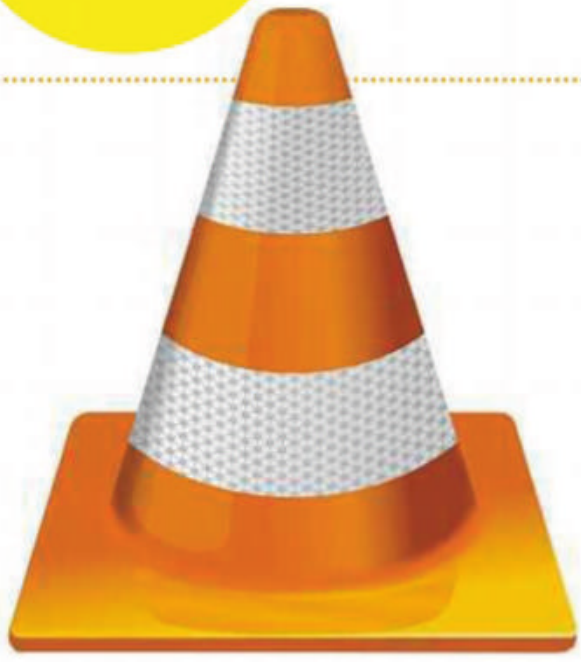
Ultimate Secret Tips For VLC MEDIA PLAYER

COVER FEATURE

VLC Media Player is one of the most popular and versatile programs available. **Wayne Williams** reveals the best hidden tricks that every VLC user should know



VLC Media Player began the year by revealing that it has now been downloaded more than three billion times. The software's developer, Videolan, also announced the addition of several exciting new features to VLC, including support for Apple's AirPlay streaming service.

Such is VLC's popularity that we imagine most *Web User* readers already use it, whether on Windows, Mac, Linux, Android or iOS, but the program's incredible versatility means there are always new tools to discover and tricks to master.

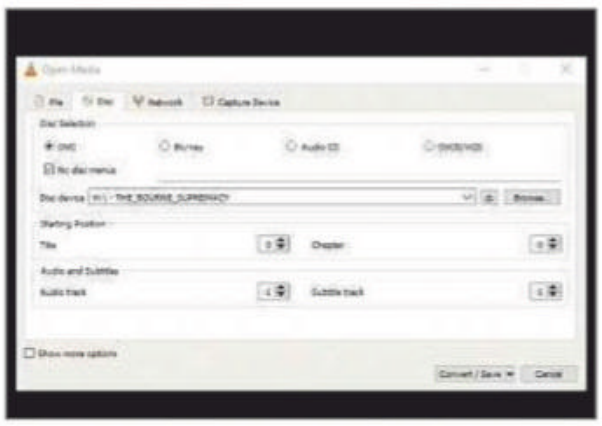
In this feature, we celebrate 18 years of VLC Media Player (released in February 2001, it's one month older than *Web User*!) by rounding up the best hidden hacks and lesser-known tips for the marvellous media player.

Even if you think you know VLC inside out, we guarantee we have a few surprises for you. And, if that's not enough, we also reveal the new features coming in the next major milestone – VLC 4.

MANIPULATE YOUR MEDIA FILES

Rip CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays

If you have a collection of audio or video discs, you can rip them to your computer using VLC. This means you'll be able to listen to your favourite music or watch your favourite films without needing the original CD, DVD or Blu-ray. To do this, insert the disc to rip in your optical drive and, in VLC, go to Media and click Convert / Save (or press Ctrl+R). Click the Disc tab and, under Disc Selection, choose the type of disc you want to rip. For video, make sure 'No disc menus' is ticked. Use the drop-down menu to select the correct disc drive and click the Convert / Save button. Choose the format you want to save the file in, select a destination and click Start.



VLC lets you rip CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays to your computer

Control VLC via a web browser

You can use any web browser as a remote control for VLC Media Player. To enable this option, go to Tools, Preferences and, under 'Show settings' at the bottom of the Interface tab, click All. Click the arrow next to Interface to expand that section, then click 'Main interfaces'. Tick the Web box on the right, expand the 'Main interfaces' section and click Lua, then enter a password under Lua HTTP, click Save and restart VLC.

To test the remote-control function, open a browser, type `localhost:8080` into the address bar and press Enter. Type your password when prompted and VLC's remote control interface will appear.

