

Holiday boxed sets with all the trimmings

Movie studios and record labels designing with gift-givers in mind, but merchandising challenges remain, reports

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In New York, shopping during the holiday season is not just a challenge but it takes courage, particularly when a store such as discount-chain, Wal-Mart has a sale. A few years ago, a woman was trampled trying to buy the last \$25 DVD player. While other areas of the US and the world may be a bit more tame than New York, the holiday season everywhere offers extreme competition in stores. Now that DVD players have saturated the market, the actual DVDs are the more popular present.

CDs, too, despite the downturn in business, are still a present that works for just about everyone. A never-ending array of multi-disc sets

line the shelves. Not only is it difficult for content providers to acquire shelf space, but when they do acquire the space, the age-old question still is... how will a consumer notice their product?

Faber, director of marketing, Anchor Bay agreed. "If you can keep the package close to the standard DVD size, retailers love special packaging." That's where O cards come in. "They make a package stand out."

Before talking about the new children's line of *Eloise* DVDs to be released by Anchor Bay this season, last year's *The Happy Elf* warrants a mention as a result of consumer reaction to

"You come up with an amazing package, but it still might be tough to get it on the shelf. It's important to really work with retailers up front to make sure that your package is something that is going to work on their shelf."

Warner Home Video's *Astaire and Rogers Ultimate Collector's Editions* collects all ten films made by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in one box



Surveys show if the box doesn't catch the consumers' attention in a few seconds, or "a New York minute" they are lost forever. The key, of course, is packaging that catches a consumers' eye while still meeting demands of the retailer. Here's a sampling of what's available for the holiday season 2006, and some of the challenges content providers and designers had to face.

HBO Video has released the complete series of *Six Feet Under* and *The Ali G Show*. "*Six Feet Under* captures the essence of the programme from its 'burial plot' packaging to the 'In Memoriam' character booklet found inside each gift set. *The Ali G Show* gift set captures the multiple characters played by Sasha Baron Cohen with a lenticular image that changes from Ali G to Borat," said Sofia Chang, HBO Video vice president, marketing.

Richard Roth, AGI Media executive vice president of sales and marketing, said the amount of Amarays with an O-

sleeve are actually more prevalent this holiday season and beyond. O-sleeves are almost a mini standard, he said. Suzanne

the product, Faber said. It's an animated story featuring the voice and music of Harry Connick Jr. The package has an Elf hanging from a string of Christmas lights. A child can push a button and get a 10-second sound byte of Connick singing *The Happy Elf* song. Plus the Christmas lights light up and blink. "It's not only a value as a DVD, but there is also instant gratification for the child."

In terms of *Eloise*, two titles have been released for the holiday season. They are *Me, Eloise* and *Eloise: Little Miss Christmas*. Other titles are forthcoming. "With the exception of the Christmas title, all releases will have a pink foil background. The Christmas title will be red. The packages have an inset picture in the middle of the box which is framed by foil with stars. Faber warns. "You come up with an amazing package, but it still might be tough to get it on the shelf. It's important to really work with retailers up front to make sure that your package is something that is going to work on their shelf." Beyond *Elf* and *Eloise*, Anchor Bay is certain that packaging is key to sales, particularly during the holidays. Faber points to *Santa Claus, The Movie*, starring Dudley Moore. It was repackaged last year, and Anchor saw an 80% lift in US sales, she said.

"We do a great deal of boxed sets and have created line looks," George Feltenstein, Warner Home Video senior vice president, theatrical catalog marketing.

Last year, the content on the regular release of *King Kong* and the special release was the same. What made the difference was the special release 3-D tin on which Kong was elevated.



A perennial holiday favourite, the soundtrack for *A Charlie Brown Christmas* gets spruced up for CD re-release by Concord, packaging courtesy of Multi Packaging Solutions

Reaction to that tin was phenomenal and from that tin came the idea to start the Ultimate Collection series, he said.

This holiday season, Warner will release three elaborate gift sets in the Ultimate Collection Series. The *Astaire and Rogers Ultimate Collector's Edition*, is a collection of all ten films made by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Designers used a special kind of foil within the design that makes the box look like it is lit up. "You'd swear there had to be a battery chip. It's phenomenal," said Feltenstein. It's a sturdy box that holds ten slim case packages. The original key art is used. Warner previously released the first five of the Astaire/Rogers films last year. The second five were released this year in traditional packaging. "We didn't want the consumers that bought the first five last year to feel ripped off. So, we created a special SKU that has all 10 packages inside, but the first five cases are empty. We worked out a deal with Amazon who is selling the box with an exclusive SKU, and it is \$4 more than if you were to buy the second set of five films alone."

