

EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION 101

By the Staff of the Video Project



So you've finished your video. Or, maybe you're just beginning to think about distribution. It's never too early to start thinking about reaching out to the educational market.

Schools and libraries are the last refuge for high-quality media that has something to say. Most schools now have a multi-media library, and many teachers regularly use video as a teaching tool. How do you get your video to them?

The following is a basic primer on school distribution. Whether you decide to distribute through the Video Project, with someone else, or on your own, we hope this simple primer will help you reach your distribution goals.

First, let's talk about the video itself.

- Does your video fit into a standard subject area?
- To what age group is your video targeted?
- Do you have educational materials to go with the video?
- Can you describe your video and who would use it in a single sentence?

Teachers buy videos in order to teach students. While this may seem obvious, many producers forget this simple concept and try to sell videos to teachers that are entertainment. While a good video is certainly entertaining, it's critical that you're able to describe the educational value of your video.

Once you've answered these questions, you're ready to think about distribution. There are seven major paths for educational distribution.

1) Direct mail

While mailing catalogs and postcards is wasteful and expensive, it's still the bread and butter of how videos are distributed to schools. Most schools are not yet buying online. Why? School purchasing systems are antiquated, and most teachers don't have authority (or school credit cards) to make purchases without approval.

So here's how it works. A teacher (or a media specialist) receives a catalog of videos in the mail. They usually throw it out. If they keep it, they circle a few videos that they like and then submit them to the school purchasing agent who then sends a snail-mail order to the distributor. Some schools use faxes now, but most still use the regular mail. It usually takes about six weeks from when the teacher decides they want a video until the order arrives at your door.

The Video Project mails about 50,000 full catalogs a year. We have 30,000 video buyers on our 'house list' who have ordered from us in the past or requested a catalog. In addition, for each new video we take on, we create a complete marketing campaign. This includes special mailings to our house list and outside buyers who we think will like your video. We're doing a targeted mailing now for a video by filmmaker Jeff Barrie, [Arctic Quest](#), that deals with the potential effects of oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Timing is important with direct mail campaigns, and, unfortunately, President George W. Bush's desire to drill in the Arctic is raising the profile of this video. Make sure your distributor is on the look-out for "news-hooks" for your video.

2) Conferences and Conventions

There are several major conferences and conventions for teachers, librarians and media buyers each year. This is the place where relationships are made and



buyers get a chance to preview tapes that distributors will be offering in the coming year. For individual producers, it doesn't make much sense to attend these conventions because they're expensive (passes cost \$500.00 and up) and you rarely sell enough tapes to justify the expense. For distributors however, these conventions are a great time to make friends and wave the flag.

At the Video Project we attend some conventions, but not as many as other distributors. Why? Well, frankly, we think we usually do better for our producers when we work the phones or do an outreach campaign to specific school districts. And besides, most conventions are in places with bad music.

3) Print and Web Advertisements

Advertising in major publications that reach teachers and media specialists is an effective way of reaching your target audience. The jury is still out on banner ad campaigns on the Internet. If you're advertising for your video make sure you closely track the response to each ad that you place. That's the best way to find out if the ads make sense for you.

At the Video Project we advertise in magazines like SIERRA, E Magazine, and Science Teacher Magazine. We also run targeted advertisements for new videos when it makes sense. We're marketing, Simple Things You Can Do to Save Energy at School, through advertisements in teacher's publications in California. We're getting a great response because of the crisis that has been caused by the greedy electricity companies. (Don't get us started...)

4) Repeat Customers

This is the most important audience. One of the reasons we like representing filmmaker John De Graaf's videos is that people who have bought one of his videos tend to want to buy the rest. Good quality videos stand out. But there are some other effective ways to generate repeat customers as well. We represent the 3-2-1 Contact series and sell it below our cost because it brings new customers to the Video Project. It's also important to have great customer service. All teachers need more than one video...we want them to call us back when they decide to get their next video. All of our videos are shipped next day with a UPS tracking number. All web orders receive a confirmation e-mail when their order is processed. We extend credit to our school customers so that they can get their videos quickly. We see the thousands of customers who have ordered from the Video Project in the past as our first audience. Make sure that your distributor is passionate about customer service. In the end, it's your reputation that's on the line.

5) Grassroots Force!

