

The downloads are coming!



A few weeks ago on a Friday afternoon, I sat with a small group of test engineers in our offices in Burbank, California, testing a new video playback device, and experienced a little shiver of excitement, tells ALBERT KOVAL, VP, UltraViolet Services & Software Testing at Testronic Labs.

The hardware-based UltraViolet player under test was playing back a full-length feature movie from a Digital Entertainment Content Ecosystem (DECE)-member major studio that was encoded by a second DECE licensee, with playback on a device from yet another licensee. True interoperability testing!

The device's rendering of the UltraViolet Common File Format (CFF) was in fact stunning; 1920x1080p high-def content playing back full-screen on a 55" monitor, with full trick-play functionality and rendering of subtitles in multiple languages.

For me personally, and having been involved for some time in the development of the DECE/UltraViolet specs and the DECE Compliance Verification Program, seeing that movie play successfully was truly a milestone, and it was hard not to be excited. A tremendous amount of effort from a large number of people and companies had all come together that Friday afternoon to make the playback of that CFF-encoded movie possible.

The promise of UltraViolet is that consumers can download and stream legal digital copies of movies, to be viewed and shared across multiple playback devices, and with friends and family who share access to the same UltraViolet user account. And once DECE introduces CFF, consumers

will also be able to copy and play their downloaded UltraViolet content across as many as 12 compatible apps or devices.

For many, the big question is: What does UltraViolet mean for the future of DVD and Blu-ray? Will they disappear from the consumer landscape, to be replaced entirely by downloads and streaming?

In my mind the answer is 'no,' at least not for the foreseeable future. DVD and Blu-ray Discs will continue to be sold, and consumers will see an increasing number of titles that will come with UltraViolet "rights," which include the ability to stream and download the movie for playback on screens large and small and on both home and mobile devices. My guess is that the availability of UltraViolet rights will in fact increase the number of DVDs and Blu-ray Discs sold in the near term, as consumers discover and adopt this new way of enjoying and sharing their digital content.

On the other hand, I expect that the availability of CFF as a widely-adopted industry standard will drive more producers and studios to release additional titles for download and streaming only, including indie movies and content that otherwise cannot afford the cost of coming to market as DVD or Blu-ray Discs. And some major UltraViolet retailers are already allowing

consumers to buy UltraViolet streaming and download rights for movies they purchased years ago on DVD and Blu-ray.

Of course, all of this assumes that it all works, which brings me back to the testing we were conducting that Friday afternoon. The success of any new consumer media format depends on two things: availability and interoperability. Availability seems to be taking care of itself when it comes to the number of UltraViolet titles in the marketplace, which leaves us with interoperability.

UltraViolet has the potential to reinvigorate the consumer market for movies and many other forms of digital content. If you are a content provider or retailer planning on bringing UltraViolet content and devices to market, what are you doing today to ensure that extensive interoperability testing is being performed on your products?

Make no mistake – the testing will get done; the only question is whether it will be you or your customers that does it.

BIOGRAPHY

ALBERT KOVAL is responsible for Testronic Labs' global UltraViolet Services and oversees Software Testing in the US. Prior to joining Testronic, Koval served as Director of UltraViolet Services at Solekai Systems in San Diego, CA. There he was responsible for managing the overall UltraViolet-related business, including the design and development of the DECE Compliance Verification Program (CVP) and the DECE CFF Verifier. Contact: www.testroniclabs.com



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