

## G

**Gallery mode (Windows Live Photo Gallery)**  
     creating panoramic photos, 405-406  
     tagging photos, 404-405  
     viewing photos, 402-403

**Game Collection dialog**, 258

**game statistics**, viewing, 232-233, 247

**GameEx**, 461

**games**  
     designing for WMC, 260  
     finding, 251-253  
     installing in EMUCenter, 255-258  
     MSN Games for Vista website, 253-254  
     playing  
         *in EMUCenter*, 258-259  
         *with mouse*, 253  
     preinstalled, list of, 253  
     utilities, 460-461

**Games Collection dialog**, 256

**Games view in Program Library**, 253

**GameV2 dialog**, 256

**General Settings menu**, 78-82  
     high-contrast menus, 80

Program Library  
     options, 80  
     rerunning WMC Setup, 80  
     sound effects, 78  
     startup configuration, 78-79

**genres**  
     creating, 175  
     editing, 388

**Genres menu (Movies Guide)**, 139, 144

**Genres view (Music Library)**, 171

**Gigabit Ethernet connections**, 369-370

**Google Maps for Media Center**, 454-455

**graphics cards**. *See* video cards

**The Green Button website**, 119, 467

**groups (of photos)**, importing, 400-402

**Guest account on Windows Home Server**, 352-353

**Guide**. *See* Program Guide

## H

**HAI Home Control for Windows Media Center**, 465

**hard disks**  
     defragmenting, 475-477  
     freeing space on, 472-475  
     requirements for, 28-30, 32-33  
     troubleshooting, 493-494  
     for TV recording, 111

**hardware, removing**, 199

**hardware information, scanning**, 49-50

**hardware options**, 33  
     checklist for, 50-51  
     for digital video/photos, 47-48

for TV/HDTV, 36-47  
     *displays*, 44-45  
     *internal versus external tuners*, 37-39  
     *NTSC versus ATSC tuners*, 39-42  
     *PCI versus PCI Express tuners*, 38-39  
     *surround sound*, 45-47  
     *video cards and integrated video*, 42-44  
     wireless input devices and remote controls, 33-36

**hardware requirements**, 20  
     for Blu-Ray movies, 163  
     hard disks, 28-33  
     processors, 20-23  
     RAM, 24-28  
     viewing TV shows, 86-91

**HD cable TV, hardware requirements for**, 91

**HD-DVD movies, supported in My Movies 2 software**, 160-163

**HD HomeRun tuner**, 90

**HDCP (high-bandwidth digital content protection)**, 42-45

**HDMI (high definition multimedia interface)**, 42  
     cables, 318  
     ports, 43

**HDPhoto format**, 406

**HDTV (high-definition TV)**, 87  
     cropping photos for, 415-416  
     resolutions for, 335  
     selecting hardware for, 36-47  
         *displays*, 44-45  
         *internal versus external tuners*, 37-39  
         *NTSC versus ATSC tuners*, 39-42  
         *PCI versus PCI Express tuners*, 38-39

- surround sound*, 45-47
    - video cards and integrated video*, 42-44
  - troubleshooting, 483-484
  - Heidi** (television movie),
    - effect on sports programming, 240
  - high-bandwidth digital content protection (HDCP), 42-45
  - high-contrast menus,
    - configuring, 80
  - high definition multimedia interface. *See* HDMI
  - High Performance power plan, enabling, 470
  - Highlights tool, 411
  - Histogram tool, 411
  - history of sports
    - recordings, viewing, 242
  - history of WMC, 11
  - hobby utilities, 466-467
  - home automation utilities, 465-466
  - home networks. *See also* networks
    - configuring media sharing
      - on Linux, 351
      - on MacOS X, 350
      - on Windows Home Server, 351-355
      - on Windows Vista, 347-351
      - on Windows XP, 338-347
    - Gigabit Ethernet connections, 369-370
    - Internet connections,
      - selecting type of, 355-356
    - routers, upgrading, 370-371
    - wireless networking connections
      - avoiding interference, 481
      - changing wireless router configuration, 361-368
      - checking for interference, 359-361
      - determining wireless adapter types, 361-362
      - increasing signal strength, 357-359
      - types of, 356-357
  - How to Install a TV
    - Antenna website, 103
  - HSN Live, 262-265
  - HughesNet, 356
  - hybrid TV tuners, 42
- 
- I
- i.Link ports, 47
  - icons for EMUCenter
    - games, 256
  - IEEE-1394 ports, 47
  - Import All New Items Now option (Windows Live Photo Gallery), 400
  - Import dialog, 199-202
  - Import Settings dialog, 398
  - importing
    - photos, 397-398
      - with AutoPlay menu, 197-198
    - deleting from camera
      - after import, 200, 402
    - Import All New Items Now option, 400
    - Import dialog, 199-202
    - Review, Organize, and Group Items to Import option, 400-402
    - selecting options for, 397-400
    - viewing before import, 198-199
    - tags, 194, 212
  - In the Movies XE for MCE, 442
  - increasing signal strength of wireless networks, 357-359
  - information-related utilities, 461-464
  - InSSIDer, 359
  - installing
    - games in EMUCenter, 255-258
    - My Movies 2 software, 159
    - QuickTime for TVTonic, 277
    - TVTonic, 277
    - utilities, 439-440
  - integrated video, selecting, 42-44
  - Intelligent Zoom option (DVD movies), 157
  - interface. *See* user interface
  - interference
    - avoiding, 332
    - wireless networks
      - avoiding, 481
      - checking for, 359-361
  - internal hard disks for TV recording, 111
  - internal TV tuners
    - external TV tuners versus, 37-39
    - PCI versus PCI Express, 38-39
  - Internet connections. *See also* connections
    - selecting type of, 355-356
    - troubleshooting, 480-483
  - Internet radio, 185
  - Internet TV, viewing, 129-130, 250
  - "Invalid Application CD/DVD Writer" error message, 311
  - IP address of wireless routers, determining, 363
  - iPods. *See* portable media players
  - IR blaster cable,
    - troubleshooting, 95

## J-K

Joost.com, 443

JPEG format, 406

### keyboards

need for, 185

on-screen keyboard for  
AOL for Windows Media  
Center, 265

selecting, 33-36

wireless, range of, 54

keys, generating  
encryption, 369

Kingston Memory  
Search, 26

## L

L2 cache sizes, 21

laptop computers, hard  
disk space in, 31

LCD displays, 54

Learn How (video  
training), 288

Library Setup (Optional  
Setup), 74-76, 82

Lifehacker website, 468

Lifextender, 444

LifeWare, 466

Linux, configuring media  
sharing, 351

### live TV

pausing, 227

recording, 110, 228-229  
*configuring settings for,*  
*110-115, 120-122*  
*one-touch recording, 115*  
*scheduling with Program*  
*Guide, 116*  
*series recordings,*  
*116-120*  
viewing, 103-108

