

# Obituary: VHS Tape

by Ken Pett; Images by John Thomas

**VHS IS DEAD.** The beloved videotape that long ago defeated Betamax and became entrenched in millions of American homes has died at the age of 30. It passed away quietly after a short illness --- the same malady that killed off the cassette tape and (for those that watch "That 70's Show") the eight-track tape.

The irony can't be lost that a contributing cause of death, the DVD, is already one foot in the grave. There was no exact point when VHS gave way to DVDs and with approximately 94 million American households still owning VCRs, it might seem premature to declare VHS DEAD, but DEAD it is. The conclusive evidence is, ironically, the slippage of DVD discs. It was March 1997, when the DVD player was introduced to American consumers. By June of 2003, DVD rentals topped those of VHS. By mid 2005, the tide had shifted yet again. DVD sales and rentals had begun to slip. The culprits: DVRs and PVRs. Digital Video and Personal Video recorders have rapidly gained hold in the 'record everything, watch at my convenience' generation who are routinely overheard saying "What has TiVo recorded for me tonight?"

The major studios, including Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Fox and Warner Bros., which have long since phased out VHS releases, are already seeing market share of DVD sales and rentals get eaten away by the video downloaders (legal and otherwise) and the Video-On-Demand providers. The current clash between the developing high-definition DVD formats Blu-ray and HD-DVD, (can you hear the echoes of VHS vs. Beta) only serves to further unravel DVD.



The real dagger in the back of DVD is the mobile video market. The mobile video player, the type that thousands upon thousands of parents routinely bought to entertain their spawn in the back of the family minivan was originally in VHS format. That device wasn't on the market for more than six months when the portable DVD units started appearing. While the portable DVD players obliterated the market for portable VHS players, they were quickly supplanted with OEM DVD players with screens built into roof consoles or the seatbacks. And as quickly as OEM units entered the marketplace, Personal Media Players began to appear. These little gems substitute magnetic flash and hard-drive media in place of a DVD disc and have the capabilities of storing 20 or more movies, depending on video compression, plus a months worth of MP3 audio files. 2006 is the likely to generate a major shift towards portability---Portable Media Player devices will appear sporting WiFi options and the ubiquitous USB port will turn up on everything from the car stereo to the latest video camera-cell phone. The latest twist on Portable Media Players? Some of them are now offering recording capabilities.

And PVRs and DVRs never charge a late fee.

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