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Amazon charging different prices on some DVDs

Linda Rosencrance

September 5, 2000 ([Computerworld](#)) Consumers who shop for the DVD *Planet of the Apes -- The Evolution* on Amazon.com Inc.'s Web site today could be charged as much as \$10 more than other customers purchasing the same product at approximately the same time -- a practice the company described as a periodic test that it runs on the prices of certain items.

For example, at 2:40 p.m. today, a search for the *Planet of the Apes* DVD on the Amazon site that *Computerworld* conducted using a Netscape Web browser turned up a quoted price of \$64.99 -- 35% off the original price of \$99.98, according to the online retailer. But several seconds later, a similar search performed with Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer browser resulted in a price of \$74.99 for the same product.

And that's not the only DVD that has different prices at different times. On Sunday, online shoppers logged on to the DVD Talk Forum, a chat room dedicated to discussions about DVDs, and noted that Amazon's price for a limited-edition copy of the *Men in Black* DVD could differ depending on a number of factors. Included among the determining factors, they said, was which browser was being used, whether a consumer was a repeat or first-time customer and which Internet service provider address a customer was using.

Computerworld also checked the price of the *Men in Black* DVD today and discovered that on Netscape the quoted price was \$25.97, while it cost \$23.97 on Internet Explorer. After completely clearing the cache and cookie files of the PC being used, the price remained \$25.97 using the Netscape browser but had risen to \$27.97 with Internet Explorer.

Amazon spokeswoman Patty Smith said the price differences on certain DVDs are the result of tests that the company performs to re-evaluate various aspects of its Web site, such as the navigation system, what the home page looks like, overall site design and product pricing.

"We've learned that certain aspects of our site resonate with customers in different ways, and we are continually fine-tuning our site presentation to see how these variables affect customers' purchasing decisions," Smith said. Currently, she added, Amazon is testing the prices on select merchandise in its DVD store for a limited time, so different shoppers could indeed be charged different prices for the same product.

However, Smith declined to say how long these tests will last or what the criteria are for determining which customers will be charged higher prices than others. "Some customers will pay the same for a certain item as customers paid last week, some will pay more and some will pay less," she said.

If consumers think they've paid too much for an item, Smith noted, they have 30 days to request a refund from the company.

Alan Alper, an analyst at Gomez Advisors Inc. in Lincoln, Mass., said he was befuddled by the Seattle-based company's pricing practices in this case. "It seems like it's 'buyer beware; you, too, could be a guinea pig,' " he said.

There's nothing wrong with offering different prices to different shoppers if that's being done "to reward good customers," Alper said. But the practice doesn't make sense "if there's no rhyme or reason to it," he added. And in this case, Amazon is leaving it up to customers to speculate about why they're being charged different prices, he noted.

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