ABA PRODUCTION COST MODEL · V2.2

THE SESSION THAT PAYS FOR ITSELF

Press start. The session prices itself.

Campaign Brief · **ABA Production Cost Model v2.2**

Prepared from the perspective of a working media studio owner.

AUDIENCE	USE	STATUS
Studio owners and principals	Campaign messaging · landing page · sales enablement	**Internal review draft**

POSITIONING STATEMENT

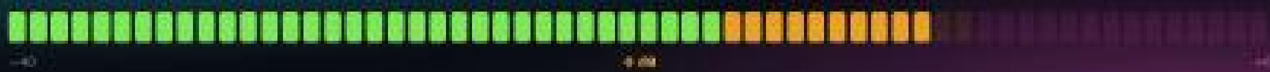
> **For studio owners who bill creative time, the ABA Production Cost Model turns a recording session into a priced, tracked, defensible unit of work — while leaving every production decision exactly where it belongs: with the people in the room.**
>
> It is not project management software. It is the session economics your studio already runs on, finally written down and made to add up.
>
> The platform takes over the analytical work — metering, attributing, pricing, splitting, reconciling — so the people in the room spend their attention on the record instead of on the paperwork.

The problem, in the owner's own words

You know the shape of it. A session runs four hours and bills as three because nobody wrote down when the coffee break started. A vocalist's second pass gets absorbed as goodwill. A project runs two milestones long and you discover it in the invoice, not in the room. When the client asks what they are paying for, you send a number — and hope the number holds.

The work is not the problem. The work is excellent. The problem is that the studio has no instrument for its own economics. Every other part of the signal chain is metered. The money is not.

YOUR CONSOLE IS METERED. YOUR MONEY ISN'T.



What it is

A single Excel workbook that models a full production as ten milestones and 82 discrete tasks, priced across eighteen cost centers grouped into Studio, Production, Engineering and Talent. It carries a live session clock on the front page, an estimate-versus-actual variance engine, a dual rate card, per-client discounting, and partner and talent split accounting — and it rolls all of it into one dashboard the owner can read in ten seconds.

Everything a studio already does informally, made explicit and made to reconcile.

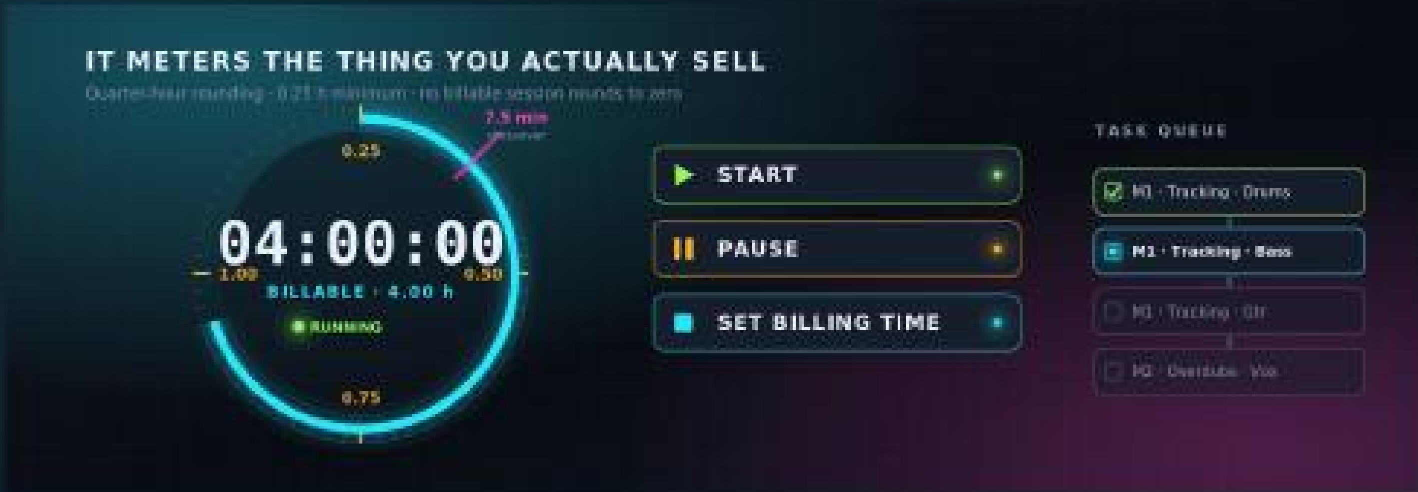
MILESTONES	TASKS	COST CENTERS	RATE CARDS
10	82	18	2
kickoff → final conductor mix	discrete, checkable, timestamped	Studio · Production · Engineering · Talent	Standard · Golden+

