

Commemorating 25  
years of *Blade Runner*



# Decking the halls – holiday special packaging

The holiday season is a time when packaging becomes even more elaborate, with special finishes and multi-packs the norm rather than the exception, as Terence Keegan explains

As the 2007 holidays near, media packagers worldwide report an overall healthy market for speciality projects, with content publishers demanding ever more flashy finishes and value-added items to make holiday releases fly off retail fixtures and onto already-cluttered household shelves. Individual order quantities may be down, but the complexity of the jobs – and the uniqueness of project requirements – are not only keeping package vendors busy but driving further innovation in package design, printing and assembly. What follows are some of the season's most richly packaged announcements.

## The still-hot deluxe-DVD

Entering its 10th holiday season, the venerated video disc remains a key driver of special-packaging creativity, and few titles embody the state of the still-hot deluxe-DVD-reissue market like Warner Home Video's *Blade Runner*.

The Harrison Ford future-noir film made its theatrical debut in 1982, with Warner Bros creating several versions for various

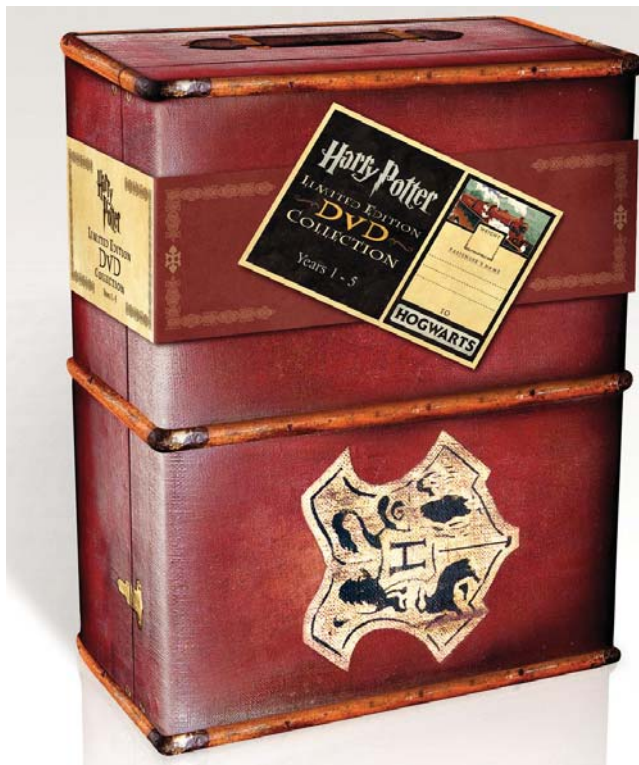
**“Major studios are asking for a lot of SKUs, but each local office wants its personalised edition of a specific title”**

international markets until director Ridley Scott completed a new cut in 1992. When DVD debuted in 1997, *Blade Runner* was among Warner's first wave of single-disc titles – and three years later, the director's cut anchored a 'Limited Edition Collector's Set' that also included still photos and various printed collateral. But that edition drew consumer complaints of poor film and sound transfers – and what's more, Scott confessed to having never been happy with the 1992 cut resting as the definitive version of his work.

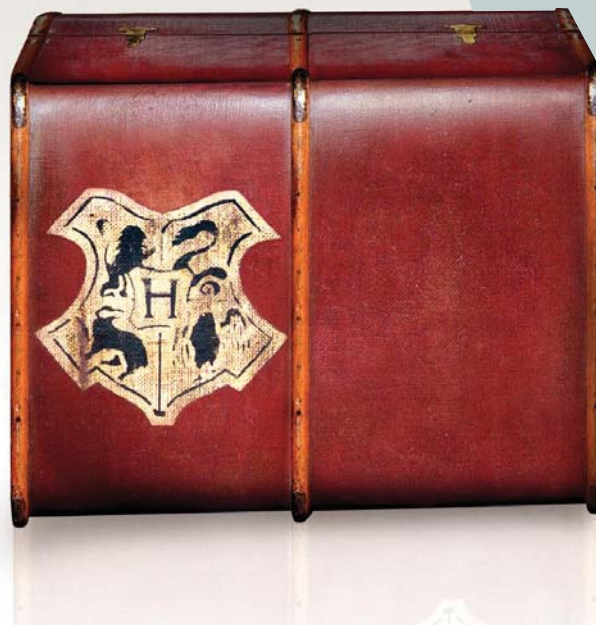
In commemoration of the film's 25th anniversary, Warner's five-disc *Blade Runner: The Ultimate Collector's Edition* aims to be the truly final DVD re-do. Due to hit the streets in December at \$79, the set will include a rare 'workprint' version, the two major versions of the 1982 debut (both restored), a remastered 1992 director's cut with a 5.1 sound mix, and Scott's new "final cut" – along with a feature-length making-of documentary and other bonus footage. Housed in a numbered, moulded suitcase that replicates the one employed by Ford's character, the board-and-tray multi-pack also includes replica figurines, a new batch of photo prints, and a signed personal letter from Scott.

