My 2008 Video New Year's Resolution

My New Years resolution for 2008 is to greatly reduce the number of video tapes that occupy way too much space in our small house. (I'll keep commercial tapes, it's the home recorded ones that need to go.) I've been successfully converting VHS tapes to DVD for some time, but I recently began to wonder if there isn't a better way. My new DVD player will play Xvid and Divx encoded AVI files, as will both Windows Media Player and Sage TV as long as the Xvid or Divx codec is installed. This is a better compression algorithm than Mpeg2, especially for a relatively low quality source such as a VHS tape. So after some experimenting and the usual hair pulling associated with digital video, I have the problem solved and a pretty efficient workflow. The best thing is that the additional software I needed was free!

As usual, I capture material from VHS tapes into Sony Vegas using a Canopus ADVC-100 external analog video to firewire converter. Vegas is probably overkill for removing commercials from old TV shows, but I'm use to it and can work really fast. Unfortunately, Vegas does not recognize either Xvid or Divx even though I have the codecs installed on my editing box. I render the edited files in Vegas to DV_AVI. I then use Dr. DivX to batch encode the files to DivX. The resultant compact files are then burned as data onto DVDs. I can play these in any of our computers, or in the Phillips set top DVD player, or copy them over to Mike the TV's hard drive for playing via Sage TV. Very versatile. It looks like I'm getting a data rate of slightly less than 10 MB per minute of video. This means I can put around 7 hours of video on a 4.3 GB DVD with very decent quality. I'm happy!

You, too, can take advantage of this delightful technology. Here is what you have to do:

1. Get the DivX codec
http://www.divx.com/

You will have to use the "Divx For Windows" package, around 23 MB. When you install, chose only the codec, you won't need anything else. Note that the Divx converter is a 15 day trial.

2. You need Dr. DivX which is better than the DivX converter and is free. Go here:
http://labs.divx.com/DrDivX

Be forewarned that both of these installs will trigger your firewall (You ARE running a firewall if you are connected to the internet, right?) but they don't really pose a risk. The Dr. Divx site has documentation, FAQs and even a users' forum, so it is worth checking out. Also note that Dr. Divx will accept just about any video format out there, you don't have to feed it DV_AVI files. Finally, as some of you know I'm a big fan of SUPER C. Well, it let me down on this project. For some reason it would quit about 5 minutes into any of the DV_AVI files I fed it. Too bad, but Dr. Divx is really nice!