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MUSIC VIDEO SALES ★ THE COMPLEAT BEATLES • WARNER HOME VIDEO

Studios' Rebranding Strategies Gain Heat

Video Labels Promote Titles, Win Shelf Space

BY SETH GOLDSTEIN

NEW YORK—The studios are heating their home video branding irons.

Reversing the long-established premise that consumers buy movies and not labels, Hollywood vendors are trying to create brands designed to promote the sale of specific titles. The concept isn't new—Paramount Home Video and MGM/UA Home Entertainment began branding catalog product in the late '80s—but the scope is.

Led by Disney and 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, the studios are placing names above hundreds of titles in an effort to draw attention from mass merchants and, ultimately, from the buying public. "They're starting to go after brand identification," says a veteran sell-through executive.

Studios will brand titles in an effort to secure hard-to-get shelf space, provided retailers can be convinced the strategy actually sells tapes. One source thinks the effort is wasted: "Consumers only know the movie and price."

Nevertheless, FoxVideo has convinced itself and has, in the process, prompted Columbia TriStar, MCA/Universal, and Paramount to follow suit. The three are following FoxVideo's lead and launching brand-name strategies this year, aided by growing retailer support.

Wal-Mart, now supplied directly by the studios, has made room in the past year for five square-foot displays (one-quarter the size of Disney's) of Warner Home Video and FoxVideo titles. Albany, N.Y.-based Trans World Music will consider similar arrangements "as brands develop," says video buyer Mark Galleo.

Bruce Pfander, FoxVideo marketing senior VP, credits the brands he has helped develop since 1993 for increases in catalog sales of 18% in 1993, 97% in 1994, and 65% last year. "It's working like a charm," he says. "We're way out in front [of the competition]." Catalog accounted for 20% of FoxVideo's revenues in the fiscal year ended June 30, 1995.

The studio has redesigned its Internet World Wide Web site to bolster catalog sales and brand awareness. While not a "primary part" of the marketing campaign, Pfander says, "the Web site does add to the overall halo effect."

Columbia TriStar executive VP Paul Culberg also plans to use a newly configured Internet page to promote his studio's 10-title Family Collection. Introduced last month, it is the studio's first attempt at what Culberg calls genre "identification," allowing mass



Screen from the FoxVideo Web site.

merchants to more easily slot the \$14.95 suggested list price. An additional 22 releases are due this year, and Culberg says that the company has roughly 15 ideas "on the table" for additional programs.

Despite Pfander's firm belief that branding works, many studio executives are unsure

of its impact, because retail evidence is lacking. Culberg says, "I'm not willing to spend the kind of money and time needed to create a Columbia or a TriStar brand unless there's a defined strategy."

Retailers still are hesitant to attribute demand for FoxVideo's catalog releases, priced at \$10-\$15, to such names as Studio Classics and Family Features. Trans World's Galleo calls FoxVideo "the king of repromotion" but isn't sure consumers recognize any of the studio's several brands. "It may develop," he adds cautiously.

"Our business is very title-specific. The jury is still out on the whole branding process," says Best Buy's Joe Pagano. Whatever the verdict, however, FoxVideo has been "hugely successful. There's no doubt they've caught our attention," Pagano says.

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WB Not Selling WarnerVision; Shifts It To Warner Home Video

BY EILEEN FITZPATRICK

LOS ANGELES—The dust still hasn't settled yet, but Time Warner cleared the air a bit with the announcement that its video sell-through label WarnerVision Entertainment will be staying in the family.

After failing to close a deal to sell the label to Hong Kong-based Tiger Eye Investment Holdings, Warner Bros. and Warner Music Group's chairman/co-CEOs, Bob Daly and Terry Semel, say WarnerVision operations will be shifted to sister company Warner Home Video (Billboard, Feb. 3).

WarnerVision, a subsidiary of Warner Music Group, had been distributed by WEA since its inception in 1990.

WEA will continue to distribute LIVE Home Video, which will be its sole nonmusic video account. The company has a distribution agreement with LIVE for another two years.

Music videos from Warner music labels will also continue to be distributed by WEA.

In addition, the music distribution company will continue to provide pick, pack, ship, and accounting functions for its sister video division. It has performed those functions for Warner Home Video since 1980.

The WarnerVision saga began heating up

when founder/CEO Stuart Hersch abruptly left the company earlier this month. Hersch had been trying to buy out the company and later brought Tiger Eye in as his financial partner before the deal fell apart.

At the time of Hersch's departure, CFO Fred Anton was named acting CEO of the unit.

Although Time Warner has decided to keep the label, many questions remain unanswered.

"We both know this product requires a separate sales force," says WEA president Dave Mount. "Now it's a matter of who [WarnerVision's] sales force will be reporting to."

Mount says he doesn't anticipate any layoffs within the sales force, which totals about seven people.

About 75 people work for the unit, which distributes tapes from exercise giants Jane Fonda (previously distributed by Warner Home Video), Kathy Smith, and Tony Little, as well as the "Buns Of Steel" series.

WarnerVision also has an extensive children's roster that includes Dualstar Video's Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, "The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," Kidsongs prod-

(Continued on page 86)

THIS WEEK IN BILLBOARD

CHANGE OF PACE FOR TOO SHORT

Rapper Too Short has made nine albums in an 11-year career and is now releasing his 10th. But after that, he's leaving music to concentrate on running his production company, Dangerous Music. Correspondent Havelock Nelson has the story. **Page 27**

BLACK HISTORY ON THE WEB

The heritage of African-Americans is being commemorated in cyberspace as companies mark Black History Month with sites on the Internet's World Wide Web. Staff reporter Douglas Reece reports. **Page 78**

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