

Playing your favorite arcade games in MAME at home is a lot of fun, but what happens when you're forced to leave the house? (Hey, it happens.) If your friends and relatives are tired of you reconfiguring their computers and installing MAME every time you visit, or your boss has your workstation locked down so you can't install any new software, what you need is a bootable MAME CD. Bootable MAME CDs allow you to boot computers from a CD directly into MAME. An operating system (usually a flavor of Linux), MAME, and all your game ROMs are contained directly on the disc, so the computer's hard drive is never even accessed.

While several flavors of these MAME Boot CDs such as (XMAME and KnoppiXMAME) have been created and are freely available for download via the Internet, the best and most complete solution is a package called AdvanceCD, named so because it also includes AdvanceMAME and the frontend AdvanceMENU.

Getting AdvanceCD to work could not be simpler. First, users need to download the installation files from the official AdvanceCD website (<http://advancemame.sourceforge.net>). Once the files have been downloaded and unzipped, users can copy their MAME ROMs of choice to the proper directory. The custom Linux kernel used in AdvanceCD takes up around 20mb of space, so that will leave you approximately 680mb of room for your games on a standard 80 minute CD-R. If that's not enough space for you, AdvanceCD also supports DVD-Rs and USB devices!

Once you've copied over the ROMs you wish to include on your image, all you need to do is run the included utilities to create a bootable CD image (both Linux scripts and DOS batch files are included to create the bootable ISO). Once the ISO has been created, it can be burned with the CD burning software of your choice.

Included in the CD image are hundreds of video and audio drivers. What makes AdvanceCD work so well is that for most computers no setup or customization is needed. Assuming the target machine has anything resembling standard hardware, AdvanceCD is able to automatically detect what video card and sound card you have installed and load the appropriate drivers. AdvanceCD worked on all my machines at home (including everything from a Dell laptop to an eMachine desktop machine).

Although AdvanceCD has worked for me on every machine I've tried, you may run into a situation where it doesn't work for you. In that case, you may wish to make your own boot CD instead. If you're planning on making a Linux-based MAME boot CD, the source code for AdvanceCD is available for download via the author's website. If DOS is more your style, a DOS-based MAME boot CD can be created as well. To create a DOS-based MAME bootable CD, you'll need to brush up on your old config.sys and autoexec.bat editing skills. Unfortunately MS-DOS predates the idea of "plug-and-play" and is a bit pickier than Linux when it comes to hardware. To get a DOS-based bootable MAME CD to work, you're going to need to track down DOS drivers for your CD-Rom drive and soundcard (assuming they exist). You'll also need a USB driver if you plan on using a USB game controller. Getting a DOS-based bootable CD working on your own computer is definitely possible, but the end result will be a lot less portable than using the Linux-based AdvanceCD solution.

There are many practical uses for Bootable MAME CDs. As mentioned earlier, they come in handy when visiting a friend's house (or stuck at the parents' house over the holidays) and want to play MAME without installing any software on their machine. The same thing goes for at work; Bootable MAME CDs allow you to spend the afternoon gaming away on company time without ever touching your own hard drive, leaving no trace of your time-wasting activities behind. Another use for these CDs is they can allow you to benchmark a computer "out in the wild". If you're looking for an older computer to use in a MAME cabinet, you can take your Bootable CD with you and pop it into the machine you're looking at to make sure the games you want to play will play at full speed and that all the hardware is recognized. Be careful though, when people see how much fun you're having playing MAME on their old computer, they may not wish to sell it as quickly!