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Elgato Turbo.264 HD video encoder

Will this save you time encoding clips?

by Stuart Miles published on 7 April 2009

With so many ways to record stuff and so many ways to watch it, making sure the file you're about to watch or record is in the right format can be a nightmare. That is until the Turbo.264 HD encoder was launched, say its makers Elgato.

Open the box and you'll be surprised to find that all you get is a USB stick and some software. We were expecting more, but then are pleasantly surprised that getting this to work doesn't require boxes, cables, power supplies and the such like.

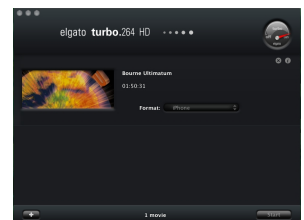
The dongle, which is slightly wider than a 3G dongle, plugs straight into a USB socket of your choice and can then be forgotten about. There is a USB extension cable in the box if you don't have space for the wide dongle without taking out most of your USB ports (MacBook users we are talking to you).

A quick drag of the software from the disc to your applications folder and you're ready to go. When it says "easy-to-use" on the box they really mean it.

For those still wondering what the hell an Elgato Turbo.264 HD actually is, it's a tool that converts video files to a format that can be played on an iPod, iPhone, PSP, Apple TV, used on a computer or shared on the web.

Boring as it might sound, H.264 is the universal video compression standard that can be played on any of the above devices, plus the usual array of games consoles, selected smartphones, and online. It's basically becoming the standard format for video.

Combined with the software the Turbo.264 HD enables Mac users to quickly convert any popular video format to the H.264 file in standard or HD resolutions so you can view it on the go.



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All you have to do is drag and drop any video file into the application and it will convert it to H.264. Supported formats include AVCHD Video, QuickTime, AVI, DV, WMV, MPEG1, MPEG2 Program/Transport Stream, MPEG4, MP4, M4V, H.263, H.264 AVC, Xvid, VIDEO_TS and many more, meaning most common uses, like footage you've grabbed from your camcorder, should work nicely.

Although you are likely to want to do editing in iMovie or another package, the Elgato Turbo.264 software also offers a basic timeline editing feature: mainly for when you are grabbing content from your camcorder.

Rather confusingly you mark what you don't want rather than what you do want, and then when the encoding/capture is done it doesn't grab those elements of the clip. Everything is automatically saved into iTunes.

In practice and the encoding process is all very fast. We encoded a copy of Bourne Ultimatum (1hr 50mins) from an M4v format stored on our hard drive to an iPhone-ready format in just under 26 minutes, simply by dragging the file from our desktop to the application. The encoding speed will be determined on your Mac (we used a 2.4GHz MacBook Pro with 2GB RAM).

Ideal if you want to load up your iPhone, iPod or PSP for watching movies on the go, but it's not only the ability to drag files into the application that we like. The fact that it improves encoding time in other consumer editing applications like iMovie or the company's own EyeTV is also a bonus.

From iMovie we were able to export a 1 minute 13 second clip to an iPhone format with the Turbo in the same time: 1 minute 13 seconds. Without it, encoding using QuickTime in the same format it took 1 minute 29 seconds.

Scale that up to an hour of encoding and it means

At a glance

What is it?

Dedicated encoding dongle

Good

Simple and easy to use, Works with iMovie and EyeTV, YouTube format support

Bad

Dongle is wide so you'll need to use the extending cable in the box, doesn't save you masses of time

Verdict

Yes you can already do this via iMovie or QuickTime already, but it's a slow process and this should make that process a little bit quicker

Price £135

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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you'll save yourself almost quarter of an hour (13 minutes by our calculations). It's not vast, however if you are doing a lot of encoding, which let's face it you probably are if you're looking to invest in a device like this, then that 13 minutes saved soon adds up.

VERDICT

Simple but incredibly effective the Elgato Turbo.264 HD works and works well as it offers you a simple interface, the ability to avoid having to plot your way through all the customisation options in QuickTime (although you can still do this if you want) and speeds up the encoding time to boot.

Of course only you will know if the speed increases are worth the cash, however when it comes to making content that you've recorded accessible to devices like the PSP or the iPhone the Turbo.264 makes it very easy.

Yes you can already do this via iMovie or QuickTime, but it's a slow process and this should make that process that little bit quicker.