

# An American Sequential Arts Guild

## Some thoughts

Rantz Hoseley, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012

There's been a lot of discussion over the years (decades, really) about the idea of unionizing comic creators. These movements have universally faltered and died out because the facts are simple; there will ALWAYS be artists and writer who are looking for their "big break" and hence will work for comic companies, both big and small, in order to get in to the industry as working professionals.

That said, there are some very valid arguments for some form of professional organization that serves an advocacy and support role for creators in the comic industry, regardless of their specific discipline. Similar to other creative professions, creators in the comic industry might benefit from having a formal, professional guild. What follows are some thoughts on roles such a guild might fill, as well some early impressions on limitations, and protocols that such a guild would need to adhere to in order to be accepted and adopted by not only the creators involved, but publishers as well. These notes are preliminary, and are presented in no particular order, and are by no means, presented as being complete or comprehensive.

- **MEMBERSHIP** - A Guild is *not* a union. It serves a support role for creators within the industry. As such:
  - Participation or membership on the part of the creators involved must be voluntary, not a mandatory requirement.
  - The guild may have annual dues (in order to support organizational operations), but the organization must a.) Function on a formal, recognized non-profit basis, and b.) Cannot require creators to deliver a portion of fees paid on a per-project basis to the guild.
- **PUBLISHERS** - Since a Guild is not a Union, it's interactions and "requirements" placed on publishers would likewise be limited in scope and function, filling such roles as:
  - Defining "Guild Minimum Rates" for specific roles (such as inker, penciler, writer, colorist, and so forth) on projects executed on a Work-for-hire basis.
    - In order to accurately address the disparity between the resources of publishers, these would need to be further categorized as rates for Small, Mid-sized, and Large Publishers
  - Publishers would not be required to pay "Guild Rates", nor would guild members be prohibited from executing work for Publishers that do not pay Guild Rates. Publishers who agree to pay the "Guild Minimum Rate" would be defined as a "Guild Accredited Publisher".
  - Guild Minimum Rates would be just that, the minimum. Recognizing that certain creators have a much greater market value than others.

The purpose of such a Guild would not be to drive rates up, but to clearly define (in an industry where most creators refuse to discuss their rates) what the recommended minimum rate is that a creator should be willing to accept

- Again, however, because this is NOT a union, there is no restriction or limitation that prevents a given creator from accepting work at “below-guild minimum” rates from a “Non-Accredited Publisher”
- However, if a Publisher has a “Guild Accredited” status, and pays a guild member below minimum rates, said publisher can lose their “Guild Accredited” status.
- Guild Accreditation for Publishers should be based not only on adhering to payments of the Guild Minimum, but should also include other criteria, such as:
  - Clear definition, before execution of work, and adherence to a production schedule.
  - Clear definition, and adherence to a payment schedule, as well as any “back end” profit participation, payment schedules for such, and the ability to independently audit profit participation reports.
  - Clear definition, and adherence to profit participation regarding the secondary usage (such as film, TV, or videogames) of key characters or brands created for the publisher on a work-for-hire basis.
- Criteria for Publishers and Projects executed on a Creator-owned, or shared ownership basis, would recognize that each arrangement in deals of this type are unique, and thus would be limited to ensuring that terms are clearly defined prior to the execution of work, and that the defined terms are adhered to on a per-deal basis.
- **SUPPORT ROLES** – There are multiple support roles in which such a Guild could play a critical role, ensuring that creators have access to needed resources, training, and tools which would enable them to function not only to the highest degree on a professional basis, but on a daily “human” basis as well. These support roles might include:
  - Apprenticeships – in the past, the comic industry (both in terms of comic strips as well as comic books) has relied on an apprentice model, which has (ironically, with the increase in interconnective networking) fallen by the wayside for the most part in the last two decades, the existing current instances becoming much more the exception, rather than the rule. As was the case in the past, having apprentices provides benefits for both established and aspiring creators. Having a formalized Guild Apprentice program, which would not only serve to place aspiring creators with established professional, but would also clearly define the guidelines that both were expected to adhere to would provide benefits that would allow:

- Established Creators to produce at higher rates of production, without a sacrifice in quality
  - Entering and aspiring creators to learn the fundamentals of production, scheduling, editorial interaction, as well as the business side of comic production from an established reputable creator while actively producing professional comic work that will build their personal reputation and allow them to transition to a recognized professional.
- Networking resources. Similar to the advent of smaller, local professional groups such as “Drink and Draw” or the online professional forums, having local Guild meetings, as well as online resources and discussions which would be limited to guild members only, would allow for professional discussion on issues ranging from industry trends, to production techniques and tricks, to “hands on” events where Guild Members might have access to pre-release production software. The boundaries and role of the Guild’s networking aspect would need to be very clearly defined, as it could easily continue to grow until it was an unwieldy, and inefficient hydra that covers a lot of ground... and none of it well.
- Insurance – One of the biggest issues professional creators who work on a freelance basis face is being able to acquire, and maintain, health insurance. Similar to the structure of the Hollywood Writer’s Guild, a member of the ASAG would be qualified for group coverage with the Guild’s insurance carrier. The individual creator would be responsible for paying the required premiums, but the ability to participate in a larger “group” insurance has (for other companies, guilds and unions) resulted in both better coverage and lower priced premiums.
- Anonymous Data Collection and Statistical Results – In an industry where creators are very hesitant to discuss the specifics of everything from page rate, to how many hours they work for the generation of each page, the ability of the guild to conduct anonymous online surveys, resulting in specific data and statistics that are available to all guild members are tools and resources that have proved valuable and useful for other creative production industries such as the game industry, and would likely provide useful in an industry that has traditionally been reticent to discuss these matters.

These points are presented as the beginning of a discussion, and I hope that other creators and members of the industry will add their input, ideas and feedback. You can contact me at [rantz@rantzhoseley.com](mailto:rantz@rantzhoseley.com)