

# HIGH-DEF ON THE HORIZON



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*Some libraries check out Blu-ray and HD DVD,  
but most wait and weigh options*

By Chris Koseluk

**H**ollywood has always embraced a "Field of Dreams" mentality when it comes to new technology—if you build it, they will come. But if anything might test this philosophy, it is DVD's next generation.

According to a survey conducted for this supplement by *Library Journal*, 3% of librarians say they are carrying the new high-definition disc formats, Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD. But while the small percentage who have bought the discs may be pleased with their performance so far, among the vast majority of other librarians, some appear poised to skip the new physical formats altogether and adopt video downloading instead.

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# VB+ LIBRARY JOURNAL

DVD + HIGH-DEF + DOWNLOADS

## HIGH-DEF *continued from page 1*

Blu-ray and HD DVD boast crisp, high-definition clarity for a viewing experience unlike any seen before. But consumer response has been slow for the latest optical disc formats, both launched last year.

The Blu-ray and HD DVD camps report sales of about 1 million discs each to date, with Blu-ray a little ahead. Comparatively, in the second half of 1997, the year DVD was launched, more than 5.5 million discs were sold. Last year's biggest-selling standard DVD, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Buena Vista Worldwide Home Entertainment), moved almost 5 million copies in its first day.

Launching two competing formats isn't helping matters. People still remember the VHS-Beta war. Of course, each needs its own player. A Blu-ray device can

cost about 10 times more than a \$60 to \$100 DVD player. HD DVD players can be bought for somewhat less, with the lowest-priced models now at \$399. A machine just introduced to play both formats sells for more than \$1,100. The retail prices of the discs, on average, are double a DVD.

Without question, DVDs are a popular addition to American libraries.

According to the Normative Data Project, a nationwide study of libraries by SirsiDynix, 1,666,561 DVDs are currently in the nation's public library system.

Kathleen Sullivan, collections development coordinator for the Phoenix Public Library, estimates that 10% of its \$6 million budget will be spent purchasing DVDs. Leslie Burger, director of the Princeton Public Library, notes that one-third of the items checked out are non-print.

But there is no rush to incorporate Blu-ray and/or HD DVD. "The technologies are still just too new," says Burger, who also is 2006-07 president of the American Library Assn.

"At this point, it's so nebulous," agrees Susan Caron, manager of the collection development department for the Toronto Public Library. "Our plan is to continue buying just the regular DVD, monitor the industry and then, at some point, either add another format or formats."

But one librarian who has begun carrying the high-definition formats is happy he did. "They're doing much better than anticipated," says Douglas McDonough, director of the Manchester Public Library in Connecticut. "Once the discs come back, they go right back

out again," he says.

McDonough began carrying the new formats just after Christmas, when he saw people lined up to get the latest flat-screen

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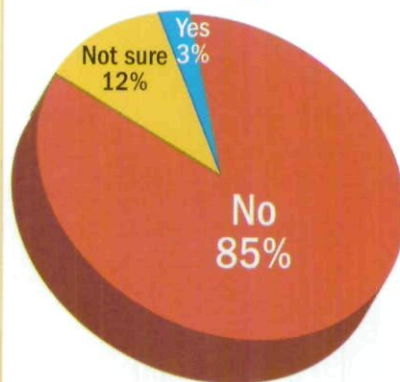
An example of the range of high-def titles available at the Manchester (Conn.) Public Library.

## LIBRARY DVD BY THE NUMBERS

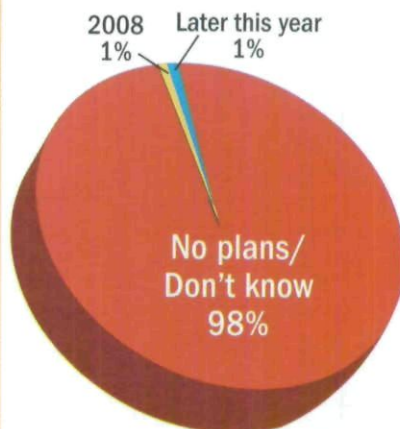
*Library Journal* polled its e-mail newsletter subscribers to determine how materials budgets are being allocated to home entertainment formats.

It found that 5% of the 189 public libraries that responded either currently carry or plan to carry high-definition DVDs by the end of 2008.