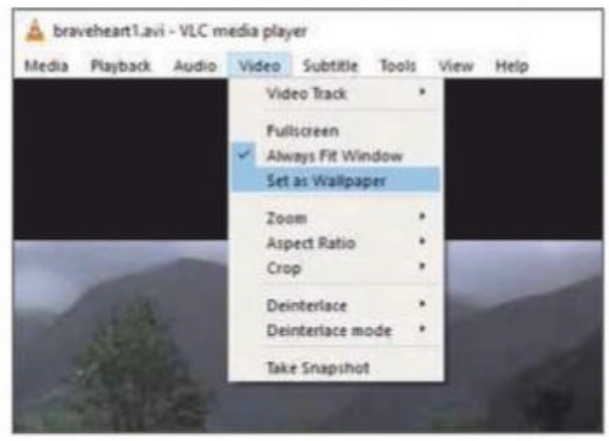


Access VLC's secret remote-control feature in your browser

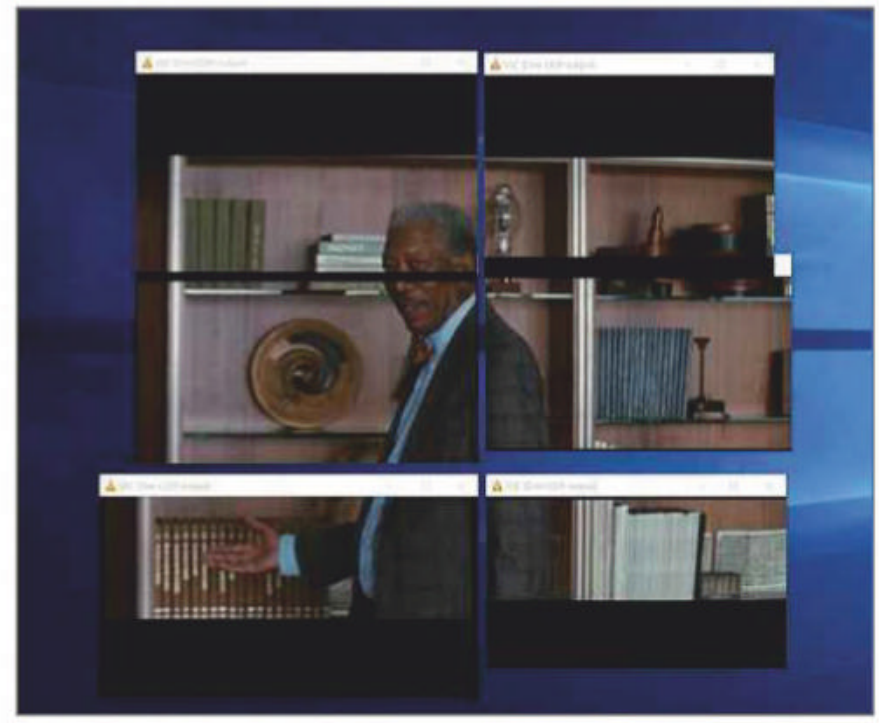
To use this feature on a remote browser, find out your computer's IP address (see 'Stream videos over the internet' tip on page 43) and use this with the '8080' port to access the interface. It will be something like: http://128.0.0.1:8080.

Set videos as desktop wallpaper

One of the best but least known features in VLC is the ability to display videos as desktop wallpaper. In previous versions of the program, this allowed video to run in the background, just like regular (albeit moving) wallpaper behind open windows and icons. This has been changed in the newer release and it now just behaves like a modified version of full-screen mode. To activate the feature, right-click a playing movie, go to Video and select 'Set as wallpaper'. The video will switch to full-screen mode, but you'll be able to access the Windows Start menu and taskbar, and drag windows on top of the playing clip.



VLC lets you create moving desktop wallpaper from videos



VLC's Wall feature plays videos across several windows

Create a wall of videos

While it's not the most sensible way to watch a video on your PC, VLC's video-wall effect is rather impressive. Go to Tools, Effects and Filters and click the Video Effects tab. Click the Geometry tab below that and tick Wall. Set the number of rows and columns that you want (keep the number relatively low if you want to avoid your system slowing to a crawl), then drag a video clip to the player and it will be displayed across a number of movable and resizable windows.

WHY THE TRAFFIC CONE?

Much as we love VLC Media Player, there's one thing that's always baffled us about the program: its traffic-cone logo. Yes, it's striking and instantly recognisable, but traffic cones have very little to do with playing media files, which makes the logo seem rather incongruous.

After extensive research (well, visiting a source cited on Wikipedia: bit.ly/cone469), we can reveal that the reason for the cone dates back to VLC's genesis as a student project. Said students, at the École Centrale Paris (Central School of Paris), had a drunken penchant for stealing traffic cones, and when they needed a logo for the exciting new program they were developing, the orange-and-white witch's hat was the obvious choice.

