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Charles Moore Reviews iVCD Video Compact Disk Authoring Utility

By: **Charles W. Moore** on Jun 04, 04 | 12:41 am
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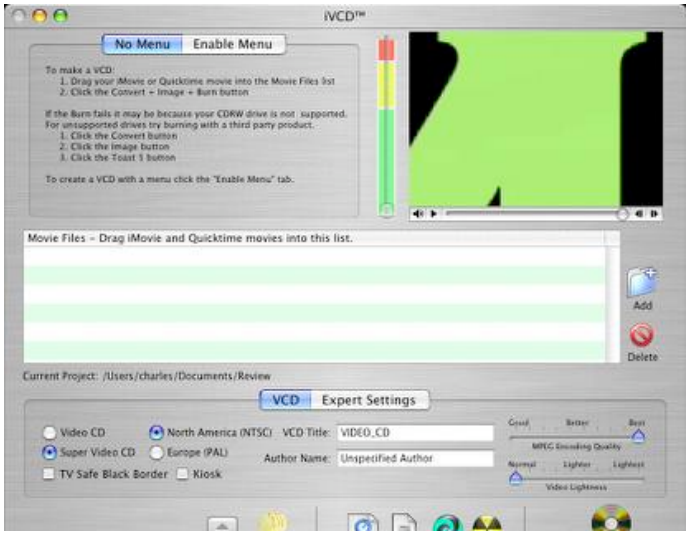
Video CD is a video format that uses ordinary recordable CD media to store movies instead of using a DVD or a VHS tape. Despite the ascendence of DVD-R, there are still some advantages that inhere with the Video CD (VCD)VCD's offer poorer video quality and much more modest interactive capabilities than DVDs, but they hold 1 hour or more of audio and video encoded in MPEG-1 (supported by QuickTime), and also have the significant advantages of being burnable on a standard CD-R as well as much cheaper media and hardware costs.

Most DVD players can play the format and because VCD's are supported by QuickTime, it is an ideal cross-platform video solution for any moderately fast computer with a CD-ROM drive.

iVCD is a VCD authoring utility that allows you to easily make Video CDs and Super Video CDs on Mac OS X. With Super Video CD (MPEG-2) format, you can expect to get about 30 minutes of video on a CD with better than VHS tape quality playback.



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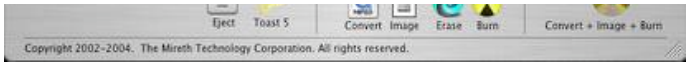

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svcd.ws

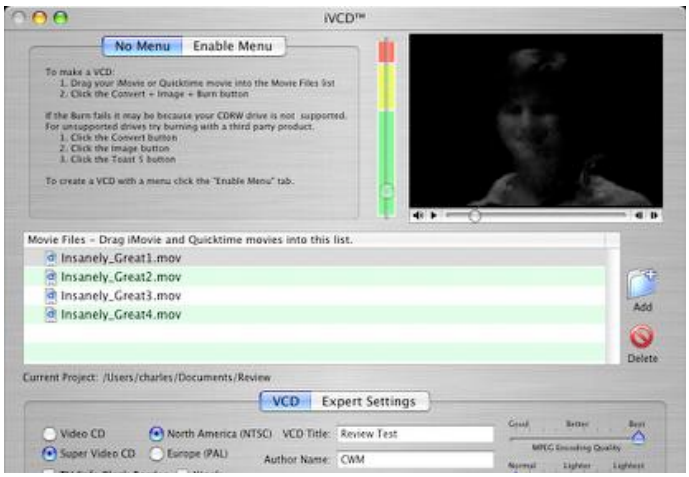
iVCD creates Video CDs from iMovie, Quicktime or .AVI movie files, and can be used to author Video CDs (MPEG-1), Super Video CDs (MPEG-2), XVCDs orXSVCDs and supports both NTSC and PAL output formats. It also supports playlists and menus. With iVCDT, each movie you make is stored in a separate project folder, so you can easily make additional copies of your home movies or corporate training videos.

Conveniently, iVCD also plays .mov files, previews encoded MPEG, and erases CDRWs. Other features include creating Kiosk VCDS, lightening video and rescuing videoclipped on the TV screen.

