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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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U2 Delivers Another Hits Package

As a kid, I studied Nielsen ratings, Variety box office figures and Billboard charts the way other kids studied box scores. I just love this stuff. So let me point out a lost art: compiling a greatest hits albums. Usually, you can't just throw on every Top 40 hit and even the order (chronological? mixing up fast and slow or big hits and minor ones?) can play a crucial role in its effectiveness. A well-chosen greatest hits package can become a massive seller for an artist and become a defining record for them.

On the other hand, repackaging stuff over and over not only annoys fans and depresses overall sales, it can keep an artist from delivering that iconic album that puts them over the top. A friend of mine was astonished when I told him that The Eagles Greatest Hits album was the best-seller of all time, passing even "Thriller" just a few years ago. Then I mentioned that the Eagles foolishly undercut themselves by churning out some new CD compilations that will make that collection obsolete. (Worldwide sales figures are difficult to get -- don't trust Wikipedia -- but one fact is indisputable: in the US "Thriller" has sold 27 million copies and the Eagles Greatest Hits 1971-1975 has sold 29 million copies, per the RIAA.)

Look at the Beatles: they've been one of the best-selling acts in the world for decades but mostly through sales of their original albums. They initially produced two greatest hits albums : double lp/CDs often referred to as the "red" and "blue" albums. And that was it. No, "The Beatles Love Songs" or "The Beatles Rock" or a million other variations they might have come up with. Either buy their albums or these two greatest hits sets. Period. So when they rethought their catalog because of the CD and it's extra length, the Beatles wisely focused on a one CD set with the very obvious hook of songs that went to #1. The result? They sold [an astonishing 10 million copies in the US and a reported 28 million worldwide](#) -- all for music that had been widely available for

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