Five things to say, in order

The message architecture. Lead with the meter, close with the payout.

1. It meters the thing you actually sell

Press START when the session opens. PAUSE for the break. SET BILLING TIME when it closes. The clock rounds to the nearest quarter hour, writes the time against the specific task that was worked, stamps the completion, ticks the checkbox, and moves itself to the next task on the list. Nobody reconstructs a timesheet on Friday.

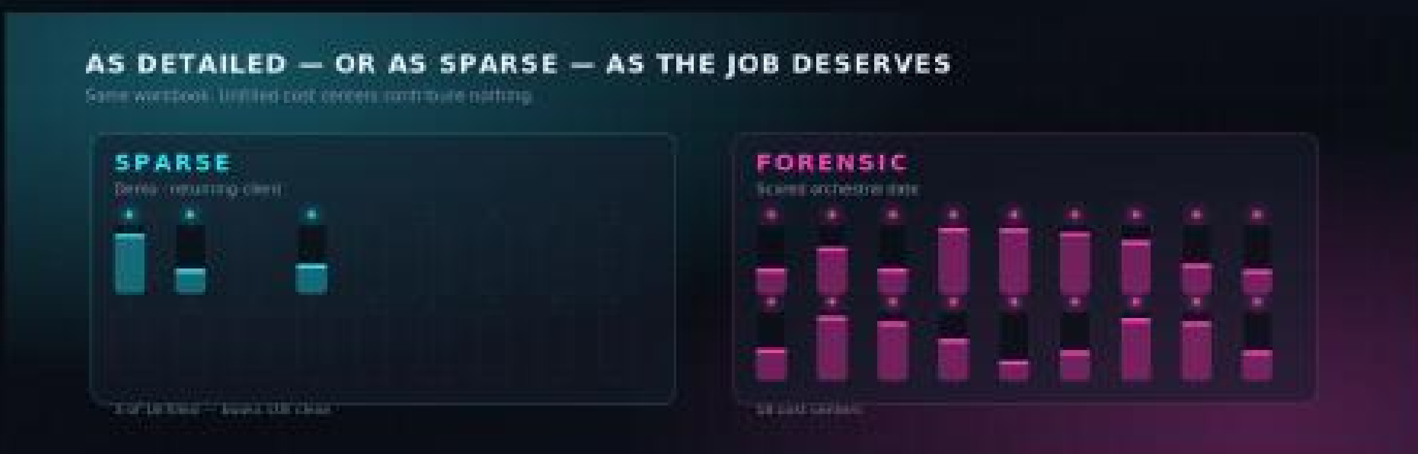


PROOF POINT

Quarter-hour rounding with a 0.25-hour minimum — verified mathematically correct, crossover at 7.5 minutes. No billable session ever rounds to zero.

2. It is as detailed — or as sparse — as the job deserves

A demo for a returning client does not need eighteen cost centers. A scored orchestral date does. The same workbook does both, because the depth lives in how many columns you fill, not in which product you bought. Leave the talent columns empty and the model quietly prices a room and an engineer. Fill them and it prices a string quartet, a horn section and a dialog pass, separately, at their own rates.

