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Media Minder-To DVD or Not to DVD?

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Book Pricing Update — Online Selection Tools

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Our colleague **Bill Kane** recently observed in this column that "use of online electronic notifications is catching on, albeit slowly. Whereas some librarians are fully wired and confident of the benefits of paperless notification products, other libraries want or need to keep the slips coming."¹ Bill is, of course, referring to the offerings of book vendors to view, select, and order titles online, based on online new title announcements, and the reluctance of some librarians to rely on such systems in lieu of paper notifications. In a recent paper presented at a conference in Oklahoma, **Jack Walsdorf** provided data about the many vendors that provide online review of announcements.² Most vendors now support Web-based announcement systems and are eager to invest dollars into their further development—dollars which, in the past, have been invested in production and distribution of paper announcements; but to increase investment in these systems requires greater reliance on them, in contrast to reliance on conventional paper forms. So, why do some librarians cling to paper announcement forms even as Web-based announcement services provide an overflowing well of information and ease not found in paper forms? Why is it that guiding selectors and bibliographers to the new systems is not as easy as it would seem?

One frequently heard argument in favor of paper forms is their portability. It is true that one can take paper announcement slips to [insert your favorite location here, e.g., on a bus, in a bathtub, to the reference desk]. Of course, most reference desks and many homes now have the equipment and Internet connection to support online review of new title announcements, but until computers and Internet connections are more transportable, there is no arguing with the superior portability of paper announcement forms. Another argument in favor of paper forms focuses on the continued reliance on manual files (e.g., shelf lists and/or order files) or on a workflow that relies on manual files. A twist on the workflow issue involves the need for a signature on paper announcement forms/orders for auditing purposes; this remains a requirement for some libraries, but how long can the attendant costs justify the practice?

What are the reasons one would forsake paper announcement forms for virtual announcements? One frequently heard reason is their immediacy. Librarians relying on Web-based announcements can browse titles immediately upon publication, rather than waiting for paper announcements to be shipped, received, sorted and distributed. As **Bill Kane** pointed out, "although the notification slips are generally provided to the library free of charge, libraries spend plenty of time and money receiving, sorting, distributing, sharing, and mailing back paper slips,"³ begging the question of whether there is a better, less expensive way to review new titles.

Media Minder — To DVD or Not To DVD

Column Editor: **Philip Hallman** (Ambassador Book Service) <phillip@absbook.com>

To DVD or not to DVD, that is the question facing many media librarians at the moment. And while Shakespeare would appear to be in love these days, (not to mention winning Academy Awards) and therefore too busy to resolve the dilemma with a nice rhymed couplet, it is up to the rest of us mere mortals to decide if DVD, the highly-touted, highly-publicized new media format, is the Betamax of the new Millennium or the real thing. Now that I have had a chance to see and experience it for myself, I'm betting that DVD is here to stay.

For the typical media librarian, the question still unanswered is: Is it nobler to jump onto the band wagon and begin to put dollars from a tight acquisitions budget towards an untried format, or play a wait and see game before laying your hand down? I'd like to present some of the frequently asked questions and try to give some reasonable answers to them so media and acquisition librarians themselves can determine if the time is right for them to DVD.

What is DVD, anyway?

According to the experts, DVD is the next wave of optical disc storage and is similar in shape and size to the CD that we now use to

Some systems also allow for advanced review of titles yet to be published, including reviewing expected dates of publication, which can go a long way towards assuaging concerns about whether and when a vendor will be treating a given title as part of its Approval program. This is a benefit that paper forms, distributed upon publication, simply cannot match. Depending on the configuration of the vendor's paper and electronic announcement systems, the latter may facilitate interdisciplinary review of announcements while the former may not; that is, the Web-based systems may allow more than one selector to evaluate the suitability of a title for purchase while, in contrast, only one paper form is generally created and sent to a library for review.

Another reason for relying on Web-based announcements is the additional information they provide. More information can fit on a virtual announcement form than on a paper form, and some vendors take advantage of this fact by including book jackets, MARC records, alternative (e.g., paper/cloth, US/UK) editions, tables of contents, and other information pertinent to a purchase decision. Keyword searching of tables of contents can enable librarians to find titles on subjects that aren't retrievable

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listen to recorded music. The difference is that it can hold audio, video and computer data on one disc and its storage capacity is bigger and faster than either the CD or CD-ROM. Some believe it stands for Digital Video Disc, while others call it Digital Versatile Disc. The long-term goal is to have DVD replace the audio CD, videotape, laserdisc and CD-ROM and possibly even the video game cartridge formats with one single format. Currently there is DVD-Video (generally referred to as DVD) and DVD-ROM. As with the CD and the CD-ROM, the new computers being produced will be made with DVD-ROM drives which will enable them to play both DVD and DVD-ROM. The DVD-ROM also features options which will enable users to record material.

