

# ATTENTION, CYBERSHOPPERS!

**F**OR ONLINE VIDEO retailing, Nov. 15 began The Week That Was. Tapes and DVDs rented or purchased online account for only a fraction of a percent of the video industry's \$19 billion in annual revenue, but market potential jumped to a new level in a matter of days—just in time for holiday point-and-click shopping—as Amazon.com launched a full-fledged video site and Buycomp.com recast itself as entertainment superstore Buy.com.

The entry of Amazon.com, the leading online bookstore, would have been adrenalinizing enough, but it's not the only market energizer. Reel.com—with the muscle of its new corporate parent, Hollywood Entertainment, owner of the nation's second-largest chain—refurbishes its website this month to provide more of the ambiance that keeps people browsing in the old-fashioned sense. Ken Crane's online business is becoming a subsidiary of Image Entertainment, a major laserdisc and DVD distributor; Blockbuster and Tower have dipped toes deeper into cyberwater by enhancing sites this year. Then there's DVD Express, considered the highest-grossing online movie retailer, with projected sales this year of \$16 million; the DVD-oriented NetFlix.com; and aggressive discounter BigStar.com, which has been known to give away hits like *Armageddon* with any film.

In short, the battle for your video dollar is joined, and what with similar stock, discounts, and service claims, you may not be able to tell the leading combatants even with a scorecard. But let's try:

■ **www.kencranes.com** Launched: September '95. Titles: 10,000 DVDs and laserdiscs. Standard discount: 20 percent off; free air shipping. Test case: *My Best Friend's Wedding*, \$23.98 DVD, \$27.98 laser.

■ **www.reel.com** Launched: January '97. Titles: 100,000. Standard discount: 30 percent off DVDs; at least 15 percent off tapes. Test case: *MBFW*, \$11.99 on tape (\$8.99 used), \$20.99 on DVD.

■ **www.dvdexpress.com** Launched: April '97. Titles: More than 2,300 DVDs. Standard discount: 30–40 percent off. Test case: *MBFW*, \$20.96.

■ **www.bigstar.com** Launched: May '98. Titles: 100,000. Standard discount: 15 percent off tapes; 30 percent off DVDs. Test case: *MBFW*, marked down on tape from \$14.95 to \$11.21 (for a special on Cameron Diaz films), \$26.24 on laser, \$20.99 on DVD.

■ **www.buy.com** Launched: Nov. 15, 1998 (after acquiring VideoServe.com). Titles: 120,000. Standard discount: Claims "The Lowest Prices on Earth." Says it regularly checks other online sites and matches any



sale prices. Most DVDs are \$14.99. Test case: *MBFW*, \$9.38 on tape (\$4.99 used), \$14.99 on DVD.

■ **www.amazon.com** Launched in earnest: Nov. 17, 1998. Titles: 60,000. Standard discount: Up to 30 percent off tapes; 30 percent off DVDs. Test case: *MBFW*, \$12.99 on tape, \$20.99 on DVD. —Michael Giltz