Live365, 274-277

local folders, adding, 74-75

login for wireless  
routers, 362

Logitech Harmony  
Xbox 360 Remote, 328

logon dialog, enabling  
autologon, 14

lossless conversion for  
music, 29

lossless formats, 377-379

lossy formats, 377-379

lot numbers of Xbox 360  
consoles, 326

Lottery Results SE for  
MCE, 467

## M

MacOS X, configuring  
media sharing, 350

manual login for wireless  
routers, 362

Manual Record dialog,  
127-129

manual TV signal setup, 61

map utilities, 454-455

Marginal Network  
Performance dialog, 329

MC Menu CustomiSer,  
457-458

MCE Customizer, 456-457

MCE Live TV Buffer  
Manager, 227

MCE Tuner Extender, 119

MCE Tunes, 451

mceAuction, 467

MCEBuddy, 444

mceContacts, 462

MCEJoy, 461

mcePhone for Skype, 462

MCEs (Media Center  
Extenders)

connections, 318-319

explained, 315-316

firewalls, enabling  
connections, 324

performance

improvements, 329-333

running Windows Media  
Center with, 325

troubleshooting, 333-335

types of, 317

versions of, 316

Windows Media Center  
setup, 320-324

Xbox 360  
*adding remote control*  
*to, 327-328*

*configuring, 326-327*

*models of, 325-326*

*upgrading video support,*  
*328-329*

mceTapiRex, 463

mceWeather, 463

MCEWorld website, 467

mControl, 466

Media Center  
Communicator, 458

Media Center Extenders.  
*See* MCEs

Media Center Health  
Monitor, 458

Media Center website, 467

media compatibility issues,  
troubleshooting burning  
CDs/DVDs, 308-309

media sharing, configuring

on Linux, 351

on MacOS X, 350

on Windows Home Server,  
351-355

on Windows Vista,  
347-351

on Windows XP, 338-347

memory. *See* hard disks;  
RAM

memory card readers,  
selecting, 48

metadata, tags as, 194

mixed-content CDs/DVDs  
burning, 305-306  
copying, 169

monitors. *See* displays

More Pictures menu, 220

More Programs menu, 262

**More Tasks menu, 253**

**More TV Locations menu, 112-113**

**mouse**

- need for, 185
- playing games with, 253
- selecting, 33-36
- wireless, range of, 54

**Movie Collector MCE, 444**

**Movie Details menu, 142, 148**

**Movie Info dialog, 148**

**movie ratings, configuring, 134-135**

**Movie/DVD Rating dialog, 135**

**Movielink, 283-285**

**movies. *See also* Movies Guide; slide shows; video finding, 137-138**

*Genres menu, 144*  
*in Movies Guide, 138-141*

*On Next menu, 143*  
*with Search tool, 145-146*

*Top Rated menu, 144-145*

**Movielink, 283-285**

**My Movies 2 software, 158**  
*adding to WMC*

*interface, 161-162*

*adding/categorizing movies in, 159-160*

*Blu-Ray and HD-DVD support in, 160, 163*  
*installing, 159*

*Settings menu, 162*

**Parental Controls, 138**

**pausing playback, 154**

**recording, 147**  
*canceling recordings, 151-153*

*customizing record options, 150-151*

*from Movie Details menu, 142*

*from Movies Guide, 148*

*from Search tool, 150*

*unlisted movies, 148-150*

**resuming playback, 154**

**Showtime, 271-272**

**utilities, 440-451**

**watching**

*Blu-Ray movies, 162-164*

*DVD movies, 155-158*

*from On Now menu, 141-142*

*recorded movies, 153-155*

**Movies Guide, 138-141**

**Genres menu, 144**

**On Next menu, 143**

**On Now menu, 141-142**

**recording movies, 148**

**switching views in, 141**

**Top Rated menu, 144-145**

**unlisted movies, recording, 148-150**

**MP3 compression format, 30-31**

**MPEG-2 videos**

**setting default**

**application for, 437-439**

**viewing in Windows**

**Media Player, 438**

**MS-DVR files,**

**converting, 436**

**MSI files, 439**

**MSInfo32, 49**

**MSN Games for Vista**

**website, 253-254**

**MSN Remote Record,**

**444-445**

**MSN TV Today, 285-286**

**multimedia features of Windows Vista, 12-13**

**multiple CDs/DVDs, burning, 307**

**multiple folders of photos, burning as slide show, 303-304**

**multiple processor cores, 21**

**multiple TV tuners, avoiding recording conflicts, 119**

**music. *See also* audio; playlists; radio; songs**

**adding to DVD slide shows, 304**

**album tracks**

*editing information*

*about, 173-175*

*selecting, 171-173*

**Albums view, 174-175**

**AOL Music on Demand, 267-268**

**compression formats, 30**

**currently playing track, viewing details of, 170-171**

**DRM-free music**

**downloads, 310**

**FM radio, 181-185**

**genres, creating, 175**

**hard disk space**

**requirements, 29-30**

**Internet radio, 185**

**queue**

*adding to, 176*

*creating playlist from, 177-179*

*Edit Queue menu, 177-178*

*Queue menu, 176*

*viewing, 176*

**searching for, 180-181**

**in slide shows, 210**

**synchronizing with**

**portable media players, 186-187**

**troubleshooting, 494-495**

**utilities, 451-453**

**visualizations, selecting, 169-170**

**music CDs. *See also***

**audio CDs**

**burning, 289**

*albums, 291-292*

*audio CDs versus data CDs, 290-291*

*playlists, 292-293*

queues, adding music to, 293-294  
 queues, editing, 294-295  
 playing, 167-169  
 ripping, 167-169, 376-380

**Music feature, 16**

**music genres. See genres**

**Music Library, setup of, 166-167**

**Music menu, 165-166**

**Music Player, 453**

**Music Settings menu, 82**

**My Blockbuster, 445**

**My Mapquest for MCE, 455**

**My Movies 2 software, 158**  
 adding to WMC interface, 161-162  
 adding/categorizing movies in, 159-160  
 Blu-Ray and HD-DVD support in, 160-163  
 installing, 159  
 Settings menu, 162

