

Elgato turbo.264 HD	
hardware video encoder	
★★★★	
fast video encoding	
price	
\$379	
Elgato	
Simms and Conexus	
Chris Oaten	
www.elgato.com	



Speed demon encoder

There are two methods for encoding video. One is using software, the other is with a hardware encoder. If you encode video on a regular basis and need the fastest times possible you should have a hardware encoder, such as Elgato's successor to its turbo.264, which carries a HD designation signifying a new model with expanded capabilities.

The proof of this encoder's muscle is easy to demonstrate. First, I found a 3:47 standard-def movie and dropped it twice into the 264 HD's job window.

I then specified two different output files - one for an iPhone and one for Apple TV. Both files were encoded in a shade under five minutes.

On the other hand, when using Quicktime's export presets to test a software transcoding solution, the result was almost seven minutes - and this was for just one export, the iPhone-ready version of the video.

Next, I used a 1:56, 3GB high-def video (1080p) I'd exported from Final Cut Pro and transcoded it to the Sony PSP format. Using the 264 HD, it took 3:22. Using Apple's Compressor software (part of the pro Final Cut Studio package), a similar video conversion took 7:42 - more than twice as long. An iPhone export of the same video file was shrunk from its original 3GB to just 19MB, which played beautifully on my iPhone.

There can be no doubting the 264 HD's speed advantage, yet encoding speed is only half the story here.

The 264 HD installs a Quicktime component, meaning any application (such as iMovie) that leverages Quicktime can exploit the 264 HD hardware accelerator to speed exports.

It's also versatile. You can drag and drop just about any video file into the application to convert it to a high-quality H.264 file in standard or HD resolutions. Supported formats are AVCHD Video, QuickTime, AVI, DV, WMV, MPEG-1, MPEG-2 Program/Transport Stream, MPEG-4, MP4, M4V, H.263, H.264 AVC, Xvid, VIDEO_TS

and, according to Elgato, other file types that are likely so obscure that they don't bear mentioning.

For owners of camcorders that use the AVCHD format, the 264 HD will automatically detect the camera and enable editing features plus automation of uploads to YouTube. I didn't test this, however, as I don't have my own AVCHD camera but *AMW* contributor Danny Gorog, who also tried this device (and waxed lyrical about it) told me it works like a charm.

Another handy trick is being able to re-name files, with names applied as DVD chapter titles if you batch export clips. This is a handy feature indeed.

Yet another is being able to customise your export formats, so you can create as many output presets as you like in addition to the nine that come pre-configured with the software.

I found this especially useful for transcoding vids already encoded for iPhone into a format that can be played on a Canon M80 portable media viewer, which requires some obscure MPEG-4 settings.

For my money, however, the turbo 264 HD's natural companion is Elgato's Eye TV, which shouldn't be too surprising considering the two devices come from the same company.

If you record HD broadcast content from free-to-air stations, being able to accelerate exports will make the process of recording/exporting/syncing and watching TV shows a great deal more enjoyable through having to wait less time to see the files arrive on your Apple TV.

On top of all this, with the 264 HD carrying the video conversion load, you'll not find yourself fighting for processor cycles while using CPU-intensive applications. I ran through a set of image enhancements to RAW image files that were roundtrip-edited between Aperture and Photoshop CS3 while in the background the 264 HD batched 76 1080p clips into 720p files. No problems.

One tip you might overlook. If you have a lot of clips queued for transcoding, don't go through each one individually to set the output format. Choose your format for the first clip in the queue while holding down the option key to apply the same export format to all clips.

Australian Macworld's buying advice. Elgato's turbo.264 HD does exactly what its maker claims it will do, has clearly been designed for the Mac, is a cinch to use, and takes a great deal of processing load off your Mac's CPU. For Eye TV owners especially it's a recommended buy, but for anyone who loves to share video by exporting it to one device or many will find this hardware encoder a godsend. It's just a shame the price could marginalise many users who would deeply appreciate the speed boost, especially those using older Macs that struggle with software-based encoding.