

DVD

The new library video format?

by Gary Bravy

DVD—Digital Video Disk—has become the new entertainment buzzword. Newspapers and magazines are filled with articles and advertisements about the format, seemingly implying that the 1/2-inch VHS tape format (the standard in many libraries) is essentially doomed to obsolescence.

While DVD has many advantages for serious film lovers, what, if any, unique characteristics of the format will be suitable for library and educational purposes?¹ Promises of greatly improved video resolution and multiple channels of sound are certainly interesting; however, the criteria by which librarians and educators evaluate video formats are different from those that deal with the optimal presentation of theatrical films.

Although VHS is looked down upon by video purists, it does offer some strong advantages: the format is inexpensive, relatively durable, and both software and hardware are widely available.

While VHS video is not of terribly high quality, in many situations that limitation is not a detraction from the training and educational properties of the format. Because VHS has been the standard for some time, huge amounts of software for both education and entertainment are available.

DVD's features

DVD is a digital format that looks like a CD; the computer version of DVD is referred to as

DVD-ROM.² (This article will be primarily concerned with DVD used in a "set top" or "viewing station" context, much in the way that current VHS cassettes are used.)

DVD can store about two hours of high-quality video. Sound can be encoded in theater formats with standard stereo sound and a variety of other formats. Discs can be either one- or two-sided.³ Because the format is digital, it does not need to be used in a strictly linear manner; with appropriate programming, a somewhat interactive ambiance can be created.⁴

For educational applications, one of DVD's more intriguing features is the potential to present multiple views of a scene. For some material, the ability to see a process or object from various aspects and the enhanced video quality of DVD may be especially appealing.

Finally, because the format is new, it could very well be used in ways that are hard to visualize at this point. Simply as a *format*, DVD is a flexible and multidimensional product with awesome technical and creative potential beyond anything VHS can offer.⁵ Nevertheless DVD may not become the standard format for the next decade.

Should libraries continue to purchase VHS material?

Although DVD is extremely intriguing, its possibilities at this point as a video format for

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educational purposes are generally untested and unknown. While this article is limited to consideration of the use of DVD in a set top situation, that limitation may be unrealistic, particularly as more experience is gained with using it.

Libraries and media centers may find, at least until the middle or end of the next decade, that they have a variety of formats available, some of which may be computer-based (with VHS continuing to play an important role for many programs), while DVD will be used to provide interactivity, multiple views, and higher resolution for those programs that need those qualities. It may well be that the increased capabilities of technology could lead to a situation where there is no standard format. The definition of a video may also evolve from that of a linear program viewed through a player with very limited manipulative capabilities to a much broader definition embracing multimodal and multimedia concepts.

Given the rapid pace of technology, predicting the future of video in libraries is speculative at best. There has been nothing to indicate that, at least for the next five years or possibly longer, DVD will make the VHS format obsolete. Library and media professionals can continue to purchase materials in the VHS format without fear. In the long term, video will become a primarily digital medium; almost surely DVD in some form will play a part in this transition.

Notes

1. One of the primary reasons for developing DVD was to allow home video users to take advantage of the independent surround and low-frequency effects [LFE] channels available in theatrical sound formats.
2. There are also "hybrid" disks that can be used in both computers and players as well as a projected DVD-audio format. A version will probably be developed that is fully compatible with the new high definition (HDTV) standard. The format is still evolving.
3. Additional technical information about DVD can be found at DVD Frequently Answered Questions at <http://www Videodiscovery.com/vdyweb/dvd/dvdfaq.html>.
4. That interactivity does not necessarily come easily, see Philip De Lancie and "Shadoan Reborn," *E Media Professional* 12 (January 1999): 51.

5. For some indication of the potential of DVD using a full-featured player see: Robert A. Starrett, "Pioneer DVD-V7200 Industrial DVD-Video Player" *E Media Professional* 12 (March 1999): 33. ■

(*Advocacy 101...*) continued from page 846)

Stay involved

Remember that libraries do not exist in an isolated world, so follow important legislative, political, economic, and cultural movements to see how they might affect you and your library.

ALA and your state and local library associations can serve as important sources of information and assistance on advocacy issues. Don't hesitate to contact them. ALA's ALAWON serves as an excellent resource for legislative concerns and as a source for advocacy training.

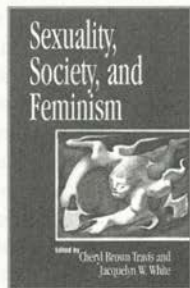
To contact ALAWON, go to <http://www.ala.org/washoff/alawon>.

Advocacy is not just an action; it is a skill that people learn over time. Practice your advocacy techniques: learn what advocacy methods work best with your personality and within your organization. Make it your business to stay in business: promote yourself and your library!

Notes

1. Elizabeth E. Bingham, "Library Advocacy," *LLA Bulletin* 58 (fall 1995): 86.
2. Else Freeman Finch, "Archival Advocacy: Reflections on Myths and Realities," *Archival Issues* 20 (1995): 115-127.
3. John N. Berry, III, "It's Time to Advocate Librarians," *Library Journal* (Sept. 1, 1996): 106.
4. Bingham, "Library Advocacy," 86.
5. Jane L. Crocker, "Marketing, Public Relations and the Academic Library," *New Jersey Libraries* (summer 1994): 6-9.
6. Rae Helton and Stuart Esrock, S. "Positioning and Marketing Academic Libraries to Students," *Marketing Library Services: MLS* 12 (Apr./May 1998): 3-5.
7. Douglas M. Ferrier, "Social Contact in the Academy: An Indirect Route to Collegiality," *The Librarian in the University: Essays on Membership in the Academic Community* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 147-152.
8. Elizabeth Esteve-Coll, "Marketing and the Academic Library," *Marketing Strategies for the Academic Library* (Cambridge, England: Library Association, Colleges of Further and Higher Education Group, 1985): 3. ■

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