

Cinema, the last bastion of analog, will soon **turn to the dark digital side** – may the force be with it.

Wave goodbye



As the worlds of consumer goods and IT grow ever closer, it looks like the analog signal could soon be a thing of the past. Finding a home with a vinyl record deck these days is as likely as finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

The convenience and superior quality that the digital medium of Compact Disc offered soon killed off vinyl. The fact that Compact Disc in a non-contact digital medium means that it will sound just as good the hundredth time you play it as it did the first time. The problem with analog contact mediums is that they degrade with each play.

Following the trend, it looks like MiniDisc is sure to replace the compact cassette. MiniDisc decks are now affordable and the blank discs are cheaper than a decent cassette. Again, MiniDisc offers the same benefits as CD, as well as being considerably smaller than a cassette.

Now we're starting to see the end of VHS video cassettes as well with the introduction of DVD. It's safe to say that DVD is finally starting to take off in the UK, with a decent amount of Region 2 software now available. Of course, the argument against DVD replacing VHS is its lack of a record feature, but this shouldn't be an issue for too long. Pioneer has already got a working prototype of a consumer DVD recorder. Once the copy protection issues are sorted, there's no reason why we won't be recording *Eastenders* on small silver discs rather than bulky VHS cassettes.

Even the humble television has succumbed to the ever-advancing digital avalanche. Thanks to ON-Digital, you can behold the beauty of digitally transmitted television programmes by placing a free box under your TV.

Add to this digital phones, cameras and camcorders, and there's very little left that hasn't been eclipsed by its digital counterpart.

Of course, there will always be arguments in favour of traditional analog technology, and many advocates will still insist that the quality is better. In some respects it is. Digital photography, for example, offers nowhere near the resolution of chemically processed film. However, it is good enough for most consumer camera users to be

happy with the results, and with more photo printers hitting the market you don't even need a PC to get your pictures off the camera.

But even with all this digital wizardry there's still one area where the analog format remains king: the cinema. It's amazing that movies are still recorded and transported on large reels of film that are subject to damage and degradation. That is until now. At the recent Comdex show in Las Vegas, Sony unveiled its new digital video camera that's destined to change the way movies are made forever. Bold claims are heard all the time at press conferences, but this claim had some heavyweight backup in the form of George Lucas. Mr Lucas proclaimed his support for Sony's new baby and by now should have taken delivery of several units for the filming of *Star Wars Episode II*. Lucas has long said that he wants to shoot *Episode II* digitally and Sony has come up with the means to do so.

With the raw footage shot digitally, editing the movie will be a far simpler process, as well as being a great deal more cost-effective. Unfortunately the digital footage

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still has to be transferred to 35mm film for distribution and viewing in cinemas, which is costly and time-consuming. But even this obstacle should be overcome in the not-too-distant future. Lucas has already experimented with digital projecting, showing *Episode I* at selected cinemas in the US using a digital print and corresponding projector. When this type of projection method becomes commonplace, the high cost of film distribution could be consigned to history. There's no reason why movies couldn't be transmitted to a cinema via satellite, assuming that there's enough encryption embedded in it to stop pirates grabbing it from the ether.

There are now few areas of our lives where digital technology hasn't been implemented, bringing with it improvements in speed, clarity, convenience and security. With benefits such as these it's fairly safe to say that the analog waveform has had its day.

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