

Left Behind

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Revisiting the Video Store

The convenience of accessing videos online and through mail-order services such as Netflix has led to the closing of not only many small local video stores, but even larger chain video stores such as Blockbuster, Hollywood Video, and Movie Gallery. Many customers are now renting videos through Redbox at their local gas station or supermarket rather than going to their local video stores. Online downloading (both legal and illegal) has become more and more popular as video stores across the nation are closing their doors for good. But, the video store has not entirely been left behind.

In many cities, though the larger chain video stores have closed, the local video stores that are still in business serve a niche audience by providing an inventory of foreign, independent and cult films that are still unavailable on DVD or on Netflix. Many customers still frequent these video stores (stores such as Acme Video in Providence, RI, Movies Worth Seeing in Atlanta, GA and Plan Nine Film Emporium in Bloomington, IN) not because they want the latest new releases, but because they love film, particularly film as an art form. Additionally, the convenience of immediate availability also appeals to many customers who don't want the lag time of mail-order video services like Netflix. And, with the closing of so many large chain stores, customers who used to rent videos from Blockbuster or Hollywood Video are now returning to their local small video rental businesses. Eager to track down film titles that are unavailable at Redbox or on Netflix, many of these customers are also interested in the eclectic (and often very personal) suggestions of the video store owners and employees. This personal interaction with knowledgeable staff and desire to support the local economy also keeps customers coming back to local video stores instead of mail-order services.

In smaller towns that still have no cable access, and among older generations who prefer browsing the video store shelves to accessing videos online, the video store is still a viable option. Though younger generations (teenagers and college students) are accessing videos online, the appeal of the local video store to older generations is its accessibility, location, ease of use, and inventory of foreign, arthouse and classic film titles. Interestingly, locally owned and independent video stores are thriving in wealthy, urban and upper class communities where customers can afford to pay higher prices for their video rentals than those in the more economically depressed communities of the smaller towns and suburbs.

Nevertheless, within the context of our contemporary media culture, the video store may be left behind very soon. Video sales at stores like Borders, Barnes and Noble, and BestBuy are dwindling as people are less and less likely to purchase DVDs in an era when these films are available online and digitally. Digital libraries are replacing the videotape and DVD libraries of the past few decades. Rather than taking up space in our living rooms, videos can now be archived digitally rather than accumulating dust on our media library shelves. Even the studios are starting to limit the production and availability of DVDs for sale and rental. Though the video store isn't quite extinct, its fate is tenuous at best. Local video stores are finding it more and more difficult to compete in an everchanging market that makes videos cheaper to rent online and through

the mail than in the store. Whereas, local video stores often charge up to \$6 per rental, Redbox charges \$1/night, while Netflix charges as little as \$8.99/month. However, as long as customers seek out cult films, film experts, and unavailable film titles, the video store will remain intact indefinitely.