Features include:

- Authors Video CD (VCD) or Super Video CD (SVCD), XVCDs and XSVCDs
- Works with iMovie, Quicktime and AVI Movies
- Converts to MPEG-1, MPEG-2 or generic MPEG
- Supports play lists and menus
- Special features such as Kiosk mode, Lighten video, and variable MPEG encoding quality
- TV Safe Border effect for rescuing video that appears clipped on the TV screen
- Supports NTSC and PAL output
- Easy-to-use
- drag and drop interface and one-step convert+image+burn operation
- Keeps a project folder so multiple copies of VCDs can be easily made
- Erase CD-RWs
- Plays movies (.mov) and previews encoded MPEG
- Works with G3 or later CPUsVersion 2.0 (April 2004) added the following:
- Video CD Playlists and Menus for authoring Video CDs that include a menu so you can make a more interactive presentation
- One-Step Video CD Convert+Image+Burn operation
- TV Safe Border effect for rescuing videos that appear clipped to the TV Screen
- Kiosk mode for making VCD that play continously
- Lighten video effect to lighten up movies that appear too dark when encoded as MPEG
- Encoded MPEG Preview using the Movie window
- Improved performance through enhanced threading
- Support for more CD-RW drives with Apple Disk Recording APIs (requires OS X 10.3)

iVCD proved simple and intuitive to use, and worked nicely with the **FastMac (Matsushita mechanism) SuperDrive module** in my Pismo.



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The iVCD screen consists of six parts,

- the Menu tabs for making VCDs with menus or without
- the Green/Amber/Red capacity indicator bar for avoiding overburning the CD
- the movie window for viewing the movie
- the movie list for adding movies and playlists to your project
- the project settings tabs for configuring the settings for each project
- the function buttons

Burning a Simple VCD with iVCD

Burning simple VCDs is what this program is likely to be most used for. (A simple VCD will just play all of the videos on it sequentially.) Proceed as follows:

1. Launch iVCD, and from the Project Folder Dialog, select: Create Project.

2. Name the new project folder.

3. Select Video CD to produce MPEG1 VCDs.

4. Select Video Type

North America (NTSC) Select NTSC if you plan to watch your Video CDs on a television that uses the North American standard. This includes the USA, Canada and many countries outside of Europe.

Select PAL if you plan to watch your Video CDs on a television that uses the European standard. This includes the England, France, Germany and other European countries.

5. Using the Finder, drag the movie or movies you want to include on your VCD burn into the iVCD Movie Files List. As you add movies to the Movie List, pay attention to the Green/Amber/Red indicator bar at the top of the iVCD screen which indicates how full the CD is. Try to keep the indicator below the red area to prevent overburning the CD.

6. Click the one-step Convert + Image + Burn button. Note that converting to MPEG takes a long time, (at least four times as long as the movie length and even longer on slower machines).

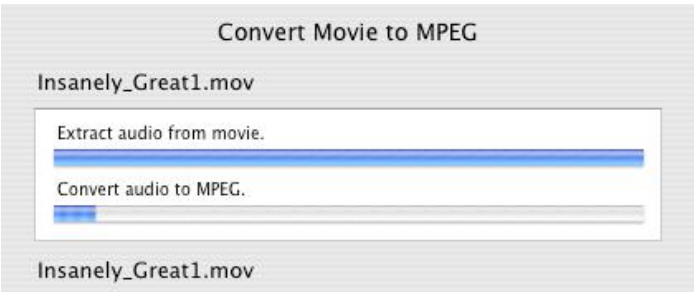
7. Insert a blank CDRW or CDR.

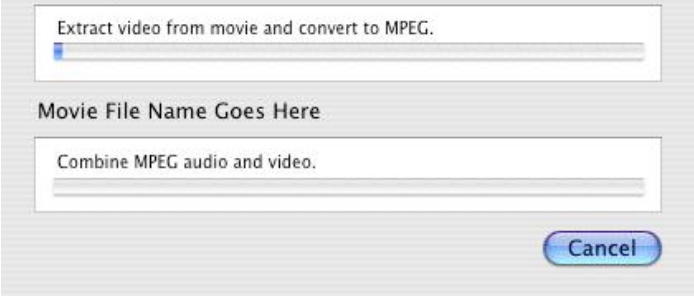
8. Once the burn process has completed successfully, play the VCD to test it. Mireth's MacVCD player can be purchased from their Website, there are third-party VCD players, or you can play the VCD on your component DVD player.

MacVCD can play Video CDs and Quicktime movies on an OS X Macintosh, featuring full screen playback, floating window playback, automatic VCD format recognition and file chaining, auto play and auto eject, save VCD track as Quicktime movie, basic editing (remove commercials or make a favorite scenes movie), Movie Controller and Keyboard control, track selection, support for both multi-language and karaoke sound tracks.

You can download MacVCD here:
http://www.mireth.com/text/macvcd_sp.html

One bug I encountered in iVCD was that after the burn was completed, the "Convert Movie To MPEG" window refused to respond to its "Cancel" button, and the only way I found to get rid of it was to quit and restart the program. Not a fatal glitch, because the burned VCD ejected and then played fine upon reinsertion, but an inconvenience.

