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## Movie Management - Four solutions for getting the best movies into your living room

By, Steve Hartfelder Diamond Case Designs, Inc.

One of the major themes at this years CEDIA (Custom Electronics Design and Installation Association) convention was media, specifically movie management. While we all love to shop for the latest and greatest electronics (you know you have been guilty of salivating over specification sheets) at the end of the day our home theater experience is only as good as the movies we play on it. We can have the greatest electronics ever made but if we have poor content the experience is lost. This begs the question; what is the best way to access, view, and enjoy the movies that we are interested in?

This article will focus strictly on movies (not TV programming) and I'll explore four different ways of getting just the right content into your living room.



- Better utilizing your cable or satellite programming
- Mail order rental services
- Digital rental services
- Digital media managers for your physical DVD collection

### *Better Utilization Of Your Cable Or Satellite Programming*



This is a topic I have covered a couple of times before so I will just briefly mention it here. In talking to customers over the years I have found that the vast majority subscribe to at least one premium programming package such as HBO or Showtime. Each of these premium packages offer hundreds of movies a month (many in high-definition) that largely go unwatched. For whatever reason most people use their DVR's just to record weekly TV programs and forget about recording movies. My first suggestion for getting the right movie content into your home is to use your DVR. Take advantage of your weekly programming guide and surf through the movie stations you are already paying for. In all likelihood you will find dozens of movies that fit your interest and are ready to be recorded at the touch of a button. One of the greatest benefits of this solution is it doesn't cost anything! If you would like more information on this option please [click here](#) to read one of my previous articles. If you'd like to learn how to expand the capacity of your DVR's hard drive so you can record over 65 high definition movies and have room to go, please [click here](#). **My Recommendation:** If you love a good movie, don't want to spend additional money, and don't want to deal with rentals this solution is perfect for you. This is a great choice for families as you can watch kids movies off your DVR over and over.

**HBO®**

### *Mail Order Rental Services*

A few companies have started very popular movie rental programs that are done on-line. The pioneer in this industry was Netflix. The basic idea behind these plans is instead of physically going to a rental store you login your computer and create a queue or list of DVDs you would like to see. Based on the plan you select, the company will send you one, two, or three DVDs at a time which you can keep for as long as you want and watch as many times as you want. Once you are done with the DVDs you simply send them back and you receive the next selection(s) on your list. These plans tend to have a fixed monthly fee that ranges anywhere from \$5-\$20 a month and covers the rentals and postage. Click on the small charts below to see the pricing plans for the two big players in this market as of the time of this writing; Netflix and Blockbuster. **My Recommendation:** If you are an avid movie fan who watches more than two DVDs a month these services are fantastic. You have an extremely large pool of movies to choose from, you don't have to leave your home, and they are very convenient. These plans are also perfect choices in more rural areas where you may not have a large selection of rental chains to choose from. **Important Note:** Compare the plans before you sign up as each service offers a unique advantages. For instance Netflix currently offers plans that include the ability to download movies on demand over the internet while Blockbuster has plans that allow you to swap movies at their physical store locations.

Rental Subscription Pricing As Of This Writing



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### Digital Rental Services

One of the oldest and newest methods of getting great movie content in your home is via pay per view. For years we have had the ability to rent some of the newest movies through our cable or satellite systems, however the selection is somewhat limited and the method of ordering can be clunky. With the proliferation of high-speed internet access and advanced user interfaces two new devices have emerged giving a completely new look and functionality to pay per view movies. Far and away the leaders in this industry are Apple TV and Vudu.



These boxes work by connecting into your homes high speed internet connection and accessing a vast database of movies on-line. When you choose to rent a movie your eyes will be treated to a visual delight of the actual cover art for the movies you are browsing. In addition, you can access movie descriptions, ratings, actors, and lengths. You can even search for specific movies based on criteria you enter. Click on the images to see larger examples of both Apple TVs or Vudus user interface.

Once you find a movie you'd like to watch you follow the on screen prompts to rent it. Today the vast majority of the rentals are standard definition but both services are actively increasing their high definition catalogs. In addition, certain titles are available for purchase. If you stick with the rental model, movies can range in price anywhere from \$0.99 (older titles with Vudu) all the way up to \$5.99 (for newer HD movies).

