

View-Master

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View-Master[®] is a device for viewing seven 3-D images (also called *stereo images*) on a paper disk. Although it is now considered a children's toy, it originally was not marketed as such.

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History

In 1911, Sawyer's Photo Services began operations. In 1918, brothers Fred and Ed Mayer bought in to Sawyer's. In 1926, Harold Graves joined Sawyer's and was responsible for Sawyer's producing photographic postcards and album sets as souvenirs. Later, photographic greeting-cards sold to major department stores, were added to the Sawyer's product line.^[1]

William Gruber, an organ maker and avid photographer, lived in Portland, Oregon. While on vacation, he met Harold Graves, of Sawyer's. Both Graves and Gruber had developed devices for viewing stereo images. Gruber had made up a stereo imaging rig out of two Kodak Bantam Specials mounted together on a tripod. He had the idea of updating the old-fashioned stereoscope by using the new Kodachrome 16-mm color film, which recently had become available. While a View-Master disk holds 14 film slides, these really are only seven pairs, making up the seven stereoscopic image; two film slides are viewed simultaneously, one for each eye, thus simulating binocular depth perception.^[1]

Shortly thereafter, in 1939, Gruber and Graves formed a partnership which led to the retail sales of View-Master viewers and disks. The patent on the viewing device was issued in 1940, on what came to be called the Model A viewer. Within a very short time, the View-Master quickly took over the postcard business at Sawyer's.^[1]

In late 1939, the View-Master was introduced at the New York World's Fair (marked "Patent Applied For"). It was intended as an alternative to the scenic postcard, and was originally sold at photography shops, stationery stores, and scenic-attraction gift shops. The main subjects of View-Master disks were Carlsbad Caverns and the Grand Canyon.^[1]

In the 1940s, the United States military recognized the potential for using View-Master products for

personnel training, purchasing 100,000 viewers and nearly six million disks from 1942 to the end of World War II, in 1945.^[1]

In 1951, Sawyer's purchased Tru-Vue, the main competitor of View-Master. In addition to eliminating the main rival, the takeover also gave Sawyer's Tru-Vue's licensing rights to Walt Disney Studios. Sawyer's capitalized on the opportunity and produced numerous disks featuring Disney characters. The takeover would pay off further in 1955, with disks of the newly opened Disneyland.^[1]

In 1952, Sawyer's began its View-Master Personal line, which included a 35-mm camera for its users to make their own View-Master disks. Although at first highly successful, the line would be discontinued within ten years. Many of these rugged, well made cameras are still used. This line also spawned the Model D viewer (available until the early 1970s, it was View-Master's highest-quality viewer) and View-Master's only 3-D projector.^[1]

In 1955, the Model E was introduced, with a more modern design, big ivory buttons on the picture changer levers, and a large "V" slot on top for easier disk insertion.

In 1958, the Model F was introduced; it used C-cell batteries to power an internal lighting source.

In 1962, the bakelite models were replaced with plastic versions, the first of which was the Model G. This change was driven by Sawyer's new president, Bob Brost, who took over in 1959. The View-Master had been constructed originally from Kodak Tenite plastic and then bakelite, a hard, sturdy, somewhat heavy plastic. The material of choice under Brost became the much lighter-weight thermoplastic.^[1]

In 1966, Sawyer's was acquired by the General Aniline & Film (GAF) Corporation, and became a wholly owned subsidiary. Under GAF's ownership, View-Master disks began to feature fewer scenic and more child-friendly subjects, such as toys and cartoons. Several now classic television series were also featured on View-Master disks, such as *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*, *Star Trek*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *Here's Lucy*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Actor Henry Fonda appeared in a series of TV commercials for the GAF View-Master.^[1]

In 1976, a red and white View-Master with a blue handle was released to commemorate the United States Bicentennial.

In 1977, GAF switched the film used in View-Masters. GAF had its own line of film and had planned to switch over all View-Master production to it. The film was of poor quality, however: images turned red over time. Therefore, 1977 has become an important date for collectors of the disks.

