

## Video on Demand II

At this year's Video Software Dealer's Association (VSDA) convention held July 25-28 at the Bellagio Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas (or Clark County, as we say for tax purposes), the most exciting sight—for me—was not the long autograph line for Patrick Swayze, the morning workout with twin bellydancers Neena and Veena, or even the side trip to see Elton John at Caesar's Palace (yes, the bitch is back, and he's still brilliant). Nope, the real biggie was a meeting with Andrew Schlessinger, President and CEO of Library Video Company, during which he demo-ed their new video-on-demand server, SAFARI Montage.

Of course, the idea of "video-on-demand" did not initially have me—to paraphrase the Beatles—twisting and shouting: VOD has essentially been around since the first T1 line was hooked up to a library, and a decade later it still only takes a handful of kids watching video game previews simultaneously on different terminals to choke connections (and let's face it, most streamed video is not exactly DVD reference quality). What makes SAFARI Montage different? For starters, there's no streaming—the content resides on networked high-capacity hard drives on a tower

or rack server, allowing 50 concurrent users to watch MPEG-1 video.

And what content: the SAFARI Montage server comes preloaded with 1,000 educational titles, including Scholastic's *The Magic School Bus*, *Dear America* and *The Royal Diaries* series; Weston Woods Studios' *Chrysanthemum*, *Miss Nelson Has a Field Day*, and *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*; the BBC's *Eyewitness* and *Walking With Dinosaurs* titles; Disney Educational Productions' *Bill Nye the Science Guy* and *ABC News Classroom Edition* series; A&E Home Video's *History Channel* and *Biography* titles; National Geographic's library, PBS's *The Civil War* and *Cyberchase*, WGBH's *Arthur*, *NOVA*, *American Experience*, *Frontline* and *Between the Lions* series, and the vast library of Schlessinger Media titles.

Tres cool, no? It gets better: the system is not only plug-and-play, but all of the programs—divided into convenient segments—are indexed with standardized metadata and are fully searchable, enabling teachers, students, or public library patrons to instantly access relevant clips. In addition, the software allows users to place bookmarks and create playlists from multiple segments and string them together into one continuous sequence.

Back in the July/August 1998 issue of *Video Librarian*, I wrote about the PBS indexed collection (with the big print binder index), call-


ing it "the first comprehensive, indexed video collection to offer, as much as videotape will allow, true ready reference capabilities." Although I didn't play with the new VOD system myself, the SAFARI Montage server looked like the PBS indexed collection on super steroids, a complete digital makeover of a then-innovative analog solution to the perennial needle-in-a-haystack problem of locating particular video clips.

The PBS offering featured 300 PBS titles on videocassette for an initial price of \$3,500 and \$3,000 annually thereafter. By contrast, the SAFARI Montage server is available in either K-8 or 9-12 content versions with 1,000 titles each (additional content can be added) from a wide variety of educational distributors, in a hardware/first-year subscription package of \$2,495 (tower) or \$2,795 (rack), with a \$1,000 annual subscription renewal price (for more information, contact Library Video Company at 800-843-3620, [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)).

The advantages for schools are, as Thomas Jefferson put it, "self-evident," but I suspect public libraries would also benefit from having a wealth of searchable video content available for patrons doing research or librarians engaged in video-based ready-reference.

Or, people like me who can sit and watch Bill Nye for hours.

Randy Pitman



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