James Gandolfini Replacing Steve Carell on 'The Office'? It Almost Happened.

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

You're reading Entrepreneur United States, an international franchise of Entrepreneur Media.

James Gandolfini starring on *The Office* might be hard to imagine, but according to some of the actors involved in *The Sopranos*, it nearly happened.

"You know, they talked about having Gandolfini at one point replace him (Steve Carell, who played Michael Scott in *The Office*), did you know that?" Michael Imperioli, who played Christopher Moltisanti on the long-running HBO hit *The Sopranos,* said on the popular podcast *Talking Sopranos*.

"I think before James Spader and after (Steve) Carell, they offered Jim, I want to say $4 million dollars to play him for the season and HBO paid him $3 million not to do it," Imperioli's co-host Steve Schirripa (Bobby Baccalieri on *The Sopranos*) added in.

True? Apparently so.

If you remember, Steve Carell left the popular show in 2011 after seven years of playing the boss at paper company Dunder Mifflin's Scranton, PA location. What followed was a series of high-profile guest stars including Spader, Idris Elba and Will Ferrell to fill his shoes. Gandolfini – known worldwide for his role as the *Sopranos*' mercurial mob boss – considered it seriously because he had been out of work for a little while.

Eventually, he turned it down.because HBO paid him the aforementioned $3 million not to take it – an offer he couldn't refuse.

Related: Who Did Americans Pick as Their Favorite TV Boss?

According to *The Office*'s writer-producer Brent Forrester in the book *The Office: The Untold Story of the Greatest Sitcom of the 2000s,* "It was really, really close to (Gandolfini) being the boss."

"Well that's a good decision," Ricky Gervais, the creator of the original version of *The Office*, said to the *Talking Sopranos* co-hosts on the same episode.

Was it? You might think that paying someone so much money not to do something is a waste. However, for HBO this was a long-term investment.

At the time, *The Sopranos* – considered one of the best television shows ever aired – had concluded its run several years prior. And yet it continued to provide HBO with untold millions in new and renewed subscriptions as well as licensing and royalty fees. On top of that, the show was a launching pad for the careers of many of its actors and crew.

The show has continued to live on in the national consciousness. This month, a highly anticipated movie prequel to the show, called *The Many Saints of Newark*, was released in theaters and on HBO Max to both critical and popular acclaim. There are rumors of more Sopranos-related content to come in the future now that David Chase, the show's creator, has signed a new contract with the network.

But *The Sopranos* would not be *The Sopranos* without Tony. And more specifically, Gandolfini.

Related: 15 Gangster Movies Every Entrepreneur Should See

The actor tragically passed away in 2013, but his portrayal of

Tony Soprano lives on as the core of the show. His menacing and brilliant performance made the mafia patriarch one of popular culture's all-time most memorable characters. Would audienced have accepted the actor running a branch office of a paper company in Scranton for a few laughs?

Some forward-thinking executives at HBO heard the possible casting news and leapt into action, checkbook in hand, which should be instructive. Smart business leaders do whatever it takes to protect their brands. Every year, big companies from Coke to Nike pay millions to attorneys, consultants, advertising agencies, public relations firms and the media to ensure that their products look as good as ever and are free of competition. So a few million to Gandolfini was likely a drop in the bucket for the cable powerhouse. These payments are all part of doing business – and they're critical for the future value of their products.

What does it mean to protect your brand? It means pursuing people that copy it or take advantage of it. Keeping your logos and trademarks up to date. Ensuring that your products and services are of the highest quality. Building loyalty. Growing name recognition through continuous marketing. Employing people that best reflect your company. You don't just release a product and have this all happen automatically. It's a continuous investment over the lifecycle of your products.

The Sopranos, like so many other iconic products for so many other companies, has returned its investment to HBO many times over the years. That's because HBO has done everything in its power to make sure it remains popular. They've controlled the brand by spending on the brand. And they've succeeded.

As Tony's psychiatrist, Dr. Melfi, once told him, "People only see what you allow them to see."

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/389856