HOW CAN I USE MY VIDEO CAMERA AS A WEBCAM?

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Did you know that you can put that handy video camera you bought for your holiday to good use all year round? No need to let it sit unused in the drawer in between trips when you can link it up to your PC or laptop and take advantage of some face time with friends or family far away.

As an added bonus, it's great to know that it's not necessary for your friends to install the same programme or even have a webcam to see you live online in the IM programme and the image is generally far better than the average webcam.

With just a little bit of set up, this article will show you how to install a webcam-conversion program on your computer to make your PC think you have a regular webcam device so you can stream video to friends and family.

It should take under 30 mins

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WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Elbow Grease

Internet connection

The KNOWHOW

You will need:

- A PC with internet connection
- Your camcorder
- A USB connection
- Some kind of Instant Messaging Solution (AIM/ SKYPE/MSM Messenger)

1. First you will need to download a software programme that connects your camcorder through a USB data cable to stream footage to a website. Some are free or have a free trial that can be used before deciding to purchase. Popular software options to download include WebCamDV, Active WebCam or a DVdriver,
2. Then, insert a data cable into an open USB (FireWire) port on your PC and the other side of the cable into a "Video Output" jack on your camcorder. Make sure your camcorder is plugged into a power outlet if you plan to leave it on for long.
3. Download the converter program. When the software recognizes your HD camcorder (instead of a webcam) the image of your device should appear in the "Preview" window of the webcam programme.
4. Open a video instant messaging program like AIM, Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger or Skype.
5. Initiate a video chat with someone. Verify that your camera's feed appears in the video chat window.

Other camcorders have a USB connection for a "Webcam" mode. Connecting the camcorder to the USB port will temporarily convert the camcorder into a type of webcam, although it's not probably the kind you want to take along to your favourite coffee spot to chat online! If so, check to see if your camcorder came with a CD that gives you the USB camera driver (or go to the manufacturer's site to find it). After installing the driver, you have to set the camcorder into Webcam mode.

Even if you have an older model DV Cam on may models you can still often set up video chat using your DV Camcorder with your PC and a two-way set of headphones with the help of a FireWire (also known as an IEEE 1394 card for digital camcorders) or a video capture card for older analog ones.

With a little knowhow and the appropriate software, you can use your kit for more than just the holidays and make the most of your digital camcorder to get a higher resolution and sharper picture than you can get with most webcams.