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Michael Giltz

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DVDs: Long Live Blu-Ray!

Posted February 24, 2008 | 12:53 PM (EST)

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Where were you when the format wars were over? HD-DVD is dead. Long live Blu-Ray. With Toshiba throwing in the towel on HD, everyone is asking me again: should they plunge into Blu-Ray? Not necessarily.

I'm a little bummed the more consumer friendly HD format died. It often contained a regular DVD version of the movie, so you could build your library even before you bought an HD player. Best of all, it got rid of the stupid region coding which makes DVDs from overseas incompatible with standard players. So theoretically if there were a UK TV show or Japanese anime or Australian miniseries you wanted to buy that wasn't going to come out in the US for years if ever, you could.

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Oh well. Blu-Ray has won. And yes, Blu-Ray is a dramatic improvement over regular DVD. Unfortunately, you have to spend literally thousands of dollars on a plasma or LCD TV, surround sound and a new Blu-Ray DVD player to get all those benefits. On top of it all, Blu-Ray (like HD), is nearly

50% more expensive than regular DVDs. That's right, DVD sales have stopped exploding dramatically so the bright idea of the studios to goose them is to introduce a format that costs thousands of dollars to watch and is a lot more expensive. Yep, they think Blu-Ray is so wonderful you'll want to spend a lot more money on it.

Not me. I have no intention of replacing all my DVDs with Blu-Rays. Maybe for a handful of special titles, like *The Lord of the Rings* and (the original) *Star Wars*. But most movies? Nope. CDs were a once in a lifetime phenomenon where everyone replaced virtually their entire collection of LPs with more expensive CDs. Regular DVDs were one of the most successful product launches in electronics history for a very simple reason: they were a quantum leap better in quality compared to VHS, they included tons of extras that VHS never could, they came out at a sale price much quicker (VHS often took six months to a year to come down from the "rental" price of \$100) and on top of it all (and this is what they always forget) DVDs were the same price or cheaper than VHS.

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Almost none of that is true for Blu-Ray.

Blu-Ray is a much improved picture, yes. But the extras aren't much different than what we normally get. (Despite some bells and whistles more exciting to them than us.) It takes a major investment to get all those benefits and on top of it all, they're more expensive. I don't think Blu-Ray will flop a la the "improved" CDs record labels tried to push on us in the last few years. But they might. But they certainly won't start flying off the shelves and it will be years before even half of all homes can watch Blu-Ray DVDs on a home theater system.

So I say, drag your feet. The longer we take to make the switch to Blu-Ray, the more likely they'll lower the price so it's the equivalent of regular DVDs. And if the studios think we're all going to happily replace our library of movies and TV shows on DVD with Blu-Ray, they are in for a rude awakening.

