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Creators Too Like to Be Paid for Their Work

Submitted by Sarah Howes on October 30, 2015



A checkout clerk walks into his boss's office.

"Excuse me, sir, I have a problem" he starts. "I spend 8 hours a day doing what you ask of me. I mop the floors, bag the groceries. I even help unload the deliveries."

"Yes, so, what's the problem?" asks the boss.

"You haven't paid me."

"Oh, I'm sorry, was I not clear when I hired you? This job doesn't pay."

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As unrealistic as this scene may read, it represents the battle creators face in trying to make a living off of their work.

Actor Wil Wheaton got some nice "[exposure](#)" this week for shaming Huffington Post, the \$50M news aggregator, for its policy to not pay him for his blog post. He was right: "you can't pay your rent with 'the unique platform and reach'" that they offered to repost something he had written.

Fair pay in the arts is the toughest riddle of all, because so many independent producers are little guys themselves. I once spent two months in rehearsals to perform 12 shows at a small venue in Minneapolis. When the time came for my \$50 check, the producer's hands were shaking from the fear that the thing would bounce. I was too broke to refuse the money, even though we were simply moving the fumes from her gas tank into mine.

Still *fairer* pay would be achievable if we placed more value on a creator's work, and defended the oh so important right to say no. Just as soon as a creator starts profiting from her work, she then has to deal with piracy sites that, again, bring her value back down to zero.

Wheaton's experience is unacceptable (to say the least), especially when the company in question profits so

much from the labors of others. But at least he exercised his right to say no. A courtesy the Huffington Post apparently did not show Matthew Inman, creator of The Oatmeal, when it [hotlinked](#) a number of his comics without permission. As revenge, Inman replaced the comics with his monthly hosting bill to prove the cost of unauthorized image aggregation.

In a marketplace where creativity is undervalued, creators desperately need the power to say no. No to projects, no to “exposure,” and no to piracy sites that give their labors away for free. Saying "no" also provides creators more time and autonomy to say "yes" to the projects more fitting of their vision and capacity.

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