



## Strong STR 5492

Price \$599

If you're looking to enjoy the benefits of digital recording, Strong's STR 5492 has a lot to offer.

Building on its reputation for good set-top boxes, Strong's STR 5492 features two HDTV tuners, so you can change channel while recording. Most twin-tuner PVRs let you record two channels at once, but the Strong lets you record three as long as they're not from more than two networks (i.e. you could record one from SBS and two from the ABC).

Indeed you could even watch a fourth live channel so long as it's from one of those two networks, although you couldn't time-shift that fourth channel. And you can always watch something you've recorded earlier. Still with us?

Another impressive feature is Mosaic Mode, offering a glimpse of what's on the other channels. You can choose to open a grid of 2, 4, 6 or 9 windows on the screen — calling up a few seconds of video from that many channels. From there you click on any window to start the video playing and then click on it again to watch that channel.

The Strong is blessed with a friendly onscreen interface, including a playback timeline that won't intimidate non-tech savvy members of the household. The remote control



is a little daunting at first, but Strong has printed its help-desk phone number and email address on the back! Nice.

When it comes to advanced features, the Strong gets a tick in almost every box. You can pause and rewind live TV plus watch the beginning of a program while still recording the end, although it doesn't warn against changing the channel while time-shifting. You also can skip the ads.

Global pre- and post-padding of 5, 10 or 15 minutes is available — although unfortunately 15 minutes still isn't enough sometimes and we'd also like to see 30 and 60 minutes for the evils of Channel 9. One of the Strong's key strengths is that it has an Ethernet port and is IceTV-compatible, letting you schedule Season Pass recordings via a browser or smartphone. The lack of Wi-Fi is slightly disappointing considering the Strong is aimed at mainstream users less likely to have

Ethernet ports in the lounge room.

The Strong's onscreen EPG displays six channels plus a live preview of the channel you were watching, but the trade-off is that it's a little cramped. You can schedule recordings from the onscreen Guide and call up a menu to create recurring recordings. Remember it can't check the guide for schedule changes unless you create a Season Pass using IceTV.

Unlike some devices, the Strong's EPG indicates which programs are scheduled to record. If you try to schedule more than two recordings at the same time, it warns you and asks which scheduled recording you want to cancel. As for overlap management due to padding, if both tuners are in use it will cut off the beginning of the next show in favour

of recording the post-padding on the earlier shows, which we reckon is exceedingly sensible. And thankfully global pre and post-padding can be set to different values.

One feature lacking from this recorder is intelligent storage management; there's no way to set it to automatically delete old recordings to make way for new ones, so you need to ensure the hard drive doesn't fill up. But if you do fill up you can transfer recordings to an external USB device or to a PC via your home network. You can even record directly to a USB device, plus you can play MP3 and JPG files from a USB device.

If you're looking for a well-priced PVR that strikes a balance between advanced features and usability, Strong's STR 5492 should certainly be on your shortlist.

## VERDICT

### Strong STR 5492

Price: \$599



- Great set of features
- Archiving to USB/PC
- Highly versatile



- No Wi-Fi
- Limited global padding

**HARD DRIVE:** 500GB (up to 60 hours HD or 250 hours SD)

**VIDEO OUTPUTS:** HDMI, Component, S-Video, RF pass-through

**VIDEO INPUTS:** none

**AUDIO OUTPUTS:** analogue stereo, optical digital

**AUDIO INPUTS:** none

**NETWORKING:** Ethernet

**CONTACT:** Strong Australia

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