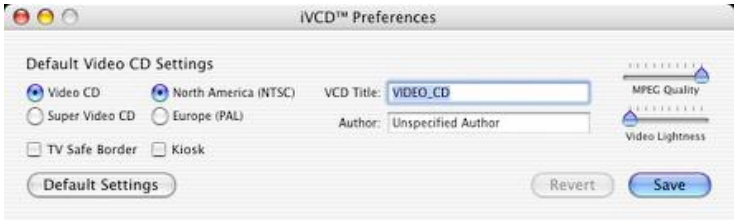




Be aware that this is not a quick process, especially if you have a slower Mac. Burning four small test .mov files totaling about 4.5 MB to a CD-RW disk (highest MPEG encoding level) took more than half an hour on my 550 MHz G4 Pismo with 640 MB of RAM. Burning the same four files in SuperVCD format took more than twice as long, Things should go somewhat quicker on faster Macs.

For each VCD, iVCD stores all the input information, the settings, and created files, in a project folder. Storing all of this makes it easy to pick up where you left off if you dont have time to finish your project in one sitting and it also makes it easy to create more copies of a Video CD. However, I found it mildly annoying that the program obliges you to either create a new project folder or open an existing one upon every startup.

The Green/Amber/Red capacity indicator bar is provided to avoid overburning the CD. As you add movies to the Movie List, the Green/Amber/Red indicator bar indicates how full the CD is. Mireth advises keeping the indicator below the red area to prevent overburning the CD.



You can change VCDs default preference settings in the preferences panel. For more information, refer to the iVCD Read Me included in the documentation folder.

iVCD can be used to burn VCDs with menus. Instead of playing the video, a VCD with a menu displays a menu that allows the user to select which video track to play. Optionally, you can set a default action in case a selection is not made. I found this the least intuitive feature of iVCD, and it is necessary to read the instructions carefully.

To burn a VCD with menu:

1. From the Project Folder Dialog, select Create Project. Name the new project folder.

2. Set the CD Type (see options in the section on burning simple VCDs above)

3. Add a Menu movie to the project and configure it as your menu movie. Drag the movie into the iVCD Movie Files List. In the Movie Files Lists, select movie name and click the large menu button, titled No Menu on the Enable Menu tab to configure it as your menu movie. Once you have successfully configured the menu movie, the name of the movie will be displayed on this button.

4 Put the Content to the project.

5. Add a Playlist for each of your movies. To add a playlist, Click the Add button to the right of the Movie Files list. In the Movie List a new playlist will appear with a folder icon. Beside the icon, type in a name

for the playlist. Name them PL1, PL2, PL3, PL4, etc.

6. Put the Content into the playlists. Using the Movie List, drag one of your movies in to each of the playlists.

7 Map the Content to the menu. Using the Enable Menu tab, map each of the four PlaylistsPL1, PL2, PL3 and PL4.... to the four buttons 1, 2, 3 and 4..... In the movie list, select the play list you want to play when a particular button is pressed (select PL1 for 1, PL2 for 2, etc.) Click the corresponding button from the Mapping buttons on the Menu tab. Once you have successfully selected a playlist, the playlist name will be displayed when you pass the cursor over the corresponding button. Repeat until all four of the selections in the Movie menu are mapped to a corresponding playlist.

10. Click the one-step Convert + Image + Burn button.

11. Insert a blank CDRW or CDR.

12. Once the burn process has completed successfully, play the VCD to test it.

You can play a VCD using a component DVD player. To Play a VCD in a component DVD player, treat it just like you would a DVD. To play a Super VCD, try MACVCD or a third-party player.

Playing a VCD on a Macintosh computer depends on the version of the operating system:

To play a VCD on an OS 8 or OS 9 computer, you can use Quicktime (included with the operating system), or a third-party Video CD player, such as Mireth Technologys MacVCD.

You can play a Super VCD on an OS 8 or OS 9 Macintosh using Quicktime with the additional purchase of Apple Quicktime MPEG-2 component, available from Apples Web Site.

To play a VCD on an OS X computer, you can use Mireth Technologys MacVCD X, which will also play Super VCDs, with the additional purchase of Apple Quicktime MPEG-2 component, available from Apples Web Site.

Other iVCD Features

In addition to burning VCD with or without menus, iVCD has several other features.

Looping Menus
If you use an animated instead of a still movie menu, youll want the menu to loop a few times. To configure this, use the looping controls at the top of the Enable Menu tab.

