

WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER

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LEARNING THE BASICS

Windows Media Player has grown into a pretty amazing application with multiple personalities. Its talents include playing music and video files from online sources or local drives (including DVDs), playing online radio and TV stations, displaying specialized web pages, organizing your music files (MP3s and WMAs), burning music CDs, copying and syncing to portable MP3 players, and providing a conduit to online media shopping sites.

MEDIA TYPES COMPATIBLE WITH MEDIA PLAYER

Windows Media Player can play the file types shown in Table 8.1.

TABLE 8.1 WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER–SUPPORTED FILE TYPES

File Type	File Name Extension(s)
Music CD (CD audio)	.cda
Intel Indeo video	.ivf
Audio Interchange File Format (digitized sound)	.aif, .aifc, .aiff
Windows Media (audio and video)	.asf, .asx, .wax, .wm, .wma, .wmd, .wmv, .wvx, .wmp, .wmx, .wpl
Windows Media Center video	.dvr-ms
Windows video and audio	.avi, .wav
QuickTime content*	.mov, .qt
Windows Media Player skins	.wmz, .wms
MPEG (Motion Picture Experts Group) video	.mpeg, .mpg, .m1v, .mp2, .mpa, .mpe, .mp2v, .mp2
AU (UNIX audio)	.au, .snd
MP3 (digital audio)	.mp3, .m3u
MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface)	.mid, .midi, .rmi
DVD video	.vob

Formats not supported: RealNetworks (.ra, .rm, .ram), iTunes (.m4p, .acc, .mp4)

** Only QuickTime files version 2.0 or earlier can be played in Windows Media Player. Later versions of QuickTime require the proprietary Apple QuickTime Player.*

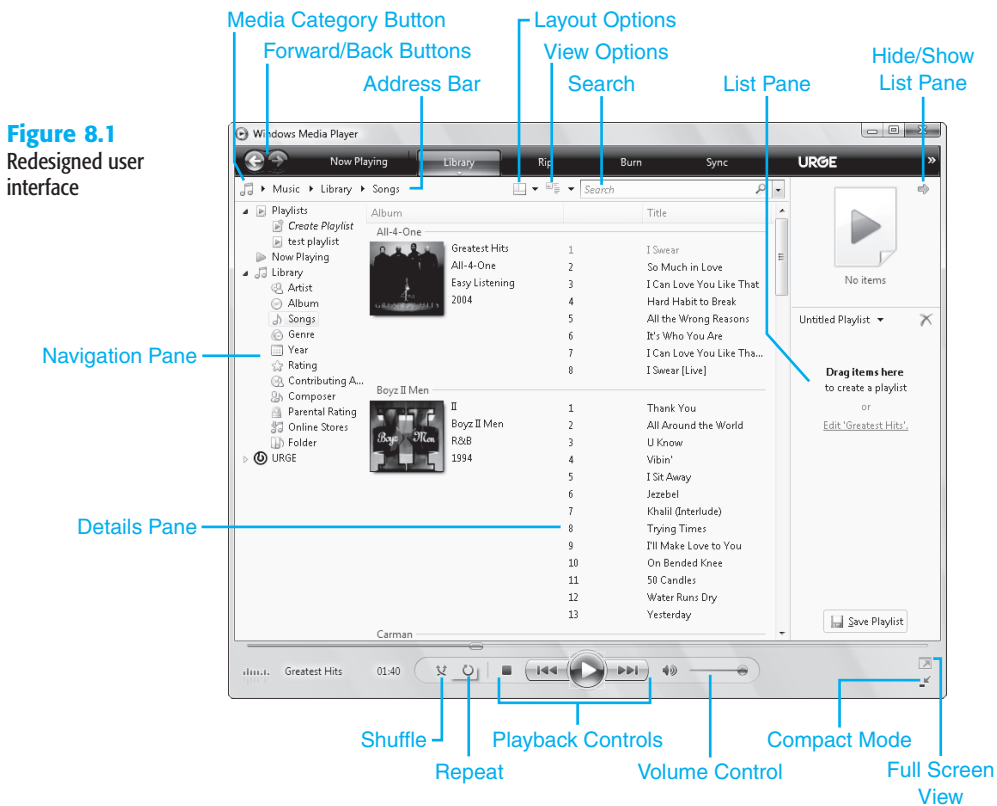
NOTE

Vista doesn't come from Microsoft with DVD playback capability, except in the editions containing Media Center—Vista Home Premium and Vista Ultimate. If your version of Vista does not contain Media Center and you want to play back DVD video and .mp2v files, you must first install a hardware or software DVD decoder on your system. If you insert a

DVD and it doesn't run, that's probably the problem. Installing a decoder is typically a simple software update you can download from the Web. To get a DVD decoder, search the Web for WinDVD or Power DVD. The decoder will cost you a few bucks, probably around \$10. (Although current boxed editions of both players are around \$50–\$60.)

GETTING AROUND WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER 11

Media Player 11 has a redesigned user interface, as shown in Figure 8.1, to make it easier for you to manage and enjoy your digital media. The classic menus have been replaced by an organized tab system, making managing and viewing your digital media easier than ever.



NAVIGATING MENU TABS

The tabs in Media Player 11, shown in Figure 8.2, provide a way to quickly focus on the task you want to perform.

Figure 8.2
New redesigned tabs
in Media Player 11



These tabs are accessed from the top of the Media Player 11 window and perform the following tasks:

- **Now Playing**—When you select online or locally stored content for playback, the Now Playing window displays a list of the content you’re playing. An optional Visualizations feature can be used to display album art (when available) or various animated abstractions that change in response to the music.

TIP

Many visualizations are available online for use with Windows Media Player 11. A personal favorite of mine called PixelTrip can be obtained from the Windows Media Player website at <http://www.wmplugins.com/ItemDetail.aspx?ItemID=881>. *Another excellent visualization* is provided by Brian Spangler and is called TwistedPixel. You can download it from his website for free at www.visolu.com/TwistedPixel.

- **Library**—Use this feature to organize and locate your favorite media types you’ve downloaded or created with Rip. As you download and create music, Media Player automatically creates album and artist information for audio and video content. You also can view content by type and by genre.
- **Rip**—Click this button to copy all or selected tracks from your favorite music CDs to the Music folder on your system.

TIP

When you copy music, by default, Windows Media Player prevents copied tracks from being played on any other computer. If you want to disable this feature so you can move copied music from one PC to another, uncheck the box labeled Copy Protect Music in the Rip Music dialog box that appears when you click More Options in the Rip tab menu.

- **Burn**—After you download or convert music tracks to WMA format, use this feature to transfer your music mix to writable CDs (CD-R or CD-RW media).

