

Save Dongle Review

By Thomas Zhao

Introduction

The R4i Save Dongle, according to the manufacturer, is a device that “perfectly cracks 3DS/NDSi/NDS original game cart game’s save” and “by download different game’s save, allow user to explore new game experience.” In essence, the R4i Save Dongle allows one to copy a DS/3DS Game Card’s save data, upload it to one’s computer for editing or posting on a website, and insert save data back into the cartridge. It’s a simple device that does one thing and one thing only. But does it do it well?

Packaging

The R4i Save Dongle comes in a surprisingly small box. Inside it, the only contents were the Save Dongle itself, nestled in a small fuzzy holder, an ad for a seemingly unrelated website, and a small strip of paper with a code for DSMonkey.com, who is presumably a reseller. Besides that, the box is surprisingly utilitarian, lacking even a manual or a driver CD. Basic documentation is found on the box itself, and the required drivers and software must be downloaded separately from the official website at www.r4i-sdhc.com. It would have been nice for the company to provide a simple manual or insert explaining how to use the device, as the explanation on the box is overly simplistic and not very helpful. The full manual is available on the manufacturer’s website, and is much more detailed.

Hardware

The hardware itself is rather bare. It’s made out of plastic and feels somewhat cheap. There is a slot for the Game Card, a small button used for firmware upgrades, an LED light helpfully labeled “LED,” and of course a USB plug. Of note is the fact that the Game Card is inserted with the label facing down. This is contradicted by the official website’s images as well as the packaging, which clearly depict the label facing up. In addition, the rather odd oval shape makes it difficult to insert alongside other devices, as it bulges out quite a bit and can cover up an adjacent port. Otherwise, the hardware itself is as simple as it gets, doing just enough to get the job done.

Software

Of course, the device is useless without the software that powers it. It is important to note that the device is NOT compatible with Mac OS X. Though the drivers allegedly support Windows versions all the way back to Windows 98, no other operating systems are supported. That being said, it’s not much of a surprise, given that Windows is still the most prevalent operating system today. There are several files found on the website for the R4i Save Dongle, the most important being the drivers. All of the files were in RAR format, which is a bit of an odd choice, considering that it requires a third party program to decompress. ZIP would have been a better choice, as people unfamiliar with compression could still open it with the built-in ZIP functionality in Windows. Decompressing the drivers RAR file, which weighs in at a rather large 52.9MB, reveals two EXEs, vcredist_x86.exe and dotNetFx40_Full_x86_x64.exe. More descriptive filenames would have been helpful here, because it’s not clear which should be launched

first. In fact, the latter program is not even necessary for those who already have the .NET Framework version 4.0 installed, meaning that making it a separate download could've reduced the file size significantly. The other file, `vcredist_x86.exe`, appears to be a Visual C++ 2010 redistributable. Interestingly enough, neither appears to actually contain the drivers for the dongle, leading me to believe that the drivers file should have been named a bit better, perhaps something like "support files." In fact, the Save Dongle identifies itself to Windows as a USB Input Device, meaning that it shouldn't require additional drivers at all.

The grunt work is done by a separate program, `R4i SaveDongle V1.1.exe`, which comes in its own separate RAR file. Upon startup, a simple screen appears with an odd faux Aero window border stating "No card detected! Please insert card!" Inserting the dongle without a card inside causes the message to add the firmware version number. Inserting a game card changes the message to "Card inserted!" as well as the card type, which is a nice touch. It also activates the Game Save Size and Game Info labels, as well as two green buttons: "PC -> Card" and "Card -> PC." Choosing Card -> PC dumps the save onto the PC, and PC -> Card uploads a save from the PC onto the Game Card. The program creates `.sav` files which, in the case of some 3DS game saves, can be decrypted by the `3DSaveTool`. However, no documentation is provided at all for `3DSaveTool`, which makes using the tool difficult.

Luckily, the main purpose of the Save Dongle can be utilized using only the `R4i SaveDongle` program and its complementary website at www.games-engine.com, where people can upload their game saves. The website is functional enough, and makes finding the proper save file a simple affair. After downloading a save from the website, all that it takes to overwrite the file on the Game Card is opening the program, clicking PC -> Card, and selecting the correct save file. However, the program is quite finicky and hangs quite a bit, and seems to randomly detect the card as missing. Luckily, I've haven't lost any data yet.

As a final note, the `R4i Save Dongle` supports upgradeable firmware, which means that it can theoretically support any future 3DS games. An update has already been released, so that's a good sign for future updates to come.

Conclusion

Overall, the `R4i Save Dongle` is a good product that does just what it advertises and not much more. Though the device itself is not spectacular in any way, the software and complementary website makes using the device's intended function, sharing game saves, as simple as possible.