Default Action for VCDs with Menus
You can configure an action that will take place if the menu times-out because no selection is made by the user. For example, this action could be to play all the movies. To configure this, use the looping controls at the top of the Enable Menu tab.

Movie Player Window
iVCD allows you to play a movie (.mov) file as well as preview encoded MPEG files. (SuperVCD MPEG preview, requires the Apple MPEG-2 Playback Component.)

iVCD creates VCDs, Super VCDs, xVCDs and xSVCDs. Using the VCD Settings Tab, iVCDTM allows you to make VCDs or Super VCDs. To create xVCDs and xSVCDs, use the Expert Settings tab.Video Types. iVCDTM supports both NTSC and PAL output formats

TV Safe Black Border Feature
Unlike computer monitors, televisions do not display the complete picture. Television defines two areas, called the Action Safe Area, which occupies the middle 95% of the screen, and the Title Safe Area, which occupies the middle 90% of the screen. Action on the edges of the screen may be clipped if they fall outside the Action Safe Area. Similarly for Titles. If you did not take these safe areas into account when you made your video, you may get some clipping of action or text on some TV screens. Rather than going back and redoing your movie, tick the iVCD TV Safe Black Border effect and iVCD will shrink your video into the Action Safe Area. For most video this will result in acceptable display on a television.

Kiosk Mode Feature
VCDs intended for use in information Kiosks need to play continuously. To enable continuous playback, tick this box. The resulting VCD will play in a continuous loop.

MPEG Encoding Quality Slider
Slide this lever to the left to reduce the time it takes to encode an MPEG. The better the quality of the MPEG encoding, the longer it takes to encode.

Video Lightness Feature
Sometimes encoded MPEG video appears darker than your original movie. If the encoded movie is too dark, you can adjust the lightness and re-encode the video so that the resulting MPEG appears brighter.

Generic MPEG Encoding
iVCD can be used as a batch MPEG encoder. You can adjust the frame size to suit your application. The advantage of creating a generic MPEG is that it is cross-platform and high quality.

CDRW Erase Button Feature
Click to erase a CDRW.

In summary, there are three reasons why Video CDs are an ideal medium for home movies and corporate videos:

VCDs are inexpensive to produce. They can be produced at home or in the office, requiring only VCD authoring software, a CD burner and a CD. CDs are is less expensive than DVDs and usually less expensive than VHS tape.

VCDs are inexpensive to distribute. CDs are not only less expensive to ship than VHStape, they are also more robust than VHS tape, reducing replacement costs.

VCDs are convenient to play. They can be played in component DVD players, component VCD players and in both Windows and Macintosh computers, making them fairly platform-independent and easily played by most DVD hardware, whether DVD player or computer.

iVCD is a user friendly and economical way to create Video CDs on your Mac. If, for example, you're looking for a medium for storing, presenting, and sharing your digital video movies, VCDs are well worth considering. The 60 minute playing time ceiling would not usually be an issue for this sort of content, and frankly, I've never considered the necessity of swapping disks midway a major hardship with VCD movies. Gives one a break to grab a snack and/or attend to other matters.

System Requirements
To run iVCD you need
Macintosh G3 or later
Mac OS X version 10.2 or later

Price
$29.95 download only
$39.95 on CD

For more information, visit:
http://www.mireth.com

COMMENTS

Posted by: Dan Johnson on Jun 04, 04 | 12:35 pm
Not having used programs of this sort it sounds very interesting. Just curious how it compares with Quick Time Pro ? Does anybody know ? The two programs are the same price $29.95...just wondering if anyone could compare them ?

Posted by: Zack Brock on Jun 06, 04 | 9:12 pm
That's a good question Dan.

I didn't realize QuickTime Pro could be used to make a VCD. Do you have a tutorial on this process? Thanks!

Posted by: Charles W. Moore on Jun 07, 04 | 12:15 am
Hi Dan and Zack;

I haven't used a recent version of QuickTime Pro. This tutorial makes it sound as if creating VCDs with QT Pro would be a lot more hassle than doing it with iVCD:
http://desktopvideo.about.com/cs/makingvcds/

Charles

Posted by: Dan Johnson on Jun 07, 04 | 8:44 am
According to the folks at Mireth QT PRO is more of an editing application not a VCD producing app. I tired iVCD and found it works quite nicely. It is strictly for making a VCD, no editing, just bring your editied files and iVCD will make a VCD for you. My $40 DVD player played both the VCD and SVCD with out any problem.

Posted by: sjk on Jun 10, 04 | 4:06 am
Another option is VCD Builder (freeware) tho' iVCD is certainly more featureful.

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