



A Call For Transparency in Subscription-Based Online Casting Sites

Background

We are individual freelancers in the voice over industry who have joined together to focus attention on, and find solutions for, the challenges in our business. We are members of World-Voices Organization (WoVO), an association of voice actors that works to inform and educate those in the voice over industry about best practices, standards for ethical conduct, and professional expertise.

Our most recent challenge concerns the displeasure of a great many of our members, as well as other voice talent across the industry, with the business practices of subscription-based online casting sites, also known as “pay-to-play” sites. Originally, pay-to-play sites were created to provide a service to both voice talent and voice purchasers (producers, casting agents, directors, etc.) by acting as a match maker for talents and purchasers. The voice purchasers do not pay to use the pay-to-play site; it is the voice talents who pay a yearly subscription fee to receive posted audition opportunities.

It has come to our attention that a very popular pay-to-play site has been taking unfair advantage of their voice talent subscribers, by inserting an extra layer of so-called “managed services” between the voice talent and the purchaser, and then deducting a significant percentage of the purchaser’s budget to pay for these “services”. The purchaser is not made aware of the extent of the deductions, and the talent is unaware of the purchaser’s original budget. The job opportunity is posted (or removed from listings and re-posted at a lower budget) with either a fixed budget, or an invitation to bid at a rate far lower than that which the purchaser and talent expected. The pay-to-play sites may maintain that it is a “fair rate”, but it is not uncommon for it to be far less than half, or even approaching one quarter, of the purchaser’s original budget.

The expectation from both purchasers and talents is that a middleman’s deduction be within the 10-20% range. In some cases this is dictated by law. It should be noted that the pay-to-play sites already take subscription fees between \$395 and \$5,000 per year from talents. The pay-to-play sites’ claim that “the purchaser pays no additional fees and the successful talent always gets what they bid” is fundamentally self-serving and misleading. The ill-defined nature of the charges and fees associated with these “services” are the cause of the current concern among voice talent.

Although there have been a few cases where a purchaser has specifically requested the pay-to-play site’s assistance in handling the transaction, it is where the service is proffered, rather than requested, that there are the major areas of concern. Both purchasers and talents are being kept purposefully unaware of the project’s financials. For a given project, for example, the purchaser may think he is getting talent commensurate with his \$2,000 budget, and the talent may think there is only \$500 on the table. Both are being misled. This is gross misrepresentation and a disservice to both parties. The pay-to-play sites have become self-serving, no longer provide an equitable service to voice talent, and are misrepresenting what the voice purchasers are paying for.

A Well-informed Business Decision

WoVO believes that our members should be presented with all of the facts pertaining to each pay-to-play site before choosing to do business with that site, and due diligence by the members in gathering their own information is also a best business practice. We also believe that our clients (the producers, agencies, studios, etc.) need to be able to make well-informed decisions. If these decisions are about the use of a middleman, then the fees attached to this service should be understood by all parties to the transaction.

We Support and Urge Full Transparency

To accomplish this, WoVO supports transparency and full disclosure of the charges made against a purchaser's budget. This is for the understanding and protection of both the purchaser and the talent. Every business offers different services, and these should always attract the appropriate fee. If a company is being contracted to provide project management or casting services, then they should be quantifiable and openly priced. To hide these costs and imply, or even openly claim that they are talent costs is, as stated before, gross misrepresentation and a disservice to both parties.

Take Action!

If you are a pay-to-play site: We at WoVO strongly urge you to institute a policy of transparency. When project pricing is clear, then both voice purchasers and voice talent can make their own well-informed business decisions.

If you are a voice purchaser: We encourage you to inquire about policies at pay-to-play sites. We urge you to inquire as to what percentage is taken from the budget and kept as a fee for commission or managed services. Please understand the level of compensation being paid to the talent, and how that reflects your overall cost.

If you are a WoVO member: We strongly urge WoVO members to contact pay-to-play sites, request immediate transparency in business transactions, and ask for a full explanation of how compensation is structured.

With best regards,

The World-Voices Organization Executive Board