In 1981, GAF sold View-Master to a group headed by Arnold Thaler, head of Ekco Housewares, for \$24-million.



View-Master disks from a German Karl May movie.

In 1984, the Electronic Talking View-Master was introduced.

In 1987, six years later, a thriving View-Master International purchased Ideal Toy Company and became known as View-Master Ideal (VMI).

In the mid-1980s, the toy eventually had a home video label, notable for producing Kidsongs.

In August 1989, the View-Master product line was sold for the third time to Tyco Toys, Inc. of Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, upon its purchase of View-Master Ideal. The View-Master line remained part of Tyco until Tyco's merger with Mattel, Inc., in 1997.

Shortly after the merger with Mattel, Inc., the View-Master category shifted to Mattel subsidiary Fisher-Price, in East Aurora, New York.

In total, there were about 25 different models of viewers and 1.5 billion disks produced. Despite its long history and the many changes in models and materials, every disk ever made will work in every model ever produced.^[1]

View-Master is ^[2] part of the National Toy Hall of Fame of the United States.

Notable uses

Disks have been produced for Disneyland, many TV shows, movies (such as *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Jurassic Park*), and the U.S. military (for airplane/ship identification and range estimation).

David L. Bassett, an expert on anatomy and dissection, collaborated with Gruber to create a 25-volume atlas of human anatomy using the View-Master system.^[3]

In the spoof comedy movie *Hot Shots! Part Deux*, a character observing a craggy coastline mistakes a View-Master with images of Mount Rushmore for a pair of binoculars. Having seen the Rushmore View-Master disk, the character remarks that "those rocks look treacherous".

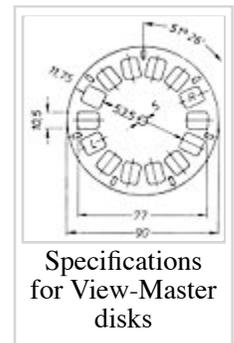
In the television show *Lilo & Stitch*, Agent Pleakly (the specialist on Earth's flora and fauna, including the mosquito) gives a View-Master to the Grand Councilwoman and tells her to "Educate herself" about the Earth's flora.

The television show *Wonderfalls* used the View-Master as a thematic emblem throughout the series.

In an episode of *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, a View-Master is used to view the past of a beaver's life.

The comic-book character The Tick uses a View-Master as if it can alert him to ongoing crimes.

The 2006 film *ATL* features a scene of a teenage girl using a View-Master, which is preceded by a computer-generated image of a disk being moved by the same girl.



Among the new View-Master products are a Discovery Channel View-Master, the new Virtual Viewer, the Discovery Channel View-Master Projector and Telescope, and the View-Master 3-D Pocket Viewer, which feature images of popular performers in concert and backstage.

In the Food Network show *Good Eats*, host Alton Brown often uses a View-Master to show viewers images of what he is discussing.

References

- ↑ *^ a b c d e f g h i j* Mary Ann & Wolfgang Sell and Charley Van Pelt, "View-Master Memories" , M.A. and W. Sell, ISBN B0006S314I, 2000 Self-Published
- ↑ Untitled Document (<http://www.strongmuseum.org/NTHoF/viewmasterframeset.html>)
- ↑ The Body in Depth - New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/science/22bass.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5087&em&en=4a6e8113b82be3ac&ex=1209096000>)

External links

- Official View-Master Site (<http://www.fisher-price.com/us/view-master/>) at Fisher-Price
- 3-D Review Online Magazine (<http://www.3-dreview.com>) 3-D products and services are reviewed monthly at www.3-Dreview.com
- Stereo Viewer Reference (<http://www.viewmaster.co.uk/index.asp>) 20th Century Stereo Viewers including View-Master
- View-Master Resource (<http://www.vmresource.com>)
- View-Master Introduction (<http://www.cinti.net/~vmmasell/infoco.html>)
- The View-Master Ultimate Reel List (<http://ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~number6/vm/>)
- View-Master Reverse Reel Index (<http://viewmaster.home.comcast.net/>)
- Meopta reels (<http://www.stereokotoucky.cz>)

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