

Inter Office Memo

CORPORATE DIVISION
Corporate Research

To: See Distribution List (page 2)

From: Alan Kay Auk

Subject: Videodiscs

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Both RCA and Pioneer have visited recently at our invitation. If anything was confirmed, it was the ambiguity of the current technology. Separate reports on the meetings are being generated by several Atari interest groups. What follows are my feelings about our plight.

Compared to tape, Vidiscs offer slightly better images and fast random access to material. But in the tape world higher quality Beta Max hasn't been competing successfully with low quality VHS offering 10 times the number of available titles. Random access is not often used for movies, performances and shows. Both disk and tape have slomo and visible search. Branching traverses through material requires instant random access - but disks can take seconds or longer to search. For the next several years only tapes could be recorded in the house - recordable disks are now being shown in the lab.

Compared to each other, the features offered by RCA and Pioneer complement each other. RCA is much lower cost, shows a lower quality image, has slower access, and has problems with contamination and number of multiple plays. Its frame format allows multiple heads but makes slomo almost impossible. Pioneer is exactly the opposite.

A frame buffer would help both technologies, especially the RCA. Still any Vidisc strategy for Atari must involve both technologies at present - too bad.

Most dynamic branching systems (Aspen, SEGA) require at least two drives or heads. Even with these it is clear that only very specially planned games will work - the SEGA fortunately is terrible.

After cost has been dealt with, the major problem is production, both visual material and software branching strategies. The master filmmakers Lucas and Spielberg will be critical here. The current plan for local productions is to use 1" masters. Divisions and CR will all have relatively inexpensive 3/4" drives and editing strategies. The edit control information can later be used to drive a compatible 1" assembler located with other one of a kind television equipment as a corporate facility.

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