### Do you currently carry high-definition formats (either HD DVD or Blu-ray)?



### If no, when do you plan to purchase high-definition format DVDs (either HD DVD or Blu-ray)?



Source: *Library Journal*

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Editors' note: Surveys have shown that video products (especially DVDs) have increased library circulation stats faster than other materials over the last few years. With visual media all the rage, *Library Journal* and *Video Business* have combined our industry expertise to present this supplement to provide librarians with valuable information on upcoming products.

[www.libraryjournal.com](http://www.libraryjournal.com)  
[www.videobusiness.com](http://www.videobusiness.com)

### HIGH-DEF *continued from page 3*

TVs at the local Best Buy and Circuit City stores. "We knew people would be looking for content," he says.

The Manchester library stocks slightly less than 200 high-definition titles now, from recently released movies such as *Employee of the Month* (Lionsgate) and *Eragon* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment) to the Discovery Channel's *Italy Revealed* (Image Entertainment), with one or two copies of each. Most are HD DVD because originally there were more HD DVD titles available, McDonough says, but Blu-ray has caught up quickly. More studios are now releasing Blu-ray titles than HD DVD, but all the majors have begun offering films in one or both of the new formats, with more than 200 titles available on each.

Libraries have always welcomed better and more cost-effective ways of delivering content and information. But many factors influence the introduction of any innovation.

"There are lots of decisions when adding a new format—questions about packaging, what we need to do in our computer system, things like that," says Jeff Gegner, senior librarian-popular materials specialist of collection management services for the 26 branches of Minnesota's Hennepin

County Library. "When we roll something out, we have a lot of people to take into consideration."

Most believe high-definition discs won't be seen in libraries in any great numbers until the format war is settled.

"We don't want to look at things that will die out real soon," says Carlos Latimer, department manager of audio-video for the Cleveland Public Library system. "So we

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**"Downloading is kind of our holy grail because, of course, it means not having to handle any kind of artifact at all."**

Susan Caron, Toronto Public Library

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look for stability within the consumer market. If it's there, it carries over to the library."

Library patrons' demands often differ from those at retail outlets. Rather than getting requests for the new formats, some librarians are hearing from borrowers who are upset that VHS is becoming a thing of the past.

Most libraries didn't even begin acquiring DVDs until about four or five years

ago—five to six years after the format's introduction. According to Bob Molyneux, SirsiDynix's chief statistician, DVD circulation in libraries did not surpass videocassettes until the last quarter of 2005.

But collection managers appear more excited about downloadable technology. Many librarians have either initiated a pilot program to offer downloadable videos or plan to do so by year end.

"I'm frankly hoping that downloadable will save me the agony [of changing formats]," says Sullivan, noting that Phoenix offers a small selection of downloadable video using OverDrive (see related story, page 11). "Because truly, who knows what the next one will be?"

"Downloading is kind of our holy grail because, of course, it means not having to handle any kind of artifact at all," agrees Toronto's Caron, who currently uses OverDrive for e-audiobooks and plans to incorporate video later this year.

But Burger believes that as the traditional video store model changes, it might create a new value for library video collections. "As the Netflix model becomes more popular, if people really want to come in and browse a collection, libraries may be one of the few places to do that," she says. **vb**

### DOWNLOADS *continued from page 11*

their own programming to the system.

Dozens of libraries from coast to coast have already begun offering videos through OverDrive, according to CEO Steve Potash, including the New York Public Library and the Los Angeles Public Library and even overseas locations such as the Singapore National Library.

Libraries that are already on the OverDrive system for audiobooks, e-books or music can select programs to offer via download for as little as \$2.99 to \$49.99 for the most recent feature films.

All patrons need to do is go to their library Web site, download the player and begin

downloading the program. Download times can be as little as a minute or two up to real time.

"The vast majority of public library patrons are still borrowing physical media," Potash says. "But many librarians who try video downloads are delightfully surprised within the first two to three months. They're seeing thousands of checkouts without any additional staff or shelf space."

And downloads are a low-maintenance format. "DVD is fairly fragile, not very durable for lending," Potash explains. "It's susceptible to scratches and cracks. And for downloadable materials, the library never closes. It's self-service, and the programs

are never damaged or lost or returned late. It's a tremendous value for the library and a proven convenience for the patrons."

Though most libraries have a policy that you must be an area resident to get a library card, Potash says they're looking to become more useful to more members of their community and "having downloading is a way of reaching new patrons."

And the digital downloads are copy-protected to prevent a patron from viewing a title past the allotted date. Just as Blockbuster and Netflix have eliminated late fees, with downloads, "no more fines" could soon become a library mantra. **vb**

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