TIP

Be sure you fill your CD with all the music you want to play; unlike conventional CD-mastering programs or Windows Vista’s Copy to CD feature in other parts of the operating system, Windows Media Player’s Copy to CD feature closes the CD (so it no longer can accept data) after you copy your selected music to it, even if you use only a small portion of the CD. Why? Standalone CD players are designed to handle single-session CDs and won’t work if you add music later. If you want to create a CD for playback on your computer, use Windows Explorer’s Copy to CD feature instead, which will allow you to copy music over several sessions.

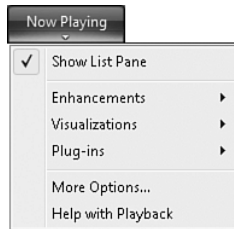
- **Sync**—After you download or convert music tracks to WMA format, use this feature to transfer your music mix to PlaysForSure compatible portable audio players.
- **URGE/Online Stores**—This option enables you to purchase media online or select from a variety of online content.

The arrows below each tab provide quick access to setting and options relevant to the task of that tab. For instance, as shown in Figure 8.3, the arrow below the Now Playing tab provides the options for playback Enhancements as well as the capability to change the current Visualization.

TIP

To show the classic menus, right-click an empty area of the taskbar or an empty area around the playback controls and select Show Classic Menus or press Ctrl+M.

Figure 8.3
New tab menus for
accessing options in
Windows Media
Player 11

**REDESIGNED BROWSING AND SEARCHING**

The navigation of the music library is similar to that in Windows Explorer.

NOTE

For the best browsing and search experience, ensure that the media information is correct and up to date as described in the section “Updating Media Information and Album Art.”

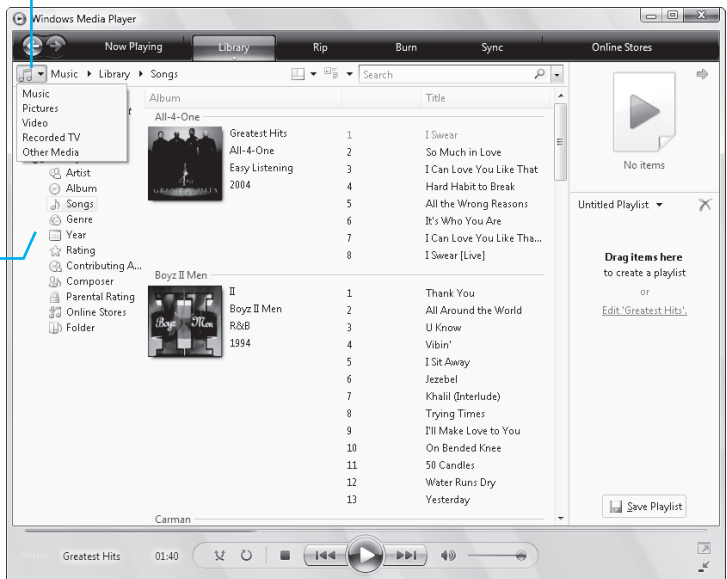
You can browse your media by performing the following steps:

1. Click the Select a Category button to choose the type of media to browse, as shown in Figure 8.4. Options include Music, Pictures, Video, Recorded TV, and Other Media.
2. Choose the desired view for your media. This includes Artist, Album, Songs, Genre, and more.
3. Narrow the items shown for the chosen view by clicking the arrow on the Address bar, as shown in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.4
Select a media category.

Navigation Views

Media Category

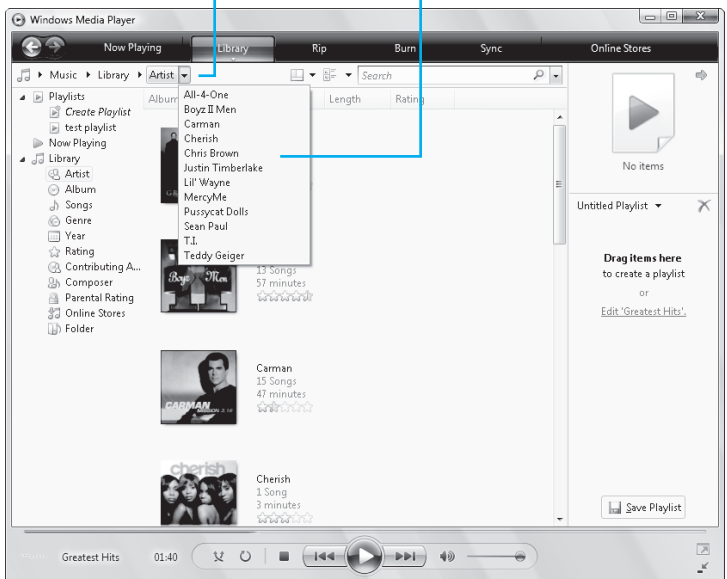


TIP

More views can be found by right-clicking Library in the Navigation Pane and selecting Show More Views.

Figure 8.5
Narrow the items shown in the view by using the Address bar.

Address Bar Options for Current View

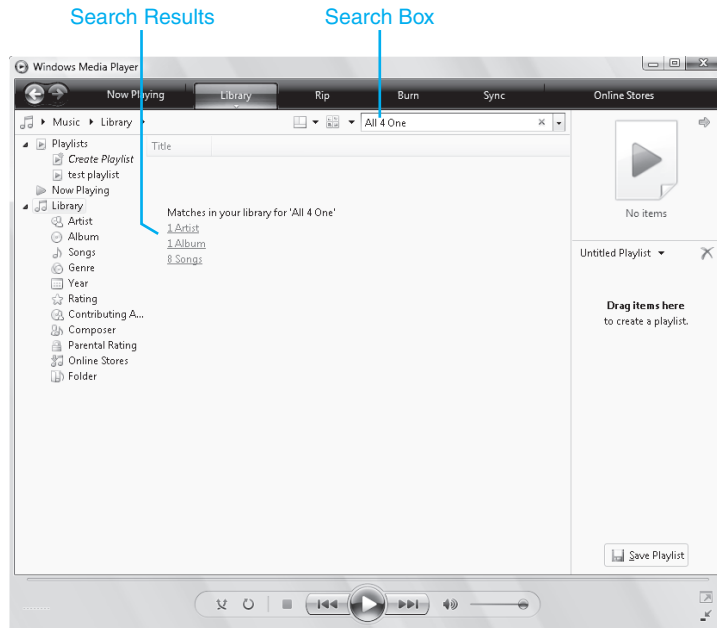


NOTE

To return to a higher level in the current view, click the desired level in the Address bar.

Searching can also be used to narrow the view of a chosen media category. After you have chosen a category as described in Step 1, enter your search term into the search box as shown in Figure 8.6.

Figure 8.6
Searching is a fast and easy way to narrow your media views.