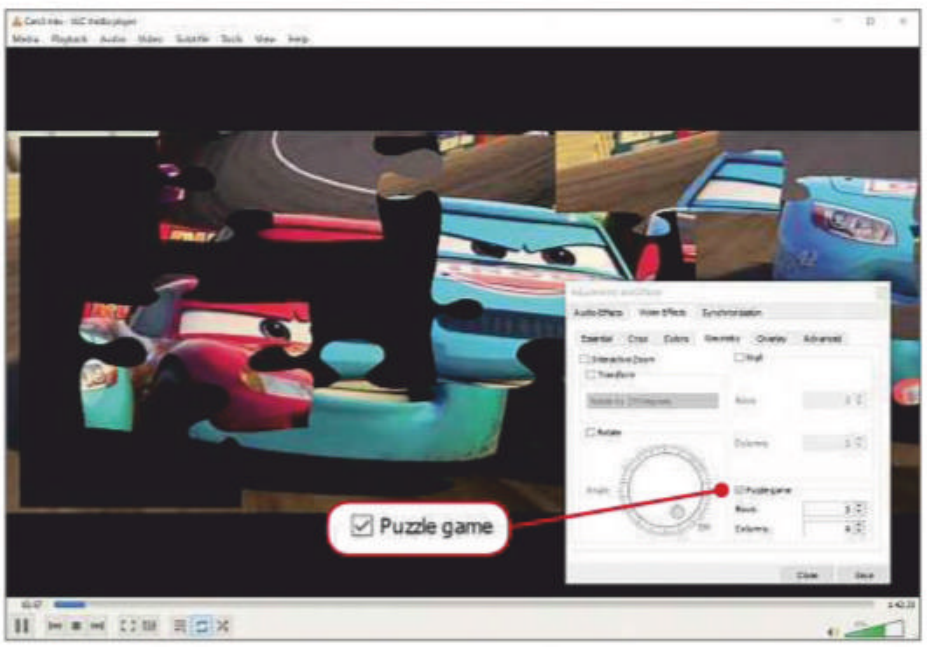
So when you next look at the iconic VLC logo on your desktop, phone or this issue's front cover, you can credit the cone to inebriated student hijinks!



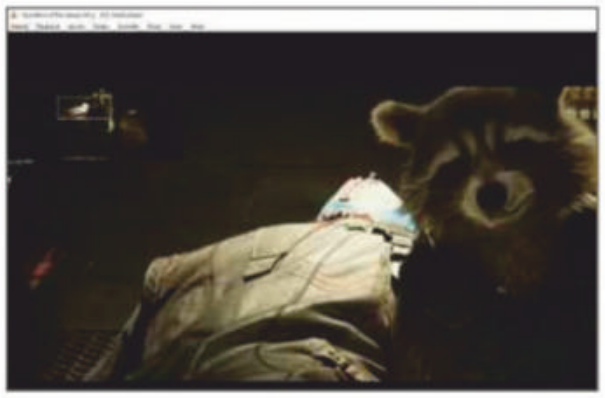
Unlock VLC's hidden jigsaw puzzle

In the same way that the video wall detailed on page 41 is a fun diversion, VLC lets you turn a playing video into a solvable jigsaw puzzle. Start playing a video, then go to Tools, Effects and Filters. Click Video Effects, then go to the Geometry tab and tick the 'Puzzle game' box. The video will instantly turn into a jigsaw puzzle.

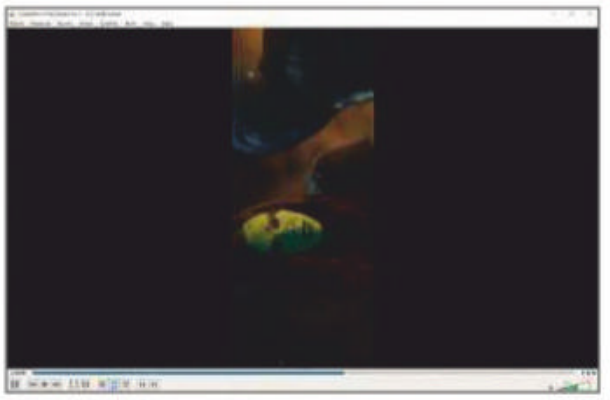
You can click individual puzzle pieces and drag them around inside the playing window. When one piece connects with another, it will snap into place, and you'll be able to move that section around. If you find the game is too easy – or too hard – you can adjust the number of rows and columns (that is, the number of pieces).



Turn a video into a jigsaw to make playback more interesting



Enlarge any area of a video using VLC's Interactive Zoom



You can rotate videos that play at the wrong orientation

Activate VLC's Interactive Zoom mode

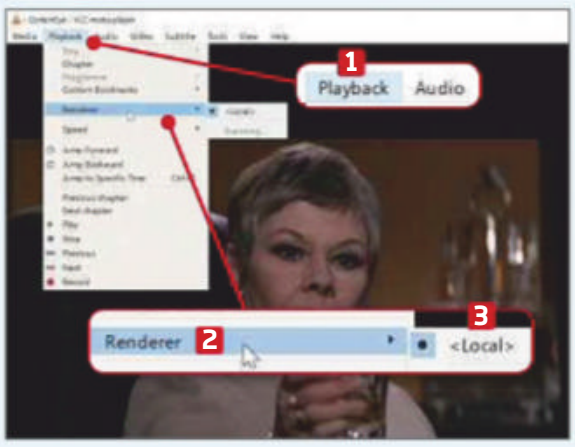
You can zoom into any part of a video using VLC's Interactive Zoom. This gives you a close-up of an area and keeps you focused on that spot as the video plays.