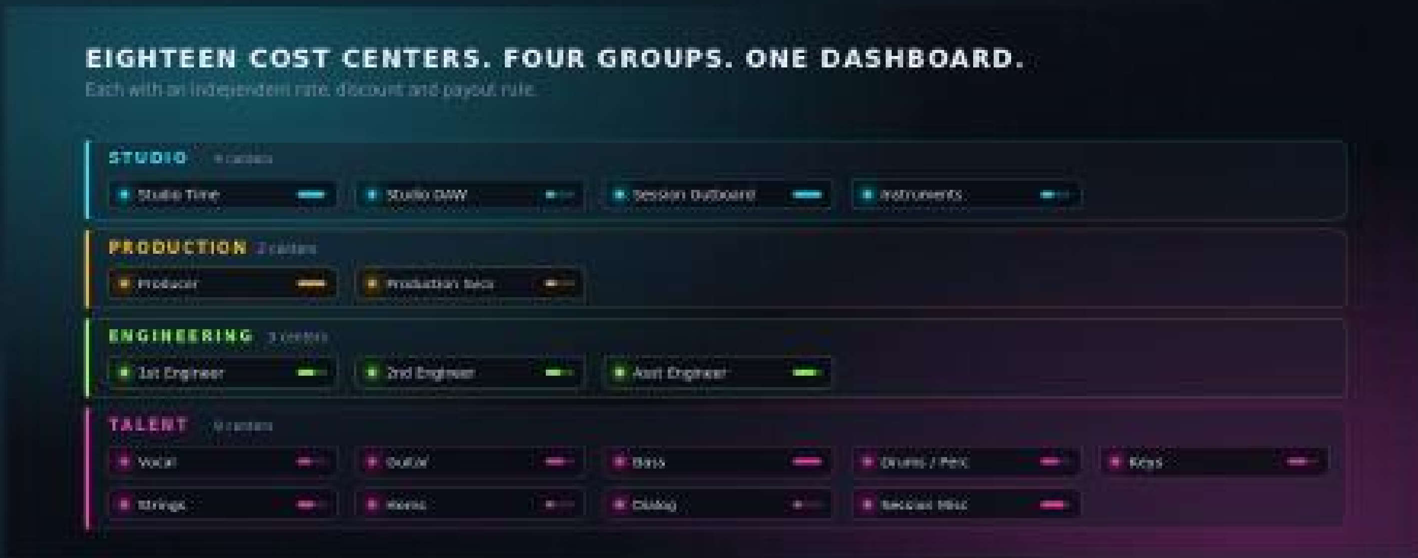


PROOF POINT

Unfilled cost centers contribute nothing — no error, no placeholder, no distortion of the totals. Sparse and forensic use produce equally clean books.

3. It prices four kinds of value, not one

Most studios bill an hour of room time and give away everything else. This model separates the room from the DAW, the preamps from the instruments, the first engineer from the second, and the guitarist from the string quartet — because they are not the same thing and they do not cost the same to provide.