Also out this week: George Clooney's *Michael Clayton* (\$28.98/\$5.99 Blu-Ray; Warner Bros.) is such an intelligent, adult legal thriller it seemed to come from a different era; *German Expressionism Collection* (\$69.95; Kino), an exceptional boxed set of four German masterpieces in terrific prints with loads of extras, including the iconic masterpiece *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and G.W. Pabst's *Secrets Of A Soul* from 1926; Ang Lee's dry but intelligent spy romance *Lust Caution* (\$29.98; Focus), which isn't defined by its sexual explicitness any more than *Brokeback Mountain* was simply a gay cowboy movie; *Father Ted: The Definitive Collection* (\$79.98; BBC Video), the UK sitcom about Irish priests that leaves Catholics in particular helpless with laughter; *Walker* (\$39.95; Criterion), director Alex Cox's oddball biopic about the dictator of Nicaragua (embodied by Ed Harris) with a thunderous score by Joe Strummer of the Clash; *Kurt Cobain: About A Son* (\$19.99; Shout), is a dream-like meditation on Cobain that uses audio interviews and virtually no images of the artist or his band in concert but rather focuses on the places he frequented to commune with his lost spirit; *Rendition* (\$28.98; New Line), a well-intentioned drama about a conflicted CIA agent (the always empathetic Jake Gyllenhaal) upset over the torture of a US citizen handed over to our allies; *In The Valley Of Elah* (\$27.98/\$35.99 on Blu-Ray; Warner Bros.), another Iraq-linked drama with Tommy Lee Jones giving an Oscar nominated performance as a dad determined to learn the truth about his late son's tour of duty in that war-town country; *Cops 20th Anniversary Edition* (\$29.98; Fox), a two-disc set on the reality series that will unquestionably celebrate a 40th anniversary and still be on the air; *Margot at the Wedding* (\$29.99; Paramount), Noah Bambauch's acidic, unatifying follow-up to *The Squid and the Whale* has fine acting from Nicole Kidman and Jennifer Jason Leigh in a too-familiar story of family squabbling; Don Rickles is celebrated in *Mr. Warmth* (\$26.99; HBO), a rare chance to see his comedy of insult in action; *Madeline: Meet Me In Paris* (\$14.98; Fox), is an animated take on the schoolgirl and after umpteen attempts via TV, cartoons and yet another feature film in the works, maybe they can admit it simply works best as a picture book and leave it at that; four Alain Resnais films from the 80s come to DVD with modest extras, led by 1983's acclaimed bauble *Life Is A Bed Of Roses* (\$29.95; Kino); the Easter Bunny simply doesn't have the pull on the imagination that other holiday characters exert, as proven in two so-so TV specials, *The Easter Bunny Is Comin' To Town* (\$14.98; Warner Bros.), a Rankin-Bass stop-motion show narrated by Fred Astaire and *It's The Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown* (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) with the even more desperate *It's Arbor Day, Charlie Brown* special as a bonus; *Chaos* (\$19.98; Lionsgate), a B movie bank heist but with Wesley Snipes, Ryan Phillippe and Jason Statham heading the cast, wouldn't you have loved to hang out on the set and heard their conversations?; and 1965's *Pierrot Le Fou* (\$39.95; Criterion), Jean Luc Godard's final stab at actually entertaining an audience via a madcap road trip movie shot with élan if not a lot of sense.

So are you going to make the plunge into Blu-Ray? And will you replace all the DVDs you own with Blu-Ray versions?

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mpgarr See Profile I'm a Fan of mpgarr permalink

I don't plan to rush out and buy any or a BluRay player for that matter--I am just fine with my basic DVD player--even playing the discs on my LCD flatscreen HDTV they still look pretty damn good--more than good enough for me.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 12:41 PM on 02/26/2008

Kungfublood See Profile I'm a Fan of Kungfublood permalink

Lying sacks of corporate crap; vinyl and tape lasts decades longer than than Cd's do and with less degradation.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 07:55 PM on 02/25/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Well, no. Tape is pure crap from the beginning. LPs do have great sound -- if you have a super expensive sound system. But they do easily scratch and pop when played regularly. CDs can be poorly mastered and are not equal to the best LPs with the best sound systems. But for 95% of the people with just an average stereo, the CD is far superior today than the LP. And despite rumors, I have CDs from the early 80s that still play just fine. That's 25 years old, which is a hell of a lot better than LPs especially when you consider how much I've played some of them. Mind you, i wouldn't mind replacing the second CD I ever bought ("Born

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in the USA") with a newly remastered disc. Bruce?

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Skandal See Profile I'm a Fan of Skandal permalink

Michael, I purchased my first CD in 1984 - Born to Run. It still plays fine, however, 2 years ago I splurged for the 30th anniversary set. Well worth the money:

http://www.amazon.com/Born-Run-30th-Anniversary-3-Disc/dp/B000BJS4OY/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1204339004&sr=8-2

Born To Run: 30th Anniversary 3-Disc Set (CD/2DVD) [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED] [SPECIAL EDITION]

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realrick See Profile I'm a Fan of realrick permalink

Great post, Michael.

I've been wondering if Blu-ray won't wind up being the equivalent of Beta for DVD.

It's a superior format, but there's really no demand for it. And the timing of releasing an upgraded DVD format in a depressed economy is just terrible.