To use the zoom, start a video playing, then go to Tools, Effects and Filters. Click Video Effects, then the Geometry tab and select the Interactive Zoom box. The video will automatically zoom in. You'll see a thumbnail showing the full video in the upper-left corner. Inside this is a small box. Click and drag it, and the main video will move accordingly to show you the area underneath that box. Below the thumbnail is the zoom control. Use this to zoom in or out. To go back to normal, just untick the Interactive Zoom box.

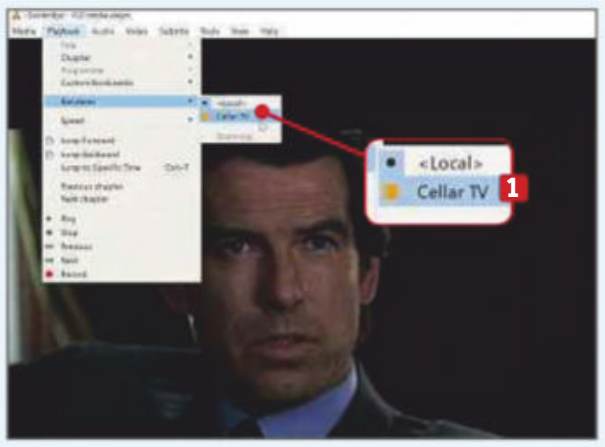
Rotate a video in VLC

VLC should automatically detect which way up a video is supposed to play, but some clips – typically those shot on mobile phones – may display upside down or sideways. The best way to fix this is to use a video-editing program, but VLC offers a temporary solution that lets you watch the video in its correct orientation. Start your movie playing, then go to Tools, Effects and Filters. Click Video Effects, select the Geometry tab and tick the Transform box. Use the drop-down menu to choose the amount of rotation in 90-degree steps. You can also flip the video horizontally or vertically, and transpose or anti-transpose the playback. If you tick the Rotate box, you can use the wheel to spin the video around.

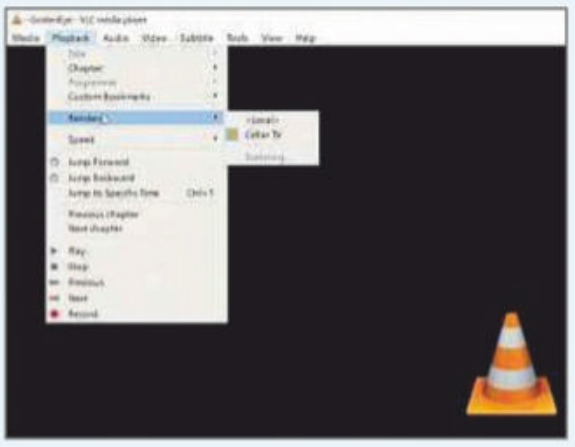
MINI WORKSHOP | Stream video from VLC to your Chromecast



1 Attach your Chromecast to a TV or monitor and make sure it's properly set up and connected to your network. Start a video playing on VLC, then open the Playback menu 1 and select Renderer. 2 <Local> should already be selected (meaning video plays inside VLC). 3 The software will scan your network.



2 Wait for a short while, then open the Renderer menu again. This time you should see your Chromecast listed (ours is called Cellar TV). 1 If you don't see the entry, make sure the Chromecast is connected to the same wireless network as your PC and repeat the process.



3 Select your Chromecast. The screen will go black and the video will stream to your device. Control playback in VLC as you would if it were playing in the video window. When you've finished, go back to the Renderer menu and select <Local> again. The video will return to playing in VLC again.

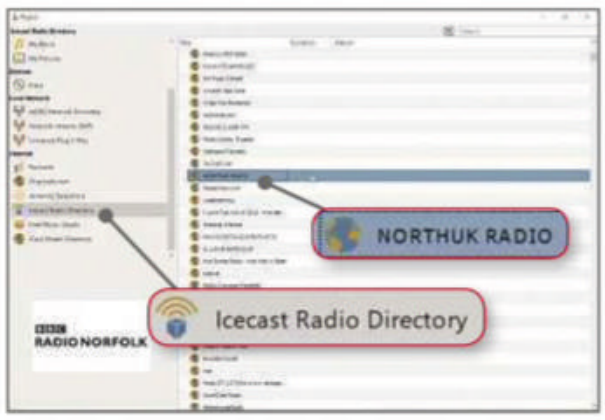
STREAM & DOWNLOAD USING VLC

Stream from VLC to Chromecast

Google Chromecast (www.google.com/chromecast) is a £30 dongle that plugs into a spare HDMI socket on your TV or monitor, so you can enjoy streaming video from a wide range of sources, including YouTube, Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Google Play Movies & TV. There's no convenient button you can press to stream video directly from VLC to your Chromecast, but the last major version of the software introduced an option that lets you connect to Google's device via the Renderer menu. Find out how to use this feature in our Mini Workshop on the opposite page.