PLAYING AUDIO AND VIDEO IN WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER 11

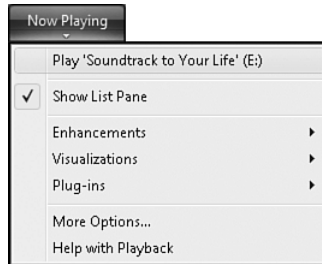
There are three options for playing audio and video media in Windows Media Player 11. These include audio CDs and video DVDs, media stored on your hard disk, and media accessible over a home network.

PLAYING AN AUDIO CD OR DVD

To play an audio CD or DVD in Windows Media Player 11, follow these steps:

1. Insert the CD or DVD you want to play into your computer's CD-ROM or DVD-ROM drive.
2. Click the arrow below the Now Playing tab and select the drive that contains the disk you want to play, as shown in Figure 8.7.
3. While a disk is playing, you can use the Play/Pause, Previous, and Next buttons of the playback controls shown in Figure 8.1 to navigate the songs or chapters on the disk, or you can double-click the song or chapter in the List pane to play it immediately.

Figure 8.7
Select the CD you want to play from the Now Playing menu.



TIP

To play a DVD in full screen, click the View Full Screen button shown in Figure 8.1 or press Alt+Enter while the video is playing or paused.

PLAYING MEDIA STORED ON YOUR HARD DISK OR NETWORK SHARE

To play an item stored on your hard disk, add it to the library following the instructions in the section “Adding Items from Your Computer to Your Library.” After the item is added to the library, you can select the media you want to view by double-clicking it in the Library view. If you want to add an item to the Now Playing list, right-click the item and select Add to Now Playing. Now Playing items can be navigated using the same playback controls described in the previous section.

→ To play media shared over your home network, see the section labeled “Sharing Media Throughout Your Home.”

TIP

When playing large amounts of media from your library, you may want to have the player randomly choose the next song to play or shuffle your playback. To do this, click the Turn Shuffle On button shown in Figure 8.1.

GETTING MUSIC AND VIDEO ON YOUR COMPUTER

Media Player 11 offers many ways to add media to your media library. These methods include ripping music from CDs to your computer, purchasing media from online stores, and adding media items already stored on your computer to the library.

RIPPING SONGS FROM CDs ONTO YOUR COMPUTER

The process of copying music from a CD to your computer and converting it to a format that Media Player understands is known as *ripping*. Songs ripped using Windows Media Player 11 automatically appear in the media library for playing.

NOTE

For best results when ripping music, make sure your computer is connected to the Internet. When connected to the Internet, Media Player retrieves media information for inserted CDs and stores this information in the ripped media files. If the media information is incorrect or missing, you can add it or edit it after ripping. For information on how to add or edit media information, see “Updating Media Information and Album Art” later in this chapter. In addition, the filenames of the ripped music files can be set to use this media information in different ways. To do this, click the arrow below the Rip tab and select More Options. In this dialog box, you can change the rip music location by selecting Change under the Rip Music to This Location section. The ripped music filename is changed by selecting File Name from this same section and formatting the filename as desired. I choose to use Track Number followed by the Song Title with a space as the separator. I use this because it results in a very neat Music folder when organized as described in “Organizing Your Media Collection.”

To rip music to your computer, complete the following steps:

1. Choose the desired format and bit rate for the file by clicking the arrow below the Rip tab, as shown in Figure 8.8. Select the desired options from the Format and Bit Rate commands. For more information on these options, see “Choosing a File Format” and “Choosing a Bit Rate” later in this section.

Figure 8.8
Change Format and Bit Rate in the Rip menu.



2. Insert a CD into the CD-ROM drive and click the Rip tab, as shown in Figure 8.9.

NOTE

By default, Windows Media Player 11 begins ripping automatically when you are on the Rip tab and insert a new CD. Automatic ripping options can be changed by selecting More Options from the Rip tab menu.

3. After the player has started ripping the CD, you may choose to uncheck songs that you do not want Media Player to rip to your computer. You can also stop or start by clicking the Stop Rip or Start Rip buttons that appear in the Rip view.

Figure 8.9
The Rip tab used for copying from CDs to your computer



CHOOSING A FILE FORMAT

By default, Windows Media Player 11 uses the Windows Media Audio Format. This format offers a balanced combination between sound quality and file size. Other available formats are

- **Windows Media Audio Pro**—Ideal for portable devices because of its higher sound quality at low bit rates.
- **Windows Media Audio Variable Bit Rate**—Results in smaller file size with the same audio quality.
- **Windows Media Audio Lossless**—Provides the best audio quality with the largest file size.
- **MP3**—Provides added flexibility with similar audio quality and a slightly larger file size than Windows Media Audio.
- **WAV**—Another lossless format providing added flexibility with high audio quality and large file size.

CHOOSING A BIT RATE

The bit rate determines the audio quality and file size of the resulting file. Typically, lower bit rates result in smaller file sizes that have lower audio quality. Alternatively, high bit rates result in high quality audio with very large file sizes.

You should choose a bit rate that balances quality and file size to meet your usage needs. A good bit rate is usually 96Kbps or 128Kbps if you plan to use your audio on portable devices

with limited storage. Higher bit rates should be used for audio archiving on your PC where storage space is not an issue. True audiophiles won't be satisfied with MP3s ripped at anything under 192Kbps, however.

SHOPPING FOR MUSIC AND VIDEO FROM ONLINE STORES

Online stores provide a quick and easy way to legally download your favorite music or videos. Media Player 11 allows the browsing and purchasing of media from many online stores that are part of the PlaysForSure program. Although many stores are available, I will focus on the new service provided as a partnership between Microsoft and MTV. This online store, called URGE, is fully integrated within Media Player 11 and provides browsing and purchasing media directly from the Library view, as shown in Figure 8.10.

Figure 8.10
The URGE music store is integrated directly into the library.



CHOOSING AN ONLINE STORE

The Online Stores tab displays the currently chosen online store or Online Stores, in the case that there is no store currently active. To choose an online store, click the arrow below the Online Stores tab, as shown in Figure 8.11, and select the desired store from the list—URGE, in our case. If you want to use a store not listed in the Online Stores menu, select Browse All Online Stores.

Figure 8.11
Use the Online Stores menu to choose your desired store.