How did DVD come about?

DVD is the result of the convergence of the computer and audio/video industries and is a child of compromise. Initially, Sony and Philips were the first to demonstrate a DVD product. Toshiba, in collaboration with Time Warner responded with their version of a new DVD item. Sony/Philips countered with another version and Toshiba/Time Warner countered again. IBM entered the race and surprisingly urged both sides to consolidate and use the best of both formats in order to create a unified for-

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with a simple title or subject search, let alone through manipulation of paper announcement forms. While weekly shipments of paper forms are usually sorted by LC class, Web-based systems can sort virtual announcements by other data elements such as treatment date, subject, publisher, publication date, or series title, or by a combination of these elements, giving librarians a different perspective on purchasing decisions, or the performance of their vendor's announcement program.

Once titles are identified by selectors for purchase, Web-based announcement systems allow electronic transfer of requests, complete with fund accounting information and local notes, from selectors to the Acquisitions department for processing; this expedites the acquisitions process and provides controls not previously available through conventional transfer of this information. Once requests are made, or orders are placed, some systems display these completed transactions, making it possible for colleagues throughout a library or within a consortium to know that the title is

coming. Finally, the ability of some systems to show what was not delivered as an announcement is another advantage; this feature is valuable in verifying whether the library's announcement profile has the intended coverage.

There are several compelling reasons for reliance on Web-based announcement systems rather than on conventional paper announcements, reasons that are consistent with the mandate under which libraries and vendors both operate in these lean times: doing more with less. And let's not forget that we can save some trees in the process!

Endnotes

¹ William P. Kane, "Online Acquisitions Tools and Price," *Against the Grain*, April, 1999, p.54.

² John J. Walsdorf, "How booksellers are employing electronic innovations to enhance collection development procedures," (paper presented at a conference sponsored by the University of Oklahoma Libraries and University of Oklahoma Foundation, Oklahoma City, OK, March 4-5, 1999).

³ William P. Kane, "Online Acquisitions Tools and Price," *Against the Grain*, April, 1999, p.54.

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studio-quality video and better-than-CD-quality audio. Unlike the laserdisc format, it can support over 2 hours of high-quality digital video on one side (and over 8 on a double-sided, dual-layer disc). It has numerous other features including menus and interactive features which allow users to search by scenes (divided into chapters). It can include up to 8 tracks of digital audio which will enable viewers to watch the film dubbed into another language or participants/critics/historians to discuss the film simultaneously to its viewing. It allows the viewer to watch the film from up to 9 different

points of view during playback by selecting different camera angles than those originally filmed. It features instant rewind and fast forward, is not susceptible to magnetic fields, is resistant to heat, is durable and is not worn out from playing, only from physical damage, and is compact in size, easy to handle, store and transport, and is cheaper to replicate. According to one source, DVD's cost is approximately \$1.00 per unit to manufacture as compared to \$2.75 for a typical video and \$6.00 for a laserdisc.

The main aspect, though, is the quality of the image. Recently, I had an opportunity to watch DVD versions of **Fritz Lang's** "M" and **Jane Campion's** "The Piano." Both demon-

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Peter Stevens

Reference Librarian
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Born when and where: Springfield, Mass., way back in 1943.

Current residence: Since 1974 in glorious Seattle.

Education: BA, English Lit., cum laude and with honors, UMass, 1965; MS, LS, Simmons College, 1969; Vietnam, 1967-68.

Summary of job experience:

Harvard College Library Acquisitions, 1965-66, head of monograph receipts; US Army Intelligence, 1966-68, intelligence analyst; Harvard College Library Cataloging, 1968-70, monograph cataloger; Harvard College Library Acquisitions, 1970-72, assistant to head of acquisitions; University of Calgary Acquisitions, 1972-74, head; Seattle Public Library Acquisitions, 1974-76, head; University of Washington Acquisitions, 1976-98, head; University of Washington Foster Business Library, 1998-, reference librarian.

Family: Wife Cynthia, also a librarian.

Most recent accomplishments: Began a new phase of my career as reference librarian after decades in acquisitions. Winner in the 40+ age group, advanced division, of the **Vertical World** spring 1998 climbing competition (also beat all the 30 year olds and all but five of the 20 year olds) at age 55. Hiked 300 miles last year, gaining 125,000 vertical feet; bicycled 4,000 miles; climbed over 100 days.

Most recent goal attained: Hiking, climbing and cycling again regularly after December ankle surgery for old Vietnam injuries. Leading 5.10c climbs again. Able to deal with reference questions in my new job and do bibliographic instruction and having great fun doing both.

First job: Paperboy for six years, starting in junior high, when newspapers cost a nickel. My first public service experience.

Biggest recent surprise: How much fun reference and public services work is and how gratifying it is to be in direct customer service with appreciative library users. Not like technical services at all!

