**DVD now a camera accessory**

Anthony Fordham

The Australian

JULY 13, 2004

THE role of the PC and local photo lab in displaying digital photos is about to be usurped – by your DVD player. Consumer electronics manufacturers are integrating data card slots and software into a new generation of televisions and DVD players to give users more power over their still photos.

"Previously, viewing your digital photos could be a bit of a chore," Philips senior product manager for DVD and audio Scott Housley says.

"Your options were to either spend lots of time and money printing out the photos, or crowd around your PC or laptop to show them to friends."

Samsung product manager for audio visual, Frank Malcaus says many digital camera users do not realise there are better ways of viewing an image than printing it.

"My mother tells me that she takes her memory card to the local photo shop and pays money to have the photos printed, he says.

"When I ask her what she does if she doesn't want to print the photos, she says she views them on the tiny screen on the back of the camera.

Philips and Samsung have introduced products aimed to change the way people work with their digital photos.

"The PC's domination of digital photography is over," Malcaus says.

Philips' DVDR77 ($1399) and Samsung's DVDP347 ($199) DVD players include multi-format memory card slots and can display images and movies stored on the cards.

"It's not just about viewing pictures though. Software in the DVDR77 can record the images to a DVD as a slide show, with background music and menu controls, just like a professional DVD," Housley says.

Samsung's DVDP347 is not a DVD recorder, but can still create slide shows on the fly reading directly off a card.

"People are impressed with the capabilities of the unit," Malcaus says.

"I can take a photo, then quickly plug the card into the DVD player and have the photo displayed on whatever sized screen I like.

"Or I can make it take up the whole wall using a digital projector."

The experience is a far cry from having to crowd around a laptop computer, or waiting for images to print, he says.

Manufacturers are putting card readers on TVs and theatre systems.

"We want to give people even more capability in these products," says Housley.

But many people do not realise the power of the devices they may already have in their homes, he says.
"DVDs have been able to play CDs and VCDs for many years now, but we find that many people still don't realise what this capability really means."

It's common for people to be shocked when they put in an audio CD only to have an MPEG4 music video start to play on their TV, he says.

"We're slowly bridging the knowledge gap, although a lot of that education has to come from retailers," he says.

Malcaus agrees, saying properly informed demonstrations by retailers are key to giving consumers access to the full power of their new products.

"Now we've included this still image capability, these demonstrations will be even more important," he says.

Because the data ports on new DVD players are often hidden behind folding panels, many users may not immediately realise these features are included.

The DVD player is the focus of still image capability, but Housley says it is likely the technology will become more widespread in televisions as well.

"The digital camera revolution is driving these kinds of features," he says.

"People are starting to realise they don't have to print their images and that there are better ways of viewing them than on a computer screen."

But the TV is not the only option for photographers.

The continuing drop in LCD panel prices means small, compact digital frames are becoming available for picture display.

Units such as PQI's Intelligent Frame take data cards directly and display images without using a PC.

PDAs, such as Sony's range of Clie, have digital-frame software that allows the unit to display a full-screen image while not in use. A flip out stand turns the PDA into a desktop frame for the office.

Electronics magazines and websites are publishing DIY guides on building digital frames out of smaller LCD panels, such as Samsung's SyncMaster 152N, for the cost of the screen plus a few cheap parts.

But, sometimes, nothing beats a professionally printed photograph.

Album makers have embraced the digital revolution and are combining ancient bookbinding methods with modern techniques to create albums that look like professionally printed coffee table books.

John Garner owner of Bookcrafts bookbinders, says the new albums are increasingly popular.

"We deal with professional photographers who want us to make an album from a portfolio," he says.

"Weddings are very popular."

The spread of Adobe's portable document format (PDF) has given photographers much more power when it comes to printing.
"They can design a page or pages in whatever software package they like, such as Photoshop, and then send a PDF to us and we can print it," Garner says.

Bookcrafts also offers a design service so photographers can send a set of pictures and leave Garner's design team to create each page.

"Its pretty expensive – about $60 a page – but many people are happy to pay that kind of money for a wedding album," he says.

Bookcrafts does not generally sell direct to retail, since Garner believes this is the photographer's market.

But he says the nature of the technology means there's nothing to stop someone sending him PDFs to be assembled into an album.

Garner says advances in digital technology aren't the only things to make a difference in making albums.

"We now have a much wider selection of papers to choose from, and we can mix and match," he says.

"Metallic is a popular new paper. You can have one or two metallic sheets in an album that highlight the picture printed on them – a feature page, if you will."

Garner says the technology is a meeting of ancient and modern craftsmanship.

"We are taking digitally printed PDF files and we're binding them into albums using bookbinding techniques that are hundreds of years old," he says.

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.