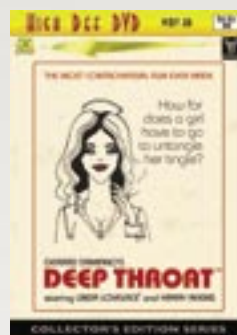




High Definition is a digital *video* format that is up to 6x **more** resolution than standard definition (NTSC).



By TOM FUNK

-- High Def Porn, then and now --

In December of 2003, with little fanfare, the world's first adult High Definition DVD was released, simply entitled "High Def XXX: Volume 1" – from a brand new adult company High Def XXX. It was shot on an \$80,000 professional camera – the Panasonic Varicam, and edited in full-uncompressed HD (which at that time was quite the feat!).

The disc was a hybrid - with both standard DVD and High Def versions on the same side of the same disc. Stick the disc in a regular DVD player and it will play the standard version; stick it in a computer and it will play the HD version, complete with menus - very versatile! This flavor of High Def DVD is based on Windows Media compression in 720p resolution – and is referred to as "WMV / HD".

Even though there have been as many as 50 adult WMV/HD titles released to date, this format never really took off – 50 is still a very small percentage of the adult titles released in 3 years. Even when WMV/HD set-top DVD players hit the shelves in mid-2005, there was little marketing or consumer awareness behind them and most people were still "waiting for the new players" – HD DVD and Blu-ray.

This was in part because the cost and technical expertise was beyond most in the adult industry; and in part because mainstream film studios were already positioning themselves behind these new formats – and that's where most of the publicity for High Def DVD lay.

Now, however, High Def DVD is finally getting ready to explode. In mid-2006, the new players hit the shelves; and with over 20 million HDTV's in the U.S. already - and prices continually dropping on larger and larger sets – the demand for true HD content has never been greater.

What is with these new players, you may ask? They both offer higher capacity storage by virtue of higher frequency lasers, full High Definition playback, and more advanced authoring features – including picture in picture (such as a director’s video commentary while the movie is playing with independently controlled volume), graphic overlays with alpha blending (such as for semi-transparent menus while the movie is playing or repositionable subtitles which can also change font and color), computer-like programmability (even some simple games are possible), and internet connectivity (which could include additional info or even video content). They are also both backwards compatible with standard DVD’s.

But HD DVD and Blu-ray are incompatible with each other. With two new High Def DVD formats, there has been much speculation about another format war à la Beta vs. VHS.

So far, HD DVD is outselling Blu-ray by about 3 to 1. HD DVD is less expensive both in terms of replication of the discs (manufacturers can upgrade their existing line for HD DVD for a couple hundred thousand dollars; Blu-ray requires an entirely new line at about \$3 million dollars!) and in terms of the cost of the players (HD DVD starts at about \$500 vs. about \$900 for Blu-ray). HD DVD is also be available to Xbox/360 owners with an add-on drive for about \$200. On the other hand, Blu-ray is included in the new Playstation 3, which began to sell in mid-November. This will certainly weigh in on the side of Blu-ray!

So which format will win? Most would say HD DVD at this point. By the time you read this, the first adult HD DVD’s will hit the shelves. High Def Home Entertainment (High Def XXX’s sister distribution company) is releasing 6 titles in December (including the original Deep Throat, transferred from the original 35mm negative to HD), with at least another 6 in the pipeline. Other companies including Wicked, Digital Playground and Adam & Eve also have HD DVD titles in the works.

An HD DVD glass master (used for replication) currently costs \$2500 / layer (one layer is likely enough for most titles at this point). It’s expensive, but possible. Blu-ray is more difficult. There are currently only a handful of places to get the discs made, and they’re all either run by Sony or they do business with Disney – both of whom are considerably opposed to the adult industry. Nevertheless, by as early as March ’07 at least one adult DVD replication facility – Sunshine, in Van Nuys – is planning to have a Blu-ray line.

But does it really matter which format is used? Perhaps, initially. But the High Def DVD format war is probably more akin to DVD+R vs DVD-R.

At first it was a big issue with no inter-compatibility, but eventually pretty much all-new drives will handle both formats. Likewise there are already plans for High Def DVD players that will handle both formats, and we could see the first of those in 2007.

-- Cameras and quality --



The real trick is to have content that’s shot, edited and delivered in HD, of course. Only a handful of adult can really handle high quality HD, even though many claim “shot in HD” on their box covers. Why is this?

High Definition is a digital video format that is up to 6x more resolution than standard definition (NTSC). To handle the amount of data that these images generate, most HD cameras need to compress the image in some way. For professional grade cameras such as the Varicam or Sony’s HDCam, this compression is visually lost. However for most prosumer-grade cameras the image has considerable loss of quality in order to squeeze it onto mini-DV tape. This is called “HDV”. Remember, there’s a difference

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between resolution, that is the number of pixels being displayed, and quality – compare a webcam image to a broadcast camera image ... they can be the same resolution, but obviously there are severe qualitative differences.

Unfortunately most adult companies today can't afford or handle professional cameras, and most who have shot in "HD" have used the Sony version of an HDV camera.

-- What storeowners need to know --

There are really only a few main things to keep in mind for video storeowners:

There are 3 formats of High Definition DVD:

- o HD DVD (currently playable on a Toshiba HD DVD player or the Xbox/360 with an add-on drive)
- o Blu-ray (currently playable on the Samsung player or the Sony Playstation 3)
- o WMV / HD (playable on a number of WMV/HD players or natively on most PC's – running at least 2.4GHz) Most titles in this format will also include a standard definition version, playable on any DVD player.

- HD DVD will play on a Toshiba player or in an Xbox / 360 with an add-on drive (shipping now)
- Blu-ray will play in the Samsung player or the new Playstation 3.
- The formats are not compatible with each other (Blu-ray will not play on an HD DVD player, and vice-versa); but all the players will play standard DVD's.

-- Will High Def DVD save the optical disc? --

As we've all seen, disc sales have at the least plateaued - especially for the adult industry, where many customers have turned to the internet for their content. However, it is much more difficult with High Definition content, which requires significantly larger files and a much higher bitrate to maintain HD quality – which means significantly longer download times at best. Plus, connecting the internet to an HDTV is not the simplest matter for most. What that means is as demand for High Def content grows, there will be a continued demand for physical-media discs.

The bottom line? Let's start getting these things out there already!

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