
Specialty on the Shelf

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Spotting the next trend is no easy task. The nature of the adult business means many people aren't comfortable with a paper trail, let alone sharing any more personal data than absolutely essential to a transaction. Folks are understandably wary of phone "surveys" inquiring as to what they are wearing and their masturbation habits.

What the industry does have is sales. As producers create a merry-go-round effect by randomly trying trends every couple years, specialties like MILF, teen, bondage, transsexual, interracial and countless others rollercoaster in popularity, as studios frantically try to hit every little trend.

The categories continue to get more and more specialized, with some stores boasting dozens within their DVD sections alone. While one still might not know which section to find, say, "Squirting Anal Midget Grannies Gone Interracial 4," some retailers are creating studio sections, so fans of Evil Angel or Wicked Pictures or Rodney Moore or studios with more specialized product can go straight to the companies they trust.

Add into that how different parts of the country, as well as different parts of different cities, fancy different kinds of products. While Fairvilla is doing great with interracial titles right now, that genre's sales are flat for TLA.

"You have to start slow and build that business up and find out if you have that customer," said Mark Franks, president and CEO of Castle Megastores. "Not all demographics apply to any two locations."

Sid Grief, president of AAA News Inc., which has five retail stores in Austin, Texas said his locations have 70 categories and stock 20,000 DVD titles. Overwhelming as that may sound, Grief pointed out that it could be worse.

"We have 20,000 DVDs you can walk around and scan with your eyes in half an hour or 45 minutes," he said. "You go online and try to scan 20,000 titles — it's a lot more difficult."

Grief does a lot of customer surveying to keep on top of what his clientele is looking for. He said that manga comics and graphic comics are hot with the under-30 crowd, while the over-30 set remains bullish on the MILF market. There is one distinct difference between the age groups: The younger customers frequently know what they want even before they walk in the store.

"People under the age of 25 have a higher average ticket, but when they come in to buy, they already know what they're looking for. They're shopping for one particular item and it's important that you have that item in stock, because they're really not interested in anything else," Grief said. "They've already researched the product online, so they know exactly what they're looking for."

And there are some customers who don't just research online, they are also purchasing online, possibly to avoid the embarrassment of feeding their fetish in a public setting.

"I notice that anything bisexual or transsexual we can't really move in our stores, but we sell it like crazy online," Jesse Short, managing editor of TLA Entertainment Group, said. "I think that's your average guy thinking he doesn't want people to think he's gay or something ridiculous like that."

Debi Yoskey, buyer for GVA-TWN, said that she had noticed similar trends.

"Transsexual does very well on VOD," she said, "like maybe there's a little bit of a stigma."

It used to be that stores had one catch-all fetish area, lumping together grannies, trannies and everything in between. Now marketing has become more specific, allowing the customer to more easily find exactly what he or she is looking for.

"In-store marketing has a huge impact on sales," Franks said. "We used to just have one big fetish section. Then we started breaking it down by the individual specialties and our sales went through the roof. Not just because it helps us to market them better, but for the ease of the customer."

Fairvilla is one of the stores that has recently taken to creating separate categories for the different studios. Jessica Ledford, a video, fetish and jewelry buyer who has been with the company nearly eight years, said the result has been a "major

increase" in sales for those studios.

"Our next move is to start doing high definition trailers with TV screens within those studios," she said.

With the rise of HD televisions, Fairvilla is also looking to bring in big screens to show customers the difference between standard definition and Blu-ray in an attempt to get them interested in the product.

In what some see as a slight return to the days of yore, many stores reported significant increases in product featuring natural girls. While amateur sales may be dropping off (possibly due to the rise of major Internet production), natural, or "normal," girls and even big bushes are seeing significant sales.

"We seem to go back and forth from natural boobs to really big boobs, though nothing has really taken hold since the MILF, other than some of the natural stuff," Yoskey said. "Vivid has a line they're starting to do with natural girls, and Adam & Eve had a title we're doing well with. Not fat girls, just natural women."

From Short at TLA, there's a call for more bush titles.

"The shaved-bush thing started in the early-'90s, and I think maybe people are sick of it," he said. "One of my biggest sellers is this 16-hour comp from Legend that's called 'So Hairy It's Scary.' The big bush stuff is going crazy for us, but I don't notice it anywhere else and I don't know if it's just our clientele that maybe only buys from us and doesn't shop anywhere else. Hairy pussy — people are eating it up."

Ultimately, the product is available for just about any fetish imaginable; it's simply a matter of matching it up with the proper clientele. While Franks said that specialty titles make up about 8 to 10 percent of Castle's sales, it is has remained consistent over the years.

"There's always somebody coming out and trying something, but if you take a look at the categories, they've really not changed that much," he said. "The major categories that have been working for years continue to be the top-selling categories."

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