

DVD (continued from page 21)

retail pricing gets under \$499, it will give removable storage a run for its money," said Mary Bourdon, an industry analyst with San Jose-based Dataquest. By Bourdon's estimates, this price drop should happen within a year to a year and a half. As for recording media, Hitachi subsidiary Maxell has shipped samples of DVD-RAM discs for \$80 each, and it expects prices to fall to \$40 by the end of the year.

DVD-RAM has implications in the consumer market as well. One of the major shortcomings of DVD-video players is their inability to record; and though a full-length DVD-video movie will not fit on the current 2.6GB capacity of DVD-RAM, Hitachi, Toshiba and others have already announced DVD-RAM discs with ROM-equivalent 4.7GB capacities. These won't be available until 1999, though, so you won't want to toss out the VCR quite yet.

Recording DVD movies will also require a real-time MPEG 2 encoder, which is currently quite expensive. But presumably at some point, you'll be watching digital TV programs on your PC Theatre or TV set, and you'll be able to record great copies of TV shows on DVD-RAM. The details are still being hammered out on how copy protection will apply to such recordings; the current spec outlines only the physical format of drives and discs. Along with the DVD-RAM announcement, a DVD-R (write-once) format was also released. These DVD-R discs, which hold a total of 7.9GB, will probably be used for archival purposes.

While CD-RW is just now becoming widely available, DVD-RAM's rapid arrival shows how quickly DVD technology is maturing. Dataquest, which had predicted that DVD-video players and ROM drives would sell about 33 million units by the year 2000, recently upped that estimate to 63.4 million units for ROM, DVD-R and RAM drives.

—Paul Williams

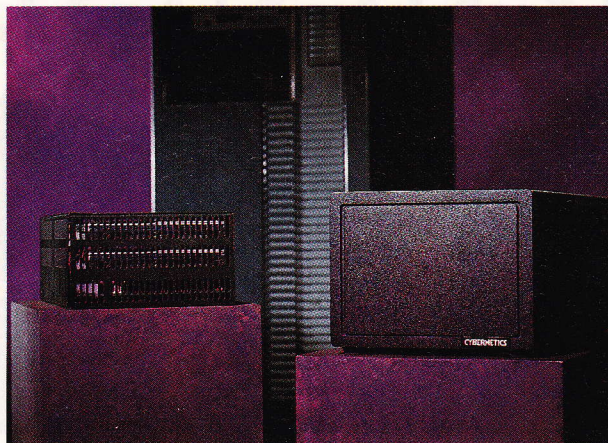
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