**My Tracker for MCE, 463**

**My Trailers SE for MCE, 446**

**My TV to Go, 446**

**MyNetflix, 446**

**MyTV Genie, 446**

## N

**naming photos, 303**

**Narrate Timeline dialog, 425**

**narration, recording for slide shows, 424-427**

**National Public Radio (NPR), 281-283**

**navigating through photos, 394-396**

**NBC Nightly News, 288**

**NetStumbler, 481**

**Network and Sharing Center, 55**

**network connections, 55.**  
*See also* home networks to MCEs, 319  
 troubleshooting, 480-483

**network folders, adding, 76**

**Network Mode settings (wireless routers), changing, 364-365**

**Network Performance Tuner, 329-330**

**Network Setup Wizard, 338-341**

**Network Stumbler, 332**

**Network Tuner dialog, 323**

**new features in Windows Vista Media Center, 503-504**

**New Rides for MCE, 466**

**news stories. See sports stories**

**Normal zoom option (DVD movies), 156**

**Now Playing dialog, 167**

**NPR (National Public Radio), 281-283**

**NSIS Windows Installer, 260**

**NTSC TV tuners. See also broadcast TV**  
 ATSC TV tuners versus, 39-42  
 converter boxes for, 99-100

## O

**OCUR (Open Cable Unidirectional Receiver), 40-42**

**on-demand channels in HSN Live, 262**

**On Later menu, 234**

**On Next menu (Movies Guide), 139, 143**

**On Now menu, 139-142, 225**

**on-screen keyboard for AOL for Windows Media Center, 265**

**one-touch recording, 115**

**online media**

adding to More Programs menu, 262

AOL for Windows Media Center, 265-270

connection speed needed, 260-261

Discovery Media Center, 273-274

Fox Sports, 262

HSN Live, 262-265

Live365, 274-277

Movielink, 283-285

MSN TV Today, 285-286

NPR, 281-283

Showtime, 271-272

TVTonic, 277-281

**Online Media menu, 17**

categories in, 260-261

limited-time offerings, 288

promotional features, 288

sports stories, viewing, 230

**online system scanners, 24, 28, 50**

**opening elevated command prompt, 439**

**operating systems, 32-bit versus 64-bit, 21-22**

**optical SPDIF output, 45-47**

**Optimize Display settings (Optional Setup), 63-71**

**optimizing. See also performance improvements**  
 configuring optimization, 82  
 disk management, 472-477  
 display settings, 477-480  
 power management, 470-472

**optional hardware. See hardware options**

**Optional Setup, 57**  
 completion of, 76-77  
 Library Setup, 74-76  
 Optimize Display settings, 63-71  
 Speaker settings, 72-74  
 TV settings, 58-59, 61-62  
**organizing photos during import process, 400-402**  
**original photos, copying, 410**  
**Other Showings menu, 142**  
**out-of-focus photos, editing, 416**  
**overexposed photos, editing, 409**  
**overlying audio and narration in slide shows, 426-427**  
**overriding parental controls, 133**

## P

**panoramic photos, creating, 405-406**  
**parental controls, 130**  
 access code, changing, 135-136  
 configuring, 82  
 enabling, 130-131  
 movie/DVD ratings, configuring, 134-135  
 for movies, 138  
 overriding, 133  
 resetting to default, 136  
 TV ratings, 131-134  
**pause buffer, changing size of, 227**  
**pausing**  
 FM radio, 183-184  
 movie playback, 154  
 sports, 227  
**PC99 color coding system (audio), 495**  
**PCI Express internal TV tuners, PCI tuners versus, 38-39**

**PCI internal TV tuners, PCI Express tuners versus, 38-39**  
**performance improvements for MCEs, 329-333**  
**performance problems, troubleshooting, 470**  
 disk management, 472-477  
 display settings, 477-480, 484-485  
 power management, 470-472  
**Permissions-Based File Sharing, 346**  
**Photato, 454**  
**Photo Gallery, 195**  
**Photo Import Wizard, 195**  
**photography utilities, 453-454**  
**photos. *See also* Windows Live Photo Gallery; Windows Photo Gallery**  
 AOL Pictures, 268-270  
 backing up, 208  
 color photos, converting to black-and-white, 415  
 copying originals, 410  
 creating slide shows from, 418-420  
 cropping, 206-207, 415-416  
 deleting, 200, 205-206, 402  
 editing, 206-208  
*Adjust Color tool, 414*  
*Adjust Detail tool, 416*  
*Adjust Exposure tool, 411-413*  
*Auto Adjust tool, 409*  
*backing up before, 408*  
*comparing to originals, 410*  
*Fix Red-eye tool, 416*  
 for EMUCenter games, 256  
 formats for, 406  
 hard disk space requirements, 29

importing, 397-398  
*with AutoPlay menu, 197-198*  
*Import All New Items Now option, 400*  
*Import dialog, 199-202*  
*Review, Organize, and Group Items to Import option, 400-402*  
*selecting options for, 397-400*  
*viewing before import, 198-199*  
 naming, 303  
 navigating through, 394-396  
 panoramic photos, creating, 405-406  
 printing, 205  
 PSD files, viewing, 210  
 RAW files, viewing, 29  
 renaming, 399  
 rotating, 205, 399  
 selecting hardware for, 47-48  
 slide shows, burning to DVDs, 302-304  
 sports pictures, viewing, 230-231  
 tagging  
*in Gallery mode, 404-405*  
*reasons for, 394-396*  
 viewing  
*in Date Taken View, 195-197*  
*in Folders View, 190-192*  
*full-screen, 202*  
*in Gallery mode, 402-403*  
*before importing, 198-199*  
*More Pictures menu, 220*  
*with Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC), 212-215*  
*Picture Details menu, 204-205*  
*Picture Library, 190-197*  
*Pictures + Videos menu, 189-190*

