



The New Gig in the Mini-Room

Insights

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As anyone who has spent a weekend binging an entire season of *Stranger Things* or *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* can tell you, society's consumption of television has shifted dramatically in the last several years. Discovering viewers' tendency to "binge-watch" several episodes of television in one-sitting, streaming services have begun producing their own original series, releasing entire seasons at once, at all different times of the year. However, along with this shift, the season size has decreased. Whereas a network television show will typically have 22 episodes in a full season, streaming series more frequently have 13 or fewer.

I know what you're probably thinking...while this may be fun fodder leading up to the Emmy Awards, what does this have to do with the gig economy?

With the shifting size and timing of content release, series producers are experimenting with new ways of staffing their writers' rooms as well. Last month, *Vanity Fair* took a look into the emerging trend of "mini-rooms," a more freelance-centered approach to the traditional television writers' room. The "mini" in mini-rooms can refer to either the number of writers, the time frame, or both. While the format can vary, a typical mini-room would consist of placing three to five writers in a room together to generate ideas. They might be working together to write a pilot script or generate story arcs for half-a-dozen different ideas. This stands in contrast to a past model where a network would invest in the production of several pilots before deciding which would go to series.

Like with most gig economy arrangements, a mini-room gives writers more flexibility, but also less stability. The concept shifts risk away from networks and production companies who are able to evaluate broader ideas up front before pouring money in production. But proponents of mini-rooms also point out that mini-rooms can shift some risk away from writers as well, who, under the traditional model, sometimes have to wait months (during which they cannot accept other work) to see if the show they've committed to is picked up.

Unlike most gig economy gigs, however, mini-rooms may be impacted by union rules. The Writers Guild of America has a Standard Form Freelance Television contract for WGA members and Guild signatory companies. And over a decade ago, the WGA entered into a sideletter agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television Producers, Inc. related to new media. The WGA has not taken a position on mini-rooms, however, and declined to comment for the *Vanity Fair* article.

Those businesses in the creative space might want to spend some time considering this concept to determine whether a gig model might work for them. While misclassification and other concerns might still exist (which is why you should always work with counsel before setting up any such arrangement), you might find that the benefits outweigh the risks.