

# In Rainbows – discbox from Radiohead



Rocking the music industry – as far as possible, the discbox was to be manufactured using locally-sourced and sustainable resources.

When it came to the design and content of the 'In Rainbows' discbox, the members of Radiohead had the final say. Christopher Barrett, features editor of *Music Week*, traced the development of this ground-breaking release

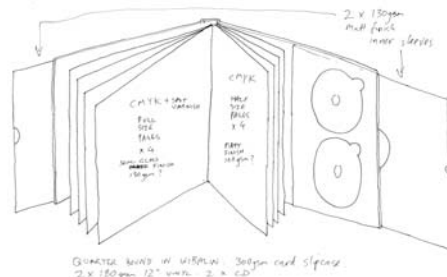
**R**adiohead rocked the music industry's foundations in October last year with the news that they would be making their 7th album available to download for whatever fans chose to pay, but chose also to provide an accompanying £40 'discbox'.

The discbox's contents and distribution were handled by Radiohead-owned merchandise specialist Waste Product Management and, when it came to the design and content, the members of Radiohead had the final say, insisting that, as far as possible, the discbox be manufactured using locally-sourced and sustainable resources.

"Wherever possible we used recycled materials and manufactured it in the UK," says Waste's Christiaan Monro. "We tailored what the band wanted with what was achievable. People don't buy CDs online from us so we knew that vinyl was a way of getting to them, and heavyweight vinyl provided added value and is more of a collector's item."

Consisting of a hardback book and slipcase housing a lyric booklet, 'In Rainbows' on CD and two heavyweight vinyl discs, along with a second enhanced CD featuring new material, photographs and artwork, the discbox has not only proved a compelling offering but a challenge for Clear Sound & Vision (CSV), the company tasked with its top-secret design and manufacture.

Headed by managing director Clive Robins, CSV handles the complete manufacturing requirements for a number of major and independent labels and first worked with



Early stages: the secret package had to consist of a case-bound cover somehow housing two 12-inch vinyl discs, two CDs and two booklets

Waste four years ago when it produced a Radiohead DVD.

In early 2007, CSV received a call from Courtyard requesting a meeting, during which the need for security and secrecy was emphasised. "The biggest thing for them on this project was that they didn't want the name 'In Rainbows' getting out," says sales and project manager Will Appleyard.

"When we were working on the initial stages of the project we were not told who the artist was, we were only allowed to know who we were dealing with when the artwork arrived and then we had to sign confidentiality agreements. Security was paramount, not only in the sense that we had to keep the project a secret verbally, but all physical aspects of production as well."

With Courtyard and Waste adamant that the October 10 announcement of the discbox's

availability should come as a surprise, the intense security presented CSV with a number of challenges.

"They wouldn't let us have the master until a day before the download was officially released so time was tight because producing vinyl is a slow process," says Appleyard. "We had the Abbey Road-produced copper master, including the back-up sets we requested, delivered by hand to each vinyl factory by CSV employees. The CD masters were also collected personally by CSV."

During the initial stages no artwork could be supplied as all the project consisted of at that point was a series of sketched ideas that had to be converted into physical mocked-up samples for approval prior to manufacturing. Appleyard explains, "We knew that the product had to consist of a case-bound cover somehow housing two 12-inch vinyl discs, two CDs and two booklets. This then had to slide into a sturdy slipcase. We were asked to experiment with various materials and finishes when submitting our product samples."

From inner page section and cover paper stocks to binding, sewing and stitching methods and the product's final dimensions, many changes were made before CSV could provide Radiohead's designer, Stanley Donwood, with the final templates. The artwork was delivered by a secure FTP site the following day. CSV then digitally proofed the project.

Due to the size and complexity of printing, binding and finishing the discbox, combined with the fact that a large amount of vinyl was to be produced, strict lead times had to be adhered to. "All elements were to be produced at the right time and crucially at the right speed," explains Appleyard. "For instance, we didn't want the vinyl production to overtake the production of the packaging and cause bottlenecks."

CSV split the vinyl pressing order over two factories and had them both deliver a quantity to the printers each day over several weeks. "We had set up with our printers a comprehensive fulfilment operation, each element having to be carefully handled and manually packed into the finished product," says Appleyard. "As per the vinyl, CDs were delivered to them on a staggered basis and overs held at our CD plant in a secure caged area."

The company had its fulfilment partner build a designated, CCTV-monitored area dedicated solely to the project – housing a cased storage area for CD, vinyl and paper part deliveries, and a large secure packing bench area that was only accessible to certain members of staff needing a pass code.

Appleyard and Robins were also responsible for overseeing the delivery of the discbox to the US, by sea freight in cargo containers and Waste's Monro was on hand to see the container actually leave the factory gates.

"It took us six or seven months, if not longer, to nail down the discbox's design and contents. For news of the album not to leak to anybody was a genius stroke," says Monro. "Security was a prerequisite of working with CSV and we applaud the way they handled it." ●