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The Complete Guide to Ripping and Converting Flash Videos

Whether you want to save and watch a Flash video offline, convert a Flash music video for your MP3 player, or do something else entirely, learning how to rip and convert Flash videos is a useful skill. Here's how it works.

When it comes to ripping Flash videos, there's more than one way to accomplish the task, and in many cases it depends greatly on where you're grabbing the video. We'll cover a number of different options for downloading Flash videos, as well as several ways you can convert them into more useful formats. Once you've seen the options, you can choose the one that works best for you and your situation.

Downloading the Flash Video

Most online videos these days use the FLV format to store the actual video files, so our first task is to get a copy of that file. Some sites, like YouTube, will offer an MP4 download in certain cases, but if not, the FLV file can be converted in the next step to a more usable format, so let's concentrate on getting the file downloaded.

The easiest way to download any video from the majority of online video sites is with the Video DownloadHelper extension for Firefox. Once you've installed the extension, head to any video page, and then click the DownloadHelper button button (see screenshot below) to see a list of the available media to download on that page. The extension provides a built-in method for converting video files, but they will end up watermarked, so just download the files in MP4 if possible, or FLV if not.

By The How-To Geek

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If the Video DownloadHelper extension doesn't detect the video on the page, you can sometimes head into Tools -> Page Info -> Media, find the video file in the list of resources, and then click the Save As button. If you are a Linux user, you can also just wait until a Flash video is entirely loaded, and then grab the file from your /tmp folder.

Alternatively, you can use Orbit Downloader, which seems to work best in Internet Explorer—just move your mouse over the video until the GetIt button shows up, and then select the video to download. In our testing, this method worked in an instance or two where the Firefox extension did not. Another solid choice is TubeMaster++, which actually scans network traffic to grab videos, works on Windows or Linux, and can convert to any format—but it doesn't really work with a wireless network card.

Downloading YouTube Videos

You can't talk about ripping Flash videos from the web without giving special attention to YouTube, since much more specialized tools are available for easily downloading and converting video from YouTube in a single step.

The single easiest Windows tool I've found for downloading and ripping YouTube videos is the YouTube Downloader application, which is as simple to use as pasting in the URL and clicking the OK button. Once it downloads the video, you can switch the radio button and convert the video into almost any format—in fact, you can use this tiny application to convert almost any video (YouTube or not) into almost any popular format.

If you'd rather not use a separate piece of software, you can use the Get YouTube Video bookmarklet, or any number of specialized sites like KickYouTube, KeepVid, deturl, or Vixy to download and rip videos from YouTube or some other sites. The problem with most of these types of sites is that they go up and down, and often end up covered in sleazy ads that trick you into clicking the wrong thing—though Vixy seems to be a solid option, for now.

Converting Flash Video to Other Formats (Video or Music)

Once you've got the Flash video downloaded, you'll probably want to convert it into a format that's easier to use on other devices (like, say, your iPod). If you're using the YouTube Downloader or one of the video ripping sites you can download and convert in one step, but if you downloaded from elsewhere you will probably want to convert them.

To convert almost any video into almost any format, I like using the free Format Factory utility; it easily handles every video conversion task you can

throw at it, including bulk conversion, which comes in very handy if you want to convert a bunch of YouTube music videos into MP3 files. Just open up the utility, choose your desired format on the left, add the files or folders you want to convert, and then click the Start button. It's got many advanced formatting options available if you want them, but in our testing the defaults usually work fairly well.

On the other hand, instead of installing a conversion utility, you can always grab yourself a copy of the command-line ffmpeg utility, which is what most video conversion applications use behind the scenes. To convert FLV to another video format like MP4, just use a command line similar to this one:

```
ffmpeg -i filename.FLV -qmin 2 -qmax 5 -ar 22050 filename.MP4
```

The qmin and qmax parameters are important for making sure the quality of video is good—the lower the parameters, the better the quality. The -ar parameter is the quality of the audio, and the extension of the filename on the last parameter tells ffmpeg what format to convert the file into. For instance, to convert a flash video to MP3, you could use something like the following:

```
ffmpeg -i filename.FLV -ar 44100 filename.MP3
```

If all the command-line options are too much for you to deal with, you can always grab a graphical front-end for ffmpeg, like WinFF or Super.

What about you? What's your favorite method for downloading and ripping Flash videos? Share your thoughts and expertise in the comments.

The How-To Geek thinks everybody should watch this FarmVille parody. His geeky articles can be found daily here on Lifehacker, How-To Geek, and Twitter.

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