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Visual Effects Workers Struggle Without Health Care, Overtime Pay, Survey Finds

MOVIES | By **Brent Lang** on July 16, 2013 @ 1:27 pm

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Findings suggest the industry's financial difficulties have trickled down to the rank and file

Visual effects workers frequently lack health insurance and are forced to work long hours without overtime pay, a new study by the Visual Effects Society found Tuesday.

The honorary professional society tapped visual effects supervisor Scott Squires, a VE supervisor who has worked on films like "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace," to survey more than 600 visual effects artists around the globe.

The findings are not scientific and are part of a larger examination of the industry's struggles to adjust to a globalizing market and shrinking profit margins. But they do reveal that the financial pressures roiling the business have trickled down to its rank-and-file workers.

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Only 37 percent of respondents said they received health care through their employer; and roughly 60 percent said they were "highly" or "very highly" concerned about coverage.

Many visual effects artists are not salaried employees – they are contract workers, often let go after work on a film is completed – so

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they do not receive full benefits.

This system hasn't helped with the issue of overtime pay: Only 38 percent of respondents reported receiving all the overtime pay they were entitled to, while that same amount said they received no OT.

Some artists have call for unionization; Visual Effects Society Executive Director Eric Roth told TheWrap that he understood why artists are angry, but said it was important that they refuse to work for employers who are late paying or who refuse to square up.

"If you're not getting paid, you shouldn't work there," Roth said. "It's not enough to accept, 'Oh well, we'll pay you on the next one.' Artists have to take responsibility for their own careers, to know their contracts and to protect themselves."

Not that taking a stand is easy. The industry has been buffeted by the rise of tax incentives in foreign countries like the United Kingdom and Canada. That has led to the bankruptcy of California-based films like Rhythm & Hues and an exodus of work abroad.

That in turn has forced many workers to seek jobs away from Los Angeles. Nearly one-third said having to move to keep working was a significant problem for them — and their families.

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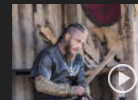
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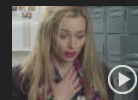
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straybill · 9 months ago

Uh... this news is at LEAST 30 YEARS OLD!!! Why are we only NOW talking about it?!

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ThatGuyInSantaMonica · 9 months ago

The tax subsidies are destructive to the VFX industry because the VFX vendors don't benefit from them. In fact, it's the opposite. To be awarded work on a major motion picture, you must have a physical facility in a tax-friendly location, built at your own expense. The studios won't even talk to you unless you have one. Plus, you don't receive a dime of production subsidy money. None. Zero. The film studio gets back 40 cents of every dollar they spend on production labor. Not only is it destructive to the industry, it's destructive to the infrastructure and government services in the subsidizing country. If I was a BC resident employed by the FX industry and I knew that 40% of my taxes were going to an American film studio instead of paying for the health care, services and infrastructure I expect to get for my tax dollars, I'd be less than pleased.

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Curious · 9 months ago

The tax subsidies are very destructive, but do you have any evidence to back up the assertion that it led to the bankruptcy of Rhythm & Hues (or the other big bankruptcy of the last year, Digital Domain)? R&H wasn't out-competed by subsidized studios. On the contrary, they were a leader in taking advantage of subsidized and low-cost-labor locations, with large and well-established offices in Vancouver, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Kuala Lumpur. DD also had a big presence in Vancouver, as well as gobbling up all sorts of tax breaks in Florida. Please explain the discrepancy between these facts and your assertion!

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