Schools and libraries will buy videos that their constituents ask them to buy. One of the best ways to get your video into libraries is to have students and professors



request them. At the Video Project we're building a nation-wide team of high school and college students who request videos from their school's library. When we release a new video, we send an announcement to these students, and ask them to help us get the word out. Start today by getting together a mailing list of people who attend showings of your videos. Make sure to get the e-mail addresses of people who you film – they're often your most passionate advocates. Let your distributor know about the names that you can bring to the table.

6) Reviews and Festivals

Many teachers make their video selections based on reviews in professional journals. Although a review mailing can be costly, it's a free advertisement. At the Video Project we maintain a list of 230 reviewers. We stay in regular contact with them. We find that they have a good sense of the videos that are coming into the market, and their input helps us decide which videos to represent. It's important to mail the right video to the right reviewer. Good reviews come from good relationships, where a distributor never wastes the reviewer's time.

7) Broadcast

Broadcasting your video is a great way to get free advertising. We frequently offer our videos for broadcast to public broadcasting and cable access stations. We tag our 800-number to the end of the broadcast and help callers get a copy of the video. We've had great success with public television broadcasts of Doug Prose and Diane LaMacchia's film, The Wild Heart of Red Rock. Each time it's aired, we're flooded with calls.



What should you look for in a distributor?

Finding the right distributor for your video is critical. There are lots of distributors out there. A personal relationship with someone who really cares about your video is the most important thing to look for in a distributor. That said, here are some other things you should ask your distributor:

- 1) What type of duplication and distribution facility do they use?

Most distributors bear the costs of duplication and fulfillment themselves, so there's a tendency to skimp on this part of the operation. Make sure that the equipment that they use is top-quality. The last thing you want is a dubbing facility in someone's garage that makes bad prints of your video and threatens the integrity of your master.

At the Video Project we keep all masters in a vault at TVA, our facility in Mountain View, CA. We use a top-of-the-line Sony system based on the Sony BVW 75 and 2800. We can dub to Beta, D2, DVCAM, PAL and all other major formats. We have two hundred and fifty decks available for dubbing in quantity.

Most importantly, we take great pride in our quality control process. It has both manual and automated components. The automated QC program was written by Duplitech Systems in San Diego, and we also do batch checking for large runs and 100% checking for small runs.

- 2) Are they too big or too small?

You want a distributor who's big enough to have a large mailing list and an active marketing program. You want them to have customers coming in the door looking for other videos and finding yours as well. Now, here's the challenge. You want them to be as small as possible while still doing all the things that big distributors do. A small distributor will give your film personal attention, and will get it into the hands of the teachers who really want it.

At the Video Project, we recently purged almost half of our catalog of videos. It was a painful process, but we believe that we can serve producers better if we carry fewer videos. If a distributor already has ten videos like yours, do you think they'll really focus on you?

- 3) Are they serious about the web?

Everyone knows that the web is the future for video distribution. It's less wasteful than mailing catalogs; it's easier to administer; it's worldwide. Ask your distributor



how nimble they can be in changing the marketing strategy of your film on the web. If you have a big broadcast date coming up, can they create a new page for you? Will they put you on their front page? Can they stream a clip for you?

Look for a distributor who's serious about web development. At the Video Project, Emil Friedlander, a web veteran of sites ranging from Thrive Online to Working Assets, is in charge of making sure that we're at the cutting edge of the web. He's on our staff – he's not an outside consultant who comes in every three months to make a few updates. Our goal is to be the first major distributor to get our videos directly to schools online. Make sure your distributor has a web strategy.

4) Do they have a plan?

Ask them to talk to you about their ideas for marketing your video. Does it make sense? Are they open to your ideas? Will they mail to your lists? Do they have any original ideas? Does it seem like they really care about your video? Trust your instincts. Choose someone who sounds like they'll really work for you. We've heard lots of stories of producers who have signed deals with bigger distribution companies and then have trouble getting their calls returned. Fortunately, you have options. Each distributor has a different focus and has different strengths and weaknesses.

Hopefully this primer on school distribution has been useful to you. If you're interested in finding out more about the Video Project, send us a copy of your video, or a rough cut, in VHS format.



The Video Project
45 Lusk Alley
San Francisco, CA 94107
1-800-4-Planet (1-800-475-2638)
415-821-7204 fax
www.videoproject.net
video@videoproject.net
04-01

