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COMPANY #: 09660981 (REGISTERED IN ENGLAND AND WALES)

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Rusty Quill – Operations Update

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General Introduction

Rusty Quill has experienced remarkable growth within the last 12 months and so, in the interests of transparency, we have decided to release a one-off, abridged, Extraordinary Operations Update to help show our supporters some of the actions we have been taking to improve as a company and some of the actions we will be taking in the next 12 months.

This document has been formatted to allow text-to-speech for ease of accessibility and does not include sensitive business information. This document should be considered a statement of intent.

Company Transparency

Rusty Quill Ltd. has an unusual business model compared with more traditional media and this can sometimes make it difficult to clearly explain complex internal processes. We try to make sure that these processes are as clear as possible for everyone concerned and we intend to continue in this manner.

With this in mind, we should restate that we have a few core principles that have influenced our development as a company and will continue to do so in future:

- **Diversity**
Maintaining a safe and non-discriminatory work-space where people can collaborate on exciting and unique creative projects.
- **Opportunity**
Providing paid employment opportunities for those seeking to break into media production.
- **Representation**
Providing a platform for new creative voices with poor representation in more established media.
- **Community**
Working with our fans to grow a friendly and supportive community, united by our love of storytelling.
- **Responsibility**
Leading by example and working with our peers to improve the business practices of the media production industry.

Our Goal

To be as transparent as is feasible to ensure that our intentions for the future of the business and its communities are clear to everyone.

Our Actions to Date

- Reviewing all our ongoing business operations and releasing this Extraordinary Operations Update.
- Employee Diversity Review:
 - At this time, we employ a high proportion of colleagues:
 - with atypical mental health,
 - who are LGBTQIA+,
 - with disabilities, and/ or chronic illnesses.
 - We have good gender parity between men, women and non-binary people within the company as a whole, although the current leadership team skews male.
 - We maintain a flat pay structure across all roles in all departments.

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- We have a lower proportion of colleagues who are POC within our organisation.
- We currently receive less applications from interviewees of colour, which speaks to a wider issue within audio, and perhaps our attractiveness as a company to potential POC applicants.
- Our company also remains less accessible to people with hearing and visual impairments than we would like. We are currently ill-equipped to meaningfully employ people with significant hearing and visual impairment. This is in part due to the dominance of audio and video production in our business model.

Our Actions going Forward

- Improving Representation of POC:
 - We will continue to directly approach organisations and agencies that represent POC creatives, sound engineers, producers, and directors, with offers of paid employment. We are also reviewing additional ways to encourage more applications from interviewees of colour.
- Hearing and visual impairment:
 - This issue requires funds and resources beyond our current means but has been targeted as point of improvement for the company. We will be generating a long-term plan to address it within the coming months.
- Public information:
 - We will be releasing more fulsome company stats showing our diversity breakdown later this year.

Employment Practices

We have hired significantly more employees within the last 12 months and so have appointed a dedicated Head of HR to help maintain the wellbeing of our team and ensure we continue to work towards our stated principals as an employer.

Our Goal

- Maintaining a safe and non-discriminatory workspace.
- Ensuring fair, competitive rates of pay for all employees.
- Ensuring an accessible workplace for all employees regardless of location.
- Prioritising diversity in our hires with considerations of gender, socio-economic background, disability, race and atypical mental health.
- Prioritising providing employment opportunities to those seeking to break into the media production industry.

Our Actions to Date

- Prioritising advertising specialist job roles in minority communities before general advertisement.
- Increasing available colleague hours for those seeking additional work.
- Repeated pay increases to all employees, now above London Living Wage.
- Maintaining a flat pay structure to ensure non-exploitative hiring practices.
 - Flat pay structure [as at September 2020] is £11ph for colleagues.
 - Performance is at £15ph to account for travel / setup times.
- Most roles begin at eight hours per week to allow flexi-hours for better work-life balance, mental health, and disability, with the possibility of additional hours on request.
- Providing regular paid internal training to employees.
- A complete overhaul of all digital infrastructure to reduce administration overheads for all employees and improve general accessibility.
- Making paid short-term sabbaticals and unpaid long-term sabbaticals available on request.

Our Actions going Forward

- Rusty Quest – A full personal / professional development programme for all regular employees with associated budget allocations.
- Benefits package for employees currently under review.
- Looking to provide work-based mental health app to all employees and regular performers.
- Ongoing review of employee pay with an aim towards further increases.

Content

Rusty Quill currently produces three in-house shows: *Rusty Quill Gaming*, *The Magnus Archives*, and *Stellar Firma*. We are glad to say that rapid expansion in 2020 has afforded us an increase in our staffing, resources and infrastructure which will allow us to develop new podcasts in the coming 12 months in a more sustainable and process-driven manner.

