

**Tapping Your TiVo's Hidden Talents – The Mossberg Solution- By Katherine Boehret,
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A Brief User Guide To Codes, Shortcuts You May Not Know

TiVo is well-known as a high-end DVR with a great user interface. Its bubble-popping sound effects and grinning, animated mascot help users forget how much it costs to use. (TiVo boxes range from \$100 to \$600, and TiVo service costs \$129 for one year when prepaid.)

A fondness for TiVo has encouraged users to refer to it with designated nicknames and/or genders. A teacher friend of mine was recently asked by a student if her husband's name was TiVo after the child heard her say she would have to tell TiVo about a new TV show. But like any old friend -- or spouse -- who has been around for a while, TiVo has a few tricks up its sleeve that might surprise longtime users and new owners alike. This column includes just a handful of those tricks and highlights some features that may make TiVo more useful. These tips are for everyday users, not serious hackers, and many others exist.

Remote-Control Codes

Each of these codes is entered one time to enable an otherwise-hidden function, and three chimes signal the code is set. These functions can be disabled by entering the code a second time, or if TiVo is rebooted.

Clock: If you miss having a VCR nearby to tell you the time while you watch TV, TiVo can help. A digital clock can be programmed to show up in the lower right-hand corner of your television screen by pressing "SELECT-PLAY-SELECT-9-SELECT."

While playing recorded shows, this clock displays the current time and the elapsed time of the program you're watching. Personally, I check a show's progress by pressing the remote's Play button to see the progress bar, and the Info button shows the current time. But the on-screen clock might come in handy when you're watching TV on a terrible date and you don't want to get caught glancing at your watch.

30-second skip: One of the glorious functions of TiVo and other DVRs is their ability to fast-forward through commercials. But it takes practice to know when to press Play so as to completely miss commercials.

If you're unsure about your fast-forwarding technique, TiVo can be permanently set to skip ahead in 30-second increments, by entering "SELECT-PLAY-SELECT-3-0-SELECT." This code must be set while watching a recorded show. After that, the 30-second skipping works whenever you press the "Skip To Tick" button, which looks like an arrow pointing right to a straight line.

TiVo says this code won't work for longer time increments, like 90 seconds, and I tried using various increments, to no avail. Still, pressing this button about five or seven times in a row (depending on the show) gets you through commercials with less guesswork.

Disappearing progress bar: TiVo's progress bar, which shows how far along a program has progressed in terms of the entire show's duration, appears at various moments, such as when you first play a recorded show or unpauses. This indicator lingers on the screen for just about three seconds, but if this seems too long, you can enter "SELECT-PLAY-SELECT-PAUSE-SELECT" to set the progress bar to disappear after less than a second.

I tried this setting on my TiVo, but one second showed only a quick blink of the progress bar, not enough time to see anything.

Number Shortcuts

From the TiVo Central menu, pressing each number on the remote control's numeric keypad skips directly to a different tool. Some of the more useful shortcuts include pressing "1" to go to Season Pass Manager (a list of programs that are set to automatically record every episode), "4" to go to Search Title and "8" to go to TiVo Suggestions.

Viewing Tips

TiVo can display a programming guide in a TV-Guide-like grid, or as a two-columned TiVo Live Guide that can list future shows for hours or days out. The top of Live Guide gives a detailed description of each selected program, along with its duration and TV rating.

The Now Playing list shows content stored on a TiVo. By default, this list is organized in time sequential order with same-series TV shows grouped into folders. Remote-control shortcuts re-sort this list: pressing "1" switches from sequential to alphabetical order and vice versa; pressing "2" ungroups shows to display each title; shows are regrouped into folders when "2" is pressed again.

Lesser-Known Features

Universal Swivel Search is a way of seeing how TiVo's various shows and movies are related to one another. It lists details about each program, including actors, directors, tags associated with a show (like love, dating and addiction) and suggestions of similar content. Swivel Search is accessed through the Find Programs menu or More Options while looking at a recorded show.

By selecting a Swivel Search detail about a particular show, such as one of its actors, you can see what else he or she starred in and whether or not that show or movie is available through TiVo or Amazon.com's Unbox. Unbox downloads movies directly to your TiVo ranging from \$2 to \$15 each depending on whether you rent or buy a movie.

Plenty of free Internet content can be downloaded from the Web to your TiVo. But TiVo confusingly places this content in two menus: Find Programs and Music, Photos, Products & More. Under Find Programs, a Download TV & Movies section offers Amazon Unbox movies and free TiVoCast content. The latter can be set to automatically download with Season Pass settings, such as The Onion's weekly video or ExerciseTV's twice weekly videos.

The Music, Photos, Products & More menu holds content like photos and unprotected MP3s from a nearby computer, podcasts, Rhapsody music, Yahoo! Weather and Traffic and on-screen games. You can even buy movie tickets through Fandango.

TiVo takes up valuable space in a home entertainment center, so it's important for the company to make sure its content is varied and useful. The codes and shortcuts mentioned can change the way you use this valuable device every day