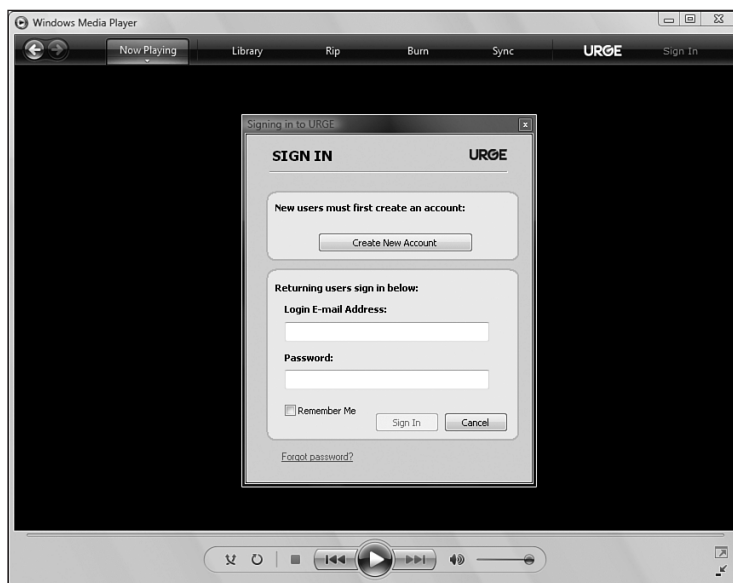


SETTING UP AN ACCOUNT

Most online stores require a similar setup process of creating a username and password, entering your billing information, and choosing your account type. To set up an account for URGE, follow these steps:

1. Click the Sign In button next to the URGE logo on the Online Stores tab.
2. Select Create New Account in the dialog box that appears, as shown in Figure 8.12.

Figure 8.12
URGE Sign In
dialog box



3. Enter your billing information and select an account type.

Common account types are as follows:

- **Purchase Only**—Standard account type that allows purchasing songs on an individual basis. Songs can usually be played on the computer, burned to a CD, or transferred to a portable device. In URGE, this is called a Basic Pass.
- **Subscription with Streaming**—Subscription account that allows unlimited streaming of all content contained in the store's catalog. You must be connected to the Internet at all times to use this type of account.
- **Subscription with Streaming and Download**—Subscription account that allows the download of music to your computer for playback when not connected to the Internet. In URGE, this is called an All Access Pass.

- **Subscription with Streaming, Download, and Sync**—Subscription account that allows you to download media and sync it to a PlaysForSure-compatible portable device. In URGE, this is called an All Access Pass to Go.

FINDING, PLAYING, AND PURCHASING MEDIA IN URGE

Because of its integration with Media Player 11, content in URGE is found the same way as media in your local library. To find media on URGE, select URGE in the Library view and browse or search as described earlier in the section “Redesigned Browsing and Searching.”

To play items in the URGE catalog, select the item you want to play and drag it into the List pane. If the List pane is not visible, click the List pane button shown in Figure 8.1. For users with a Purchase Only account or users who are not signed in, a 30-second clip of the file is played. To play the entire song, you must purchase it or sign in to a subscription account with streaming.

To download music if your account type enables it, right-click the media file or album in the Library view and select Download. This will immediately download the media files selected to your computer for playback later.

If your account is a Purchase Only account, you can download media by purchasing tracks individually or by purchasing full albums. To purchase media, select the media file or album to be purchased and select Buy. After media is purchased, you can play it on your computer, burn it to CD, or sync it to a portable device.

ADDING ITEMS FROM YOUR COMPUTER TO YOUR LIBRARY

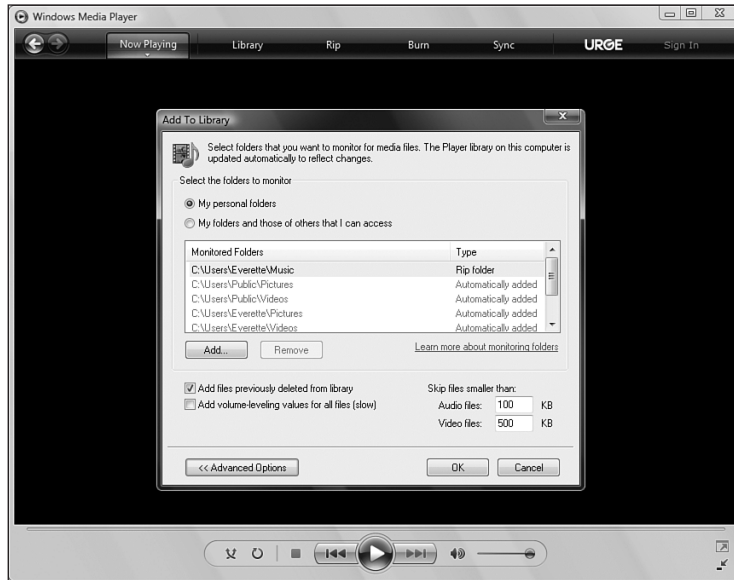
By default, Windows Media player 11 searches certain folders on your computer for media files and automatically adds these files to your library. If your media does not appear in the library automatically, it is located in a folder that is not monitored by Media Player. To change the folders that are monitored, perform the following steps:

1. Click the arrow below the Library tab and select Add to Library.
2. In the Add to Library dialog box, click Advanced Options.
3. As shown in Figure 8.13, you can Add or Remove monitored folders as well as change options for monitoring.

TIP

To add .m4a, .mp4, .m4p, or .aac files from iTunes to your Media Player 11 library, you must first convert the files to a compatible format such as Windows Media Audio or MP3. Many software programs convert media files, such as Xilisoft Audio Converter. To find one of these programs, search Google for “Audio Converter” and look for one that supports your desired source file type.

Figure 8.13
Add to Library
options



TAKING YOUR MUSIC AND VIDEO ON THE GO

Windows Media Player 11 provides many ways that make it easier than ever to take your music and video files with you. Media Player 11 has built-in functions for burning CDs, synchronizing files to your portable media player, and for sharing your media throughout your home network.

Media Player 11 and PlaysForSure Versus iTunes & iPod

One of the first questions that is asked is should I get an iPod or another type of MP3 player? Having used a large number of portable music players in the past, I would recommend one of the excellent, more featured alternative players. If you are choosing a new portable device, the first consideration is the software you currently use for your digital media. If you currently use iTunes for your digital media management and purchasing, then you should definitely choose the iPod since it would integrate with your current media system. However, if you currently use Windows Media Player or any other PC-based media software, I would recommend using Windows Media Player in conjunction with a PlaysForSure compatible device. Of the portable devices I have used, the Creative Zen Vision:M, found at www.creative.com, is by far a superior device. The device has an incredible screen offering 256,000 colors to view your video as well as extremely crisp audio provided by Creative's patented audio processors. The player also includes the ability to listen and record FM radio as well as support for TiVo-to-Go, both of which the iPod lacks. Other advantages over the iPod include the longer battery life of 4 hours of video or 14 hours of audio playback. The Zen provides a much larger number of formats, which is its main advantage over the iPod, in my opinion. Instead of being limited to a couple of audio and one video format, the Zen offers support for the WMA, MP3, and WAV audio formats as well as MPEG1/2/4-SP, WMV9, Motion-JPEG, DivX, and XviD, and Tivo-to-Go video support. All PlaysForSure devices also support the large number of online content providers available through Windows Media Player 11 instead of being restricted to only one provider, as iTunes/iPod are, the iTunes Store. Finally, with the newly redesigned

Media Player 11, the benefits of the standardized PlaysForSure program offer far superior function to the proprietary iTunes software suite without the need to install another piece of software onto your system. For this reason, it is my recommendation to choose Windows Media Player 11 and a compatible PlaysForSure device over iTunes and the iPod as long as your current media software is not iTunes.