Stream internet radio stations

VLC used to let you stream Shoutcast radio stations, but the option is no longer available. You can, however, tune into online radio stations using the Icecast streaming-media server. To do this, click the View menu tab and select Playlist. In the left-hand pane, click the Icecast Radio Directory option. Wait while the list of stations downloads. Find one you want to listen to or use the search box to track down a station by name, then double-click your choice and it will start playing. If you like a particular radio station, you can bookmark it for easy future access by right-clicking it and selecting 'Add to Playlist'. You can access your favourite stations from the Playlists entry at the top of the left-hand column.



Tune into thousands of online radio stations through VLC

Stream videos over the internet

You can remotely watch videos stored on one PC on another, provided that both systems have VLC installed on them. On the host PC (the one with your videos on), find your IP address by clicking Start, typing `CMD` and pressing Enter. Type `ipconfig` into the command prompt and press Enter. Make a note of the address next to IPv4 Address. With that done, return to VLC and go to Media, Stream. Select a video to play and click the Stream button.

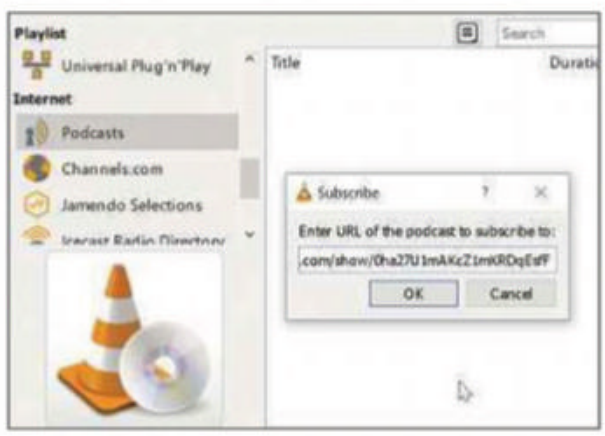
A wizard will open. Click Next, select HTTP in the 'New destination' drop-down menu and click Add. Click Next, then Next again, and click Stream.

On the remote PC (the one you plan to watch the videos on), go to Media, Open Network Stream and enter `http://ipaddress:8080` (replace 'ipaddress' with the other PC's actual IP address). If the video doesn't play, it may be that the Windows Firewall is blocking the stream on one or both systems. Go into Firewall settings in Windows to fix this.

Subscribe to podcasts in VLC

VLC has a built-in subscription feature for streaming the latest podcasts. However, you will need the feed URL of the podcast you want to subscribe to because VLC doesn't provide a way to browse available episodes. You can usually find the feed address on a show's website or in the notes.

Once you have this, go to View, Playlist and scroll down on the left until you see Podcasts listed under Internet.

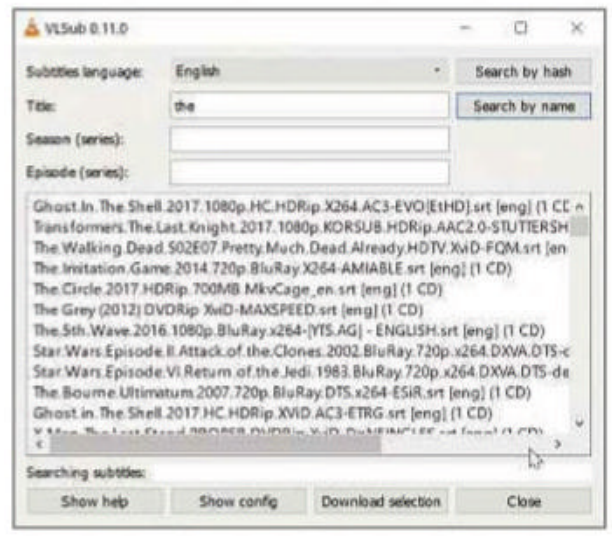


You can subscribe to your favourite podcasts through VLC

Select this, and click the plus sign. Enter the URL of your podcast into the Subscribe box. To unsubscribe from a show, hover over its name on the left and click the minus button.

