



Game on: A small sample of packaging components produced by Ivy Hill for various game publishers

Game packaging: breaking new ground

The biggest year ever for video and computer game sales in the US saw leading packagers sharing the wealth, with innovative designs and new 'green' initiatives. Steve Traiman reports

Major North American packagers and replicators shared in record-shattering sales racked up by the US video and computer games industry in 2007. Combined hardware and software dollars rose nearly 40% to \$18.85 billion, according to final figures from the NPD Group, which tracks retail point of sale.

The combined software sell-through of nearly 268 million units was an 11% increase over 2006, topping the previous mark of 250 million units in 2004. A significant 15% increase to 231.4 million combined video console and portable units more than offset a slight decline in computer games to 36.4 million.

Software dollars at retail topped \$9.5 billion, a stunning 28% over the previous high of \$7.43 billion in 2006.

Considering a conservative 20% manufacturing overrun, packagers 'covered' more than 320 million console, portable and computer game packages in 2007. Suppliers offered innovative designs, new eco-friendly materials and took a lead role in upscale product offerings.

“The longer lifecycle of more games through online play is encouraging more publishers to spend more on packaging”

Sharing their observations with *MediaPack* are representatives of such leading packagers as AGI Media, Bert-Co, Clear-Vu, Ivy Hill, Nexpak, Shorewood and Univenture.

“Our game volume was up about 12% in a record year,” says Brian Clouser, AGI Media vice president, sales.

Tim Keuning, Clear-Vu operations vice president, observes, “The overall game market was stronger than we anticipated, with growth

in the source package area for leading publisher Nintendo and others.” Clear-Vu is the patent holder for the Nintendo DS (NDS) package, the leading system in 2007 unit volume, and consulted on development of the Nintendo Wii package, produced by Viva Magnetics.

“Overall, it was a good year and sales were definitely up,” says Mary-Kevin Stockwell, Bert-Co national business development manager. “A few key customers had some big hit games bundled with accessories, offering new opportunities for creative package approaches.”

For Ivy Hill, long a leading music and movie package supplier, “The games market is new for us,” according to executive vice president Rich Oppenheimer. “With the recent acquisition of leading game distributor Ditan by our Cinram replication company, we’re riding in on their coattails.”

Shorewood Packaging continues to see opportunities for value-added packaging and special collector’s editions. Marketing services director Linda Lombri notes, “We opened a new Design and Development Center in

Los Angeles early last year, with a design staff for special packaging and POP displays, backed by an in-house digital prepress resource.” The company opened a similar Center this January in New Jersey, across the river from Manhattan headquarters, which is the new home of Shorewood Digital, the digital prepress operation.

“Overall the year was pretty good,” reports Dave Coho, Univenture vice president, sales. “With our fiscal year ending this March, we have very strong back orders with established game accounts.”

Green is good for games

“Sustainable packaging will continue to be a growing trend throughout the home entertainment market,” Shorewood’s Lombri emphasises. “We’ve already introduced our greenchoice environmental solutions programme to many of our customers.” As an example, she points out that the oversize ‘O’ sleeve for the Guitar Console available with Activision’s top hit ‘Guitar Hero III’ was printed on renewable, recycled paperboard using vegetable oil-based inks.

At Ivy Hill, Oppenheimer notes, “Wal-Mart has led the push for vendors to shift to reusable, sustainable materials instead of the oil-based, clear polystyrene box.” Ivy Hill vice president, entertainment sales, Mark Roberts, adds: “We offer all our customers the Eco Options line of alternative paper and board stock, with 30%

post consumer-content waste paper and board, and inks that are more conducive to the environment.”

“For our leading Unikeep game package case,” Univenture’s Coho says, “we already offer ‘green-friendly’ traditional poly sleeves with a biodegradable additive. Based on client interest and functionality, we also introduced new PLA (polylactic acid) sleeves that use plant material, and are exploring other eco-friendly material substrates as a member of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition.”

At Bert-Co, Suzan Kerston, senior vice president, packaging and POP divisions, adds, “We’re very proud of our green efforts in using more sustainable materials, and being FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified.”

Innovative designs abound

“For both our plastics division and our high-end SteelBook group, more games customers are looking for upscale, multi-disc packages,” observes Kim Sorenson, president of Scanavo Ltd. “For PC games, our 22mm plastic case now holds up to eight discs, and for our BD and HD customers we have alternative boxes with blue and red spine stripes, leaving clear front and back panels for graphic inserts.



For the ‘American Idol Karaoke’ with a microphone, Bert-Co used a silver metallized poly finish

polypropylene One-Time Case that is RFID-enabled through Checkpoint and 3M,” reports Clear-Vu’s Keuning. “The ID tag allows patrons to go into the library, get games in secure packaging, and check them out using our automated unlock feature.” The company is also working with key retailers on new approaches to make ‘high-shrink’ games more accessible to impulse game buyers, with a faster check-out promised.

“New bundled games offer more opportunities for all of us,” notes Bert-Co’s Stockwell. “For Konami’s hot DDR franchise we did all the structural work on the box that included a dance mat and microphone, and for their ‘American Idol Karaoke’ with a microphone, we used a silver metallized poly finish that made the logo really pop out. It was done with our first Sakuri silk screen UV coater in our California plant. A second Sakuri unit has been operational since last October at our new plant in Tennessee.”

