

Activision in legal battle with game developers

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A screengrab shows an Activision video game. A lawsuit filed in Los Angeles has asked a court to order gaming giant Activision to pay from 75 million to 125 million dollars in promised bonus cash to game developers and then as much as a half-billion dollars in damages.

Activision has a fight on its hands as developers behind "Modern Warfare" accuse the videogame publisher of holding them "hostage" to complete a new installment of the blockbuster franchise.

A lawsuit filed in Los Angeles on Monday asks the court to order Activision to pay from 75 million to 125 million dollars in promised bonus cash and then as much as a half-billion dollars in damages.

The team at Infinity Ward qualified for the bonus money by delivering "Modern Warfare 2" (MW2) in time for a November 2009 launch as Activision had asked, according to the legal filing.

Activision had only come across with some of the bonus cash by the time it notified US regulators in early March that it was firing Infinity Ward co-founders Jason West and Vince Zampella.

"Activision paid them part but kept most of the money in their own pocket," said attorney Bruce Isaacs, who filed the suit on behalf of an Infinity Ward Employees Group comprised of 38 current or former studio workers.

"They were holding the cash captive to hold the developers captive...They wanted people to stay so they would deliver 'Modern Warfare 3'."

In the wake of the departure by West and Zampella, a flood of developers deserted Infinity Ward to join the pair at a new studio called Respawn. "Respawn" is a videogame term for a character coming back to life.

The lawsuit argued that "Activision withheld the property of the Infinity Ward Employee Group in an attempt to keep the employees hostage" so that the company could reap the benefit of "Modern Warfare 3."

Activision racked up more than a billion dollars in sales of "MW2" in the three months after its release. The videogame was the latest in a "Call of Duty" series with a fiercely devoted following.

Activision wanted to have the next version of the shooter videogame ready for release by the end of 2011 and was withholding the bonus money to get Infinity Ward developers to stick around to meet that deadline, Isaacs said.

With more than a quarter of the Infinity Ward team gone, Activision has reportedly farmed the [Modern Warfare](#) sequel job out to other studios.

Isaacs has asked the court to combine the Infinity Ward employees case with a similar civil suit filed by West and Zampella, who are also seeking bonus money they claim to be due.

Southern California-based [Activision](#) did not return AFP requests for comment but was publicly quoted as saying that the case is "without merit" and that the company has the right to determine amounts and timing of bonus payments.

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