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Create the ultimate home theater!

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QUE®

Mark Edward Soper



Home Theater



Online Media



Music



Games

Unleashing Microsoft Windows Vista Media Center

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About the Author

Mark Edward Soper has taught computer troubleshooting and other technical subjects to thousands of students from Maine to Hawaii since 1992. Mark is the author of nine books, most recently *Maximum PC Microsoft Windows Vista Exposed*, and coauthor of nine books, most recently *Upgrading and Repairing Networks*, 5th Edition. He is a longtime contributor to *Upgrading and Repairing PCs*, working on the 11th through 18th editions. He has contributed chapters to *Upgrading and Repairing Networks Second Edition*, *Special Edition Using Microsoft Windows Millennium Edition*, *Special Edition Using Microsoft Windows XP* (all editions) and *Special Edition Using Microsoft Windows Vista*. Mark is currently writing *Upgrading and Repairing PCs: A+ Certification Study Guide*, 3rd Edition. He is a regular contributor to *Maximum PC* magazine and website and has contributed chapters to *Maximum PC Guide to Building a Dream PC* and *Maximum PC Ultimate PC Performance Guide*.

Dedication

For the newest member of the family, Clara Louise Soper, who will grow up in a world of digital media without boundaries.

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Introduction

In This Introduction

- [Maximizing the Potential of Windows Vista's Multimedia Control Center](#)
 - [How This Book Is Organized](#)
-

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.

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.

The number of photos for the month is listed at bottom center. The numbers in the bottom-right corner refer to the timespan of the collection in months (in this example, 56), and the selected month (the 14th month).

"Date Taken"—What It Means and What It Doesn't

The Date Taken view is designed to help digital photographers track down their favorite photos by the dates they were taken. For this feature to work properly, your digital camera must have the proper date and time settings. And, no, I'm *not* referring to that annoying date and time stamp you find on some digital pictures.

Whenever you take a picture with a digital camera, the camera creates a file, just like a computer does (hence my favorite one-line explanation of what a digital camera is: "a computer that takes pictures"). Like any good computer, the digital camera stores the date and time (down to the second) when it saves the picture to flash memory, CD, DVD, or floppy disk. So how does the digital camera know what time it is?

When you first set up a digital camera, you're supposed to dutifully go through every setup menu listed on the display on the rear of the digital camera and adjust settings as desired. One of the most important settings is the date and time. If this information is not set correctly when you start using the camera, each and every photo you take will list the wrong date and time. I teach digital photography classes, and I find students in every opening class session whose cameras are set to the wrong date and time.

In addition to just forgetting to set this information, another common mistake digital camera newbies make is forgetting that digital cameras, like any other type of computer, use a 24-hour clock. Thus, if you're setting up a brand-new camera at 7:02PM, the correct time is *not* 7:02, but 19:02. (You add 12 hours to a time in AM to calculate the 24-hour clock equivalent.) What happens if you don't set the date and time information at all? The camera calculates the date and time from the manufacturer's internal default, which could be any date and time selected by the manufacturer. The one thing all digital cameras have in common as far as internal default date and time settings are concerned is that they're always in the past, and therefore, they're always *wrong*.

So, if you set the date and time when you first set up your camera, are you home free from now on? Unfortunately, no. Some digital cameras retain date and time information in a non-volatile RAM chip, so when you swap batteries, the date and