Warner uses another suitcase to pack two-disc editions of all five of its Harry Potter films with bookmarks, trading cards and other memorabilia for \$119 (arriving December 11). Package vendor Shorewood, which is manufacturing suitcase components for certain Warner packages this year, praises the studio's

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Harry Potter suitcase pack from Warner with particular attention to detail



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attention to detail. "In the past, if a customer wanted to duplicate a suitcase, it would be a two-piece, rigid cigar-style box with a paper hinge on the back," says David Aldana, Shorewood's special projects manager. "One particular job is full-blown injection-moulded, with a foam inside, foil stamping, custom colouring and painting. I haven't seen something like this in a while."

Elsewhere, while the TV-on-DVD market isn't expecting to post double-digit sales gains any longer, the odd complete-series set will still find its way onto holiday shelves. Take for example HBO Video's 44-disc encapsulation of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, fitting all 210 episodes of the nine-year, typical-American-family sitcom into a paperboard box designed to resemble the character family's house.



Dustin Wills, VP West Coast Sales, Shorewood

Sofia Chang, HBO Video's senior vice president of marketing and creative services, notes that the studio is never one to shy away from employing speciality materials – it was among the first to package DVDs in a metal tin (with 2002's *Band of Brothers*), and its lucite-and-pink-velvet *Sex and the City* gift set (2005) won consumer and industry acclaim. But for the \$279 Raymond set, streeting at the end of October, they wanted a simpler approach to retail distinction. "We used traditional paper material, but the 'house' structure is very complementary to the brand," Chang says. "Our strategy is always to stay true to the specific title."

Taking cues from the simplified style of last year's 36-disc *M\*A\*S\*H: Martinis and Medicine Complete Collection*, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment releases early November *The X-Files: The Complete Collector's Edition*, a \$329, 61-disc megaset that catalogues all 201 episodes from the long-running sci-fi series as well as the *X-Files* theatrical film and over nine hours of bonus features. No replica *tchotchkes* here, however: the multi-packs are encased in a box befitting an encyclopedia, with emphasis on the DVD contents themselves. With a TV property that already has seen numerous DVD releases, "You have to make it a unique consumer proposition that clearly spells value," says Steve Feldstein, Fox Home Entertainment's senior vice president of marketing communications.

In the bread-and-butter single-disc sector, studios across Europe and the US are springing for more lenticular tip-ons, PVC O-cards, holographic finishes, bundled toys and other additions to make standard Amarays and Digipaks stand out in shops. A print run for an upcoming *Barbie* DVD from NBC Universal, for

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instance, reportedly involves four print and foil stamping passes on top of an already custom foil-hologram stock.

Manufacturers confirm that the SKUs keep multiplying for the secret retailer and territory exclusives that come out during the height of holiday shopping. "Major studios are asking for a lot of SKUs, but at the same time, each local office wants its special and personalized edition of a specific title," says Fiorenzo Bettoni, VP marketing and sales Europe for Italy-based package vendor Pozzoli. "Nearly all of our O-cards have a special finishing on them."

### Hi-def low profile

With the fight between HD DVD and Blu-ray Disc intensifying at US and European retail – but shoppers still largely unaware of either next-generation format – studios are packaging most of their holiday hi-def releases in the branded, translucent polypropylene cases that the formats launched in last year. At the very least, HD DVD and Blu-ray's respective logos and colours play prominently.

"As the marketplace becomes more familiar with the two formats, I think it will give us a lot (Continued on page 17)

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more flexibility with package design,” says HBO’s Chang, who directed the creation of one of the industry’s first hi-def boxed sets last fall for *The Sopranos: Season Six, Part One*. But this year, for *Part Two of The Sopranos’* final season, Chang says, “HBO is going with the same strategy, the same use of blue and red,” on the multi-pack boxes.

Still, major studios are beginning to court a hi-def collector’s market with more elaborately designed HD DVD and Blu-ray boxed sets, based largely around properties that have seen successful deluxe-edition treatment in years past. In one of the splashier promotions announced to date, CBS Home Entertainment will release in November the first season of *Star Trek: The Original Series* as a multi-pack set of 10 two-sided “combo” HD DVDs – while partnering with format champion Toshiba America Consumer Products to offer buyers of the boxed set an exclusive Star Trek phaser remote control for Toshiba’s HD DVD players.