- in Preview mode, 407-408*
  - RAW files, 215*
  - right-click options, 202-204*
  - as slide show, 208-209, 217*
  - in Tags View, 193-195*
  - troubleshooting, 217*
- Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC), 210-212**
  - configuring, 217-219
  - viewing pictures, 212-215
  - viewing slide shows, 216-217
- picture adjustment controls, locating, 66**
- Picture Details menu, 204-205**
- Picture Library, 190**
  - Date Taken View, 195-197
  - Folders View, 190-192
  - Tags View, 193-195
- picture quality of MCEs, troubleshooting, 335**
- Picture Viz I/II visualizations, 390**
- pictures. *See* photos**
- Pictures Settings menu, 82**
- Pictures + Videos menu, 16, 189-190**
- playback controls, 14**
- players on fantasy teams, viewing statistics on, 248-249**
- Players menu, 248-249**
- playing. *See also* viewing**
  - converted video files in Windows Media Center, 436-439
  - games
    - in EMUCenter, 258-259*
    - with mouse, 253*
  - music CDs, 167-169
  - playlists, 179
  - video DVDs, 298
- Playlist pane (WMP), viewing, 381**
- playlists**
  - auto playlists, 179-180, 293
  - burning to CD, 292-293
  - creating in WMP, 380-382
  - deleting, 384-385
  - editing, 295, 382-383
  - playing, 179
  - saving queue as, 177-179
  - synchronizing with portable media players, 186-187
  - using in WMC, 384
  - viewing, 292
- point-to-point wireless broadband Internet connections, 356**
- points, earning for My Movies 2 software, 158**
- portable media players, synchronizing music with, 186-187**
- power management, optimizing, 470-472**
- preinstalled games, list of, 253**
- Premium Digital Cable Ready PCs, 97**
- preparing for WMC setup, 53-55**
- presets for FM radio, setting, 183-184**
- preventing blank screen, 484**
- Preview mode (Windows Live Photo Gallery)**
  - Adjust Color tool, 414
  - Adjust Detail tool, 416
  - Adjust Exposure tool, 411-413
  - Auto Adjust tool, 409
  - cropping photos, 415-416
  - Fix Red-eye tool, 416
  - viewing photos, 407-408
- printer settings, configuring, 205**
- printers, changing default, 205**
- printing photos, 205**
- prioritizing scheduled recordings, 245**
- Priority menu, 245**
- privacy statement**
  - displaying, 82
  - for Program Guide, 100
- Processor Power Management settings (Balanced power plan), changing, 471-472**
- processors**
  - requirements for, 20-23
  - upgrading, 23
- program categories, 14**
- Program Guide**
  - activating, 62
  - channel listings, editing, 107-109
  - configuring, 100-103
  - downloads,
    - configuring, 82
  - scheduling TV recordings, 116
  - series recordings, 116
  - usage overview, 104-108
- Program Info menu, 105-106, 117, 122**
- Program Library**
  - configuring options, 80
  - finding games, 251-252
  - More Programs menu, 262
  - preinstalled games,
    - list of, 253
- promotional features in Online Media menu, 288**
- PSD files, viewing, 210**
- PSE-WMC (Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center), 210-212**
  - configuring, 217-219
  - viewing pictures, 212-215
  - viewing slide shows, 216-217



**Public folder, enabling sharing, 348**

**publishing slide shows, 428-430**

## Q

**QAM, 40**

Clear QAM, 90-91

**quality levels**

effect on TV recording storage space, 110  
of recorded TV shows, configuring, 120-122

**queue (of music)**

adding to, 176  
burning to CD, 293-294  
creating playlist from, 177-179  
Edit Queue menu, 177-178  
editing, 294-295  
Queue menu, 176  
viewing, 176

**Queue menu, 176**

**QuickTime, installing for TVTonic, 277**

## R

**radio**

FM radio, 181-185  
Internet radio, 185  
Live365, 274-277  
NPR, 281-283

**RadioTime, 452**

**RAM**

requirements for, 24-28  
reusing between systems, 27  
scanning configuration of, 24-28  
upgrade strategies, 26-27

**ratings**

albums, 386  
movie/DVD ratings, configuring, 134-135  
songs, 385-387  
TV ratings, 131-134

**RAW files, viewing, 29, 215**

**reconfiguring original setup (Settings menu), 77-78, 82**

high-contrast menus, 80  
Program Library options, 80  
rerunning WMC Setup, 80  
sound effects, 78  
startup configuration, 78-79

**Record Settings menu, 116, 120, 150-151**

**recordable media, rewritable media versus, 308**

**recorded movies**

deleting, 155  
pausing/resuming playback, 154  
watching, 153-155

**recorded TV**

custom recordings, configuring, 127-129  
deleting, 127  
saving, 431-433  
scheduled recordings, viewing, 124-126  
series recordings, canceling, 127  
viewing, 122-123

**Recorded TV Manager, 446**

**Recorded TV menu, 122-123**

**Recorder Settings menu, 110-115**

More TV Locations menu, 112-113  
Recorder Storage dialog, 110-112  
Recording Defaults menu, 113-115

**Recorder Storage dialog, 110-112**

**recording**

FM radio, 185

movies, 147

canceling recordings, 151-153

customizing record options, 150-151

from Movie Details menu, 142

from Movies Guide, 148

from Search tool, 150

unlisted movies, 148-150

narration for slide shows, 424-427

sports, 228-229

adding recording time, 240

advanced options, 237-239

burning DVDs of, 245-246

reruns, choosing whether to record, 243

resolving conflicts in, 235-237

scheduled recordings, 234-235

scheduled series recording management, 243-245

viewing recording history, 242

viewing recording schedule, 242

viewing recordings, 240-242

TV shows, 110

configuring settings for, 110-115, 120-122

with Discovery Media Center, 273

hard disk space requirements, 29

one-touch recording, 115

scheduling with Program Guide, 116

series recordings, 116-120

troubleshooting, 491-493

**Recording Broker, 447**

**recording conflicts**

- avoiding with multiple TV tuners, 119
- resolving, 117-118

**Recording Defaults menu, 113-115**

**red-eye in photos, editing, 416**

**regions, specifying for TV reception, 58**

**RegisterMCEApp.exe program, 262**

**Remind Me for MCE, 463**

**remote controls**

- adding to Xbox 360, 327-328
- requirements, 507
- selecting, 33-35
- for set-top box, configuring, 94-95
- WMC remote control
  - advantages of, 93*
  - configuring, 95-97*

**removing hardware, 199.**  
*See also deleting*

**renaming photos, 399**

**replacing batteries in wireless keyboard/mouse, 36**

**Required Setup, 56-57**

**requirements**

- disk space requirements
  - for DVD slide shows, 304*
  - for TV recordings, 299*
- hardware requirements, 20
  - for Blu-Ray movies, 163*
  - hard disks, 28-33*
  - processors, 20-23*
  - RAM, 24-28*
- software requirements for Blu-Ray movies, 163-164
- upgrades from
  - Windows XP to Windows Vista, 504-507

