

Movie Licensing and You!

Long gone are the days when librarians and school media folks could just pop in a video, show it to a roomful of kids, and not think twice about it. In today's intellectual property-conscious society, showing movies at the library has become a little more complex and usually requires paying for the rights to show films. Hopefully, this quick-and-dirty guide to the licensing process will help you figure out which plan is best for your institution.

Full Licensing

Paying full licensing price for a movie is usually done one movie at a time. This can be done by contacting individual studios (assuming you can do enough Web hunting and phone calling to contact the correct department) or through companies that act as intermediaries for the process. One of the major companies today is Swank Motion Pictures (<http://www.swank.com/other/main.html>). Another is Modern Sound Pictures (<http://www.modernsoundpictures.html>). Prices for licensing one movie at a time usually run in the hundreds of dollars. This can be expensive if you want to show several films over the year, but it does have a few benefits. Full licensing does allow you full advertising rights to use the name of the movie and the image of the movie poster in any marketing medium you desire. Additionally, some companies, such as Swank, offer editing services so you can show trimmed down versions of R-rated movies. Finally, these sorts of licensing corporations often will also act as a provider for a copy of the film itself in either VHS, 16 mm, or DVD format.

Umbrella Licensing

This type of movie licensing is what is more popular for public libraries and school media centers because it allows for many more movies to be shown for about the same price as showing one or two under full licensing. Corporations make deals with individual studios for the use of their property and, again, act as the intermediary to pass on these rights. The two primary names in this industry are Movie Licensing USA (<http://www.movielic.com>) and Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (<http://www.mplc.com>). The companies have different lists as to what movie studios their umbrella license covers. These lists should be compared side-by-side when making a decision. Considerations should be made regarding how many major versus minor studios are on the lists and if any of the studios have become defunct in the past few years. In general, Movie Licensing USA tends to cost more, but they have more major studios on their list. In both cases, the cost for the license is based on either community population or number of registered patrons or students.

The major drawback of using an umbrella license is in the care that must be taken with advertising. The name of the movie cannot be used on any external promotions. However, the definition of internal promotions includes any information sent directly to the patrons. This would include monthly newsletters (both paper and electronic), information on the Web page, flyers or posters hung within the institution, and verbal messages from staff (an example being answering questions over the phone). Essentially, the only promotions that are excluded are posters around town and any media such as newspapers or radio. But even in those cases, you are allowed to say that you are having a movie night with a science fiction theme, just not the name of the exact movies being shown.

One of the major advantages to umbrella licensing, other than the cost for multiple titles, is that you are not limited to a single showing of a film. If you wanted to run Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets in an all-day loop on the day the next book came out, you could do so without paying extra.

Free Licensing

Occasionally, single companies will give full or limited permission for free showings of their films. A great example is Bandai Entertainment (<http://www.bandai-ent.com>), which will allow for their anime movies to be shown at clubs and conventions. If your institution has an anime club, then you could fill out the request form to show the movie. Another good example of free licensing is Warren-Miller Entertainment, which allowed for any Colorado library to show their films over the course of the summer as a way to tie in with the statewide summer reading theme, Fourteeners. These are just a couple of examples of the sorts of free licensing opportunities that arise from time to time. All in all, showing movies at the library makes for a great program with generally high attendance, and it's well worth the money to invest in the rights to show the films.

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