We have recently undertaken a review of our current shows to see what lessons can be learned from these first productions in line with feedback from our community. We have learned much that will stand us in good stead for future productions but we have also come to realise that, despite our best intentions, some elements of our storytelling and presentation have not met the standards we wish to set to the industry.

There are some storylines and characterisations within our content that are racially and/or culturally insensitive, some of which propagate harmful stereotypes. We acknowledge that these exist and apologise for their unintended appearance in our work.

These have included:

- Depictions of Egypt and Egyptian culture in *Rusty Quill Gaming* which should have been more fully researched and depicted in a more nuanced manner.
- The character Tom Haan and his association with 'The Flesh', in *The Magnus Archives*, perpetuating harmful East Asian tropes.
- The inclusion of 'real world' figures (such as John Amherst) as antagonists, which can be problematic because real people and cultures were seriously harmed by their actions and this harm is ongoing.
- General representation in *the Magnus Archives*. Specifically, because all characters are either antagonists, victims or otherwise morally dubious as a result of the horror genre, there is a disproportionate number of antagonists who are described as non-white when contrasted against the general a-racial presentation of the main cast.

It is clear in hindsight that these issues should have been addressed prior to release. Since our existing shows are nearing the end of their runs, and the content in question is already public, there are limited ways we can correct matters, though we will do so where we can. We are focusing our efforts at this time on generating new processes with additional staff and resources to ensure we do better in all new content.

Our Goal

- Including new creative voices with poor representation in more established media on our platform.

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- Providing opportunities and support for marginalised creators and technical staff, both in-house and through external and promotional activities.

Our Actions to Date

- Providing increased visibility to 'behind the camera' colleagues in all departments.
- Starting to use external sensitivity consultants for some topics raised in our shows.
- Collated feedback and responses to shows from our fan community.
- An assessment and evaluation of our current sensitivity processes.

Our Actions going Forward

- An in-house sensitivity consultant has been hired. They will monitor our ongoing shows and assist in the creation of all upcoming projects, both reviewing all new scripts and providing consultation in the early stages for all improvised shows.
- External specialist sensitivity readers will be consulted on an ad-hoc basis during story development and scripting stages for all future shows.
- Themes, characters, and plot points in our content will be subject to a more thorough planning process that will include sensitivity consultation as a requirement.
- Creating a dedicated diversified writer's room for development of new content.
- Continuing to directly invite creative submissions from organisations that assist underrepresented creatives.
- Reaching out to relevant organisations currently seeking to crowdfund projects.
- Continuing to offer paid opportunities for non-agent represented creators.
- Updating past show notes to ensure problematic episodes are appropriately highlighted for future consumption.
- Introducing additional initiatives to actively expand the diversity of our team across production, administration and performance.

Corporate and Social Responsibility

Corporate and social responsibility is a difficult undertaking for a smaller, independent company due to limited resources. That said, Rusty Quill has always given charitably in many forms and we intend to continue doing so albeit in a more structured way. We are now able to formalise some CSR initiatives for the coming 12-24 months with an intention to revise our plans annually.

Our Goal

Use our resources and platform to assist people more effectively beyond just offering employment and visibility. Put simply, to 'Pay it forward'.

Our Actions to Date

- Donating ad-hoc to international current affair/emergency causes through fundraisers and donations.
- Approximately 15% of our monthly revenue (not profit) is spent on charitable causes (including donating 10% of monthly Patreon pledges to the WHO COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund)
- Social media promotion of diverse shows/ highlighting diversity in the arts.

Our Actions going Forward

- Increased charitable appearances at live events and livestreams.
- Signing the [Equality in Audio Pact](#) pledge as a reiteration of our established values
- Creating a Development Fund. We are allocating time and resources into identifying and assisting organisations, charities, Sixth Forms, colleges and agencies across the UK that provide practical opportunities for young people to start a career in media production.
 - We will actively pursue districts and areas with lower rates of higher education attendance.
 - Where possible, we wish to target vocational and practical skills that do not funnel recipients into paid-for higher education or unpaid internships.
- Researching the long-term feasibility of Rusty Quill also offering assistance via associated university programs.

Closing Statement

Thank you for reading this document.

Maintaining ethical and sustainable business growth during a pandemic-induced international lockdown is an exceptional challenge. We have made leaps forward in some areas and have slowed in others. At this time, we are confident in our ongoing stability, but we do not anticipate a return to regular operations until 2021. We will only resume such operations once we can ensure the ongoing safety of all our colleagues and performers.

As a result, the actions and aims that we have described here will take time to achieve with what is still a very small team of people and so we ask for your continued patience as we continue to shape Rusty Quill into the company we want it to be. We remain ambitious and optimistic in our outlook thanks to your ongoing support and look forward to implementing all the improvements described here.

If you have any further feedback you would like us to consider, please send it to mail@rustyquill.com.

Chief Operations Officer, Hannah Brankin.