Bottom Line: I don't have the eyes of an eagle or the ears of a bat. What I see and hear on DVD right now is just fine for me and a huge upgrade over VHS. There is just simply no demand for a DVD upgrade right now.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 05:42 PM on 02/25/2008

commentguy1234 See Profile I'm a Fan of commentguy1234 permalink

What the article REALLY misses are the extra costs and annoyances that make Blu-Ray suck: the broadband internet requirement and the so-called upgrades to the firmware. For, you see, it's not just greed that drives the hi-def promotion, it's their Ahab like obsession with thwarting piracy. When you find you can't watch a dvd without first connecting to a database to ensure the movie you have is not pirated, you'll realize you made a huge mistake. When YOUR player becomes a brick because someone on your network hub unlocked THEIR player, you'll realize you made a huge mistake. When the studios make a mistake and brick your players because they misidentified your dvd as pirated and you have to spend months trying to get them to fix it, you'll realize you made a huge mistake. It will happen. Blu-Ray is a rip-off, and anyone who plunges money on it is a sucker, or has too much money.

Besides, do you really need to see Alvin in the Chipmunks or Norbitt in stunning HD? This isn't the golden age of movies. It's not even 1985. Not that I wouldn't have wanted to see Molly Ringwald in HD. God, she was hot.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:34 PM on 02/25/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Molly Ringwald was -- and is -- totally adorable. I did not get into the piracy realm which is another reason I much preferred HD. Sony is moronically concerned about piracy, putting in stupid blocks that just make life miserable for people who never break the law but not really stopping real thieves. They're the geniuses who gummed up tons of computers by putting stupid anti-consumer I mean anti-piracy software onto Neil Diamond's 12 Songs, perhaps the best album of his career. I knew about the internet options but don't THINK it's essential for working the player since most people don't have Sony PlayStations and therefore wouldn't have their DVD players hooked up the internet. But I've no doubt they have all sorts of dumb things in place like you describe. Thanks for bringing it up.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:30 AM on 02/27/2008

Guitarsandmore See Profile I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore permalink

"This isn't the golden age of movies"

No, more like the Golden age of the rip-off.



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mrcontinental See Profile I'm a Fan of mrcontinental permalink

Perhaps Sony will jack the price of the Playstation III back up now as well. Some folks were buying them because they also served as a Blu-Ray player as well once the price came down.

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

I doubt they'll raise the player back up. They're more concerned about regaining market share from Wii. And people who have Blu-Ray via Sony PlayStation are the smart ones: those are the only players guaranteed to be able to access all the features that Blu-Ray will be offering by the end of the year. All the other "standard" Blu-Ray players currently out will NOT be able to access all the features. You'll have to wait for fall and new Blu-Ray players tagged "BD Live" to not feel ripped off.

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JScott See Profile I'm a Fan of JScott permalink

So...

I'm still using a VHS with tapes.

I want to get a DVR do they have DVR with Blu Ray and do I have to get a CD/DVD/Bluray disc drive for my computer. And what goes with what and what's compatible with what when TV broadcasts go to digital in Feb. 2009? Jeez you think those with the power to determine these things would get it right for once instead of nickel and diming the consumer with out of date equipment.

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

You're still using VHS tapes? You def need to get a DVR. I assume you have cable TV. If so, your best bet is usually the DVR service offered by your cable subscriber. If you have a high-def TV (which I doubt given your VHS status), then get a digital DVR service that lets you record shows in hi-def. Most computers will NOT play Blu-Ray discs. You'd have to get a drive that was Blu-Ray compatible. The switch to digital signals has no effect on Blu-Ray discs, since that's just a home viewing format. People accessing TV via rabbit ears are the ones who will be most affected by the switchover to digital. Assuming you have cable, you'll either need a relatively current TV or a converter that will switch the signal over. Your cable provider can tell you if you're ok for the 2009 switchover. But that is entirely separate from what discs you put into a DVD player.

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Guitarsandmore See Profile I'm a Fan of Guitarsandmore permalink

When I started buying DVDs I kept all of my VHS tapes and they still work fine.