BURNING CUSTOMIZED CDS

Media Player 11 provides the capability to create customized CDs for playing in your home or car CD player. Before you can burn a CD, you must first have a Windows Vista-compatible CD burner and a blank CD-R disc. To burn a custom CD, perform the following steps:

1. Begin by selecting the Burn tab.
2. Click the arrow below the Burn tab and select Audio CD, as shown in Figure 8.14.

Figure 8.14
Select Audio CD from
the Burn menu.



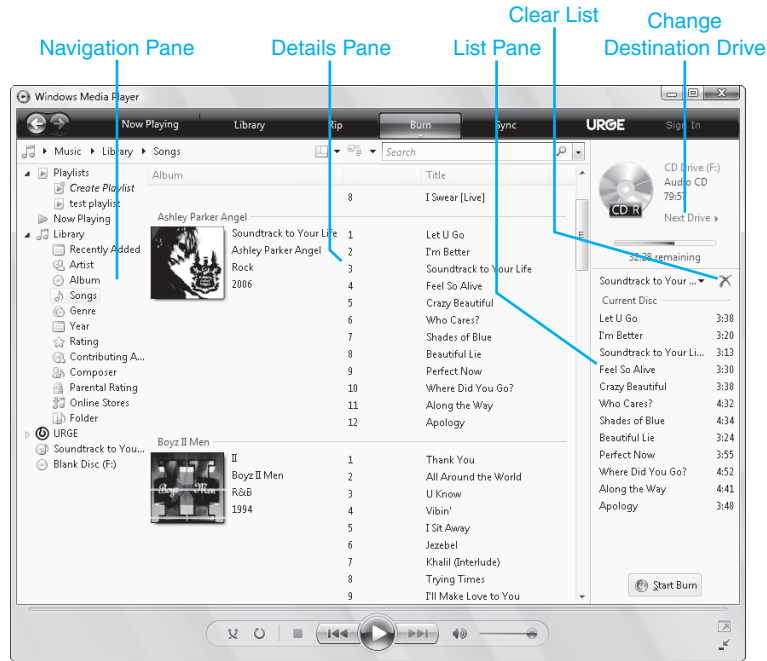
3. Insert a blank CD into your CD burner drive.

NOTE

If you have multiple CD burners, you can change the destination burner by clicking Next Drive in the List pane of the Burn view, as shown in Figure 8.15.

4. Create the list of songs to burn by dragging items from the Details pane to the List pane to add those items to the burn list. To remove items from the list, right-click the item and choose Remove from List. Items can be rearranged by clicking and dragging the songs to match the order you desire for your CD.

Figure 8.15
Use the List pane to change the destination drive, set up the burn list, and start the burn.



NOTE

As you add items to the list, you will notice the time remaining, or free time on the disk, decrease to account for the newly added songs. If you choose more files than can fit on a single CD, you can choose to remove some items or have Media Player automatically split the list to burn two CDs.

5. At the bottom of the List pane, choose Start Burn, as shown in Figure 8.15. It is recommended that you not perform other tasks while the burn is in progress. The current progress can be viewed in the burn list.

SYNCING FILES TO YOUR PORTABLE MEDIA PLAYER

The first step to synchronizing your files with your portable media player is to choose a portable device. Many players will work with Windows Media Player 11, but for the best experience, you should look for a device that is PlaysForSure compatible.

Tivo-To-Go

For users with a Tivo Series 2 DVR, there is now a way to get those recorded episodes of 24 onto your portable player for watching on the go. This requires a PlaysForSure Video mobile device that states its support for Tivo-To-Go videos. An excellent player, and one I use quite often for this purpose, is Creative's Zen Vision:M. To use this feature, you must first have a Tivo that is connected to your home network. See your Tivo manual for how to do this. Secondly, you will need to download the free Tivo desktop software from Tivo's website at

www.tivo.com/tivotogo. After it is installed, follow the instructions on Tivo's website or the Tivo desktop help file for how to transfer your recordings to your PC. After your recordings have transferred successfully to your PC, you can add them to your Media Player 11 Library, as described in "Adding Items from Your Computer to Your Library," and sync the files to your device either automatically or manually as described next.

PlaysForSure is a program between Microsoft and hardware vendors that ensures the best operation with Windows Media Player 11 without the need to install drivers or software for those devices. PlaysForSure is separated into many compatibilities that describe what services a device offers. To view a list of PlaysForSure devices, visit www.playsforsure.com. When shopping for your PlaysForSure device, look for the logos shown in Figure 8.16.

Figure 8.16
PlaysForSure logos indicate available services for the device.



After you have your device, open Media Player and connect the device to your computer. Media Player prompts you to choose either Automatic or Manual sync method. For a description of these methods, see the corresponding section that follows. If you decide later to change the sync method, click the arrow below the Sync tab, point to the device, and select Set Up Sync. You can then select or clear the Sync This Device Automatically check box.

CHOOSING WHAT SYNCs AUTOMATICALLY

If your device is set to sync automatically, the items selected to sync will be updated each time you connect your device to your computer. To select the items that will be synchronized, follow these steps:

1. Click the arrow below the Sync tab, point to the device name, and select Set Up Sync.
2. In the Device Setup dialog box, shown in Figure 8.17, you can choose the playlists that are synchronized with your device. Using the available playlists, select Add to sync the selected playlist with the device. To stop a playlist from synchronizing, select it in the Playlists to Sync list and choose Remove.

TIP

To make sure your favorite playlists sync in the event that your device runs out of storage space, make sure to use the priority arrows in the Device Setup dialog box to set the priority of the selected playlist.

Figure 8.17
The Device Setup dialog box allows you to choose the playlists to sync and their priority.



