

BD-Live: an exercise in perseverance



Having just completed U2-360° – At the Rose Bowl's Blu-ray disc, ANDY EVANS, Founder and Managing Director of London high-end authoring house The Pavement, offers a reality check on the trials and tribulations – and ultimate satisfaction – of producing a BD-Live title.

Clients worry about costs as soon as you mention BD-Live. They are worried about developing and maintaining a website. The idea that BD-Live material is up there and left stagnating is a real concern to them. They want to sell the disc, get the money and bye-bye.

It was a battle just to bootstrap the disc with a BD-Live link to at least make it future-proof. At that time they struggled to really understand what BD-Live was or what commitment it would be to include it, together with the fact that they did not know what content or features would eventually exist on the BD-Live section. It was not a priority focus for them to get a decision on whether to bootstrap or not. Getting the double disc DVD and single BD-50 out to hit the street date was the priority.

The idea for BD-Live came about because on all the previous DVD titles U2 did there was DVD-ROM content for the computer. Whilst you can include ROM on a Blu-ray, with so few computers with BD-ROM drives, it would be a waste of time and money at this point in time to include it. U2 has a very active fan base generating content that ends up on U2.com, from fans taking cameras to

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and it can be a rude awakening when they first experience it. 'How do you solve that?' is a question I get about it all the time. Having continued discussions with U2 and the management primarily to educate them on what BD-Live is and what it can do, they are getting more and more interested about the possibilities. Starting with simple features like iTracks with user-generated information related to songs popping up on screen and exclusive content, they are also now understanding how far you can take BD-Live. Future ideas to include selling tickets and merchandise, and streaming live material.

Generally speaking, when it comes to BD-Live production, there are internal politics that we see the clients are facing. Who will pay for it? The video production department gets squeezed budgets and the marketing department does not want to spend extra money. They do not seem to talk to each other when we come to discuss BD-Live. This can create a lack of awareness of what they could do with the format and the potential of their own products. That ends up causing delays and mistakes. Everyone is so geared to DVD for 10 years that it is many peoples benchmark for a BD title in terms of budget, costs, and production procedure. But Blu-ray is a different animal.

Extra content is a big issue. Distributors sometimes get a licence for the movie, but little else. They are often not allowed to put up a bespoke website, biographies, interviews, other film bits, or simply do not have the money or internal resources to manage it.

There is another issue on the technology front. Buffering and connection delays are big problems.

Consumers are use to inserting their DVD or Blu-ray discs into the players under their TV and get instant access to the film. They can also accept delays and buffering when they use their computers to download video because that is the environment they used to. But they do not expect – and accept – these delays on their living room TV with BD-Live,

and it can be a rude awakening when they first experience it. 'How do you solve that?' is a question I get about it all the time.

It's also a challenge to get clients to push the production of a BD-Live up the priority ladder. In general on many DVD and Blu-ray productions, time is of the essence and clients hardly ever seem to have the time and resources they'd like to have. On the U2 project, we effectively had two weeks to produce, from design to masters, a double-disc DVD with DVD-ROM material, screen saver, wallpaper, together with a BD disc with four hours of material and bootstrapping for BD-Live.



Future-proofing a Blu-ray disc with a bootstrap during production can cost as little as £500, which will then allow you to activate that BD-Live feature as and when you like once the disc is pressed – or not. Keeping a BD-Live feature active for 12 months with pretty much unlimited text and images and changing or adding in one video clip per month starts at about £3,000 per year, which is in addition to the regular BD authoring budget. That's a long way from the £50,000 pricetag I have heard as expectations for BD-Live from many clients.

BD-Live is not for every title, far from it, but I do think that it can be considered for many genres and applications, and I'd recommend at least looking into it before you release the disc. Looking into it after release will cost a lot more as it means having to repress the discs.

BIOGRAPHY

ANDY EVANS began his career in multimedia solutions and Virtual Reality simulations at the BT Research Laboratories. He then joined post-production facility TVI which he eventually relaunched as a DVD production studio, Stream. Andy left Stream in 2000 to form The Pavement. In 2008, the company opened its Blu-ray division. Goldcrest Group invested in The Pavement at the beginning of 2009 in a bid to develop the company's Blu-ray, DVD, online, mobile and production services. Contact: Andy@thepavement.com



concerts to uploading pictures and messages. For fans to watch the concert on a DVD and then go to their PC to see this additional material on the Internet is one thing, but to be able to watch the HD content from the Blu-ray disc and then, via BD-Live, to access their own user-generated material, all on their TV set, is another, more exciting, experience which the band eventually has come around