

## Video tape rentals: Rocky road at first

(AP) — Renting a favorite movie to play on a VCR is as easy as making a trip to the local video store and plunking down a couple of bucks. But the entrepreneurs who came up with the idea of renting pre-recorded videocassettes to consumers faced enormous opposition in the beginning.

An article in the current issue of Video Magazine by James Lardner traces the colorful history of home video rental.

Andre Blay, a Michigan-based businessman, first came up with the idea of selling videotapes of movies to consumers, an idea that challenged the old Hollywood policy of never parting with the rights to a movie.

Taking out a \$65,000 ad in TV Guide, Blay launched a direct-mail operation called the Video Club of America. By March 1978, Blay's company had sold 40,000 cassettes. Most of Blay's customers were retailers who were buying the cassettes and selling them to consumers.

On the other side of the country, a man named George Atkinson was gearing up to start his own video club.

It was Atkinson who first came up with the notion, for a \$50 membership fee, of renting the videotapes rather than selling them. Atkinson worried that he may be breaking the law by renting, and contacted the movie companies to ask if it would be an infringement of the law. No body could say for sure.

**THE BUSINESS** thrived. After the movie companies saw the enormous success that Atkinson and other early renters were having, the studios decided to try to get a piece of the rental action.

They tried to put pressure on Atkinson by cutting off his source of supply. Atkinson, however, got around the ban by buying his tapes from other retailers rather than directly from the studios.

Drew Barrymore won people's hearts with her portrayal of Gertie in Steven Spielberg's "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial," but not like the alien creature whose likeness was reproduced on everything from T-shirts to dolls.



## For love of 'E.T.' spells big bucks

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

"E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial," a heart-warming story of love between a young boy and visitor from another planet, has shattered records in advance sales of home videos, with release still nearly two weeks away.

More than 10.6 million copies of the delightful film by Steven Spielberg have already been sold. Cassettes will be available to consumers Oct. 28. They are being released by MCA Home Video.

"The number is staggering, the dream of dreams," said Mark Hayden of Chicago-based Blockbuster Midwest, a nationwide video distributor with 17 outlets in the metropolitan Detroit area.

"The number is a record by far. A huge, huge title might sell 5 million. This is already double," Hayden said.

So far, area Blockbuster outlets have each sold an estimated 300 copies of "E.T." at the discounted price

of \$22.46. Sales have been strongest in the Birmingham, West Bloomfield and Livonia outlets. Advance sales are normally slower in the Westland and Garden City outlets, according to Hayden.

**EACH YEAR**, Blockbuster purchases two to three titles for advance-sale campaigns. "E.T." and "Cinderella" are the selections this year. Hayden expects "E.T." sales to top 30,000 copies here.

"It's hot, both in sales and rentals," said Frank Barbat of the "E.T." video. Barbat owns Video House, an area chain of 27 rental shops and Video House Wholesale, which supplies both Barbat's shops and another 130 video rental stores.

Barbat has stocked 5,000 copies of "E.T." and expects to sell them all. Video House, located in such communities as Bloomfield Township, Southfield and Canton, has priced the video at \$19.95 each. The price is \$5 less than the suggested retail price by MCA.

The reduced rate "is a draw for

new customers. Plus, we like to give something to our old customers," Barbat said. He must also compete with prices offered by low-priced department stores like Target and K mart which are offering "E.T." videos at \$14.95 each.

Any U.S. consumer may receive a \$5 rebate on a sale price of \$24.95 by purchasing one of a myriad of Pepsi-Cola products and submitting proof of purchase with a completed rebate form. The offer is good through Jan. 10, 1989.

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**MCA VIDEO** and Amblin Entertainment, which owns the film, stand to make well over \$100 million in profit on the sale of "E.T." videos which, since May, have been marketed worldwide. A portion of the proceeds will be contributed to the Special Olympics, according to a spokeswoman for MCA in California.

Originally released in 1982, Spielberg's "E.T." is the top grossing film of all time, amassing a staggering \$700 million in box office revenues. An estimated 240 million people have paid to see the film.

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