

A family-friendly R-rated movie? Companies scrub flicks_62705

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Baptist Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—It's an embarrassing moment millions of parents have experienced—enjoying a movie at home with their family when a seemingly harmless film turns offensive.

A few seconds of profanity and sexual dialogue ruin the evening, with mom and dad left bewildered and wondering, “Why was that in there?”

Thanks to DVD technology and a few innovative companies, mom and dad now can enjoy movie night in peace.

Three young companies—CleanFilms, CleanFlicks and Family Flix—offer family-safe edited DVD versions of PG, PG-13 and R movies, deleting the objectionable content. Another budding company, ClearPlay, sells a DVD player with the capability of muting profanity and “skipping” offensive scenes.

In all instances, the profanity, sexual dialogue, nudity and graphic violence are gone. PG movies become G-rated. R movies turn PG-friendly. And movie

night becomes less worrisome.

While thousands of families have embraced the industry-CleanFilms alone claims nearly 10,000 customers-Hollywood's reaction hasn't been so kind. Movie directors have sued the companies, asserting they are infringing on artistic license.

Congress has provided some protection, passing a bill signed into law by President Bush in April, shielding ClearPlay and similar companies from lawsuits. But the new law, called the Family Entertainment and Copyright Act, apparently does not protect the other three companies, the ones like CleanFilms that physically alter the DVD.

Among the four companies, ClearPlay's service is unique in that it works with the original, unedited version of the movie. The ClearPlay DVD player is pre-programmed with filters for hundreds of movie titles that tell it when to mute or skip over objectionable content. Filters for the latest movies are downloadable online, and parents can customize the filters to fit their preferences. The ClearPlay DVD player retails for around \$199.

Each of the companies has hundreds of movie titles.

"There's no question that Hollywood movies are getting edgier and edgier," ClearPlay CEO Bill Aho said. "You find sex and language and violence creeping into more and more movies. I don't think that these trends in Hollywood reflect the values that parents have for their families."

The other three companies-CleanFilms, CleanFlicks and Family Flix-differ significantly from ClearPlay in their approach. They offer edited movies, maintaining they are within the law because they keep a 1-to-1 ratio between edited and original copies. That is, for each edited movie they rent or sell, they purchase an original copy of the movie. When purchasing a movie, customers receive two DVDs-an edited copy plus a disabled original version that is not viewable.

CleanFilms CEO John E. Richards says edited movies are the best option because it allows families to avoid having unedited R- and PG-13-rated movies in their home. Children would watch them when their parents aren't around, he says.

"I think it's great what ClearPlay is doing. I want them to be successful. But for my family, it's not right," he said. "I have four teenagers in my home, and they're curious. That's why we believe strongly in our model."

CleanFilms and CleanFlicks offer a Netflix-type rental service for \$19.95 per month, which includes unlimited DVD rentals. They also sell DVDs. Family Flix does not rent movies-it sells them-and claims to be the strictest in its editing. Family Flix also offers something the other companies don't-the option to mail the company a DVD or VHS movie and have it edited. Its handling of VHS movies is unique among the companies.

With ClearPlay now protected by law, the other three companies appear to be the sole targets of the suit. A handful of other companies already have shut down in light of the lawsuit.

Richards and others defend their practice by noting TV networks and airlines frequently show edited movies that are free of profanity, nudity and graphic violence. Hollywood, though, does not sell those versions.

"A lot of us in the past have gone (to Hollywood) and said, 'Why don't you just take the airlines movies and make them available on DVD now that technology allows you to put two versions of the movie on the same disk?'" Richards said. "The problem is that they have gone in the opposite direction. They started using the double capacity (for) uncut versions."

With the "uncut" and "uncensored" versions, PG movies turn R-rated, and R-rated movies become even worse.

ClearPlay's Aho noted: "This was part of the DVD promise-that you could

have both PG-13 and R (versions on the same DVD), and you could pick your rating. It never happened. The reason it never happened is because directors don't want you to see movies other ways. They hate airline versions. They hate TV versions.”

The new law allows ClearPlay to focus more on its business and less on the court battle. This summer, the company will release two new DVD players. One model will come with a USB jump drive that can be used to download the latest movie filters. After downloading filters, the jump drive then can upload them to the player. The second model comes with a modem and phone cord and is aimed at people who have no computer. The modem downloads the latest filters directly to the player. Each will retail for \$199, Aho said.

For more information about the companies, visit their websites: www.ClearPlay.com, www.CleanFilms.com, www.CleanFlicks.com and www.FamilyFlix.com.

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