**reruns, choosing whether to record, 243**

**resetting parental controls, 136**

**resolution**

- of displays, 65-66, 157
- of HDTV displays, 44, 335
- setting, 484

**Resolve Conflict dialog, 237**

**resolving recording conflicts, 117-118, 235-237**

**restricted access. *See* parental controls**

**resuming**

- MCE setup, 323
- movie playback, 154

**reusing RAM, 27**

**Review, Organize, and Group Items to Import option (Windows Live Photo Gallery), 400-402**

**rewritable media, recordable media versus, 308**

**RGB color balance (display), adjusting, 70-71**

**right-click menu**

- for Albums view (Music Library), 174-175
- viewing photos, 202-204

**ripping music CDs, 167-169, 376-380**

**ROMs for emulated console games, 254**

**roof-mounted antenna, resources for information, 102**

**rotating photos, 205, 399**

**routers. *See also* wireless routers**

- Gigabit Ethernet connections on, 369-370
- upgrading, 370-371

**running**

- Windows Media Center with MCEs, 325
- Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor, 501

## S

**S-video connectors, 318**

**Safely Remove Hardware dialog, 199**

**satellite Internet connections, 261, 356**

**satellite TV**

- configuring TV signal, 93-97
- viewing, hardware requirements for, 91

**Saturation tool, 414**

**saving**

- queue as playlist, 177-179
- slide shows, 420
- TV recordings, 431
  - in different format, 431-432*
  - to DVD, 432-433*

**scanned photos, "date taken" information on, 197**

**scanning**

- hardware information, 49-50
- RAM configurations, 24-28
- for TV signals, 58-61

**scheduled recordings**

- canceling, 151-153
- series recordings, managing, 243-245
- setting up, 116-120
- sports recordings, 234-235
  - resolving conflicts in, 235-237*
  - viewing list of, 242*
- viewing, 124-126

**scores (sports), viewing, 232-233, 247**

**Scores menu, 247**

**screen geometry (display), adjusting, 68**

**screen name (AOL), obtaining, 265**

**screen savers, disabling, 54, 484**

screen settings. *See* display settings

screens. *See* displays

SDTV (standard definition TV), 87

SDV (switched digital video), 97

Search tool  
finding movies, 145-146  
recording movies, 150

searching  
for HSN Live products, 264  
in Movielink, 283  
for music, 180-181

secondary displays,  
running WMC on, 11

Secure Digital (SD)  
memory cards, 48

secure wireless  
networks, 353

selecting  
album tracks, 171-173  
Internet connection types,  
355-356  
optional hardware, 33  
checklist for, 50-51  
for digital video/photos,  
47-48  
for TV/HDTV, 36-47  
wireless input devices  
and remote controls,  
33-36  
photo import options,  
397-400  
program categories, 14  
slide show styles, 419-420  
visualizations, 169-170

Series Info dialog,  
125-127, 243

Series menu, 243

series recordings  
canceling, 127  
configuring settings for,  
121-122  
managing, 243-245  
scheduling, 116-120  
for sports, 234  
viewing list of, 125-126

Series Settings dialog, 121

Set IR Signal Speed  
dialog, 96

Set Up Your TV Signal  
wizard, 91

set-top boxes  
configuring TV signal,  
93-97  
troubleshooting, 486-490

Settings menu, General  
Settings, 78, 82  
high-contrast menus, 80  
Program Library  
options, 80  
rerunning WMC Setup, 80  
sound effects, 78  
startup configuration,  
78-79

Settings menu  
(My Movies 2), 162

setup of Windows Media  
Center. *See also*

configuring  
and MCEs, 320-324,  
333-334  
Optional Setup, 57  
completion of, 76-77  
Library Setup, 74-76  
Optimize Display  
settings, 63-71  
Speaker settings, 72-74  
TV settings, 58-62  
preparation for, 53-55  
Required Setup, 56-57  
Settings menu, 77-82  
starting, 55-56

Shadows tool, 411

share names in Simple File  
Sharing, 343

Shared Documents  
folder, 347

sharing. *See also* media  
sharing  
enabling, 55  
folders, 167

shopping with HSN Live,  
262-265

Showtime, 271-272

Sidebar. *See* Windows  
Sidebar

signal strength  
ATSC channels, checking,  
102-103  
wireless networks,  
increasing, 357-359

signals (TV)  
manual setup, 61  
scanning for, 58-61

Similar Movies menu,  
148-150

Simple File Sharing,  
343-346

single-layer DVDs, 246

size of pause buffer,  
changing, 227

sizing (display),  
adjusting, 67

slide shows  
audio  
adding, 420-421  
music in, 210  
overlying with  
narration, 426-427  
burning to DVD, 302  
adding music to slide  
show, 304  
editing slide show, 304  
from multiple folders,  
303-304  
from single folder,  
302-303  
creating, 417-420,  
427-428  
narration, recording,  
424-427  
photos, viewing as,  
208-209  
publishing, 428-430  
saving, 420  
Timeline view, 422, 424  
title, adding/editing,  
421-422  
transitions, editing,  
422-423

- viewing
  - with Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC), 216-217
  - troubleshooting, 217
- software requirements for Blu-Ray movies, 163-164
- songs, rating, 385-387. *See also* music; tracks (music)
- Songs view (Music Library), 171
- sound cards, selecting, 45-47
- sound effects, disabling, 78
- SPDIF ports, 45-47
- speaker connections
  - troubleshooting, 74
  - types of, 72
- Speaker settings (Optional Setup), 72-74
- speed
  - of Internet connection types, 355-356
  - of wireless networks, increasing, 357-359
- sports
  - fantasy team players, viewing statistics on, 248-249
  - Fox Sports, 262
  - game statistics, viewing, 232-233, 247
  - On Later menu, 234
  - On Now menu, 225
  - pausing, 227
  - recording, 228-229
    - adding recording time, 240
    - advanced options, 237-239
    - burning DVDs of, 245-246
    - reruns, choosing whether to record, 243
    - resolving conflicts in, 235-237
  - scheduled recordings, 234-235
  - scheduled series
    - recording management, 243-245
  - viewing recording history, 242
  - viewing recording schedule, 242
  - viewing recordings, 240-242
- scores, viewing, 232-233, 247
- sports stories, viewing, 225, 230-231, 250
- sports videos, viewing, 231-232
- viewing, 225-228
- Sports menu, 17, 223-224
- sports stories, viewing, 225, 230-231, 250
- sports videos, viewing, 231-232
- SportsLounge window
  - pausing sports, 227
  - viewing
    - game statistics, 232-233
    - sports, 225
    - sports scores, 232-233
    - sports stories, 230-231
    - sports videos, 231-232
- star ratings. *See* ratings
- StarBand, 356
- starting
  - AOL for Windows Media Center, 265
  - configuring startup, 78-79
  - Windows Anytime Upgrade, 500
  - Windows Media Center, 13-15
  - WMC setup, 55-56
- statistics
  - on fantasy team players, viewing, 248-249
  - game statistics, viewing, 232-233, 247
- stereo cables, 318