Download missing subtitles for films

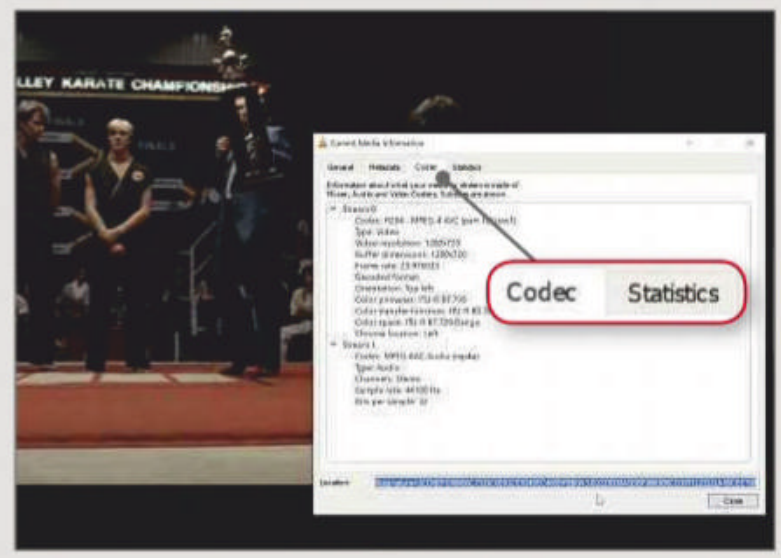
If you've downloaded a foreign-language movie or TV show that doesn't come with subtitles, you can add them manually. Finding the correct subtitles can be difficult, but VLC can track them down through its VLSub (bit.ly/vlsub469) add-on. To use it, download the LUA file and copy it to the extensions folder, which should be located at C:\Program Files\VideoLAN\VLC\lua\extensions. Close and restart VLC (if it's running), then go to View, VLsub. Click 'Search by name', enter the title of the movie or show, then select the relevant subtitle and click 'Download selection'.



Make foreign films easier to follow by downloading subtitles

Watch and download YouTube videos

If you want to download a video from YouTube to watch offline, VLC can grab it for you. Copy the video URL from YouTube, open VLC and go to Media, Open Network Stream. In the Network URL box, paste in the copied video address and click Play. VLC will begin streaming the video. Now go to Tools, Codec Information and copy the long URL in the Location box at the bottom of the window. Paste this into your browser's address bar. The video will begin playing there. Right-click this and save the video from the context menu. Once it's downloaded, select it, hit F2 and give it a more descriptive name.



VLC has a built-in option for downloading YouTube videos

CONVERT & RECORD USING VLC

Record your webcam

You can use VLC Media Player to record footage from your webcam to watch later. To do this, go to Media, Open Capture Device and set 'Capture mode' to DirectShow. Use the drop-down menu to change 'Video device name' to your webcam, and 'Audio device name' to your microphone. Click 'Advanced options' and change the video input frame rate to 30, or tick the box next to 'Device properties.'

You can then start watching the live feed. To record something on screen, right-click it and hit the Record button to start capturing, or click the arrow next to Play and choose Convert instead. When done, hit Stop and the recording will be saved.