There is no way I am going to upgrade my daughters Pooh Bear tapes to DVD let alone Blu ray.

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mbaty See Profile I'm a Fan of mbaty permalink

With the economy what it is, it seems silly that suddenly Blu-ray dvds would be pushed our way. We really don't have an extra \$30 to spend on a dvd of a movie we liked and will watch one time, and unless it's a movie we absolutely love and have the technology to enjoy in Blu ray, I don't think this is going to work. I predict sluggish sales. I'm considering not even changing my tv to "DTV," but instead I may just stop watching broadcast tv. I have plenty of dvds that play on my regular player, and the picture is just fine and the sound is fine. It's really not necessary to see every photon and particle and pore.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 02:22 AM on 02/25/2008

drkazmd65 See Profile I'm a Fan of drkazmd65 permalink

Exactly mbaty.

I have two TVs,... one almost 15 years old, the other new enough to be DTV compatible (I

think). I haven't had cable TV of any kind for the last 4 years and really haven't missed it.

Now - 'they' inform me (I actually have known for about 2 years) that my rabbit ears won't work on my TVs come February '09. Or - if I want to keep watching 'free' TV I need to buy a converter box.

My DVD player for the last 4 years has been a reliable old Playstation II - and I have no intention of switching to HD-TV format just so I can spend umpteen \$\$'s on a plasma TV, and new Blue-ray compatible CD player, and sound system.

I'm just going to spend more time out taking nice long walks, and reading some more good books.

Last I checked - a Library Card was still free.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:35 PM on 02/25/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

I think you're right. IN a depressed economy, trying to get everyone to pay a lot more for a product they're already happy with seems like very bad timing. Offering a massively improved product for the SAME price -- now that would be smart. I def think sluggish sales are ahead for the foreseeable future and it's such a badly done rollout that they might have poisoned it.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:29 PM on 02/25/2008

metropixie See Profile I'm a Fan of metropixie permalink

The article fails to mention developments in movie watching beyond the DVD format war. Before Christmas I purchased 2 HD players (one as a gift) because with HD DVD at lower prices and no discernible quality differences I gambled HD would be around for a long time. Within 30 days my purchases were obsolete. Meanwhile Apple upgraded my already-owned Apple TV overnight and now I can watch instantly downloaded purchased or rented movies on my HD TV at what is called "near-HD" quality. I think the quality is great and I've set out to rip all my DVDs to Apple TV-playable format. I will no longer buy any format DVDs (sorry Amazon) and stick with Apple, a visionary company that has changed the MP3 player world and stands to do it again with the way we watch movies. An iTunes-downloaded movie (either purchased or rented) plays on my TV, my Mac (or your PC), as well as in my iPhone (or your iPod). Sayonara format wars. Apple won your battle.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 04:10 PM on 02/24/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

David Pogue of the NYT did an article about downloading movies and I agree with him on this one. First, it's going to be a long time before most people in the US have enough bandwidth to download movies seamlessly. The people with a device like Apple TV are less than 1% of the entire home audience and I don't see sales for them exploding. Netflix is easy. Buying DVDs is easy. Downloading is a bit cumbersome and you get NONE of the extras and bonus discs and commentary tracks that make DVDs so far superior to VHS. To me, it's a step back. Fine for TV shows where there are no extras yet, but weak for movies. Plus, it only ends the format war if you are devoted to Apple. I hate being linked to one company and basically never buy digital files. (I buy my own CDs and rip them onto iTunes. Then, if I get a different player or my computer crashes or whatever, I still have a master copy of the album/movie. More new movies are allowing you to download a free copy of the film which I think is def the way to go. If you buy a DVD, you should have access to a download copy that lets you watch it on your laptop or iPhone or other device. Apple's approach is great if you are pure Apple. But the record labels bitterly regret letting Apple get such dominance in online sales and the movie studios are NOT going to give them the same access to movies and TV shows. That's why they're library of movies is so weak and will be for a long time. (I know, iTunes was lame at first too; but studios are scared of Apple now.)

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Kenai See Profile I'm a Fan of Kenai permalink

Are blu-ray players compatible with today's DVD's?

