

Blu-ray Burning Its High-def DVD Rival

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Of the high-definition discs bought by consumers in the first quarter, 70 percent were in the Blu-ray Disc format and 30 percent were HD DVD, according to sales figures provided by trade publication Home Media Magazine.

Blu-ray took the lead in February, and its percentage of total sales accelerated to the point where it accounted for nearly three out of every four high-definition discs sold in March.

What's more, when given the choice, consumers are going with Blu-ray. Warner Home Video released "The Departed" the same day, February 13, in both formats. Between then and March 31, consumers bought 53,640 copies of the film on Blu-ray Disc and 31,590 on HD DVD, according to Home Media's market research, based on studio estimates and Nielsen VideoScan point-of-sale data.

Research also shows that eight of the 10 top-selling high-definition titles in the first quarter were on Blu-ray Disc. At the top of the list was "Casino Royale," which sold through to consumers an estimated 59,680 units in the period. The Blu-ray Disc edition of "Departed" finished second, while the HD DVD version of that Oscar-winning film placed third.

From January 1-March 31, consumers bought almost 1.2 million high-definition discs - 832,530 Blu-ray units and 359,300 HD DVDs - according to Home Media Magazine. In March, consumers bought 335,980 Blu-ray Discs and 119,570 HD DVDs.

Since the high-def format's inception - HD DVD launched in April 2006, while Blu-ray got rolling two months later - more than 2.14 million discs have been purchased by consumers: 1.2 million Blu-ray Discs and about 937,500 HD DVDs.

Observers aren't surprised by the disparity, noting that Blu-ray Disc enjoys the support of five of the six major studios, while HD DVD is supported by three of them. Three studios - Sony, Disney and Fox - are exclusively in the Blu-ray camp, as is mini-major Lionsgate. Paramount and Warner support both formats. Universal is the only major studio to release titles only in the HD DVD format, which backers claim is easier and cheaper to produce.

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