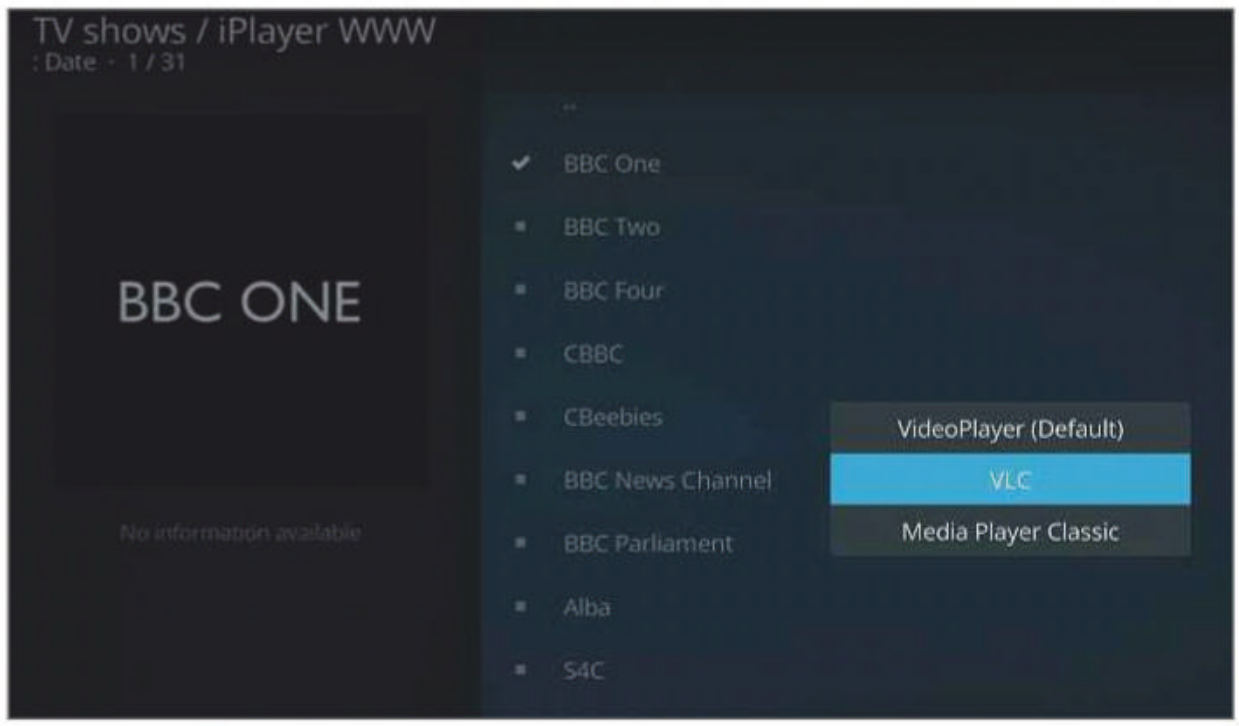


VLC can record video footage directly from your webcam

Record your desktop

Recording your desktop in VLC isn't too different from recording your webcam, as detailed above. Go to Media, Convert / Save and, in Open Media Window, click the Capture Device tab. This displays the current capture mode. Click the 'Capture mode' drop-down menu and switch from DirectShow to Desktop. By default, VLC will capture your desktop activity at a rate of 1 frame per second. This obviously isn't going to produce a very good video, so change this to 25 or 30 fps (bear in mind this will increase the size of the saved video significantly). Click the Convert / Save button at the bottom of the page, and a new window will open. The source of the capture should be: screen://.

Click the Profile drop-down menu and select the video and audio codecs/ formats to use. Enter a name for your screen capture, then click Browse to navigate to the save location. Click Start and VLC will begin capturing your screen. When you've finished your on-screen activity, click the Stop button to end the recording.



You can record streaming video from Kodi to play in VLC

Record Kodi streams

Kodi is great for watching local or streaming content, and though it comes with its own built-in player, you can use VLC for playback instead. This lets you apply effects and filters, and even record video as it streams.

First, download the 'playercorefactory .xml' script from bit.ly/script469 and copy this into the Kodi folder at %APPDATA%\kodi\userdata. You may need to change the path inside the script. To check this, open the playercorefactory.xml file in Windows Notepad. The VLC.exe is probably listed as being in C:\Program Files\VideoLAN\ VLC. If the program is actually installed in C:\Program Files (x86)\VideoLAN\ VLC, you'll need to change the path in the script to match. Save the file and open Kodi. When you start a local video playing, it should open directly in VLC. If you're streaming something in Kodi, right-click it, choose 'Play using...' from the menu, then select VLC. Your stream will open in the external media player and you can start watching.

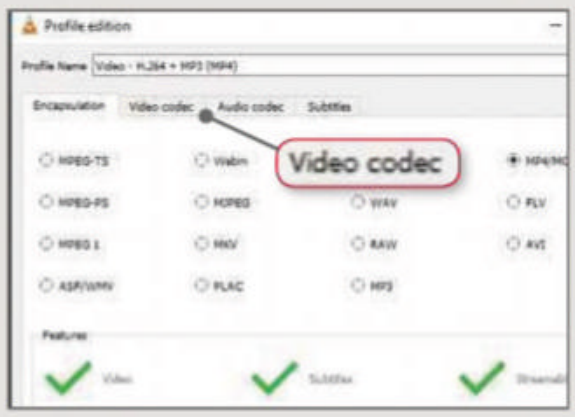
To record a stream, go to Tools, Preferences in VLC and click Input/ Codecs. Click the Browse button next to 'Record directory or filename' and navigate to the folder you want to save your Kodi recordings in. Click Save. Return to the playing stream, right-click the screen and select Record. Recording will begin, even though it may appear as if nothing is happening. To end recording, right-click and select Stop.

See our Workshop on page 52 for details of the new version of Kodi.

Convert files to different formats

You don't need to install a special program to convert audio or video files to different formats – VLC can do it for you. The program offers a large selection of preset codecs and formats to choose from, or you can specify the exact format and the video/audio codecs to use. This can be useful for reducing the size of a video for playing on a mobile device.

To convert a file, go to Media, Convert/Save, click Add and find the video you want to convert. Click the Convert/Save button, then the drop-down menu next to Profile and choose any of the listed options. For more manual control, click the spanner button to the right of the Profile box and pick an 'encapsulation' (the file format). When you select one, the list of features supported by it will be shown below. MKV, for example, offers the full range of options, while MP4 doesn't allow chapters, and AVI doesn't support subtitles, menus or chapters, and isn't streamable either. You can then pick the Video and/or Audio codecs to use, and optionally add subtitles.



Why use a separate tool when VLC converts videos for you?

