

NEWS

'Cruel' April Fool's prank prompts agency criticism

MATTHEW HEMLEY

A talent management company has come under fire for calling on its clients to self-tape an audition for a non-existent job as part of an April Fool's Day prank.

Dee Boss Talent Management sent a briefing to clients on April 1, asking them to record a video for a commercial, called Veg Power, described as "a campaign to get people to eat their veg". It promised £600 pay.

"We are trying to make vegetables appear appealing and yummy. We will be casting this via self-tapes due to the current climate, and we will be hoping to film this as soon as we come out the other side. But for now, we would love to get started on the casting process," it said, adding that the advert would appear on UKTV and ITV.

It said it was looking for "a variety of ages to all play the parts of vegetables to encourage both adults and children to eat their vegetables".

One of those who took part was a six-year-old. Her parent wrote on Twitter that she had been left "crying her eyes out".

"I've just spent time and energy doing that when I should have been at work. She was so excited. She's six," they wrote.

Another, Imogen Miller Porter, said: "Nice to see the self-tape system works. I wish I hadn't cut short a voice-over lesson I paid for. When an actor gets told there's a 2pm deadline they drop things. £600 would be very useful right now."

The move was criticised for duping actors when theatres are closed and work is scarce.

Helen Raw, who runs the British Actors Network, tweeted: "Dee Boss Talent thought this would be funny. Many actors currently don't have a pot to piss in and an 'agent' is having their clients waste time on a shitty fake casting, building up the hopes? Fuck right off."

Others criticised it too, with actor Allison Saxton labelling it "cruel and heartless".

Responding to Raw on Twitter, Dee Boss Talent admitted it was not "funny, but fun at a time that is difficult for everyone".

"I don't have a 'pot to piss in' either. Judging by all my emails, 95% of my clients had fun. To those that didn't I have apologised," it said.

In an email seen by The Stage sent to clients, the company said it was "sorry to the few people we have upset by doing this" and added: "It was not our intention."

It said it had originally planned to edit the videos together and put them on Twitter as a "way of entertaining people", but that it would no longer be doing this.

Clients also defended the prank, with actor Joanne Denson stating: "It was great fun being creative again. Please lighten up – it was meant to be fun and it was. I am proud to be represented by Dee Boss Talent."

Actor Meg MacMillan said: "It was a joke meant to give us all a giggle in serious times." She added: "Granted, it was probably poorly judged in the current climate but condemning them like this? There were clues for us to find in the email to let us know it was a joke."

Dee Boss Talent has been approached for comment.

ALSO ONLINE

BECTU has reached an agreement with UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre to ensure theatres "take full advantage" of the government's job retention scheme. The scheme allows employees on the Pay as you Earn system to be put on leave but still receive 80% of their salary or up to £2,500 a month paid for by the government.

[Theatres will be able to claim gift aid when audiences agree to donate the cost of their cancelled tickets rather than request a refund, the government has confirmed. Cultural organisations across the country and of all sizes are appealing to audiences to consider giving the money they spent on tickets to shows that are now cancelled.](#)

[Two fifths of creative organisations estimate their income has dropped by 100% since the coronavirus outbreak, new data from the Creative Industries Federation has revealed. The data comes alongside an open letter to the government, calling for urgent grant support for creative businesses and charities that "fall between the gaps".](#)

[Drama school graduates missing out on final-year performances because of coronavirus will be able to showcase online as part of a new initiative. Called Showcase 2020, the website launched by actors Olivia Beardsley and Isaac Stanmore allows performers to be listed by their school and course, and to upload a Spotlight link and showcase video.](#)

[Harriet Harman is calling on the chancellor to ensure theatre workers are not left behind by the government's income support plans, arguing that the creative workforce will be disproportionately affected by the coronavirus crisis. The Labour MP and former shadow culture secretary has written to Rishi Sunak to ask what further measures he is considering to support arts workers.](#)

[A national competition has been launched for the over-70s to encourage people with no professional experience in the arts to create new works while they are quarantined. Called the King Lear Prizes, the competition offers £1,000 prizes for short stories, short plays, poetry, solo musical compositions and visual art works.](#)

Newcastle boss delays retirement to lead Theatre Royal in lockdown

MATTHEW HEMLEY

Newcastle Theatre Royal chief executive Philip Bernays has postponed his retirement to "lead the organisation through this difficult time".

In January, Bernays announced he would be retiring at the end of 2020 after 15 years in the post.

In a statement, the venue said: "In light of the unprecedented challenges the Theatre Royal is facing, in common with all other theatres, the board of Newcastle Theatre Royal Trust has taken the decision to postpone the recruitment of its new chief executive while it focuses on managing this crisis.

"The current chief executive, Philip Bernays, has kindly agreed to stay on to lead the organisation through this difficult time."

Bernays said: "These are extraordinary times. I care deeply about the Theatre Royal and couldn't not continue to support it and the incredible team of people who make it happen. We will come through this crisis; we look forward to bringing entertainment to many generations of theatregoers to come."

According to the theatre, the board acknowledged potential candidates will also "be working through these issues with their own organisations for the foreseeable future".

The theatre closed on March 16 as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.



Chief executive Philip Bernays

Curve calls for kids to submit Wizard of Oz designs

GEORGIA SNOW

Leicester's Curve is asking children who have taken part in the nationwide Rainbows of Hope campaign to submit their drawings as inspiration for the set of its Christmas production of The Wizard of Oz.

The theatre is launching a campaign inspired by the recent social media trend, #RainbowsOfHope, which has seen children across the country stick drawings of rainbows in the windows of their homes during the coronavirus lockdown to display messages of happiness and unity.

Curve is asking people to share their creations, which could be used on stage as part of the artwork for The Wizard of Oz.

A statement from chief executive Chris Stafford and artistic director Nikolai Foster said they had been inspired by seeing so many homes display rainbow drawings "as beacons of hope, optimism and joy".

"Working with our set designer Colin Richmond, we'd like to use these children's drawings of rainbows and Oz to help inspire the set of our Made at Curve production. We imagine our Oz as a world sketched by a child, as seen through Dorothy and Toto's imaginations. You might see your work on stage at

Curve this Christmas and it will help inspire our design process," the statement said.

They also encouraged families to read L Frank Baum's novel or watch the Judy Garland film and submit drawings of the setting and characters to help inspire the designs.

Curve's production will mark the regional premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber's version of the show, which includes additional songs as well as the music and lyrics from the 1939 film.

It is due to open at Curve on November 28, running until January 16, 2021.

Drawings can be submitted on social media using #RainbowsOfCurve, or to thewonderfulwizardofoz@curvetheatre.co.uk