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## UltraViolet: The story so far

### Consumer Electronic Show 2012

By ROBYN WEISMAN

Today, the Digital Entertainment Content Ecosystem is to make a major announcement about UltraViolet, its digital distribution platform.

UltraViolet, though a big project, has been mostly theoretical until recently. Ads promoting it started to emerge over the holidays as studios began releasing UltraViolet-enabled DVD titles such as Sony's "Friends With Benefits" and Warner Bros' "Horrible Bosses."

UltraViolet acts as a cloud-based digital locker for purchased movies and TV shows. Once users set up an online account, they may watch UltraViolet-enabled content on up to 12 different devices, no matter which studio produced it or which retailer sold it. And these devices include TVs (via DVDs or streaming), cable- and satellite-providers, digital video boxes and iOS and Android mobile phones and tablets using third-party apps.

"Rollouts are usually governed by how fast consumers go to buy new devices, but with UltraViolet, consumers can use devices they already have," says Mark Teitell, general manager and executive director at DECE.

But while the DECE consortium comprises more than 75 companies, it's missing two industry powers. Disney has eschewed UltraViolet for its own Studio All Access online initiative, and Apple is standing pat with iTunes, the dominant digital content service provider in the industry.

Sony Pictures Entertainment chief technology officer Mitch Singer isn't concerned about this lack of participation. "When DVD launched, only Sony and Warner Bros. were onboard. With Blu-ray, we had a format war. UltraViolet has had none of the issues," Singer told Variety.

Moreover, Mac and iOS users can access UltraViolet on their devices using such third-party apps as Warner Bros.-owned Flixster.

Apple and Disney "can license these specs at any time. Not being a (DECE) member doesn't preclude them from using UltraViolet," Singer says.

But Interpret senior veep Dan Casey is skeptical that Mac and iOS users will flock to third-party apps to use UltraViolet. "Customers want things as simple and straightforward as possible, and Apple has done that with iTunes," Casey says. "Never underestimate consumer laziness."

Moreover, Casey says educating consumers about it will be tough because it lacks a singular voice evangelizing the service.

But Singer counters UltraViolet will most likely take a grassroots, word-of-mouth approach. Such DECE member studios as Warner Bros and Sony are starting to insert UltraViolet proofs-of-purchase in Blu-ray discs and DVDs. Online retailers, meanwhile, can automatically enable UltraViolet for online movie and TV purchases.

Also, UltraViolet's common file format offers a low barrier to entry for retailers, which could lead to smaller vendors using UltraViolet in groundbreaking ways.

"The studios publish the titles. (Retailers) don't have to worry about delivery, storing or transcoding. Combine that with word-of-mouth, and you get all kinds of interesting possibilities," Singer says.

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