Also from Warner this holiday season is *Forbidden Planet Ultimate Collectors Edition*. The two-disc set is in a tin resembling a lunch box. When the tin is opened up, there is the disc and a Robbie the Robot figurine. Last but not least is the *Superman Ultimate Collectors Edition*, which contains 14 discs. It includes all the Superman feature films, an alternate version of *Superman II* as well as the new *Superman Returns*. While Feltenstein said these are irresistible Christmas gifts, price is key. If the price is right, "People might buy extra copies and keep them sealed as collector's editions. No matter how much e-commerce and downloading increases, packaged media that you hold in your hand, and you pull off the shelf, that is still the end-all."

New Video distributes product for A&E Home Video Entertainment, Scholastic Video Collection and Docurama. New Video principal/COO Susan Margolin said, "Our fan base is sophisticated. They don't want to pay extra for packaging. We don't

LP-SIZE CD BOOKS AN EARFUL

Music packaging takes another step forward with Universal Music's "Earbooks," a unique book-like package that can be marketed in traditional and nontraditional outlets such as books shops and gift shops.

Earbooks are hard-back books, 30cm x 30cm, nearly the size of an old vinyl cover. Included in the page are 100-page full-color photographs and text on high quality paper and thread-stitched with at least four CDs embedded within the inside cover. The package can hold up to 12 CDs.

The first Earbooks released in Fall 2006 were from Universal artists, Dusty Springfield, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, The Jam, Thin Lizzy and The Police.

Silvia Montello, marketing director, Universal Music Catalog, UK, said Earbooks were developed by a company in Hamburg, called The Edel Group. Originally, these packages were created as coffee-table books. For example, a book about New York City might have compilations of music from the city with scores of pictures, she explained. Initial packages were more about the photos than the music, but "Edel came to us with this concept, thinking it would work well for a music product as well. We agreed."

Key artist box packages already in existence were a first step for Universal in order to try out the new format. Sets that had a smaller booklet and fewer photos "were expanded. One of the things that really interested us about these packages is the book element. For example, we are going to put Earbooks into Waterstones, the biggest book chain in the UK. As we create more titles next year, we'll be able to go further into the gift market," Montello stated.

In 2007, Universal will also be looking at creating some packages from scratch and putting together some new collections and sourcing all the photos and commissioning liner notes.

"We believe people actually do want the background of the artist in addition to the music," Montello said. "It's important to give people a history of the artist's career



Universal Music Group's "Earbook" series was designed with gift-giving in mind

and the discography, etc. Earbooks offer a nice big space, instead of squeezing photos into the CD size. This does the photography a lot more justice as well. We're also going to look at doing books around a particular label's story as well. There is a lot of opportunity in this format. We need to give fans something they can be proud to own."

At the moment, the deal with Edel is just for the UK and Ireland markets, and Edel has the rights in the European market. Montello is not sure if or when it will expand into the US.

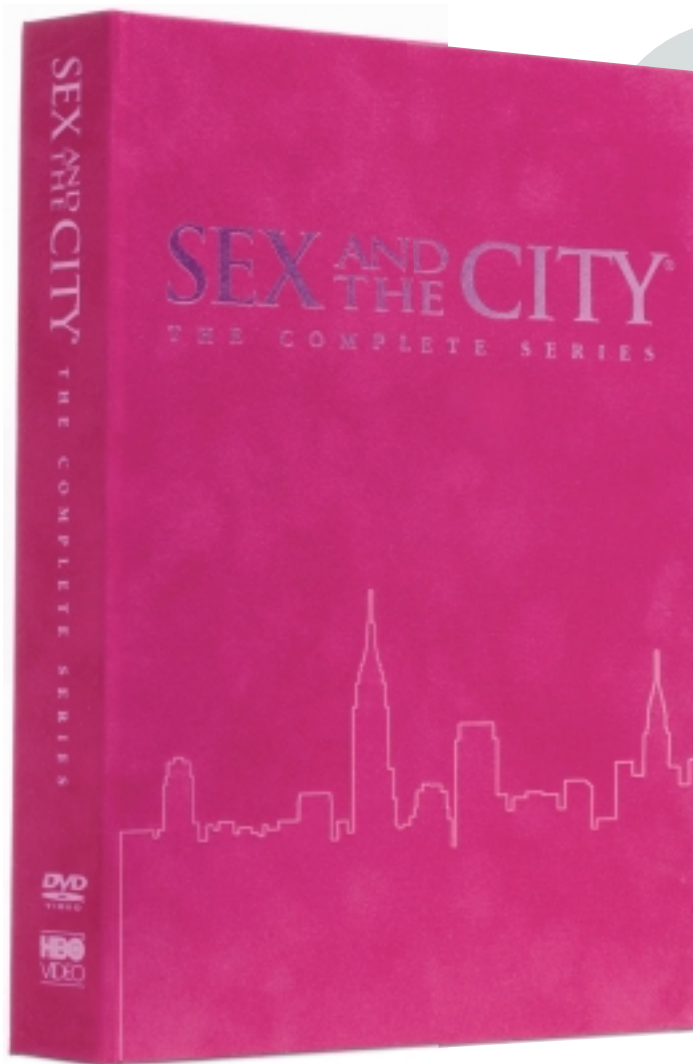
expect them to. We've been looking at doing some packaging overseas to keep costs down. It can't be the entire solution, because we have to be able to reprint on a dime. We want to create something of value. We don't want it to be flashy just for the sake of being flashy."