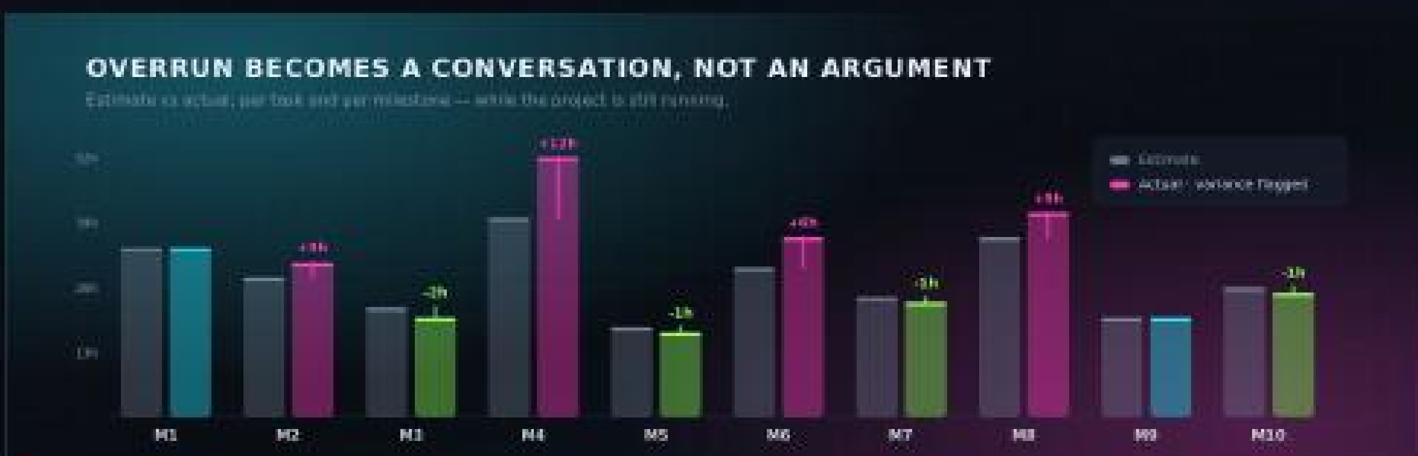


PROOF POINT

Eighteen cost centers across four groups, each with an independent rate, discount and payout rule.

4. Overrun becomes a conversation, not an argument

Every task carries an estimate and an actual. The gap is visible in hours and in dollars, per task and per milestone, while the project is still running. You are not discovering the overrun at invoice time. Neither is the client — and that changes the tone of the discussion entirely.



PROOF POINT

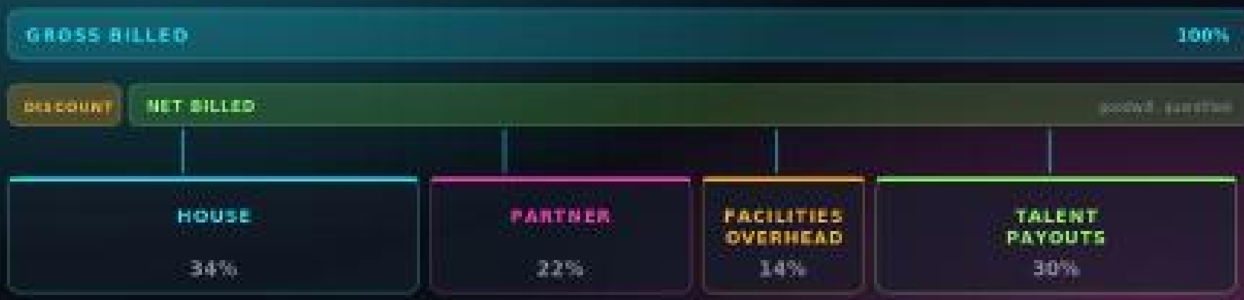
Variance is computed per task, rolled per milestone, and surfaced on the dashboard alongside revenue and profit.

5. It knows who gets paid

Client discounts, house percentage, partner percentage, facilities overhead and talent payouts are each modelled separately and applied per cost center. Two rate cards — Standard and Golden+ — sit behind a single switch per line, so premium pricing is one cell, not a rebuilt quote.

IT KNOWS WHO GETS PAID

Discounts, house share, partner share, facilities overhead and talent payouts — per cost center.



Settlement is arithmetic rather than negotiation.

> **PROOF POINT**
>
> The Golden+ card is a configurable uplift on the Standard card; changing a line's rate type reprices that line and every total above it instantly.

