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KWorld USB Dual DVB-T HD Stick

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KWorld's USB Dual DVB-T HD stick turns your desktop or laptop computer into a digital TV set. Its dual TV tuners allow you to watch or record two digital TV channels at the same time. It also has access to the digital channels that broadcast in High Definition (HD) formats.

Tags: KWorld, TV Tuner, DVB-T

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First Looks: KWorld USB Dual DVB-T HD Stick

Reviewed by Vincent Chang on Tue, 12 Oct 2010

Seeing Double

Recent developments by Apple and Google - Apple TV and Google TV - have brought a renewed interest in television. Of course, what Apple and Google are proposing have more to do with harnessing internet TV streaming services for your daily fix. Here in Singapore, where such popular TV streaming services like Hulu and Netflix are unavailable, these solutions are less attractive. Instead, the traditional cable channels rule the roost, though there are a handful of free-to-air TV channels available, including a HD channel from the local broadcaster, MediaCorp.

It's Really HD Capable

These are the channels that KWorld's TV tuner solutions give access to us, like the USB dual DVB-T HD stick that we are looking at today. Yes, like its name suggest, this relatively small USB stick contains the electronics for two DVB-T TV tuners, which means one can view two different digital channels simultaneously with this device. Not only that, it supports up to 1080i HD content, so one can even view free-to-air HD channels like MediaCorp's HD5. Targeted at users who wish to watch and record their TV programs on a PC or notebook, this USB TV tuner stick is a handy, portable option.

Inside the package, you'll find the USB TV tuner stick along with accessories like a small remote, antenna and the bundled software.

Given such claims, one can be forgiven that this small device is capable of doing all that. Except that such USB TV tuner sticks are in fact rather common, with a few manufacturers offering similar products in the market. Hence, it's not the technology and hardware that will determine which brand emerges top. It's the software. In case you still have lingering doubts, KWorld's USB stick supports DXVA, so a decent graphics card would be able to share the processing burden required for HD. KWorld also has a list of minimum system requirements for HD channels that you can check, though any non-netbook system within the last two years should have no issues. Windows from XP onwards is supported, along with Windows Media Center.

The CPU utilization for viewing HD channels was one of the first things we tested and as you can see from the screen capture below, the KWorld USB TV tuner managed to juggle two channels including one HD while taxing our quad-core processor moderately. Naturally, results will vary with different systems, but we believe that most users will find a smooth and lag-free experience.

CPU utilization was sufficiently low and hovered between 20 - 30% on a mid-range quad-core processor, even with two TV channels (one of which was HD) running simultaneously. The UI at the top right hand corner is KWorld's TiVme. Click for larger image.

It's the Software

Besides the USB stick, KWorld includes the antenna, a remote control and a software bundle which includes CyberLink's PowerDirector 7. Installation was straightforward - plug in the USB stick and then the driver CD. You'll get the option to install the drivers and the TV viewing application (TiVme) separately, but unless you already have a choice of media portal/hub software, you should try KWorld's TiVme.

While the user interface does have a translucency effect in Windows 7, it could do with a bit more polish. The TiVme application too works as advertised. First, we scanned for the local channels. Then we tried the recording schedule, played with the time-shifting, checked Teletext and used Electronic Program Guide and didn't encounter any issues. You can even record in PS and TS (Transport stream) formats, though H.264 is the default. The remote control on the other hand barely passed our minimum expectations for such a device, though again one can't expect too much for a portable TV tuner.

Final Thoughts

KWorld has done a very decent job with this dual DVB-T HD stick and it runs two channels like a champ on our test system. It gets the job done with little fuss and those who travel often may find it useful to grab any free-to-air channels on their notebooks while commuting. The only problem is the lack of content locally and that's not something this tiny device can solve.

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