

John Hunter Media

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A Guide To

DVD and CD ROM Authoring and Production

DVDs and CD ROMs are an economical way of delivering information - especially if you have large amounts of video, animations or graphics. Many corporations now use CD ROMs to replace paper catalogues, using install-to-system modules with update via internet or email. Uses include:

- Software Delivery
- Corporate Videos
- Training courses
- Product catalogues
- Product Demonstrations
- Presentations

The process of creating a DVD or CD-ROM is termed **authoring**. This involves assessing the client's needs, creating the content which may include text, video, graphics and animations, then determining how the product will be assembled. A variety of authoring tools, or programs, are available and often which one is used depends on how the end product is to be used and whether on-line up grade facility is to be provided.

Once all media is gathered and the client's requirements are fixed, the authoring process begins. This can take anything from a few days to several months, depending on the complexity and size of the production. Computer CD ROMs have a greater interactive capability than video DVDs, however DVDs can also be authored to contain computer program material and hold four to six times the amount of information. Your authoring house will advise on whether DVD or CD ROM should be used for your project.

Once authored the product is then tested on all platforms that it is intended to function on, eg Windows 2000, XP etc. Testing is essential and is intended to show up any anomalies or conflicts within the program.

It is vital to understand this process, as some clients will assume that authoring and testing can be done as a last minute, rushed job. This can lead to errors that can result in the production of disks that are only suited for use as drink coasters!

If you intend having a DVD or CD-ROM authored, always build in an adequate time buffer to allow for unexpected contingencies during this phase.

Mass production of your DVD or CD-ROM. Once authoring and testing has been completed, the next step in the production is to determine whether you will have the item stamped or "burned". A guideline for this is the quantity you wish to produce. Costs are directly linked to quantity and as a guideline, if you require more than 250 units, then the DVD or CD will be stamped.

Stamped or pressed DVD/CD ROM. The authoring house provides you with a master which is a fully functional DVD or CD-ROM. From this the production house will produce its "stamping master" - sometimes referred to as a "glass master". This takes around a week to have prepared (this is an average turnaround time and can vary either way). Once this is made it's not possible to make changes to the product without remaking the stamping master - which costs approximately \$600. So make sure before you give the go-ahead, your authoring master is the correct version and all changes have been made.

Once the stamp master is ready the production run commences. Modern machines press out DVD/CDs at a rate of around 800 units or more an hour.

Other items to be considered during the process are:

- Disk Labeling - Usually silk screened in up to four colors
- Packaging - Plastic case, plastic or paper sleeves
- Inserts - Instruction manuals etc

A safe time period to plan on for the DVD/CD stamping process is a minimum of ten (10) working days. This can vary and you should consult with your production house on actual time requirements as they can vary during the year, depending on demand.

DVD/CD-Rs or "Burned" CDs. Most people are familiar with this production method. Basically suited for small runs (under 250) this can be done in-house or using a company that specializes in software duplication. Production time is usually much shorter as software duplication houses use multiple high speed burners and multi-color labeling machines (often with direct to disk printing rather than paper labels)

Again packaging and accompanying literature must be taken into consideration and often this will be the critical item in the production timeline.

As well as being cost competitive with “paper” productions, DVDs and CD ROMs have a lifespan that is reported to be five times that of most “paper” productions. In addition they tend to be passed around to a much wider audience than printed materials. One advantage is having modules such as screensavers, pictorial or video catalogues that can be installed to user’s systems – this way the product spreads to a wide audience at no additional cost to the original producer.

They also save costs in mailing – usually a disk can be mailed for less than \$1, but the “paper” equivalent of say a two hundred page catalogue, can cost in excess of \$5 per unit.

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