Feature → benefit matrix

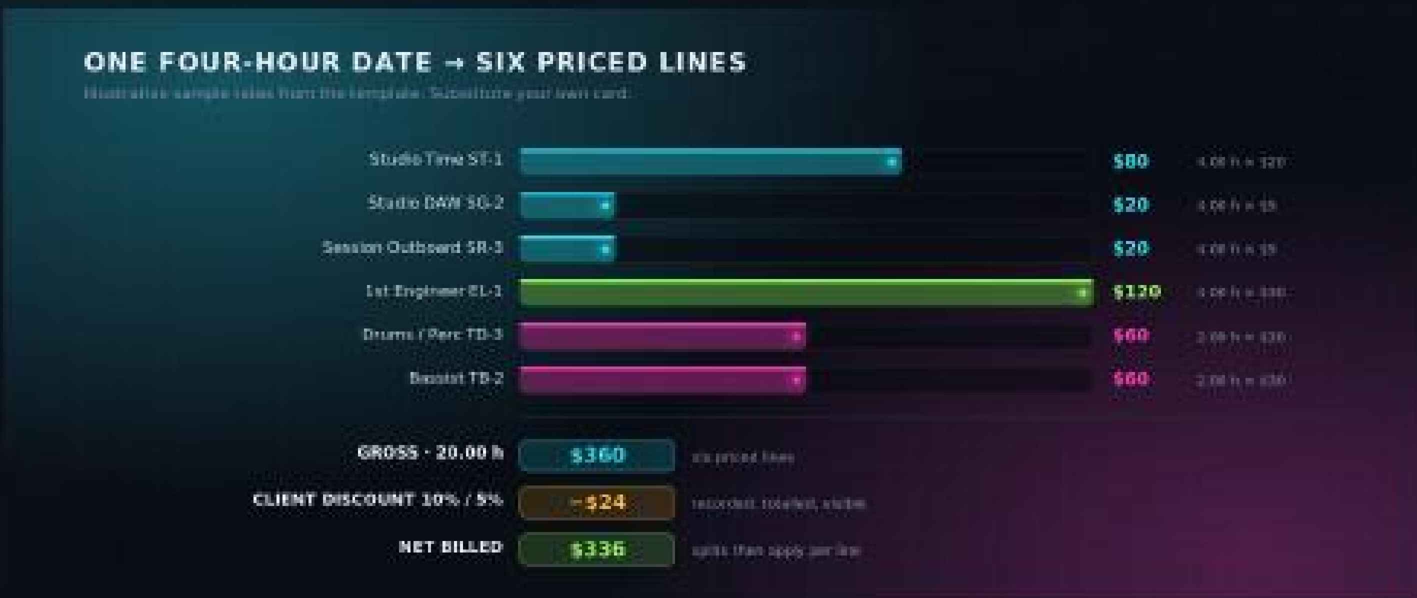
For sales enablement. Left column is what it has; right column is what to say.

FEATURE	WHAT THE OWNER GETS
Session Billing Clock	Billable time captured at the moment it happens, against the task that consumed it. Start, pause, resume, close. No reconstruction, no rounding arguments, no forgotten quarter hours.
Automatic task advance	Close one task and the clock is already pointed at the next incomplete one. The session moves forward without anyone managing the spreadsheet.
Ten-milestone production script	A repeatable path from kickoff to final conductor mix, with client and producer sign-off built in as tasks rather than assumed as courtesies.
Eighteen cost centers	Room, gear, outboard, instruments, production, three engineering tiers and nine talent categories — each priced, discounted and paid out on its own terms.
Estimate vs actual	Scope drift visible per task and per milestone while there is still time to act on it.
Dual rate card	Standard and premium pricing behind a single per-line switch. Quote a Golden+ session in one cell.
Per-client discounting	Discount the room without discounting the talent. Every concession is recorded, totalled and visible — you know exactly what goodwill cost this year.
Partner & talent splits	House share, partner share, facilities overhead and musician payouts computed per cost center, so settlement is arithmetic rather than negotiation.

FEATURE	WHAT THE OWNER GETS
Milestone revenue view	Revenue and hours by production stage — which milestones earn, and which quietly consume the budget.
Talent-by-milestone breakout	What each musician category earned, stage by stage. Useful for settlement, and for deciding who to book next time.

A worked example

A four-hour Milestone 1 rhythm-section date. Figures below are the sample rates carried in the template and are illustrative only — substitute your own card.



COST CENTER	HOURS	SAMPLE RATE	GROSS	NOTE
Studio Time (ST-1)	4.00	$20	$80	Room eco-system
Studio DAW (SG-2)	4.00	$5	$20	Billed separately from the room
Session Outboard (SR-3)	4.00	$5	$20	Legacy preamps
1st Engineer (EL-1)	4.00	$30	$120	
Drums / Perc (TD-3)	2.00	$30	$60	Talent, own payout rule
Bassist (TB-2)	2.00	$30	$60	Talent, own payout rule
Gross	**20.00**		$360	Six priced lines from one date
Client discount	10% / 5%		−$24	10% on studio lines, 5% on labour
Net billed			$336	Splits and payouts then apply per line

> The point of the example is not the total. It is that one four-hour date resolved into six independently priced, independently discountable, independently payable lines — and that the studio can now say precisely what the client bought.

Headline bank

Ranked. The first three are the strongest.

