

Going all-region

Playing a foreign DVD doesn't have to be a trial

by Jeff Heinrich

The vast majority of DVD players sold in Canada are pre-set to play DVDs from only Region 1, the regional code for North America.

But many are easily hacked, usually by simply punching in a series of code-breaking numbers on the machine's remote control. The "secret" hacks can be found on specialized websites like VideoHelp.com.

Some retailers like Best Buy also provide photocopied cheat sheets to customers with instructions on how to hack the pre-set codes on the major-model DVD players they sell.

Hacks also work for many older players you might already own.

"It's easy as pie, usually," said Gary Tooze, who runs the website www.DVDBeaver.com in Mississauga, Ont.

Though not illegal, hacking DVD players does void their warranty; for that reason, owners do so at their own risk. Most players can be modified. The latest Philips models, for example, are hacked this way, according to VideoHelp.com and the Best Buy cheat sheet:

- 1. Turn on the player.*
- 2. Open the loading tray.*
- 3. Press the set-up button on the remote.*
- 4. Navigate to the "Preferences" page.*
- 5. Enter the numbers 1-3-8-9-3-1.*
- 6. You will now see the current region code displayed.*
- 7. Using the up/down arrow key, select "0" for all regions.*
- 8. Press the set-up button again, then "OK." Your player is now ready to play all DVDs.*



Consumers who prefer not to hack can simply buy a new all-region player. They can be found at some big-box stores, while many smaller electronics stores catering to immigrant clientele also sell them. Or just go online - you can Google "all-region DVD players" to find suppliers - and have one shipped to you.

To each region, a code

DVDs are produced around the world. But unlike CDs, most DVDs are coded so they can't be played on non-compatible players. That way, studios can price and market the same film one way in North America and another in Europe or Asia. Region code numbers are usually displayed in a little box on the back of the DVD case; the number is superimposed on an image of the globe. Below are the codes, the areas of the world they cover, and the estimated number of DVD movies released so far in each.

Total DVD releases worldwide so far	179,732
R0 Playable in all regions	n/a
R1 Canada, U.S. and U.S. territories, Bermuda	102,162
R2 Western Europe, Central Europe, Japan, Greenland, Middle East, Egypt, French overseas territories, Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland	56,958
R3 Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea and Taiwan	*
R4 Mexico, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Oceania	15,663
R5 Rest of Africa, ex-Soviet Union, Indian subcontinent, Mongolia, North Korea	519
R6 Mainland China	*
R7 Reserved for future use	
R8 International venues such as aircraft, cruise ships	n/a

* There are an estimated 4,427 releases in Regions 3 and 6 combined

Sources: Wikipedia, dvd-basen