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Welcome to the 15th edition of our annual magazine, the informative, inquisitive, and at times irreverent companion to www.dvd-and-beyond.com, our industry website.

A publication, launched at the dawn of DVD, that still offers today food for thought on the present and future of discs, surely is a reminder that, notwithstanding the decline in total consumer spending on packaged media, DVD and Blu-ray Discs continue to be the cash cows of the home video industry. Discs are by far the largest generator of spending in the European video market – last year accounting for a 85% share of total consumer outlay on video across all platforms. And in Europe's largest market, Germany, consumer spending on packaged media went up 3% during the first six months of this year!

Digital delivery is certainly on the rise, but money talks. Hollywood has to square the circle between the inexorable fall of high-revenue producing packaged media and the unstoppable rise of low-revenue generating online digital delivery. Could UltraViolet's cloud-based digital locker system be just what studios need to provide extra value to the discs they want to keep selling?

I always contended that Blu-ray is not just a spinning disc, but a bridge between packaged media and the Internet (pictured). The hdef format was designed that way. Remember BD-Live? Remarkably, it is only last year that Wifi-enabled BD players arrived on the market. The latest generation of players can be used to connect your TV to the Internet and an increasing number of consumers are doing just that.

Perhaps this latest generation of connected BD players could be the ones that will make a success of the currently overcomplicated UltraViolet. As is, UV requires a computer to set up access to the cloud-based digital copy of the BD disc. Steve Brown, CEO of Cinram, laid out the condition for UV success at a recent London conference: "You buy a Blu-ray disc, take it home, put it in the connected Blu-ray player and up pops a menu option that says 'Play feature and add a UV copy to my online account.' That's it. Will the industry listen?"

Another friend of Blu-ray is 3D. Stereoscopic 3D displays can only rely on the high-capacity BD disc if you seek the best picture quality – 1080p in each eye, with active shutter glasses. However, 3D did not make inroads into the market as anticipated.

Headaches, unsightly glasses, content shortage, hardware costs, all have been thrown at poor souls, like me, who enjoy what they have experienced so far. There is no doubt the industry did an abysmal job marketing 3D to consumers. When you think of it, the industry is not that good at marketing innovations.

Dont' give me Smart TV as a counter-example. If retrofitting an inexpensive Wi-fi modem in a TV is presented as a bleeding-edge technological endeavour, we are in trouble.

Blu-ray may get a shot of adrenalin with the emerging 4K format. To bring a 3840 x 2160 pixel image to the home requires a lot of storage. A BD disc is potentially a prime candidate for the job - if the Blu-ray Disc Association revamps the specs, perhaps towards a 3-layer 100GB disc.

Given that most households still get a paltry bitrate from their ISPs, that most broadcasters are yet to offer HDTV and most of those who do, only supply a sub-optimal 720-line HD picture, one wonders why such an *engouement* for 4K when the priority ought to be to deliver a full 1080i HDTV signal to all. The fear of the 4EVER folks who are carefully designing 4K's frame rate, pixel count and colour gamut is that manufacturers have started introducing in the market 4K TVs that actually will not optimise the new standard.

Blu-ray also means hdef audio, and all is not quiet on this front as Universal Music is joining smaller labels in releasing its own version of Pure Audio titles. In a wide-ranging interview, Stefan Bock, who pioneered the Pure Audio Blu-ray concept back in 2008, is anxious to ensure that any Pure Audio titles coming into the market feature the user-friendly functionalities they have associated to the BD audio format to secure its success.

The *pièce de résistance* is the must-read 13-page section that collates the view of 14 industry movers and shakers who answered our detailed questionnaire on the present and future of packaged media.

Last, but not least. The support we have received from the industry, especially in these times of economic uncertainty, has been once again most gratifying. It helps maintain this publication as the annual review that market-leading companies prefer to use in their efforts to reach customers in Europe.

As always, I welcome your comments.
Have a good read!