CUSTOMISE & ENHANCE VLC

Change VLC's appearance

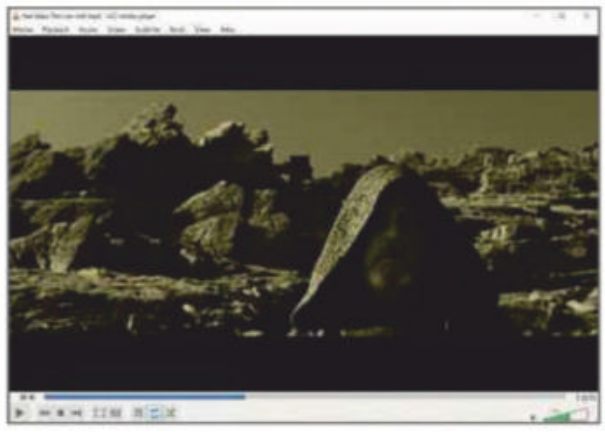
If you're not a fan of VLC's default appearance, you can customise how the player looks using skins. Go to Tools, Preferences and select the Interface tab. Under 'Look and feel' select 'Use custom skin'. Download any skin you like the look of at bit.ly/skins469. Click the Choose button next to the 'Skin resource file' box and select a downloaded skin. Click Save, restart VLC and it should open with the new interface. You can also make changes to the media player's look by going to Tools, Customise Interface.



Customise VLC's look by changing its skin

Apply video and audio effects

VLC lets you apply a number of fun effects to videos and music files as they play. Go to Tools, Effects and Filters, and browse the options in the Audio Effects and Video Effects tabs. The choices are sorted into a separate row. Under Video Effects, you can adjust colours, including watching the video in sepia; crop a clip; and add a logo or text. Under Advanced, you can add blurs and effects such as Mirror and Psychedelic.

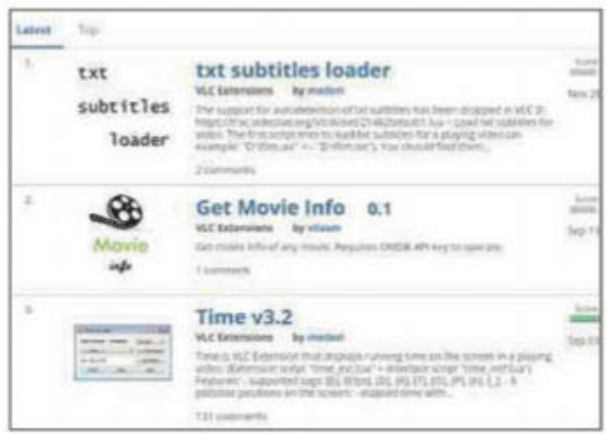


Apply fun filters to your videos in VLC

Install the best VLC add-ons

VLC supports add-ons, which lets you introduce additional functionality to the media player. To install an add-on, download the LUA file for it and copy it into the extensions folder, which should be located at C:\Program Files\VideoLAN\VLC\lua\extensions\. Close and restart VLC.

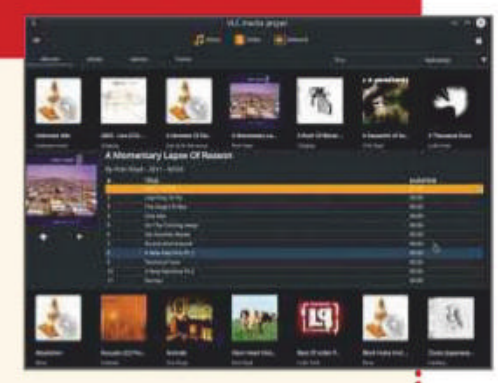
You can browse the full list of available add-ons at bit.ly/vlcadd469 but here are some of the better ones we'd recommend trying:



VLC has lots of great add-ons to make the player even better

- **TIME** Displays the running time of a video on the screen.
- **MEDIA CONTEXT** Displays contextual information about the currently playing media.
- **CHAPTER SKIPPER** Lets you automatically skip a chapter in a video (provided the video has chapter data associated with it).
- **MOMENTS' TRACKER** Lets you bookmark your favourite moments in a video.
- **SKIP INTRO/OUTRO CREDITS** Jump straight to the action by skipping the start or end of a video.

WHAT'S NEW IN VLC 4



Videolan, VLC's developer, is hard at work on the next big update of the media player, VLC 4.0, and has just released a preview build of the software, which you can download from bit.ly/vlcpreview469.

Changes include a more modern interface; a new input manager that adds support for gapless audio; and a revamped media library that makes the desktop player more like the Android version.

Videolan has also confirmed that AirPlay compatibility is on its way, which will allow videos to be sent from VLC on an iPhone or Android device to Apple TV, and provide support for virtual-reality content.

VLC is set to be available on more platforms, too, including Roku devices, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch, though version 4.0 will be the first not to work on Windows XP or Vista.

Note that the preview build of VLC 4.0 is likely to have a few bugs and stability issues, so you may want to wait for the stable release later this year.

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 6 March 2019

TIME TO DITCH ANTIVIRUS?

Free security tools that promise the same protection as traditional third-party software



PLUS...

OPTIMISE YOUR WI-FI
Find the best channel and location for your network

STOP USING WHATSAPP
Private-messaging apps that Facebook can't spy on

BUILD YOUR OWN PVR
Turn an old PC into a set-top box for your television

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