

Blu-ray Wins the High-Def Format War But Does Anyone Care?

**By Nevin Buconjic
For Fresh Magazine**

(Original Print Date - June 2008)

In my last article on the Blu-ray vs. HD-DVD war, I described the stunning quality of both formats and how either were an excellent successor to standard DVD.

At the time, both formats were battling for supremacy – essentially Sony (Blu-Ray) vs. Toshiba (HD-DVD). The key to winning was the support of the movie studios which would provide the movie content. Blu-Ray had the majority of the studios, but their players were significantly more expensive than HD-DVD players, and HD had significant advantages.

None of this mattered anymore of course, once Warner Brothers announced in January 2008 that they would stop supporting HD-DVD beginning in May 2008 -- this would mean Blu-Ray had the support of 75% of the movie studios while HD would only have 25% . The stunning announcement forced the cancellation of Toshiba's release of their latest HD-DVD models and quickly resulted in Toshiba's announcement that they would stop production of all HD-DVD products. Sony and Blu-Ray won the war. No one predicted the war would end so soon.

The Internet was a buzz with news sources and blogs touting that the future of High-def was now clear – and consumers were set to benefit. With only one format to choose from, consumers would now have nothing holding them back from upgrading to the next generation of video.

But the expected surge in Blu-Ray sales has not materialized. In fact, following the Warner Brothers announcement, even though Blu-Ray was declared the winner, sales of stand-alone players actually decreased by 40% from January to February followed by a slight increase of 2% between February and March.

So what of the anticipated rush of new consumers? Well it turns out that consumers may think that standard DVD is still good enough for the time being. Most consumers are buying up-converting DVD players, which play regular DVD's and "upgrade" the resolution from standard 480i to a 1080i HD resolution. In my opinion the improvement wasn't impressive, but it was noticeable.

Another factor in Blu-Ray's slow uptake could be the price. Since its declared win, the price of stand alone Blu-Ray players has actually increased. With no competition, perhaps the Blu-Ray camp is no longer in any rush to lower prices.

In my article I had suggested for anyone wanting to upgrade to minimize risk, they should stick to the Xbox 360 with HD-DVD attachment or the PS3 with built

in Blu-Ray. I had both and was happy with either. Although I had been rooting for HD-DVD to win, I am ok with how things ended. The PS3 is still the best Blu-Ray player on the market, as it is currently the only Blu-Ray player to support the new 2.0 standard – which brings picture-in-picture and online functionality to Blu-ray discs (two things HD-DVD had from the start).