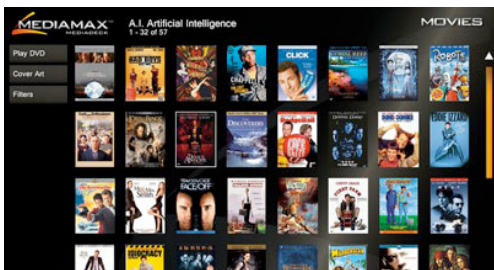
**My Recommendation:** I am a big fan of this category of movie management as I love the user interface and easy access to the movies. However there are some fair comparisons that should be drawn. Rental services such as Netflix and Blockbuster currently have much larger movie libraries to choose from (this will change fairly quickly as Apple TV and Vudu continue to grow). Because the movies are being downloaded through your internet connection, in most cases, you can not start watching the movies immediately upon renting them. The boxes will download and cache enough of the movie so that when you start watching you are not interrupted due to a slow connection. This delay could be several minutes or a few hours depending on the movie you rented (SD or HD) and your internet connection. The best way to overcome this is plan ahead and select your rentals a bit in advance (Once a movie has been rented you have a full 30 days to watch it. Once you start watching the movie you have 24 hours to complete watching it).



It should also be noted that Apple TV is not strictly a movie renting device. Quite the contrary it has been designed to be a complete entertainment hub. In addition to movie rentals you can view digital photographs, listen to CDs, subscribe to PodCasts, and much more. Based on the very reasonable cost of \$229 (for a 40 GB HD) or \$329 (for an 80 GB HD) AppleTV it is almost a no-brainer to integrate into your home theater. Look for a future article that covers some of these "extras" on Apple TV.

### Digital Media Managers for your Physical DVD or Blu-Ray Collection

Early on in life as children we have been exposed to the concept of collecting. That collection could be Topps baseball cards (as in my case), Cabbage Patch Kids (as in my wife's case), rocks, coins, stamps, etc. True collectors want to physically own their toys or movies and have the ability to see, touch, and feel them. In fact, can you imagine renting a rookie Cal Ripken Jr. baseball card? What about paying \$5.99 to watch a set of Legos for 24 hours? While it seems like a funny comparison many people treat their movie collection seriously and tend to watch movies over and over.



If you fall into this category you may see your collection grow to hundreds or even thousands of titles over the years. While building this collection can become a joyful addiction actually finding, organizing, and enjoy what you've purchased can be a nightmare. This problem has bred a new category of hard drive based media management systems such as MediaMax and Escient.

The concept with this product category is to take your vast collection of movies and copy them onto huge hard drive based systems which will digitally organize and manage your movies. These systems have advanced user interfaces that will download cover art,



descriptions, actors, ratings, movie lengths, etc. and create rich on screen displays much like Apple TV or Vudu. . MediaMax is even compatible with Blu-Ray DVDs and audio CDs.

**My Recommendation:** If you have ever had a chance to sit down with one of these products (and don't know what it costs) you'll almost instantly be sold. It is next to impossible to not fall in love with the interface, functionality, and just plain 'coolness' of these devices. The only drawback I can see at this point in time is cost. These solutions start at \$4,000, however if you are a collector and a videophile they are worth every penny.

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*The Bottom Line*

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Serious collectors should take a strong look at MediaMax or Escient as the functionality, interface, and value are undeniable. For the main stream, like myself, start by taking full advantage of your existing DVR and cable or satellite programming package. Simple changes in the way you record will get great high definition movies into your living room at no added cost. If you find yourself needing a larger library to choose from or want to watch the newest movies available you should purchase an Apple TV and/or subscribe to Netflix.

**Use the links below to help you in your research. Once you decide which solution is best for your needs be sure to call Diamond Case Designs, Inc. as we are authorized dealers and we can assist you with your purchase. You can reach us at 800-616-5354. Ask for me (Steve) or my business partner and brother Dave.**

Media Management Links and Resources

<i>Better utilization of your cable or satellite box</i>	<i>Mail order rental services</i>	<i>Digital rental services</i>	<i>Digital media managers of your DVD collection</i>
<a href="#">How to take advantage of your existing programming</a>	<a href="#">Netflix</a>	<a href="#">Apple TV</a>	<a href="#">MediaMax</a>
<a href="#">How to expand the size of your DVR's hard drive</a>	<a href="#">Blockbuster</a>	<a href="#">Vudu</a>	<a href="#">Escient</a>
<b>Typical Cost</b> None, or \$269 to upgrade your existing HD to 1TB	<b>Typical Cost</b> \$5-\$20 a month	<b>Typical Cost</b> \$229-\$329 most boxes \$0.99-\$5.99 per rental	<b>Typical Cost</b> Start at \$4000

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