New Video's Patricia Keim, vice president of marketing offers an example of *Homicide-Life on The Street*, megaset the collectors edition of the A&E Home Video, which includes 35 DVDs. It looks like a filing cabinet, but it is only a couple of inches taller than an Amaray and about an inch wider.

"The DVDs of the individual seasons have done well, so we wanted to come up with something that would bring together all of the individual sets and some new bonus material. But with 35 discs, it was tricky. The filing cabinet was compact enough to sit on many store shelves and sit on a consumer's shelf in the living room."

Keim said, "We spent a lot of time making sure the packaging was durable and touching it; pulling out the drawer and making sure the 'cabinet' wouldn't tip over. We rejected a lot of packaging in between. Each season is in a

(Continued on page 30)



HBO Video's *Sex and the City* boxed sets, packaged by AGI Media, have proven to be big sellers during the holiday gift-giving season

may be gaining some momentum this holiday season. While AGI's Roth said, the amount of truly, exotic designs has been somewhat limited in this season's DVD market, music has been stronger than expected. While admittedly, "there is a good deal of downloading which is pretty substantial for the overall pie... the overall pie is pretty substantial itself because it is the content after all that people are downloading. There is still a desire to own the packaged goods. We are seeing some real strength in those areas."

A perennial favourite, *Charlie Brown Christmas* (Concord), will debut in a new CD package this Christmas.

The cover has a yellow square on which the characters are printed, and it has a clear window over

it. The package reverts back to the original fantasy cover with the Peanuts characters dancing around the tree.

"This is an existing release, but we wanted to do something special and have it stand out in the marketplace so that a new consumer

and fulfilment with his purchase," said Rahmyn Kress, Universal Music Group International (UMGI) managing director, supply chain management.

Jean-Christophe Casalonga, UMGI's director of planning & procurement on its supply chain management team, added, "The perceived quality is improved by adding visual features and tactile features. Nevertheless these features have to stay consistent with the global product design and artistic direction. Visual features include special inks and varnishes, to improve the overall finish of the product. High gloss effect or spot lacquer improving contrast with high gloss are now used quite often. Metallic inks or foils have been heavily used but are now less in favour. Matte effects are mostly used now through the use of offset papers and rarely otherwise as opposed to cosmetics packaging. Direct, sharp colours and transparency effects come out regularly."

Special varnishes or laminations are now available to provide extra finish, adding special effects like diffraction, metal dust, pearl finish. Tactile features include special papers with either a rougher finish (offset, recycled) or with special calendaring for an increased smoothness. "Varnishes add significantly to the finish, giving smoothness and extra thickness feeling to papers. Cardboard used for packaging tend to be thinner and more rigid. Plastics are used for cases, slipcases (to play on colour and transparency) over finished products, and CD trays in combination with cardboard," explained Casalonga.

Perhaps the moral of this holiday season is put forward by Warner's Feltenstein: "Make the customer run across the store to grab your product!" ●

(Continued from page 29) multi-disc Amaray. We've provided filing cards. Each has an episode description, so people can look through and find their favorite episode."

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Another new DVD packaging concept is an individual sleeve treatment New Video calls SleeveStats, used for its Major League Baseball complete game collectors sets. "We cover the sleeves with rare and exclusive facts and stats. Each Amaray box, inside and out is filled with trivia, artifact shots and memorabilia of the game. Each disc is one game. Each sleeve applies to that game," Margolin explains. Next up, is a Major League Baseball package featuring the winner of the 2006 World Series.

Music packaging, while a little quieter on the single CD side than on the boxed set side,

won't pass it by," said Brit Davis, Multi Packaging Solutions vice president of sales.

Universal Music Group (UMG) in the UK is paying particular attention to its single CD packaging, as well as its boxed sets. Last summer UMG announced a move to offer new music releases in the Super Jewel Box. The first three titles released in September were *Ta Dah* by the Scissor Sisters, The Killers' *Sam's Town* and Fergie's *The Dutchess*. "The trend in packaging is towards increasing the product complexity and perceived quality, to give the consumer a feeling of increased satisfaction



Warner's *Superman Ultimate Collector's Edition* contains 14 discs packed in a tin