To be honest, I have yet to see the difference between an HD television and the regular one I have. I've gone to BestBuy and such and watched their HD's in action, and while the quality is good... I have yet to see what they're doing that makes them different than standard definition. Maybe I just have bad eyesight and I can't see the details.

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 **leftcoastindy** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of leftcoastindy](#) [permalink](#)

Maybe?

But you aren't the only one. Are you tone deaf too?

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 **Kenai** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Kenai](#) [permalink](#)

I'm definitely not tone deaf.

I'll try watching HD with my glasses on, that might help. :)

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 **Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Kenai, I have to agree with leftcoastindy. My standard for technology being a major leap forward is the grandmother test. (Or mother test.) If your mother can tell the difference between an audio cassette and a CD or a VHS tape and a DVD (and of course she can), then it's a major leap forward I don't know anyone who hasn't been blown away and been made weak at the knees by hi-def programming on a hi-def TV. Regular TV shows don't always look dramatically better but sports and nature programming in hdef looks just stunning on a plasma or LCD screen. Typically, stores have the best setup guaranteed to wow customers. You might indeed want to get your eyes checked :) And yes, new Blu-Ray players will typically play regular DVDs as well as Blu-Rays. There were some early incompatibility problems but those have been resolved. As I mentioned above, there's a new wave of extras that only Blu-Ray players released in the fall will be able to accomodate (along with current PlayStations) so if you're not eager, wait.

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 **leftcoastindy** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of leftcoastindy](#) [permalink](#)

First DVD player - \$650 (\$900 today's dollars)

First (1080P capable) Blu-ray player - \$360

To make viewing DVD's in widescreen format acceptable (picture more than 12" high) I had to purchase a 16/9 TV - \$4000 (\$5000 today)

To make all my old DVD's look great on a Blu-Ray player so I don't have to replace my whole collection, I have to buy an HDMI connected TV - \$1200

If you don't already have a surround sound system, you have no business reading this.

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 **Michael Giltz** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Well, not quite. Early DVD players were even more expensive. But all electronics tend to drop as they go mainstream and until DVD players went below \$300 it was considered a luxury, geeks-only product. BluRay players are more expensive than HD-DVD players but no one but early adaptors buys them until they go below \$300. The question is what do you get when you buy a player? With a CD player and my junky old stereo, the sound was light years ahead of audio cassettes. With the same old TV I had, DVD players were stunningly better than VHS tapes. With Blu-Ray on a standard TV, there's an improvement but it's marginal. That's just a technical fact. You must spend \$1000+ (or much more) on a plasma or LCD screen to get the full wow effect. Hook up a BluRay to the fine TV I already own (which is not widescreen) and you don't see much difference at all. That's what most people will experience. Same TV. VHS tape seems fine until you plug in a DVD player. DVD player is great. And when you plug in a BluRay it's a little better but not remarkably so. Not everyone has a home theater system. Indeed, 80% of households don't have a home theater system. And they want to know, if I buy just a BluRay player the way I bought a DVD player and before that a CD player, will I be thrilled? The answer is no. Unlike CDs and DVDs, getting the benefit of BluRay is a LOT more expensive. It just is. I've got a perfectly good TV, a Bose speaker system and hundreds (okay thousands) of DVDs. I'm def going to get a plasma screen maybe by the end of the year. Should I rush out and get BluRay before that? No. What's the point?

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:47 PM on 02/25/2008

philistine See Profile I'm a Fan of philistine permalink

I've already been suckered into LPs, 8-track tapes, compact cassette tapes, betamax, VHS, CDs and DVDs in both full-screen and wide-screen formats--not to mention noise reduction and multi-channel technologies. I'm done being on the bleeding-edge.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 02:48 PM on 02/24/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

I hate the bleeding edge, too. That's why I tend to not be an early adaptor even though I love electronic toys. By the end of 2009, you should be able to sort out the switchover to digital tv signals and the BluRay fallout and downloadable movies and a plasma screen tv etc. Until then, enjoy your kinescopes.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 01:49 PM on 02/25/2008

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