- stopping. *See* pausing
- storage space, configuring for TV recordings, 110-112. *See also* hard disks
- Stretch zoom option (DVD movies), 157
- styles for slide shows, selecting, 419-420
- subscribing to TVTonic channels, 278
- surround sound, hardware for, 45-47
- switched digital video (SDV), 97
- switching between program categories, 14
- switching views in Movies Guide, 141
- Sync dialog, 186
- Sync Progress dialog, 187
- synchronizing music with portable media players, 186-187
- System Monitor for Vista, 459
- system RAM requirements, 506
- system requirements. *See* requirements
- system utilities, 456-459

## T

- tags (on photos)
  - explained, 193-195
  - importing, 194, 212
  - inserting in Gallery mode, 404-405
  - reasons for, 394-396
  - viewing photos by, 213
- Tags View (Pictures Library), 193-195, 403
- Tasks feature, 17
- team statistics, viewing, 232-233, 247

television. *See* TV

third-party applications.  
*See* utilities

Thurrott, Paul, 328

TIFF format, 406

time settings. *See* date and  
time settings

Timeline view (AutoMovie),  
422, 424

Tint tool, 414

titles, adding/editing in  
slide shows, 421-422

TLC, 273

tools. *See* utilities

Top Rated menu (Movies  
Guide), 139, 144-145

Touch Up menu, 206-208

track information (music),  
adding, 387-389

tracks (music). *See also*  
songs

album tracks

editing information

about, 173-174

selecting, 171-173

currently playing music  
tracks, viewing details  
of, 170-171

transferring pictures. *See*  
importing, pictures

transitions, editing in slide  
shows, 422-423

Travel Channel, 273

troubleshooting

audio/music playback,  
494-495

AutoPlay menu, 197

burning CDs/DVDs,  
307-311

channel changing, 95

codecs, 495-496

hard disks, 493-494

HDTV, 483-484

MCEs, 333-335

network connection  
problems, 480-483

performance problems, 470  
*disk management*,  
472-477

*display settings*,  
477-480, 484-485

*power management*,  
470-472

Program Guide  
configuration, 101

resources for  
information, 496

scanning for TV signals,  
60-61

speaker connections, 74

TV recording problems,  
491-493

TV tuning problems,  
485-491

viewing slide shows, 217

WMM (Windows Movie  
Maker), 417

zoom settings for DVD  
movies, 157

tuning into FM radio,  
181-182

TV, as display, 54

TV + Movies menu, 16,  
137-138, 250

TV connections to MCEs,  
318-319

TV Manager, 447

TV Pack for Windows Vista  
Media Center, 504

TV Program Guide. *See*  
Program Guide

TV ratings

configuring, 131-132  
explained, 131-134

TV recordings, 110. *See also*  
TV shows

burning to DVD

*data DVDs, creating*,  
299-300

*video DVDs, creating*,  
296-297

*video DVDs, data DVDs*  
*versus*, 295-296

*video DVDs, playing*, 298

configuring settings for,  
110-115, 120-122

custom recordings,  
configuring, 127-129

deleting, 127, 300-302

with Discovery Media  
Center, 273

disk space requirements,  
29, 299

one-touch recording, 115  
saving, 431-433

scheduled recordings,  
viewing, 124-126

scheduling with Program  
Guide, 116

series recordings,  
116-120, 127

troubleshooting, 491-493  
viewing, 122-123

TV settings (Optional  
Setup), 58-59, 61-62

TV Settings menu, 82

TV shows. *See also*  
Program Guide; TV  
recordings

channel listings in  
Program Guide, editing,  
107-109

HDTV, troubleshooting,  
483-484

Internet TV, viewing,  
129-130

MSN TV Today, 285-286

selecting hardware for,  
36-47

*displays*, 44-45

*internal versus external*  
*tuners*, 37-39

*NTSC versus ATSC*  
*tuners*, 39-42

*PCI versus PCI Express*  
*tuners*, 39

*surround sound*, 45-47

*video cards and*  
*integrated video*, 42-44

Showtime, 271-272

utilities, 440-451

viewing, 103-104

*basic cable TV*, 86

*broadcast TV*, 86

*digital broadcast TV*,  
87-88  
*digital cable TV*, 88-91  
*HD cable TV*, 91  
*with Program Guide*,  
104-108  
*satellite TV*, 91  
*troubleshooting*,  
485-491

## TV signals

configuring, 91-93  
*with Digital Cable Tuner*  
(DCT), 97-100  
*manually*, 61  
*with set-top box*, 93-97  
scanning for, 58-61

## TV Toolbox, 447-448

## TV tuners. *See also*

**hardware requirements**,  
**viewing TV shows**  
dual-tuner devices, 237  
multiple TV tuners,  
avoiding recording  
conflicts, 119  
need for, 223  
requirements, 507

## TVTonic, 277-281

adjusting cache size for,  
279-280  
changing viewing  
modes, 281  
subscribing to  
channels, 278  
viewing channels,  
278-279

# U

**“Unable To Add File” error  
message**, 309-310

**underexposed photos**,  
**editing**, 409

**unlisted movies**, **recording**,  
148-150

**unlocking My Movies 2**  
**advanced features**, 158

**upcoming sports programs**,  
**viewing information**  
**for**, 234

## updating

device drivers, 481, 485  
graphics card drivers, 157

## upgrades

clean installs versus,  
507-508  
cost of, 506  
firmware upgrades for  
wireless routers, 330  
Windows Anytime  
Upgrade, 11, 499-501  
Windows Vista Upgrade  
Advisor, 504-507

## upgrading

processors, 23  
RAM, strategies for, 26-27  
routers, 370-371  
Windows Photo Gallery to  
Windows Live Photo  
Gallery, 396-397  
Xbox 360 video support,  
328-329

**uploading photos to AOL  
Pictures**, 268-269

**USB 2.0 hard disks**, 111

**User Account Control**, 439

**user accounts on Windows  
Home Server**, 352

**user interface in WMC**,  
14-16

adding My Movies 2  
software to, 161-162

## utilities

for business and  
information, 461  
*Big Screen Contacts 2*,  
461  
*Big Screen Headlines 2*,  
462  
*Big Screen Weather 2*,  
462  
*mceContacts*, 462  
*mcePhone for Skype*, 462  
*mceTapiRex*, 463  
*mceWeather*, 463  
*My Tracker for MCE*, 463  
*Remind Me for MCE*, 463  
*Vista Caller ID*, 465