At AGI Media, Clouser points to their recyclable paperboard package for Disney’s ‘High School Musical’ videogame with microphone, and a double-hinged metal box for Microsoft’s ‘Halo 3’ deluxe version that shipped with two or three discs. “Bundled games and accessories also give our customers a bigger shelf presence at retail,” he emphasises.

At Shorewood, Lombri notes, “For Activision’s ‘Spiderman 3’ videogames, we produced DVD-size O-cards using holographic foil embossing and hot foil stamping, as well as lenticular graphics. We also packaged such high profile games as Activision’s ‘Guitar Hero III’ and their Limited Collector’s Edition of ‘Enemy Territory: Quake Wars’.

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“Big hit games bundled with accessories offer new opportunities for creative package approaches”

“One of our newer products for the highly collectible gamer market is our CardPak, a credit card-sized plastic case for the exploding online game card experience, popular with NCSOFT, Vivendi Games and Microsoft Live, among others. Samples of our Hi-Def Unikeep wallet for the Xbox and PS3 have gotten good response from prospective customers. For the SteelBook, we just introduced a G2 version that is the same 14mm size as the single BD case.”

At Nexpak, a major supplier of the Sony PlayStation 2 case since its launch, Shelli Kaiser, executive director of marketing, notes, “Our 27mm, heavy-duty STACKpak was developed in 2004 due to Wal-Mart’s need for vendors to supply a multi-disc PC case that could hold up to its very aggressive warehouse ‘back-pusher’ equipment. It now holds up to six discs on a stacking hub mechanism, and we recently introduced 22mm and 15mm versions for the industry.”

The company came up with a creative orange STACKpak for Electronic Arts’ best-selling ‘The Orange Box’ PC release of five top action games, also produced for Xbox and PS3 versions.

“Our library game ‘rental’ business has been phenomenal with our new copolymer,



Nexpak supplied EA with the distinctive orange STACKpak for ‘The Orange Box’ multi-disc PC release

Activision's *Spiderman 3* videogames from Shorewood with holographic foil embossing and hot foil stamping, as well as lenticular graphics



TOP GAMES ANTICIPATED FOR 2008

- Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar, Xbox 360, PS3)
- Halo Wars* (Microsoft, Xbox 360)
- Metal Gear Solid 4* (Sony, PS3)
- Super Smash Bros. Brawl* (Nintendo, Wii)
- Mario Kart Wii* with Wii Wheel and Wii Fit (Nintendo, Wii)
- Unreal Tournament 3* (Epic, PC, Xbox 360, PS3)
- Resident Evil 5* (Capcom)
- Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix)
- Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore* (Konami)
- Major League Baseball 2K8* (2K Sports)
- Sid Meier's Civilization: Revolution* (Firaxis)
- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* (LucasArts)
- Pokemon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time* (NDS)
- Pokemon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time* (NDS)
- Gran Turismo 5* (Sony, PS3)
- Gears of War 2* (Microsoft, Xbox 360)
- Battlefield Bad Company* (DICE, Xbox 360, PS3)
- Kung Fu Panda* (Activision)

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Outlook bright for 2008

Looking ahead, Lombri observes, "Industry experts predict another banner year for games, with sales projected up 28% over last year's record. Marketers want their games to stand out and we see even more opportunities for value-added packaging and more collector's editions." Equally bullish is Nexpak's Kaiser, who says, "We see our new STACKpak getting a lot more acceptability in the games market." And Ivy Hill's Oppenheimer notes, "With a couple of game customers under our belt, we'll be working very closely with Ditani and are very excited about this year and our future in the games market."

At Scanavo, Sorenson says, "From a budgetary point of view, we're looking for even more growth in the gaming area, with more demand from all publishers for our high-end SteelBook case. Capcom's 'Devil May Cry 4' in early 2008 is the first of a good slate of highly anticipated games that lend themselves to a 'better box.'" Clear-Vu's Keuning is equally optimistic for growth in the game rental market, both at retail and in libraries. He also anticipates introduction of a better shrink-resistant package now being tested with several key accounts.

"It's going to be another banner year for Bert-Co," Stockwell says, "with Konami's 'Metal Gear Solid 4', Namco's 'Soul Calibur 3' and THQ with some prominent titles ideal for premium packaging. Nintendo, the industry leader in game unit sales last year, is now doing a lot of POP that we'll be involved with as well." At Univenture,

Coho notes, "We hope to reach out soon to Nintendo with our 80mm Unikeep case that is ideal for Wii, and we see more growth in the educational market for the growing number of multi-disc educational games on all class levels."

AGI Media's Clouser emphasises, "It should be another great year for games, with our continuing support for DS and Wii, and more games with peripherals like 'Guitar Hero, Rock Band' and the 'DDR' franchise that offer more creative opportunities. The longer lifecycle of more games through online play is encouraging more publishers to spend more on packaging." ●



Univenture has introduced new PLA sleeves for its game package case