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Pa.'s MVD Dedicates Itself To All Things Music Video

BY MATTHEW S. ROBINSON

NEW YORK—Though music video may seem like a stepchild of the music industry, as it is not fully in the realm of the music or the video industry, Tom Seaman, founder of Music Video Distributors Inc. (MVD)—an Oaks, Pa.-based wholesaler with about \$20 million in revenue last year—saw the potential for a new market niche.

“From the very beginning of home video, he thought that getting an album is nice, but to have an album with video would be much better,” explains VP Ed Seaman, Tom’s son.

So in 1986, with that premise in mind, Seaman—an industry veteran with more than 25 years’ experience at Sam Goody, Musicland, and Jem Records—and his family went about building a hybrid of a distributor, one-stop, and label for music videos, with the company handling both exclusive product and pass-throughs, which allows them to work both with the majors and the indies. Today, MVD is the go-to source for many music video titles that range from concert films to compilations. MVD has more than 50 exclusive agreements with more than 30 different content owners on a title-by-title basis. It also handles shipping and billing for Germany’s Studio Distribution (formerly K-7). MVD currently distributes to more than 5,000 retailers.

“When I came on in 1989, we were already doing so much in video that customers could basically say, ‘If I want it, these guys will have it,’” Ed Seaman says. “That also allowed us to establish solid relationships with our vendors and even to arrange exclusive distribution agreements, which strengthened our retail position.”

Combining its industry expertise with its strength in creating and maintaining relationships, MVD has formed alliances that allow it to create its own DVD product. Last year, MVD produced and released a special DVD of the band Sublime called

Stories, Tales, Lies & Exaggeration with the band’s former label, Skunk Records. “We put it out and pay them royalties,” Seaman says.

In addition to its own product, MVD carries, or has access to, nearly every available music video. The company recently installed an electronic inventory control system and keeps only about 10,000 items in stock in its 20,000-square-foot warehouse at any given time. Seaman says, however, that MVD has access to more than 30,000 SKUs. Also, MVD has recently established a business-to-business section on its Web site (musicvideodistributors.com) that allows customers to place and fulfill orders directly.

According to Seaman, sales have been rising for both VHS and DVD over the past five years. He adds, however, that “the impression is that music video sells as a viable format on DVD.” As a result, DVD gets more attention, both from producers and distributors. Among MVD’s top-sellers are the DVD editions of the reggae classic *Rockers* and the new electronica documentary *Better Living Through Circuitry*. “We also did GG Allin’s *Hated*,” Seaman recalls. “It’s a really cool title that we’re proud of.”

MVD also sells licensed T-shirts. Although this concession was initiated to help independent retailers bulk up their orders, most of the orders currently come through CDnow.

Going forward, MVD is planning to release 12 new DVDs by May and has 25-30 slated for 2001 overall.