Fondest Memory: Last summer's two weeks of hiking in the Austrian Alps. Or maybe the previous summer's two weeks in the Dolomites of northern Italy. Or maybe earlier hiking trips to Saas Fee, Zermatt, Cortina. Or maybe

Favorite pastimes: Climbing, hiking, cycling, sea kayaking, skiing, gardening, reading, classical music.

Last book read or literary tastes: Anything by Bill Bryson, Jonathan Raban, Paul Theroux, Martin Amis, Elmore Leonard, John Mortimer.

What would you like to be doing seven years from now: Reflecting on the joys of having been retired from work for several months with so much more time for all my sporting activities!

Had I but world enough and time: Live in Italy year round with my wife and BMW, playing Chopin on a grand piano, climbing all the peaks.

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strate what DVD does well. Lang's "M" was filmed in 1931 in black and white. Today, most VHS and 16mm prints of the film are grainy and washed out. The DVD version is the most clear and pristine version I have ever seen. There is a tremendous modulation between the blacks, white and grays and one can actually see details in the lighting. "The Piano" DVD shows a great deal of depth within the frame that is never evident in even the best video copy. During the jungle scenes, for instance, the foreground, middle ground and background are clearly visible and details extend throughout the image. The quality of the picture is almost three-dimensional, creating a sense of space that one gets when watching the film in its original form. It still isn't film, but it comes closer to anything I've seen previously. This is due to the picture size and pixel aspect ratio of DVD versus the NTSC video and a resolution of over 500 scan lines which is a higher number than the typical NTSC video.

What are the disadvantages of DVD?

For now, the main disadvantage is lack of product. It will take years for the same number of titles that are currently available on VHS or laserdisc to become available on DVD. Currently, the only titles one can buy are feature films, music videos and some adult titles. Also, not all of the studios are willing to release their product on DVD. **Disney**, for instance, has not yet committed to any titles to this format. Also, the thousands of educational titles that are used by colleges and universities are several years away, if ever, from being available. **Films for the Humanities & Sciences**, for instance, is considering the implications and costs of making titles available in this new format. As of now, they are debating whether to go with DVD-Video or another variation of the DVD format. It will take a leader in the educational market, such as FFHS, to help make the DVD format a widespread success like the videotape. If the DVD is to go beyond the specialized market, which the laserdisc never succeeded in doing, products from both the feature film market and educational markets must be readily available.

Other disadvantages of the DVD that should be considered are: at this point, they don't have recording capability, although this will change if the demand becomes greater; current players do not play in reverse at normal speed; distributors have added copy protection and regional lock-out devices to the players. That means that a disc purchased in the U.S. will not necessarily play in Japan and vice-versa. This may be a problem for those who collect materials from overseas to support foreign language curricula. Also, the Macrovision system used causes some color and picture problems.

What is DIVX?

To complicate matters, Divx has been created as a kind of rival format and the result is slowing down the DVD boom. **Circuit City** and a Hollywood law firm are behind the development of the divx format which is basically a pay-per-viewing period variation of DVD. The viewer needs a different player in order to watch a divx disc (a divx player will play a DVD disc, but not the other way around). If someone wishes to watch a divx disc, they go to the store and buy it for about \$5.00 as compared to the average DVD price which varies from \$14.95-\$29.95. The player must then be hooked up to a telephone line so that it can call an 800 number. The disc can then be watched for a 48-hour period. If the viewer wishes to watch it beyond that 48-hour window, they must call the number and have it unlocked for another 48-hour period. The advantage of the divx is that the disc need not be returned (unlike renting a video); however the disadvantages seem to far outweigh the advantages. For library collections, this format seems completely unacceptable because of its non-archival quality.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the medium, the question of whether or not a particular library should begin to collect DVDs remains unanswered. To DVD or not to DVD? Well that depends. I feel that those libraries that support a fully developed film studies program should absolutely begin to collect DVDs; the high quality of the product outweighs the low number of titles that are currently available. Some faculty members will use feature films to help illustrate specific ideas in the classroom. In a case such as this, I would suggest that librarians log onto the **Image Entertainment Website** (www.image-entertainment.com) and see exactly what titles are available in order to determine future use and demand. If there are a more than 20 titles that are used on a regular basis, I would say that you should definitely consider purchasing DVDs. The next question will be to determine how many players to buy and where they will be housed. For now, it would make sense to limit equipment to the library and perhaps a couple of machines that can be floated or transported to classrooms. For those libraries that collect educational titles primarily with an occasional feature film, the time is not right for you. It is best to wait for the educational distributors to begin to get into the act before investing any money.

While the eventual goal for the industry is to see DVD replace all the other formats, it is at the very minimum a five-year project before something like that could happen. And even five years is probably too short an estimate. In the meantime, we'll have to continue to buy all the other formats and hope that DVD continues to make its presence felt. 🐼