How to solve common video problems

Have you ever had problem looking at a video you downloaded from the Internet? Have you had Windows media player crash on you? Have you had videos play without sound or freeze in the middle of a movie? Your computer probably has hundreds of Codecs installed and most likely a few of these are broken or obsolete and are causing you problems.

Are you having video problems?

My name is Fredrik Lönn and I am the author of the Fast Video Indexer software (http://www.fastvideoindexer.com). The most common video support issue I get again and again is problems caused by codecs.

Read on to learn how you can solve these problems yourself so that video programs will work as intended on your computer. Now let's get started.

What are DirectShow filters?

Direct Show is the name of the most common system in Windows to play videos. Most Windows software, like Windows Media Player, uses DirectShow to decode and play video files. Codecs in DirectShow are called filters.

Things that can and does go wrong with DirectShow

A component based system like Direct Show is extremely powerful. One of the biggest benefit with this system is that you can add support for new better video formats without updating all your video programs. The downside is that many things can go wrong. Let me try to explain, and give you a simple common example.

Windows applications ask Windows what types of codecs are installed on the computer and for which type. When more than one codec is installed for a type of video compression the application can ask in which order it should try the codecs. If you have two DVD movie player programs installed on your computer they typically each come with their own mpeg codec as mpeg decoding is at the core of the DVD player. Each DVD player program will specifically ask to use its own MPEG codec when it playbacks DVD movies. But other programs, like Fast Video Indexer, could really use either of the installed codecs. When a video program has to ask Windows for an MPEG codec it will get one of the two, most likely the codec from the last installed DVD player program.

Say that last DVD player program you installed wasn't any good and you eventually uninstalls it. Now, depending on the installer the MPEG codec of the first DVD player could be the default one on your computer, you might not have a default mpeg codec anymore or you can have entries pointing to the recently removed codec, a bad thing for sure.

Only install new codecs if you really need to

First of all, if you do not have problems with codecs you should Not install new ones. Don't mess with what is already working. Just because something is new does not say it's better. Even the best of programmers regularly introduces new bugs, this is especially true for complicated software like Direct Show filters.

Installing the latest codecs

If you have problems with a specific video file start by upgrading the codec for that video file. Some file extensions (.avi for example) only say that the file is a video file but it can use a number of different compressions. You can only tell which codec is required by looking inside the file using a tool.

.wmv and .wma files

If you have problems with .wmv and .wma files you can download codecs to play them from Microsoft. These video formats should be included with Windows Media Player. Some European versions of Windows does however not include Windows media player and therefore they don't have the required codecs installed.

.ra files

.ra files are usually played with the Real Player. I would recommend that you instead of the Real Player download the Real Alternative that only includes the needed codec. The standard Real Player does not support using any other program to access the ra video file, it does not have any DirectShow filters.

.vob, .mpeg2

.Vob and .mpeg2 are the formats used by DVD movies.

.qt

.Qt is the QuickTime extension. QuickTime is really a container format that handles many formats including mpeg4.

What you need to download and install

If you are a professional user and have a machine that you use to make your videos I would not install more codecs than absolutely necessary. The codecs you need should have been included with your video software. Try to upgrade the software and look for support from your software vendor.

I personally stick to the k-lite codec pack. It includes just about all codecs you need and it's free. The k-lite pack is also well tested and the installer automatically checks for a number of known issues with other codecs you might have on your computer. (I am in no way affiliated with the makers of this codec pack).

Download k-lite Free from here : *http://www.codecguide.com/download_kl.htm*

How to solve codec issues without installing a codec pack

Included with k-lite is a something called the **codec tweak tool**. You can download that software by itself and run it on your computer.

Download for Free from here: http://www.codecguide.com/download_other.htm

The codec tweak tool will scan your registry to detect and remove broken references to codecs and filters. It can generate a list of the codecs you have installed on your computer and you can manually enable/disable more than 200 codecs and filters.

Step by step guide

So to summarize here are the steps I recommend you to follow to solve your video codec issues:

Uninstall previously installed codec packs.

Install the latest version of the k-lite codec pack.

Run the Codec tweak tool.