SELECTING ITEM TO SYNC MANUALLY

If your device is set to sync manually, each time you want to make changes to the files on your device, you must create a list of files to sync. To remove files from your device, navigate the device using the Navigation pane to find your file. Right-click the file and choose Delete. To set up a list of files to sync to the device, perform the following:

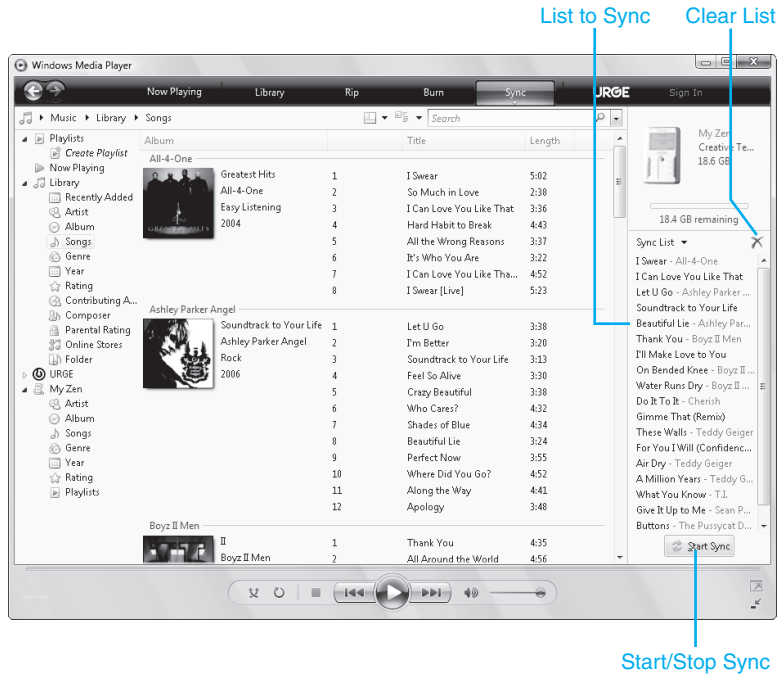
1. Select the Sync tab and clear the sync list by clicking the Clear List pane button as shown in Figure 8.18.
2. Find your media in your library and drag them to the List pane to add them to the Sync List as shown in Figure 8.18. To select multiple items, hold down the CTRL key while selecting your media. To remove items from the Sync List, right-click the item and select Remove from List.

TIP

To have Media Player automatically choose a set of random songs from your library, you can choose Click Here on the List pane when there are no items in the Sync List. After doing this, you can add or remove items from the list and click Shuffle Now.

3. After you have set up your Sync List, make sure that all the items will fit on your device by looking at the List pane. Remove any necessary items from the Sync List and click Start Sync.

Figure 8.18
Sync view allows you to manually set up your Sync List for your device.



SHARING MEDIA THROUGHOUT YOUR HOME

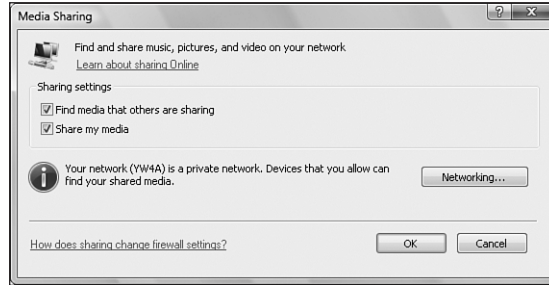
Before you begin to set up media sharing throughout your home, you will need to make sure you have all the required equipment. To enable media sharing, you will need a home network and a networked digital media player. A networked digital media player, also known as a digital media receiver, is connected to your network and plays the content shared by Media Player on your Windows Vista machine. Suitable digital media receivers include other Windows Vista PCs and the Xbox 360, as well as a number of standalone units that can be found by visiting the PlaysForSure website at www.playsforsure.com.

To connect a digital media receiver to your network, you can use an ethernet cable or a wireless network adapter. Consult the documentation that comes with your device for more information on getting it connected to your home network. If you are connecting another Windows Vista PC as a digital media receiver or setting up a new home network, see Chapter 20, "Creating a Windows Network," later in this book.

After your device is connected to the network, turn it on and complete any configuration steps that may be needed to finalize the installation. If you are using another Windows Vista PC as your device, you must select the Find Media Others Are Sharing check box in the Media Sharing dialog box shown in Figure 8.19. After your device is fully connected and operational, complete the following steps to enable media sharing on your Windows Vista PC with your newly installed digital media receiver.

1. Click the arrow below the Library tab and select Media Sharing.
2. In the Media Sharing dialog box, enable media sharing by checking the Share My Media check box, as shown in Figure 8.19, and click OK.

Figure 8.19
The Media Sharing dialog box shown if media sharing is currently disabled

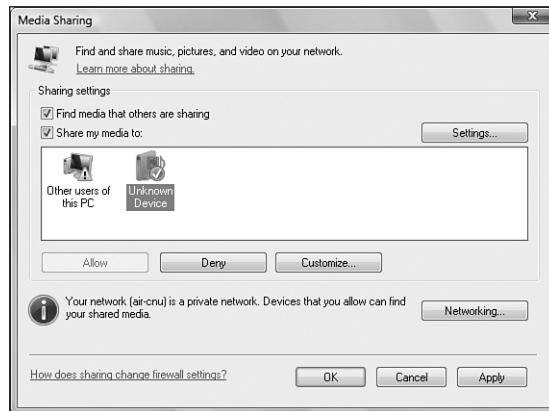


3. To allow sharing with your device, find the device in the list of devices in the Media Sharing dialog box and choose Allow, as shown in Figure 8.20. If you want to prevent access to a device, choose Deny.

TIP

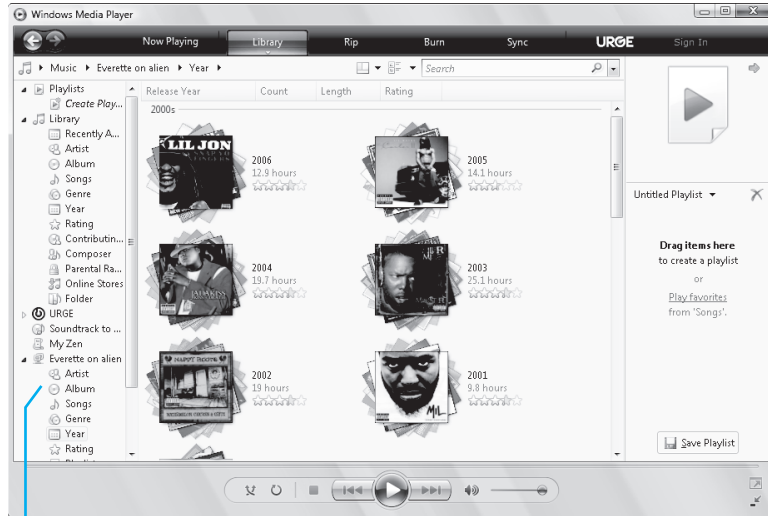
To change what library items are shared with new devices by default, choose Settings in the Media Sharing dialog box. To change what library items are shared with a certain device, select that device from the device list and choose Customize.

