

MEF VIDEOS & UNDERFUNDED INSTITUTIONS:

A Note from the Marketing Manager | *By Kendra Olson*

"I teach at a small (and \$ poor) private college. My colleagues and I very much like MEF material, but our department can rarely, if ever, afford to purchase it. I realize production costs are expensive, but it is difficult for me to understand and justify your two-tier price structure (high schools v. colleges) to my administration."

JENNIFER | California

It is not uncommon for us to receive feedback from customers like the comment above. The feedback is generally kind and understanding, yet it often marked with a tone of resignation—*I love your material, but our school just doesn't have the money.* This is a real dilemma. When I hear that a school or social service organization cannot afford our videos, it frustrates me to no end. My frustration is primarily directed at the way our country (de)values education, and therefore the scarce financial resources allotted. It is extremely difficult for me to know that we spend billions of dollars on military defense (and offense) and yet there isn't money to pay for classroom materials, prevention education, and social justice work.

It truly is our mission to make these materials accessible for all educators who would like to use them. That said, MEF's pricing structure exists for a number of reasons, and it has become clear that our customers are curious about them. In the following article, you'll find both answers to pricing questions and suggestions for greater accessibility. As a nonprofit organization, MEF is, unfortunately, not in a place at present to either drastically reduce our prices, nor to distribute our videos without cost to all those who should and would have them. Yet, it is our hope that we can work together to acknowledge the budgetary constraints on both schools/institutions/groups and on MEF, and be creative and resourceful in finding ways to fund important educational programs.

Regards,

KENDRA OLSON | **MARKETING MANAGER**

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MEF VIDEOS & UNDERFUNDED INSTITUTIONS: FAQ

Q: Why do your videos cost \$125-\$300 when I can buy a Hollywood DVD at Blockbuster for \$19.95?

A: To begin with, it is important to know that the Media Education Foundation (MEF) is a non-profit organization. At this time, all of our work is primarily funded through the sales of our videos. We are in the process of looking for outside funding (from individual donors and from foundations), but as that is not in place at the moment, we rely on institutional sales to enable us to continue to do the work we do. It's critical to remember that if we lowered the prices right now, MEF would not be able to continue to produce videos for you!

Our videos are priced institutionally for a number of reasons. The prices are not just for the cost of materials alone but also include the costs of research, production, and design, as well as public screening rights. When you buy a DVD at Blockbuster, you are purchasing material that has already recouped its costs in the theatres. Because of the volume of viewers—with each movie-goer paying approximately \$7 per ticket—the films gross a tremendous amount of money *before* they are made available for home-use. MEF videos are produced for educational purposes and do not have theatrical distribution. Because of this, the institutions need to pay for the public screening rights. The volume of videos sold by MEF is moderate, and it is therefore important for the cost per unit to remain fairly high. When the volume increases, the cost per unit can decrease, but this needs to happen on a proportional basis.

Q: Why do you have one price for high schools and non-profits and another price for colleges and universities?

A: Although the majority of educational institutions in our country have restrictions on their budgets, high schools and community organizations, for the most part, have much lower A/V budgets than do institutions of higher education. Based on models created by other distributors of educational videos, we created a sliding scale to make our videos accessible to organizations with much lower budgets. It is not possible for us to lower the prices for all institutions, or MEF would dissolve and no longer exist, so we are doing our best to meet budgetary needs and restrictions as best we can while still making videos. We're continually re-evaluating our policies based on customer comments, including examining the budgets of most community colleges. In the meantime, our two-tier price structure will remain in place.

Q: I understand the rationale for your price structure, but I still can't afford it. What options do I have?

1. Talk to your local public library.

A lot of public libraries have purchased MEF videos. They often have a portion of their funding devoted to A/V resources. Bring them a catalog (*you can call us at 800.897.0089 or e-mail us at info@mediaed.org to request a catalog*) and ask them to purchase the titles that interest you.

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2. Talk to your town.

Many towns across the country have purchased MEF videos for community screenings or use in community education programs. Talk to your town officials to see if there is any money in their budget for A/V materials.

3. For the health titles, contact local hospitals.

Hospitals generally have education/outreach programs. Increasingly, they are integrating media literacy into this type of programming. Bring an MEF catalog to the coordinator/director, and make your recommendations. Try to work out an arrangement where you can borrow their video(s) a few times during the year.

4. For the political titles, contact your local peace, justice, and activist organizations.

Many progressive political organizations know about MEF, but many don't. They would likely be thrilled to have a community screening. MEF videos come with not-for-profit public screening rights. This means that an organization has permission to hold a large public screening (*at the town hall, at a local theatre, in the school gymnasium, etc.*) but cannot charge admission. However, it is acceptable to ask for donations to the sponsoring organization at a screening. Donations at a public screening can often cover the cost of the video. It is also possible to get a local business to sponsor a community screening by donating the funds to purchase the video and rent out a screening space.

5. Team up with other organizations.

We have heard from MEF supporters that they have often collaborated with like-minded organizations to pool their resources and buy a video. *i.e.* The local domestic violence shelter, the local chapter of Business and Professional Women, and the community center might pool their resources to purchase a copy of *Wrestling With Manhood*. All three organizations can then have access to the video and/or they can work together to organize a community screening.

6. Put out a collection jar.

One woman in California recently told me that she put a jar out at the front desk of her organization with a small sign that said: "*Would you like to see the new documentary **Beyond Good & Evil: Children, Media & Violent Times**? Consider making a donation, so we can purchase the video and organize a community screening and discussion.*" People like to know that their money is going directly to a cause, so you might be surprised at how quickly the funds add up and enable you to afford a video.

7. Collaborate with other departments at your school or university.

Often, at universities, individual departments have their own budgets. Sometimes you can get two or three different departments to go in together to purchase a video. This creates less drain on any one department's budget, and they all get to benefit. I have often heard from professors that the Women's Studies, Anthropology, and Social Sciences departments work in this way at their schools.

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8. For some of our gender or health titles, try contacting your state department of health.

We recently sold a large quantity of *Tough Guise* videos to the department of health in a midwestern state. The department wrote a grant, purchased the videos in bulk, and then distributed the videos to high schools across the state. We think this is a great idea, and we are happy to negotiate pricing for large bulk purchases shipped to the same location. If enough of you make requests to the state departments of health or education, you might be able to get them to write a grant! If you would like to discuss this option further, please email marketing@mediaed.org.

9. If you work for a chapter of a national organization, consider asking the national office to write a grant to purchase a large quantity of any given video.

As mentioned in #5 above, we are happy to negotiate pricing for large bulk purchases shipped to the same location. Large organizations with many chapters can benefit from this. If you would like to discuss this option further, please email marketing@mediaed.org.

10. Encourage your friends and colleagues to make donations to MEF.

The larger our donor base becomes, the less we will have to rely on institutional sales to cover our costs, which means we will be freed up to subsidize distribution of videos to those in need. For information about making a donation to MEF, go to www.mediaed.org/contribute. Donations of any size are appreciated.

On a final note, if MEF had limitless funds, we would be distributing our videos at minimal or no cost. But because we need to maintain our staff, our facilities, our production, and our distribution, we are still, at this point in time, required to charge institutional prices. Like many nonprofits, we're still looking for the large gift that will help us subsidize our programs and the distribution of our materials. I'll be sure to let you know when it comes in.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. If you would like to ask questions about or comment on the suggestions above or have more to add, please email marketing@mediaed.org.