01 **Your console is metered. Your money isn't.**

02 **Press start. The session prices itself.**

03 **Know what the session costs before the invoice tells you.**

ALSO IN THE BANK

#	HEADLINE
04	Eighteen cost centers. One dashboard. Ten seconds.
05	The room is not the same as the record. Bill accordingly.
06	Overrun is a conversation, not an argument.
07	Every quarter hour, on the right task, automatically.
08	Goodwill is a line item. Start treating it like one.

Channel copy

ONE-LINER

> A session clock and a cost model in one workbook — so the studio bills what it actually did.

ELEVATOR, THIRTY SECONDS

Studios sell time and expertise, then bill from memory. This is a production cost model with a live session clock on the front page: start it when the session opens, close it when it ends, and it writes the quarter hours against the exact task that was worked, then moves to the next one. Behind it sits an eighteen-cost-center model that separates the room from the gear from the engineer from the talent, tracks estimate against actual per milestone, and handles discounts, partner splits and musician payouts. As detailed or as sparse as the job needs.

EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

#	SUBJECT
01	The four hours you didn't bill last week
02	What did that session actually cost you?
03	Your studio has no meter on its own economics
04	Stop reconstructing timesheets on Friday

SOCIAL, SHORT FORM

> Every part of your signal chain is metered. The money isn't. Fix that.
>
> A studio hour, a DAW hour, an engineer hour and a string quartet hour are four different products. Bill them that way.
>
> If you find out about the overrun at invoice time, it's already an argument.

Messaging by audience

AUDIENCE	WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT	LEAD WITH
Studio owner	Margin, leakage, whether the studio is actually profitable per project	Revenue, expense and profit by cost-center group on one dashboard — and the cost of a year of goodwill, quantified.
Producer	Scope, sign-off, protecting the creative plan from budget drift	Sign-off is a task, not a courtesy. Overrun is visible per milestone while there is still time to act.
Engineer	Not being the bookkeeper. Getting credited for the work.	Three button presses per session. Hours land on the right task automatically.
Session musician	Being paid correctly and promptly	Nine talent categories tracked separately, with payouts computed per cost center and broken out by milestone.
Client	Knowing what they bought and why it cost that	An itemised, milestone-based record instead of a number and a hope.

Objection handling

OBJECTION	RESPONSE
"It's just a spreadsheet."	It is — deliberately. It opens on any machine in the building, needs no login, no subscription, no vendor between you and your own numbers, and it can be handed to an accountant as-is. The clock is the part that isn't a spreadsheet.
"Too much admin for a creative session."	Three button presses: start, pause, close. Everything else — which task, what rate, whose payout, which milestone — is already modelled. The admin exists either way; this version takes seconds instead of Friday afternoon.
"Our projects don't look like that."	The milestone script is a starting template, not a constraint. Tasks are rows — edit them, cut them, add them. The cost-center engine underneath is what does the work, and it is indifferent to what the tasks are called.
"We don't bill by the hour."	Then use it for cost, not price. A flat-rate project still has an hours cost and a talent payout, and the model will tell you what your fixed fee actually bought — which is the number that decides whether to quote that job again.
"My engineers will hate it."	It was designed around not asking them to be bookkeepers. The clock advances itself, the checkbox ticks itself and the timestamp writes itself. The engineer's only job is to press a button when the session opens and again when it closes.

Call to action

Run it against one project you have already delivered. Enter the hours you know you worked, at the rates you actually charged. The model will tell you what that project earned, what it paid out, and what it cost in discounts you had forgotten giving. Most owners find the answer in the first ten minutes.

INTERNAL ONLY — NOT FOR EXTERNAL PUBLICATION

NOTE FOR THE CAMPAIGN TEAM

All dollar figures in this brief are the sample values carried in the template and are illustrative only. Replace them with the studio's live rate card before any external publication.

This brief describes the model's designed capability. A separate technical audit records sixteen open defects, four of them critical — including one that means the billing clock does not yet post its hours to the revenue grid. Confirm the remediation status of C-1, C-2, C-3 and C-4 before making claims about automated billing or profit reporting in any external campaign.