Also in November, Warner will bring the first two installments of its *Ocean’s* trilogy to HD DVD and Blu-ray exclusively within three-disc gift sets that include this year’s *Ocean’s Thirteen*, in addition to offering Blu-ray and HD DVD versions of its *Blade Runner* and *Harry Potter* suitcases. Blu-ray booster Sony Pictures trots out a three-disc Blu-ray package for its *Spider-Man* trilogy in October. And while Disney has announced a standard DVD and Blu-ray edition of its final *Pirates of the Caribbean* film, *At World’s End*, for December, company CEO Bob Iger confirmed in an August financial earnings call that the studio will release a hi-def deluxe set of the *Pirates* trilogy as well – though he remained mum on a street date.

Special but simple and complementary to the brand

quantity and quality in deluxe music sets.

“Labels continue to do special packages, but I’ve definitely seen a drop in the level of intricacy,” says Dustin Wills, Shorewood’s Los Angeles-based VP of West Coast sales. “They just aren’t putting the financial commitment behind special packaging that the studios and game companies are right now.”

### Games with frontiers

Videogame publishers are indeed picking up the music industry’s special-package slack, enhancing O-cards and software boxes with foil finishes and custom holograms – and even in a few cases, breaking the long-enforced boundaries of their retail configurations. “More than any other industry, game publishers are held to that 5x7 footprint,” Wills says. “CDs and DVDs both have a ‘no rules’ section for special packages at retail. The games section in the Best Buy is still very standard.”

Still, Best Buy is sure to stock oversize videogame units like ActiVision’s \$90 *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* bundle which, like its addictive predecessors, comes with its own scale guitar controller for PlayStation, Wii or Xbox systems. For PC gamers, ActiVision is testing the limited-edition waters with the latest installment of its Quake franchise, *Enemy*



lamination, embossing and special goffering on board; new varnishing techniques, new textures, holographic effects, new inks, hot foiling, recycled materials and more.”

In the US, Shorewood agrees that satisfying the diverse demands of this year’s specialty packaging orders has necessitated new workflows. Aldana observes that, “All of the old rules to packaging construction and assembly are being broken, with vendors no longer necessarily conforming speciality designs to the specifications of automation. We’re going outside the traditional parameters with curvatures and angles, as well as hand-wrapping and hand-fulfilment.”

Shorewood’s new “team” approach to special projects, Aldana notes, enables clients to get more elaborate. “In the past, the project manager handled an order solely on his own, negotiating within the plant as well as for outsourcing, shipping, pricing and samples. It got a little overwhelming. Now, we have a special packaging manager, such as myself, with a co-ordinator under me, as well as a trafficker. The manager helps negotiate pricing, meeting with the sales rep and the customer, pitching out ideas and letting the customer know what we can and can’t do. The co-ordinator helps with the pricing and negotiations among the plants, and the trafficker, at the tail end, is somewhat of a sales assistant, while logging all shipments and data entry.”

“We’re starting to see the studios move toward a global look, where they’ll do one purchase order with multiple ship points across the world,” Wills adds. “As far as our sourcing goes, we’re utilising China and Mexico much more than we ever have in the past, because of the nature of these custom designs, which require a lot of hand work. We’re having to invest money in more people and more support, to handle these projects as they get more and more complex. And when I say ‘complex,’ that doesn’t always mean the package is more complex; the shipping and customer service has become more complex as well.” ●

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### Multi-disc music

The business most affected by digital downloading will offer a few multi-disc sets around its most legendary performers this season – notably, an eponymous three-CD retrospective for Bob Dylan (Sony BMG/Columbia in October), with vintage-styled CD sleeves, an extended booklet and postcards in a cloth-bound box. The limited use of plastic in the package reflects new Columbia Records co-chair Rick Rubin’s eco-inspired mandate to ditch the jewel box across all label releases. Dylan exhibits another trend: that of designing media items to look and feel the way they used to which, according to manufacturers, can also involve sourcing of vintage stock and custom antiquing of components.

Other veteran artists returning to the deluxe-edition scene this season include Annie Lennox (Arista) and Bruce Springsteen (Sony BMG/Columbia). By and large, however, manufacturers report a decline in both the

*Territory*, with “premium slipcase packaging” as opposed to simple sleeves, collector’s cards and a bonus DVD with game artwork.

Microsoft, meanwhile – no stranger to designing custom skins and controllers for its Xbox and Xbox 360 consoles – will offer two limited editions of its anticipated *Halo 3*, the final installment of the Xbox platform’s cornerstone property. The audience for such enhanced videogame product is proving to be no small niche. Pre-orders for the hefty, \$129 *Halo 3: Legendary Edition* – which encloses the first-person shooter game and bonus DVD video discs in a 10-inch, high-impact polystyrene helmet display stand – propelled the set to number 22 on Amazon’s Top Videogame Sellers in early September.

### Materials and workflow

Pozzoli’s Bettoni comments that with the broadening of specialty packaging requests, “We’ve introduced a lot of new materials: special