

Physical and digital embrace

During EMX, packaging players reasserted the value of their trade in the face of the rowing package-less download distribution juggernaut. Physical and virtual packs can coexist was the consensus. Dan Daley reports

The Entertainment Packaging Summit, the back half of the agenda at the annual Entertainment Media Expo (EMX, 7-9 August) at the Universal City Hilton in Los Angeles, acknowledged the fact that retail, which increasingly determines the direction that physical media take in terms of supply chain and shelf space, is seeking more ergonomically and cost-effective solutions. The answer, said David Gorman, president of Hackmart, a boutique US music marketing, advertising and packaging design firm, and a former vice president of creative at WEA Distribution, is to embrace the virtual distribution paradigm and work with it, not against it.

"Packaged products and downloads are not mutually exclusive propositions," he told the audience at EMX. "By using packaging to enhance rather than simply hold a disc is what makes the music or video on that disc a rewarding experience. Quality is what we can provide and [unpackaged download distribution] can't."

Packaging as a marketing tool

At a panel entitled Managing Brands Across Multiple Markets, Laura Abele, vice president of marketing at New Line Home Cinema, said that the package could often be the single component of a product that sets it apart from the group. "Anything we can do to make a release an event and bring in as many partners as we can, we do."

Citing a best-selling tear-jerker, Abele recalls cutting a co-packaging deal with tissue-maker Kleenex, in which the package essentially told the prospective buyer or renter, "You're going to need a lot of tissues when you watch this one."

On the same panel, David Pokress, vice president of global brand management at Activision, said that creating packaging designs now have to go as deeply into the production process of a game or a movie as authoring does in order to collect and integrate basic elements of the project into its packaging – a tactic that can lead to more dead ends because of deeper investments in projects whose future success is not by any means assured. "You have to start before principle photography is completed," he said. "And it's hard to turn the ship once it's gotten going. You have to hope that the project develops as expected and hoped for."



AGI Media collecting awards from presenter Craig Braun (main pic and top right) and Braun with Karen Stetler of the Criterion Collection (bottom right)

One thing that helps reduce risk is working on sequels to successful titles. With projects including the *Rush Hour*, *LOTR* and the Austin Powers franchises behind her, Abele said buyers were looking for the common elements between films, such as the talent, and that those elements are what packagers can build their designs around.

Andy Siditsky, vice president of worldwide creative services at Disney's Buena Vista Home Entertainment, told the crowd that part of the mission for the packaging for *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* was to remind home video viewers that "Pirates 3" would be coming down the pike soon enough. "With an event film like *Pirates*, you want to maintain the buzz between theatrical releases and manage the expectations of the audience," he said.

All this means involving more partners – Pokress mentioned that Activision had sought out Marvel Comics as a collaborator on the packaging of the film studio for the packaging of the Spiderman series of films. "For any film you want to leverage the key art, and with franchise sequels the key art becomes something consistent throughout the films," he explained. "This is important because the cost of failure has gone up. [Disney announced earlier this year it would cut the number of films it capitalised on a yearly basis, the implication being the remaining ones would each represent more expensive gambles.] The way to deal with that is to consolidate the partnerships and hit the marketing hard."

On a panel entitled *Who Needs Specialty Packaging?*, the answer was an optimistic, "Everyone, apparently." Per Larsson, president of 30 Sixty Advertising Design, noted the growth of

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retailer-specific packaging, driven in large part by fierce competition between the big-box retailers like Wal-Mart and Target that is increasingly defining the entertainment media retail landscape. "Retailers are looking for different content and packaging to help them compete against each other," he stated, citing three distinct packaging versions of the latest *King Kong* film for three different retail chains. "I think you could say this trend is good for the packaging business."

The rest of the panel was also sanguine about the directions that cultural and retail trends were pushing packaging. "Every generation has its own take on the same thing," commented Bradley Grose, of Bradley Grose Design. "We used to go to McDonald's for hamburgers; our kids go for packaged Happy Meals. We can see a long future for package design in that," he said. Michael Waite of Wynaldo Litho agreed, adding that Happy Meals and sequels help create longer shelf-life continuity, which makes content providers become more willing to invest in sophisticated packaging. "But," he cautioned, "price is always going to be an issue. The ideas will get bigger but will always be pared down by economic realities. You want to keep packaging solutions automatable to avoid having them outsourced overseas."

Virtual packaging

The notion of partnerships was explored further in the Birth of the Digital Package panel, which examined virtual packaging as an extension of download content. Tom Gibbons, co-founder of TuneBooks, acknowledged that the concept was in its "evangelical" stage, and content providers are still largely being proselytised by the concept. But he pointed to early third-party personalisation efforts, such as ISP Yahoo's promotion in which consumers can purchase Jessica Simpson singing a song that calls them by name (assuming you have a name that's already in the promotion's database of 300 or so) that includes similarly personalised "packaging" elements.

"The package elements for products like this allow for a much higher degree of brand differentiation than ever before," commented Gary Price, an executive at TAG Strategic, founded by former EMI digital guru Ted Cohen. "We're looking at strategic tie-ins with a much wider range of partners, including airlines," he said. Added Gibbons, "Virtual packaging is going to take packaging for media to a whole new level."

Alex Awards

The Packaging Summit also played host to the Alex Awards at the close of the EMX show, an annual packaging accolade event to honour outstanding achievement in entertainment packaging.

AGI Media snapped up five prestigious Alex Awards for Best CD Package, Single- or Double-Disc for *Tool: 10,000 Days* (AGI Media, Muti Packaging Solutions) (Label: Voleano Records), Best CD Boxed Set and Best Package Printing for *Johnny Cash: The Legend* (Label: Sony BMG Music Entertainment). AGI also won Best Limited Edition DVD Package for *Sex in the City: The Complete Series* (HBO Video) and Best Structural Design for *HBO: For Your Emmy Consideration* (HBO).

"The Alex Entertainment Packaging Awards are the Oscars of our industry," said Richard Roth, executive vice president of sales and marketing worldwide at AGI Media. "We are extremely honoured to have our creative efforts recognised by the superb panel of judges that represent the top creatives in the entertainment design business."

Other Alex Award winners on the night were:

Best Vinyl Record Package

The Raconteurs: Broken Boy Soldiers (V2 Records)

Best DVD Package, Single- or Double-Disc

The Man Who Fell To Earth

(The Criterion Collection)

Best DVD Package, Multi-Disc

The Electric Company: The Best of the Electric Company (Shout!Factory)

Best Entertainment Software Package,

Console Platforms

Grand Theft Auto: The Trilogy (Xbox) (Shorewood Packaging) (Publisher: Rockstar Games)

Best Entertainment Software Package,

Computer Platforms

Age of Empires III: Collector's Edition (Microsoft)

Best Promotional CD/DVD, Entertainment Trade

The Doors: Love/Death/Travel (Cinram-Ivy Hill)

(Label: Rhino Handmade)

Best Promotional CD/DVD, Consumer/Marketing

Sundance Film Festival Collection

(Cinram-Ivy Hill) (Studio: Sundance Channel Home Entertainment)

Best Entertainment Retail Marketing Materials

Cinderella Platinum Edition: Floor Display (Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

(Label: Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

Best Disc Decoration

Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo Chapter 1

(Geneon Entertainment) ●