

## Videotape and Home Movie Day



Incorporating video into a Home Movie Day event presents a host with technological and curatorial challenges. You'll need to bring even more equipment including numerous decks, cables galore, and something to show tapes on, either a video projector or a large enough monitor. Since videotapes can go on for hours, you'll need to set time limits in advance so no one person takes up more time than other attendees. But with a little planning you can easily be showing families' histories recorded on tape alongside those on good ol' small gauge film.

### **Equipment Needs**

There is a daunting number of consumer-level videotape and optical video formats. But just as you can't expect to have a projector for every film format, you shouldn't expect to support every video format. In our experience, the most popular formats are VHS and Video8. DVD is also common format for people bringing in already-transferred home movies. You'll need to balance your expectations of what video formats your particular audience will be bringing in with how much effort it will be to bring in a particular format.

Other video formats to consider include, but are not limited to, Hi8, Digital8, Betamax, DV, SHS, and VHS-C. And don't forget the difference between PAL, NTSC, and SECAM.

Also, don't forget to have enough cords and adapters to connect video decks to the monitor/projector. Depending on how many decks you are bringing to your HMD event, you might want to consider getting a video switcher.

### **Preparing Video Decks for HMD**

Check out every piece of video equipment before the event. Clean the heads if you have a tape head cleaner. You can open up VHS decks for a deeper cleaning. Use test tapes to make sure everything is working properly. Do not use any video decks at HMD that haven't been checked out in advance.

### **Inspection/curation station**

Just as you should inspect all films before screening them, you should set up an

inspection station for video as well. Sitting down with someone and their home videos is a great way to teach them about video preservation and help them figure out what's on their tapes. Also, you can use this opportunity to select videos to screen that day or to flag any that might not be playable.

This means you'll need a deck and monitor with sound for every video format you are expecting to screen.

### **Inspection of tapes**

All tapes to be screened should be examined for any clues that they might be in a deteriorated state and thus, should not be played in a video deck. Before placing a tape in a deck look out for the following:

- Cracked or warped tape cases
- Labels on the verge of peeling off
- Crinkled tape outside of the case or inside the little window
- Mold or dust on the tape label or inside the window
- A musty smell like old socks
- Commercial video labels or anything that looks like its not a home or amateur video.

### **Curation**

The joy of small gauge film is that it has a visible cue of how long it is. Consumer videotape doesn't. A 50ft reel of film is less than 4 minutes - making it easy to screen regardless of content, knowing that whatever it is, it will end soon. Video is much more of a challenge. Ideally, you would preview the tape at the inspection station with the attendee and cue the tape to the desired scene.

You will have to decide how to deal with this longer length of videotapes. HMD hosts who've already played videos usually set a time limit for how much footage you'll show. Depending on how many people are bringing in videos, this can be between 5 to 20 minutes. But be sure to tell people in advance of this policy! And you will need to be respectful yet firm when you cut them off in the middle of the video.

Another issue to consider is whether you show transfers of home movies from film that have been reformatted to VHS or DVD? Some hosts do, while others only show a home movie on its original format. This is a decision you'll have to make based on how many attendees you have and your feeling on whether this limits your ability to discuss issues of preservation.

### **Presentation**

As stated, you'll have to bring at least one deck for every video format you'll be

screening. Depending on the size of the room you'll need either a video projector or large TV. Don't forget a PA or other way to amplify sound!

How you switch between video and film will depend on how large your staff is, your technical set-up, and the amount of formats being brought in. If possible, switching between film and video allows you to thread up a film while a tape is playing. Just be sure to tell the audience which format is being screened so people are able to link the look of a home movie with the medium which it's recorded on.

Finally, don't forget to discuss the preservation needs and recommendations for videotape. We've made a two-page list of suggestions and resources for video preservation. You can print this up and pass them out to attendees with video as well as using it as a jumping off point for the information you discuss during the screening.