*Vista Media Center*

*Email*, 464

*Vista Media Center*

*Outlook*, 464

*Vista Media Center RSS*

*Reader*, 464

*Vista Media Center*

*Video Phone*, 464

donations for, 440

finding documentation  
for, 440

for games, 460

*Accedo Broadband*

*Funspot*, 460

*GameEx*, 461

*MCEJoy*, 461

for hobbies, 466

*Lottery Results SE for*

*MCE*, 467

*mceAuction*, 467

*New Rides for MCE*, 466

for home automation, 465

*HAI Home Control for*

*Windows Media*

*Center*, 465

*Life|Ware*, 466

*mControl*, 466

installing, 439-440

for maps, 454

*Google Maps for Media*

*Center*, 454-455

*My Mapquest for*

*MCE*, 455

for music, 451

*MCE Tunes*, 451

*Music Player*, 453

*RadioTime*, 452

*Web Media for*

*Windows Vista Media*

*Center*, 453

for photography, 453

*Big Screen Photos 2*,

453-454

*Photato*, 454

system utilities, 456

*FrontView for Windows*

*MCE*, 456

*MC Menu CustomiSer*,

457-458

*MCE Customizer*,

456-457

*Media Center Communicator*, 458  
*Media Center Health Monitor*, 458  
*System Monitor for Vista*, 459  
 for video, 440  
*clipShow*, 440-441  
*DVRMSToolbox*, 441-442  
*In the Movies XE for MCE*, 442  
*Joost.com*, 443  
*Lifextender*, 444  
*MCEBuddy*, 444  
*Movie Collector MCE*, 444  
*MSN Remote Record*, 444-445  
*My Blockbuster*, 445  
*My Trailers SE for MCE*, 446  
*My TV to Go*, 446  
*MyNetflix*, 446  
*MyTV Genie*, 446  
*Recorded TV Manager*, 446  
*Recording Broker*, 447  
*TV Manager*, 447  
*TV Toolbox*, 447-448  
*Video Browser for MCE*, 448  
*WebGuide*, 449-450  
*Yougle*, 450-451  
 websites for additional utilities, 467-468

## V

**versions of MCEs**, 316

**video**. *See also* **movies**; **slide shows**; **WMM (Windows Movie Maker)**

codecs, troubleshooting, 495-496  
 converted files, playing in Windows Media Center, 436-439  
 MPEG-2 videos, setting default application for, 437-439  
 MSN TV Today, 285-286

selecting hardware for, 47-48  
 sports videos, viewing, 231-232  
 TVTonic, 277-281  
   *adjusting cache size for*, 279-280  
   *changing viewing modes*, 281  
   *subscribing to channels*, 278  
   *viewing channels*, 278-279  
 utilities, 440-451

**Video Browser for MCE**, 448

**video cards**

requirements, 506  
 selecting, 42-44  
 updating drivers for, 157

**video DVDs**. *See also* **DVDs**

burning, 296-297  
 data DVDs versus, 295-296  
 playing, 298  
 of recorded sports, burning, 245-246

**video support for Xbox 360, upgrading**, 328-329

**viewing**

content types, troubleshooting MCEs, 334  
 details of currently playing music tracks, 170-171  
 episode list (scheduled recordings), 119-120  
 fantasy team player statistics, 248-249  
 game statistics, 232-233, 247  
 HDTV, troubleshooting, 483-484  
 Internet TV, 129-130  
 movies  
   *Blu-Ray movies*, 162-164  
   *DVD movies*, 155-158  
   *from On Now menu*, 141-142  
   *recorded movies*, 153-155

MPEG-2 files, in Windows Media Player, 438  
 photos

*in Date Taken view*, 195-197  
*full-screen*, 202  
*in Folders view*, 190-192  
*in Gallery mode*, 402-403  
*before importing*, 198-199  
*More Pictures menu*, 220  
*with Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC)*, 212-215  
*Picture Details menu*, 204-205  
*Picture Library*, 190-197  
*Pictures + Videos menu*, 189-190  
*in Preview mode*, 407-408  
*RAW files*, 215  
*right-click options*, 202-204  
*as slide show*, 208-209, 217  
*in Tags view*, 193-195  
*troubleshooting*, 217

Playlist pane (WMP), 381

playlists, 292, 382-383

PSD files, 210

queue (of music), 176

RAW files, 29

recorded TV, 122-123

recording history, 242

recording schedule, 242

scheduled recordings, 124-126

slide shows

*with Photoshop Elements for Windows Media Center (PSE-WMC)*, 216-217

*troubleshooting*, 217

sports, 225-228

sports recordings, 240-242

sports scores, 232-233, 247

sports stories, 225,

230-231, 250

sports videos, 231-232  
 TV shows, 103-104  
   *basic cable TV*, 86  
   *broadcast TV*, 86  
   *digital broadcast TV*,  
     87-88  
   *digital cable TV*, 88-91  
   *HD cable TV*, 91  
   *with Program Guide*,  
     104-108  
   *satellite TV*, 91  
   *troubleshooting*, 485-491  
 TVTonic channels,  
 278-279  
 upcoming sports program  
 information, 234

viewing modes for  
 TVTonic, changing, 281  
 views, switching in Movies  
 Guide, 141

Vista. *See* Windows Vista  
 Media Center

Vista Basic Color Scheme,  
 switching to, 477-478

Vista Caller ID, 465

Vista Codec Package, 495

Vista Media Center  
 Email, 464

Vista Media Center  
 Outlook, 464

Vista Media Center RSS  
 Reader, 464

Vista Media Center Video  
 Phone, 464

visualizations  
   configuring, 390-391  
   downloading, 389-390  
   selecting, 169-170

## W

watching. *See* viewing

WDDM (Windows Display  
 Driver Model), 417

We Got Served website, 467

Web Media for Windows  
 Vista Media Center, 453

WebGuide, 449-450

website method for  
 Windows Anytime  
 Upgrade, 501

websites

  roof-mounted antenna  
   information, 102  
   for troubleshooting  
   information, 496  
   TV ratings information,  
   132  
   for utilities, 467-468

WEP encryption (wireless  
 routers), 366

Wide channel settings  
 (wireless routers), 364-365

Windows Anytime  
 Upgrade, 11

  backups before  
   starting, 501  
   benefits of, 499-500  
   Control Panel versus  
   website upgrades, 501  
   starting, 500

