

## Film downloads help buffs discover movies at home

A perfect couch potato set-up, with chips and the remote in easy reach, is pointless when there's nothing good on TV. But where a lack of good TV would have once meant running to the video store, nowadays home viewers can turn on their computer to download one of their favourite movies.

Mail movie rentals via online services have been around for a while. But now those services are diversifying into direct downloads onto personal computers.

Many of these 'video on demand' services have long since worked the kinks out of their systems, says Nico Jurrán of Hanover-based c't magazine.

'Nowadays, almost everyone has a connection with the necessary data transfer rates.' Downloads should work fine with a connection of four Megabits (MBit) a second. 'Theoretically, you could get by with a slower connection, but then it takes longer.'

Downloading a movie doesn't require a particularly powerful computer. Any standard, modern PC will do. Most computers need Windows Media Player to run the movies.

'Some vendors have their own playback software, which can be downloaded for free,' adds Jurrán.

A comprehensive menu lets customers pick from various categories.

Searches can also be performed alphabetically or by genre, such as action or comedy. There are also documentaries, children's movie packages, which give customers a large selection of movies on a monthly rental basis.

'Technical limitations are a big drawback of video on demand services,' says Jurrán.

Usually, movies have to be watched on a computer. Transferring the download to a television requires special graphics cards, specific ports and cables. A set-top box can broadcast a video directly from the computer to a TV.

'Eventually, films will be broadcast only on the Internet,' says Tobias Kollmann, professor of electronic business at the University of Duisburg-Essen.

Eventually, conventional video rental shops will lose out to online competitors, a fate they must see looming.

'This is the same battle that the music industry is fighting unsuccessfully,' Kollmann points out.

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