

Blu-ray Shifts Promo Plans Post-Warner

By Greg Tarr -- TWICE, 1/8/2008 4:55:00 PM

LAS VEGAS — Some members of the **Blu-ray Disc Association** (BDA) were not declaring victory in the war of the HD disc formats Monday, but their actions seemed to be speaking louder than their words.

Since **Warner Bros.**' surprise announcement that it will exclusively back Blu-ray Disc later this year, leaders of some of the BDA's largest manufacturers and studios said they have agreed to shift gears in their joint promotional and marketing efforts from a Blu-ray vs. HD DVD approach to one that will promote the advantages of Blu-ray over standard definition DVDs.

"Hopefully, we can start focusing our energy away from fighting about which format is the better format and now start focusing on consumer education," said Steve Beeks, Lionsgate president/COO. "The choice is clear — consumers need to upgrade from standard def to high def, and perhaps we can start to see packaged media sales start to grow again."

Beeks acknowledged that replacing DVD with Blu-ray Disc sales will "take a long time, maybe an eight- to 10-year timeframe," but he added that Blu-ray sales could help to start replacing the revenue lost from declining DVD sales later this year or next.

Bob Chapek, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment president, agreed, adding he was not surprised by Warner Bros.' decision after seeing BD sales activity in the United States during the holidays. On certain weeks in the year, BD movie sales surpassed HD DVDs by a 2-to-1 to 4-to-1 ratio, he said, and at a 10-to-1 ratio in Australia and Japan.

"I think the handwriting was on the wall," Chapek said. "Consumers had started to make their choice a while ago. Now I think it is safe to say that Blu-ray will be the ultimate successor to DVD."

Andy Parsons, point man for the Blu-ray Disc Promotion Group activities in the United States, said "if the United States is trying to get people to convert over to a high-definition TV system, Blu-ray can play a very important part in making that happen. The uncertainty has gone away, now you can start to show people the very best a new high definition TV can deliver."

During a Blu-ray Disc Association presentation Monday, Ron Sanders, Warner Home Video president, said his studio sided with Blu-ray in response to consumer demand, and he denied speculation that the studio had received a cash incentive from Blu-ray backers. "We have a \$42 billion worldwide home entertainment business — any payments would be a drop in the ocean compared to getting it wrong in terms of what the consumer wanted. It didn't have anything to do with any incentives," Sanders said.

Blu-ray studios and manufacturers also used CES to tout the forthcoming interactive capabilities of the new Bonus View and BD Live features, which will bring picture in picture running commentaries and a host of Web-enabled bonus material to select titles this year.

Sony offered a special demonstration of the new BD Live capabilities Monday, and 20th Century Fox is demonstrating at the BDA booth an "Alien vs. Predator vs. You" connected player video game that will be included in the BD release of "Alien vs. Predator" later this year.

That capability promises to bring together communities of fans and players through new Web-enabled interactivity.

Similarly, Chapek said Disney will embrace BD Live in a big way later this year starting with special features in "some 'National Treasure' releases" and on the studio's first Blu-ray animated platinum classic title "Sleeping Beauty," with BD Live bonus features.