Figure 8.20
The Media Sharing dialog box shown if media sharing is enabled. Notice the addition of the device list.



After you have sharing enabled, you are ready to play your media on your new digital media receiver. For information on how to do this, see the documentation that came with your device. If your digital media receiver is another Windows Vista PC, the shared media will appear in the Library view of Windows Media Player 11, as shown in Figure 8.21.

Figure 8.21
Accessible shared
media appears in the
Library view of
Windows Media
Player 11.



Shared Media on Your Network

CAUTION

Not all shared media will play back on your digital media receiver. Check your device's documentation for information on supported media types. Also note that media obtained from online stores may be supported only if purchased and might not be supported if obtained from a subscription service.

ORGANIZING YOUR MUSIC COLLECTION

To keep track of all your media that you have added to your library, you must learn to organize your library and files for easy access of your favorites. Your media library can be set up to contain playlists that allow you to quickly play your favorite music. In addition, arranging the media files on your computer's hard disk in a neat fashion will greatly aid you in the event that you need to back up your media files for transfer to a new PC or for repair of your current PC.

CREATING YOUR OWN CUSTOM PLAYLISTS

With Windows Media Player 11, it is easier than ever to create and edit custom playlists to contain your favorite media. With playlists, you can create the perfect layout of songs for any occasion. To create a new playlist, follow these instructions:

1. Open Windows Media Player 11 and select the Library tab. If you need to clear the List pane, click the Clear List pane button shown earlier in Figure 8.18.
2. To add media to your playlist, drag items from your media library onto the List pane, as shown in Figure 8.22. To rearrange items in the playlist, select and drag the item to the desired location. To remove items from the list, right-click the item, and select Remove from List.

- When you are finished creating your playlist, select Save Playlist at the bottom of the List pane, as shown in Figure 8.22, and enter the name for your playlist.

NOTE

After your playlist is saved, you can play it by right-clicking it in the library Navigation pane and selecting play. In addition, the playlist may be edited anytime by selecting it from the Navigation pane and choosing Edit in List Pane. After it is opened in edit mode, make any changes to the playlist as described in Step 2 and select Save Playlist to save your changes.

Figure 8.22
Drag items to the List pane to create a new playlist.



CREATING AND EDITING AUTO PLAYLISTS

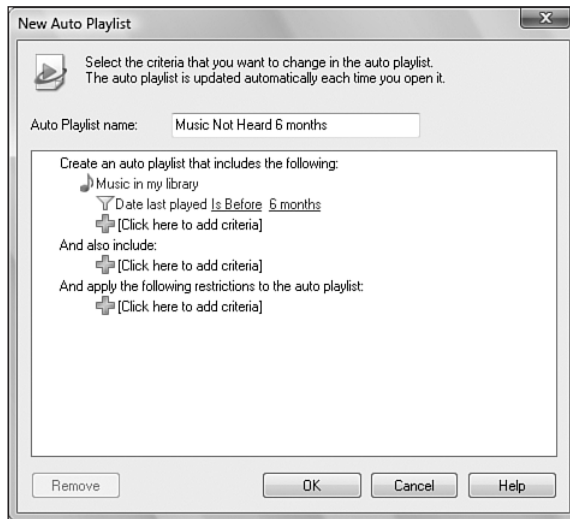
An auto playlist is a playlist that is set up with a set of filters. Using these filters, the content of these playlists is automatically updated to reflect changes to your media library. To create a new auto playlist, complete the following steps:

- Click the arrow below the Library tab and select Create Auto Playlist.
- Type the name of your new auto playlist into the Auto Playlist Name box.
- In the bottom half of the window, set up your filters by selecting Click Here to Add Criteria, as shown in Figure 8.23. You can add as many filters as you would like to your auto playlist. To remove a filter, select it and choose Remove.

NOTE

To edit an existing auto playlist, right-click the playlist in the Navigation pane and select Edit.

Figure 8.23
Name your auto playlist and create filters.



ORGANIZING YOUR MEDIA COLLECTION

Over time, your PC will have media files scattered all over the hard drive. This can make it difficult to find all your media files in the event that you want to create a backup. Your media library may also become cluttered with media files you no longer want or that you want to remove from your media library.

CAUTION

Before performing this next section, ensure that all your media has the correct media information as described in “Updating Media Information and Album Art.” This will prevent the creation of incorrectly named folders and improperly grouped media.

To arrange your media files into an organized central location, perform the following:

1. Make sure your Rip music settings are set to use your Music folder and the filename is set up as described in the first note under “Ripping Songs from CDs onto Your Computer.”
2. Click the arrow below the Library tab and select More Options.
3. Set up the Automatic Media Information Updates for Files section of the Library Options dialog box, as shown in Figure 8.24, and click OK.

4. Apply these changes to your media library files by clicking the arrow below the Library tab and selecting Apply Media Information Changes. The result will be a single Music folder, your rip music folder, arranged in folders by artist. Each Artist folder will contain Album folders that contain the songs that appear on that album.

TIP

When browsing your media files using Windows Explorer, you can set your view to any icon view to see the Album Art displayed for Album folders and a Collection of one or more Album Art images on Artist Folders. This provides a nice visual way to view your media files when you are not using Windows Media Player 11.

Figure 8.24
Settings to have your media files renamed and rearranged using your rip music settings.



HOUSECLEANING FOR YOUR MEDIA LIBRARY

Although Media Player 11 automatically removes files from the library that are no longer present in the file system, you may at some point decide that you want to clean out your library. If you have tons of files that you no longer use and want to remove them from your library, you have two options:

First is to leave the file on your computer's hard drive and remove the file only from the library. This is a good choice if you think you might want to add the file back at a later time or if you just want to hold on to that file for sentimental reasons.

Second, you can have Media Player 11 remove the file from both your library and your PC. This results in the file being permanently lost and should be used only if you are sure you are never going to want the file again.

To remove media from your library, find the item in the Library view. Right-click the item and choose Delete. In the dialog box, choose the appropriate option for removal, as described previously.

UPDATING MEDIA INFORMATION AND ALBUM ART

Most of the time, your media information will already be correct because it is downloaded when you rip a CD or it is embedded in the file when you buy music from an online store. However, on occasion, the media information that is downloaded for a file on your hard drive or for a CD is incorrect or missing. Incorrect or missing media information is a major problem when ripping CDs that are not well known or are a mix of different songs previously burned onto a CD.

TIP

To ensure your files stay organized and updated, make sure you update your media files after changing any media information or album art. To do this, click the arrow below the Library tab and select Apply Media Information Changes.