Windows Device Manager  
   determining wireless  
   adapter types, 361-362  
   Gigabit Ethernet  
   connections in, 369

Windows Display Driver  
 Model (WDDM), 417

Windows DVD Maker,  
 432-433

Windows Home Server,  
 configuring media  
 sharing, 351-355

Windows Live Photo  
 Gallery, 195. *See also*  
 Windows Photo Gallery  
   advantages of, 393-394  
   Gallery mode

*creating panoramic*  
     *photos*, 405-406  
     *tagging photos*, 404-405  
     *viewing photos*, 402-403  
   importing photos, 397-398  
   *deleting from camera*  
   *after import*, 402

*Import All New Items*  
     *Now option*, 400  
   *Review, Organize, and*  
   *Group Items to Import*  
   *option*, 400-402  
   selecting options for,  
   397-400

Preview mode

*Adjust Color tool*, 414  
   *Adjust Detail tool*, 416  
   *Adjust Exposure tool*,  
     411-413  
   *Auto Adjust tool*, 409  
   *cropping photos*,  
     415-416  
   *Fix Red-eye tool*, 416  
   *viewing photos*, 407-408

upgrading Windows  
 Photo Gallery to,  
 396-397

Windows Media Center.  
*See* WMC

Windows Media Player.  
*See* WMP

Windows Movie Maker.  
*See* WMM

Windows Photo Gallery, 12.  
*See also* Windows Live  
 Photo Gallery  
   advantages of, 393-394  
   upgrading to Windows  
   Live Photo Gallery,  
   396-397

Windows Sidebar, 479-480

Windows Vista  
   comparing edition  
   features, 500  
   configuring media  
   sharing, 347-351  
   MCE versions, 316  
   multimedia features,  
   12-13  
   sharing folders in, 167  
   Windows Media Center  
   and, 11  
   wireless network  
   encryption settings,  
   367-368

Windows Vista Community  
 website, 468



**Windows Vista Transfer Wizard, 507****Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor, 501, 504-507****Windows XP**

- configuring media

- sharing, 338-347

- File and Printer Sharing for Microsoft Networks*, 341-342

- Network Setup Wizard*, 338-341

- Permissions-Based File Sharing*, 346

- Shared Documents folder*, 347

- Simple File Sharing*, 343-346

- MCE versions, 316

- sharing folders in, 167

- wireless network

- encryption settings, 367

**Windows XP Driver Model (XDDM), 417****Windows XP Media Center**

- upgrading to Windows

- Vista, 504-507

- when not to upgrade, 507-508

**Windows XP Media**

- Center Edition, history of WMC, 10**

**wireless adapters**

- determining types of, 361-362

- performance improvements for, 330

- wireless input devices, selecting, 33-36**

- wireless network channels, changing, 331**

**wireless networking connections**

- changing wireless router configuration, 361-368

- checking for interference, 359-361

- connection speed, 261

- determining wireless

- adapter types, 361-362

- increasing signal strength, 357-359

- types of, 356-357

**wireless networks**

- connections to MCEs, 319

- interference, avoiding, 481

- security, 353

**wireless peripherals, range of, 54****wireless routers**

- changing configuration of, 361-368

- firmware upgrades

- for, 330

- IP address,

- determining, 363

- manual login, 362

**Wireless-N networks, 5GHz signaling, 331****WMA (Windows Media Audio) compression format, 30-31****WMC (Windows Media Center), 9**

- advantages with WMP, 375-376

- features of, 9-10, 16-17

- hardware information,

- scanning, 49-50

- hardware options, 33

- checklist for, 50-51*

- for digital video/photos*, 47-48

- for TV/HDTV, 36-47*

- wireless input devices*

- and remote controls*,

- 33-36

- hardware requirements, 20

- hard disks, 28-33*

- processors, 20-23*

- RAM, 24-28*

- history of, 10-11

- MCE setup, 320-324,

- 333-334

- new features, 503-504

- playlists from WMP,

- using, 384

- running with MCEs, 325

- setup

- Optional Setup, 57*

- Optional Setup,*

- completion of, 76-77*

- Optional Setup, Library*

- Setup, 74-76*

- Optional Setup, Optimize*

- Display settings, 63-71*

- Optional Setup, Speaker*

- settings, 72-74*

- Optional Setup, TV*

- settings, 58-62*

- preparation for, 53-55*

- Required Setup, 56-57*

- Settings menu, 77-78, 82*

- Settings menu, high-*

- contrast menus, 80*

- Settings menu, Program*

- Library options, 80*

- Settings menu, rerunning*

- WMC Setup, 80*

- Settings menu, sound*

- effects, 78*

- Settings menu, startup*

- configuration, 78-79*

- starting, 55-56*

- starting, 13-15

- TV Pack, 504

- user interface, 14-16

- Windows Vista and, 11

- Windows Vista

- multimedia features,

- interrelationships with,

- 12-13

**WMC desktop, viewing sports on, 228****WMC remote control**

- advantages of, 93

- configuring, 95-97

**WMC user interface, 14, 16**

- adding My Movies 2

- software to, 161-162

**WMM (Windows Movie Maker), 12, 417**

- advantages of, 393-394
- downloading previous version of, 417
- saving TV recordings, 431-433
- slide shows
  - audio, adding, 420-421*
  - audio, overlaying with narration, 426-427*
  - creating, 417-420, 427-428*
  - narration, recording, 424-427*
  - publishing, 428-430*
  - saving, 420*
  - Timeline view, 422, 424*
  - title, adding/editing, 421-422*
  - transitions, editing, 422-423*
- troubleshooting, 417

**WMP (Windows Media Player), 12, 375**

- advantages with WMC, 375-376
- album art, adding, 387-389
- audio ripping,
  - configuring, 376-380
- genres, editing, 388
- playlists
  - creating, 380-382*
  - editing, 382-383*
  - using in WMC, 384*
- songs, rating, 385-387
- track information,
  - adding, 387-389
- viewing MPEG-2 files
  - in, 438
- visualizations, 389-391

**WMPhoto format, 406**

- workgroup name,
  - determining, 339

- WPA encryption (wireless routers), 366-368

**X-Z****Xbox 360 as MCE**

- adding remote control to, 327-328
- configuring, 326-327
- models of, 325-326
- network connections
  - for, 319
- upgrading video support, 328-329
- versions of, 316

**Xbox 360 Universal Media Remote, 328****XDDM (Windows XP Driver Model), 417**

- Years view (Music Library), 172

- Yoogle, 450-451

- ZIP files, 439

- zoom settings for DVD movies, 156-158

- Zoom option (DVD movies), 157