CAUTION

Do not use the automatic Find Album Info features if the song was originally ripped as part of a mixed CD. This is because all files on that original CD are linked, and if you choose the album info for one file, all other files will be changed back to the album of the chosen file, thereby forcing you to redo the album info for every file in that mix CD. A word of advice—when in doubt, use the manual procedures for updating media info and album art.

ADDING OR EDITING MEDIA INFORMATION

In some cases, the media information of a file may be incomplete or missing. This inaccurate media information should be corrected immediately to ensure that your library and files remain neatly organized and easy to navigate and maintain. It is a lot easier to find your favorite song if it contains the correct media information than if its media information reads “Track 2, Unknown Album, Unknown Artist,” along with about 400 other songs in your library. It may be tedious, but supplying your media library with correct information will make things much more enjoyable in the long run. You can enter media information into Windows Media Player 11 in several ways, including automatically from online databases, dragging items, and using the Advanced Tag Editor.

AUTOMATICALLY GET MEDIA INFORMATION FROM AN ONLINE DATABASE

Many albums have their information stored in online databases accessible to Windows Media Player 11. This is usually the easiest and fastest way to update your media information. To do this, complete the following steps:

1. Find the album you want to update in the Album view of the library.
2. Right-click the album and select Find Album Info.
3. Follow the instructions on the Find Album Information dialog box to search for the correct information and update the album.

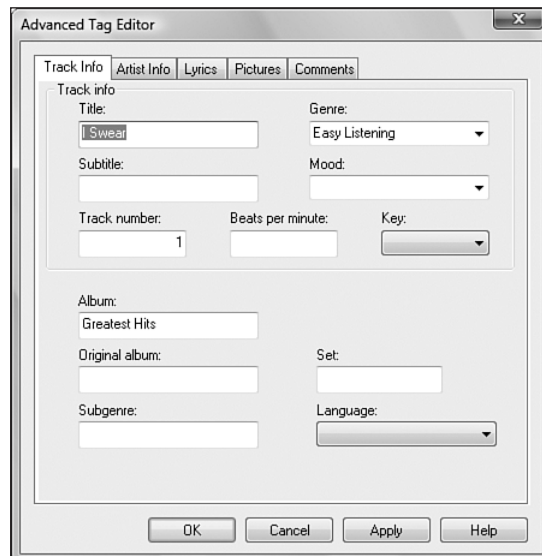
If you are unable to find the album information in the online database, or if your media was originally part of a mix CD, you must use one of the manual options. The first of these is useful if you have at least one file in your library that has correct information for the album. Files with incorrect media information can be dragged on top of a file with the correct media information. Confirm the move and media information change to add the correct media information to the desired file. If this option is not possible, you must use the Advanced Tag Editor. This is the most powerful option for editing your media information and personally is my favorite because each file is edited independently and there is no chance you can mess up the media information you have already entered for other files. To use the Advanced Tag Editor, right-click a song in the library and select Advanced Tag Editor. Enter the correct media information in the boxes for the Track Info tab and the Artist Info tab, as shown in Figure 8.25 and click OK. Although not all information will always be filled in, the essential fields are as follows:

- **Track Info tab**—Title, Genre, Track Number, Album
- **Artist Info tab**—Artist, Album Artist

TIP

To enter multiple artists in the Artist field, enter all artists separated by semicolons.

Figure 8.25
The Advanced Tag Editor is the most powerful way to modify a file's media information.



ADDING OR CHANGING ALBUM ART

The most common missing piece of media information is the album art. The album art provides a visual representation of every album in your media library and is displayed in the Expanded Tile view of your media library; it's used as well by many portable media players and digital media receivers.

TIP

Make sure all media information is correct before updating album art. This will reduce the risk of files being assigned incorrect album art.

To add or edit the album art, complete the following:

1. Click the Library tab and locate the album for which you want to add or change the album art.
2. To automatically find the album art, right-click the album and select Find Album Info. Search for the correct media information and click the correct entry.

If the media information found is correct, but there is a generic album art image or if the media information is not found at all, you must manually set the album art. The following steps describe how to manually add or change the album art.

1. Click the Library tab and locate the album for which you want to add or change the album art.
2. Find the image you would like to use on your computer or on the Internet. Good websites for finding album art are Google images, images.google.com, and albumart.org. When you find the desired album art, right-click the image and select Copy.
3. In Windows Media Player 11, right-click the album art box of the desired album and select Paste Album Art. The Album Art for all songs in that album is updated with the new album art.

TIPS FROM THE WINDOWS PROS: PLAYING AUDIO FROM YOUR PORTABLE DEVICE THROUGH YOUR CAR STEREO

So now you know how to work Media Player and how to organize your media with complete media information and album art. You have synchronized your media to your portable device. The majority of music that people listen to during the day is in the car during the commute to and from work. Next, I explain the options you have for getting your newly stocked portable player connected to your car stereo so that you never have to carry a CD again.

To decide the best method to use, you need to know a little bit about your car stereo. If you have not already checked, see whether your stereo has an auxiliary input. This information can usually be found in the vehicle or stereo's manual, or you may need to call your local dealership. Another option to look into is whether your stereo supports a stereo Bluetooth link. After you know this information, review the following options, listed from best sound quality to worst, and choose the one that best suits your needs. In all cases, the portable media player's headphone jack is used as the audio source.

- **Auxiliary Input**—This is a direct connection to your stereo either through an auxiliary (front/rear) or an adapter connected to your specialized CD changer input. There is little interference with this type of connection and as a result, it is highly recommended over other methods.
- **Bluetooth Link**—If your stereo supports a Bluetooth link, you can get an adapter for your portable device that will allow a high-quality wireless direct connection with your stereo. Because the link is wireless, the Bluetooth link is subject to slightly more interference than the Auxiliary Input method.
- **Cassette Adapter**—This option offers quality similar to that of the FM options discussed next. However, because it is not bound to the FM spectrum, it is subject to less interference and noise. This device connects from your portable device directly into your car's cassette player.
- **Wired FM Transmitter**—This option does offer decreased sound quality to the previous option because of the limitations of the FM spectrum. A wired FM transmitter is a device installed in line with your stereo's FM antenna. While an audio source is connected to the device, the car's antenna is switched off and the audio signal is modulated to a set FM frequency, such as 88.9 FM. When there is no audio input source, the device switches the antenna back on to keep from interfering with FM radio reception.
- **Wireless FM Transmitter**—This is identical in operation to the wired FM transmitter, except that it modulates the audio to the FM frequency and then broadcasts it within a short range (usually 3–6 ft.) so that it can be picked up by your vehicle's antenna. Notice that this device does not switch off the vehicle's antenna, because it requires it for operation. Although most used, this option has the lowest audio quality because of the large amount of interference introduced by the wirelessly transmitted FM signals competing with other local FM stations.